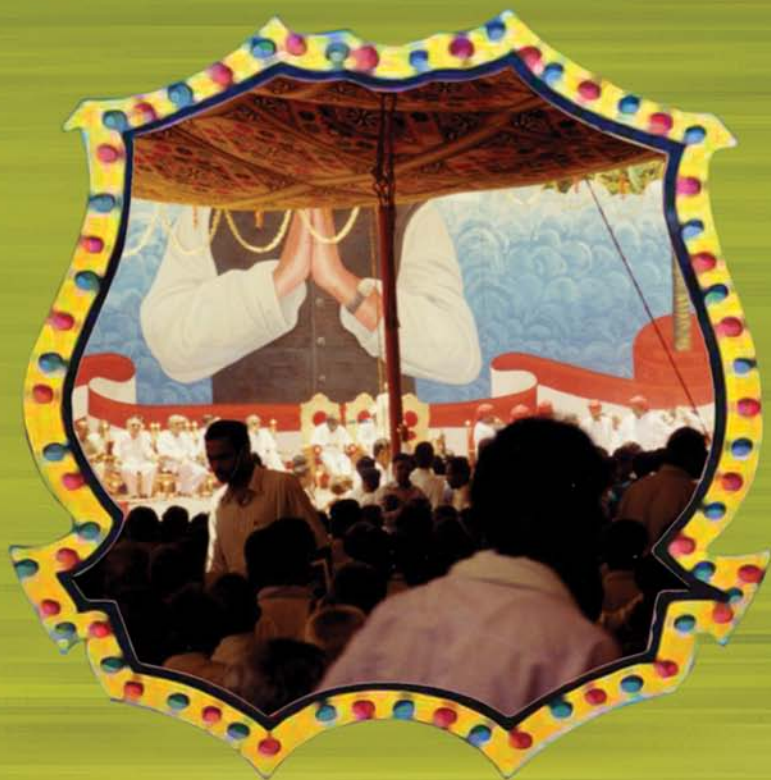


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Power and Influence in India

BOSSSES, LORDS AND CAPTAINS



PAMELA PRICE & ARILD ENGELSEN RUUD

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Reader in Anthropology, London School of Economics
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Power and Influence in India

Bosses, Lords and Captains

Editors

Pamela Price

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*To Birgit and Hans-Olaf Ruud
in memoriam
and
to Leila Gillette*

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Leadership and the Power of Honour in a Corrupt System

Paul R. Brass[†]

The Passions that most of all cause the differences of Wit, are principally, the more or lesse Desire of Power, of Riches, of Knowledge, and of Honour. All which may be reduced to the first, that is Desire of Power. For Riches, Knowledge and Honour are but severall sorts of Power.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 59

Introduction: Leadership Styles

It is possible to identify a multiplicity of different ‘leadership styles’ that have actually existed in different political systems along the entire spectrum of regimes from ‘totalitarian’ to ‘democratic’. It is questionable, however, whether leadership style is something that exists independently of the political system or cultural environment or historical period or state of communications technology in which leaders operate. In some societies, especially diverse, culturally complex and highly competitive political societies such as India, a range of workable political styles may coexist side by side. Certainly, during the past century, Indian political leaders have adopted a considerable range of different styles, among which the most prominent would be the charismatic, non-violent revolutionary strategy of Mahatma Gandhi, the ‘tutelary’¹ leadership style of Jawaharlal Nehru and the populist style of Indira Gandhi. But these strategies have been superimposed over a multiplicity of other styles that would include the princely style of the rulers and former rulers of the princely states and the former big zamindars and talukdars (Brass 1965: 69–71), the *guru–shishya*

¹ Edward Shils coined this term in Geertz (1963).

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[†] I have drawn a few passages for this article verbatim from Brass (1965) and Brass (1993).

relationship that is widespread in Indian society and has manifested itself also in leader–follower relations in factions and parties from time to time (*ibid.*: 55), the recent emergence in local politics of various forms of thuggish, ‘mafia’-style leadership, and many other variations.

In the pre-Independence period, many leaders occupied transcendent positions of authority resting on dual pillars: the principles for which they stood and the purity of their character. The outstanding example, of course, was Gandhi, who, in addition to these two pillars, had a third, namely, his ability to touch the core of cultural values within Hindu society. But, there were many others who stood solidly enough on the other two pillars. One such pillar was modernist/secular, represented especially by Nehru. A second pillar was a form of Hindu revivalism, represented especially in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in an earlier period by Madan Mohan Malaviya and later by Purushottam Das Tandon, who challenged Nehru for the presidency of the Indian National Congress in 1952 and gained the support of the entire following of Nehru’s principal rival, Sardar Patel. There were also in those days socialist ideologues such as Acharya Narendra Dev, who stood fast enough for his principles to leave the Congress at Independence, giving up the certain prospect of high position in the UP government for the sake of building a socialist party organisation in the state. All these men, whatever their ideological stance, were also noted for their personal honesty, integrity and devotion to the country above personal interest. And it was these types of men, who naturally rose to the top positions of power in the central government and in most of the Indian states.

In UP, it was Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, who held the position of transcendent authority and became the premier (later termed chief minister) of the first Congress government in the state from 1937 to 1939, and again of the Congress government formed just before Independence in 1946. But, Pant’s authority rested on yet another pillar, that is, his neutrality, aloofness from any kind of ideological or group commitment and loyalty to the leader of the country, Jawaharlal Nehru. He held no strong views that would alienate him from any of the competing parties and groups in the Congress or outside of it. Like the other principal leaders, he was considered to be a man of

integrity as well as a person who examined all issues on their merits, irrespective of which of his subordinates and followers promoted any particular view on a subject at hand. For these reasons, he was always the man who acted as arbiter in resolving conflicts among contending groups in UP politics even after he was taken into the central government by Nehru in 1955.

