

CHANDRA SHEKHAR: A POLITICIAN WITH DIFFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

Where is the need to remember a politician who could not last even four months as the Prime-Minister of India? So this article tries to analyse the personality of a person with midas touch and splendid personality for whom politics was not an end for him to gain reputation, wealth and personal enhancement but the means to serve the country and common people. A man with courage, conviction, values, principles and following, he could have become a cabinet minister at any time of his own choice particularly 1977 onwards till he became the Prime-Minister. Why did it not happen because he had a vision, a roadmap of strong healthy India with its head held high and without fear. This article with examples would illustrate it. The methodology adopted includes my interview with the native people of his village, interviews of few political leaders, the auto-biography and his own writings apart from the secondary sources. Every secondary source has been acknowledged.

Chandra Shekhar was born on 1st July 1927 in a very remote village Ibrahim Patti in Ballia district in eastern Uttar Pradesh. His father Thakur Sadanand Singh was a small farmer and his mother Draupdi Devi was a house wife. His village had a population of 500 only and deprived of any facility such as school, hospital etc. The economic condition of Chandra Shekhar could be judged from the fact that his mother died of cholera due to lack of treatment. So, the poverty of rural people had a strong imprint on his mind.

He did his matriculation from Jeevan Ram High School in Azamgarh in 1945. Despite his protest, he was married to Dwija Devi in 1944 brushing aside his objections.

He completed his graduation from Satish Chandra degree College, Ballia in 1949 and Post-Graduation from Allahabad University in 1951 in Political Science.

He was inclined towards politics from his college days and came to lime light when he led an agitation against fee hike of students at Allahabad University. Here, he established himself as a firebrand leader with revolutionary fervor. He drew the attention of Acharya Narendra Dev, a great socialist leader and became a close associate of Acharya Narendra Dev and Dr Ram Monohar lohia.

After his Post-graduation, Chandra Shekhar enrolled himself for Ph.D under another Socialist leader Prof. Mukut Bihari Lal at Banaras Hindu University. Acharya Narendra Dev at that time was the vice chancellor of the Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalay. He summoned and advised Chandra Shekhar to leave his research work and to enter into Politics to serve the nation.ⁱ

Taking Acharya's advices as the mission of his life, he became full time worker of Praja Socialist

Party and became the secretary of the district Praja Socialist Party in Ballia in 1951.

In 1951 itself he became the Joint-Secretary of the party state unit and got elected as the Secretary of the party state unit in 1955. He remained on his post till he was elected to Rajya Sabha in 1962 on Praja Socialist party ticket from U.P. He remained the member of Rajya Sabha till 1977.

When Chandra Shekhar became the member of Rajya Sabha few things should be noted:-

- A. He was about 35 years old.
- B. People like Pandit Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri were Member of Parliament.

But under such scenario, when he rose to speak people listened to him very carefully. On Indo-China conflict, he vehemently criticized Pandit Nehru and his foreign policy. Speaking in Rajya Sabha on 20th February 1963 he said, "I have heard many times that we were not prepared to fight against China. We could not fight against China because we were fighting illiteracy, poverty and hunger. We were involved in the development of infra-structure. Our prime minister has been proudly propagating that we are a peaceful and civilized country. But let me point out that security is followed by peace and civilization".ⁱⁱ

Further he says, "For how long we will say that the attack was sudden. In Nov-Dec 1957, I wrote a letter to the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh Sh. Sampurnanand that Chinese people were assembling near Talkakot and we must keep a watch on them. I did not receive any reply. Later on I wrote to the chief secretary that you are the senior bureaucrat and you must act on this."

I received a letter from the chief secretary that my letter was sent to C.I.D officials and they were looking after the issue." Chandra Shekharji in same speech said that in 1959 there was an article in "People's Daily" titled, "Revolution in Tibet and Nehru philosophy." It was said in the article that Nehru was an imperialist agent and here we are chanting the slogan of "brotherhood and co-existence."ⁱⁱⁱ

Thus he proved to be a powerful orator and whenever he spoke, he spoke with facts and proofs. In 1964, there was internal division within Praja Socialist Party and Chandra Shekhar joined Congress Party. He came close to Mrs. Gandhi and worked relentlessly for her.

However, he never compromised with his values and principles because the values and democratic norms, which were very close to his heart mattered most to him. He proved himself to be a great listener and open to others views even if he differed with them. He was a devil's advocate of common masses and till the last day of his life, fought for them.

