



BAL RAM JAKHAR



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Bal Ram Jakhar, an eminent parliamentarian and a farmer turned political leader, was born on 23 August 1923 at Panjkosi village in Ferozepur district of Punjab. He had a brilliant academic career and graduated in 1945 from the Forman Christian College, Lahore, with Honours in Sanskrit. He was virtually a linguist, being well-versed in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. Jakhar was essentially an agriculturist, particularly an orchardist. After graduation, he adopted the family profession of farming and made use of modern techniques for the development of orchards and vineyards in his farmlands. Through years of hardwork, he succeeded in converting barren lands into green meadows and flourishing orchards and vineyards.

Jakhar's services in the field of fruit-growing received national recognition when he was awarded the title 'All India Udyan Pandit' by the President of India in 1975. In the same year, he was also chosen to lead the Farmers' Delegation to the International Agricultural Producers' Conference in Washington. During this period, he was elected President of the Punjab Cooperative Grape Growers' Federation and also of the Farmers' Forum of the State. Recognising his contributions in the field of agriculture, he was awarded the honorary degrees of Doctor of Science and '*Vidya Martand*', respectively, by the Haryana Agricultural University, Hissar, and the Gurukula Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Hardwar. It was his leadership role among the farming community that eventually propelled Jakhar into an active political role at the national level.

Jakhar began his legislative career in 1972 when he was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Punjab. Within one year of his election to the Assembly, he was inducted into the Council of Ministers as the Deputy Minister of Co-operation, Irrigation and Power. He remained a Minister till 1977. On being re-elected to the Assembly in 1977, he was chosen as the Leader of the Congress (I) Legislature Party and in that capacity was recognised as the Leader of the Opposition in the

Punjab Legislative Assembly, a position he held till January 1980 when he was elected to the Seventh Lok Sabha from the Ferozepur parliamentary constituency. Through his active role in the affairs of Punjab as a political activist, legislator, Minister and as the Leader of the Opposition, Jakhar had already proved his mettle.

Jakhar was elected the Speaker of the Seventh Lok Sabha on 22 January 1980. Even though Jakhar did not have any previous experience as a Presiding Officer, he was completely unperturbed about the great responsibility cast upon him. With a realistic role-perception, with confidence in himself and with his innate common sense, Jakhar efficiently discharged his duties as the Presiding Officer of the House with great finesse and competence. He was aware that the Speaker played a crucial role in the smooth and effective functioning of the House, represented by members with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, regional and socio-political backgrounds.

Jakhar always strove to carry on the business of the House with utmost dignity, decorum and objectivity. Firm, but at the same time sensitive to the mood of the House, he laid stress on the cooperation of the members in the smooth and orderly conduct of the House and thereby in projecting a healthy image of the Parliament to the country and outside. Though he attached great importance to procedures, rules, conventions and customs, he did not let them stifle the opinion of the House. He subscribed to the general view that in a parliamentary democracy, the House is the ultimate master of its own procedures.

The manner in which Jakhar conducted the proceedings of the Seventh Lok Sabha earned appreciation from all quarters and endeared him to all sections of the House. Therefore, on his re-election to the Lok Sabha in the General Elections of December 1984, this time from the Sikar parliamentary constituency of Rajasthan, he was the natural choice to preside over the new House as well. On 16 January 1985, he was re-elected, once again unanimously, to be the Speaker of the Eighth Lok Sabha. When he relinquished the office at the end of the Eighth Lok Sabha in December 1989, Jakhar earned the distinction of being the only Speaker in independent

India to have presided over two successive Lok Sabhas for their full terms, only about a month short of a full decade (*i.e.* from 22 January 1980 to 18 December 1989).

Jakhar's decade-long stint as the Speaker of the Seventh and the Eighth Lok Sabhas was remarkable in many ways. All along, he remained vigilant in protecting the rights and privileges of the members individually and of the House collectively. He once ruled that any officer of the Government deposing before a Parliamentary Committee was protected by the privileges of the House. Similarly, though he respected the role of the Judiciary in a democracy, he held that each organ of the Government should act only within the realm allotted to each by the Constitution, each respecting the rights and privileges of the other. Accordingly, in November 1987, Jakhar ruled that courts cannot compel the Speakers to present themselves before the courts in defence of what is perceived as their omissions and commissions relating to the functioning of Parliament.

Speaker Jakhar was steadfast in defending all matters concerning the privileges of the House. He was equally resolute in defending the sanctity of constitutional offices and discouraged every attempt to drag such offices for discussion in Parliament.

Jakhar's tenure as Speaker also witnessed the evolution of several procedural innovations and initiatives. After 1952, for the first time, a comprehensive review of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha was undertaken in 1989, under Speaker Jakhar's initiative, and several changes were formalised and incorporated into the Rules in May 1989. It was also during his tenure that the Anti-Defection Law which provided for disqualification of members on grounds of defection was enacted by Parliament in 1985. The Members of Lok Sabha (Disqualification on Grounds of Defection) Rules, 1985 came into force with effect from 18 March 1986.

Jakhar's initiative in revamping the Committee System in the Indian Parliament is indeed noteworthy. The full-fledged Departmentally Related Standing Committee System, introduced during the life of the Tenth Lok Sabha, was only an offshoot of the original

Subject Committee System introduced by Shri Jakhar in August-September 1989, after years of deliberations during the life of the Seventh and the Eighth Lok Sabhas. Similarly, the beginnings for the computerisation and automation of the services to the members of Parliament were made during the Speakership of Jakhar. All along, he evinced keen interest in the expansion of the Parliament Library and its Research, Reference, Documentation and Information Services for the benefit of the members.

