

Hey I Know How to Contest Elections

Hey I Know How to Contest Elections

Arjun Singh Rawat



AUTHOR'S PRESS

Worldwide Circulation through Authorspress Global Network

First Published in 2017

by

Authorspress

Q-2A Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi-110 016 (India)

Phone: (0) 9818049852

e-mails: authorspress@rediffmail.com; authorspress@hotmail.com

Website: www.authorspressbooks.com

Hey I Know How to Contest Elections

ISBN 978-93-86722-31-7

Copyright © 2017 Arjun Singh Rawat

Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. The characters and events are entirely imaginary and the names are fictitious and no personal reflections of any kind are intended. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the express written consent of the author.

Printed in India at Krishna Offset, Shahdara

Dedicated to Uttarakhandees agitators

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

In early days when I was mulling over to enter in writing field, fortunately or say by chance I got an opportunity to accompany with a team of contesting candidate, hunting for a ticket. On those days, we roamed here and there, met leaders and their chips, strode on foot far flung hills, interacted locals and run about here and there. That was a thrilling experience for me as I was too in quest of such a plot for my writing.

After that run about, when we were wheeling back after finished out tasks, all of sudden my mind struck – why to not write something on those eye witness incidents. Then I plunged in gathering the names, memorizing the conversations, discussions what we heard, what we chat, places we visited and the people we met. From here, my journey of writing started and I learnt how to write.

Hey I Know How to Contest Elections is a true-to-the-fact story. As I like and prefer writing fiction and novel, so I try my best to make those incidents, events readable. I write what I notice, what people utter and what actually public expect from their masters.

I hope readers will enjoy reading this book as much as I have loved writing it, and apprise me with their views.

ONE

I overheard buzzing sounds of two scooters approaching my narrow street. Killing the engine, they stopped in front of my house. Few people were talking in slow voice. I didn't give ear. Maybe visitors of neighbours. I was busy in my kitchen drill. Just then continuous knocking on our iron gate distracted me. Wiping hands with a cloth and wearing *dupatta* I hurried towards the gate to open. Three-four gentlemen were stood outside with folding palms.

"Namaskar Bhabhijee," two of them hurled in loud voice. They were Jaiprakash and Harish Bisht.

Saying Namaskar I bestowed a smile on them and opened both the doors. Behind them, two more gentlemen, Gambhir Singh and Bhubneshwar were waving me. I welcomed them smilingly and escorted in drawing room.

In between, my husband, Gajender joined us. Shaking hands and hugging he made them to sit. They sank on sofas, so did Gajender.

"Without any phone or information, what brings you here all of sudden? At least, drop a call." I said in a little loud voice.

"Can't we come to you without informing?" Replied Harish Bisht and laughed.

“That is not. At least, I could have prepared something. Oh, my telephone is out of service for the last 2-3 days.” I said. My telephone was dead for few days. I registered a complaint about that but the service man didn’t visit so far.

“How is your family?” With these words, my husband, Gajender asked well-being of all.

“With of grace of God, all is going well. We are agitators. Neither sit idle, nor allow others to sit restfully.” Replied Jaiprakash and laughed aloud.

I returned to kitchen.

“We are hanging this way. While returning, think to meet you.” Bhubneshwar said smilingly.

“You are most welcome.” Saying this I put glasses of water on table and returned to kitchen. They drained the same.

My drawing room was buzzing with conversations. Nothing was clearly coming to my ears, as the kitchen was a little bit away and my concentration was fully on preparing tea.

As I stepped in drawing room with tea tray, Bhubneshwar said apparently, “Garimajee, we wish you to contest elections, will you?”

On hearing this unexpected question I uttered, “Me!” My hands trembled. Few drops of tea came out of cups.

“I have no capability, nor having money. Contesting election gives the grace only to moneyed people.” These words came out of my mouth accidentally.

“Bhubneshwarjee, you are the best choice to contest elections. Flourished business, lot of vehicles and penny too. We

are salaried people and managing anyhow to meet both ends.” Gajender came to my rescue and turned his scull around.

“Gajenderjee, money is not the solution of everything. Orating good speech and magic of assembling people is required for fighting elections. In that field I am a big zero. These qualities are possessed only by Bhabhijee.” Said Bhubneshwar and laughed uproariously.

“Brother, you too have that qualities and money as well.” I replied beaming a smile on him.

“Garimajee, the art of orating, fluency, to attract the crowd and the magic style you have in your voice, no other has that quality. God has granted you a special talent. It is now your duty to hone and utilize that talent, because a person who wastes his God-given talent is” Said Gambhir Singh in my praise.

“What I learn, it is blessings of elders like you people. I learn that much from you experienced people, otherwise I was nothing at all.” I replied that gentleman with bowed head.

“That’s why we come to you to fight assembly elections. You are the most suitable candidate. An active agitator, dedicated and dutiful worker with art of orating speech. What other qualities are required for a leader?”

Just then, someone knocked the main gate. I stepped to open. Two more gentlemen were standing in street with folding palms for permission to in. I too folded palms and escorted them in gently. All were sipping tea while conversation.

I was totally in perplexed and in dilemma. They were discussing only about me and I was listening them smilingly. Nothing was catching in my mind. It seemed sweet in hearing to contest elections and become MLA, but it was not so easy. According to my best knowledge and information, vehicles,

workers, uncounted penny, banners-bamboos, goons, stalwarts and musclemen are required to contest elections. I heard lot of quarrels, fighting, manhandling, bloodshed and sometimes bullet-firing occurred in elections. And these 5-6 gentlemen are advising and pressing me to contest elections. Are they making me laughing stock? Are they making me scapegoat? These thoughts were whirling in my skull.

My mind flashed back to a winter day, around 9-10 years ago, when few youths came to my house to meet Gajender. They were talking about an organization, agitation and so on. Nothing was catching in my mind as it was not my subject-matter. My priorities were to handle house, up-bring siblings. I was in teaching job at that time too. Off and on Gajender used to go in those meetings, sittings. Sometimes I also accompanied him. In this way, we met our village-people residing in cities. Whenever I enquired about his outings, he used to say – today I am going to Garhwal Bhavan, tomorrow I will go to Nazafgarh, some other day to Noida. Every Sunday, his meetings and sittings took place somewhere or other. I didn't understand what hell they do in these meetings.

One day two youths came to my house with Gajender. They posed themselves as active members of an organization, dedicated for separate Uttarakhand. Now they intended to expand it in entire hills and in a path to connect more people with it so to mobilize more public for it.

“Bhabhijee, please pay a visit in our meeting any time. Brother Gajender was telling about your being teacher. You educate students, so guide us too.” A youth said.

“Your brother is enough for meeting and agitation. It gives grace to gents only, we ladies have to handle household too.” I replied in a way to get rid of.

“We don't hold meeting daily. Twice a month. At least you can attend one of that.” Said another youth in a way of pleading.

“You know only Sunday is left for us to relax. Lot of pending tasks and engagements are reserved for that holiday. It is difficult for us to spare time. This man is always out so I have to take care of siblings.” I replied reluctantly showing my inability.

“We spend only 2-3 hours in a meeting, not the whole day. Please spare some sort of time for us. Two-three ladies too used to come. They also find accompaniment of you.” Pleaded the first one.

“I will try, let me see.” I have to utter unwillingly.

“We will wait for you eagerly Bhabhijee. All these works are the tasks of our entire life. It never ends. We should spare some sort of time to our society.” Said the second one.

I assured them so it was obligatory to attend their meeting. One Sunday I made my mind and went to their meeting with Gajender. The meeting was in someone's house. When we approached to door-step I saw only 14-15 people were sitting on cotton mats. Two-three ladies were too amongst them. Ceiling fan was running at top of its speed to make cool room. That day, these people were telling high in my house – we snatch Uttarakhand, stir agitation, we will organise rally and so on and so forth. I laughed inwardly how these handful people will make separate Uttarakhand. These thin, lanky and less educated people will fight against government. Fool and ignorant people.

As both of us stepped in, all of them stood up to welcome us. I really felt worthy. Gajender was shaking hands and hugging them whereas I was wishing them Namaskar. They made room for us to sit.

One by one each lectured. Someone said to enroll more membership, some other suggested opening new units, another opined to sit on dharna at Jantar Mantar. All were tendering various suggestions, opinions. In totality, they were orating good speeches with zeal and enthusiasm.

I too filled with enthusiasm and thought if I got a chance I too orate such an impressive speech. In school, lecturing the students in classroom was

my profession. For that task I received salary. So I felt myself in much better position than those delivering lectures.

Just then, the youth who visited us earlier stood up to address and transpired few words in praise of me. Gesturing at me he urged to say few words of address. I inwardly too wish to say something.

I stood up to address. First of all, I welcomed all of them with due respect and then shifted to lecture. I started and kept on speaking fluently around 15 minutes. I realized that all the eyes were fixed only on me attentively, even that of Gajender. Perhaps he didn't expect of my being lecturing so efficiently. Entire room was gazing me without a wink.

As I concluded my speech, audiences broke into continuous applause in room. And all stood up to congratulate me on my triumphant speech. Ladies congratulated me with folding palms and bestowing a smile thinking that one more joined their herd.

Then what happened later was entirely unexpected and unbelievable. The president of the organisation began praising me and Gajender and also spelled out activities of the organization. He told me a search of new gem and declared me the convener of Mahila Morcha. As he announced, once again claps ran through in small crowd. He assigned me with the tasks of enrolling other ladies, hold a meeting with ladies and to attend at least a meeting in a month. On that all applauded.

I stunned on hearing that. I realized I took a trouble on visiting and lecturing here. And if I too attend all the meetings-sittings like Gajender, then who will look after our siblings, who will do their homework and so on. A dozen random thoughts spilled out in my brain. I threw Gajender a puzzled look.

The very following evening once again the same persons crammed at my residence to discuss the issue, at length. Few more also expected to join them. As usual, I was also attending the kitchen. By now, more than twenty were sitting in room.

I saw, Gambhir Singh stood up from his place and silenced the gathering, “As you are well aware, assembly elections are around the corner. All of us took active part in Uttarakhand movement and so succeeded. For long, we are mulling over whether to take part in elections or not. And at last reach at a conclusion that power of newly state should go in the hands of the people who struggled and agitated for the State.” In this way, he shed light on few other issues and at last proposed my name to contest from Bironkhal.

The gathering welcomed his proposal with raising hands and big clapping. Few other suggestions also came in this discussion.

At the end, I had to rise up to put my words. I took a cursory glance around and started, “Brothers and sisters, first of all, I thank all of you wholeheartedly for your trust and support for enhancing my morale. I think personally that it will not advantageous to fight the election as independent. As you all know very well, an individual can certainly not win the elections without the support of any political party, whether she or he is powerful in money or has a good reputation.” I took a pause. “This issue requires a serious discussion and more consideration. The question is not restricted up to contesting the election only. Development of region is also fully involved. I have no objection in this venture. All of us struggle for this cause and also intend to continue. Contesting an election is entirely different subject-matter. For this, a strong organization, dedicated workers and sufficient funds are required. Unfortunately, we are nowhere stand in this field. Even then, if any party will offer ticket, we may consider it.” Thus, I made my position crystal clear.

For a moment, pin drop silence fell in the room. I thought I hurt them badly by saying this.

“You mean to say, if we are able to get the ticket from a party, only then we should go ahead.” Said Gambhir Singh breaking the silence.

“Exactly the same, but the question arises to whom we approach. At the time of agitation, we boycott these parties and were deadly against them.” Said Gajender.

“The boycott was only upto the creation of state and we achieve our goal now.” Said Jai Prakash and nodded.

“Brother, don’t expect from BJP. We burnt effigies of their reputed leaders, boycotted them at various forums and also in public.” I said laughingly. I was also serving light refreshment to them.

“At least we may approach Virender Singh Bhandari. Presently he is president of the party too. I think he will not ignore us. We ventured collectively during the movement. Besides this, our candidate is also strong enough in comparison to others.” Said Gambhir Singh in firm words and took a cursory look around.

“You are absolutely right. Being a president, he is also expecting his party to be in power. And to fulfill this, it is necessary to choose such a strong candidate that, at least, may be in a position to bag the seat.” Said Harish Bisht. There was a free flow of conversation and everyone was tendering his views openly. I too sat on a chair.

“His own people may be in queue. If we will not able to get ticket from any party, then should Garima make contest as an independent? This point should be discussed with open mind.” Jai Prakash tried to steer the conversion.

“This is not impossible but may be difficult. In Uttarakhand, there is a record of loosing securities by independents except one or two. Reason behind this, people give more importance to parties, than that of individual candidates. Value of independent is negligible even so he is capable and stronger than that of other party candidates. We should discuss this point seriously.” With these words Gambhir Singh sank on sofa.

“I think, we should not lose this golden opportunity. It is the first ever elections of newly formed state. Earlier we worked hard in movement. People know our organization’s name and the newspapers also gave due space to us. People must recognize us. Our struggle must not go waste.” Jai Prakash reiterated his view strongly. I saw all eyes turned towards him.

“There is credence on your words. Perhaps you don’t know in villages, people know only the agents, chips and the symbols of these parties. We must not forget this fact too. Apart of this, we have little influence in villages. Newspapers clipping alone can’t help more. If we really want to fight the election, then first of all, we should visit the region immediately and know the will of people.” Gajender said in serious tone.

Bhubneshwar was listening the conversation silently since beginning and flipping through the pages of a book, now stood up to speak, “I am a village person and know the mood and manners of people. Public also want a good leader to put their problems in assembly and so work for the development of their region. I participate in various elections and gather lot of knowledge about the region. You need not worry about that matter. You people decide firmly whether to contest the election or not.” He expressed his view in a strong and impressive way and sat.

Finally, after a long discussion all arrived at a conclusion that I should come forward to contest the election, as this chance will never come again. The room was buzzing with conversation.

Harish Bisht stood up to silence the people and hurled, “Are all of you agreed on the point of contesting elections by Garima? Those in favour raise their hands?” He turned his skull around.

With delighted and cheerful voices, all raised their hands up. A stretch of smile flickered on my lips.

“Merely raising hands is not enough. Pledge to keep this struggle on and leave no stone unturned in the fight.” These words filed enthusiasm in gatherings.

“We support your words and promise to cooperate wholeheartedly.” Gathering replied almost in one voice.

Finally, it was unanimously decided to visit Virender Singh Bhandari. If he agrees that is better, otherwise I should file the paper as an independent candidate. With this decision the meeting defused.

I came to gate to bid goodbye the visitors. While returning I cajoled Gajender, “These people are pressing me hard to contest. We much aware of our actual position. To whom we will approach for funds?”

“Everything will go well. Be patience. People are with us, so need not to worry. A decision has been taken, so to stay on that.” Replied Gajender calmly.



Without any delay, the following morning Gambhir Singh, Gajender and I dashed at Virender Singh Bhandari's residence. Fortunately he was at home that instance.

"Congratulations Bhandarijee, on being designated on the prestigious post of party-president of Uttarakhand." All of us hurled in unison passing through the passage.

"Thanks, your wholehearted cooperation made me reach at this position." Said Virender Singh Bhandari and extended his hand.

"Wishing on phone is another thing, so we raid without any prior appointment." Said Gajender smilingly and shook both his hands warmly.

"Why are you making me ashamed saying this?" Replied Virender Singh Bhandari. Just then his eyes fell on another person, "Aye, Gambhir Singhjee is also with you." With these words Virender Singh Bhandari gave Gambhir Singh a tight hug and cordially escorted us in.

Room was rather spacious. A large sized half-circled sofa, where 12-13 persons could easily be accommodated. A table placed midst of the room. On a wall, a black and white portrait of Mahatma Gandhi was fixed. On another wall, portraits of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were also seen. A coloured photo, in which Virender Singh Bhandari garlanding to Rajiv Gandhi in smiling face, was also found a place on the wall.

After performing formalities, Virender Singh Bhandari asked gently, "Any kind of service from my side, don't hesitate in saying."

"Your workload and responsibilities also increase on taking charge of party president." Said Gajender and smiled.

“To some extent, I returned yesterday from Dehradun. In few moments I am to dash party office.” Virender Singh Bhandari replied and sank on sofa.

“Thank God, we strike at appropriate time, otherwise we miss you.” I said and beamed a smile.

“Listing of potential candidates for the forthcoming elections would have been started by now, isn’t it?” Gajender asked with a grin.

“Not yet at this level, but searching of suitable candidates is in process. For that task, I have to run about here and there.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari folding his arms around his chest.

“Sir, if search of candidate is going on, then give a chance to Garima from Bironkhal.” Said Gambhir Singh glancing towards him.

“All is now in your hands sir. If she is able to get party ticket, we assure you of her definite win. It is our guarantee.” Gajender vowed. I bowed my head on being appreciated.

“Everything is not in my hand. Party has constituted various committees for selection of candidates, such as, screening committee, election committee, survey committee.” Replied Virender Singh Bhandari calmly. After a while he added, “If you are really determined for Garimajee, then first of all, get in touch with people of your own region. Gather their views. Central committee considers the names only after getting approval of Regional Committee.” Virender Singh Bhandari explained the prevailed procedure.

“We will manage that issue and expecting your cooperation, Sir.” I replied in anticipation and bestowed a smile on him.

“I heard Dr. Joshi and Hardayal Singh are also in queue. You discuss the issue with them too. If they have no objection, then it will be easy for me, as they are senior members of party and their views can’t be ignored.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari clearing his position and threw the ball in our court.

Thus, he neither gave any firm assurance, nor refused our request. We returned happily of the residence of the Virender Singh Bhandari.

Since Virender Singh Bhandari became president of the party, he got full time employment. Now he had no leisure time to sit. He was to visit Nainital, Dehradun, Pauri off and on. Sometimes he had to frequent Uttarakhand hills for weeks.

In beginning, when his party was dead against the separate state demand, he dared not went against the will and wish of party too. So, he had to oppose the demand reluctantly. However, to escape the ire of public, he used to toss other issues like hill council, hill cadre, economic package, Forest Act to remain in public domain. Whereas public was not in a mood to compromise less than separate state. When the agitation for separate state was on its peak, the then ruling party, BJP, won the confidence of people and uprooted the Congress completely. During that upheaval, most of the partymen and office-bearers tendered their resignations. In that thunderstorm epoch, Virender Singh Bhandari too lost Lok Sabha seat thrice and cornered within the party.

To survive within party, Bhandari had to struggle hard. To retain his position, he worked phase-wise. Separate state was essential for the progress of Uttarakhand. He made apprised this fact to senior party leaders and too won confidence of high command. Finally, he got the success. As a result, a resolution to this effect was passed in party convention. In this way, party too

engaged in some sort of activities and partymen were now openly supporting the demand of separate state. Dissidents, those left the party earlier, also started rejoining.

In his next effort, he made up his mind to participate in agitation. To materialize his next step, he revived an outfit, named Uttarakhand Sanyukt Sangharsh Samity, that was motionless for long. Gradually, he integrated and made involved other agitators, outfits in it and made inflated in a massive organization. In this process, he got the cooperation of other organizations. My organization was one of them. Party workers also filled with enthusiasm and zeal when he took part actively in movement. Once again, people polarized towards his party. After viewing the surprise change in party workers, high command designated him of party president of Uttarakhand region.

By now, the public turned towards his party and his status and influence within party increased tremendously.



TWO

On getting a nod from Virender Singh Bhandari, I and other agitators fully plunged ourselves in mapping the strategies. It was then decided to make an extensive tour of region, prepare a list of partymen, active agitators, dedicated persons and to contact them personally. A list of activities performed during agitation, such as, organizational tasks, rallies, *dharnas*, demonstrations, fast, effigy-burning were finalized, got printed and mailed. A file of clipping, paper cuttings and photographs of the last ten years were prepared and kept ready for showing the people.

A pamphlet was made printed exhorting the public not to forget the agitators those sacrificed, struggled and laid down their lives. It was appealed to support that candidate who actively participated in movement, capable to raise the issues of development, migration and so on in Assembly fearlessly.

With full-fledged preparations, I along with others was visiting the region. We were wheeling towards Pokhra and Bironkhal in a Maruti. Bhubneshwar was briefing the geographical vicinity of the constituency. Whenever we took halt at a market place, we tried to interact with locals and handed over them pamphlets. Bhubneshwar was insisted to drive the vehicle fast. Gajender was behind the wheels. Today, a

meeting was being organized, where potential candidates in race, were expected to participate in large number.

“Gajenderjee, run the vehicle fast, we are already getting late. We must reach before time to listen the people’s views.” Advised Bhubneshwar and smiled.

“Don’t be in hurry. We will reach in time.” Replied Gajender pressing the accelerator. The vehicle was wheeling along the snaky and uneven raw roads of hills flying the dust.

“No one is aware about the mood of people till today. The moment when names announce, only then the real picture will emerge.” Said Bhubneshwar.

“In elections, image or work does not count any more. The persons pour huge amount in party fund or get blessings of senior leaders, are generally able to grab the tickets. You felt it in Delhi assembly elections too. A gentleman poured one crore to party and got the ticket. Now you can easily imagine how much money he would have spent in election.” I said glancing towards him. “And how much he will grab after the election,” I added.

“Madam, it is not Delhi. It is Uttarakhand, the land of giant agitation.” Interrupted Bhubneshwar.

“It is heard that ticket is being offered to an industrialist of Bombay from Thalissain. He is a new face there. And the poor Mahimanand Nautiyalji, that sacrificed his entire life for the party totally ignored.” Sighed Gajender.

“This is called politics. In politics, there is no place for individual’s work, character or participation in movement. You witness it in Dhumakot too. Ticket is being allotted to a retired colonel, instead of Rajender Dhyani.” Laughed Jaiprakash. A deep silence in atmosphere. All engrossed in their thoughts.

In Siryakhhal, a meeting was being organized to support Diwakar Negi. He was an active party-worker in Pokhra Block. He gained lot of reputation on becoming Pradhan in young age. He also had good hold in villages of Pokhra Block. Keeping this point in mind, a meeting was organized in that particular place to make more people in his support and so atmosphere created that no other person is suitable in comparison to him. More than fifty party office-bearers and workers were expected to attend the meeting.

Diwakar Negi was also looking after the arrangements for the reception and refreshments personally. There was no slackness in arrangements. It was the first ever huge public meeting in the region, where the names of potential contestants were to be considered seriously.

Within an hour we approached Siryakhhal. The programme was running in a school, as it remained closed for students being holiday. Serious discussion was going on to keep the party-workers united, mulling over potential candidates and preparations for elections. Locals were delivering speeches in favour of their choice of leaders and mentioned the jobs they did in region. On the other hand, some were giving reverse views and criticizing them bitterly. On several occasions, discussions became so heated that there appeared a fight-like scene among them.

Apparently, someone quoted “parachute” or “outsider” for the party-workers trying tickets from Delhi or outside. The issue became the bone of contention. Party-workers jostled with each other. Organizers were trying hard to control but at this peak time of election, nobody wanted to put their arms down. Instead of calming down, they were intentionally raking up such issues to create chaos.

When the atmosphere became little cool, I got a chance to speak few words. I transpired the gathering that people living inside and outside equally participated in agitation and so the separate state created. I pointed out that outsiders played vital role in Delhi, as they used to flock almost daily for agitating at *Sansad Marg*, whereas people who habitated in Uttarakhand played active role in their native areas. It was therefore, not correct to say “parachute” or “outsider” to agitators.

People listened my words patiently, calmly. In this way, I got success in handling such a chaotic meeting slipping towards useless. In clear words, I appealed party-workers to swear not to indulge in trifling debates and work wholeheartedly for the party in a dedicated manner.

That energetic speech made such impact in the minds of partyworkers that after the meeting, few approached me for introduction. At the other end, Gajender, Jaiprakash and Bhubneshwar were at their task of showing the file of paper clippings and photos to people and transpiring about their organization, active participation in movement.

After the meeting, I emerged as an ideal candidate in the minds of people so gathered. No other person was seemed to be seen to challenge me.

In a tea stall, we came across many new faces. Gajender scrawled down their names, addresses on a note book. After interacted with various people, we took depart from Siryakhali and wheeled towards Bironkhal.

“Attending this meeting at least we meet various people and they too agree with our views and work.” Gestured Jaiprakash in cheerful voice.

“It counts nothing till we don’t get blessings of Vijay Pal Singh. So our task is still incomplete.” Snapped Bhubneshwar making wry face.

“I try to meet him several times. But always find him away.” Said Gajender clearing his position.

“Even then at least we commit a big mistake. We must have contacted Vijay Pal Singh by now.” Advised Bhubneshwar and nodded.

“I was considering him a defeated MP. I come to know about him here only that he is a big fish.” I said in light words.

“Neither he took active part in agitation, nor accessible easily.” Said Jaiprakash.

“Let us see what happen next.” I sighed.

Gajender was behind the wheels. There was no sign of hurry on his face. All of a sudden Bhubneshwar caught glimpse of a poster on the wall opposite.

“Gajenderjee, stop the vehicle. Let me see that poster.” Bhubneshwar shouted apparently. Gajender slowed down the vehicle and stopped along the road. Bhubneshwar went briskly towards the poster.

On returned, his face was delighted in joy and eyes were sparkling, “It is a matter of pleasure that we may attain another target shortly. Day after tomorrow, there is a big rally in support of Vijay Pal Singh in Dhumakot. It is the right opportune to have words with him. All the contestants will also be seen there.”

“And today’s briefings will also reach to his ears. We gain a plus point attending this meeting. Garimajee, you have to deliver an emphatic speech in praise of Vijay Pal Singh, regard him a

great personality, did several major jobs for welfare of public, participate in agitation actively, did lot of developmental work in region, provide jobs to people and so on and so forth..." Said Jaiprakash glancing towards me.

"I can't tell that much of lie, you know." I laughed. I felt my smile displayed white teeth in a ring of dark hair.

"Madam, it is called politics. We have to please him to grind our own axe. You must keep in mind one thing that without the blessing of Vijay Pal Singh, nothing can be done here in this region." Advised Bhubneshwar in serious tone.

"If that's the matter then I will prepare few points for speech." I replied turning eyes towards him.

"Remember one more. On concluding the speech, don't forget to touch his feet. As we are performing a drama, it should be in full dress." Said Jaiprakash and laughed uproariously.

"We have to spare some time in Vedikhal. A shopkeeper is his very intimate. We may get more information from him about the activities and programmes of Vijay Pal Singh and also the ground position of this region." Said Bhubneshwar as a prudent person.

"Gajender Bhai, you keep on noting down name and address of the persons clearly. New year greetings are to be sent them shortly." Advised Jaiprakash.

A stretch of silence fell in atmosphere. Now our minds were concentrated only on how to contact Vijay Pal Singh. Till now we showed paper clippings, about our achievements, activities during the agitation, and the people were also influencing very much. But now it seemed insufficient after reviewing the situation. All lost in their thoughts.

Vehicle was scrolling on the uneven road leading towards Vedikhal. Just then, another van from opposite waved us to stop. A person alighted from the van, whose face seemed to be acquaintance. He was Bhopal Singh. He was seen occasionally in rallies and *dharamas* at Janter Mantar. He came nearer. Gajender rolled down the glass of vehicle.

“Bhopal Bhai, amaze to see you here. At this crucial time, you should be in your own region.” I said with wide eyes.

“Just now I come to know you are here. How the preparations are going on? It seems the campaigning is on its peak.” Quipped Bhopal Singh smilingly.

“What kind of preparations? We are facing a new complexity day by day.” I replied in spiritless voice.

All got down of the vehicle and parked it opposite side along the road.

“It is not such an easy job, and you may have to face such problems in coming days. First of all, did you fill up the party candidature form? Without completing it your candidature will not consider. It has to submit before the last date of this month at Pauri duly signed and recommended by at least five party members of the constituency.” With these words Bhopal drew out papers and handed over two forms to me.

“No one told us about this.” Replied Bhubneshwar surprisingly.

“Why anybody tell all these things? One more thing, this application form will go to Delhi passing through Dehradun and Pauri. It will route through various committees and members will examine and discuss at large about the capabilities and qualification of candidates.” Explained Bhopal in detail.

“Bhopaljee, are you aware about Vijay Pal Singh’s rally?” I asked eagerly.

“Why not, it is in Dhumakot. He will definitely attend the rally. He is going to introduce a retired army colonel from Dhumakot. This rally is being organized for the support of that colonel only.” Bhopal replied in firm words.

“That means Rajender Dhyani is now out of fray and he will never get ticket from Dhumakot. Isn’t it?” Said Gajender.

“Yes, his ambitions of catching ticket shatter.” Bhopal replied with wry face.

“Is he planning to contest from Bironkhal?” I asked suspiciously and grinned.

“No, he will not. Firstly, he was preparing himself from Dhumakot for long. Secondly, Bironkhal is new region for him and nobody will entertain him here. You should not worry about him.” Assured Gopal and nodded his head.

“And from where you are going to contest?” I asked laughingly.

“Right now I am party coordinator and sending the factual report of the region to party. So there no question of contesting election arises.” Replies Bhopal and grinned widely.

“It means one part about my progress report is also in your hand and that is an advantage for us.” I said beaming a smile on him.

“Why not? From my side I will send a good report of you. By the way, where are you running now?” Asked Bhopal.

“We are going to Rikhad right now. Next morning we are to visit Kalinka Mata to pay homage. We shall also distribute

pamphlets there.” Said Gajender showing few pamphlets to Bhopal.

“It is a good idea. It is heard thousands of people witness this *mela* and in this way message will also reach to far flung villages.” With these words Gopal headed towards his van and sat on driving seat.

“See you tomorrow in Dhumakot, Good Bye.” Bhopal waved and drove away.



Kalinka mata *mela* was organized in every fourth year. The temple was on hill-top of a high peak near Bironkhal. Thousands of people witnessed the holy place to catch a glimpse of the sacred shrine. It was common belief that devotees never returned empty hands, and most of their wishes were fulfilled.

Publicity of this *mela* – fete, spread without any specific efforts. The sacred place was situated at the boundary of Kumaon and Garhwal. Preparations for the *mela* started one month in advance. Worship ceremony of Mata was performed at Kwatha Village. It was generally organized at the fag end of December. A particular *Gotra* of Rawat community organizes the worship of Kalinka Mata. About fifteen to twenty days ahead of *mela*, the God and Goddess were worshipped and people danced around. *Pujari* sings unusual *bhajans* with the beating tune of drums and utensils. The God and Goddess are behind to dance in the form of human beings with these tunes and sounds. The devotees worshiped the God and Goddesses offering ghee and lit *agarbati* as a token of devotion.

To witness this fair, people from far-flung villages used to flock this place. Kalinka Mata was also worshiped in the form of a sacred flag. Every day the holy flag visited to the villages of daughters of its devotees. The sacred flag was tied along a long bamboo stick and a devotee carried it. The sacred flag was decorated with small flags and copper *chhatris*. Despite its heavy weight, only one devotee carried it and performed the visit with bare feet. Other devotees followed him. The place where it stopped or halts, that particular village people made arrangements of meals and staying for the devotees. On sensing any filth on its path, the sacred flag diverted its route and the devotees automatically turned towards the path of the flag. It scored on any uneven or dangerous footway or pathway. This procession of visiting villages went on for fifteen-sixteen days. On final day, it took its way towards sacred temple, where thousands of devotees took blessings and bow their heads and caught a glimpse of Kalinka Mata.