Present Lok Sabha speaker Mrs. Sumitra Mahajan writes, "Shri Chandra Shekhar was undoubtedly a man of masses who connected himself well with the poorest of poor and unfailingly espoused their cause. He firmly believed that no matter how good a system maybe, until social justice is ensured and poverty abolished, nothing concrete could be achieved for the betterment of the weak and depressed. He was a vanguard of change for social reconstruction and uplift of the vulnerable section of society."^{iv}

Back to the Congress politics, he caught the eyes of Mrs. Gandhi and was inducted as a member of Congress working committee. He was also elected in central election committee in Shimla Session of the Congress party with the help of Lalit Narayan Mishra despite opposition from some senior leaders of the Congress Party.

During Congress Regime also, he vehemently criticized the economic policies of Morarji Desai. He was courage personified. He made a mark by taking keen interest in espousing the cause of downtrodden and pleading for policies for rapid social change. He attacked the disproportionate growth of monopoly houses with the state patronage. Also to propagate the same cause he started a magazine "Young Indian" in 1969. He was the editor in chief of the magazine and wrote the editorial of the magazine himself. His editorials were read and analyzed even by tall personalities of print

media. Here, he did come in conflict with centre of power and formed a group of congressmen who analyzed, wrote and spoke with socialist fervor. This group came to be known as "Young Turks." Mr. Mohan Dharia and Shri Krishan Kant along with Chandra Shekhar were important members.

As a Socialist, Chandra Shekhar was concerned about the accumulation of wealth by large industrial houses, of growth of black money, the spreads of corruption, squandering of funds by financial institution and other economic offences. He made charges when he had all the proof. He was also for nationalization of Bank and doing away with Privy Purse.

Participating on this issue in Rajya Sabha, he said, "the country belongs not to a few privileged persons but it belongs to every one living in the country."^v

On industrial policy he favoured public sector. He said, "There cannot be any industrial policy in India that does not spell out the role of public sector in the country's planned development. It has become a fashion to berate public sector without understanding its crucial role in planned development. It is true that Indian public sector enterprises suffer from a variety of problems. There is need to approach the public sector with the intention of improving its performance and to strengthen this vital sector rather than attempting to reduce its area of operation by preaching privatization and inviting multinationals. It has serious economic implications."^{vi}

If the economic and social policies of any government are challenged, the challenger naturally comes face to face with corporate houses and leadership of the country. Chandra Shekhar's frankness and his strong conviction towards democratic norms brought him face to face with Indiraji.

Two important events need to be analyzed here:-

A. The first is the Allahabad High Court Judgment. Justice Jag Mohan Lal Sinha had

set aside her election to the Lok Sabha purely on Technical Ground.

Mrs. Gandhi was disqualified from the membership of the Lok Sabha. She was barred from voting in parliament. She was barred from fighting parliamentary election for 6 years. However she was given twenty days' time to appeal to the Supreme Court against its verdict. The judgment created furor in political circle and made Mrs. Gandhi position untenable as the Prime Minister of India.

Almost the entire congress leadership was in favour of Mrs. Gandhi's continuing in the post. But again democratic morality confronted Chandra Shekhar and he publically said that Mrs. Gandhi should resign from her post and hand over the reign of Administration to some other leader of the party.

B. The second event was J.P.'s movement. When Jay Prakash Narayan launched his movement, Chandra Shekhar was of the opinion that J.P. is a saint and he should be heard. He publically warned Indiraji not to be in conflict with Jay Prakash Narayan. Mohan Dharia too wanted Mrs. Gandhi to meet J.P. He was served a notice and ultimately he resigned. He sent his resignation directly to the President embarrassing Mrs. Gandhi. He too was later imprisoned.

He told J.P. also that the concept of total revolution was not clear and an ideal society could not be formed with the kind of people associated with the movement. From the deep core of his heart, he desperately tried to fix a meeting between Jay Prakash Narayan and Mrs. Gandhi but failed. In the meantime, during the J.P. movement, J.P. organized a rally in Ram Lila maidan (Delhi) and addressing the crowd he called upon the public servant and particularly the army to disobey the 'unjust commands' of

political executive. This was in a way calling the army to revolt.

This proved to be flashing point in Indian Politics. Mrs. Gandhi imposed emergency on 25th June 1975.

