



CHAUDHARY CHARAN SINGH

A Profile

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

PREFACE

This booklet containing the profile of Chaudhary Charan Singh has been brought out on the occasion of installation of his portrait in the Central Hall of Parliament House on his 91st birth anniversary falling on 23 December 1993. It is our humble tribute to Chaudhary Charan Singh, an indefatigable freedom fighter, an able administrator and a relentless champion for the cause of peasantry.

DR. R.C. BHARDWAJ
Additional Secretary.

New Delhi;

A multi-faceted personality—an ardent patriot, an able administrator, an astute statesman and, above all, a man of character, integrity and humanist inclinations Chaudhary Charan Singh was born on 23 December 1902 in a peasant family at Noorpur Village in Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh.

Education

Chaudhary Charan Singh had his primary education in his native village school. He went to the Government High School in Meerut for matriculation. Later having moved to Agra for college education, he graduated in Science in 1923 from the Agra College. In 1925, he did his M.A. in History from the same college. He passed the LL.B. examination in 1927 and got himself enrolled as an advocate at Ghaziabad before shifting to Meerut in 1929 as a lawyer.

Political Career

It was in Meerut that Chaudhary Charan Singh's stint in politics began. As a student of History, he was very much aware of the historic role that the city of Meerut played during the First War of India's Independence in 1857. And when he moved in there, the City was very much within the vortex of India's Freedom Movement. A born patriot that he was, Chaudhary Charan Singh could hardly remain

unaffected by the prevalent political atmosphere of Meerut and that of the country as a whole.

The legal profession gave Chaudhary Charan Singh ample opportunities to come in contact with the people and their problems, especially those of the farmers. This was how he got the first hand feel of the unjust character of the imperial rule over India. At the same time, the ideas and teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj, a leading Organisation of social reform movement in India had a deep influence on Chaudhary Charan Singh's personality. Under the spell of Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, he joined the Freedom Movement and the National Congress in 1929.

Chaudhary Charan Singh's career as a Legislator was to start within eight years of his joining the Congress Party. Following the promulgation of the Government of India Act, 1935, Provincial elections were held in the country in 1937 when Chaudhary Charan Singh was elected for the first time as a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly. He continued to be so till 1939.

As a Legislator, Chaudhary Charan Singh took a leading part in formulation and finalisation of the Debt Redemption Bill, 1939 which brought great relief to the indebted peasantry. In June, 1939 he wrote two important pamphlets entitled 'Peasant Proprietorship or Land to the Workers' and 'Prevention of Division of Holdings Below a Certain Minimum' besides preparing a Bill entitled 'Land Utilization Bill' which sought to transfer the proprietary interest in agricultural holdings of U.P. to such of the tenants or actual tillers who chose to deposit ten times the

annual rental in governmental treasury to the account of the landlord.

He was re-elected to the State Assembly in 1946. Chaudhary Saheb's ministerial career was to begin during this period when Govind Ballabh Pant, the then Chief Minister of U.P., appointed him as one of his Parliamentary Secretaries in 1946 and in that capacity he worked in the Departments of Revenue, Medical and Public Health, Justice and Information. In 1951, he became a Cabinet Minister holding charge of Justice and Information. In the following year he was appointed as Minister for Revenue and Agriculture in the Ministry of Sampurnanand.

Chaudhary Charan Singh played a pivotal role in the eradication of the Zamindari system. He was the originator of every single idea embodied in the land reform legislation. He wrote scores of well-reasoned articles and broadcast a number of speeches explaining every single step taken by him. It was as a result of his efforts that the Zamindari and Land Reform Act, 1952 was placed on the statute book which resulted in the abolition of Zamindari and introduction of uniform tenure throughout the State, thus paving the way for consolidation of land holdings.

In 1954, he was instrumental in putting another legislation, called the Soil Conservation Act, on the statute book. He was the first to give a lead in making 'Soil Conservation' a major subject at the University level.

