

CHAPTER FIVE

NEHRU ON PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

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Nehru was a great nation builder, and he had his own convictions in matters of Parliamentary democracy. He was an intellectual of his own style. He firmly believed in political democracy, and what he always desired was that from political democracy one can advance to the concept of economic democracy. He also believed that one cannot have political democracy without mass education, and he was firmly convinced that in other countries full blooded political democracy came after education had spread a good deal as a result of the economic revolution which had prepared the ground for it. He was conscious that India had opted for taking a huge jump in introducing hundred per-cent political democracy, without having conscious electorate. It was not only in this context, but he has also given much thought on how a true parliamentarian, should dedicate himself to the parliamentary democracy. In this context; in this chapter; it is felt essential to reproduce some of his thought in this context; which he has expressed in parliamentary debates, in his speeches at various places in the All India Congress Committee

meetings, and sessions, in the Legislative Assembly debates etc; which help us in bringing forth on various aspects of the functioning of Parliamentary democracy. This chapter hence is heavily based on the various Legislative Assembly debates etc. The quotes are mentioned in brief (gist) above; and followed with some interpretation of the same.

- 1) Disordered liberty not democracy too much liberty leading to license and suppression of liberty limitations on freedom necessary.

... I should like this country to develop the democratic process and grow on democratic lines. But we talk so much of democracy and of liberty. And those words are dear to us because most of our lives we have fought for freedom and liberty; and yet when you talk of democracy it means some kind of ordered liberty because a disordered liberty is not democracy, and it leads ultimately to the suppression of that liberty. We have seen those of us who are acquainted with recent history how too much talk of liberty has led to licence and has led to the suppression of that liberty. The history of Europe will show that, the history of other countries too.

So let us not be too sure of the liberty and freedom we possess. Let us cling to them and guard them jealously. But we will not guard them or preserve them loose talk or loose action. Only by stern discipline and sternly understanding the limitations of freedom can we preserve them, for everything has its limitations, even freedom and even liberty. Without those limitations we endanger.¹

- 2) Adult franchise a bold step
 faith in democracy no rights
 without obligations.

We live in an age of democracy, and India is committed to the democratic ideal. For the first time in history we were brave and courageous enough to give the vote to the dwellers in the jungle, even as to the dwellers in the cities. We did not deny the vote to any person in India. We did not attach any property qualifications or educational tests. We treated everyone as a human being, with a right to say what his Government should be. So we put our faith in democracy to the fullest extent. And democracy only flourishes, as freedom flourishes when the responsibilities of freedom are understood and carried out. If the responsibilities are not understood and carried out then freedom itself tends to slip away. There is no right without a corresponding responsibility

and obligation. We claim rights, but we forget the obligations that accompany the rights and such rights will not be a blessing to us, and may even be a curse.²

- 3) Democratic process adopted in the interests of individual freedom and social growth.

We have definitely accepted the democratic process. Why have we accepted it? Well, for a variety of reasons. Because we think that in the final analysis it promoted the growth of human beings and of society; because, as we have said in our constitution, we attach great value to individual freedom because we want the creative and the adventurous spirit of man to grow.³

- 4) Democracy as a means to an end, end being good life for the people at large political democracy to lead to economic democracy vote meaningless for a hungry man importance of self discipline in democracy.

Democracy is a means to an end. What is the end we aim at? I do not now if everybody will agree with me, but

I would say the end is the good life for the individual. What form it should take can be argued about but the good life certainly must imply a certain satisfaction of the essential economic needs, which will release him from continuous oppression, and which will give him a chance to develop his creative faculties.

