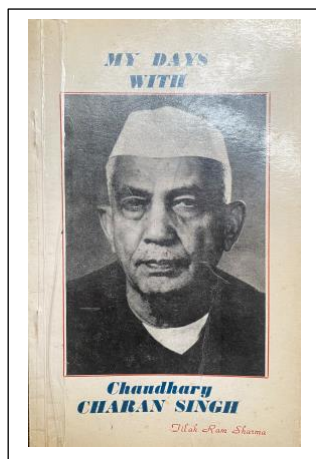


“My Days With Chaudhary Charan Singh”

By Tilak Ram Sharma. 1988

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“I worked as private secretary with Chaudhary Charan Singh, Minister for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Forestry from October 1963 to May 1964 and again from August 1965 to March 1967 when he held charge of Forest and Local Self-Government departments. I was fortunate to observe him at close quarters and for a sufficiently long period of time – this is my only excuse for embarking on this write-up. He took over as Chief Minister in April 1967 and I, being junior in the UP Secretariat hierarchy, was not taken by him as his private secretary because it was not in consonance with government rules and was against his principles

to favor any one person. All the incidences quoted here are from the years 1963 to 1967.”
Page 1.

Chaudhary Sahib’s honesty. “Once, in 1966 when Chaudhary Sahib was Minister for Forests, his eldest daughter [Satya Wati] along with her children, came by road from Agra to Lucknow. During the course of conversation with her early in the morning Chaudhary sahib discovered they had made use of a Jeep of the forest department and had paid for the purchase of petrol used in the Jeep on reaching the secretariat. At 10:00 AM, he called me and said *“look here, they have come from Agra by a Jeep of the forest department. Of course, she paid for the petrol consumed but I’m not satisfied with this. You will find out what are the rate of charges if a government vehicle is used for private purposes. After calculating the amount due, deduct the sum paid by them and have a check for the balance, issued by me. Mind it, this is to be done before lunch today.”* I at once contacted the department concerned and the needful was done.” Page 26

Chaudhary Sahib’s propriety. “The trunk [long distance] phone calls made for political or private purposes were charged from 34 Mall Avenue, Choudhary sahib’s residence in Lucknow. Similarly, the roadways taxi charges or petrol used for journeys outside Lucknow in connection with social functions which Chaudhary sahib rarely attended were also recovered from his residence. His wife Shrimati Gayatri Devi had to bear the brunt of these ideals, and found it difficult to balance the domestic budget. Cuts had to be



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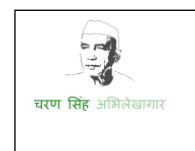


resorted to on other items, clothes being one of them. Once Chaudhary sahib found a worn-out dhoti placed in the bathroom for his use. He took it to her and said sarcastically “*shall I go wearing this dhoti to attend the cabinet meeting today?*” He was so annoyed that he tore it into two!” Page 27

Chaudhary Sahib’s honesty. “The following incident from 4 February 1964 reflects on the high sense of honesty of Chaudhary sahib and brings to the fore his other qualities of strict discipline and protocol guided solely by his own code of conduct and conscience. His stenographer J.P. Verma and his personal security officer Kartar Singh traveled by train from Lucknow to Trivandrum in connection with meetings of the Central Board of Forestry in January 1964. Chaudhary sahib flew in a 5-seater plane to save on travel time. His two assistants were unable to accompany him on the airplane as his daughter and her husband occupied the two seats which were allowed to a minister by air. Chaudhry sahib wrote a long four-page note in longhand to me [Sharma, his personal assistant] explaining why his assistants must charge the daily allowance which would have been chargeable were their journey made by plane, and not the higher amount that accrued to them by train, and the travel allowance which was permissible to them under the rules for a railway journey be debited to Choudhary sahib's account. Such was his sense of propriety.” Page 28-30

