

Sardar Surjit Singh Barnala

Sardar Surjit Singh Barnala was born on 21st October, 1925 at Ateli, Begpur now in District Mohindergarh in Haryana where his father was a Magistrate. His father passed away when he was only nine years of age. Sri Surjit Singh Barnala had to struggle hard for acquiring education. After matriculation, he went to Lucknow for higher studies and passed Law from Lucknow University in 1946. During his stay at Lucknow, he participated in Quit India Movement in 1942, received lathi blows from the Police and was arrested. He started practicing Law in District Court at Barnala. And in 1967, he was elected as MLA from Barnala Assembly Constituency and represented the Constituency till 1999. In 1969, he became Education Minister of Punjab. During his tenure, he was instrumental in establishing Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar. In 1977, he was elected as MP and was inducted as Cabinet Minister in Janata Party's Government headed by Morarji Desai with Agriculture, Food, Irrigation and Rural Development as his portfolios. When he was elected to the Parliament, Barnala Assembly Constituency seat fell vacant and was contested by his wife Mrs. Surjit Kaur who won with a large margin. During Emergency and after operation Blue Star, he was kept in Solitary confinement for a long time. He went to jail nine times for various political agitations and spent in all, three and a half years in jail. In 1985, he was elected President of Shiromani Akali Dal after the assassination of Sant Longowal. Under his leadership, Akali Dal had a landslide victory in Assembly Elections and he became the Chief Minister of Punjab in 1985. He managed the affairs of the State very well in spite of there being terrorism at its peak in those days. He stood like a rock against terrorism and became the prime target of terrorists. He faced them boldly when other politicians in the State had succumbed to their threats. In 1990, he was appointed as Governor of Tamil Nadu, but due to some differences with the Central Government, he resigned after about a year. He was elected to Lok Sabha in 1996 and again 1998 and was appointed as Cabinet Minister with Chemical & Fertilizers and Food & Civil Supplies Portfolios. He was the first Governor of Uttranchal State. He was the Governor of Andhra Pradesh from 03.01.2003 till 02.11.2004. On 03.11.2004 he assumed office as Governor of Tamil Nadu. He has again been appointed for a full term as Governor and was given the oath of Office on 20th June 2006.

He has traveled widely and has represented India in the United Nations, F.A.O., S.A.R.C. and other international organizations. Mountains are of special interest to him. He has extensively traveled through the mountains in India and also the Alps in Europe and American and Canadian Mountains. A nature lover, he is fond of painting, reading and writing. He has painted scores of paintings mainly during the jail stints and exhibitions of his paintings were held in 1998 in the Art Gallery of Patiala University and in 2004 at Hyderabad State Art Gallery.

He has also authored a book entitled "Story of an escape" which was published by Penguin. Its second edition was published as "Quest for freedom – Story of an escape" by Natraj Publishers, Dehradun and was released by the President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. It has been published in Punjabi, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Urdu and has been set in Brail also.
