



JP's Quest for Total Revolution in India: an Analysis

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ABSTRACT

JayaPrakash Narayan was an eminent political leader who became a guiding spirit of the mass movement in India during 1975, popularly called after his name as JP movement. He had an untiring zeal to serve the country and its masses which drove him in the freedom movement. Completely detached from the glamour of power he further employed her energies in the Bhudaan movement. Being a true humanitarian and believer of democracy and its values, he challenged the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi and advocated for the rights of masses. He organized people against autocratic regime of India Gandhi and became a guiding leader of this movement which was aimed to restore democracy in the country. Though Janata Party government could not materialize his dream of Total Revolution but he remained a conscious soldier of Total Revolution.

KEYWORDS

Total Revolution, Emergency, Bhudaan movement, Quest

In 1970s Indian politics witnessed many changes. A first non-congress government came into power at the centre. Emergency on national level was imposed in the country by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on the pretext of internal disturbances. Almost all the opposition leaders, persons from Intelligentsia, Academics, press and media were put behind the bars because they opposed the growing concentration of power in few hands. It was the time when veteran leader Jai Prakash Narayan popularly known as 'JP' gave a call for "Total revolution" to youth of this country. Not only youth but people from academics, intelligentsia and press responded warmly and actively to 'Total revolution'.

In a democratic society like India, when a person concentrates more and more power in his/her hands and does not care for the miseries of common man, he is thrown out of the office by the masses, because it is ultimately the public which gives him power (in the form of mandate) to rule over them. This right to vote may be said as the "Sharpest weapon in the hands of Public". Elections which held after Emergency showed that the Indian citizen used this weapon effectively.

JP was the man behind this whole political change. He not only inspired and guided the movement but also challenged the Emergency whole heartily though his shattering health was not giving him permission to do so.

JP personally considered Indira Gandhi like her daughter but ideological differences between both the leaders were quite prominent. "Despite many ideological differences between them, JP went to visit Mrs. Gandhi personally at her home. It was his unending love for human being. He blessed her for bright future."¹

He accepted Vinoba's leadership in Bhudan movement (charity of land). Vinoba observed about JP "There were a politician and a saint in our movement. Jayaprakash was saint and myself politician."²

His relationship with socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia was very intimate and who later on said about him, "He can move the country but the condition is that he himself stands unmoved."³

JP wanted radical changes from below to top level in the society. His Total revolution was aimed to bring the changes in the lives of ordinary masses. He believed that we get only political freedom and unless and until we get economic and social freedom, this freedom is meaningless. JP was very eager for social change as he observed "there are rotten customs and

manners associated with such things as marriage, birth, death etc. The purging of these evils also falls within the purview of the Total revolution."⁴

Similarly he was critical about the ill effects of the cast system in India. "The cast system among the Hindus is a glaring example of our evil inheritance. From the time of Lord Buddha and may be even from earlier times, attempts have been made to destroy the hierarchical system of cast but it still flourishes in every part of the country. It is time that we blot out this black spot from the Hindu society and proclaimed and practiced the equality and brotherhood of all men."⁵

Total freedom was JP's dream to be materialized by Janta party government, which came into power after Emergency. But it was the greatest irony that whole period of janta government passed away in fighting among the various factions.

Today, many leaders of JP movement are facing charges of corruption and malpractices to win the elections. Politics has become synonym of power and is dominated by criminals and out laws. In current scenario, this question has become more relevant whether service to people can be a motto in politics or not. JP was an answer to this question not only in the past but in the present as well.

Now a day, politics is dominated by money power and muscle power and it seems impossible for a poor man to contest and win the election. JP had visualized this situation very early. He advocated reforms in the whole election procedure.