Like previous years, this year too thousands of people were expected to mill around the vicinity of holy temple place. There was a long queue in front of the temple. The people in coloured traditional dresses were witnessing the *mela* sitting on elevated places of the hills. It was believed, the relatives that never met anywhere in usual terms must see at this *mela*. To witness this *mela*, people visited from various parts of the country and even from abroad. People from the far-flung villages start their journey on foot around four early mornings with their village's flag and musical instruments such as *dbol-damoh*.

After bowing their heads in temple, I and Gajender distributed the pamphlets sitting on a small peak. There we met lot of people those participated in the movement.

There were various footways leading to holy temple. These footways were narrow and dangerous so need extra precaution to walk. From the hill-top, far-flung villages and jungle was looking beautiful with scenic beauty. Fresh air passing through the trees was very pleasing. Clean blue sky, shining sunrays, snow-clad peaks of Himalayas, majestically dense forests, sprawled tiny villages, extensive orchard with fruits and vegetation also giving inner satisfaction to everyone who visited the area. Motorable road looked like a scrolling snake from this high place.

No motorable road was connected to reach this hilly place except few footways. Despite that, people of *Mela Samity* arranged water and other essential services for the devotees and announcements were constantly aired on the loudspeakers to guide them properly.



Now, to meet vijay pal singh was not so important for me. Issue of forwarding party membership form to district headquarters with recommendation of five party members was churning our minds. In these days, few party-members were on regional visits, while other was roaming Deharadun. Somebody went Delhi for the confirmation of his ticket. The last date for submission of membership form was nearing. All planning seemed to be futile. All of sudden my mind stroke to meet Dr. Joshi at Syunsi, where he was running his clinic.

Fortunately, at that moment Dr. Joshi was at his clinic and attending few patients. It was his first ever meeting with us. He knew Bhubneshwar very well for long. Bhubneshwar greeted the doctor introducing me, “Meet the lady Garima. She is being active in Uttarakhand Movement in Delhi and fight for the

public cause.” While moving towards Gajender, “This gentleman is her husband and the next gentleman is Jaiprakash. We greeted the doctor and he welcomed us smilingly.

At that moment, doctor sahib was also in a relaxed mood. He called a man for chairs and gestured us to sit. We sat comfortably. At this time of elections, visiting of four persons might have some purpose. Apart of that, he got advance information about our visit. He easily gauged the situation. Without performing any formalities he asked directly, “How your election visit is going on?”

“Quite well, but it is not election visit. We are only taking views of people what kind of candidate they are expecting. As you know, our field of work was only Delhi and we never did agitation aiming to fight elections. Had we mulled about it earlier, we might have been shown our presence much earlier and would have played tricks, tactics.” I replied tactfully. After a pause I added, “But I am amazed to see such groupism among the party-workers.”

“Yesterday in Siryakhali, partymen were quarrelling just like school-children. In this atmosphere, a candidate has to fight first against his own party-workers. And after that the opposition party candidate.” Saying this Bhubneshwar laughed uproariously.

“Occasionally this happens everywhere, particularly at the time of elections. People used to try leg pulling.” Replied Dr. Joshi and turned his face.

“Sir, you are block president of party and so guide them properly. And at this time of election, this sort of groupism certainly will give wrong message to public, particularly when party is in a better position to take fight.” Said Bhubneshwar pampering Dr. Joshi.

“Dear Brother, the fact is that I don’t want to involve in this muddle. I openly tell each and every party-worker if he or she wishes to fight the election, so declare openly. We will forward his name to headquarters. Everyone has the right to fight election in democracy. Ticket distribution is the job of party. Even that few people in Bironkhal didn’t utter a word in meeting, but next day they rushed Pauri for filing papers. Had they informed why we would stop them?” Said Dr. Joshi venting his spleen out.

“How many are going to file the papers.” Asked Bhubneshwar shifting the subject.

“According to my information, fourteen-fifteen. I also tell frankly everyone if anybody wants my signatures and stamp. I have no hesitation in forwarding their applications. But if one of them is able to get the ticket, then all the party members have to cooperate with him at any cost.” Said Dr. Joshi waving his hand.

“Have you send your own application or not?” I asked apparently eyeing him.

“I will too forward within a day or two. As all are filing papers, then why not I. Isn’t it?” Said Dr. Joshi advocating himself and gazed on others.

“We have come to know only yesterday that application is required to be sent to Pauri. So we approach you directly for advice what to do now.” I said haltingly and waited a little for his reactions.

“You may take my signatures right now. Hardayal Singh is out right now. Data Ram probably may not at home. Day after tomorrow, all the partymen and office bearers will cram at Dhumakot rally. You may take their signatures there.” Said Dr. Joshi in relaxing mood and took a long yawn.

Without losing any chance, I extended my application form towards the doctor. Dr. Joshi appended his signatures with his stamp and said smilingly. “Promise, if I am able to get the ticket, you will cooperate me, and if you get, I will help you wholeheartedly.”

“Why not Doctor Sahib. Please don’t make us ashamed by saying this. We will definitely cooperate you with heart and soul.” With this assurance we thanked the doctor and left the clinic.

I was contented that at least we got signature of one party member. Task of getting signatures of four others remained churning in our minds. Without prior introduction how one would agree to append his signature? This question was worrying all of us.

In my Legislative Assembly there were around two hundred villages, 90 villages were from *Khatli and Sabli patti* - belt, 90 villages from Pokhra Block and 20 villages from Akeshwar Block. According to caste ration, *Rajputs* were of 70 per cent, *Brahmins* 20 and artisans, backward classes and *Tamtas* around ten per cent. Keeping in view the caste calculations, each party was taking steps carefully, cautiously. Sitting MLA Sureshanand of BJP was *Brahmin* and not in favour of taking any risk from this constituency. That’s why, there was no strong enough and reliable candidate from the ruling party.

Doctor Joshi was considered a strong candidate of opposition. Firstly, he was block president of party. Secondly, he was doctor, by profession and well renowned in region. Thirdly, he wholeheartedly helped the earlier candidate in the last parliamentary election, whose blessings were too with him. So, his ticket was strongly considered as confirm. He used to run his clinic at two or three distinct places in entire week. Occasionally, doctors were not regular at government hospital and medicines

also not easily available to the patients. As a result, public had to rushed private clinics or quacks for treatment.

In few years, Dr. Joshi amassed lot of the wealth with both hands. In his profession, there was no place for wellbeing and benevolence towards patients. He never offered any kind of concession to patient, whether he is poor or not. His minimum fee was 150 rupees. Because of his uncouth, obstructive and unkindness behaviour, public didn't have any soft corner towards him, and so he lost last two elections very badly with a huge margin. His opponents used to say - this doctor will never win election, whatever much money he will spend.

Conditions of hospitals in Uttarakhand were pathetic. Primary Health centers (PHC) were established almost around motorable roads, so that villagers could get medical facilities easily. But hardly found any doctor, paramedics to attend the patients in these PHCs. Medicines also remained missing. In that absence, practice of private doctors was thriving high. They charged exorbitant fee, even from poor villagers.

Once, an Ex-Director General of Health Services, Dr. Bisht, suggested for closing down of PHCs for not seemed beneficial to the public. He advocated for big hospitals, equipped with modern medical facilities in each district. But hill politicians didn't pay any heed his suggestion, as they were more anxious about their vote bank.

Dr. Joshi was fully confident towards Vijay Pal Singh in getting party ticket. To strengthen his claim, he began partaking in party meetings regularly, reduced fee rate for patients and conversed the patients politely. Whenever Vijay Pal Singh or Virender Singh Bhandari visited the region, he always arranged the meetings, rallies and led the processions energetically.

Meanwhile, a challenge appeared from a youth, named Babban Bhai. His posters started displaying in market places and school-walls off and on. It was heard about him that once he forced the state employees to perform their jobs on his *dadagiri*. He used to intimidate electricity people, water supply employees and PWD workers. One day he forcibly locked PWD office in the pretext that employees were not performing their duty properly and diligently. For this unwanted act, police arrested him and put behind the bars. Since then, his name tossed up in region and became an idol of boldness, daring among the youths. Thus, he established himself as a bold leader in public.

In Bironkhal, Hardayal Singh was also counted one of the potential candidates. A middle-aged reputed party worker, always took part in public activities, and always stood in sharing sorrows and happiness of the people. Being an owner of a grocery shop in market, he was involved in business as well *netagiri* and too made good contacts in far flung areas. His well-shaped physique, clad with *khadi kurta pyajama*, Nehru cap on skull gave him a figure of real leader in public.

He was also considered to be a suitable candidate, as his reputation was good in public, but was narrowed to few villages only or say in other words, to a small segment. That's why he was not recognized as a leader, acceptable to all. After the demarcation of constituency, he also increased his activities extensively. Since then, he hung a lock on his shop and plunged himself fully in politics. With a cotton bag slung on shoulder, he used to frequent his relatives, acquaintances and partymen's at Bironkhal, Bajiro and Vedikhal. This had now become his routine chores.

There was no scarcity of candidates in NCR Delhi too. Being headquarters of various parties and harbours of influential leaders, mini leaders and potential candidates frequented there instead of their own constituency or work place. They now started strolling around the bungalows of leaders of their acquaintances in Lutyens Delhi.



THREE

My mind flashed back to the old days of movement. Gradually I too involved in agitation. I felt these boys were not wrong. To make aware about your land was not a crime, to raise voice against backwardness, migration and poverty of one's region was not a crime. I realized the boys whom I considered fool and less educated were far ahead of my imagination and mental status.

Although, hills are seen green, beautiful, heart loving from distant, that are gifted by nature to the man, yet living conditions of its habitants were pathetic. Tinny terraced fields did not produce enough to fill the stomach of peasants. Even then, a peasant was not able to fill his own family's stomach. The year, in which good rains poured, the crops also grew enough, on the other hand, the year in which less rains poured, entire crops destroyed. The farmers had to purchase food articles from the market.

Womenfolk had to fetch water from distant hills. Without road and lack of vehicles, they had to do their everyday drill on walk and carried the goods, household items on head. Thousands of youths had to migrate towards cities for the quest of employment, bread or livelihood.

I felt inwardly I should join them. So, I too started attending the meetings-sittings along with Gajender. Handing over the siblings to grandparents-in-law, off and on we both wheeled out every Sundays. But the after-effects were soon seen on children. Earlier both the kids were excelled in their classes, but now they were legging behind others. Then I also started taking care of their studies. Once I thought to leave those meetings-sittings,

but could not. Anyhow I was trying hard to make balance between the family and the agitation.

All of sudden, Uttarakhand agitation burst out and took a gigantic shape. Pauri, Khatima and Mussoorie tragedies occurred one by one that jostled entire Uttarakhand hills as well as plains. Now, I didn't feel better to retreat. Uttarakhand agitation also caught the attention of newspapers and print media too gave wide space in their newspapers.

To support Uttarakhand agitation, a decision had been taken to organize a rally at Jantar Mantar. All the members were assigned the duties of bringing more and more people for the rally. Being convener of Mahila Morcha, my responsibilities were too increased to some extent. My overall activities too had increased tremendously. Visiting the people daily at evening and appealing them to come in rally became our routine drill and sole aim. With day and night long hardwork, I anyhow convinced and made prepared at least 35-40 ladies for the rally.

On the rally day, our tempo wheeled towards Jantar Mantar. There I saw hundreds of ladies and gents so gathered with waving hands and hurling slogans at the top of their voices. As our group approached, the masses welcomed us with applause and shouting high pitched slogans. Really, I felt very much proud inwardly. In this jollity moment, I became emotional and my eyes moisten and water drops slide down on my cheeks.

On podium, impressive speeches were continuously airing. Agitator leaders were increasing the morale of crowd, so sitting down, with their enthusiastic and triumphant speeches. I was silently listening them, as I was very much tired of running about for the last few days. All of sudden, my name was announced from podium. I didn't believe my ears. I was inviting for orating speech. In hesitation, I remained sat quietly. The ladies sitting beside me pull me to stand. I don't want to go on podium, but two ladies dragged me. I had to deliver a speech.

Hesitantly, I grabbed the mike and started. I didn't know what I was orating, but what I was orating that, that was with enthusiasm and

zeal. I felt audiences were listening me attentively, peacefully. Pin drop silence fell around. All the eyes were focusing on me. Clapping was also running through the audiences intermittently. I felt all the people were staring, gazing at me only. I spoke about 15 minutes. It was my first speech in public.

As I concluded my speech, the atmosphere resounded with thundered applause. As I alighted from the podium, people clustered around me for congratulating on my triumphant speech. I was the only lady that delivered the speech on that very day. I saw Gajender was too gazing me from distant smilingly.

Soon after that, the masses headed towards the Sansad Marg making two queues with waving hands upward and hurling slogans. Police was too walking along us with guns and sticks. As we marched few yards, police ordered to halt then and there. I saw a strong iron barricade tightened with thick ropes. Few policemen were too grabbing it tightly. The youths didn't care the warning of policemen and ran towards the barricades wildly. They climbed on the barricade and jostled with police. I too followed them and mounted on a barricade. All of sudden, a strong water current hit me on back and I could not stay in front of that pressurized water, so fell down. I saw policemen were hitting the people with their sticks. I fell unconscious. After some moment, I found myself on the lap of a lady with lot of people clustered around me. I received a small injury on my head.

On the other side, Vijay Pal Singh was busy in mapping the poll strategy with his loyalists. He had little command and control in entire Uttarakhand, even then had some sort of base in Pauri, Tehri and Haridwar. Although he had not played any active role in Uttarakhand agitation, yet few organizations off and on published pamphlets, papers on his behalf or in his name and organized *dharnas*, rallies in his favour. As he accumulated a lot of money, assets, property so had a cadre of dedicated and hired workers with him.

“Sir, it appears that this time public is slightly inclining towards our party and that’s why our workers are also in high spirit.” Said Dr. Joshi in praising voice.

“On final stage of agitation, *dharnas* and demonstration gave a clear message to people about our party’s strong approach of separate state and ruling party’s negativity.” Said Surender Sajwan enthusiastically.

“You agree with me or not but I can say that most of the credit goes to Virender Singh Bhandari, that took appropriate steps at the opportune time.” Said Pundir in praising words.

“That was the position upto the creation of new state. On back of that success, he is constantly organizing meetings, rallies in Uttarakhand and public is now supporting him too.” Grumbled Dr. Joshi. This made Vijay Pal Singh panic.

“In his region, he may do anything what he wants, and we have no objection. But if he organizes any programme in our region without our consent, it is highly objectionable and incorrect too.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in fit of anguish. The conversation now shifted on the activities of Virender Singh Bhandari.

“Sir, really it is a matter of serious concern. Well, he did good job for party. Even then he dare not interfere in our region.” Dr. Joshi stimulated.

“Nowadays he is in high spirits and over enthusiasm. Last week he paid secret visits to roadside markets and contacted party-workers. And also tried to impress the workers in Dhumakot, Bironkhal, Thalısain, Baijro, Pokhra, Satpuli and Pauri.” Said Surender Sajwan conspiracously.

“He may not act like this without intimating me. After all, it is my area. How dare he?” Said Vijay Pal Singh. All of sudden

his temper rose high. “Find out how many workers are helping him.” He added and turned his face towards Surender Sajwan.

“Few agitators of Delhi accompanied him and warm welcome was given by people of the region. Apart of party-workers, there were good enough gathering in such meetings.” Grumbled Surender Sajwan.

“I myself saw Rajender Dhyani, Pushkar Shah, Garima, Surender Negi and other agitators accompanying him. Rumours are afloat that Rajender Dhyani will make his claim from Dhumakot. Garima is also taking chance from Bironkhal. Another agitator is trying from Thalissain.” Explained Dr. Joshi in detail.

“All this happened under my nose and I am completely unaware of that. Very amazing.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in anguish.

For a while, deep silence fell in room.

“Sir, had we participated in agitation at that time, then people would have been with us in addition to party workers.” Said Surender Sajwan breaking the silence.

“At that time, I tried to meet Virender Singh Bhandari several occasions and also sent a man to him but he did not pay any heed.” Vijay Pal Singh roared.

“Even so, you should not sit idle.” Reiterated Surender Sajwan.

“I tried to contact other agitators too and sent money and other things off and on to them but ultimately it could not serve the purpose.” Said Vijay Pal Singh clearing his position.

“Now, we have to do something quickly, otherwise nobody will listen you in party. As all are happening right now, then what

will happen later when party will come in power.” Alarmed Dr. Joshi.

“You are right. Now the time has come to show our strength.” Vowed Vijay Pal Singh.

“If we do not react at right time, then we have to repent later.” Warned Surender Sajwan.

“Sajwan prepare a list of seventy candidates. I certainly not compromise on Pauri, Tehri and Haridwar seats at any cost.” Said Vijay Pal Singh waving his hand.

“We must do something to save our existence within party.” Added Dr. Joshi.

“A conspiracy is being hatched against me. I will talk party president and other executive members. We should also make quick visits to region and quest suitable candidates.” Suggested Vijay Pal Singh and threw a cursory glance of all.

He was disgruntled towards party high command on giving much more importance to Virender Singh Bhandari. To give charge of president of Uttarakhand region to Bhandari was the recent one. This was done without taking him in confidence. Since then the distance between them had widened more. Now he was quite frightened of Virender Singh Bhandari.



A massive rally was being organized in Dhumakot. On the main motorable road, there seemed to be sufficient space for the crowd to gather, as there was a U turn band on the road. In the hilly areas generally enough space was not available for the rallies to be organized easily. Normally this kind of space was available only in schools and colleges, but it was herculean task

to gather and attract public or masses in such distant places. One advantage in organizing rallies on the roadsides was that trespassers, passengers also attracted without venturing any extra efforts.

Walls and the shops nearby the rally site were fully pasted with colourful posters of Vijay Pal Singh, Colonel Rawat, party president and veteran leader Jata Shankar. In these posters, public had been appealed to listen their respected leaders. In front of small podium, few chairs were placed in rows. Sounds of patriotic songs were making the atmosphere emotional. Few colourful flags were seen all around the roadside and nearby shops. Public was gradually milling around the rally site. Local and mini leaders, chips and villagers were roaming around the spot. Few locals in *kurta payajama* were strolling around the stage to impress the people about their leadership or acquaintance with leaders. For the time being, local leaders and *pradhans* were delivering speeches, criticizing the state government. Announcements were constantly aired about the arrival of Vijay Pal Singh at any moment.

I and other agitators dashed well in advance at the scene and occupied seats in front row. Gajender was trying hard to interact with the coordinators to get a chance for me to deliver the speech, particularly at the time of Vijay Pal Singh's arrival. Fortunately, coordinator was also found a known person and he made the task easy.

After a short while, four vehicles were sighted nearing towards the rally place. All eyes turned towards that scene. Vehicles stopped quite short distance from the rally place. Vijay Pal Singh and other people alighted of the vehicles and slowly walked towards the podium welcoming the people with folding

both the hands. He blessed with putting his hands on the heads of people those touched his feet.

Vijay Pal Singh stepped slowly on the podium. Clad white *kurta payajama*, Nepali cap on head and long light yellow scarf around the neck, he waved the public and then plopped on chair. Slogans were continuously hurled by the party workers in his praise. The programme resumed only on stopping the slogans and the public became silent. Then garlanding function started. Colonel Rawat was sitting next to Vijay Pal Singh. Dr. Joshi was also seen seated on the podium. He was talking with Vijay Pal Singh with smiling face. Meanwhile, speeches on podium were going on.

All of sudden, deafening sounds of *Dhol* and *Nagaras* were heard. Figures in small groups donning with traditional dress and performing traditional dancing were seen advancing towards the podium. Rajender Dhyani was leading the procession. Public turned their skulls towards them. Programme got interrupted for a while. Slogans again hurled in praise of Rajender Dhyani.

Vijay Pal Singh, Colonel Rawat and others were seemed forlorn on this unexpected development and reactions were clearly seen on their faces. When Rajender Dhyani was brought on the podium, only then the programme resumed. Leaders delivered short speeches. I too delivered impressive speech, in which I praised and appreciated the wonderful tasks done by Vijay Pal Singh. Most of the speakers praised Vijay Pal Singh, but the speech orated by me was unique and received lot of clapping of the crowd.

To make impression on villagers, Colonel Rawat delivered the concluding speech in local dialect. In his speech, Rajender Dhyani proclaimed that the tickets should be allotted to those

who actually represented the public, struggled for public cause and participated in Uttarakhand agitation.

Vijay Pal Singh, in his speech made allegations on the state government for maladministration. He tossed lot of assurances in public that he will make this region Switzerland of India on getting power. He will work towards rapid development of this region in such a way to eradicate backwardness completely from the region.

After the rally, Vijay Pal Singh asked me to visit him at Delhi. Meanwhile, Gajender succeeded in gathering the signatures of other executive members on application form. In this way, we hit a major obstacle of our way.



Rajender Dhyani was too considered as a strong claimant from Dhumakot. He was active in public for the last three to four years and his posters were too seen at shops, walls, bus stands off and on.

Rajender was also associated with Uttarakhand agitation. He always managed to show his presence in Jantar Mantar and too managed to get a chance in delivering speech whenever any *dharana* or demonstration organized by others. It was another matter he always had scarcity of his own party workers.

He too participated actively in Uttarakhand movement. His photos and news were found space off and on in newspapers. It was said he developed ample interactions with journalists, so they used to give enough space to his news in their local dailies.

On the final phase of Uttarakhand agitation, Rajender joined hands with Virender Singh Bhandari and instrumented in

activating the agitation, that helped steering the public-trend towards the party. Being the right hand of Virender Singh Bhandari, he became eye sore for Vijay Pal Singh. Since then, Vijay Pal Singh was in search of a suitable alternate in place of him. At last, he succeeded and found a retired Colonel of army suited for the purpose.

Rajender Dhyani was purely a politician. He always found glued with a political party right from the beginning. Being an office-bearer of Sanyukt Sangharsh Samity, he played active role and handled media desk tactfully.

After the declaration of separate Uttarakhand, he made Dhumakot Constituency as his work place for politics and constantly showed his interest towards local public. He used to organize *dharanas* and demonstration on local issues such as electricity, water, roads and so on in region. Once few names of voters were found missing in voter lists. He launched massive agitation for the inclusion of the names in voters list. Thus, he always managed to keep himself on headlines on local dailies and public mind too.

Off and on his photos, posters were also seen pasted at walls, market places and schools. He made an impressive impact on the party workers in Dhumakot. Now he assumed himself as claimant that no other candidate could stand in comparison to him.

But some other plans were revolving in the mind of Vijay Pal Singh. He was not in favour of giving ticket to Rajender from Dhumakot, as he was loyalist of Virender Singh Bhandari. He determined to introduce Colonel Rawat in front of public. So, wherever he visited or roamed the region, Colonel Rawat used to glue with him. In this way, he was able to get good deal

of support from the ex-servicemen of region, whose strength was not neglected.

As Rajender Dhyani came to know about the intention of Vijay Pal Singh offering ticket to Colonel Rawat, he became stunned. He never expected this sort of treatment towards him. Immediately he rushed to Virender Singh Bhandari. He assured him of full cooperation. But his assurance did not soothe his heart.

Now he got a golden chance to show his strength and ability of his candidature in front of public in Dhumakot. Within two days, he made two hundred people assembled along with classical drums, traditional dressing and joined rally with explosive entry. In that rally he roared to decide the candidate by public of the region, not by any leader.



One group within party concentrated around Vijay Pal Singh. Despite his consecutive defeats in last two elections, his influence in the party was not diminished and faded. He was still an important personality of Garhwal region. His position didn't dip because of veteran leader Jata Shankar's blessings. His position got slightly depleted only when Virender Singh Bhandari was able to turn the mood of public towards party during the final phase of on-going agitation. He was discontented with the extra enthusiastic activities and role of Virender Singh Bhandari in his region. He didn't like the interference of others in his parliamentary constituency of Pauri.

To make contest a retired Colonel from Dhumakot, it was clear signal that Vijay Pal Singh was determined to encash ex-

servicemen votes from the region. He was not in favour of Rajender at any cost, as he was loyal of Virender Singh Bhandari and so may create trouble for him in future. From Thalisan, he was planning to drag a Brahmin industrialist hailed from Bombay to encash the Brahmins votes. For this, he totally ignored the claim of a veteran ex-minister Mahimanand Nautiyal, that devoted his entire life for the party and in social service.

In Bironkhal, his first choice was Dr. Joshi, but I disturbed all the equations. He presumed me a loyal to Virender Singh Bhandari, as I also joined hands with him in the fag end of Uttarakhand movement days.



On receiving positive response from Dhumakot rally, on appointed day Gambhir Singh, Gajender and I flocked towards the residence of Vijay Pal Singh. Fortunately on that day Vijay Pal Singh was available. He welcomed us informally.

“Garimajee, you impress the public very much. I appreciate your dynamic speech. Well done and keep it up.” Vijay Pal Singh said few words in my praise. This made me enthuse and a stretch of smile slide on my lips.

“Sir, it was not a speech. It was the agony of our struggle that we felt during the agitation. I only put that agony in front of public.” I replied apparently. I could not decide what to say. “I am not inclined to contest election but our agitators opined that if one can fight for the movement then why desist to contest elections. After all, we also did some sort of work for development of Uttarakhand.” I was over-whelmed on being appreciated by Vijay Pal Singh.

“Dream of Uttarakhand is fulfilled only because of the struggle done by people like you. I have no doubt on this.” Replied Vijay Pal Singh in appreciation and nodded.

“We constantly ventured to meet you, sir. Several messages also dropped at your office.” Said Gajender gently.

“I was busy in my own task at that time and in Dhumakot it was not possible to talk at length. Crowd was good enough on that day too.” Vijay Pal Singh uttered. After a pause he added, “On that day Rajender did such a mischief.” He vented out his anguish grudgingly.

“I don’t know why he is blaming me for the ticket, and that too in front of public-gathering. Decision on ticket distribution will be taken by senior people of party, and not by me. I don’t understand why he is so eager to show his strength in public that is ridiculous.” He added and waved his hand.

“At least such an act must not be performed in front of public.” I said in a slow voice and nodded.

“It may also send wrong signal to public and that too at the fag time of elections.” Said Gajender in my support.

“What is the position in Bironkhal? Whose name is going to be recommended by you, Sir.” Asked Gambhir Singh smilingly and tried to steer the conversation to other side.

“I am going to recommend all the names.” Vijay Pal Singh laughed apparently. “Decision is to be taken by the high command, not by me. My role is nothing on that part.” Replied Vijay Pal Singh sheepishly.

“Sir, you are the reputed leader of entire Garhwal and how dare party ignore your words?” I tried to please him. “Owing to pressing demand from agitators, I too make my mind to file the

paper from the party. If I get moral support of your side, I certainly succeed. Sir, I can't give you guarantee, but can assure you to make it." I added.

"I have no doubt on your capabilities of bagging the seat. I judge this on your ardent speech and that is why I promise you to visit me in Delhi." With these words Vijay Pal Singh stood up of his chair.

"Sir, if you recommend my name to high command, it will be easier for me." Bringing a smile on face I said hesitatingly, haltingly.

"Of course, I will try my best. And best of luck to you." With these words, he stepped in.

On getting such assurance, we left the place in delighted mood. Our intention was that if Vijay Pal Singh didn't give any clear assurance, at least he should not poke his nose in the matter. That was enough for us.



On receiving positive response on the part of Vijay Pal Singh, I made up my mind firmly for elections with full enthusiasm. A meeting was summoned in haste. Office bearers of organization gave assurance on their part. Letters from other organizations were also poured in expressing their whole-hearted support. Letters and New Year greetings were also dropped to *pradhan*, *pramukh*, party workers. A Curriculum Vitae (CV) with full details of activities performed by me during Uttarakhand agitation was too prepared.

Once again we met Virender Singh Bhandari and transpired him the factual position on Bironkhal.

List of potential candidates was received at party office, Dehradun, that were to send Delhi later on. By now, 14 candidates were approaching for one ticket. Contacts were also made through other sources to Vijay Pal Singh for seeking his support to me.

Meanwhile, Vijay Pal Singh shown his reluctance towards my candidature and revealed someone about my non-acquaintances in Bironkhal region. Thus, it was a clear indication of Vijay Pal Singh for not favouring me and already made up his mind on Dr. Joshi for ticket.

His reluctance created confusion and uncertainty amongst us. We again summoned a meeting in haste and discussed the matter at length. The matter was pinching everyone badly.

In between, all the fourteen names were recommended for the ticket to party office. These names were to be discussed at party office. I was in high spirit, as amongst the names, nobody was seen capable enough to challenge my claim. In the list of candidates of opposition parties, there was also no strong enough candidate to challenge me. Now I was waiting for the party ticket eagerly.

“Now we should file nomination without any further delay. Thinking on ifs and buts will confuse us more.” Said Bhubneshwar in a little loud tone.

“Bhubneshwarjee, if we are able to get party ticket, matter will be entirely different.” Replied Gajender in convincing tone.

Bhubneshwar was also calculating other candidates in mind. He said while counting in his fingers, “Dr. Joshi will never win the election because public is fed up with his costlier treatment. His image in public is not so good. Hardayal Singh’s image is quite good, but he too cannot stand against us. Now

take master Data Ram. He himself will quit before filing the paper. Someone instigated him. Biru Bhai is liquor mafia. He may get votes from eight-nine villages only and that is enough for him. Laxman Singh may also get votes from nearby villages of Timili. Other candidates are negligible.” Said Bhubneshwar in a rough analysis.

“If Vijay Pal Singh himself filed the paper. What will be the next step?” Quipped Jaiprakash and looked around.

“Then our game will over. There is no need to fight election.” Replied Gajender nodding his head.

“Can you imagine that such a reputed and heavy weight leader will fight for such a tiny assembly election? Will he not feel ashamed?” Laughed Gambhir Singh uproariously.

“Anything can happen in politics.” Replied Gajender with a laugh.

“Whether any party offers me ticket or not, I vow to jump in elections. How dare Vijay Pal Singh tell nobody know us in hills.” I replied becoming little anguished.

“Now we gauge other parties too.” Said Bhubneshwar and continued, “Sureshanand of ruling party is not contesting from here. Master Prem Singh is light candidate. Of course, if Varun Dev is able to grab the ticket, he may hack some votes and perhaps may give a tough fight.”

All were listening him patiently, attentively.

“I suggest we start preparations right now. Rest depends on wish of the Almighty.” Said Bhubneshwar in firm words.

“We also have good contacts with other organizations, as we swirl the agitation. They must help out us. People too know

our work. All these contestants are nowhere stand in front of us.” Said Gambhir Singh and waved his hand.

“The list is now sending to Dehradun, where all contestants will be summoned for interview. The candidate they find suitable, name of that will be forwarded to Delhi.” Said Gajender and took a cursory glance around.

“And what after that.” Asked Jaiprakash eagerly.