But alongside these types of political personalities, and indeed providing for them the political — as opposed to the personal — bases on which their power rested, were a new and different breed of politician and an entirely different political style, that of the virtuoso politician or political entrepreneur. It was this kind of political style and personality that soon became the predominant one and the principal method of aggregating a political following and political power. In UP, the most important figure of this new breed before Independence was Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Nehru's trusted political operator. In contrast to the socialist leader Acharya Narendra Dev, and to Nehru himself, Kidwai adhered to no ideological principles (though he had moderate socialist leanings that mirrored Nehru's own). Instead, he had a different kind of orientation and loyalty, to men, to his leaders — initially Jawaharlal Nehru's father, Motilal, and then to Jawaharlal himself — and to his followers, 'a motley band of district leaders who loved him and worked with him throughout his career' (Brass 1965: 38). Indeed, his loyalty to both was legendary in the 1960s after his death. In addition to loyalty, Kidwai was noted for his generosity, not only to his followers, but even to his enemies. In this sense, he fits the traditional princely model of the ruler who distributes his largesse to his subjects.² He was, as I noted in 1965, 'the prototype of the modern faction leader in Indian politics' (*ibid.*: 39).

In fact, after Kidwai's departure to the central government, his followers in UP had to confront another person whose political style was similar to that of Kidwai, namely Chandra Bhan Gupta, the

² And indeed, in death, he was honoured like a Muslim prince, buried in his home town of Masauli in Bara Banki district in a Mughal-style mausoleum.

first post-Independence state party boss in UP, a formidable political entrepreneur, who built the principal intra-party faction in the state Congress on a base of followers in all the then 54 districts of this huge state. Upon this base, C. B. Gupta came to power as chief minister from 1960 to 1963, and again for a brief period in 1967. However, despite his massive support base throughout the state of UP, he was never able to maintain a secure position of power in the state government.

Gupta was never able to consolidate his power because he had several factional rivals, some operating in a style similar to his own, others resting upon a broad base of support among particular castes, and yet a third representing an entirely different political style, led by Chaudhuri Charan Singh. It was, in the end, Charan Singh, who displaced C. B. Gupta in power in 1967, after which Gupta never regained the position of chief minister and was never able to reconstruct his political power in the state.

The focus of this article is on Charan Singh, a politician who moved within the milieu of the corrupt political society that already existed at the time of Indian Independence in 1947 while striving successfully to establish a position of leadership based on his own incorruptibility. In other words, this is a study (part of a much larger one) of political leadership that ran counter to prevailing political practices and that was, nevertheless, effective. The great contest between Charan Singh and C. B. Gupta will be the subject of several chapters in my forthcoming biography of Charan Singh, but will not be discussed further herein. My focus here is on the political style of Charan Singh at the time, just before and after Independence, when both these men were building their support bases throughout the state, but in entirely different ways.

Chaudhuri Charan Singh

Charan Singh came from a Jat peasant family in Meerut district in western UP. He was an Arya Samajist, who, as a matter of principle, rejected all forms of caste identification in social and public life while at the same time retaining the near total support of his own caste — the most important

landholding caste of Meerut district — throughout his life. But this was only one factor in his early domination over district politics. He had also become a favorite of Pandit Pant, whom he admired greatly, and was brought into the Pant government as a parliamentary secretary in 1946. He became a full-fledged cabinet minister in 1951 and enjoyed Pant's patronage until the latter's death in 1960. Thanks to his position in the state government and his special relationship with Pandit Pant, both party and government patronage for Meerut district filtered through his hands. In this respect, therefore, he was able to act like other Indian faction leaders, including C. B. Gupta. But, in fact, he acted quite differently in other ways. Unlike either Kidwai or Gupta, he was *not* considered to be accommodating. He did not distribute patronage indiscriminately, irrespective of the character of the persons who asked for his help. He expected not only loyalty from his followers — and was deeply grieved when followers he trusted betrayed him — but honesty and probity as well. He demanded, in other words, that his followers emulate him and his standards of public behaviour.

Despite his famous rigidity in these matters, Charan Singh developed a base of power across the state of UP that made it possible for him to become chief minister twice, in the course of which he and the political following he had developed across the state became the critical factor in the displacement of the Congress for the first time after Independence. He also played major roles in formulating and implementing policies that transformed the agricultural economy of north India in the post-Independence period, and in the politics of his home state and of the country as a whole during the last two decades of his life. His political career involved him at all levels of the Indian political system, from his own district of Meerut in western UP to the state as a whole and ultimately to national politics, when he became prime minister of India for a brief period (1979–80) after the fall of the Janata government (the first non-Congress central government in post-Independence India). In his rise to power and influence, he became identified as the principal spokesman of the middle peasantry of India. Further, he was identified also with the aspirations of the so-called backward castes of intermediate social status between the elite castes and the lower

castes. He was also a politician with intellectual credentials, who had written several books as well as political pamphlets that presented an extremely sophisticated and coherent alternative development strategy for India entirely different from that of former prime ministers Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

Clearly, therefore, in the course of his political career, Charan Singh played a central role in several of the most crucial turning points in the history of the politics of India's largest state and that of the country as a whole. Charan Singh was both a politically ambitious man and a man with clear policy proposals. His political life, therefore, raises the issue of how one successfully pursues both power and policy in a rough-and-tumble representative political system.

The dialogue of virtue and corruption that existed in the first two decades of Independence permeates Charan Singh's papers³ on district, state and national politics. They are filled with charges, counter-charges and defences traded back and forth between him and other politicians, his rivals and the rivals of his supporters. They include complaints about bribery, casteism, favouritism in appointments, misuse of election machinery, and connections between politicians and criminals.

These papers also provide further insights into the dynamics of political mobilisation and competition. Equally important are the ways that charges and accusations are received and answered, what they reveal about the values and moral standards of the participants at the time, especially, of course, Charan Singh, who valued his personal honesty and integrity and devalued all others who departed from his own rigorous standards. However serious the accusations and charges appeared at the time, they are qualitatively different from those that are made now, as are the facts. Bribery, casteism, favouritism, misuse of the election machinery, and the criminal connections of a few politicians have been replaced by large-scale institutionalised political and bureaucratic corruption, charges and actual cases of considerable local violence before and during elections, and

³ In 1981, I expressed to Charan Singh my wish to write his biography, in connection with which I was allowed to go through all his papers and files and make copies of materials which were of particular interest.

the interlinking of politics, politicians and criminals in networks of illegal activity, including murder and the deliberate instigation of so-called communal riots for political purposes.

