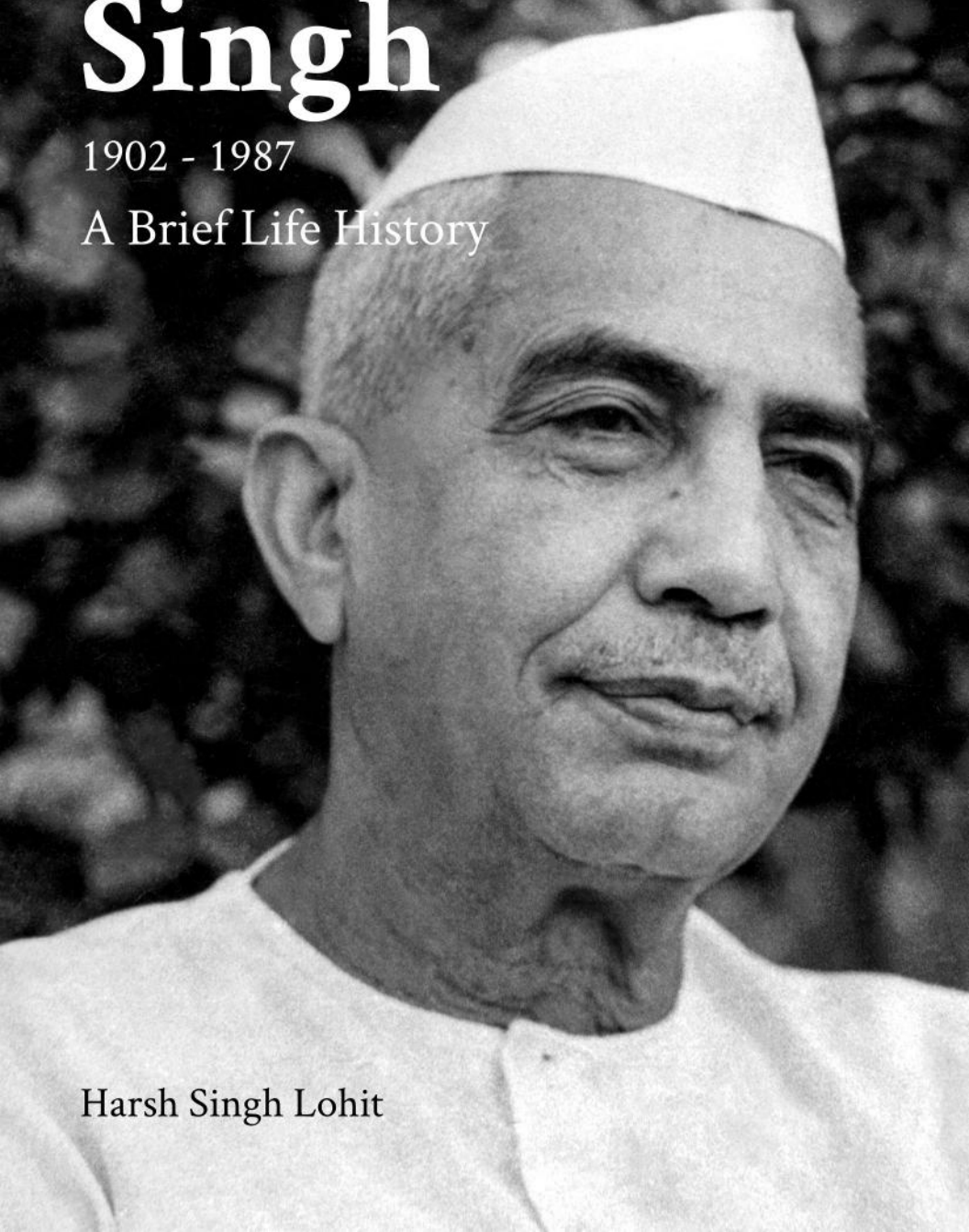


Charan Singh

1902 - 1987

A Brief Life History

Harsh Singh Lohit



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The author acknowledges a debt of gratitude to Paul R. Brass, without whose inspiration and life's work on the politics of Uttar Pradesh and on Charan Singh this brief life history would not have been possible.

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Mir Singh and Netar Kaur, parents of Charan Singh, 1950

Early Life

Charan Singh was born 23 December 1902 “*in an ordinary peasant farmers home under a thatched roof supported by kachcha mud walls, with a kachcha well ... for drinking water and irrigation*”.ⁱ This infant born into poverty in a landless farmers mud hut in Noorpur village in Meerut district of the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) was to rise to become the most prominent voice of the village in independent India.

Charan Singh was the eldest of five children of Mir Singh and Netra Kaur, a *bataidar* (sharecropper) tenant - from 1898 to 1903 - of the *zamindar* (landlord) on a 5-acre farm in the principality of Kuchesar.ⁱⁱ Mir Singh was forced to move from Noorpur as his farm was re-possessed by the landlord, and the family settled in Bhoop Garhi (till 1922) and subsequently in Bhadaula village, both in Meerut district, where he purchased land in increments over the years with the help of his brothers who had served in the

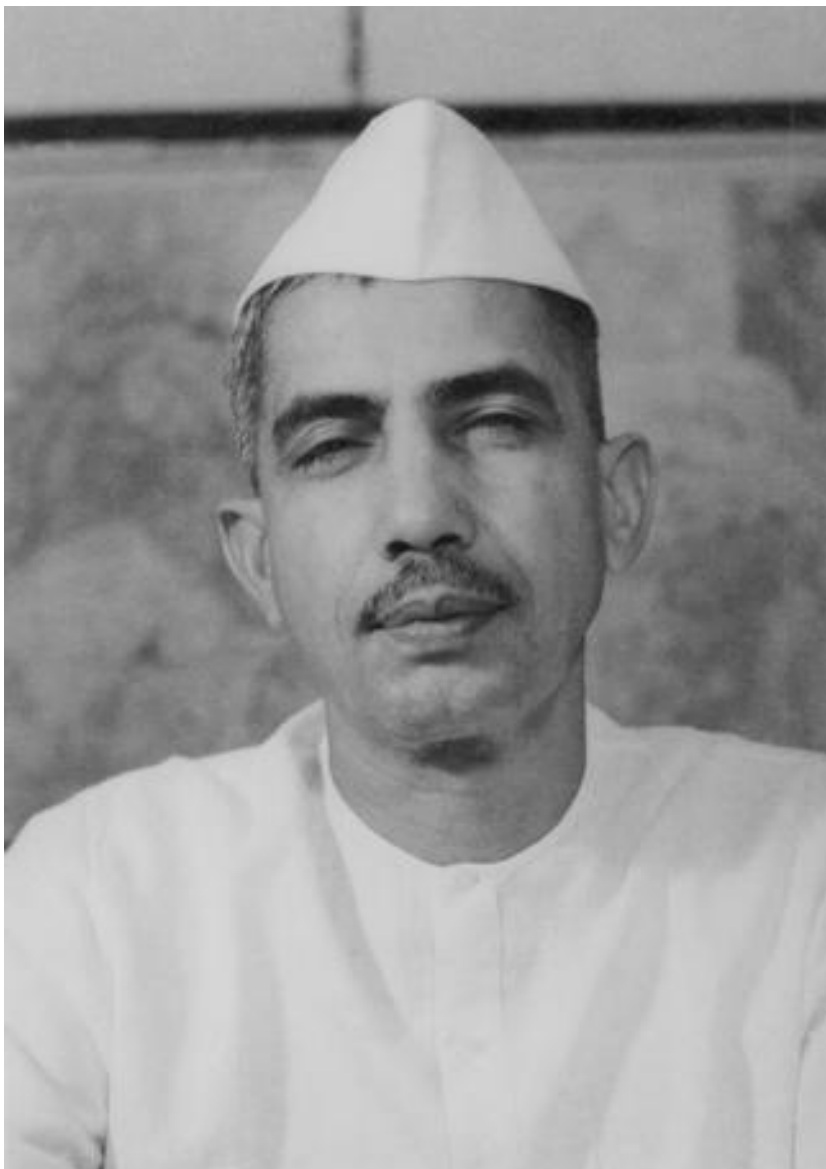
British Army. Mir Singh belonged to a locally dominant peasant community of the cultivating middle castes known for their industriousness and expert skill in the methods of farming, though he started off a landless peasant. This unusual circumstance of Charan Singh's early life left an indelible mark on his mind, and established a lifelong sympathy for the smallholding, self-cultivating peasant family.

Charan Singh walked daily to attend the primary school in nearby Jani Khurd village, 3 kilometers away, where he was identified as a bright and thoughtful student. His father Mir Singh was an unlettered man of few words, with a peasant's grounded morality that emerges from a lifetime of an unequal struggle with nature. One evening, after seeing the working of a compass that the excited young Charan Singh had brought from school, he inquired where his son had got it. On being told it was a gift from a classmate weak in arithmetic who he had allowed to copy his solution and thereby pass a test, Mir Singh expressed his strong disapproval "allowing others to copy at the back of the teacher was wrong, and accepting any gift in return of this wrongful act was even worse – it was sinful. One should always employ honest means to gain anything in life". The contrite young Charan Singh returned the compass to his friend the very next day, and took his father's message to heart as a core value for the rest of his life.ⁱⁱⁱ

Mir Singh did not have the money to enable Charan Singh continue his education beyond the village school. His eldest brother Lakhpatt Singh, especially fond of his promising nephew,

now undertook the responsibility of educating him. Charan Singh did not let them down: he moved to Meerut city to complete his Matriculation and Intermediate in first class from the Government High School in 1921, went on to Agra College, Agra, where he graduated Bachelor of Science in 1923, acquired a Masters of Arts in History (British, European and Indian) in 1925, and finally qualified in Law (LLB) in 1927 from Meerut College, Meerut (then a part of Agra University). He gained a deep understanding of European and Indian history, as well as the structure of the civil law of British India as it impacted the lives of common people in the villages. In addition he acquired a command over English, which he would put to good use in his scores of publications over the years.^{iv}

Charan Singh's higher education in Agra was rare for a youth from a rural and backward cultivating caste in the United Provinces in a period when overall adult literacy was only 3.1%^v, and where the traditional higher castes - Brahman, Rajput, Bania and Kayastha – were urban-born and formed an overwhelming majority of this miniscule number of literates.



Charan Singh, 1940

Early Influences

In the 1920s, when Charan Singh was a youth in the village, the rural environment was one of extreme poverty, debt and unemployment as the lot of what he later in life came to call the 'agriculturalist': the self-cultivating peasantry, and the landless. Charan Singh's heart was forever imprinted with scenes of village life where deprivation and injustice stalked the land, and his mind was imbued with the value of hard work that enabled his family survive and emerge from poverty. Charan Singh cherished throughout his life his upbringing in a peasant's family and the values he associated with it, namely, a loving family life, incessant hard work, independence, and uncompromising honesty. This provided the fertile bed for his intellectual practice and political views. His intimate knowledge of privation of a tenant-peasant led him to roundly condemn the Zamindari system patronised by the British colonists that had kept peasants dependent on landlords, and he 'ultimately played the principal role in its abolition in the state of Uttar Pradesh'.^{vi}

The Arya Samaj and its founder Swami Dayanand influenced Charan Singh early in life. “There was no yielding in his character no expediency or sycophancy or compromises -- in life and with his beliefs. In fact Swamiji himself was fond of repeating the parable about an assembly of a thousand faiths. A king searching for the true religion asks each preacher representing his faith at the assembly what their religion consists of. He gets a thousand contradictory replies and decides none is worthy because there are 999 witnesses to the falsehood of each. A real sage then asked the king to find out the basic points on which they all agreed. These were truth, knowledge and a moral life. That, said the sage, is the only true religion.” Charan Singh went on to name his three eldest children *Satya*, *Ved* and *Gyan*.

Further, Charan Singh went on, “...prominent among Swamiji’s many-faceted achievements was his gift of a cultural and organisational basis to our nationalist aspirations....He bitterly denounced the caste system with its countless taboos and privileges and exposed its malpractices in private and public life. By acknowledging merit alone as the criteria of superiority (Brahmin-hood) and not birth, he sought to solve the problem of social inequality which had been the cause of our repeated political subjugations.”^{vii} Charan Singh came to believe in his youth in the establishment of a caste-free community in which social and material progress would be based solely on individual effort and merit, a belief in education for all specially girls, an absence of religious rituals, exploiting priests and idol worship, and the permanent destruction of caste divisions.^{viii}

His desire for social and political change thus intermingled since he was but 15:^{ix} Dayanand influenced his social and religious thinking, and Gandhi his political and economic views.^x Maithilisharan Gupt, the 20th century nationalist Hindi poet and his book *Bharat Bharti*, and Kabir (the 15th century mystic poet writing in vernacular Hindi against meaningless rituals of all religions) were some other influences on the young Charan Singh. He was to use Kabir's verse to good effect during the freedom movement, and remembered many of these verses well into his later years.^{xi}

By far the most significant and long lasting impact on Charan Singh's intellect and his economic worldview was the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi's philosophical teaching and life practices became increasingly his own from 1919: non-violent political revolution based on Truth and *satyagraha*, social change, uplift of the *Harijans*, self-sacrifice, self-control, simplicity and *khadi* (handspun) as a representation of the craftsman and the village. The manifestations of Gandhi were consistent throughout Charan Singh's everyday life.

First, he lived in extreme simplicity as the representative of a poor people: he wore traditional *Khadi kurta-dhoti* his whole life, paid no attention whatsoever to the amassing of material wealth, and stood opposed to ostentation in any manner in private and public life which he considered one and the same for a political figure.^{xii} Charan Singh believed that "a poor country like India cannot afford politicians who preach idealism from the pulpit and practice corruption on the side".^{xiii}

Second, Charan Singh consistently advocated throughout his 60-year long public life the establishment of a rejuvenated, self-sufficient rural economy based on small, independent peasant agriculture and village hand-made or small-scale production with machines as may be required.