“After the recommendations of election committee, screening committee, tickets will be finalized by party high command. Views of Vijay Pal Singh and Virender Singh Bhandari will also be taken about the candidates. Then candidates will be interviewed and final decision will be taken by the party president.” Explained Gajender in detail.

“So, first of all, we have to approach members of these committees and make contact them.” Said Gambhir Singh and nodded his head.



We were at task of preparing CV and list of jobs done by me, particularly during agitation. Few papers were in the hands of Gajender, some were with Jaiprakash and rest was taken by me myself. We were comparing the details.

“November 1993 – Formation of Uttarakhand Jan Morcha.”

“31st August 1994 – Massive demonstration at Golmethi Chowk.”

“23rd August 1994 – Participation in the first rally at Jantar Mantar and lathi charged by police.

Jaiprakash pointed out these points one-by-one and Gajender noted down simultaneously on a blank paper.

“Bhai Sahab, when I participated in the first rally of your organization, I remember that day very well. On that very day, rain was on its full swing, people were not more than thousand but they were in full enthusiasm. In that year, my both the siblings were small and one was around one-and-a-half year and other was of three years. I left them home to attend the said rally.” I said pointing towards my teens standing next to me and were now around fourteen-fifteen years.

“Next point. Preparation for 2nd October 1994 rally with great zeal. Set up of Uttarakhand Mahila Jan Morcha for women’s participation in movement.

“In 1995 – *Jail Bharo Andolan*, *Ansan* in temporary jail in Kidwai Nagar and Tihar Jail.”

“Bhai Sahab, those days are very memorable. In Kidwai Nagar temporary Jail, when police harassed the gent agitators, all of us protested it strongly beating the utensils. After that, we were shifted to Tihar Jail. We also went on hunger strike there. As a result, they served us good meals. Our toilet cubic was made cleaned daily. Kanta Didi used to entertain us singing Garhwali folks.” I was narrating the incident in such a way that it occurred recently.

“Bhabhiji, when you were inside the jail, we were participating from outside by delivering banana, tea, biscuits to you people and bidi-cigarettes, betel-leaf to gents. You made us tired running outside. We were to stay outside the jail till eleven in the night and next day at nine morning we reassumed outside the jail at your services.” Announced Jaiprakash praising the task during that period.

“I also ate bread and *channas* in jail and hurled the slogan ‘*Jab tak jail me chhanna rehenga, aana jaana laga rehenga.*’ Said Gambhir Singh patting the shoulder of Jaiprakash and laughed aloud.

Just then Harish Bisht entered in room from nowhere and announced in cheerful voice, “Good news for all of us. Vijay Pal Singh has decided not to contest the elections and probably Garimajee’s ticket is now confirmed. This is cent percent true.” Then he turned towards me with folding hands. Gambhir Singh made room for him to sit.

All glanced at him and felt relaxed on his soothing news.

“Tell me the next point.” Asked Gajender in curiosity.

“Nyaya Rally”

“Dharna at Jantar Mantar”

“Effigy burning”

“Rally in support of Udham Singh Nagar”

“We did that much of jobs during Uttarakhand agitation, did Vijay Pal Singh and others do such kind of task.” quipped Harish Bisht thumbing his hand on the table.

“Brother, it is called politics. In politics zero becomes hero, and hero becomes zero. But we are not amongst those people who show their back in battle.” Said Gambhir Singh in a loud voice.



The question about unknowing me in Uttarakhand was really a serious matter. If it came out from an ordinary man then it was nothing serious, but if it came out of the mouth of Vijay Pal Singh, also in-charge of Pauri, was very grave and it meant he, at

any cost, will not advocate my name for ticket. Instead, he will mount pressure on committee members for not allotting ticket to me. These words were constantly clattering in our skulls.

Members of overseeing team from Delhi was also on their visit in Uttarakhand and were gathering information about the trend of public, suitability and capability of candidates from markets, bus stands, tea shops and other public places. On the basis of their report, tickets were to be allotted to the candidates. As soon as I came to know about this news, I instantaneously wheeled to hills for making public contact programme. At this time, I made appeal to the public that population of female is more rather than that of male, so a lady member should be given ticket from this region. I also appealed that being an agitator and combatant; I applied for candidature and wished to ascertain the support from this region.



Party workers and office bearers in the region were forlorn, discontented with the attitude of Vijay Pal Singh, as he didn't lend his ear to the affairs and the problems of the party workers. He showed his presence only after five years, just at the nick time of elections, and remained disappeared from the area rest of the period. As a result, the party workers had to face the ire of public. They were also very dissatisfied with the assurance of ticket to Dr. Joshi. They now wanted to teach a lesson to Vijay Pal Singh.

In Maithanaghat, party workers expressed their unhappiness, displeasure openly. Sudarshan Singh was president of youth brigade. Whenever the party organized any *dharna* or demonstration, he used to be summoned for arrangements. But at the time of distribution of tickets, he was totally ignored by

the party. Apart of this, the recommendation for the ticket was made to a person like Dr. Joshi, whose reputation in public was not good. He could not win the seat at any cost, despite all their best efforts. Their reputation was also ruining among the other opposition parties.

Sudarshan was running a grocery shop in market and his family was entirely depended on it. People from nearby villages used to pour in his shop to purchase essential commodities, household items. In this way, his shop-keeping business as well as public relations kept on going simultaneously. With the on-going public contact, Sudarshan became a well-known figure in region.

He was very much impressed with our views. After having a look on newspaper clipping and cuttings, he was very much influenced with my tasks and achievements.

After a short while, few more people also gathered in his shop and threw eyes on paper cuttings and went through the files of newspaper clippings. They too impressed with the viewpoint of agitators.

“We want exactly that kind of combatant to come forward from the society and represent Bironkhal region.” Said Sudershan in assurance.

“Madam, had you come six or seven months earlier, then the matter would have been entirely different. At this short period, it is very difficult to divert the minds of people, particularly those are bind to their parties.” Said Girish in a thoughtful manner.

“Had I made my mind earlier to contest the elections, then I would have prepared myself in that way. But now agitators are

pressing me hard for contesting, so come to you.” I replied in convincing way.

At that moment, few village *pradhans* also poured in shop. They put their signatures on the memorandum with their stamps as a token of support to me. Sudarshan Singh gave his support with a written letterhead and handed over it to me with an assurance to accompany us for Bajiro. Our morale was boosted high by the support offered by the public.

Two youths were also witnessing this incident attentively. Initially they did not give their ears to the conversation, but while flipping through the file clippings, all of sudden they recalled that on 2nd October 1994 Rally, after arresting police took them Paharganj Police Station and then sent all of them to Tihar Jail. Few of their acquaintances made them released from the jail on bail and gave food at Indira Park, Palam Colony and also extended money towards the expenses for their journey to reach their villages. They felt that these faces seemed to be recognized. They listened conversations eagerly and went through the paper clippings thoroughly.

One of them introduced himself with folding hands. “I am from Sili village and during the 2nd October rally you gave us a great help.” Thus he narrated the full episode and introduced me and other agitators to villagers.

“We are really happy to know your contesting from this region. We take the responsibility of Rasia Mahadev.” After this assurance they took some packets of pamphlets and kept them in their bags.

Another ex-serviceman also introduced himself. He recognized Gambhir Singh, where he was distributing food to the people during Ex-servicemen’s Rally at Firoz Shah Kotla

Maidan. He also took some packets of pamphlets and kept in his bag.

Datta Ram Barthwal was a dedicated partyman of Congress. He took active participation in each and every activity and function of party without fail. When he came to know Dr. Joshi was being recommended for the candidature from Bironkhal, he could not tolerate it at all. And in anticipation, he also filed his papers for candidature stating that in what way his candidature was inferior to that of Dr. Joshi. He developed good deal of interaction with teachers and also had grip on the schools. Teachers were also fully supporting him, as he was in teaching line. In addition, he was also member of the *Nyaya Panchayat*. He was having good deal of reputation in the region.

After finishing our task at Maithana Ghat, we wheeled towards Rikhad. Arrangements of food and stay were made there. Bhubneshwar had a grocery shop there. There was enough space for the visitors to stay in his house. I prepared *chapatti* and *sabji*. After the meals, we went to our beds. Gambhir Singh, Jaiprakash and Bhubneshwar went to the upper floor. We were in enthusiasm on today's programme. Tomorrow we were to go Bironkhal and day after tomorrow wheel to Pokhra, where a rally was being organized by the party.

Trio was reviewing their plans while on bed.

"We commit at least a big mistake. Had we visited extensively six-seven months earlier and contacted the people, situation would have been entirely different." Said Bhubneshwar lighting the cigarette.

"Of course, even then there is ample time left with us. People recognize us, they know about our work." Replied Gambhir Singh silently wrapping himself with the blanket.

“I am constantly telling Garima for the last two years to visit region, become active and show her presence. But she did not hear me at all.” Grumbled Bhubneshwar. He was also in influence of liquor. He continued, “By this time, a list of active people must have been prepared and at least Vijay Pal Singh didn’t find a chance to say adverse about her.”

“Bhubneshwarjee, forget about those words. The fact is that he is not in favour of allotting ticket to Garima, so is making this allegation.” Said Gambhir Singh cooling down his temper.

“Can anybody ask him about his participation in Uttarakhand movement? Has he done any work of sympathy towards the families of martyrs? He has amassed so much of wealth. Had he desired, he could have changed the fortune of this region.” Said Jaiprakash peeping out of the blanket.

“Public know us very well and we are also getting their response and will get in near future. Public know all those that participated in movement. At this time, our position is far better than others, as we did the work for public cause and work means work, whether it is done at Delhi or elsewhere.” Remarked Gambhir Singh taking long yawn.

“Gambhirjee is right. We should prepare for next step. Tomorrow we are to visit Bironkhal, Baijro and Vedikhal. Day after tomorrow, attend a rally at Pokhra.” Said Jaiprakash.

“Perhaps Central Supervisory team may visit there as rally is being organized as a demo of power and interested people will use their money and manpower.” Said Bhubneshwar taking a long inhale of cigarette.

“It is heard Diwakar Negi will claim his solid candidature in Pokhra and Vijay Pal Singh is also backing him strongly. That

is why rally is being organized in that particular place.” Said Jaiprakash weighing the situation.

“Whatever other people are doing let them do, we must show the list of work done by us to public.” Said Gambhir Singh. “It is too late. Let us sleep now.” He added and took a long yawn.



It was winter. The day was about to break. Birds started chirping. Murmuring of insects in jungle was also slowed down. Bell sounds of the nearby temple were sounding. Horn of a vehicle on the road was also heard. Animals’ footsteps were giving the feeling of morning. There were sounds of men going through their mid-morning drill.

Bhubneshwar took two buckets and strolled towards the water-tap along the road to fill the water.

“*Ram Ramjee.*” He overheard a sound around nearby.

“*Ram Ram.*” Replied Bhubneshwar in loud voice.

“Yesterday there was lot of conversation in market. Garima is the first preference of people. Had you people come six-seven months earlier, the equation would have been entirely different.” Said the man and neared to Bhubneshwar.

“Let us see, what will happen. All depends on Almighty”. Replies Bhubneshwar and raised his hands upwards.

He returned with two buckets of water in both hands and voiced everybody to get ready.

In Bironkhal Block Office, SDM and other officials were demonstrating how to operate Electronic Voting Machines

(EVM). Massive crowd crammed in a huge hall and officials were demonstrating how to cast the vote, which button was to press and so on. Key party workers, party agents, *pradhans*, *pramukhs* and others were witnessing this demonstration in curiosity. Scores of ladies were also present there. Outside the hall, Gajender was gathering the signatures of villagers on a paper-sheet for supporting me. A good deal of enthusiasm and zeal in people, especially ladies, was seen that at least one lady was in fray from Bironkhal.



FOUR

I dug back into my memory. There was a grocery shop of a local leader of a reputed party few streets ahead of mine. He was having a post too in party. Although he was supporter of separate Uttarakhand, yet he used to instigate the public against us. He made afraid the people by saying – don't participate any rally, police may can you, there may be chances of bullet-firing, police may put you behind the bars, nobody will come for your rescue then how you will look after your families and so on.

Even then people didn't gave ear to his words. We organized series of rallies, but never gave any chance of such occurrence. Our aim was to pressurise the government to fulfill our demand so we used to demonstrate peacefully and show our anguish. There was no enmity with police then why we fought with them.

People knew the deeds of that local leader. Whenever his party organized any demonstration, he used to hire a bus for that, but his bus remained empty and only 10-12 people seen sitting, whereas our tempo was fully packed with 40 people.

That year we announced election boycott and vowed to boycott that Uttarakhandi leaders attending public-meeting and promising for separate state for vote-purpose. If they really wished to fulfill the demand, so to discuss it in Parliament or Vidhan Sabha, why in public-meeting.

That local leader totally ignored our declaration. He was determined to hold a public-meeting in Ramleela maida, near his vicinity. Inviting few

senior Uttarakhandi leaders, he thought to capture hill-people votes. For that, he manned few goons, musclemen and stalwarts.

We also determined to teach him a lesson. In evening, the public-meeting began. Lot of public assembled, as he spent lot of money. Large number of hill-people too crowded as hill-leaders were invited. All the leaders were seen sitting on chairs gracefully and speeches were airing all around. Two-three Uttarakhandi leaders were also sitting with them cautiously. Their eyes were revolving around. The local leader was too happy as today he made gathered lot of people even then was suspicious inwardly. He was repeatedly moving his skull around and sometimes alighted from the podium to instruct the party workers.

We too melted in the crowd and sat down silently. In between, a leader stood up to speech. Initially, he talked about here and there, but as he switched on to separate Uttarakhand state issue and made promise, we stood up in protest, as to why he was discussing here and why he did not put the matter in Parliament or Vidhan Sabha. In support of us, few more too stood up and hurled the slogans of boycott. Few people jostled with goons and musclemen, but at last the speeches on podium disrupted badly.

Uttarakhandi leaders felt it better to slip silently. One by one they got down of the podium in the fear of disgracing with the hands of public. We fulfill our aim and hurling slogans returned safely.

Today, football ground at Pokhra had become hive of activities and hustles. A rally of scheduled castes and other backward classes was being organized there. This rally was organized in support of the opposition party. A sizable podium was made at one corner of the huge ground, where thirteen-fourteen chairs were placed. It was presumed that reputed leaders would participate to attract scheduled castes votes. Cutouts of Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru were also hanging at corners of the ground. Well-decorated Pokhra bazaar today seemed to be very beautiful.

Sound of patriotic songs were making the people emotional and increasing glory of market. Public was now gradually milling around the podium.

I was busy in chatting with agitators in a teashop. Harish Bisht and Shakuntala Rawat were too arrived there. Both of them had good acquaintance in Pokhra. They introduced me and other agitators to locals that filled me in enthuse and zeal.

Harish Bisht was a dedicated activist of Uttarakhand agitation. He participated actively in agitation and devoted himself for this cause. He always remained prepared and made himself available for any task at any time. His long curly hair, average height, round and joyous face always attracted everyone. He had good interactions and acquaintances in Pokhra, as his native village was too near Pokhra. He was distributing the pamphlets amongst the public and also introducing me to them.

On the other side, Jaiprakash was busy in preparing photocopies of credentials of mine that were to distribute the public.

After a short while, we strolled towards rally site. Shakuntala Rawat soon introduced me to other ladies. The ladies those participated in agitation, known me very well but other village ladies did not know me so well. Gajender and Gambhir Singh were seen talking to the coordinators of the rally to insert my name in orators' list. Coordinators were known to them very well and so my name was inserted immediately. To attract the crowd and to make engage the public, speeches of local and mini leaders were being blowing. In between, I and other agitators started distributing the pamphlets and interacting with the public.

Just then, few people in the form of small crowd were seen advancing towards the podium. Among the other leaders, Vijay

Pal Singh was walking ahead of them. On the ground, slogans “*Vijay Pal Singh Jindabad* – live long Vijay Pal Singh” were hurled. As the crowd neared the podium, suddenly few youth raised the slogans “*Diwakar Bhai Sangharsh Karo, hum tumhara sath hai.*” – keep the struggle on, we are with you. Near the stage, ladies welcomed the Vijay Pal Singh, Janki Prashad and other leaders. After a while, another slogan “*Garimajee Sangharsh Karo, Hum Tumhara Sath Hai*” – Keep the struggle on, we are with you – was hurled and atmosphere grew warmer. I was not expecting that kind of welcome for me. It seemed that it made uncomfortable Vijay Pal Singh and he walked towards the podium in anguish.

Shekhawat, a member of central supervisory team, was also screening the activities closely and kept his eyes deeply on the situation. His eyes caught me controlling and handling the crowd, particularly the ladies. He was expected to give the ground reality of the potential candidates to the high command.

As the time passed by, one by one most of orators delivered their speeches, except me. Vijay Pal Singh perhaps removed my name from the list of speakers. So far no potential candidate could be able to put his views impressively, strongly in front of public. Hardayal Singh, Dr. Joshi and Diwakar Negi also delivered their speeches. At the last moment, Vijay Pal Singh himself grabbed the mike in hand. Perhaps he did not want to give chance to other speakers, as only I was remnant one to deliver the speech.

Without paying any etiquette to spectators, he started “Brothers and sisters, I will make Bironkhal one of the best regions in Uttarakhand. I have a vision and I am mulling over it. I will try to make this region as Switzerland of the country and

will set an example in history.” Likewise he made many old and torn out promises before the public.

He further added, “Our region is very backward and I will try to provide employment opportunities to youth so to stop migration. I will try hard to make this region as VIP, eradicate poverty and backwardness, establish large number of small industries, connect each and every village with motorable roads, and provide potable water to all villages. I will try to electrify each and every village, open schools and colleges for better education. For generating employment, I will open polytechnique institutes everywhere with employment-oriented courses for the youth.”

One or two people sitting in front row began clapping, so public had to clap unwillingly, as they were fed-up hearings such stereotyped old and torn out promises of the mouth of Vijay Pal Singh and others for years.

As he concluded his one-hour boring speech, unrest felt amongst the ladies. Few of them stood up from their places and voiced, “Give right to ladies to speak. Give a chance to Garima to speak.”

Vijay Pal Singh deliberately ignored their voices. On witnessing such a reluctant attitude, other ladies also rose from their places and stormed towards podium hurling slogans, “*Garimajee Sangharsh Karo, Hum Tumhare Sath Hai*”— keep on struggle Garima, we are with you. Lot of uproar and pandemonium created around the podium and in the rally as well. I was amazed and aghast to witness the scene and was in perplexed.

Janki Dass, Sekhawat and other senior leaders became stunned on witnessing such an awkward situation. At last, unwillingly Vijay Pal Singh had to give two minutes to me.

I stepped gently towards podium. Taking the mike in hand, I started, “Dear Sisters and brothers, by virtue of your strong voice, I have been given two minutes time to talk to you.” Claps ran through the crowd. “Our mothers and sisters took active participation in agitation and at last succeeded. I thank them wholeheartedly and never forget their sacrifices. The whole burden of the family lay down on the shoulders of ladies, as most of the gents had to move towns for earnings and employment. Once again I whole-heartedly appeal to all the mothers and sisters to come forward for their rights and struggle for it. We have to struggle once again for the development of region.” And adding few enthusiastic slogans, I concluded the speech.

Crowd broke into continuous applause. Face of the Vijay Pal Singh turned sour, contorted in agony. He had not received one-fourth of the applause on his one-hour speech so delivered earlier. I saw clearly the reactions on his face.

Arrangement for light refreshment was made at the other corner of the ground. On dispersal of rally, I handed over a bunch of papers to Vijay Pal Singh, duly signed by *pradhans*, *pramukhs* extending their support to me for contesting from Bironkhal. He gave me a dirty look, took the papers unwillingly and passed it on to his personal staff without having a look.

On witnessing such reluctant behaviour, I sensed that he was in favour of giving the ticket to some other else instead of me. Shekhawat openly praised me in front of many leaders and took my credentials. Janki Dass also took copies of my credentials and fully assured for recommending my name to the party election committee.



Nowadays, lot of hustle-bustle was also going on in party office in Delhi. Some sort of activities usually happened daily there but in comparison to other days, nowadays there was good deal of crowd clustered around the party headquarter. Roads were completely encroached by the vehicles. Inner side parks and lawns were crammed with public. Long queues for tea, *samosa* and meals were seen in canteen. Wherever the eyes run, scores of people clad with *khadi kurtas and payajamas* were seen punching the keys of phone, talking on mobiles in loud voices and strolling around.

Forthcoming assembly elections were the reason behind this. From here tickets were to be allotted. Meetings of election committee and screening committee of party were held off and on there. Each member was allocated a separate cubic, even then they never available at their places. In lawns, supporters of potential candidates were roaming impatiently. Someone was munching groundnuts, whereas some other was relaxing on the benches. At times, hurling of slogans were overheard. A person was selling flags, caps, badges, cutouts of senior leaders as well as past reputed leaders. Few salesmen were also selling *khadi kurta and payajama*, caps and banners inside the party office. Groundnuts, *chana, chhola bhature* venders were in happy mood, as their sales shoot up high nowadays.

Outside the main gate, a middle-aged lady was lecturing aloud standing on a high wall. She was claiming herself a devoted party-worker and for the last twenty years she was participating in each and every function, activity of party. But at the fag time of ticket allotment, some other snatched the ticket, instead of her. Now to whom she made complaint about this injustice. She was very upset on the injustice paid towards her and was crying desperately waving both the hands. A good deal of crowd was milling around her.

An aged man, with patched clothes with Nehru cap on skull was holding a huge party flag on his shoulder. It was said that he used to flock there daily without fail for the last fifteen-sixteen years with this flag and returned only at evening.

In the middle lawns, Sikhs of Punjab were sitting in queues. Food was served to them on leaf plates. Ten to twelve persons were performing this task.

Whenever any vehicle wheeled in, eyes of crowd used to turn apparently towards the main gate and they flocked towards that vehicle wildly.

Outside Room No.15, information about candidates of Uttarakhand was pasted on a notice board. A list of election committee, screening committee members with their names and addresses were also displayed on the notice board. Names of the legislative assemblies with areas so were also pasted. An officer was occupying the seat, but was not in a position to give any firm information about the tickets. Chief Election Commissioner had already announced the dates for filing the nomination, submission, withdrawing the names, voting. Now only four days were left and people still chasing for the tickets here and there.

I and few other agitators were also roaming wildly there for the last seven or eight days in the hope of releasing final list. For the last three days, we visited various members of screening committee, election committee and other dignitaries of the party and got full assurance on their behalf. Curriculum Vitae and other details of task done by me were also given to them. Several talks too took place with Virender Singh Bhandari at his residence. We also met the veteran leader Jata Sankar several times. It was hoped I will be able to grab the ticket. Somewhere news flashed that four persons were in the race but my name

was on top. At times, news came out that the screening committee approved the list and now it was laid with the election committee for consideration and because of the interference of Vijay Pal Singh, Bironkhal Constituency was regarded as the most sensitive seat.

Next day, the long awaited list was released. In this list, name of Bironkhal candidate was not displayed. I became bitterly disappointed. Suddenly, exciting news flashed that Vijay Pal Singh revolted and formed a new party. He also issued another list of seventy candidates. These rumours were afloat all around.

This incidence gave setback to party as well as me. Few people rushed to Vijay Pal Singh. He was dissatisfied for not allotting tickets to his men and loyalists. A follower of Vijay Pal Singh was openly showing the list of seventy candidates in public.

On the other hand, ruling party BJP had announced the names of its candidates. They were expecting confirmed ticket for me from Bironkhal. Keeping this point in mind, party allotted ticket to a lady member, named Rajeshwari from Bironkhal, whereas there were several other capable candidates above her. Sitting MLA and minister Sureshanand played vital role in this drama and he himself slipped to another safest place Thalissain, instead of Bironkhal. That's why he didn't take any interest in development, schemes and other tasks in Bironkhal region for long. People from Dumaila Talla visited him several times in connection with the motorable road to their village and once they dragged him their village to witness the factual position. Even then, he did not show any interest towards their demand, as he didn't want to contest from Bironkhal so tried to avoid resolving any local issues, problems deliberately.

There were many strong enough candidates in ruling party BJP. One of them was Varun Dev. He was teacher in a school and was in process of making his position strong in party. He made his special identity in Bironkhal. Afraid of his inflating influence within party, Sureshanand made transferred him out to a far-flung village school on promotion to make Bironkhal beyond his proximity, and also made obliged to him for this favour.

The image of Rajeshwari was not so impressive in party. By offering ticket to her, Sureshanand intended to kill two birds with one stone. If she wins the election, entire credit goes to him, and if losses, then defame may fall on the heads of party workers or high command. He was the old fox of the politics since long.

There was another strong candidate in party, named Dilwar Singh. He had a grocery shop in Maithana Ghat and used to take active part in each and every organizational activities of party. He was the loyalists of Harshvardhan, the MP of region so had a little distance with Sureshnand. Dilwar Singh gave a new identity to the party in region and made direct access to local people. Once he was jobless youth, thrown away by city. He didn't able to get any job in city, so ventured to earn his livelihood in village. He, however, was able to open a grocery shop. The shop didn't run long, as there was scarcity of customers in village and their purchasing power was also poor. He was cooperative, sociable, and jolly by nature and easily mingled with villagers, particularly in their sorrows and joy. Whenever any work carried out in village, such as, repair of pathway, laying or repairing of water pipe, social, religious or marriage functions, he always participated actively on these functions and mixed up with the people. Owing to his helping personality and cooperative nature, he became a familiar face in

nearby villages. Earlier he applied for a job in bank, but could not strike. His honesty and dedication caught the attention of bank manager and he offered him a loan for self-employment. And with this loan, he opened a small grocery shop in Maithana Ghat. Villagers helped him out by all means in transiting material and luggage in Maithana Ghat.

As the time dragged by, so the shop got established and gradually his business flourished and met with success. Apart of this, his interaction and familiarity spread around far-flung villages. Now he started taking interest in local politics and became a dedicated worker of ruling party BJP. He initiated each and every activity for the expansion of party in region. Soon party offered him the post of block president of the region as a token of his dedication and hard work. Now he was also strongly hoping for ticket and for that he was prepared mentally by all ways and means.

In the allotment of tickets, Sureshanand applied his influence and kept his hand upper totally ignoring the MP of region. He tactfully cornered all his opponents one by one and gave the ticket of Bironkhal constituency to an unknown lady, whose image was also not much better within party. In the neighboring Dhumakot constituency too, ticket was allotted to a Delhi based leader Ratnamani Semwal, instead of a local reputed leader of the region, whereas fewer people knew Semwal in the region.

As the ticket allotted to Rajeshwari, a wave of dissatisfaction and resentment grew in the ruling party workers. They openly revolted against the party decision. At this stage, they assumed themselves as defeated without contesting the election. There were lots of capable and reputed candidates in the party. Despite that, ticket was given to an unknown lady

member, that neither had any experience in public, nor capable even in delivering a speech in public. That fact was unbearable and intolerable to the party workers.



Opposition party Congress in hills was also divided in two groups. One group was milling around Virender Singh Bhandari, and the other group clustered around Vijay Pal Singh, that was getting blessings of Jata Shankar, a veteran leader for long.

Because of his anti-Uttarakhand image, Virender Singh Bhandari lost Lok Sabha elections thrice consecutively. As a result, he was totally ignored and neglected in party. Party too went to oblivion.

To save his existence, he realized his mistake and pulled down the slogan of Hill Council. Feeling the sentiments and aspirations of public and delicacy of time he immediately stood in the queue of supporters for separate Uttarakhand. To materialize it, first of all, he made pressure on his party high command for passing a resolution towards creation of separate state. Fortunately, in party convention, the resolution was passed unanimously. And in this way he made realized the public of his not being against the separate state, but his party high command. After passing the resolution, he grabbed an inactive agitating organization, revived it and ultimately got benefitted. In the back of that, he came to public in the form of an agitator and integrated other outfits in it. In the final stage of agitation, he organized series of *dharanas*, demonstrations and made it more energetic. He injected new energy and strength in the movement and boosted the morale of people high. At last he gained instantaneous advantage as party workers also joined him and public also supported him wholeheartedly. Gradually, the

public opinion polarized towards his party. In order to prevent polarization of public and to check the agitation, the BJP government at Centre had to announce separate Uttarakhand state.

Party also gifted Virender Singh Bhandari offering the post of president in Uttarakhand region. As a result, his grip on party became tightened. He was now interfering arbitrarily in the home district of Vijay Pal Singh. He intended to clutch maximum tickets for his loyalists and corner Vijay Pal Singh within party organization. As Virender Singh Bhandari tasked the job of upbringing the party to a comfortable position, he was now planning to encash it in the forthcoming elections.

On the other side, Vijay Pal Singh had little experience in politics. He amassed lot of wealth, assets and so there was no dearth of dedicated workers with him. These workers formed an organized cadre for him. He was very upset with the upswing influence of Virender Singh Bhandari in the party.

Gajender, Gambhir Singh, Harish Bisht, Bhubneshwar, I along with others were regularly frequenting the party headquarters for the last ten-twelve days. Daily unusual stories were afloat there. Every morning, photocopies of CV and particulars were taken to hand over the VIPs. My supporters tried to meet the members of screening committee and election committee. Gajender arranged a Maruti car and a mobile for this purpose. Other people used to come with their own vehicles, scooters to accompany us. Whenever any news flashed, we rushed towards that place. Member of supervision committee, Shekhawat tabled his report before the screening committee and election committee, ranking me on top. We were fully assured of getting the ticket. Now we met another member of the screening committee and transpired him in detail our activities

during the agitation. At evening, we flocked to Jatashankar, the veteran leader of the party, at his residence, but failed to meet, as he was unwell, as transpired by his staff.

Next morning, I took time for appointment with one Maharaniji. It was believed Maharaniji had a good interaction and influence in the party. We put factual position before her about my claimant. Maharaniji was not holding any post in party; even then her position in party was quite impressive and had a good image too. Her approach was upto the key members of the party. She was very much impressed of me and assured of full cooperation on her part. Whenever I visited somewhere, at least six-seven people used to accompany me.

One evening we met one of leader Vivek, who came across us in connection with court cases. Impression was made on the members of committees that while allotting the tickets, weightage should be given to lady members, as they played active role in Uttarakhand Movement and their participation should not be forgotten or ignored. We gathered all the authentic proof in this regard, particularly about me and placed them before the members.

As Rajender Dhyani came to know that Vijay Pal Singh was playing vital role in allotting the tickets, he headed runningly towards his residence. He camped there for two days in the hope of melting the heart of Vijay Pal Singh so to not remove or drop his name from the proposed list. But all his efforts went in vain and at last Col Rawat was allotted the ticket from Dhumakot.

In the party office, there was an employee, who was *babu* for the last 20-25 years. He was serving the party with devotion and diligence. He knew personally each and every leaders of the party, so visited there off and on. He was also dreaming of

getting ticket from the Pauri Constituency. Plopping on his revolving chair in impressive way and revolving it around, he used to show his assured claim over his candidature from Pauri constituency. To show the proof of assurance to others about his candidature he used to chew *paan* – beetal-leaf all the day. In this gratification, he used to offer tea, *samosha* to other fellow employees and partymen, those always clustered around to praise him. Till now he spent more than two lakhs during the last six months in visits and tours to his area towards pre-election campaigning. But sudden revolt by Vijay Pal Singh made colour of his face faded and his planning seemed to be futile.

