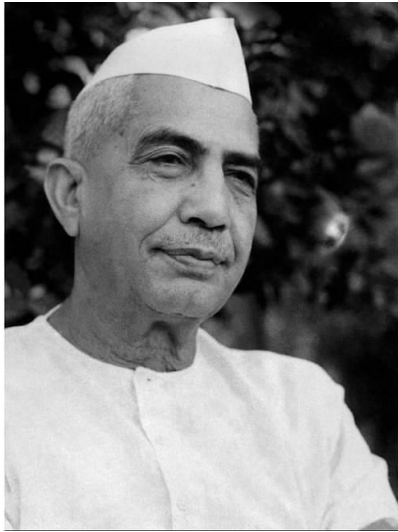


Chaudhary Charan Singh: Champion of farmers, first CM of non-Congress government in northern India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Friday, announced that former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh as well as agriculture scientist M S Swaminathan will be honoured with the Bharat Ratna.

PTI

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Singh's political career witnessed a major turn on April 1, 1967 when he quit the Congress. Credit: DH Pool Photo

New Delhi: Chaudhary Charan Singh, who on Friday was conferred with India's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna, is popularly known as a champion of farmers. Opposed to the country's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's socialist economy, he advocated ownership rights to the farmers. Though Singh was a Congress follower in the beginning of his political career, he quit the party in the 1960s and went on to form the first non-Congress government not just in Uttar Pradesh but entire north India.

In his long political career, Singh briefly served as the sixth prime minister and was twice the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. He was the second prime minister, after Morarji Desai, of a non-Congress government.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh as well as agriculture scientist M S Swaminathan will be honoured with the Bharat Ratna.

Born to Netra Kaur and Chaudhary Meer Singh on December 23, 1902 in Noorpur village in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, Singh's primary education took place in his native village school at Jani Khurd. He passed his matriculation from the Government High School, Meerut. Graduating in Science from Agra College in 1923, he did his MA in History from Agra University. After passing LLB examination in 1927, he got enrolled as an advocate in Ghaziabad. He was deeply influenced by the ideas and teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai

Patel, he joined the freedom movement.

He was sentenced to jail several times for taking part in the freedom movement. He was imprisoned for six months for breaking the salt law. He was again imprisoned for a year in 1940. After getting released in October 1941, he was rearrested in 1942.

Besides the freedom movement, Singh was also active in politics in the United Provinces before Independence. He was elected to the United Provinces Assembly from Chaprauli in Meerut district in 1937. He went on to represent the seat in 1946, 1952, 1962 and 1967. He served as parliamentary secretary in Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant's government in 1946. He worked in several departments such as revenue, medical and public health, justice and information.

He became a cabinet minister for the first time in 1951 with the portfolios of justice and information. Revenue and agriculture portfolios were added a year later. Subsequently, he also handled ministries of home, agriculture, forests and local self-government.

Singh's political career witnessed a major turn on April 1, 1967 when he quit the Congress. Two days later, he was elected as leader of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal and as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.

It was the first non-Congress government in entire northern India. He became the chief minister of the state for a second time in February 1970 after the Congress split. However, his government did not last long as president's rule was imposed in the state on October 2, 1970. Singh is known for piloting pro-farmer legislation such as the Consolidation of Holdings Act of 1953 and the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari and Land Reforms Act, 1952. The latter led to the abolition of zamindari system in the zamindari system in the state. He was also strict in dealing with the 'Patwari strike crisis' in 1953. He had introduced the Agricultural Produce Marketing Bill in 1938, which was passed in 1964. It helped the farmers in improving the market linkages.

Land reforms resulted in empowering the tillers and providing the landless with ownership of land. It created a conducive atmosphere for the social and economic upliftment of the farmers. During the drought in 1966-1967, Singh offered the agriculturists a much higher procurement price than the prevailing market rates. The infrastructure he laid down led to the minimum support price (MSP) mechanism.

He was active in the anti-Emergency agitation. He was arrested on June 26, 1975, when Emergency was imposed. He later merged his Bhartiya Lok Dal with the Janata Party. As one of the founder members of the Janata Party, he was elected to the Lok Sabha for the first time in 1977 general elections. He was the Union home minister in the Janata party government. He was appointed as the finance minister in January 1979 and was subsequently elevated to the post of deputy prime minister.

It is believed that he had been nursing the dream of becoming the prime minister ever since the Janata Party came to power in 1977. Finally, his dream was fulfilled when the Janata Party split and he was sworn in as the prime minister on July 28, 1979 with the support of the very Congress party which he had opposed since 1967. He served as prime minister till August 20, 1979 and then was the caretaker prime minister from August 21, 1979 to January 14, 1980.

He played an important role in rural electrification and the creation of institutions such as National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). He was a scholar of Indian economics. He wrote books such as India's Economic Policy - The Gandhian Blue-print and Economic Nightmare of India - Its Cause and Cure. Some of his other important publications include Abolition of Zamindari, Co-operative Farming X-rayed, India's Poverty and its Solutions, Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh, and Land reforms in UP

and the Kulaks. He also wrote an offbeat book, Shishtachar on Indian etiquette. Singh died on May 29, 1987 at the age of 84 years. His birth anniversary, December 23, is celebrated as Kisan Diwas.