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The Role of Babu Jagjivan Ram in the Freedom Struggle and Emancipation of Depressed Classes

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Abstract:

Babu Jagjivan Ram was an eminent personality, he played vital role in freedom struggle of India and up-liftment of depressed classes economically and socially in the society. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, he worked with many people like Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, and Netaji Subash Chandra Bose to get the freedom. He prisoned so many times in freedom Struggle. Since his student life, he suffered with ill-treating by the society, because he regards to backward class. So, he got realized and he started to awake the people with his ideas about the socio – economic situation of Dalits (Backward Classes) via social organizations like “Ravidas MahaSabha” and depressed classes Legue. Babu Jagajivan Ram became a crusader for social equality. Being as a nominated member of Bihar Legislative Council, he represented the oppressed classes in the council. In 1937, he founded a “ KhetiharMajdoorSabha”, which is meant for labourers and their welfare. He came out with his ideas on the current socio – economic circumstances of backward classes at “All India Depressed Classes League” in Champaran, Bihar. Therefore, Gandhi publicly said about Babu Jagjivan Ram is “Jewel” of India. So, he was such an ideal person and his life history is inspire to future of the nation. M.VENKATACHALAPATHY, Research Scholor of Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapur, Andhrapradesh(India) did research on Babu Jagjivan Ram. I gathered a lot of information about him in his native district of Shahabad district in Bihar (India).

1. Introduction

Jagjivan Ram, popularly known as Babuji was a national leader, a freedom fighter, a crusader of social justice, a champion of Depressed Classes, a true democrat, a distinguished union minister. He was their emancipator and their savior and symbol of their hopes. Jagjivan Ram was the product of our national struggle. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the freedom movement acquired a new meaning and shook the very foundations of our society as it mobilized the masses. It awakened and inspired millions and unleashed new social and economic forces. It was in this context Jagjivan Ram came in contact with the tallest of our leaders; Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and others.

He came to be looked upon as a representative of the millions of the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes and the Depressed Sections of our society who had suffered socioeconomic deprivation over the centuries. He united the depressed classes on a national scale. He participated in Mahatma Gandhi's anti-untouchability movement, became secretary of Harijan Sevak Sangh and organized the All India Depressed Classes League. Even the British acknowledged Babu Jagjivan Ram position as an outstanding representative of the weaker sections. His efforts, as the founder - president of the All Indian Depressed Classes, left a great impact on the nation. The Congress took the suggestions of Jagjivan Ram for the uplift of depressed classes. Jagjivan Ram played a very active role in the freedom struggle. Inspired by Gandhi, JagjivanRam courted arrest in December 1940. After his release, he entered himself deeply into the Civil Disobedience Movement and Satyagraha. Babu Jagjivan Ram was arrested again in August 1942 for his active participation in the Quit India Movement launched by the Indian National Congress. Babu Jagjivan Ram after his release in 1943, checked the attempts to convert the depressed classes people to other religions. Under his leadership and guidance, the All India Depressed Classes League organized several secret meetings all over the country and in members held demonstration against the British government. He submitted a memorandum to the cabinet mission on 8th April 1946, recommending special provisions in government jobs for the education people from depressed classes. This step is really a milestone.

He waged a struggle for equality and empowerment. As member of Constituent Assembly, he ensured that free India would be rid of the pernicious practices of such as untouchability and social discriminations based on caste consideration. He strongly supported Reservations for Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Legislature, public employment, education, etc. He had divergent views with Baba Saheb Ambedkar. He urged the Schedule Castes and the Backward Class people to fight for their rights and dignity within the existing social setup. He never wanted a gulf between them and the forward classes. He was in favour of social and communal harmony and this only can ensure the growth and development of the nation. Jagjivan Ram lived his life to achieve such an ideal. He died in July 1986. His life and work will undoubtedly continue to inspire generations to come. This paper attempts to study the role and achievements of Babu Jagjivan Ram in the freedom struggle and emancipation of depressed classes.

2. Early Life and Education

Jagjivan Ram was born on 5th April, 1908 at Chandwa, a small village in Shahabad district in Bihar. His father's name was Shobhi Ram. Jagjivan Ram had an elder brother named Sant Lal while his sisters were Balkeshi, Ramkeshi and Ram Dasi. His father Shobhi Ram was in the British Army. His mother's name was Basanti Devi. Jagjivan Ram studied till to class fifth in the school at Chandwa village. After Primary education, Jagjivan Ram joined the Middle School, Arrah in January in 1920. He joined the Arrah Town School in 1922 for higher education. Ram came face to face with the oppressive caste discrimination and bigotry of the upper castes that shackled his community for centuries and put abhorrent limits on him and his community's life. He was much distressed by the discriminations meted out during student life.

In 1925, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya visited Arrah. Jagjivan Ram was a matric student then. Since Jagjivan Ram was the best student in the school, he was asked to read the welcome address. Pandit Madan Mohan was deeply impressed by the erudition and panache of Ram. And so he invited Jagjivan Ram to study at 'Banaras Hindu University'. Jagjivan Ram passed Matriculation in 1926, with a first division from Arrah Town School.

