



CHAUDHARY DEVI LAL'S CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL SOCIO- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: VISION, POLICIES, AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

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Abstract:

Chaudhary Devi Lal was a prominent Indian political leader and advocate for farmers and other rural people. Chaudhary Devi Lal, more of a political activist than a political theorist, devoted his life to India's independence and social and economic reforms. Following Mahatma Gandhi's lead and the example of other leaders of his time, he left school to work in India's independence movement. He took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement. He was jailed multiple times. His commitment to his principles and democratic ideals, as well as his affection for ordinary people, earned him the nickname Tau. Chaudhary Devi Lal was highly respected by farmers and other disadvantaged groups, including tenant farmers and farm laborers. He helped organize small farmers and landless laborers to resist exploitation by larger landowners and developed a reputation as a folksy politician. This paper examines Devi Lal's vision and initiatives for improving the socio-economic conditions of the agrarian population and rural communities. It explores his contributions to social welfare, employment generation, agricultural development, and rural infrastructure, highlighting the significance of his policies in promoting inclusive development. His emphasis on social justice, equitable access to resources, and the welfare of disadvantaged groups remains relevant to contemporary debates on agrarian relations and rural transformation. Against the backdrop of present-day agricultural challenges, the paper underscores the importance of critically examining his vision and assessing its relevance to contemporary rural development policies.

Keywords: Chaudhary Devi Lal, Socio-Economic Development, Rural Development, Agricultural Welfare, Social and Economic Reforms, Rural Welfare Programmes, Contemporary Relevance.

Introduction

Chaudhary Devi Lal, a prominent populist politician and freedom fighter popularly known as the *Raging Bull of Haryana*, was born on 25 September 1914 in Teja Khera village in the present-day Sirsa district of Haryana. After completing his primary education, he attended Government School in Dabwali, where he studied up to the eighth grade. However, his growing involvement in the national movement gradually overshadowed his academic pursuits. Consequently, he discontinued his formal education and devoted himself to the struggle for India's independence. Devi Lal was first imprisoned in 1930 under Section 108 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and sentenced to one year of rigorous imprisonment. He was released in March 1931 following the Gandhi–Irwin Pact. He also championed the cause of poor tenants through the Indian National Congress. The colonial authorities accused him of instigating tenants and arrested him again in 1933, although he was subsequently released for lack of substantial



evidence. Following his release, he resumed his efforts to organize tenants, small peasants, and landless labourers. By this time, his reputation as an emerging Congress leader had spread throughout the region.

In August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement, which sought to end British colonial rule in India. The British administration attempted to suppress the movement through arrests and other coercive measures. Along with other nationalist leaders, Devi Lal went into hiding to carry out his activities from secret locations. Members of his family and other relatives came under official harassment. Devi Lal surrendered at his village on October 5, 1942, and was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment following his trial.

After his release in October 1943, Devi Lal helped organize peasants and farmworkers without land and other poor people who were struggling during and after World War II and competition with large landowners. Increasing tensions between tenants and landowners became a central issue in Devi Lal's political career.

Following India's independence, some of Devi Lal's early political activities included mobilizing local farmers to protest against the Muzara Act and other issues related to agriculture in the region. Devi Lal was one of about 500 farmers arrested during these protests. An agreement was later reached with Punjab chief minister Gopi Chand Bhargava, and reforms were implemented in the laws in question. These actions suggest that Devi Lal advocated for tenant farmers and helped them protest against other issues.

Devi Lal was first elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1951. He was president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee in 1956. Other political accomplishments of Devi Lal include his strong advocacy for the creation of a separate state of Haryana. Before the States Reorganization Commission, Devi Lal submitted evidence concerning the regional disparities in irrigation, fertilizer distribution, electrification, and other development benefits. He supported the idea of a separate Hindi-speaking state in Punjab and helped establish the Haryana Lok Samiti, serving as convener. The state of Haryana was established on November 1, 1966.

