

SHRI CHARAN SINGH'S ATTITUDE
TOWARDE HARIJANS



The Harijans or Scheduled Castes have suffered for long from three kinds of disabilities---social, economic and political.

REMOVAL OF SOCIAL STIGMA

1. As a practical step towards this goal, Shri Charan Singh took a Harijan boy as his cook in 1932 who continued to serve him till he left Ghaziabad (where he was practising law) for Meerut in 1939. In Lucknow also, he had a Harijan cook in 1973-74 (In 1974, he employed a Christian as a cook who continued in his house-hold till he left Lucknow for Delhi in 1977).

2. It is the caste system based on birth that is at the root of untouchability and notions of high and low. And caste, in its turn, is rooted in marriage. A caste can be defined only as a group of persons who inter-marry amongst themselves.

Shri Charan Singh wrote a long letter to Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru in 1954 suggesting that he sponsored an amendment in the law and the Constitution of the country to the effect that after a certain date, only those young men would be recruited to gazetted services (and permitted to enter the legislatures) of the country who had married or were prepared to marry outside their caste. Pt. Nehru did not agree.

In 1967 when he headed the SVD Ministry in Uttar Pradesh, he wanted to enact a legislation on the above lines but his colleagues of the State Cabinet over-ruled him. During this period, however, he took a decision that no educational institution carrying the name of a caste would be given financial aid by the Government with the result that all institutions named after a caste hastened to change their names.

CONFIRMATION OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

The Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act (ZAIR Act), 1951, in its final shape, is the greatest achievement of the State Government of Uttar Pradesh in the field of agrarian legislation. Every single idea which informs this law, has originated from Shri Charan Singh.



It may not be out of place to mention here that, according to an agrarian expert of international fame, Mr. WA Ladejinsky, "Only in Uttar Pradesh, has a well thought-out comprehensive legislation been enacted and effectively implemented. There, millions of tenants and sub-tenants were made owners and hundreds of thousands who had been evicted, were restored in their rights" (vide a Study entitled 'Tenurial Conditions in the Package Districts' submitted to the Planning Commission in 1963). Under this law, permanent rights of cultivation were conferred by Shri Charan Singh, in the teeth of bitter opposition from several colleagues, on comparatively small and poor farmers also who were entered as sub-tenants, tenants of Sir or trespassers in revenue papers and were collectively known as Adhivasis under the new law. By this amendment, Harijans stood to benefit greatly. Table 395, included in para 12 of the Census of India, 1951, Vol.2, Part I(A), Report of Uttar Pradesh (pages 424-25), will show that 26.5* per cent of the total number of Adhivasis belonged to the Scheduled castes. Eighty-four members of the Scheduled Castes out of every one thousand, were entered as Adhivasis or 'cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned and their dependents', whereas this number for the general population amounted only to 51. According to the Zamindari Abolition Committee Report, the total number of Khatas or land holdings held by Adhivasis entered in the revenue papers stood at about 3 million. That this law was actually implemented in the field, is not an idle boast, is borne out by the Report of the Ford Foundation Team.

* 26.5 per cent was the figure when at the time the Census operations 1951 were carried out, the percentage of Harijans in the total population was calculated at 18.0 or 18.5 per cent. Later on, with the inclusion of some other castes in this group, this figure rose to 20.0% or more. So the actual percentage of Harijans who benefited most have been not more than 30 percent.



- 3 -

3. Section 198 of the U.P. Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act provided that, next to a recognised educational institution imparting instruction in Agriculture, landless labour had the first right to be admitted to land which the Land Management Committee of the Village wanted to let out for cultivation under Section 195 or Section 197. It was also provided under the Rules that, whereas an agricultural labourer belonging to a caste other than scheduled caste was liable to pay to the Land Management Committee a rent for such land equivalent to ten times the amount calculated at the hereditary rates, no such rent or amount was payable by a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes (vide Rules No.174-A and .175).