Lakhan Singh, Pushkar Singh was the other candidates from Bironkhal constituency, propagating their own names and giving wide publicity in the public. Kripal Singh was proclaiming Vijay Pal Singh as his uncle and for maintaining his sweet relationship, his uncle would offer ticket only to him. Lakhan Singh of Timili village was also made his claim over the ticket.



In the list of forty candidates, names of Bironkhal and Dhumakot were nowhere. These two were treated as disputed and decisions on the remnant were to be taken later on. Out of forty, loyalists of Vijay Pal Singh were only seven. After lot of tussle and tricks, he was able to get only seven seats, very meager to him.

When the list was shown to Vijay Pal Singh by his loyalist, his temper rose in fury. He quickly left the party office and stormed off towards his residence. Summoning urgently his loyalists and so other potential candidates of his favour he switched off all his mobile phones. An emergency meeting was called on.

“To compromise on such meager seats means leading to suicide.” Said Dr. Joshi in agitating tone and nodded.

“Virender Singh Bhandari got clear his seats tactfully making the seats of our region disputed. Even if we make more pressure, we can get hardly ten only.” Said Surender Singh Sajwan calculating in his fingers.

“And if we will able to win half of them, then we may have only eight in Vidhan Sabha.” Added Dr. Joshi glancing on the faces of others.

“It is totally injustice. Trap a reputed leader in his own district.” Cried a turban donned person.

People gathered there were chatting agitatingly in loud voices. Someone was airing the news on mobile, whereas some other was receiving.

In a room, Vijay Pal Singh was busy in a serious discussion with his loyalists in camera. Crowd was constantly increasingly at his residence. They were being served with tea. Atmosphere was totally in tense and excitement. People were mumbling in small groups.

Vijay Pal Singh stepped out of the bungalow along with two-three people grabbing few papers in hand. Arrangements of sitting for the public were made on cotton mats spread on lawns. A chair was placed for Vijay Pal Singh. Others remained stood beside him. Silencing the gathering, he signaled everyone to sit down on the mat.

Vijay Pal Singh took the mike to address the crowd, “Today’s incidence make all of us shock. It is totally injustice for us.” He took a cursory glance around, “We decide to fight the election under the banner of a separate party. The name of new party will be declared soon.”

With this declaration, atmosphere became more tense and little bit later clapping started hesitatingly. Few stood up from their places and hurled slogans in support of him. These voices turned the tense and lullness into enthusiasm and cheerfulness.

He tossed a question towards the masses, “Will you follow me?”

“Yes, we will.” These words hurled almost in one voice.

“We are compelled to go against the party and it is the conspiracy of those who don’t want to see the party in unity.” He indirectly leveled allegation against Virender Singh Bhandari without quoting his name.

“I devote my entire life for strengthening the party and irrigate it with my blood. And in anticipation, they reward me this kind of disgrace. Under these circumstances, it is better for me to take *sanyas* of the politics forever.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in a way to gain sympathy among his party workers.

“No Vijay Pal Singhjee, you should not do like this. We will not permit you doing so.” Said a man in a loud voice and rose from his place.

Others followed him and stood up from their places hurling the slogans with top of their voices, “Long live Vijay Pal Singhjee Vijay Pal Singhjee Keep on struggle, we are with you.”

“I prepare a list of seventy people. The persons whose names are in this list, will proceed tomorrow morning to their respective headquarters for filing the nomination.” Said Vijay Pal Singh showing and hurling a paper towards gathering, “I am giving one clear day’s time to high command for compromising.” With these words, he stood up and stepped inside. So did others. Few of his supporters roared in glee and chanted slogans in favour of Vijay Pal Singh.

Thus, delivering such an enthusiastic and cheerful speech, he fortified his supporters in his favour and strengthened his fort. Gatherings started chatting in small groups.

“It is right decision.” Said a supporter.

“But this act will benefit opposition. They take advantage of this. Isn’t it?” Remarked another.

“There is no option left except to revolt. Is it fair to marginalize such a reputed leader of our region?” Said another in rage.

“It will teach a good lesson to party.” Said the third one.

“If we anyhow manage to bag fifteen seats out of seventy, then we also involve in forming the new government.” Said another person calculatively.

“Now see the attitude of high command. Either expel Vijay Pal Singhjee from the party or invite for talk?” Said another in conspicuous tone. “Picture will not clear before tomorrow morning.” He added.

“Vijay Pal Singhjee did a good job of not surrendering in front of party high command.”

Entire lawn was buzzing with agitating views of people assembled there.

“If he didn’t take such bold step, then his own existence is in danger and nobody will entertain him in forthcoming elections.” Such heated voices were overheard inside the bungalow of Vijay Pal Singh. They crammed there for taking final and decisive steps.



On hearing the news of revolt by Vijay Pal Singh, high command became aghasted and stunned. Nobody was expected such kind of revolt on the part of Vijay Pal Singh, that too just four days before filing the papers. News was immediately given to the party president, who was in deep sleep that time.

A meeting was summoned in hurry wherein the party president himself was present. Virender Singh Bhandari was also summoned to attend.

“Such a revolt at the neck hours, not only send a bad message to public but also divide party workers in region.” Said the party president in a disappointing tone.

“And the entire benefit may go to opposition.” Said a senior member.

“President sir, position of party will not affect any more on such revolt, as entire public is with us. And this fact is also transpired by the supervisory committee very well. Our party is massive and its roots are in-depth.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari in aggressive words. After a pause he added, “In my opinion, those rebels must be expelled from the party for ten years right now.”

“Virenderiji, we should also listen to Vijay Pal Singh why he took such a hard step. At this crucial juncture, it is not appropriate to expel him.” Another member suggested.

“This seems to be a right suggestion. Show cause notice or expulsion may call after the elections.” Said the first one.

“Main contention is on tickets. He is demanding much more than his capacity that is fairly wrong. For the last four years, I take the party to the top position. And as a result party is now in a position to fight the elections in Uttarakhand. And Vijay Pal Singh is demanding tickets without doing any work for

the party.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari in agitated tone. “It is nothing but black mailing. On this issue party should take strict action.”

“Virenderji, please don’t become so adamant. First of all, we save the party from getting division. And if the party divides, neither you, nor Vijay Pal Singh will gain anything. We have to sort out this problem, with your consent.” Said the president politely and grinned.

“Okay, let we know in how many seats the dispute arise.” Asked the second member.

“Around eighteen-twenty seats. And the maximum seats are of agitators, those participated in Uttarakhand movement. They supported me in my difficult time and too helping in strengthening the party. Now how can I forget them?” Said Virender Singh Bhandari and put the matter strongly before the members.

“Virenderji, at present you are president of party in state and you have to bear more responsibility. Vijay Pal Singh is not ready for taking any responsibility at all. If he mulled little over it so, situation will not arise like this. Anyhow you have to adjust. Make the agitators and other companions cool offering some sort of assurances. When we will form our government, then you may have full power to do whatever you want.” Said party president giving few words of assurance.

“A wrong message will also flash to public as well as party workers that party has surrendered in front of a rebel.” Reiterated Virender Singh Bhandari.

“We will promise you, after the elections, party will take strong action against Vijay Pal Singh.” Said party president in a way of satisfying him.

“Tomorrow we are going to hold talks between you and Vijay Pal Singh to discuss the disputed seats in question at length.” Said one member in decisive words.

“As you wish! You are the supremo.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari in slow and weak words and made a bad mouth.



Virender Singh Bhandari had to agree with the party on pressure, but he was very upset and restless inwardly. He was much anguished on the matter how party was totally surrendering timidly in front of Vijay Pal Singh instead of taking strict action against him.

Two O'clock at night was given to Vijay Pal Singh for meeting or compromise so to kill all the issues before dawn.

“My seats are deducted in my own region. I am also a senior member of party and after all how long I keep myself silent. At least, I have been asked about this.” Roared Vijay Pal Singh in harsh words.

“Vijay Pal Singhjee, it is not the matter of mine and you. All the seats are of party. And you are talking about those seats on which agitators also demanding as they are having tight grip on these. They definitely make win these seats.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari in the same tone. Both exchanged a look.

“And those party members who are serving the party for years, where will they go and how can I pacify them? Will they remain silent in party?” Questioned Vijay Pal Singh clarifying his viewpoint.

“The people I recommended are too dedicated. Screening committee, election committee and supervisory team too recommended their names strongly and there is no dispute on these seats.” Virender Singh Bhandari replied the question of Vijay Pal Singh.

“I know much better than you in my region who is able to win or not.” Said Vijay Pal Singh straightaway and remained in adamant mood.

“Vijay Pal Singhjee, party has assigned me the responsibility of president of the state unit and I am performing my duties diligently. And how can I leave the party in dilemma.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari glancing towards other members.

“Vijay Pal Singhjee, you are unnecessarily becoming stubborn. You know it very well that on each seat selection of candidates is being done on the basis of merits, qualification and their activities in social field.” Said the second member in a temperate mood. He tried to convince Vijay Pal Singh.

“Sir, I tell you in clear words that in my region tickets should be allotted according to my will. I don’t like any interference. After all, I am too not interfering in others matters then why others interfering me.” Roared Vijay Pal Singh.

“How many seats do you want?” Said the first member eyeing towards him.

“All the thirty-five seats.” Said Vijay Pal Singh and nodded.

“It is totally black-mailing. We did that much of hard work for the party to rise, and at the time of election, someone else hijacks the seats. There is no compromise at this stage.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari in heated words and stood up to leave in anguish. His hackles rose.

“Vijay Pal Singhjee, you are demanding much more than your capacity. We must not throw the party in ditch. In the last fifteen years, party has hardly come in a position to clinch the power.” Said the second member showing strictness and also held the hand of Virender Singh Bhandari to make him sit.

“I am not in a position to give more than twenty.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari tactfully.

“I need all the seats from Pauri, Tehri and Haridwar. I can’t compromise in these regions at any cost.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in firm words.

“Now the matter is between both of you and the last number is twenty-seven. For the sake of party, nobody will say beyond this.” Said the first member in compromising tone.

“From Bironkhal, Dhumakot and Thalissain, tickets should be allotted to agitators and are also recommended by the election committee, screenings committee and the supervisory team. Bironkhal seat to a lady member only.” Said Virender Singh Bhandari nodding his head.

“From Bironkhal I am in favour of my wife.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in clear words.

“She is unknown within party. Who will vote her and how the party workers digest her?” Questioned Virender Singh Bhandari in reply of Vijay Pal Singh.

“You need not worry on this. I will tackle that. As far as Dhumakot and Thalissain, I am going to give the ticket to a retired colonel from Dhumakot, as he is an ex-serviceman and Rajput. And from Thalissain, the population of Brahmin voters is more and I make up my mind on a Brahmin industrialist. After all, I am also a senior member of party and too mull over

the benefit of party.” Said Vijay Pal Singh ironically. A roguish smile slid over his lips.

At the end, Vijay Pal Singh was able to captured twenty-seven seats for his loyalists. Virender Singh Bhandari was very anguished inwardly that at the time of distribution of tickets, Vijay Pal Singh is blackmailing the party on his thumb and what will happen after the elections when party will come in a position to form the government, and to what extent will he go to blackmail the party?



FIVE

In evening we returned home from the party office in despair, doomed. It was an eve of decision. Next day we have to move Pauri for filing the papers at any moment. So it was necessary to take a firm and final decision whether to take part in elections or not.

A serious discussion was going on this particular issue at my residence. After weighing up the situation, Gajender and I made up our minds not to contest. In our opinion, it will be better to sit in this changed circumstances and scenario.

“It seems it is not favourable for us to contest election. In other words, it is assumed that Vijay Pal Singh himself is fighting the election.” Said Gajender in low voice. He was in exhausted mood.

After a short while I uttered, “If Vijay Pal Singh himself fight the election, then I must file the papers against him at any cost, and then we may get good support from the public, particularly ladies. But now it seems we should take our steps back.”

Bhubneshwar was dead against the decision of retreating. From the beginning, he was strongly advocating for the preparation at least one and half years in advance. If one is

mentally prepared, then the situation may not arise like this. Signs of tension and anguish were clearly seen on his face.

He turned his skull towards me and said in stern words, “Madam, at present our position is the best amongst all. We are getting support all around, as we did the work for the public cause and public must remember it. So, we must not take our steps back and go ahead.” Then he lit a cigarette and put between the lips.

Agreeing with him Jaiprakash said apparently, “Bhubneshwarjee is right. Till date you spend more than sixty thousand in visiting and campaigning. So it is not advisable to take reverse step on account of expenses alone.”

Gambhir Singh was also in favour of going ahead. He said in hoarse voice, “We can give a tough fight. This is the first ever election of newly formed state. If we don’t put our claim this time, then who will ask next time? We people struggle hard for public cause, organize *dharanas*, demonstrations, and rallies. Public is fully aware of that so we should be firm on our earlier decision and must go ahead.”

At last, I uttered, “I appreciate your suggestions and also trust on public support. But we must keep a thing in mind that if we would be able to get the ticket from party, we also get party workers, readymade organization, well-organised and well-equipped party cadre. And that should be easier for us to propagate and I must be able to bag that seat.” After a while I added, “But now the situation and circumstances are entirely reversed. We have no strong enough organization, nor a cadre. We are marching ahead only on our credit, that we earned during movement, our social work and on public-trust on which we never come across earlier, and the main aspect is that we have no penny. On the other hand, Vijay Pal Singh has lot of

wealth. Past experience says that public never supports independent candidates at all. This is because our public likes to remain glue with big parties, whether their candidates are dacoit, duffer or criminals.”

“Madamji, we will go in field only on public faith. Everyone folds his hand on the will and wish of public and salute her. If public make its mind to make a person win, then nobody can stop her.” Said Harish apparently.

“I take the responsibility of Akeshwar block. You need not worry over that. I have good contacts and command in that area.” Vowed Gambhir Singh in firm words

Now the turn was of Bhubneshwar. He said, “I have been engaged in election campaigning since the era of Bahugunajee and participated each and every election. I know each and every part of region very well, to whom contact and what public wants. I shoulder the responsibilities of Khatli and Sabli patties of 150 villages.” And looked around.

“And I take responsibilities of Pokhra Block, that consists of 50 villages.” Said Harish in full enthusiasm waving hand.

“We may rely on Bhubneshwarjee rather than others, as he himself is living in village for long and has vast experience of participating previous elections. We take advantage of his vast experience and enthusiasm. Others are people of cities and they do not have enough knowledge about the elections.” Said Jaiprakash swiftly and grinned.

“Once we decide then must strict to our words. Till now I work for others and this time I will work for my own people.” Said Bhubneshwar in enthusiasm.

“It is heard workers of the ruling party are too unhappy over the decision of their high command. They are protesting

against Rajeshwari openly and we may get indirect advantage of that.” Said Harish in a joyous mood.

“Not only that even workers of the Congress are also discontented with Vijay Pal Singh and we may get benefit of that as they promised us for full cooperation.” Added Harish.

“We should keep in mind that party-man never go beyond his party. He has to bind with the party under any circumstances, at any cost. That is another thing he will become inactive within party.” Said Gajender laughingly.

“Dear brothers, I would like to say in clear words that I am a service class lady with a limited income and Gajenderjee is also in a private job. Neither we have any wealth, nor money to spend on elections. If I was able to get the party ticket then at least we will get banners, posters and workers free of cost.” I said waving both the hands.

“That’s correct. At least you convey your consent. All of us will task it collectively.” Said Gambhir Singh.

Gajender, while calculating in his fingers said, “Expenses on banners, papers, vehicles, meals, sound systems, if it will come around 2,500 per day. It means at the end, expenditure will be around seventy-eighty thousands.”

“That’s right. You already spend this much of amount. If we withdraw then all efforts and money will go waste.” Said Jaiprakash and nodded.

“We are getting a golden chance to go public. We should not lose this. People are aware of our capability and combativeness. We also organize successful rallies and demonstrations during the movement in difficult situations.” Said Gambhir Singh in encouraging words.

“You people boost my morale and keeping trust on me, so I am too ready for the struggle. Once decision has been taken unanimously then how can I desist.” With these words I once again announced my decision of fighting the election independently.

On my declaration, all took a long breath of relief and only then preparations for marching Pauri started.



For the last few days, pauri became hive of activities and hustles. Contesting candidates were filling their papers comparing with others to avoid mistakes. At least ten voters of the constituency were required for recommending the candidates. To arrange ten voters became difficult for me. The voters called for the task didn't reach in time. Biru Bhai was one of the candidates came for filing the papers. He was accompanied with his supporters in three-four vehicles. After filing his paper, he helped me out in facilitating ten voters in that crucial time.

Lakhan Singh and Pushkar Singh were too amongst the candidates those filed their nominations. Diwakar Negi was member of Zila Panchayat. He belonged to the nearby village of Pokhra. He also came for filing paper with great enthusiasm along with many villagers. On reaching Pauri, heavy pressure for not filing nomination was mounted on him by the followers and chips of Vijay Pal Singh and as a result he could not succeed. However, Lakhan Singh and Pushkar Singh anyhow managed to file the nomination.

Biru Bhai alias Dharmendar was engaged in liquor business. His business was spread all over Pokhra, Vedikhal, Bajiro and Bironkhal. He used to supply liquor pouches carrying

in vehicle on the back of passengers. His network was strong enough and in this way he was minting lot of money. In his business, he devised schoolboys for supplying liquor pouches to villages and for this task he paid good amount to them. He also made an image of a donor in the area. Off and on he used to reach in any marriage ceremony without invitation and donated five-six thousands rupees to the parents or guardians of bride or bridegroom. That was good enough help to a poor family in village. So villagers considered him as a God. Because of his liquor business, local police and administration always created problems to him, particularly at the time of elections. At times, police arrested and put him in locker in the pretext of maintaining peace and harmony in the region. To get rid of this unwanted situation, he hatched a plan and filed assembly election papers. Getting votes was not a matter for him, but by contesting as a candidate in elections, at least police or administration dare not put hand on him easily.

After filing the nomination, I left the place with other agitators. Last night heavy rain with snowfall poured in Pauri hills and nobody was able to find the activities of other contestants.

Loyalists of Vijay Pal Singh were keeping sharp and vigil eyes, particularly on the persons filing the papers from Bironkhal. As they came to know about filing papers by me, they chased us long. At the bus stand, they clustered around my vehicle and transpired, "Vijay Pal Singhjee is calling you." They insisted me to meet Vijay Pal Singh immediately. But I turned down their requests and drove away hurriedly. They tried to convince me but I anyhow managed to slip.

During the last two months, the party workers and public view polarized towards me sharply. That's why he was scared of

my uprising reputation. No other opponents seemed dangerous than of me. He was not afraid of the opposition parties. He tried at his best to mount pressure on me for withdrawing name, but all his plans went in vain.

After filing the papers, I got the symbol of axe as an independent candidate. On acquiring the symbol and completing other paper work, we drove towards the region for election campaign.

Main election office was opened at Syunsi at my in-laws house. It was the central and spacious place where lot of people could be accommodated easily. There were agricultural fields near the house. A person was manned for preparing meals. Arrangements for staying of visitors were too made at Rikhad, four-five kilometers ahead of Syunsi. After that arrangement, we drove to Delhi.

At evening around fifteen-sixteen people crowded at my residence to support me. Active members of the organization were summoned on telephone. Strategies were mapping for the election publicity. Assurances were constantly pouring on phone for participation in election campaign from various places and people.

“I will apply 12 days leave for this.” Said Kulwant.

“I will be available for 15 days.” Assured Jaiprakash.

“And I can take 20 days leave.” Said Harish.

Gambhir Singh and Bhubneshwar lived in villages. Gambhir Singh frequented Delhi too. He took the responsibilities of Aakeshwar Block.

Bhubneshwar ran a grocery shop at Rikhad with which he was earning his livelihood. He handed over the shop to his

father till the elections, who crossed eighty years. Letters were mailed to acquaintances, relatives and members of organization, *gram pradhans*, *panchs* and members of *Zila Panchayat*, along with CV, date-wise details of events and activities performed during the movement, in an attractive way.

Gajender was scrawling suggestions, names and addresses of useful persons on a note-book and I was serving the tea to the visitors. People were in full confidence of my victory in the elections.

Bhubneshwar was the most experienced person amongst the policy makers for us. He stood up for addressing, “We need at least seventy-eighty persons for this election.

Small crowd was listening him patiently, attentively.

“Ten teams will be made and each team will consist of seven-eight people.”

“These teams are to send to different villages. At night, they will assemble in one place.”

“Next day they will march to other villages.”

“What are the duties of ladies?” A person interrupted.

“Don’t be in a hurry. First, let me finish my talk.” Said Bhubneshwar, gazing towards the person and continued. “Eight to Ten teams of ladies will be made. Each team will consist of four-five members. Team will visit each and every village and invite the villagers on a fixed date. On appointed day, Garimajee will visit the village and deliver her speech to convince the ladies.

“We divide Bironkhal region in five segments. Garimajee will take not more than three days in a region.” Announced Bhubneshwar talking a sip of water to lubricate his throat.

“When the election bag and pamphlets will distribute?”
This time I tossed the question.

“This job will be done exactly four days before the poling day.” Said Bhubneshwar in a loud voice.

“A grand party will be hosted for election agents and the entire material hand over to them. Voters list, voters slip, pen, big and small sized pamphlets, three-four posters will be passed on and only one hundred rupee note for tea will be offered to each election agent for that task.” Bhuvneshwar continued

Gathering was listening attentively and patiently to him.

“On next day, election material will be supplied at remnant places. At least three polling agents will attach to one polling booth. Name and address of polling agents should be noted down from today onwards. Our retired and aged people can perform this duty perfectly.” Bhubneshwar was kept of addressing. He took a cursory look around.

“On final day of propaganda, we will organize five-six vast public meetings and for this jumbo task we will require at least three-four vehicles. More than fifty-sixty people will assemble in one place, where the lady participants must be in big count. Each vehicle will be fitted with mike and loudspeaker. In each rally, Garimajee will deliver stirring speech.” He resumed after taking a gulp of water.

“This is the sketch of the entire programme that may be changed according to time and situation. Now we discuss about the management of material and publicity work. Responsibility of printing all sized pamphlets is given to Jaiprakash and Gajender. Purchase of mikes, loudspeakers and battery sets, battery charger and challenger will be done by Pappu and Deepu.”

“Two Tata Sumos from Delhi and another two vehicles from Bironkhal will be arranged. This task is to be materialised within two days at any cost and next day we will dash for Bironkhal with full election material.” Voiced Bhubneshwar looking towards the gatherings waving both the hands.

“Task of wall-painting will be performed by expert painters and pasting of posters on walls by volunteers and workers. No laxity will be paid at work.”

“As you know, I am handling this job for the last ten years and also make many leaders win, so please hear my words seriously, attentively.” Said Bhubneshwar and grinned widely.

“Bhubneshwarjee, you pour long list of programmes, tell a little about the expenditure too.” I asked laughingly.

“According to my estimate, it will not cross one lac rupees. May be ten thousand up and down.” Replied Bhubneshwar in the same tone. He continued.

“I offer my house for the election office work and myself available at your disposal for twenty-four hours till elections.”

“Now you start dispatching the letters and papers to your relatives, acquaintances and request them to reach villages and report at Syunsi.” Said Gambhir Singh addressing to all and moved towards his place.



After filing the election papers of his wife, Vijay Pal Singh started election campaign with full enthusiasm. Having with lot of wealth, scores of workers, easy accessibility of resources, he also had a cadre of dedicated partymen with him. There was no deficiency at all, but filing of papers by me as independent

candidate was pinching him severely. In a short period of two months, I diverted the public opinion towards my side. If once public got unhappy or public opinion turn towards opposite, entire piles of wealth, quantity of resources, cadre of party workers would become futile. He felt this bitter experience in the earlier elections too. Each and every step was demanding to take carefully. So this time, just before the nomination, he played a well-planned tactical drama. To resolve that, high command had no option, except surrendering in front of him timidly and in this way amongst the party workers he emerged as a new gigantic Vijay Pal Singh. All was going according to the plan by now. The task was only to divert the trend and mood of public. From Dhumakot, adjacent to Bironkhal he planned to make a retired colonel to contest so to capture ex-servicemen's votes, and in nearby region Thailisain, he made Mumbai based Brahmin industrialist to contest so to encash lavishly Brahmins votes. After all, he was the old fox of the politics.

First of all, he tried to make the rebel or independent candidates to withdraw. These independent candidates, directly or indirectly, hack the votes of his own party. First, liquor mafia Dharmender alias Biru Bhai was made to sit so to save two thousand votes from dispersing. Biru cleared his position why he was interested in contesting the election. No extra efforts were made to make him withdraw. He agreed on thirty thousand only. After that Laxman Singh of Piplee village took his name back. His influence was also good in twenty-twentyfive villages. He also made compromised on bargaining anyhow. Diwakar Negi of Pokhra region was made convinced before filing of nomination. He was the key person who played important role in organizing scheduled castes rally. After that rally, large number of people from that community came closer to party at

large. All local, mini and senior leaders including most of retired administrators took active part in that rally.

Among the rebel candidates, I now remained the main danger for Vijay Pal Singh. I came to know that a plan has been hatched to send mediator to me for convincing to withdraw name with assurance of being awarded suitably either by council member or member of any committee.

Nirmala, the wife of Vijay Pal Singh didn't have any interaction with public, nor any interest towards politics. She never attended any meeting or rally in her entire life. That fact was fretting Vijay Pal Singh badly whether public would accept or not that candidate, who had ever no link with political or social activities. When a hardworking, dedicated and public-connected lady candidate already available in party, then why an unknown female was thrust upon the public? This fear was constantly churning the mind of Vijay Pal Singh.

To make sparkle image of Nirmala, a plan was mapped to release *Garhwali* audio cassettes of sweet songs in her admiration. In these cassettes, Nirmala will be displayed as a warrior just like Teenu Rautali and Queen of Rani Jhansi. These cassettes were to distribute in each and every village. Admiration songs of Nirmala were to sound in the region of Bironkhal day and night long.

Cutouts of Vijay Pal Singh and Nirmala were fixed each and every market. One team was deputed, with a task to brush wall paintings and torn out the posters of opposition candidates. This job was carried out stealthily at night only. Contracts for pasting of posters were given paying huge money. Hired workers used to venture this job at night climbing on long wooden ladders. Contracts were also given to expert painters to paint the name, slogan and election symbol of Nirmala on walls.

To win the election, Vijay Pal Singh was determined to use all out efforts, with full strength and might. Mouth of wealth-sack was opened widely.



The position of Rajeshwari, the candidate of ruling party BJP, comparatively was not considered so well. Her claim was not digested by her own party members. As a result, many rebels of her party also filed papers in protest. Active party men, eagerly hoping for tickets, were reluctantly participating in election campaign and remained inactive. One day in Maithanaghat, wife of Dilwar Singh wrangled with Rajeshwari badly. These rebels were not seemed in surrendering mood at any cost. On issuing stern warning by high command, some sort of bustle was noticed in motionless party workers, even then inwardly they felt their party as defeated.

Although, Rajeshwari didn't take active part in the party organization, yet she was only a member of *Zila Panchayat*. Neither she knew how to deliver speech in public, nor was that much educated to divert the public trend towards her party. For the time being, her position was not considered as strong one.



It was a chilled winter. Cold was in its extremity on mountains rather than plains. Fresh snowfall on upper hills increased the coldness considerably. The days in winter became shorter than in summer and it was not possible to venture out in morning before nine. In winter season, it seemed to be difficult to get out of bed in early hours. Without hot water, no routine work could be performed, as the cold water made the fingers frozen.

I started my election campaign from Diva Mandir at Diva Danda jungle and bowed head before the temple deity. I took the blessings of the priest, who marked *teeka* on my forehead.

In my tiny cavalcade, there were two Tata Sumos and one Maruti van, equipped with banners and loudspeakers. Raising and hurling the slogans, my caravan approached Kothila village. With the three fully packed vehicles, my caravan was moving slowly in the narrow, curbed snaky motorable roads. On arriving Kothila, we distributed pamphlets to our acquaintances and pasted the posters on walls and on shops. I delivered a short speech turning the mouth of loudspeaker towards the few villages. This programme was limited and only to show my presence in region.

Within half an hour our cavalcade approached Maithana Ghat. The market was connected directly with fourteen-fifteen nearby villages. It was a small township beneath the valley, most of them were of shops and shopkeepers. A small river was running near the township. This small township was central place of the area. I was expecting a good support from here. Earlier when I initiated public-contact programme, lot of people boosted my morale from here.

Gajender was making widespread publicity with loudspeaker and a small crowd gathered in market and clustered around us. I delivered remarkable and significant speech that attracted the public and they listened me patiently, calmly.

We met Girish Shah and handed over pamphlets, papers and banners. Some posters were pasted on the walls. Girish Shah had a jewelry shop and his interaction in this vicinity was also good enough.

Dilwar Rawat, a potential candidate of the ruling party BJP, was also residing here. But he was disappointed on his non-

allotment of ticket by the party. Despite that, his command and control in the area was also good. He played important role in establishing his party in this area. Harshverdhan Uniyal, the MP used to visit his house and sip a cup of tea whenever he toured Garhwal region.

In Maithanaghat, we went to Sudarshan Singh, a member of youth brigade too. He was running a grocery shop there. Fortunately, he was in his shop at that time. Two-three others were also sitting there. While entering his shop, Gajender announced, “We start our election campaign with this small caravan.”

I with four-five others also entered in room. Sudarshan Singh and others unwillingly made the space for us to sit that made me amazed.

“Bhai sahab, are you ready to accompany us for this battle?” I asked and sat on a wooden bench.

Sudarshan Singh replied in hesitation, “Madam, had you got the party ticket I would have been definitely accompanied you with full enthusiasm and without glitch. But now you are contesting as independent, sorry I am unable to support, as I can’t go beyond party line.” And turned his eyes sheepishly. I gave him a penetrating look. I was not expected that kind of reply of his mouth.

“On that very day you gave me full support and assurance. You know I am fighting this election on your assurance and encouragement. Now you are going back to your own words.” I uttered hardly in surprise and tried to convince him. I took a gaze on others too.

“Madam, I am a responsible office-bearer of the party and by virtue I am expect not to indulge in any anti-party activities.” Said Sudarshan Singh clearing his position.

“Question does not arise about against or within the party. The question is of development and awareness.” Replied Gajender in a hope to change his viewpoint. All of us were stunned to hear that kind of reply from him. I was fuming inwardly.

“That’s all right. You are agitators and you are fighting election for the development of region. I will support your endeavour, but we receive stern warning of high command for not supporting any independent candidates.” Said Sudarshan Singh looking towards earth.

“Do you think Nirmala will perform her duties well to develop this region?” I baffled at him in the changed situation.

“All of us know she don’t know the problems of this region and after the victory she will not show her face too.” Replied Sudarshan Singh.

“It seems Vijay Pal Singh offer fat money or post to you for not supporting us.” I alleged with a wan smile.