In April, 1959, he resigned from the Sampurnanand Ministry. On his resignation, the 'National Herald' of

Lucknow paid a tribute to Chaudhary Charan Singh's qualities in its editorial when it wrote:

"There is tragedy, both personal and organisational, in Mr. Charan Singh's resignation. His exit is a loss to the U.P. administration and Mr. Sampurnanand has also lost an able, earnest-minded and hard working colleague with a reputation for integrity when such reputations are rare. There were several occasions when he differed strongly from Mr. Charan Singh and criticised him severely, on matters of policy, but his sincerity of purpose, his knowledge of the subjects he had to deal with and his devotion to duty could not be questioned.'

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh

Between 1951 and 1967, except for a short period, Chaudhary Charan Singh functioned as a member of the State Council of Ministers holding important portfolios. In 1967 elections, Shri C.B. Gupta of Congress became the Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh with a slender majority. On April 1, 1967, Chaudhary Charan Singh, accompanied by 16 of his followers crossed over to the opposition in the Assembly and christened his group as the "Jan Congress". The opposition legislators came together to form a "Sanyukta Vidhayak Dal" (SVD) which also included Chaudhary Charan Singh's Jan Congress. On April 3, 1967 Chaudhary Charan Singh was elected leader of the SVD, and was subsequently sworn in as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. The SVD experiment, hailed initially as an alternative to Congress, did not however prove to be a success. Inner strains and squabbles led to the downfall of the SVD Government in less than a year. As none of the

other political grouping in the Assembly was in a position to form a stable Government, the State was placed under President's rule.

In December 1968, Chaudhary Charan Singh formed a new party called the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD). The President's rule lasting for 11 months ended with the mid-term election held in February 1969 which was contested by BKD also. By winning 98 seats, the BKD emerged as the second largest party in the Assembly. The failure of the Opposition to reach an understanding however led to the formation of the Congress Government headed by Shri C.B. Gupta although the Congress did not command majority support in the House. In the course of subsequent turn of events in the Assembly, Chaudhary Charan Singh once again became the Chief Minister of the State in February 1970 and remained as such till September 1970, whereafter the State was brought under President's rule.

As Union Minister

Chaudhary Charan Singh was elected to the Lok Sabha for the first time in 1977 general elections, contested and won by the opposition parties under the banner of 'Janata Party'. The Janata Party having won majority of seats in Lok Sabha, Shri Morarji Desai was sworn in as the Prime Minister of the first ever non-Congress Government at the Centre. Chaudhary Charan Singh was appointed as Home Minister and subsequently elevated as Deputy Prime Minister. In January 1979, he was appointed as Finance Minister in Morarji Desai's Cabinet in which capacity he

presented the Budget for 1979-80 and placed the overall budgetary gap at the existing rates of taxation at Rs. 1,975/- crores.

As Prime Minister

By the dawn of 1979, differences between Chaudhary Charan Singh and other Janata Party leaders had widened further. As a result, Chaudhary Saheb resigned from the Janata Party in April 1979 and revived the BKD under the name of Lok Dal.

Subsequent events at the Centre, however, saw the Janata Government headed by Shri Morarji Desai going out of office on 15 July, 1979 when Shri Desai handed over his resignation to President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy. Shri Desai's resignation was followed by resignation of a number of members of Janata Party including some of his Cabinet colleagues from Lok Sabha, thereby reducing the ruling party to a minority in the House. All this happened before the motion of no-confidence against the Desai Ministry tabled by the then Leader of Opposition Shri Y.B. Chavan, came up for voting before the House.

On 18 July, President Sanjiva Reddy invited the Leader of Opposition, Y.B. Chavan, to explore the possibility of forming a government, who in turn, expressed on 22 July, his inability to do so.

Subsequently on 26 July, after considering the rival claims of Chaudhary Charan Singh, whom the Congress (I) had promised support from outside and Shri Morarji Desai of the Janata Party, President Reddy invited Chaudhary

Charan Singh to form a new government and simultaneously asked him to seek a vote of confidence from Lok Sabha at the earliest possible opportunity, say by the third week of August, 1979. He was sworn in as the Prime Minister on 28 July, 1979.

On assuming the charge of Prime Ministership, Chaudhary Charan Singh, in a broadcast to the nation said:

"Our poverty has to be eliminated and the basic necessities of life made available to every single citizen. Political leadership of the country must remember that nothing mocks our values and our dreams more than the desperate struggle of our people for existence. Nothing could, therefore, be more poignant than the look of despair in the eyes of a starving child. Nothing could, therefore, be more patriotic objective for our political leaders than to ensure that no child will go to bed hungry, that no family will fear for its next day's bread and that the future and capacities of not a single Indian will be allowed to be stunted by malnutrition."

