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"One best book is equal to hundred good friends,
One good friend is equal to a library".

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

From Editor's Desk

Our Quarterly Nesletters aim to introduce a very distinguished person in each issue who lived in our midst, but about whom very little is known. In this issue of the Newsletter, we cover **Prabhavatiji, wife of Jaya Prakash Narayan**. The available information on her on the internet, in particular, is very flimsy and unreliable.

We reproduce here the article on the life of Prabhavatiji and her role in the freedom movement by (Late) Dr B.P.Sinha, Professor Emeritus, Patna University. I am sure the readers will find this write-up very revealing.

The '**Special Article**', in this issue, is a continued essay on the topic of 'Economic Resurgence of Bihar'. In this issue we cover the aspect of infrastructure develoment and the overall investment climate in the state.

The article titled '**Punah, Punah**' is based on the real-life experience, and throws light on the rich heritage of the state. In the section on '**Poem**', we have a poetry written decades ago on 'Monsoon Rain' by Meera Vema.

As usual, I look forward to helpful suggestions from you to improve the Newsletter. I also request you to send us short articles or poems for the Quarterly Newsletter.

Sharat Kumar



Prabhavati Devi

(1904-1973)

*B. P. Sinha**

Prabhavati Devi was daughter of Brajkishore Prasad and wife of Jaya Prakash Narayan. Gandhiji was impressed by Brajkishore Prasad and to strengthen the bond of friendship, he sought his agreement to let Prbhavati join the Sabarmati ashram where she would be like his own daughter. When Prbhavati was sixteen years old, under the mediation of Shambhu Sharan, a lawyer colleague of Brajkishore Prasad, a proposal was mooted to marry Prbhavati to Jay Prakash Narayan who was eighteen years old. Jay Prakash Narayan had completed his school and had won a district merit scholarship for college admission in Patna University.

When Brajkishore Prasad, himself a great social reformer, was asked 'why is he giving in marriage such a young child as Prbhavati,' his reply was 'I have liked Jaya Prakash, and I may not get such a suitable husband for my daughter again.' They were married in 1920 and Brajkishore Prasad declared that Prbhavati will not go to his father-in-law's place for the next five years. However, as Jaya Prakash (JP) was soon to go to the USA for higher studies, the customary "gauna" was performed and Prbhavati went to her 'sasural' (father-in-law's house). It is reported that she would sleep with her mother-in-law when she was at the 'saural'.

When JP went to the USA, Prbhavati returned to the Sabarmati ashram; here she received unbounded love of Gandhiji and Kasturba (Bapu and Ba) who treated her as their own daughter. Gandhiji himself taught her Sanskrit, Gujarati, arithmetic, biology and food and nutrition sciences.

She followed the rigorous routine of the 'ashram,' which began at 4 AM in the morning and went on until 9 PM in the night. It was in this pure and spiritual atmosphere that despite Gandhiji's objection, **she took the vow of lifelong "celibacy" (brahmacharya) without the ascent of JP in the USA who was informed by her of her decision.**

On return from the USA, JP wanted an ordinary married life and children, but Prbhavati was steadfast and will not change her mind. JP wrote strong letters to Gandhiji who told him that Prbhavati took the vow against his advice, while conceding that the atmosphere in the ashram and his own life experience may have influenced her. JP had to bow to Prbhavati's determination, and as he was not ready for the second marriage, he also took the vow of 'brahmacharya'!

The two lived a happy married life thereafter. It is indeed an extraordinary thing for a woman. Ma Sharda (wife of Swami Ramkrshna Paramhans) and later in life also Kasturba (wife of Mahatma Gandhi) took such a vow in deference to their husband's decision namely of Swami Ramakrishna and of Mahatma Gandhi, but here it was because of Prbhavati's inflexible vow and JP had to follow suit. Prbhavati did not, however, give up domestic life and her responsibilities and cared utmost for JP's comforts. She was his true "sahagamini" (life partner).

Prbhavati was active in the freedom movement. She was arrested in 1932 at Allahabad leading a women demonstration. She was convicted for two years of rigorous imprisonment. JP was already deeply involved in the freedom movement and faced arrests. JP was released from jail in 1940 and arrested again on 23rd April 1941. He was detained in the Deoli camp in Madhya Pradesh. JP was very restive in the camp and anxious to strengthen the freedom movement, he was ready to take recourse to violent means.