Jagjivan Ram took admission in Banaras Hindu University for Higher Education keeping in view Pandit Malaviya's advice. Jagajivan Ram was to face further caste based prejudices and hostility at Banaras Hindu University. He took accommodation in the university hostel. It's here other students began discriminating against him. In 1928, after passing Inter Exams from BHU went to Calcutta. He joined B.Sc., in Calcutta's Vidyasagar College. On April 9th, 1930, Gandhi began to civil disobedience movement. Jagjivan Ram collected political activists and social reformers and raised slogans against British administration. There was lath charge and Ram received strokes and injuries. This brought him to lime light in Calcutta.

In 1931, Babu Jagjivan Ram passed his graduation exam in Science from Calcutta University. The student years strengthened his resolve to fight on two fronts, for the freedom of the country and for social equality. Jagjivan Ram's patriotism and his desire to serve the dalits were far higher than attachment to mere academic degrees.

3. Active Participation of Babuji in Upliftment of Dalits

After reaching his village Chandwa in 1931, his mother wanted him to join a high government position. He wanted to please his mother by joining government service but his burning desire to work for the upliftment of dalits and also for the independence of the country prevented him from doing so. At this time there was famine in Bihar. There were starvation deaths everywhere. He worked tirelessly for the people of the area. At this time, Gandhi was in Yerwada prison.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was invited as the chief guest at a seminar to oppose untouchability held in an auditorium situated at Patna. Jagjivan Ram was also invited to the same seminar as a speaker. He said, "The objective of our life is to uproot the British rule from India. Gandhiji is in Yerawada Jail. The Missionaries are tempting the untouchables with several offers to convert to Christianity by offering cash, land and free education. The untouchables are Hindus. We are born as Hindus and shall die so. We have created the nation and not, vice-versa. This is our nation. Mahatma Gandhi has said that 'untouchability shall have to be eradicated'. All India Congress Committee also supported it. It has given a new hope to the oppressed people. It is my firm belief that Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Vittal Bhai Patel shall implement this proposal in the interest of the nation. I shall vow for this. I shall not hesitate in making sacrifices. We shall have roused the society against religious conversions. Practice of discrimination against lower castes¹. This speech of Babu Jagjivan Ram impressed Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the Chief Guest of the function and also the audience.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was invited by Rajendra Prasad and asked him to work for the Anti-untouchability League. This Anti-untouchability league was founded by Mahatma Gandhi on 30th September, 1930. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was familiar with Babu Jagjivan Ram's struggles during his student life.

4. The Role of Babuji in Freedom Struggle

Mahatma Gandhi attended the second Round Table conference in London in September 1931. Dr. Rajendra Prasad wrote to him about Babu Jagjivan Ram's calibre and intense devotion. When Gandhi reached Bombay, he was accorded a grand welcome. Several eminent personalities participated in the function. Babu Jagjivan Ram was also invited. He reached Bombay and met Gandhi along with Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Gandhi gave the guidelines for an active role in the struggle for independence of India. Gandhi also entrusted the state level responsibilities of the work of Harijan Sevak Sangh in Bihar province to Babu Jagjivan Ram. Ram gladly accepted the same. He then returned to his village Chandwa².

5. The Organizations – Babu Jagajivan Ram

During his student days, he successfully organized a number of Ravidas sammelans and had started celebrating Guru Ravidas Jayanti in the different parts of Calcutta. In 1934, he founded the Akhil Bhartiya Ravidas Mahasabha in Calcutta. The other organizations that he founded for social reforms were namely, Khetikar Mazdoor Sabha for agricultural labour and the All India depressed classes League (1935). Through his organizations he involved the the depressed classes in the freedom struggle and also rallied that all Dalit leaders should unite and not only fight for the social reforms but also demand political representation.

Gandhi focused his attention on problems of Dalits and in 1933 announced a 21 days fast, to cleanse psyche of his followers towards the Harijans. He also postponed the civil disobedience movement for a year and was released from prison. The country was electrified by the fast of Mahatma Gandhi at the act of the British government in separating caste Hindus and scheduled castes in electoral representation. When the action was nullified after the Poona Pact, Jagjivan Ram wrote an angry letter to the Mahatma, questioning

his reasons for not permitting the scheduled castes from having seats reserved for them in the Assemblies. He received a reply from Gandhiji's secretary, stating that the Gandhi believed that any separation of this kind would have a negative impact on the scheduled castes themselves.

At the All India Depressed Classes leaders unity conference in Kanpur in 1935, Jagjivan Ram proved to be the guiding spirit. He pointed out that the Harijans would not be able to advance their efforts at social and economic upliftment if they were not able to secure representatives for themselves in elected bodies. Moreover, there had to be unity among them, as they would otherwise nullify their efforts by working through a number of different and separate organizations. He also emphasised that it was important to be linked to the mainstream of the freedom movement, as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi and the congress. As a result of his efforts, the All India Depressed Classes League was formed with Rasiklal Biswas as its president and P.N. Rajbhoj and Jagjivan Ram as secretaries. He also became the president of the Bihar branch of the Depressed Classes League.

