



SARDAR HUKAM SINGH



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An eminent parliamentarian, a noted jurist, a social reformer and an able administrator, Sardar Hukam Singh was well known for his qualities of head and heart. Unrivalled in his fairness, truthfulness, clear vision and succinct expression, he was a statesman imbued with noble virtues.

Born on 30 August 1895 at Montgomery in Sahiwal district, now a part of Pakistan, Hukam Singh was the son of Sardar Sham Singh, a farmer by profession and a businessman of moderate means. He had his early education at his native place in a *Gurudwara*, where he learnt *Gurumukhi*. Hukam Singh did his matriculation from the Government High School, Montgomery in 1913. Graduating from the Khalsa College, Amritsar in 1917, he served for two years as an Inspector in the Department of Cooperative Societies, after which he resumed his studies. He completed his LL.B. from the Law College, Lahore in 1921 and set up practice at his home town, Montgomery. Soon, he established himself in his profession as well as in the civic life of the town. One of the leading lawyers, he was the President of the Montgomery Bar Association for a number of years.

Sardar Hukam Singh won people's esteem for his honesty, nobility of character and his ready willingness to be of help to others. The sphere of his activities gradually widened. He was initiated into politics as a member of the Shiromani Akali Dal at the time of the Akali Movement for Gurudwara Reforms (1921-1925), which was then arousing the Sikhs to a new political consciousness. He was one of the initial members of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee which was soon declared unlawful by the British Government. For taking active part in the agitation connected with the Movement, Sardar Hukam Singh was arrested in 1924 and was sentenced to two years of imprisonment. He was elected a member of the newly formed Committee at its first elections held under the Sikh Gurudwaras Act, 1925 and continued to be elected successively from 1926 to 1941.

During partition, Sardar Hukam Singh displayed a martyr's spirit in his willingness to suffer and did a yeoman's service to his fellow men at the risk of his life. He went

about the town of Montgomery evacuating people from danger zones, burying the dead and removing the dying to the hospital. He reached India during the night of 19-20 August 1947. His talents were soon recognized. In December 1947, he was appointed a Puisne Judge of the Kapurthala High Court, a post which he held till November 1948, when the High Court was abolished due to the integration of all the East Punjab States into a single new State called the Pepsu, *i.e.*, The Patiala and East Punjab States Union.

In April 1948, Sardar Hukam Singh was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India as a representative of the Shiromani Akali Dal against some seats falling vacant in the aftermath of the partition. He was also a member of the Provisional Parliament (1950-1952), the First Lok Sabha, the Second Lok Sabha and the Third Lok Sabha. Elected President of the Shiromani Akali Dal in 1950, he continued in that capacity for three years and displayed qualities of wise leadership, a pragmatic approach to issues and great organizational skills. On his election to Parliament in 1952, he was Secretary to the National Democratic Front. However, he continued to be in the Akali Dal till the General Committee of the Dal decided to join the Congress Party in 1956.

A brilliant debater and a convincing speaker, Sardar Hukam Singh took a keen interest in the proceedings of the House. He listened with rapt attention and observed minutely the parliamentary procedure in operation. His qualities of great wisdom, his amiable nature, his soft spoken manners and the sustained interest that he evinced in the proceedings of the House, attracted the notice of the then Speaker, Shri G.V. Mavalankar, who placed Sardar Hukam Singh on the Panel of Chairmen of the Lok Sabha. The way he conducted the proceedings of the House whenever such an opportunity came his way, was admired by all cutting across party lines. On 20 March 1956, Sardar Hukam Singh was elected as Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha even though he was a member of the Opposition at that time. He was re-elected Deputy Speaker of the Second Lok Sabha. Besides, he also served as the Chairman of the Committee of Privileges, the Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions and the Committee on Subordinate Legislation during the Second Lok Sabha.

In the General Elections held in 1962, Sardar Hukam Singh was returned for the third time to Lok Sabha as a Congress candidate. This time, he was unanimously elected to the high office of the Speaker of the Third Lok Sabha. Felicitating him on his election as Speaker, Lok Sabha,

the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, *inter alia* said:

“In congratulating you, I am not quite sure whether it will not be more fitting for us to congratulate ourselves on this occasion because this is an occasion which is a particularly happy one for all of us.....It is not merely a question of choosing a good and worthy person for this high office; it is something more than that because you represent more than any of us here in this House, the dignity of this House, the combined wisdom of this House, and so much else.”

During his speakership, Sardar Hukam Singh also led various Indian Parliamentary Delegations abroad in connection with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences and also on goodwill visits. During these tours, he visited several European countries, the United States, the then U.S.S.R., Mongolia and several South-East Asian and African countries.

After laying down the office of the Speaker, Lok Sabha on 16 March 1967, Sardar Hukam Singh did not contest elections. On 16 April 1967, he was appointed as Governor of Rajasthan, the Office which he adorned till 30 June 1972. As Governor also, he rendered distinguished services and won wide spread acclamation for upholding the high traditions of that Office.