4. Under the Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, every resident of a village was made owner of his house including the site and appurtenant land, trees that he might have planted and wells that he might have constructed. This provision benefited the Harijans, in particular, because formerly they had no such rights at all and could be ejected from their houses etc. at the will of the zamindar (vide Section 9 of the UP ZAIR Act, 1951).

5. Under Rules 115 L and 115 M of the ZAIR Act Rules, preference was to be given by LMC (Land Management Committee) to landless agricultural labourers in the allotment of abadi sites also.

6. Provision was made in the Consolidation of Holdings Act 1953 (vide Section 8A) that, while preparing a Statement of Principles for consolidation of holdings, land will be set apart for Harijans and landless persons in the village for purposes of extension of their abadi. It is mostly this land which Congress(I) in Uttar Pradesh claimed that it is they who had provided land to the Harijans for construction of houses.

7. Shri Charan Singh was also instrumental in promoting Sirtans--- as the tenants-at-will in Kumaun were called and who belonged overwhelmingly, rather almost wholly to the scheduled castes --- to the status of Sirdars in teeth of opposition from Pt. Govind Ballabh Ji Pant, Shri Jagmohan Singh Ji Negi and Shri Narain Dutt Tewary. A Sirdar in



U.P., enjoys permanent rights of occupancy.

8. In March 1953, consequent upon resignation of old Patwaris, some 19,000 Lekhmalis were to be recruited by the Revenue Department of Uttar Pradesh. Shri Charan Singh, who held the Revenue portfolio, ordered that a reservation of 18% be made for the Harijans. Actually, owing to lack of qualified candidates, only 5% could be taken. Formerly, the number of Harijans in the Cadre of Patwaris did not amount even 1%. For the future, Shri Charan Singh issued an order that 36% of the vacancies will go to the Harijans in order to make up the leeway.

In the consolidation operations, thousands of ACOs (Assistant Consolidation Officers) were to be recruited. Whereas no caste Hindu candidate who had not secured a second division in his B.A., or B.Sc., examination was chosen, in the case of Harijans even a third divisioner was admitted.

9. While there was a general order issued by the Appointment Department, about reservation of 18 per cent of the vacancies for the Harijans in all the Services, Shri Charan Singh issued an Order in December 1963 that all vacancies in Class IV Services in the three departments then under his charge, viz., Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Forest, shall be filled by scheduled caste candidates till their quota reached 18 per cent. A few months later, the Appointment Department of Uttar Pradesh raised an objection, at the instance of the Central Government, that the above order about cent per cent reservation was against the Constitution and that not more than 45 per cent of the vacancies could be reserved at the outside.

10. There was a long-standing demand of the Harijans that at least one of the members of the State Public Services Commission should be taken from the Scheduled Castes. When Shri Charan Singh became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in April 1967, he hastened to meet this demand by the end of the year.

11. Since early 1972, the election manifesto of the Party which Shri Charan Singh had founded and nurtured, viz., the Bharatiya Krante Dal (and later on in August, 1974 became the major foundation brick of the Bharatiya Lok Dal) contained a clause under which 20 per cent of the unskilled jobs in all factories both in the public or private sector as also of the permits or licences in the gift of government which did not require any technical skill to exploit, shall be reserved for scheduled castes. The Congress Government of Uttar Pradesh took a decision on these lines in 1976. Whether it was actually implemented, is not known.

Despite such being the facts, in order to malign him, a mendacious propaganda was, for reasons of their own, been launched against Shri Charan Singh at the instance of certain persons who occupied high positions in the Janata Party. While this campaign weakened the Party by internal subversion, it gave comfort to our political opponents who are on the look-out to exploit any such opportunity.

It had been the consistent endeavour of the BKD as well as the BLD, which came into existence later, that as many Harijans as possible should be set up as candidates in elections. The proportion of Harijan Candidates who succeeded on BKD tickets to successful candidates from General Constituency was higher than those who were set up by other political parties. There are three examples when Harijan Candidates sponsored by BKD have been victorious from the General Constituencies.

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