



Chandra Shekhar



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
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Shri Chandra Shekhar was an outstanding leader on the Indian political firmament for five decades who contributed a great deal towards strengthening our parliamentary system and the evolution of progressive thought in the post-Independence era. An ardent patriot, a distinguished parliamentarian, a spell-binding orator and a committed socialist, Chandra Shekhar was a multifaceted personality who rose to become the Prime Minister of the largest working democracy in the world. Endowed with exceptional social and intellectual sensitivity, he forcefully espoused the cause of the masses and the nation with great conviction.

Chandra Shekhar was born on 1 July 1927 in a village at Ibrahimpatti in the Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh. He was the son of Shri Sadanand Singh and Shrimati Durpai Devi. He was attracted to politics and to public service from his student days and was known in those years as a great idealist with revolutionary passion and fervour. After obtaining his Master's Degree in Political Science from Allahabad University, he plunged into the socialist movement. He had the privilege of having been associated with Acharya Narendra Dev, and remained his true disciple throughout his life.

Chandra Shekhar started his long and illustrious career in politics and public service as the Secretary of the Praja Socialist Party in Ballia District and later on served as the Joint Secretary and then General Secretary of the U.P. State Praja Socialist Party. He was also a member of the National Executive of the PSP. Chandra Shekhar joined the Congress Party in 1964 and in the years to come, he was acclaimed as a 'Young Turk'.

Chandra Shekhar quit the Congress Party in 1975 and spent 19 months in prison during the Emergency. In 1977, Chandra Shekhar became the President of the Janata Party, which headed a Coalition Government under the Prime Ministership of Shri Morarji Desai from 1977 to 1979.

In 1983, Chandra Shekhar undertook a *padayatra* of 4260 kms from Kanyakumari to Rajghat in Delhi to establish a rapport with the masses and to understand their problems. He also established *Bharat Yatra Centres* in various States to train social and political workers for mass education and grassroot work. His *padayatra* was a landmark event in our political history in awakening people's consciousness of their rights and duties. In 1988, Chandra Shekhar played a key role in the formation of the Janata Dal and the National Front, which formed the Government at the Centre in 1989.

When the V.P. Singh Government resigned in November 1990, Shri Chandra Shekhar assumed office as the Prime Minister of India on 10 November 1990. He remained in office as the Prime Minister till 21 June 1991 during which period he held charges of the Ministries/ Departments of Atomic Energy; Defence; Electronics; Home Affairs; Information and Broadcasting; Industry; Labour; Ocean Development; Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions; Planning and Programme Implementation; Science and Technology; Space; Welfare and other subjects not allocated to any Cabinet Minister or Minister of State with Independent Charge. He also held charge of the Ministries of External Affairs and Health and Family Welfare from 20.2.1991 to 21.6.1991 and of the Ministry of Water Resources and Ministry of Surface Transport from 26.4.1991 to 21.6.1991. On assuming the Prime Ministership, he told the people, "If there is an ocean of misery around, you cannot protect islands of affluence". His stint as Prime Minister of the country was brief; but during this eventful period, he earned approbation of the entire nation as an astute administrator.

The distinguished legislative career of Chandra Shekhar, which spanned over four decades, began in 1962 when he was elected to the Rajya Sabha from Uttar Pradesh for the first time. He was re-elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1968 and 1974. He was elected member of the Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Lok Sabhas. When he died in July 2007, he was a sitting member of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha. The fact that he was elected eight times to the Lok Sabha bears ample testimony to his extremely close rapport with the masses.

Chandra Shekhar was a forceful, fluent and persuasive speaker in Parliament and was always heard with rapt attention by all sections of the House. His meaningful and compelling expositions on a wide range of issues greatly enlivened and enriched the proceedings of the Parliament. During his long and eventful parliamentary career, he always focused the nation's attention on the problems of the common man and made the Parliament the voice of the people. His innate and inherent respect for decorum and dignity of the democratic institutions represents a shining example of the best traditions of the spirit of democracy. All through his public life, he strove for ethical values in the democratic system. When the Thirteenth Lok Sabha took the landmark initiative to set up an Ethics Committee on 16 May 2000, Shri Chandra Shekhar was made its Chairman. He remained the Chairman of the Ethics Committee in the Fourteenth Lok Sabha as well, till he breathed his last. Keeping in view his exemplary parliamentary performance and acknowledging his many contributions to parliamentary democracy, Chandra Shekhar was honoured with the Indian Parliamentary Group's Outstanding Parliamentarian Award in 1995. While receiving the Award, Chandra Shekhar said: "If we come forward to put in all our efforts to mitigate the sorrows and the sufferings of the rural masses and to take care of the state of helplessness and compulsions being faced by our people in general, then there is nothing that can stop India from regaining her position as a leader of the world".

Besides being a parliamentarian *par excellence*, Chandra Shekhar was a profound thinker. He was the Founder Editor and Chairman of the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Young Indian*. His books, *Meri Jail Diary* and *Dynamics of Social Change*, are acknowledged for their literary skills and original thinking.

Chandra Shekhar was married to Smt. Duja Devi and has two sons Pankaj and Neeraj Shekhar. The younger son Neeraj Shekhar was elected to the 14th Lok Sabha in the by-election from Ballia constituency and is a sitting member of the 15th Lok Sabha representing Ballia.

Shri Chandra Shekhar died at the age of 80 on 8 July 2007. Rich tributes were paid to him by whole nation on his demise. In his condolence message, the President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, said: "He was a secularist known for his convictions to the principles he believed in". Paying tributes to the departed leader, the Vice-President and Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, observed: "The country had lost a messiah of the poor, an embodiment of secularism and fearless sentinel of democratic values and traditions." The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh pointed out: "He was a truly secular nationalist, a man of the people, committed to their welfare and well-being". The then Speaker of Lok Sabha, Shri Somnath Chatterjee, said: "With the passing away of Shri Chandra Shekhar, an eventful era in the political history of the country has come to an end. In his demise, the country has lost an eminent parliamentarian, an able administrator, a statesman and a dedicated socialist who stood for a castelss society". Both Houses of Parliament also condoled the passing away of Shri Chandra Shekhar.

Shri Chandra Skekhar's life and his many splendoured contributions for the welfare of the people will ever remain inspiration to the succeeding generations.

[The portrait of Shri Chandra Shekhar will be unveiled by the Hon'ble Vice-President of India and Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, in the Central Hall of Parliament House on 4 May 2010. The portrait has been painted by Shri R.D. Pareek and donated by Shri Kamal M. Morarka, former member of Rajya Sabha.]