

*Revolution From Above: India's Future and the Citizen Elite*, Gupta, Dipankar, Rupa Publications, India Private Limited, New Delhi, pp. i-xiii, 225, 2013.

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Dipankar Gupta, a senior sociologist, renders his thoughts on democracy, citizenship, fraternity, role of 'elite of calling' or 'citizen elite', and citizenship. After his year-long stay at Bilbao, Basque Spain and witnessing its changeover, revolutionised; he started reflecting on the Indian scenario, as mentioned in the preface. He delves into India's recent past and its various problems, and the need for revolution, especially to ensure universal education, health care, energy resources and to understand the phenomenon of urbanisation for deepening of citizenship. This book is an outcome of his reflections, in which he focuses on India's need to have citizen elites to bring out democracy's potentials or revolutionising India from above as counter argument that such changes historically have not come from below. Several development issues, such as poverty, corruption, labour and informal sectors, economic growth, politicians and politics of given, including divides on caste, class, religion and regional identities, have been extensively studied across ten of the total eleven chapters. The last chapter covers the historical political evolution of Basque region of Spain and their achievements in education, health and research sectors. Each chapter begins with an outline of the chapter, which is a new style of presentation introduced in this book.

The first chapter sets the tone of the book, focusing on the quest for India's Citizen Elite in the context of constraints of democracy, mirroring reality and revolution from above. Through a case of Mandal formula, which increased the scope for reservations, he introduces it as 'politics of given'; that is, accepting the reality of caste. This has resulted in India becoming much more caste-conscious in its political life than ever before. He then refers to seeing reality in the mirror and the need of hammer-wielding craftsmen to shape a democracy wherein citizenship, fraternity and equal opportunities are described as critical constituents. He stresses

the need to transform the architects of fraternity from artists to the political life, as they see the people as citizens and merge 'them' in as 'us'. The elites think in terms of 'aspirations', sound like utopians and go beyond what exists. While advocating hammer, he stresses on education, health care and energy sources as priority areas.

The second chapter describes 'elites of calling' as the vanguards of democracy. He contends that the present scenario distracts us from thinking clearly about our future as citizens and that's where the role of Citizen Elites is important in altering reality. For instance, they would think about handling poverty not through a special programme for the poor but to include them in the ambit of citizenship. Reaffirming as truth that the poor people cannot revolt on their own and if they do so, such expressions of rebellion are short-lived. The 'citizen elite' may be drawn from the established elite but the fact that they are able to see the big picture clearly and contribute to social development for the advantage of all citizens. Members of 'elite of calling' dedicate their lives to people but they are not made by the people, as the politicians are elected by the voters. Earl Grey and the Factory Act in Britain 1833 and Henry Brougham and Education Bill in 1837 and many more 'elite of calling' during the nineteenth century made education and quality public health care the holy cow that no European government dare sacrifice; setting it as the first principle of citizenship. In India, meanwhile, the question of whether it is possible to be a voter and yet not a full citizen takes on a much starker appearance. Though India has a large elite class, they are all busy looking after their own interests and had they been 'citizen elite', they would have acted and thought differently, thinking beyond the 'iron law of dystopia'.

Mahatma Gandhi and Ahimsa as an elite intervention makes the third chapter. It is often argued that Gandhi is no longer relevant in India. In fact, he contributed towards giving India a modern, liberal democratic state. Gandhi forced us to reject untouchability, embrace fraternity, protect minority rights, give equal space to women, and question unchecked industrialisation. He got these ideas from his experience and reading of Emerson, Thoreau, Tolstoy and the Gita, very little from the 'people'. He opposed socialism for two reasons; one of them was that socialism was impossible in its current articulation without resorting to violence. The spirit of democracy and the most prized Articles on Fundamental Rights and Duties have found their place in our Constitution largely because of Gandhi's insistence on non-violence as a political precept. He insisted that 'the weakest should have the same opportunity as the

strongest', and 'Independent India as conceived by me will have all Indians belonging to different religions living in "perfect friendship"', signifying equality and secularism as well as a liberal state—the life and soul of India democracy. Disavowal of separate electorate too goes to the credit of Gandhi.

Unlike previous chapters, the following chapters delve into politics of given, exploring various dimensions of given reality. Utopia to the politics of given is discussed at length, from Nehru to Manmohan Singh, in the fourth chapter. 'Nehru's memory should have been kept alive, yet we have to scratch our heads to remember him'—the statement reveals the lingering relevance of elite intervention while accepting the fact that he steered India through its most difficult period. Though Nehru is given credit as 'elite of calling' who challenged established customs and wisdom, such as starting IITs and IIMs, Bhilai and Bokaro for sourcing steel, and other initiatives for scientific and industrial self-reliance, he did not focus on education and health sectors, nor did he free our legal and law enforcement apparatus from the colonial past, which indicates non-commitment to citizenship. This is why we see a plethora of politicians avidly maximising 'the given'. Nehru instead of equating the public sector with service, his daughter Indira made it synonymous with 'nationalisation'. Political control, at whatever cost, became the guiding motto of the Congress party after Nehru and this characterises all political parties today. The planning commission and Five Year Plan did not yield expected benefits, as our planners are of a different kind; like politicians they do not take positions and remain non-committal. The author has described the failure of Five Year Plans and how poverty has remained alive based on empirical data, and how Manmohan became a politician rather than a 'citizen elite'.

