

BABU JAGJIVAN RAM—A PROFILE

Jagjivan Ram, endearingly called Babuji, was a freedom fighter and a crusader for social justice. His meteoric rise in public life saw him emerge as an eminent and popular political leader, who devoted his entire life working for the welfare of the country. He belonged to the vintage era of modern Indian politics. As national leader, parliamentarian, Union Minister and champion of depressed classes, he had a towering presence and played a long innings spanning half a century in Indian politics. His enduring and quintessentially twentieth century political legacy reminds us of the fervour, idealism and indomitable spirit of India's political leadership that not only fought and won freedom for the country, but also laid the firm foundation for a modern, democratic polity. Gifted with a flair for political leadership and moved by the ideals and goals of the socio-political events that enveloped the country, Babu Jagjivan Ram played a significant role in scripting our country's political and constitutional development and social change. A passionate leader dedicated to public life, he enjoyed immense respect from all quarters. Widely admired for his leadership qualities and organizational abilities, he always remained a force to be reckoned with in Indian politics.

EARLY LIFE

Jagjivan Ram was born on 5 April, 1908 at Chandwa, a small village, in Shahabad district, now named Bhojpur, in Bihar. His father, Shobhi Ram was in the British Army where he learnt English and became proficient in it. He was posted in Peshawar, but due to differences with the British he resigned. Thereafter Shobhi Ram returned to Bihar, bought agricultural land in Chandwa and settled there with his family. Being of religious disposition, he became the Mahant of the Shiv Narayani Sect. Sant Shobhi Ram was a skilled calligraphist and spread the teachings of his Sect by writing and illustrating books and distributing them among his followers.

In January 1914, at the age of six, Jagjivan Ram was sent to the village *pathshala*. He had barely started school, when his father died leaving the young Jagjivan in the care of his mother Vasanti Devi, who despite the social and economic hardships, insisted on Jagjivan continuing his education.

In 1919, at the age of eleven, Jagjivan Ram passed the upper primary examination. He was an exceptional student. The deep and abiding impressions of his Late father, religious atmosphere at home and love and

affection of his mother and the village schoolmaster, Pandit Kapil Muni Tiwari were instrumental in shaping his character.

After the upper primary education, Jagjivan Ram joined the Middle School, Arrah in January 1920. The medium of instruction in Middle School was English. Young Jagjivan worked day and night to learn English and eventually mastered the foreign language. He was advised by many to avail the scholarship offered to Harijan students. Confident of his ability to compete with the students in the general category, the young Jagjivan refused the scholarship offered to Harijan students. Instead, he competed with the other students and earned the scholarship based on his meritorious academic performance.

Jagjivan's love for books and knowledge opened up a whole new world of ideas, thought and intellectual discourse. He would spend an hour in the library everyday to read books on different subjects. Jagjivan was fluent in many languages, besides Bhojpuri. He read extensively in Hindi, English, Bengali and Sanskrit. At 6:00 every morning he would walk 3 kilometres to the Arrah railway station to read 'The Statesman' newspaper as to keep abreast of all national and international news and developments. He came across Bankim Chandra's—*Anand Math*, a Bible for the young revolutionaries and freedom fighters. He was so inspired by it that he learnt Bengali to read the book in its original form.

Jagjivan Ram joined the Arrah Town School in 1922. It was here for the first time that the young Jagjivan 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. The school had separate water pitchers for Hindu and Muslim students. Some upper-caste boys refused to drink water out of the earthen pitcher touched by Jagjivan Ram and a separate pitcher was installed for the schedule castes. Outraged, Jagjivan Ram refused to tolerate this insult and broke the pitcher and when it was replaced he broke it again. Taking note of his protest the headmaster ordered that a common pitcher be installed for all the students. Though Jagjivan won his point, the discriminatory treatment meted out to him filled his heart with both grief and anger. In spite of this he passed his matriculation in first division and hundred per cent both in Sanskrit and Mathematics. By the time he passed out of the High School, he had earned the reputation of being a cut above the rest.

In 1925, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya visited Arrah and Jagjivan Ram, 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 the young Ram, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, invited Jagjivan Ram to study at the Banaras Hindu University. At the same time the Christian Mission at

Chandwa had also offered to bear the expense of his education and urged his mother to send Jagjivan to Lucknow and then to America for higher studies. However, after some deliberations she turned them down. Vasanti Devi felt that changing religion was not an answer to the oppressive caste system and advised Jagjivan to join the Banaras Hindu University.

Jagjivan Ram was to face further caste-based prejudices and hostility at Banaras Hindu University. Servants would not serve him, or wash his plates in the students' mess. But even as a new student, he commanded such respect and loyalty that the entire student body stood up in his support and resolved that henceforth each student would wash his own plate. But Jagjivan Ram did not want to create inconvenience to the entire hostel and decided to shift out.

After passing the Inter Science Examination from BHU, Jagjivan Ram 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 35,000 people. The huge success of this rally brought him into the limelight and leaders like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose took notice of him. During this period he got acquainted with Chandrshekhar Azad, Manmath Nath Gupt and other leading revolutionaries. He read Das Kapital, Communist Manifesto and other socialist literature that greatly influenced his ideology of a casteless and classless society.

Since childhood Jagjivan Ram had dreamed of being a scientist. But as he grew up he could no longer ignore the socio-political situations enveloping the country and he sacrificed his personal ambitions to answer the call of his motherland.

The student years strengthened his resolve to fight on two fronts, for the freedom of the country and for social equality.

Foray into Politics and Freedom Struggle

In 1934, an earthquake struck Bihar. Jagjivan Ram rushed back to North Bihar to organize relief work. He worked day and night to organize clothing, shelter, medical aid and other relief supplies for the people affected by the calamity. It was here during his work in the relief camps that he met Gandhiji for the first time, and realized that Mahatma Gandhi was the only national leader, who was fighting not only for the independence of the country but also for the emancipation of the depressed classes and Harijans. Gandhiji's fight was on both fronts. All other leaders chose one over the other.

During his student years, Jagjivan Ram successfully organized a number of *Ravidas Sammelans* and had started celebrating Guru Ravidas Jayanti in the different districts of Calcutta. In 1934, he founded the Akhil Bhartiya Ravidas

Mahasabha in Calcutta. The other organizations that he founded for social reforms were Khetihar Mazdoor Sabha for agricultural labour and the All India Depressed Classes League. Through his organizations he involved the depressed classes in the freedom struggle and also rallied that all Dalit leaders should unite, and not only fight for social reform but also demand political representation.

On 1 June, 1935, Jagjivan Ram married Indrani Devi, daughter of Dr. Birbal, a renowned medical practitioner and a social worker of Kanpur. Dr. Birbal was earlier in the British army and was awarded the Victoria Medal by Viceroy Lord Lansdowne for his services in the Chin-lushai war in 1889-90. Indrani Devi was herself a freedom fighter and an Educationist, who stood by Jagjivan Ram through all his years of struggle. They had two children- a son, Suresh and a daughter, Meira.

The subsequent years saw greater political participation and intervention by Jagjivan Ram and his fight for independence became inseparably intertwined with his struggle for social reform. On 19 October, 1935, Babuji appeared before the Hammond Committee at Ranchi and demanded for the first time voting rights for Dalits.

In 1936, when he was just 28 years old, Jagjivan Ram began his parliamentary career as a nominated member of the Bihar Legislative Council. In 1937, he stood as a candidate of the Depressed Classes League and was elected unopposed to the Bihar Legislative Assembly from the East Central Shahabad (Rural) and he also ensured the unopposed victory of his Depressed Classes League candidates in all the 14 reserved constituencies. With such an unopposed and decisive victory, Babuji emerged as the kingmaker. Subsequently, the Congress invited him to join them.

Under their policy of divide and rule, the British wanted to set up a puppet government in Bihar. For this they needed his support. They offered a large sum of money and a Ministerial berth and other political benefits to buy his support. He did not even consider it. All national leaders and the masses praised this act of patriotism and integrity. Gandhiji said that Jagjivan Ram had emerged as pure as gold in the test of fire.

After the failed attempt of a puppet government, a Congress government was formed. Babuji was appointed the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Co-operative Industry and Village Development.

In 1938, he resigned along with the entire Cabinet on the issue of the Andaman prisoners and the British policy of involving India in the Second World War.

Inspired by Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience Movement of 1940, Jagjivan Ram courted arrest on 10 December 1940 by giving a notice to the District

Collector. He was arrested at Arrah and sent to the Hazaribagh Jail. In Jail, he had long discussions with socialist prisoners on varied subjects ranging from Marxism to Gandhism which made a deep impact on Babuji. After his release, Babuji entrenched himself deeply into the Civil Disobedience Movement and Satyagraha. He went to Wardha and stayed at Gandhiji's ashram. During their morning walks Babuji and Gandhiji discussed matters close to their hearts—a vision for an independent India with a society free from the highly discriminatory dogmas of the past.

Jagjivan Ram's participation in the freedom struggle and his activities as a Congress leader were inseparable. As a leader of the party, Jagjivan Ram strengthened the national cause by his strong organizational work and effective participation in the various programmes the party undertook in its struggle for freedom.

In 1942, the Indian National Congress launched the Quit India Movement. On that occasion Jagjivan Ram had joined the Congress leadership in Bombay. The AICC passed the historic Quit India resolution. Soon after, most other Congress leaders were arrested and it was left to Jagjivan Ram to make the Quit India Movement a success. He headed to Bihar to organize a mass movement against the British. Due to his revolutionary activities and the impact he had on garnering support for the Quit India Movement, Babuji was arrested in Patna from his house on 19 August 1942.

Jagjivan Ram was released on 5 October, 1943 and in the following years, he organized many meetings and rallies and condemned the British Government for their suppression of Indian freedom movement.

He won unopposed in the 1946 Central Elections from the constituency of East Central Shahabad (Rural). The same year he deposed before the Cabinet Mission in Shimla as a representative of the depressed classes and strongly defended their cause and the unity of the nation. He frustrated the designs of the British and other divisive forces to further divide the country.

On 30 August, 1946, Babu Jagjivan Ram was one of the twelve leaders of the country, who were invited by Viceroy/Lord Wavell, to become a part of the Interim Government. He was the only representative of the Dalits in the Interim Government formed on 2 September 1946 and held the portfolio of Labour.

While returning from Geneva after attending the International Labour Conference, Babuji's aeroplane crashed in the desert of Basra, Iraq on 16 July 1947. Babuji had a providential escape, though he had severe injuries in his right leg and foot. In this crash all the employees of the BOAC aircraft had died.

Independence and After

In post-Independent India, his contribution to nation-building has left an indelible mark. As one of the founding fathers of the Constitution and as an important leader of the Constituent Assembly, he ensured the importance of social justice as one of the ideals enshrined in the Constitution.

After Independence, when India embarked upon the task of nation-building and fulfilling the dreams of the people, there were formidable developmental challenges before the nation which required the formulation of sound policy and new initiatives. Jagjivan Ram proved an ever-dependable parliamentarian who assumed the charge of various key Ministries to handle the challenging tasks when the country was passing through sensitive and delicate times and people looked towards governmental assistance and schemes to face the crises and overcome the struggling phase. As Labour Minister, he introduced time-tested policies and laws for labour welfare. He was instrumental in enacting some of the important legislations for labour, *viz.* the Minimum Wages Act, 1946; the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947; the Indian Trade Union (Amendment) Act; the Payment of Bonus Act, etc. He actually laid down the foundation of social security by way of enacting the two important Acts, namely the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 and the Provident Fund Act, 1952.

In 1952 Lok Sabha elections, Jagjivan Ram chose Sasaram as his parliamentary constituency since his earlier constituency was a part of it. The people elected him as their representative to parliament and he was given a Ministerial berth. As Minister of Communication (1952-1956), he nationalized the private airlines and spread the postal facilities to the remote villages. In 1957, Babuji was returned unopposed for the second time from his constituency of Sasaram. During 1956-62, as the Railways Minister, he modernized Railways and gave a new momentum to the expansion of Railways in the country. He took innumerable welfare measures for Railway employees and set a record by not allowing any increase in passenger fares for five years. In 1962, the people of Sasaram elected Jagjivan Ram once again and during 1962-63, he was Minister of Transport and Communications. In 1963 he resigned under the Kamaraj Plan and worked to strengthen the Congress organization. During 1966-67, he shouldered the responsibility of the Labour and Rehabilitation Ministry. As Food and Agriculture Minister during 1967-70, he pulled the country out of the clutches of a severe drought, heralded the Green Revolution and for the first time made India self-sufficient in food. In March 1971 the stage was set for mid-term election. Babuji returned victorious once again to the Lok Sabha. As the Defence Minister during 1970-74, he changed the political map of the world and made history by liberating Bangladesh and made the Pakistan Army surrender unconditionally. The way the war was fought was unprecedented and he kept the promise he had made to the people of India that the war would not be fought on a single inch of Indian soil.

In 1974, Jagjivan Ram took charge of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. He organized the Public Distribution System to ensure that food was available to the masses at a reasonable price. As Minister, he had unparalleled ability to look after the affairs under his Ministry and he had his priorities well defined to take on the challenges ahead. In all the Ministries and Departments at the Centre, where Babu Jagjivan Ram had held charge, he left his mark of qualitatively high performance. In political power, he saw the opportunity to transform people's lives and promote their welfare by bold and well thought-out plans.

He played a dominant role in the Indian National Congress right from 1937. During the pre-Independence period Babuji held important offices at the State level in the Congress. After Independence, he became the axis of the Party and indispensable for party affairs as well as governance of the country. He was a member of All India Congress Committee from 1940 to 1977 and was in the All India Congress working Committee from 1948 to 1977. He was in the Central Parliamentary Board and All India Congress Committee from 1950 to 1977. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Smt. Indira Gandhi could not afford to spare him due to his astute political acumen. He was the mind of the Government and the Party. In 1966, following the death of the then Prime Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Congress Party witnessed some inner power struggle and the age-old party deteriorated due to groupism. On one side were the old guards like Morarji Desai, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy and K. Kamaraj who were called the Syndicate and on the other side were the Progressives such as Smt. Indira Gandhi, Jagjivan Ram and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. In 1969 the conflict between the two groups came to its head and the party split into two, the Congress (O) and the Congress led by Babu Jagjivan Ram. In the Bombay Session of the Congress in December 1969, Babuji was elected unanimously as the party president and thereafter worked hard to strengthen the party which had weakened its hold in many States.

His hard work paid off. His diligence, organizational skills and leadership ensured that the Congress came back to power with a thumping majority in March 1971.

In a turn of events, Emergency was declared on 26 June 1975. The fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution stood suspended. However, Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi recommended the dissolution of the Lok Sabha on 18 January 1977 and to hold fresh General Elections. As the impact of emergency was felt by everyone, Babu Jagjivan Ram resigned from the Cabinet and the Congress Party on 2 February 1977. He formed his own party, 'Congress for Democracy' (CFD) on 5 February 1977. He returned victorious once again to Lok Sabha in General Elections from Sasaram Constituency in Bihar. On 25 March 1977 he joined the Janata Government and became Defence Minister. He merged CFD with Janata Party on 1 May 1977. Babu Jagjivan Ram became the Deputy Prime Minister of the country

on 24 January 1979 and continued to handle the charge of Defence Ministry till 28 July 1979.

The internal conflicts of the Janata Party resulted in losing its majority in Parliament and the Government led by Shri Morarji Desai fell in July 1979. Thereafter, Chaudhary Charan Singh was sworn in as Prime Minister on 28 July 1979 and Babuji close to remain as leader of the opposition. But, Chaudhary Charan Singh could not prove his majority in the House. After the fall of his Government, many members of Lok Sabha rallied around Babu Jagjivan Ram and asked him to stake his claim. The President, however, dissolved the Lok Sabha on 22 August 1979 and ordered fresh Elections.

In January 1980, the people of Sasaram re-elected Babuji to the Lok Sabha and for the first time he sat in the Opposition. After the fall of the Janata Government, Babuji launched his own party the Congress (J) on 5 August 1981 and in the General Election of December 1984, he once again returned victorious to the Lok Sabha.

His long tenure is a reflection of a fearless and dedicated life. Since the inception of the Parliament, till his death, he represented the same constituency and fought and won every election. His uninterrupted legislative career from 1936-1986 spanning half a century is a world record. Leaving behind the message of equality, he breathed his last on 6 July, 1986.

Champion of the Depressed Classes

Babu Jagjivan Ram had shown complete solidarity with the depressed classes since his early life. He was highly convinced of the need to improve the lot of the oppressed and the downtrodden sections of the society. The most remarkable facet of Jagjivan Ram's political life had been his nationwide recognition as one of India's tallest leaders. He was committed to dealing with the scourge of casteism, which had taken deep roots in Indian society for ages. A large number of people were denied equal opportunities in social, political and economic spheres due to casteism, which was inconsistent with a modern society and its concept of basic human dignity. Jagjivan Ram had experienced its ill-effects, such as untouchability and marginalisation and was of the view that it is the most important barrier in the full development of human potential. Deeply hurt by the then existing situation in the country, particularly the practice of rampant caste-based discrimination and the resultant marginalization of a vast section of the society, Jagjivan Ram dedicated his leadership prowess and faculties for the upliftment of the depressed classes. Promoting people's welfare in general and the upliftment of the oppressed, in particular, became his passion in life.

From his student days, he was actively involved in organising the youth from depressed classes and sought to create awareness among the members of his community to fight for their rights and to draw the attention of political

leaders. During his formative years, he had witnessed the sufferings and privations perpetrated on the depressed classes under the feudal value system. However, he did not surrender to the unjust order of the day, rather he picked up the gauntlet and made it a mission to remedy the social malaise in every possible way. He too had to suffer ostracism and persecution at the hands of the same forces. Such experiences toughened his resolve to fight for justice and he made it his life-long goal to strive for eliminating the social malady that crippled a vast population. For his unwavering support and relentless struggle for the cause of the downtrodden, he has been rightly called a 'Messiah' of Dalits. He wanted a place of respect for the Dalits within the Hindu fold. Babuji felt that conversion to another faith would not rid the society of the malaise of casteism, for casteism was a rot, which has affected all religions and the only way to fight it was to reform the Hindu faith and change social attitudes.

The temple entry movement gained momentum largely due to his efforts and today the doors of Jagannath temple at Puri, Vishwanath Mandir in Kashi and Meenakshi temple in Madurai, to name a few, are open for upper and lower castes alike.

It is said that in him were symbolized the hopes and aspirations of the backward and the downtrodden people. He never minced words and boldly advocated the path of self-reliance for Harijans. He advised them to carry on a relentless struggle against social prejudices and unfair treatment meted out to them by society and wrest their legitimate right from the unwilling hands of unbending orthodoxy.

Organising the Depressed Classes

His impressive organizing capabilities saw him elected to the post of Secretary of Bihar State Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1933. In 1934, Jagjivan Ram successfully organized the All India Ravidas Sammelan in Calcutta. During this Conference, he met several social workers, with whom he shared his views and suggested that all Harijan leaders should speak from one platform. The Depressed Classes Unity Conference was held in Kanpur in 1935. In 1936, Jagjivan Ram was chosen to preside over the Lucknow Session of the All India Depressed Classes League, to be followed by many such conferences in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bombay and Punjab. He mobilized the backward classes and tried to articulate and air their genuine grievances.

While remaining a Congress party worker and leader, Jagjivan Ram was overwhelmingly identified as a champion of the depressed classes who took up their advancement and social justice as an agenda close to his heart. In 1937, even before joining the Congress he had ensured the unopposed victory of all 14 candidates of his Depressed Classes League. In the 1946 national elections, it was under his leadership that the All India Depressed Classes

League members contested as Congress candidates and obtained a convincing majority. Consequently, in 1946, he was invited by the visiting Cabinet Mission to present his views on the depressed classes.

On the issue of conversion, he was of the view that the injustices on the Harijans would neither end, nor can they get social status by adopting another religion. He rather exhorted them to raise themselves with their own effort, join the mainstream of the nation and work for its advancement. In this connection, he once said :

"In the progress of the country lies our progress; in its salvation our salvation and in its emancipation, our emancipation."

Like Gandhiji, Jagjivan Ram attached greater importance in his life to true religion, while fighting for uprooting the social evils and injustice existing in our society. Definitely, he had done so because of his enriched faith in true religion. He vehemently opposed the evils of casteism and orthodoxy in Hindu society, but never hammered on the very root of Hinduism as a whole.