He tried smuggling a long statement out of the camp jail through his wife Prbhavati. Being a staunch Gandhian, she showed hesitation in accepting the smuggled papers and this made the jail officials suspicious. The statement was seized by the police and its extracts published to show that JP was for violent means to attain freedom. This was also akin to throwing a challenge to Gandhiji and his principle of non-violence. However, instead of disowning JP, Gandhiji observed that while JP was against the Congress policy the British who believe in violence had no right to criticize him.

He also said that Prbhavati was quite innocent of the whole matter, and her thinking is quite different from JP's thinking. Gandhiji also asserted that Prabhavati is one of my most trusted colleagues. She took part in 'the Quit India Movement' of 1942 and was arrested in Patna and sent to the Bhagalpur central jail. On the specific request of ailing Kasturba - for her daughter Prbhavati to be beside her - she was taken to Pune. She served Kasturba till her death in 1945.

JP was released on 11th April 1946, and Prbhavati was at the Delhi railway station to welcome him along with thousands of people. JP was by then a national hero. Although admiring various qualities of JP, Gandhiji remarked that if he had to offer a bravery medal, he would offer it to Prbhavati and not to JP.

After independence, she established the Mahila Charkha Samiti at Patna. She used to accompany JP on his missionary tours to various parts of the country and was noticed to take notes of his sayings/speeches during the meetings. Prabhavati ji was found to be suffering from cancer in August 1971. She faced the grim situation bravely and continued to look after JP. She passed away on April 14th, 1973, at their (Kadam Kuan) residence in Patna.

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- (Late) Dr B. P. Sinha was Professor Emeritus, Department of Ancient Indian History, Patna University. The article above is from his book 'Kayasthas in making of Modern Bihar' published by Impression Publication (Delhi, 2003).

Special Article

Economic Resurgence of Bihar

Part III - Investment Climate and Infrastructure Development

Sharat Kumar

The World Bank report titled '**Bihar: Towards the Development Strategy**' (2005) stated that "investment climate" refers to 'institutional, economic, political and infrastructural environment that shapes the manufacturing sectors operations and expectations'. The report identified 'poor infrastructure relating to power supply', 'road connectivity' and 'low telephone density' as obstacles to favourable investment climate besides mentioning the poor 'law and order' situation in the state.

The report pointed out, 'In the poor climate states 73 per cent of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have captive (self-owned) power generators whereas, in the best climate states the figure is 31 per cent. For SMEs, the cost of own power generation is twice that of power from the public grid'. It also pointed out, 'Bihar has relatively low road penetration despite its high population density, with only 77 km. road length per 100 sq. km. compared with 169 km. in Orissa, 118 km. in Tamil Nadu and 97 km. in Uttar Pradesh'. Regarding telecommunications, the report observed, 'Bihar has the lowest telephone density in India with 0.93 telephones per 100 persons'.

There is a big improvement on all these parameters today in 2025. The 'law and order' situation in the state has significantly improved. Due to the advent of mobile telephones and low call charges, the telephone density in the state has gone up to 60 phones per 100 persons. 'Telecommunication' does away with the need to be physically present to convey a message whether for placing an order, for supplying goods and services or for rendering an advice. **This has reduced costs and increased productivity.** Regarding road connectivity, the state now boasts of having the 3rd highest road density in the country!

Power Supply

Soon after independence, three large public sector units namely (a) the Barauni Fertiliser, (b) the Barauni Refinery and (c) the Barauni Thermal Power plants were set up in the 1960s in the district of Begusarai. The capacity of Barauni Thermal plant was raised over the years and stands today at 720 MW. Besides the Barauni

Thermal Power Plant, there are three other major thermal power plants operating in the state such as (a) the Barh Super Thermal Power Plant (3,300 MW) in Patna district, (b) the Kahalgaon Super Thermal Power Plant (2,640 MW) in the Bhagalpur district, (c) the Kanti Thermal Power Plant (220 MW) in the Muzaffarpur district. All the power plants operate under the overall management of NTPC, which is a central public sector enterprise.



Super Thermal Power Plant, Barh

The Indian Railways have a captive power plant (BRBCL) at Nabinagar in Aurangabad district having a generating capacity of 1980 MW to meet the demand for power supply for its electric trains. A few more thermal power plants are coming up in the districts of Buxar and Bhagalpur. The peak consumption demand of electricity in 2025 is stated to be 8,752 MW. The State government has entered into a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with the NTPC.

