



Chronology & Milestones
in the Life of
Charan Singh

23 December 1902 – 29 May 1987

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this detailed chronology would not have been possible.



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1898: Mir Singh, 18-year son of Badam Singh from village Bhatona in Bulandshahr district, marries Netra Kaur from Chitsona Alipur village in Bulandshahr. Mir Singh is a landless, tenant farmer in village Nurpur on 5 acres owned by the local *zamindar* (landlord) of Kuchesar.

- **Charan Singh, eldest of their 5 children, is born on 23 December in village Nurpur**, United Provinces of Agra and Awadh.

1903: Mir Singh moves 60 kilometres north to Bhoop Garhi village in Meerut District, where the family lives till 1922.

- Charan Singh receives primary education till the Fourth grade at Jani Khurd village, 1 kilometre away, and takes some examinations at Siwal village 5 kilometers away.

1913-1919: Charan Singh receives school education in Meerut city, 15 kilometers away.

- **1913:** moves to private boarding in Moral Training School, eldest uncle Lakhpat Singh commits to support his education expenses.
- **1914:** Takes admission in Sixth grade in Government High School, Meerut. Studies Science from the Ninth grade, shows early promise in English, Economics and History. Completes Matriculation (Grade 10).

1919-1923: Studies for a Bachelor of Science at Agra College, Agra.

- Studies for Intermediate (Grade 12) in Science.
- Provided scholarship of Rupees 10 per month by Bhopal Singh, a reputed doctor in Meerut who supports bright and financially needy students.
- Resolves to leave College on Gandhi's call for boycotting British schools during the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement, but is convinced to stay on by elders.
- **1921:** Motivated by Gandhi's exhortations in *Young India* to strike at the orthodoxy of caste, young Charan Singh eats food prepared and served by the *Balmiki* sweeper of his hostel. He is boycotted by his hostel mates and is denied meals in the hostel kitchen, but he perseveres.
- **1922:** Appears for a test for entry to the Roorkee Engineering College and qualifies, but is not able to obtain admission account of his lower than the minimum marks in drawing. This is his first brush with academic failure, one that exhorts him to pay careful attention in future to all matters however seemingly unimportant.
 - **1922:** Mir Singh moves to village Bhadaula, Meerut district where he buys land over time and lives for the rest of his life.

1923-1925: Studies for a Masters of Arts in History from Agra College.

- Studies the history of Britain, France and India.
- **25 June 1925. Marries Gayatri Devi**, from Garhi Kundal village, Rohtak district, united Punjab. A Matriculate from Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar she belongs to an Arya Samaji family.

1927: Receives a Masters in Law (L.L.B.) from Meerut College, Meerut (then part of Agra University).

- His principles increasingly shape his character and inform his actions. Consolidates a core social belief that caste divisions are the fundamental fault lines in Hindu society.
- Opposes the public flaunting of caste allegiances in community life by declining the position of Principal at Baraut Jat High School, Meerut and of Lakhavti Jat Degree College, Bulandshahr unless they remove the word 'Jat' from their name, which they do not.
 - Satya, his eldest child, born on 14 September 1927.

1928: Commences practice of civil law in Ghaziabad city, Meerut district, which he continues till 1939.

- His quicksilver mind, argumentative ability, capacity to influence others, attention to detail, hard work and compassion for the underdog gives his practice a head start. Attempts to bring opposing parties together through compromise without going to court.

1929: Joins the Indian National Congress, at 27, where he remains till 1967.

- Establishes the Town Congress Committee of Ghaziabad, in which he holds various elected positions until 1939.

1930: Active in the Arya Samaj and the Indian National Congress in Meerut district.

- Dayanand Saraswati informs his social and religious beliefs, and Mohandas Gandhi comes to define his political and economic thinking.
- **1930-1939:** Is either Chairman or General Secretary of the Ghaziabad Arya Samaj committee.
- **5 April 1930:** Participates in Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha at the start of the Civil Disobedience movement, and is imprisoned for the first time in a British jail for six months. His wife Gayatri Devi sells her solitary gold bangle to continue to provide for the family, gives up her job as a teacher, and moves from Ghaziabad to the village.
 - Ved, his second daughter, born on 17 September 1930.

January 1931: Wins elections unopposed to the Meerut District Board. Vice Chairman, till December 1935, to Chaudhary Khushi Ram (Chairman) and Maulvi Bashir Ahmad (Senior Vice Chairman)

- **1932:** Leads Congress movement in Ghaziabad against the 'Communal Award'. Congress asks him to stay out of jail and manage the affairs in the absence of Chairman and Senior Vice Chairman who had both been arrested.
- Travels extensively in the rural areas, his wide exposure to the poverty of the Meerut countryside, and the social evils he comes face-to-face with, convinces him the removal of British rule is the first step to their amelioration and emancipation.
 - Rescues a widow and her young daughter from the hands of an exploitative Ghaziabad municipal employee, gets the daughter married and helps support the mother.
 - Fails to stop the marriage of a girl-child to an old shopkeeper in village Raeespur, the deep poverty of the father who marries her for money leaves an indelible mark on his conscience that he remembers with deep feeling till late in life.
 - Sees English as a symbol of the oppressive rule of the British, and despite opposition by one magistrate uses Hindi as a pleading language in some of his cases. Becomes an active supporter of Hindi as the national and link language of India.
- Returns falsely constructed travel bills made by Board junior officials for his inspection travel, and refuses to apply Board *peons* for his personal jobs. Sets a personal example of uprightness that publicly defined his standards of integrity in all his subsequent public positions of authority.
- **1932:** Takes on a young *Harijan* (as Dalits were then addressed) cook as a practical manifestation of his visceral opposition to caste, who remains with him till 1939.
 - Third child, Gyan, born 23 September.