“No, that is not the matter.” Replied Sudarshan Singh in slurred voice.

“Yes, it is the truth. On that day, you were dead against Vijay Pal Singh stating that he used to show his face only on the days of elections. He wins election on the power of money and muscles.” Said Gajender in harsh words. Anger filled in his voice. “Now where are your promises of village development, connecting villages with roads, employment generation, improvement in condition of education and opening of new hospitals?” He added.

Sudarshan Singh and his supporters became speechless and were listening us unwillingly.

“You fasten to party, follow that. But we are not. We keep our struggle for the development of region.” I vowed in firm words. I stood up and stepped out of the shop. So did others. Worry lines crisscrossed our foreheads.

I was not expected that kind of response and attitude from Sudarshan Singh. Although I knew it very well that no party worker would come in my support leaving his party. These kinds of people like to glue their parties only. They were not bothered about development of villages, region and so on.

I knew it very well that after coming to power, these party workers will take contracts of motor roads, water pipelines, ration shops, electricity wiring, wine shops and will get fat commission. By these means, these middlemen, contractors, mediators will drain the government exchequer and rob the hard earned money of general public. These kinds of elements do not like to accompany the honest people struggling for the public causes.

On getting negative, discouraging reply from Sudarshan Singh, we drove away. After that denial I assessed that other people would also follow the same tone.

Another supporter also refused to accompany us. He was also belonged to that kind of lobby. Initially, he praised very much the activities and tasks of ours during Uttarakhand movement, but now he was hesitating to accompany our caravan. The party men or those who were against Vijay Pal Singh or unhappy with him, he made them in his favour by giving lure of employment, portfolio in party and contracts of various civil works.

During the election time in Uttarakhand, unemployed or jobless people get some sort of employment, stomach full food to eat and liquor to drink. They also get three hundred rupees per day for roaming in vehicles, making crowd, raising slogans and noise, pasting of posters, banners and flags. They had to take at least two rounds in vehicles from Bironkhal to Baijro and other places and at night they were served with free liquor to relax their tired bodies. What a poor unemployed young man expected much better than this kind of hospitality? As a result, in those days quarrels, manhandling, fighting, jostling, exchange of abusive now become common scene in villages and market places.

Rasia Mahadev, Lalitpur, Mangro, Takulsari and ten-twelve other villages, around eight-ten kilometers away of Maithanaghat were on a considerable height.

There was only one primary health center in Maithanaghat, where neither any doctor, nor nurse was available for the public, nor medicines were provided to the patients.

My election caravan approached Bironkhal while touching through many places. Bironkhal was a historical place. It was said that in the beginning of eighteenth century, Katures attacked Garhwal for expanding their territory and regime. In this fight, they reached near the Bironkhal. Tinu Routali was the princes of Garhwal King. In this fight, her father and brothers fell in battle. Donned in warrior dress and equipped with arms, she flocked towards battlefield to fight. She fought the battle bravely. The battle was tough and neck-to-neck. At last, she won and Katures had to leave the battlefield. They didn't recognize her as a lady and were in impression of her being a gent. After the battle, she went to river for bathing, relaxing. When she was changing her dress putting the arms aside, few Katures caught a

glimpse of her and they didn't believe that the same lady in warrior dress defeated them badly. They slew her in deceive. After that incident, this place named as Bironkhal i.e. place of warriors. Earlier this place was the jungle of Dumaila. Tilu Rautali belonged to Kanda village and she fought the battle like a brave warrior and became a martyr. Till today her bravery songs are sung by the old ladies in villages while making their grandchildren to sleep.

There was major problem of water in nearby villages of Bironkhal. At summer, it became drastic. Occasionally, acute scarcity of water occurred in Bironkhal market and Dumaila Malla village. Some sort of relief was given by supplying water with tanks on contract basis, but no permanent solution was sorted out. Natural source of water was insufficient for the village and they used to wheel Rikhad or Maithanaghat to fetch water. These places were far away and wasted their precious time, money and labour.

Despite this long pending problem, neither the partymen, nor the locals raised this issue during election to the visiting leaders and their chips. All these issues buried or suppressed under the noise of loudspeakers, wall posters, banners and flags of parties. Distribution of money and liquor to poor also made them to forget all these problems.

Bironkhal market was the central place of the region. There was a bank. The ex-servicemen and retired persons used to withdraw their pensions from this bank and run their families. There were no other employment resources in the region. A block office and a post office were also situated here.

Next to Bironkhal, a hospital was under construction. It was heard that being a thirty-three bed hospital, eight-nine doctors, various paramedics, nurses and other staff were to be

appointed. Only one or two doctors were for attending the patients, and the patients used to purchase medicines from market. Around two hundred kilometers of Garhwal parliamentary constituency, there was no big hospital with modern facilities. For any small treatment or fracture, patient had to wheel Ramnagar, Kashipur or Kotdwar, hundred or hundred fifty kilometer away from Bironkhal.

Nowadays, political parties were lavishly spending their black money on election campaigning in the form of posters, banners, liquor, and petrol/diesel for vehicles. It was a matter of discussion and consideration why these funds or money was not spent on public welfare, like construction of hospitals, roads, water tanks, pipes and so on?

Beneath Bironkhal, people of Dumaila Talla solved the water crises somehow with their own efforts. Water was supplied from Rikhad jungle through pipes. This job was ventured under public awareness and campaigning movement. Lack of employment made the development of these villages static. Villagers of these regions were very much eager to develop and made their all-out efforts, but non-cooperation on the part of politicians, their partymen and officials, the task could not be accomplished. Connecting various villages with motorable road, people of this area may get some sort of employment opportunities.

Funds meant for upliftment or developments of villages were gulped, swallowed down by *pradhans*, BDOs and *Zila Panchayat* members collectively. Routed through DM, BDO, JE, EE, Gram Sewak, the funds reduced to twenty-thirty percent when it reached to *gram pradhan*. And *pradhan* also spent this amount on useless projects or work and filled his pocket.



Turning the mouth of loudspeaker towards Bironkhal, I voiced a speech. Before the speech, attention of the public was drawn playing pre-recorded speech and slogans. The space in Bironkhal market was not sufficient for public assembly. One or two buses and four-five vehicles were also parked on the road. Passengers were also strolling here and there. On hearing the resounded noise of loudspeaker, scores of people and passengers milling around the main road and clustered around us.

“Dear Brothers and Sisters of Bironkhal region, I am contesting as an Independent candidate in your region. I am new to this region as my work place was Delhi. In Delhi we stirred movement for the separate Uttarakhand state and swore that till the time we would not get separate state, will not sit silent. We organized scores of rallies, *dharanas*, *ghaeraos*, *ansans* and as a result, the path was cleared for separate Uttarakhand state.”

“You people struggled here and we in Delhi. Aim was the same. Having achieved the goal of separate state, I accept the challenge to contest from this region. As we can struggle for a separate state, then why not for the development of this region.” I hurled the questioned.

In my brief speech, I expressed my determination and sought cooperation of the crowd. Public welcomed my speech with bursting applause. Large number of people crammed at Bironkhal bazaar.

There we met people, opened an election office and after spending some moments we headed towards Syunsi, taking a small halt at Rikhad.

Scores of people arrived at Syunsi. Amongst them were relatives, close friends, Captain Chauhan, an aged Rawatjee and an old veteran Raje Singh Gusain, who crossed seventy by then.

Unexpected cooperation was received from the nearby villages, Kakrora, Parinda, Syunsi, Nougain, Syar. The young and the old were participating in full enthusiasm and zeal.

All of us were mapping the strategies. A big question arose in what form my image be presented in front of public. The people who used to read the newspapers, kept eyes on political activities or eager to know about the development of area and kept contacting each other, were fully aware of my activities, but more information was required to disseminate in general public, particularly ladies who lived in villages and seldom went out.

It was the general opinion that had I made contacted couple of years ago or shown determination to contest the election earlier, I would have got full support and cooperation of public. But now it was too late and not only the precious 20-25 days, that we spent roaming around party office, but also the days chasing Vijay Pal Singh and other leaders for seeking ticket, paid us heavily.

Bhubneshwar was the key person in my election campaigning. He had enough knowledge and experience since the time of Bahugunajee and nobody could ignore this fact. In addition, being a local party man, his better interactions and contacts were upto far-flung areas. I was getting enough advantage of his vast experience. So, there was an atmosphere of overwhelming, enthusiasm in Syunsi.

“We are to present the image of Garima what she ventured during the Uttarakhand agitation.”

“Independent candidate. Election symbol Axe.”

“Well qualified and capable to put the problems of public before assembly strongly.”

“Advocate”

“Combative women, capable, qualified.”

These words uttered by Bhubneshwar in front of a small gathering there. He emphasized each word.

“We have to tell the public to compare the three lady candidates and then choose the abler and more qualified one. Now the fight is among the three ladies.” Suggest Jaiprakash.

“You are absolutely right. We must bring the matter before the public as to who can serve the people in best possible manner, that possess the vast experience in social field and people should decide this.” Opined Raje Singh Gusain in his hoarse voice.

“We also have to tell the people that Nirmala is just like as Maharani of a Mahal, who come in public for the first time, whereas Garima is struggling for the public cause for the last ten years. Nirmala never visited the villages in her lifetime, nor took part in any agitation, rally or public service. The person who never came across the public, how can she understand the problems, aspirations, feelings and difficulties of people and mull over their solutions? As Vijay Pal Singh used to leave the regions after showing his face during election, so she will also repeat the same and follow his steps.” Said Captain Chauhan in convincing words.

“As far as Rajeshwari is concerned, no doubt she lived among the public and is member of *Nyaya Panchayat*. Even then can anyone believe whether she will be able to put her words and problems of region in front of cunning and shrewd seventy legislators.” Question raised by Gajender.

“We have to transpire the public to weigh the pros and cons of the contesting candidates. They should apply their mind while tendering their votes.” Said Jaiprakash.

Food was also serving while conversation. In another room ladies were taking meals. Bhubneshwar entered in room and addressed the ladies, “From tomorrow you will start to visit nearby villages in two groups and cover at least nine-ten villages a day. Make organize meeting of ladies and distribute pamphlets. You have to meet the lady *pradhan* or *Mahila Mangal Dal* at any cost and must sip a cup of tea with them during conversation.”

He continued, “Tomorrow’s target is Rikhad, Dhobighat, Aamkuloan, Kakrora and nearby villages. I send words to all the village *Pradhans*. Day after tomorrow, you are to visit Bangar, Langchuri, Arkandai, Khetu, Masi, Nandakhet. In morning, we will drop you on road with a vehicle and the remnant journey you are to perform on foot.”

At night when all the people went to bed, Bhubneshwar, Gajender and Jaiprakash were busy in reviewing their plans. Beddings of the three were lying on floor. There was extreme cold in hills. Gajender while peeping out of pillow said, “Tomorrow, myself and Garima will go to Aakeshwar Block where Gambhir Singh is waiting for us. We will take two days there and on third day we approach Pokhra, where Vidya Rawat, Shakuntana Rawat and Harish will accompany us. We need to spend two more days in those places. You look after rest of arrangements here.”

“You need not worry. Pappu and Pandit will engage in painting and pasting of posters on walls. I will handle the mike. We will take one vehicle. Another vehicle will be at the disposal of Jaiprakash, who will go along with Gusainjee and other two boys to cover Baijro, Lachchi, Choukhal, Bhaisura, Mathkund, Bungadhar Malla and Talla, Haladh.” Said Bhubneshwar feeling drowsy. He switched off the light to fall asleep.



SIX

My mind flashed back to the old days. Once exactly 6-7 days before the rally, fever took me in its grip. Despite taking local medicine, it didn't subside. On visiting doctor, he diagnosed it as viral and announced to take its own time. The day time I had to attend school and evening to roam in streets for mobilizing people. Owing to fatigue and exertion, the fever was not in a mood of dipping down.

Others suggested for cancelling the rally but I didn't agree. One reason, it was not fair to cancel the rally and someone or other may fall sick any time. And no other activity can take place in that pretext. By now, posters-pamphlets had been distributed, banners were prepared, tempos-busses were booked and newspapers had been informed about the rally. All the preparations were going on its peak and war-footing. It was not fair to retreat the steps once taken. Once a decision has been taken so to implement it at any condition.

I attended all the meetings in fever. Made aware the public roaming in roads and streets, delivered series of speeches. The rally succeeded with a grand success. All praised my decision and audacity.

Soon after the rally, my body developed weakness and I laid on bed completely. After taking 7-8 days bed rest, I was able to move. Today remembering those incidents I feel inward pleasure thinking that I had done something special for my society.



At this crucial stage when Vijay Pal Singh was required to map the plan for his wife Nirmala, he was fighting against his own party leaders to grab more tickets so to obtain good representation in Assembly. This was possible only when more enough seats be captured. One fight was over and now preparations for second one were being made.

“We have to open election offices in entire region, tell me better places?” Asked Vijay Pal Singh scratching his chin.

“Sir, far flung villages, main motorable roads and main markets are best suitable.” Replied Dr. Joshi gently.

“Separate teams should be deputed for different tasks. Emphasis is to be given for wide publicity. In addition, one team should be deputed for poster pasting. Job of another team will be to tear off the posters of opposition. Be careful, this task has to carry out only at night.” Suggested Surender Sajwan glancing towards Dr. Joshi.

“Each and every party worker will be provided with cap and scarf as party identity.” Suggested Vijay Pal Singh and nodded.

“In my view, we should present the image of Nirmalajee in such a manner to make public impress. And the best way is to sound sweet songs praising Nirmalajee through video cassettes and CDs.” Said Dr. Joshi adding one more suggestion.

“For this specific task, we have to hire a professional *Garhwali* singer.” Said Surender Sajwan.

“Good idea.” Praised Dr. Joshi and grinned.

“So, it is one of the devices to attract public towards party. Next step is to keep an eye on the activities of opposition,

rebels and their supporters. We have to take them in our side at any cost or either way.” Instructed Vijay Pal Singh in stern voice.

“If they don’t.” Surrender Sajwan questioned in suspicion.

“Thwart them going towards opposition by way of greed, hook or crook.” Roared Vijay Pal Singh. “I don’t want to see their posters and banners anywhere.” He further added in harsh tone. Stretch of silence fell in room.

“Pay wages to workers daily and regularly. In last election agents grabbed the entire money themselves and didn’t pay them. Hence, they refused to work and we lost that election badly.” Grumbled Vijay Pal Singh and shrugged.

“Sir, to recharge energy, liquor should be served to party workers at night.” Said Dr. Joshi adding one more suggestion hesitatingly.

“Give this responsibility to Biru Bhai and don’t drag me unnecessary.” Said Vijay Pal Singh waving his hands.

“Sir, liquor makes any complicated task easy. The tasks that can’t sort out on money, liquor solve it in easy way.” Elaborated Dr. Joshi. The fact was right. Nobody could ignore this.

“Now let us shift towards caste and brotherhood issue.” Said Vijay Pal Singh steering the conversation to other direction.

“Sir, paternal and maternal relatives of your side can be pleaded from the villages. They will definitely support the community.” Said Dr. Joshi gazing towards Vijay Pal Singh.

“Similarly, paternal and maternal relatives of Nirmalajee should also approach for campaigning.” Said Vijay Pal Singh and fixed his gaze on wall.

“And in this way if we are able to make a network of castism and brotherhood, public must polarize around us.” Said Vijay Pal Singh calculating in mind.

“At least they will not try to slip other parties.” Supported Surender Sajwan.

“Ten vehicles, equipped with loudspeakers and banners, must wheel on roads uninterruptedly. Priests, *pandits* or teachers, those are interested in lecturing must be provided with these vehicles for campaigning.” Instructed Vijay Pal Singh.

“Apart of this, manage *bhandara* and serve free meals daily to people in each village.” Suggested Surender Sajwan this time and turned his skull around for the consent.

“Why not.” Supported Dr. Joshi and nodded his head.

“Stickers, badges, cassettes, caps, scarf must be ready within three days and compulsory for every party worker to wear. Arrange to cassettes on music system in party offices and if possible at the residence of party workers too.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in a way of giving order.

“No laxity and delay at work is acceptable. In case of any problem, contact me immediately. I provide mobiles to key members. They keep in touch and talk me at evening with update position.” He added and stood up to leave. And so did others.

“Sir, this time we will not give any chance to opponents. Earlier mistakes must not repeat this time.” Said Dr. Joshi in a way of obeying the instructions of Vijay Pal Singh.

“Now plunge on your task and do it diligently.” Said Vijay Pal Singh and stepped out.



In a vehicle, Jaiprakash sank on the front seat. In the rear seat, Raje Singh Gusain and two-three others were sitting. An elder man was also seen accompanying them. Propaganda was going on loudspeaker. Vehicle was scrolling through Baijro towards Choukhal.

“Brothers and sisters ... be remember ... the forthcoming 15th day ... put stamp on axe ... vote and support Garima.” A boy was screaming on loudspeaker something like that.

“Brother, this time voting will tender on electronic voting machine (EVM).” Said another boy behind him with a laugh.

Both the boys were new to this business so they repeated one sentence intermittently. Then Jaiprakash gave a written statement and asked them to follow so. After that they handled the mike right way.

Whenever they neared a market, Jaiprakash took the mike and start to speech, “We have to develop our region, and stop migration of youths from the region; to link education with employment; to provide medical facilities to public; to remove backwardness of the region. If we do not elect an educated and capable candidate, conditions of this region will never improve.” He put the problems of Bironkhal in an analytical way and analyzed why the region was still backward in comparison to plains.

Team was accompanied by a veteran, named Raje Singh Gusain. He was above seventy, still in good health and in full enthusiasm. He was boosting the morale of boys. In his younger days, he had been active member of *Sabli Samaj* and with this organization, they did a lot of major development work in Sabli region. Opening of Degree College in Vedikhal was one of their achievements. He was also involved in establishment of Garhwal Bhawan at Delhi.

Vehicle was crawled towards Baijro. On return way, they approached a village called Lachchi. Parking the vehicle along the road they headed towards the village, as few of acquaintances were there. Gusain was trying to step fast with support of his stick. In the village, they met one relative and transpired him of their aim. He offered them tea and promised full support. They met few other villagers and then left the village.

Vehicle was moving dead slow. The road was a newly constructed and because of heavy rain, it developed potholes so became uneven, muddy and slippery. They took halt at the next village called Sain. A retired Subedar of the army welcomed them graciously. He escorted them to his residence and offered tea. They handed over him the publicity material and left the village for onward journey.

Campaigning team reached at Choukhal touching and contacting various villages, such as, Bhaisuda, Mathkunda, Seela and Mangaro. After sipping the tea there, they drove towards Bhagwati Talia. The area of Choukhal was not under the constituency of Bironkhal, so did not carry out any publicity there.

The vehicle was wheeling downward on sloping road towards Bungidhar. Parking the vehicle on roadside they visited Bungidhar Malla and Bungidhar Talla. There, they met one retired inspector of BSF. He gave a warm welcome to them and offered meals. Till that day, no partyman or others had visited this place, so the people were happy to see them and overjoyed. During the entire journey Raje Singh Gusain walked on foot with support of his bamboo stick. On the road, my pre-recorded speech was playing on loudspeaker.

After finishing their task, the campaigning team reached on main road. Again they climbed the hill and reached at a village called Passo. A person got the information in advance about their visit. He was waiting eagerly for them and made assembled ten-twelve people there. He had also been involved in the Uttarakhand movement, while residing at Palam Colony, Delhi and knew Jaiprakash very well. They gave a warm welcome to team in village. He made good arrangements there. Posters and banners were already pasted on the walls. After chatting with the villagers, the team returned to main road in contented mood where the vehicle was parked.

This dedicated person took the responsibility of publicity in Bhagwati Talia region. He took the team to Bhagwati Talai and made wide publicity on loudspeaker. Pamphlets distributed among the public, posters pasted on walls and the atmosphere was made patriotic by playing patriotic songs.



A letter from the office of election commission, Thalishain was received to me for attending a meeting in connection with the on-going election. Permit letters for vehicle was also required. Without the permit letter, vehicles for election campaign could not be run on road. There were strict instructions of the election commission. One day SDM handed over only two permits when he was on his routine way. To attend the meeting, to get permit cards and to sort out other issued, Jaiprakash had been deputed to visit Thalishain.

Thalishain was an important key center of Bangarsue *Patti*, belt. There were various offices, such as, block office, SDM's office, education, *panchayat*, *tehsildar* offices. Beneath Thalishain, a river called *Purvi Nayar* was running silently. From there, buses

were plied towards Pauri, Tehri, Kotdwar, Ramnagar, Gairsain, Dehradun. A Canteen Stores Department for the ex-servicemen was also located there to avail CSD facilities.

On reaching Thalissain, Jaiprakash visited the office of SDM, also looking after the duties of Election Commission. He collected the permit letters and other papers regarding codes of conduct, rules and regulations of election on behalf of me. After finishing his task, when he approached bus-stand for taking bus or any vehicle heading for Syunsi, he became bitterly disappointed. Vehicle were seen nowhere. All were engaged in the election work of the parties. On that day, a big rally was being organized by ruling party BJP in Thalissain, where the key leaders were expected to attend. This rally was being organized in a school ground. So, all the vehicles including public buses were put at the disposal of Sureshanand, the minister, for ferrying the people to the rally place. Rally was being organized for supporting Sureshanand and Rajeshwari. That's why there was no vehicle available for the passengers to go out of Thalissain.

Party-workers, mini and local leaders in the office of ruling party were in full enthusiasm and in confidence. On the other hand, workers of opposition party Congress were with long faces and doomed. A temporary helipad was made functional in school ground. Tight security arrangements were made around the helipad. In the middle of playground, a circle of white-lime with a sign of 'H' was highlighted, for the helicopter to land on that particular spot. Policemen were surrounded the ground with attentive eyes and kept watching the activities of the crowd. Near the main gate of playground, village artists donned in traditional dress were playing musical instruments *dhhol*, *damok* and *mushkbaj* to give warm welcome to visiting leaders.

On the other side of playground, near the party office, a small podium was erected for the visiting leaders to deliver their speeches. Entire area of Thalissain was decorated with colourful flags, banners and posters of party. Party workers were wandering around the market place donning *kurta-payajama*, party symbol caps and scarf with wide chest and great pride on their faces.

The helicopter was to arrive at three evening sharp. Now it had already past four evening, but there was no sign of its arrival. Tension was clearly shown on the faces of Sureshanand and Rajeshwari. They were strolling impatiently, aimlessly here and there. As the time dragged by, so their faces were getting red. Water was poured on the ground to settle the dust and not to fly on arrival of helicopter.

On the other hand, faces of opposition party-workers were dimmed and darkened. Public was waiting eagerly for the helicopter to arrive, instead of senior leaders. This was an amazing and exclusive incident in that remote and backward region. There was an exciting and curiosity for the people, as in such a remote area, visit of helicopter had taken place rarely. This was an excellent idea for the party to assemble the crowd.

In the winter, the sun sets around five-thirty evening in hills and soon the brightness of the day was also vanishing. People brought for crowding had to go homes thirty-fourty kilometers away from Thalissain. They gradually started leaving the helipad. They felt cheated and be fooled. Sureshanand and Rajeshwari were trying to convince them hard but they didn't hear them at all. On the other hand, party workers of opposition were instigating the public for making them fool. Sureshanand, Rajeshwari and other party workers were continuously giving assurance to public about the arrival of

helicopter at any moment and presently it was landing at Nakuri village, near Bironkhal and they received latest message over mobile. Despite these assurances, public began moving out.

Public hopelessly left the helipad and clustered around the bus-stand for taking busses or vehicles towards their destinations. They were to go far flung villages. Suddenly, a bursting noise heard in the silent valley. The noise was rising increasingly. The buzzing of rotors announced the arrival of the helicopter. Just then, people caught a glimpse of helicopter in the sky, that was approaching towards the Thalissain. All of a sudden, public jumped off the vehicles and hurried towards the helipad wildly. Dust storm flew around the entire market. As the helicopter landed, a huge balloon of dust engulfed the entire Thalissain in its grip. Entire market covered under the dust storm. As the dust settled down, Harshwardhan Uniyal, the MP and other jumped out of the helicopter. Party members immediately surrounded them and garlanded with flowers and escorted them down to party office, where they were to deliver speeches. But the public was more interested in witnessing a glimpse of helicopter rather than listening the boring speeches of VIPs. So they didn't move a bit from there. Sureshanand, Rajeshwari and few party workers were only among the listeners. Public was milling around the school ground for witnessing the helicopter and there was no space left to sit or stand. Police was trying hard in controlling the crowd. A thick and strong enough rope was made surrounded the ground to control the crowd and nobody was allowed to enter beyond that rope. Leaders took hardly fifteen minutes to deliver their speeches and returned quickly towards the helipad to depart. As the helicopter rotated its fans for taking off, entire market of Thalissain once again covered with a huge balloon of dust storm. But the public didn't

bother over the dust and remained stayed on ground till the helicopter took off and faded away from their sight.

As the helicopter took off and vanished away, the crowd stormed towards the bus-stand wildly and mounted on their respective buses. These buses were hired for the rally and therefore no other passenger was allowed to in. Jaiprakash anyhow managed to sit in a bus heading to Chowkhal via Baijro. Bus was creeping in narrow hilly snaky road. It had already six evening at Thalissain and the darkness gripped the entire valley. Bus was to take another two hours to reach Baijro and it was moving slowly because of pitch dark. Few youths from the rally were travelling over the roof of bus. They didn't bother about the severe cold. Whenever they saw any vehicle of opposition party, hurled strong enough slogans against their leaders and also used abusives and filthy language. They made lot of noise throughout the way. The atmosphere of the region had already become tense at the time of elections.

As the bus arrived at Baijro, twenty-thirty persons, grabbing sticks and lathies stood in front of the bus to attack.

“Get all of them out of bus and hit. Teach them lesson.” With these aggressive voices and uproars, obscene abusives also hurled. They challenged sitting persons inside the bus and insisted them to come out. They were very angry and in aggressive mood, particularly with the youth sitting on the rooftop of bus. Because of non-supply of electricity, there was pitched dark in market. Same was the scene inside the bus too, except the torch-light beaming from the crowd outside. Bus passengers were sitting scarily, silently. Persistent threatening was continuously receiving from outside. Few aged people showed courage and boarded out of bus and tried to calm the situation. But the crowd was much anguished, particularly with the youth

sitting on the rooftop of the bus hurled abusives. After all out efforts, the situation any how got controlled, even then two youth were beaten up by the crowd badly.

Jaiprakash however managed to get out the bus and walked briskly towards Syunsi. It was around six kilometer away from Baijro. Entire area was in the grip of darkness, as it was situated beneath the hills and the valley was engulfed with thick clouds. On the other hand, black charcoal road was multiplying the darkness. Thunder noises of the flowing river were making the atmosphere scary. Steps of Jaiprakash were advancing rapidly towards the Syunsi. He had no other means of light like torch to see the way and at least reached around ten o'clock night at Syunsi, where other agitators were waiting for him anxiously.

Rikhad village was three kilometer away from Bironkhal. Bhubneshwar had a grocery shop there along with attached two-three rooms. Whenever more people joined the camp, they were made adjusted in Rikhad. Good arrangements were made by Bhubneshwar for accommodating these people and from there they used to make future plans.

Rikhad village was under the purview of Dumaila Tall Gramsabha. In past, there was no habitation there. It was situated beneath the two valleys. Years ago, steep streams were used to flow in this area, particularly in rainy season. Heavy stones were placed on the edge of road to protect the people flowing away by the stream. Earlier, few people made rooms for the purpose of business, but they could not stay against the strong streams. Owing to global warming, nowadays, the rains didn't fall so much as in earlier years. So a small market established there and people from nearby places used to purchase household items. A long and huge wall of stone was

erected to slow down the velocity of water and so to turn its flow other direction.

Dr. Joshi was now the main election advisor of Vijay Pal Singh. He had no good command and control over the region. Reason, he was not in habit of giving any kind of concession to patients in his medical profession and charged higher fees in comparison to other doctors. In this way, he amassed lot of penny with both hands. As a result, he consecutively lost the last two elections. Despite knowing this fact, he was unable to catch the people's view.

This time he was fully assured about the ticket. He was also dreaming to bag the seat. Firstly, nobody in the region was in a position to give a tough fight to him, and secondly during last elections he helped Vijay Pal Singh wholeheartedly and when asked for the expenses he spent, Dr. Joshi took nothing in anticipation. Vijay Pal Singh didn't forget that favour and promised him for the ticket in the forthcoming assembly elections. After that, he became one of the loyalists of Vijay Pal Singh.

In between, I tilted the balance of his equations. All the potential candidates were surprised at my sudden proclamation. And this incidence occurred just only two months back. Dr. Joshi assumed me a danger for him, as on the one hand, I have been an active agitator of Uttarakhand movement for the last ten years, and on the other hand, I was also a good orator and being a lady candidate I would be in better advantage as lady voters were in majority in hills. Wherever I visited, gained full public faith and support.

Vijay Pal Singh rented a hotel in Pauri for election purposes, where he used to obtain the latest developments of his loyal candidates and day-to-day update position. This time he

was worried more about Bironkhal. After all, why not, as his wife herself was in fray from that place.

Vijay Pal Singh was summoning election agents of his party one by one in a big conference room. Arrangements for accommodating nineteen-twenty people were made to sit. A Semi-circular sofa with extra chairs was placed to accommodate more people. In the front side, Vijay Pal Singh himself plumped on sofa.

Nirmala, Dr. Joshi and four-five party workers stepped in the room. Nirmala sank beside Vijay Pal Singh, whereas others took front seats.

“What is the scene in Bironkhal? How the publicity is going on, dear brother?” Asked Vijay Pal Singh bringing a smile on face and fixed his gaze on Dr. Joshi.

“Everything is going all right. We convince most of the dissidents and remnants will persuade in a day of two.” Replied Dr. Joshi scratching his skull and gazed towards others in expect of their assent.

“I think matter of dissidents and rebels are settled by now?” Asked Vijay Pal Singh and nodded.

“Rebels are persuaded nicely and they will not go beyond the party line, but it seems hard to tackle independents.” Replied Dr. Joshi timidly in surrendering tone with low head.

“Forget them, Sir, within eight-ten days, when their money drain out completely, they will leave the field themselves.” Said Hiralal Tamta apparently and waved.

“This time we must not repeat that mistake. May be opposition instigate them offering money. After all, these rebels

will cut our votes. First of all, we have to make them sit somehow or other.” Surender Sajwan suggested.

Vijay Pal Singh took a cursory glance around and asked, “Tell me clearly who is more dangerous for us?”

“That lady, Garima. Liquor mafia Biru and Pushkar already surrender before us.” Replied Dr. Joshi in slow voice.

“Make her to sit either by hook or crook. I don’t want to see her in the election arena.” Roared Vijay Pal Singh in anger.

“Only Garima is main hurdle.” Said Dr. Joshi timidly.

“We have to make her withdraw at any cost. She has messed up all the things. I know how I manage the things right. Because of her, I have to drag Nirmala. Otherwise Nirmala is not in favour of contesting election. There was no option left with me except Nirmala. On the one hand, election committee, screening committee and supervision team all were in favour of that lady and on the other hand, Virender Singh Bhandari was supporting her openly. At last, there was no option left for me except bargaining.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in little harsh tone. Anger seethed within him.