The state did not however, have the capacity for long to properly evacuate the power made available to it given the hard reality of burnt transformers and in the absence, transmission lines in the rural areas. All these challenges have been overcome through purchase of new transformers and changes made in the structure of the public sector Bihar Electricity Board, which has been converted into Bihar State Power Holding Company Ltd ((BSPHCL) with separate subsidiary companies under it looking after power generation and distribution. As a result of the sincere efforts by the State government (political leadership, bureaucrats and engineers), the state is able to fulfil its promise of “**Har Ghar Bijlee**” – with uninterrupted supply - to the citizens residing even in the remote areas.

The per capita consumption of energy the state tripled from 134 kwh in 2012 to 363 kwh in 2024. This is bound to help the SME sector in a big way. The recent announcement of the Chief Minister to give free electricity to consumers up to 125 units has, however, made things difficult as the demand has further gone up leading to power deficit in the state raising its head once again with the consequent power interruptions and power shortages (Kumar, 2025).

Road, Rail and Water ways

Roadways

The state today has the third highest road density in the country. As per the Basic Road Statistics, Government of India, the state had 5,387 km. of National Highways, 3,714 km. of State Highways and 2,230 km. Project

Roads during 2020. In addition, there are District roads (13,475 km), Rural roads (2,60,171 km.) and Urban roads (14,599 km.). As high as 76% of rural roads and 70% of urban roads are surfaced. The total length of all the roads put together in the state during 2020 was equal to 2,99,376 km. The road density in the state stood at 3,181 km. per 1000 square km.



Expressway in Bihar

Several four to six lane Green and Brown Express Highways with an investment of more than one lakh crore are under implementation and are expected to be ready by the next two years. All these investments would reduce the travel time and are bound to bring about a noteworthy improvement in road connectivity within the state and with rest of India.

Railways

There has been a significant improvement in relation to rail infrastructure as well in the state. New railway lines have been laid, and rail connectivity in the state has been improved both in terms freight and passenger traffic. Five railway stations at Gaya, Patna, Muzaffarpur, Begusarai and Singrauli are proposed to be developed as world class stations through the PPP mode.

Proposed Design of the Station at Gaya



Station at Gaya, under construction.

Forty-nine other stations are already being renovated under the Amrit Bharat Yojana for greater convenience of passengers. More number of coaches are also being added on busy routes.

Waterways

The Ganga River bifurcates the state into north Bihar and South Bihar. The river flows for about 405 km. in the state. The main cities on its bank are Buxar, Chapra, Patna, Munger and Bhagalpur. Three rail-cum- road bridges join the two regions of Bihar namely (a) Mokama Bridge (Rajendra Setu), (b) Digha Sonpur Bridge (JP Setu) and (c) Munger Ganga Bridge (Srikrishna Setu). In addition, there are road bridges across the Ganga such as the Mahatma Gandhi Setu, connecting Patna to Hajipur and the six-lane Mokama Ganga bridge built by the National Highway Authority connecting Mokama to Begusarai.

Between 2012-13 to 2023-24, moreover, 1,112 new bridges were constructed on several other rivers that traverse the state. The state is often considered to be 'landlocked' as it does not have any coast, and therefore

direct access to sea. It was not so in the past as large boats from docks at the ancient city of Pataliputra could go up to the riverine ports in the Bay of Bengal through sailing on the Ganga. There are still evidences today of 'docks' on the bank of the river Ganga at Patna from where (international) trade took place.



JP Rail-Road Bridge, Patna

Since the rivers constitute an alternative mode of transportation, the bridges built across the Ganga come in conflict with the objective of smooth transportation through the river waterway. The "bascule" bridge built such as the **Pamban bridge** linking Rameshwaram to the mainland India is worth considering for overcoming the conflictive objectives of transportation through road ways and water ways. None of the bridges built across the Ganga in Bihar appear to be of this type. The video below shows

the newly constructed vertical lift bridge by the Indian railways at Pamban in Tamil Nadu.

https://youtu.be/ajl_bn9Nhrk?si=BTNVjhRBsgvj7WIH

Currently, the natural flow of water in Ganga River is affected adversely during the lean seasons due to canals built upstream the Ganga at Patna. The Farakka barrage been built downstream has similarly denied the possibility of uninterrupted navigation through the river to the seaports. Needless to say that waterways are recognised the world over as the cheapest means of transportation.