After his retirement from the Office of the Governor of Rajasthan as well as from active politics in June 1972, Sardar Hukam Singh continued his interest in several social, religious and cultural activities. He was nominated as the President of the Singh Sabha Centenary Committee in 1973. The Committee however continued to function, after the celebrations were over, as a permanent non-political body under the name of Kendari Singh Sabha for research and preaching of the Sikh tenets, of which Sardar Hukam Singh remained President throughout his life.

In his capacity both as the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha, Sardar Hukam Singh acquitted himself with great success and shaped the parliamentary traditions of our nation. He displayed qualities of sagacity, probity, fair play, justice and a spirit of tolerance and accommodation. His judgment was noted for its clarity, sobriety and moderation. He genuinely protected the interests of the Opposition. The House was particularly appreciative of his sense of dignity and *quasi-judicial* objectivity coupled with a perceptive sense of humour which created ties not only of respect but also of affection between him and the members.

Often described as a fair and a firm Speaker, who set a number of healthy precedents in conducting the Parliament, Sardar Hukam Singh attached great importance to maintenance of decorum in the House. He believed that for a proper functioning of Parliamentary democracy, it was necessary that the members conducted themselves in the House in a dignified manner. He felt that it was essential that the freedom of speech guaranteed by the Constitution was also used in a proper fashion. Through many a stormy debates during his term as the Speaker of Lok Sabha, which included as many as six motions of No-Confidence against various Councils of Ministers, Sardar Hukam Singh ensured that the decorum and discipline were maintained in the House.

Convinced of the importance of the rules and conventions in ensuring a smooth functioning of the House, Speaker, Sardar Hukam Singh was always in search of methods and devices to improve the effectiveness of the House. When the Third Lok Sabha met, he suggested to the House that a convention might be established not to move any Adjournment Motion on the day the President addressed members of both the Houses of Parliament assembled together in the Central Hall. The House approved the suggestion and the practice continues to this day. This shows the strength of his vision on laying down strong foundations in parliamentary procedure. During his speakership, Sardar Hukam Singh also tried to dispose of all the Calling Attention Notices on the day on which these were tabled.

Sardar Hukam Singh presided over debates on many important subjects. The remarkable way in which he conducted the proceedings of the House during the passage of the Defence of India Act, 1962 – one of the major legislations enacted by the House in the wake of the Chinese aggression on India – profoundly elevated his position as Speaker.

Sardar Hukam Singh played a leading role in the formation of Punjabi speaking State out of the erstwhile State of Pepsu on 1 November 1966. As Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee of the two Houses of Parliament formed to consider the aforesaid issue in October 1965, he successfully steered it to secure a unanimous report. The Committee gave its verdict in favour of a Punjab State to be reorganized on linguistic basis.

As in politics, Sardar Hukam Singh was brilliant in other fields too. Besides being a keen student at College, he also excelled in athletics and distinguished himself as

a member of the Panjab University Hockey Team during 1914 to 1916. He made notable contributions in the field of journalism and education also. When the annual session of the Sikh Educational Conference was held at Montgomery, he was the Secretary of its Reception Committee in 1928. Later, he presided over the 40th and the 46th sessions of the Conference. He was the Manager of the Khalsa High School, Montgomery in 1941 and again from 1943 to 1945. He was the patron of the Montgomery Guru Nanak Educational Trust, re-established at Jalandhar after partition, which is presently running many educational institutions including Training Colleges and Public Schools at Jalandhar and Kapurthala in Punjab. He was also the Chairman of the Governing Body of the S.G.T.B. Khalsa College, Delhi. He was a member of the Panjabi University Commission, which preceded the establishment of the Panjabi University at Patiala in 1962. The degree of Doctor of Law, *honoris causa*, was conferred upon him by the University in 1967. The well known English weekly, '*The Spokesman*' launched in 1951 from Delhi, owes its origin to him. He was also its editor till his election as Deputy Speaker, Lok Sabha in 1956. Besides, he also has to his credit a few books in English and Punjabi, viz., '*The Sikh Case*', '*The Problem of the Sikhs*', '*Russia as I saw it*' and '*Russia Today*'.

Sardar Hukam Singh passed away on 27 May 1983 at the age of 88. Giani Zail Singh, the then President of India, expressed his deep grief on the passing away of Sardar Hukam Singh and described him as a rare personality gifted with sterling qualities. Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India in her condolence message said, "I am deeply grieved to hear of Sardar Hukam Singh's passing away. He was a veteran public leader of Punjab. He made his mark as a lawyer, educationist and legislator and rose to be the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. In that office and later as Governor of Rajasthan, he won wide spread respect through his conscientiousness, dignity and unflinching courtesy".

As a mark of respect to his memory, references were made in both the Houses of Parliament. Dr. Balram Jakhar, the then Speaker, Lok Sabha, in his obituary reference, remembered Sardar Hukam Singh as a deeply religious person and a noted parliamentarian who made a very distinguished contribution as a presiding officer in the form of decisions and rulings from the Chair. Adding further, he said, "In his passing away the country has lost a dedicated son who devoted himself to the service of people and the democratic institutions".