Towards a New Social Order

Babuji symbolised the dawn of a new era of assertion, equality and empowerment for the depressed classes. His life was a positive statement for the backward classes, who were immensely inspired by the sustained presence of Babuji at the national political scene. His sincerity, dedication and political clout instilled confidence and courage among them. His achievements were seen as part of remarkable advancement for his community.

Jagjivan Ram once appealed to the depressed classes:

"To struggle for a 'socially interdependent society which would be so changed and revolutionised that they could participate in it on terms of equality of rights and obligations."

As a member of the Constituent Assembly, he played an active role in formulating provisions for the safeguard of the depressed classes. He also ensured that the Constitution of India should have enough provisions to forbid any practice of untouchability, or discrimination of persons on grounds of caste. The provision for State intervention for the advancement of socially backward classes by way of reservation in public employment and reservation of seats in legislatures for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes also owes its success to leaders like Jagjivan Ram. He was instrumental in the making of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955.

These provisions were meaningfully and effectively translated into instruments of socio-political empowerment and economic progress, with

people's active participation enabled by the towering presence of stalwarts like Jagjivan Ram. All these have resulted in giving a better deal to the depressed sections and bringing social changes in the country with a new mindset and social outlook. Jagjivan Ram did not nurse any utopian hopes that caste system would be eliminated at one go. His strategy and approach to the scourge of casteism was based on his abiding faith in the values of a democratic society and the process of transformation through constitutionally established system. He contributed in his own way for a national debate on the depressed classes welfare. In breaking the shackles of the caste system and transforming society, he believed in the use of sustained campaign to educate people to assert their rights and promote their welfare. Throughout his life, he believed passionately in human dignity and individual freedom. He abhorred oppression and believed in the philosophy of 'with malice towards none and charity for all'.

As a Parliamentarian

Shri Jagjivan Ram had the unique distinction of serving as a Member of the Central Legislature uninterruptedly for as long as 40 years. In the 1930s itself, Jagjivan Ram had emerged as a popular leader with strong mass support base. Since his nomination as a member of the Bihar Legislative Council in 1936, followed by his unopposed election to the Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1937, he never looked back and continued to get elected from the same constituency so long as he stood as a candidate. Till his last breath, he was a sitting member of the Lok Sabha—his Eighth term—never missing a Lok Sabha since the First General Election. Jagjivan Ram has had the distinction of being the longest—serving Minister in the history of Indian Parliament.

A man of old world political morality, he had mass following in his own right, before and after Independence. In his capacity as a member of Parliament, during the major part of which he was a Minister, he sought to address many long term issues before the country in the socio-economic spheres by shaping public opinion, policy and consensus.

Jagjivan Ram was known for his apt handling of parliamentary business. As a Union Minister, he introduced numerous Bills in the Lok Sabha and piloted their passage in Parliament. He was one of the best image-builders for the ruling party. He was a down-to-earth, unassuming leader who displayed exceptional political realism and accommodative spirit in presenting a responsible and responsive Executive. He had tremendous grasp of Indian political situations, problems facing the country and offered practical solutions for the many challenges. He was one of those parliamentarians who enriched the country's parliamentary democracy by his mature and dignified participation. Almost always a Minister and on the Treasury Benches, Jagjivan

Ram played his role in an exceedingly impressive manner. He had his points sent across the various sections in the House effortlessly. He never pursued an evasive approach in Parliament and spared no efforts in keeping the Members satisfied with detailed and informative replies and statements.

Jagjivan Ram was an effective debater since his young days and in Parliament, his oratory was well-acknowledged and admired. He is still remembered for his calm and composed demeanour even amidst the stormiest moments of the House. He had tremendous persuasive power and logical arguments which helped him drive home his points. He spoke both Hindi and English with equal ease and eloquence.

During those days, Parliament had many outstanding parliamentarians with great debating skills and many of them were known for their ability to put the heat on the Ministers. One of Babuji's sterling qualities was that he was not the one to be easily provoked by Opposition attacks. Armed with facts and figures, he faced the House, especially the Opposition benches with dignified confidence and when the occasion demanded, he displayed his toughness and even a pinch of sarcasm for the Opposition. One of his junior Ministers, Shri V.C. Shukla, remembers Jagjivan Ram in the following words:

"A great quality of Shri Jagjivan Ram, one that instantly put him among the select few anywhere, is his imperturbability. He remains his unruffled, serene self, no matter what storm may be raging around. Many must no doubt have had the occasions to see the deft, confident manner in which he handles even the stormiest debates on the floor of Parliament. It comes out on such occasion that the unruffled, unhurried, even amicable man, is also capable of retorting hard, and woe betake the member who sought to underestimate this capacity of Shri Jagjivan Ram.

He was known for his unfailing courtesy to the House, taking due note of the opinion from all sections of the House and was also an effective spokesperson of the Government on the floor of the House. Recounting from his memory of Jagjivan Ram, Sardar Hukam Singh, former Speaker, Lok Sabha said :

"He would make out his case convincingly, taking criticism calmly, and give back with force and redoubled vigour, without offending anybody. He is not a dry bore. On the other hand, he can utilize wit and introduce humour at suitable occasions."

Jagjivan Ram was known for his calmness and composure even in the most trying circumstances. He would sit in the House fully in control of himself, composed and attentive, listening to the debate with rapt attention.

Dr. L.M. Singhvi, an eminent parliamentarian, very impressed by Babuji's parliamentary performance, said :

"I have had the privilege of seeing Shri Jagjivan Ram functioning on the floor of the Lok Sabha as well as in the Committees and other meetings. I have always had the feeling that in tact, as well as in talent, in skill as well as in effectiveness, in exposition and in eloquence and in elaborate replies as well as in casual repartee, Shri Jagjivan Ram is one of our best parliamentarians of eminence".

One of the most effective parliamentarians, Jagjivan Ram made significant contributions to strengthen the parliamentary institutions of our country. In his talent and expertise, the successive Prime Ministers had put unflinching faith. Jagjivan Ram gave his best to the party, Government and Parliament. He formed part of the political elite that shaped and strengthened the working of parliamentary institutions in the country and ensuring people's faith therein. The esteem, goodwill and image of Jagjivan Ram and his wealth of experience combined to make him a unique leader. Dr. Karan Singh, former Union Minister of Health and Family Planning, recalls Jagjivan Ram's parliamentary days in the following words:

"Over the last 10 years I have been in Parliament. I had occasions to witness at close quarters Babu Jagjivan Ramji's performance in Parliament. His tremendous grasp over his portfolio in particular and national affairs in general, his imperturbability in the face of provocation and his effective delivery, both in English and Hindi, combined to make him one of our ablest Parliamentarians."

A True Democrat

Throughout his life, Babuji was a firm believer in democracy and democratic values. He stood by his principles and never compromised with values even during turbulent political situations. In spite of being one of the veteran Congress members and a close confidante of Smt. Indira Gandhi, Babuji did not hesitate to differ from her views. Jagjivan Ram tried to persuade Smt. Gandhi to revoke the Emergency and restore normalcy in the country. After failing in his effort to do so, he sent in his resignation to Smt. Gandhi. In his resignation letter on 2 February, 1977 to Smt. Gandhi, Babuji wrote:

"A fear psychosis has overtaken the whole nation. People are living in a state of constant fear and are silently suffering. This is bad for any country, more so for a democracy. Therefore, it is necessary that the emergencies are ended, all extraordinary laws are made inoperative

and freedom of the people restored, so that the entire nation can be rescued from the stage of impotence to which it has been reduced at present..... It is difficult for me to associate myself with such a dispensation any longer. I am, therefore, sending my resignation herewith from your Cabinet and request you for its immediate acceptance".

After resigning from Smt. Gandhi's Cabinet, he addressed the Press and said :

"The motherland calls once again to guard and preserve democracy, to protect human values so that India and India alone becomes strong and prosperous".

Coalition Politics

After quitting the Congress, the same day he formed a new party, the "Congress for Democracy". A man of the masses, he could sense the people's desire for a change and could foresee the results of the Sixth General Election. Indeed, he became a unifying force for the Opposition. As things unfolded, his assessment turned out to be prophetic. The multi-party alliance, which his party—the Congress for Democracy had joined, secured a landslide victory. When India's parliamentary system was entering a new phase of coalition politics, Jagjivan Ram was one of the key political actors in shaping national politics. There was a strong opinion and expectation that Jagjivan Ram should be chosen to head the first non-Congress Government at the Centre, but this was not to be.

In the Janata Government, Jagjivan Ram took charge of the Defence portfolio on 25 March 1977. Soon after, Babu Jagjivan Ram merged his party, the CFD with the Janata Party. Babuji became the Deputy Prime Minister, in addition to handling the Defence portfolio. Later, as the Janata Party disintegrated and the Morarji Desai Government resigned in 1979, there was political crisis. Although Chaudhary Charan Singh was sworn-in as the Prime Minister, he could not prove his majority in the House. The first coalition experiment at the Centre thus came to a premature end.

In the Seventh Lok Sabha, the Congress came back to power and the Janata Party succumbed to disintegration. Following the disintegration of the Janata Party, Jagjivan Ram formed a new party, namely, Congress (J). Though he did not return to the Congress Party, he was always consulted by many of its national leaders. People from various walks of life sought his advice on various issues, particularly related to Indian politics and administration.

Jagjivan Ram always remained the unquestioned leader of his long-term constituency—Sasaram in Bihar. In the Seventh and Eighth General Elections to the Lok Sabha, Jagjivan Ram won from the same constituency, unaffected by the changed political equations and other factors.

An Accomplished Administrator

Since the Interim Government in 1946, Jagjivan Ram had been a Cabinet Minister for more than three decades, except when he relinquished ministerial position and did party work under the 'Kamaraj Plan' during 1963-66. He enriched India's parliamentary system of governance, both as a Member of Parliament and as a Minister. Three decades as the Union Cabinet Minister speaks volumes of his administrative capabilities and acumen. He held important portfolios such as Labour, Railways, Transport, Communications, Food and Agriculture, Defence, etc. He had shown great political wisdom and understanding in dealing with the country's challenges, be it in Defence or Agriculture. He also demonstrated tremendous enthusiasm for India's development. Under his direction and guidance, various Ministries pursued development-oriented programmes and introduced services, which were highly appreciated and welcomed by the people. He took lead in the formulation of sound and result-oriented policies and programmes concerning the Ministries and Departments under his charge and implemented them efficiently. He was sensitive to the people's needs and development requirements and was prompt at taking appropriate measures to manage various crises in the country. He knew how to handle the bureaucracy and the art of getting the best out of it. In translating the untold dreams of the people into perspective planning and meeting the many challenges before the nation, Jagjivan Ram's expertise was invaluable.

He was the Minister of Labour during 1946-52, a portfolio he held again in 1966-1967. Besides the Labour Ministry, the other Ministries he held were Communications (1952-56), Railways (1956-1962), Transport and Communications (1962-63), Food and Agriculture (1967-1970), Defence (1970-1974) and Agriculture and Irrigation (1974-77). When the Janata Party Government headed by Morarji Desai was formed in 1977, Jagjivan Ram joined it as a Cabinet Minister holding Defence portfolio. He also became the Deputy Prime Minister and held the Defence portfolio from 24 January 1979 to 28 July 1979.

As Minister of Labour

Labour portfolio fell on the shoulders of Jagjivan Ram first in 1946 and later during 1966-67. When he became Labour Minister in 1946, it was a time

Labour welfare was receiving much attention—both nationally and internationally, to create more humane conditions for workers and ensure them remunerative wages and other rights. He was convinced that unless the problems of poverty, unemployment and low standard of living of the vast masses were successfully dealt with, it would be difficult to address labour problems. He laid the foundation for a new era of labour welfare, industrial climate and productivity with new policy measures and an enabling working environment. He was instrumental in bringing many progressive labour laws incorporating sound labour policy befitting a Welfare State, which provided the labour force in the country great relief and incentives to work. A number of labour friendly laws were enacted during his tenure, viz., the Minimum Wages Act, the Coal Mines Provident Fund and Bonus Scheme, The Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund and the vast network of Employees' State Insurance Corporation. Such measures saved the labour force from pitiable and exploitative conditions and also ensured social and financial security and dignity.

In 1947, he piloted the enactment of the Industrial Disputes Act, which was a landmark legislation heralding in an era of hope and mutual goodwill for settlement of industrial disputes. This was further modified with the Industrial Disputes (Appellate Tribunal) Act, 1950. In November 1947, he introduced the Dock Workers (Regulation and Employment) Bill in the Central Legislative Assembly. Another social security measure was the Workmen's State Insurance Bill that Jagjivan Ram introduced in November 1947. In 1948, the Factories Act was enacted which inter alia, prohibited the employment of women and children in dangerous occupations. The Act also regulated hours of work, payment of overtime wages, weekly holidays, leave with pay, etc. Another major enactment was the Indian Trade Union (Amendment) Act, 1946 seeking to strengthen the Indian Trade Union Act, 1929 which had proved ineffective. This constant liaison with labour stemmed from his early association with the oppressed classes and he had made a bold and original contribution for the amelioration of their lot by his constant and untiring endeavours. Babuji was a champion for the cause of labour. But at the same time, he frequently reminded the labour force of their responsibility towards building a vibrant and modern India. While addressing a convocation at the Banaras Hindu University he said:

".....I need hardly emphasise the importance of the new political role of the labour, except to say that increase in power means increase in responsibility. These two go together and cannot be separated. Power with irresponsibility will lead to disaster, that may even spell the loss of liberty and the downfall of the State".

He further added:

"I am myself a firm believer in the efficiency of negotiations, conciliation, and adjudication. It is only when all these avenues have exhausted that the last weapons in the armoury of labour may be wielded and that also only for economic reasons. A strike, as political weapon, is doomed to failure and will be resisted with all the energy and resources at disposal of the government."

In June 1947, Shri Jagjivan Ram led the Indian delegation to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Conference. He had the honour of becoming the first Asian Chairman at the Conference of the ILO held at Geneva in 1950. By tackling issues on the labour and employment front and adding to industrial peace and productivity, Jagjivan Ram had contributed much to the productive potential of the country. He was always sympathetic to the cause of the labour and the poor workers.

During his second tenure as the Labour Minister in 1966, he brought the Contract Labour Bill that was aimed at the abolition of contract labour from certain categories of trade unions and for regulating working conditions where the total abolition of contract labour was not possible. The welfare of the labour class was always in his mind. He appointed the National Commission on Labour, headed by Shri Gajendragadkar, to review the changes in conditions of Labour since Independence and to report on their existing conditions. The report, submitted to the Government in 1969, provided a wealth of information and included many useful recommendations. Jagjivan Ram's term as Labour minister was indeed a boon for the working class in the country.

As Minister of Communications and Transport

Jagjivan Ram held charge of the Ministry of Communications from May 1952 to December 1956. He also held both—the Ministry of Communications and Ministry of Transport from April 1962 to August 1963. Nationalization of air transport was one of the most significant developments of his term. He piloted the Air Corporation Bill, 1953 amidst great opposition and ensured its successful enactment. The Air Corporation Act provided for reorganization and development of the Civil Aviation sector and resulted in the genesis of Air India and Indian Airlines as nationalized air carriers. There was tremendous expansion of civil aviation infrastructure during his tenure. On his behest, a number of aerodromes were built and auxiliary facilities were augmented. Equal importance was attached to the improvement of the existing aerodromes and completion of ongoing works. Though he attached great importance to Civil Aviation and regarded it as the second line of defence, he did not agree to the demand of handing over this Department to

the Defence Ministry. While replying to the Demands for Grants of the Ministry of Communications, he once said :

"If Civil Aviation is to be treated as a second line of defence, the very argument justifies that it should be separate from the Defence Ministry and should be allowed the fullest scope for development so that in times of emergency, it can function as an efficient second line of defence."

In the field of Communications, he took key initiatives and made radical changes. He laid the foundation for expansion of this vital service for the progress of the country. It was his policy decision that every village with a population of 2,000 must have a post office. For villages in far-flung areas, the provision was suitably relaxed, so that no one would be made to walk for more than two miles to utilize postal facilities.

It was also his decision to have a telegraph office for every Tehsil town. As a matter of policy, he decided that telephone exchanges should be opened in all District towns and Public Call Offices at sub-divisional towns. Such a far-sighted step enhanced the communication network to a great extent. It also proved to be very useful for the educated unemployed of the nation.

Realising the huge potential of the Shipping sector, Jagjivan Ram emphasized the expansion of its fleet and covered all the important trade routes of the world. Indian ports were modernized and developmental works were undertaken in major ports *viz.* Cochin, Visakhapatnam, Kandla, Tuticorin, Mangalore and also at Calcutta and Haldia Dock Projects. All these initiatives resulted in substantial increase in the total cargo shipment and in turn gave a boost to foreign trade and increase in foreign exchange resource.

This apart, he also took steps for the development of roadways during his tenure. The number of national highways and the total length of roads registered a significant growth. A Transport Development Council was set up. It made important recommendations pertaining to motor vehicle taxation, schemes for establishment of National Road Safety Council, framing model rules for the transport of goods by road and development of inland water transport.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was an ardent lover of Hindi language and literature. As a visionary, he realized the importance of Hindi and encouraged the staff to be initiated into Hindi. During his tenure, a new practice was started to issue all the circulars and postal notices released by the Director-General in Hindi, as well as in English. Stamps and seals in Devnagari script were introduced in the circles, where Hindi was used as an important language of communication. In other cities, bilingual stamps and seals were supplied. A

number of telegraph offices were also fully equipped to handle telegrams in Hindi.

As Railway Minister

Jagjivan Ram was entrusted with the Railway portfolio in December 1956. Indian Railways was under tremendous strain at that time. It was perceived that by allocating the Railways portfolio to Babuji, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru brought the right man to ensure that the Railways attained adequate growth to cater to the increasing passenger and freight traffic in the country. With wisdom, intuition and an unorthodox approach, he endeavoured to overhaul the Indian Railways which had come under strain and stagnation in growth. His efforts paved the way for the accelerated growth of Indian Railways, making it the fourth largest in the world and the largest in Asia. During his tenure, all areas like modernization, economy measures, better management practices, self-sufficiency in indigenous production of railway requirements, etc. received special attention. Undoubtedly, the Railways took great strides forward. The Indian Railways network proliferated under the dynamic leadership of Babuji. It was indeed given a facelift. Remarkably, this was achieved without raising the fares in all the five Railway Budgets, which were presented by Jagjivan Ram in Parliament.

Some other achievements during his term included construction of about 650 kilometres of broad-gauge line, 610 kilometres of metre-gauge line and doubling of about 1,500 kilometres of existing single line. With his vast experience, zeal and unparalleled innovative skill, Babuji introduced a number of amenities for all classes of passengers without raising fares.

He paid special attention to the welfare of the railway workers. The most noteworthy step was the introduction of a Pension Scheme in December 1957, similar to one applicable to the Central Government employees. On his behest, several staff training schools were opened and the existing ones were expanded to facilitate the Railway men to equip themselves for more responsible work and thereby improve their career prospects. It was during his time that reservations were made for departmental promotions of employees from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and these were strictly implemented. Attention of the recruiting authorities was constantly drawn to the necessity of filling all vacancies for the candidates belonging to the reserved category.

As Minister of Food and Agriculture

During his tenure as the Minister of Food and Agriculture, first from March 1967 to June 1970 and then again from October 1974 to February 1977,

he took up the responsibility of handling this Ministry at a difficult juncture. It was in the late sixties, the country was reeling under a severe food shortage following two years of drought. Jagjivan Ram concentrated on the growth of agriculture, food production and Public Distribution System (PDS). He worked hard and helped in enabling the country to ensure food security and availability of food at reasonable price for millions of people in the country.

When he began his tenure in this Ministry, India was dependent on foodgrain imports and was struggling to find some innovative measures to increase agricultural production. Babuji was convinced that the growth of the national economy rests heavily on the growth of agriculture. He was, therefore, of the opinion that self-sufficiency in India's agricultural economy should be achieved as quickly as possible, so that dependence on foodgrain imports could be eliminated. He initiated a number of new measures and reoriented agricultural policies and programmes to achieve record food production. Important among them were—acceleration of irrigation programmes, resolving inter-state water disputes, National Seeds Programme for production of quality seeds, promotional campaign for fertilizer use, etc. Through adoption and application of improved agricultural practices, cultivation of high-yielding varieties, increased use of fertilizers and pesticides, assured irrigation, improved water management practices, expansion of agricultural credit, development of marketing and storage, crop production was taken to new heights.