In the Lok Sabha, Jakhar, as Speaker, was the Chairman of the Rules Committee, Business Advisory Committee and the General Purposes Committee. He also took interest in organising periodic Conferences of the Chairmen of various Committees common to the national Parliament and the State Legislatures in New Delhi. This facilitated the sharing of each others' experiences and thereby led to more effective and purposeful functioning of these Committees throughout the country.

Jakhar demonstrated a remarkable sense of history when he took the initiative for the setting up of a Parliamentary Museum and Archives (PMA) and the Hall of National Achievements during his Speakership. The interest he showed in recalling the great sacrifices and contributions made by the leaders of the Indian freedom movement only testified to this sense of history.

Another area that received special attention from Bal Ram Jakhar during his Speakership was in developing inter-parliamentary contacts and cooperation between the Parliament of India and other Parliaments as also with the international parliamentary associations. With these objectives in view, Jakhar facilitated the hosting of many Conferences of Parliamentarians at different levels. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Regional Seminar in 1981 and the Conference of the Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers in 1986 were held in New Delhi at his initiative. During his Speakership, he also led the Indian Parliamentary Delegations at the Conferences of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and he was actively associated with the activities of the CPA and the IPU.

Jakhar was a member of the CPA Executive Committee for several years since 1980. He was the first Asian to have been elected Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPA in 1984 for a three-year term. In these capacities, he chaired and attended several meetings of the CPA Executive Committee. He was also elected member of the Executive Committee of the IPU in 1983.

After he relinquished the office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha, Jakhar was appointed General-Secretary of the All India Congress Committee(I) in 1990. In the General Elections of 1991, Jakhar was once again elected to the Tenth Lok Sabha from the Sikar constituency and became Minister of Agriculture in the new Government.

As the Union Minister of Agriculture, during the 1991-1996 period, Jakhar's primary concern was protecting the interests of the Indian farmers. In Parliament and in the Government, he successfully projected and protected the interests of the farming community. He strongly resisted both national and international pressures for cutting down the subsidies to the farmers in the wake of the liberalisation of the economy initiated by the Government of which he was a part. He firmly believed that encouragement to industries should not be at the cost of the farmers of the country. As the Minister of Agriculture, he represented India at various International Conferences relating to fisheries and agriculture, besides leading several Ministerial Delegations to other countries. He was also a member of the Planning Commission from 1991 to 1996.

Although Jakhar did not contest the elections to the Eleventh Lok Sabha in 1996, he continued to be active in the affairs of the Congress Party and in national politics. Again, with the Eleventh Lok Sabha proving to be a short-lived one, Jakhar soon had the opportunity to contest yet another election to the Lok Sabha successfully from the Bikaner parliamentary constituency in Rajasthan in February 1998 and remained a member of Parliament till the dissolution of the Twelfth Lok Sabha on 26 April 1999. During this term in Parliament, Jakhar was a member of the Committee of Privileges, General Purposes Committee, and

Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Agriculture. He was also Chairman of the Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Petroleum and Chemicals.

Bal Ram Jakhar was appointed Governor of Madhya Pradesh on 30 June 2004 and held that office till 29 June 2009. He also served as Governor of Gujarat (acting) from 2 to 23 July 2004.

Dr. Bal Ram Jakhar was also the Chairman of the Bharat Krishak Samaj and the Managing Committee of the Jallianwala Bagh Memorial Trust. Shri Jakhar was actively associated with numerous socio-cultural and literary organizations and he was also the Chairman of the Third World Hindi Conference, Delhi. A prolific writer, Shri Jakhar had authored three books, namely, People, Parliament and Administration, an authentic work on contemporary Indian politics; New Horizons in Agriculture in India; and Udgaar, a compilation of his speeches as Governor of Madhya Pradesh. He was a multi-faceted personality. With his unceasing interest in agriculture, sports and literary activities, combined with his much demanding public work, Jakhar led a hectic and eventful life.

Shri Jakhar passed away on 3 February 2016 at the age of 92. Rich tributes were paid by dignitaries, including the President, Vice-President and the Prime Minister.

The President, Shri Pranab Mukherjee in his condolence message said:

Dr. Jakhar was a veteran Parliamentarian... He was also a distinguished administrator who served the nation in various capacities... As Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Dr. Jakhar was instrumental in automation and computerisation of Parliamentary records and establishment of the Parliament Museum. The nation will always remember his valuable contributions and pursuit of excellence in public life.

The Vice-President, Shri M. Hamid Ansari, condoling the demise of Shri Jakhar, said:

A popular leader and a champion of the farmers, Shri Jakhar contributed to the growth and deepening of Parliamentary system in India in his capacity as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, condoling the passing away of Shri Bal Ram Jakhar, said:

Bal Ram Jakhar ji was a popular leader who enriched our Parliamentary democracy in his long political journey.

Both the Houses of Parliament paid glowing tributes on the demise of Shri Bal Ram Jakhar.

In the Rajya Sabha, the Chairman, Shri M. Hamid Ansari said:

...Dr. Jakhar took keen interest in the development of agriculture, horticulture and rural areas through the application of modern technology and scientific farming methods and innovations. He served as the Chairman of the Bharat Krishak Samaj and the International Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Association and as President of the Farmers' Forum, Punjab.

In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker, Smt. Sumitra Mahajan, said:

...As Speaker of the Lok Sabha, he conducted the proceedings of the House with great ability and distinction. His parliamentary skill and comprehensive knowledge of parliamentary practices and procedures earned him respect from all the sections of the House.