As a leader of the oppressed classes, he was constantly pondering upon ways to arrange free access to Harijans to public places, temples, eating places, walls and schools. He desired equal rights for all. Caste or religion based distinctions between human rights were unjust, inhuman and an affront to god as well. In his book, 'Caste challenge in India', Babu Jagjivan Ram writes, "progress is interent in the idea that we extend our social horizons and generate awareness in social life. Definitely, this will work towards promoting the ideals of high social form. The social consciousness of the people caught in the endless cobweb of casteism, is nearly nil. Until the disarrangement of casteism is eliminated, it is in possible to establish a society that is based on the sentiment of uniformity".⁴

The main objective of in establishing social organizations as 'Ravidas Mahasabha' and Depressed Classes League was to make the crores of people from oppressed, backward and exploited classes, aware of human rights and bring them at par with other classes in the country. For fulfilment of this aim, Babu Jagjivan Ram became a crusader for social equality. Jagjivan Ram appealed to the depressed classes: "To struggle for a socially interdependent society which would be so changed and revolutionized that they could participate in it on terms of equality of rights and obligations".⁵

Babu Jagjivan Ram more attracted by the congress policy of uplift of the oppressed class people. He was also attracted to congress because of congress vow of gaining freedom from the British. Mahatma Gandhi established the 'Anti-untouchability league' in September 1932, to eradicate untouchability. At the inauguration ceremony of the Bihar province branch of Anti-untouchability league, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Babu Rajendra Prasad and many other prominent personalities took part. In this meeting, Babu Jagjivan Ram drew the attention of the crowd towards the various aspects of the social and economic conditions of the people belonging to the oppressed classes. At this conference, Babu Jagjivan Ram was made the secretary of the Anti-untouchability league in the province of Bihar. Later the name of the Anti-untouchability league was changed to 'Harijan Sevak Sangh'. Babu Jagjivan Ram shouldered the responsibility of three organizations. These were 'Ravidas Mahasabha', 'Depressed Classes League' and 'Harijan Sevak Sangh'. He wanted to bring social awakening among Dalits through these organizations. He wrote, "I have always said that untouchability, with denial of opportunities and elements of slavery, permeates the social and economic fabric of the Hindu Society. This is why I have come to believe that it can only be eradicated when the social and economic order is reestablished.

This point to a revolution - social, economic and political so big in all aspects as the world has not been to date".⁶

In October, 1935 Babu Jagjivan Ram appeared before the Hammond Committee at Ranchi and demanded for the first time voting rights for Dalits. Though the Acts of 1909 and 1919 gave the people of oppressed classes representation, but this has not helped much in bringing about social awareness among the oppressed classes to the extent as was expected. The main reason for this was the under representation of the oppressed classes, far less in proportion to their population. The oppressed classes respected the system as the Act gave fixed representation. To defend the right to vote of the oppressed classes, the British administration in 1932, announced the Mc Donald Communal Awards by which they gained representations through reserved constituencies. This was seen as another plot by the British administration to divide and rule the country; reserved constituencies gave rise to the feelings of separation among the Muslims. It also affected the Sikhs. From Yerawada prison, in March 1932, Mahatma Gandhi threatened to undertake a fast unto death over the plot to divide the country. This fast unto death of Mahatma Gandhi moved the whole country. When the situation became serious, Mc Donald communal award was amended in accordance with Mahatma Gandhi's wishes and he ended his fast. This amended declaration later came to be known as 'Poona Pact'. Before the Poona Pact was finalized, Babu Jagjivan Ram saw to it that the depressed classes league passed a proposal. Though he thought of presenting the proposal to Mahatma Gandhi, he could not so because of his brothers' ill health (Sant Lal).

The proposals are:

- The people of oppressed classes prefer living with the undivided public in India and oppose all types of separatism.
- After gaining independence, oppressed classes shall have to be given due representation in all the state legislatures.
- Instead of separate constituencies there should be an arrangement that the oppressed classes should find full representation in municipality and the legislatures.
- The people of oppressed classes should be adequately represented in all the government services in the country.⁷

Mahatma Gandhi gave serious consideration to the proposals from the Depressed Classes League of Babu Jagjivan Ram. These proposals laid the foundation for the future of the crores of oppressed class people in the country.