To overcome the food scarcity situation in the country, due to the unprecedented droughts of 1965 and 1966, Babuji took several measures and dealt with the situation successfully. Large-scale feeding programmes were organized for the benefit of the vulnerable sections of the population. The distribution of foodgrains from fair price shops was maintained with a view to safeguarding the interests of the consumers. Vigorous efforts were made to maximize domestic procurement of foodgrains and to supplement the domestic supplies through imports. In 1970, when he switched over to the Defence Ministry, food shortage had been reduced to a mere bad dream.

Jagjivan Ram realized that Public Distribution System was an effective mechanism to manage the supply chain of foodgrains to the common people. To meet the requirements of the Public Distribution System, increased emphasis was laid on domestic procurement and the country's dependence on imports was progressively reduced. Public distribution of foodgrains was made a regular feature of food management in the country.

Another important contribution of Jagjivan Ram was in the field of Land Reforms, to which he accorded much priority as an effective step to transform the rural economy. Following the Chief Ministers' Conference in 1976,

considerable progress was made in implementing land reforms. Development of animal husbandry and dairying, inland fisheries, improving the forest cover, procurement of foodgrains from domestic markets for public distribution, making PDS a regular feature for better food management in the country, building buffer stock, incentive prices for farmers, etc. were also given emphasis during Babuji's tenure.

In 1975, during his second term as the Food Minister, there was a world-wide shortage of foodgrains. India managed the crisis with effective policy measures such as de-hoarding campaigns, expansion and streamlining of the PDS and increased inputs of foodgrain production. In fact, the whole approach to food and agriculture policy under the leadership of Jagjivan Ram was of practical significance. They not only succeeded in meeting the crisis in those times, but also came to be part of the long-term policy framework on food and agriculture in the country.

As Minister of Defence

Jagjivan Ram was the Defence Minister of the country at an important juncture and proved to be a tough taskmaster. He took over the reins of this Ministry in June 1970, when the threat of war was knocking at India's eastern and western fronts. By December 1971, India successfully fought and concluded a war against Pakistan in which our Armed Forces proved its might and capability. Given that, India had not emerged victorious in any of the wars fought previously, he had the uphill task of preparing the armed forces for the eventuality of a war and keeping them fit and war-worthy. With his unmatched ingenuity, he managed the affairs of the Defence forces at that critical juncture. He not only motivated the Armed Forces to fight for the liberation of another country, but also kept his promise to the people that the war would not be fought on Indian soil.

In the build-up to the war, he visited the places where Armed Forces were stationed and also addressed civilians in other areas explaining to them the emerging situation. This helped in readying the entire nation to fight the war. In October 1971, when the Army was preparing for the war, Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi and Defence Minister, Shri Jagjivan Ram visited many Army divisions and units in Punjab and the border areas in other States. Lt. Gen. K.P. Candeth who was the Commander of the Army's Western Command during the 1971 war, has recounted their visit in the following words :

"Shri Jagjivan Ram went down well with the soldiers. He is a wonderful speaker who can carry his audience with him and he never makes the mistake of talking down to them, but manages to convey the impression

that he is one of them....I had to brief him on the operational situation and war plans and was struck by his incisiveness and quick grasp of the root of a problem. My admiration grew during the initial reverses we had....He used to ring me, normally in the morning, and in his slow drawl ask me how it was going and if I could cope with the situation, and being told that there was no cause to worry and that I could deal with it, he used to wish me good luck and ring off. He never seemed excited, bothered or flurried and his phlegmatism did much to inspire confidence."

The internal situation in the erstwhile East Pakistan had spilled over to India, with hundreds of thousands of refugees crossing over to the Indian territory. He considered the refugee influx to India as a humanitarian problem and emphatically said,

"...which civilized country, least of all, one with the tradition like ours, could seal off borders and allow innocent civilians to face the bullets."

His inspiring leadership galvanized the entire nation and the Armed Forces to deal with the crisis in East Pakistan, which ended with the creation of a new country, Bangladesh. The moments of acute national crisis in December 1971, bear testimony to the quiet confidence, patience and immense courage of Babuji. Babu Jagjivan Ram displayed unparalleled resoluteness during those historic days.

His 'warrior with a humane face' image is still fondly remembered by the Armed Forces. He proved a good samaritan for the men in uniform in several ways. He took steps for the rehabilitation of the families of the jawans who had laid down their lives to uphold the honour of the country, or sustained grievous injuries, a new scheme of family pension for widows of the deceased officers and "sheltered" appointments for the disabled jawans and officers. The provision of "War Injury Pay" was made for those who could not be accommodated in service. Several other welfare measures like free land and employment to war widows, medical treatment for the families at military hospitals and education for children of martyred soldiers were also launched. He also extended such benefits to the servicemen and ex-servicemen disabled in the 1947-48, 1962 and 1965 wars.

Showing his concern for the welfare of the Armed Forces servicemen he once said:

"The members of our Armed Forces have proved to the world that in the final analysis it is the man behind the machine who counts. It is his

valour, dedication, determination, morale and skill which brought success to our arms. It is his conduct and his regard for human values, which earned us and our forces a good name from our friends in Bangladesh and from foreign observers."¹⁴

As the Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram shouldered the crucial responsibility of strengthening the defence apparatus of the country. In his endeavour to ensure that the defence apparatus of the country was kept in perfect order with all defence requirements, he attached great importance to the research and development aspect of the Defence organizations. In this regard, while replying as Defence Minister to the discussion on the working of the Ministry of Defence in Rajya Sabha in 1972 in the wake of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, Jagjivan Ram said:

" It is gratifying when my Ministry receives universal support from all sides of the House for strengthening our Armed Forces, for modernising the Army, for modernising the Navy and for modernising the Air Force. It gives me added strength. We are taking certain steps for modernising the three wings of the Armed Forces. We are producing some of the arms and military hardware that we require. But to think that so far as sophisticated weapons are concerned we have become self-reliant, well, it will be far from the reality. It will take time. And in this connection, I would like to say that so far as our research and development are concerned, it will be my effort to see that the research and development activities are strengthened to the maximum extent in the Defence Ministry, and work will not be permitted to suffer for want of requisite funds, and when I have got support of both Houses, I am sure it will be possible to provide adequate funds for research and development."

On International Relations

Jagjivan Ram was keen on rebuilding and improving bilateral ties with Pakistan and developing friendly relations with other countries. After the war was over, he took several steps in this direction.

On the issue of Indo-Pak bilateral relations, he said,

"In our view, there is no dispute between our two countries which cannot be settled by friendly negotiations between ourselves.....It will now be our endeavour to forge, through bilateral negotiations, a new relationship with Pakistan, based not on conflict but on cooperation.....assuring to the peoples of the two countries freedom from fear of recurring wars and an opportunity to devote their full attention to economic and social progress."

Jagjivan Ram also contributed to the growth of India's cooperative and friendly relations with other nations. It was during his tenure as the Defence Minister that India entered into the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation.

His Last Journey

Jagjivan Ram passed away in New Delhi on 6 July 1986, at the age of 78 after a period of illness. As a leader who shared his political career with many generations from Mahatma Gandhi to Rajiv Gandhi, he has left an indelible imprint on the polity of India. He was a stalwart among the leaders of his time and a doyen of Indian Parliament. Leaders, media, general public and the entire nation expressed grief over the passing away of Jagjivan Ram. He was given a national honour, with his cremation being attended by President Giani Zail Singh, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Cabinet Ministers, Chief Ministers, leaders of various parties and thousands of his followers.

With Jagjivan Ram's passing away, came an end an era representing perhaps the most important phase of the country's transition from pre-Independence to Independence and on to a vibrant, democratic society. He has left the legacy of a sincere and dedicated political leader, a committed public servant, freedom fighter, social reformer, revolutionary and a true humanist. He will be remembered for a long time to come for his varied contributions towards socio-economic development of the country. A democrat to the core and a conscientious political leader, he enriched Indian politics with his mature and principled positions. He was a pillar of strength for the Indian polity during periods of great challenge and transition. He played a significant role in the upliftment of the depressed classes, ensuring justice for the oppressed and the deprived, enhancing the country's infrastructure development and in accelerating India's march to emerge as a stronger power in the world. In his passing away, the country lost a unique leader, a patriot, a visionary and a great nationalist. His legacy will live on and continue to inspire the coming generations in social and political activities and in the continuous search for a better society.

PART-II
ARTICLES

MEMORIES OF BABU JAGJIVAN RAM

—Pranab Mukherjee*

Babu Jagjivan Ram was a valiant fighter in India's freedom struggle and a great inspirer and organizer of people against oppression. He was a powerful orator, a distinguished parliamentarian and an able administrator.

Babuji was born in a poor Harijan family in a small village of Bihar on 5 April 1908. His life is a story of rise from abysmal depths to great heights and exalted position which was not achieved with anybody's patronage but simply by sheer merit, competence, self respect and self sacrifice. As a student, he was meritorious right from the beginning. While studying in the Kolkata College, he was inspired by the ideals of Gandhiji and plunged into the freedom movement under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and others. He got himself educated despite social and economic disabilities and chronic poverty. This gave him a unique position in the prevailing political situation in the country. He recognized the need of freedom from political slavery to address the problems of untouchability, social discrimination and backwardness. To him freedom meant not just change in the colour of the leaders from white to black or so, but it encompassed freedom from political slavery, economic bondage and cultural stagnation. He participated actively in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and the Quit India Movement in 1942. By appearing before the Cabinet Mission in April 1946 as a representative of the depressed classes, he frustrated the designs of the British and other divisive forces to further divide India. Babuji had arrived on the political scene as the representative of the Scheduled Castes and the Congress leadership looked to him as an able spokesman of the depressed classes.

Throughout his life, he worked for these ideals and tried to implement them through administration of various Ministries/Departments over which he presided for a very long time. He was inducted in Bihar Government in 1937 as a parliamentary secretary under the premiership of Babu Sri Krishna Sinha. He joined the Interim Government under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in September 1946 and continued to be the Union Minister till July, 1979. However, Shri Jagjivan Ram resigned from the Council of Ministers under the Kamaraj Plan for revitalizing the party in 1963 and again became Union

* He is the Union Minister of Defence.

Minister in 1966. In his long ministerial career, he proved to be one of the best Ministers the country had ever produced. He dealt with various portfolios ranging from Labour, Communications, Railways to Agriculture and Defence where he made his presence felt by sheer competence.

As Defence Minister, he was always a source of inspiration to the officers and jawans. I still remember during the Bangladesh War when the US establishment threatened to send the 7th Fleet to the Bay of Bengal in order to embolden Pakistan, the bold and famous utterances of Babuji that the 7th Fleet will be sunk in Bay of Bengal, which not only demonstrated courage and conviction of a nation, but also helped in the freedom struggle of a neighbouring country. This speaks of the courage and determination of a leader of his stature.

His legislative career is as illustrious as his administrative career. He represented Sasaram in Bihar from 1952 till his death which is unique. His popularity was so much that a couple of times he was elected unopposed in general elections.

At the personal level, I had privilege of having his care and affection as a junior ministerial colleague. Whenever I wanted something from him for my State of West Bengal (Bengal was his second home state and he could speak Bengali flawlessly) he used to meet my request. After the formation of Congress Government in 1972, there was an acute shortage of foodgrains in West Bengal to support the Public Distribution System. Additional requirement was needed over and above the normal allocation to manage the situation. The request of the State Government to the Food Minister was regretted as the demands from all other States were equally acute. I met Babuji along with the then Food Minister of West Bengal, Satada (Shri Praful Kanti Ghosh) and requested him for additional allocation. Babuji made special provision for West Bengal when we explained the critical situation prevailing therein. Throughout my political career, till his death, I always received support and encouragement from him whenever I needed it.

BABU JAGJIVAN RAM—PEOPLE'S LEADER

—*Sharad Pawar**

Great leaders and personalities participated in India's Freedom Movement and later shaped its destiny in the post-Independence period. One of the stalwarts amongst them was Jagjivan Ram—popularly known as 'Babuji'. Born on 5 April, 1908 in a small village, Chandwa in Shahabad district, now known as Bhojpur in Bihar. He rose from a very humble beginnings to shape the political, social and economic future of our country.

A true man of the masses, his simplicity and intelligence endeared him to all sections and strata of people of our country. He caught the attention of Dr. Rajendra Prasad who was greatly impressed by his oratorical skills and his forceful articulation of people's grievances and aspirations. With his initiation into the Indian National Congress, began the meteoric rise of one of the greatest personalities of our times. He emerged as the leader of masses and came to be looked upon as a representative of the millions of the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes and the depressed sections of our society who had suffered socio-economic deprivation over the centuries.

In the Congress, Jagjivan Ram emerged as a staunch supporter of Mahatma Gandhi and the principles which he stood for. His early social and political life was also refined and sharpened when he was nominated to the Bihar Legislative Council and later to the Legislative Assembly. In 1946, he became the youngest Minister in the Interim Government. In the Constituent Assembly, he actively participated in shaping the Constitution of our country. He remained a Member of the House of People (Lok Sabha) continuously from the First to the Eighth Lok Sabha.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was also an important symbol of the struggle waged by the Scheduled Castes and depressed classes for equality and empowerment. As the Member of the Constituent Assembly, he ensured that free India would be rid of the pernicious practices such as untouchability and social discriminations based on caste consideration. Reservations provided to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Legislatures, public employment, education etc. were strongly supported by him to ensure economic progress

* He is the Minister of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

and socio-political empowerment for them. He believed in educating the people in order to make them conscious of their rights and privileges as citizen of a free country and enable them to lead a life of dignity and freedom. He worked ceaselessly for the unity and solidarity of the socially and economically depressed sections and led the All India Depressed Classes League while continuing to be in the Congress. In a significant divergence of views with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, he urged the Scheduled Castes and the Backward Class People to fight for the rights and dignity within the existing social set-up; he never wanted a schism between them and the forward classes. He was always in favour of social and communal harmony for the betterment of the society and for the growth and development of the nation as a whole.

Babu Jagjivan Ram had a deep and abiding faith in the efficacy of democratic polity, value-based politics and necessity for establishing an egalitarian society. He dedicated his life to strengthen such institutions and fight against casteism and bring about social transformation. His organizational skills, administrative capabilities were displayed at its best when he was entrusted with a variety of Ministries during his long political career in the Union Government. Among the Ministries which he held included: Communications, Railway and Transport, Food and Agriculture and Defence.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was the Union Labour Minister from 1946 to 1952 and again from 1966 to 1967. During his tenure some important legislations were enacted. Mention may be made of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 and the Factory Act of 1948. The Industrial Disputes Act was a very important labour legislation which provided the mechanism for settling industrial disputes and creation of healthy work environment. The Factory Act of 1948 regulated the working conditions of children and women in the Factories and Industries in conformity with the Directive Principles of State Policy as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Other important labour legislations enacted during his tenure were the Plantation Labour Act, 1961 and the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966. His pro-labour attitude also saw the appointment of the National Labour Commission which made many a recommendation that resulted in improving the conditions of the workers in the industries—both in the organized and unorganized sector. These far-reaching legislations went a long way in creating a congenial, industrial environment, providing benefits to millions of workers, boosting production and putting the country firmly on the road towards development of being a Welfare State.

Among the Ministries on which Babu Jagjivan Ram left an indelible impression were the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Earlier as the Defence Minister and presently as the Minister for Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, I have come

across the remarkable imprint he has left behind during his tenure. His dexterous handling of issues in these Ministries is still recalled with great appreciation and admiration. He was the Defence Minister during 1970-71 when Indian Armed Forces proved their superiority and professionalism beyond any doubt by fighting a successful war against Pakistan. He managed the affairs of the Defence Forces during this period with great efficiency. He used to frequently visit the jawans posted in the far-flung areas and boosted their morale by impressing on them that it was the man behind the machine which made a difference. Through his calm resolve and intelligent observations, he also won admirations of the Generals and Commanders of all the three wings of the Armed Forces while taking strategic decisions and policy formulations. He was very concerned about the modernization of the Armed Forces and laid great emphasis on achieving self-sufficiency in defence preparedness. He also encouraged indigenous research and development in the sphere of Defence and ensured that funds were never a restraining factor in this regard. The welfare of the jawans was also very close to his heart. He evolved many beneficial programmes for their resettlement—like medical treatment at army hospitals and employment opportunities for the disabled, education and family pensions for the families of the deceased. He is still very fondly remembered by our officers and jawans.

In January 1967, Babu Jagjivan Ram took over the charge as the Minister of Food and Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperation. The day he entered Krishi Bhawan to preside over one of the most vital Ministries of the Government of India, it rained heavily. The rain Gods also seemed to have changed their moods and it was a pointer of the shape of things to come. His years in this Ministry proved to be a boon for the country. He was responsible for formulation of new policies for food production and procurement. As a result of these policies, the production of wheat increased from 12 million tonne to 23 million tonne. Such near doubling of production in about four years' time was not witnessed even in developed countries like the United States and Canada. In fact, the total production of foodgrains increased from 74 million tonne to 98 million tonne during his tenure as the Food and Agriculture Minister.

In order to improve the well beings of the farmers, he introduced the price support policy and issued instruction for fixing maximum price support in the case of wheat and paddy. During his tenure, build up of the buffer stock of foodgrains was 8 million tonne. As a result of these policies of price support and procurement, the import of foodgrains was stopped. India became self-sufficient in foodgrains. Surely, a very proud moment for our country.

To Babu Jagjivan Ram also goes the credit for providing a pragmatic and stable sugar policy which has stood the test of time. Under this policy, sugar

mills were allowed a definite and substantial free sale quota which increased the viability of the sugar industry and ensured higher cane price payment to cultivators. At the same time, release mechanism which was put in place, ensured that prices did not rise abnormally. The welfare of consumers was further protected by a stable policy of obtaining levy sugar from sugar factories and supply through the Public Distribution System. The net result of these policies was a substantial increase in sugar production in 1967-68 and record production in 1969-70. The policies also took care of the concerns of all stakeholders and placed Indian Sugar Industry on a firm path of growth.

Another important decision taken by Babu Jagjivan Ram pertained to channelising the import of tractors through the state owned Agro Industrial Corporations. Thus, the huge profits which were being usurped by the importers at the cost of farmers were stopped.

The various policy initiatives and programmes launched by Shri Jagjivan Ram during his tenure as the Food and Agriculture Minister(1967-70) improved the well-being of farmers as well as the consumers. However, his single largest contribution was to make India self-sufficient in foodgrains.

He was a Cabinet Minister for over thirty years during which he was incharge of number of Ministries. As a pragmatic leader and person with vision and clear understanding he implemented policies and programmes very effectively and with great expertise. His sensitivities to people's needs, management skills and the uncanny art of getting the best from the civil servants were keys to his success.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was an outstanding parliamentarian. His sharp intellect, oratorical skills, the ability to remain calm in the most adverse circumstances stood him in good stead. Since his entry into the Bihar Legislative Council in 1936 and later from the First Lok Sabha till the Eighth Lok Sabha, he remained a legislator till his last breath. He had the unique distinction of being not only the youngest but also the longest serving Minister in the annals of Indian Parliament. He was greatly admired by his colleagues in the Congress Party and also by the Opposition for his ability to carry them along on many issues through his dignified approach and also caring for the sensibilities of his opponents in the House. He was ever willing to discuss any issue and share information with all his colleagues and left them happily satisfied by his answers. He was a very quick learner, who had a tremendous grasp over the subjects handled by his Ministries. This enabled him not only to carry out the routine administrative work efficiently, but also offer new and innovative ideas and directions.

Jagjivan Ram's abiding faith in democracy and freedom prompted him to leave the Congress when his effort to persuade the Congress leadership to

revoke the emergency failed. He formed his own political party called the Congress for Democracy which later joined the Janata Party to form the Government at the Centre.

A great organizer, administrator and social crusader, Babu Jagjivan Ram carved out a special niche for himself in India's modern political history. In his long and remarkable political career he had become a legend during his lifetime. He earned respect and admiration from all sections of the society. His contribution to our nation-building is invaluable—in the political, economic and social sectors. His life and work will undoubtedly continue to inspire generations to come.

MY FATHER'S CHILDHOOD

—Meira Kumar*

It is not easy for a daughter to write dispassionately about her father because the bonds are too close, the sentiments too deep and the images get blurred. Ever since I remember, I saw him as a national figure, a performer at centrestage, bathed in limelight. He was called upon to meet the most difficult challenges facing the nation in his times and he met them all with devastating success. Equipped with remarkable grit, intellectual rigour and a strong commitment to moral and quintessentially human values, Babuji remained the longest in that rarefied atmosphere at the top where even the best survive only briefly. As a growing child therefore, I was naturally overawed by the aura of supermanship that always surrounded him.