During the emergency all opposition leaders and political activists were arrested. Chandra Shekhar was a big Congress party leader but he too was arrested under the maintenance of internal security act, 1975. It was because of his courage, frankness and democratic convictions. Had he chosen to keep quiet, he could have enjoyed any ministerial berth. "Young Indian" had to be closed down. It resumed regular publication in February 1989.

But closure of 'young Indian' and his arrest did not divert and deter him from his literary interest. While in jail, he penned down his thought which was published as "Meri Jail Diary." His other important writing is autobiography 'Zindagi ka kaarwan'. Chandra Shekhar always used to recite the following two lines which reflect his personality and the mode of his functioning.

***"Chah gayi, Chinta gayi, Manma Beparwah,
Jinko Kachhu na chahiye so shahan ke shah".***

In his Jail Diary, describing his arrest and his feelings, he writes:-

"This gave me peace of mind. It was not possible for me to agree with all that was happening around me. How could one claim that country's future rested on one single individual. So much of sycophancy and such slavishness are beyond me."^{vii}

Judge the self-respect of the person. His son and Rajya Sabha M.P. Shri Neeraj Shekhar in one of his articles, Chandra Shekhar: my father" writes that he could fathom of his qualities of his head and heart at a very late years of his life. He abhorred humiliation of crest fallen opponent. He was magnanimous and humble in victory. He never nursed any personal ill-will

against anybody, including even Indiraji. He was proud of his father that he never promoted him or his brother Pankaj in Politics."^{viii}

After his release from prison he was shifted to New Delhi on 30th December 1976 and was placed under house arrest, at Rouse Avenue.

After the emergency was lifted, he became the president of Janta Party. This party was formed after the merger of Congress (O), Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party, Lok Dal and Congress for democracy. Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister.

In the beginning, a small cabinet was formed by Morarji Desai which included Chandra Shekhar's name. But he refused and in turn recommended Shri Mohan Dharia's name who was made a minister.^{ix}

However Janta Party government could not last long and on the question of "Dohri Sadasyata" the government collapsed in 1979. During the Janta Party government, there were many differences between the government and its party president. Chandra Shekhar was against the arrest of Mrs. Gandhi. The day Mrs. Gandhi was arrested; Chandra Shekhar confided with his 'Young Turk' leaders that the revival of Congress started from that very day.

There is another very interesting story of the way he functioned. It is important to note that he was the second person to visit Mrs. Gandhi after her defeat. The first was the great Jay Prakash Narayan. When he met Mrs. Gandhi, he found that Indiraji was worried about her house as she did not have any house and she had to vacate the house, she was residing as the Prime Minister. Chandra Shekhar assured her that nobody will ask her to vacate the house. He directly went to Morarji Bhai and told him about the assurance he had given to Mrs. Gandhi. Morarji was shocked and asked as to how this could be possible? Chandra Shekhar said, "Remember, it is a word given by the party president and a question of my prestige". This one line was enough.

After the fall of government, though he retained his seat but the party was in a bad shape. As a president of the Janta Party, he undertook "Bharat Yatra" from Kanya Kumari, Kerala to Rajghat in New Delhi, covering a distance of 4260 kilometers from 6th January 1983 to the June 1983. Chandra Shekhar on his "Bharat Yatra" observed:-

"For the first time people realized that there was someone who was ready to come to their houses to understand their problem. When we started, it was doubtful whether people would react positively to Bharat Yatra or take it as a political drama. But all through the yatra, the villagers who were illiterate, who were ignorant, who were helpless and poor lined up in large numbers to receive the volunteers who were walking. In almost all the villages, even the poor people managed to offer the best welcome that they could manage. There might have been difficulty of language but the language of the heart, which was more powerful, helped to communicate the feelings".^x

During the Yatra, he came face to face with the wretched reality of rural India. The plight of children of rural India made a deep impact on him.

At the end of Bharat Yatra, Chandra Shekhar decided the following 5 points which were of immediate relevance to the men and women living in the villages:-

- I. Drinking water for every villages.
- II. Health facilities and steps to prevent malnutrition among children and expectant mother.
- III. Education for all.
- IV. Problems of Adivasis and Harijans and
- V. Communal Harmony.

