

## **Captain Abbas Ali, A life worth remembering- by Dr G.G. Parikh** JANATA, October 19, 2014.

Captain Abbas Ali, who died on Saturday October 11, 2014 the day on which many were remembering JP, should be remembered for his passionate urge for Socialist unity, even though there is much more in his life that is worth remembering and can be an inspiration to younger socialists.

When he turned 90, and there was a function to celebrate it, he made a fervent appeal for socialist unity and those who were present on the stage – all the who's who of the socialist movement were there – concurred. All of them felt that what he was urging was worth doing and when they assured that they would do it were not hypocritical, but sincere. The urge to unite, among the socialists, is as serious and persistent as, some say in half jest, the urge to split. Unfortunately after the function, those socialists who were in a party which was in power got busy with their routine of keeping the party going and remaining in power and those who were in parties that were not in power, felt the past experience so daunting that they despaired and did not pursue. It is not that some of them were not important enough in the movement who could have pursued this Captain Saheb's injunction and if they had done it as single-mindedly as he wanted may have even succeeded, but the failure of the past efforts had such demoralizing effect that his plea was not taken seriously. Net result is that the socialists have remained as scattered as ever.

It is this which hurt the Captain. He was forever impatient with socialists for not doing enough to unite, not enough to take up the issues of the masses, the poor, the deprived. His commitment to socialism and his experience of the movement as an active worker, an office bearer, a leader made him feel, and certainly rightly, that if socialists could be on one page the myriad problems that the country faced would get solved. He was as much committed to equality as to communal harmony and he felt very strongly that the socialists, and also perhaps communists, could ensure peace and harmony between the two communities. He believed that the fight against oppression, against injustice, against inequality would be better waged by socialists than other forces. Ageing and with the frail body, he ruminated in the evening of his life over his own past, the problems of the socialist movement, and felt helpless, in fact, frustrated. Frustrated because he could not do much to pursue what he believed to be the need of the hour. Anyone who met him would get a feel of his passion and the desire to see that socialists were restored to their past glory and also get singed for their inaction.

On August 9, in 2011, he was in Mumbai to pay homage to the martyrs at the *August Kranti Maidan* and to flag off the *Saptkranti Vichar Yatra* organized by the Yusuf Meherally Centre with the help of *Rashtra Seva Dal*. There too, while wishing the *yatra* success, he told the *yatris* to create a climate for unity. He repeated this at Dadar, immediately afterwards, where the *yatris* and the socialists of Mumbai had assembled. As it happens, George Fernandes too was there, perhaps that was his last visit to the city and the last public assignment. And he made it a point to be at the Yusuf Meherally Memorial Lecture in the Gandhi Peace Foundation on September 23rd 2014.

Captain Saheb joined the Socialist Party in 1948 and remained the part of socialist movement till his last breath. Abbas Ali joined politics under the influence of socialist leaders, including Rammanohar Lohia, Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan. In 1966, he became the State General Secretary of Samyukta Socialist Party. He played an important role in the formation of first non-Congress government (*Samvid Sarkar*) in Uttar Pradesh in 1967.

Captain Saheb was arrested and kept behind the bars during the entire period of the Emergency. He was kept in Bulandshahar, Bareilly and Naini Central Jails. In 1977, when the Emergency was lifted and national elections were announced, Socialist Party merged with the Janata Party and he was elected to the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council and was appointed as the first President of Uttar Pradesh unit of the merged party.

Shortly before his death, while attending a public function at Aligarh on the eve of August 15, Captain Saheb remembered Subhash babu and said, "There is only one unfulfilled wish of my life and that is that the true story behind the last few days of my leader Subhash Chandra Bose should see the light of the day".

He was born on January 3, 1920 in Kalandar Gadhi near Khurja, in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh. In his early life he was inspired by Shaheed Bhagat Singh. An alumnus of Aligarh Muslim University, Abbas Ali joined the British Indian Army in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War II. In 1945, when Netaji raised the banner of armed revolt, Abbas Ali left the British army and joined the Indian National Army. Shortly thereafter, he was arrested, court marshaled and sentenced to death and was imprisoned in Multan Fort. When India gained independence, he was released along with Captain Manjit Singh (Jullandhar), Captain Abdul Aziz (Rawalpindi) before the death sentence was meted out. His memoir in Hindi under the title "*Na Rahun kisi ka Dastnigar-Mera Safarnama*" was published in 2009 by Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, a book worth a read, capturing not just his life, but the events of those days.

GGP

Note: Please read also Prof. Anand Kumar's article on Captain sahib "The critical optimist" from Janata Weekly, 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2014

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