At the same time, even today, however weak it may be, the dialogue of virtue and corruption persists in contemporary Indian politics. The dialogue is covered by thick layers of hypocrisy, but elements of it continue to rise to the surface, particularly for what I call the unending diogenic search in a corrupted polity and society for the one honest man to lead the country, which also has its counterparts at lower levels, in the Indian states. It also persists in the efforts of some, very few no doubt, who seek to offer policy alternatives that rise above a mere politics of patronage and corruption. In his life, Charan Singh, with all his faults, provided a model of a politician who, as skilled as any of his rivals in political tactics, nevertheless retained throughout his life a dedication to personal integrity, public probity and the pursuit of public policies for the good of the country, not just for his caste or community.

Corruption and Anti-corruption

At Independence, and until his death in 1964, Jawaharlal Nehru was seen as the one honest man fit to lead the country, though, at that time there were many other nationalist leaders of untarnished reputation. In several of the states also there were such men, holding the position of chief minister. In UP, as I noted in my study of *Factional Politics in Uttar Pradesh*, Pandit Pant was such a man, 'who occupied a position of unchallengeable authority and esteem because of his seniority in the [nationalist] movement, because of his integrity, and because of a certain touch of charisma drawn partly from his own personality and partly from his association with the great leaders of the nationalist movement in the country' (Brass 1965: 45). But, at the local level, the situation was far different. Nehru himself provided the astonishing revelation in a conversation with Rammanohar

Lohia in May–June 1946, still more than a year away from Independence, of the extent of the ‘degradation’ of his party men in Uttar Pradesh.

[Nehru] told me with some vehemence how low Congressmen had fallen and that I did not possibly possess a full picture of their degradation.

He told me of an annual report of the Uttar Pradesh congress tribunal for internal elections, which stated that congressmen violated every single section of the Indian Penal Code in their fights with each other. I could not understand how the whole penal code [comprising 511 sections] could come into operation but was again told with some vehemence that that was so, which of course may have been true. (Lohia 1960: 20)

In this reported statement of Nehru’s, the reference is to internecine conflicts for power within the Congress organisation. But what were the stakes? And what was going on in society, the bureaucracy and in the government that had made the stakes so high? Charan Singh’s files provide ample evidence of what was at stake, how pervasive the system of corruption was and how difficult it was for any person to maintain a reputation for honesty and integrity.

Charan Singh had been elected to the UP Legislative Assembly in 1937 and re-elected from Meerut district (southwest) in the March 1946 elections. In the government of Premier Govind Ballabh Pant, he became parliamentary secretary to the minister for revenue. In the politics of the district in those days, he was associated with another MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly), one Vishnu Saran Dubish, a legendary figure who had turned to violent revolutionary action against British rule in the 1920s, was a defendant in the Kakori Conspiracy Case in 1925 and was imprisoned in the Andaman Islands from 1929 to 1937. Within a few months after the 1946 elections and the re-establishment of the Congress government in the province, an investigation was conducted by the Anti-Corruption Department (ACD) on charges of corruption against one O. N. Jauhari, a subdivisional officer (SDO) posted in Baghpat Tahsil (subdivision) of Meerut district, the home base of Charan Singh. The charges against Mr Jauhari were that ‘he gave some fine cloth

quota[s] to shop keepers of [C]ongress views'. The officers who conducted the investigation complained that Mr Jauhari was a favourite of both Charan Singh and Dublish and that the latter two, along with 'some other local congress leaders' were 'openly siding' with Mr Jauhari and hampering the investigation. In contrast, the report of the ACD remarked, 'Mr [Raghukul] Tilak', who was also a parliamentary secretary in the state Congress government, was said to be 'giving all possible assistance'.

Ostensibly, we have here an issue that begins with a characteristic action in the early stages of the 'permit–license–quota raj', namely, the awarding of a quota for 'some fine cloth' to shopkeepers 'with Congress views', patronised by Congress politicians. The report further names one shopkeeper so patronised, Prakash Chand, who is described as 'an established black marketier [sic]'. It is suggested also, but not confirmed in the report, that he paid a bribe of Rs 300 to Dublish for the favour. But the report is curious in many respects. It provides no substantial evidence for the charges made, repeatedly alleges the involvement of two leading politicians of the district, and includes a favourable reference to another district politician of apparently equal status in the UP government of the time. What is not noted is that Charan Singh and his ally Dublish were in different factional camps in the Congress from that of Tilak. The final report addressed to the Deputy Inspector-General (DIG), Anti-Corruption on 29 May 1947 states that the investigator 'had great difficulty in unearthing the true facts' because Mr Jauhari 'had already got scent of the complaints against him' from the Congress group led by Charan Singh and Dublish, who 'were out to defend him'. It also notes that Mr Jauhari, in his statement before the investigator, showed him a letter dated 14 June 1945 from Charan Singh to 'one Mr Sirohan Mukhtar, ... a resident of Baghpat Tahsil wherein Chaudhri Saheb had disclosed that Kashmiri Lal of Baghpat had complaints against Mr Jauhari'. The report concludes: 'This tendency of the public together with the influence of the zamindars and rich men like Krishan Dutta etc. the men of Mr Jauhari backed by the congress group of ch. Charan Singh MLA and Mr Vishnu Saran Dublish MLA present difficulties in investigation'.

So we begin with a rather trivial matter that, however, suggests already a nexus of relationships of alliance and conflict among multiple segments of society, the bureaucracy, political party and factions, and the government, including shopkeepers, an administrative officer in a part of the district, an anti-corruption agency of the state government, and rival groups within the Congress and the state government. Running through it all are allegations and charges of favouritism and bribery, none of them substantiated. Further, the names of some persons are mentioned, whose identities, reliability and character are not clearly specified.

This final report was submitted on 29 May 1947. Apparently, the report was not sent to Charan Singh for nearly a year, and was forwarded to him by the premier, Pandit Pant himself, to which Charan Singh responded on 5 March 1948. In the meantime, however, Charan Singh gathered information from various sources concerning the conduct of the investigation and the character of both Mr Jauhari and the officers who investigated him. One document,⁴ addressed to the premier and dated 17 June 1947, described the investigation undertaken against Mr Jauhari as ‘unfair and biased, even vindictive’. It said further that Mr Zafar, the author of the final report, and Inspector Raghubar Dayal had ‘satisfied themselves that Mr Jauhari was a very corrupt officer’ on the basis of little evidence and the statement of one Badlumal which the writer believed was ‘concocted and untrue’. The statement also laid the responsibility upon Mr Abu Zafar for allowing an investigation to be undertaken ‘in a biased and dishonest manner’. It concludes by asking how the ACD can ‘be relied upon to investigate and discover real cases of corruption and bribery if they themselves resort to dishonest ways and concoction of evidence?’.

