Acharya Kripalani was among the few national leaders who served the country for more than seven decades. His whole life was marked by adventure and sacrifice.

Kripalani was a born rebel. He had inherited his uncompromising attitude from his parents. He was always up to some mischief or the other in his childhood. He posed several problems to his teachers in his primary and secondary school.

After passing the matriculation examination, he had no plans to continue his education. If he had continued his family tradition or government service, he would have been a good administrator.

However, at the instance of his father, Jiwatram, he joined the Wilson College at Bombay. It was during this period that Kripalani came under the influence of the freedom fighters like Iaf, Bal and Pal who were then agitating against the partition of Bengal.
Kripalani created a lot of trouble for his college authorities also due to his radical political ideas against the British. So he had to leave one institution after another. Then he went back to Karachi for his studies. The young and violent Kripalani was expelled again. From Karachi he migrated to the Fergusson College, Poona. This was an institution inspired by the patriotism of fighters like Tilak. He graduated from this college in 1908.

He served as a school teacher till he took his MA degree in 1912. As a teacher he used to be bold, patriotic and inspiring to his students. His patriotism and non-conformism made him migrate from school to school in Sind. After his MA he was appointed as a Professor of History at Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

Kripalani used to support the revolutionaries in Bengal, Sind and elsewhere with financial aid. He dared to receive Gandhiji as his guest at Muzaffarpur. Kripalani went to Champaran to join Gandhiji who was then leading the indigo planters' movement. He had to lose his job owing to his activities.

The then prevailing situation compelled Kripalani to enter the freedom movement. He accepted the Gandhian means of
truth and non-violence and the technique of Satyagraha. He became a non-violent fighter. He was the first Satyagrahi to be arrested in Champaran.

In 1918 he joined Haribhavan Mohan Malaviya, founder of the Banaras Hindu University, as his personal secretary. Later he worked as Professor of Political Science at the Banaras Hindu University. He had to quit this post when he responded to the call of Mahatma Gandhi to quit educational institutions and join the non-cooperation movement. He started Gandhi Ashram at the Nepali Kothi in Varanasi. The idea behind the ashram was to educate the students who had left their schools and colleges in support of the non-cooperation movement. Kripalani was the implementer of the national education system of India in the true sense of the term. Gandhiji felt a strong urge to establish a national university especially for those who had come out from their schools and colleges to support his movement. The Kashi Vidyapith was established to fulfil this need. Kripalani was appointed as Vice-Principal of the Vidyapith. Along with his teaching work he was actively engaged in constructive work on the Gandhian lines. Kripalani was keen on production of Khadi. On the model of the Gandhi Ashram started at Varanasi, hundreds of Ashrams were opened in the major parts of northern India.
It was a nation-building work of tremendous importance done by Kripalani.

Besides attending to rural development work, he continued to be an active political worker. He had to go to jail on several occasions.

When the Gujarat Vidyanpit was opened in 1923, Kripalani was appointed as its Principal. He served in this capacity in Ahmedabad for five years. It is at this time that he came to be known as "Acharya" Kripalani.

In 1934, Kripalani was appointed as General Secretary of the Indian National Congress. The first thing he did was the reorganisation of the set-up in terms of a number of departments like those of Agrarian Reforms, Labour, Peasants, Information and Publicity, Women's Work, Foreign Relations, Economic Affairs, Constructive Work etc. He also recruited talented and capable persons to head each of the departments.

He organised the work so thoroughly that the British government was alarmed. The nature of his work was totally Gandhian. During this period, when Nehru started preaching socialism, Kripalani, as a committed Gandhian, took serious note
of it. He not only opposed it but sent in the resignations from the Working Committee of himself, along with Bajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel, C. Rajagopalachari, Jammalam Bajaj, Jairamdas Daulatram and Shankar Rao Des.

Kripalani took an active part in the famous 'Quit India' movement. He was arrested and kept in the Ahmednagar fort (prison). Later he was shifted to the Karachi jail where he was kept for three years. He was released only on the eve of the Simla Conference. Kripalani soon intensified the programme of Charkha and Khadi.

Though he participated in the Simla Conference, he was not happy with the turn of events. As a far-sighted man, he had smelled the partition of the country long before it came actually in 1947. At heart, Kripalani was as opposed to partition as ever. To him it was a personal tragedy besides a national calamity.

He was the Congress President during the partition of the country. He had to agree to partition mainly because the Congress had accepted the division of the country. It was against the wishes of Gandhiji. Kripalani himself regretted it in later years.
However Kripalani had not given up the hope of re-uniting India although even after a lapse of 40 years the situation has not changed so as to favour the realisation of that objective.