I loved him as my father. While the world was curious about his work, his influence and the power he wielded, I was only concerned about his person, his childhood, his youth, his struggles and his dreams. As a little girl, I loved to listen to the tales of his childhood pranks which grandmother narrated as bed-time stories. She narrated them in a style so picturesque that I see them before my eyes as paintings coloured in great detail by a very fine brush. Whenever, Barka Baba, my father's elder brother, twenty-four years his senior, came to Delhi, I would shower him with questions about Babuji's childhood. I have treasured every word that grandmother and Barka Baba spoke about Babuji and have used them painstakingly to reconstruct his early life.

The earliest scene, then, is set in the first decade of the 20th century against the backdrop of Chandwa, a small, backward village in Bihar in a country reeling under the shame of being a British colony. Babuji was born here on 5 April, 1908 amidst poverty and untouchability. For thousands of years Indian society had treated the untouchables with utter scorn and contempt. The repression and exploitation had crippled their very psyche so that they could not even entertain the idea of protesting against the unjust social system. They were the disinherited ones, a casualty of history, too feeble and with wounded souls to fight back.

But Babuji was different. He was made of sterner stuff. It was against his grain to accept injustice. As life began to unfold and he felt the trauma of his

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circumstances, he took the reins of destiny into his own hands and strode ahead unstoppable—to a new dawn. I can visualize him as an ill-clad, dusty little boy out to conquer the world.

Babuji was admitted to the village school at the age of six. It was Basant Panchami day and after offering prayers to Goddess Saraswati, he was sent to school, attired in a new yellow dhoti and velvet cap, a piece of jaggery in his mouth for good luck and a slate tucked under his arm.

My grandfather Sant Shobi Ram had set great hopes in him—the youngest of his eight children. Grandfather was tall, handsome and very upright. As a young man, he had resigned from his job in the British Army, to protest against their unjust conduct. Thereafter, he worked in the Calcutta Medical College, but retired prematurely to settle down to a quiet, ascetic life in Chandwa. The produce of his land somehow sustained the family. As the priest of the Shiva-Narayani Sect, most of his time was spent in praying and writing the holy book “Anayas” in his beautiful, long hand to distribute among his disciples. He died young, when my father was only six. His last words to my father were “I have taught English to your elder brother but I have not even taught Hindi to you. May you scale great heights in life”. It was then that my grandmother Vasanti Devi, a lady of rare wisdom and courage, made a silent vow to her departing husband that she would spare no effort to give the best education to her young son.

The village school was his temple of learning. There were new books to read and there was so much to learn. He had just learnt to spell his long name but one of his friends invariably spelt it wrong in order to tease him. Once the teasing led to a heated argument followed by fist cuffs. The friend went crying to Panditji, who not only scolded Babuji, but also thrashed him without giving him a chance to explain. This was his first encounter with injustice. Furious at the treatment meted out to him, he took a long stick and climbed atop a mango tree instead of going home for lunch. When grandmother made inquiries, she was told that he was very angry and threatened to beat anyone who dared to go near the tree. When further inquiries revealed that he was beaten for no fault of his, she headed for Panditji’s house. She told Panditji’s wife in no uncertain terms that her husband was not only guilty of gross injustice to her little son, but was also responsible for beating him and keeping him without food. She made these charges in a manner so forceful and so appealing that she won instant support from the Panditani who joined her in her mission against injustice. The two accosted Panditji who was already suffering from pangs of remorse. The child he had wrongly punished was the brightest he had seen in his long, teaching career and he had the intuition that the little boy would do him proud one day. He apologized to grandmother and the Panditani, who were

still in a belligerent mood, and then proceeded to the mango tree to beckon his favourite student. Babuji politely came down, but declared his refusal to study in Panditji's school. Panditji was finally able to pacify him, but the little crusader had won his first battle.

The incident, which left a lasting impact on him, occurred when he was around seven. It was rainy season and the tiny rivulet Gangi, which criss-crossed the eastern side of the village, had swelled. One hot afternoon Babuji and his friend went for a swim after school. The current was too powerful for the young swimmers. Being closer to the shore, the friend managed to come out, Babuji could not. Overcome by fierce mid-stream current he was fast drifting away when a woman spotted him. She had a long stick for driving her pigs. She rushed and extended the stick to rescue him. He saw the stick, outstretched his arm, held it tight and using all his might came out. It all happened in a flash, but it kindled a light within him forever. By accident, he had chanced upon the *Moolmantra*, the basic philosophy of his life, which he never allowed himself to forget. That the elderly lady thereafter was accorded the same respect, which was reserved for his mother, is another matter. What is significant is that the incident became a reference point in his life, one to which he referred again and again for sustenance, especially in trying moments.

Perched on his knees as a little girl, or sitting by his side when I grew up, I often heard him talk of it. The elderly lady was, no doubt, a help, he would explain, but what really mattered was that he had the presence of mind to hold on to the stick and the strength within him to pull himself out.

After finishing middle school, Babuji joined the high school in Arrah town. Although his reputation as a topper had already preceded him, it was eclipsed by the social prejudices prevalent at the time—prejudices that unfortunately exist even today. The most unusual reception awaited him upon his arrival at the school. To the school verandah which hitherto had accommodated two earthen pitchers, the Hindu and the Muslim pitcher, was added a third one—the untouchable pitcher. At the sight of this, his innocent face quivered in anguish and his young frame froze with incapacitating humiliation. He bent, picked up a stone and, as if in a trance, hurled it at the pitcher with all the force at his command. The next day the broken pitcher was replaced by a new one. Once again he aimed a stone, shattering it, as if he shattered not the pitcher but what lay behind it, that age-old practice of inhuman discrimination which heaped untold hurt and insults on the likes of him. The breaking of the untouchable pitcher remained a mystery for the headmaster and the others in the school. But with every new pitcher meeting the same fate, the exasperated headmaster gave in and what followed can

only be termed revolutionary by all standards in the Bihar of 1920s. The school verandah thereafter had only one earthen pitcher for every one.

At the age of ten when most of his classmates were content with the monotonous and uneventful life of that sleepy little village, Babuji was possessed by a strong urge to know what was happening outside its narrow confines. Reading the newspaper was one way, but the village provided no such opportunity. So, every morning without fail he would walk considerable distance to the Arrah railway station just to read a newspaper. While in the high school, he regularly spent two hours in the town library. Gandhiji's "*Young India*" and Bankim Chandra's "*Anand Math*", were of special interest. He specially learnt Bengali to read '*Anand Math*' in original.

The coming of the monsoon was always welcomed in Chandwa, but that year it spelt disaster. Days of continuous and heavy downpour brought unprecedented floods. Babuji's humble mudhouse caved in. Barka Baba was in Calcutta on work. Babuji, then in his teens, spent the whole day moving the household goods and the stock of foodgrains to the tiny hillock nearby where he and grandmother took shelter along with the other villagers. Alone he had to make innumerable trips to and fro, carrying heavy items on his frail shoulders. By sunset when he had managed to retrieve almost everything, it suddenly occurred to grandmother that some silver coins, her savings of years buried in the kitchen wall had been left behind. Scared to send her son at that hour to dig out the coins she went herself. Babuji naturally followed. But they could not go far. The water level had risen erasing every trace of their home as also of the earthen pot which contained their modest savings. Bewildered and helpless, they returned. The water receded in a few days and the house was rebuilt. But the experience, as Babuji so often recalled had toughened him beyond his age.

I must write about his eventful journey to Khopira where the family owned a small piece of land.

Harvesting had begun in right earnest in the vast stretches of paddy fields, as lilting melodies of Bhojpuri folk songs filled the winter air. Soon a relative came from Khopira to inform *Dadi* that harvesting being completed, the paddy should be collected. Since the high school was closed for winter vacations, Babuji volunteered himself for the task. The two proceeded to Khopira in a bullock cart which wound its way through the thicket and narrow pathways. There was chill in the air and dew drops shimmered in the golden light of the morning sun. Birds twittered and occasionally a stray hare darted from the bushes as they went swinging and swaying to the rhythm of their wagon. As they approached the village, the relative nudged Babuji to the side of the cart.

They were in the vicinity of the colony of the Babu Sahebs. According to the custom, untouchables had to get down from their bullock carts, take off their shoes, fold their umbrellas and walk through that part of the village with bowed heads. If they did not, they would attract abuse and assault. No one had ever questioned the demeaning custom. Some did not have the courage, others the conscience.

Babuji decided to defy the custom. Refusing to fold his umbrella, take off his shoes, or get down from the wagon, he forced his relative to follow suit. The terror stricken relative trembled and quivered and begged him not to invite doom while Babuji firmly held him from falling off the cart. The Babu Sahebs were too taken aback to react and the cart slowly passed through the narrow lanes and by-lanes, trampling over the outdated system they had so zealously guarded. They pretended not to look, but watched stealthily from the corners of their eyes a new era emerge from the trail of dust raised by the cart. The elan and panache of the fearless boy aboard the cart dazzled the inhabitants of Khopira and changed the course of their lives in the days to come.

Of the myriad colours in the kaleidoscope of Babuji's childhood, I have brought into focus just a few. It is not that others do not deserve to be highlighted, but taken together, they all serve to point to the informing principle of his life, to instill courage, to fight for the oppressed and to take charge of one's destiny.

BABU JAGJIVAN RAM: A GREAT VISIONARY

—T. N. Chaturvedi*

There are times in the history of every country when it seems that titans walk the earth. For India, that time came during the period when the country was fighting for its freedom from alien rule under the inspired and inspiring leadership and guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. But these stalwarts —Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, to name a few, vanished much too soon, leaving our country poorer. But, we were fortunate that some of the founding fathers remained with us for almost 40 years after the dawn of freedom, giving us the benefit of their wisdom, experience and courage. Notable among these was Babu Jagjivan Ram, who was much younger and emerged as the indomitable champion of the poor and the downtrodden. Without a brief recapitulation of his life, it is well-nigh impossible to have an adequate and proper assessment of his place in our national life.

The Life and Political Career of Jagjivan Ram

Jagjivan Ram was born on 5 April 1908 in Chandwa, a small village in Bhojpur, in Bihar in a Scheduled Caste family. His grandfather, Shiva Narain, was an agricultural labourer. Jagjivan's father, Shobhi Ram, was born in 1864. He lost his mother at a young age and was brought up by his grandmother. Shiva Narain died soon after, and Shobhi Ram was, more or less, adopted by an uncle, who worked in the army in Punjab. Shobhi Ram learned English and got a job in an army hospital. He had a spiritual bent of mind, and joined the Shiva Narayani Sect. He married Vasanti Devi, and had eight children — three boys and five girls—of whom Jagjivan Ram was the youngest.

Young Jagjivan's schooling began on Basant Panchmi in January 1914. He went to a *pathshala* run by Pandit Kapil Muni Tewari. After passing the Upper Primary School Examination in 1919 he began to attend the Agarwal Middle School. Jagjivan became a proficient debater in school, a trait which was to stand him in good stead in later life. Jagjivan did not show much interest in politics at this time, but was quite aware of the momentous events that were taking place in the country. Those were the days of the Khilafat movement, and he read about it and its underlying causes in the newspapers that he used to devour vociferously—another habit that continued throughout

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life. It was at this time that he began to wear a Gandhi cap, which became something of a trademark—he was probably one of the last Congressmen to wear it as part of his daily dress, well into late life, when the cap became an accoutrement, one wore only at party meetings. After a visit to Calcutta, where his elder brother lived, Jagjivan returned to Bihar. In 1925, he attended the Bihari Student's Conference as a delegate. He took away from the Conference a deep impression of the personality of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, one of the early leaders of the Congress. This would soon prove to be crucial in his life. Greater contacts in future created strong bonds of mutual affection and respect between the grand old man and a young man of promise.

Jagjivan passed the Matriculation Examination in 1926. He had taken Sanskrit and Mathematics as extra subjects, in addition to the compulsory subjects. He passed in the First Division, and with full marks in Mathematics. It so happened that Pandit Malaviya and Mohammad Ali paid a visit to Arrah the same year. An Address was presented by the Scheduled Caste community, and read out by the young Jagjivan. Impressed, Malaviya urged him to come to Banaras and join the Banaras Hindu University and study for Intermediate Science, which Jagjivan did in July 1926.

However, it was here that he began to face caste prejudice for the first time on a sustained basis. While there had been no particular discrimination at the *pathshala*, Jagjivan had faced some unreasonable prejudice in the Middle School, when he was forced to drink water from a pitcher meant exclusively for him, and not from the one used by the upper caste hindu boys. The situation in Banaras became frightful due to rampant caste prejudices and he moved out of the university campus and began to live in an area of the city known as Lanka.

However, the situation did not improve and Jagjivan Ram organized his first campaign against untouchability. The provocation was the refusal of the barber to cut his hair after having discovered his caste. Jagjivan organized a boycott of all barbers by members of the Scheduled Castes. After six months, the barbers gave in. Jagjivan had won his first battle.

At Banaras, Jagjivan Ram studied Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Hindi and English. He was a keen participant in the Student Parliament of the Banaras Hindu University, where he honed his already considerable skills. He was an inveterate sportsman and became a devotee of Hindi language. Banaras, at this time, had a number of eminent Hindi literary persons such as Shyam Sundar Das, Ramchandra Shukla, and Lala Bhagwan Din teaching there. He also attended meetings of the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society, and heard a number of Annie Besant's lectures. His was a searching mind trying to learn more and more and also ruminating all along as to what path or course of action he should take at that stage of his life.

But the matter that exercised his mind the most was that of prevailing caste prejudice. He undertook an extensive study of the *Vedas*, Brahmin Granths, and the 18 Puranas (in original Sanskrit), and their extensive commentaries in order to discover whether untouchability was divinely ordained. He concluded that it was not, instead it was an ugly manifestation of the stratification of Hindu society. He also understood that the only way for the community to break the barriers thrown up by caste prejudice was to assert its rights. The only way they could be assertive was through organizing themselves. A look towards the East showed him that a large number of members of his community, from his own home province, lived in Calcutta, working in hospitals and jute mills. Jagjivan, therefore, resolved to go to Calcutta and wake his community to their intrinsic power and create awareness of their potential strength and significance in national life.

Jagjivan joined the Vidyasagar College at Calcutta in 1928. After Banaras, standard at the Vidyasagar did not prove difficult at all. In fact, in his third year, Jagjivan finished the curriculum for the next year. This left him ample time for what he was determined to do in life *i.e.* to ameliorate the conditions of his people. He began to contact important members of the community in Calcutta, and began to organize *Ravidas Sabhas* in different parts of the city. A Meeting was also organized at the Wellington Park. Even Jagjivan was surprised by the presence of 15,000 people at the venue. The 25-year-old student was now seen to be an upcoming leader of greatest promise in his own right.

Jagjivan took two further steps to consolidate his position. Within the community, he began to argue for social reforms. He worked against consumption of meat, and drinking of wine. This brought him into touch with senior leaders of the community. Some of them treated him in a condescending fashion, others declared their adherence—but all found in him an emerging leader of ability and determination.

He also established links with the leaders of the Congress party in Bengal, such as J.M. Sengupta, Dr. B.C. Roy, P.C. Ghosh and Subhas Chandra Bose. He also came into touch with the influential Marwari Community of Calcutta—Jugal Kishore Birla, Sita Ram Seksaria and Basantlal Murarka, to name a few. Ironically, Jagjivan had entry into the highest ranks of the Congress leadership in Calcutta, much before he met any senior Congressman from his home province of Bihar.

Jagjivan attended the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1928 presided over by Motilal Nehru. He fell ill and was unable to give his examinations, which he finally did in 1932 and received his B.Sc. degree. He received his initiation into jail-entry when one day he observed some policemen

lathicharging a group of Congressmen near the Presidency College. Though an observer, he was hit by a policeman. His pride hurt, he immediately decided to court arrest and was taken to jail.

The country was electrified by the fast of Mahatma Gandhi at the act of the British Government in separating Caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes in electoral representation. When the action was nullified after the Poona Pact, Jagjivan wrote an angry letter to the Mahatma, questioning his reasons for not permitting the Scheduled Castes from having seats reserved for them in the Assemblies. He received a reply from Gandhiji's Secretary, stating that the Mahatma believed that any separation of this kind would have a negative impact on the Scheduled Castes themselves.

An Anti-untouchability League was set up with Shri G.D. Birla as its provisional President. The Organization was later renamed the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. Its purpose was social and economic upliftment of the *Harijans*, as Gandhi now described the Scheduled Castes. However, due to his increased political activity, Jagjivan had to end his links with the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* later. Due to his burgeoning reputation, Jagjivan Ram was also invited to attend the Leaders Conference in 1932 at Bombay. He also attended the Bihar Provincial Anti-untouchability Conference at Patna. Leaders of the Congress, Arya Samaj and *Hindu Mahasabha* also attended. Jagjivan Ram was offended by the nature of the speeches being made, which cast the onus for untouchability on the scheduled castes themselves. He retorted that only the upper castes needed to reform themselves. This created a furore, but one of the Congress leaders present was Dr. Rajendra Prasad. He told Jagjivan Ram to devote more time to Bihar and he readily agreed to do so. He also became the Secretary of the Bihar branch of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. For the rest of his life, Bihar was to be the epicentre of his activities. Jagjivan Ram had married at an early age and his wife died in 1933. He married Indirani Devi in 1934. They had a son and a daughter. The son unfortunately, died at an early age. The daughter Smt. Meira Kumar after quitting the Indian Foreign Service followed the footsteps of her father. She joined politics, was elected to the Parliament and became a Minister in the U.P.A. Government in 2004.

At the All India Depressed Classes Leaders Unity Conference in Kanpur in 1935, Jagjivan Ram proved to be the guiding spirit. He pointed out that the Harijans would not be able to advance their efforts at social and economic upliftment if they were not able to secure representation for themselves in elected bodies. Moreover, there had to be unity among them, as they would otherwise nullify their efforts by working through a number of different and separate organizations. He also emphasized that it was important to be linked to the mainstream of the freedom movement, as exemplified by

Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress. As a result of his efforts, the All India Depressed Classes League was formed, with Rasiklal Biswas as its President and P.N. Rajbhoj and Jagjivan Ram as Secretaries. He also became the President of the Bihar branch of the Depressed Classes League.

A new and perplexing question arose, when Dr. Ambedkar threatened that the Scheduled Castes in the country would embrace a religion other than Hinduism in view of the blatant caste discrimination and Jagjivan Ram was opposed to this view. He attended the All India Mahasabha Conference at Pune in December 1936 with a 30-member strong delegation. The Party President, Malaviya appealed that all the disabilities put before Harijans should be removed. All went well, until an amendment was moved that while Harijans could enter temples, they could not enter the main shrine room. Taking objection to it, Jagjivan Ram threatened to leave. Malaviya stepped in and the move was dropped. This goes to show the stature and prestige that Jagjivan Ram had acquired in just a few years.

As noted, Jagjivan Ram had strongly opposed Ambedkar's views on conversion. He made his disagreement public and in the campaign for the Assembly elections in 1937, exhorted Harijans across the country not to cut themselves off from the national mainstream.

A major event took place in 1936, when Jagjivan Ram was nominated to the Bihar Legislative Council. This followed the separation of Orissa from Bihar. As a result, the position of a nominated member from the Scheduled Castes became vacant, since the member was from Orissa and had shifted to the Orissa Assembly. Jagjivan Ram stunned everyone on the first day of the Council. As a nominated member, it was expected that Jagjivan Ram would normally vote with the Treasury Benches on all issues. However, Jagjivan Ram thought that the Opposition's demand that canal rates be cut was justified and voted against the rates. He had proved that he was his own man, a man with vision and determination.

In the elections to the Bihar Assembly in 1937, the League contested all 15 reserved constituencies and won 14 of them. The Congress had adopted all the 15 candidates as its own. The Interim Chief Minister of Bihar, Mohammad Yunus tried to get Jagjivan Ram to join his Ministry. He, however, declined the offer and even refused to consider any negotiations, making it clear that the League must support the Congress Party in the Legislature. Dr. Rajendra Prasad brought Jagjivan Ram's stand to the notice of Gandhiji who publicly described him as a "jewel". He became a Parliamentary Secretary in the First Congress Ministry, later on with responsibility for Development, Cooperatives and Industries. During his brief tenure, Jagjivan Ram did pioneering work in organizing the Department of Rural Development. He

added an electrical and mechanical section to the Department of Industries. Even while he was Parliamentary Secretary, he organized the *Khetihaar Mazdoor Sabha* to uphold the rights of agricultural labourers. He was opposed by the socialists, who floated their own outfits. He left office when the Congress Ministries resigned to protest against the forced entry of India in the Second World War without consulting Indian opinion.

