



CHAUDHARY CHARAN SINGH



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Chaudhary Charan Singh, an indefatigable freedom fighter, an ardent patriot, an able administrator, an astute statesman, a leader of impeccable character and integrity and a champion of the India's peasantry was born on 23 December 1902 at Noorpur Village in Ghaziabad District (then Meerut District) of the United Province (now Uttar Pradesh). Having completed his school education in his native village and then at Meerut, he graduated in Science and did his M.A. in History from Agra University. He passed the LL.B. examination in 1927 and got himself enrolled as an advocate at Ghaziabad and later on shifted to Meerut. He married Gayatri Devi on 5 June 1925 and was blessed with one son and five daughters.

While in the legal profession at Ghaziabad, Chaudhary Charan Singh started taking keen interest in the Freedom Movement. The legal profession gave him ample opportunities to come in contact with the people and their problems, especially those of the farmers. This helped him in getting first hand impression of the unjust character of the imperial rule over India. Influenced by the ideas and teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and under the spell of Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, he joined the Freedom Movement and the Indian National Congress in 1929. He was imprisoned several times during the Freedom Movement. When Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement in August 1942, Chaudhary Charan Singh responded promptly. He went underground and organized secret activities against the British, which mainly centred around Meerut, Hapur and Bulandshahar. But, he was soon arrested and remained imprisoned till November 1943.

Chaudhary Charan Singh became the Vice-Chairman of the District Board, Meerut in 1932. In 1937, he was elected to the Legislative Assembly of the United Province from Chhaprauli in Meerut District. He continued to be a legislator, with little intervention,

till 1977. As a legislator, Chaudhary Charan Singh took a leading part in the formulation and finalisation of the Debt Redemption Bill, 1939, which brought great relief to the indebted peasantry. Besides, he helped in preparing the Land Utilization Bill which sought to transfer the proprietary interest in agricultural holdings of United Province to the tenants of actual tillers.

In 1946, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, the then Chief Minister of United Province, appointed Chaudhary Charan Singh as one of the Parliamentary Secretaries. In that capacity he worked in the Departments of Revenue, Medical and Public Health and Local Self-Government. Thereafter, between 1951 and 1967, he held various important portfolios in the Council of Ministers. In 1951, he became Cabinet Minister in the State holding the charge of Justice and Information. During the subsequent years, Chaudhary Charan Singh held the charge of various Ministries in the State Government, which included Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Information, Transport, Home, Forest, Revenue and Local Self-Government.

Chaudhary Charan Singh played a key role in the eradication of the *Zamindari* System in Uttar Pradesh. Well-versed with the basics of farming and its problems, he rendered invaluable services to the cause of the Indian peasantry throughout his life. Impressed with his ability and commitment to introduce land reforms, he was entrusted with the task of making a suitable legislation in the area of land reforms by Pandit G.B. Pant, the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. It was due to his efforts that the legislations such as the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari and Land Reform Act, 1952, which resulted in the abolition of *Zamindari* throughout the State; the Uttar Pradesh Consolidation of Holding Act, 1953, which paved the way for consolidation of land holdings of rich and medium peasants; and the Uttar Pradesh Soil Conservation Act, 1954, which aimed at containment of gradual soil erosion and decline in productivity of soil, were placed on the statute book. He was the first to introduce 'Soil Conservation' as a major subject at the University level.

After the 1967 General Elections, Chaudhary Charan Singh, accompanied by 16 of his followers, quit the Congress and set up a group called the Jan Congress. Later, the

entire Opposition came together to form the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD), including the Jan Congress with Chaudhary Charan Singh as its leader. On 3 April 1967, he was appointed as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. In December 1968, a new party viz. Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) was formed of which Chaudhary Charan Singh was one of the founding member. Thereafter, he fought and won the mid-term Assembly Elections held in Uttar Pradesh in 1969. In February 1970, Chaudhary Charan Singh once again became the Chief Minister of the State and remained so till September 1970. Thereafter, the State was brought under President's Rule, after which Charan Singh continued to be the Leader of the Opposition in the Uttar Pradesh State Legislative Assembly till 1977.

In 1974, Chaudhary Charan Singh attempted to unite all Opposition parties at the national level and succeeded in forming the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). He was one of the main architects in the formation of the Janata Party at the national level in 1977. He merged the BLD with the Janata Party.

Elected to the Sixth Lok Sabha for the first time in 1977 under the banner of the Janata Party, Chaudhary Charan Singh was appointed as the Union Home Minister and was subsequently elevated to the post of the Deputy Prime Minister. In January 1979, he was appointed as the Finance Minister in which capacity he presented the Union Budget for the year 1979-80. On 23 December 1978, a huge Kisan Rally was organized in Delhi to mark the 76th birthday celebration of Chaudhary Charan Singh. It was an important event as it put the issues of farmers into the focus.

Chaudhary Charan Singh resigned from the Janata Party in July 1979 and revived the Bharatiya Kranti Dal with the new name Lok Dal. Following the resignation of the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai on 15 July 1979, after a series of consultations, the then President, Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy invited Chaudhary Charan Singh to form the next government and asked him to seek a Vote of Confidence in the Lok Sabha. Chaudhary Charan Singh was sworn in as the Prime Minister on 28 July 1979. When the Lok Sabha was summoned on 20 August 1979 to discuss the Motion of Confidence, before the commencement of the Session that day, the Congress(I),

which had earlier extended its support to the Charan Singh Ministry, announced the withdrawal of its support. Chaudhary Charan Singh tendered his resignation the same day and advised the President to declare fresh General Elections. He was later elected to the Seventh Lok Sabha in 1980 and again to the Eighth Lok Sabha in 1984.

Chaudhary Charan Singh was a great scholar of Indian economics and planning. His books '*India's Economic Policy—the Gandhian Blueprint*' and '*Economic Nightmare of India—Cause and Cure*' are masterpieces on the Indian agrarian theme. Some of his 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*'.

Chaudhary Charan Singh breathed his last on 29 May 1987 following a cardiovascular failure. His quest for the betterment of the farming community caused his memorial in New Delhi to be named as 'Kisan Ghat'.

Paying glowing tributes to the departed soul, the then President of India, Giani Zail Singh, said: "....Chaudhary Charan Singh was veteran freedom fighter and a man of character and integrity and his death is a great loss to the country....".

Mourning the demise of the octogenarian leader, Shri R. Venkataraman, the then Vice-President of India and Chairman, Rajya Sabha 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".

Expressing his deep grief on his demise, the then Speaker, Lok Sabha, Dr. Balram Jakhar said "..... Chaudhary Saheb proved himself to be very able administrator in whatever capacity he functioned and left lasting impression of his straightforwardness and simplicity.....".