Explaining the policies and programmes that his new Government proposed to follow, Chaudhary Saheb observed:

"All backward classes, weaker sections and minorities, Scheduled Castes and Tribes shall be ensured all protection and help to develop themselves to the optimum so that they play a

rightful role in society. The Government will ensure maximum opportunities to all minorities for development—economic, religious and cultural—and strive for their effective integration within the Indian society. Every language shall be given the maximum opportunity for development. No language shall be imposed on any section of the society against its will, although it is this Government's fond hope that in time, an acceptable lingua franca will develop."

A few days after the installation of his Government, Chaudhary Saheb had another opportunity to address his countrymen when he unfurled the national flag at the historic Red Fort on the occasion of India's 33rd Independence Day. Addressing the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort, he warned Pakistan:

"If it (Pakistan) persisted in its efforts to make an atomic bomb, India would be forced to reconsider its earlier decision not to make a nuclear bomb under any circumstances."

Espousing the cause of the rural poor, he said that a nation could prosper only when its rural sector was uplifted and the people in the villages got greater purchasing power. Expressing his concern for the categories of people closer to his heart, he observed:

"...Kisan worked hard, but did not get remunerative prices for his hard-earned products. The foodstock in the warehouses was in ample quantity. Even if the monsoon was not favourable all over the country, 'I

am hopeful that the Kisan will work still harder to produce more', he added. In the past, 'we have identified our countrymen who deserve our first attention. But in actual practice, we have failed in our commitment to them. The Harijans, the Adivasis, the landless, the unemployed, the under-employed as also more than 50 per cent of the Kisans who possess less than one hectare of land must get our first attention. If we fail again, history will not forgive us."

Chaudhary Charan Singh was to seek a vote of confidence on 20 August 1979 when Lok Sabha had been summoned to meet for its session. However, before the commencement of the session that day, the Congress(I) Party, which had earlier extended its support to the Charan Singh Ministry, announced withdrawal of its support. Chaudhary Charan Singh tendered his resignation the same day and advised the President to make arrangements for obtaining a fresh mandate from the people. The President, accepting the resignation, requested Chaudhary Charan Singh to continue in office till alternative arrangements were made. On 22 August, 1979, the President dissolved Lok Sabha and ordered fresh elections.

Last Phase

The results of elections held in 1980 in which he again got elected to Lok Sabha, however, came as a set-back to Chaudhary Charan Singh as his

party—Lok Dal—could win only 41 Lok Sabha seats as against 76 the party had in the previous Lok Sabha.

In the 1984 elections to Lok Sabha held following the assassination of Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, which resulted in a landslide victory for Congress(I), Chaudhary Charan Singh was elected to the Lok Sabha for the third time.

Titan passes into History

In November 1985, Chaudhary Charan Singh was admitted to Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital after he suffered a paralytic attack. On March 14, 1986, he left for the United States for medical treatment at the John Hopkins Institute of Medicine where he underwent physiotherapy to overcome the partial paralysis that he was suffering from. On 29 May 1987, following a cardiovascular failure, Chaudhary Charan Singh breathed his last.

Tributes

On his passing away, the entire nation—the Parliament, the press and leaders from all walks of life mourned the said demise of this colossus who strode across India's national scene for decades.

Paying glowing tributes to the departed soul, the then President, Giani Zail Singh said:

"Chaudhary Charan Singh was a veteran freedom fighter and a man of character and integrity and his death was a great loss to the country."

Mourning the demise of the octogenarian leader, Shri R. Venkataraman, the then Vice-President, described Chaudhary Charan Singh as "a champion for the cause of India's peasantry".

In his condolence message, the then Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi described Chaudhary Charan Singh as "a veteran of the national movement who will be remembered for his simplicity and single minded devotion."

This is what the editorial column of a National Daily wrote on his passing away:

"No national leader was identified so closely with the interests of the peasantry as Mr. Charan Singh. He doggedly sought to protect the interests of peasant proprietors against the inexorable juggernaut, as he saw it, of collectivism, and of modern industry..."

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BY LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT

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