Devi Lal continued to participate in the Haryana formation movement during his second term in the Punjab Legislative Assembly from 1962 to 1967. Devi Lal left Congress in 1971 because he was disillusioned with Congress leaders and practices. Devi Lal was imprisoned for about 19 months during India's Emergency period from 1975 to 1977. Devi Lal emerged as a prominent opposition leader after the Emergency. He led the winning Janata Party campaign in Haryana in the 1977 elections and became chief minister of Haryana on June 21, 1977.

His government implemented policies to encourage economic development in rural areas. When he was elected leader of the Janata Party legislature group, he reportedly stated, "Development must find its projection in the huts and cottage of the poor people and not in the tall Secretariat building in Chandigarh." This quote indicates an interest in development and other policies to assist the poor.

On July 4, 1977, members of his government announced a two-part program for reform in Haryana. Among the measures proposed were efforts to combat corruption and provide more water and electricity. Government officials expected to implement the party platform and other campaign promises made during the election. In 1987, Devi Lal successfully campaigned in another election. A coalition of the Lok Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party won 85 of the 90 seats in the Haryana Legislative Assembly. Victory in the state election raised hopes for a non-Congress alternative on the national scene. Devi Lal gained national stature as a leader of the opposition and made campaign trips around India to mobilize other party members and politicians.

During his tenure as Chief Minister, Devi Lal initiated other policies and programs with long-term impacts on rural



social welfare programs. Haryana, led by Devi Lal, was among the first Indian states to introduce pension programs for the elderly as part of broader social welfare efforts to assist vulnerable populations. Devi Lal's Kaam Ke Badle Anaaj (Grain in Lieu of Work) program shared features with later rural social welfare programs, such as work requirements for public projects as a condition of receiving benefits.

The program offered food assistance to individuals in exchange for their labor on community development projects, including the construction of earthen dikes around villages to prevent flooding and enhance residents' well-being. Additional community development projects included higher compensation for landowners who had their land seized for public purposes and loans to Dalit households to fund the education and marriage of daughters. Other program activities included unemployment assistance for youth and the construction of chaupals, or village community centers, where residents could socialize and engage in other activities.

These programs were implemented by Devi Lal to benefit rural populations and other disadvantaged groups through social work programs, employment programs, infrastructure development, and other assistance programs. The political goals of these programs included advancing the interests of rural and other disadvantaged groups and reducing existing inequities affecting rural people.

The inclusive character of his development philosophy is captured in his well-known slogan:

“Har Khet Ko Paani, Har Haath Ko Kaam, Har Tan Ko Kapda, Har Sir Pe Makan, Har Pet Ko Roti, Baaki Baat Khoti.”

The slogan may be translated as: “Water for every field, work for every hand, clothing for every body, a roof over every head, and food for every stomach; all else is meaningless talk.” It reflects his emphasis on agricultural prosperity, employment, access to basic necessities, and human dignity as essential components of rural development.

Chaudhary Devi Lal is famous for supporting agricultural and other rural and low-income groups. Throughout his political career, Chaudhary Devi Lal advocated for social and economic policies to help rural and other poor groups. Efforts by Chaudhary Devi Lal to help rural and other poor people included advocacy on behalf of farmers and farm laborers and other initiatives to assist rural populations.

His work on social security and employment programs and other programs to assist poor families contributed to policies in Haryana that emphasize social welfare programs. Other accomplishments during his time in Haryana demonstrate the benefits of social programs for rural residents. Lessons from his time in Haryana about the importance of non-state-run programs to help poor families in rural areas are still useful when evaluating rural development policies.

His memorial in Delhi, Sangharsh Sthal, on the banks of the Yamuna River, honors his political achievements and public service. Devi Lal's accomplishments highlight the value of farmer-centered policies, equitable access to resources, social protection, and participatory approaches to rural development.

Given present challenges in rural areas, including high unemployment and underemployment, resource shortages, foreclosures, and other socioeconomic issues, this leader's work is worth additional scholarly research. Studying this leader's ideas and programs can help other scholars better understand his life and achievements and suggest ways to address rural socioeconomic issues.