He also established 15 Bharat Yatra centre to train social and political workers for mass education and grass root work in backward pockets of the country. The centers were set up at Kerala, TamilNadu,

Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujrat, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

Explaining the importance of Bharat yatra centers, Chandra Shekhar said;

"We have just made a beginning and this beginning may not be very romantic. It does not catch the eyes of the media but certainly catches the eyes of the people in the village. This is an endeavor which requires lots of patience and endurance. No immediate result can be seen. But in the long run, this is the only way to get the willing co-operation of the people and try to create a powerful movement for a new social order."^{xi}

When Chandra Shekhar was on Bharat Yatra, Mrs. Gandhi was the prime Minister of India and Punjab was witnessing a very long and strong wave of terrorism. To quell the terrorist upsurge, Mrs. Gandhi ultimately went for 'operation blue star', where army was asked to free Golden temple of Amritsar from the clutches of Bhinderwala. The army completed its mission successfully and it seemed that almost all political parties were happy and anticipating that the terrorism will come to an end. Advaniji, then a very strong leader of BJP went to the extent of claiming that ultimately it was he who forced Mrs. Gandhi to take this extreme step. He has written this in his Autobiography "My Life: My Country."

Only Chandra Shekharji criticized Mrs. Gandhi and said, "Country will have to face the consequences." At that time he was criticized but after the tragic assassination of Mrs. Gandhi and anti-Sikh-riot of 1984, the Country realized the importance of this visionary.

The Parliamentary election of 1984 was held in the background of Mrs. Gandhi assassination and Chandra Shekhar too lost his parliamentary seat of Ballia to Jagan Nath Chaudhary of Congress Party.

Captain Abbas Ali in one of his articles, "Chandra Shekharji: An imminent political personality writes that in 1985, a Rajya Sabha berth was proposed for Chandra Shekhar. Janta Party government was there in Karnataka under Ram

Krishan Hegde. He could also have been elected from Uttar Pradesh but he refused. He said that he would enter parliament only when he gets elected for Lok Sabha. He choose to send Shri Ashok Nath Verma, the son of Acharya Narendra Dev to Rajya Sabha in his place.^{xii}

Do we have any leader today to be compared with him. Remember Ministry of Mohan Dharia and Rajya Sabha birth for Ashok Nath Verma.

In 1989 Parliamentary election, Chandra Shekhar fought from two constituencies:- Ballia and Maharaj Ganj from Bihar. He won both the seats but vacated Maharaj Ganj seat later on.

In this election, Sanyukt Morcha did fairly well with 143 seats. Though, the Congress party emerged as the single largest party with 197 seats. Shri Rajiv Gandhi, leader of the Congress party refused to form the government stating that the people had not given him and his party a clear mandate to form the government.

Now it was certain that Chandra Shekhar would be the Prime Minister of the country. Unfortunately Devi Lal betrayed him and V. P. Singh became the Prime Minister with outside support of BJP and CPM. Chandra Shekhar felt cheated but did not revolt, though he never considered V. P. Singh to be his leader.

After about 10 months of V. P. Singh's rule, Advaniji on his Somnath to Ayodhya Rath-Yatra was arrested by Chief-Minister of Bihar Lalu Prasad Yadav. BJP in retaliation withdrew support from V. P. Singh government and the government fell.

After the fall of V. P. Singh government, Chandra Shekhar agreed to form the government with outside support of the Congress Party.

The circumstances in which he agreed to be a Prime Minister were very critical. There was curfew in more than dozen cities in view of Ram Janm Bhumi- Babri Masjid controversy and the Rath Yatra of Shri Advaniji. The youth were committing self-immolation in protest against Mandal Commission and extremism in Punjab was not showing any sign of cooling down. The country was on the verge of

bankruptcy owing to the loan taken by the previous governments.

Under such circumstances, Chandra Shekhar took the oath of Prime Minister on 10th November 1990. Perhaps he came to power with a magic band and within one month, the country seemed to be back on track. The election of Punjab Legislative assembly was announced and the country was saved from bankruptcy.

Chandra Shekhar had no prior administrative experience. Bureaucrats particularly from foreign ministry and finance ministry were apprehensive. However, the Prime Minister at times decided against the wishes of bureaucrats and ministers successfully. Let me begin with the economic vision of this great visionary. Here I have extensively taken help of an article written by Deepak Nayyar: Economic liberalization and political process: 1991 published on 13th October 2016.^{xiii} I may point out here that prof. Nayyar was economic adviser, government of India from 1989 to 1991.

Nayyar writes that during the 1980's, the competitive politics of populism reinforced by the cynical politics of soft options, led the governments into a spending spree. Government finances became progressively unsustainable. The inevitable crunch did come in the form of an acute economic crisis.

