

Paper: Contentious Politics and Popular Movement: Enigma of Karpoori Thakur  
Manish Jha

Expert: Pushpendra Kumar Singh, Professor and in-charge, Centre for Development Practice and Research, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna

This is a well-written draft. I am adding a few points for his consideration. Karpoori Thakur provides an opportunity to understand the contradictions of the Socialist politics or the politics of social justice (as articulated by the Socialists) and the 'anti-caste' movement against the upper caste hold over politics, economy and society. Karpoori Thakur also provides an opportunity to understand the complexities of the caste equation championed by Dr. Lohia. It would be interesting to see how Karpoori Thakur dealt with this complexity. For example, his closeness with some of the upper caste leaders such as Kapildeo Singh (a Bhumihar leader) and Sachchidanand Singh (a Rajput leader). Similarly, his strategy to divide the backward castes into Annex. I and Annex. II to deal with the dominance of the upper backward castes is worth analysis. The debate around that time around this 'Karpoori Formula' of reservation should be studied, particularly in the legislature. In this regard, his relationship with Jayprakash Narayan should also be studied who was reportedly unhappy with the Karpoori's reservation policies and widely believed to be behind the protests against the Karpoori government. In fact, the inherent contradictions within the backward politics and Karpoori's opposition to Yadav dominance became evident when Karpoori separated from Charan Singh's BLD and formed a separate party – Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party. However, the limitations of any effort to oppose Yadav dominance was evident from the compromises Karpoori Thakur had to make and his loss in 1984 Parliamentary elections.

It would also be interesting to study Karpoori Thakur in contrast to another backward caste leader, Jagdeo Prasad who separated from the Socialist Parties to form "Shoshit Samaj Dal". His slogan was – *Abki saal bhado mein, gori kalaiyan kando mein*. Shoshit Samaj Dal used to win 2-3 Assembly seats and was influential in at least 11 seats. What was the response of Karpoori Thakur to this initiative and why did Karpoori Thakur did not make any such attempts despite being completely marginalised in his party and in Bihar's politics in the 1980s till his death? [Ref., how he was called Kapti (cunning) Thakur (barber) by Laloo Prasad]. It should also be enquired why Karpoori Thakur was not in the forefront of the JP movement. Though he could not be overlooked completely, but he was never in the inner circle of JP. Why? What role did he play? The contradictions of the anti-Congress politics of Dr. Lohia should be studied with respect to the relationship of the socialist parties with the Jan Sangh. Neither Lohia nor JP had any aversion to Jan Sangh and the Socialists time and again formed alliance with the Jan Sangh. Karpoori too followed this strategy. How to explain this apparent contradiction between the ideology of egalitarianism as well as anti-Brahminical politics and alliance with a party with clear Brahminical ideology?

Another idea of Karpoori Thakur needs close scrutiny is his decision to arm the dalits. This was his Cabinet's decision. This came as a response to his predecessor, Jagannath Mishra government's decision to arm the upper caste rich peasantry. Karpoori Thakur later backtracked. What was the debate over this decision in the Assembly and how was the decision taken by different political groups. This also brings the issue of his relationship with the left parties and the peasant movement which should be studied in detail.