6. Babuji –Political Life

The government of India Act 1935 was implemented by the British administration. In accordance with it, the province of Bihar was separated from Orissa. As a result, the position of a nominated member from the scheduled castes became vacant, since the member was from Orissa and had shifted to Orissa Assembly. To fill this post, Babu Jagjivan Ram was considered as the best choice, on the

basis of his contributions. Therefore the Bihar government nominated Babu Jagjivan Ram as a member of the Bihar Legislative Council. Its session began on 30th August 1930 in Ranchi and continued till 12th September 1936. For the first time, Babu Jagjivan Ram represented the oppressed classes in the Bihar Legislative council. As a nominated member, it was expected that Jagjivan Ram would normally vote with the Treasury Benches on all issues. However, Jagjivan Ram thought that the opposition's demand that canal rates be cut was justified and voted against the rates. He had proved that he was his own man, a man with vision and determination. In August 1936, Babu Jagjivan Ram organized a huge rally at Lucknow under the aegis of All India Depressed Classes League. Babu Jagjivan Ram presided over it. In his presidential speech, Babu Jagjivan observed, "on the basis of complexion, colour type of hair and body built marking an area separately, it cannot be said that the race of people of a particular area is pure. Besides, it has been definitely proved that caste components are not determinant factors of a person's abilities, inferiority or superiority. Actually, what matters is the sentiments that link people together viz caste sentiments, caste customs, caste conduct, caste-language, these are the influential elements to break traditions. In this way, Babu Jagjivan Ram sought support and cooperation for Mahatma Gandhi for the ongoing freedom struggle in the country from not only the people of a particular province but the Harijans from deferrer provinces in the country. Babu Jagjivan Ram attended the All India Mahasabha conference at Pune in December, 1936 with a 300 members, strong delegation. The party president, Malaviya appealed that all the disabilities put before the Harijans should be removed. All went well, until an amendment was moved that while Harijans could enter temples, they could not enter the main shrine room. Taking objection to it, Jagjivan Ram threatened to leave, Malaviya stepped in and the move was dropped. This goes to show the stature and prestige that Jagjivan Ram had acquired in just a few years.⁹

In accordance with the government of Indian Act 1935, elections were declared in 1936. The electoral process began in December 1936 and the election campaign came to an end in the beginning of 1937. In 1937, he stood as a candidate of the Depressed Classes League and was elected unopposed to the Bihar Legislative Assembly from the East central Shahabad (Rural) and he also ensured the unopposed victory of his Depressed Classes League candidates in all the 14 reserved constituents. The congress had adopted all the 15 candidates as its own. In these elections, congress was a majority in Bombay, Madras, the united provinces, M.P. and Orissa. In the province of Bihar, congress needed the cooperation of legislators of other parties to form a government.

In 1937, Babu Jagjivan Ram founded the Khetihar Majdoor Sabha (landless labourers society)¹⁰. The prime objectives were to ensure fair wages to the agricultural labourers, arrange best education for their children, organize the labourers, and reform their financial conditions, raise voice against the land-owners atrocities and efforts for the elimination of the Zamindari system. There were demonstrations by lakhs of labourers in front of the Bihar Assembly for the achievement of the objectives of this organization. Jagjivan Ram organized this rally to oppose the practice of forced labour, under payment, and harassment. This rally made the labourers aware of their rights.

Congress formed governments in seven out of the eleven provinces. In Bihar province, it's a different matter. Jagjivan Ram had the support of 14 legislators from the Depressed Classes League. For any political group, to constitute a council of ministers, the support of Depressed Classes League is necessary. Mr. Mohammad Yunus sought the support of Babu Jagjivan Ram to form a cabinet. Jagjivan Ram was not swayed by the offer of a ministerial berth and also the several facilities which were offered to Jagjivan Ram by Mr. Mohammad Yunus. Babu Jagjivan Ram declined the offer and even refused to consider any negotiations, making it clear that the league must support the congress party in the legislature. Babu Jagjivan Ram informed Dr. Rajendra Prasad about the temptations offered by Mr. Yunus with British backing. Dr. Rajendra Prasad informed Ram's sincerity and political maturity to Mahatma Gandhi. The Harijan legislators determined not to join the cabinet.

Mr Yunus offered Ram a ministerial berth and applied pressure tactics. But Yunus could not by Jagjivan Ram. Dr. Rajendra Prasad told to Mahatma Gandhi about the great sacrifice of Babu Jagjivan Ram. Jagjivan Ram, who is from oppressed class, had shown to the world how high ideals can be maintained even while living in poverty, morale can be kept high and self-respect preserved despite insults and high handedness. Senior leaders, social workers and intellectuals from all over the country praised Babu Jagjivan Ram, Mahatma Gandhi publicly described Babu Jagjivan Ram as a 'Jewel'.

Babu Jagjivan Ram also attended the session of the All India Depressed Classes League at Champaran district in the province of Bihar. Babu Jagjivan Ram came out with his ideas on the current socio-economic circumstances of the dalits. He came out with several suggestions for the upliftment of depressed classes and these suggestions were drafted and submitted to the government. Babu Jagjivan Ram was appointed as the Parliamentary Secretary in the First Congress Ministry in Bihar. Had Babu Jagjivan Ram thought of becoming a cabinet minister, he would have certainly become a cabinet minister. But Shri Jagal Lal Chowdhary claimed the ministerial post. Babu Jagjivan Ram withdraws from the scene saying that Jagan Lal Chowdhary had experience and age. Shri Jagan Lal Chowdhary became a minister due to Jagjivan Ram's sacrifice. This step certainly strengthened congress organisation and this step of Ram was praised and lauded by Dr. Rajendra Prasad and other congress leaders.