In the second document, also addressed to the premier, but unsigned and apparently not sent to him, though evidently written by Charan Singh himself, he acknowledged in his opening remarks

⁴ Files of Chaudhuri Charan Singh in my possession: CX File No. 282/46, entitled ‘Enquiry into the conduct of Mr. Prem Narain Jauhari, SDM, Baghpat, Meerut’, signed by one T. R. Misra (whose designation is not indicated), and dated 6 June 1947.

that he once 'expressed' to the premier that, in his opinion, Mr Jauhari was 'an honest and efficient officer'. In support of his opinion concerning Mr Jauhari, he noted that he had avoided the opportunity to earn 'huge amounts [of money] from smuggling which went on unchecked across the Yamuna [River] throughout the whole Tahsil' with the complicity of the police. Instead he 'came into conflict with the police over this smuggling business'. Further, 'his record of criminal court work was very clean; nobody ever suspected that he could be approached in the discharge of his judicial work'. Moreover, he had not succumbed to the influence of Nawab Jamshed Ali, the dominant landowner of the area, 'as almost every SDO previous to him did'. On the contrary, 'he stood up to him'.

Charan Singh traced the origins of the entire Jauhari affair to 'this smuggling business' and 'the prosecution of one Lachchmi Chand for smuggling'. The alleged smuggler then turned for help to 'Kashmiri Lal Jain an ex-patwari of the worst possible repute', who in turn 'was a favourite of Mr P. W. Marsh', the previous district magistrate, who had taken up a position at Lahore in the Public Service Commission of pre-partition Punjab, where he 'summoned' Kashmiri Lal and provided him 'agencies, permits and contracts' that enriched him (and presumably Mr Marsh as well). Further, this now wealthy *ex-patwari* 'had a joint agency of cement with one Ganga Prasad, resident of Meerut city who had some influence in a certain section of congressmen'. The trouble with Mr Jauhari began because Kashmiri Lal had 'some cause for grouse' against the latter. So, he gathered some support from 'one or two congressmen of Meerut who personally knew nothing about Mr Johari [sic] or persons or affairs of Tahsil Baghpat' — the reference here is clearly to Raghukul Tilak — and, at the same time, 'entered into a conspiracy with one Mr Kamta Prasad an ex-Mukhtar [attorney or solicitor] of Baraut'. The latter man was 'easily the worst man in Baraut and there can be no two opinions about this definite assertion of mine'. He had only recently been released from jail after serving a sentence of five years 'for removal of corpse of a relative of his whom he had murdered for the sake of a few hundred rupees'.

The chain of corrupt and criminal activity from Lahore to Meerut now extended to Inspector Raghubar Dayal and his superior, Abu Zafar, in the ACD. The former man, Charan Singh noted, was someone against whom he had previously 'brought definite allegations' that 'he had accepted as bribe a huge sum of money from the black marketers of Pilakhua [a town in the southern part of Meerut district] whose cases he was deputed to investigate'. Abu Zafar was complicit with him in the matter. Raghubar Dayal then 'carried on the investigation with the help of Kashmiri Lal and Kamta Prasad, two very discredited persons'. Among Mr Jauhari's problems with this discredited group of people was that he had instituted proceedings of some sort against one of them, Kamta Prasad. Thus, the chain of corrupt and criminal activity, according to Charan Singh's information, brought these disreputable people up against an obstruction in the form of the SDO, Mr Jauhari, whom it was necessary for them to displace.

The material from these documents apparently formed the basis for Charan Singh's ultimate response to the issue concerning his own alleged involvement in the matter in his signed note to the premier dated 4 March 1948. His response, clear and precise on several points, thoroughly discredited the report, the investigative officers and the entire ACD. In this statement, Charan Singh remarked that the premier would recall 'that in a party meeting held in July 1946 I had said that the Anti-Corruption Department had been staffed with corrupt officers. Events that followed have conclusively proved that instead of combating corruption, these officers added to it'. Further, he claimed that the allegations concerning his own interference in the case against Mr Jauhari arose as a consequence of the fact that the inspector in the case, Raghubar Dayal, a man who 'was so boastful about his honesty', and his 'Superintendent' (Mr M. A. Zafar) had been accused by Congress workers from the town of Pilakhua of having 'accepted a huge sum as bribe' in the course of his investigation of another case of black marketing in that town.

In fact, Raghubar Dayal approached Charan Singh initially on 30 September 1946, when they were both travelling on the train to Lucknow, to complain that these Congressmen had made

allegations against his integrity. But Charan Singh had just met with those Congressmen during his stay in the district and had instead learned from them that there was not just suspicion of his integrity, but 'a definite complaint against him'. Furthermore, upon presenting Raghubar Dayal with this complaint, the latter promised to come to his office the next day in the state secretariat, but failed to appear. Consequently, on 2 October, two days after his meeting with Raghubar Dayal, he sent a note to the premier 'suggesting an inquiry into the latter's conduct in the matter of Pilakhua cases. The result is that this man along with his boss, M. A. Zafar, has sought to cover up his sins by throwing mud at me'.

As for the involvement of Raghukul Tilak and the person named Kashmiri Lal, Charan Singh stated that the latter person was sent to him by Tilak, to whom he first went with his complaints against Mr Jauhari. Charan Singh refused to oblige Kashmiri Lal because, he said, he was not satisfied that the charges against Jauhari were justified and because he knew, and had stated 'before in another note' that Kashmiri Lal, an 'ex-patwari', and one of the latter's associates, 'were themselves corrupt beyond measure'.

With regard to the alleged bribe of Rs 300 paid to Mr Dublish, Charan Singh noted that this was the amount of a subscription paid by 'six persons of Baraut' for a 'subscription for membership of the Congress Reception Committee'. The money was handed over to Mr Jauhari, who made a memorandum to file about it, and then handed it over to Mr Dublish. Concerning the allegations that he and Mr Dublish had obstructed the investigation whereas Tilak was assisting it fully, he characterised this as an unmitigated lie'. He noted that Jauhari had been 'transferred by telegram to Hardoi' on 30 September 1946, which was the first time he had learned that there were any charges against him, so he could hardly have interfered in the matter, 'even if', he remarked, he 'could stoop to such low depths as to hamper investigations'. In any case, he knew nothing about the substance of the charges 'and who the witnesses were' until 20 October.