It was triggered by an increase in world crude prices, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The balance of payment situation became almost unmanageable. Chandra Shekhar to begin was hostile to the international monetary fund (IMF) but after exhausting his all possible options unsuccessfully, he authorized resumption of negotiation with the IMF.

Now IMF was needed not simply as a lender of last resort but also for its imprimatur, essential to restore international confidence.

The negotiation started with IMF. Remember the parameter of negotiation is always fixed by the political masters because ultimately bucks stop at the table of the Prime Ministers.

Negotiators were successful in extracting \$1.8 billion from IMF almost without any condition. The union budget exercise began in right earnest with the broad approval of Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and it was completed. The broad contours of this budget, which finance minister Yashwant Sinha could not present to parliament as scheduled in February 1991 because the Congress Party withdrew support, were broadly the same as what was ultimately presented in July 1991 by the then finance minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh of Narsimha Rao government.

Sanjay Baru^{xiv} has authenticated this in his different articles in Indian Express and Vinay Sitapati^{xv} in his book: Half-Lion: how Narsimha Rao transferred India endorses the same.

From these facts I am inclined to conclude that history due to circumstantial reasons could not credit Chandra Shekhar which was due to him. Had he survived for another two months in government, he would have got all the credits that have passed to Dr. Man Mohan Singh and Narsimha Rao.

Now I would give examples of three different events from the article of Shri Harivansh, a Rajya Sabha member who followed Chandra Shekhar closely:-

- a. Once the leader of the labour Party led a delegation of four-five members of parliament (House of Commons) to India. Prior to that Kaufman, deputy leader of labour Party had visited Pakistan and Pak-Occupied Kashmir. He made venomous remarks against India. He intended to visit India also. Contrary to the wishes of bureaucracy and external affair ministry Prime Minister decided to deny visa. Both external affair ministry and bureaucracy feared that the move would go against the national interest. The delegation of the labour party called on P.M. during their visit. The Prime Minister during the talk remarked that the labour party had made a great contribution in India's independence.

It has also championed the cause of liberty, equality and fraternity in the world.

Has there been a shift in its ideology in the recent past? Who is this Kaufman in your country, who makes whimsical remarks against India? The delegation was on the defensive. The British delegation was impressed and returned with the assurance of further strengthening ties in future.^{xvi}

- b. The other story is related with the U.S.A. when the U.S.A. was dictating its term with Indian political leadership. One day 35 infiltrators were killed on Indo-Pak border. The U.S. senators launched a scathing attack on India. The vice-president of U.S.A. visited India and raised this issue with the Prime Minister. Chandra Shekhar replied that he knew his country and its people better than any senators. Pakistan does not understand the language of peace and the level playing field was paved.^{xvii}
- c. The third example of his courage and vision is reflected from this example:

Once the Vice-President of the World Bank visited India. He was of Pakistani origin. He came to pay a "courtesy call" on the Prime Minister. During the talk he gave certain suggestions for India. Chandra Shekhar struck at the root of the philosophy he cherished and hinted at the political motive behind the policies of the World Bank.

The Vice-President retorted saying that if the World Bank stopped giving aid, what would India do?

Indian economy was in deep waters then. Balance of payment situation was in a critical state. The Prime Minister replied:- I would immediately approach the media, address the country and announce that all imports would be stopped barring lifesaving drugs and essential petroleum products and we would find indigenous solution.

Then the Prime minister asked the Vice-President if the World Bank or the western countries had the power to ignore the Indian Market? The Vice-

President was speechless. Later he shared his opinion with Sanat Mehta, chief of world bank sponsored Narmada project, "as long as Chandra Shekhar was the Prime Minister of India, there was no scope for market incursion here."^{xviii}

Unfortunately, the government did not survive for long. It was said that the Congress withdrew support because two policemen from Haryana were deployed on Rajiv Gandhi's residence for spying. But this is half-truth. The fact of the matter is that because of his leadership qualities, Rajiv Gandhi and corporate houses got frightened. Chandra Shekhar was nearing to solution on two very important problems:-

First: - Ram Janam-Bhumi- Babri Masjid controversy and second on Indo-Pak border controversy.