25 February 1937: Elected, at 34, to the limited-electorate United Province Legislative Assembly in December 1936, on the Congress ticket from Meerut district (South-West), comprising tehsil Baghpat and Ghaziabad. (At this time Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Mathura districts were a part of the Delhi District Congress Committee)

- Wins 78.06% of the vote, defeating the candidate of the *National Agriculturist Party of Zamindars*.
- Elected 8 consecutive times from Chhaprauli Legislative constituency: 1937, 1946, 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1969 & 1974.
 - Fourth child, Saroj, born on 23 February 1937

17 July 1937 to 2 November 1939. Formulates and presents multiple rural and peasant supportive legislation in the Assembly, and progressive resolutions to the Congress Legislative Party. Comes to the attention of the state Congress leadership.

Requisitions a meet of the Congress Legislature Party to discuss the poor performance of the administration and police, is disappointed in the response of Govind Ballabh Pant and Jawaharlal Nehru.

- **November 1938:** Charan Singh chairs a vast public meeting in Ghaziabad to honor Vishnu Sharan Dubish, of Kakori Conspiracy fame, returning from Andaman Jail after 10 years imprisonment. They become life-long friends and intimate political allies, further cementing Charan Singh's political base in Meerut.
- **1938:** Introduces a draft 'Agricultural Produce Market Bill' as a private bill to safeguard the interests of the producer against exploitative food-grain dealers and traders. Government of Punjab led by Sir Chhotu Ram passes Mandi Samiti Act in 1940 based on the draft bill presented by Charan Singh. U. P. has to wait till 1964, when Charan Singh is minister of agriculture.
- Publishes articles on 31 March 1939 and 1 April 1939 in The Hindustan Times, and in Lucknow, on this legislative measure for the protection of the cultivators. These logically argued, data-based articles - in English - are flag-bearing precursors of his extensive writings in newspapers throughout his public life.
- **April 1939:** Formulates 'Land Utilization Bill' calling for the transfer of land ownership to all tenants or actual tillers of the soil who chose to pay an amount equivalent to 10 times the annual rental on the land they cultivated. The bill faces stiff resistance from *Zamindars* and is not placed in the Assembly.
- **5 April 1939:** Proposes a resolution before the executive committee of the Congress Legislature Party, calling for reservation of 50% of positions in public sector jobs for the sons and dependents of the cultivators or agriculturalists. The resolution is not accepted by the party.
- **April 1939:** Introduces a resolution before the Congress Legislature Party prohibiting any enquiries with regard to the caste of any Hindu who seeks admission in an educational institution or a position in any government service, except in the case of Scheduled Castes. The resolution is not discussed by the party.
- **1939:** Plays a leading role in the formulation and passage of 'The United Provinces Agriculturists and Workmen Debt Redemption Bill' that frees several farmers of Uttar Pradesh from the clutches of moneylenders and debt and in saving their fields from public auction. Lobbies with Revenue Minister to pass relief for peasants, under the UP Tenancy Act 1939.
- Requisitions a meeting of the Congress Legislature Party where he speaks against the un-responsiveness of the British Administration to the needs of the common people, and the continued indifference of the Police department.
 - Britain unilaterally declares India a participant in the Second World War, and all Congress State governments resign in protest.

December 1939: Moves to Meerut city from Ghaziabad after the resignation of the Congress Government.

- 1939 to 1946: President or General Secretary of Meerut District Congress Committee.
- Succeeds Raghuvir Narain Singh, highly respected prominent Congressman and big *zamindar* in Meerut district, in a critical transition of leadership from born privilege to individual capability.
 - Fifth child, Ajit, born on 12 February 1939.

November 1940 – October 1941. Second imprisonment In Bareilly jail during the 'Individual Satyagraha' movement.

- Interred initially in Meerut Central Jail, then in Bareilly Central Jail. Reads voraciously, and hand writes jail diaries that contain extracts from a wide range of books: from John Stratchey's 'The Theory and Practice of Socialism', Edgar Snow's 'Red Star Over China', Sydney and Beatrice Webb's 'Soviet Communism', Emile Burns' 'A Handbook of Marxism', GDH Cole's 'Practical Economics'. Reads extensive reports on European, English, Russian and Indian Agriculture.
- Writes *Shishtachar*, in Hindi, on traditional Indian good breeding and manners, as letters from prison to his children. This innocuous manuscript is confiscated by the Police, and is released to him only many years later. His family, meanwhile, lives dislocated in the village under great privation.