The congress session was held at Haripura in February 1938 under the president ship of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Babu Jagjivan Ram also participated in it. As parliamentary secretary in the First Congress Ministry in Bihar, he was also assigned the responsibility for development, cooperatives and industries. During his brief tenure, Ram did pioneering work in organizing the department of Rural Development. He added an electrical and mechanical section to the Department of Industries. Even while he was parliamentary secretary, he organized the Khetihhaar Mazdoor Sabha to uphold the rights of agricultural labourers. After the congress session at Haripur was over in February 1943, Babu Jagjivan Ram organized a session of the Khatihhaar Mazdoor Sabha. Sardar Vallabai Patel inaugurated the session. Mean while in 1939, the international situation grew grim with Germany launching a war. Germany occupied Poland. The war took place because of imperialistic interests. On one hand, the allied nations, England, America and France, to defend their commercial and industrial interests were bringing several countries of the world under colonial rule. On the other hand, when Germany, Italy and Japan, for their growing population and industrial progress, sought to establish colonies England, America and

France began opposing them. They could not tolerate that these countries set up their settlements in Asia and Africa, coming to pose perpetual danger to their own economic prosperity. Thus the Second World War took place due to conflict in mutual interests of these two sides.

Russia occupied Finland, Latvia of Baltic ocean, Estonia and Lithuania. Germany occupied Norway and Denmark. It attacked France from three sides and occupied Paris then occupying Greece, Yugoslavia and Crete, it came to dominate the East. The international situation worsened and in such an atmosphere where the whole world was threatened by war, the Congress had to explain its policy with regard to the freedom movement. So Congress issued a statement totally distancing itself from the conduct of the fascist countries in destroying democratic structures and also declared that eliminating tyranny and imperialism is essential for peace and progress in the world. British dragged India into the war without consulting the political bodies in India. Congress criticized the policies of viceroy and non-violent demonstrations were organised in all parts of the country. In protest, Congress boycotted several sessions of the central legislative council. All Indians gathered under Congress flag to agitate against the plot of viceroy to drag the country into the Second World War. The representatives of Muslim League grew more vocal in their demand for a separate country. Taking advantage of the situation, Viceroy, passed the Government of India (Amendment) Act and India Defence Act that allowed him the power to suppress democratic rights. Now viceroy could even use his special powers through the medium of Governors to adjourn or dismiss the legislatures in the provinces.

Congress immediately demanded from the British government the acceptance of India's right of self-decision and the formation of government at centre, responsible to union legislature. The government assured Congress of considering its demands. When the new and amended laws were implemented, its false promises were exposed.

Congress immediately passed a resolution where by elected members resigned from the central and provincial governments. The freedom movement gained momentum, Mahatma Gandhi assumed leadership of Congress again. In the beginning of 1940, Babu Jagjivan Ram was elected as member of the All India Congress committee. In March 1940, Jagjivan Ram was elected as the secretary of Bihar Provincial Congress Committee. Babu Jagjivan Ram was entrusted with the responsibility of making arrangements for training to the activists of youth Congress. As per the programme of the Congress, he organised people at several places in Bihar province. He directed them to face all critical situations.

Thus he contributed to the strengthening of Congress. As president of the Depressed Classes League he inspired the people of depressed classes to work for the Congress connecting them to the Congress. He also addressed many meetings of students attending schools in Bihar. He conducted extensive propaganda tours propagating love for one's country, unity, integrity, awareness of human values and secularism. He took up the responsibility to set up a camp office in Ramgarh in preparation for the full session of Congress. This responsibility was given to Jagjivan Ram in his capacity as secretary of Bihar Province Congress Committee. The session was organized in March 1940 and Maulana Kalam Azad presided over it. The Congress in this session clearly stated that it will not involve directly or indirectly in the war. Some Ministers in the viceroy's Executive Council criticised Congress. Zafarullah Khan, the then Law Minister said, "Each of us here, feels for the world-crisis and we are firmly with our king and country, with courage and allegiance."¹³ Congress branded Zafarullah's statement as regrettable. Babu Jagjivan Ram termed this statement as 'shameful'.¹⁴

Babu Jagjivan Ram held a rally and said, "If the colonies under the imperialists and the vested interests and privilege are to be defined by war the India cannot have anything to do with it. If the British are battling in favour of democracy then they should essentially put an end to colonial subjugation. Therefore, they have to establish a total democracy in India and Indians should get the right to form their own constitution through the medium of a constituent assembly without any external or internal interference."¹⁵