In 1940, Jagjivan Ram was elected Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Congress, an office he held till 1946. He was also elected to the All India Congress Committee, a position he was to hold until his departure from the party in 1977. He offered individual satyagraha and was arrested. After his release, he became involved in the Quit India Movement. He tried to organize resistance against the British, doing his best to ensure that at no point did it turn violent. He was finally arrested again, but released in 1943 due to illness.

On 12 August, 1946, the Viceroy Lord Wavell, invited Jawaharlal Nehru to form a coalition government consisting of representatives of the Muslim League, Congress and other elements in India. The Muslim League refused to join, on the ground that all Muslim Ministers should be from their party, and, therefore, Maulana Azad could not be a Minister. The Interim Government was finally installed in September 1946. On 2 September 1946, Jagjivan Ram, at the age of 38 was sworn in as the Minister for Labour. He was to stay in office till the first General Elections of 1952.

Jagjivan Ram was a Member of the Indian Government from 1946 to 1979, with two short breaks. In 1963, he resigned under the Kamraj Plan to revitalize the Congress party. Again in February 1977 he resigned from the Government and Party to form the Congress for Democracy. He became a Minister again in March 1977. He was thus a Member of the Central Legislative Assembly and the Constituent Assembly (1946-50), a Member of the Provisional Parliament (1950-52) and also a Member of the first Eight Lok Sabhas.

He was the Minister of Communications (1952-56), Minister for Transport (1956-57), Minister for Railways (1957-62), Minister for Transport and Communications (1962-63), Minister for Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation (1966), Minister for Food, Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperation (1967-70), Minister of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation (1969-79), Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation (1974-77), Minister for Defence (1970-74 and 1977-79). He was also President of the Congress Party (1969-71). It has not been given to many in public life to have such a vast and varied experience of public affairs.

He was also a Member of the All India Congress Working Committee (1948-77), Congress Economic Planning Sub-Committee, Central Parliamentary

Board (1950-77), Congress Central Election Committee (1951-56 and 1961-77), Chairman of the Reception Committee of the 67th Session of Indian National Congress at Patna (1962), Member of the Vallabhbhai Patel Trust and Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and Trustee, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Trust.

Jagjivan Ram served with distinction in all the Ministries that he held for over 30 years. We will have a look at his brief achievements in this sphere.

Nevertheless, it will not be out of place to refer to two major events here. First, as the Defence Minister during the India-Pakistan War of 1971, it was Jagjivan Ram who saw to it that the armed forces had all that they required for the task before them and was instrumental in keeping their morale and that of the country, at a high level. Secondly, Jagjivan Ram made a reference at one point of time on the need to have a “committed” bureaucracy. What he meant was that the bureaucracy should be committed to the implementation of the programmes of the Government of the day and the ideas and ideals of the Constitution without fear or favour. This was, however, interpreted in certain circles as calling for the bureaucracy to be committed to the ruling party as that had come to prevail on the perspective of looking at administration in certain vocal political circles. It is necessary, therefore, to quote the relevant passage, as it is not easily available today.

The following is what Jagjivan Ram said as the Congress President at Bombay:

“We have had to depend all these years on an administrative apparatus which was set up for entirely different purposes. It was originally colonial and was meant to subserve British interests and perpetuate British rule. It did not then have the much-publicized civil services neutrality. It was very much a committed service-committed to the maintenance of British rule at any cost. In the post-Independence era, the administrative apparatus did undergo certain changes but the basic structure remained unaltered. The machinery, in the higher layers, is manned today by the best products of Indian universities and it swears by British principles and traditions. But, at best, it may be said to be only a pale imitation of its British counterpart. Neutrality of the services, in a country where social disparities are extremely glaring and where the privileged classes control all the levers of power, invariably operate to the advantage of the privileged and the disadvantage of the have-nots. Moreover, in a country which has stagnated for centuries and where centuries of delayed progress are sought to be compressed into a decade, where the pace of economic change has to be accelerated beyond measure, the so-called neutral administrative machinery is a hindrance, not a help. The theory, moreover, of a neutral bureaucracy

is hardly relevant to Indian conditions. The society in which the concept emerged and got institutionalized was different and had a different background. To regard that development, therefore, as an integral part of the democratic structure is not wholly tenable, nor necessary. Has our bureaucracy, particularly at the lower echelons, that dedication to duty and that pride of work which characterizes its British counterpart? Does it have that impartiality which is another name for neutrality? We need, therefore, clearly and inevitably, an apparatus with a purpose, a mind. We need a service committed to the ideal of democracy, socialism and secularism. I know it calls for a major revolution in the thinking of the services, in the administrative procedures, rules, regulations. The recruitment policy and the recruiting agencies will have to be so re-oriented that the personnel manning the administrative machinery at various levels will be helpful in effecting the social and economic changes required for the establishment of democracy, socialism and secularism on a firm and secure basis”.

After over 30 years of association in the Congress, Jagjivan Ram left the Party in 1977, just before the general elections were to take place. He formed a new party, the Congress for Democracy. The party allied with the Janata Party in the general elections and joined the new coalition of Janata Party Government, before merging into it. When the time came for the alliance to choose a Prime Minister to head the new Government, Jagjivan Ram was expected to be the clear front runner. However, the mantle finally fell on the shoulders of Morarji Desai and Jagjivan Ram went back to his old job as the Defence Minister to the great satisfaction of the Defence forces. From January to July 1979, Jagjivan Ram was also the Deputy Prime Minister. Many in the country, felt that a great injustice had been done to a political stalwart, one with unprecedented experience of public affairs in general and of governmental functioning in particular.

When the Government of Morarji Desai fell in 1979, following the decision of a section of the Janata Party to move out, President N. Sanjeeva Reddy asked Charan Singh to form a Government. Following Charan Singh's inability to prove his majority in Parliament, it was expected that the President would turn again to the new leader of the Janata Party, Jagjivan Ram and offer him a chance to try and form a Government. However, the President decided that any further attempt to form a Government was futile, dissolved the Lok Sabha and ordered fresh elections. Thus, the country found that Jagjivan Ram had, once again, been denied the chance to head a Government. Though he retained his seat in the subsequent election, he never again held office. Among his last work was the publication of a landmark sociological study, “Caste Challenge in India”. He passed away on 6 July 1986.

HIS CONTRIBUTION AS A MINISTER

As Minister of Labour

The selection of Jagjivan Ram as the Labour Minister in the interim Government from 1946 to 1950 proved to be the right choice. During his six years in office, he laid the foundations of labour welfare in India, which, after more than 50 years, still bear the imprint of his firm hand. Till this time, all the laws relating to labour were those which were heavily tilted towards the big business and factory owners. For the first time, the pendulum swung the other way and laws were now enacted in favour of labour.

As the Labour Minister, Jagjivan Ram worked out a five-year plan, which he proceeded to implement. It was based on the promise made by the Congress that it would implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission, 1931 and the Labour Investigation Committee, 1946. He put through laws that guaranteed the rights and privileges of labour. During his tenure, he ensured that the consultative machinery comprising the Government, the labour and the employers yielded results and did not stagnate. During this period, he also led the Indian delegation to the International Labour Organisation's Conference, where he was elected President of the Asian Regional Conference of the Organisation.

The landmark laws that were passed during this period included Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946; Mica Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act, 1946; Industrial Disputes Act, 1947; Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act, 1948; Factories Act, 1948; The Minimum Wages Act, 1948; Coal Mines Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1948; Industrial Tribunal (Appellate Tribunal) Act, 1950; Plantation Labour Act, 1951; Employees Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.

As Minister of Transport and Communications

After the first General Election, Jagjivan Ram was shifted to the Transport and Communications, a charge that he was to hold twice. The transport and communication systems in India were still at a rudimentary stage, with the bare minimum possible having been done under the British rule. Whatever had been done was with a view to the firm and easy working of British rule and enhancement of trade favouring the British. The focus of Jagjivan Ram as the Minister was on developing the transport and communication system in the country in an integrated, holistic manner and as per the needs of India.

Jagjivan Ram first turned to the question of civil aviation. An Air Transport Inquiry Committee reported in 1950 that the Sector should be left in private hands for five years. If, during that period, it proved unable to break even,

the Government should take it over. Another factor was the fact that the aircraft being used were antiquated and the industry was not in a position to buy new one. It was, therefore, thought prudent to take over the industry. The Air Corporation Act, 1953, took over eight air companies and combined them into two-Indian Airlines for domestic service and Air India for international services. New aerodromes were also built across the country. Jagjivan Ram also emphasized the improvement of meteorological services, realizing that they were important not only for aviation but also for river valley projects, Railways, Defence services, etc.

Jagjivan Ram was the first to understand and enunciate the need for a National Transport Policy for independent India. He set up a Committee under K.C. Neogy to formulate such a policy. He understood that a modernizing economy needed a comprehensive system of transport which would also ensure that there was no wastage or duplication of efforts. Apart from air transport, he also placed shipping, ports and highways on a priority list for development during his administration.

The Shipping Corporation of India expanded its fleet and covered all trade routes across the sea lanes. A programme was set up for the rapid expansion and modernization of ports. These included the Calcutta and Haldia Dock projects, the Wet Dock at Madras (Chennai), expansion of Mormugao, Visakhapatnam, Cochin, Tuticorin, Mangalore and Kandla. Apart from these, 160 minor ports across the coast were also brought into use.

The number of national highways went up and the total length of roads increased tremendously. In Delhi, the Delhi Transport Corporation's fleet was expanded. The Border Roads Development Board was also set up. A National Transport Development Council was set up, which made important recommendations related to taxation, establishment of a National Road Safety Council and framing rules for transport of goods by road and development of inland water transport.

The Ministry of Communications covered a huge number of different organizations spread throughout the country. These included all the posts and telegraph organizations, as well as the Post Office Savings Bank, National Savings Certificates, Postal Insurance, collection of licence fee, and also, in later years, enterprises such as the Indian Telephone Industries (Bangalore) and Hindustan Teleprints (Chennai).

One of the major achievements of Babuji was to bring post offices to rural areas. During his tenure, the number of post offices doubled. He laid down a rule that every village with a population of 2,000 should have a post office. He also laid down that if there was no such village nearby, then the criteria should be that no one should have to walk for more than two miles to reach a post office.

Another innovation was to motorise mail services wherever possible, thus improving delivery time. He also emphasized ancillary services such as the Post Office Savings Bank, which brought the banking system to many parts of the country for the first time. He also considerably improved and expanded the service of the money orders, which proved to be extremely popular with people in rural areas. The quality of stamps was also improved with the aid of modern technology. He also set up the Regional Post and Telegraph advisory bodies, which gave inputs as to what was required in a certain area and the problems that were being faced by the public. Such advisory bodies ensured that there was no wastage of resources, improved efficiency and brought the public into the policy-making loop. He also focused on the expansion of overseas communications services, noting that it was an absolute necessity in a modernizing country.

The telephone system in the country had expanded during the Second World War due to the need of the military for instant communication. During this time, the Government also took over a number of private companies, which were integrated to form a single, unitary, modern telephone system. By 1955, the number of telephone exchanges had gone up to 759, from 321 in 1947. Long-distance Public Call Offices, Local Call Offices and Rural Public Call Offices sprang up all over the country. As a matter of policy, in 1955 it was decided that every district town should have a telephone exchange and every sub-division public call offices. Ninety per cent of district towns were covered by 1956. In the same period, 70 per cent of sub-divisions were also covered.

To save valuable foreign exchange, it was decided to set up the Indian Telephone Industries to manufacture telephone instruments and other instruments needed by the telephone exchanges. A new trend began when instruments and exchanges began to be exported to countries such as Egypt, Nepal, Kuwait, Uganda, Sri Lanka, etc.

Thus, in both transport and communications, the foundations for a modern India were laid early on, during Jagjivan Ram's tenure. At no point was there any slackness in the system. He also ensured that the morale of the employees in these crucial areas was never affected adversely, by taking into consideration all their needs and making provision for them.

As Minister of Railways

The Railways were the key to India's economic development during this time. Without a functioning Railways System, the integration of the States following Independence would have been difficult. However, there was a major difference between the Railway System before and after Independence. Before 1947, the Railways were geared to taking raw materials, minerals etc.

from the interior to the coast for export. After Independence, the focus shifted to providing a viable transport system for both people and for the movement of goods and materials within the country, given the great distances which needed to be traversed.

Moreover, the system had been shattered following Partition and had to be reconstituted. It was with this in view that in 1956 Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru shifted Jagjivan Ram to Railways, a tribute to his effective handling of his earlier responsibilities with brilliant results.

The basic objectives of the Railways' Five-Year Plan for rehabilitation was to provide the needed capacity for freight and coaches, while modernizing equipment, keeping financial constraints in view and to maximize efficiency.

Major steps were taken towards the goal of self-sufficiency in equipment and the basis for a rolling stock industry was laid. The Chittaranjan Locomotive Works made progress and a modern Integral Coach Factory was also set up and the Ganga Bridge project was soon underway. Jagjivan Ram placed great emphasis on the expansion of the existing network. New lines were laid, single lines were doubled and electric traction took place. A number of railway yards were remodelled. The Minister insisted that regular meetings took place of a Committee of railway engineers, public works department and irrigation and forest departments of State Governments in order to iron out problems.

Shri Jagjivan Ram also initiated action for electrification of Railway on a big scale during his tenure.

As in other Ministries that he had to look after, Jagjivan Ram in Railways, too, laid great emphasis on the welfare of Railway workers. For the first time, Railway workers got a Pension Scheme in 1957. He also examined ways and means by which promotions could be faster. He insisted on Joint Committees of Officers and Staff at all levels "to make the staff feel as partners in common endeavour". He also started a number of staff training schools to inculcate the necessary skills in an expanding workforce for an ever-expanding network. An interesting measure that he took for staff welfare was to start two holiday homes for rail workers at Srinagar and Pahalgam in Kashmir, after discovering that they were becoming favoured destinations.

It was during Jagjivan Ram's stint at the Railways that reservations were made for promotion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. More than that, he forced through measures which led to the building of new quarters for rail staff across the country. New railway hospitals and dispensaries were also opened. By June 1959, some 500 primary schools were opened for the children of rail workers. Hostels were also set up in areas where staff were forced to send their children for education. All children were given a free uniform at these schools.

As Minister of Food/Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation

The Ministry was usually looked upon as a graveyard for reputations. Jagjivan Ram took charge at a time when the country was reeling under drought. But, as was his wont, he faced the challenge and viewed it as an opportunity. As he once remarked: "The growth of the national economy is, in a way, the growth of agriculture itself. And development of agriculture in a rational way is, to a considerable extent, the promotion of social justice for the weaker sections".

The Green Revolution in the future brought by agricultural scientists would have been impossible without the unstinting support that Jagjivan Ram gave them from early days during his stewardship of the Ministry. This was possible only because of the new food policy initiated by Jagjivan Ram. Its basic components were as follows:

"Domestic procurement must be always undertaken without fail, public distribution of foodgrains should be a regular feature of food management, a buffer stock needed to be built up, incentive prices needed to be paid to farmers and high-yield seeds should be used."

He also elaborated on the need for introducing machinery in agriculture. It is this integrated approach which paid dividends and helped to turn the country from a food-deficient to a food-surplus nation.

As Minister of Defence

This, unquestionably, was Jagjivan Ram's finest hour. When refugees began to pour into India from East Pakistan, he made it clear that India would not stop them from coming in and it would also not force them into East Pakistan as long as President Yahya Khan was in power. As the rhetoric became more and more belligerent from the Pakistan side, the Defence Minister made it clear, time and again, that the armed forces were ready for any misadventure from the other side. He also noted that if any conflict took place, it would be on Pakistani soil.

The changes in the nuances of Indian policy could be seen in the statements being made by Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi and the Defence Minister. Both naturally hardened their tone as time went by. But, the Prime Minister concentrated on diplomacy, while the Defence Minister made the country ready for conflict, all along maintaining and boosting the morale of the armed forces. He had the unstinted support of the Prime Minister and his colleagues and earned the confidence of the Defence forces at all levels.

After the successful conclusion of the War, which ended with the creation of Bangladesh, Jagjivan Ram proved through his imagination and deft

handling as to why he had been given this job in the first place. He liberalized the pensions for the families of those killed in the war. The families received three-fourths of the pay which the officer was drawing at the time of his death, till the time he would have retired. After that, the family would receive the pension that he would have drawn otherwise after retirement. All those wounded would be employed in the army in some capacity. Those who were disabled would receive their full pay for life. Other benefits were also extended to the families of those killed in action. These actions showed the extent of Jagjivan Ram's humanity.

As the Defence Minister he made changes in the organization of the armed forces to make them more efficient. For one, he ended the system of recruitments to regiments on a caste basis and also ensured that recruitment centres were spread all over the country, giving ample scope for all to join the armed forces. He also focused on the indigenization of defence equipment. As part of this, the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) was given a major boost in the budget.

Jagjivan Ram was rightly acclaimed with great enthusiasm in a public reception at Red Fort by his countrymen.

The Political, Social and Economic Philosophy of Babu Jagjivan Ram

Being a busy politician and a senior Minister he did not have enough time to express his thinking in any holistic and academic framework despite his intellectual sharpness, deep understanding and intensive as well as extensive experience of men and public affairs. He did not put his thoughts down in a systematic manner, except on the question of caste (in the book "Caste Challenge in India") at a later stage. However, it is possible to make a brief survey of his outlook and thinking by sifting through the numerous speeches, addresses and interviews that he gave, as well as the records of his debates in Parliament which bear testimony to a wide ranging mind and a keen observer with capacity to analyse every problem threadbare with an eye on constructive and practical solution.

Political Philosophy

Jagjivan Ram's political convictions came from certain observations that he made of society and his personal experience of politics in actual life. The first was that caste had been perverted from its original intention, into a social reality in which one group considered itself to be superior to another and deprived it of all rights. The only way to end this was for the oppressed to unite and through the strength of their numbers, bring to an end this discrimination. Simultaneously, the oppressed group must work with other sections of society and not against them. If it worked against other groups,

it was not likely to end discrimination, but might even end up increasing it. One discerns a sense of agony but no acrimony in his approach to this thorny problem.

It was for this reason that the Depressed Classes League joined hands with the Congress. Jagjivan Ram maintained his strength through his own organizations, while simultaneously working in tandem with those he believed harboured a view of society similar to his. In this manner, he hoped to bring about harmony and cohesiveness in society. As a Minister, while he took particular interest in the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, he did not confine himself to them. He looked after the welfare of the entire broad spectrum of those who constituted society. This could only be possible in a democratic system. He worked for a participatory democracy, as could be seen in the manner in which he tried to involve as many people as possible in the making of policies in many of the Ministries that he headed, consulting widely and deeply with sincerity and sensitivity.

On Economic Issues

Jagjivan Ram was a firm believer in a Planned economy. According to him, it was the only way in which not just the narrow interests of one section of society, who held all power in their hands, but the interests of all sections of society, could be served. It was also the only tool through which the wastage of scarce resources could be prevented. It is interesting to consider the lengthy reply that he gave to a question on whether the adoption of democratic socialism in India had been correct:

“Ideologies and concepts do change from time to time. Gandhiji made the village the centre-piece in his concept of planning. He stressed as imperative of planning, the utilizing of the unutilized or under-utilised rural labour and their skill through organization of agriculture and village industries. He advocated the democratic decentralization and dispersal of economic and political power. All his constructive programmes were related to his ideal of making a new man in a new society. When power shifted into the hands of the people, the ideals took the shape of actions. Therefore, soon after independence, India embarked upon planned socio-economic development to transform quickly her colonial village economy, feudal agrarian pattern and backward rural technology into a highly developed or an economic society of an advanced nation, so as to cater to the social requirements of the masses and achieve the goal of democratic socialism”.

He always stood strongly for equity and egalitarianism in economy and society.