There were a number of confrontations between Kripalani and Nehru. One such confrontation was over the non-implementation of the Gandhian policies by the leaders of the Congress government. Kripalani found it difficult to persuade the leaders. So he preferred to resign the Presidentship of the Congress.

Kripalani unsuccessfully contested for the same post in 1950 against Shri D.P. Tandon. He formed the Democratic Front within the Congress which he later dissolved at the instance of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Soon however the prevailing situation compelled Kripalani to leave the Congress Party once for all. He founded the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) in 1951. The results of the 1952 general elections however surprised the KMPP as Kripalani himself was defeated from the Fyzabad constituency of Uttar Pradesh. It was a debacle not only for the KMPP but also to the Socialist Party of Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia.

Since the Socialist Party had come to have faith in Gandhiji's political, social and economic ideas and policies, there was a
demand for the merger of both the KMPP and the Socialist Party. Kripalani agreed and a new party known as Praja Socialist Party (PSP) came into existence. Kripalani was made its Chairman. He held this post till the mid-fifties.

Both the leaders of the KMPP and the Socialist Party wanted a classless and casteless society free from social, political and economic exploitation. The Socialists called it the Socialist Society whereas the KMPP leaders called it the Sarvodaya Society. According to Ashoka Mehta, the merger isolated the communists and opened the prospects of weaning away the people from them.

But the merger did not last long. Though there was no opposition from the rank and file of the KMPP since it was relatively a nascent party, there was considerable opposition from the side of the Socialist rank and file.

Kripalani continued to be the Chairman of the PSP till the Nagpur session. At that session he submitted his resignation. He complained that he received no respect from either the leaders or the rank and file of the party, and that since his judgements were not valued, there was no point in his remaining as a Chairman of the party.
Kripalani had an active parliamentary life. He was a member of the Constituent Assembly. Unfortunately he was defeated in the first general elections in 1952. But he entered the parliament by winning a by-election from Sitamarhi constituency (Bihar) in 1953. He retained the seat in the 1957 general elections. In 1962 he was defeated from the North Bombay constituency. In 1963 he entered the parliament via a by-election which he won from Amroha (U.P.). Again in the 1967 elections he faced defeat from Raipur (M.P.). This time he had stood as an independent. In the same year however he won the by-election from Guna (M.P.) and entered the parliament.

He remained a member of parliament till the end of 1970 after which year he decided to give up parliamentary life.

Kripalani was a seasoned parliamentarian. He used to take part in vital discussions. He aimed at safeguarding the interests of his countrymen in the light of the Gandhian values. He used to point out the errors and failures of the government. He was often critical of Nehru's foreign policy. He was fair and used to judge every issue on its merits.

Even in the old age he was quite active. He toured the length and breadth of the country warning the countrymen against
the dictatorial rule of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Carrying on the
fight against the internal emergency, declared by Mrs. Gandhi in
June 1975, was like Kripalani's second struggle for freedom.

He was a chief force in installing the Janata Party
government at the centre in 1977. Though he announced his
retirement from active public life, he did not lay down his powerful
pen. He continued to issue press statements and contributed a
series of articles to educate both the masters and the servants
in democratic India.

Kripalani was not only a political leader but also an
educationist. He had been a teacher, a professor, a vice-
principal and a principal. The action taken against Kripalani
by the authorities during his college days, when he had to migrate
from college to college, made him a nationalist.

Kripalani, as an ardent follower of Gandhiji, had already
implemented a number of programmes long before the basic education
system came into existence. The Gandhi Ashram, started by him
at Varanasi during the non-cooperation days, aimed at production
of Khadi by the students.

Kripalani knew the pros and cons of the system of basic
education. The new scheme, when it was announced, was opposed
by many Indian educationists, including some Vice-Chancellors. Kripalani, while supporting the basic education scheme, rightly criticised those educationists as belonging to an earlier era.

According to him, the Western system of education was thoroughly bad. He observed that it violated all the known principles of good and scientific education.

The basic education scheme was an attempt to replace the Western system of education by a more dynamic one. Kripalani defended the reforms initiated by Gandhiji in many ways. He expounded the ten principles constituting the core of basic education.

Kripalani warned the radicals and Marxists, who had no faith in moral philosophy, against using the Wardha scheme for their own narrow purposes.

