

SUSHIL KUMAR MODI ON KARPOORI THAKUR: THE COMMON MAN'S MAN

Relevant for: null | Topic: Important Prizes and Related Facts

Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur was finally conferred the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. The demand to confer this award on Karpooriji, the often unacknowledged pioneer of India's social justice movement, was long overdue and much awaited. That the honour was conferred by the government led by Narendra Modi, another champion of social justice and backward classes, is a true tribute to the legend.

Karpooriji belonged to the "Nai" community, among the most backward communities in Bihar. Back then, no one would have thought that a member of this community would take on the Congress, fight for the rights of the backward classes and end up becoming one of the first non-Congress chief ministers of Bihar in 1970, and then come back again as CM.

Karpooriji studied only till the intermediate level. He had to cut short his education to join the country's freedom movement. But this was no hindrance for this son of the soil — Karpooriji had learnt much through his experiences in poverty and backwardness.

Very early on, he realised that the benefit of reservation was being arrogated by the privileged backward classes. To undo this wrong, Karpooriji provided a separate 12 per cent reservation to the EBCs. Powerful BC communities like the Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri were given only 8 per cent reservation. While the Congress vacillated on implementing the report of the Mungeri Lal Commission, in 1978, Karpooriji showed courage and created quotas in government jobs for EBCs and BCs. The Karpoori Formula also gave women a share of 3 per cent and reserved another 3 per cent seats for the poor from the upper castes. It, therefore, tried to accommodate all sections of society.

The then Jan Sangh was a party to this decision — Kailashpati Mishra was the finance minister in Karpooriji's government.

There were violent protests by those unsettled by the reservation formula. But Karpooriji stood firm. This decision not only changed the socio-political scenario of Bihar decisively but also changed the way backward classes were looked at in India.

Karpooriji's brainchild was later emulated at the Centre when the Morarji Desai government constituted the Mandal Commission in 1979. While Congress again backtracked after the report was submitted in 1980, it was only 10 years later, in 1990, that the National Front government led by VP Singh implemented the Mandal Commission report.

Not just the Mandal Commission. In fact, PM Modi's decision to grant 10 per cent reservation to EWS and 33 per cent reservation to women is inspired by the ideology which Karpooriji preached and practised.

As chief minister, he ensured that he was always in janta's darbar — his house and office were always open to the public. He was always swarmed by people wanting to meet him — truly a janta's CM.

Karpooriji was a staunch supporter of regional languages. As education minister in Bihar, when he realised that English was becoming an impediment in students passing the matriculation

examination, he directed that English as a subject not be counted for passing matriculation. Liberals and the English-speaking gentry mocked this decision — they called it the “Karpoori Division”. But Karpooriji remained undeterred.

As an Opposition leader, it was Karpooriji who set the trend of being the first responder. He was the first to reach accident sites in remote places in Bihar, irrespective of where he was. Such was his commitment and dedication to his people.

That Karpooriji was the epitome of simplicity and honesty is well-known. This quality was evident in all aspects of his life. He wore his trademark half-sleeve thick kurta and dhoti, rode a motorcycle, roamed without bodyguards and never promoted family in politics. When Karpooriji passed away, he left behind only an ancestral jhopdi and no vehicle or property and very little bank balance.

He took many other notable decisions, including abolishing malguzari, the government tax on unused land, prohibition of alcohol and free education till the matriculation level.

The Opposition tried to pull him down and many of his policies were met with stiff resistance, but Karpooriji’s popularity only increased. After all, he was the common man’s man.

Karpooriji was a true socialist and someone who fought against the Congress’s misrule. He lived up to the ideals and created ideals for others to follow. Unfortunately, his socialist disciples have now lost their way in the lust for power and have joined hands with the same Congress which Karpooriji fought all his life.

Today in the hustle to garner support from backward classes, political parties remember Karpooriji, every year on his birthday. But they also ensure that he is forgotten as soon as the anniversary celebration is over. So short is our memory. It is due to this that despite repeated demands from backward classes for Bharat Ratna for Karpooriji, all political parties in power, to date, paid lip service to his ideals — and to such demands.

However, such great sons of the soil who have uplifted the most backward should never be forgotten. To recognise this contribution, a government which understands the pulse of the backward classes was needed. It is apt, therefore, that PM Modi, who has learnt from his struggles against poverty and backwardness, decided to finally honour Karpoori Thakur with the nation’s highest award.

Karpooriji’s birthday is over and political parties may have already forgotten him. But the Bharat Ratna has finally placed Karpooriji in the category that he always belonged.

PM Modi has ensured that principles on which Karpooriji lived will now be etched in this nation’s memory forever and will be followed. One hopes that his disciples, who have ventured away from his ideals and joined hands with the Congress, finally walk the talk, instead of merely remembering him next in the coming year.

The writer is a [Rajya Sabha](#) MP from the [BJP](#) and a former deputy chief minister of Bihar

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© [Zuccess App](#) by [crackIAS.com](#)