Views on Education

Jagjivan Ram believed that education was one of the effective means for the downtrodden to stand up for their rights. He believed that if all had equal access to education, then their natural abilities would flower. He supported reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes in educational institutions, because it was the one way in which they could escape the burden placed upon them by their economic backwardness. Since they did not have adequate financial resources, they could not access education; since they could not access education, they could not get jobs—and so, the vicious circle continued. From his own personal experience as well as from his observations over the years of happenings within the country and outside he realised that education is a powerful tool of empowerment—a source of sure and steady socio-economic advancement. But he would also plead that the disadvantaged sections ought to develop a spirit of self-reliance and self-respect through hard work thus averting the dependency syndrome.

He also had strong views on the nature of education that was being provided in India. He once said:

“The present education system is defective. The so-called upper middle class and affluent community have imitated the English ways and manners. We have introduced the public school system simply because it prevails in England. In the USSR, there is no public school system, nor is it in Japan, France, America, etc. But they have their own educational systems. When we talk of equality, democracy and socialism, then what is the need for such systems of education. What I wish to emphasise is that we must not sow the seeds of disintegration and inequality right from the primary and secondary stage. Equality of opportunity is the soul of democracy. Where lies this equality when, on the one hand we see a promising child reading in an ordinary school and at home besides an earthen lamp, while on the other hand, a dull child of a rich family is reading in a public school. By denying due facilities of education to all those who deserve and by creating a situation where facilities of better education are available only to those, who afford enormous fees, we are doing nothing but creating inequality in society, establishing aristocracy, snobbery and spreading the feeling of disunity and disintegration.”

Social Thinking

Though ample mention has been made to his social thinking, Jagjivan Ram's views on the prevailing situation on the matter of caste can better be

summarized in this extract from the speech that he gave as the Congress President at Bombay:

“I have always maintained that the problems of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes cannot be fully appreciated much less solved except in the framework of a radical reorganization of the socio-economic order. That will take long. But even the scope of welfare projects and the manner of their implementation leaves much to be desired. It was to be expected that when the condition of these communities improved they would aspire to live as decent human beings. It was equally to be expected that with the growth of consciousness and an understanding of their rights, they would refuse to be treated as before. But wherever this trend has manifested itself, particularly in the rural areas, oppression and harassment have been renewed. It is an indication of the fact that upper caste psychology has not undergone any real change, there has been only some kind of a grudging adjustment. Even the so-called liberals share the same attitude; only its expression is different. How else would one explain the much-vaunted talk of pity, the much publicized desire to do some good to the depressed and suppressed communities.”

Thus vividly and with deep sense of hurt as well as social sensitivity he realistically portrays as to how the matter stood.

His Personality

Jagjivan Ram was no ordinary individual. He was endowed with a strong intellect, a stout heart, great strength of character, firmness of conviction and purpose and an astounding capacity for sustained hard work. He had a vision along with capability and clarity of approach towards its realization.

As a young boy, he was deeply involved in his studies. He enjoyed going to school, but he had one great regret. That the other boys had books to carry, while he had none. Thus, one day he carried to school a few books belonging to his elder brother, given to him by his father.

Jagjivan Ram was a deeply religious person throughout his life. The Ramayana was a great favourite. When *Ramayana Paath*, took place at his house on Sundays, he would read out to the gathering the meaning of each verse in the epic. Probably, this was not only a source of delight and wisdom but also of spiritual strength.

Jagjivan Ram was also a great sports enthusiast. During his school days, he used to wrestle and play football. His favourite sport was swimming and at times, he would swim across the river and back, with apparent little effort, at Banaras.

He was also a voracious reader of newspapers, a habit he imbibed at young age and continued. While he was still in High School, he began to subscribe to Gandhiji's *Young India*. Once he came across a few Hindi translations of books written in Bengali. Jagjivan Ram was so impressed that he decided to read them in the original. He, therefore, learnt Bengali and was soon reading the works of Bankim Chandra, Sarat Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore and others. It is not generally known that Jagjivan Ram was a great enthusiast and devotee of Hindi. In the Constituent Assembly, he said that merely enshrining the language in the Constitution was not enough. Much work would have to be done to popularize the language with sympathy, understanding and meticulous hardwork. As Minister for Communications, he was instrumental in bringing out an in-house publication in Hindi, "*Dak Samachar*", which was a bulletin carrying news of the important actions taken in the Ministry.

Jagjivan Ram had a quiet and dignified air about him. He never lost his temper, in public, in Parliament or with his ministerial staff. He would evoke loyalty from his subordinates at various echelons and he would also stand by them. His composure even in troubled times was remarkable. With his wit and humour and charming smile he could disarm his vocal opponents. But he was always logical and clear in his arguments and exposition. He was the embodiment of old world courtesy. After having voted against the Bihar government on canal rates, as a nominated member in the Assembly, Jagjivan Ram went on to receive the Governor at the railway station. When some elements criticized him for this step, he said that common courtesy and decency should not be given the go by. This same politeness was witnessed in Parliament, where he always made it a point to thank members who had raised an important point or made a valuable suggestion.

Jagjivan Ram was not only an astute politician, an outstanding parliamentarian but also a great administrator. He combined idealism and pragmatism in his approach to problems. He would give opportunity to all of his advisers or officers to express freely and frankly their reactions or views and listen to them quietly and intervene occasionally to seek clarifications or elaboration of some vexed points. Having done this he would succinctly and clearly give his definitive opinion or decision. There was a finality about his decision and his personality was such that those responsible for execution of the decision would do so without demur or doubt as they always were confident of guidance and support as and when necessary. He could therefore produce results as desired by him in his various exacting spheres of ministerial responsibility. His memory was phenomenal and his decisiveness was proverbial. In any discussion or debate he would manage to his final say persuasively and logically. He had an uncanny sense of humour, capacity for repartees and thorough grasp or mastery of the subject in detail

and in depth. The happy blending of those qualities made him a front rank parliamentarian whom everyone would like to listen to with attention and respect.

Jagjivan Ram was highly and widely respected as a person and a statesman. This is what H.M. Patel, a former member of the Indian Civil Service and later Union Home and Finance Minister, had to say about Jagjivan Ram in 1977:

“I had occasion to see him in action in Parliament. He was called upon to express Government’s case on more than one occasion and on each occasion he gave a dazzling display of eloquence and wit on the one hand and a superb mastery of the subject matter under discussion on the other. From the opposition benches, I could not but admire such skill. No one else could have put up a better justification and defence of Government’s policy and actions. But Shri Jagjivan Ram has a claim to recognition for more solid achievements. He has undoubtedly proved himself to be one of the most successful ministers. He has a real understanding of the problems of the rural areas and has shown that he is capable of seeking solutions for them in a realistic manner. Even when we in the opposition do not agree with his policies, we know that he is sincere and not motivated by political considerations.”

And Dr. V.K.R.V. Rao, the economist and once a Cabinet colleague wrote:

“I found him always alert and with the vast experience he has had of many portfolios and his quick grasp of the essence of every problem he tackled, he could always make a valuable contribution whenever he chose to intervene in Cabinet discussions. He commands the respect of the bureaucracy in whichever portfolio he functions and at the same time, there is no doubt that he is in command”.

To sum up, Jagjivan Ram had a chequered, purposive and a remarkable career as a public man. Jagjivan Ram participated in the freedom movement, became a member of the Bihar Legislative Assembly and then the Central Legislative Assembly and from 1946 onwards, till almost his death, he served as a member of the Government under every Prime Minister from Jawaharlal Nehru to Morarji Desai. During this time, he made varied and lasting contributions to the political life of the nation and its economic and social development the likes of which we rarely see and are not likely to see easily in future.

Jagjivan Ram fought against caste prejudices all his life. But while deploring the conduct of those who practised caste prejudice, he never directed his ire against them, he never harboured hate or animus for them. He was

keen for social solidarity and social progress and amity and for removal of social inequity of every kind and complexion. Like Gandhiji, he hated the sin, not the sinner. He did not want to pit caste against caste, prejudice against prejudice, hate against hate. He wanted, quite simply, equality for all and harmony between everyone. Is it a wonder that his birth anniversary is observed throughout the country as *Samta Diwas*? Though profoundly concerned with the problems of the Scheduled Castes and deprived sections in society throughout his life he transcended the narrow frontiers of caste, community, religion and region and rose to be a popular mass leader interested in the welfare, progress and future of all of his countrymen.

Though I did not have the opportunity to serve directly in any Ministry presided over by Jagjivan Ramji while in office, he having been a witness to those times, particularly 1946-50 as a university student and subsequently as an officer did have the opportunity to see him in action and meet him during his visits to States for political as well as official reasons. One thing which was particularly noticeable was the silent authority that he carried with him with ease while in office or out of it. Whether party workers, common people or officers everyone will defer to him and try to gather around him and carry out his wishes as if he was one in office even when he had left the Government under Kamaraj Plan. It seemed quite natural that his equanimity, his habitual courtesy, his prodigious memory, his capacity to explain in simple language the most difficult issue would leave a mark on everyone around him. The brief or occasional opportunities that I have had to meet him would leave their mark on me. As chance would have it, I came in fairly close and personal contact with him on a continuing basis when Shri Ashok Mehta could persuade him to accept the Chairmanship of the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi. Shri Ashok Mehta had expressed his desire to relinquish the office for his personal reasons during early seventies. As a member of the Executive Council or its Committees or for about two years as Director of the IIPA, I had to be in touch with him on a regular basis. One could see how he would steer through smoothly and with good humour the heated discussion in some of its very controversial meetings. His word would be final. As Director, when even I sought guidance on any matter his sagacious advice and adequate response would come with utmost promptness and clarity. His old world charm and consideration for all and sundry would win over people easily. Thus I invariably enjoyed his confidence and his encouragement and once I came to know him well enough since early seventies till he passed away. Such memories I do cherish along with many of his admirers. It has been a rewarding experience to have met him and known Jagjivan Ramji. I deem it a privilege to pay my humble tribute and homage to his memory.

JAGJIVAN BABU: A DYNAMIC LEADER AND A TRUE STATESMAN

—*Bali Ram Bhagat**

Jagjivan Babu whom I had known and admired and with whom my association is spread over for almost four decades, was one of the shining and seasoned parliamentarians with a rare distinction of winning eight terms consecutively from First to the Eighth Lok Sabha (1952-84) that also from the same parliamentary constituency. In true sense of the term, he was a statesman. The difference between a politician and a statesman is that a politician places the services of the nation for his own self whereas a statesman places his services for the nation and its people. By any yardstick, Jagjivan Babu was a proven dynamic leader of the 20th century. He was a force to be reckoned with on the national scene till his demise in July 1986. He spoke the voice of the masses and often mooted original ideas for solving the problems. He joined the Indian National Congress in 1933 and plunged into the freedom struggle. He began his political career as Parliamentary Secretary to the Bihar Vidhan Sabha in 1937 and rose to the post of the Deputy Prime Minister in 1979. His services to the people as Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister with different portfolios speak volumes of his administrative acumen. His ability to understand and judge the issues quickly was superb. Some of the social service measures, which he initiated, are milestones in our march towards achieving a cherished goal of Bapu – that is wiping tears from every eye.

Our Enduring Association

My association with late Jagjivan Babu lasted for almost four decades, which could be divided into two phases. The first phase began in 1950 when I became member of the Provisional Parliament coming into direct contact with him and this came to an end in 1977 when he quit the Congress and formed his own party, Congress for Democracy (CFD). During this first phase both of us were the members of the Treasury Benches and were in the Council of Ministers of the first three Prime Ministers holding different portfolios as well as occupying various positions in party. I gained immensely from his rich and varied experience. We had had the distinction of working under the

* He is the former Speaker of Lok Sabha.

first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru succeeded by Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri and Smt. Indira Gandhi. Both of us also belonged to the same region of Bihar and his Parliamentary constituency 'Sasaram' and my constituency 'Arrah' were neighbouring and contiguous. Both of us worked together with shared perception and used to campaign jointly for the success of the party. As a result, we won all the elections from First to Fifth Lok Sabha comfortably with massive majority. He was my senior in terms of position, age and experience. I had a great respect and admiration for him. He was a towering personality and achieved a nation-wide fame. Despite achieving all the success and occupying high offices in Government, he remained very humble and down to earth.

A Clash of Personalities: Jagjivan Babu *versus* Morarji Desai

I vividly recall an event of 1961, which could be considered as a very significant event in the destiny of our country. When the nation had a towering leader of Nehru's stature, a question always confronted many as to what would be the nation's future when he would disappear from the scene. The question was raised even when Nehru was alive. It was the period of Nehru who was at the apex of the governance with considerable influence over the rank and file of the party. But a debate had already begun on "After Nehru Who"? After the demise of Govind Ballabh Pant, the then Union Home Minister, the seat of the Deputy Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in Lok Sabha became vacant. During those days, the post of the Deputy Leader was considered most important. Virtually it was second to the Prime Minister who himself was the Leader of the House. Consequently, a vigorous tussle and search for this post began. Both Morarji Desai and Jagjivan Babu who were aspirants for the post, decided to contest the election and started lobbying. It was very difficult for me to take a stand. I was a colleague of Morarji Desai in the Ministry of Finance. He wanted that "I must take his side openly". On the other hand, Jagjivan Babu was from our State and the District then known as 'Shahabad'. It was his gentlemanliness that he did not pressurize me to extend him my support. I remained neutral and my stand was appreciated by Jagjivan Babu. Finally, with the intervention of Nehru, the issue was resolved amicably. The post of the Deputy Leader of the House was given to a non-Minister. Later, the post was further devalued as provision of separate Deputy Leader was made for each House. I was happy that Jagjivan Babu praised and appreciated my stand. The chapter was closed for the time being. The clash of the two personalities and struggle for supremacy revived again in 1977 but at that time both were not in the Congress Party.

Winning 1971 War: Pinnacle of his Career

Keeping in view his superb administrative skill and leadership qualities, Jagjivan Babu was given the portfolio of Defence by Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1970.

It was a period, which witnessed the gradual deterioration of our relations with Pakistan and finally a war broke out in December 1971. Under his inspiring leadership the Indian Defence forces fought against Pakistani aggression and liberated the oppressed people of Bangladesh. During the events of December 1971, Shri Jagjivan Ram displayed unparalleled resoluteness and immense courage and added a golden chapter and made us proud.

No doubt, it was Jagjivan Ram's superb leadership and his able and masterly handling of the Defence Affairs of the country which won us the war in 1971. This is perhaps the greatest contribution a Defence Minister can make to the motherland. Jagjivan Babu always showed his worth in the midst of bitter crisis, conflict and challenge. During mid-70s when there was drought and shortage of food, he was given the charge of Agriculture. In the field of agriculture he did a marvellous job. With his dependable leadership he served the nation and guided the people like a friend and philosopher in moments of crisis and calamity.

Parting with the Congress

The second phase of our relations began in 1977 and continued till his demise. The National Emergency was imposed in June 1975. It was the period of turmoil. I became the Speaker of Lok Sabha. After Emergency was lifted in January 1977, General Elections for the Sixth Lok Sabha were announced. All the major Opposition parties came together and decided to fight jointly against the Congress. Jagjivan Babu and H.N. Bahuguna decided to quit the Congress and joined the Opposition. Jagjivan Babu approached me and tried to prevail upon me to quit Congress. I did not agree with him on the issue of deserting the Congress Party. I told him in clear terms that, "my conscience does not permit to do so". Whatever I am today including the prestigious Constitutional post of Speaker, I got from Congress. In principle and spirit I turned down his proposal. In fact, I reminded him that it was he who played a key role on the Floor of the House for getting the parliamentary approval for the Emergency. But he was not pleased and he threw an open challenge to me that he would see that how I would win the election. In the election, he campaigned vigorously in my constituency and I lost the parliamentary election for the first time. Although, there was a wave against the Congress in the wake of some excesses during the Emergency and the Congress lost all the seats from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Even if he had not campaigned, I am sure, I would have been defeated. What I could not appreciate was his personal campaign against me. When I look back I feel proud even today that I took a principled stand.

A Missed Opportunity

A new party, Congress for Democracy, was formed by Jagjivan Babu and it became a constituent of the Opposition and later on it merged with the

Janata Party. His party did well in the election and he rose to the post of Deputy Prime Minister with Defence portfolio. But the Janata regime did not treat him well. He never got the due respect, that he was getting in the Congress. He was considered as one from outside the Janata Party. When Morarji Desai's Government fell in July 1979 due to infighting within Janata Party, Jagjivan Babu emerged as a strong candidate for the post of Prime Minister. But he could not achieve as other partners of the Janata Party were inimical. So, despite his ability and superb quality of leadership, he could not become the Prime Minister. Even today, I think Jagjivan Babu was the most suitable for the post of the Prime Minister. In private conversation, he admitted time and again the uneasiness of quitting the Congress. When Rajiv Gandhi came to power in 1984, he wanted Jagjivan Babu to rejoin the Congress Party. I was also in favour of his rejoining the Congress. We also sent such feelers to him. But he declined saying that he had gone far away from the Congress.

A Quality Administrator

The qualities of a good administrator differ according to the nature and form of the governance. In colonial days, or in a dictatorship, or in a dynastic rule, execution of orders is the prime consideration of an able administrator. What distinguishes a good administrator from others in a parliamentary democracy, in a country trying to modernize the tradition-ridden social structure and in a developing economy, definitely calls for a different character. In such a set of circumstances, Jagjivan Babu was a representative of not merely a territorial constituency he hailed from, but he represented the hopes and aspirations of the entire nation. He was the leader to whom the country and the masses looked up to. He gave expression to their aspirations and hopes, to the unspoken thoughts of the less articulate and the less fortunate people and to their dreams for a better social order. He was a man of vision. The vision extended beyond the immediate future, to perspective planning for decades ahead. While he was a great planner, he was firm in the execution of the policies as well. He used to think, consult and discuss but once a decision was arrived at, he was quite firm. The position he had come to occupy did not distance him from the masses. He always sought to maintain a close rapport with the people.

A Down to Earth Man

Jagjivan Babu was born of poor parents in the village 'Chandwa' near Arrah in 1908. The family, though, belonged to Dalit community, was endowed with high spiritual values. He knew what poverty and hardship were. He understood the social impediments, and constraints one had to face in life. His early childhood and the struggle paved the way for him to rise up in life, moulding his character. His simplicity and mild manner hid an iron-will and

strong determination. His success which began rather early in life endowed him with self-confidence. His unique and characteristic smile made him most lovable. Mahatma Gandhi wanted Indians to walk erect and have self-respect. He felt he could help achieve this dream only when he was able to make Indians self-reliant and revive their moral fibre.

A True Gandhian

Jagjivan Babu was a true Gandhian. He not only had great respect for Gandhiji but he also practised Gandhian principles in letter and spirit. He believed in non-violence and Satyagraha. Jagjivan Babu's approach to the Harijan problem was almost identical to the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi. Many people are mistaken when they consider him as a leader of Dalits. His appeal had nationwide effect. He wanted the upliftment of Harijans and backward classes and worked towards the restoration of a rightful place for them in society. It was a gargantuan task. But Babuji's determination was equally strong. He did not believe in any melodrama or a magic wand for their amelioration. He was confident that it was by making them realize their potential rights, by infusing in them confidence and by removing first the shackles that bound their mental horizons that the Harijan problem could be solved. This clearly showed his farsightedness as a leader and also his sensing rightly the general attitude of the suppressed masses he was spearheading.

Organising Capacity

Jagjivan Babu displayed his organising capacity and administrative capability rather early in his life. Even in his student days, he organised Ravi Das Sabhas in order to bring under one platform the leaders and men of his community. He began reforming the community, trying to rid it of some pernicious habits and had to face on that count opposition from the people of the sect. He was dictated by what was right and did not fear the opposition and could carry on his task relentlessly with patience and perseverance even under heavy odds. He soon came to be recognized as a leader in his own right to be reckoned with.

The first opportunity for real public work as a leader which would put his administrative acumen, his organising capacity and leadership to test, during the relief operation following the Bihar earthquake of 1934, which caused enormous misery to the people and heavy damage to life and property. He came in close contact with Rajendra Babu during the relief operation and toured with Mahatma Gandhi in Bihar in providing the much needed succour to the affected people. Both Mahatma and Rajen Babu recognized the great potentialities in young Jagjivan.

His First Political Assignment

The year 1937 saw the Congress entering the Legislatures and forming Governments in the Provinces. By that time Jagjivan Babu was the recognized leader of the Harijans in Bihar. Though everyone recognized his right to be included in the Bihar Council of Ministers headed by Late Shri Krishna Singh, he conceded the place to a senior leader—Shri Jaglal Choudhary. As long as one is spurred by an ardent desire to serve the people, the position one holds makes only relative difference. He showed that when the cause is right he need not bother about opposition to his work, but with determination he went ahead, leaving the opposition to realize their mistake in time and recognize the beneficial results of the measures taken by him.