In the past, democracy has been taken chiefly to mean political democracy, roughly represented by the idea of every person having a vote. It is obvious that a vote by itself does not mean very much to a person who is down and out and starving. Such a person will be much more interested in food to eat than in vote. Therefore, political democracy by itself is not enough ~~except~~ that it may be used to obtain a gradually increasing measure of economic democracy. The good things of life must become available to more and more people and gross inequalities must be removed. That process has, no doubt, gone on for some time in countries where there is political democracy.⁴

We believe in democracy. Speaking for myself, I believe in it, first of all, because I think it is the right means to achieve ends and because it is a peaceful method. Secondly, because it removes the pressures which other forms of Government may impose on the individual. It transforms the discipline which

is imposed by authority largely to self discipline. Self discipline means that even people who do not agree the minority accept solutions because it is better to accept them and then change them, if necessary, by peaceful methods.

Therefore, democracy means to me an attempt at the solution of problems by peaceful methods. If it is not peaceful, then to my mind, it is no democracy. If I may further elaborate thesecond reason, democracy gives the individual an opportunity to develop. Such opportunity does not mean anarchy, where every individual does what he likes. A social organization must have some discipline to hold it together. This can either be imposed from outside or be in the nature of self discipline. Imposition from outside may take the form of one country governing another or of an autocratic or authoritarian form of government. In a proper democracy, discipline is self impose. There is no democracy if there is no discipline.

The problems of government have grown so enormously that sometimes one begins to doubt whether the normal parliamentary procedures are adequate to deal with them. I remember reading discussions about the growing difficulty in the British Parliament thirty years ago. They were not finding time to deal with these problems in detail and suggestions had been made from time to time for powers to be transferred to large committees

of Parliament which could deal with legislation in detail and finalize it once the principle had been laid down by Parliament. That is one way of getting over the difficulty, but I do not know whether any satisfactory solution has been found.

Parliaments nowadays have to work much harder than they used to. Members of Parliament get a vast number of papers to study which they can hardly read. They have to sit late hours to grapple with the problems. If the average Member has to carry this great burden of printed paper and sit late hours, with select committee and all kinds of other committees functioning, you can very well imagine what the poor members of the Government have to carry. In addition to the papers given to private Members, they have to carry the burden of decisions and many other loads which are part of the day to day government of the country not coming up before parliament. The business of Government and the business of Parliament become more and more complicated and it becomes a little doubtful how far Parliamentary democracy can carry on its work and solve such problems. Some kind of a division of authority may become necessary; otherwise problems might remain unsolved, unsolved problems are dangerous.... How far can parliamentary democracy be adapted to meet these new burdens and functions of government satisfactorily, effectively and in time ?

Time is the overriding consideration and that is why the question has arisen whether it is possible to have devolution of authority in parliamentary democracy which ensures that these problems can be dealt with rapidly and effectively. The **easiest** way to deal with a problem is for an autocrat or dictator to settle it at once, rightly or wrongly. Obviously that is an approach which is bad for the growth of the people. It does not develop that creative energy, that spirit and that sense of freedom which we consider essential. But remember also that creative energy and sense of freedom do not develop merely by giving a person the right to vote.

Parliamentary democracy is inevitably in going the direction, everywhere, of what might be called economic democracy. It may take different forms, but only in the measure that it solves the economic problems does it succeed even in the political field. If the economic problems are not solved then the political structure tends to weaken and crack up.

To sum up, all our institutions, including the parliamentary institutions, are ultimately the projections of a people's character, thinking and aims. They are strong and lasting in the measure that they are in accordance with the people's character and thinking. Otherwise, they tend to break up.

- 5) Parliamentary system chosen
 as in keeping with old traditions
 the British model ability,
 devotion to work, spirit of cooperation,
 discipline and restraint necessary for
 success - principles of change and
 continuity sign of life disruptive
 tendencies to be fought through
 peaceful methods.

We choose this system of parliamentary democracy deliberately; we choose it not only because, to some extent, we had always thought on those lines previously, but because we thought it was in keeping with our own old traditions also; naturally the old traditions, not as they were, but adjusted to the new conditions and new surroundings. We choose it also let us give credit where credit is due because we approved of its functioning in other countries, more especially the United Kingdom.

So, this Parliament, the Lok Sabha became, to some extent not entirely, but to a large extent rather like the British Parliament or the British House of Commons whether it is in regard to our questions or our rules of procedure or methods of work.

