

Charan Singh and the Congress

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To write about any politician is to play with fire. But Paul R Brass, an eminent political scientist, does so deftly. He shows us the life and times of Charan Singh, the well-known agrarian leader, who went on to become the chief minister of the most populous state of the country. The times were turbulent.

Brass, in his work, does not sing hosannas for Charan Singh. He holds the politician in high esteem, but does not lose sight of his flaws. The armour, no matter how strong, has chinks too. The maturity and objectivity come easily to Brass, who has published several books and has authored numerous articles on comparative and south Asian politics, ethnic politics, and collective violence. His work has been based on extensive field research in India during his many visits since 1961.

The book develops a consistent argument that Charan Singh's courage and conviction made him what he was. It provides a rare insight into the working of the minds of politicians. Brass analyses Charan Singh's thinking in this volume beautifully, the second of a multi-volume work on *The Politics of Northern India: 1937 to 1987*.

The book is well organised in terms of its content and context. It has 11 chapters and is divided into three parts. It is an important milestone in accessing the contemporary politics of north India.

Other than this, it consists of interesting appendices. Appendix A gives a day-by-day account of the state employees' strike in UP, from 14 July 1966 to 28 July 1967, while Appendix B gives brief biographies of and interviews with persons mentioned prominently in this volume. The book also provides a chronology of principal events in the life of Charan Singh in about three and a half pages.

Reorganising the State

The book opens with a vivid account of the reasons that played a role in causing differences between the western and

An Indian Political Life: Charan Singh and Congress Politics, 1957 to 1967 by Paul R Brass; (New Delhi: Sage India), 2012, pp 508, Rs 895.

eastern districts of the state. Chapter 1 explains the general conditions that tend to divide opinions in terms of language and economic issues with particular focus on UP, which happened to be struck by regional disparity. In this chapter the writer delineates the reasons why, unlike such disputes at other places, in UP, language could not take a central position between the two regions at variance despite having quite different languages. Instead, it is mentioned that more sensitive issues were raised concerning the moral character of the people, the habits of different castes, and their "work ethic" to draw lines between the regions.

It brings out in great detail how Charan Singh, while holding the portfolio of revenue, dealt with the scarcity conditions of the eastern districts and the opposition's demands, with a lot of misgivings. It is mentioned that this attitude portrayed him as a tough administrator. This is brought out through media reports, letters and drafts sent to the chief minister by Charan Singh showing his discomfiture. The chapter also successfully puts the message across regarding Charan Singh's idea of democratic principles.

For Charan Singh, mass movements in free India were undemocratic and he had an unapologetic stand on terminating a popular movement. Though the book is dedicated to statesmen with integrity, it does not fail to bring out the follies committed by them. It explains how the selective viewing of the reports and the skewed vision of Charan Singh regarding the legitimate democratic practices and the opposition's exaggerated demands did no good to the people at the ground level. The opening chapter begins to give glimpses of how politics works away from ground realities and how the art of wooing people, negotiating, and defecting is used for political aspirations.

The second chapter of the book insinuates that Charan Singh was in favour of a reorganisation of state boundaries, citing his alleged aloofness from the problems of the people of the eastern districts. Origins of the demand to separate western UP from the eastern part have been efficiently traced through for a comprehensive politico-historic picture. How Charan Singh remained silent on the demand of separation, yet supportive of his allies vouching for it, is traced and analysed well. To substantiate this account, Charan Singh's letter to Indira Gandhi is well incorporated, in which he gives major arguments in favour of creating Delhi Suba. It also talks about how the agitations and political demands give motivation to other states, cases in point being the division of Andhra province and the demands for the break-up of UP. It also cites the development and pursuit of the demands for Brij Pradesh, Avadh and Poorva Pradesh.

Charan Singh did favour the reorganisation, but not for the reasons that the opposition accused him of. While saying so, the writer nowhere seems to be defending Charan Singh's case, he rather tries to say things solely through documented facts. It is mentioned that the accusation of an increasing proportion of Jats in such a province is highly exaggerated. Yet again, the scope of opportunities for the politicians that reorganisation brings along has not been dismissed. Here, it is also explained why Mulayam Singh Yadav prevailed over Ajit Singh, Charan Singh's only male heir. The chapter talks of strategic alliances and negotiations in the power struggle in UP, revolving around the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), and the formation of other small parties by the defectors.

Through the case study of the making of Uttarakhand, the writer brings hidden layers involving the political processes out into the open.