“Mahatma Gandhi said India lived in villages, not in cities. ... In the circumstances of the country which had such vast manpower and comparatively little land and other natural resources, he argued, it could only be cottage industry, which required little or nominal capital, that could provide the needed employment and otherwise answer our needs best, not capital-intensive, mechanized industry based on the Western model of economic growth which would only add to unemployment and concentrate wealth in the hands of a few, and thus usher in capitalism with all its abuses.”

“Most of them [farmers’ sons] can and should take to cottage or small industries in their village or its neighbourhood as a subsidiary or alternative occupation which does not require much capital.”

“... we committed the mistake of setting our sights too high and, on attainment of political power, immediately fell for heavy industry. Gandhi wanted to build the country from the bottom upwards on the strength of its own resources—with the village or agriculture and handicrafts as the base and the town or a few large-scale industries, that we must inevitably have, as the apex.

We forgot that development of India's economy or a rise in the living standard of its vast millions will have to take place within the framework of its own factor endowment (in other words, within the limitations set by its low land or natural resources-man ratio) and of democratic freedoms which prevent exploitation of its own working force beyond a point.

The present situation can therefore be remedied by a shift of resources from the metropolitan, industrialized, capital-intensive and centralized production based on the purchasing power of the upper-middle classes to agriculture, employment-oriented and decentralized production which, in Gandhi's telling words, is "not only for the masses but also by the masses."^{xiv}

These radical views of a small producer, small consumer economy came to be articulated over the coming decades in his many well thought-out books, political manifestoes, legislation and laws, and hundreds of administrative actions during his periods in political authority.



Charan Singh, 1940s

U.P.
CH. CHARAN SINGH
MEERUT LEADER GETS
ONE YEAR'S R.I.
MEERUT, Dec. 6.
Mr. Charan Singh, M.L.A. and General Secretary, Meerut District Satyagraha Committee, who was arrested on November 29 for offering Satyagraha in village Toogana, Meerut district, was tried today in the jail and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. He has been placed in "B" class.
Mr. Vishnu Saran Dubbish, who was arrested yesterday in Mowana, will be tried in the jail on Saturday December 7.

Hindustan Times, 7 December 1940

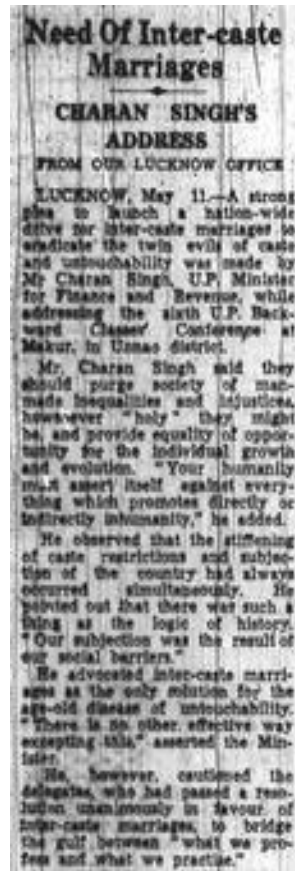
Struggle for Freedom

While a student in Agra College in 1921, inspired by Gandhi's call for the upliftment of *Harijans*, 19-year-old Charan Singh accepted food from the hands of a *Balmiki* sweeper of his hostel for which he was boycotted in his college but he stood his ground.^{xv} This was his first symbolic action that struck at the root of caste prejudice, requiring boldness of thought and a desire to oppose his fellow students engrained prejudices. Later in life, he employed a *Harijan* boy as his cook while in Ghaziabad from 1932 to 1939, and then from 1943 to 1946 in Meerut. Subsequently, he took another *Harijan* and then a Christian cook in Lucknow from 1973 to 1977.^{xvi} Beyond symbolism, he took multiple political steps over the course of his long career to ameliorate the economic conditions of the lowest castes, as documented later in this life history. He however came to an early conclusion that, one, significant State resources directed to agriculture would automatically create prosperity for all rural communities and

castes, and that, two, true emancipation for the landless and the lowest castes was to be found in non-farm livelihoods outside agriculture.

He looked for a suitable livelihood after completing his education in 1927, but refused to accept positions as Principal at the Baraut Jat School and the Lakhavi Jat Degree College unless they removed Jat from their name, which they obviously did not. This was another manifestation of his passionate and principled opposition to caste, questioning this divisive tradition in Indian society.

Charan Singh was a member of the Arya Samaj in Ghaziabad in the 1930s, and his work for bringing social change in caste and ritual-bound Hindu society inter-mingled with that of the Congress of which he became a formal member in 1929. He was elected unopposed to the Meerut District Board in 1930 where he was Vice President or Vice Chairman till 1935, and was general Secretary or President of the Meerut District Congress Committee from 1940 to 1946. He also commenced practicing civil law in Ghaziabad city in 1928,



HindustanTimes, 12 May 1958

where he lived till 1939 before moving to Meerut, and founded the Ghaziabad District Congress Committee in 1929.

His first political activity was organizing and participating in the Anti Simon Commission protests in 1928. In 1932, he organized protests in opposition to the Communal Award (separate electorates for religious communities and the Scheduled Castes), organized common meals for *Harijans* and enabled them draw water from village wells from which they were traditionally excluded by other castes.^{xvii}

The British administration imprisoned Charan Singh in April 1930 for six months for his participation in Gandhi's call for *Salt Satyagraha* by making salt in Loni, Ghaziabad. His second imprisonment was for 11 months in November 1940 in Bareilly jail during the *Individual Satyagraha* movement. His third imprisonment term, for 13 months, was during the *Quit India* movement from October 1942. He soon gave up his intermittent legal practice for a full-time career dedicated to the freedom of the nation. During these difficult times, with no source of income and repeated terms in jail while working for the nationalist cause, his wife Gayatri Devi (married in 1925) supported him by taking care of their six children in great privation. Usually, the family moved to the village when Charan Singh was interred in Jail, and for some months after.



*Cabinet of Govind Ballabh Pant (5th from right),
Parliamentary Secretaries Lal Bahadur Shastri (5th from left),
Charan Singh (3rd from right). 1946*

A Political Life

First elected to the legislative assembly of the United Provinces in 1937 on the Congress ticket from Meerut district (South-West), he played an active legislative role there, raising questions on many subjects that displayed an early concern with the livelihood of the peasantry in the villages. He introduced the *Agricultural Produce Market Bill* in the U. P. Legislative Assembly as a private bill to safeguard the interests of the producer against the rapacity of food-grain dealers and traders, called for reservation of 50% of positions in public sector jobs for the sons and dependents of the cultivators or agriculturalists to Congress Legislature Party and formulated the *Land Utilization Bill*, precursor of the *Zamindari Abolition and Land Reform Bill*, calling for the transfer of land ownership to all tenants or actual tillers of the soil who chose to pay an amount equivalent to 10 times the annual rental of the land they cultivated. He also took strong interest in the passage of *The United Provinces Agricultural and Workmen Debt Redemption Bill* a measure to provide relief to the

cultivators that freed several farmers of Uttar Pradesh from the clutches of moneylenders and debt and helped thousands of farmers in saving their fields from public auction.

In 1939, and again in 1947, he introduced a resolution before the executive committee of the U. P. Congress Legislature Party that proposed 50% reservation in government employment for “sons or dependents of the actual tillers of the soil so that the peasantry may have its due share in the administration”. This caste-less demand for agriculturists in 1939 was the seed that morphed to ultimately become the caste-based reservation scheme of the Mandal Commission report on the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) during the Janata Party regime in 1979-80.

He was elected the second time in 1946 to the U. P. Assembly, with funds collected only from the public and not from the wealthy classes – he followed this restrictive model of funding for the rest of his political life. His deep knowledge of conditions of the village and agriculture, his passion and indefatigable spirit, his work ethic, and his knowledge of the law and his academic bent of mind soon made him a favorite of Govind Ballabh Pant, the premier of the state, who appointed Charan Singh his parliamentary secretary (junior minister) in the second Congress government from 1946 to 1950. He became a member of the All India Congress Committee in 1946, and was General Secretary of the U.P. Congress Legislature Party till 1954.

In a 1947 note to the Congress Legislature Party in Uttar Pradesh, seeking 60% reservations for agriculturists (peasants and

agricultural labourers, both), he virtually declared class war on the urban and rural landowning elite. 45-year-old Charan Singh speaks here clearly about his own upbringing, character and aspirations "For, a farmer's son by reason of the surroundings in which he is brought up, possesses strong nerves, an internal stability, a robustness of spirit and a capacity for administration, which the son of a non-agriculturist or a town-dweller has no opportunity to cultivate or develop.....Only those who are brought up in the swaddling clothes of the cultivator will share his life or spend the night with him. Only those who are connected with him by ties of economic interest, by cultural bonds and psychological affinities will strike the right chord or turn on the switch that will illumine his life and dispel the darkness that surrounds him today....."xviii



Hindustan Times, 19 February 1937



Charan Singh as Minister in Uttar Pradesh, 1952

Political Power

Despite his relatively junior status, Pant appointed him the principal architect and defender of the *Zamindari Abolition & Land Reforms Bill* that was ultimately passed into law in 1952. Charan Singh considered this – the empowerment of tens of millions of peasant farmers and landless on over 67 million acres of land in the state of Uttar Pradesh, along with the peaceful destruction of a (mostly overwhelmingly) exploitative and parasitic class of powerful landlords the primary achievement of his political life.

The land on which the landed and the landless (mostly the Scheduled Castes), had built their homes was made over to millions of homeowners; the right of the former landlord to ‘resume’ land from the tenant for self-cultivation was not given in UP (unlike most other states); and the nascent democratic structure of society was strengthened by making millions of peasants allies of the State. Later in life, Charan Singh gave credit to the unwavering political support

of Pant, his father-figure and mentor, from 1937-1954 as the primary reason why he was able to achieve what he did related to rural reconstruction during this 'golden period' of his political career.^{xix}

From 1951 to 1967, with the exception of a period of nineteen months in 1959–60, he was a Cabinet minister in every Congress government in Uttar Pradesh. He gained deep knowledge of a range of complex issues in state legislation: Justice & Information; Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Information; Revenue and Agriculture; Revenue and Transport; Home and Agriculture; Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and Forests; Forests and Local Self-Government. These provided him an unparalleled view of the many issues and solutions to the vast problems faced by Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, and later the country.

He publically opposed collective farming in the All India Congress Committee meeting in Nagpur in January 1959, and his opposition to Jawaharlal Nehru's policies was at great personal cost to his political career as he had to sit out of the Congress Cabinet for 19 months. Giani Zail Singh, former President of India, wrote "I got an opportunity to hear Chaudhary Saheb's inspiring speech at the Nagpur session. ... Chaudhary Saheb vigorously opposed the Collective Farming proposal brought by Panditji. I was spell bound by Chaudhary Saheb's hour-long fluent speech. Panditji listened carefully to Chaudhary Saheb's powerful speech, and even smiled. In the pandal, there was all round clapping when Panditji moved the resolution, but after Chaudhary Saheb's speech it seemed as if the tables had been turned. Panditji replied to Chaudhary Saheb, and

though not agreeing with Panditji, we had to support him because such was the force of his personality then. I know for sure that had I been in Panditji's place I would not have been able to argue the case put forth by Chaudhary Saheb.^{xxx}

By now, Charan Singh had established himself to be “incorruptible, an efficient administrator, a man of principle with a track record of policy achievements, and devoted to the causes of the public specially the peasantry”.^{xxi} The benefit of his sitting out of the Cabinet was the publishing of ‘Joint Farming X-Rayed’ in 1959, the first verbalization of his core idea of a Gandhian economy based on peasant-led small agriculture and small industry-led development. This book contained trenchant criticism of Nehru's, and the Congress party's, headlong plunge into collective farming and made him many enemies in high places.

While he deeply respected and admired Jawaharlal Nehru for his role in India's freedom struggle and for his patriotism, he faulted him on his ideas for India's development. He later said, much after the passing away of the great man, that “Nehruji was born in India, but wasn't born from the soil of India”^{xxii} and was openly critical of Nehru's economic policies that “wanted to build India from the top downward, that is, from the industrialists, managers and technicians and hence followed the centrality of the town” while “Gandhi sought to build India from the bottom upward, that is, from the poorest and the weakest and hence followed the centrality of the village.”^{xxiii}

He held Vallabhbhai Patel, the first home minister of free India, as his ideal leader "... an efficient administration requires a clear policy, with the policy being implemented with complete conviction. The people who execute these policies must be of unquestionable personal integrity and should be such as to keep away from all temptations and pressures that come their way".^{xxiv} To Charan Singh, Patel was the one Congress leader in sync with rural India's aspirations; possessing a firm and no-nonsense view of India's myriad problems and their solutions after the departure of the British. "Sardar Patel had anger in his heart against poverty, corruption and lies. When it came to upholding his principles, Sardar Patel did not spare even his relatives".^{xxv}

Charan Singh's two decades in government provided him the reputation of a crusader for efficiency in administration, an uncompromising opponent of sloth and corruption, and a dedicated public servant who himself worked hard and long hours in office. In February 1953 the *Patwaris*, front-line land revenue employees, launched a statewide strike and submitted their resignations en-masse. Charan Singh, the Minister for Revenue, understood that under the guise of grievances about their terms of employment the *Patwari* agitation, covertly supported by landlords, was intended to erect barriers in the program to abolish landlordism. After two warnings, he accepted the resignations of all 27,000 *Patwaris*. "The correct attitude that the Government should adopt in such circumstances, is that if the demands of its employees, or, for that matter, any other section of our people, are reasonable, they will be accepted as soon as they are brought to its notice. If they are unreasonable, they will not

be accepted -- strike, satyagrah, or any other form of agitation notwithstanding Democracy without leadership is anarchy^{xxxvi} In place of the *patwaris*, he created the posts of *Lekhpal* answerable to the elected village bodies, and issued instructions to recruit 18% from the Scheduled Castes though the lack of suitable candidates frustrated his plans.