One important part of Chaudhary Devi Lal's rural development efforts was promoting political consciousness among



rural and other marginalized groups. Rural groups are economically and otherwise marginalized relative to the state. Small farmers and landless and other laborers and marginalized groups have few resources and other advantages that would allow them to lobby effectively on their own behalf against more powerful groups. Chaudhary Devi Lal's political consciousness-raising efforts were designed to benefit rural and other marginalized groups politically.

His leadership style involved interacting with ordinary citizens on everyday issues. Along with political activities at official sites, he cultivated a public image associated with rural and agricultural interests. His nickname, Tau, and other elements of his public image demonstrated his connections with rural citizens and voters. His connections with rural citizens helped him communicate political messages to farmers in a way that resonated with them.

The advantages of rural political mobilization extend beyond elections. Increased political awareness among rural residents can help them hold government officials accountable and gain other policy and resource advantages to improve their economic prospects. The political activity of Devi Lal and others brought rural interests to the attention of political leaders.

His case study suggests ways in which leaders and communities can work together on development projects. Government officials and other leaders play a role in rural development, but community participation in planning and goal setting is also important. Programs to include farmers and other agricultural workers in development efforts are an important component of democratic development.

In contemporary India, problems of rural people, including low agricultural incomes, suggest a continuing need for political action. The political career of Devi Lal illustrates some roles that organized rural groups can play in influencing agricultural and other development policies and programs. Other obstacles to continued political advancement by rural groups, including small farmers and landless laborers and other disadvantaged groups, such as women, include efforts to develop other rural institutions to represent diverse rural interests.

Rural Development, Human Dignity and the Welfare State

Devi Lal's development-oriented political philosophy can be understood in terms of welfare states. Welfare states recognize additional responsibilities of government beyond law and order and economic management. Other responsibilities of government include protecting vulnerable groups and assisting them in accessing services and other benefits to address poverty and other social issues.

In India, social welfare programs were important because of the large share of the population working in agricultural and other nonagricultural occupations in rural areas with insecure employment. Social welfare and rural development programs addressed concerns other than agricultural production and the needs of rural populations, such as employment and infrastructure. Devi Lal had close political ties to farmers and other rural groups throughout his career and as chief minister of Haryana. Biographical materials from the Lok Sabha Secretariat indicate that Devi Lal's governments in Haryana increased funding for agricultural and livestock programs and other rural development programs. Other initiatives of Devi Lal's governments in Haryana to help rural populations included social welfare and self-employment programs for rural populations in addition to programs related to farming.

This approach is important because the welfare of farm households depends on factors in addition to farm production. Other factors related to farm household welfare include access to irrigation and electricity, nonfarm employment opportunities, and other rural assets and resources, such as farm animals and community business opportunities, as well as social protection programs to help farm households cope with economic shocks. Joint programs to develop



the rural economy and provide social services can address multiple dimensions of deprivation among rural households. Devi Lal's focus on farm issues went beyond agricultural concerns about farm prices and output and reflected a larger political agenda that sought to elevate the status of villages and farm households in national policy. Social programs of Devi Lal's government provide evidence of a broader understanding of governance. Rural pensioner and worker programs and poverty programs for rural households and infrastructure programs helped meet other social needs of rural residents. These social programs show that social development, along with economic development, can be judged by greater safety and dignity for common people.

One contribution of Devi Lal was his involvement in expanding old-age social security programs. Correct historical information should be shared about his contribution. When Haryana was part of the combined Punjab state, it had an old-age pension program. Haryana continued this program after its separation in 1966. Major changes to the old-age pension program started during Devi Lal's second term as chief minister on June 17, 1987, when the monthly pension for people 65 years of age and older was fixed at ₹100. The current Haryana government's web page on the Old Age Samman Allowance Scheme recognizes Devi Lal's 1987 changes. Other changes to the program made by later governments include reducing the age for eligibility to 60 years. Devi Lal's key contributions to old-age social security in Haryana included efforts to promote and politicize old-age social security in rural areas.

