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CHARAN SINGH
President
Lok Dal

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April 19, 1984

Dear Mr. Malhotra,

You have been pleased to say in your editorial of April 16 on the Akali extremists, entitled 'A Dangerous Agitation', that "Ch. Charan Singh with an eye on the Jat vote in Haryana and Rajasthan has been opposed to any concessions to the Akali Dal".

Now, granting that I am a casteist or a narrow-minded Jat, pure and simple, may I know how the interests of the Sikh community in Punjab conflict with those of the Hindu Jats in Haryana and Rajasthan so that my opposition to the demands of the Sikh extremists will bring me more votes of the Jats as compared with those of the non-Jats in the latter two States? Coming from Punjab as it seems you do, you must be knowing that some 40 to 50 per cent of the Sikhs are born of Hindu Jat parents so that, naturally enough, relations between the Hindu and Sikh Jats have always been as cordial as possible.

My reasons for opposing the demands of the Sikh extremists inspired by the Anandpur Sahib resolution of 1973, were explained fully by me in my speech on the floor of the Lok Sabha in March or April, 1983 of which your paper carried a long report.

I had told the Prime Minister in her face in the last week of October, 1982 when she was pleased to send for me (for a talk on the Punjab situation) that Sant Bhindranwale was a phenomenon of her creation. Your editorial would lead, at least, some of your readers to the conclusion that my removal from the scene is likely to lead to a solution of the problem. If God so wills it I am prepared for it. But I will speak the truth as I see it and as the national interest so imperatively demands.

Inasmuch as you are the editor of an important daily with a wide circulation your views carry much weight with the people at large. Your mention of my name with reference to my caste is likely to create a prejudice against me in the minds of your readers. Not only that you have been unfair to me: your remark, whether you so intended it or not, has only served to lower the standards of public debate.

Much more as I would like to write, I refrain and content myself with reproducing below some extracts from the last chapter of my book entitled 'Economic Nightmare of India: Its Cause and Cure' (1981) for your perusal -- extracts which will serve to show that it is our social system based on birth which is the main cause of our undoing throughout the centuries.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,
Sd/- Charan Singh

Shri Inder Malhotra,
Editor,
The Times of India,
New Delhi.

THE TIMES OF INDIA - Monday April 16, 1984.

A Dangerous Agitation

It is possible to sympathise with the so-called national democratic alliance, its constituents - the Bharatiya Janta Party and the Lok Dal - face not one but two cruel dilemmas. First, their leaders have not been in agreement on how to respond to the Akali challenge in Punjab. While Chaudhri Charan Singh, with an eye on the Jat vote in Haryana and Rajasthan, has been opposed to any concession to the Akalis, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been worried lest Mrs. Gandhi's tough stance towards them swing the Hindu vote in her favour and has, therefore, been holding her primarily responsible for the tragedy in Punjab. There has been a noticeable change in the tone of the BJP's pronouncements since the assassination of Mr. Khanna, vice-president of the party's Punjab unit, in Amritsar. But even now it has not taken the position that the Akalis must bear the blame for the reign of terror in the state and that a suspension, if not withdrawal, of the agitation is an essential condition for the restoration of normalcy there. Secondly, like other political leaders, they have no specific solution to offer. But what sense does it make for them to present a memorandum to the President calling for dismissal of the Union government, and worse, to launch, as the alliance proposes to do on May 3, an agitation to press the demand that Mrs. Gandhi "either meet the extremist challenge or quit"?

On the face of it, this would appear to be a wrong, indeed partisan, question on two counts. For one thing, no one can possibly claim that the administration in Punjab has displayed much skill and determination; the small number of arrests in connection with several hundred murders speaks for itself; we do not need further evidence to show that the state machinery has conscientiously fallen on its face. For another, agitations, and memorandums are normal methods of drawing the government's and the peoples' attention to urgent issues. But there is another aspect to this problem. Which is that if the Akalis get strengthened in their conviction that Mrs. Gandhi's position in the country as a whole is under attack and that she cannot bring the power of the Indian state to bear on them, they will become even more intransigent if that is at all possible. A great deal can be said in criticism of the way the Congress leadership, including the Prime Minister, had handled the affairs of Punjab since 1980 when the party returned to office both at the Centre and in the state. Some members of the leadership occupying very high offices can also be said to have built up Sant Bhindranwale a more dangerous man than whom the country has not seen since 1947. But how does it help to recall all that? For only a Prime Minister assured of, and seen to be assured of, the support of the vast majority of people in the country can inspire the necessary respect and fear in the hearts of the extremists and their backers at home and abroad.

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