In 1953, as Minister for Revenue and Agriculture, he guided the passage of the *UP Consolidation of Holdings Act* in the UP Legislative Assembly and implemented it from 1954. He then framed a policy for redistribution of land obtained by imposition of ceiling on large farmers to Scheduled Castes. He also exempted payment of land revenue for farmers owning land up to three and half acres.

Senior bureaucrats in U.P. respected Charan Singh as 'he was recognized by them to be serious, scrupulously honest, and a terror to corrupt officials'. "... Mr. Charan Singh, the then Chief Minister of U.P. in 1970, had performed the miracle of reducing communal riots to zero in the notoriously communal riot-prone state of U.P. This was done not by arranging lectures on the teaching of Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira, Christ and Mahatma Gandhi. It was just done by enforcing the law of the land."^{xxxvii} "The first and the most important step should be that the chief minister should disassociate himself from postings and transfers and should not interfere in technical police operations. This was the reason why Charan Singh succeeded in virtually eradicating communal riots in Uttar Pradesh in 1970. ... He maintained strict discipline in the police by dealing sternly with police officers who tried to bring political pressure to bear on him."^{xxxviii}



Charan Singh as Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh. Lucknow. 3 April 1967

**BKD will
contest all
U.P. seats**

Hindustan Times Correspondent
New Delhi, June 3—The Bharatiya Kranti Dal National Executive by a resolution today decided to contest almost all seats in the U.P. mid-term poll.
By another resolution, the party

HindustanTimes, 4 June 1968

After the Congress

In 1967, after a long period of intense dissatisfaction with factional machinations of the Congress party machinery in which he rarely got ahead, Charan Singh broke away from the Congress with 17 other legislators to head the first non-Congress *Samyukt Vidhayak Dal* (SVD or 'Joint Legislative Group') government of Uttar Pradesh as Chief Minister in a coalition with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and the Socialists.¹

His government fell; ironically partly due to the fact the police arrested Raj Narain (leader of the Socialist party that was a critical part of the SVD coalition) for violent demonstrations against

1 "I do admire those few persons in political life who see politics as their vocation, pursue clearly stated goals, and do not enrich themselves in the process." Preface xxi. "That he [Charan Singh] did relentlessly seek power and office throughout his political life cannot be doubted, but, ... there was a difference between his drive for power and those of his opponents, namely, the he had a set of policies that he consistently sought to implement for what he saw as the good of the country and its people." Page 434. *An Indian Political Life: Charan Singh and Congress Politics, 1937 to 1961. Volume 1 The Politics of Northern India*. Sage Publications India, New Delhi. Brass, Paul 2011.

Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister on her visit to UP in January 1968. Charan Singh abhorred mass mobilization as a means of public protest in independent India: he considered these tactics of mass disobedience irrelevant and criminal in a democratic government run by Indians.

Along with former leading Congressmen in Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and Rajasthan he helped establish a new political party, the *Bharatiya Kranti Dal* (BKD, Indian Revolutionary Party) in 1968. His efforts from this time onwards till his death were focused on bringing together political parties in opposition to the Congress, which from the 1967 elections became a minority recipient of popular votes and came to a majority in the state legislature simply due to the fragmentation of the opposition. BKD ultimately drew its support principally from his mass base among the small and middle peasantry of Uttar Pradesh. In the mid-term Assembly elections in 1969, the BKD came a credible second to the Congress with 98 seats and over 21% of the popular vote; without the benefit of an established political organisation or funding other than what the public contributed. Charan Singh became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for a second time in 1970; this time in an uneasy and short-lived coalition with the 'New' Congress led by Indira Gandhi after the historical 1969 split in her party.

Charan Singh held a persistent concern throughout his life about exponentially increasing corruption in public life and the need for public men and women to be beacons of virtue "Jaisa Raja, Tatha

Praja” he often said, “People Follow the King”. The ‘national character’, or the lack of it in India, for him compared unfavorably to a nation like Japan that exhibited an advanced work ethic coupled with honesty.^{xxxix} “Corruption has grown manifold. I hold the politicians responsible for this, not the bureaucrats. My experience has been that the political leadership defines the actions of the officers, they react quickly to directions: it is like the horse and the rider. The horse very rapidly understands whether the rider on his back knows riding or not, and drops him immediately if he does not ... corruption starts at the top, not from the bottom.”^{xxxx} Charan Singh continued with administrative measures to bring order to the chaotic state of Uttar Pradesh that he considered ‘ungovernable’. In 1967, his Cabinet passed a model anti-corruption ordinance *The Uttar Pradesh Public Men Enquiries Ordinance*. In 1970, he dissolved all 51 *Zila Parishads* (District Boards) of the entire state on documented charges of corruption.

Charan Singh had a long memory for principles he considered close to his heart – he followed up his 1939 appeal to the Congress viz. “the caste of a Hindu candidate should not be inquired into while seeking admission into an educational institution or public service...except in the case of Scheduled Castes.” In 1970, his Cabinet approved a law where the State would withdraw financing from all educational institutes that named themselves after a specific caste or community: all institutions quickly removed caste and community names, and fell in line.

He constituted the *Bharatiya Lok Dal* (BLD, Indian People's Party) as an attempt at forging a national alternative to the Congress on 29 August 1974 with the merger of the BKD, Swatantra Party, Samyukta Socialist Party, Utkal Congress, Rashtriya Loktantrik Dal, Kisan Mazdoor Party and Punjabi Khetibari Zamindari Union.

Indira Gandhi attempted to attract Charan Singh back into the Congress right from after his 1967 separation. These efforts invariably came to naught, as they were both strong personalities not willing to give in to the other, with diametrically opposing views on the direction of Indian's economy. His opposition to Indira's increasing authoritarianism and dynastic actions came to a head in the Emergency of 1975-1977, which left no scope for coming together.

He lost his first election to the Indian Parliament in 1971 in the pro-Indira Gandhi wave generated by her populist 'Garibi Hatao' slogan, and the massive application of money power by the Congress in Uttar Pradesh including in Muzaffarnagar where Charan Singh stood from.^{xxxi} The BLD continued as the main political opposition to the Congress in the 1974 Uttar Pradesh state elections, and he remained in Lucknow as Leader of the Opposition in the UP Legislative Assembly from 1971 to 1975. During this period, he remained fully occupied in bringing together the opposition as a national alternative to the Congress and its policies under a common manifesto and a unified organisation.



*Charan Singh as Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh. Lucknow.
16 February 1970*



Hindustan Times, 18 February 1970



Rally at boat club, New Delhi, 23 December 1979

In Delhi

During Indira Gandhi's 2 year 'Emergency' between 25 June 1975 and 25 March 1977, when all civil liberties were snatched away by an authoritarian regime, he was imprisoned in Delhi's Tihar Jail as were all prominent opposition political leaders and tens of thousands of political workers across India. The excesses of the Emergency and the destruction of the institutions of the Republic were unprecedented in India's Independent history. Indira Gandhi's slide into dictatorial rule that brooked no opposition had been a gradual process, one whose brunt Charan Singh had faced and opposed in Uttar Pradesh. Upon release from jail Charan Singh's BLD's political base among the peasantry of northern India provided the principal component of the Janata Party coalition of the BLD, Jan Sangh, and Congress (O), which defeated the Congress in the general elections of 1977 and brought about the temporary downfall of Indira Gandhi and the first Central non-Congress government in post-independence

India headed by Morarji Desai. The BLD contributed its party symbol of the 'peasant with a plough', the backing of the middle-caste peasant communities in North India specially in the politically crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, and its Gandhian-inspired pro-agrarian and pro-cottage industry development thinking. The BLD faction was estimated to constitute between 80 to 100 Members of Parliament, at par with that of the Jana Sangh. Most importantly, Charan Singh finally had the political power to influence India's policies towards what he considered an equitable development model as the Chairman of the Janata Party committee on Economic Policy. "...Therefore, as long as this country remains committed to the present pattern of economic development in which it sets up capital-intensive modern industries at enormous cost... unemployment [will] go on increasing and capital go on concentrating in the hands of a few.... The only and the right way of avoiding this bondage is to make a clear break with the prevailing pattern of industrialization and take the Gandhian path ..."^{xxxii}

Charan Singh had by now established himself as the primary spokesman of the peasant cultivating classes in Independent India. However, he remained deeply troubled by the intractable issue of providing livelihoods and equality for the landless: overwhelmingly also the lowest castes. He had understood early on that the fundamental problem was too little land and too many people in India, and even distributing land acquired from large landlords under land ceiling laws could only be a palliative and not solve the problem of land scarcity. In addition, the growing

demands of food for a rapidly burgeoning population meant a focus on first making 'uneconomic' peasant land holding 'economic'; even while the laws of inheritance added to the problem by the fragmentation of even 'economic' land holdings from one generation to the next. Instead of struggling solely with the intractable issue of land, he saw the solution for village non-cultivators and landless labourers outside agriculture on Gandhian lines. He attempted to distribute land to the landless where he could, unsuccessful in the most part as the landed found ways to retain their holdings by various legal subterfuges, and he consistently advocated a state-supported movement for the landless away from agriculture. While he propagated a massive 'turning towards' agriculture through a re-alignment of resource allocation towards this primary sector away from industry and the city, he simultaneously wanted the government to invest in reviving non-farm occupations in the 'informal' sectors of the Indian economy: for example, reviving traditional handcrafts of village India that had been decimated during and since the times of the British, and in building employment in micro and small scale industry in and near the villages. His India was a nation of small producers and small consumers.

Charan Singh was Home Minister of India from March 1978 to July 1979 in the Janata Party government. As minister, he constituted the National Police Commission in 1977, the first such comprehensive review of the criminal justice system since 1902.^{xxxiii} One of its most important terms of reference required it to recommend measures and institutional

arrangements to "prevent misuse of powers by the police" and "misuse of police by administrative or executive instructions, political or other pressure, or oral orders of any type, which are contrary to law". The most important recommendations of the NPC centred around the problem of insulating the police from illegitimate political and bureaucratic interference.^{xxxiv} Charan Singh was a nationalist, opposed to communalism of any religion. He was implacably against the division of India on the basis of religion. The creation of Pakistan in 1947 as a separate state for Muslims established, for him, an unnatural situation where the Muslims would carry the heavy burden of proof of loyalty to India, and the majority community would align itself with the minority Hindu in Pakistan. However, he also believed that in free India it was the responsibility of the Hindu majority to provide a sense of security for all minorities. In furtherance of this concern for the rights of the minorities he set up the Minority Commission in January 1978 'in order to preserve secular traditions and to promote national integration...and for the implementation of all safeguards provided for the minorities in the Constitution ...'^{xxxv}

One of the largest rallies of peasants in independent India was held in Boat Club, New Delhi on 23 December 1978, Charan Singh's birthday, as a signal to the city that the village was no longer willing to wait for political power.^{xxxvi}

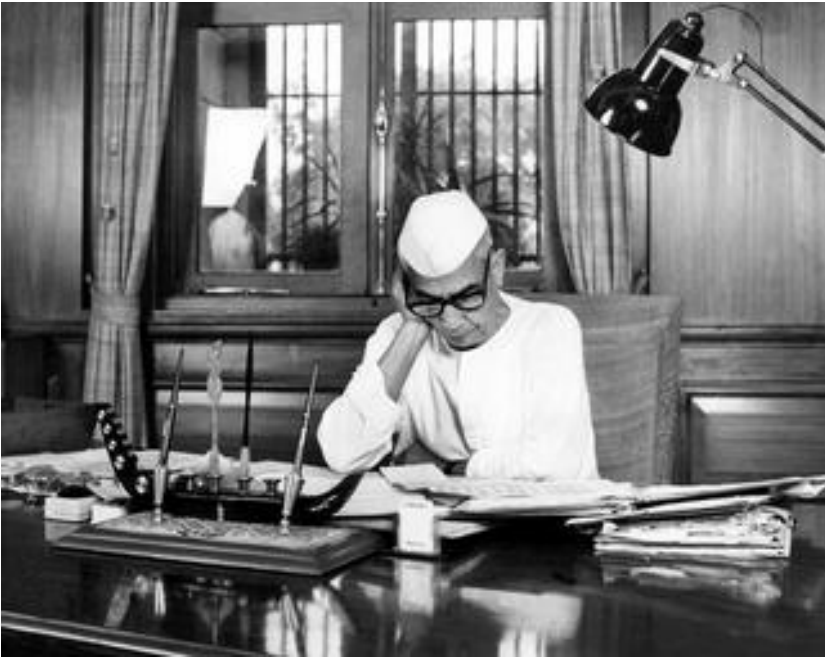
After six months out of the Cabinet, Charan Singh became Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister from January to July 1979. While Finance Minister, Charan Singh constituted the B. Sivaraman Committee in March 1979 to review institutional credit for agriculture and rural development, which later led to the founding of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in 1982. The Union Budget “.. attempted ... to put the maximum emphasis on agriculture, rural development and labour-intensive industry because it is no accepted by all that only that way can we eradicate poverty and unemployment in the country. I have however, not neglected large industry and infrastructure in the process. On the contrary, I have positively encouraged them. But I have no sympathy with those industries which cater to the wants of the rich. We can have no room for production which caters to the rich, and is, thus, a visible manifestation of the disparities which exist in society.”^{xxxvii} He exempted unmanufactured tobacco from excise levy and moved it to cigarettes and beedi's, and thus “relieved millions of farmers from the clutches of tax inspectors”, and reintroduced Capital Gains Tax, an unpopular decision with the wealthy classes.^{xxxviii} In addition, he launched and liberally funded the ‘Food for Work Programme’ for rural unemployed youth that provided food grains in exchange of labour, a precursor of the pro-poor MNREGA Program, and lakhs of tonnes of foodgrains were used from the government surplus food stock to create employment.^{xxxix}