The same attitude we find in Shri Jagjivan Ram when he occupied the position of Minister of Labour in the Interim Government also and later in his long parliamentary career. The period of six years when he was the Labour Minister saw the laying of firm foundations of a sound labour policy. Many of the labour legislations aiming at the amelioration and welfare of the workers were piloted by him and found place in the statute book.

A Versatile and Dynamic Personality

Since his entry in the Union Cabinet in 1946 Jagjivan Babu had the opportunity to give his versatile and dynamic leadership in many and varied fields. Whichever portfolio he was called upon to shoulder he did so with dedication and determination. He proved that he was a rebel against injustice, a fearless fighter for the weaker and vulnerable sections of the community.

One of the astute qualities of an able administrator is capacity to take the officers and staff along with him. Jagjivan Babu always carried and enthused his officers with his point of view. He felt that this was absolutely necessary if the policy were to be implemented not only in letter but in the spirit in which it was laid down. The officers who had the opportunity to serve under him always spoke highly of him, his open-mindedness and free and frank discussion to which he patiently listened.

Jagjivan Babu was not satisfied merely by the civil servant carrying out the orders or policies laid down as a matter of course. He desired them not merely to be the implementing authority but wanted them to be active participants in the socio-economic transformation process. Towards this end he wanted them to be dynamic in their thinking. He desired a sense of participation on the part of the civil servants in the nation-building activities.

Seasoned Parliamentarian

A dynamic leader need not necessarily be a successful one as well. But, Jagjivan Babu had been a uniquely successful administrator whichever

portfolio he held. In a parliamentary democracy, the Parliament is the testing ground for a parliamentarian. It is the forum to testify how able and articulate a people's representative is. But more than that this success depends on the type of leadership he is able to provide for his Ministry in Parliament. Many an otherwise able and experienced administrator flounder when facing the vigilant Opposition in the House. Parliament is a training ground and helps the Minister in many ways. It enables him to understand more intimately the working of his own Ministry. He is in a position to assess the impact of its functioning on the masses. In other words, it serves as a spring board for the measures he may have in mind. He is able to feel the pulse of the people. Secondly, by his performance in the House, by his ability to face Opposition and answer their criticisms, he is able to command the respect and regard of the bureaucracy. The administrators know that no amount of briefing will alone be enough for a Minister. It is only the personal ability and skill that will sustain him. Here his sense of proportion and judgment is often on test. Jagjivan Babuji was one of our ablest and seasoned parliamentarians. Effulgent with self-confidence, he used to remain fully composed with that familiar smile on his face, patiently following the proceedings of the House. He was never to be seen in ruffled tempers. When some unjustified remarks were made, he did not jump up to counter it. He used to get up when his turn came and answered all points squarely with clarity and composure. He fully met the criticisms voiced by the Opposition. He answered them in a matter-of-fact way giving full information and justifying his stand. In his long cherished parliamentary career hardly can we cite an instance when he had not risen to disarm the criticisms with his logical and precise arguments. He was not a flowery orator but whatever he spoke was full of wisdom and logic. As a colleague I may conclude, "whatever he said, he meant, and whatever he meant he did". Members knew this and admired him.

Disciplined Political Worker

Yet another character which goes to mark Jagjivan Babu as a successful dynamic leader was the close rapport he maintained with his leader and the deference he showed to the leadership. He was a disciplined soldier. He was a man of strong convictions and firm commitments. When he was in the Congress, he remained committed to the principles of the party. When he quit, he never looked back. In the Congress split (1969), he instinctively recognized the leadership that was likely to take control and lead the country onward on the way to socialism. He aligned himself with the progressive forces under the leadership of Smt. Indira Gandhi. I was fully with him on these issues.

It is a pleasure for me and as well for millions of Jagjivan Babu's followers and admirers to learn that Lok Sabha Secretariat is bringing out a

commemorative volume on his life and works. Though it is being brought out after two decades of his demise, it is indeed a very laudable step. Definitely the publication would be a guiding force for younger generations in the years ahead and they will be able to understand the vision and wisdom of Jagjivan Babu and his invaluable contribution to nation-building. Here my reminiscences go back to 1976-77 when 'Smriti Granth' was brought out by his colleagues to mark his glorious four decades in Parliament. I am happy that then as the Speaker, Lok Sabha, I was associated with that publication and after 28 years today, I am able to pen my reminiscences of our long-cherished association. Among the galaxy of leaders of the 20th century, Jagjivan Babu definitely is one of them. I feel proud to say that Jagjivan Babu possessed numerous noble qualities but I was highly impressed by his simplicity from core of the heart and his dedication to the well-being of the people at large.

गरीबों की शक्ति का पर्यायवाची नाम : जगजीवन राम

—मोहन सिंह*

बाबू जगजीवन राम को प्रथम बार सन् 1964 में इलाहाबाद विश्वविद्यालय के छात्रसंघ भवन में भाषण करते निकट से देखा और सुना। उनके प्रभावशाली भाषण की अमिट छाप मेरे मन पर पड़ी। उन्होंने कहा “भारत में गरीबों की दशा सुधारने के लिए एक जबर्दस्त क्रान्ति की जरूरत है लेकिन यह क्रान्ति आज के भोले-भाले गरीब जन नहीं ला सकते। इस देश की युवा पीढ़ी, अपने घर में गरीबी से तड़प कर मरने वाले गरीब में साहस पैदा कर, सरकारी राशन की दुकान पर सस्ते भरपेट अनाज पाने के लिए जूझते लोगों में संघर्ष करने की क्षमता पैदा कर ही साकार कर सकती है।” इस तरह युवा पीढ़ी के जज्बात को उभारने की उनमें जबर्दस्त शक्ति थी। उनके प्रभावकारी भाषण को सुनने के बाद उनके बारे में विस्तृत जानकारी की जिज्ञासा जागृत हुई।

1936 में जब बिहार से अलग हटकर प्रथम भाषायी राज्य के रूप में उड़ीसा का जन्म हुआ तो बिहार विधान परिषद में एक सदस्य का स्थान रिक्त हुआ। बाबू जी उसी रिक्त सीट पर पहली बार बिहार विधान परिषद के सदस्य नामित होकर अपने संसदीय जीवन की शुरुआत करते हैं। उसके पूर्व 1934 में बिहार में आए भीषण भूकम्प के समय जो आम जन की सेवा की उसके कारण वे देश रत्न राजेन्द्र बाबू के करीबी बन गए और पूना पैक्ट के समय डा. अम्बेडकर की जिद को समाप्त करने में जो अहम भूमिका निभाई थी उसके कारण बापू ने उन्हें शुद्ध सोना की संज्ञा दी थी। बापू के अस्पर्श्यता निवारण अभियान में सक्रिय होने के कारण वे गांधी जी के नजदीकी लोगों में प्रारंभ काल में ही हो गये थे। 1937 के चुनाव में जीत प्राप्त होने के बावजूद बिहार में कांग्रेस ने सत्ता नहीं सम्भाली। थोड़े दिनों के लिए अंग्रेजी हुकूमत ने श्री मुहम्मद युनूस के नेतृत्व में एक सरकार बना दी थी। मुख्यमंत्री ने बाबू जी को मंत्री बनाने का लालच दिया। लेकिन उन्हें कांग्रेस के नेतृत्व में लड़ी जाने वाली आजादी की लड़ाई का ही पक्ष मंजूर था और उन्होंने मुहम्मद युनूस की सरकार में जाना नामंजूर कर दिया। अपने जीवन के प्रारंभ काल से ही आजादी के लिए संकल्प, स्वदेशी, राष्ट्रीयता एवं लोकतंत्र के विचार उनके व्यक्तित्व का हिस्सा बन गये थे। इसलिए 1942 के संग्राम में उन्हें महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभानी थी लेकिन उन्हें पहले ही गिरफ्तार कर लिया गया और वे 14 महीनों तक जेल में रहे। उनके त्याग, समर्पण तथा उनकी निष्ठा का ही परिणाम था कि उन्हें 1946 में जिसे आजाद भारत की पहली अन्तरिम सरकार कहा जा सकता है, जवाहर लाल जी के नेतृत्व में प्रथम श्रम मंत्री जी के रूप में काम करने का मौका मिला। आज देश में मजदूरों के लिए जो भी कानून है उसका श्रेय बाबू जी को जाता है। श्रमिकों के लिए न्यूनतम मजदूरी का कल्याणकारी

* श्री मोहन सिंह वर्तमान (चौदहवीं) लोक सभा के माननीय सदस्य हैं। वह दसवीं व बारहवीं लोक सभा के सदस्य भी रह चुके हैं।

कानून उन्हीं की देन है। कर्मचारियों के लिए भविष्य निधि कानून और संगठन उनके विवेकपूर्ण निर्णय की उपज है। श्रमिकों के लिए काम के घंटे, चिकित्सा संबंधी सुविधा, व अन्य कल्याणकारी कार्यों को मालिकों के लिए अनिवार्य रूप से करना उनके बुद्धिसम्मत निर्णयों में से एक है। कम्प्रिहेन्सिव फैक्ट्री एक्ट, प्लांटेशन लेबर एक्ट, डाक कर्मियों की सुविधा के लिए कानून, खदान कर्मचारियों की सुरक्षा के लिए कानून आजादी के प्रथम पांच वर्ष में ही बनाए गए और इन सभी का श्रेय बाबू जगजीवन राम की सूझ-बूझ और संकल्पबद्ध निर्णयों का परिणाम है। देश के इतिहास में जब तक श्रम हितकारी कानून रहेंगे बाबूजी का नाम रहेगा। दुर्भाग्य यह है कि आज नए युग में हम उन्हीं कानूनों को शिथिल कर अपना खून-पसीना बहाकर देश की तरक्की में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान करने वाले श्रमिकों को भेड़ियों के मुंह में ढकेलने का पापपूर्ण काम कर रहे हैं।

1963 में जब उन्हें कामराज योजना के बहाने देश के मंत्रिमंडल से हटाया गया तो बाबू जी ने उस दौर में देशव्यापी दौरा कर देश की नई पीढ़ी को अपने पैरों पर खड़ा रहने का भाव पैदा किया। 1963 से 1967 का दौर युवा पीढ़ी के देश व्यापी सक्रिय आंदोलनों का वर्ष है। लगभग सम्पूर्ण मध्य और उत्तर भारत में युवा, विद्यार्थी, मजदूर, किसान और राशन के अभाव में तड़पते अकालग्रस्त इंसानों द्वारा अपने हक के लिए लड़ते हुए सड़क पर जाने का दौर है और उन्हीं चार वर्षों में बाबू जी सरकार से बाहर रहकर मैदान में थे। इंदिरा जी 1967 में प्रधानमंत्री हुईं तो उन्होंने बाबू जी को अपने मंत्रिमंडल में लिया। उन्हें सबसे चुनौतीपूर्ण खाद्य और कृषि मंत्रालय दिया। बाबू जी ने अपनी सूझ-बूझ, दक्ष क्रिया प्रणाली से राशन के लिए लाइन लगाती इंसानियत को राहत दी। अमेरिका, कनाडा से बचा हुआ गेहूं, आस्ट्रेलिया का मक्का खिलाकर हिन्दुस्तानियों का पेट पालने का कलंकपूर्ण अध्याय समाप्त हुआ। भारत महान हरित क्रान्ति के दौर से गुजरा। देश के अधिकांश हिस्सों में वर्ष में तीन बार खेती होने लगी। विदेशों से गेहूं खरीदने तथा किसानों पर लेवी लगाकर जबरन गेहूं खरीदने के नृशंस दौर का खात्मा हुआ। देश अन्न उत्पादकता के क्षेत्र में आत्म-निर्भरता की ओर कदम बढ़ाने लगा। जिस तरह श्रम मंत्री के रूप में बाबू जी ने अपनी कौशलपूर्ण प्रतिभा का प्रदर्शन किया था उससे बहुत आगे जाकर राष्ट्र को खाद्यान्न की आत्मनिर्भरता दिलाकर प्रत्येक भारतीय को दरिद्रता के कलंकपूर्ण अध्याय से मुक्त कराया और फिर से सिद्ध हुआ कि नेहरू युगीन लोगों में बाबू जी सर्वाधिक सक्षम राजनेता थे।

श्रीमती गांधी बाबू जी के सक्षम व्यक्तित्व से प्रभावित थीं इसीलिए उन्हें खाद्य और कृषि के बाद रक्षा विभाग का दायित्व दिया। पूर्वी बंगाल में पाकिस्तानी सैनिक हुकूमत के खिलाफ ज्वालामुखी की लपटें निकल रही थीं। श्रीमती गांधी भी सूझबूझ वाली महिला थीं। उन्हें परिस्थिति की सही जानकारी थी। शेख मुजीबुर्रहमान 6 सूत्रीय कार्यक्रम देकर पाकिस्तानी सैनिक हुकूमत से निपटने को तैयार थे। ऐसे में भारत में सूझबूझ वाले रक्षा मंत्री की जरूरत थी और बाबू जगजीवन राम से बेहतर भला कौन हो सकता था। रूस के साथ न केवल सैनिक अपितु वैदेशिक मामले में सितंबर 1970 में एक संधि हुई जिससे भारत अपनी सामरिक शक्ति के हिसाब से विश्व के ताकतवर देश की सुरक्षा छतरी में आ गया। इस संधि को साकार रूप देने में बाबूजी की अहम भूमिका थी। इसके बाद से भारत ने अपनी सामर्थ्य का परिचय दिया और दक्षिण एशिया का नक्शा पलट गया। स्वाधीन, सार्वभौम बंगलादेश का उदय हुआ। विश्व इतिहास का सबसे बड़ा सैनिक समर्पण भारत की सेनाओं के समक्ष पाकिस्तानी सेनाओं का हुआ। विश्व के सबसे बड़ी तादाद में सैनिक युद्धबंदियों की भारत ने मेहमाननवाजी की और एक वर्ष के भीतर उन्हें पाकिस्तान वापस सुरक्षित ढंग से भेज दिया।

1968 के बाद का वर्ष बाबू जी के राजनैतिक जीवन के झंझावतों का वर्ष था। वे एक स्थिर व्यक्तित्व के पुरुष थे। मैंने सदैव उन्हें उत्सुकतापूर्वक सुना। अन्य लोगों की तरह उनकी भी देश के सर्वोच्च पदों पर जाने की बलबती इच्छा थी। किन्तु उन्हें इस बात का खेद शायद जीवन के अंतिम वर्षों में रहा कि वे चूँकि गरीब और दलित समाज के थे इसलिए उन्हें सर्वोच्च पदों पर जाने से रोकने के लिये सभी तरफ से अवरोध पैदा किए गए। उनमें दृढ़ निश्चय था, उनके विचारों में पूरी सफाई थी और उनकी वाक्शैली अद्भुत थी। उसके बावजूद सर्वोच्च पद उनके निकट आकर छूटते रहे। शायद जीवन के अंतिम दौर में उन्हें विश्वास हो चला था कि देश के गरीबों में उनकी जो राजनैतिक पैठ थी उसका अन्य लोगों ने अपने शक्ति विस्तार के लिए इस्तेमाल किया, लेकिन उन्हें सत्ता के सर्वोच्च शिखर तक पहुंचने में कोई मदद नहीं की। 1977 से 1985 के बीच उनसे निकट से बात करने और उन्हें देखने पर मेरा ऐसा निष्कर्ष है। मैंने उनसे एक बार कहा कि 1968 में जब राष्ट्रपति का पद रिक्त था तो प्रधानमंत्री श्रीमती गांधी ने उनके नाम का प्रस्ताव बँगलोर के पार्टी के संसदीय बोर्ड की बैठक में किया था। उनका जवाब था, “सिंडिकेट से निपटने के लिए वह उनका (श्रीमती गांधी का) एक रणनीतिक, सामरिक मूव था। यदि वह मुझे राष्ट्रपति पद पर देखना ही चाहती थीं, तो वी.वी. गिरि को क्यों लड़ाया? मेरे नाम को क्यों नहीं उछाला? मैं भी तो हो सकता था? मेरे नाम के बहाने श्रीमती गांधी ने पार्टी के अपने भीतर के विरोधियों का काम तमाम कर दिया मुझे तो कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष बनाकर मेरे नाम का प्रचार कर एक बड़े वर्ग में अपना वोट बैंक तैयार किया गया।”

1971 के भारत पाकिस्तान युद्ध में भारत की विजय का श्रेय रक्षा मंत्री के रूप में बाबू जी को जाता है। युद्ध के बाद प्रधानमंत्री श्रीमती गांधी को भारत रत्न से अलंकृत किया गया। किन्तु भारत रत्न से बाबू जी को अलंकृत नहीं किया गया। यह बात उन्हें हमेशा कचोटती रही। एक बार 1977 में वे मेरे जिले में रक्षा मंत्री की हैसियत से (जनता पार्टी सरकार के दौर में) एक महाविद्यालय में दीक्षांत भाषण करने गए थे। मैं उन दिनों उत्तर प्रदेश जनता पार्टी का महामंत्री था। उनकी आवभगत करना मेरी जिम्मेदारी थी। हेलीकाप्टर में मैं उन्हें कुरेदता रहा उनके मन का छिपा घाव बाहर आता गया। उसी बीच एक घटना घटी थी। कुछ अच्छे लोगों ने बाबू जगजीवन राम के हाथों वाराणसी में महान विचारक डा. सम्पूर्णानन्द (जो उत्तर प्रदेश के मुख्य मंत्री भी रह चुके थे), की प्रतिमा का अनावरण करा दिया था। वाराणसी संस्कृत विश्वविद्यालय के कुछ विद्यार्थी, पाखंडी दकियानूस पंडितों के उकसाने पर उस प्रतिमा को गंगा जल से धोने लगे। उन्होंने कहा कि एक दलित के हाथ महान पंडित की प्रतिमा का अनावरण करने से प्रतिमा अशुद्ध हो गई। इस समाचार को याद कर बाबू जी विचलित हो जाते थे। मैंने उनको संतुष्ट करने के लिए कहा यह काशी है यहां के पंडितों ने बाबा विश्वनाथ तक को हरिजनों के मंदिर प्रवेश होने पर अशुद्ध घोषित कर दिया और स्वामी करपात्री जी ने अलग से विश्वनाथ मंदिर की प्राण प्रतिष्ठा कर दी थी। मंदिर में हरिजन प्रवेश आंदोलन समाजवादी नेता श्री राजनारायण के नेतृत्व में लड़ा गया था। मैंने बाबू जी से कहा कि काशी के पंडितों ने भूमिहार वंश में उत्पन्न श्री राजनारायण को काशी विश्वनाथ मंदिर में हरिजन प्रवेश के लिए उत्तरदायी मानकर उन्हें नहीं बख्शा तो आप तो दलित परिवार से हैं, आपको वे कैसे क्षमा करेंगे? मेरी इस बात से उनका आहत स्वर थोड़ा मंद पड़ा। महाविद्यालय के जिस प्रांगण में उन्हें दीक्षांत भाषण

करना था। वहां उन्हें महाविद्यालय की वार्षिक पत्रिका “भारतन्धरा” भेंट की गई। उसके पन्ने बाबू जी ने पलटे। प्रथमतः महाविद्यालय के अध्यापकों की सूची थी, लगभग पूरी सूची एक जाति विशेष की थी, पत्रिका को पढ़ते ही फिर उनका मन जो किसी तरह शांत हुआ था, फिर से उद्विग्न हो उठा। मुझसे धीरे से बोले आचार्य को काशी विश्वविद्यालय के छात्र जीवन से जानता हूँ। उस समय के बाद बहुत फर्क है। महाविद्यालय के लगभग सभी आचार्य एक ही वर्ग से थे। अपने भाषण में उनका स्वर तीखा था। जन्म आधारित वर्ण व्यवस्था पर करारा हमला किया। दकियानूस मानसिकता के लोग थर्रा उठे। बाबू जी, बिना और कोई औपचारिकता के, भाषण समाप्त कर चल दिए।

