

## **M. N. Karna on Mithilesh Kumar's paper on the JP Movement**

I have a few points to make on Mithilesh Kumar's essay on the JP or Bihar Movement. Kumar has portrayed the social movement that occurred in the 1970s in Bihar, mostly against the corrupt and unjust rule of the state government. In doing so he has focused almost entirely on one great figure of the movement, Jay Prakash Narayan or JP. I think in writing this kind of 'great men history' he missed out on a lot of features of the movement. JP became the 'Loknayak' or the 'hero of the people'. People gathered around him. It is essential to look into the social groups who supported him and made him the leader. Rather than starting from the top, Kumar should look from below and study the local roots of the movement. This will give him the perspective to situate the leadership of JP in a wider framework. In any social movement, the mass plays a critical role. We cannot gauge the nature or the extent of the movement by looking only at the leadership or their strategies, negotiations and contestations with the authorities.

My second point stems from the first—the JP movement was not a singular movement—'ek andolon char naam'. There were various separate and distinct strands within the social discontent of the period. There was a strong current of dissatisfaction among the students of the state. The students played a crucial role in providing a solid base to the emerging wider social movement. One should look at the students' agitation on its own, and then see how it got melted within the general movement. Same is the case with the idea of the 'Sampurna Kranti Andolon' or 'Total Revolution'. Did the Bihar Movement from the beginning have this notion? Or there was a distinct strand which thought of this as its goal which then went on to merge with other demands? Also, what happened during the nation-wide railway strike in 1974? How did it affect the movement in Bihar? I think Kumar should look carefully into the condition and structure of the railway strike. This should provide him with some idea about how to situate the Bihar Movement within a wider framework of social movements at this point of history. In a way, I am suggesting that Kumar should try to look at the historicity of the particular movement that he is studying by situating it against a backdrop of social discontent among various groups of people during the second and third decade of independent India.

Lastly, I would urge Kumar to look critically at the caste-class nexus in the Bihar Movement. Debate on class and caste and their overlap is still a lively issue in case of Bihar. One needs to see the working of this nexus while studying any social movement based in Bihar. In this sense, one might argue that the Bihar Movement is an on-going movement even if JP is no more.