The Janata Party – the first non-Congress government in Delhi since the Independence of India in 1947 - split in July 1979. In hindsight, this breakup was inevitable. The key participants had little experience of running a coalition of disparate political parties with long-standing organisation structures, varying political and personal interests, and ideologies that ranged from Socialist to Hindu partisan. Despite the front of a united and single party, it was hidden to none that the Janata remained a coalition of multiple factions, with none willing to merge their separate identities into a common body. Each faction jockeyed for power in the states and at the Centre where the Janata Party was in government, and destabilised their own majority governments. Factions also made shifting alliances with other factions for control over the party organisation at the state and the centre. Lastly, there were the personalities and ambitions of the leaders, each chieftain with a record of sterling service to the nation. Charan Singh felt he tried being accommodative by ignoring the interests of his faction, but the political attacks on the BLD faction-run Janata Party state governments in Bihar, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa were unrelenting.^{x1} In addition, the internecine warfare for control of the party organisation was vicious and deepened existing divisions. Had history provided an accommodating and large-hearted man in the mold of Pandit G B Pant as the leader of the Janata government, the party and the government may well have completed its term as an uneasy coalition of interests and ideologies. Unfortunately, Morarji Desai was not quite such a

personality. In the ensuing and increasingly bitter factional political battles, of which Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram, Charan Singh and the Jana Sangh faction were an integral part, the Janata Party disintegrated and belied the hopes of an expectant nation.



Charan Singh, 1982



Prime Minister of India, 1979

Prime Minister of India

After the break-up of the Janata government, Charan Singh became the fifth Prime Minister of India on 28 July 1979 as head of a disparate coalition that was to be short-lived. His government was supported ('unconditionally') from outside by the Indira Congress, which withdrew its support within weeks once Charan Singh refused to withdraw legal cases against Sanjay Gandhi instituted in the Courts for his excesses of the Emergency. The government fell before Charan Singh had an opportunity to face Parliament, and he was asked by President Sanjiva Reddy to stay on as caretaker Prime Minister till the mid-term election results were announced on 14 January 1980.

While Prime Minister, Charan Singh elevated the Department of Rural Development to the status of a new Ministry of Rural Reconstruction in August 1979, (renamed Ministry of Rural Development in 1982)^{xii} His government launched "a National

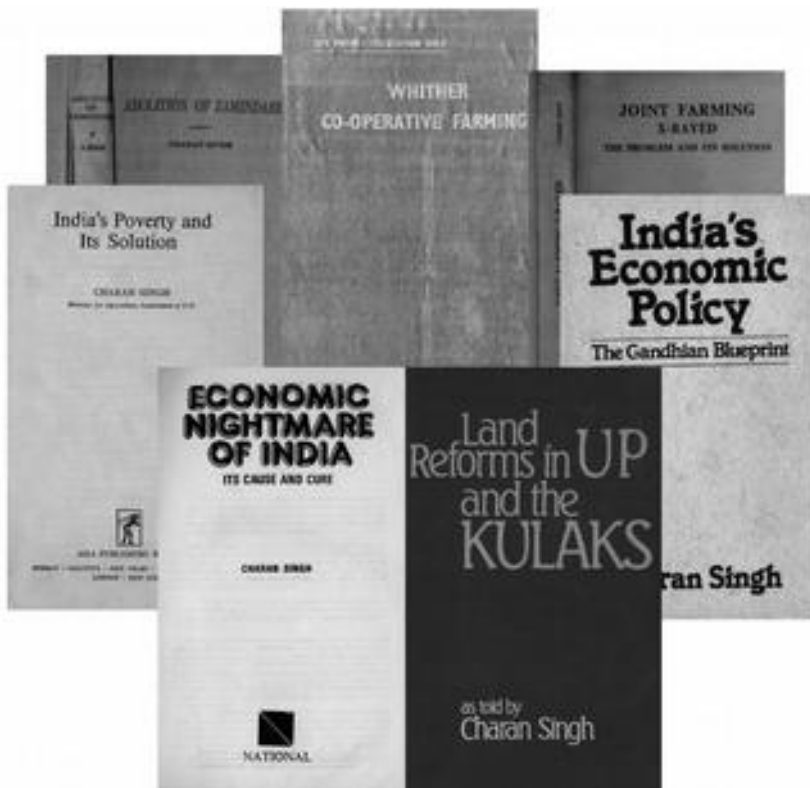
Programme of Training for Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) in various sectors of agriculture and agro-industries. "Under this training program, we wish to impart relevant skills to 200,000 rural boys and girls each year through the technique of 'learning by doing' and provided substantial funds for other programs and services for rural and farmer development."^{xliii}

He proposed implementation of 25% reservation for OBC's (both Hindu and Muslim) in government employment, the removal of the principle of reservation in promotions and exclusion of children of those who had secured jobs by taking advantage of reservations or were assessed to Income Tax.^{xliiii} However, the President of India Sanjiva Reddy requested him to hold this proposal in abeyance till after the elections.

In the succeeding general election of January 1980 Indira Gandhi and the Congress returned to power, with the Janata Party itself to blame for her return. Charan Singh was re-elected to parliament in that election and his party won 41 seats in the Lok Sabha to become the second largest party in Parliament after the Congress. He continued to be politically active between 1980 and 1984, and spoke his mind on a range of issues of national importance. For example, he wrote and spoke against extremist activities in the Sikh community in Punjab, and what he saw as the weak-kneed handling by the Congress government of militant extremists like the Sikh militant Bhindrawale. He vociferously and publicly opposed the demand for *Khalistan* (a separate nation state for the Sikhs, carved out of India) for which he received multiple death threats, but he continued nevertheless.

In the run-up to Parliamentary election in 1984, he once again became the centre of national opposition unity to fight an increasingly unpopular Congress government of Indira Gandhi, but the dastardly assassination of Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in October 1984 enabled her son Rajiv Gandhi win a massive sympathy landslide majority in Parliament in December 1984. Charan Singh was one of the few opposition leaders re-elected to Parliament in 1984, but he did not hold government office ever again.

He suffered a severe, incapacitating stroke in November 1985 and died in New Delhi on 29 May 1987. He is immortalized at Kisan Ghat, next to the *Samadhi* of his inspiration Mahatma Gandhi.



Books written by Charan Singh, 1947-1986

Charan Singh's Intellectual Heritage

Charan Singh was the rare politician with intellectual credentials. He wrote a number of books, as well as published numerous political pamphlets and political party manifestoes, that present a sophisticated and coherent alternative development strategy for India. He forcefully argued for an emphasis on agriculture, the village and labour intensive 'cottage' and small-scale industries - as opposed to the emphasis on capital-intensive industrialization of Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, and in reality every government since Independence in 1947 till today. His views predated those of global development thinkers (Michael Lipton, E. F. Schumacher) by decades, and are argued with the sword of reason based on copious data. "He was exceptional ... in producing a substantial corpus of written work, between 1947 and 1986 which contained a coherent and elaborate set of ideas,

encompassing a vision of the nature of rural India and of the road that rural India might best take. He was a genuinely productive intellectual, who distilled in his writing a potent mixture of analysis and prescription. ... thirdly, he possessed a special distinctiveness, in combining a capacity for political action with intellectual activity and facility in conveying ideas.”^{xliv}

Amongst the prominent publications by Charan Singh that argue in favour of an agrarian, small peasant-small industry-led more equal social and economic order for India are *Abolition of Zamindari: Two Alternatives* (1947), *Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh* (1957), *Joint Farming X-Rayed: the Problem and its Solution* (1959), *India's Poverty and Its Solution* (1964), *India's Economic Policy: The Gandhian Blueprint* (1978), and *Economic Nightmare of India: Its Cause and Cure* (1981).

All these publications were in English, as he wanted his ideas to reach the English-speaking city elites. Many of these were subsequently translated into Hindi, an end product he was rarely happy with. While propagating the need to adopt Hindi as a national language, he was no Hindi chauvinist.

Each of these books was an outcome of his wide range and depth of reading since the 1920s that gave rise to an intimate knowledge of global and India-wide trends in economic thought, development studies, state intervention and history.^{xlv} This was all the more praiseworthy coming as he did from an unlettered peasant's home far removed from an environment of academics

and the fact that he wrote these fully immersed in the hurly-burly of politics. In moments of deep frustration with the factional politics in Uttar Pradesh during the 1960s, he was heard to have expressed his desire to move to academics.^{xlvi} His children's and grandchildren's most prominent memory is of Charan Singh immersed in either reading or writing. His official profiles for each of the Parliaments he was a member of, 1977, 1980 and 1984, lists his 'favourite pastime and recreation' simply as 'Reading'.

Charan Singh held strong beliefs about the flags of a man's character, and he himself lived a simple, spartan life. He was a lifelong vegetarian, did not smoke or drink alcohol, and he held prejudices about those who did. He never countenanced sexual profligacy in men and women, and one of his commandments was honesty in married life to one partner. He considered impeccable personal and financial integrity and a life of material subsistence (as opposed to consumption) as a foundation for a public man's private and public life. He didn't listen to film music, didn't ever visit to a movie hall, or occupy his leisure with anything other than the company of his family. His life and thinking was consumed by his idea of India, and little else mattered. His strict morality often created problems for his political associates and opponents alike and he was known to ask the electorate to vote against his own political party's candidate if they found him to be addicted to alcohol, or to be corrupt.

During his long life as an active politician Charan Singh's principal hallmarks were his honesty and integrity, never successfully challenged, his lifelong crusade against corruption in public life, his unrelenting hard work, and his proven effectiveness as an able administrator. Charan Singh ran his independent political organisations with money collected only from individuals, unusual for any political party, and made it a stated principle to not accept donations from wealthy capitalists no matter how well meaning.^{xlvii} The stories of his refusing large contributions from influential industrial families in Uttar Pradesh are legion.

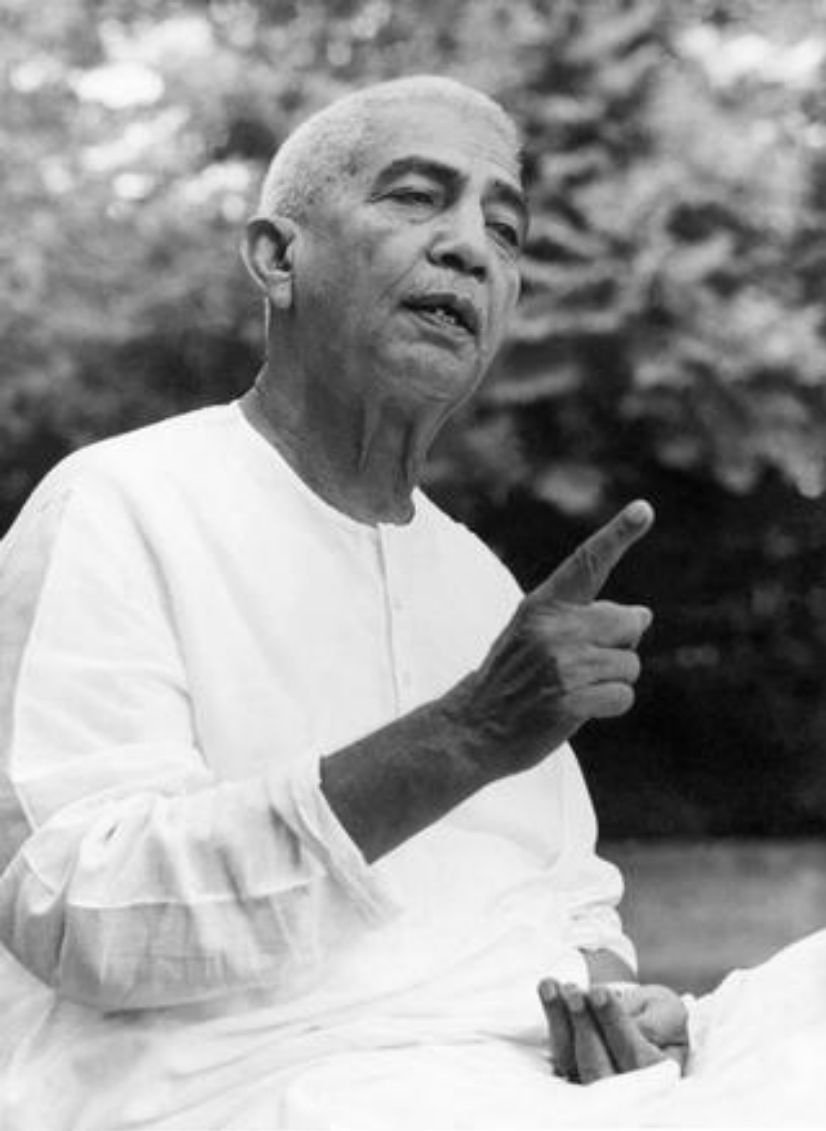
Charan Singh was, without doubt, an ambitious politician. He sought political power his entire career, not however to enrich himself or his family,^{xlviii} but to bring about a radical change in the ordering of Indian society on the lines of the theories defined comprehensively in his many books and publications including the political manifestoes of the political parties he was associated with. Often, he would seek and obtain political power and then let it go just when it became too big a struggle between his principles and his desire for bringing systemic change. At times more often than not he was judgmental of individuals more than required, at other times he was rigid and uncompromising.

