

Tribute

Jagdish Tirodkar: The departure of a gentle socialist

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As a consequence of my fledgling activism in my student life to my dedicated commitment towards socialism till now, I found umpteen occasions to meet and interact with many people active in this stream. I constantly learned and picked up something from verily everyone during my work and interactions with them. Of them some became the source of intellectual inspiration, a few helped me in grasping the situations better while others taught me to keep the struggle on even keel in adverse circumstances. As with all other movements, in the socialist fold as well, there were some committed few who selflessly played their part in enriching the movement.

Despite being in politics, they never took their work as some kind of competition with their compatriots. Leaders and ideologues come and go and the jugglery of power continue but such people have neither desire for name, fruits of leadership or hankering for power. Their attitude towards the organization is of humility and without any complaint or grudges. By contributing to the maximum of their ability, they nurture the movement and the organization. Such rare people mirror a touch of humanity in the rough and tumble field of politics, which is often anti-human and ruthless. Comrade Jagdish Tirodkar in the socialist movement was such a rare person. He died suddenly on 29 October 2022 at the age of 85 after spending a long active life in the socialist movement.

I always found Jagdish ji's life gentle and smooth and almost laid back to an extent. However, the moment of his death was dramatic. He went to the Wagah-Attari border, about 30 kilometers from Amritsar, with his daughter Amita Samant and granddaughter. There he suddenly had a heart attack. A minister had also come there to watch the parade. Jagdish ji was fortunately able to get medical help available in the ambulance that had accompanied the minister but that was of no avail and he breathed his last there.

Saint poets have drawn vivid pictures of uncertainty with the inevitability of death. Kabir has said 'Kes pakar kahan marihai kai ghar kai pardes'. (*One would never know when and where the death would kill a person pulling by hair: it could be home or borderland!*)

Born in a village in Sawantwadi taluka of Maharashtra, death overtook Jagdish ji far away from home – on the India-Pakistan border. His daughter informed that the over-stimulating performance of the soldiers of both the countries in the name of the parade at the Wagah-Attari border may have had an adverse effect on Jagdish ji, who was calm and mild by temperament. It was suggested by some speakers in the condolence meeting held after Jagdish ji's death that the form of provocative demonstrations on both sides of the India-Pakistan border should be changed.

My first acquaintance with Jagdish ji happened around 1989-1999. My wife and I travelled to Mumbai (then Bombay) where we had some work at the King Edward George Memorial (KEM) Hospital. We carried a letter from George Fernandes addressed to a comrade of the Bombay Labour Union. We both met Jagdish ji in the union office. He was assigned the task of taking us to the hospital. He stayed with us the whole day along with his union colleagues. The next day also we went to the hospital with him. My wife says that we had also gone to Jagdish ji's house for food. That incident is not in my memory. I remember this much that Jagdish ji's spontaneity and gentleness had a deep impact on us in that meeting of two days. There was a calmness of bearing with an equal amount of straight forwardness coupled with genuinely felt concern in his behaviour.

About a decade after this meeting, during the days of Samajwadi Jan Parishad (SJP), I met Jagdish ji again with senior socialist leader and writer Pannalal Surana. The old memory was refreshed. With the formation of Socialist Party (India) in 2011, the chain of meetings with Jagdish ji continued till 2019.

I had been active in the party work since its inception till 2019. Jagdish ji hardly used to miss any meeting/program of the party. Be it in any state, he used to work seamlessly - from the preparation of the meeting till its conclusion. I used to be surprised that such a senior comrade who volunteers with so-called trivial odd jobs of getting photocopies of the material related to the meeting, arranging and distributing them with promptness and dedication.

Jagdish ji had worked in the socialist movement throughout his life because of his ideological commitment. Along with me, he also used to feel very upset when many people would leave party documents prepared with hard work and expenses at the meeting place or in the living room. It was only on this issue did I find him getting truly upset. He would collect contributions from Maharashtra and Goa colleagues who often sympathized with the party and bring the amount while

attending meetings and programs. I often asked him why he took so much trouble, and his answer would be that everyone should do this important work to run the party.

Maharashtra has given several socialist thinkers/leaders to the socialist movement of the country and the world. Jagdish ji must have been naturally influenced by them. When I got an opportunity to edit the writings of Sane Guruji in Hindi for 'Sane Guruji Kathamala', I perceived a glimpse of Sane Guruji in Jagdish ji's personality. Unfortunately that work of translation/editing of Sane Guruji's works into Hindi did not progress further after the publication of two volumes. We should return to completing that unfinished work.

Jagdish ji spent his whole life in the socialist movement. Apart from the Socialist Party, he was also active in the labour movement. The struggle for liberation of Goa comes under the umbrella of socialist movement. Jagdish ji had participated in the Goa-Mukti Satyagraha of 1954-55. He also got the status of freedom fighter.

There are still people like Jagdish ji in this world and they exist in the rough and tumble of politics too. Such people live quietly and depart without a crescendo of drums. Simplicity is the ornament of their personality. The world, which is habituated to finding meaning solely in distinctiveness, does not feel any loss when such people are gone. That's why no one even takes notice of their absence. But I am sure such dedicated souls really don't mind. If they did not hanker for recognition while living, why should it happen after their passing away? The loss, regrettably, is ours alone. Many colleagues of our movement will continue to feel the emptiness for a long time created by the departure of Jagdish ji. Pannalal ji, perhaps the most acutely.

My humble tributes to him.

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