जनता पार्टी गठन के समय भी उनकी शाश्वत पीड़ा को बहुत बल मिला। हम लोग आपातकाल के विरुद्ध थे और अभी बरेली केन्द्रीय कारागार में बंदी थे। प्रातः काल दिल्ली से प्रकाशित इण्डियन एक्सप्रेस में पढ़ा कि बाबू जी कांग्रेस से विद्रोह कर जनता पार्टी की रामलीला मैदान की सभा में गए। घर से जिन रास्तों से होकर रामलीला मैदान की ओर उनका काफिला गया उसके स्वागत का चमत्कारिक वर्णन इण्डियन एक्सप्रेस ने मेरे मानस पटल पर सजीव कर दिया। यद्यपि बाबूजी ने लोक सभा में इमरजेंसी का विधेयक अनुमोदन के लिए पेश किया था, किन्तु उनका कहना था कि यदि वे ऐसा न करते तो शायद उनकी भी जगह जेल के किसी हाल में सुरक्षित रहती। उन्होंने अपनी शाश्वत पीड़ा का वर्णन किया। “श्रीमती गांधी ने हेलीकाप्टर से देश की गरीबी देखी है। जगजीवन राम ने उसे स्वतः भोगा है जब जगजीवन राम देश की बड़ी कुर्सियों से कुछ कहता है तो देश के सुदूर गांव में हल चलाने वाला गरीब सीना तानकर कहता है यह हमारा आदमी है।” उनके इन वाक्यों को अखबार में पढ़कर मेरे मन में जैसे बिजली का करंट छू गया हो। 20 महीने से जेल की यातना झेल रहे मेरे मन को बड़ी ताकत और संतोष मिला। मैं जेल से शीघ्र छूट गया। मैं श्री मधुलिमये के करीब तक अपनी बात पहुंचा सकता था। मैंने उनसे आग्रह किया बाबूजी को ही अगले प्रधान मंत्री के रूप में पेश किया जाये। जनता पार्टी दो-तिहाई मतों से जीत कर लोक सभा में आई। श्रीमती इंदिरा गांधी जैसे वर्चस्व वाली महिला का सत्ता विराज बिखर गया। वह स्वयं भी चुनाव में हार गई। भारत के इस प्रथम और दूरगामी प्रभाव डालने वाले सत्ता परिवर्तन में बाबू जगजीवन राम का योगदान महत्वपूर्ण था।

1977 के सत्ता परिवर्तन के बाद वे प्रधानमंत्री की कुर्सी चाहते थे। मेरे नेता मधुलिमये उनकी दावेदारी के जबर्दस्त समर्थक थे। बहुगुणा जी ने भी उनके दावेदारी का समर्थन किया था। मेरे सामने मधु जी को मोरारजी भाई के समर्थन के लिए श्री जयप्रकाश नारायण (जे.पी.) ने गांधी शांति प्रतिष्ठान में बहुत समझाया। उनकी नजर में मोरारजी भाई की दावेदारी का नैतिक औचित्य था। मोरारजी भाई आपातकाल में जेल काट चुके थे। वह पहले से उप-प्रधानमंत्री रह चुके थे। उम्र में भी सभी नेताओं में बड़े थे। चूंकि जे.पी. का प्रभाव जनता पार्टी पर सर्वाधिक था। इसलिए मोरारजी भाई को प्रधान मंत्री का पद मिला और बाबू जी ने उप प्रधानमंत्री पद को काफी विरोध तथा कड़वाहट के साथ स्वीकार किया। फिर 30 महीने बाद सत्ताधारी जनता पार्टी में विवाद हो गया। मधु जी की भविष्यवाणी सही सिद्ध हुई कि मोरारजी भाई अक्खड़ व्यक्तित्व के हैं। बहुत समय तक सबको साथ लेकर नहीं चल सकते। मधु जी के शब्दों में, “जनता पार्टी जैसे घटकों वाले सभी पक्षों को साथ लेकर चलने की काबलियत केवल जगजीवन बाबू में थी।” उनको प्रधानमंत्री बनाने के पक्षधर वे केवल इसलिए थे

कि उन्हीं के नेतृत्व में दल टिकाऊ रह सकता था। किन्तु विधि को जनता राज बहुत समय तक मंजूर नहीं था। मोरारजी भाई को प्रधानमंत्री पद से त्यागपत्र देना पड़ा जिसकी पृष्ठभूमि उन्होंने स्वयं तैयार कर ली थी। उसके बाद फिर नया नेता चुनने का प्रश्न आया। चन्द्रशेखर जी ने स्वतः अपनी दावेदारी पेश कर दी। उधर इन्दिरा जी के सहयोग से चौधरी चरण सिंह ने अल्पकाल के लिए प्रधानमंत्री की कुर्सी पा ली, बाबू जी फिर चूक गये। यदि मोरारजी भाई ने परिस्थिति परिपक्व होने से पूर्व ही त्याग का परिचय दिया होता तो बाबू जी को भी अवसर मिल गया होता। किन्तु मैं स्वयं जब सभी परिस्थितियों का निरपेक्ष मूल्यांकन करता हूँ तो पाता हूँ कि बाबू जी की राह में जन्मना जातिप्रथा का कलंक हमेशा बाधक के रूप में खड़ा था।

1980 का चुनाव जनता पार्टी ने बाबू जी को प्रधानमंत्री बनाने का नारा देकर लड़ा। बची हुई जनता पार्टी में संघी भाईयों का प्रभुत्व था। कहने को तो चन्द्रशेखर जी अध्यक्ष थे लेकिन चौधरी चरण सिंह से अलग होने से जनता पार्टी के जमीन के नेता बाहर हो गये थे। व्यवस्था पोषक संघ के कार्यकर्ता क्या कभी बाबू जी को प्रधानमंत्री की सबसे बड़ी कुर्सी पर देख सकते थे। जिन्हें बाबू जी द्वारा उद्घाटित प्रतिमा ही स्वीकार नहीं थी, वे उन्हें प्रधानमंत्री कैसे स्वीकार कर सकते थे? जनता पार्टी का चुनावी भविष्य वही हुआ जिसे हम लोग समझते थे। चुनाव अभियान के दौर में ही बाबू जी षड्यंत्र को भांप गए थे। इसलिए चुनाव के बाद उन्हें भी व्यथित मन से जनता पार्टी का त्याग कर अपने नेतृत्व में पार्टी खड़ी करनी पड़ी। उस दौर में उनसे मैं बहुत बार मिला। हमारे लोक सभा क्षेत्र के एक एसेम्बली क्षेत्र में उप-चुनाव के प्रचार में अपने उम्मीदवार की ओर से गए थे। मैं चौ. चरण सिंह के नेतृत्व वाले लोक दल में था। मुझे खबर लगी कि बहुत छोटी सभा जगजीवन बाबू की हुई है। मैं उनसे गोरखपुर में मिला। मुझसे बोले तुम्हारा उम्मीदवार जीतेगा। मेरे लोग मुझे धोखा देकर यहां लाए। मेरे पक्ष में कोई नहीं। मैंने उनसे कहा आपसे पैसा वसूलने के लिए कुछ लोगों ने उस उम्मीदवार को पैसा दिया है, वह तो मेरा ही आदमी था। वे बोले मैंने सब समझ लिया और उसे कोई पैसा नहीं दूंगा।

उनके व्यथित जीवन के अंतिम समय में मैं कई बार उनसे मिला। 1985 का चुनाव किसी तरह जीतकर वे एकदम निराश हो गए। उसके बाद ही एक ऐसा व्यक्तित्व जिसने शानदार ढंग से देश को हर क्षेत्र में तरक्की दिलाई, देश के गौरव को बढ़ाया वह जन्मना जाति प्रथा के तिरस्कार का शिकार होकर इस दुनिया से विदा हुआ। एक शानदार इतिहास का शोकपूर्ण पटाक्षेप, बाबू जी की जीवनी की एक लंबी दास्तान है। फिर भी उनके लंबे राजनैतिक जीवन ने भारत के सार्वजनिक जीवन को कई दशक तक प्रभावित किया। अपने वजनदार व्यक्तित्व से उन्होंने मेरे जैसे अनेक पूर्णकालिक कार्यकर्ताओं को प्रभावित किया। मैं राजनैतिक रूप से उनके साथ कभी नहीं रहा लेकिन भावनात्मक स्तर पर सदैव उनसे प्रभावित रहा। उनके प्रभावशाली व्यक्तित्व ने मुझे उनके अंदर झांकने को मजबूर किया। उनके अंदर छिपी विशाल मानवीय आत्मा से मैं प्रभावित रहा और उनका सदैव प्रशंसक बना रहा।

BABU JAGJIVAN RAM : A STATESMAN WITH RARE QUALITIES

—Dr. Mohan Dharia*

Babu Jagjivan Ramji was perhaps a privileged person to be a Central Minister in the Government almost continuously from 1946 to 1979. He was in the Council of Ministers in 1946, as the youngest Minister in the Interim Government. Since 1952 he got elected from Bihar for Lok Sabha and represented his Constituency (Sasaram, Bihar) from 1952 to 1986. Babu Jagjivan Ram belonged to a backward family. Though he was persuaded to join hands with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, as a freedom fighter he preferred to remain with the Congress Party till 1977. Babu Jagjivan Ram was incharge of several Central Ministries like Labour, Agriculture, Defence, Railways, Transport, etc. and in all his Ministries he has left permanent impression as one of the most able Ministers. Babu Jagjivan Ram was an able Parliamentarian and an efficient administrator, who had unprecedented skill to handle all officers. Though he always used to take them into confidence, he was never swayed away by the bureaucrats. He had his own opinion on every issue and every time through his persuasive skill he prevailed upon the bureaucrats to the extent that after his retirement from the Ministry there was always a word of praise even from senior bureaucrats. Babu Jagjivan Ram was, many a time, instrumental in changing the policies of the Government to serve the weaker sections. Babu Jagjivan Ramji never forgot that millions of his fellow people were looking at him as their saviour. Whenever necessary he used to raise his voice to protect the interests of the poor in the country.

When we had raised our voice in Parliament for politics of commitment as against the politics of convenience, Babuji in his own style supported the cause that we were serving. He was well aware of our concern for the poor and extended his support both directly and indirectly. His existence in Parliament and in the Council of Ministers was itself a great strength for many.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was not only a politician. As a Minister he led several delegations to various countries and during negotiations or deliberations he succeeded because of his capability of convincing. He had command over

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Hindi, Bhojpuri and English languages and was always fond of Tulsi's Ramayana.

In Parliament, whenever serious issues were discussed, Babu Jagjivan Ram was known for his wit and wisdom in giving a befitting reply. He commanded respect from all sections of the House particularly from the Opposition parties because of his modest behaviour. He was a great humanitarian. He firmly believed that a society based on caste has no place in modern secular India. It is not a crime to take birth in a particular family, belonging to any caste, sub-caste or religion. It is all decided not because of the faith of the individual—but because of his or her birth in a particular family. For such an act beyond the control of any individual, a society that penalizes the individual cannot be a just society; it is tantamount to penalizing the humanity itself. Throughout his life, Babu Jagjivan Ram stood firmly so that one's fate should not be decided on the basis of birth.

Babu Jagjivan Ramji represented India's Civilisation and Culture. He was a lover of music and art. Every year, Holi was celebrated at his residence where hundreds of people used to come and join the gala function. Being his neighbour I participated in the function and enjoyed it. Both of us mixed with the people forgetting our Ministerial status. That was a rare quality of Babu Jagjivan Ramji. Unfortunately, he had not written much, but his speeches in Parliament speak volumes about Babu Jagjivan Ram and about his capacity, ability, understanding and humane nature.

Many are tempted to compare Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram. I believe that such a comparison is not fair as both of them had their unique personalities and different approaches. While Dr. Ambedkar was a rebellious revolutionary, Babu Jagjivan Ram who as a freedom fighter was grown in the non-violent movement believed in the process of evolutionary reforms. He always felt that without converting the minds of the majority of citizens and securing their support, minorities would not be able to enjoy sustainable social justice and lead honourable life. Both of them had dedicated their lives for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Dr. Ambedkar was the founder of the Republican Party and Babu Jagjivan Ram was the creator of the All Indian Depressed Classes League. Both of them prevailed on whole of the society to recognize the agonies and injustices suffered by the depressed classes and set a role model through their leadership.

On the occasion of his Anniversary, I sincerely pay my homage to the memories of Babuji, a great son of mother India.

JAGJIVAN RAM : THE CHAMPION OF THE POOR AND DOWNTRODDEN

—K.C. Pant*

Babu Jagjivan Ram carved out a special place for himself in the public life of India. After a brief stint in Bihar, he came to the Centre at a young age and made his mark as a skillful parliamentarian and an efficient and effective Minister. As his stature continued to rise in national affairs, the poor and downtrodden found in him a powerful champion of their cause. He raised his voice against injustice and exploitation. He did so uncompromisingly but persuasively, and without generating hatred. That is why his words had an impact on all segments of society.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was a formidable figure in Parliament. His grasp of men and matters, apart from his thorough, knowledge of his Ministry enabled him to handle Parliament with ease. He was equally forceful in English and Hindi. One speech of his, which I particularly enjoyed, was when he intervened on behalf of the Government in the course of a heated debate on a No-Confidence Motion. The opposition was building up case accusing the Government of wanting to stay in power inspite of the litany of failures compiled by the opposition. Babuji's reply was disarming. He asked the Opposition whether the purpose of the No-Confidence Motion was not for the opposition to displace the Government and come to power itself. What struck me was not just the repartee but the friendly and pleasant manner in which he spoke. As I came to know him better, I realised that he enjoyed a fund of goodwill in all Parties, and had cordial relations with Opposition leaders. I also saw that, regardless of party affiliations, caste, community or region, his approach was helpful and sympathetic.

I also had the occasion to see Babuji as a senior Minister in the Cabinet as well as in the Political Affairs Committee during the seventies when many momentous events took place. His contribution is now a part of history.

Another event which is still fresh in my mind is a *Holi Milan* at PM's residence about forty years ago when I was a young MP. Panditji was sprinkling rose water on his guests while Babuji was regaling the audience

* He is the former Defence Minister and former Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission.

with a string of good natured barbs, sparing no one. It was a sophisticated version of a common feature of Holi revelries, a wonderful example of ready wit, delivered extempore, capturing the Holi spirit in a polished form.

Babu Jagjivan Ram treated me with great affection. Regardless of political changes, I always kept in touch with him and found him invariably preoccupied with national affairs and deeply worried about some trends which he saw coming and which are now very much in evidence in Bihar. My saddest memory was when his son Suresh died. On receiving the information, I rushed to his house and found him all alone.

JAGJIVAN RAM : THE MAN OF WISDOM

—Dr. (Smt.) Sarojini Mahishi*

It was just the beginning of the 20th Century that saw the rise of the great son of Bihar, Shri Jagjivan Ram. He was born in 1908, in Sasaram district. His father was Shri Sobhi Ram. Jagjivan Ram, though born in a Scheduled Caste family, had the rare opportunity of getting higher education in Banaras. He had completed his B.Sc. under difficult circumstances.

By that time, the British people had already started collecting cheap labour from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh to Fiji and Mauritius. Gandhiji's movement had also gained momentum at that time. Hazaribagh, Motihari and Champaran in Bihar had occupied a very important place in the movement. Gandhiji started walking and gained the moral support of the farmers fighting for indigo production and protection.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad and others in Bihar had already entered in the Congress movement for freedom. The movement had attracted a large number of younger people and Babu Jagjivan Ram was one among them.

In response to the demand for 'Home Rule' made by the Congress, the Imperial Government had brought out number of reforms in India and had also sent a number of Commissions to India. They ultimately called the Round Table Conferences and invited Mahatma Gandhi and a few others to participate in the discussions at the Round Table Conference.

Physical participation was accompanied by mental reservations on the part of the Indian representatives. To overcome all these obstacles, the Imperial Government introduced, in 1937 "Provincial Autonomy" at the State level in India. Shri Jagjivan Ram found himself a fitting candidate and he was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar unopposed. He continued to serve through the Legislative Assembly in Bihar till 1940. He came to Centre as a Member of Central Legislative Assembly and Constituent Assembly of India, 1946-50 and Provisional Parliament, 1950-52. He made substantial contribution in framing the Constitution along with top national leaders.

From this period onwards until 1979, when the Janata Government under Shri Morarji Desai's leadership fell, Shri Jagjivan Ram continued to be in power. In fact, he was the Deputy Prime Minister in the Janata Government.

* She is the former Member of Parliament and former Union Minister of State.

Shri Jagjivan Ram had held almost all important portfolios from 1946 to 1980. When he was the Cabinet Minister for Food and Agriculture, I had an opportunity to contact him for some work in my State. I had already communicated the problem to him. When I approached him, the concerned officer was sitting with him. Babu Jagjivan Ram asked him as to why he had not attended to the concerned work. The officer was trying to give him some excuse which the Minister did not like. The Minister immediately said, "I can afford to lose you but I cannot afford to lose her—a talented Member".

I was taken aback by his remark!

His birthday was being celebrated in all pomp and glory in New Delhi. When well-known sweetmeat sellers also used to gather there with their contribution of sweets. Once when I was invited by my friends to attend the same, I did so when I was asked to speak on the occasion, I spoke a few sentences in Sanskrit, concluding by saying

जीवेन शरदः शतम्।

(may he live for hundred autumns)

Within a few minutes, I heard him speaking a few sentences quoting from Upanishads and looking at me, indicating his knowledge of Sanskrit at the same time.

In 1971, when he held the portfolio of Defence he used to say in public, "From now onwards, if there is any war between India and Pakistan, it will not be on our soil but it will definitely be on their soil."

And he would immediately turn to his right and smile to his satisfaction.

War in Bangladesh where India participated in favour of Mujibur Rehman and against Pakistan ended in fourteen days. Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India was crowned with success and she was awarded the 'Bharat Ratna' title immediately. But the question remained hanging before some people "Why should not the Defence Minister also be awarded this title".

The whole of India, rather, the whole world was an open book for him. Off and on he read the same.

And Shri Jagjivan Ram, there, was the "Man of Wisdom."

JAGJIVAN RAM : A BORN LEADER

—Avtar Singh Rikhy*

I had the privilege of observing the finesse and the rare administrative acumen with which Hon'ble Shri Jagjivan Ram discharged the onerous responsibilities as a leading Minister of the Government for nearly 30 years.

He was a born leader who nurtured his team of senior administrators with a clear vision of the goal. He was a strategic thinker and inspired confidence in the team players to contribute their best in national interest.

Two instances come to my mind.

The first one goes back to his taking over in December 1956 as a Railway Minister after Hon'ble Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri resigned over the tragic loss of lives of a large number of passengers in a railway accident due to sudden caving in of railway bridge near Ariyalur in Tamil Nadu. Hon'ble Shri Jagjivan Ram on taking charge of the responsibility, did not start any witch hunt to penalise the top railway officials etc., instead he took to a calm and in-depth analysis of the systemic causes of failure specially inadequate maintenance of railway bridges, railway track, signals etc. so as to initiate concerted measures on priority basis to rectify the deficiencies. He gave the railway men, numbering over a million the reassuring feeling that they were doing a great job in running the life line of the nation and that the deficiencies and shortcomings had to be recognized and tackled effectively on a programme basis within an accelerated time-frame.

He showed mature statesmanship in steering the Railways—one of the largest undertakings in the world—out of the psychological shock and galvanizing them to improve the operations.

The second instance relates to a persistent demand voiced in 1978 in Lok Sabha to increase the number of languages in which simultaneous interpretation facilities were provided in Parliament. This was a sensitive matter. He appreciated the concern of those who had raised the issue, at the same time he was cognizant of the logistic and other problems which could arise. His approach as Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee, appointed

* He is the former Secretary-General of Lok Sabha (18 June 1977–31 December 1983).

for this purpose, was to hear out the viewpoint of all sections of the House with sympathy but also in the process make them aware of the practical implications particularly in respect of the logistic.

The sudden unexpected fall of the Govt. in 1979, followed by dissolution of Lok Sabha, deferred the sensitive issue to a later date. It goes however, to the credit of Hon'ble Shri Jagjivan Ram that he could contain the issue and channelise it into the orderly proceedings of a Parliamentary Committee.

He had phenomenal patience, a retentive memory, an analytical and constructive approach. He had a persuasive way of articulating sensitive issues.

While he was truly nationalistic in his approach his deep sympathies and commitment was there to better the lot of the underprivileged particularly the Scheduled Castes.

He was a gifted man of destiny endowed with diplomatic finesse who understood the limits of practical politics and managed to stay within the acceptable norms of democratic functioning. He understood the finer nuances of the Constitutional provisions for reservation of jobs for the Scheduled Castes etc. and persisted with its implementation in an orderly manner. That is why there was no back-lash despite these radical but essential reforms of the polity. This surely was a unique achievement for one truly dedicated to the cause of bringing the under-privileged into the mainstream.
