Chapter I

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION
Carlyle said that history is nothing but biography of great men. He laid great emphasis on the role of great men in history who were depicted as being really responsible for moving the wheels of history. It is really applicable to Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan. The early childhood or the circumstances in which Jayaprakash Narayan grew up did not show any trait of J.P. which later on dominated his life. In the history of modern India, the month of October has been a favourable month. Because mother India has given birth to a number of her illustrious sons like Gandhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri and others. Jayaprakash Narayan was born in a middle-class Kayastha family on 11 October, 1902 in the village of Sitab-Diara of Bihar. It was the day of Vijaya Dashmi, the tenth day of Dushehra. Nobody knows at that time that 11 October, 1902 will go down in the annals of revolutionary movements of India, and will be remembered with joy and pride by all those who believe in a free-democratic and egalitarian society. Nobody at that time was aware of this fact that one day the son of Harsoodayal and Phool Rani would become the Champion of individual freedom and aspiration of the downtrodden people.

As the months and years rolled by, the child grew up by from his mother’s lap to the cradle, from the cradle to the courtyard, and then he began to crawl and toddle. As a child he was nicknamed as “Baul”—innocent to the point of being a simpleton. Thus Ajit Bhattacharjea observed about him that “while he
was clearly in advance of his age in intelligence, his lack of guile, ready trust in others and complete absence of personal aggrandizement meant that he could be easily exploited or done out of his share.\textsuperscript{1} Being very close to his mother he grew up very shy boy. A children’s book of his life showed that from the very beginning he was very studious and took little interest in games.

Perhaps nature wanted that in Baul’s fragile physical frame, mature mind seeking for something beyond and higher should dwell. The impression about his mental maturity had become evident when he was a little boy. His father who was an officer in the canal department wondered why the little boy remained so disinclined and withdrawn. He was so calm and quiet that he would never like to play with his fellow children. Fell Man in his scholarly study of J.P. refers to his father’s one time remark that J.P. was oldish or serious. However, “I do not think that was exactly intended as a compliment”, observed Fell Man.\textsuperscript{2}

In fact, Jayaprakash was the eldest son. An elder brother and sister had died at an early age due to cholera. He had two more sisters, Chandrakala and Chandravati, one elder and one younger sister and a brother Rajeshwar, born eight years after him. Rajeshwar was somewhat spoilt and very ill-tempered. Thus from the very beginning J.P. was a serious child burdened with an early sense of responsibility due to the tragic death of eldest brother. He did not like to play with children or toys, but was fond of birds and animals. In a note written in 1963, his sister Chandrakala recalled his father giving him a pair of
pigeons. One became sick and died in spite of his careful nursing. He was unable to eat and sleep that day. This sensitivity to suffering never left him in his life.  

When Baulji was sent to school by his parents had no specific career combination for him but J.P. is said to have collected that he preferred law or government service, as his goal, nothing was clear to him. But one thing should not be forgotten about him that he proved exceptionally well in his studies and thus soon became the centre of attraction for all. His teacher had a very high opinion about him. Most of his time was spent reading. By the age of ten, he was reading historical novels glorifying the kings and heroes of Ancient India.

After completing his primary education at the age of 12 Baulji had to go for secondary education. He was sent to Patna to live there with his nephew, Shambhoosharan, and receive education under his supervision. The first exposure to national spirit came here when he was sent to Patna to enter the Patna College, At Patna, Baulji was admitted to the seventh class in Patna Collegiate School under a changed name, Jayaprakash Narayan by which he was known for the rest of his life. For a while he stayed with Shambhoosharan and then in a student’s hostel Saraswati Bhavan—in which most of the boys were quite a bit older and were quite active in revolutionary activities. At that time, Saraswati Bhavan was regarded as the centre of national and political activities in Patna, which attracted all the brilliant youth and students of Bihar. Many famous persons, such as Anugraha Baboo, who was later known as one of
the makers of modern Bihar, Ramcharitra Singh, who came to be recognized as ‘hero of Bihar, Ramnavami Baboo who took a leading part in the Champaran Movement’s as a trusted comrade of Gandhiji, Shambooshranji, Sri Krishna Sinha, enduringly called the ‘Lion of Bihar’, and several other revolutionary personalities had entered the Saraswati Bhavan. It was here that tender-aged Jayaprakash Narayan was deeply influenced with the spirit of patriotism. There gradually political questions concerning national struggle for independence began to capture his attention and he began to formulate his own views about the men and political issues of the time.