The benefits of programs like this are not always financial. Higher lifetime income can increase older people's influence over household decisions when they are unable to work in traditional occupations. In rural areas with low income and savings and occupations including farming and other temporary work, an additional retirement income source can provide funds for food, health care, and other personal expenses for older adults and reduce their dependence on other family members. Programs providing retirement income can otherwise improve dignity by shifting perceptions of older people from a charitable model to one recognizing them as citizens whose minimum welfare is a legitimate concern of public policy.

The benefits of social security are particularly important for rural families involved in agriculture. Rural agricultural families experience income instability because of seasonal employment and other factors that influence prices and costs for agricultural products. Older people and households with limited savings experience hardships because of this instability. Government social insurance and other social programs can reduce hardships by providing some income stability to these groups.

The same welfare-state arguments apply to farmers and other agricultural workers. Even landowners can face insecurity and other problems because of risks and other problems associated with farming, including lack of irrigation and other water issues, crop loss, debt, and price volatility for agricultural and other products and services. Small and marginal farmers are particularly vulnerable because crop losses mean they cannot use surplus agricultural products to meet other household expenses or pay off debt. In his political platform, Devi Lal advocated policies to help farmers and other rural citizens and proposed other measures to offer immediate economic advantages to rural households. Newspaper accounts of his second term indicate that farm households received substantial relief from cooperative agricultural debt and other benefits under Devi Lal's administration.

Debt relief should be considered a part of broader rural policy rather than a solution to rural poverty. Benefits of debt relief programs include immediate gains for distressed households, while other approaches to reducing rural poverty include programs to boost agricultural productivity, irrigation, access to remunerative markets and institutional



credit, and diversification of rural employment. The key benefits of debt relief programs for a government committed to the welfare of poor rural households come from combining debt relief programs with other programs to help these households generate higher future incomes.

Likewise, employment programs can provide benefits to households in the form of immediate cash and other public assets. Other benefits of employment programs in rural areas include protection against periods of economic hardship. Barriers to successful implementation of employment programs include lack of funds and other resources, corruption in recruiting processes, late wage payments, and lack of monitoring.

Employment programs show the relationship between welfare and dignity. Other welfare programs, including cash and pension programs, provide a safety net for people who cannot participate in the labor force. Employment programs provide opportunities for income from work to people who can work. Political and administrative biographies of Devi Lal reference programs that provide work and other benefits to people and programs designed to encourage self-employment in rural areas. A Devi Lal biography on the website of the Lok Sabha Secretariat states that self-employment and other welfare programs were part of a rural development program under Devi Lal's administration.

A popular welfare policy in rural areas that Devi Lal promoted was kaam ke badle anaaj, or food-for-work programs. Rural welfare programs involved infrastructure projects. Accounts of Devi Lal's welfare policies describe food-for-work programs in flood-prone villages to improve infrastructure. Other accounts of Devi Lal's welfare policies describe food-for-work projects in other rural areas. The goal of food-for-work programs was to offer short-term employment and other public benefits through infrastructure projects funded by government welfare spending.

This program teaches an important lesson about rural development. Providing public works and other off-farm employment opportunities to rural people need not be conflicting goals. Public works projects such as stormwater and levee projects and irrigation projects create jobs. Other off-farm jobs may be needed by rural households, particularly at times when farm jobs are not available. Public works programs can serve both purposes. Policy changes may be needed to improve the benefits of public works programs to participants, including equal access to program benefits and selection of worthy public works projects with adequate wages and completion.

Village infrastructure has implications for human dignity and economic opportunity. Benefits and costs of public services in villages, such as water and power services, paved roads, sanitation facilities, and schools and health clinics, affect villagers' ability to participate fully in society and the economy. Barriers to participation due to poor village infrastructure raise the costs of agricultural and other village economic activities and reduce farmers' access to markets. Other health and other costs of poor village infrastructure include lost time on other activities. Biographical entries about Devi Lal in the Lok Sabha biographical file note his work on water and power projects and increased government spending on other rural development projects. These biographical entries indicate that Devi Lal believed in a relationship between the economic well-being of farmers and village infrastructure.

The welfare-state perspective highlights benefits of social integration. Providing and other support to poor families can provide educational and other benefits and opportunities. Other disadvantages of programs to help poor families exist.