The fifth chapter titled 'A thousand tyrants: One citizen, many masters' would expectedly discuss about bureaucrats, administrators and decision-makers as continuation of his argument of 'change from above' but it is largely focused on consolidation of political class, corruption and how the culture of patronage enlivens 'politics of given'; that is, none of the political parties has evolved policies on agriculture, urbanisation, health delivery system, formalisation of labour force or such measures that strengthen citizenship. The Gorwala report describing 'durbari'-style politics and patron-seeking practices making citizens more vulnerable to these practices is an interesting point that is dealt in detail.

As a logical extension to the previous chapter, the sixth, seventh,

eighth and ninth chapters focus on the issue of formalisation of labour force and its contribution to economic growth, health sector, education sector, and urbanisation, respectively. Each chapter quotes the widely circulated data of various government agencies and reports of national and international agencies on human development to mirror the ground reality, linking it with citizenship intermittently.

The tenth chapter, the shortest among all chapters, discusses the crux of the book; that is, the difference between citizen elites and Mahatmas as well as concepts of civil society and citizenship. The heroes (or Mahatmas) and the 'citizen elite' may resemble each other at first glance but actually they are quite different. The former category is characterised by 'goodwill' and charity whereas for the latter, 'fraternity' is the driving force. Heroes or Mahatmas come in to fill the gaps in anon-delivering democracy but when democracy delivers universally, Mahatmas become a rare feature. The distinction between both categories is blurred because the term 'civil society' is used carelessly and perhaps even promiscuously. The author opines that 'the term civil society refers only to those apparatuses of the state that actually deliver citizenship', and examines two different viewpoints of Partha Chatterjee and Rajni Kothari. He further mentions that the UN and other multilateral agencies identifying civil society with NGOs are obviously unaware of the long, intellectual tradition of this concept. He argues that when a set of rights is won, avenues for legal guarantee of the equality of opportunity as well as legitimate access to socially valuable skills are opened up. The targeted approaches and trickledown theory failed because they are not universal in scope; different social divisions are the basis for various programmes of the government.

In sum, relentless depiction of various issues that ail Indian democracy, which is well known, overshadows many important conceptual terms and processes that the book has dealt with. A little more prodding on the issues mentioned in the following paragraph would make the book a thought-provoking and path-breaking contribution.

The journey of the book, as the author has planned, fulfils expectations of the readers on 'revolution from above', as the title suggests. The term 'revolution' has two distinct aspects: one of social transformation through systemic changes, and the other with protest and people's collective action, based on contentious politics. The author has used words like leader, visionary and utopia rarely. Through the case of Gandhiji, he has indicted potentials of citizen

elites, though that undermines the role of Constituent Assembly members, leaders and freedom fighters and their contribution in ensuring many other rights of Indian citizens. In this regard, one of the obvious questions that arises is of the contribution of Dr Ambedkar and his role as elite of calling. An overview of Nehru to Manmohan Singh highlighting the 'politics of given' like other chapters overweighs the concerns of the book regarding deepening of citizenship and 'what could have been done' to achieve full potentials of democracy.

The tenth chapter is one of the most significant chapters in continuing his arguments as well as to travel on the less explored paths of 'citizenship', different set of rights' and developmentalism and its impact on democracy. The inter-linkages between these have been touched upon, yet these could have been dealt with in a much organised manner. Similarly, the role of UN and other multilateral agencies should have been articulated vis-à-vis human rights and right to development, as these discourses have been in place for developmentalism and casually touching upon citizen's rights; the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) stresses on universal rights to education and health care, yet it undermines the citizen's rights as a critical element for citizenship. And if we believe that these agencies can play a critical role as Citizen Elite, articulating their roles would have been helpful.

The debates on citizenship, on ethnicity, rights of linguistic and religious minority bring out the State as a major player in shaping up of citizenship; a chapter initiating a dialogue on the inter-linkages and role of the State, civil society, citizen elites and heroes (or philanthropy and social welfare measures) in bringing about 'revolution from the above' is much expected. Though the failure of theories of trickle down, targeted approach and politics of given are dealt in depth, addressing 'why still these practices are dominant in developmentalism and not giving way to new ones' would have been an invaluable contribution of the book. Similarly, how dystopia prevents a process of making of 'citizen elite' as well as how 'politics of given' enlarges the scope of dystopia would have been enlightening. Otherwise, one of the impressions the book leaves in the reader's mind is that citizen elites are 'born', once in a millennium! The role of democracy or societal processes has negligible avenues to create 'calling of elites'!