On first front, the Prime Minister constituted a committee of three chief ministers: Sharad Pawar (Chief Minister of Maharashtra), Bhairu Singh Shekhawat (Chief Minister of Rajasthan) and Mulayam Singh Yadav (Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh). Naturally, this committee was coordinating with people from different sections of society related with the controversy. Both the fighting factions had been made to understand the intention and strictness of the government in a very clear term.

The big-wigs of politics sensed that Chandra Shekhar may get the credit for solving the Ayodhya tangle and their politics would be exposed. It is not without reason that on daily basis Sharad Pawar was reporting the development to Congress High Command and Shekhawat to BJP High command.

On the second front during the SAARC summit in Maldives, Chandra Shekhar got the opportunity of straight talk with Pakistani counter-part Nawaz Sharif. Chandra Shekhar mathematically calculated the cost Pakistan was paying for it and war was no solution. They had planned for ministerial meetings and were very close to solving the problem.

The third angle was that of capitalist section of our country. The capitalist/ industrialists had realized that the economic policies of Chandra Shekhar were

against their interest and sooner the government goes the better. It may be noted here that during the period of his government, taxes to the tune of 1200 crores were imposed on corporate houses. No taxes were imposed on the common people.

Coming back to the fall of his government, Desai Chaudhary (the then industry minister, having independent charge) and Dr. Subrahmanyam Swamy (the then law minister) have written that when Rajiv Gandhi realized that Chandra Shekhar might tender his resignation, he desperately attempted to stop him from doing so. But the self-respecting Chandra Shekhar resigned on 6th March 1991 in a nationally televised address and recommended the dissolution of Parliament.

The President accepted his resignation, dissolved Lok Sabha and requested him to carry on as a care taker Prime Minister till the new Lok Sabha was constituted and a new government was formed. Finally on 20th June 1991, he paved the way for Narsimha Rao.

The President, who had administered him oath, had written that, had Chandra Shekhar got majority in the Lok Sabha, he would have been among the ablest premiers. The same view of the officials who had worked with him has been well documented.

The President felt very sorry when Chandra Shekhar tendered his resignation. He wrote, "I did not accept the resignation without feeling sorry for Chandra Shekhar. During his few months in office, he had handled parliament competently and was responsive to suggestions from the opposition. He was under constant strain from the pressures of the Congress Party which I am afraid assumed that it was the real government and Chandra Shekhar only a proxy. The office-hungry coterie of the congress party used to misguide Rajiv Gandhi that Chandra Shekhar's attempt at building up a good image could prove deleterious to his image..... I realized that unequal combinations are always disadvantageous to weaker side."^{xix}

Chandra Shekhar again won from Ballia and continued his politics in his own way. He never practiced the politics of a party but participated in

politics for the society and his country. He could join any political formation if it was in the interest of the country. He never liked RSS but he had no hesitation in praising "Swadeshi Jagran Manch."

Chandra Shekharji was a member of Rajya Sabha for three terms from 1962 to 1977 after which he got elected as a member of sixth Lok Sabha for the first time in 1977. After that, he remained a member of seventh Lok Sabha and afterwards from Ninth to fourteenth Lok Sabha.

His passion, conviction, courage and believe in democratic norms and values made him an outstanding parliamentarian. He was the first recipient of outstanding parliamentarian award in 1995 introduced in the same year by the then speaker of Lok Sabha, Shri Shiv Raj Patel.

Chandra Shekhar was very well versed with the procedure and proceedings of the parliament. He had immense respect for decorum and dignity of the democratic institutions. When the thirteenth Lok Sabha took the initiative to set up an "Ethics Committee" on 16th May 2000. Chandra Shekhar was made the first chairman, a position he held in fourteenth Lok Sabha also.

Chandra Shekhar died on 8th July 2007 due to multiple myeloma. He was cremated with full state honor on a traditional funeral pyre at Jannayak Sthal on the bank of river Yamuna on 10th July. In August, his ashes were immersed in river Siruvani.

Leaders from various political parties' paid rich tributes. President APJ Abdul Kalam said, "Chandra Shekhar was a veteran parliamentarian, a secularist and a socialist known for his conviction to the principles he believed in."

Bhairo Singh Shekhawat termed him as the messiah of the poor and embodiment of secularism and fearless sentinel of democratic values and traditions.

Man Mohan Singh remembered him as a hero who steered the nation and the economy through stormy waters with statesmanship and wisdom.

Vajpayee summed up the whole nation's thought process. He said "An era of struggle in Indian politics had ended.

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***Note: The Tributes are based on newspaper reports.**

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