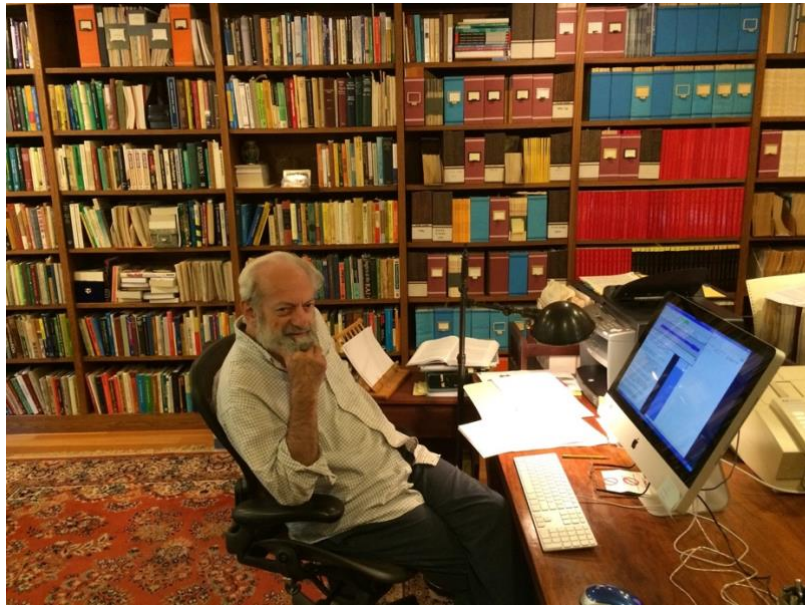


Paul R Brass

8 November 1936 – 31 May 2022



Paul Brass. August 2015 at his home study in Acme, Washington State, USA.

A Tribute

Paul Brass was a renowned academic of political science, with the finest reputation as a leading American scholar on modern Indian society. Paul built this sterling reputation over 50 painstaking years of field-work in North India that resulted in the publication of a score of respected and well-read books, and hundreds of articles and talks on the nature of Indian politics and communalism in India. Behind this incisive, analytical mind and gruff exterior was a caring man, a side that few in India were exposed to. I was one of the lucky few.

My unlikely bond with this eminent man of letters began in 2012: Paul was 76, I was 52. I had little knowledge of the social sciences or academia, having just exited a business career helping produce software in India for world markets. In hindsight, it was our love for Chaudhary Charan Singh that brought us together. Singh was Paul's favourite Indian politician, and my maternal grandfather. It was a startling, and pleasant, realisation for me in 2012 on reading Paul's freshly published Volume 1 of *Charan Singh and Congress Politics : 1937 to 1961* that erudite Paul found Singh to be an exceptionally principled man with intellectual depth and vision. Thus commenced my very personal journey of exploring my grandfather's soul, and in many ways discovering and re-defining my thinking as I commenced farming on 2.5 acres near my home in Gurgaon. Paul's scholarship enabled me ground my admiration and respect for Charan Singh in facts and careful analysis, beyond loyalty and personal experience.

For the nation, Charan Singh (1902-1987) is India's tallest peasant leader, with his birth anniversary celebrated as Farmer's Day across India though the rural remains forgotten. Paul published the first volume of a three volume series '*An Indian Political Life – Charan Singh and Congress Politics*' in 2012. Born in a poor, tenant, illiterate peasant family in the most populous Indian state of Uttar

Pradesh (U.P.)¹, Singh was active in India's struggle for freedom from the British empire and indeed was imprisoned for over two and a half years over three Congress campaigns. His unusually high intelligence and application enabled him pursue higher studies despite highly striated circumstances. First elected to the U.P. legislature in 1936, he was re-elected continually till 1977 and he remained a Cabinet Minister for most of this period. Singh was elected to Parliament between 1977 and 1987, and was Prime Minister of India in 1979-80.

Singh's importance in India goes beyond elected positions, it was his advocacy of an agrarian life that caught the imagination of the rural masses and peasants; one that remains alive today almost four decades after his death. He was recognised as one of India's greatest sons by the award of the nation's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna (Jewel of India) by the President of India on 30 March 2024, a recognition given to only 53 Indians since Independence.