Babu Jagjivan Ram turned the country extensively. He addressed a crowd at Benaras wherein he stated, "In the perspective of this war, only a free and equal India can extend cooperation. Until this huge change is brought about, no leader in the country has the ability to inspire people for a battle that is not ours. Therefore, the first step should be the declaration of freedom for the India."¹⁶

The All India Congress committee session was held at Patna in August 1940. Babu Jagjivan Ram participated in it. In this meeting, Mahatma Gandhi demanded self rule and expressed his desire to meet the viceroy. Accordingly efforts were made to meet viceroy. But the viceroy refused to meet him. Public became unhappy but exercised restraint as they have decided to follow the path of non-violence that their leader had shown. Another meeting of AICC was organized at Bombay in September 1940. Gandhi presided over the session. In November 1940, the Congress decided to undertake Satyagraha, a unique and disciplined effort towards gaining freedom and dignity of the country. Mahatma's disciple Vinoba Bhave became the first Satyagraha activists courting arrest from Parnar Ashram. All over India thousands of people courted arrest. The depressed classes also played a vital role in making this movement a success under Babu Jagjivan Ram's leadership. Heeding to Gandhi call for individual Satyagraha, Babu Jagjivan Ram decided to opt for it. On December 1940, in the Sahabad district of Bihar, Babu Jagjivan Ram held meetings along a 40 mile long route telling to the people disobey the diktat of British government to include the country in the second world war and obey Gandhi's instructions. He was arrested and kept at Arrah prison from sometime. He was put on trial and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. People of Arrah developed political awareness because of Jagjivan Ram imprisonment there. His elder brother Sant Lal said, "Jagjivan Ram is in prison for the country. He has brought fame to our family and lineage. We should be proud of this".¹⁷ Babu Jagjivan Ram's imprisonment for individual Satyagrah was a symbol of respectable representation of Dalit, in the freedom movement.

On 11th December 1940, he was sent to the central jail, Hazaribagh. Jaiprakash Narayan, S.K. Sinha, A.N. Sinha, Prakash Narayan, K.B. Sahai and B.N. Tha were also with him at the prison.¹⁸ In the prison, he read Karl Marx's 'Das Capital' and other books on economics, political science, history, religious literature, Hindi and English literature. He wrote from prison several letters to his wife. These letters reflect not only the prevailing conditions but also Babu Jagjivan Ram's in-depth knowledge of Social Philosophy. The letters were censored by the prison officials, but some excerpts are given thus, "The freedom of a parrot in a gold cage is as restrictive as in an iron cage. Both yearn equally for freedom. However, there is also a kind of pleasure involved, by the restriction of one,

others are benefited or there is a possibility of their welfare. For such as noble people, so many in the world have embraced bondages for the good of others, teaching them the lesson of emancipation. Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, Swami Dayanad's... The lives of these saints is in itself a noble teaching. All have forsaken their ego, given up their family and loved ones for universal good. If one could emulate their example, sacrifices and ideals, even to some extent, one should consider oneself lucky... Today in the world, only a few ideologies find a place in political sphere or administration - Imperialism, Nazism, Fascism, Socialism and communism. There is not much of a difference between socialism and communism. Both share the objective that all essential commodities should be available to all in the society and country. All should have equal civil rights and disparities within society should end.

Today, despite hardwork, one doesn't get enough to eat or sufficient clothes to cover oneself with, while another without lifting a finger, gets to bathe in milk. Many, capable of working, but jobless, suffer untimely death from starvation. The aim of socialism and communism is that all should be employed as per their calibre and all be provided provisions according to needs. The nation's property should belong to the nation, each citizen should have a right to it. In such a system, when the nation fulfils the needs of each individual, none shall need or aspire to our personal property. This in brief, is the definition of socialism and community.¹⁹

Babu Jagjivan Ram was released from prison on 10th September, 1941. He again involved in the congress work. Babu Jagjivan Ram met Mahatma Gandhi at Vardha. And he stayed in the sevagram Ashram at Varda for a few days. Mahatma Gandhi's main question before him was how to bring about social, economic and educational emancipation of the people from depressed classes. Babu Jagjivan Ram gave much thought to the issue of the all round development of the people suffering from centuries. During his stay at Vardha, Jagjivan Ram held discussions everyday with Mahatma Gandhi on the issues of liberation of the depressed classes. Dr. Rajendra Prasad also participated in the discussions and deliberations. Indian National Congress party also worked for the emancipation of the depressed classes. Congress wanted to bring dalits into the mainstream in the Independent India. Congress based its future plans on several suggestions of Babu Jagjivan Ram. He returned to Patna and kept busy with the congress work.

In February 1942, the eighth session of All India Dalit Varg Sangh was organised in Meerut and Babu Jagjivan Ram presided over it. The depressed classes at the session decided to support congress in the fight for the freedom of the country. They also decided to sacrifice their lives in the cause for freedom. The session also discussed about the all round development of the depressed classes. Later Babu Jagjivan Ram came to Delhi to address the activists of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh. There he emphasised the need of the Harijans participating in the freedom struggle. Because of Babu Jagjivan Ram's influence the depressed classes' actively participated in the freedom movement.