Charan Singh's political career involved him at all levels of the Indian political system, from his own district of Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh, to the state as a whole, and ultimately to national politics. In his rise to power and influence Charan Singh

became identified as the principal spokesman of the small and middle peasantry of India, and went on to become closely identified with the aspirations of the 'backward' peasant castes of intermediate social status between the high-born élite castes and the lowest castes. He remains as the voice of rural India we do not hear, as we listen to the rumblings of the agrarian crisis in our times.

The political legacy of Charan Singh is the pursuit of clearly articulated policies in favour of rural India and the good of India as he saw it, and his pursuit of political power in the rough-and-tumble of Indian politics without enriching himself or his family. He believed that he was the only person who had a sufficient grasp of the fundamental problems of India's development. His solutions were based on grassroots elective democracy and free enterprise – a small-enterprise, small-farm economy - accounting for the modern world. This solution abjured the capitalist and communist methods of either private or state corporate control of the productive levers of the economy, and sought instead a unique 'middle path' solution for India's agrarian-led development that did not mimic or imitate foreign models while being fully alive to their contributions.

The five problems of poverty, unemployment, inequality, caste and corruption consumed his thinking and actions throughout his long public life. Each of these issues remains intractable today, and his solutions as fresh and relevant to their amelioration and ultimate eradication.



Charan Singh, Delhi, 1984

Chronology & Milestones

1898: Mir Singh, 18-year son of Badam Singh from village Bhatona in Bulandshahr district, marries Netra Kaur from Chitsona Alipur village in Bulandshahr. Mir Singh is a landless, tenant farmer in village Nurpur on 5 acres owned by the local zamindar (landlord) of Kuchesar.

- **Charan Singh, eldest of their 5 children, is born on 23 December in village Nurpur, United Provinces of Agra and Awadh.**

1903: Mir Singh moves 60 kilometres north to Bhoop Garhi village in Meerut District, where the family lives till 1922.

- Charan Singh receives primary education till the Fourth grade at Jani Khurd village, 1 kilometre away, and takes some examinations at Siwal village 5 kilometers away.

1913-1919: Charan Singh receives school education in Meerut city, 15 kilometers away.

- **1913:** moves to private boarding in Moral Training School, eldest uncle Lakhpat Singh commits to support his education expenses.

- **1914:** Takes admission in Sixth grade in Government High School, Meerut. Studies Science from the Ninth grade, shows early promise in English, Economics and History. Completes Matriculation (Grade 10).

1919-1923: Studies for a Bachelor of Science at Agra College, Agra.

- Studies for Intermediate (Grade 12) in Science.
- Provided scholarship of Rupees 10 per month by Bhopal Singh, a reputed doctor in Meerut who supports bright and financially needy students.
- Resolves to leave College on Gandhi's call for boycotting British schools during the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement, but is convinced to stay on by elders.
- **1921:** Motivated by Gandhi's exhortations in *Young India* to strike at the orthodoxy of caste, young Charan Singh eats food prepared and served by the *Balmiki* sweeper of his hostel. He is boycotted by his hostel mates and is denied meals in the hostel kitchen, but he perseveres.
- **1922:** Appears for a test for entry to the Roorkee Engineering College and qualifies, but is not able to obtain admission account of his lower than the minimum marks in drawing. This is his first brush with academic failure, one that exhorts him to pay careful attention in future to all matters however seemingly unimportant.
 - **1922:** Mir Singh moves to village Bhadaula, Meerut district where he buys land over time and lives for the rest of his life.

1923-1925: Studies for a Masters of Arts in History from Agra College.

- Studies the history of Britain, France and India.
- **25 June 1925. Marries Gayatri Devi**, from Garhi Kundal village, Rohtak district, united Punjab. A Matriculate from Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar she belongs to an Arya Samaji family.

1927: Receives a Masters in Law (L.L.B.) from Meerut College, Meerut (then part of Agra University).

- His principles increasingly shape his character and inform his actions. Consolidates a core social belief that caste divisions are the fundamental fault lines in Hindu society.

- Opposes the public flaunting of caste allegiances in community life by declining the position of Principal at Baraut Jat High School, Meerut and of Lakhavti Jat Degree College, Bulandshahr unless they remove the word 'Jat' from their name, which they do not.
 - Satya, his eldest child, born on 14 September 1927.

1928: Commences practice of civil law in Ghaziabad city, Meerut district, which he continues till 1939.

- His quicksilver mind, argumentative ability, capacity to influence others, attention to detail, hard work and compassion for the underdog gives his practice a head start. Attempts to bring opposing parties together through compromise without going to court.

1929: Joins the Indian National Congress, at 27, where he remains till 1967.

- Establishes the Town Congress Committee of Ghaziabad, in which he holds various elected positions until 1939.

1930: Active in the Arya Samaj and the Indian National Congress in Meerut district.

- Dayanand Saraswati informs his social and religious beliefs, and Mohandas Gandhi comes to define his political and economic thinking.
- **1930-1939:** Is either Chairman or General Secretary of the Ghaziabad Arya Samaj committee.
- **5 April 1930:** Participates in Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha at the start of the Civil Disobedience movement, and is imprisoned for the first time in a British jail for six months. His wife Gayatri Devi sells her solitary gold bangle to continue to provide for the family, gives up her job as a teacher, and moves from Ghaziabad to the village.
 - Ved, his second daughter, born on 17 September 1930.

January 1931: Wins elections unopposed to the Meerut District Board.

Vice Chairman, till December 1935, to Chaudhary Khushi Ram (Chairman) and Maulvi Bashir Ahmad (Senior Vice Chairman)

- **1932:** Leads Congress movement in Ghaziabad against the 'Communal Award'. Congress asks him to stay out of jail and manage the affairs in the absence of Chairman and Senior Vice Chairman who had both been arrested.
- Travels extensively in the rural areas, his wide exposure to the poverty of the Meerut countryside, and the social evils he comes face-to-face with, convinces him the removal of British rule is the first step to their amelioration and emancipation.
 - Rescues a widow and her young daughter from the hands of an exploitative Ghaziabad municipal employee, gets the daughter married and helps support the mother.
 - Fails to stop the marriage of a girl-child to an old shopkeeper in village Raeespur, the deep poverty of the father who marries her for money leaves an indelible mark on his conscience that he remembers with deep feeling till late in life.
 - Sees English as a symbol of the oppressive rule of the British, and despite opposition by one magistrate uses Hindi as a pleading language in some of his cases. Becomes an active supporter of Hindi as the national and link language of India.
- Returns falsely constructed travel bills made by Board junior officials for his inspection travel, and refuses to apply Board *peons* for his personal jobs. Sets a personal example of uprightness that publicly defined his standards of integrity in all his subsequent public positions of authority.
- **1932:** Takes on a young *Harijan* (as Dalits were then addressed) cook as a practical manifestation of his visceral opposition to caste, who remains with him till 1939.
 - Third child, Gyan, born 23 September.

25 February 1937: Elected, at 34, to the limited-electorate United Province Legislative Assembly in December 1936, on the Congress ticket from Meerut district (South-West), comprising tehsil Baghpat and Ghaziabad. (At this time Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Mathura districts were a part of the Delhi District Congress Committee)

- Wins 78.06% of the vote, defeating the candidate of the *National Agriculturist Party of Zamindars*.
- Elected 8 consecutive times from Chhaprauli Legislative constituency: 1937, 1946, 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1969 & 1974.
 - Fourth child, Saroj, born on 23 February 1937

17 July 1937 to 2 November 1939. Formulates and presents multiple rural and peasant supportive legislation in the Assembly, and progressive resolutions to the Congress Legislative Party. Comes to the attention of the state Congress leadership.

Requisitions a meet of the Congress Legislature Party to discuss the poor performance of the administration and police, is disappointed in the response of Govind Ballabh Pant and Jawaharlal Nehru.

- **November 1938:** Charan Singh chairs a vast public meeting in Ghaziabad to honor Vishnu Sharan Dubish, of Kakori Conspiracy fame, returning from Andaman Jail after 10 years imprisonment. They become life-long friends and intimate political allies, further cementing Charan Singh's political base in Meerut.
- **1938:** Introduces a draft 'Agricultural Produce Market Bill' as a private bill to safeguard the interests of the producer against exploitative food-grain dealers and traders. Government of Punjab led by Sir Chhotu Ram passes Mandi Samiti Act in 1940 based on the draft bill presented by Charan Singh. U. P. has to wait till 1964, when Charan Singh is minister of agriculture.
- Publishes articles on 31 March 1939 and 1 April 1939 in The Hindustan Times, and in Lucknow, on this legislative measure for the protection of the cultivators. These logically argued, data-based articles - in English - are flag-bearing precursors of his extensive writings in newspapers throughout his public life.

- **April 1939:** Formulates 'Land Utilization Bill' calling for the transfer of land ownership to all tenants or actual tillers of the soil who chose to pay an amount equivalent to 10 times the annual rental on the land they cultivated. The bill faces stiff resistance from *Zamindars* and is not placed in the Assembly.
- **5 April 1939:** Proposes a resolution before the executive committee of the Congress Legislature Party, calling for reservation of 50% of positions in public sector jobs for the sons and dependents of the cultivators or agriculturalists. The resolution is not accepted by the party.
- **April 1939:** Introduces a resolution before the Congress Legislature Party prohibiting any enquiries with regard to the caste of any Hindu who seeks admission in an educational institution or a position in any government service, except in the case of Scheduled Castes. The resolution is not discussed by the party.
- **1939:** Plays a leading role in the formulation and passage of 'The United Provinces Agriculturists and Workmen Debt Redemption Bill' that frees several farmers of Uttar Pradesh from the clutches of moneylenders and debt and in saving their fields from public auction. Lobbies with Revenue Minister to pass relief for peasants, under the UP Tenancy Act 1939.
- Requisitions a meeting of the Congress Legislature Party where he speaks against the un-responsiveness of the British Administration to the needs of the common people, and the continued indifference of the Police department.
 - Britain unilaterally declares India a participant in the Second World War, and all Congress State governments resign in protest.

December 1939: Moves to Meerut city from Ghaziabad after the resignation of the Congress Government.

- 1939 to 1946: President or General Secretary of Meerut District Congress Committee.
- Succeeds Raghuvir Narain Singh, highly respected prominent Congressman and big *zamindar* in Meerut district, in a critical transition of leadership from born privilege to individual capability.
 - Fifth child, Ajit, born on 12 February 1939.

November 1940 – October 1941. Second imprisonment In Bareilly jail during the ‘Individual Satyagraha’ movement.

- Interred initially in Meerut Central Jail, then in Bareilly Central Jail. Reads voraciously, and hand writes jail diaries that contain extracts from a wide range of books: from John Stratchey’s ‘The Theory and Practice of Socialism’, Edgar Snow’s ‘Red Star Over China’, Sydney and Beatrice Webb’s ‘Soviet Communism’, Emile Burns’ ‘A Handbook of Marxism’, GDH Cole’s ‘Practical Economics’. Reads extensive reports on European, English, Russian and Indian Agriculture.
- Writes *Shishtachar*, in Hindi, on traditional Indian good breeding and manners, as letters from prison to his children. This innocuous manuscript is confiscated by the Police, and is released to him only many years later. His family, meanwhile, lives dislocated in the village under great privation.

23 October 1942 - November 1943: Third imprisonment, for 13 months, during the Quit India movement.

- Before imprisonment, leads a two-and-a-half month underground anti-colonial struggle in Ghaziabad, Hapur, Mawana, Sardhana and Bulandshahr. Police issue a ‘shoot-at-sight’ order, he surrenders voluntarily. On release, goes back to practicing civil law. Lives a life of hardship.
 - Sixth, and last child, daughter Sharda, born on 23 December 1942.

November 1945: Proposes employment of cultivators in government services to make the administration more representative and responsive to the 85% rural population of United Provinces

- Charan Singh drafts a Congress manifesto prepared on 9 September 1945 on Land and Agriculture that calls for the abolition of landlordism. This is adopted at a November 1945 meeting of kisans at Banaras chaired by Acharya Narendra Dev, and forms the basis of a resolution approved by the All-India Congress Working Committee in December 1945.

21 March 1946 – 12 May 1948: Charan Singh elected, for the 2nd time, to the United Provinces Legislative Assembly from Meerut District (South-West) and appointed Parliamentary Secretary (junior minister) in the U. P. Congress ministry.

- **24 April 1946 – September 1947:** Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Minister for Revenue, Hukum Singh.
 - Ensures the caste of a tenure-holder, other than that of Scheduled Castes, is not entered in Revenue records.
 - Includes a new Section in Land Reforms Manual that forbids the acquisition of farmland for public purposes if there is barren or inferior land available within half a mile.
- **Beginning September 1947 – 12 May 1948:** PS to Cabinet Minister for Local Self Government & Health, Atmaram Govind Kher. Holds independent charge of the departments of Medical and Public Health.

14 November 1946 - 3 July 1948: Member of the Congress' Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Committee (ZALRC) tasked to abolish landlordism in Uttar Pradesh.

