

**By Sidharth Mishra**



Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), the charismatic Socialist leader, led the most momentous democratic movement post-Independence. The movement first led to the imposition of Emergency by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975 and then her ouster from office following defeat in the 1977 Lok Sabha polls. Jayaprakash was in his seventies and poor health when he came out of retirement to lead what was largely a youth movement against the government of the day. This movement had maximum impact in two states – Gujarat and Bihar. In Gujarat, the movement was organised under the aegis of Nav Nirman Yuvak Samiti and it largely protested against the prevailing issues of price rise and unemployment among the youth. With support from Morarji Desai and Jayaprakash Narayan, the movement succeeded in first the dismissal of Chimanbhai Patel government and then the dissolution of the state assembly, forcing fresh polls in the state. A similar youth movement took roots in Bihar

and the issues too were similar – corruption, price rise and unemployment. These issues prevailed across the country. Manoj Kumar's film Roti, Kapada Aur Makan, the biggest Bollywood hit of the time, reflected these very issues. The 'apolitical' movement in Bihar enjoyed both the blessings and leadership of JP and it gave rise to a new generation of leaders – Lalu Prasad Yadav, Nitish Kumar and Sushil Kumar Modi. The three are today locked in a crucial political duel that is panning out to be the most critical poll not only for them individually but also for the state.

After meeting some success in Bihar, JP decided to raise his struggle to an all-India level. He galvanised the opposition parties in different states at one hand and raised a youth movement on the other. The CPI (M) arrived at an understanding with the leader; in Odisha, Sarvodaya volunteers took the initiative; similar initiatives took place in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. The mobilisation of mass support also took place in Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi and Haryana. All these events led to a powerful political movement culminating in the formation of Janata Party in 1977, which handsomely won the Lok Sabha polls.

Soon after Indira Gandhi was defeated and replaced by Moraraji Desai as Prime Minister, Jayaprakash's ideals and the man himself were consigned to the dustbins of history. In two years, Indira Gandhi successfully broke through the Opposition ranks leading to the fall of the Morarji government. Chowdhary Charan Singh led the group of defectors to become Prime Minister with Congress support, which pulled the rug in no time.

## JP as arbitrator in Bihar polls

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Under JP, the Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (BCSS) led the movement in the state. The BCSS comprised of volunteers from both the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh and the Samajwadi Yuvajan Sabha (SYS), whose cadres were inspired by Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, the socialist veteran. The Lohiaites and the right wingers established a very effective combination leading to the defeat of the Congress, not just in 1977 but its gradual decimation in the state 1989 onwards.

In 2015, the Lohiaites are pitched against their comrades (how ironical to use the term) from the Vidyarthi Parishad. Prime Minister Narendra Modi calls himself a product of Gujarat's Nav Nirman movement and Lalu Yadav and Nitish Kumar worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Sushil Kumar Modi in Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti. The Congress, whose policies led to the rise of the movement in 1973-74, has today latched itself onto the Grand Alliance of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Janata Dal (United) comprising of the Socialists in the fight against the Modi-led BJP.

With his birthday falling in the middle of the ongoing poll campaign in Bihar, both factions of JP's disciples have decided to dig out the memories of the veteran leader like a forgotten fixed deposit account in a bank and have tried to encash it in the crucial poll time. It's worthwhile to speculate on which of his disciples JP would have put his money. Towards this end, we would also need to know a little more about JP's ideals.

Jayaprakash's political life is underlined by his consistent refusal to accept public office including those of the Prime Minister and the President. Some of his critics have come to interpret this as his inability to take responsibility. However, there are others who explain this as JP being more than a seeker of truth than anything else. His tryst with several ideologies including Marxism, Socialism, Gandhian philosophy and Sarvodaya were part of his search for truth.

In an article on Jayaprakash Narayan's 100th birthday, veteran journalist Sudhanshu Ranjan wrote, "JP served the country without any desire for return, which gave him a lofty height and moral authority. This moral authority had its sway even on the ferocious dacoits of Chambal, whom the Government failed to nab, but they surrendered before JP. Such instances abound." If we were to go by these enunciation, it's unlikely that Lok Nayak (as JP was anointed after he agreed to lead the movement) would have approved of any of his disciples.

In a function to 'commemorate' JP's memory, Prime Minister Modi said, "Emergency should be remembered not to cry or brood over what had happened then, but to strengthen our resolve to fortify and further strengthen the democratic values and framework in our country." However, one does wonder whether fighting an extraordinarily expensive election would have passed Lok Nayak's muster as the mean to strengthen democratic values. Similarly, the Grand Alliance's grandstanding on matters of corruption and lawlessness as being part of the process social empowerment of deprived classes would have failed to find favour with the post-Independence

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India's best known political Dronacharya.

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