

Jaglal Chaudhary: The “Gandhi of Bihar”—An Icon of Sacrifice, Revolution, and Simplicity (February 5, 1895 – May 9, 1975)

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ABSTRACT

On February 5, 2025, during an event at the Sri Krishna Memorial Hall in Patna, the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, paid floral tributes to Babu Jaglal Chaudhary on his birth anniversary. By highlighting Chaudhary’s immense political and social contributions, Gandhi brought the leader, often called the “Gandhi of Bihar,” back to the forefront of national discourse, thereby encouraging scholars to delve deeper into his life and legacy.

Keywords: Gandhi of Bihar, Revolution, Simplicity

The Formidable Journey of Jaglal Chaudhary :

Jaglal Chaudhary was born on February 5, 1895, in Mithepur village, Garkha Block, Saran District, Bihar. He belonged to the Pasi community (also identified as Bhar and Tadmal) of the ancient Bharshiv dynasty—a lineage whose history is characterized by immense sacrifice. The royal emblem of the Bharshiv dynasty explicitly features the Palm tree (Tad), establishing a direct historical link to the present-day Pasi/Bhar/Tadmali communities, who remain the traditional guardians of these trees.

Chaudhary holds the distinction of being the first Cabinet Minister from the Scheduled Castes in Bihar. In 1953, he authored a book titled ‘A Plan to Reconstruct Bharat’, in which he aligned with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s vision by advocating for equal rights and opportunities for all genders and classes. He considered caste discrimination the greatest curse of Hindu society and was a resolute proponent of Hindu-Muslim unity, religious tolerance, and the freedom of every individual to practice their chosen faith. Rising above the narrow confines of caste and creed, he dedicated his life to national and social service.

Early Life and Family Background:

Jaglal was the son of Musan Chaudhary and Tetri Devi. Despite belonging to the marginalized Pasi community and practicing the traditional occupation of toddy tapping, Musan Chaudhary possessed a profound understanding of the value of education. He staked everything to ensure his son received a high-quality education. At the age of 15, Jaglal was married to Jogeshwari Devi. Although she came from an impoverished and unlettered family, Jaglal remained steadfast in his pursuit of higher education despite the surrounding illiteracy.

Academic Excellence and Dedication:

A meritorious student from the outset, Jaglal received a government scholarship of five rupees per month in the ninth grade. His elder brother, Meesam Chaudhary, who served in the army, significantly supported his education by providing financial assistance. After his primary schooling in the village, he enrolled in Chhapra District School in 1903. At 17, he passed his matriculation in the first division, earning a silver medal in Bihar. In 1914, he joined Patna College for his I.Sc. and

subsequently secured admission to the prestigious Calcutta Medical College. At that time, medical admissions were based on a competitive joint examination across North India without any reservation. Only three students from Bihar succeeded in that rigorous exam; one of his peers eventually retired as the Principal of PMCH, Patna.

Join Non-Cooperation Movement of Gandhi :

While in the final year of his MBBS, Jaglal Chaudhary heeded Mahatma Gandhi's call for the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921, abandoned his medical studies, and plunged into the freedom struggle.

Vishwanath Chaudhary, Secretary of the Jaglal Chaudhary Smriti Sansthan, Patna, notes the close bond between Jaglal and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, evidenced by their extensive correspondence still preserved by the family.

By 1922, Chaudhary had emerged as a prominent figure in Bihar politics, serving in both the Saran District Congress and the Bihar State Congress Committee. He also spent time at the Tikapatti Ashram in Purnia, resolving local issues and mobilizing the public. He participated in every major Congress movement, including the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, for which he was imprisoned.

In March 1934, when Gandhi visited Danapur (Patna) for the 'Harijan Upliftment' movement, he was welcomed by Jaglal Chaudhary and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Despite the catastrophic Bihar earthquake at that time, Chaudhary toured extensively with Gandhi through Chhapra, Muzaffarpur, Bhagalpur, and other regions to campaign against untouchability.

Ministerial Tenure and Bold Reforms :

Following the provincial elections of 1937, a Congress government was formed in Bihar. On July 20, 1937, Shri Krishna Singh became the Chief Minister, and Jaglal Chaudhary was inducted into the cabinet as the Minister for Excise and Public Health. He was the first person from the Pasi community to achieve this rank.

As Excise Minister, he took a historic decision on April 6, 1938, by declaring prohibition in select districts to curb alcohol addiction among the marginalized. However, he advocated for the production of Neera (non-alcoholic palm sap) to preserve the traditional livelihood of the Pasi community.

The 1942 Revolution and Supreme Personal Sacrifice:

During the Quit India Movement of 1942, British records describe Chaudhary as a leader who incited the masses to defy colonial rule. For his revolutionary activities, he was sentenced to 40 years in prison.

The most heroic chapter of his life occurred on August 22, 1942. During a protest in Garkha, British troops opened fire, killing two individuals—one of whom was Jaglal's son, Indradev Chaudhary. Upon his arrest the next day, the police informed Jaglal of his son's martyrdom and showed him the body. History records few such moments where a father, looking at his son's corpse, remarked with stoic pride:

"I am proud that my son sacrificed his life serving Mother India."

Post-Independence Legacy:

After the 1946 elections, Chaudhary was again appointed as a Cabinet Minister for Health and Welfare in the interim government. His bond with Mahatma Gandhi was so profound that following Gandhi's assassination, Chaudhary led the immersion of the Mahatma's ashes in the Falgu River at Gaya on February 12, 1948.

He continued to serve as a legislator, winning five consecutive elections (1952–1969) from the Garkha constituency. Jaglal Chaudhary passed away on May 9, 1975. In his honor, the Government of India issued a commemorative postage stamp in 2000, and a life-sized statue was unveiled in Kankarbagh, Patna, in 2018.

The findings also line up with (Choudhury, 1960; (Datta, 1857 & 1974; Home Political, 1935, 1944 & 1946; Jaiswal, 2014; Kshirsagar, 1994; Vidrohi, 1989)

Conclusion:

Babu Jaglal Chaudhary was an extraordinary leader who never compromised his principles or simplicity, even while in power. His vision of delivering education and health to the most marginalized sections remains a cornerstone of "Inclusive Growth." As a tribute to his sacrifice—having abandoned his medical career for the nation's freedom—it is imperative that the government establishes a Medical University in Garkha in his name. This would fulfill his academic legacy and inspire future generations to emulate his life of integrity and sacrifice.

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