Paul met Charan Singh (then an important minister in the U.P. administration) for the first time in 1961 in Lucknow (the capital of U.P.) where Paul resided till 1963 for his Ph. D. research under the guidance of the reputed Indologist Prof. Myron Weiner. Paul was 25, and Singh 59. The gap of age and culture between the two was quickly bridged as Paul's doctoral dissertation - published as *Factional Politics in An Indian State*² in 1965 - had positive references to Singh's politics, policies and character.

"Charan Singh has many of the qualities of the ideal Indian faction leader. He is known for his intellectual abilities and has a reputation for integrity. No one has ever charged him with a desire for material advantages for himself.Charan Singh is faithful to his friends, provided their requests for favours are both reasonable and just to his satisfaction." Pp 141-142

This relationship grew stronger and into one of mutual respect as both advanced in achievements and age. Singh saw in Paul a common intellectual spirit, a kind he didn't get to engage with at all in politics and greatly desired. Much later, in 1983, Singh accepted Paul's commitment to write his biography and provided complete access to his vast collection of confidential papers. These papers from 1936 to 1984 are a treasure trove of political and social history that enables one trace the disintegration of the Indian National Congress. Only an accomplished academic such as Paul could weave a story around these.

I was innocent of all of this knowledge till Paul's Volume 1³ was published in early 2012. While there were scores of biographies of Singh of varying quality, no scholar of repute such as Paul had written a book on Charan Singh. Indeed, there are few scholarly biographies on public figures from Uttar Pradesh other than political giants like Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Ram Manohar Lohia.

In a rapidly urbanising and industrialising world, Singh ploughed a lonely furrow. He wrote and spoke passionately in favour of investing India's scarce resources and minds in the self-cultivating peasant economy, in agriculture, and village-based industry. He advocated Gandhian thinking of generating employment in the rural economy through small-scale jobs and jettisoning the imported models of both state or private industry-led heavy industrialisation and mechanisation that the

¹ Uttar Pradesh's population today is 240 million.

² <https://www.charansingh.org/books/1990>

³ <https://charansingh.org/books/1743>

world follows. It is little wonder Singh was, and is, looked on with fear and disdain by the urban elite. In Singh's time, 80% of India lived in the villages (67% yet do). The elite judged Charan Singh on his rural politics prejudiced by urban media and informed by their own high-caste privileges and Macaulite education. Paul understood all this, and spoke in an objective voice. He wrote these 3 volumes on Charan Singh from his intimate knowledge of hundreds of Indian politicians in meticulously recorded interviews over 40 years. He understood that Singh's ethical life and vision of India as an agrarian civilisation was the source of his politics, policies and quest for political power.

Paul too saw in Singh a kindred spirit. He writes in the Preface to Volume 1:

"I greatly regret that I disappointed Charan Singh by failing to produce his biography before his death. It is no secret that I admired Charan Singh in many ways, even though I did not always share his views on contemporary Indian politics.But I do admire those few persons in political life who see politics as their vocation, pursue clearly stated goals, and do not enrich themselves in the process. The numbers are tiny in my country and in India. Charan Singh was such a man..... with Charan Singh, I felt a certain kinship of character which perhaps will be revealed in my assessment of him in these volumes." Pp. xxi

Reading Volume 1 in 2012 was thus a transformative event. Here was an American finding commonality of ethics with a politician in distant India, recognising fully the depth of his intellect. Paul had taken 30 years, but he redeemed his pledge to write this biography. I was stunned seeing Paul's depth of commitment. And here I was, grandson of a man I admired so, knowing little about him and doing even less to preserve his memory. This realisation provided the impetus and required shake-up. I had recently separated from a successful corporate career in December 2011, had the resources and time to do what I wanted. What I needed was a lifelong project, which Paul's scholarship now provided. None of this could be a coincidence, it was destined. My father Dr. Jai Pal Singh had passed away in 1998, and my mother Ved Wati in May 2012. In hindsight, 2012 seems a handover year from my parents to this connection of affection with Paul. Condoling my mother's death, he wrote "I do have a sense of being closely connected to all of you." I engaged with Paul for 3 years planning the digital archives and re-publication of the many books and papers of Charan Singh. Paul was always forthcoming and helpful and often requested me to stay with him and go through the files and material in his possession.

