

Making of a populist government: A study of Karpoori Thakur's regime.

Presented by: Mithilesh Kumar

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Manoj Kumar Jha, the discussant of this paper, suggested that it is important to go beyond Karpoori Thakur's personality and towards his politics in order to discuss his role. He also poses the question of the choice of the word "populist" instead of "popular". He opined, in lieu of personal, anecdotal insights that Karpoori Thakur's role in politics should be treated in the realm of popular. He also pointed out the need to locate Karpoori in between the conflicting trajectories of Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayprakash Narayan. Furthermore, with respect to Karpoori's politics, he explained that it is imperative to consider the conflicts that occur within the same party and organisation. Karpoori's "sub-categorisation", as Jha explained was based on hard facts and evidence and was therefore, not merely a populist tactic. The politics of "Anti-Congressionism", "English Hataao Andolan" etc., Jha opines, should be seen in the context of time and ethos of that time. Lastly, he mentions that the greatest contribution that Karpoori Thakur made was probably to make Social Democracy a lived reality more than an imagined one.

Prabhu Mahapatra enquired into the tension that he perceived in the paper, between the concepts of "popular" and "populism". He wondered as to whether the Backward Castes Movement was represented in advance by the Socialist Party. The second question was in reference to an Engels' quote and he urged the presenter to re-view this quote in light of politics reconstituting the economic factor. Manish Kumar Jha, in response to the first question, pointed out the existence of Triveni Sangh Movement in Bihar that brought the three castes of *Kurmi*, *Yadav* and *Koeri* together for the first time and posed a threat for the Congress. Though the leaders were co-opted, he explained that it showed the aspirational aspect that Karpoori Thakur utilised later. Ranabir Samaddar observed that the difference between the two terms, "popular" and "populist" may not be a sacrosanct one. He opined that in reconstituting the popular, it is populism that comes into being as without populism, there cannot be any people as such; the populism is the ideological leaning of the material reality of the people. Positing such theoretical questions, he then asked can Karpoori Thakur be read without the governmental procedures that characterise his politics. He specifically challenged the value-judgement that one associate with these terms (popular as a positive one and populism is seen as negative) and urges the paper to explore these questions. In response to the first question, Mithilesh pointed out the methodological issues that one faces in case of political uncertainty and thus, is dependent on the political parties and other actors' behaviour in order to analyse and research. On the issue of existing tension between "popular" and "populism", he stated that in the latter concept, the question of power becomes essential; the paper, he says, is an attempt to see Karpoori as a person trying very consciously to capture governmental power and thus, a "populist".