“We try hard to talk her through various sources, but she didn’t.” Said Dr. Joshi expressing his inability.

“I assign this responsibility to Gabbar Singh. He has been having good interaction with agitators for long. Am I right?” Asked Vijay Pal Singh and threw his eyes on him.

“Yes, why not. It is my pleasure. I am ready for this service.” Replied Gabbar Singh expressing his willingness.

“Now it is your job to handle that arrogant lady at any cost, whether on greed or promise or bargain. You are a capable

and experienced person.” Hurling Vijay Pal Singh few words in his praise.

“Sir, I will try my best. All depend on meeting what she wants actually.” Said Gabbar Singh nodding his head.

“I want her name back so to pay my full attention to other constituencies freely. I can compromise at any level.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in an advisory tone.

“Sir, you need not bother. I will try my best with all out efforts. But Sir, she is adamant lady and hard to crack.” Said Gabbar Singh and turned his skull towards others.

“Sir, there is no need to give such importance to Garima. I know it very well she has little money left with her. She does not stand anywhere in front of our bombarding publicity. It is true she is expert in making speeches, but our workers are also far ahead in publicity.” Said Hiralal Tamta with the intention to switch the matter other direction and to boost enthusiasm among the people.

“Not only publicity, money was also spent lavishly in last elections. Tell me, why I got defeat that time?” Said Vijay Pal Singh in harsh words. After a pause he added, “This time I am not in a favour of giving any chance.” With these words he stood up to leave and storm off the room. So did Nirmala.

As he left, whisper started. People were stunned and discouraged of the rude behavior of Vijay Pal Singh.



SEVEN

Gambhir Singh took command of Aakeshwar block making three-four teams. Each team consisted of four-five people. They used to visit villages on foot and distributed pamphlets and printed material. They met particularly the ladies and managed to gather them for meetings and on appointed day they invited me to deliver the speech.

Gambhir Singh also assigned the responsibilities to his father, crossed seventy, fit in health, perfectly right in walking step by step with others. Donning a woolen cap on skull and wrapping with white blanket around the body, he visited various villages a day.

Dharansu, Ransua and Rawadi were the vast enough villages in Aakeshwar block. I attended various public meetings. In addition to these villages, I visited on foot to Rithakhal, Simarkhal, Churinda, Devrajkhali, Pingli, Pokhri, Chitroli, Sanglakoti, Pundori, Giwala, Uchyakot and other nearby villages and organized scores of public meetings.

Gambhir Singh was also serious at his work. The task once decided, he determined to complete it at any cost. Owing to his natural quality of dedication and fierce determination, other agitators titled him 'Iron Man'. He was also one of the senior policy framers of the Uttarakhand Jan Morcha. He was much in favour of contesting elections by the agitators. The idea behind

this was that if the agitators will not contest the elections and give the power of newly state in the hands of vested interested, then the so-called elements and the old foxes will go on the same path, as they did earlier in last sixty years. That's why agitators wanted to jump in election fray to lead the state in right direction, for which they struggled so long and people sacrificed their lives.

While returning from Pokhra region, Vidya Rawat accompanied me. She was also an agitator and participated in movement along with me shoulder to shoulder. *Jail Bharo Andolan, Sansad Gherao, Dharna*, demonstration and rallies during that era were major achievements. She belonged to nearby village of Pokhra vicinity and was on campaigning task there for me.

At the early hours, people were getting prepared for their work towards campaigning. Today we plan to visit various villages nearby Bironkhal and had to cover as more villages as possible. There was heavy fog due to rains.

I overheard a commotion outside. Two persons were stepping down the stairs into the house hurling "*Garimajee bain, Garimajee bain*" – Is Garima there? Gabbar Singh was robust man of medium height with bushy eyebrows and a thick beard. Another was quite average height with clean shaven except for his moustache with was curled into circles on his cheeks. Both were wrapped with white shawls.

I and Gajender came out of room, welcomed both with folding hands and escorted them into the room gently. Jaiprakash and Bhubneshwar too joined us of the next room.

Gabbar Singh was a partyman as well as Uttarakhand agitator. He knew me very well since long and we met off and on in rally, *dharna* during agitation era. Sudden visit of a known

person like this without any prior notice made astonished and suspicion all of us.

After chatting about here and there, Gabbar Singh asked, “How the election campaign is going on.”

“Quite well.” I replied simply bringing smile on face.

“I didn’t like ignoring you the party ticket.” Said Gabbar Singh showing his sympathy, “All of us hoping you the right claimant for the ticket and you deserve it too.” He added.

“You know it better and can enquire Vijay Pal Singhjee about this.” I replied smilingly and turned my face other side.

“If he himself wanted his wife to contest from Bironkhal then we would never try and sit at home silently or accompany him. But he constantly and deliberately misguided us.” Gajender grumbled.

“We left no place to chase him to know his intentions. Pokhra Rally, Dhumakot Rally and so many visits at his residence. Had he showed his intention of contesting his wife, at least our fifty-sixty thousands of hard earned money would have been saved. But Vijay Pal Singhjee made us to run behind him. After that, we made up our mind not to retreat.” I vowed in firm words.

“Had Vijay Pal Singhjee cleared his intention, we would have never proceeded, but he deliberately neglected us.” Uttered Bhubneshwar in agitating tone.

“Now he is feeling his mistake. He must not treat like that and particularly with an agitator.” Gabbar Singh turned his face towards the window. He continued, “He feel it bad and request me to visit you as I know you very well and you may not ignore my words.” Said Gabbar Singh in hesitation and grinned.

“Gabbar Singhji, now it is not possible for us. We already go to public and also getting her support. Is it right to take steps back now? Is it not betrayal to public?” I questioned him and continued, “The people who are keeping trust on us, offering us vehicles on their own expenses, accompanying us without taking anything. Is it right to betray them? See this lady Vidya Rawat, she is with us, leaving her siblings alone for few days. These kinds of dedicated people are supporting us without selfishness.” A deep silence fell in the room.

“It is too late now. There is no question of retreating. Public will beat and insult us badly. You people will soon leave Bironkhal and move to Delhi but I have to live here in Rikhad.” Said Bhubneshwar breaking the silence and laughed aloud. His laugh made the atmosphere little ease.

“So, Vijay Pal Singhjee send me to keep my words. That’s all right. He assured me to offer the membership of Legislative Council or a member of any committee.” Gabbar Singh threw a dice of greed.

“What will you give to Pushkar Shah? What are you going to give Rajender Dhyani? After all they are also agitators.” I questioned ironically.

“Gabbar Singhjee, you know it very well there is no Legislative Council in small states like Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. It lies only in vast states like U.P.” Clarified Gajender gently.

“As you wish.” Saying this he stood up to leave. Hurriedly, he took out a packet of currency from his pocket and tried to hand it over to me with the words, “This is a small help or cooperation from my side. I am giving this help to every person.”

I refused it intact and took his hand on my head and said, “You are as elder as my father. Give me blessings, not money.” And with these words I bowed to touch his feet.

Gabbar Singh once again tried to give some money as token for negotiation but I refused politely. Both the persons went out with long faces and in dejected mood.

When duo left, I roared in anguish, “It is pity, Vijay Pal Singh considers that he can make me withdraw showing his power of money. He has placed me in the queue of others like liquor mafia Biru Bhai and wants to shut my mouth. I will never surrender, nor take my steps back under any circumstances.”

“Now we have to be more conscious. It seems that Vijay Pal Singh feels more danger of us and may apply other means to threaten us for withdrawing.” Said Gajender alerting all.

“I am not afraid of these threats. We should write to SDM for security of our people.” I said in firm words.

“Now get ready for next mission. By now, we would have covered one more village.” Said Bhubneshwar and lit a *bidi*.

It was hard to get out of bed during chilly winter in early hours. There was always a persistent need of hot water for daily chores. Everyone had to go out with stomach-full meals as there was no arrangement for lunch. But by the grace of God wherever we visited, we were offered with tea, biscuit, *namkeen* by people. In this way, we got some sort of bits and pieces in place of meals.

By then, Munna fixed the loudspeaker, battery, mike and banners on the vehicle. We didn’t depute anyone for preparation of food at Rikhad. I and Vidya Rawat ourselves prepared *chapattis* and vegetables for them and all took their meals. With a Tata-sumo and a Maruti, we took our way. We approached

Kothila touching through Bironkhal, Sinduri, Maithanaghat. The experienced locals suggested us to contact and visit far-flung areas rather than roadside markets.

After parking the vehicles along the road, we entered in Kothila village. A boy called Munna, also accompanied the team, whose task was to carry the challenger – a small mike with loudspeaker, battery in a bag and fit them when required. Painting of walls, pasting of posters and distribution of pamphlets were tasked by other boys collectively and voluntarily.

The team of eight-ten people reached in the middle of village with the announcement “Garima is arriving.” In a quite enough space, people sat in queue on a small and long stone seat. After hearing the screaming sound of challenger, children and other people, at home that time, also flocked there. Most of the women and men were out on fields, as it was a busy season. When a good deal of crowd assembled, Gajender took the mike and orated, elaborating our work, struggle, agitation and other activities. Other people of the team have a little knowledge of handling the mike. So they only hurled slogans and made clapping. After few moments when heavy crowd milled around us, he handed over the mike to me. I started speech, “Dear brothers and sisters of Kothila village. I am daughter-in-law of Capt Bisht of Kakrora village. I filed the nomination for assembly election as an independent and my election symbol is Axe.....”

Like this I started my speech politely and raised voice during the course. I felt expressions of determination on my face. Clinching fist in determination, I was orating waving hands in air. Large number of ladies assembled to hear me. Perhaps it was the first occasion when a candidate herself visited the villages and tasking her publicity herself.

I raised the local issues one by one. Position of female in villages, such as, took care of family and children, education of children, farming, whereas the male went to cities for employment. I shed some light on the issues and reminded ladies' participation in agitation and appealed them to take part once again in the development of the region. I talked about the need for a change in education system, sources of employment, mobile dispensaries, migration of youth, corruption, backwardness and water problems in the region. I made appeal to the people to weigh my capability, combativeness, qualification and interaction, with other two lady candidates. I delivered a balanced, impressive and dignified speech on Uttarakhand agitation, rallies, demonstrations.

After my speech, *pradhan* of village offered us tea, biscuits. Gajender noted down the names of active person of the village. Few passionate ladies and youths of village joined us. Without any delay we stepped rapidly towards next village.

Next village was Ghansali, almost three kilometer ahead of there. We stepped as fast as possible to reach Ghansali and five-six more persons also accompanied us. To go to Ghansali, first we had to go down and then mount up the steep slope. There was a wide valley between these villages and it took an hour to reach Ghansali.

The same course of action was applied here in Ghansali village. Fortunately, three known persons met there and they made our task easy for getting the people assembled. Posters got pasted and pamphlets distributed to the people.

Next destination was Kolari village, so we quickly took depart from Ghansali and moved to Kolari. The Kolari village was situated at the equal height as of Ghansali and there were series of step fields between the two villages. The part of the

hill was full of terraced fields and waving crops were making the atmosphere fragrant. Women and men were working on their fields with bowing heads. Someone was collecting the vegetables, while another was weeding away the wild plants off the fields. Landscape of small terraced fields with vegetation and greenery was giving inner relief to the heart. Chirping sound of birds heard around.

Kolari village was quite big and seemed to be divided in two parts. We asked a villager about the way leading to *panchayatghar* and entered in village. Gents were totally absent. On hearing the screaming sound of challenger, children stormed with us. Morning time was busy hours so the presence was thin. Jaiprakash took a short halt at the house of a person of his acquaintance and sipped tea while the others went to *panchayatghar*.

Scores of women and children got assembled to listen me, but the presence of gents were seen nowhere. They were busy in playing cards in a deserted house. Few members of the team tossed them pamphlets but they were so much busy at their play and put it intact into their pockets without having a glance on it.

After finishing our task at Kolari village, we marched towards another village called Jamari. This village was quite far and at a considerable height. On the one hand, the footway was very narrow and uneven, and on the other hand, cold winds were blowing sharply, so required to travel carefully. The footway was slanting down and after a distance it starting up sharply.

Slowly and steady we reached near Jamari village. Now the footway was quite wide and the fields were seen along the footway. Ladies and children were fetching water canes and vessels on their heads from a nearby stream. Announcement

about the arrival of team was blared on challenger. On hearing the screaming sound, people in terraced-fields started moving towards the village. In this village too it was the first occasion when a candidate herself visited the village on foot. A man escorted us in the middle of village and then hit an iron poll of electric with a wooden stick, that made big bang sound. That was treated as a whip for the village people to assemble for a meeting. This alarm was used to summon the people. In shyness, ladies were nowhere in scene, instead craning their necks of their windows to catch a glimpse of me. They did not come near the scene. Gajender was busy in making the announcements whereas others engaged in pasting and distributing the pamphlets. I myself went to the womenfolk and urged them to join. Gradually one by one, womenfolk moved towards the site and a good deal of crowd crammed in courtyard.

When a good deal of crowd gathered, I delivered my speech. I felt that was striking enthusiastic as womenfolk were very much impressed of it. After a short while, front portion of the space of the houses were filled completely with crowd. Agreeing my words, ladies were gesturing for support.

Till now presence of any party was negligible in these villages. The places we visited, found myself the first candidate in these far-flung villages.

We were to cover more and more villages in a day so it was necessary for us to take quick steps. As we finished our task in Jamari village, we immediately brisk towards the next village named Kamdai. The footway was quite narrow, even then there was no difficulty in walking. As eight-nine people were stepping together with chatting, tiredness vanished away automatically.

Just then, our eyes fell on few figures coming towards us slowly from distant, clad with party caps and scarf around neck. On coming nearer, a person happened to be known to me and others too. He was walking with the help of stick. They were drenching in sweat profusely and were on party campaigning. The person was known as Lakhan Singh, who earlier too filed as an independent.

Earlier he raised voice against Vijay Pal Singh strongly in party forum for the sake of the party democracy. He used to reiterate that voices of partymen should be heard and the feelings of the party-workers should not be suppressed or ignored. Party is not a personal property of anybody. His rebel gestures were also experienced in Pokhra rally. It was strongly assumed he would contest as an independent, but later on he surrendered in front of Vijay Pal Singh timidly. Earlier he not only insisted me to file papers, but also gave assurance of full support in election.

He was amazed to see me here in such a remote, far-flung area. Colour of his face drained completely. Words were not coming out of his mouth. I myself initiated the conversation, “How are you Lakhan Singhji. Looking tired and face is breaching with perspirations. It seems coming from a long journey.” The voice was loaded with sarcasm.

“We have to cover all these villages and also reach at Kothila by evening. These eight-ten days are very difficult for me.” He said in weak words and turned his face other side.

I came nearer to him and said, “Sir, in those days you were talking so loudly in Delhi. Where your words self-esteem, self-respect, self-decision are now.” After a pause I added, “How much money Vijay Pal Singhji offer to shut your mouth?” And gave a sharp gaze.

He was not expecting such a question, so replied in stammering voice, “I am not that sort of person, I take nothing but as you know we people can’t ignore order of the high command. You are agitators and you people are independent. You can take your own decision, but we can’t go beyond the party line. We are bind to this.” He spelled out his position.

“That’s all right. Keep on holding party line. Earlier you carried the bag of Vijay Pal Singh. At present carrying his wife’s bag and later on his son’s and grandson’s.” I taunted ironically with a laugh and moved away with my team.

The footway leading to Kamdai was slight up. All were walking slowly and taking rest intermittently. Bhubneshwar and Pappu reached far away from others. On reaching at the top of hill, Bhubneshwar yelled, “Take rapid steps. If you walk lazy like this, we can’t reach at home till night. We have to cover three more villages by now. That’s why I am telling to start work early. In this way, we can’t fight election.” They sat on a huge stone for relaxing.

“I don’t bother about elections. Had I known I have to visit villages on foot then I would have never filed the paper.” I replied in fun and laughed.

“Tomorrow you will become MLA, minister and nobody will ask us.” Replied Bhubneshwar with a laugh. “Am I right?” he looked towards others for their comments.

All of them laughed aloud. Exchanging words, chatting and joking we neared Kamdai village. Bhubneshwar already sent words to a person named Kulwant, a shopkeeper there. Gajender took the challenger and started with few words. Scores of people assembled in middle of village. The Village was too big in comparison to others. There were long queues of houses. The houses were closed to each other so their front portions

were quite spacious. Small stone walls were erected in the corner for the visitors to take rest there. Front spacious areas were made flat and plain fixing flat slate stones.



Houses in uttarakhand hills found totally different than that of plains and constructed traditionally. The first floors used for living purpose, whereas the ground floor for kitchen and storing wood, agricultural equipments. Generally, each floor consisted of four small rooms, even few families also had two small rooms. Being terraced fields and hilly region, houses were comparatively smaller in size. Heights of ground floor were not more than six-seven feet, and the first floor not more than eight-nine feet. Mostly, walls were made of stones and kneaded with mud around one and a half foot width. Roofs were built cone shaped to slide away rains or snow. They were made of huge plain stone slates and fixed with kneaded mud and pieces of wood. Thick wooden beams also used for supporting. Advantages of these houses were of not becoming so cool during winters and not so hot in summers in comparison to the houses of bricks and cement. The houses were so attached with each other in a long row in such a way that made a wide space and frequently used for marriages, social functions and agricultural work. Thick walls were also made above the boundary for sitting and relaxing.

Cowsheds were built at a considerable distance from the village to make residential area clean and disease free.

Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD) was formed for the exclusive purpose of creating separate state. UKD made unite and fortified the people of hills for attaining separate state. It constantly organized series of rallies, *dharamas*, demonstration

and mobilized the public at large. Concerning over their vote bank, gradually other political parties also supported the demand for the separate state.

It had been the fate with UKD that whenever its own leader attained a sizable height and acquired good status in public, he cheated and joined other party to fulfill his selfish motives, leaving the UKD amid.

Ram Prasad Nautiyal was a freedom fighter and actively participated in Indian Independence movement. He also took active part in construction of motorable road of Moradabad to Garhwal, that connected various parts of the region. He also activated the Garhwal Transport Users Society to provide transport facilities to the people of Garhwal. In past, when the entire country was facing severe drought and famine situation, he led an agitation pressing the administration to supply foodgrains to the far-flung villages of Garhwal. Later on, he became MLC in U.P. assembly. He belonged to Kanda village.

Among the companions of Ram Prasad Nautiyal, one of them was Gulab Singh Rawat of Dumailla Talla village. He also joined Indian Independence movement, leaving the teaching job amid, when he was in Lahore. Another companion was Bhagat Darshan of Musaeti village, near Thalain. It was said when the British Police used to raid for arresting them in Dumailla Talla, they hide themselves in dense jungle and stayed in hut. Children supplied them food and water. Later on, Bhagat Darshan became the Agricultural Minister of UP. Gulab Singh Rawat ran the Garhwal Motor Users society and became the first Pramukh of Bironkhal region.

In Kamdai village, Harish Dhaundiya of UKD was having good influence. Here the people were opposing both the parties, the ruling party as well as the opposition. As I stood up for

speech, claps ran through the crowd. Taking the mike in hand, I appealed to the throngs of people to weigh the pros and cons about other candidates. I transpired them in detail about the activities of my organization during the Uttarakhand movement. After the speech when the people saw my photos and clippings in newspapers, they realized the reality.

Evening was approaching and we had to take steps fast to reach Thapla village. After distributing pamphlets and posters we headed down towards the valley. We were to cover a long distance. After stepping down the valley we were to mount opposite hill again. Darkness fell at Thapla. We took our steps little fast and crossed the bridge over the river. Taking steps rapidly we started mounting the hill. The climb was quite tiring, but fresh breezes reviving us. Black clouds were seen above the sky and all of sudden lightning started with heavy cold winds. The lightning and thunder clouds were constantly spreading over the valley. Started with drizzling, soon it followed with heavy pelting rains. Somehow we were able to reach Pipalsain village. We met a person of acquaintance, who was running a shop there. He promptly served us hot tea and biscuits. The rain was continuously on and did not appear to halt.

Expressions of deep worries were clearly shown on our faces. The reason was that our one vehicle was left for servicing, while another was stationed at Kothila, from where we started journey in morning. From Pipalsain, there was a road leading to Bironkhal, but at evening there was no bus or vehicle for public and all the vehicles were engaged for election campaigning of parties. Worry lines crisscrossed our foreheads.

“Sister, you need not worry. I will make arrange for stay.” Shopkeeper said gently craning outside to see the heavy pouring.

“That is not the matter. We give time for other areas and it is necessary to reach there.” I said with worried face and in dejected mood.

“If rain will not stop, how can we move? Tomorrow we will start from here, and day after tomorrow we may go to that area.” Replied Bhubneshwar with ease. He turned towards the shopkeeper and added, “Brother, you may make arrangements for food and stay. We will stay here today.” He sat on the bedstead tense-free and stretched out his legs.

“On seeing this rain I recall *Lalkar Rally* of 10th August 1996.” I hurled with sparkling eyes.

“There was a miracle on that very day. Drizzling was continuous on for three days.” Vidya Rawat also joined me.

“But our task did not stop. We kept on organizing meetings, public contacts, public address.” said Gajender in a joyous mood.

“On those days, continuous rain smashed its earlier records. We are expecting to stop next day, but four days dragged by it didn’t. On rally day too it was drizzling. I went out in street to call people in rain and accommodated them in bus.” I said with wide eyes. People were listening me in curiosity.

I resumed after taking a gulp of water. “On my leaving the house, a phone call poured in from a reporter of a newspaper enquiring about the rally. My mother-in-law transpired that the bus already left for the rally towards Jantar Mantar.”

“On that day few people deceived us. They made cancelled the buses booked for rally. We were relaxing in bus stand. From the early morning, we were busy in gathering the people in bus-stand and women, men and children had also arrived. All of us were waiting eagerly for the bus to arrive. The bus was to reach

around 10 am. Time was passing bit by bit and it was already 12 past noon, but busses were nowhere in scene. On those days there were no mobile phones.” Said Jaiprakash rolling his eyes. He continued. “We were unable to do anything and mind was very upset. I took a scooter to hire another bus or tempo for the rally. Just then, we saw two school buses opposite returning after leaving the children from school. Harish Bisht’s mind stuck. He dashed and talked to bus driver. Drivers agreed to go for rally.” Jaiprakash was narrating the story in such a way that the incident was of yesterday.

“Bhai sahib, when one does work with full dedication and whole-heartedly, God always helps him.” Added Vidya Rawat apparently.

“I never forget that fateful day, as I had had all the papers of rally, such as, memoranda given to the PM, HM and press releases. Had I not reached the rally, all the labour, hard-work and reputation of organization would have been razed to ground.” Said Jaiprakash with enthusiasm.

“On that momentous day we were also strolling worriedly at Jantar Mantar. We were continuously announcing about arriving of 4-5 buses from Kailash Puri, Sagarpur and Indira Park sooner and the media persons were after us badly for the press releases. On the other side, we were in impression of your being arrested at Dhaula Kuan and taking to police station.” Said Gajender and laughed uproariously.

“Can you believe, next day’s newspapers gave that much coverage to that rally in comparison to other in colour photos with caption “*Despite pelting rains, Uttarakhandi women organized a massive demonstration for the cause of separate state*”. On seeing the photos on newspapers, our tiredness and fatigue vanished away.” I shouted in cheerful voice. I had a look of triumph on my face.

“You people struggle for the separate state, but the people of this region forget all those struggle, sacrifices in the wake of propaganda and publicity of these political parties, noises, few bottles of liquor and in greed of little money.” Said the shopkeeper disappointedly.

“We will continue our struggle. Earlier we struggled for the separate state and now for mitigating the backwardness, migration and for the development of the region.” I vowed.

The rain was not last long. It was now drizzling lightly.

Just then Bhubneshwar rose from the bedstead and said hurriedly, “Let us move to Panas without wasting any time. We may get any vehicle from there. Heavy rain is over now.” He stood up to leave and so did others, thanking the shopkeeper.

Panas village was one and a half kilometer away from there. We headed for Panas with rapid steps on motorable road. Rain made the weather too cold. We were shivering badly in cold. Few took cap on their heads and others woolen scarf around their neck. Ladies were wrapped with shawls.

On reaching Panas, our quest for taxi began. Bhubneshwar sent a boy down in village for taxi. The boy returned with the message of taxi driver’s consent to ferry up to Rikhad. Presently, he was taking his meals and would come on finishing it. There was no other option except waiting.

I noticed a beam of light appeared from the distant hill focusing on nearby hill, just opposite. It was already nine at night. The vehicle was coming from Dunao. As it neared, Bhubneshwar waved to stop. He boarded on it for taking the maruti van from Kothila. We reached at Bironkhal by taxi and then wheeled to Syunsi. By then, it was already eleven of night at Syunsi.



Next day's itinerary was to visit the villages located above Maithana Ghat. These villages were Bawansa, Gween, Jamaria, Rasia Mahadev, Mangro and Takulsari.

We reached Maithana Ghat village early hours of morning. A person named Datta Ram of our acquaintance welcomed us affectionately.

Earlier, Datta Ram too filed the papers for the election but later on withdrew because of pressure mounted on him by Vijay Pal Singh. He made assembled the villagers in front of his house, introduced me and apprised the people about my participation in Uttarakhand movement in detail. After that, I delivered an appealing speech and impressed the gatherings a lot. Many women promised me to accompany in the struggle and clustered around me.

"There is no place for justice in this village." A woman grumbled.

"Last month, our village received fund from the block office for construction of footway. Three or four people gulp the entire fund." Said another woman in harsh voice.

"To whom we complaint? If complaint, we will be penalized in *panchayat* and debar from the village." Complained another woman to me.

"That's why I am raising this issue constantly in villages and appealing the villagers to unite. There is strength in unity. Government allocates money to each and every village for development, but officials and agents of political parties misappropriate it deceiving the public." I said emphasizing each word.

"Just three-four months ago money was received for the repair of footway. The government has fixed the daily wages for

each man and woman.” An aged woman said. After a while she added. “Two or three people of this village gave major part of daily wages to their own people, while the rest were given little amounts.”

Women of this village were very much discontented on the irregularities. But they did not know to whom they complaint. They didn’t use to go out the village so didn’t know much what to do.

“Most of people receive wages without doing any work. Forged names are inserted in register and others are getting in place of that.” Said a woman in high-pitched voice.

Men of the village were stunned to witness such an embarrassing situation so created. They were unable to decide what to do now.

“Problems of village should resolve within the village only. There is no use to discuss outside. It disgraces the reputation of village.” A man said politely with a view to cool down the agitating women.

“Village problems must discuss outside so to apprise others about the corruption prevailing in our villages.” Replied another woman truculently.

“We must tell about the misuse of funds to other villages.” Snapped another woman.

“Few people construct double storey houses, purchase television, fridge, fan, washing machine misusing government money.” Said Bhubneshwar persuading other woman.

“We will tell aloud this issue in market too. When there is no one to listen us so we have to tell others?” Many women shouted in unison.

“That’s my only aim to contest the election. In this way, we are visiting villages and create awareness among them to come forward collectively against the corrupt practices of corrupt officials.” I said looking towards the womenfolk.

“Earlier the fund released from the government was meager, and after creation of new state it has increased. As you know, the mentality and habit of *panchs*, *pradbans*, *sarpanch*, *pramukhs*, agents of parties and officials never change night long and they are still misusing the fund as usual.” Said Jaiprakash and waved.

“So, all of us must create awareness among the people so to utilise government money for development of villages.” I vowed.

“*Pradban* of my village has constructed a double storey house on *panchayat* fund. Few people made houses in Delhi and someone purchased Tata sumo and other vehicles for their kiths and kins.” Said Bhubneshwar citing few examples.

“Our struggle is not against a single person but against those who are dacoiting the hard earnings of general public. These persons are not less than the criminal or thief or dacoit.” I said in firm words and clearly spell out my fierce determination to fight the cause.

Other people of village brought tea, biscuit for us. It was a tradition of Uttarakhand that whenever someone visited a village, arrangements of tea was made by the villagers voluntarily.

After finishing our task at Maithana Ghat, we wheeled towards Rasia Mahadev. We had to travel a long to reach there. First, we were to go Kothila and Diwa Danda and then took a reverse way to hillside. The distance between Maithana Ghat

and Rasia Mahadev was hardly five-six kilometers on foot, but there was no shortcut approachable motor road to reach there. That's why it took long route to reach there. This motorable road was passing through the oak jungle of Diwa Danda and it took more than three hours' time to reach Rasia Mahadev.

After a long fatigued road journey, at last we dashed outskirts of Jamaria village. It was located below the road. On getting down the vehicle, we trooped towards Jamaria village making announcements over the challenger on the way. A new gentleman named Mohan Singh of Maithana village joined us. He impressed very much with my thoughts and readily offered his services for campaigning. He was guiding us about this vicinity, as his distant relatives and acquaintances too belonged to that region and he had good interactions in these villages.

On reaching in middle of village, I orated an triumphant speech in high pitched voice at the *Panchyat Ghar* without performing any formality and appealed to the throngs of people to come forward for the development of region. I asserted that without public awareness, the development of region can't take place. Without awareness, party agents, leaders and other elements will continuously misguide and cheat them.

After finishing the task there, we approached Seeli village. Publicity started from the house of Jagat Singh, a school teacher. People of other parties had not yet visited there, so scores of men and women assembled easily for witnessing outside faces of ours.

Gajender was addressing the villagers. Others were plunged in task of pasting posters, distributing pamphlets and contacting the villagers. When good deal of persons gathered, he advanced the mike to me. One of the lady clapped gazing others and the rest of the crowd applauded as well. The sound

of challenger was heard clearly in the neighbouring villages too. I appealed to throngs of people to get unite for the sake of development. I further added that until they don't send an appropriate candidate to the legislative assembly, the development of the area will remain a day-dream. One must not cast his or her vote on party or personality basis, but for ability or quality basis.

Jagat Singh and other two-three people were the key party workers of Vijay Pal Singh in Seeli village. They were extremely in high spirits with the donation of five thousand rupees offered by Vijay Pal Singh for the repair of *Panchayat Ghar*. At the peak time of the election, donation by a leader added goodwill in his credit.

In his concluding speech, Jagat Singh, the school teacher, thanked me and also added few words that Vijay Pal Singh donated five thousand rupees for the repair of *Panchayat Ghar*, so they have to reciprocate him for that favour and so pardoned them at this time for any kind of help on their part to me.

After the speech, Jagat Singh took his seat. Light gossiping and chatting was going on. Matter of five thousand rupees pinched us badly.

“Masterji, will this meager amount of five thousand develop your entire village.” Asked Gajender bringing little smile on his face.

“We may demand more whenever required.” Replied Jagat Singh, the teacher apparently.

“If Vijay Pal Singh refuses to donate after the election, what will you do? Will you go to Delhi after him?” Questioned Gajender eyeing at him.

“Is there any hospital in your region?” I trigged the next question.