The Acharya was of the opinion that the goal of a true democratic society can be achieved only when there is mutual understanding and cooperation among groups and individuals. To him, the basic education scheme was ideal for introducing a common productive activity in the schools.
While commenting on the student unrest in some of the universities in India, Kripalani held that the unrest was mainly due to the defective system of Western education in the country.

Kripalani had critically examined the various reports on education such as the Radhakrishnan Commission report and the Kothari Commission report and felt that the suggested reforms had not gone far enough.

Though the methods of basic education seemed to be simple, natural and scientific, there were difficulties regarding implementation. Kripalani felt that the greatest difficulty was to find and train the necessary teachers for translating the scheme into practice.

Kripalani's thinking and activities in the field of economic reconstruction and modernisation of India were not only sound but have also, rightly, influenced the course of events in the country. Kripalani believed that large-scale industrialisation of the Western type was destructive to the traditional arts and handicrafts in India. He was not against industrialisation or mechanisation as such. With Mahatma Gandhi he believed that science and technology were undoubtedly desirable and valuable. But he insisted that science and technology
or machines have to be used in the service of the toiling millions of India and people elsewhere. He argued that for the sound economy and rapid modernisation the economic philosophy and programmes should centre around small-scale industries or cottage industries which would be labour-intensive and provide employment and wages to the teeming millions of India and which would enhance the spirit of self-reliance of masses. He believed that this was the foundation for the reconstruction of India and India's modernisation. He insisted that the economic programme of India should be such that it must be fully consistent with the moral and political dimensions of India's life and people. He believed that the Western-type industrialisation militated against the traditional labour-intensive pattern of activities in the country, specially the economic or industrial activities. Hence he stood firmly for industrialisation in the sense of spread of the labour-intensive or small-scale industries in the framework of a mixed economy so that these would ultimately lay the foundation for an economically just and sound social order and pave the way for modernisation as well.

Kripalani was a multi-faceted personality. He reflected many areas of human thought and activity. There were not fields where he did no venture. His voluminous literature covered
subjects like history, politics, law, journalism, sociology, economics and so on.

Like basic education, he defended democracy, liberty, freedom, rights, property, courts and judiciary, Charkha, Khadi, village industries, village panchayats etc.

He strongly condemned communism. He rejected the economic interpretation of history, the theory of class struggle and the method of armed insurrection. The ideology behind the rejection of the communist method by Kripalani was that bad means could never be justified by ostensibly noble ends.

Kripalani, a staunch supporter of Gandhiji, was a confirmed believer in non-violence, class cooperation and decentralisation of power, both political and economic. He found no truth in the slogans like "The proletariat of all countries unite" or "The poor have nothing to lose but their chains." He believed that these slogans had been falsified in every war involving a communist country.

Kripalani was a champion of fundamental rights. He strongly criticised the Congress government when it passed the two amendments to the constitution, the 24th and the 25th, in 1972.
The 24th amendment was passed to make the parliament to
competent/alter, abridge or take away any of the fundamental
rights guaranteed in the constitution.

He held that the 25th amendment would adversely affect
some other fundamental rights of the citizen.

According to Kripalani, the people in a country where
there was no democracy, freedom or liberty, could not be called
citizens. They were either subjects or slaves.

Kripalani advocated the Gandhian values of truth and
non-violence. He also advocated a free press. To him, democracy
and non-violence were essential to each other. He spoke not only
of political democracy but also of economic democracy.

He loved freedom and hated aggression. He viewed freedom
not only in the context of India but also in an international
context.

Kripalani condemned the French Imperialists when they tried
to crush the Vietnamese nationalists. He was the first Indian
leader to issue a press statement in which he regretted that
the French who valued their own freedom so highly should try to
deprive the Vietnamese of their freedom.
He criticised Britain's colonial policies in Malaya, Kenya, Singapore, Cyprus and Aden. He also condemned the British government's policy of terror against the Africans and Indians who lived in Africa. In a statement in the Lok Sabha, he criticised Britain and other Commonwealth countries for racial discrimination.

The Acharya condemned the combined attack by England, France and Israel on Egypt. Nor did he spare the Russian intervention in Hungary.

Kripalani was one of the great critics of India's foreign policy. According to him, the foreign policy of India was neither independent nor serving the vital interest of the country. He felt that this policy believed in passive and negative neutrality and was based on appeasement, sentimentalism and cheap popularity.

A seasoned critic of non-alignment, Acharya Kripalani held that India was weak and slow in applying the principle of non-alignment in case of the USSR and China.