23 October 1942 - November 1943: Third imprisonment, for 13 months, during the Quit India movement.

- Before imprisonment, leads a two-and-a-half month underground anti-colonial struggle in Ghaziabad, Hapur, Mawana, Sardhana and Bulandshahr. Police issue a 'shoot-at-sight' order, he surrenders voluntarily. On release, goes back to practicing civil law. Lives a life of hardship.
 - Sixth, and last child, daughter Sharda, born on 23 December 1942.

November 1945: Proposes employment of cultivators in government services to make the administration more representative and responsive to the 85% rural population of United Provinces

- Charan Singh drafts a Congress manifesto prepared on 9 September 1945 on Land and Agriculture that calls for the abolition of landlordism. This is adopted at a November 1945 meeting of kisans at Banaras chaired by Acharya Narendra Dev, and forms the basis of a resolution approved by the All-India Congress Working Committee in December 1945.

21 March 1946 – 12 May 1948: Charan Singh elected, for the 2nd time, to the United Provinces Legislative Assembly from Meerut District (South-West) and appointed Parliamentary Secretary (junior minister) in the U. P. Congress ministry.

- **24 April 1946 – September 1947:** Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Minister for Revenue, Hukum Singh.
 - Ensures the caste of a tenure-holder, other than that of Scheduled Castes, is not entered in Revenue records.
 - Includes a new Section in Land Reforms Manual that forbids the acquisition of farmland for public purposes if there is barren or inferior land available within half a mile.
- **Beginning September 1947 – 12 May 1948:** PS to Cabinet Minister for Local Self Government & Health, Atmaram Govind Kher. Holds independent charge of the departments of Medical and Public Health.

14 November 1946 - 3 July 1948: Member of the Congress' Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Committee (ZALRC) tasked to abolish landlordism in Uttar Pradesh.

- **ZALRC publishes "Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee".** Superintendent, Printing & Stationary, Allahabad, UP. 611 pages.
- **1 September 1946:** while ZALRC is in deliberation, ensures amendment of UP Tenancy Act to stop eviction of tenants from the land they tilled, and all those evicted from 1 January 1940 are reinstated.
- **12 January 1948:** Ensures right of ownership is transferred to all tenants of the land on which their hut was built, as part of UP Village Abadi Act. A boon to all peasants as it stops eviction by *Zamindars*, the Scheduled Castes in particular.
- **1946:** Member, UP Pradesh Congress Committee, till 1967.
- **From 1946:** General Secretary of the UP Legislature Congress Party, resigns in 1956 on account of differences with then Chief Minister Sampurnanand.
- **21 March 1947:** Proposes a passionate and well-structured note for 60% reservation for peasant cultivators in government employment to the Congress Legislature party.
 - **1947: Publishes booklet *How to Abolish Zamindari: Which Alternative System to Adopt*, 1947.** Allahabad: Superintendent Printing and Stationery, United Provinces.
 - **1947: Publishes first book "*Abolition of Zamindari, Two Alternatives*".** Kitabistan, Allahabad, UP. 263 pages.

13 May 1948 – 3 June 1951: Parliamentary Secretary to Premier (later, Chief Minister) Govind Ballabh Pant (1887-1961) of United Provinces (later, Uttar Pradesh).

- Parliamentary Secretary for Judicial and Legislative departments, also responsible for Zamindari Abolition Publicity Board and Zamindari Abolition Fund.
 - **1946:** Member All-India Congress Committee (AICC) till 1967

- Offers his resignation multiple times to Premier Pant on corruption in the state administration (example, the Ramgarh Court of Wards scandal in Bulandshahr), on the lack of quality work, and on the calibre of his senior Cabinet colleagues many of whom Charan Singh considered less capable than himself. Pant, a calm and inclusive leader of men, refuses to accept these offers, smoothens Charan Singh's angularities and directs his energy for the historical tasks ahead.
- **1948-1951: Formulation of Zamindari Abolition & Land Reform (ZALR) Bill**, one he considered the principle achievement of his political life.
 - **18 October 1948:** gives a reasoned 18-page note on Zamindari abolition to Pant opposing many of the final recommendations of the ZALRC, and is given charge of the Drafting Committee of Revenue and Law officers to prepare the Zamindari Abolition Bill and shepherd it through the Legislature.
 - **12-17 May 1949:** U. P. Cabinet approves Bill as presented by Drafting Committee
 - **7 July 1949:** Bill referred to a Joint Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly, which presents its report on 9 January 1950
 - **24 January 1951:** Bill is passed by both Houses, and is approved by President of India
- **12 June 1950:** Directorate of Information as added responsibility as Parliamentary Secretary to Premier.
 - **1951:** Member, State Election Committee or UP Congress Parliamentary Board. Resigns in 1965 on account of bitter factional politics of which he wants no part but has to participate at time in order to survive in the party.
 - **Feb 1951:** Moves a resolution, carried with considerable majority, in a meeting of the Executive of the Pradesh Congress Committee that no active member of the party should be allowed to associate himself with caste institutions or organisations.

4 June - 8 August 1951: Minister of Justice and Information

9 August 1951 - 19 May 1952: Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Information

20 May 1952 - 27 December 1954: Minister of Revenue, Scarcity, Agriculture, Cane Development, Food Development and Animal Husbandry.

