

Thank you, Doctor Sahib

Manmohan Singh remained above
the harshness of politics and the
cold power games around him



ASHWANI KUMAR

A TRULY SUITABLE eulogy to Dr Manmohan Singh is beyond my competence. This tribute can hardly do justice to the greatness of an extraordinary man whose life was marked by decency, integrity, humility and magnanimity. As the architect of India's economic reforms, he set the trajectory for the nation's rise as an Asian economic power and lifted millions of Indians above abject poverty. These contributions will remain a lasting testament to his vision and wisdom.

Singh's leadership role on the global high table in shaping the contours of the future world order amidst the transformational changes of our times makes the nation proud. Those who derided him for being "weak" need only recall his steely resolve in clinching the Indo-US civil nuclear deal that ended India's nuclear apartheid and established the nation's credentials as a responsible nuclear power. The forging of what has now blossomed into an all-encompassing special strategic and global partnership with Japan — seen as establishing an arc of peace and prosperity in Asia — is a tribute to his statesmanship and incisive understanding of the realities of geopolitics.

After appointing me as his special envoy to Japan for facilitating the historic visit to India of their Imperial Majesties — the then Emperor and Empress of Japan — he told me that this was one of the most important state visits to our country and the Indo-Japan relationship was the defining bilateral partnership of the 21st century. Subsequent events have vindicated his vision. The record of his spectacular achievements as prime minister will not be complete without reference to his path-breaking initiatives and rights-based pieces of legislation such as MGNREGA, RTE, RTI, and the farmers' loan waiver. His tenure will also be remembered for the foundational framework of Aadhar and the largest-ever budgetary allocations for education and healthcare.

His patience and forbearance in the face of grave provocation by allies and opponents secured the longevity of the government and ensured the political stability necessary for implementing the nation's ambitious development agenda. He saw and scripted the progressive future of our nation and seized upon the idea of a developed India whose time had come.

The unending accolades received by Singh, including from his vocal critics, affirm his towering stature amongst the world's foremost leaders. This is because of his innate humanity, selflessness, unimpeachable personal integrity and genuine

concern for the welfare of all. The generosity of his heart made no exceptions. He could instinctively relate to the pain of others. None who came to him for assistance or solace in moments of despair left without being comforted. His was a healing touch, one that was both humbling and ennobling. He remained above the harshness of politics and the cold power games orchestrated around him.

In informal conversations, he would often mention the transience of power and perhaps, therefore, carried the authority of his high office with a lightness of touch. At a difficult time during the UPA II, when some of his ministerial colleagues unfairly derided him, he refused to crack the whip, saying that he did not wish to discipline them as a headmaster. His rare reprimands to his ministers were softly delivered. Those who see this as a weakness must know that his life and politics were a reflection of his spirituality anchored in compassion and an abiding faith in the goodness of people.

Even as he navigated the treacherous pathways of politics, Singh did not allow his moral clarity to be diminished. He was deeply saddened by the allegations of corruption during the UPA II and agonised over his name "being dragged in the mud".

In moments of intense anxiety and extreme despair, such as in the last days of my late wife, he lent his shoulder as a family elder and comforted me. I recall his telephone call to tell me that "miracles are known to happen". That was his way of keeping my hopes alive.

On a happy occasion, when he had to cancel his presence at my son's wedding reception on account of last-minute security issues, he instructed several members of his personal staff in the PMO to represent him and his wife, Gursharan Kaur, who was his greatest source of strength. At the end of my last meeting with him, a little before Diwali in October last year, when I took leave of him, he patted me on my shoulder with a smile on his lips as if he was bidding me goodbye with his last blessings. This moment is etched in my consciousness, as are several other memories of his benevolence and grace that have given me a perpetual purpose in life — the pursuit of human dignity in all its manifestations.

Thank you, doctor sahib. And thank you Sonia ji or giving us an outstanding prime minister who elevated himself above his exalted office.

Farewell, sir. Rest assured that history is kinder to you, your place is assured in its annals, in the pantheon of the great. For the sceptics, let me invoke the felicity of the celebrated poet, Mir Taqi Mir as a tribute to our beloved "Doctor Sahib". "*Mat sehl hamein jano, phirta hai falak barson/Tab khaak ke parde se, insaan nikalte hain*" (Do not make the mistake of treating us as unknown/ordinary. For the skies wander for years, only then, from the cloak of dust, (such) human beings emerge).

The writer is former Union minister
for law and justice