The congress executive session was held at Vardha in July 1942. In this session, Mahatma Gandhi emphasised, "Now the time has come when breaking the several years old chain of Slavery. Congress should demand strongly, "Britishers, quit India". Mahatma Gandhi's call electrified the nation on 7th August 1942, a meeting of congress executive was held in Bombay. Babu Jagjivan Ram also took part in it. Congress stated "The All India Congress Committee, for defending India's right to freedom has decided to begin a non-violent public movement on a large scale and on every possible basis so that the country can put to use, the entire nonviolence power that it has conserved driving the last twenty three years of peaceful struggle. The Movement will be undertaken under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. This committee requests him to assume leadership and take such steps as he considers suitable in this regard, to lead the nation".²⁰ The restrictions was passed in 8th August 1942. On 9th August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi was arrested. The British began arresting prominent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Maulan Abul Kalam Azad, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu etc., The congress was declared an illegal organisation. Martial law was imposed and curfew enforced in the major cities. The country was terrorised. Babu Jagjivan Ram and his associates returned to Patna returned participating in the Bombay Session of congress. The British followed them. Kamalpati Tirupathi wrote, "In the 1942 campaign, Jagjivan Ram and I returned from Bombay in 9th August. I remember that the people of the secret service department were following us. They caught me, but Jagjivan Ram reached his province and led an intensive campaign for ten to eleven days."

In Patna Babu Jagjivan Ram spread the message of the 'August Revolution". He exhorted the people to make this movement successful by a non-violent struggle for the freedom of the country even by losing lives. There was a large Anti-British Rule demonstration before the Patna secretariat by the students on 11th August, 1942. The students who protested were lathi charged and many were hurt and injured. Babu Jagjivan Ram was arrested on 20th August, 1942 in Patna. He was kept at Bankipur Prison in Patna. Later in September 1942 he was sent to Hazaribagh central jail. He stayed in that jail for another 14 months. He bore many hardships during his prison term. The All India Dalit Varg Sangh Session was held at Amritsar at this time. Babu Jagjivan Ram was chosen as its president in absentia. Jagjivan Ram guided this organisation and the depressed classes held secret meetings at various places and they also held demonstrations against the British government. The members of All India Dalit Varg Sangh were also the members and activities of congress. The congress organisation was also strengthened by activities of All India Dalit Varg Sangh. Babu Jagjivan Ram's health deteriorated. He did not recover despite good treatment. So he was released by government on 5th October 1943. Babu Jagjivan Ram did not recover during his stay at home in Patna and so for a change in climate he left for Jhimta in June 1944. He stayed there till September 1944. Later he returned to Patna. In 1943 the British Government banned the All India Depressed Classes League's session at Kanpur. Babu Jagjivan Ram continued his freedom movement in the country. Gandhi was released from prison on 6th May 1944. The viceroy also ordered the release of all congress and other leaders. The British government tried its best to crush the Quit India movement. The Quit India Movement was the biggest organised campaign to throw of British rule after the 1857 revolt. Each section of the society actively participated in it. In June 1944, C. Rajagopalchari prepared an alternative frame work to prevent the division of the country. The British realised they have to quit India. The viceroy announced the intention of the government to grant full autonomy to India and provide for self rule. The P.M of England announced the declaration of elections to the central and provincial legislative assemblies Atlee and Wavell, both reassured Indians that in the post election scenario work would begin in drafting a new constitution for India and organising an executive in accordance with it. The viceroy convened a conference in Shimla

on 25th June 1945. The presidents of congress and Muslim league, the representatives of depressed classes and Sikhs, the congress and Muslim leaders in the union cabinet and chief ministers of governments in provinces. Lord Wavell proposed an executive council of 14 members. Under the proposal, congress and Muslim league had to suggest five names each and the remaining four were to be nominated by the viceroy. But Jinnah insisted that all Muslim representatives must be nominated by the league only. The conference ended without any tangible result. The All India Dalit Varg Sangh (Depressed Classes League) criticised discriminatory attitude of the British for not inviting the representatives from the institutions representing depressed classes. A session of the league was held at Delhi in 28th June 1945 under the presidentship of Babu Jagjivan Ram. To submit to the viceroy, a memorandum was prepared. In the memorandum, the League requested the British to invite at least one representative from 'All India Dalit Varg Sangh Scheduled Castes Federation' and the Depressed Classes Federation each, if any meeting is convened on the broader issue of providing freedom and self rule for the country.