- **1 July 1952:** legal challenges in courts by Zamindars end, and **implementation commences of the U.P. Zamindari and Land Reforms Law**. No part of this law was ever successfully challenged in a court, attesting to its detailed and careful drafting by Charan Singh and his team of dedicated bureaucrats. This historic Act, in a State with 85% population dependant on agriculture in 1952, altogether removed the landlord intermediaries between the self-cultivating peasant and the State. The disintermediation of the *Zamindar* and *Taluqdar* (landlords) provided cultivating peasants the independent self-owned status of *Sirdars*, or *Adhivasi* to the landless sharecroppers of these landlords.
- ZALR makes every resident of a village the owner of his house, well and trees; this was especially beneficial to the landless Scheduled Castes who were till then at the complete mercy of the *zamindar*. Preference are given to the landless in the allotment of *abadi* sites in ZALR and Consolidation laws.
- Commences a vigorous program of awakening villagers to their rights under the new Act through scores of speeches in Hindi on All India Radio Lucknow, an equal number of well-reasoned newspaper articles and pamphlets in Hindi and English, and hundreds of well-attended public meetings across the length and breadth of Uttar Pradesh between 1952-1957.
- **1953: Formulates and guides passage of UP Consolidation of Holdings Act**. The bringing together of fragmented land holdings of individual farmers is a harbinger of farming efficiency in Uttar Pradesh, the other side of land ownership for increased productivity. Charan Singh acts strictly against complaints of corruption that are brought to his notice.
- **February 1953:** The revised Land Records Manual (1952) had drastically reduced the powers of the *patwaris* (village level land record functionaries) to adversely affect the cultivator. Forces of landlord reaction egged on these powerful functionaries, all of who went on strike despite ongoing negotiations. Charan Singh, in an act of administrative firmness and political astuteness, dismisses all 27,000 *patwaris* from government service and replaces them *Lekhpals*.
 - He directs 18% job reservation for Scheduled Castes, of which only 5% could be recruited due to a lack of suitable candidates despite relaxed qualifications.

- **1954:** Legislates Uttar Pradesh *Bhoomi Evam Jal Sanrakshan Adhiniyam* for soil and water conservation, implements the Soil Testing Scheme in Universities across the state.
- **13 September 1954:** Amends ZALR Act to provide permanent rights of land ownership to 3 million small tenants, known as Adhivasis, of which 1 million were Scheduled Castes. Does not provide the right of 'resumption' (cultivation by a former landlord who did not cultivate his own lands) of land from former tenants despite recommendation of the Planning Commission and pressure from UP landlords, the only state to have this as an original Section in the 1952 ZALR Law.
- **1954:** Sends a proposal to Prime Minister Nehru to pass a law that would ensure only those youth who married outside, or were prepared to marry outside, their caste be recruited in gazetted government services. He believed the intractable issue of caste required drastic measures to start the process of its disintegration. Nehru disagrees with his proposal on account of freedom of choice of individuals to choose their life partner.
- His popularity increases with rural sections of society in Uttar Pradesh. Earns further enmity from landed interests.
 - 27 December 1954: GB Pant moves to Delhi as Union Cabinet Minister for Home Affairs, on the passing away of Vallabhai Patel. This ends what Charan Singh later, in 1979, calls the 'golden period' of his political career – 1937 to 1954 - when he worked intimately with Pant to impact the critical issues of the peasantry closest to his heart.

28 December 1954 - 9 April 1957: Cabinet Minister for Revenue, Scarcity and Transport in Dr. Sampurnanand's ministry

- Issues orders to from Board of Revenue to Districts to increase recruitment of Scheduled Castes to 18%, including as *Lekhpals* and *Amins*.
- **June 1957:** Proposes in a note to the Cabinet that ministers take a 10% pay cut, drive in small cars instead of imported limousines, not display the national flag on their cars, armed policemen not accompany ministers, armed guards not be provided to ministers, and that police do not salute any minister other than Chief Minister and Home Minister.
 - **1956: Publishes book "Whither Co-operative Farming"**. Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, United Provinces, India, 1956

10 April 1957 – 31 March 1958: Cabinet Minister of Revenue & Scarcity.

- Mother Netra Kaur passes away, aged 75
 - **1957: Publishes booklet "Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh"**. Prakashan Shakha, Soochna Vibhag, Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1957

1 April 1958 – 16 November 1958: Cabinet Minister of Revenue, Scarcity, Finance and Sales Tax.

17 November 1958 – 21 April 1959: Cabinet Minister of Revenue, Scarcity, Irrigation, Power & Power Projects

- **9 January 1959:** Speaks for 1 hour against Jawaharlal Nehru's Soviet-inspired proposal for adopting collective farming as the definitive Congress policy for Indian agriculture at the 64th session of the All India Congress Committee in Nagpur.
- The failure of collective farming across the world, and the higher productivity of self-cultivating small peasants, speaks to Charan Singh's far sightedness.
- **22 April 1959:** Resigns from the Cabinet after continuing differences with Chief Minister Sampurnanand. Sits out of government, for the first time since 1937, for 19 months till 6 December 1960
- The shadow of his act of solidarity with his principles at the Nagpur AICC looms large as he is shunned by party colleagues as well as state and national party leadership, but Charan Singh had for long found CM Sampurnanand administratively inept and colleagues corrupt as he wrote in letters to Sampurnanand himself, to Nehru and Pant.
- The immediate reason for his resignation is his principled opposition to the State Government's decision to supply energy at preferential prices from the Rihand Dam to an Aluminum project of the Birla group rather than to peasants.
 - **1959: Publishes book "Joint Farming X-Rayed: The Problem and Its Solution"**. Kitabistan, Allahabad. 322 pages.