Jayaprakash, while still a young boy, became an ardent nationalist and leaned towards the revolutionary cult of which Bengal was notable leader, Bihar was also not left untouched by the terrorist activities, perpetrated mostly under the influence of some young Bengali revolutionaries. Not only this, but the first act of bomb throwing in the struggle for India’s freedom was committed in Bihar. It was Khudiram Bose who hurled the first Bomb in Muzaffarpur. Similarly, the first case of political decoity was also recorded in Shahabad, District of Bihar. Such incidents filled Jayaprakash with excitement and his faith in the urgency of revolution for Indian Independence became stronger. He was considered to be more advanced in his intelligence than his age and was a sensitive young man. According to Vasant Nargolkar, “The insipient spirit of resistance to injustice, however, was quite evident in him even at that young age." But his revolutionary fervour could mature Gandhiji’s nonviolent and non-cooperation movement had swept over the land as a strangely uplifting.
hurricane. In the meanwhile Gandhiji returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and preached his method of *Satyagraha* for which he had earned so much fame. But to tender-aged Jayaprakash, Gandhian philosophy of *Satyagraha* was new to him. J.P. was still in a school in his early teens when a companion, Chotan Singh introduced him to young Bengali revolutionary and Jayaprakash became aware of the exploitation of Indians by Britishers.

But he did not allow all this to affect his studies. By now he was an outstanding student. He read widely, was fascinated by English literature and learnt to write well in the language. The Mathematics teacher was also greatly impressed by his devotion to studies. Many of his friends were reading law and they spoke to one another in English. But he did not forsake Hindi for English but he experimented in writing plays and even some poetry in Hindi. Thus J.P. was a very serious boy in his studies. The only blot on his school career was the occasion when he boycotted classes because they were held on the day of Raksha Bandhan.

After completing his primary education, J.P. was sent to Patna for secondary education. In 1919, passed matriculation with first division and was awarded a merit scholarship. As a science student in Patna he was greatly influenced by revolutionary movement in Bengal. Gangadhar Tilak, the leader of the extremist group of the Indian National Congress gave the slogan, "Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it". The historical Russian Revolution took place in the year 1917. All these events had a tremendous impact on J.P. He
read about Gandhi's lifewritings and was also greatly influenced with the philosophy of the *Geeta*. The simplicity of Gandhiji and his identification with a common man had a profound impact upon him. But he was also influenced by moderate Gopal Krishna Gokhale and his father being not politically active was also sympathetic towards Gokhale's liberation. He never liked the reportedly inclination of his son towards terroristic activities. J.P. was so much influenced by Gokhale that he wrote a tearful poem when Gokhale died.  

In 1920, he was married to Prabhavati Devi, the eldest daughter of Braj Kishore Prasad, a well known Congress leader of Bihar. Braj Kishore Prasad had earned a great fame not only as a progressive social worker, but also as a national leader of the highest order. He also became the first member of the Legislative Council of India from Bihar. They young Jayaprakash was brought into his contact by his nephew, Shambhoosharan. On his first meeting with Jayaprakash, Braj Kishore had made up his mind to offer the hand of his daughter to him as the former saw in him the natural ability and the power of becoming a great leader. At the time of marriage J.P. was eighteen years of age and Prabhavati of fourteen. The marriage proved momentous for Jayaprakash in a sense that his family relations with some of the foremost figures of Bihar were established and that politics had become a household affair in his life. Further, he got an ideal life partner in Prabhavati, highly enlightened, sensible and patriotic lady.
It was the second year of his marriage and his intermediate examination was only a few days away when Gandhiji started his Non-Co-operation Movement. Gandhiji asked the students to boycott all educational institutions maintained by the British Government. J.P. left the college and joined the movement. He wrote, "As a boy, like most boys of those days, I, was an ardent nationalist and leaned towards the revolutionary cult of which Bengal was the noble leader at that time. But even then the story of the South African Satyagraha had fascinated my young heart. Before my revolutionary leanings could mature, Gandhiji's first Non-Cooperation Movement swept over the land as a strangely uplifting hurricane. I, too, was one of the thousands of young men of those days, who, like leaves in the storm, were swept away and momentarily lifted up to the skies."