Now, parliamentary democracy demands many things, demands of course, ability. It demands a certain devotion to work as very work does. But it demands also a large measure of cooperation, of self discipline, of restraint. It is obvious that a house like this cannot perform any functions without the spirit of cooperation, without a large measure of restraint and self discipline in each member and in each group. Parliamentary democracy is not something which can be transplanted in a country by some wand or by some quick process. We talk about it but we know very well that there are not many countries in the world where it functions successfully. I think it may be said without any partiality that it has functioned with a very large measure of success in this country. Why Not so much because we, the members of this House, are exemplars of country, and because our people have the spirit of democracy in them.⁵

Now, this system of parliamentary democracy, therefore, embodies, I think these principles of change and continuity both. And it is up to those who function in this system, Parliament, Members of the House and the numerous others who are part of this system, to increase the pace of change, to make it as fast as they like, subject to the principle of continuity, because the moment that continuity is broken we become rootless and the system of parliamentary democracy breaks down. Parliamentary democracy is a

delicate plant and it is a measure of our own success that this plant has become sturdier during these last few years. We have faced grave problems, difficult problems, and solved many of them; but many remain to be solved. Indeed, there is going to be no end of the problems that will come to us, because problems are inevitable when you grow. It is only those who are stagnant that have few problems, and if there are no problems that is a sign of death. Only the dead have no problems; the living have problems and they grow with problems, fighting with problems and overcoming them. It is a sign of the growth of this nation that not only we solve problems, but we create new problems to solve.

Parliamentary democracy involves naturally peaceful methods of action, peaceful acceptance of decisions taken and attempts to change them through peaceful ways again; it is no parliamentary democracy otherwise. It is essential that we, who talk and who believe in the quest of peace so much, should remember that the quest of peace and the quest of democracy can only be made through methods of peace and not through any other. We have a great united country, a country which is dear to us, and of which we are proud. But being proud of it does not mean that we should close our eyes to the grave problems we often have to face in the country and the disruptive process which this Parliament represents.

It is in the measure that we put an end even in our thinking to these disruptive tendencies which divide us and which tend to break up the unity of India that we will have strengthened our country and laid sound foundations for the future.

- 6) Constitution based on Parliamentary Government method ^{of argument, discussion and} decision majority to have its way, minority not to be ignored Parliament to function with speed Parliamentary democracy not tied to system of free private enterprise political to economic democracy system to be changed if economic aims not achieved parliamentary system perhaps the best as the most dynamic.

Deliberately and after long argument we in India adopted a constitution based on parliamentary government. The fact that nearly eight years of the working of our constitution have not ⁱⁿ any way made us waver in our allegiance to it indicates our strong faith in it. We prize the parliamentary form of government because it is a peaceful method of dealing with problems. It is a method of argument, discussion and decision, and of accepting that decision, even though one may not agree with it.

However, the minority in a parliamentary government has a very important part to play. Naturally, the majority, by the mere fact that it is a majority, must have its way. But a majority which ignores the minority is not working in the true spirit of parliamentary democracy.⁶

In a period of dynamic change, the institution of parliament has to function with speed. Does the parliamentary form of government enable a country to move with speed when speed becomes essential ? Take an emergency like war. When a war occurs, parliaments continue to function but with certain limitations because of the emergency. A great deal depends on the conditions of the times, on the environment and on the problems which a country has to face. Having, approved of parliamentary democracy as the right approach, we have to see how to temper it and how to fit it in, so that it can answer the major question of the age.

Sometimes it is said parliamentary democracy is inevitably combines with a system of private enterprise. Private enterprise may be good or bad, but I do not see what parliamentary connection between the two except the connection of past habit and past thinking. In fact the arguments about socialism, private enterprise and public sector, important as they are, have tended to become

less and less valid. There is no country in the world where some middle way between the extremes has not been or is not being found. In the U.S.A. which is said to have a highly developed form of modern capitalism and private enterprise, there is more public enterprise than in most countries which apparently have a different objective and ideal.

