



Sardar Swaran Singh



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
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One of the longest-serving Cabinet Ministers of India, Sardar Swaran Singh was an outstanding leader who handled matters of state with a rare finesse. He was a close advisor to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri and Smt. Indira Gandhi, and proved himself as a great statesman. He was a versatile political leader who held several key portfolios in the Government, and a name to reckon with in matters of India's foreign policy in particular.

Sardar Swaran Singh was born on 19 August 1907 in a farming family in the village of Shankar in Jalandhar district of Punjab. His parents laid great store by education, and he was sent to study at the Government College at Lahore after he passed his intermediate from Randhir College at Kapurthala. After receiving an M.Sc. Degree from the Government College, Lahore, he worked as a Lecturer in Physics at the Khalsa College at Lyallpur. He also studied Law and had been a practising lawyer before he plunged into politics. He also played an active role during the freedom movement.

Sardar Swaran Singh entered politics in 1946 when he was elected a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly. He was appointed as Parliamentary Secretary in 1946 and later held various important portfolios in the Punjab Government till 1952. At the end of the British rule, when Punjab was partitioned between India and Pakistan, Sardar Swaran Singh was on the Committee that looked into dividing Punjab's assets between the two nations.

Sardar Swaran Singh was a Member of the Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 1957, and a Member of the Lok Sabha for four consecutive terms representing the Jalandhar Parliamentary Constituency of Punjab from the Second to the Fifth Lok Sabha.

When Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru formed the Government after the country's first General Elections in 1952,

Sardar Swaran Singh was inducted into the Union Cabinet. From his first induction into the Government in 1952, he served continuously as a Cabinet Minister till 1975 under three successive Prime Ministers.

Under Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Swaran Singh was Minister for Works, Housing and Supply, 1952-57; for Steel, Mines and Fuel, 1957-62; for Railways, 1962; and for Food and Agriculture, 1963-64. Impressed by Singh's unflappability and his capacity to pay attention to details, Prime Minister Nehru picked up Sardar Swaran Singh to assist him in his talks with the Chinese on the border dispute. Sardar Swaran Singh also led the Indian delegation for the six rounds of talks with Pakistan on the Kashmir issue between 1962 and 1963. As a close advisor to the Prime Minister on political and diplomatic matters, his views were regarded with special attention.

After Pt. Nehru's death in 1964, Sardar Swaran Singh became the Minister for Industry and Supply in Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri's Cabinet. With his experience in handling India's relation with its neighbours and as a long-standing Minister in Pt. Nehru's Cabinet, it was but natural for the new Prime Minister to choose Sardar Swaran Singh as his Foreign Minister. He served as the Minister of External Affairs under Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri during 1964-66. It was no small achievement since Pt. Nehru, the architect of independent India's foreign policy, had been his own Foreign Minister, and his adroit handling of such cornerstones of India's foreign policy as non-alignment, independence of the country's foreign policy, opposition to racial discrimination and imperialism, Asian solidarity and solidarity with the oppressed colonial peoples around the world, was a hard act to follow. However, Sardar Swaran Singh measured up to the task and forged a reputation as a skilled and tough defender of India's interests.

After two years as the Minister of External Affairs, Sardar Swaran Singh served as the Minister of Defence in Smt. Indira Gandhi's Cabinet from 1966 to 1970. In 1970, he was brought back to the Ministry of External Affairs. He served as India's External Affairs Minister for the second time from 1970 to 1974 during which the question of Pakistan Army's brutal repression of the

people of the then East Pakistan and the incessant flow of East Pakistani refugees into India resulted in an India-Pakistan war and the birth of Bangladesh. Sardar Swaran Singh addressed the United Nations Security Council and strongly defended India's stand by outlining the reasons that led to the outbreak of the war and called on the world to recognize "the reality of Bangladesh." During 1974-75, he was again made the Defence Minister, the last in a series of Cabinet posts that he held during his long stint in the Government from 1952 till he resigned as Defence Minister in 1975.

After the proclamation of national emergency, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi constituted a committee in 1976 under the chairmanship of Sardar Swaran Singh to review the working of the Constitution and to make recommendations for necessary changes in the light of past experiences.

During his long stint in the Government, Sardar Swaran Singh led the Indian Delegation to the United Nations on many occasions, and attended the Summit meetings of the Commonwealth countries and the Non-aligned countries several times. He also led India's Goodwill Missions to many Afro-Asian and other countries on number of occasions.

An eminent parliamentarian and democrat to the core and inspired by the vision of a strong, secular and socialist India, Sardar Swaran Singh was a firm defender of India's foreign policy. He believed in the significance of the Non-aligned Movement as a stabilizing force in order to maintain world peace amidst the tension created by the existence of power blocs in the Cold War era, and in ending the remnants of colonialism and racist regimes across the world. Representing India in various forums such as the United Nations, the NAM Summit and the Commonwealth, Sardar Swaran Singh took the opportunity to put across India's stand on various issues. Described as a "roving Ambassador", he served under Smt. Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister's envoy to a number of countries, including Pakistan, Indonesia and Nigeria, and also played an active role trying to resolve the crisis in Punjab in the 1980s.

After his retirement from active politics, Sardar Swaran Singh worked for several organizations and made immense contributions. From 1976 to 1981, he was the President of the think-tank Indian Council of World Affairs. He was also a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group on South Africa to promote a process of dialogue for ending apartheid and establishing a non-racial democracy in South Africa, and a member of the United Nations' Panel of Eminent Persons on Regional and Inter-regional Co-operation during 1982-84. Outside of politics, he spent several years working for the UNESCO, and became the Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO Board during 1984-86. The last years of his life were spent in the study of Sikh letters at the Bhai Vir Singh Sadan.

Sardar Swaran Singh was a man of high ideals and simple habits. He led a life of unimpeachable personal integrity and beyond personal aggrandizement. Perhaps the most enduring tribute from his many admirers was that he was always a 'gentleman.' He was known for his very charming and immaculate personal manners. Cool and level-headed in his personal temperament and trained as a lawyer, Sardar Swaran Singh excelled as an orator and was a brilliant debater. The patient and skilled negotiator that he was and fluent in several languages, he forcefully handled several national and international issues with calmness. For his immense contributions to the nation, he was awarded the *Padma Vibhushan* in 1992.

Sardar Swaran Singh breathed his last on 30 October 1994. His passing away was deeply mourned by the entire nation. The then President Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma, in a condolence message, said that Sardar Swaran Singh's contribution to national reconstruction would be remembered by the people forever. He also played a stellar role in the formulation of the country's defence and foreign policies, he added. Recalling his long personal association with him, the President said Sardar Swaran Singh represented high standards in public life. The then Vice-President Shri K.R. Narayanan, paying tributes to him, said, "Swaran Singh was one of the

eminent figures in Indian politics". Both the Houses of Parliament also paid tributes to Sardar Swaran Singh on 7 December 1994. The selfless services rendered to the nation by Sardar Swaran Singh will ever remain an inspiration to the people of India.

[The Portrait of Sardar Swaran Singh, painted by Shri Mehar Singh, will be unveiled on 22 December 2008 by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. The portrait has been donated by Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, Union Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers and Union Minister of Steel, and National President, Lok Jan Shakti Party.]