Agricultural Development and the Need for Balanced Rural Transformation

Agriculture is important to the economic and social development of Haryana. Other factors that affect the welfare of



farmers in Haryana include irrigation, access to electricity and transportation, marketing and credit services, and other information, as well as land and production. Rural development programs need to address a variety of other problems faced by farmers. In an economy where most people are farmers, problems in these other areas can quickly affect the income, employment, and food supply of rural households and other aspects of rural welfare.

Devi Lal's work on farm and other economic and infrastructure issues demonstrates knowledge of farm and other rural issues. Other political activities by Devi Lal drew attention to farm issues and the need for government policies responsive to farmers' economic circumstances. Devi Lal frequently supported farm interests and programs designed to help farmers. These activities continue to be important today in discussions of farm and other rural economic issues, especially in states such as Haryana, where agriculture plays a large role in the rural economy.

One important rural development issue is income inequality. Increased farm production is unlikely to benefit large and small farmers and landless farm laborers equally. Increased farm output by itself will not eliminate rural poverty. Those without assets such as land and irrigation are unlikely to benefit from higher farm output. Policies to improve rural development should consider ways to make rural development more equitable so that all rural groups can benefit from increased farm output.

A combination of interventions to support irrigation and provision of affordable farm inputs and other agricultural and institutional credit and off-farm job opportunities could benefit farm households. Policy efforts should focus on the needs of small and marginal farm households, who lack resources and face other constraints to adopting new technologies and practices and recovering from economic shocks. Actions to improve marketing and transport services and reduce postharvest losses could increase farm households' bargaining power.

Environmental issues are also concerns. Some modern agricultural issues include water and soil conservation and other environmental problems associated with irrigation and crop production decisions, as well as climate variability. Policies to address these issues can help farmers' welfare depend on the sustainable use of environmental resources. The general takeaway from Devi Lal's political vision is the need for rural development policies based on rural peoples' needs. Recommendations for policy development include adding other objectives to development policies beyond efficiency, such as social and economic and environmental equity objectives.

Challenges and Limitations of a Welfare-Oriented Development Model

While programs administered by Chaudhary Devi Lal demonstrate the advantages of welfare programs, other considerations for rural development programs exist. Political support alone is not enough to achieve lasting socioeconomic improvements. Considerations for implementing welfare programs include government administration and funding and other factors, such as local implementation and awareness of and continuity of welfare programs under new administrations.

One challenge related to welfare programs, including pension and job training programs, is funding and implementation. Policymakers, locally and nationally, can take steps to address funding and implementation issues for welfare and other programs. Locally and nationally, policymakers must balance the short- and long-term needs of welfare recipients with other needs, such as the need to invest in infrastructure and education and health care programs and economic development. Locally and nationally, policymakers can take steps to support sustainable welfare programs, such as public disclosures and reviews of welfare programs. Locally and nationally, policymakers may face challenges sustaining and expanding welfare programs in the absence of planning to fund these programs.



Another issue is identifying rural program beneficiaries. Diverse social and economic factors among rural residents may prevent eligible individuals from accessing and benefiting from rural programs. Socially vulnerable rural groups, such as sharecroppers, landless workers, female heads of households, and other disadvantaged groups, may face barriers to rural program participation. Strategies to improve identification and delivery of rural benefits include streamlining benefits applications, gathering and using data, better defining eligibility rules, and creating formal complaint and feedback mechanisms. Local-government accountability reforms can reduce inappropriate or inequitable benefit delivery.

Another issue to consider is short- versus long-term approaches. Short-term programs to provide cash and employment services to poor rural families can reduce poverty, but other measures are needed to expand educational and health services and employment and other opportunities for rural residents. Programs to help rural poor people will be more effective when implemented along with other policies to promote rural economic opportunity and self-sufficiency.

Another problem is a lack of systematic data. Historical records may provide information about development objectives and achievements but not other useful information about project participants and outcomes, such as access to and costs of services and information about participants' long-term well-being. The absence of such information makes it difficult to assess the extent to which development projects reduce poverty and improve the well-being of participants. Other types of data collection and evaluation can help overcome these challenges.