“No, it is in Bironkhal. Only one doctor attends it and medicines never available there.” Replied a woman and nodded.

“Then why didn’t you demand a hospital from Vijay Pal Singh.” Asked Jaiprakash this time.

“How many degree colleges are in your region?” Asked Bhubneshwar in serious tone.

“Not a single. One is in Vedikhal, too far from here.” Said Jagat Singh in a hopeless voice.

“Do you not want to educate your children further?” Asked Bhubneshwar ironically.

“Why not.” Replied another woman.

“Then why didn’t you ask Vijay Pal Singh for a degree college.” Asked Jaiprakash and threw a cursory glance on all.

“Are buses plying in this road connecting your village?” I asked.

“Not at all, the road is uneven and still incomplete.” Replied another old woman in hoarse voice.

“Did you ask Vijay Pal Singh why the road is not completed by now and why the vehicles and buses are not plying here?” I asked to that lady.

“It may be possible that the motorable road construct only on papers and the fund gulp down by the engineer, MLA, contractors.” Said Bhubneshwar and laughed aloud.

“Is it possible?” One lady asked in surprise and innocently.

“Why not, it is happening in each and every village. Forged vouchers, bills and papers are submitted and *pradhan, pramukh*, officials and leaders are filling their pockets with these public funds.” Said Jaiprakash looking towards them.

“This kind of money never digests and not prospers their families.” Said another woman innocently nodding her head.

“This illegal money is prospering them all around. It is improving their status and they digest it perfectly. Have you not seen the houses of *pradhans*, *panchs* and the *pramukhs* in the villages where a lot of money are spent?” Replied Gajender and gave a dirty look.

“Someone has double-storey house, colour television, washing machine, refrigerator.” I remarked.

“Some other has taken plots and houses at Ramnagar, Dehradun, Roorkee and Delhi.” said Jaiprakash this time.

“Few have purchased Tata sumo, jeeps, cars and are minting money of them.” Said Bhubneshwar.

“All these assets and properties are accumulated by them from your hard earnings and public fund, that supposed to be spent for construction of hospital, electricity, water, school, repair of footway, *panchayat ghar*, *mahila milan kendra*, *anganwari* in villages, instead they are doing their own benefits.” I said in high pitched voice.

“Have you noticed in cities like Ramnagar, Kotdwar, Dehradun, Delhi, Mumbai, Kanpur, there are scores of small and big offices, factories and industries. As these units can be established in cities, then why not here.” Said Gajender and waved.

“We people get deceive in five or ten thousand and can say, in other words, these parties and their agents offer us five or ten thousand rupees to shut our mouths to not reveal the truth.” Said Bhubneshwar and gave a dirty look to Jagat Singh, the school master.

“You are telling right. We are still in dark. Whatever words our *pradhans* and *panchs* used to say, we agree with them blindly, and don’t ask, what they are venturing.” A woman said agreeing with them.

Jagat Singh tried to divert the issue and said apparently with a wane laugh, “Garimaji, you are young and have sufficient age to contest elections, and may contest many more. Give chance to Nirmalaji this time.”

“Masterjee, question of contesting the election does not arise at all. By participating in this election, we find a golden chance to come closer to public.” I snapped in replied of his question.

“We want public to aware about their rights. Earlier people struggle for separate state, similarly now they ought to struggle for development of their region.” Said Jaiprakash and waved his hands.

“Our aim is not to contest election only. The people accompanying me too took part in movement at Delhi and they received sufferings in the hands of policemen. Now we want awareness so that public funds could not be misused.” I said in enthusiasm.

“You are speaking truth. No party man or party ever tell these facts to us.” Someone said in assertion.

“The leader visit us used to give promises of opening new schools, construction of roads, launching water schemes and so on and so forth. In other words, they give five or ten thousand and disappear till next elections.” Complained another woman.

“There is no hospital, no post office, no bank and also no government office at all. All the parties are misguiding us for

years. You show us a way and now we are with you in your task of development.” Vowed another man.

“We depute two dedicated persons to accompany you.” Said an aged woman.

In this way, we created some sort of awareness among the public in Seeli village. I was very contented that public was listening me patiently.

Mohan Singh was guiding us in this area. After finishing our task at Seeli, we wheeled towards Rasia Mahadev. There was an ancient temple of Lord Mahadev, so the towship called Rasia Mahadev. A tiny market near the river valley fulfilled the needs of twelve-thirteen villagers.

On parking the vehicle along the road, I turned the mouth of loudspeaker towards the market and delivered a speech. The two youths, whom the police earlier arrested on 2 October 1994 rally and put in Tihar jail, were also habitating in that area. During that time our members made arrangements for their release, stay and food at Indira Park, Palam Colony. They were also provided with some sort of money to reach their respective villages.

On hearing my voice on loudspeaker, public flocked towards the market immediately. They recognized us. Both the youth met earlier at Maithana Ghat and promised for their full cooperation. After finishing the speech and other tasks, they took us to their residence and served tea.

On completing our job at Rasia Mahadev, we wheeled towards Mangro village located on hill top. Both the youth accompanied us. On reaching Mangro village, the vehicle was sent back to Maithana Ghat. The vehicle had to travel reverse more than two hours to reach Maithana Ghat.

We were to walk on foot to cover five-six more villages to reach Maithana Ghat through a down footway. As we arrived at Mangro village, heavy rains burst with thunder storm. Being located on hill top with a considerable height, this place was too cold. Speedy cold winds with slanting rain-drops were eroding the upper soil sharply. Somehow we managed to reach in a shop situated on the corner of road. Time was precious. Without paying any heed of pelting rain, I vowed to orate the speech. I conveyed the message to the villagers and made appeal to weigh the pros and cons of the contesting candidates, their past performance. Responsibility of distributing pamphlets was assigned to two-three other persons.

The rain was not last long. As the rain slowed down, we walked briskly towards Takulsari Malli, one and a half kilometer away from there. Mohan Singh had family relations with this village and he succeeded in assembling 15-16 ladies in a house. Last few days, rain increased the severity of coldness so villagers were burning wood fire – furnace, outside their houses to protect themselves from severe cold and to keep warm. We did not bother about the cold and continued with our assigned task. On sensing the weather condition, I curtailed speech and summed up within few words. Having a small talk with village people we then proceeded to next village Takulsari Talla. We completed our job quickly and got ready for next mission. By the time, the weather had further worsened and the way to reach Maithana Ghat was only a narrow footway. Black clouds above made the silent valley pitch dark. Pamphlets and publicity papers were distributed to the people walking on their way towards Gwin Malla and Gwin Tall villages. People of these villages had good acquaintances with us and they were returning to their villages, and most of them were shopkeepers. They met us several occasions in Maithana Ghat. Responsibility of the entire

work had been assigned to them. After handing over the publicity material to them, we took quick steps towards Maithana Ghat. The last day's rain taught us a lesson so we dare not want to repeat that. By then the vehicle arrived Maithana Ghat and we took our way to Syunsi.

On the other side, lady team was playing their role efficiently and dedicately. They were performing their tasks of publicity in Syar, Padinda, Rikhad, Bharoli Talli and Malli, Dumaila Talla villages very efficiently and contacting the people with great enthusiasm. The places they visited, womenfolk of that village asked for me, but owing to the large constituency, it became hectic for me to visit each and every village.



My massive and extensive public contact programmes and foot-march made most of the parties disturbed and panic, particularly Vijay Pal Singh, whose efforts of withdrawing me from the contest had been collapsed. Efforts of convincing through Gabbar Singh too didn't succeed, nor give the desired results. On the other hand, foot-marches and overwhelming support given by the public, particularly by the womenfolk became a big concern for him.

Nirmala, on her speech repeatedly pleaded of her being visited to maternal place after 27 years and appealed to public to give her a bid farewell by tendering votes in place of *Jhiti-kandi* - sacks of paddy and wheat given to newly married daughter by her parents. In beginning, she used to visit villages along the roadside and mostly on vehicles. Now she had to go on foot in villages to compete me. She also adopted the same pattern of mine and walked the villages on foot, far from the road side. Nirmala followed instantly me and visited the very next day to

the same village. It also turned easy for her as she had well enough manpower, money power and there was no dearth of modern means of publicity with her. It was very easy for her to get the public assembled.

Entire region of Uttarakhand was very backward. Agriculture produce in small and tiny terraced-fields was meager. These small terraced fields of peasants could not produce enough to support their families. In general, in this hilly region, wheat, rice, *mandua*, pulses and oil seeds were produced in the name of agricultural crops. Income from these agriculture produce was negligible. Even peasants were unable to get stomach-full meals for the entire year. They had to purchase the food grains and essentials from market, whereas the entire family remained engaged in tilling throughout the year. Non-availability of resources to earn income made the youths to migrate towards plains in search of employment and livelihood or they joined the army, forces and then sent the money-orders to run their families. When the money orders received in villages, only then the families ran on track. This was termed as '*Money Order Economy*'. Entire economy of this region depended on money orders so received.

It was an admitted fact that in hills factories, industries and enterprises could not be established, as it required labour, transportation, distribution, marketing, raw material, huge capital and its overhead charges also were much more than that of plains. Despite that, establishing small scale industries, cottage industries and tiny industries, at least, migration of youths would have been stopped somehow or much. Promoting and enhancing production of fruits, floriculture and tourism, employment could be generated at large with proper guidance and training to the locals. Unfortunately, no serious attempts were ventured to resolve the crises so far.

Scores of rivers and natural water streams flow in hills and throughout the year, drizzling took place intermittently. There was good scope for tiny hydropower projects and fisheries. Lot of electricity could be generated by constructing tiny hydropower projects. In rainy season, vegetables produced in good quantity and constructing cold storages, large quantity of vegetables and fruits could be saved from going waste. By establishing flowers and fruit-processing industries, employment could be generated in large scale. But nothing was materialised so far.

When Uttarakhand was part of Uttar Pradesh, projects and the plans were framed in Lucknow. The budget announced at Lucknow didn't reach upto hills. There were various sieves in system so hills persistently pushed backward. Keeping in mind the backwardness, migration, poverty, inequality, the people of hills poured on roads with the demand of separate state. It was an exceptional example in the entire world, where the people themselves crowded on roads and agitated for their upliftment, betterment of lives and development. After a long, constant struggle and sacrifices of agitators, the government at last had to fulfill the demand of separate state. After all, struggled and combative people won the fight.

On forming of the new State, next object of agitators was to develop the region, for which they struggled, sacrificed for long. Keeping these facts in mind, agitators filed papers for assembly elections and tried to jump in the fray. But these stereotyped old fashioned parties did not support them at all and went on their own traditional, professional path of attracting people.

The first conspiracy was hatched announcing Dehradun as temporary capital instead of Gairsain, whereas public of

Uttarakhand were unanimously favoured the latter. And in this way, they started betraying with the public aspiration and expectations. Uttarakhand could never be made developed from Dehradun. There was not much difference of Dehradun with Lucknow or Delhi. People sitting in Dehradun never thought or imagined about the development, planning and policy for the hills of Uttarakhand. All political parties, bureaucrats, contractors, land mafia, liquor mafias were behind this fraudulent game and conspiracy, so they totally ignored the feelings, sentiments of public, as they did not want to develop hills and kept their grip tight on entire Uttarakhand to exploit the natural resources as they did earlier.

Through me, agitators intended to transpire the public to become more cautious about their rights. One more revolution is required. The youths have to be provided with employment. Each and every village has to be connected with roads and communication. Education needs to be job-oriented so to get employment; a big hospital in each district has to be constructed so to make available all the medical facilities under one roof. Till that time mobile dispensaries have to establish so to treat the villagers then and there.

Corruption and liquor mafia played vital role in making Uttarakhand a backward region. The funds allotted for the development of region reached to *pradhan* of village through various mediators such as MLA, BDO, Party agents, block *pramukhs*, *Gram Sewak* and so on. When the funds routed through these mediators, it reduced to less than 30 percent. Each mediator took certain percentage as commission or bribery, in form of '*suwidha sulk*' and filled their pockets. In remnant 30 percent, *gram pradhan* gave the job construction to his near and dear and also corroded fat commission. There were thousands of such cases and incidents around villages where

gram pradhans, contractors, *panchs* and mediators grabbed the entire funds as commission and supplied or mixed inferior quality of material so constructed.

In a village near Bironkhal, there are two incidents of misappropriation or misuse of funds noticed where *gram pradhan* constructed a canal for irrigation in an isolated, deserted place where neither the water, nor any fields for irrigation were found and it was beyond the access of villagers too. Similar instances were repeated in other villages. The villagers called this project as *Sookhi Nahar* – dry canal.

A small bridge so constructed over a river did not even bear the meager weight of two bulls and collapsed. The poor bulls scum to injuries. In that bridge, the ratio of cement, sand was inappropriate. In another village, repair and construction of footway for three to four kilometers were shown on papers, whereas one and half lakhs of rupees were shown as spent. However, not a single paisa was spent on that footway. When villagers enquired the *pradhan* about the expenses, he spelt out clearly for taking that money for his personal use and roared for not bothering about any complaint whatsoever.

When a *pradhan* in a nearby village embezzled the funds in large scale, the villagers pleaded him with folded hands to give chance other men too. After that plea he relieved of his post calmly. The loan or subsidy granted under the *Indira Awas Yojna* was occasionally taken by the near and dear of the *pradhans* and they did not construct a single cubic, whereas the needy people could not avail this facility. The rations given to schools in name of Mid Day Meals were also engulfed by these mediators. The shopkeeper, with the help of local *pradhan* and *pramukh*, sold out food stuffs in open market and supplied inferior quality of ration to the children in that place. The ration meant for the

poor and weaker sections of the society did not reach them at all. *Gram Pradhan* and shopkeepers sold them out in the open market and thus made lot of money. A fully packed ration truck was caught by the public in Bironkhal. However, it was learnt that later on it was disposed of and no action was taken against the truck driver and the owner.

Recently, a Member of the Planning Commission admitted the fact that poor people in villages did not receive even five percent of the funds so allocated, and had this five percent funds utilized in a proper way, even then enough development of the country would have been taken place so far.

In summers, jungle mafia and contractors calculatedly put the forests on fire so to embezzle the funds allotted for afforestation, soil conservation plans. Funds taken in the name of flood control were also misappropriated with the similar devices. Hundreds live and practical examples in each and every village could be witnessed.

Liquor mafia also made the society crippled and deteriorated law and order situation in hills. After the sunset, entire Uttarakhand drown in wine. That was the reason why liquor mafia was so powerful and wandered fearlessly. The region where liquor has been given that much of importance, why they scare of anyone and who dare to ask them to stop. Any occasion, whether wedding, public work, worshipping of God or Goddess, *mundan* ceremony, *sradh* or in any social function, offering of wine was a part and parcel of that occasion. Public and social works like marriage, where the preparation of food were made by villagers, wood for cooking food were fetched from the jungle, these odd jobs never fulfilled without offering wine. As government liquor shops were found in each and every tiny market, so wine was in everyone's access.

Besides that, illegal liquor too supplied by the mafia openly. Apart of that, sufficient liquor quotas had been received by the army personnel from CSD canteen on concessional rates. There were thousands of servicemen as well as ex-servicemen habitating in hills and they were getting reasonable quota of liquor from CSD.

Although liquor was affecting badly the economy of people, yet it inflated the revenue for the government as well. People drained their hard earned money on such bad habits, leaving their families in distress, doom.

Earlier various measures had been taken to prohibit the liquor, but all went in vain so far. Once Garhwal region was declared as prohibited for liquor for long. Even then, liquor was supplied frequently with the help of local police and *patwari*. With the help of social organization and public support, womenfolk launched a strong drive and massive agitation against the liquor shops and distilleries, where rallies were organized in villages and numerous liquor distilleries were destroyed, government liquor shops were attacked, but after some time, the agitation slowed down and came to end itself.



Vijay Pal Singh became panic, troubled of my constant public contact programmes, visits and foot-marches in villages. He was receiving entire information about my activities. He also became worried about the morale of agitators and their supporters. Because of on-going situations, he had to concentrate fully on Bironkhal, leaving the other constituencies of Pauri, Thalissain, Dhumakot unattended.

An evening, a person named Roshan flocked Syunsi in my office. The day before the allotment of ticket, he was with me,

but on grabbing the ticket by Nirmala, he changed his mind and joined Nirmala immediately leaving my camp. His sudden appearance surprised everyone. On seeing me away of Syunsi for campaigning, he became vibrant for speaking.

“How your election campaigning is going on?” asked Roshan. The question was loaded with sarcasm.

“Quite well.” Replied Jaiprakash smilingly.

“How many segments are covered by now?” He threw another question.

“More than half and remnant will cover sooner or later.” Replied Jaiprakash reluctantly.

“Fighting election is business of rich people. It is beyond the capacity of you and me people. Isn’t it?” Said Roshan in laugh and tried to indulge others in discussion.

“That is not the matter. Money has importance in its place. People have their wishes and ambitions.” Said Raje Singh Gusain, the veteran in hoarse voice. Till that he was listening the conversation patiently.

“After all, what was oscillating in mind of Garima when she decided to jump in fray, whereas nobody knows her in this region.” Commented Roshan with a roguish grin on his face. “I mean to say, she should have come here one and half year ago.” He rubbed salt into their wounds and wanted to fume the issue more.

“It is simple. Garima stir movement in Delhi for creation of separate state. Now jump in fray for the development of region.” Replied Jaiprakash unwillingly.

“Till today, she might spend too much.” Said Roshan prolonging the argument.

“We spent some sort of money and some more are to be spent.” Replied Jaiprakash in short. This gave him another talking point.

“Frankly speaking, she will never get more than five thousand votes. If she will make it, will be a great achievement. Don’t take it otherwise.” He said ironically and started criticizing me.

“How can you say this?” Said Jaiprakash turning his head towards him and gave him a dirty look.

“People do not like independent candidate.” Said Roshan with wry face. The voice was loaded with sarcasm.

“Even then public is welcoming Garima in each and every place and she is getting massive support.” Replied Raje Singh Gusain, the veteran with a broad smile.

“Whatever you say, Garimajee cannot fight with Nirmalajee in any field. Vijay Pal Singh is a big gun. He is resourceful person. You people have limited workers, may be counted in fingers. I know everything. My humble suggestion is that she should take her steps back. At least remnant money may be saved of being wasted.” Said Roshan in a little loud voice. He wanted to discourage me and my camp.

Meanwhile, I along with Vidya Rawat and Gajender entered in room. I overheard the last sentence so spoken by Roshan. Anger seethed within me. I felt very bad and could not contain my anger.

“When I am accompanied by so many dedicated people and agitators, why should I take my steps back? As far as Vijay Pal Singh is concerned, we knew him better than you.” I shouted in harsh words and gave a searing look out of my bloods hot eyes. The colour drained from Roshan’s face.

“Oh *Bhabhiji*, when did you return?” He said in a slurred voice and stood up from his place.

“You are a big cheater. Shame on you. I hadn’t realized that you would stoop so low. Just few days ago you were with us and

promising support. As Nirmala got the ticket, you slip and stick together Vijay Pal Singh.” I made a direct allegation on him and scolded badly. My temper rose high.

“What can I do *bhabhiji* when he himself came to me with a request. There was no option left for me except to join him.” He bleated to clear his position.

“You are telling lie. For the greed of money, you yourself went to his camp. You are such a dishonest person.” I cried in fit of rage.

He remained silent with head bowed. All were staring at him with dirty look.

“Your brother was talking loud about fighting election, democracy in party and so on. Now timidly went in pocket of Vijay Pal Singh.” I said sternly waving right hand. “Tell me the truth, how much money you received from Vijay Pal Singh for this betray?”

“*Bhabhiji*, this is not true.” He replied haltingly with a wry smile on his face.

“I know you come here as a mediator on behalf of Vijay Pal Singh to discourage we agitators to withdraw.” I hurled in furious and pointed finger towards him.

On hearing this, he turned to leave the room.

“Before leaving, listen clearly, Garima will not put her arms down and fight to the last with Vijay Pal Singh. We agitators have learnt how to struggle.” I shouted from the back in a challenging voice.

Roshan left the place with a long and sad face.



Election campaign was reaching gradually on its peak. To support their candidates, few leaders were frequenting air travels and others travelling by road. Few candidates were inviting cinema personalities, TV artists for their propaganda to attract crowd.

On the other side, far from these dramas and road-shows, I was performing massive foot-marches and creating awareness among the public, appealing them to unite for the cause of development of the region.

Rain was not in a halting mood and still drizzling continuously since night. It was disturbing the routine work in general, but didn't stop the enthusiasm or fierce determination of we agitators. That day was also fixed for campaigning in Khatli region. Womenfolk intended to worship the God and Goddess in a temple so to take blessings of the Almighty.

Strategy was mapped to meet the womenfolk of Bangar village and to organize a meeting. I and few other ladies headed towards Bangar village in rain. It was situated near Syunsi Bazar.

To reach Bangar village, a river called Purvi Nayar was to cross. In the river, water was constantly increasing and its colour also turned muddy. At least twenty women were able to reach the temple of Bangar village protecting themselves from rain and mud. Atmosphere at the temple was quite devotional. The bells were ringing and the devotees were singing and swinging with devotional songs.

After worshipping, Raje Singh Gusain, the veteran of team, grab the mike and pleaded the villagers to assemble in courtyard of the temple. He welcomed the gentlemen of his acquaintance and others, delivered a small introductory speech recollecting his old memories.

After a short while, Gajender took the mike and welcomed the gatherings. He cleared the objectives of agitators and elaborated what kind of thought they kept in their minds while contesting the elections. He further clarified that agitators will never sit silent, idle. This time they wanted to show their presence and their fight will continue last long. He questioned the people about the objective and purpose for which they attained the Uttarakhand State and so urged to come forward to fulfill this.

As I took the mike, claps ran through the crowd. In my speech, I appealed to the throngs of people gathered to come forward once again as agitators, that they played during the mass movement. I voiced not to hand over the region in the hands of land mafia, liquor mafia, corrupt officials, corrupt contractors and middlemen. I further added that they supported the movement for the formation of separate state. Now they have to restart the movement against these corrupt lobbies.

The workers of other parties also milled around the temple premises with caps on heads, colourful scarves around necks and badges on chests. When they witnessed me in aggressive-impressive gesture while delivering the speech, one by one they removed their caps, badges, scarves and silently put them in their pockets. Despite continuous drizzling, people were listening my words calmly and patiently. A deep silence fell around temple courtyard except my speech. Few people were standing under the shade of their houses, while others were craning through windows to listen.

After finishing my triumphant speech, I melted in crowd, distributed pamphlets and then walked towards Syunsi. We swallowed meals quickly and prepared for the next programme. Due to heavy rains, the aged people had to stay and they were

assigned the task of making lists of agents, election packets. Women took their way to nearby villages for publicity. I and others were to visit Nakuri, Ghodiyana, Dumaila Malla, Dumalla Talla, Bharoli and Rikhad. We packed the vehicle with loudspeakers, banners and quickly wheeled towards Nakuri village.

Jaiprakash and Raje Singh Gusain had already distributed the pamphlets and publicity material in Nakuri village during their earlier visit. We parked the vehicle along the roadside and stepped down footway leading to village. Nakuri village was situated across a slanting hill. Footway was also going down. Speedy flowing of rainwater was taking away tiny pebbles with it, eroding the upper soil on footways. The team reached in the middle of village and gathered in front of a house. A cemented shade of roof was attached to the house. Because of continuous rain, people did not go out to fields so were remained stayed at home. It was right opportune to interact with them.

Just opposite to Nakuri village, three more villages, called Ghansali, Kolari and Tachchikhal were seen clearly. Turning the mouth of challenger towards them, firstly Gajender addressed the people and cleared the aim of agitators for participation in the election. After that I took the mike to orate. I also cleared my aim for contesting the election and transpired that after considering and analyzing the capabilities, qualifications and abilities of other contesting candidates, I decided to jump in fray. And I felt myself the best one among the other contestants. As we can struggle for separate state earlier, then why can't for the cause of development of region? I urged them to come forward and fight for development and let not waste the sacrifices of agitators. I wooed the womenfolk heartily for playing their important role, as their population in villages is more because men had to leave for cities in search of livelihood.

In another room, villagers were preparing tea. Jaiprakash got into a conversation with them. He asked them to weigh the pros and cons of the contesting candidates, their past performance. First, about that woman who visited after twenty-seven years and showing her affection towards the region only to contest the election. She had been owner of vast wealth and property. Second, about that lady having knowledge to run only a *panchayat samity*. And third, about the lady that not only agitated for the separate Uttarakhand for the last ten years, but also had knowledge of judiciary and presently engaged in teaching job.

After listening Jaiprakash, a man replied, “You are asserting absolutely right. Had Garima came earlier and interacted with people, then public would have been recognized her easily. Around this fag-end of election, few people already polarized towards other parties. Party agents are alluring them money and liquor to attract towards their group. You are witnessing it very well now-a-days how much hue and cry is going around the roads and markets. All the boys of our village already left for campaigning and are getting three hundred rupees a day with stomach full food and drink. Had you visited us a year or six months earlier, we could have been sent all of them with you. We are fully supporting your views but how can we stop them for not campaigning other parties, as they are earning three hundred rupees a day.”

We were offered with tea and biscuits by the villagers. Next programme was to reach Ghoniyana village, ahead about four-five kilometers from Nakuri. It was located at the heights of hill and at the upper side of the motorable road. To reach the village there was a quite wide stone footway. We reached in the middle of village. Because of heavy drizzling and severe cold, villagers were still staying in their houses during that precious time.

On hearing the announcement on challenger, few people gathered, opened *Panchyat Ghar* and sent message to villagers to assemble. In a small *panchayat ghar*, dirty cotton carpets were lowered on the floor and benches were placed properly.

I heard about its nice brotherhood among villagers. Whenever a marriage solemnized of any family, entire village was used to participate actively and cooperate whether he lived in Delhi or any other city. They must attend the function without any fail. Monthly meeting of the village, organized in Delhi, were attended by all. For the last thirty years, *pradhan* of the village was elected unanimously and unopposed.

Villagers flocked at the *panchayat ghar* despite severe cold. Few people took umbrellas, whereas others wrapped with shawls. When the *panchayat ghar* filled to its capacity, I orated a speech. People listened me keenly and patiently.

After finishing task at Ghoniyana, we took our way towards Dumaila Malla, near Bironkhal Bazar. Leaving the vehicle in Bironkhal we headed towards Dumaila Malla village. The way leading to village was full of mud. The situation was exactly the same as in Ghoniyana. Somehow we managed to reach in village protecting ourselves from mud and drizzling. Here also no one was ready to step out of their houses, as non-stop downpour and biting cold made the life cripple. During that time, womenfolk were at home and the men were sitting at their shops in bazaar. Houses were scattered and it took considerable time to get people assembled at *Panchyat Bhawan*. After all out efforts, around thirty women made assembled at *Panchyat Bhawan*.

I delivered my speech in an attractive way and impressed all of them. I pointed out the main water problem of village and asked why this perennial problem could not be solved out yet. I

also explained the reasons behind this stating that during the time of elections, these parties used to distribute money to their agents, to shut the mouths of public and so the problems remained alive, unresolved. I voiced that parties were flooding so much of money in this election, if that money would have been spent for the development of Bironkhal region, then they would not approach public for seeking votes. On the contrary, public themselves come forward to vote wholeheartedly. I quoted the example of Vijay Pal Singh, who opened the mouth of wealth-sacks. But these leaders and parties do not want the welfare of public. Political parties used to win the election with money and muscle power. They distribute twenty-five thousand each to their agents to visit these villages and demand votes with folded hands. I questioned how the development of region will take place by such devices, tactics applied by these political parties.

I also cited an example of an MLA in Delhi, who grabbed the seat with money and muscle power. When public went to him with their problems, he bluntly transpired, “I won this election by purchasing votes with money, and people did not make me win.” Hearing this, people returned with long faces and dejected mood.

I cautioned the public the manner in which money was being spent in Bironkhal like water, there won't be any surprise about the woman who got elected as MLA, may repeat the same dialogue. I too explained the reasons why the problems of the regions remained unsolved.

I further elaborated that for the sake of small greed, these agents betray the entire public. Whenever anyone raise question about the problems, his mouth is being made shut with little money. There are number of cases of bribery, misappropriation

and irregularities in development works like repairing of footways, road construction, electricity work, repair of school, loan for house construction, renovation of water tanks and pipelines. Because of misappropriation, poor are becoming poorer and the rich wealthier.

The womenfolk praised my speech and promised to accompany me. When we left the village, darkness engulfed the entire valley and it was advised not to visit Dumaila Talla. On the one hand, rain was pouring continuously, and on the other hand, the footway leading towards village was quite narrow and dangerous to walk in rain, particularly at night. Thus, the visit to Dumaila Talla was postponed twice, though it was a vast village and there was a pressing demand for visiting the village for long.



EIGHT

On getting a negative reply from me through Gabbar Singh, Vijay Pal Singh became disappointed, frustrated. He grew furious towards me as I had become an obstacle in the way of Nirmala, his wife. He did not forget that day at Pokhra rally where despite his all-out efforts of not being called for speech, I instigated women to raise slogans in my favour. As a result, he had to compel to give me two minutes for the speech and I roared a triumphant speech. In my two minutes speech, public applauded tremendously rather than his an hour speech. He also anguished badly on Virender Singh Bhandari, for supporting me openly. These thoughts were kept on oscillating in his skull.

Vijay Pal Singh was strolling aimlessly in his room and waiting eagerly for the party workers and agents to reach and so to instruct them suitably. Positions of other constituencies were seemed to be far better than Bironkhal.

Dr. Joshi, Gabbar Singh, Lakhan Singh and four-five others stepped in room swiftly. They greeted Vijay Pal Singh with folded palms. Few of them bowed to touch his feet. He himself initiated the conversation without performing any etiquette.

“That day you assured me of convincing Garima. What happened now?” Questioned Vijay Pal Singh in harsh words and took a sear look at Gabbar Singh.

“Sir, I tried my best, gave all offers and at last when she did not agree at any cost, I too handed over a packet of money to compromise or change her mind.” After clearing his throat he added. “But she didn’t accept that too. She made me ashamed by touching my feet for blessings.” Gabbar Singh clarified his position with bowed head.

“I thought had she agreed to withdraw, then one more hurdle would have been removed by now and I feel relax and visit other regions with free mind.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in a hopeless tone. He folded his arms around chest.

“Sir, you need not worry on that part. We have not lost anything yet and are sure the victory will touch the feet of Nirmalaji only.” Said Dr. Joshi and tried to satisfy and pacify him.

“In my suggestion, we concentrate our mind only towards the voters. If we offer them a deal, they will definitely move our side. Money is perfect vote catcher.” Opined a person.

“Shed some more light on the issue.” Asked Dr. Joshi anxiously.

“If we pay a hundred rupee note to each voter, then he will certainly vote us. Whatever amount we will play to Garima, if the same is spent on voters, that would be advantageous to us.” Explained the gentleman in simple manner.

“This fact didn’t strike our mind earlier. Wonderful ideal! We have to win the election, whatever be the mean. Our public used to go on the same track, the path we show them.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in blissful mood. A contented smile flickered on his face.