Paul's books, articles, interviews and his encouragement and support were instrumental in establishing the Charan Singh Archives⁴ (CSA) as the primary source of the great man's intellectual legacy, his life and thought for libraries, scholars, the government, and the public. Paul figures prominently here.⁵ I read all of Paul's books and articles on Charan Singh and his times, as well as his recommendations of other scholars of his time and they became the foundation on which I subsequently built my intimate understanding of Singh. On 23 December 2015, the 113th birth anniversary of Charan Singh and the formal launch of CSA, Paul wrote "I am delighted and deeply moved by what you have done and the prominence you have given to my work and to my love for your grandfather."

Paul had interviewed my father and my mother on Charan Singh, thanks to which I have the only recording of my father's voice. I also have 12 oral interviews of Charan Singh recorded over 25

⁴ <https://www.charansingh.org/>

⁵ <https://charansingh.org/archives/biography-charan-singh-paul-r-brass>

years as well as with hundreds of politicians that Paul shared with me with an open heart. His condition was for me not to publish any of them while the interviewee was alive. By sharing his research with me Paul was, I feel, paying his debt of trust to a man who had shared his own confidential papers in 1983.



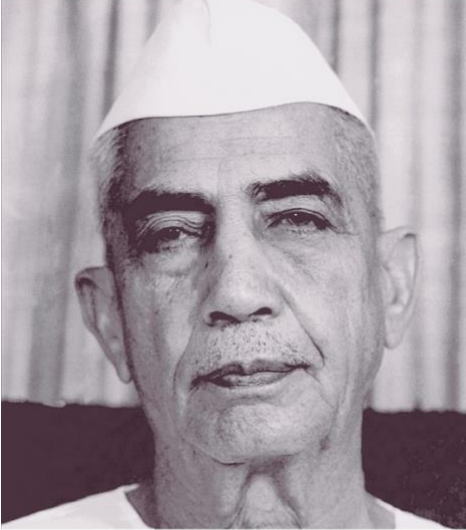
Paul Brass and Harsh Singh Lohit.
August 2015 in Boondocks, Acme, Washington State, USA.

My friendship with Paul and Susan Brass commenced in 2012, and soon became a close one. We met and spoke multiple times when they were visiting India between November 2012 to July 2013, dinners at our home and theirs in Delhi, and evenings with journalists, politicians and friends. We kept in touch on the phone and on email when they returned to Washington state. In 2015, Paul and Su were kind enough to invite me to Boondocks, their sanctuary in the woods near Seattle. “My memory is not as good as it used to be!” as Paul often wrote, a sign of his struggle with ageing and Alzheimer’s; nonetheless we spoke of his times in India, his own life, he opened to me his multiple libraries with hundreds of rare books on India. Paul, Su and I walked the boardwalk, played horseshoes, ate fruits off the trees, cooked food and drove to Seattle for a day out. It was a most memorable visit.



Susan and Paul Brass at University of Washington, Seattle in August 2015

None of Paul's books had been made available in any Indian language, though he shared that Chinese publishers were interested in obtaining translations of his books on India. It seems ordained that I would be the instrument of his only Hindi publications. On 23 December 2016, the Hindi translation of Paul's volumes was launched by the then Vice President of India M. Hamid Ansari, in the presence of a galaxy of politicians including former Prime Minister Deve Gowda.⁶ Paul responded in his inimitable way on email "Looked like a nice event, but it would have been better if they had recognized me more - because in one of the articles it sounds as if Vice President Hamid Ansari wrote the book." The publisher has since ceased academic publishing in India, and CSA and Su Brass now make these volumes available in Hindi and English to the reading public.⁷