Jayaprakash had two paths before him- One was the path of Bengali revolutionaries and the other was that of Gandhiji, and he was faced with the question which of the two is the right path to be chosen? Certainly Gandhiji had a greater effect on the mind of Jayaprakash through his speeches and writings, and also through personal example of self-dedication to the extent of self-abnegation. But at the same time he had no mean attraction for the terrorist philosophy also, which Gandhiji had no liking for. No doubt, Jayaprakash had all praise for Bengali revolutionaries but he would not like to appreciate their underground activities and perform violent acts secretly. Thus ultimately he decided to go the Gandhian way, the way of peaceful revolution. But it is very interesting to note that though he was moved by Gandhian method of peaceful
revolution, however, he could not become a whole-hearted non-cooperator because of the Gandhiji’s stress on the moral and spiritual side of the movement. He, with his scientific and rational approach to the movement, failed to understand the language of Gandhiji. His decision to join the Non-Cooperation Movement was motivated only by one factor to win political freedom for the country.

When Gandhiji called off the movement in 1922, J.P. enrolled himself in the Bihar Vidyapeeth, an institution which the leaders of the nationalist movement had started for the benefit of those, who had turned non-cooperators and left Government colleges. After passing the intermediate examination, J.P. wanted to join higher studies. But there was no teaching facility of science beyond intermediate in the Vidyapeeth at the same time. J.P. did not like to join the English Government aided Educational Institutions. Moreover he was convinced that government owned institutions “produced only slaves.” But at the same time he was not ready to stop his further studies. So he went to Professor Phooldev Sahai Verma, and was privately tutored. He also refused to join Benaras Hindu University which provided a more Indian style of education because it received grants from the government and its founder, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, had opposed Gandhiji’s call to students to leave colleges. One day J.P. heard in a speech by Swami Satya Dev that in the United States, the students earned while continuing their studies. He also read some books on America at the latter’s house. The ‘earn while you learn’ way of life of the American students had an instructive appeal for Jayaprakash. As he himself
believed in self-reliance, he finally made up his mind to go to America and continue his academic career there.

On 16th May, 1922, Jayaprakash left India for the United States. His young wife Prabhavati went to Sabarmati Ashram, 'for which she had already sought the consent of her husband. Thus Jayaprakash moved towards socialism his wife went towards Philosophical Gandhism. In 1922, J.P. left for the United States of America and reached San-Francisco on October 8. He lived there for seven years. He studied there by turn at the Universities of California, Iowa, Wisconsin and Ohio. He took a Master's degree in Sociology from University of Ohio. The subject of his M.A. thesis was “Cultural Variations”. At Ohio University, J.P. was very popular amongst his teachers and his colleagues for his uncommon idealism. Soon enough J.P. earned a reputation for serious scholarship and intelligent concern with whatever little or big happened around. When he applied for a fellowship in New York, one of his teachers, a renowned Professor of Sociology F.E. Dumley recorded his appreciation in a testimonial. “He is a careful and critical thinker, and a searcher after truth, of course he is a wide reader. He is, in every sense, a scholar in the making.”

Ozer one of his fellow students observed later, “I had never met a person who was more awake and intellectually alive to the implication of whatever anybody in that class said.”

Even after 40 years, a fellow student, Saul D.Ozer remembered clearly the impression he made when interviewed in Washington in March, 1968 by
Nageswar Prasad of the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi. Thus Ozer observed:

I had never met a person who was more awake and intellectually alive to the implication of whatever anybody in that class said. He was always like an architect developing his case and argument.... Narayan was never rude, but Narayan was as sharp as a knife. And Narayan followed every argument to its logical conclusion. And as a logician he was superb.12

While Marx had made a strong impression on J.P., Gandhi had not been forgotten. As Ozer put it, “I had a feeling that he was profoundly aware of and understood Marxism, that he had studied it, that he had absorbed it, but it was still a strange mixture of Marxism with Gandhism at the time. ... “ Ozer further recalled that when J.P. went to America he was deeply concerned with the ills of the Indian society. There in the U.S.A., J.P. became convinced that the capitalist system would not be suitable for solving India’s problems. Ozer felt that J.P. might not have accepted communism if he had belonged to a country with less serious problems. J.P. appeared to find in communism a clue to the understanding and resolution of Indian problems. This made him turn to Marxism.13

While at Wisconsin University, J.P. made a lot of friends not only Americans, but Russians, Poles, Germans, Dutchmen and the French also.14 One of his closest friend, was a Polish Jew named Avrom Landy, who was the member of the American Communist Party, and also a member of an underground communist cell at the university. J.P. attended occasionally the
meetings of this cell. Landy introduced J.P. to Marxism under his and Manual Gomez's a Mexican born leader of the American Communist Party, influence, Jayaprakash Narayan studied Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. He read almost everything that Marx had written and which was available in English, including the three volumes of the *Das Capital*. He wrote, "... It was in the land of resilient and successful capitalism, in the United States of America... that I became a convert to Marxism, or precisely, to Soviet Communism as it was then. It was at Madison, Wisconsin the home of LaFollete progressivism then, that in the Company of Jewish and European born fellow students I drank deep at the fountain of Marxism."  