In Europe, we see many countries haveing advanced very far on the road to socialism. I am not referring to the communist countries but to those which may be called parliamentary, social democratic countries. There is no conflict between socialism and parliamentary democracy. In fact, I would venture to say that there is going to be an increasing degree of conflict between the idea of parliamentary government and full fledged private enterprise. Parliamentary government is a democratic conception. It means the gradual widening of the franchise till it becomes adult franchise. It is only in very recent times that any country has had adult franchise. The effects of adult franchise are being felt in full only now. This political change having fully established itself, it has become obvious that a political change by itself is not enough.

From political democracy we advance to the concept of economic democracy. First of all, that means working for a certain measure of well being for all, call it Welfare State. Secondly, it means working for a certain measure of equality of opportunity in the economic sphere. Every country, whether it is communist or anti communist, is going that way.

We can hardly have a political democracy without mass education. In other countries full blooded political democracy came after education had spread a good deal as a result of the economic revolution which had prepared the ground for it. But in most Asian countries, certainly in India, we have taken a huge jump to hundred percent political democracy without the wherewithal to supply the demands which a politically conscious electorate makes. That is the essence of the problem in all the Asian countries. All our political life is really concerned with how rapidly we can bridge this hiatus between desires and their fulfilment. India's Second Five Year Plan is an attempt at the wrong way of the form of government which we should have, but in terms of a political structure which will fulfil the demands made upon it. If the political structure cannot do so it means that it has become out of date and may have to go.

I do not know whether ultimately the parliamentary structure answers this question or not. But I should imagine that

the parliamentary form of government is more likely to do so than the other forms which lead to some measure of authoritarianism.

..... Any system of government which tends to become passive and static is bad. Parliamentary system of government will all its failings, has the virtue that it can fit in with the changing pattern of life. Progress was Jawaharlal Nehru's creed. His concept of was two dimensional :

- 1) Material welfare or economic development was the one; and the other
- 2) Development of the human personality was the other.

This is how he viewed the functioning and the process of Parliamentary democracy.

Nehru's concept of democracy was a broad one, resting on at least four main pillars :

- 1) Individual freedom, the freedom of the individual to grow and to make the best of his capacities and abilities and tolerance not merely of those who agree with us, but of those who do not agree with us';

- 2) Representative government, based on popular sovereignty and elected representatives;

3) Economic and social equality, calling for a proper balance between freedom and equality, and a ' socialist pattern of society, and

4) Social self discipline.

Above all, to him democracy was something of the mind.... a mental approach applied to our political and economic problems' and ' scheme of values and moral standards in life',.. He realized how poorly India was prepared for this kind or any kind of democracy. He knew that democracy was ' the hard way ' and required a higher standard of human being '. He was well aware that people seldom realize their full potential, but he believed that ' everybody can attain a certain measure of greatness and out of that a large number of individuals rise up to positions of great responsibility."

It has often been said that Indians have a great history, but little sense of history. Nehru, at least, had a profound sense of history, a deep interest in and knowledge of the past and a great respect for India's heritage. At the same time he wanted the Indian people to free themselves of the mental shackles of the past, and to undergo the kind of mental reconditioning which would better equip them to deal with the problems of the



present and the future, without leading them to turn their backs on the past and on their rich heritage. In his will and testament, made public after his death, he explained his approach to the past and the present. After a moving tribute to the Ganga as 'a symbol and memory of the past of India, running into the present, and flowing on to the great ocean of the future', he continued.

And though I have discarded much of past tradition and custom, and am anxious that India should rid herself of all shackles that bind and constrain her and divide her people, and suppress a vast number of them, and prevent the free development of the body and the spirit, though I seek all this, yet I do not wish to cut myself off from that past completely. I am proud of that great inheritance that has been, and is, ours, and I am conscious that, I too, like all of us, am a link in that unbroken chain which goes back to the dawn of history in the immemorial past of India. That chain I would not break, for I treasure it and seek inspiration from it.

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