Chaudhary Sahib’s work ethic “Chaudhary sahib usually took a light breakfast in the morning and reached the Council House by 9:30 AM. He continued sitting in his chair till 9:30 PM without lunch or rest, particularly during the hot summer days and this he did not for one day or two but for months together. He used to take meals only once, in the night. At lunchtime he used to take a cup of tea with some biscuits or a few pieces of melon during summer sharing some with his secretary or any MLA or MLC who had dropped in at that time. Sitting in front of the cooler we used to doze off slightly in our chairs before him whenever there was a gap in conversation owing to his turning to the relevant pages of the file to dictate his minutes. I was wonder struck to see his capacity to work so hard from 9:30 AM till 9:00 or 9:30 PM uninterruptedly, sitting in his chair. After this I acknowledged my defeat and in my heart of hearts ceased to boast that I was a very hard-working person.” Page 31

Chaudhary Sahib’s attention to detail “One difficulty with Choudhary sahib was that, as was the prevalent practice, he did not go by the latest note of the officer on file. He



used to read the office note very carefully, and after going through the Secretary's note at the end form his own opinion. In a few cases, he accepted the views expressed by the officer. This explains his engrossment or involvement throughout the day in the secretariat files, because at that time the material often ran into some 100 or even more pages. Probably Pandit Gobind Ballabh Pant was another such person who did not take a rest of even 40 winks during the day. Chaudhary sahib himself worked very hard and expected others also to do the same.” Page 32

Chaudhary Sahib’s simplicity “Like Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, who had only one woolen coat prior to his going to Delhi, Chaudhary Sahib also had only one woolen sherwani till 1967 before he became Chief Minister. In 1965 when his sherwani gave way and needed repairs it was given to the tailor master of Shri Gandhi Ashram at Hazratganj in Lucknow. As bad luck would have it, the sherwani was misplaced or lost somewhere by the master. We were very worried and thought that Chaudhary sahib will be very angry and much annoyed. But it was a great surprise to see him cool, undisturbed and calm. He did not say anything about the person who was responsible for the loss. He simply said - all right, purchase new cloth and give it to him for making a new sherwani. Such was his regard for people of ordinary means.” Page 35

Chaudhary Sahib’s compassion “When a dinner given in honor of a VIP from Delhi at Carlton Hotel was over and the guests began to disperse, a policeman had his hand injured while closing the door of a VIP vehicle and it was bleeding profusely. Whoever passed that way first inquired what had happened, showed sympathy, and then moved on with the good advice to ‘send him to hospital early’. Chaudhary sahib was then Home Minister of UP. He saw the injured person, indeed felt sorry for what had happened, and asked him to get into his car immediately. He straightway went with him to the hospital instead of going to the aerodrome to see off the VIP.” Page 35

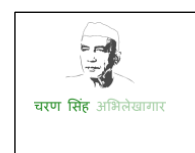
Chaudhary Sahib’s etiquette “Choudhary sahib was very quick to detect if the person meeting him violated any of the standards of our traditional etiquette. People had to be very cautious in buttoning up their shirt or coat and take care not to put their hands in the pocket of the pant or coat which to him was a sign of disrespect to elders. He also did not like people coming to see him with beetle nut paan in their mouth. Smoking of cigarettes by subordinates or younger ones in his presence could not be imagined. Such were his standards of personal conduct.” Page 36



Chaudhary Sahib's care for subordinates “One day when he was ready to leave office at 8:30 PM, an MLA who was politically very close to him entered his room though I had no prior knowledge of his presence. I received a call from his residence to send Chaudhary sahib home soon as dinner was ready. When I opened the door to go into his room, Chaudhary sahib was talking to the MLA in a low voice – perhaps, discussing some confidential party matter. Seeing me enter his room he gesticulated with his hand signaling me to return. I retreated and sat on my chair. After 7-8 minutes, the bell rang and I sent a PA in. But Chaudhry sahib sent him back saying “*send Tilak Ram*”. I thought he was annoyed by the entry I had made into his room but I was surprised to hear something altogether different! He enquired “*Tilak Ram, I had sent you back waving my hand, did you feel bad about it?*” ‘No Sir’ I replied “*I should not have come in at that time but I did not know that he was in your room.*” Then Chaudhary sahib went to his ante-room before leaving, as was his usual practice, to put on his cap and taking his walking stick. I was waiting at my office table for his departure. He stopped there, stick in his left hand, and raised the first finger of his right hand towards me he asked ‘*Tilak Ram, have you pardoned me?*’ ‘Yes Sir!’ was my spontaneous reply then because neither was I prepared to hear this type of question, nor could I think at the spur of the moment any other words as I was overjoyed by the cent-per-cent gentleness of my boss. I could not help having a hearty laugh at the childlike repentance of this gentle man whose pious conscience could not bear the pinch of even inadvertently injuring the feeling of others especially if they happened to be his subordinates.” Page 37