- **ZALRC publishes "Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee".** Superintendent, Printing & Stationary, Allahabad, UP. 611 pages.
- **1 September 1946:** while ZALRC is in deliberation, ensures amendment of UP Tenancy Act to stop eviction of tenants from the land they tilled, and all those evicted from 1 January 1940 are reinstated.
- **12 January 1948:** Ensures right of ownership is transferred to all tenants of the land on which their hut was built, as part of UP Village Abadi Act. A boon to all peasants as it stops eviction by *Zamindars*, the Scheduled Castes in particular.
- **1946:** Member, UP Pradesh Congress Committee, till 1967.
- **From 1946:** General Secretary of the UP Legislature Congress Party, resigns in 1956 on account of differences with then Chief Minister Sampurnanand.
- **21 March 1947:** Proposes a passionate and well-structured note for 60% reservation for peasant cultivators in government employment to the Congress Legislature party.

- **1947: Publishes booklet *How to Abolish Zamindari: Which Alternative System to Adopt***, 1947. Allahabad: Superintendent Printing and Stationery, United Provinces.
- **1947: Publishes first book "*Abolition of Zamindari, Two Alternatives*".** Kitabistan, Allahabad, UP. 263 pages.

13 May 1948 – 3 June 1951: Parliamentary Secretary to Premier (later, Chief Minister) Govind Ballabh Pant (1887-1961) of United Provinces (later, Uttar Pradesh).

- Parliamentary Secretary for Judicial and Legislative departments, also responsible for Zamindari Abolition Publicity Board and Zamindari Abolition Fund.
 - **1946:** Member All-India Congress Committee (AICC) till 1967
- Offers his resignation multiple times to Premier Pant on corruption in the state administration (example, the Ramgarh Court of Wards scandal in Bulandshahr), on the lack of quality work, and on the calibre of his senior Cabinet colleagues many of whom Charan Singh considered less capable than himself. Pant, a calm and inclusive leader of men, refuses to accept these offers, smoothens Charan Singh's angularities and directs his energy for the historical tasks ahead.
- **1948-1951: Formulation of Zamindari Abolition & Land Reform (ZALR) Bill**, one he considered the principle achievement of his political life.
 - **18 October 1948:** gives a reasoned 18-page note on Zamindari abolition to Pant opposing many of the final recommendations of the ZALRC, and is given charge of the Drafting Committee of Revenue and Law officers to prepare the Zamindari Abolition Bill and shepherd it through the Legislature.
 - **12-17 May 1949:** U. P. Cabinet approves Bill as presented by Drafting Committee
 - **7 July 1949:** Bill referred to a Joint Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly, which presents its report on 9 January 1950
 - **24 January 1951:** Bill is passed by both Houses, and is approved by President of India

- **12 June 1950:** Directorate of Information as added responsibility as Parliamentary Secretary to Premier.
 - **1951:** Member, State Election Committee or UP Congress Parliamentary Board. Resigns in 1965 on account of bitter factional politics of which he wants no part but has to participate at time in order to survive in the party.
 - **Feb 1951:** Moves a resolution, carried with considerable majority, in a meeting of the Executive of the Pradesh Congress Committee that no active member of the party should be allowed to associate himself with caste institutions or organisations.

4 June - 8 August 1951: Minister of Justice and Information

9 August 1951 - 19 May 1952: Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Information

20 May 1952 - 27 December 1954: Minister of Revenue, Scarcity, Agriculture, Cane Development, Food Development and Animal Husbandry.

- **1 July 1952:** legal challenges in courts by Zamindars end, and **implementation commences of the U.P. Zamindari and Land Reforms Law.** No part of this law was ever successfully challenged in a court, attesting to its detailed and careful drafting by Charan Singh and his team of dedicated bureaucrats. This historic Act, in a State with 85% population dependant on agriculture in 1952, altogether removed the landlord intermediaries between the self-cultivating peasant and the State. The disintermediation of the *Zamindar* and *Taluqdar* (landlords) provided cultivating peasants the independent self-owned status of *Sirdars*, or *Adhivasi* to the landless sharecroppers of these landlords.
- ZALR makes every resident of a village the owner of his house, well and trees; this was especially beneficial to the landless Scheduled Castes who were till then at the complete mercy of the *zamindar*. Preference are given to the landless in the allotment of *abadi* sites in ZALR and Consolidation laws.
- Commences a vigorous program of awakening villagers to their rights under the new Act through scores of speeches in Hindi on All India Radio

Lucknow, an equal number of well-reasoned newspaper articles and pamphlets in Hindi and English, and hundreds of well-attended public meetings across the length and breadth of Uttar Pradesh between 1952-1957.

- **1953: Formulates and guides passage of UP Consolidation of Holdings Act.** The bringing together of fragmented land holdings of individual farmers is a harbinger of farming efficiency in Uttar Pradesh, the other side of land ownership for increased productivity. Charan Singh acts strictly against complaints of corruption that are brought to his notice.
- **February 1953:** The revised Land Records Manual (1952) had drastically reduced the powers of the *patwaris* (village level land record functionaries) to adversely affect the cultivator. Forces of landlord reaction egged on these powerful functionaries, all of who went on strike despite ongoing negotiations. Charan Singh, in an act of administrative firmness and political astuteness, dismisses all 27,000 *patwaris* from government service and replaces them *Lekhpals*.
 - He directs 18% job reservation for Scheduled Castes, of which only 5% could be recruited due to a lack of suitable candidates despite relaxed qualifications.
- **1954:** Legislates Uttar Pradesh *Bhoomi Evam Jal Sanrakshan Adhiniyam* for soil and water conservation, implements the Soil Testing Scheme in Universities across the state.
- **13 September 1954:** Amends ZALR Act to provide permanent rights of land ownership to 3 million small tenants, known as Adhivasis, of which 1 million were Scheduled Castes. Does not provide the right of 'resumption' (cultivation by a former landlord who did not cultivate his own lands) of land from former tenants despite recommendation of the Planning Commission and pressure from UP landlords, the only state to have this as an original Section in the 1952 ZALR Law.
- **1954:** Sends a proposal to Prime Minister Nehru to pass a law that would ensure only those youth who married outside, or were prepared to marry outside, their caste be recruited in gazetted government services. He believed the intractable issue of caste required drastic measures to start the process of

its disintegration. Nehru disagrees with his proposal on account of freedom of choice of individuals to choose their life partner.

- His popularity increases with rural sections of society in Uttar Pradesh. Earns further enmity from landed interests.
 - 27 December 1954: GB Pant moves to Delhi as Union Cabinet Minister for Home Affairs, on the passing away of Vallabhai Patel. This ends what Charan Singh later, in 1979, calls the 'golden period' of his political career – 1937 to 1954 - when he worked intimately with Pant to impact the critical issues of the peasantry closest to his heart.

28 December 1954 - 9 April 1957: Cabinet Minister for Revenue, Scarcity and Transport in Dr. Sampurnanand's ministry

- Issues orders to from Board of Revenue to Districts to increase recruitment of Scheduled Castes to 18%, including as *Lekhpals* and *Amins*.
- **June 1957:** Proposes in a note to the Cabinet that ministers take a 10% pay cut, drive in small cars instead of imported limousines, not display the national flag on their cars, armed policemen not accompany ministers, armed guards not be provided to ministers, and that police do not salute any minister other than Chief Minister and Home Minister.
 - **1956: Publishes book "Whither Co-operative Farming".** Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, United Provinces, India, 1956

10 April 1957 – 31 March 1958: Cabinet Minister of Revenue & Scarcity.

- Mother Netra Kaur passes away, aged 75
 - **1957: Publishes booklet "Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh".** Prakashan Shakha, Soochna Vibhag, Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1957

1 April 1958 – 16 November 1958: Cabinet Minister of Revenue, Scarcity, Finance and Sales Tax.

17 November 1958 – 21 April 1959: Cabinet Minister of Revenue, Scarcity, Irrigation, Power & Power Projects

- **9 January 1959:** Speaks for 1 hour against Jawaharlal Nehru's Soviet-inspired proposal for adopting collective farming as the definitive Congress policy for

Indian agriculture at the 64th session of the All India Congress Committee in Nagpur.

- The failure of collective farming across the world, and the higher productivity of self-cultivating small peasants, speaks to Charan Singh's far sightedness.
- **22 April 1959:** Resigns from the Cabinet after continuing differences with Chief Minister Sampurnanand. Sits out of government, for the first time since 1937, for 19 months till 6 December 1960
- The shadow of his act of solidarity with his principles at the Nagpur AICC looms large as he is shunned by party colleagues as well as state and national party leadership, but Charan Singh had for long found CM Sampurnanand administratively inept and colleagues corrupt as he wrote in letters to Sampurnanand himself, to Nehru and Pant.
- The immediate reason for his resignation is his principled opposition to the State Government's decision to supply energy at preferential prices from the Rihand Dam to an Aluminum project of the Birla group rather than to peasants.
 - **1959: Publishes book "*Joint Farming X-Rayed: The Problem and Its Solution*".** Kitabistan, Allahabad. 322 pages.

7 December 1960 – 25 August 1963: Joins Cabinet of Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Chandra Bhan Gupta as Cabinet Minister for Home, Police, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Fisheries.

- Remains dissatisfied with being passed over for Chief Minister, which he believes is due to his opposition to Nehru's obsession with collective farming which he had opposed and not his capability and commitment to the people.
- Attempts to make the working of the Police beneficial to the people, while understanding and acting on the genuine difficulties created by their working conditions.
 - Commits to protect police officers from political interference while implementing the law
 - Believes the low wages of and poor working conditions of the constabulary needs to be improved to reduce corruption, works to improve their conditions of transport, communication and technology.

- Provides full pension and salary to the surviving family of police officers who die in encounters with criminals.
- Refuses to be pressured by politicians for Police postings and transfers, specially at the level of Police Sub Inspectors, till then a source of patronage and corruption.
- Refuses to withdraw legal cases of rioting against students of Allahabad University, arson at the Mansarovar Cinema and multiple cases against Legislators from his own party accused of crimes.
- Home & Police portfolio taken away on 13 March 1962 due to differences with the CM.
- Continues as Minister for Agriculture till 1 October 1963.
 - Amends the 1954 *Bhoomi Evam Jal Sanrakshan Adhiniyam* law to provide improved seeds, fertilisers and farming implements to all farmers through an agricultural supply organisation.
- Imposition of Ceilings on Land Holdings Act of 1960 passed by UP Legislative Assembly in which he took keen interest.
 - Father Mir Singh passes away in 1960, aged 80.
 - Gobind Ballabh Pant, mentor and father figure, passes away on 7 March 1961

14 Oct 1963 - 13 March 1967: Joins Cabinet of Sucheta Kripalani as Minister for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and Forests.

- **1964:** Passes Agricultural Marketing Act to regulate the activities of agricultural markets, an unfinished task since 1939
- **January 1964:** Founds the government-funded *Krishak Samaj* with an objective to benefit small and ordinary farmers by modern scientific methods.
 - Jawaharlal Nehru passes away on 27 May 1964.
 - Lal Bahadur Shastri, fellow Parliamentary Secretary in UP, elected Prime Minister.
- **14 May 1965:** divested of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries portfolio
- **14 May 1965 - 13 March 1967:** Cabinet Minister of Forests
 - Indira Gandhi elected Prime Minister in January 1966

- **1964: Publishes "India's Poverty and Its Solution"**. Asia Publishing House, 1964. 527 pages. This is his most comprehensive book till date on an alternate, small-producer rural-industry framework on Gandhian thinking.

February 1967: Wins Legislative seat in UP Assembly with record margin, highest of any Assembly candidate in any election since Independence. 4th Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha constituted on 10 March.

- **Early March 1967:** Indira Gandhi's emissaries (Uma Shankar Dixit and Dinesh Singh) convince Charan Singh not to contest the post of head of the Congress legislature party. He agrees, after much persuasion.
- **13 March 1967:** Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai come together at Delhi partly due to the efforts of C. B. Gupta, who has been promised the post of Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in exchange.
- **14 March 1967:** Charan Singh refuses to join the Cabinet of C. B. Gupta as his agreement with Gandhi's emissaries to specifically keep two corrupt Congress ministers out of the UP Cabinet is broken. He is told to do what he wants to
- On hearing of his decision to finally separate from the Congress, Congress (R) makes a last-minute desperate offer to support him as Congress Chief Minister if he stayed on in the party. Charan Singh declines, his mind made up to set out on his own. Critically, Gayatri Devi advises him to steer his own path.
- **1 April 1967: Charan Singh breaks away with 16 other legislators to form the Jan Congress.** After a long period of disillusionment with self-seeking Congress politicians in the post-Independence era, his reasons for leaving the organisation he helped build for 38 long years included widespread corruption, incorrect development policies and moral decay in the party. More specifically, Charan Singh
 - held an unwavering belief in his competence to be the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh over the claims of factional leaders of the party who controlled the party organisation but had little backing with the people. He had been passed over in 1960, 1963 and now in 1967; at 65 time was running out for him to implement the policies and plans he had developed over decades of his political practice.

- intensely disliked the increasing and widespread corruption in legislators and ministers of his party, completely divorced as they were from the interests of the poor. He believed corruption or morality flowed from the top.
- rued the absence of well thought-out policies to favour agriculture, rural development, cottage and small industry that would enhance the quality of life of the common citizen, 80% of which yet lived in the villages.
- was desirous of wrenching the entrenched control of levers of authority of the urban and high castes in the executive, the bureaucracy and the legislature.

3 April 1967 - 25 February 1968: First non-Congress Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh since independence, leads a coalition of the *Samyukt Vidhayak Dal* (United Legislators Party) of the opposition *Jana Sangh*, *Samyukt Socialist Party (SSP)*, *Communists*, *Swatantra Party*, *Praja Socialist Party*, *Republican* and *Independents*. The *Jan Sangh* with 99 and *SSP* with 45 legislators are the two largest constituents.