Kripalani was aware of China's intention when it occupied the Indian territory (Aksai Chin). He had warned the Nehru government of a possible attack by China on India's border.
Nehru felt that Kripalani was unnecessarily apprehensive. But Kripalani's apprehension proved well-founded when China attacked India's northern borders in 1962.

As a parliamentarian Kripalani used to make sound suggestions to the ruling party. He was right in pleading that it was in the interest of the ruling party to consult opposition parties on various foreign policy issues.

Kripalani was against the military alliances. He opposed the power blocs. To him military aid was as dangerous as economic aid. He wanted that India should be self-sufficient in all fields.

Kripalani condemned the formation of regional security pacts like SEATO and the Baghdad pact. He viewed such pacts as dangerous to the security of peace-loving countries like India.

Kripalani always pleaded for close and friendly relations with all neighbouring countries.

The Lok Sabha paid rich tributes to Kripalani soon after it received the news of the death of the 94-year old Gandhian leader.
Mr. Balram Jakhar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, recalled the services of Kripalani to the parliament and the nation and his crusade for truth and moral values in public life.

In the 40-minute obituary references, Acharya Kripalani's independence of thought, his lucidity in writing and forcefulness in oratory and his reluctance to aspire for power were praised.

Professor Madhu Dandavate remarked that the last bastion of Gandhian thought and action had collapsed. He said that the Acharya, with an incisive mind, had represented the conscience of the nation.

There was no doubt that Kripalani was an able and gifted individual. But he had his own limitations. These limitations came to the fore when he was engaged in the task of nation building and developing the spirit of nationalism before India became free. One of his patent limitations seems to be an implicit reliance on Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and principles. As a result, the defects and shortcomings that characterised Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy characterised his philosophy also. Mahatma Gandhi believed in unilateral disarmament. Logically Kripalani also believed in this philosophy and preached it. One wishes that he had exercised his own independent judgement and
not placed so much reliance on Mahatma Gandhi's judgement. But this did not seem to have happened. This attachment to the Gandhian philosophy and Gandhian approach of purity and altruism etc. and readiness to give up office in any situation, without caring for consequences, landed Kripalani in confrontation with several Congress leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel. Kripalani was very keen on the government's practising the Gandhian policies. At the same time, Kripalani could not develop any smooth working relations with the Congress leaders and government. This caused his resignation as Congress President. Kripalani was a powerful individual no doubt. But he seemed to be less skilful in getting along with people or building the party machine. He does not seem to have appreciated the fact that team work was necessary to carry out large undertakings or programmes in the interest of people. Kripalani did have a powerful mass support on the whole. Although he failed to win a few elections, he could win by-elections from some other constituencies and get returned to the parliament. This shows that he had the political strength. But it seems that he could not get along with the mainstream leadership of the Congress party and as a result he could not perform the nation-building role from inside the government. In this respect he was more like Jayaprakash Narayan who was powerful politically but who
fought shy of accepting any official or ministerial responsibility in the central government.

Since Kripalani was powerful and influential and highly articulate, he functioned as an opposition leader in the Indian parliament for a long time. He also led a number of protest Morchas and demonstrations. He provided a rallying point for the opposition parties and groups to unite for particular causes. This was seen most fruitfully in the emergence of the Janata Party and in its assumption of power at the centre. But the party, being essentially a collection of disparate forces, could not carry for long the responsibility of ruling such a large nation with so many chronic problems.

But, on the other hand, it may be argued that Kripalani had his own ideas of developing the national movement and performing the task of nation-building. He preferred to act as a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and engaged in the nationalist projects like those of Khadi and village industries, civil disobedience, Satyagraha, basic education and so on. Kripalani was a party builder no doubt. But he acted more as a builder of movements than party machines. As a result, he created political forces in the shape of the Congress organisation, the KMP and the ESP and so on but he was not attached to these
organisational selfish and motivated leaders are attached to
the party machines built by them over the years. While every
other major leader had his own home state or constituency in
terms of his community, Kripalani had none. Apart from the fact
that his home province, Sind, went away as part of Pakistan,
Kripalani was opposed to the idea of belonging to any particular
region or section of India. He contested elections or by-
elections from diverse parts of India. He preferred to produce
results on the strength of his work, skills and convictions.
Kripalani built the Congress Party in the 1930s and streamlined
its working. He also acted as a successful opposition leader in
the post-independence years. But in all these contexts he
preferred to function as an intellectual, as a speaker and writer,
as a man of ideals and ideas, as a man of wise criticism and
constructive comment. It is in this capacity that he has rendered
a phenomenal service to the cause of Indian nationalism and
nation-building.