

'Upvaas' of Dallewal: Imparting credibility, dignity and strength

Prem Singh

On 5 March 2025 one hundred days have passed since Jagjit Singh Dallewal's protest fast. Discussions will continue on issues like minimum support price (MSP) for crops, other demands put forth under the aegis of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, talks related with the government; and coordination with the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), and also will continue Jagjit Singh Dallewal's protest fast. Except that if it continues for still more days, then there a serious fear of the fast becoming a 'maran vrat'.

As a result of the farmers' protest at Delhi's Singhu border in 2020-21, the government had withdrawn the three agricultural laws. Since then, the *yaksh prashn* has also stood out in the open about how the country's vast agricultural sector can survive with the rapidly increasing pace of corporatization of education, health and service sectors including the public sector enterprises! Economists have not yet raised the question about the private capital that is being worshipped in corporate India, and how much of the private capital is looted public money! It is hoped that economists like Professor Arun Kumar, who have explained how much of the Indian economy is black money, will also consider this central question. Whatever be the case, a decisive point in the clash between farmers and corporate powers is not expected to happen soon.

But for Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast which has crossed 100 days, it can be said right now with certainty that it has become a kind of landmark in the history of nonviolent resistance to injustice. The importance of this fast increases even more when we find that it has restored the credibility, dignity and strength of protest fasts. I do not want to refer here to the fasts that are sponsored and carried out for self-promotion but would like to mention that Abhimanyu Kohar, convener of the protest going on for more than a year at Khanauri border for their demands, has made the observation that while the media covered Anna Hazare's 13-day fast in 2011 day and night, they have not paid even a fraction of the same footage to Jagjit Singh Dallewal's long fast.

In fact, this comparison itself is wrong. The truth had come out at the very beginning that Anna Hazare used to fast for the media. The powers involved in that fast-episode and their intentions were also not a hidden truth. Its result was also on the same lines - India's national and social life came under the tight grip of the corporate-communal nexus.

Seriousness, dignity and humility have always been maintained in Jagjit Singh Dallewal's satyagraha-fast. Jagjit Singh Dallewal and the farmer leaders/supporters involved in the movement did not make the fasting site a platform for speeches. This has upheld the belief that the long-tested value of 'weighing before speaking' has not been lost entirely in the noise of

ongoing verbosity. Needless to say, Jagjit Singh Dallewal had prepared himself for this fast. Before sitting on the fast, he had completed some of his worldly duties in order to detach himself. At that time, some of his close colleagues too did not realize that he was actually going to begin a 'maran vrat'.

With Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast, there has indeed been a small revolution in the non-violent mode of resistance - a single person standing up fearlessly against injustice through satyagrah, civil disobedience, fasting. Mohandas Gandhi used this mode of resistance in India's freedom movement while taking inspiration from global sources. Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, describing Gandhi's "nonviolent mode of action as the most revolutionary core of his teachings," writes, "The greatest revolution of our time is, therefore, a procedural revolution, removal of injustice through a mode of action characterized by justice. The question here is not so much the contents of justice as the mode to achieve it. Constitutional and orderly processes are often not enough. They are then transgressed by the use of weapons. In order that this should not happen and that man should not ever get thrown around between ballet and bullet, this procedural revolution of civil disobedience has emerged. At the head of all revolutions of our time stands this revolution of *satyagraha* against weapons ..." ('Marx Gandhi and Socialism', pg. xxxi-ii)

It's a matter of accepted common sense that the three agricultural laws withdrawn by the government will be implemented in the same or a changed form. The government had said, 'The laws are being withdrawn, not completely repealed.' This is bound to happen due to the neoliberal consensus among the political and intellectual elite of the country. But this does not reduce the need for resistance, nor its value. As long as even a single citizen of the country is against corporatization and in favour of freedom, self-reliance and sovereignty, the need and value of resistance will remain.

Governments can fire bullets. They can rig elections. But citizens who disagree with the decisions of the government have the option to offer resistance, at the risk of their lives. This satyagraha-fast of Jagjit Singh Dallewal is an open non-violent rebellion by him and his colleagues against the corporate dictates of the government. Lohia, at the end of his above statement, said that despite its moral value and righteousness, the non-violent mode of resistance had in effect, "made only a faltering appearance to date." The protest fast and resistance at Khanauri border is an assurance against this; it has resurrected the non-violent mode of protest against injustice and infused a new faith in its credibility, dignity and strength.

(The writer associated with the socialist movement is a former teacher of Delhi University and a fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla)