

PROFILE

Dr Harsh Vardhan, at present Minister of Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, Government of India, was a practicing ENT surgeon before entering public life in 1993. He was elected to the Delhi Assembly that year from Krishna Nagar constituency in east Delhi and went on to retain that seat in all five elections in 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013. In 2014, he contested the Lok Sabha election for the first time and was elected from Chandni Chowk, Delhi.

Fondly called “*Doctor Saab*” by supporters and opponents alike, Dr Harsh Vardhan is known for disarming simplicity in his personal life and transparency at the work place. When he was Minister in the Delhi government (1993-98), the people found him remarkably accessible and officials respected him for his hands-on style of functioning. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee once said of Dr Harsh Vardhan: “*He joined politics with the laudable objective of using his considerable medical knowledge and experience for serving the common man*”.

As Health Minister in the Narendra Modi government for five months, he initiated many reforms in the public health system of the country. He took over as Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences in November 2014 with the confidence of the Prime Minister who earlier held this portfolio. He is committed to set a roadmap for the implementation of the “Make in India” programme by building a robust R&D infrastructure and promoting synergies between industry and scientific research institutions.

The second child of late Om Prakash Goel and Snehlata, Dr Harsh Vardhan was born in December 1954. He has an older sister and a younger brother. Young Harsh Vardhan had his schooling in the Anglo-Sanskrit Victoria Jubilee Senior Secondary School in Daryaganj, which is one of the oldest educational institutions in northern India, founded in 1869. He decided to be a doctor and attended GSVM Medical College in Kanpur from where he obtained his MBBS and MS with specialisation in ENT. He returned to Delhi to set up a private practice as an ENT surgeon. But his restless soul, which had manifested itself earlier and drawn him towards the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, persuaded him to take up projects for the betterment of society. So, he joined the Indian Medical Association’s Delhi Chapter and worked hard in east Delhi, which is his immediate neighbourhood, to build up solidarity of medical practitioners. He held various posts in the Delhi Medical Association – from secretary and President (East Delhi) to state secretary and President, Delhi Medical Association where he showed early signs of his leadership qualities.

Given his remarkable achievements, Dr Harsh Vardhan maintains a low profile. A RSS activist since childhood, he retains the Swayamsevak’s tendency to downplay the “Swayam” giving precedence to “Seva”. Few who follow Indian politics are aware that Dr Harsh Vardhan had pioneered the Pulse Polio programme in India. He launched it first in Delhi, his home city, which was then home to 10 per cent of polio cases in India (60% of the whole world’s cases were in India). In 1994, on a single day (October 2, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi), he organised the mass immunisation of 1.2 million children. No immunisation programme in India before that had involved the marshalling of such

awesome logistics. Interestingly, the entire programme was also supported by school children who acted as “Polio Sena and Polio Sainiks”, apart from activists from over 400 NGOs, the RSS and thousands of people from all walks of life.

But Dr Harsh Vardhan had bigger plans. He dared to visualise a polio-free India, which could only be possible if a regular Pulse Polio campaign was held on a national scale. At first, experts, both Indian and foreign, discounted the possibility of holding it because of the awesome number of doctors, paramedics, volunteers and administrators that would have to be assembled on a single day across the country. Remember, it was the age before Internet, mobile phones and widespread telecommunications and power. Yet, undaunted by these challenges, Dr Harsh Vardhan went around the country persuading the health ministers of all the states to cooperate in making Pulse Polio a success. In the past, no state-level health minister had ever succeeded in recruiting such widespread, bipartisan support for anything, leave alone a **polio eradication programme**.

Today, Pulse Polio is a fact of life in India. On 13th January 2012 India completed one full year without a case of polio being reported, the last case in the country having been reported on 13th January 2011 at Howrah, West Bengal (read article ‘India is almost free of polio’ in Pioneer dated 13th January 2012).

