

CHAUDHARY CHARAN SINGH: A GRAND PERSONALITY

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**“Lives of great men all
Remind us, we can make,
Our lives sublime, and
departing, leave behind us
foot prints, on the sands of time”**

Chaudhary Charan Singh, Prime Minister of India for a brief period after the fall of the Janta Party Government in 1979, and twice Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh during his long political career in that state, played a major role in transforming the agricultural economy of Northern India in the post Independence period and two polities of his home state and of the country as a whole during the last two decades of his life.

Shri Charan Singh was born in 1902 at Noorpur in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, in a middle class peasant family. He graduated in science in 1923 and did his post graduation from Agra University in 1925. Also trained in Law, he set up practice at Ghaziabad. He shifted to Meerut in 1929 and later joined the congress.

He was first elected to the U.P. Legislative Assembly in 1937 from Chhaprauli, and represented the constituency in 1946, 1952, 1962 and 1967. He became parliamentary secretary in Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant's Government in 1946 and worked in various departments such as revenue, Medical and Public Health, Justice, information etc. In June, 1951, he was appointed Cabinet Minister in the state and given charge of the departments of justice and information. Later he took over as the minister for revenue and Agriculture in the cabinet of Dr. Sampurnand in 1952. when he resigned in April, 1959. He was holding charge of the department of revenue and transport.

Shri Charan Singh served Uttar Pradesh in various capacities and won a reputation as a hard task master who would not tolerate inefficiency, nepotism and corruption in administration, A gifted parliamentarian and a pragmatist, Shri Charan Singh is known for his eloquence and courage of conviction.

He was the chief architect of land reforms in U.P. He took a leading part in formulation and finalisation of the Depts. Redemption Bill 1939, which brought great relief to rural debtors, It was also at his initiative that the salaries and other privileges enjoyed by minister in U.P. were drastically reduced.

Few political leaders of the country could match Shri Charan Singh in their command of popular will at the grass roots level. A dedicated public worker and staunch believer in social justice, Shri Charan Singh's strength stemmed essentially from the confidence he enjoyed among millions of peasants.

Charan Singh followed Mahatma Gandhi in non-violent struggle for independence from the British Government, and was imprisoned several times, In 1930 he was sent to jail for 6 months by the British for the contravention of salt laws. He was jailed again for one year in November 1940 for individual satyagraha movement. In August 1942 he was jailed again by the British under DIR and released in November 1943.

Charan Singh opposed Nehru on his Soviet style Economic reform. Charan Singh was of the opinion that cooperative farms would not succeed in India. Being a son of farmer, Charan Singh opined that the right of ownership was important to the farmer in remaining a cultivator. His speech to the nation on India's independence day (15 August 1979) was very prophetic in which he identified Pakistan's nuclear ambition as a major threat to India. He led the country for just a few months but continued to led the Bhartiya Lok Dal till his last breath.

The other aspect of Charan Singh life that deserves emphasis is his role as an author of several highly original books on land reform, agriculture, and economic development in India that take a broad comparative perspective and are of theoretical interest as well to scholars of economic development.

Charan Singh most important book 'India's Poverty and its Solution' was originally published in 1959 under the title, Joint Farming X-rayed. The problem, and its Solution' in response to the Nagpur resolution of the Indian National Congress, which proclaimed as one of the principal goals of the Congress. The establishment of large scale co-operative farmers in India as a means of solving India's agricultural problems."

Although the book takes off from the issue of cooperative farming and is an attack upon it, it is far more interesting as a positive statement of and proposal for an economic development strategy for India based upon agricultural rather than Industrial growth and as a defence of the system of peasant proprietorship as the most suitable form of social organization to achieve both the economic goals of development and the political goals of democracy.

Charan Singh always saw himself as a Jat, which meant for him, among other things, that he was not from an elite caste. Although he never himself adopted a militant public position on the matter of backward caste representation, he sometimes referred in private, with some resentment, to the position of Brahmans and Thakurs in society and in public life. Moreover, he felt that the position of the Backward classes, in contrast, especially in the services and especially also in his state of U.P. was deplorable. He kept in his head and would now and then recite figures showing that 45 percent of particular government service were dominated by Brahmans, Baniyas, Khattris, and elite casters generally, whereas the backward caste had negligible representation, amounting to less than 1 percent in some department.

He would point out that Harijans, because of the reservations accorded to them in government services since independence, were far better represented than the backward classes. During the period of Janata Rule between 1977 and 1979 at the centre and in northern India, Charan Singh supported the reservation policies for backward castes adopted by the Janata government of U.P. and Bihar. However he did not argue for proportionate representation of positions for backward castes, but thought that the reservation policy of 15 percent for recruitment of backward castes adopted by the U.P. government was reasonable.

Being a son of farmer, Charan Singh always thought about welfare of farmers. He did his best to improve the condition of Indian farmer. During his long life as an active politician, Charan Singh's principle hallmark was his honesty. As Shakespeare said:-

“No legacy is so rich as honestly”

Ch. Charan Singh articulated his judgement on different spheres of life. He was truly 'a leader of the masses'. for Farmers the best thing to give to son is land, it is live property - 'Robbers cannot take land away, thieves cannot steal it, men die but land remains in the family'

He emphasised that society is dependent upon agriculture for its food and clothing to men.

In a word, Charan Singh was insisting that technology and capital inputs must be applied to Indian agriculture not willy-nilly, but in a carefully controlled manner designed to sustain a particular socio-economic order, political system, and way of life.

References:

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