Chaudhary Sahib's sense of justice “Once, going through his *dak* [postal mail] he came across a postcard of a few lines from the wife of a police employee of lower rank posted at Kanpur complaining against some senior police officer who was after her and harassing her. Chaudhary sahib instantly contacted the DIG on phone, gave him the address of the postcard, instructed him to record the statement of the lady at the earliest and call Chaudhary sahib back. The complaint was found to be correct and the senior police officer was punished.” Page 40

Chaudhary Sahib's discipline “Chaudhary sahib's visiting hours were fixed at his residence after breakfast and before going to office, and thereafter in the evening at his office in the secretariat members of the legislature were given time to meet him between 5:00 and 6:00 PM, officers prior to 5:00 PM (beginning sometimes after 4:00 PM) and the general public after 6:00 PM. During office hours he did not like any interruption from



visitors. Some of the legislators who were close to him often tried to take a chance to meet with him during office hours but he deferred it to the visiting hours fixed specifically for them. When asked not to be so rigid in meeting members of the House, he promptly retorted “*I don't only have to be the Chief Minister, I must also attend to the business of my department sincerely.*” Page 44

The bureaucracy’s respect for Chaudhary Sahib “Whenever Chaudhary sahib wanted to talk to any Secretary or departmental head he himself used to assign the time. An interesting feature was that Secretaries and heads of these departments which were not even in his charge, were also always cautious to reach my room a minute or two earlier than the appointed time in order to know what was the business for which they had been called and whether there were any papers available with me in that connection! If they were at the headquarters, they always made it a point to come personally instead of deputing their second in command for the purpose. In some cases, these officers had to apologize to their own Minister for their absence in Chaudhary sahib’s room at a particular time when the Minister also needed them. Such was the high regard of those senior bureaucrats of that time towards the senior most minister of Uttar Pradesh.” Page 46

Chaudhary Sahib’s honesty “In the 1967 UP Assembly elections, when he was convalescing at the circuit house some people of Ghaziabad (factory owners) came to him and left the sum of rupees 6,100 for his use during the election. Chaudhary sahib did not keep the money with him. When they left he asked me to take away the amount from below his pillow. 6,100 rupees may appear a small amount today [1981] but in 1967 it was at least equal to rupees 50,000 now. I kept that amount with me for a few days because thereafter we were to leave for Lucknow. In the railway compartment, he instructed me to return the amount of 6,100 to the people concerned by a bank draft as he did not want to keep it. A check of rupees 1,000 sent by the treasurer UPCC to Congress Party candidates for election purposes was also returned by him.” Page 55

Chaudhary Sahib’s care for his staff “When I accompanied him on tour to Meerut for the first time I stayed at the circuit house and he went on to visit his electoral constituency. In the evening he reached directly to the house of his friend where he was to have dinner. I received a phone call from there inviting me also. I thanked them saying that I had my arrangement, and they need not worry about me. The next moment, his



host friend was on the phone to tell me that Chaudhary sahib was waiting for me and that he would not start his meal till I reached there. Just then a car arrived at the porch to take me to dinner. When I reached the place I found the meal had been served before Chaudhary sahib and the others present, but the meal started only when I joined them. Such was his consideration for his personal staff.” Page 87

Chaudhary sahib spoke thus:

“Office and power in due course reach the person who deserves them.”

“I had to wage a struggle for every step. I always carried my resignation in my pocket.”

“If you have three or more sons, keep only one of them in agriculture and send the rest to a nearby town or city to earn a living by means other than agriculture, because the greater the number of persons dependent on agriculture, the lesser will be the per capita income of that country.”