“Sir, you are absolutely right. Voter is always greedy. The place where he gets liquor, money and mean, he casts his vote

there.” Commented Gabbar Singh with a roguish grin on his face.

“In my view, you afloat a slogan ‘one note, one vote’ that means one hundred rupee for one vote. But this task is to execute clandestinely, otherwise it may become a big issue without any reason.” Said Vijay Pal Singh in slow words.

“You need not worry, sir. Slogan will disseminate to voters carefully, stealthily.” Said other man in triumphant voice.

“And one more suggestion. On behalf of Nirmalaji, *sari* may be gifted to each lady party worker. As a lady is contesting the election from their region, so care should be taken of other ladies too.” Said Vijay Pal Singh bringing a broad smile on face. So did Nirmala.

“It is an excellent idea, sir. After all, majority of work is being performed by the ladies only. This act will boost the morale of woman party-workers and they will work with enhanced enthusiasm.” Said Gabbar Singh in admiration.

“This job will also perform clandestinely and silently. Now-a-days election commission people are also roaming around. This news should not reach them at all.” Said Vijay Pal Singh cautioning others. He turned his skull towards Nirmala. “Dear, you want to say few words.” He asked her smilingly.

“I am tired of this election. Had I known earlier that I too have to go on foot and on narrow footway hills, I would never have filed the papers. I wish the remaining days may spend quickly.” Replied Nirmala taking a long breath.

“Don’t loose heart, madam. We are with you with heart and soul. It is matter of just few days only. If we do not go to villages, public may think you wealthy and rich, so not like to meet the poors. Only few days left, after that you are free from

your duty for next five years. Then we will do our jobs.” Said Dr. Joshi with a laugh. He particularly emphasized the last sentence. All of them laughed aloud. This laugh reduced the tension somehow prevailed in the atmosphere.

To ease the atmosphere, Vijay Pal Singh arranged wine, cold drinks. He was well aware of the nature and habits of his party workers. He called a man and whispered something in his ear. Immediately the man returned with bottles of wine, rum, whisky and plates of dry fruits, and put on a table. Nirmala left the room smilingly.

All of them took heavy drink and stomachfull of food. Abusing me, they vented out their fury and spleen.



Gambhir Singh was busy at Akeshwar region. He, along with six-seven persons, visited villages in favour of me. Harish Bisht took the responsibility for Pokhra region. Donning posters on his body and he walked around the streets, market and villages and distributed pamphlets in favour of me. He made-up a wonderful idea of publicity. He used to convince the people about the activities performed by me during Uttarakhand movement roaming around Pokhra with his two teams.

After covering major portion of Khatli Malli, Khatli Talli and Sabli patti, I along with Gajender and Vidya Rawat wheeled towards Pokhra and Akeshwar Block where we accompanied Gambhir Singh and Harish Bisht. Gajender prepared a list of agents, their names and addresses. While moving to Pokhra we also covered Vedikhal, Bharpur, Saindhar, Ghaniyakhil, Chorkhinda and approached Pokhra.

On reaching at Vedikhal I delivered a small speech and proceeded to Bharolikhal while touching Lodli village. We organized small public meetings, wherein lot of people assembled to listen us.

Two veterans Captain Bisht and Raje Singh Gusain were also engaged in assigned task with great enthusiasm and visited various villages walkingly. Both were covering five-seven villages in a day and stayed at the house of their relatives at night. Next morning they used to walk towards nearby village and took halt at their acquaintance. By this way, they sent words in advance to their relatives for their stay on a particular night.

One evening when both the veterans were about to near a village called Maithan a in Sabli Patti, heavy rain broke with thunder lightening. The walk-way leading to village through main footway was too long. They decided to take shortcut footway to reach little earlier and also save from long fatigue. Because of sudden rain-pour and clouds, darkness emerged over the entire valley. Both of them forgot the walk-way led to the village and their umbrella had also broken. They became indecisive in the sudden changed scenario.

Villagers turned into worried that veterans did not reach yet. News afloat in entire village. Villagers went out for their search with torches and umbrellas. This news also spread to another village from where they started. They transpired that the duo already left the village too early.

Pitch dark emerged in jungle because of black clouds and heavy rains. Both were unable to see anything around. On the one hand, the area was unknown to them, and on the other hand, it was pretty night. Luckily, Raje Singh had a stick to support, whereas Captain Bisht had nothing with him. On mere estimation they took their steps forward with the support of

bushes and supporting each other. As and when lightening of thunderclouds flashed, they searched their way and took next steps. They didn't loose heart and preyed the Gods and Goddesses at heart to show them the right way and save their lives at this hour of distress. After a long distance, they felt they had reached in a – step-field. But still the footway was seen nowhere. The heights of the step-fields were about eight-nine feet. Captain Bisht was comparatively tall in height, whereas Raje Singh Gusain was little short. First, Captain Bisht climbed the field and Gusain pushed him upward. After that venture, Captain Bisht pulled Gusain with the help of a stick upward. He grabbed tightly one corner of the stick and climbed the field. Then Captain Bisht took the hands of Gusain and pulled him upward direction. In this way, they succeeded to climb many fields and on one field they saw a collection of folded dry grass fastened with a tree. On seeing that Raje Singh Gusain murmured in hope folding both the palms, “It means we reach near the village, thank God.”

“How it, brother?” Asked Captain Bisht in anxiety.

“See this dry grass surrounding the tree. That means there are habitation and the village is nearby the fields.” Replied Raje Singh Gusain in a relaxed tone.

Duo took a long breath. After mounting few more step-fields, some houses were seen in flashing light of clouds. They whistled and called the villagers in high pitched voices. Villagers listened their voices and came runningly with torches and umbrellas. They escorted them to village where all the people gave them warm welcome and felt relax to see them in safe and unhurt, as they were preparing to make another search operation for them. Both the veterans completely drenched and were shivering in cold badly. People offered them warm clothes and

hot tea. Then they transpired the villagers their entire episodeale. Villagers appreciated the confidence and enthusiasm of the two old aged people.



Bhubneshwar, Jaiprakash, a retired Fouji and two other boys dressed for campaigning at Dunao-Markhola and nearby villages. Loudspeakers, mike and banners over the jeep were fixed. Before visiting Dunao-Markhola route, the team visited Jiwai, Sukai and Baijro.

In the season of election fever, days of those people fond of delivering speeches on mike became brighter. Parties engaged these people, particularly school teachers, priests and those who were interested in delivering speeches. In Syunsi market, a priest of temple was propagating in favour of a party. He also recited hymns and stanza from the *Ramayana*, *Geeta* and other religious books. Although nobody was listening him, yet he was performing his duty diligently.

In Baijro bazaar, the multipurpose area, a school teacher was orating an impressive lecture in front of public and people were laughing at him for not teaching students at school at that time.

Bhubneshwar turned the vehicle towards Bironkhal after completing their publicity job at Baijro. He and Jaiprakash were doing the publicity job through loudspeaker while delivering the speeches. They were putting the real position of the region highlighting the problems, such as, road, water, conditions of school, hospitals. They also elaborated how the corruption and irregularities were taken place in their area.

The team reached at Dunao while going through Bironkhal, Nakuri, Sisai, Panas, Pipalsain. Jaiprakash was orating in *Garhwali* dialect so to understand the facts clearly by locals, whereas Bhubneshwar was in Hindi.

In Markhola, the team was divided in two groups. One group for Ghorpalla Malla, Ghorpalla Talla, Chaundi, Kanda, Kanduli and nearby villages and the group for Timili and other nearby villages. Bhubneshwar's legs were painng so he didn't move anywhere and performed his job at Markhola only.

To go to Ghorpala, the footway was steep slop towards the river and after crossing it was leading sharp ascend. We took our steps fast. It was easy to walk down in hills. When we neared the river, our eyes fell on a concrete shade built with stone and cement. We could not comprehend the logic behind that cemented shade so built, as there was no windmill seen anywhere, nor any house or field to cultivate. On enquiring a passerby, it was transpired that the shade was made for the people who attend the last rites of a departed soul, so to sit under the shade to protect themselves of scorch sun or pelting-rain.

After crossing the bridge, it was steep ascending footway. The *fouji* and other local ones were taking their steps rapidly, but the rest could not. We had to sit from time to time to hold breath, to take rest or for drying sweat. Whenever any passerby seen, we handed over the pamphlets and explained about our aims. When we started to move down, cold winds welcomed us and we had to wrap woolen clothes to cover our neck and body. And now we started to climb up, so we were sweating profusely, despite blowing cold winds. Our breathings were racing. The destination villages were at a considerable height. From there,

Markhola was seen clearly, that was much below then the opposite side.

On reaching Ghorpalla talla, we distributed publicity material and appealed the people to weigh the three female candidates and judge the capable one that put their demands in Legislative Assembly effectively.



Ghorpalla Malla was situated on hill-top on a considerable height, so we need to climb further more. Village-people had to carry provisions and other material on heads and climbed up to their village. They were facing a lot of difficulties for years. It was very difficult for them to fetch water regularly on head. They had to come down to market for each and every small piece of work, that was too far from their village and consumed considerable amount of time and labour.

At the time of elections, agents of political parties made lot of promises and commitments. But after the elections, nobody used to come to show his face. For years, leaders and their agents promised for making motorable road to connect the village, providing water, repairing the footway but after the elections, all the promises were forgotten.

Last evening agents of a party came to their villages for campaigning. Now it become intolerable for the village people to bear and they fired them badly and jostled. Party workers somehow managed to escape from the villagers' attack.

I, Gajender and others were on our way towards Ghorpalla village. As we approached outskirts of village, a passerby warned us about the situation prevailed in village. He advised us not to visit there as the women were in bad temper and villagers were

determined not to allow any party worker to enter in their village, but I didn't frighten.

The agitated women of village crammed at the main entrance leading to village. They constantly hurled in loud voices to me and others not to enter in village, else face the consequences.

"We must visit your village." I replied loudly them from below.

We gradually neared the village. Women were constantly resisting. As I approached, they clustered around me and argued truculently on false promises and commitments made by politicians.

"You yourself are responsible for the problems." Said Gajender and grinned.

"Not we, the party-workers are not doing their work and duties properly." Protested ladies almost in unison.

"Every village gets specific a budget for development work. Have you ever tried to know how much funds allotted for repairing of footway, water scheme, construction of school?" Jaiprakash asked simultaneously to them.

These volley of questions made their mouth shut but still they looked fierce.

"Fund is given to each *pradhan* and *pramukh*, who is supposed to spend on various schemes like water supply, school, laying of footway. Have you ever asked your *pradhan* and *pramukh* about the funds where he spends this amount?" I asked them eyeing. Now the irritation of agitated womenfolk somehow cooled down and they listened me patiently and amazingly.

"Funds were not allotted to our village." A woman said reluctantly.

“Dear sister, how it is possible. Funds have been released to each and every village by block office. *Pradhan and pramukh* used to bring this amount and spend on village development.” I said in a way to explain them.

Thus, we were able to lower down the temperament of fierce ladies and convinced them to ask their *pradhans and pramukh* where they adjusted and buried the money that was allotted for the village. We also advised them to visit and ask block office how much funds were released, to ask MP or minister why the roads were not constructed so far and to enquire the PWD about the difficulties that forbid them to construct the roads? The villagers now calmed down and were inferred to keep attentive about their funds.

After attaining an astonished success on our task at Ghorpalla Malla and Talla, we reached Markhola, where Bhubneshwar was waiting for us. We gorged on tea, samosa and bun in a tea-stall to subside our hunger and then trooped towards Kanda village.

Kanda village was also at a considerable height of hill. The only difference was that the footway leading towards this village was cemented and quite wide to walk. There was no problem in mounting despite the ascending footway. Slowly and steadily we approached Kanda village.

It was the village where Uttarakhand Kranti Dal had earned good reputation and grip. Harish Nautiyal, candidate of UKD, was also of this village. We distributed pamphlets and publicity material and returned towards Markhola.

On reaching Markhola, we climbed on vehicle and wheeled towards Dunao accompanying Bhubneshwar. There we waited an hour for the other group to return and then drove towards Bironkhal. In the entire way, Jaiprakash and Bhubneshwar kept on orating over loudspeaker. They repeatedly emphasized about

the initiation taken by the agitators for the development of region. And it is a testing time for the public to mull over what kind of candidate they wished to choose. While pressing the button, they must consider twice which candidate can fulfill the aspirations of the public. Public must not come under any influence, fraud or allure of the vested interest. The publicity work was going in full swing.

Next day we were to cover Vedikhal, Bharolikhal, Kandkhet, Ghaniyakhal, Sattonkhal and nearby villages.

The team consisted of Bhubneshwar, Jaiprakash, a retired army person and two boys approached Vedikhal while wheeling through Baijro, Pharsari, Khaldhar and Khetu. The team gave a wide publicity over loudspeaker, distributed pamphlets and then drove to Bharolikhal

They covered Lodhli, Maithana, Gudalkhil, Matela villages and reached Kasani village. At Kasani village, they turned the mouth of loudspeaker towards the villages situated just opposite the hills i.e. Dumaila Talla, Dumaila Malla, Bhamrai, Chandoli, Mahadev Sain and did wide publicity. Jaiprakash and Bhubneshwar expressed their thoughts one by one.

On returned way, the team took a short halt at the residence of a retired Subedar, who offered them tea at Bharolikhal. They consumed a considerable time with him and by then darkness emerged completely. The team was to travel another forty kilometers to reach Syunsi. Jaiprakash advised them to finish the conversation quickly to avoid going too late at night as the situation in the area was not worthy and there may be chances of hot discussions with other party workers. In this situation, anybody may take revenge, as they knew the activities of our team.



I planned to deliver triumphant speeches at the main markets on the final day of election campaign. For this, enough quantity of pamphlets and posters were kept in stock. We were hatching plans for the final day of campaigning so to divert the minds of people fully towards me. Simultaneously, we were too preparing the packets and bags for the voting day.

“We have to throw full strength on final day and make the public to mull over that no other candidate is capable as of Garima.” Said Bhubneshwar emphasizing each word.

“Sister, you have to deliver fierce speech and thrust the issue in the minds and souls of people in such a way so to leave them no option except Garima.” Said Jaiprakash and took a gaze of me.

“Delivering six-seven speeches daily my throat is soaring badly. I am feeling feverish too. And my right hand is also paining.” I said in weak words.

“You take medicine immediately and visit doctor. We must not take any lenient step. Whatever be the matter, we have to exhaust our full might and energy on the final day.” Vowed Bhubneshwar and smiled broadly.

“How many pockets and bags left with us by now?” He turned towards Gajender and asked.

“Half of agents have taken their material so far, half of packets are left with us.” Replied Gajender gently.

“Gajenderjee, you note down all in note book and remnants have to deliver in rally.” Said Bhubneshwar in an advising tone.

“And if somebody approaches at Syunsi, then he will return with empty hands.” Queried Jaiprakash.

“We will send him words to join us at rally place and collect the packets.” Replied Bhubneshwar simply.

“On that very day, nobody will stay at home whether old, young, woman or child. All will participate in rally. At least a caravan of four-five vehicles must march on road. Vehicles will be equipped with loudspeakers and banners and people will shout slogans with their full strength and top of voice.” Bhubneshwar rose from his place. He resumed after taking a gulp of water.

“Posters will be pasted on walls”

“We need to make the atmosphere in favour of Garima at any cost.” He continued.

“Few people will distribute the pamphlets and quickly disperse around.”

“Womenfolk will assemble and form a crowd. Raising slogans and applauding intermittently, they will make the atmosphere fervor.”

“From where the rally will begin?” Asked Jaiprakash.

“It will start from Jiwai, then Bajjro, Syunsi, Bironkhal and Maithana Ghat. On return way through Pharsari and Vedikhal.” Replied Bhubneshwar moving his skull around.

“We have to make all out efforts on the last lot. Our destiny will depend on these final rallies.” Announced Gajender in loud voice.

“Rallies should be as bombardment and no leniency will be paid on that task.” Said Bhubneshwar. “As the rally end at Vedikhal, womenfolk will return homes. Garima and two-three others will visit six-seven villages and take fifteen minutes in

each village while returning to Syunsi.” He was giving instructions to the gathering.

“Bhubneshwarji, let us finish the discussion now. After all, we are also human being, not machines. For the last twenty-five days we are running without taking a halt. Our bodies also require some sort of rest.” I said and gestured others to go to their beds.

All of us went to our beds to sleep. Due to tiredness, sleep engulfed us immediately.



In the last two days of election campaigning, agents of Vijay Pal Singh pasted posters around all the markets. Small colourful party flags on jute threads were decorated in markets in such a way that it gave an impression of Diwali festival. Opposition parties were not in a mood to give any chance to their opponents. They too decorated the markets of their commanded areas with their parties’ posters in favour of their candidates.

Polling agents, deputed for polling booths, were given fifteen hundred each along with election bag. Such a huge sum created looting and capturing the bag among the party agents. They were in race of grabbing more election bags so to collect more money. Employees posted at polling stations and booths, had been contacted. In addition, arrangements for food, tea, water was also made for the polling agents as well as election staff to gratify and so not to miss any possible opportunity.

This election had become a question of reputation for Vijay Pal Singh and he was focusing his full attention on it. Cassettes of songs in admiration and praiseworthy of Nirmala

were sounded in villages. Children were roaming in streets with swollen chest gluing photo-stickers of Nirmala. A calendar of entire year also got printed, on which a huge coloured smiling photo of Nirmala was shown. These calendars were fixed or hanged in houses of villagers.



My cavalcade in the form of a rally began from Syunsi. Four jeeps were fully packed with the people. Others were instructed to reach by other means at the respective places of rally. Two jeeps of them were equipped with loudspeakers and banners. More than seventy persons followed the cavalcade for that rally.

The final rally started from the Jiwai Bus stand. As I took the mike on hand to address, claps ran through the crowd. I appealed to the throngs of people to stand up for the development of region. Public have to return on roads once again to keep the corrupt people away. These political parties are constantly exploiting the public for the last fifty years. They divide the public in the name of religion, caste and reservation. They do not raise the issues and never bother about the problems of under-development, poverty, over-population, education, unemployment, water crisis, roads, medical facilities. Had the youth from Uttarakhand not migrated, the region would have been developed all around. Had industries and offices established, medical facilities provided and employment opportunities generated in proper way, then why the people of Uttarakhand would have ever been demanded the separate state? We have to fulfill the dreams of martyrs, so to not go waste or futile their sacrifices.

I further added that we held *Ansan, dharanas, jail bharo andolan* at Delhi because of their inspiration. Now I chose my

workplace Bironkhal instead of Delhi. I hurled that struggle of public should be continued for the development of the state too.

As I concluded speech, masses applauded in cheers and raised slogans in my favour. Many moved towards the podium to witness me. They never heard such a fervent speech so far.

Baijro was market place situated beneath the two hills and on the bank of river Purvi Nayar. Besides shops on main road, there was small market and a school down the roadside. Being center place of region, buses, vehicles regularly kept on running for their destinations. Buses were used to ply important places, such as, Ramnagar, Kotdwar, Srinagar, Thalain, Chokhal, Upharaikhal, Tehri, Dehradun.

Scores of private vehicles and jeeps kept on wheel to ferry the passengers constantly to local village-towns. Hive activities of passengers and vehicles made this place crammed, overcrowded.

Hurling the slogans in high pitched voices, my caravan reached Baijro Bazar. Parking the vehicle along the road, I stood on top-roof of a vehicle to address the public. I attracted the masses with loud, rhythmic language and with my familiar style. Taking the mike in one hand and waving other hand in air, I at times clinching fists appealed the public to ready for another struggle. Hundreds of people milled around the bus stand to listen and witness me. People, playing cards on roof-tops of the shops and houses, also poured in market. Few stood on their roofs and balconies of their houses to listen my words.

In my speech, I recalled a veteran gentleman, who had been dead against the separate Uttarakhand state since birth and too put obstacles at times, now he is dreaming for Chief Ministership. Only these kinds of selfish, shrewd politicians and

bureaucrats didn't allow Gairsain to be the capital of state. Had Gairsain declared as capital, the region would have been run in the path of development. Because of heavy pressure on the part of bureaucrats, liquor mafia, jungle mafia and land mafia, these opportunist politicians did not declare Gairsain as capital. There is no scarcity of natural resources in Uttarakhand. There are scores of rivers, springs, streams and so electricity can be generated constructing tiny dams. By applying proper method of modern technology, production of agriculture, fruits and vegetables can be enhanced.

Decision is now in the hands of public. She has to decide what kind of candidates they need. A candidate, who return after 27 years and ask for votes without any previous social work, political background and is promising to work after victory. The second candidate has got the opportunity of becoming *pradhan* of three villages and has never taken her steps out of the village. Will she able to put the problems of this backward region before 70 odd MLAs? And the third one is stood in front of you, who fought for separate state for the last ten years and now seeking support of you. Now you people have to decide who can play effective role for the development.

Scores of passengers came out of the buses, jeeps, vehicles and milled around the bus stand to listen to me. Reverberate of clapping made the atmosphere enthusiastic. As I finished my speech, audience broke into continuous applause. Few came towards me and I welcomed them smilingly. Then my caravan wheeled towards Syunsi.

A big crowd already gathered at Syunsi. It was situated at the bank of Purvi Nayar with a small market. Here the land was flat, even and good enough tilling was taken place on these large fields. Water for irrigation was funneled from a nearby natural

spring. During winter season, when the fields laid vacant, tournaments of various games, such as, football and cricket were organized with enthusiasm. Children used to take keen interest on these games.

In Syunsi, I delivered a speech in challenging gesture. On hearing the sound of loudspeaker, a small crowd gathered. I hurled that being the first election of newly formed state, this election will decide the future of state, what kind of MLA represent the new State? What direction they will give to State? What kind of plans and schemes they will frame for the development of state? So we should elect our MLA very carefully and wisely.

I appealed the gathering to transform the traditional viewpoint that MLA of a big party is better and he alone can develop the region. If the party is better and the MLA is incapable and unqualified one, then how the development will take place?

On finishing the task at Syunsi, my caravan wheeled towards Bironkhal. Wide publicity through loudspeakers on both the jeeps was kept on going. Womenfolk were creating enthusiasm raising high pitched slogans. My caravan reached Bironkhal after touching Padinda and Rikhad.

At Bironkhal, I started speech without any delay, as the time was precious. I reiterated that after struggling a lot for the separate state, now I came here for usurping the development of the state. We were of the views that there need to be a separate administrative unit for hills so to make suitable planning and this was not possible without a separate state. Our one dream is fulfilled and now the representatives we will send in legislative assembly should be foresightedness, high thinking

and possess good administrative experience. And this is decided only by the public.

On hearing my voice, people turned towards the main road and clustered around the roadside. Few were conveying their assent nodding their heads. Sound of clapping rose intermittently.

In Maithana Ghat, while delivering an aggressive speech in public, I questioned Vijay Pal Singh on his being spending lot of money like water in election. Had he spent only one-fourth of it for public-welfare, then public would have been appreciated his good work and come forward for voting to thank him in anticipation. Demand for a big hospital, schemes for self-employment, tiny and cottage industries are for many years, but every time promises have been given and after the elections these promises are forgotten forever. If we want to develop the region of Bironkhal, we should send such a candidate that come amongst the masses with better social background and ability to put the problems of region in legislative assembly boldly. And this decision is to be taken by the public only.

After finishing the task at Maithana Ghat, my caravan approached Pharsari touching through Bironkhal, Baijro. Here the condition of road was extremely bad. At various places, it was uneven and required immediate repair. The road got damaged particularly during rainy season when big stones slides down the hill and blocked the road and sometimes portions of road slides down due to heavy rain. On papers, this road was constructed and got *damerikaran* of charcoal several times, but the ground reality was telling a different story. The road was completely uneven, full of stones and dust. It became dangerous to drive particularly at rains when the road turned slippery.

While addressing the public at Pharsari, I roared that public should vote that candidate who possessed the vision for development, honour the feelings and expectations of public, have wide experience in social life and also took keen interest in serving the public. Only that kind of person can provide the employment to youths, health facilities to public and thwart the migration from the region. Decision will be taken by the public only.

At its final halt, the caravan awaked the entire bazaar with its loud voices of slogans. Vedikhal was situated at hill height with a small market, an inter college and a degree college. Students from far-flung areas come for pursue study in this college. After opening of Degree College, education standard of region raised somehow. Subjects were only of Arts and Science and Commerce was not in course. Students had to struggle hard in getting jobs due to lack of employment-oriented courses in graduation level.

While delivering speech at Vedikhal, I voiced that the time has come to weigh the pros and cons of the contesting candidates. In my half-an-hour speech, I motivated and agitated the public for their rights.

After finishing the rally at Vedikhal, entire caravan members sat at a tea-shop and gorged on tea, samosa and rusk. All were sent back to homes, except me and four-five others, as we required to visit six-seven nearby villages.

At first, I visited Khalidhar village and villagers welcomed us warmly. Next was Khetu village, where Vikram was performing his task industriously and villagers were praising openly his venture. Next village was Khaldhar and most of the people were of our acquaintance and already interacted. All

these villages were near the motorable road and it was easy to visit there.

Now it was very important to deliver the election packets to all the election booths and centers. This task was to be completed three days in advance. Most of the bags and packets had been delivered at the respective places by Bhubneshwar and Gajender. Remnants were to be delivered at least one day before the voting.

Villagers, particularly the local party agents, were used to take keen interest in grabbing packets or bags of their parties. Good and sufficient money was paid to the bag-holders. Besides this, free lunch and tea were served by the party. A table and few chairs for each agent were also placed to prepare voter slips comfortably and handed it over to voters easily. Party agents also used their interactions and influence on voters for voting to their favourable parties.



A day before the polling, party workers of Vijay Pal Singh pasted the posters on walls and shops in such a way that beginning and ending of walls seen nowhere at all. He deputed 15 persons to each polling station to watch the situation. A day before the polling, all party workers and agents were served with stomach-full food and drink. The atmosphere was made diverted completely towards Nirmala. *Bhandaras* were arranged at places for voters to eat stomach-full food so to vote her.

On the other hand, my financial position was not so good. Budget was so prepared keeping in view the limited sources of funds. Banners and posters were printed in limited quantity. Only two vehicles were made arranged for entire campaigning,

that were insufficient to cope up with such a vast constituency. Agents were provided only one hundred rupees for handling election packet, that contained voter list, voter slip and a pen. One hundred rupees note was too little in comparison with that of Rs.1500, offered by Vijay Pal Singh to his party agents. And there was no questions arose of printing stickers, flags, cassettes and other material.

Vijay Pal Singh applied all possible methods to win the elections; *Sama* – gentle persuasion and praise; *Daama* – monetary incentives; *Danda* – punishment and *Bheda* – intelligence, propaganda and disinformation. Despite that I did not run from the battle-field and stayed with my will-power and fierce determination and he kept on running to save his status and reputation.

The slogan “*one Note – One Vote*” played its magic. Party workers of Vijay Pal Singh clandestinely yearned the voters in favour of Nirmala for hundred rupees note. At night long, this news disseminated in public. People did not want to lose that chance as it comes rarely, and only once in four-five years.

Now the lady party members of Nirmala too plunged in their tasks with full enthusiasm, after all they were gifted with *saries*. They allured other ladies to join their group.

Vehicles of election commission started running on roads. Following day was voting day. Polling officer, polling personnel were posted to their respective booths. Police forces took the area under its custody with full-fledged arms and vehicles. SDM, Tehsildar, Police-in-charge, Nayab Tehsildar, SSP, Patwari and other responsible officers put at the disposal of Election Commission. They were checking and inspecting the polling booths.

Next day early morning, personnel on election duty set their EVM for the task. This time the voting were being held on EVM so no botheration of folding, inserting ballot papers in ballot box. Voters were to press only one button and a long beep sound confirm their voting.



Party workers of Nirmala finished their work efficiently. From the main road to the polling booth, they pasted the coloured posters of Nirmala in such a manner that no starting and ending point of the walls were seen to onlookers. Identity of other candidates was completely wiped off. I and other candidates were nowhere in scene. Only Nirmala was being thrust upon the minds and souls of public.

In these glaring – glistening posters, no option left for the public except Nirmala. Apart of that, they were getting a note of one hundred rupees. Development, backwardness, migration, electricity, water, roads, employment and other problems were forgotten and vanished away in a “one hundred rupees note”. In other words, they were made to forget. While pressing the button, only one hundred rupees and posters of Nirmala were oscillating in the skulls and souls of voters. They completely forgot the poverty of their families, education of their children, water, medical facilities and employment for their children under the influence of phobia.

As the sound and bombardment of prestigious elections seized, so the leaders, their workers, contract workers returned to their homes and cities. Youth in Bironkhal constituency again came on roads and become jobless. For the last twenty days, they were getting good temporary employment. Now they were

passing their time in hanging, roaming, chatting, sipping tea in shops, smoking *bidis* and playing cards. During those elections days, they become the peculiar men of different parties donning their caps, badges and scarves. Now they were common men and returned to their original status.

Results declared next day. Winner was only Nirmala and her money power and the losers were the innocent public and the agitators of Uttarakhand, whose dreams were buried under the sacks and bundles of money and pouches, bottles of liquor.

Whenever villagers visited to Vijay Pal Singh with their problems, he made returned them with the wordings of not having any portfolio in party as well as in government. He is nowhere and advised them to go Nirmala, the MLA. The villagers used to go Dehradun to meet her. Before visiting her, they had to confirm whether she is in city or not.

Whenever she visited to Bironkhal, her party workers kept her far from the public and handed over pieces of papers. In this way, problems were lingered on or avoided for another year. Party agents always seen approaching her for inclusion their names in various committees to make fat commission or money or other favour or benefits.

My mind wandered to the auspicious day when our long awaited dreams were to fulfill. On the very day, UP Reorganization Bill was discussing in Lok Sabha and our hearts were jumping high as no one knew what happened next because there were numerous disguised enemies in the path to put obstacles. Newspapers were forecasting about easily passing of Bill. Despite that few MPs and their parties were deliberately fortifying others to protest. The day long television was blaring the news of discussion about the bill, who voiced in favour and against the move.

Around quarter to nine at night, as the television declared about the passing of UP Reorganization Bill in Lok Sabha, a wave of cheerfulness flew in my family. Congratulations calls poured in telephone. Gajender brought crackers from nowhere and fired them in middle of street. In between, few agitators too arrived to share the happy moments. All of us hurled slogans, made noise and distributed laddoos. A programme was chalked out to roam every street of colony next day.

The following day, as the evening set in, few people dashed at my house with drum, nagara and a petro-max. Few come with packets of laddoos. Around 15-16 people crammed there. Then we headed in a street in the form of procession. Few were dancing with the tune of drum. I too danced. Petro-max was giving enough light to the people. Busting sound of drum made the people of street to move out. Then we headed to another street. We visited the houses of those people who actively participated in our rallies. We offered them laddoos and dragged out to accompany us. In this way, handful numbers of people turned into a big procession. In addition of petro-max, people were having torches too make the way light. The beating sound of drums and slogans proclaimed about the existence of new Uttarakhand state. The hard work and dedication of we people at last borne the fruits.