7 December 1960 – 25 August 1963: Joins Cabinet of Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Chandra Bhan Gupta as Cabinet Minister for Home, Police, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Fisheries.

- Remains dissatisfied with being passed over for Chief Minister, which he believes is due to his opposition to Nehru's obsession with collective farming which he had opposed and not his capability and commitment to the people.
- Attempts to make the working of the Police beneficial to the people, while understanding and acting on the genuine difficulties created by their working conditions.
 - Commits to protect police officers from political interference while implementing the law
 - Believes the low wages of and poor working conditions of the constabulary needs to be improved to reduce corruption, works to improve their conditions of transport, communication and technology.
 - Provides full pension and salary to the surviving family of police officers who die in encounters with criminals.
 - Refuses to be pressured by politicians for Police postings and transfers, specially at the level of Police Sub Inspectors, till then a source of patronage and corruption.
 - Refuses to withdraw legal cases of rioting against students of Allahabad University, arson at the Mansarovar Cinema and multiple cases against Legislators from his own party accused of crimes.
- Home & Police portfolio taken away on 13 March 1962 due to differences with the CM.
- Continues as Minister for Agriculture till 1 October 1963.
 - Amends the 1954 *Bhoomi Evam Jal Sanrakshan Adhinyam* law to provide improved seeds, fertilisers and farming implements to all farmers through an agricultural supply organisation.
- Imposition of Ceilings on Land Holdings Act of 1960 passed by UP Legislative Assembly in which he took keen interest.
 - Father Mir Singh passes away in 1960, aged 80.
 - Gobind Ballabh Pant, mentor and father figure, passes away on 7 March 1961

14 Oct 1963 - 13 March 1967: Joins Cabinet of Sucheta Kripalani as Minister for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and Forests.

- **1964:** Passes Agricultural Marketing Act to regulate the activities of agricultural markets, an unfinished task since 1939
- **January 1964:** Founds the government-funded *Krishak Samaj* with an objective to benefit small and ordinary farmers by modern scientific methods.
 - Jawaharlal Nehru passes away on 27 May 1964.
 - Lal Bahadur Shastri, fellow Parliamentary Secretary in UP, elected Prime Minister.
- **14 May 1965:** divested of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries portfolio
- **14 May 1965 - 13 March 1967:** Cabinet Minister of Forests
 - Indira Gandhi elected Prime Minister in January 1966
 - **1964: Publishes "*India's Poverty and Its Solution*".** Asia Publishing House, 1964. 527 pages. This is his most comprehensive book till date on an alternate, small-producer rural-industry framework on Gandhian thinking.

February 1967: Wins Legislative seat in UP Assembly with record margin, highest of any Assembly candidate in any election since Independence. 4th Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha constituted on 10 March.

- **Early March 1967:** Indira Gandhi's emissaries (Uma Shankar Dixit and Dinesh Singh) convince Charan Singh not to contest the post of head of the Congress legislature party. He agrees, after much persuasion.
- **13 March 1967:** Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai come together at Delhi partly due to the efforts of C. B. Gupta, who has been promised the post of Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in exchange.

- **14 March 1967:** Charan Singh refuses to join the Cabinet of C. B. Gupta as his agreement with Gandhi's emissaries to specifically keep two corrupt Congress ministers out of the UP Cabinet is broken. He is told to do what he wants to
- On hearing of his decision to finally separate from the Congress, Congress (R) makes a last-minute desperate offer to support him as Congress Chief Minister if he stayed on in the party. Charan Singh declines, his mind made up to set out on his own. Critically, Gayatri Devi advises him to steer his own path.
- **1 April 1967: Charan Singh breaks away with 16 other legislators to form the *Jan Congress*.** After a long period of disillusionment with self-seeking Congress politicians in the post-Independence era, his reasons for leaving the organisation he helped build for 38 long years included widespread corruption, incorrect development policies and moral decay in the party. More specifically, Charan Singh
 - held an unwavering belief in his competence to be the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh over the claims of factional leaders of the party who controlled the party organisation but had little backing with the people. He had been passed over in 1960, 1963 and now in 1967; at 65 time was running out for him to implement the policies and plans he had developed over decades of his political practice.
 - intensely disliked the increasing and widespread corruption in legislators and ministers of his party, completely divorced as they were from the interests of the poor. He believed corruption or morality flowed from the top.
 - rued the absence of well thought-out policies to favour agriculture, rural development, cottage and small industry that would enhance the quality of life of the common citizen, 80% of which yet lived in the villages.
 - was desirous of wrenching the entrenched control of levers of authority of the urban and high castes in the executive, the bureaucracy and the legislature.