The third chapter covers the developmental policies and Charan Singh's stand on rural and agricultural policies, as well as his vision for UP. It reveals the leader's intolerance for corruption and

irregularities. Here, the case in point being the “irregularities in the grant of loan in two cases involving Sahu Jain’s company and the government” (p 114; further reference on p 116). There is a section cut out for Charan Singh’s assessment of the Sahu Jains, the Birlas and the Rihand dam project. A statement prepared for presentation in the legislative assembly is taken to understand Charan Singh’s assessment of Sahu Jain’s arrangement, which brings out his craft of reason and articulation based on conviction. This section adeptly brings out Charan Singh’s abhorrence for the industrial class.

The writer surveyed the sites of dam constructions several years hence, and gives a complete back-and-forth explanation of the fears and interests behind the constructions. This section very clearly brings out the sagacity of Charan Singh and places him in the category of fantasists.

The book also documents Charan Singh’s audacity and courage to speak on corrupt practices going on inside the government in Chapter 4. The writer, here, agrees that Charan Singh’s characterisation of the rapidly-developing system of corruption and idleness can hardly be faulted. It highlights Charan Singh’s concern and restlessness regarding the lack of attention to the needs of the cultivator and the necessity of the centrality of agriculture to the well-being of the country. It also includes how Charan Singh went on to reveal charges of casteism, corruption and nepotism against the then chief minister, Sampurnananda.

Follies of the Fantast

The next chapter, “Interval” covers the period of his resignation against his “true desires”, and the intermediate period that was necessary for Charan Singh to regain power in terms of self-respect and political presence. It shows how he had joined hands with his worst enemy, C B Gupta, and made fresh allies. It talks about Charan Singh’s stand in favour of reconciliation with Sampurnananda during a time of danger, which the country was going through in the face of the Indo-China conflict, even though it was not fruitful to him for his political advancement.

It is notable to mention that the writer does not hesitate to reveal the evidence regarding Charan Singh’s love of power. In a letter that Charan Singh wrote to Pandit Pant, he discloses his love of power as well as his anguish about it. He also talks about the takeover of C B Gupta during 1960-63, after the fall of the Sampurnananda government. Here, it is elucidated how Charan Singh dealt with the police, of whom he was in charge. His failures in assessing the situation during the 1961 riots in western UP have been well documented. Statements are also mentioned that reflect “his deficient knowledge and lack of understanding the mechanics of riot production” (pp 180-81). It documents the realities of administration and police behaviour in UP.

In Chapter 6, we see the relations between Charan Singh and C B Gupta, which could never work given their opposite concerns and personalities. It is also mentioned here how Nehru decisively tried to intervene in UP politics. There is a detailing of the events, the clash of interests and the showdowns, which is reflective of comprehensive research.

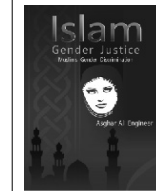
The chapter on Sucheta Kripalani, “Sucheta! (1962-65)”, shows how she became the chief minister of UP under impossible circumstances and had to deal with the quarrels among “fractious members of the cabinet” (p 232). It also talks about how she asserted her independence and survived as chief minister. It brings to the fore the kind of resignation games that were played then. The theme of the work, i e, how UP politics functioned at three levels: the government, the state party organisation, and the centre.

Chapter 8, “Crisis and Sabotage”, narrates the state employees’ agitation for an increase in dearness allowances, and Charan Singh’s role in arguing against any concession to the employees. The hostility to Charan Singh among officers and cabinet members is also mentioned. Charan Singh’s defection from the Congress and the launching of a new party, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD), is also covered. Charan Singh became the chief minister in 1967, and the bitterness between government employees and Charan Singh throughout his tenure is referred to in this chapter. The

GYAN BOOKS HIGHLIGHTING WOMEN ISSUES

ISLAM GENDER JUSTICE

Muslims Gender Discrimination
Asghar Ali Engineer



These essays deal with various problems like fatwas issued on marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody of children etc. and attempts critique of these fatwas. The author maintains in these essays that Muslim practices deviate from Qur’anic pronouncements on gender equality and women’s rights clearly spell out in Qur’an. The rights of women in

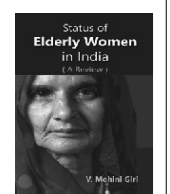
Muslim societies are mainly determined, not by Qur’anic pronouncements but by cultural practices and hence it appears that Islam suppresses women’s rights which is not true.

ISBN: 978-81-212-1169-7, 312pp., 2013, Rs. 900

STATUS OF ELDERLY WOMEN IN INDIA

(A Review)
V. Mohini Giri

The book attempts to address the various issues concerning the elderly women in India. Taking a close look at the status of elderly women in the country, it presents a critical analysis of the various aspects of the life of elderly people such as their human rights, their safety and protection, mainstreaming and capacity building, self-reliance, nutritional status, and health care.

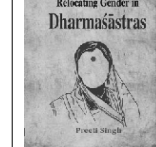


Further analysing the role of science and technology in the welfare of elderly people, the book also examines the impact of National Policy on them.

