

Culture

Long Live Comrade Ramakant Dwivedi 'Ramta'

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Freedom fighter and popular revolutionary poet in both Bhojpuri and Hindi, Comrade Ramakant Dwivedi 'Ramta' passed away on January 24, 2008, at the age of 90 in Patna.

Ramtaji was born in October 1917 - that epoch-making month and year marking the Russian Revolution. All his life, he remained dedicated to the struggles of the deprived. He was approaching his 91st spring; and yet he was full of the indomitable spirit and revolutionary energy of youth. His life inspired many generations to walk the path of revolutionary struggles.

As a young man, Ramtaji threw himself enthusiastically into the freedom struggle. His political life began with the dream expressed in his song 'A charkha in each and every Indian's home'. In 1932 he was jailed during the Salt Satyagraha. In 1941 he was jailed again, but by then he was disillusioned with the Gandhian movement. In a poem written in July 1941, he declared, "I am marching on the path of revolution/Swiftly breaking the bonds of restraint, here I come". In the Quit India movement of 1942, young people really did break the bonds of restraint; Ramtaji too was at the forefront of that movement and was again arrested and tortured in 1943. In a poem of 1943, he indicated his future path, "I am off on the path taken by Bhagat Singh and Azad/Khudiram-Sukhdev-Bismil Ramprasad".

He was never taken in by the promises of the post-1947 regimes of independent India. In one Bhojpuri song he wrote, "I said so right from the start that the 'Suraj' (freedom/good rule) would turn into 'Kuraj' (misrule)/ Those whom we looked towards with hope and trust betrayed us." Since then his attraction towards Left politics grew, and initially he joined the CPI (M). While in CPI (M) he was jailed during a Bihar Bandh in 1966. Soon after that he joined the CPI (ML). In 1980-81, he became a formal member of the CPI (ML) and remained active with the party's activities and movements all his life. He faced jail terms many times in the course of active struggles.

He was one of the founder members of the 'Bihar Rajya Janwadi Deshbhakta Morcha' which was formed during the early 80s, and was elected the President of IPF in its founding conference. Ramtaji was also elected the member of Central Control Commission of the CPI (ML) in its Varanasi Congress.

CPI (ML) was home for Comrade Ramtaji. When he came to Ara just a week before his death he insisted on being taken to the Party office, despite his fragile health, saying "take me home". In spite of his failing health he was very keen on attending the Party Congress at Kolkata, and was dissuaded with great difficulty. When CPI (ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar was arrested in Jharkhand and a protest was held there, he too arrived there along with the contingent from Bihar. He was one of those senior comrades who played an important role in establishing the Party's roots in Bhojpur's soil.

The tradition of people's songs established by Ramtaji was developed by Gorakh Pandey and

Vijendra Anil. Ramtaji's song on Kunwar Singh has a sharp and popular political perspective, and in this song we can see the backdrop of the political debates surrounding 1857. Ramtaji's songs were popular and sung even by activists from other Left and democratic streams, often without the knowledge that he was the author of the songs. Some of Ramtaji's best known songs are: "Rajniti sabke bujhe ke, bujhave ke pari/desh phasal bate jaal mein, chhodave ke pari"(All must understand and explain politics/The country is caught in a trap, we must free it); his satire on Emergency and Indira Gandhi whom he lampooned as 'Dilli wali raniya' (queen of Delhi); "Hamar suni"; and many others. The spirit of his defiant and bold creativity is captured in his lines, "Kranti ke ragini ham ta gaibe karab/Kehu ka na sohal ta ham ka kari/ Lal jhanda hava mein udaibe karab/ Kehu jarike butala ta ham ka kari" (I'll sing the songs of revolution come what may/ If anyone objects there's nothing I can do/ The red flag with fly high in the wind/ if it bothers anyone what can I do?"

Red Salute (Laal Salaam) to 'Ramta ji'!

P.S.

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