These disadvantages do not diminish the historical significance of Devi Lal's emphasis on welfare. They offer suggestions for policy reforms to address current issues in rural development. Other approaches and reforms to rural policies modeled on Devi Lal's emphasis on rural welfare could include strengthening policies based on research and studies and external and internal government monitoring and support, cost containment, and long-term commitments to human development.

Future Directions for Rural Development in Haryana

Devi Lal's development concepts are evaluated for their usefulness in meeting the needs of rural Haryana. Economic and other advances made in Haryana have not eliminated other problems facing rural people there, such as limited employment and income opportunities and other social disadvantages. New technology and other developments, as well as more ambitious goals and expectations among rural youth and increased income disparities among rural households, have made rural development challenges more complex since Devi Lal's era. Both old and new policies are needed to address rural problems in Haryana.

First, rural development programs can promote economic security for small and marginalized farmers. Programs that provide small farmers with greater access to agricultural extension and training services, irrigation and water management services, credit and other financial services, and storage and other marketing services can help small farmers improve their production and marketing practices. Other rural development programs that encourage crop diversification and other sustainable practices can make farming a more economically sustainable long-term option for small farmers. Other ways to increase small farmers' access to information and markets include digital technologies and farmer cooperatives.

Second, employment programs should not be limited to farm work. Other livelihood opportunities in rural areas include work in small businesses, food production, and other light industrial and information services. Vocational



training programs that match training with local job demands can benefit rural youth by helping them learn skills for which there is demand. Providing alternatives to farm work can reduce youth dependence on farm jobs, which are often seasonal.

Third, social security benefits should be provided to elderly and other low-income individuals. Ways to improve social security benefits for these and other beneficiaries include regular payments and other services, simplified access to benefits, complaint-resolution procedures, and periodic reviews to assess appropriate benefit levels. While technology-based services can be helpful, other methods are needed to serve individuals without access to technology or other forms of documentation.

Fourth, rural infrastructure investments should be made with sustainability in mind. Investments in rural energy, water and sanitation, transportation, health clinics, and other communications projects can benefit rural populations economically and otherwise.

Finally, steps should be taken to promote participatory government. Panchayati Raj institutions and other community groups can play a role in assessing community needs and overseeing programs. Greater participation by women, landless laborers, small farmers, and other vulnerable groups can help make rural programs more responsive to community needs.

These guidelines show that Devi Lal's work remains relevant by promoting the modification of previous development programs to suit current needs, rather than simply copying previous programs. Important aspects of Devi Lal's work, including programs aimed at increasing social acceptance and economic self-reliance and government accountability and responsiveness, especially in rural areas, are still important considerations in development.

Concluding Observations on His Legacy

Chaudhary Devi Lal's contributions to rural socioeconomic development illustrate the importance of political leaders in advocating for underrepresented groups. Chaudhary Devi Lal's political activities connected India's independence struggle with efforts after independence to support rural and other social welfare initiatives. Chaudhary Devi Lal's activities with farmers and other rural welfare programs raised rural issues on the political agenda. Chaudhary Devi Lal's career demonstrated the importance of addressing the needs of farmers, farmworkers, the elderly, and others as part of development efforts.

His research provides valuable insights for rural development projects, which must consider both economic and other production needs in rural areas and social and legal protections and rights for people employed in agriculture and other occupations. Social and legal issues remain relevant as other forces shape people's aspirations and expectations for rural living. Methods for sustainable rural development might include measures to increase economic and other opportunities and provide social services in rural areas.

At the same time, policies and other evidence-based actions will be needed to implement his vision in modern settings. Budgetary and other community considerations should be taken into account in policy reforms, and policies should be evaluated according to their effectiveness. Historical lessons can help guide current policy decisions related to rural development. Other actions to promote rural development include using historical lessons in modern settings and enhancing government capabilities such as transparency.

In conclusion, Devi Lal's development policies offer lessons in assessing the effects of public policies on ordinary citizens. Further research on Devi Lal's policies toward farmers and other rural residents and social services may



help promote policies to improve rural communities.



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