Single Window Clearance

The World Bank report 'Bihar: Towards a Development Strategy' (2005) also observed that 'the regulatory burden appears higher in poor climate states.... the efficacy of the regulatory framework related to the issues of entry or starting a business, labour relations and flexibility in labour use, efficiency and transparency of financing and taxation, and efficiency of regulations concerning the environmental safety, health and other legitimate public interests shape the investors' expectations'. This calls for a transformation in outlook; only then the investment climate in the state will improve.

Some positive steps have indeed been taken in this regard. According to Bihar Economic Survey (2024-25), 'the State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) completes the application process in an online mode, adopts a transparent, accountable, and reliable method for selecting investment proposals in the state'. Moreover, besides adopting the 'single window clearance' approach for approving investment proposals in the state, the State government has come out with a number offers to allure investors such as (a) provision of ten acres of land free of cost on an investment of Rs.100 crores, (b) government to bear the interest cost incurred on loan

for investment, if any (c) providing new manufacturing units at earmarked 'industrial parks' with all facilities under the 'plug and play' scheme .

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'Punah Punah'
("पुनः पुनः")

Sharat Kumar

Ram Nandan Sahay Sinha (1928 -1984) was an eminent lawyer (Advocate) of Patna High Court. Most of his cases came from the mineral belt of Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Ranchi, Bokaro and Jamshedpur. When a new High Court was opened at Ranchi for this region, Ram Nandan Sahay was very anxious about his legal practice at the new place. As he did not have much choice, he moved to Ranchi. Fortunately for him, his nephew¹ was employed in MECON, which has the best residential colony in the city. His nephew's house was, moreover, close to Ranchi High Court. He stayed with his nephew for some time before moving into his own rental house. As things turned out, his practice soared at the Ranchi High Court!

People flocked to him when they came to know that he was a senior Advocate of Patna High Court. All the Judges were his former colleagues, and it was easier presenting his client's case before them. Apart from his successful career in law, he was very affectionate to his nephews and nieces. He would often share anecdotes from his younger days. As he told us, once when he was travelling from Patna to Gaya as a teenager by train, he found himself in the company of some Buddhist monks as fellow travelers from either Thailand or Japan, who were going to 'Bodhgaya' for pilgrimage.

Enroute the rail journey from Patna to Gaya, the train crosses a few rivers such as the rivers 'Punpun' and 'Phalgu', which are tributaries of Ganga. These rivers are generally dry rivulets but get swollen during the rainy seasons. When the train was crossing the railway bridge on the river 'Punpun', the elderly Buddhist monk could not help exclaiming "**Punah Punah**" and bowed to the river in reverence. "Punah Punah" ("पुनः पुनः") in Sanskrit and Pali means 'again and again'; implicitly implying that this is a place worth visiting repetitively!

That was perhaps the original name given to this river by the Buddhist pilgrims. It got corrupted overtime into 'Punpun'. It is worth mentioning that as high as 25 lakhs pilgrims visit 'Bodhgaya' annually from abroad. A foreign tourist can reach 'Bodhgaya', either by direct flight to the airport at Gaya or by embarking first at the Patna International airport and then go to Bodhgaya by road. The country benefits in terms of earning foreign exchange due to the expenditure incurred by these tourists on their travel and stay in India.

¹ Ram Nandan Sahay's elder sister's son Sri Harsh.

When an average traveler decides to visit his/her preferred destination, he/she desires to visit nearby places of interest. I leave it to the readers to think about the places of attraction at Patna for an international tourist. Fortunately, a few more five-star hotels have come up in the city. It is worth recognizing that the total income from tourism to the country depends on (a) expenditure incurred on travel by the tourist, (b) number of his/her stay in the country and (c) the purchases he/she makes in the country. On all these counts, India lags most countries despite a very rich cultural heritage.



Taj City Centre, Patna

'MONSOON RAIN'



The monsoon rain is here.

The clouds are thick
Thundering and quick to light.

The lightning falls far away,
Brightening the darkened sky.

My heart leaps, my heart cries

Oh rain, oh rain

Come soak me to the ribs.

The earth is dry

She waits to drown

In the pattering drops

From the sky above.

It makes me cry

It makes me laugh.

I had never ceased to be a child, I realize,

The earth turns green, the trees dance.

Soak me in your pearl-like drops she said

O rain, o rain, come again.

To quench our thirst and make us green.

Meera Verma