With regard to Mr Jauhari, Charan Singh acknowledged that he did in fact consider that he was 'not a corrupt officer' and noted that Congress workers in Baghpat Tahsil held 'a good opinion' of him. Nevertheless, when the charges were made against Jauhari and, as a result of the report of the ACD, when he was transferred to another district on 2 October 1946, Charan Singh 'kept mum'. Further, when his Congress workers came to him in defense of Jauhari, he 'told them that they should suspend their judgement [sic], that human nature is very complex and there are very few men, indeed, about whose honesty we can swear'. Only 13 months later did he write 'a note reiterating my opinion about Mr Jauhari and saying that findings of corrupt officers like Raghubar Dayal in an inquiry conducted with the help of men like Kashmiri Lal and Kamta Prasad should be taken with a grain of salt'. (The reference here is clearly to the unsigned note discussed above.) In concluding his remarks to the premier, Charan Singh noted that the premier, having informed him just the day before, after he had completed his note on the matter, 'that Raghubar Dayal was being made to retire' and 'Mr M. A. Zafar has already gone to Pakistan', there was no need for him to say anything more 'except... perhaps, we have to take some drastic steps, more drastic than those taken hitherto, to weed out black sheep from the ranks of the Police'.

The Jauhari case ended with a complete vindication of both Mr Jauhari and Charan Singh and a severe indictment of the ACD in the findings of the UP Administrative Tribunal dated 24 December 1948. The authors of the report concluded that the ACD investigation was faulty from beginning to end. It began by assuming that Mr Jauhari and another officer were guilty, then looked for 'instances' to support the charges against them; in other words, they deliberately framed the case against them. The evidence they collected was inherently faulty, based as it was on the testimony of persons who had been denied favours by these two officers and held 'personal enmities' against them. The witnesses, Kashmiri Lal, characterised as 'a dismissed Patwari', and Luxmi Chand, had previously 'threatened to sue Shri Jauhari in the civil court in respect of acts for which Shri Jauhari

was complimented by the Government'. The inquiries conducted by the ACD concerning alleged favouritism were not only conducted 'in a very haphazard manner, but were also not quite fair and above board'. Further, the tribunal suggested that charges were concocted that Mr Jauhari had issued permits to cloth dealers without application when, in fact, it seems that the police were in collusion with the ACD in concealing the fact that such permits had been issued according to proper procedure by simply hiding the bundles that contained them. The tribunal concluded by remarking that it was 'very unfortunate that the agency entrusted with the task of enquiring into the doubtful conduct of others should itself be of a doubtful character'.

Let us return now to examining the nexus of relationships in this local case. Several agencies and offices of government at all levels were involved, paralleled by party agencies at the same level (see Figure 8.1). The central person around whom the controversy revolved was a sub divisional officer, that is to say, a civil-cum-judicial administrative officer intermediate between the district administration and the general population, the seniormost officer in a tahsil, the subdivision just below the district itself. The tahsil in question was Baghpat, Charan Singh's home base, within which the *pargana* (the next lowest administrative level in a district) of Baraut was situated. Throughout his political life from 1937 onward, Charan Singh was the elected MLA or MP (Member of Parliament) and the predominant political figure in the area. To maintain his political base, he would naturally visit this area to meet with his Congress workers. Moreover, as a junior member in the state government, but one of the most prominent men from the entire district of Meerut in the government, he would naturally even at this time be sought after by Congressmen from other parts of the district, such as the men from Pilakhua with whom he also met in connection with this case. His status in these regards would also be enhanced by the fact that he was known to have the confidence of the premier of the state.

Congressmen in a district which was then dominated entirely by the Congress were intermediaries between the public and both the local administration and the elected representatives,

