

Limitations of Nehruvian Democracy

Bhaskar Sarkar

M.A, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad

Abstract-It has been popularised in textual history that Nehru upheld the very foundations of Indian democracy. One cannot deny his contribution in establishing affirmative actions through democratic institutions. This paper tries to re-evaluate the political ambition of INC in consolidating masses and how pre-independence elites successfully secured its habitus in newly found state. Limitations of Nehruvian democracy lie within JawaharlalNehru's clientelism and upper caste-class power background of the party. Nehru's death of socialist dream was contradiction of his latter commitment toward political democracy without economic democracy which gradually established his political authority throughout apparently fair elections of two decades since Independence of India. The paper tries to find the reasons of failed channelization of power during postcolonial state building and how it only filtered through liberal disguise of elitist parliamentarianism.

Keywords-Political Democracy, Political habitus, Elitist authority, Socialism, Nehruvian Democracy, Nehru.

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Jawaharlal Nehru's political philosophy was multi-layered that influenced some major social shifts in the subcontinent and it was always in changing flux by adjusting itself to the then scenarios and beliefs. The development of his ideological beliefs was not just a result of fleeting passion and external western influences but a subjective changing itself that gradually was interpreted through Indian National Congress' policies and mostly post-colonial government's policies. One might suggest his fragmentation of ideas were considerably romanticised in nature rather than well decisive but here in this paper I would like to focus on the romanticization itself and how his future account of actions adjusted two conflicting beliefs of Nehru such as historical materialism and Gandhian Indianism. Like any other postcolonial state leader his approach was national reformism but reforming state, society, democracy and national subjects toward a developing idealism was itself a critical tactics given that his party's predispositions were Gandhian and latent Hinduite¹. It is true that *The Discovery of India* was fashioned in a manner of supremacy of people (Nehru 1956) but racial and historical superiority were arguably main thematic base of it, yet century old societal problems were adequately mentioned and criticised. It was a doctrine of future account of his plans as a statesman who previously observed the multi-layered India from its core. Although one cannot deny Nehru's intersectional backgrounds of being an upper caste-class son of a prominent leader behind his perception about India. His romantic apotheosis on nationalist movement (Nehru 1956) was later typically followed by Congress in its textual history writing which later got criticised by many postmodern scholars. Nationalist movement was not something where people deliberately participated in the name of freedom but it was a series of movements of many heterogenous partisan and non-organised forces with conflicting interests (Aloysius 1997). Though I will take the romantic accounts in consideration in analysing position of women as they largely shaped Nehru's own perceptions and his state building.

Democratization of consolidated masses was perceived by Congress differently at different historical junction. Nehru and Sardar Patel both has historical roles in consolidating Congress masses in colonial India and both firmly believed that strongly institutionalized government and party system can only invoke strong democracy. This particular notion has empirically been proved and interestingly present Indian regimes are very obsessive about destroying those institutions that consolidated masses before. Although it is not that all the institutions Nehru government established were Congress' sole brain child; many argued that success of Indian democracy that later consolidated the state in a nation form was positive product of British political-colonialism (Jaffrelot 2002) therefore INC and first Indian government played a positive succession in uniting ethnic, social and political differences of masses. There is a decentralization of consolidated power in Indian government that has versatile branches rooting in all socio-political classes and institutions ; for this rhetoric India is one of the few South Asian states where bureaucracy or military still couldn't take over power and this is the reason of a courtesy and protocol rhetoric of distributed power (Tharoor 2004) in which Nehru, unlike other Asian postcolonial head of the states, celebrated with the first President of India Rajendra Prasad.

Succession of power in INC leaders in decolonialised India had followed a historical tendency though, tendency of concentrating the decisionmaker powers only within upper caste-class elite section.

Majoritarian historiography unconditionally supports Nehru as most committed idealist to democracy but the conflicting incidents within INC regarding party and newly found state depicts another image of Jawaharlal Nehru. Dismissal of first non-INC government of India in Kerala in 1959 adequately proves his structural authority over apparent democracy. The intersectional background of Nehru motivated him in protecting the political elite in order to create a social habitus for party supporters and decision makers by whom he continued to enjoy governmentality for two decades and later his successors in INC. Democratic institutions are sometimes product for consolidating hegemony over apparently fair electorate competition (Singh 2015) thus authorising elite section of any given society to gradually take over. I am not denying the necessities for those democratic institutions but actually criticising the channelization of power within social elites which later created a class of power elites in India and Nehru government's policy level activities of destabilizing own legal institutions for electorate gains. After decades from independence the masses of this land have been consolidated within a practiced democracy and newly found idea of nation India but most of the political authority has already been channelized toward elite sections. Textual history explicitly depicts classical elites as the major martyrs for democratic struggles all around the globe but elitist contribution in democracy is very much arguable. Like any other countries, Indian historiography has given the crown jewel to the elitist in later documentation (Aloysius 1997) but it is empirically proved that elitist commitment in democratic struggle is very much calculative input where they have measured their upcoming roles in the new politico-social structures. Elites make the power accessible only for those who live with the political habitus (Bourdieu 1990).

