

KARPOORI THAKUR (24 January 1924-17 February 1988)

Veteran Socialist leader Karpoori Thakur, son of Gokul Thakur & Ramdulari Devi, was born at Ismail Nagar alias Pitaunjhia (now renamed to Karpuri Gram) village of the Samastipur District of British India on 24th January 1924. He was educated at Upper Primary School, Pitaunjhia Middle English School, Tajpur, Tirhut Academy, Samastipur and Chandradhari Mithila College, Darbhanga. He Studied up to III year B.A. As a student activist, he left his graduate college to join the Quit India Movement of 1942. For his participation in the Indian independence movement, he spent 26 months in prison during National movement.

He was Librarian, Youth Library in Home Village, 1935-40. Member, Students' Federation, 1937-42. Assistant Secretary, Bihar Pradeshik Kisan Sabha, 1947. Secretary, (i) Bihar Pradeshik Kisan Sabha, 1948-52, (ii) Bihar Relief Committee; Member, Central Committee of Akhil Bhartiya Hind Kisan Panchayat; Member, Bihar State Level Bhoodan or Sarvodaya Committee.

After India gained independence, Karpoori Thakur worked as a teacher in his village school. He became a member of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha during first general elections in 1952 as Socialist Party candidate and almost remained member of Vidhan Sabha till his death.

He was Political and Social Worker, previously associated with the Congress Socialist Party, Socialist Party, Praja Socialist Party, Samyukta Socialist Party, Samyukta Socialist Party (Lohia), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Janata Party, Janata Party (S), Lok Dal (K), Janata Party, Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party and Lok Dal.

Karpoori Thakur was Secretary, Darbhanga District Congress Socialist Party, 1945-47. Joint Secretary/Secretary, Bihar Socialist Party, 1948-52. During 1952-72, he held the offices of (i) Provincial Secretary, Praja Socialist Party, Bihar, (ii) Member, National Working Committee of All-India Praja Socialist Party, (iii) Chairman, Samyukta Socialist Party, Bihar. Chairman, All-India Samyukta Socialist Party, 1969-72. Member, National Committee of Samyukta Socialist Party, 1972-73. Member, Bharatiya Lok Dal, after its formation.

He was arrested for leading P&T employees during the general strike of the Central Government employees in 1960. In 1970, he undertook a fast unto death for 28 days to promote the cause of Telco labourers.

He was Member, Bihar Legislative Assembly, 1952-74. Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Education and Finance, Government of Bihar 1967. Chief Minister, Bihar, 1970-71.

Karpoori Thakur was Chairman/Secretary of several educational Institutions. He was Chairman of different Trade Unions for several years. Delegate to the International Union of Socialist Youth Convention at Vienna, was also a member of the Socialist Delegation to Yugoslavia.

He was also elected to Sixth Lok Sabha as Janata Party candidate from Samastipur parliamentary constituency but resigned after three months to become Chief Minister of Bihar in 1977.

Karpoori Thakur was a votary of Hindi language, and as the education minister of Bihar, he removed English as the compulsory subject for the matriculation curriculum. It is alleged that the Bihari students suffered due to the resulting low standards of English-medium education in the state. Thakur served as a minister and Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, before becoming the first non-Congress socialist Chief Minister of Bihar in 1970. He also enforced total prohibition of alcohol in Bihar. During his reign, many schools and colleges were established in his name in the backward areas of Bihar. He also took active part in Bhoodan, Gramdan and Sarvodaya Movements. Founded several educational institutions like Acharya Narendra Dev College, Shahpur Patori, Dr. Lohia College, Tajpur, Prabhavati Rumdulari High School, Pitaujia and took special interests and constructive activities relating to Khadi and Village industries.

A socialist, Karpoori Thakur was close to Dr Rammanohar Lohia and Jaya Prakash Narayan. During 1974-77, he and other prominent leaders led the "Bihar Students' Movement" and "Total Revolution" movement aimed at non-violent transformation of the Indian society. After the Janata Party came to power, he won the chief minister ship battle from the then Bihar Janata Party President Satyendra Narayan Sinha to become the Bihar Chief Minister for a second term in 1977.

However he could not last his full term because he lost the leadership battle in 1979 from Ram Sundar Das whom his adversaries placed against him and was replaced as chief minister. Popularly known as "Jan Nayak," the people's leader he served as the Chief Minister of Bihar from December 1970 to June 1971 and from December 1977 to April 1979 (Janata Party).

Karpoori Thakur was known as the champion of the cause of the Dalits and the poor. He introduced reservation for the backward classes in the Government jobs, in 1978. He is called mentor to the prominent Bihari leaders such as Ram Vilas Paswan, Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar. Karpoori Thakur's birthplace, Pitaunjhia, was renamed to Karpuri Gram (Hindi for "Karpuri village") after his death in 1988. The Jan Nayak Karpuri Thakur Vidhi Mahavidyalaya (Law College) in Buxar is also named after him.

The Department of Posts released a commemorative stamp in his memory. The government has taken immense commemorative measures that includes naming several stadiums after Jan Nayak Karpuri Thakur in the state, establishment of scores of colleges and statues in most of the districts, Karpuri Thakur Museum, Jan Nayak Karpuri Thakur hospitals in Samastipur and Darbhanga, publication of Karpuri Thakur's speeches in Bihar legislative Assembly and documentary on Karpuri Thakur. He was married to Smt. Phuleshwari Devi and had two sons and one daughter.

Social activities: Took active part in Bhoodan, Gram dan and Sarvodaya Movements. Founded several educational institutions like Acharya Narendra Dev College, Shahpur Patori, Dr. Lohia College, Tajpur, Prabhavati Ramdulari High School, Pitaunjia. Favorite pastime and recreation: Folk music, particularly classical music. Special interests: Constructive work; Activities relating to Khadi and Village industries. Publications: Several booklets on Politics, Socialist Movement and Emergency. Travels abroad: Austria, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Egypt, Nepal and several European countries.

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