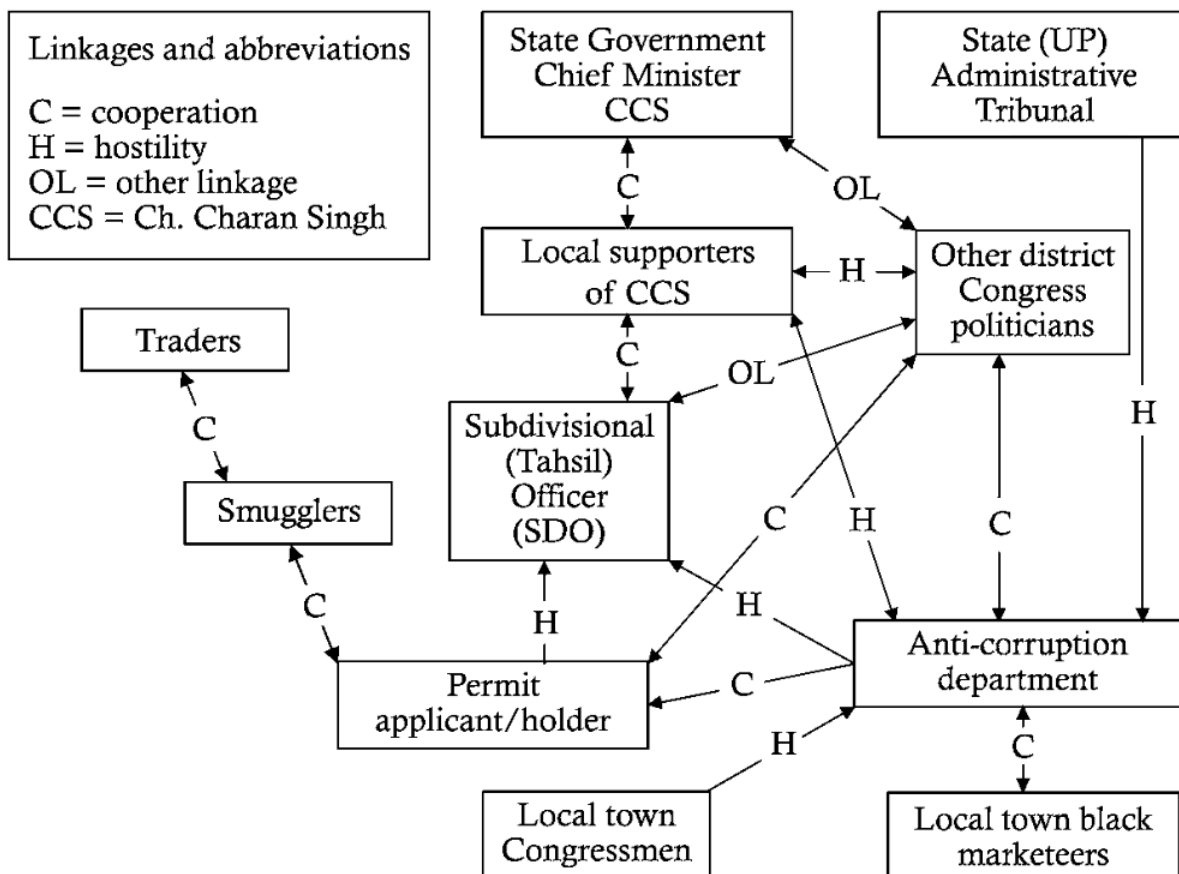


Figure 8.1 Nexus of Relationships in the Jauhari Case

the MLAs. The Congress itself, however, was divided into factions at all political levels. Tilak was a member of a different faction, but not the one that was later to be the principal factional group opposed to Charan Singh and his group. But, whether intentionally or not, Tilak acted, or appeared to be acting on behalf of those who were complaining about Mr Jauhari. It is clear enough that, whether he was honest or corrupt, Mr Jauhari had excellent relations with the local Congress workers. Tilak, a quite genteel and educated man, was not at all a grassroots politician.

Now, what about the question of whether or not Mr Jauhari was corrupt? Nothing in the file actually provides any evidence that he was. All that is certain is that he was in the good books of the predominant local Congressmen. Further, there can be no mistaking the obvious fact that the position of this sub divisional officer, as of all other similarly-placed administrative personnel in the state at this time, was inevitably compromised by his implication in, or identification with, locally

dominant politicians. This in turn meant that those Congressmen were satisfied with the way in which he distributed the resources at his disposal, that is, the permits and licenses over which he had authority. Since they were satisfied, they considered him an honest officer. Those on the other side were dissatisfied, so they considered him a dishonest officer — or used the tactic of accusing him of being one in order to get rid of him. Moreover, despite the superior strength of Charan Singh and his Congress workers in the area, they succeeded in getting the ACD to investigate Jauhari, as a consequence of which he was transferred out of the district to another district remote from Meerut.

In the transfer of the officer in this way, we note the early operation of a process that gradually magnified during the heyday of the permit-license-quota raj and the elaboration of the system of corruption in the state. In India's civil service system, officers of the state are well-protected in their positions in the sense that they cannot be easily dismissed. Where corrupt activity is at issue, the standard action for all officers, including the police, is to simply transfer to another place. But the transfer system then, and since, was never really a method of dealing quickly with corruption and malfeasance. Rather, it has had two other purposes. The first, coming from the local politicians, is simply to get rid of an officer who has not been obliging to their side. The second, as the system of graft and corruption became highly profitable for the local officials, came from the officers themselves. They began to seek postings and transfers to the districts that offered the greatest opportunities for garnering large-scale corrupt income. As the scale of such opportunities increased, these postings became—literally—for sale on payment of a very substantial sum directly to ministers in the state governments or to their intermediaries.

It has become quite rare, however, for administrative officers to be actually punished, and deprived of all opportunities for corrupt income through dismissal. Yet, at this time, it seems that such action was indeed taken in this case, perhaps by the premier himself, since Charan Singh noted that the latter had informed him that Raghubar Dayal, the allegedly corrupt anti-corruption officer, 'was being made to retire'. So, in the end, both Charan Singh and Mr Jauhari were vindicated.

Charan Singh established the honesty of his favored officer and the dishonesty of the investigator. However, leaving aside the question of corrupt income, Mr Jauhari was transferred away from a much better-situated district and a more favourable posting to a more remote and less favourable posting in a poorer district.

It is noteworthy also that a dispute over one administrative officer in a subdivision of one of UP's then 54 districts reached the highest levels of the government of the state. The premier himself had ultimately to deal with the situation. Nor, to be sure, was this the only case of its type with which he must have dealt during his tenure as premier. Moreover, the chief ministers of the state have ever since taken a vastly increased interest in the whole question of transfers and postings in an increasingly corrupt system. With each change of government and party, the newly-elected chief minister deals with requests for, and sanctions the transfers of hundreds of officers from one district to another in order to satisfy the members of his or her party in every district in this vast state.

This single case also illustrates quite clearly the existence at this time of a complex network of entanglements in the system of corruption, from which it would seem almost impossible for anyone to become disentangled, in which indeed the honesty of virtually everyone was suspect. Everyone indeed proclaimed, even 'boasted' of his honesty; everyone, including Charan Singh, was obliged to defend himself. Nor was there any clear boundary line between corrupt and exemplary behaviour. The terms used over and over again are highly personalised, framed in opposites, stated or implied, and graded in qualitative vocabulary. Corruption versus honesty; boasting about one's honesty as a cover for corruption; corrupt or not corrupt; covering up one's *sins* by mud-slinging of another; bribery and black marketeering posited opposite the term 'integrity'; mere suspicion of a person's integrity versus a definite complaint against a person; persons said to be 'corrupt beyond measure'; persons of 'the worst possible repute'; 'very discredited persons'; truthfulness versus unmitigated lies; truth versus false and concocted charges. In the midst of all this, however, there is Charan Singh's personal commentary upon the human condition. Even with regard to Mr Jauhari, for whom

Charan Singh had some positive regard, his praise for this officer was limited to the phrase that he thought he was 'not corrupt'. But when his own men rushed to Jauhari's defense, he was very circumspect, telling them 'they should suspend their judgement [sic], that human nature is very complex and there are very few men, indeed, about whose honesty we can swear'. That then leads in Charan Singh's own personal life and in Indian political life in general to a personal and social search. For Charan Singh, it meant that he must search for and pursue in his life a course that would make his own integrity unchallengeable. For Indian political life, it has meant the unending search for the one honest man to head the state. For Charan Singh, Premier Pandit Pant was such a man. But, he had scant regard for the honesty of others.