But there are other scourges to tackle also. Dr Harsh Vardhan moved next to control tobacco consumption. As an ENT specialist, he was regularly confronting cases of laryngeal, oral and lung cancers – all attributable to tobacco use. So he conceived the first ever anti-tobacco legislation in India, despite facing stiff opposition from the tobacco lobby whose clout and arrogance at the time knew no bounds. In 1997, under his bold leadership, the **Delhi Prohibition of Smoking and Non-Smokers Health Protection Act** was passed. It was welcomed by hundreds of millions of Indians who were directly and indirectly affected by the tobacco menace. The Supreme Court passed an Order asking all states and the Centre to follow suit. Soon, other states followed Delhi’s example, culminating in a Central legislation banning smoking in public places in 2002. Fighting tobacco is Dr Harsh Vardhan’s passion and he has attended all international conferences on tobacco control in recent years may it be Chicago, Helsinki, Washington or Singapore.

Dr Harsh Vardhan believes that a society does not become “modern” by just changing its superficial appearance. Progress and modernisation means adopting lifestyles that reflect collective maturity and vision. *“You can’t call yourself a superpower if Health for All, Universal Elementary Education and Environment Protection are mere slogans”*, he says. The World Health Organisation has recognised his contribution to society and awarded him the Director-General’s Commendation Medal at a prestigious function held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in May 1998. It was an honour previously bestowed on the likes of US President Bill Clinton and football superstar Pele. In January 2001, Prime Minister Vajpayee honoured him with Rotary International’s **“Polio Eradication Champion Award”**. He is the first Indian to receive this prestigious award, which earlier went to former British Prime Minister John Major, former President of USA Bill Clinton, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and a galaxy of other famous international personalities. At the function held in New Delhi attended by a large number of international luminaries to hand him the award, Prime Minister Vajpayee described Dr Harsh Vardhan as *“Swasthya Vardhan”*.

He is one of the few politicians in the country to enjoy broad, bipartisan admiration. Former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral famously commented at an international event: *“If I have to single out*

one minister for an outstanding award in India, then my first choice will be Dr Harsh Vardhan". Within the BJP, he worked hard to organise the "Doctors' Cell" and established vibrant units in different states of India.

Dr Harsh Vardhan was conferred the Paul Harris Fellowship by Rotary International twice. The International Institute of Polypathy based in Milan, Italy, nominated him as a Fellow in 1996. In 1995, the then President of Lions International, Mr C. Pino Grimaldi, awarded him the Lions International Service Award. In 1994, he received the "IMA President's Special Award of Appreciation" and was given the "IMA Special Award to Eminent Medical Men for Distinguished Achievement of Highest Order" for two successive years – 1995 and 1996. On "Doctor's Day", July 1, 2002, he was named "Doctor of the last Decade" (Swasthya Ratna) by the New Delhi branch of the Indian Medical Association for being the "noblest medical campaigner of the last decade".

A number of prestigious social organisations have honoured Dr Harsh Vardhan with awards and recognitions. The Maharaja Agrasen Forum conferred upon him the 'Aggarwal Ratan Award' in 1994. The Jain Mahasabha bestowed on him the 'Ahimsa Samman' in 1996. The 'Sewa Shree Samman' was given to him in 1996 for his outstanding achievements by Dr Manmohan Singh, the then Finance Minister and former Prime Minister. The All India Conference of Intellectuals conferred on him the 'Delhi Ratan Award'. The Acharya Kshemchand Suman Seva Samiti conferred on him the prestigious Acharya Suman Shree Samman for the year 2001. He has also received the Vocational Excellence Award by the Rotary club of Delhi Uptown for his outstanding contribution in serving the community with special mention of his dedication and commitment in providing relief to the victims of the Gujarat earthquake. He also received a Certificate of Excellence from Dr Bhisham Narain Singh, the former Governor of Tamil Nadu, on behalf of the India International Friendship Society for outstanding services, achievements and contributions. In February 2002, he was honoured at the Polio Plus International Presidential Summit held in Mumbai in acknowledgement of his commitment to the eradication of Polio. In 1999, Dr Harsh Vardhan received the Human Care Award of the Millennium for excellence in the medical profession from the Chief Minister of Delhi, Smt. Shiela Dixit, on behalf of the Punjab & Sind Bank. The International Institute of Integrated Medical Science, Varanasi, awarded him with the Certificate of Academic Excellence. For his services to the environment, Dr Harsh Vardhan received the National Environmental Seva Samman at the 1996 World Environment Congress. Dr Harsh Vardhan has also received the Rashtriya Hindi Samman in 1996 at the All India Hindi Sammelan by the Dr Ganga Sharan Singh Rashtriya Hindi Sansthan.

A major pioneering initiative of Dr Harsh Vardhan was his act of implementing WHO's Essential Drug Programme, which revolutionised governments' attitudes on public health care. Under the concept, maximum budgetary outlay was apportioned to those drugs most needed by the people. It was henceforth known as the "Delhi Model" and taken up by several foreign countries and at least a dozen state governments in India. The Delhi Society for Promotion of Rational use of Drugs, which is a powerful movement now, was thus born and Dr Harsh Vardhan continues to be associated with its progress.

His missionary zeal touched other areas of health care as well. Under him, Delhi's Maulana Azad Medical College got the country's first ever Department for Occupational and Environmental Health.

He launched the **Matri Suraksha Programme** to ensure proper mother and childcare for Delhi's middle and lower income groups. The Cancer Control Programme, the Cataract Free Delhi Programme and the Shravan Shakti Abhiyan for the rehabilitation of the elderly and the hearing impaired, were begun under his leadership. His administration also launched the Healthy City Project, the **Hepatitis B Immunisation Programme** and a Delhi Research Centre for Modernised Promotion of Ayurveda. Two other significant pieces of legislation that bear his stamp are the Delhi Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Act and Delhi Artificial Insemination Act.

Dr Harsh Vardhan's fame as a committed health minister grew far and wide. Experts from all over the world consult him and he is regularly invited abroad to address gatherings of medical practitioners and social activists. His life-long commitment to polio eradication continues notwithstanding his being in power or not. To this end, he also served the South-East Asia office of World Health Organisation (WHO) as an Advisor. He is the first Indian to have been nominated to the prestigious WHO body, the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE), in which capacity he counseled the international body on developing policies on vaccines and biologicals. Apart from this, he has served on the Global Technical Consultative Group and the Technical Consultative Group of the South East Asia region for polio eradication. This is the highest body of WHO dedicated to the elimination of polio.

Dr Harsh Vardhan is a member of several prestigious organisations in not only the medical field, but also culture, diplomacy and related areas. He is a life member of the International Medical Parliamentarians Organisation, the Antar Rashtriya Sahyog Parishad, the Council for International Affairs and Human Rights, the Panchnad Research Institute, the IMA Academy of Medical Specialties, the Association of Otolaryngologists of India, the All India Rhinology Society, the Gems Association and the Delhi Society for Promotion of Rational Use of Drugs. He is also one of the founders of Green Forum, the country's first multi-party platform of leaders interested in environment protection.

Dr Harsh Vardhan has presented research papers at several national and international scientific conferences. He has also contributed to the world's leading medical journals and has travelled in many countries, where he has visited centres of excellence to learn and consider the relevance of developments in the Indian context. He was also a senior member of an Expert Advisory Committee for Health Programmes on Doordarshan Bharti Channel.

He contributes articles on environmentalism, medical ethics and progressive issues to mainstream media. Dr Harsh Vardhan's articles have been published in Hindustan Times, The Indian Express, Punjab Kesri, Organiser and other magazines and journals.

Married to Nutan, a specialist in hospital administration who preferred to be a homemaker, Dr Harsh Vardhan has two sons – Dr Mayank Bharat, who has done his MBBS and MBA from Indian School of Business, Hyderabad. Sachin who did his Accountancy and Finance graduation from Monash University, Melbourne is finishing his C.P.A. now and a daughter, Inakshi, who finished her graduation B.com (Hons) from Delhi University and followed it with MBA and works for a multinational company. His demeanour is uncharacteristic of Indian politicians. He lives in the house built by his father in Krishna Nagar. A non-smoker and teetotaler, Dr Harsh Vardhan believes in the medical efficacy of yoga and physical exercises. He had made sports, yoga and value education compulsory in the school curriculum of Delhi when he was Education Minister.

Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians – indeed the followers of all faiths acknowledge Dr Harsh Vardhan as a leader who can unify societies and bring about national reconciliation. He worked with Imams of mosques all over India to help implement polio immunisation among poor Muslim communities. **In special recognition for his services to the community, the prestigious Ghalib Academy of New Delhi awarded him “best professional” award in April 2008.** In June 2008, he worked closely with the Catholic Archdiocese of New Delhi to launch the first ever anti-plastic bag movement in Delhi called the “*Green Shopper*” campaign which also promotes business partnership in the manufacture and marketing of environment friendly products involving poor communities organised into Self Help Groups across India.

In June 2007, he held a day-long consultation with leaders of the **environment movement** in Delhi and resolved to become India’s premier “green” leader. In July 2008, when he went to the US to address the annual convention of the American Physicians of Indian origin, he was hailed as a “leader of the future” by the entire community of Indian doctors in that country. **The Mayor of Las Vegas, Mr Oscar Goodman, handed him the “key” to the city, an honour given earlier to film actress Aishwarya Rai.**

In December 2004, Dr Harsh Vardhan came out with his own account on how he conceived and implemented the Pulse Polio programme. The book, titled - **A Tale of Two Drops** (English)/ **Kahani Do Boondo ki** (Hindi), was released at a glittering function in New Delhi by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the presence of Shri L.K. Advani, former Deputy Prime Minister of India, Shri Mohan Bhagwat, present RSS chief (General Secretary, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh at the time of release of book), Smt. Sushma Swaraj, former Union Health Minister, and Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, the then Regional Director, World Health Organisation, South East Asia Region.

As President of the Delhi Pradesh unit of the BJP, a position that he enjoyed four times. Dr Harsh Vardhan proved that an able doctor professional could also be a good organiser. Earlier, he had also held the post of Vice-President of the party’s national unit. In late 2003, he was nominated President of the Delhi unit of the BJP. He rebuild the party’s structure from the grass roots to the top most level. The resolve of the common worker was restored and soon the BJP returned on the winner’s track. In April 2007, the party recaptured the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and in 2008, the Delhi Cantonment Board. Under his leadership Party won 7 out of 7 Loksabha seats in 2014 Parliament election and scored maximum number of assembly seats in 2013 elections when he was projected the Chief Ministerial candidate by the Party. He was incharge of Haryana State on behalf of national BJP on two occasions.

Apart from hard politics, Dr Harsh Vardhan was also involved in promoting the legacy of Dr Shyama Prasad Mookherjee, the founder of the Jan Sangh, who gave his life for Jammu and Kashmir’s integration with India, and Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay, the visionary and ideologue who conceived the theory of Integral Humanism. In early 2008, he was named secretary of the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Foundation by the BJP President, Shri Rajnath Singh, which has taken up three important projects: to assemble the collected works of Dr Mukerjee, to restore his house in Kolkata along with all memorabilia including photographs and, most importantly, promote research in topics of national importance (see website: www.indiannationalism.org, www.theideology.org, www.deendayalupadhyaya.org, www.drshyamaprasadmookerjee.org).

Since 2003, as the leader of the principal opposition party of Delhi, Dr Harsh Vardhan has campaigned relentlessly against corruption and mal-governance. He won the respect and admiration of Delhiites for defending their human, civic, environmental and consumer rights. Some of the major issues highlighted by him are corruption in power privatisation, the proposal to privatise Delhi's water, unauthorised colonies, Commonwealth games scam, the fast-running electronic meters, price hike and BRT.

(More details on Dr Harsh Vardhan's policies and programmes are available on his web site, drharshvardhan.com and drharshvardhan.org)