- Appoints 4 Cabinet Ministers and 2 Ministers of State from the Backward Castes that formed 55% of the population of the state, 4 Muslim ministers, and 1 from the Scheduled Caste: each the highest representation for each community in any Congress Cabinet since 1937.
- Starts the historical rise of the “Other Backward Castes” (OBCs) as a pre-eminent political force in North India.
- **May 1967** in Patna - *Bharatiya Kranti Dal* (BKD) formed by former senior Congressmen from Bihar, UP, Bengal, Orissa and Rajasthan. Merges the *Jan Congress* into the BKD in 1968, and takes on the Chairmanship of the party in April 1969.
- Holds talks with C. Rajagopalachari and his *Swatantra Party* for a merger, which does not fructify. His criteria for a united party is based a common constitution in which people from all beliefs can agree on.
- Issues ‘Publicmen’s Enquiry Ordinance’ to enquire into allegations against Legislators, Mayors etc by an independent investigation agency.
- Cabinet takes decisions to abolish the honorary magistrate position given out by the British to collaborators; isolates the judiciary from the executive

interference on 2 Oct 1967; decides any educational institution that carries name of a caste would not be given financial aid by the government (with the result that all institutions named after a caste hasten to change their names); provides funds for the promotion of Urdu and makes the Government Gazette available in Urdu in 23 *tehsils*; makes Hindi the sole language of state administration; and reduces land revenue from small farms. There are no communal riots in U. P. during his tenure, despite violence in many parts of north India, as the police is fully empowered to act against anti-social elements from both communities and is insulated from political interference.

- SVD government, however, disintegrates under the pulls of its constituents. Charan Singh personally accompanies the Prime Minister while she is on an official visit to Uttar Pradesh in January 1968 and ensures the threats of leaders of the Socialist Party, one of the constituents of the SVD government, to 'arrest' her are nullified - their leaders are put behind bars. He resigns as CM, and refuses to accept the entreaties of the contrite SVD constituents to reconsider.
 - State remains under Governors Rule for a year when bye-elections are called.

26 February 1969: The BKD does resoundingly well in bye-elections, and is the second largest legislative party in Uttar Pradesh with 98 seats after the Congress' minority 211 legislators in a house of 425.

- BKD does well on the basis of its workers enthusiasm and the groundswell of support of its voters, but has a nascent and weak organisation and an absence of significant funding by wealthy capitalists.
- C. B. Gupta once again elected Congress Chief Minister with help from independents, Charan Singh is Leader of the Opposition.
- BKD establishes its political vision at its Kanpur Session, one based on the Gandhian framework of the village, agriculture and rural cottage industry. Its comprehensive manifesto is an example of an integrated social, economic and political vision for a poor, agrarian nation.
- Holds discussions with Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party, Praja Socialists to merge into a single entity, idea remains stillborn.

- Indian National Congress splits in November 1969 into the Congress (O) with 90 legislators and C.B. Gupta as leader, and Congress (R) (Indira Gandhi) with 120 legislators led by Kamalapati Tripathi.
 - This commences the rise of Indira Gandhi as the unquestioned leader of the Congress, and the decimation of independent state leadership across her new Congress. Her authoritarian tendency is to manifest itself darkly for the nation in the Emergency of 1975.

17 February 1970 – 29 September 1970: Charan Singh becomes Chief Minister of UP for the second time, with the support of Indira Gandhi's Congress (R) after both factions of the Congress approach him to form the government.

- Speeds the process of distribution of land rights, *Sirdari / Adhivasi*, on thousands of acres to the landless
- Makes compulsory students union membership voluntary in all educational Institutions in Uttar Pradesh
- BKD votes against the abolition of Privy Purses in the Lok Sabha as it was a sacred promise by Sardar Patel to the former princely states as a part of their accession to India. BKD also refuses to merge with the Congress (R), and their political relationship quickly deteriorates.
- Charan Singh refuses to quit as Chief Minister, and Presidents Rule is enforced against all principles of legislative convention and legal opinion.
- On removal of Presidents Rule after a month, despite entreaties by all parties other than the Congress (R), he declines to head a new SVD government and offers his support to Tribhuvan Singh of the Congress (O) to form the next government.

March 1971: Indira Gandhi calls Parliamentary elections in March with the 'Garibi Hatao' (Banish Poverty) slogan, and with the nationalisation of banks in July 1969 behind her.

- Charan Singh's loses his first election to the Indian Parliament, from Muzaffarnagar, to Vijay Pal Singh of the Communist Party of India in electoral alliance with and heavily funded by the Congress (R).

- Remains in Lucknow as the Leader of the Opposition in the U. P. Legislative Assembly until 1977.

February 1974: BKD again does well in UP Assembly elections (with 106 seats out of 425) with 21% of the vote, but cannot replace the dominant Congress due to a fragmented opposition.

- 1973 Manifesto proposes 20% reservation for Scheduled Castes in factories in both private and public sector, as also of permits or licenses, which do not require and technical skills.
- **1973:** Continues efforts at bringing together all political parties opposing the Congress. Jana Sangh and Congress (O) do not want to come together - Morarji, for example, seeks half of all seats for his Congress (O).

29 August 1974: Constitutes the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) with the merger of the BKD, Swatantra Party, Samyukta Socialist Party (Raj Narain), Utkal Congress (Biju Patnaik), Rashtriya Loktantrik Dal (Balraj Madhok), Kisan Mazdoor Party and Punjabi Khetibari Zamindari Union as a step to a 'Democratic Nationalist' national alternative to the Congress.

- Perseveres with efforts to form a single, united party with one constitution and constructive program but fails as the two major national political parties – the Congress (O) and Jana Sangh - are not eager to subsume their independent political identities and Jayaprakash Narayan is immersed in his non-party 'Total Revolution' in Bihar.
- **16 March 1975:** Massive demonstration against Congress in Delhi led by Jayaprakash Narayan, Charan Singh, Prakash Singh Badal, Nanaji Deshmukh and Raj Narain.
 - **12 June 1975:** Indira Gandhi found guilty on charges of misuse of government machinery during her 1971 election campaign in Rai Bareilly on a petition by Raj Narain the losing candidate, her election is set aside and she is debarred from contesting elections for six years. She suspends the Constitution on 25 June 1975 and declares an internal Emergency.

25 June 1975 - March 1976: Charan Singh jailed for the fourth time, and the first time in independent India. He is interred in Tihar Jail in Delhi, as are hundreds of political leaders all over India and tens of thousands of political workers and journalists during the 21-month dictatorial internal Emergency regime imposed by Indira Gandhi.

- Kept in a 10 by 16 foot room without a window, with a 4 by 6 foot toilet. Starts to write his book 'Economic Nightmare of India'. Discussions of a united political party take fresh shape in Tihar on 8 February 1976 with Jana Sangh leaders Vijayaraje Scindia and Nanaji Deshmukh as well as senior Akali leader Prakash Singh Badal and others interred there.
- Released without notice from jail on an Amnesty International report of 7 March 1976, along with Ashok Mehta and other leaders.
- **23 March 1976:** On being released, gives a historic 4-hour speech in the UP Legislative Assembly, condemning the Emergency and energizing political opposition to Indira Gandhi. His speech is not reported to the public due to total censorship in the press.
- Holds multiple meetings to further the agenda of a united opposition to the Congress from April 1976 to December 1977 with other opposition leaders, without significant progress. Indira Gandhi announces elections on 18 January 1977 which galvanises the opposition. Morarji Desai appointed Chairman and Charan Singh Vice Chairman, with complete responsibility for North India in a single, united Janata Party.

23 January 1977: Helps found Janata Party, his party BLD provides the principal electoral base for the decimation of the Congress in North India.

- **24 March 1977:** Elected to the Indian Parliament for the first time

24 March 1977 - 1 July 1978: Union Home Minister of India in the Cabinet of Morarji Desai, 4th Prime Minister of India.

- Significant differences within the Janata Party, factional infighting between Cong (O), Jan Sangh, BLD and CFD factions. Morarji Desai removes Charan Singh from Cabinet on 1 July 1978.

- **1978: Publishes book "India's Economic Policy: The Gandhian Blueprint".**
Vikas Publishing House, Delhi. 127 pages

23 December 1978: Presides over a historic 'Kisan (Peasant) Rally' at Boat Club in Delhi on his 76th birthday, said to be the largest gathering of peasants and villagers in the history of independent India.

24 January 1979 – 16 July 1979: Returns to the Morarji cabinet as Union Finance Minister, and Deputy Prime Minister

- Presents the Union Budget in Parliament on 28 February 1979, with a focus on agriculture, rural India and small-scale industries.
- Continued differences with an inflexible Morarji Desai, manoeuvring by the dominant Jana Sangh faction, the ambitions of Jagjivan Ram, and Janata Party President Chandrashekhar, some ill-advised actions by Raj Narain and Madhu Limaye lead to the break-up of the Janata Party.
- Charan Singh's faction, Janata (Secular), gets the support of 76 Members of Parliament of the undivided Janata Party, he is invited by President Sanjiva Reddy to form the government

28 July 1979: Sworn in as **Prime Minister of India** in a short-lived coalition government of the Congress (Chavan), Akali Dal, Communists and smaller parties, supported from the outside by 73 Members of Parliament of the Indira Congress.

- Charan Singh refuses to withdraw the Special Courts and the cases against Sanjay Gandhi in the Supreme Courts for their excesses during the Emergency; the Congress (R) revokes its support; and Charan Singh submits his resignation to the President on 20 August 1979 without facing a vote in Parliament.
- Continues as caretaker Prime Minister till 14 January 1980, when mid-term elections are held to Parliament.

1980: Elected to the Parliament for a second term from Baghat, Uttar Pradesh.

- Election results are a setback for his party, the Lok Dal, as the people reject the breakup of the Janata Party and bring back Indira Gandhi. Though Lok

Dal wins 41 Parliamentary seats (with 9.4% of the national vote) it emerged as the second largest political party in Parliament after the Congress (I). The remnants of the Janata Party led by Jagjivan Ram win only 31 seats in Parliament.

- **1981: Publishes book "*Economic Nightmare of India: Its Cause and Cure*".** National Publishing House, Delhi. 598 pages.

1982: Split in Lok Dal

- Key associates leave him on account of political differences.
- Remains engaged with opposition unity, forms an electoral alliance with Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party – the first National Democratic Alliance.

1983-1984: Remains engrossed in the affairs of the nation, vigorously and publicly opposes Sikh extremism.

- Becomes the centre of national political opposition to Indira Gandhi and her Congress. 21 October 1984: forms the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party comprising the Lok Dal, Democratic Socialist Party, Rashtriya Congress, Kisan Mazdoor Party, Utkal Congress and other smaller parties.
- However, Indira Gandhi's dastardly assassination on 31 October 1984 gives her son her Rajiv Gandhi a historical landslide majority in Parliament with 411 seats out of 542.
- Charan Singh is elected to Parliament for the third, and last, time from Baghpat along with 3 Members of Parliament from his party.

25 November 1985: Suffers a brain stroke that incapacitates him for the next 18 months.

- **14 March 1986:** Treated at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, USA to no avail. Regresses into a coma.

29 May 1987: Passes away on 29 May, 7 months short of 85.

- Cremated and immortalised at *Kisan Ghat*, next to the samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi.

Sources

The 'Charan Singh Papers' (CS Papers) at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (NMML) are over 300,000 pages of rich historical material donated by Gayatri Devi, Charan Singh's wife, in February 1994. These papers comprise documents meticulously collected by Charan Singh over 50 years of public life, and are a source of ongoing research on many aspects of his life and work. The earliest document is a handwritten note from 1939 of a proposed legislation in the United Provinces on reservation in government jobs for 'sons of cultivators' and amongst the latest is an incomplete manuscript of his book '*Rise and Fall of the Janata Party*' from October 1985. (The Index of the CS Papers is at <http://charansingh.org/archives>) Since 2013, the Charan Singh Archives have contributed thousands of photographs, videos, speeches, biographies written on him, all the books written by him, as well as his legislative speeches made in Lucknow and Delhi.

I have relied heavily on Charan Singh's own words, as he was a detailed record keeper with an acute historical sense. Some of these papers are CS Papers Installment II, Subject File # 49 '*Bio-data of Charan Singh ...*'; CS Papers Installment I – III, F-1: 99 page booklet '*Who Is a Kulak: Let Land Reforms of UP Testify*' by Charan Singh; Chapter 1 and others of '*Land Reforms in UP and the Kulaks*', Charan Singh,

Vikas Publishing House, Delhi. 1986; Installment II, Subject File #49 'Bio-data of Charan Singh'; Installment II, Subject File #416 'Life Sketch of Charan Singh'; and Interview with NMML in Lucknow, 1972.

Another historical source are books written during his lifetime and after by authors some of whom spent considerable time with him on the content. I have cross-verified dates and events across what I consider the key publications amongst the scores published in Hindi: **Sharma, Jaidev**, Editor *Prantap*, Deshbhakt Morcha Prakashan, 1978. **Pandey, Anirudh**, *Dhartiputra Chaudhary Charan Singh*, Ritu Prakashan, 1986. **Goyal, Sukhbir Singh**, *A Profile of Chaudhary Charan Singh*, 1978. **Rawat, Gyanendra**, *Chaudhary Charan Singh: Smriti aur Mulyankan*, Kisan Trust, 1995, **Singh, Nathan**, *Kisan Masiha Chaudhary Charan Singh (1902-1987)*, New Delhi. Kisan Trust, 2002.

Finally, **Paul Brass** has been an inspiration. Paul generously shared with me the vast material on his research since 1960 on factional politics in the Congress in Uttar Pradesh. A self-confessed admirer of Charan Singh, though by no means an uncritical one, Paul's 25 September 1993 article "*An Indian Political Life*" from the *Economic And Political Weekly* is a succinct and fluid narrative of Charan Singh's political journey.

