

## **Contentious Politics and Popular Movement: Enigma of Karpoori Thakur.**

**Presented by: Manish K. Jha**

**Discussant: Priyankar Upadhyaya** heads the Malaviya Center for Peace Research and holds the UNESCO Chair for Peace and Intercultural Understanding at Banaras Hindu University

The discussant for the panel, Priyankar Upadhyaya, suggested that the paper would benefit from a better sense of the continuum instead of limiting itself to the politics of the Backward Castes. Commenting on the presence of a leader like Ram Manohar Lohia and his influence on the socialist politics, he enquired into the nature of such politics. Further, with reference to the factor of “Anti-Congressionism”, he brings to attention the need to put Karpoori Thakur in hindsight and perceive the shifting discourse of present times and BJP’s use of the fragmented nature of caste politics. He also opined that incorporating a detailed analysis of Karpoori’s “English Hataao Andolan”, his relationship with *Bhoomihars* and other castes would be effective for the paper. The discussant, while commenting on Karpoori’s stages of political life, specifically probes into his last years when his popularity was waning. In response to the last point, Manish K. Jha explained that his interest was specifically in the last phase of Thakur’s life, i.e. after 1980 when he started losing ground due to the shifting loyalties of castes like *Kurmis* and *Yadavs* who wanted a representative from their own community. It is in this stage that he started dealing with issues of *Dalits*, Buddhism and such other factors.

The first observation came from Ranabir Samaddar. With regard to the selection of personality/ies in case of Bihar and issues/events for Bengal, he observed that could it be possible that in Bihar, there is a strong drive towards “governmentalisation” and reaching positions of power quickly than in Bengal and thus, a tendency of focussing on charismatic personalities? In reply, Manish K. Jha opined that he would need to acquire greater knowledge about Bengal politics to be able to comment on this point of observation. The second observation was in lieu of the “English Hataao Andolan” mentioned in the paper. The observer enquires into the ways in which, or if at all, the linguistic issue played a role in the politics of the region popularly known as the “Hindi Heartland”? How did this factor in with a rise in socialist politics? On this point, Jha opined that the Hindi Heartland’s problem lies in their notion of a nationalism that is exclusive and not inclusive. This problematic vision, he elaborates, is the reason of the failure of Bhojpuri, Maithili movements and other sub-nationalist issues. The third observation was more general in nature. It was regarding the present political scenario of a rise in anti-BJP feelings and how is it affecting the overall political scenario in the subcontinent.