Honour and Reputation in a Corrupt System

The question that I want to raise next is how an honest man or woman functions in such a system. A reputation for integrity, honour and honesty was central to Charan Singh's sense of himself. It was equally central to his evaluation of the political order as a whole. Yet, he felt all his life that the Indian political order was populated mostly with corrupt persons. But Charan Singh himself did succeed in establishing and maintaining an untarnished reputation as an honest man, an *imandar admi*, and it served him in good stead throughout his political life. Indeed, though the guarding of his reputation was central to his sense of himself, reflective of the core of his being as a man of integrity, it also served him well as a political strategy. And, although it was for him a deeply personal matter, the struggle for recognition as a man of integrity in the Indian political order was also a strategic game that was constantly played by both the corrupt and the honest and all those in between, that is, mere ordinary men and women for whom maintaining a straight path in life frequently involves difficult and borderline decisions. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, a reputation for honour constitutes a 'a particular form of capital' ([1985] 1990: 22), social and political capital that pays a return in social and political life. For some, like Charan Singh, the struggle for

recognition of oneself as a man of integrity is not a conscious strategy so much as a practice integral to one's being. But the fact that it was so central to his personhood also made him vulnerable in a strategic game in which honour and a reputation for honesty could be translated into power whilst its opposite could threaten one's position in the political order.

In a system that became increasingly corrupt as Charan Singh became more prominent and more influential, and as his political base expanded until he became a central figure in any political calculations for attaining power in north Indian politics, he also became feared and hated. His very reputation for integrity and his relentless attacks upon all those whom he saw as corrupt indeed underlay those fears and fed the hatred of his opponents. Charan Singh was feared because he was not playing the game, because he was serious about preserving his own reputation and about pursuing, relentlessly when he had the chance, those he considered corrupt.

But most others were playing the game, which has taken many forms in post-Independence Indian politics ever since. Indeed, the corrupt state of the politicians in the ruling party has become the staple refrain in virtually every election campaign since Independence at the state and central government levels, no matter which party or coalition of parties is in power. Then, in the 1960s, when non-Congress parties finally achieved power in half the Indian states, it became the practice in many states in the country to appoint commissions of inquiry against the outgoing party, which sometimes led to voluminous reports, but hardly ever any convictions or other serious consequences for those charged. But, when the Congress returned to power, it responded in kind with corruption inquiry commissions of its own directed against the cabinet ministers of the previous government. Most political parties now and then also launched so-called 'anti-corruption movements' to mobilise mass support in the interim between elections. By the 1980s, it had become the stock in trade of politicians and political parties also to trade accusations of corruption. Often, especially in the case of persons of rigid integrity such as Charan Singh and Morarji Desai, attempts were made to attack the integrity of their family members. In Charan Singh's case, the attempts were made to discredit

his father and other relatives in his home village. In other cases, allegations have been made (often correctly) that the offspring of important politicians were taking bribes in exchange for their presumed ability to influence their politically powerful fathers.⁵ These kinds of charges especially targeted the few other politicians with established reputations for integrity. Indeed, it was Charan Singh himself who later levelled such charges against Morarji's son.

But there can be no denying, all rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, that corruption in all segments of Indian society and the political order was already widespread at Independence, that it has increased since, and that it has spread ever more widely and deeply into the police,⁶ into the highest levels of the Indian Administrative Service as well, and down to the voting public.⁷ There is here yet another paradox. In virtually every election in India political parties stress the corruption of the incumbent regime. The voters everywhere complain incessantly of corruption. It is also believed that these anti-corruption campaigns and the feelings of the voters have been responsible for the apparent tendency of voters in many Indian states to vote incumbents out of power in very large proportions. But the true picture is rather different. Anti-corruption campaigns scarcely mask the corruption of the campaigners. Parties that come to office usually have no policies of consequence to develop into legislation, but seek primarily to gain control of the resources of government to

⁵ B. D. Dua (1985: 420), for example, refers to the 'increase in political scandals involving the "sons and daughters" of illustrious and not so illustrious politicians', and increases in various forms of corruption by the 1980s.

⁶ Described by many observers in India, including high court judges, as often constituting in their areas 'one of a number of criminal gangs' (Rubin 1987: 382).

⁷ Hardly any serious research has been done on the state of 'moral' values among ordinary people in India, especially in the countryside, and especially concerning what value still adheres, with what consequences, to men of character, and to whom honour and respect are due. Pamela Price's work (1999, 2005 and 2006) is an exception. See especially Price (1999: 149–76), where she examines the kind of respect that is given to criminals and gang leaders, and how they themselves seek respect in society.

distribute to their supporters, who in turn distribute them to the voters.⁸ Once in power, with rare exceptions in India, governments reveal that they have no intention to eliminate corruption (Wariavwalla 1988: 121). As for the voters themselves, however much they may complain about corruption, they vote for those ‘whom they think can give *them* the most favors, in a particularist way. Most voters do not see an “issue” of corruption; they see that they themselves have not been successful enough in corrupting’ (Wade 1985: 487).⁹

Honesty and Popularity in a Corrupt System

How then does an honest man in a corrupt system not only maintain his reputation for integrity, but retain popular support in a society where the public, the ordinary people, themselves expect and anticipate that everyone in political life and in the bureaucracy is corrupt and that the only way to derive any personal benefit for oneself, one’s group, one’s village is either to pay a fee to the bureaucrats or to get help from a politician to whom they have given their support or their vote? In the early years after Independence certainly — and probably even today — most politicians of any status did not expect cash in hand from ordinary, poor villagers and other poorly placed people in society in return for favours they are asked to grant. What they expect in return is gratitude manifested in electoral support. If they do not get it from groups, villages and other segments of Indian society whose members they benefit, they will withhold both legal and illegal benefits to such groups and even seek to make them suffer in concrete ways. Since this is virtually a universal

⁸ Much of this distribution does not technically constitute corrupt behaviour, that is, behaviour involving illegal acts of bribery, favouritism and nepotism, but is mere patronage. But, Wade and Kochanek years ago found that much, if not most of the distribution did, in fact, involve outright corruption. The Charan Singh files support the latter view; see Wade (1985: 467–97) and Kochanek (1987).