Though, few people think that JP's finest hour came during the time of Emergency but if we scan his whole life chronologically, we find that he was working at grassroots level since very early. During the *Quit India Movement*, he was involved in it very actively. When the movement was launched, he was behind bars in Hazaribagh. Mahatma Gandhi and other congress leaders were arrested and this news made him restless. "On November 9th, 1942 he along with three other revolutionaries, Yogendra Shukul, Suraj Narayan Singh and Ram Nandan Misra managed to scale the 21 feet high walls of Hazaribagh central jail and escaped."⁸

This news boosted the moral of revolutionaries throughout the country. He went underground along with his comrades and formed a small army of freedom fighters known as the Azad Dasta. Some of the top men of the Dasta were Achyut Patwardhan, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali and Suraj Narayan Singh. JP was its supreme leader. Arrangements were also made to train young recruits in the jungles of Nepal terai. JP also tried to

establish contacts with Azad Hind Fauj of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Burma. British government was very serious about him. It requested the Government of Nepal to cooperate in his arrest and finally 'JP along with his friends were arrested and kept in Hanuman Nagar jail. But before they could be handed over to the Indian police across the border, Azad Dasta led by Suraj Narayan Singh stormed the jail and JP with his friends was rescued.'⁹ He became a legendary figure in India. As a prisoner he was tortured very much by the British police to extract some unworthy confessions from him but JP did not bend. 'Although all the top leaders of Congress were released by June 1945, JP and Lohia were considered too dangerous for the British government that they were released only in April 1946.'¹⁰

Emergency of 1975 came as a severe blow to democracy when almost all the freedoms of citizens were eroded. The Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was passed by the [Indian parliament](#) in 1973 giving the administration and Indian law enforcement agencies immense power like indefinite "preventive" detention of individuals, search and seizure of property without warrants, telephone and wiretapping - in the quelling of civil and political disorder in [India](#), as well as countering foreign-inspired sabotage, terrorism, subterfuge and threats to national security.

Police and administration were used to suppress the political opponent's at large scale. Almost all the opposition leaders were kept behind the bars.

Impact of Mahatma Gandhi on JP's thinking was quite prominent, which shaped his ideas and working style. He said "I bow before the non violence of Mahatma Gandhi, but it is easier for me to fight with a gun."¹¹ British government arrested him in 1940 on the charge of opposing British war efforts & kept him in Deoli detention camp in Rajasthan, where he smuggled out his famous letter giving detailed instructions to his party men to organize underground revolt against colonial rule. The letter was intercepted and seized by police and his plan was frustrated. The British govt. published the letter in a distorted form and tried to denigrate him in the eyes of the people. At this moment Gandhi Ji immediately came to his rescue. Mahatma Gandhi dissociating from his violent plans, condemned the British attempt to malign a patriot like JP. He also pleaded to the govt. for the abolition of the Deoli detention camp. The British govt. abolished it and transferred JP to the Hazaribagh central jail in Bihar.

Gandhi ji introduced him with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and very soon cordial relationship developed between them as JP and Nehru both held radical views. Both leaders were committed to socialism. Nehru invited him to join the Indian National Congress and work for national independence. He also placed JP in charge of the Labour Department of the Congress and posted him at its central headquarters at Allahabad. 'Once, Pandit Nehru had suffered one of the worst indignities of his life at Patna. He could not even address a public meeting at the Wheeler Senate Hall at Patna in face of an angry & hostile audience. But when Pandit Nehru failed, JP, who had accompanied him, succeeded in saving the situation & denouncing

the angry demonstrators for their scandalous behavior.'¹²

The main quest, however, remained where and what it was, namely a relentless confrontation against corruption, money power and misuse of political authority which seemed to dominate the national scene even after 30 years of parliamentary democracy.

But unfortunately forces of selfishness, struggle for power and partisanship reasserted themselves and JP was a disillusioned man at the time of his death in October 1979. His long letter to the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, reflects his utter disappointment.

But there are rays of hope to bring the change. It seems that change should be started by introducing reforms in election procedure. Thanks to right to information movement which forced the government to pass the Right to Information Act in Indian parliament which empowered the ordinary man to seek information to the responsible authority. People are learning to use "the right to information". It may prove to be an important instrument in the hands of common man in a democratic society like India.

So there are rays of hope to come out from the present dark shell. Thoughts of J.P. can provide a guideline to begin a change.

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