It was during this time, he was introduced by Landy to the work of M.N. Roy. The writings of M.N. Roy made an impact on his political mind and even aroused in him a suspicion of Gandhism. He read the writings of Roy, like "The Aftermath of Non-Cooperation", 'Indian in Transition' and the issues of his journal called 'Masses' and some of his pamphlets. In 1954, J.P. wrote, "The First Time I came to know anything of M.N. Roy was in the United States. I was studying in Madison, Wisconsin then. It must have been the year 1925....."  

Through the Communist cell J.P. was introduced to the flaming political tracts powerfully written, closely reasoned, and attempting to tear to shreds the

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'**M.N. Roy:** Manavendra Nath Roy 1886-1954 A.D. He was a radical nationalist. He was the first Indian to lead the International Communist movement and had the honour to participate in the revolutionary struggles in Mexico and China. He was one among the few Indians who had equations with Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky. He proved his original genius in contributing immensely to the political philosophy.
ideology of Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation Movement. “The Aftermath of Non-Cooperation” and a pamphlet whose exact title I forget, but which dealt with the question..., “What is to do now”? I still vividly remember. Later, when I was working in Chicago in the Stockyards, among other places, I came across ‘India in Transition’, which impressed me as a masterly exposition. Thus, J.P. himself admitted that he had great regards for M.N. Roy’s writing.17

Thus was it that J.P. made his acquaintance with M.N. Roy. “Naturally, he had a great hand in moulding my thought and leading me to communism, which was still a revolutionary doctrine. That Roy was a colleague of Lenin and was a big personality in the Communist International, made him in my young eyes a hero and a great Indian... In the States I was drawn towards him as a disciple to the master.”18 This overwhelming impact of Roy converted a nationalist J.P. into a confirmed Marxist. “The pungent writings of M.N. Roy that found their way from Europe into the communist cells, particularly of Asian students, completed the conversion to Marxism.19

By that time, Jayaprakash had enough of scientific knowledge in store. Indeed, he wanted to have further knowledge of science, but the problems of socio-economic and political rehabilitation which India was facing and would continue to face seemed to be too urgent to allow him to remain confined to the four walls of the laboratory. Thus, the problem of national self-determination and socio-economic growth of the country became uppermost in his mind. For that he had natural urge to familiaries himself with the social sciences. A few years after, explaining his mind, he said, I am talking about 1924, before Lenin
died. Later during the same year, Lenin was succeeded by Stalin. I read Lenin’s and Trotsky’s writings avidly. I was convinced that what they were doing was right. But this conviction led me to question the value of studying science. The immediate task was to win freedom for our country. Why not familiarize myself with the social science? So I switched courses, and for my graduation, chose sociology as my major subject, and economics as subsidiary.”

Thus adopting social sciences and after completing his M.A. in Sociology, J.P. started to make arrangements to enroll for Ph.D. In the meantime, he received a letter from his father intimating his mother’s serious illness. Jayaprakash had a deep attachment to his family especially to his mother. He left the United States for India in September 1929, after seven years stay there. He reached India in November 1929, at the age of twenty-seven. His father had then retired from service. His wife, Prabhawati was staying with Gandhiji and had taken the vow of celibacy. J.P. respected the decision of his wife. During this time the nationalist movement had reached its peak of frenzy. Gandhiji was preparing for the next phase of struggle after independence. J.P. went to Wardha to see Gandhiji he met also Jawaharal Nehru there. Jawaharlal Nehru was impressed by him and invited him to come to Allahabad and head the labour research department of Indian National Congress. When J.P. returned to India in 1929, he was not interested in leading a comfortable life. He was determined to devote the whole of life for the good of the people.”
Though he started his political activity as a Marxist and was known in India as a “Red Fugitive” during the Quit India Movement, he remained in the later half of his life a devoted Gandhian in life, thought and deed. Once convinced of the ugly side of Soviet Communism under Stalin, he turned his back on it never to look back. But he owed his deep concern with the poverty, exploitation and injustice in the existing society to his influences during the days of his youth. In that concern and his commitment to work for a better society, he remained active and steady until he breathed his last in October 1979.

Above discussion indicates that he was a serious and committed student. He was not a lazy. He was a sincere and voracious leader. He learnt many new things in U.S.A. while studing.
References


3. Ajit Bhattacharjea, op.cit. p.27.


10. Ibid., pp.XVII-XVIII.


13. Ibid.


17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.