⁹ See also Chandra (2004), who articulates clearly the ethnic particularism of voters who vote for candidates of their own caste in the expectation that this will give them access to government resources. However, she uses the rather less pejorative term, ‘patronage democracy’, for the Indian political order and for the practices associated with it.

practice, how did Charan Singh manage to maintain and increase his popular support throughout his long political career without soiling his own hands in this system of rewards and punishments?

The pressures that Charan Singh faced came not only from big-time smugglers, black marketeers and the like, but from everyday folk. Like every other politician in India with power, influence and any kind of following, he was besieged every morning by ordinary people from the villages, who travelled from their abodes to meet him in Meerut or Lucknow or Delhi to present their grievances and requests before him, to complain about the corrupt officials they had to face, the abusive police who harassed them and the failure of the authorities to provide them with benefits to which they felt themselves entitled. In all such cases, Charan Singh sought to satisfy himself that his intervention was justified by the circumstances. But, as a matter of fact, his followers and admirers were reluctant to approach him for anything that could not be justified legally. It is not that most of his followers were any different from other people in Indian society and politics, but that *he* was different and was known to be different. Had they thought otherwise, they would not have hesitated to make the usual requests for benefits from him, legal or illegal.

Pamela Price has noted that there are two types of honour that are respected in Indian society. One type, associated with royal power, revolves around generosity to one's subjects, followers and subordinates.¹⁰ In the contemporary Indian context, that would include also, of course, the distribution of patronage, including the rewarding of one's followers with positions of power and influence, especially positions which would allow one's followers to garner corrupt income for themselves and their own followers. It would not be the concern of the person distributing such benefits to monitor the behaviour of his followers to ensure that they too behaved honourably.

This type of leadership based on generosity has continued; indeed, it has become the predominant form in contemporary Indian politics. It is best exemplified in its traditional form by the practices of those few former talukdars and zamindars, who managed to retain enough of their

¹⁰ In earlier comments on this chapter and in her own work cited above.

former land and wealth, despite zamindari abolition, to continue to be generous towards, and protective of their former ‘subjects’ and to use their continued loyalty to get themselves elected to the state legislature and/or to achieve positions of prominence from which they can continue to provide for their subjects, turned constituents, who now provide them the votes they need to retain their positions.¹¹ It was also noted above that this kind of generosity was practiced by Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and that his generosity extended even to former enemies. Charan Singh, in contrast, was, as I noted in an earlier work, ‘faithful to his friends, provided their requests for favors [were] both reasonable and just to his satisfaction. He [was] ruthless towards those he [considered] his enemies’ (Brass 1965: 142).

Many other politicians, perhaps most, have adopted some variation of the old princely style. Virtually all hold *durbars* (courts) in the mornings and evenings at their residences, where they hear the complaints and grievances of their constituents and provide succour to them or sign applications for them to obtain places in educational or other institutions.¹² Charan Singh too held his *durbars* every morning, listened to grievances, and helped his constituents. But, in my personal observation, he was different from most of the rest. He made his own judgments in each case, even sent away those with frivolous complaints, and otherwise satisfied himself that his intervention was justified because a wrong had been committed. But that did not prevent his constituents from trying, nevertheless, to gain his support for less worthy goals.

A striking illustration of the peculiar position of Charan Singh in relation to his followers is provided in a letter written to him from a villager in his own home area. This man claimed that he

¹¹ The Raja of Mankapur, focus of chapter iv in Brass (1965), exemplifies this style of leadership, esp. pp. 69–71.

¹² Again, the Raja of Mankapur provides an example; see Brass (1965: 70).

had learned from one of Charan Singh's closest allies, Fateh Singh Rana, 'that Charan Singh had got a plot allotted to his brother', and wrote to him as follows in light of this information.

I would like to ask you whether it was true. If yes, please, help me obtain a plot there. If there is any hitch in my case, do something about the power connection I have already applied for. If not even that, manage to get a bus permit for me, at least.

Sh. Shyam Singh is your brother, but you may consider me your humble [*sudama*] friend. I know only you. Please consider me your brother. I shall be highly obliged to you. I have been long craving for something. But I never asked you anything as I knew that you keep your hands off such things. But, now as I learnt it from Sh. Rana, I had the courage to ask you something.¹³

In short — assuming the letter is authentic — the writer never asked Charan Singh for any favor since he had thought he was an honest man, but now that he has learned otherwise, he requests his help for anything that would benefit or enrich him. If the letter is authentic or representative of the feelings of Charan Singh's constituents, it suggests that his honesty does not really matter to the writer. If he is a politician like all the rest, he should help him.

Now, the possibility, indeed the likelihood, is that the letter was itself a trick played by Charan Singh's enemies to see if he would believe that his own man, Fateh Singh Rana, had said that he (Charan Singh) had engaged in nepotism on behalf of his brother and, as well, to see if he would respond by compromising his much-vaunted integrity and satisfying the letter writer. But, even if the letter was a trick, it would nevertheless reflect the prevailing social and political norms. The trick would be to see if Charan Singh would go for the bait. The file contains no response from Charan Singh to this letter nor any comment upon it.

So, we return to the question of how Charan Singh could maintain his extensive popular support and a degree of admiration that was uncommon in UP politics then or since. What would prevent

¹³ Letter of Mulki Ram, Village Alaklapur, P. O. Baraut, Tahsil Baghpat to CCS, handwritten in Hindi, date illegible; marked item 9 in file 'Miscellaneous', Charan Singh files.

such a letter writer from voting next time, or trying to get his caste and village fellows to vote next time, for some other more responsive candidate? Is it to be believed that, in a society in which such a letter would be written, a man like Charan Singh would be able to retain the votes, admiration and persistent loyalty of such people? Was, and is, honesty, integrity and reputation truly valued to such an extent that ordinary people would vote for such a person rather than pursue their own personal interests by siding with someone who would be willing to provide a plot of land, a power connection, or a bus permit? I believe that many would do so, and many did in fact do so in Charan Singh's case, but there were other reasons as well, namely, that he stood for, and provided benefits for, whole classes of people by pursuing and succeeding in implementing policies that benefited large categories in society, most especially the middle peasants and the backward classes. In short, his followers believed he was honest and believed that he stood for their interests and their well-being. He did so especially through his roles in overturning the zamindari land system in the state and shoring up a system of peasant proprietorship, through agricultural policies that benefited most middle and small landholders, and through his unswerving support for the advancement of the classes and castes that constituted a majority in north Indian society.

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