In the 1946 General elections, besides several national - level political bodies, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation and the All India Depressed Classes League took part in the general elections. Under the leadership of Jagjivan Ram, the All India Depressed classes league fought election on congress seats. Out of the total 151 seats, 123 dalit candidates fielded by congress were successful. He was re-elected unopposed. All India Scheduled Castes Federation could get only two seats. This clearly shows that dalits of India supported Babu Jagjivan Ram. The cabinet mission reached India on 24th March 1946. The objectives of the mission were to set up a constituent Assembly, constitute an Executive Council that is supported by all parties in India and to decide upon the ways to draft a constitution. The cabinet mission separately invited the leaders of all the parties and listened to their ideas. It also conferred with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar from the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, about the status of Dalits. The Federation also submitted a memorandum to the commission. The mission also invited Babu Jagjivan Ram through a telegram. At that time, Babu Jagjivan Ram was the president of the All India Depressed Classes League. He enjoyed the full confidence of the dalit community as the results of the general elections had succeeded in providing it. He appeared before the mission as a representative of depressed classes on 8th April 1946. Babu Jagjivan Ram was accompanied by the vice president of the League, Radhanath Das and Prithvi Singh Azad. He had earlier prepared a memorandum. The memorandum stated that from the religious and cultural view points, the dalit communities possess political authority of their own in spite of being a part of the Hindu Community. The dalits are lagging behind from social, religious, political and educational perspectives. Therefore special privileges should be given to guard their rights and interests and those privileges be extended until such communities 'Catch up with the so-called higher classes among Hindus and become fully integrated with in the Hindu society. The memorandum also stated that the congress alone represents all religions and castes and so the dalit communities fully support congress in freedom movement. Babu Jagjivan Ram presented the memorandum to the mission and later he put forth many suggestions for improving the situation of the dalit communities and safeguarding, their self-respect. He was of the opinion that Harijans are Hindus and their religion is Hinduism and so they will always remain as Hindus only.

Muslim League favoured the formation of Pakistan and does not want to remain in undivided India. In July 1946, Muslim League rejected the cabinet mission. Congress accepted the proposals of the cabinet mission and formation of an interim government. So the viceroy decided to constitute an interim government and announced in June 1946 the 14 persons who were to shoulder the responsibilities of working in the interim government. The persons were : Sardar Baldev Singh, Sir N.P. Engineer, Jagjivan Ram, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, H.K. Mehtab, John Mathai, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Khwaja Sir Nizamuddin, C. Rajagopalachari, Nawab Mohammed Ismail Khan, Nawab Liaqat Ali Khan and Sardar Vallabhai Bhai Patel congress rejected the viceroy's decision to constitute an interim cabinet since the list does not contain the name of any nationalist Muslim. Babu Jagjivan Ram also said that he does not want to be included in the interim government since no nationalist Muslim had been included in this government. Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah had several talks. But Jinnah remained adamant

and refused to join the interim government. Nehru sent to the viceroy a list of names of people for constitutions an interim cabinet on 21st August 1946. The viceroy again announced the names of 12 persons for constitutions the national interim government. The name of Babu Jagjivan Ram figured in this list also. Babu Jagjivan Ram took oath as the labour minister in this council of ministers on 2nd September 1946. He got now the opportunity to serve the country as a dalit representative. The depressed classes expressed gratitude towards Lord Wavell for including them leader in his council of ministers. They termed the event as "a revolutionary and courageous step based on intensive thinking, for the advancement of dalit class and elimination of slavery. For preparing India's constitution, a constituent assembly was to be set up. In July 1946, people were chosen for the constituent assembly from all parts of the country. In these elections too, Babu Jagjivan Ram was elected unopposed.

The Constituent Assembly began its first session on 9th December, 1946 in Delhi Assembly. The session was attended by 208 members. Babu Jagjivan Ram addressed the concerns of the depressed classes. He addressed the people of lower classes by the terms, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. He was of the opinion that each citizen born in India should enjoy unrestricted freedom in the activities concerned with equal opportunities viz., education, medical treatment, trade, Industry, commerce and entry in to places of religious worship. He laid emphasis on the need to consider the principle of equality as the basis. 'Babu Jagjivan Ram was of the opinion that for the upliftment of depressed classes, special privileges in political sphere and reservation in government services are necessary. So he saw to it that these are included in the constitution.

For several days the discussions continued in the constituent assembly with regard to reservation. It is only due to Mahatma Gandhi's force, Nehru's will power and Babu Jagjivan Ram's determination several clauses concerned with reservation in elected bodies and government services have been incorporated in the constitution of the country. The credit goes to Jagjivan Ram for including the provision of reservation for dalits, in government jobs under sections 16 and 335. Jagjivan Ram wrote in his book, "...The special facilities and privileges should not be deemed as incentives for taking sides but be understood as rightful dues to be provided for years of deprivation."

Babu Jagjivan Ram was the only representative of the Dalits in the interim government. While returning from Geneva after attending the International Labour Conference, Babu Jagjivan Ram aeroplane crashed in the desert of Basra, Iraq on 16th July, 1947. Babu Jagjivan Ram had a providential escape, though he had severe injuries in his right leg and foot. In this crash, all the employees of the aircraft had died.

7. References

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