3 April 1967 - 25 February 1968: First non-Congress Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh since independence, leads a coalition of the *Samyukt Vidhayak Dal (United Legislators Party)* of the opposition *Jana Sangh, Samyukt Socialist Party (SSP), Communists, Swatantra Party, Praja Socialist Party, Republican and Independents. The Jan Sangh with 99 and SSP with 45 legislators are the two largest constituents.*

- Appoints 4 Cabinet Ministers and 2 Ministers of State from the Backward Castes that formed 55% of the population of the state, 4 Muslim ministers, and 1 from the Scheduled Caste: each the highest representation for each community in any Congress Cabinet since 1937.
- Starts the historical rise of the "Other Backward Castes" (OBCs) as a pre-eminent political force in North India.
- **May 1967** in Patna - *Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD)* formed by former senior Congressmen from Bihar, UP, Bengal, Orrisa and Rajasthan. Merges the *Jan Congress* into the BKD in 1968, and takes on the Chairmanship of the party in April 1969.
- Holds talks with C. Rajagopalachari and his Swatantra Party for a merger, which does not fructify. His criteria for a united party is based a common constitution in which people from all beliefs can agree on.
- Issues 'Publicmen's Enquiry Ordinance' to enquire into allegations against Legislators, Mayors etc by an independent investigation agency.
- Cabinet takes decisions to abolish the honorary magistrate position given out by the British to collaborators; isolates the judiciary from the executive interference on 2 Oct 1967; decides any educational institution that carries name of a caste would not be given financial aid by the government (with the result that all institutions named after a caste hasten to change their names); provides funds for the promotion of Urdu and makes the Government Gazette available in Urdu in 23 *tehsils*; makes Hindi the sole language of state administration; and reduces land revenue from small farms. There are no communal riots in U. P. during his tenure, despite violence in many parts of north India, as the police is fully empowered to act against anti-social elements from both communities and is insulated from political interference.
- SVD government, however, disintegrates under the pulls of its constituents. Charan Singh personally accompanies the Prime Minister while she is on an official visit to Uttar Pradesh in January 1968 and ensures the threats of leaders of the the Socialist Party, one of the constituents of the SVD government, to 'arrest' her are nullified - their leaders are put behind bars. He resigns as CM, and refuses to accept the entreaties of the contrite SVD constituents to reconsider.
 - State remains under Governors Rule for a year when bye-elections are called.

26 February 1969: The BKD does resoundingly well in bye-elections, and is the second largest legislative party in Uttar Pradesh with 98 seats after the Congress' minority 211 legislators in a house of 425.

- BKD does well on the basis of its workers enthusiasm and the groundswell of support of its voters, but has a nascent and weak organisation and an absence of significant funding by wealthy capitalists.
- C. B. Gupta once again elected Congress Chief Minister with help from independents, Charan Singh is Leader of the Opposition.
- BKD establishes its political vision at its Kanpur Session, one based on the Gandhian framework of the village, agriculture and rural cottage industry. Its comprehensive manifesto is an example of an integrated social, economic and political vision for a poor, agrarian nation.
- Holds discussions with Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party, Praja Socialists to merge into a single entity, idea remains stillborn.
- Indian National Congress splits in November 1969 into the Congress (O) with 90 legislators and C.B. Gupta as leader, and Congress (R) (Indira Gandhi) with 120 legislators led by Kamalapati Tripathi.
 - This commences the rise of Indira Gandhi as the unquestioned leader of the Congress, and the decimation of independent state leadership across her new Congress. Her authoritarian tendency is to manifest itself darkly for the nation in the Emergency of 1975.

17 February 1970 – 29 September 1970: Charan Singh becomes Chief Minister of UP for the second time, with the support of Indira Gandhi's Congress (R) after both factions of the Congress approach him to form the government.

- Speeds the process of distribution of land rights, *Sirdari / Adhivasi*, on thousands of acres to the landless
- Makes compulsory students union membership voluntary in all educational Institutions in Uttar Pradesh
- BKD votes against the abolition of Privy Purses in the Lok Sabha as it was a sacred promise by Sardar Patel to the former princely states as a part of their accession to India. BKD also refuses to merge with the Congress (R), and their political relationship quickly deteriorates.
- Charan Singh refuses to quit as Chief Minister, and Presidents Rule is enforced against all principles of legislative convention and legal opinion.
- On removal of Presidents Rule after a month, despite entreaties by all parties other than the Congress (R), he declines to head a new SVD government and offers his support to Tribhuvan Singh of the Congress (O) to form the next government.

March 1971: Indira Gandhi calls Parliamentary elections in March with the 'Garibi Hatao' (Banish Poverty) slogan, and with the nationalisation of banks in July 1969 behind her.

- Charan Singh's loses his first election to the Indian Parliament, from Muzaffarnagar, to Vijay Pal Singh of the Communist Party of India in electoral alliance with and heavily funded by the Congress (R).
- Remains in Lucknow as the Leader of the Opposition in the U. P. Legislative Assembly until 1977.

February 1974: BKD again does well in UP Assembly elections (with 106 seats out of 425) with 21% of the vote, but cannot replace the dominant Congress due to a fragmented opposition.

- 1973 Manifesto proposes 20% reservation for Scheduled Castes in factories in both private and public sector, as also of permits or licenses, which do not require and technical skills.
- **1973:** Continues efforts at bringing together all political parties opposing the Congress. Jana Sangh and Congress (O) do not want to come together - Morarji, for example, seeks half of all seats for his Congress (O).