एक भारतीय राजनीतिक जीवन
चरण सिंह और कांग्रेस राजनीति
१९३७ से १९६१

पॉल आर. ब्रास

यह पुस्तक 1937 से 1961 के दौर की राजनीति में चरण सिंह की भूमिका पर केंद्रित है। उस समय के बड़े मुद्दों, विधायी और गतिविधियों का विस्तृत ब्यौर भी इसमें दिया गया है।


इस किताब में एक ऐसे सिद्धांतवादी और स्वाभिमानी व्यक्ति के शुरुआती जीवन का उल्लेख है जो एक सर्मापित राष्ट्रवादी था। जिसने देश के लिए देश के नेताओं द्वारा चुने गए मार्ग और इसके अधिकांश पेशेवर राजनेताओं की निंदा की। जबकि अपने देश से प्यार भी किया। यह साधारण फूटभूमि वाला और ग्रामीण क्षेत्र से था। लेकिन वह कोई गांव का गंवार नहीं था बल्कि अपने द पर सफलता की सीढ़ी चढ़ने वाला बेहद बुद्धिमान शख्स था। एक मझोले जाट परिवार से तास्तुक रहने वाले इस व्यक्ति ने उत्तरी भारत की पिछड़ी जातियों, जिनके हितों को उसने हमेशा बढ़ावा दिया और जिनकी उन्नति में उसने सबसे महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई, का एक नया सामाजिक आंदोलन खड़ा किया और उसकी पैरवी की।

चरण सिंह के व्यक्तिगत संग्रह (राजनीतिक फाइलों का) के साथ ही राजनेताओं, प्रसिद्ध शख्सियतों और स्थानीय लोगों के विस्तृत साक्षात्कारों का ध्यानपूर्वक अध्ययन करने के बाद यह किताब अस्तित्व में आई है। इस किताब में उस कालकर्म के मुख्य मुद्दों और घटनाओं जिसमें हिंदू-मुस्लिम संबंधों, तेज गति से औद्योगिकीकरण के नेहरूवादी उद्देश्य और कृषि को प्राथमिकता देने के पक्षधरों की आकांक्षाओं के बीच सार्थक, कानून व्यवस्था से जुड़े मुद्दे, राजनीति में भ्रष्टाचार और अपराध की वृद्धि, आधुनिक होते समाज में जाति व हेसियत का स्थान और उस जमाने के व्यापक गुटीय राजनीति लड़ाकों का विवरण है।


यह किताब एक महत्वपूर्ण राजनेता की जीवनी के अलावा भी बहुत कुछ है। इस किताब में स्वतंत्रता प्राप्ति से थोड़े पहले के काल और स्वतंत्रता बाद के प्रारंभिक काल के उल्लेखनीय मुद्दों, आंदोलनों और राजनीतिक संघर्षों का विश्लेषण है।

यह पुस्तक उत्तर भारत की राजनीति: 1९५७ से 1९६७ पर दो खण्डों में लिखी गई अंखला का पहला खंड है।

पॉल आर. ब्रास (१९३६-२०२२) वाशिंगटन यूनिवर्सिटी, सीएलएल अमेरिका में राजनीति विज्ञान और अंतर्राष्ट्रीय अध्ययन के विद्यात प्रोफेसर थे।



चरण सिंह अभिलेखागार
Charan Singh Archives
www.charansingh.org



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Price ₹ 1,195/-

I came to know Paul as an exacting scholar, a man of the world, and an ethical, caring human. It was my good fortune to obtain his affection, sadly for all too brief a period. Paul's helpfulness, kindness, hospitality and open heart remain etched in my soul. He was a friend and guide when I needed him most. Charan Singh is worshipped by millions in India for his advocacy of an ethical life and his democratic ideas for an agrarian nation, and Paul's name remains forever by his side.

Harsh Singh Lohit
harshlohit@charansingh.org

29 May 2024

⁶ Launch of Paul's Volumes translated to Hindi. 23 December 2016. <https://www.charansingh.org/books/1968>

⁷ <https://www.amazon.in/dp/8196262515>