Paul obtained an approval from Charan Singh in 1981 to write his political biography (for which he was provided free access by Charan Singh to his voluminous papers), which to Paul's regret was published only in 2011 much after the passing of Singh in 1987. These are available today in three volumes '*An Indian Political Life: Charan Singh and Congress Politics*', Volume 1, 1937-1961 (2011), Volume 2, 1957-1967 (2012) and Volume 3, 1967-1987 (2014). Sage Publications, Delhi. His scholarship provided the impetus for this brief life history, and I am eternally grateful to Paul for that.

Harsh Singh Lohit

Gurgaon,

29 May 2019

Endnotes

- i. Note by Charan Singh, 1982. Charan Singh Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi. Installment I, File 1, Pg. 3. Hereafter referred as 'CS Papers, NMML.
- ii. Raja Nahar Singh (a feudal lord of Ballabhgarh, with 121 villages under his control) was hung by the British at Delhi's Chandni Chowk in 1857, along with the Nawabs of Jhajjar, Dadri and Farukhnagar and 17 of his soldiers for his role in the Uprising. The British subsequently confiscated the possessions of the Raja and put his family and community to flight. Singh, Hari. *"Raja Nahar Singh of Ballabhgarh and the Revolt of 1857."* Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol. 52, 1991, pp. 587–597. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44142662. Mir Singh's father Badam Singh was Nahar Singh's clans-member, and migrated in 1860 from Sihi village, present day Faridabad district, Haryana. *Parantap*, 1978. Deshbhakt Morcha, Kanpur & New Delhi. Eds. Madhvilata Shukl, Jeyadev Sharma, J and SP Mehra. Pages 13-21.
- iii. Unpublished manuscript of a biography of Charan Singh by Capt. R. S. Rana. This page approved by Charan Singh. CS Papers NMML, Installment II, F-457. Pg. 2
- iv. Charan Singh was not a fluent English speaker, not that he was at all embarrassed about it. Unpublished interview with Paul Brass, 1982. Personal knowledge of author.

- v. Riskey, HH and Gait, EA. *Census of India 1901*, Volume 1-A. Part II – Tables, Pages 108-157. Calcutta
- vi. Brass, Paul. *Chaudhuri Charan Singh An Indian Political Life*. Economic and Political Weekly, India. 25 Sept 1993.
- vii. Speech by Charan Singh on the occasion of Nirvana Shatabdi (death anniversary) of Swami Dayanand, 04 November 1983. CS Papers NMML, Installment II, F-452. Charan Singh seemed to be referring to his own concept of himself when he wrote “ Though humble, Dayanand as not hesitating and halting in his beliefs, but was sure of the words he uttered. He was a born fighter and when it was a question of principles he never knew how to yield. He called a spade a spade, come what might. ... Dayanand stood up in the midst of the whole hostile world like an oak that defied all tempests, like a rock, against all kinds of shams and superstitions and false beliefs.” Extract from an article in the Hindustan Times by Ch. Charan Singh on Swami Dayanand’s 50th Death Anniversary, 4 June 1933.
- viii. *ibid*.
- ix. Charan Singh in an interview with Shyam Lal Manchanda, NMML Oral History Project, 10 February 1972. Lucknow, UP.
<http://charansingh.org/archives/interview-nehru-memorial-museum-and-library>
- x. *Parantap*, 1978. Interview with Charan Singh Pg. 194
- xi. Charan Singh in an interview with Shyam Lal Manchanda, NMML Oral History Project, 10 February 1972. Lucknow, UP.
<http://charansingh.org/archives/interview-nehru-memorial-museum-and-library>. Personal knowledge of the author.
- xii. Letter to Prime Minister Morarji Desai from Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister for Finance Charan Singh, 3 July 1979. Statement of Assets and Liabilities as on 31 March 1979. Provides details of Immovable Property – land at 191-A Saket, Meerut constructed by my wife Gayatri Devi. Movable property – Jewelry: five stone studded rings. Bank Account with savings account with Rs. 3,841.09 and Vijaya Cash Certificates for Rs 15,000 in all. CS Papers, NMML Installment II. File 322
- xiii. Interactions with the Press, 1979. CS Papers, NMML.

- xiv. *India's Economic Policy: The Gandhian Blueprint*. Charan Singh. Vikas Publishing House, Delhi. 1978. Pages 43, 91
- xv. Unpublished manuscript of a biography of Charan Singh by Capt. R. S. Rana. This page approved by Charan Singh. CS Papers NMML, Installment II, F-457. Pg. 13
- xvi. CS Papers, NMML. Installment II, File 49, Bio Data of Charan Singh... CS Papers NMML
- xvii. Charan Singh in an interview with Shyam Lal Manchanda, NMML Oral History Project, 10 February 1972. Lucknow, UP.
- xviii. Singh, Charan. "Why 60 per cent, services should be reserved for sons of cultivators?" 21 March 1947. NMML CS Papers, Installment I. F-2.
- xix. Charan Singh's Speech at the 92nd Death Anniversary of Pandit Gobind Ballabh Pant, 1979. CS Papers NMML. Installment II
- xx. Singh, Giani Zail *Kitni Khoobiaan Thi Is Insaan Mein*, Asli Bharat. December 1990, Page 20. CS Papers NMML.
- xxi. Economy in Government was His Watchword: Mr. Charan Singh's Fight Against Corruption, Times of India, 28 April 1959
- xxii. *Parantap*, 1978. Interview with Charan Singh Pg. 195
- xxiii. Singh, Charan. *Towards Gandhiji*. *Parantap*, 1978. Pg. 367
- xxiv. *Parantap*, 1978. Interview with Charan Singh. Pg. 195
- xxv. Charan Singh, CS Papers, NMML, Installment II, F 457 Pg. 72
- xxvi. CS Papers, NMML, Installment I. Note by Charan Singh 21 April 1967 on the issue of the agitation by state employees
- xxvii. Saxena, N. S. *India: Towards Anarchy 1967-1992*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. 1993. Saxena was a senior Indian Police Service officer. A former Director General (DG) of UP Police, he retired as Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force. Saxena was DG of UP Police in 1970 when Charan Singh was Chief Minister.
- xxviii. UP Police Capable of Curbing Riots, Times of India, 1985. By N. S. Saxena. Saxena was a senior Indian Police Service officer. He was a former

Director General of UP Police, and retired as Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force.

xxix. *Parantap*, 1978. Interview with Charan Singh. Pg. 194

xxx. Charan Singh in an interview with Shyam Lal Manchanda, NMML Oral History Project, 10 February 1972. Lucknow, UP.

<http://charansingh.org/archives/interview-nehru-memorial-museum-and-library>

xxxi. Personal interview with a former Communist (an ally of the Congress in the 1971 elections) and professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, 16 March 2015. The son of a political ally of Charan Singh, he converted to being a supporter of Charan Singh in the 1977-85 period. He confirmed the free amounts of cash he personally took from the Treasurer of the Congress to defeat Charan Singh in Muzaffarnagar, an act of misguided opposition he confessed was the biggest mistake of his life.

xxxii. Singh, Charan. *India's Poverty and Its Solution*. 1964. Asia Publishing House, National Publishing. 527 pages. Pg. 115

xxxiii. *Parantap*, Interview with Charan Singh. 1978. And Arvind Verma IPS, 1998

xxxiv. http://humanrightsinitiative.org/old/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=91%3Ashiva&id=686%3Apolice-india-national-police-commission&Itemid=98

xxxv. http://ncm.nic.in/Genesis_of_NCM.html

xxxvi. <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19790115-was-the-kisan-rally-organised-merely-to-boost-the-bruised-ego-of-charan-singh-821787-2014-12-08>

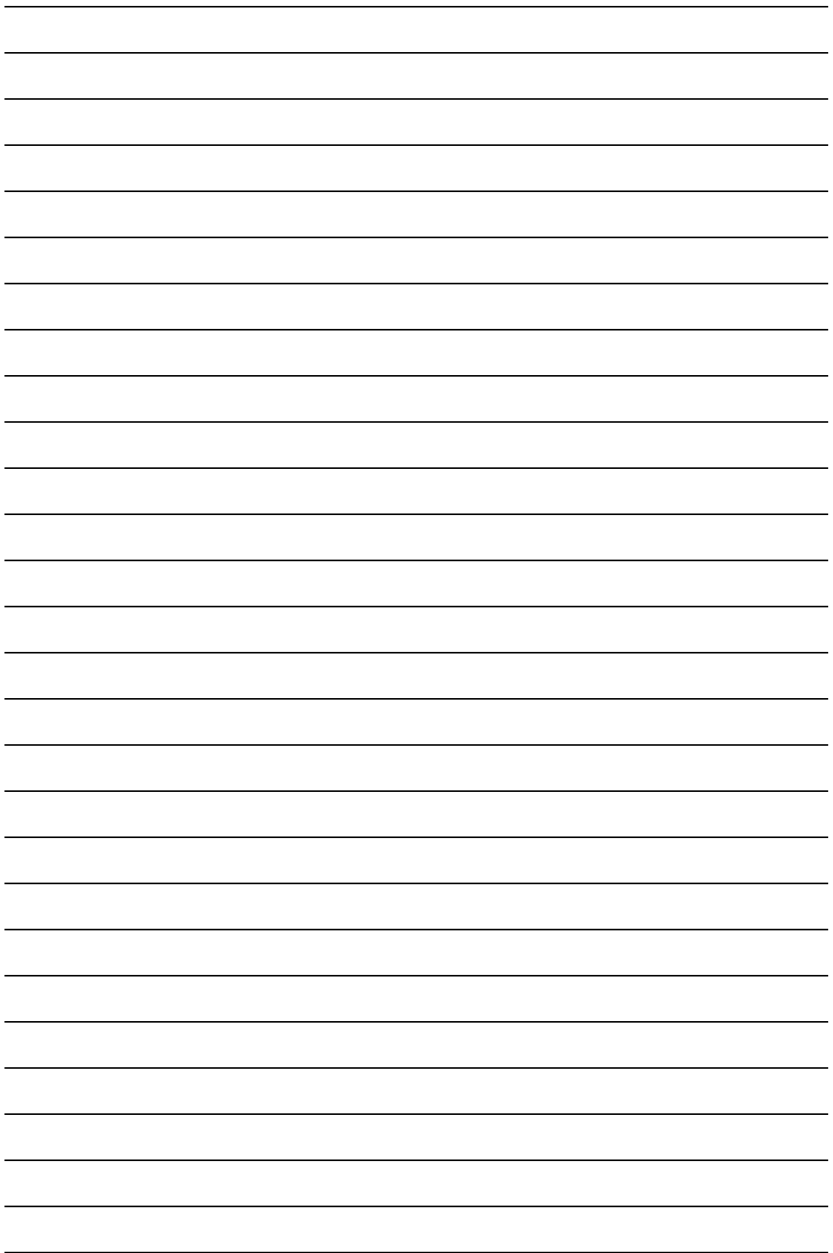
xxxvii. Speech of Shri Charan Singh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Introducing the Budget for the year 1979-80. 28 February 1979, CS Papers. NMML. Installment III. Not yet indexed.

<https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/bspeech/bs197980.pdf>

xxxviii. Ramachandran, G. *Walking With Giants*, 2013. Pages 192-193.

Ramachandran was Finance Secretary to Government of India in 1978 when Charan Singh was Minister of Finance.

- xxxix. http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/49084/11/11_chapter2.pdf . Article by Satya Prakash Malaviya, former Union Minister, in 2002. CS Papers, NMML, Installment III. Not yet indexed.
- xl. Singh, Charan. *The Rise and Fall of the Janata Party*, Volume I and Volume II. 1985. Unpublished and incomplete manuscript, Charan Singh. October 1985. CS Papers, Installment III, NMML. Charan Singh had a stroke in November 1985, and was unable to complete his versions of the breakup of the Janata Party. This manuscript defines this as the work of factional manipulations, in which he comes across as a victim rather than the cause.
- xli. <https://rural.nic.in/about-us/about-ministry>
- xlii. PM Shri Charan Singh's Inaugural address at ICRISAT Hyderabad, on 30 August 1979. <http://charansingh.org/archives/inaugural-address-international-crops-research-institute-semi-arid-tropics-icrisat-patan>
- xliii. Cabinet Note on 25% Reservations for OBCs by Prime Minister Charan Singh, 3 Dec 1979. CS Papers, NMML. Installment III. Not yet indexed.
- xliv. Byres, Terence. *Charan Singh, 1902–87: An Assessment*, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1988. 15:2, 139-189
- xlv. Publications by Chaudhary Charan Singh, 2018 <http://charansingh.org/books-by-charan-singh>. Also see <http://charansingh.org/life-history/publishes-his-first-book-many-abolition-zamindari-two-alternatives> for a Bibliography of the books he had read by 1947 when he wrote his first of many books – in English.
- xlvi. Personal knowledge of author
- xlvii. CS Papers, NMML. Installment II, file 457 Pg. 97 Charan Singh's assets on his death on 29 May 1987 were an old Fiat car, a savings bank account with a balance of less than Rs 5,000 and a house constructed by his wife Gayatri Devi on a small plot in Saket, Meerut city. Also see endnote xi



Charan Singh was born 23 December 1902 “in an ordinary peasant farmers home under a thatched roof supported by kachcha mud walls, with a kachcha well ... for drinking water and irrigation”*. This infant born into poverty in a tenant farmers mud hut in Noorpur village in Meerut district of the then United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) was to rise to become the most prominent voice of the village in independent India.

This is his brief life history from Congress nationalist and freedom fighter to politician, and an organic rural intellectual articulating an alternative development thinking for India around the primacy of agriculture and small village industries on Gandhian lines.



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