29 August 1974: Constitutes the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) with the merger of the BKD, Swatantra Party, Samyukta Socialist Party (Raj Narain), Utkal Congress (Biju Patnaik), Rashtriya Loktantrik Dal (Balraj Madhok), Kisan Mazdoor Party and Punjabi Khetibari Zamindari Union as a step to a 'Democratic Nationalist' national alternative to the Congress.

- Perseveres with efforts to form a single, united party with one constitution and constructive program but fails as the two major national political parties – the Congress (O) and Jana Sangh - are not eager to subsume their independent political identities and Jayaprakash Narayan is immersed in his non-party 'Total Revolution' in Bihar.
- **16 March 1975:** Massive demonstration against Congress in Delhi led by Jayaprakash Narayan, Charan Singh, Prakash Singh Badal, Nanaji Deshmukh and Raj Narain.
 - **12 June 1975:** Indira Gandhi found guilty on charges of misuse of government machinery during her 1971 election campaign in Rai Bareilly on a petition by Raj Narain the losing candidate, her election is set aside and she is debarred from contesting elections for six years. She suspends the Constitution on 25 June 1975 and declares an internal Emergency.

25 June 1975 - March 1976: Charan Singh jailed for the fourth time, and the first time in independent India. He is interred in Tihar Jail in Delhi, as are hundreds of political leaders all over India and tens of thousands of political workers and journalists during the 21-month dictatorial internal Emergency regime imposed by Indira Gandhi.

- Kept in a 10 by 16 foot room without a window, with a 4 by 6 foot toilet. Starts to write his book 'Economic Nightmare of India'. Discussions of a united political party take fresh shape in Tihar on 8 February 1976 with Jana Sangh leaders Vijayaraje Scindia and Nanaji Deshmukh as well as senior Akali leader Prakash Singh Badal and others interred there.
- Released without notice from jail on an Amnesty International report of 7 March 1976, along with Ashok Mehta and other leaders.
- **23 March 1976:** On being released, gives a historic 4-hour speech in the UP Legislative Assembly, condemning the Emergency and energizing political opposition to Indira Gandhi. His speech is not reported to the public due to total censorship in the press.
- Holds multiple meetings to further the agenda of a united opposition to the Congress from April 1976 to December 1977 with other opposition leaders, without significant progress. Indira Gandhi announces elections on 18 January 1977 which galvanises the opposition. Morarji Desai appointed Chairman and Charan Singh Vice Chairman, with complete responsibility for North India in a single, united Janata Party.

23 January 1977: Helps found Janata Party, his party BLD provides the principal electoral base for the decimation of the Congress in North India.

- **24 March 1977:** Elected to the Indian Parliament for the first time

24 March 1977 - 1 July 1978: Union Home Minister of India in the Cabinet of Morarji Desai, 4th Prime Minister of India.

- Significant differences within the Janata Party, factional infighting between Cong (O), Jan Sangh, BLD and CFD factions. Morarji Desai removes Charan Singh from Cabinet on 1 July 1978.
 - **1978: Publishes book "India's Economic Policy: The Gandhian Blueprint".** Vikas Publishing House, Delhi. 127 pages

23 December 1978: Presides over a historic 'Kisan (Peasant) Rally' at Boat Club in Delhi on his 76th birthday, said to be the largest gathering of peasants and villagers in the history of independent India.

24 January 1979 – 16 July 1979: Returns to the Morarji cabinet as Union Finance Minister, and Deputy Prime Minister

- Presents the Union Budget in Parliament on 28 February 1979, with a focus on agriculture, rural India and small-scale industries.

- Continued differences with an inflexible Morarji Desai, manoeuvring by the dominant Jana Sangh faction, the ambitions of Jagjivan Ram, and Janata Party President Chandrashekhar, some ill-advised actions by Raj Narain and Madhu Limaye lead to the break-up of the Janata Party.
- Charan Singh's faction, Janata (Secular), gets the support of 76 Members of Parliament of the undivided Janata Party, he is invited by President Sanjiva Reddy to form the government

28 July 1979: Sworn in as Prime Minister of India in a short-lived coalition government of the Congress (Chavan), Akali Dal, Communists and smaller parties, supported from the outside by 73 Members of Parliament of the Indira Congress.

- Charan Singh refuses to withdraw the Special Courts and the cases against Sanjay Gandhi in the Supreme Courts for their excesses during the Emergency; the Congress (R) revokes its support; and Charan Singh submits his resignation to the President on 20 August 1979 without facing a vote in Parliament.
- Continues as caretaker Prime Minister till 14 January 1980, when mid-term elections are held to Parliament.

1980: Elected to the Parliament for a second term from Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh.

- Election results are a setback for his party, the Lok Dal, as the people reject the breakup of the Janata Party and bring back Indira Gandhi. Though Lok Dal wins 41 Parliamentary seats (with 9.4% of the national vote) it emerged as the second largest political party in Parliament after the Congress (I). The remnants of the Janata Party led by Jagjivan Ram win only 31 seats in Parliament.
 - **1981: Publishes book "Economic Nightmare of India: Its Cause and Cure"**. National Publishing House, Delhi. 598 pages.