Nehru's idealist conceptions were derived from his Fabian socialism and philosophical humanism but he always tried to accommodate western philosophies with Indian traditionalism which in fact was a product of unmitigated upper caste political upbringing in Congress atmosphere. He was largely influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and Radhakrishnan in choosing peaceful method of social change which attracted him in traditionalism (Nehru 1956) but the basic components he derived from this so-called traditional India were restructured images of unequal, unjust society which he wanted to abolish. Democratic institutions were given stress on economic growth in order to achieve ultimate political democracyⁱⁱ because adult suffrage cannot reduce inequality. Ironically, under pressure from landowners' lobby of INC led by Sardar Patel, he neglected abolition of Zamindari and distribution of lands in pre 1952 India. It has been later proved that no other institutionalisation can bring equal representation and opportunity than distribution of lands in the then India. He was successful in securing votes of landed classes and their interests but he continued the tactics until his death. He was very much critical toward the politics of sacrosanctity and alerted Indians not to consider Constitution as a sacred object but a dynamic entity; asserting freedom of individual and popular sovereignty of representational governments. Yet dismissal of Kerala government was as autocratic as it was undemocratic. The crucial questions asked by Nehru during parliamentary session in 1954, vividly depicted his latent racial supremacist attitude, for instance he believed colonialism had made a great dynamic Hindu society into an unequal static societyⁱⁱⁱ. One cannot deny colonial reasons for the destruction of Indian economy but this reactionary dynamic-static duality is supremacist and as well as prejudiced. It is true that INC was enough tolerant toward Hindu supremacist politics and it is open for empiricism to prove their influence over its winning in recent elections.

It is interesting that pre-independence Nehru understood the class nature of democracy and how it could be manipulated in particular direction, so institutions were made in that fashion that any power deprived Indian can access the democratic power. Nehru believed that economic equality is the ultimate free democracy and adult suffrage is absolutely fruitless without filtration of power toward the lowest of the society. He did not absolutize the largest functioning democracy in the world (Brown 2014) and it was very appreciable given the present scenarios. He tried to liquify the British standards of bourgeoisie democracy according to certain historical and political lives of Indians in order to ultimately adjust it into putting an end to poverty and contradicting capitalism (Nehru 1934). According to him present day democracy had collaborated capitalism, militarism and bureaucracy into chauvinistic parliamentarianism which should be eradicated for the graces of ultimate free democracy. Pre-Independence Nehru, from his socialist cognition, believed in political democracy as a growing measure for economic democracy. Although in 1950s, he became more tolerant toward bourgeoisie democracy claiming the success of parliamentarianism in solidifying economic growth. It is very much contradicting of Nehru to assert that bourgeoisie democracy may bring economic growth; certain rise in living standards cannot be accepted as economic democracy. Nehru's affirmative actions uplifted economical lives of million Indians but he himself invoked the death of the dream of an economically equal India by adjoining his dream of socialism with elitist model of power (Martyshin 1981). Even in Jaipur AICC session of 1963, he argued for political democracy that will lead to social-economical democracy of a just society but his the then economic reformism toward capitalism contradicted his views. In a society of democracy, revolutionary enthusiasm of masses is essential for invoking socialism but he, during his ministership, didn't mandate any such inspiring atmosphere for the masses. Interestingly Nehru did not reduce democracy to a political structure where privileged power centric minority can undermine numerical majority. According to him it is away of progression in indispensable conditions in which mass education cannot be possible by union government but villagers will educate themselves in peaceful way into ultimate political consciousness to justify, secure and

satisfy own rights^{iv}. These idealist stances helped in shaping directive principals and affirmative actions and it stressed upon the secular nature of the Constitution. He and Indonesian head of state Sukarno derived these terms such as 'progressive democracy' and 'directed democracy' but both did not enhance what they meant by these yet we can assume it differed from liberalism.

On the other hand, post-Independence Nehru used democratic institutions not to consolidate INC's interests over oppositions but over rivals from own party. Procedural features of democracy helped Nehru in defeating his party rivals from state offices in order to stabilize his authority. He also accommodated defeated party rivals into the zones of influence just to effectively check their threats and later using anti-corruption mechanisms to get rid of them (Singh 2015). Idealist international image and mass mobilizing charisma led Nehru into office for two decades but one cannot deny his nepotism toward favourable leaders such as Indira Gandhi; this undemocratic practice in the disguise of populism gave birth to network based clientelism strategies in Indian politics.

Democratization is solicited to power elites as long as it is from their political habitus. Electorate democracy or bourgeois democracy is historically enhancing force for capitalist structure that later intensify authority over institutions. Nehru may have established many legal institutions that helped in filtering power accessibility for downtrodden Indians but pre-independence elite sections are still enjoying ultimate power accessibility. India may have the largest mass mobilization in the world in the name of election but still a question is very relevant today that how far clientelism or populism can drive democracy without decentralisation of power. Nehruvian democracy may be accessible but its product is not approachable by those who live outside of clientelism political habitus.

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ⁱ Most of the INC member of parliaments protested against Hindu Reform Bill 1951 in the fear of sabotaging traditional Hindu cultural practices.

ⁱⁱ Parliamentary speech on 15 December, 1992 discussing the essentiality of economic growth for political democracy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Parliamentary Speech on 22 May, 1954 during debate on the Special Marriage Bill.

^{iv} Nehru's idealist philosophy and motivations can be found in his *An Autobiography*, 1936.