ISBN: 978-81-212-1190-1, 281pp., 2013, Rs. 850

RELOCATING GENDER IN DHARMAŚĀSTRAS

Preeti Singh



The study on dharmaśāstras which are treated as one of the major sources of Hindu law is an important example of non-contextual study. Unfortunately, most of the researchers in the field of dharmaśāstric studies apply the method of selective study. These śāstric texts have been used by different groups for diverse purposes. What is significant to note is that some have derived not only different but opposite meanings from the same śāstric texts.

The present work emphasises the need of holistic study of śāstric texts and women’s position therein. It tries to establish that both the critics and extollers of dharmaśāstric tradition lack in an honest portrayal of reality, which perhaps was situated in between the two extremes and was placed in the socio-historical milieu of the times.

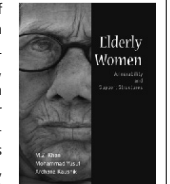
ISBN: 978-81-7835-955-7, 322pp., 2013, Rs. 950

ELDERLY WOMEN

Vulnerability and Support Structures

M. Z. Khan, Mohammad Yusuf and Archana Kaushik

The book focuses on a cross-section of elderly women in nine states of India having a high proportion of BPL households, including Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh. Going deep into their socio-demographic background, it addresses issues pertaining to their livelihood, nutrition and health, interpersonal relations and vulnerability risks. It also presents a critical assessment of the awareness and availability of existing social security schemes meant to shield the elderly women from undeserved want and vulnerability.



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in-between happenings are also covered in the “fast forward section of the chapter” (p 290).

The next chapter squarely puts forth the face of the ministers of UP. The writer heavily banks on letters, documents, files, and reports to portray the scenario. He juxtaposes the cases in point and their arguments along with his own analysis. The accusations of and around three points-persons have been dealt with in detail for a clearer picture, viz, Kailash Prakash, ranked 15th in the cabinet holding the portfolio of education; Banarsi Das, C B Gupta’s right-hand man and Sucheta Kripalani’s spokesman; and Chaturbhuj Sharma, one of the dissidents engaged in exposing the alleged misbehaviour of Banarsi Das. The alleged scandal of Chaturbhuj Sharma involving an American woman is also mentioned.

Congress Decline

The penultimate chapter of the book looks into “The Forms of Corruption”. In fact, three chapters deal with the conditions that were preparing the ground for the decline and disintegration of the Congress. Chapter 9, as mentioned already, deals with groupism and corruption charges in great detail. Chapter 10 enumerates the forms of corruption

that north Indian politics and bureaucracy was riddled with since before Independence. The ministries that were supposedly wallowing in plundering are mentioned, for example, irrigation, education, transport, industries, cooperation, local self-government and panchayati raj. Detailed accounts of certain cases are mentioned to get the message across. The case of Muzaffar Hasan as the minister of transport and his mother-in-law, the operator holding one of the biggest interstate bus routes, is mentioned to show the stubborn attitude and the extent of corrupt practices and nepotism prevalent. In this case, the helplessness of the chief minister is also portrayed. The case in point also reveals the unwillingness of the officials to accept an appointment as head of an inquiry against a sitting minister, as mentioned in the chapter.

The last chapter of the book, “Disintegration of the Congress”, traces the trajectory of the decline and disintegration of the Congress. The failure of the Congress in operating as the governing party, its incapability of providing stable leadership and inefficiency in devising and implementing rational public policies, is portrayed as the reason behind the folding up of the Congress Party in UP. The patronage-laden system, loss

of control over the party organisation, and the malignant political gains by the rivals are all convincingly and methodically presented as the factors responsible for the failure of the Congress.

The immense research and time invested in the detailing of each and every argument makes the book an important work for understanding the nuances of north Indian politics. The sources used make the work unbiased and authentic to a large extent along with the discretionary interpretations of the researcher. The researcher has interviewed the peasants and local people, yet there is no section in the book narrating their grievances or acceptance regarding the political scenario prevalent in UP.

Due to the documentation of the facts the book becomes close to the bone. It is a must-read for those who wish to understand the various layers of politics, how politicians work, corruption, nepotism, and the grip of sycophancy. Some leaders, despite flaws that make them so human, stand tall.

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Books Received

Agarwala, Rina (2013); *Informal Labour, Formal Politics, and Dignified Discontent in India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press), pp xx + 250, Rs 895.

Campbell, Ben (2013); *Living between Jupiter and Palm: Nature, Culture and Power in the Himalayas* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), pp viii + 392, Rs 995.

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Dhaktode, S S (2013); *Human Rights & Indian Constitution: Dr B R Ambedkar’s Enduring Legacies* (Mumbai: Bhashya Prakashan), pp xxxiii + 602, Rs 650.

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