1982: Split in Lok Dal

- Key associates leave him on account of political differences.
- Remains engaged with opposition unity, forms an electoral alliance with Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party – the first National Democratic Alliance.

1983-1984: Remains engrossed in the affairs of the nation, vigorously and publicly opposes Sikh extremism.

- Becomes the centre of national political opposition to Indira Gandhi and her Congress. 21 October 1984: forms the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party comprising the Lok Dal, Democratic Socialist Party, Rashtriya Congress, Kisan Mazdoor Party, Utkal Congress and other smaller parties.
- However, Indira Gandhi's dastardly assassination on 31 October 1984 gives her son her Rajiv Gandhi a historical landslide majority in Parliament with 411 seats out of 542.
- Charan Singh is elected to Parliament for the third, and last, time from Baghpat along with 3 Members of Parliament from his party.

25 November 1985: Suffers a brain stroke that incapacitates him for the next 18 months.

- **14 March 1986:** Treated at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, USA to no avail. Regresses into a coma.

29 May 1987: Passes away on 29 May, 7 months short of 85.

- Cremated and immortalised at *Kisan Ghat*, next to the samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi.

Sources

The 'Charan Singh Papers' (CS Papers) at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (NMML) are over 300,000 pages of rich historical material donated by Gayatri Devi, Charan Singh's wife, in February 1994. These papers comprise documents meticulously collected by Charan Singh over 50 years of public life, and are a source of ongoing research on many aspects of his life and work. The earliest document is a handwritten note from 1939 of a proposed legislation in the United Provinces on reservation in government jobs for 'sons of cultivators' and amongst the latest is an incomplete manuscript of his book '*Rise and Fall of the Janata Party*' from October 1985. (Index of the CS Papers at <http://chaudharycharansingh.org/archives>.) Since 2013, the Chaudhary Charan Singh Archives have contributed thousands of photographs, videos, speeches, biographies written on him, all the books written by him, as well as his legislative speeches made in Lucknow and Delhi.

I have relied heavily on Charan Singh's own words, as he was a detailed record keeper with an acute historical sense. Some of these papers are CS Papers Installment II, Subject File # 49 '*Bio-data of Charan Singh ...*'; CS Papers Installment I – III, F-1: 99 page booklet '*Who Is a Kulak: Let Land Reforms of UP Testify*' by Charan Singh; Chapter 1 and others of '*Land Reforms in UP and the Kulaks*', Charan Singh, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1986; Installment II, Subject File #49 '*Bio-data of Charan Singh*'; Installment II, Subject File #416 '*Life Sketch of Charan Singh*'; and Interview with NMML in Lucknow, 1972.

Another historical source are books written during his lifetime and after by authors some of whom spent considerable time with him on the content. I have cross-verified dates and events across what I consider the key publications amongst the scores published in Hindi: **Sharma, Jaidev**, Editor *Prantap*, Deshbhakt Morcha Prakashan, 1978. **Pandey, Anriudh**, *Dhartiputra Chaudhary Charan Singh*, Ritu Prakashan, 1986. **Goyal, Sukhbir Singh**, *A Profile of Chaudhary Charan Singh*, 1978. **Rawat, Gyanendra**, *Chaudhary Charan Singh: Smriti aur Mulyankan*, Kisan Trust, 1995, **Singh, Nathan**, *Kisan Masiha Chaudhary Charan Singh (1902-1987)*, New Delhi. Kisan Trust, 2002.

Finally, **Paul Brass**¹ has been an inspiration. Paul generously shared with me the vast material on his research since 1960 on factional politics in the Congress in Uttar Pradesh. A self-confessed admirer of Charan Singh, though by no means an uncritical one, Paul's 25 September 1993 article "*An Indian Political Life*" in the *Economic And Political Weekly* of is a succinct and fluid narrative of Charan Singh's political journey <http://chaudharycharansingh.org/biography>.

Paul obtained an approval from Charan Singh in 1981 to write his political biography (for which he was provided free access by Charan Singh to his voluminous papers), which to Paul's regret was published only in 2011 much after the passing of Singh in 1987. These are available today in three volumes '*An Indian Political Life: Charan Singh and Congress Politics*', Volume 1, 1937-1961 (2011), Volume 2, 1957-1967 (2012) and Volume 3, 1967-1987 (2014). Sage Publications, Delhi. His scholarship provided the impetus for this Chronology & Milestones, and I am eternally grateful to Paul for that.

Harsh Singh Lohit

Gurgaon
2 October 2018

¹ Professor Emeritus of political science and international relations at the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, USA since 1965.

Charan Singh was born 23 December 1902 “in an ordinary peasant farmers home under a thatched roof supported by kachcha mud walls, with a kachcha well ... for drinking water and irrigation”. This infant born into poverty in a landless farmers mud hut in Noorpur village in Meerut district of the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) was to rise to become the most prominent voice of the village in independent India.

This is a detailed chronology of the life of Charan Singh: from Congress nationalist and freedom fighter to politician and experienced administrator, and an ‘organic rural intellectual’ articulating an alternative development thinking on agriculture and village and rural industries on Gandhian principles.



Chaudhary Charan Singh Archives

www.chaudharycharansingh.org