

Book Review**By****Anuradha Bose**

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Revolution from Above: India's Future and the Citizen Elite. (2012) Dipankar Gupta. New Delhi (INDIA). Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2012. ISBN 978-81-291-2460-9. 129pp. INR 495/-

Democracy is a commitment to change the world and not merely hold back a nation in its context. It is to strive for a better tomorrow for the citizens, more equitable, progressive and accommodating. Democracy is void without the very notion of citizenship which protects each and every individual irrespective of their inherent advantageous or disprivileged positioning in the society.

This book takes us through the gaps that India need to address in order to emerge as a democracy that ensures true citizenship. India is yet to deliver on the livelihood concerns of its citizens be it education, health, employment opportunities, migration, fraternity, urbanisation etc. Drawing upon the vivid journey of the western democracies, the author elucidates that democracy needs its citizen elites or elite of calling who shoulder the pillars of prosperity through struggle. The elite of calling, like in all the other democracies, deliver to all the citizens, and not only to the targeted fragments in the society. They are visionaries, people of substance, training, foresight and immense willpower, who forsake their interests for social good. They are the leader of the masses and together they move towards true democracy. India too once had its citizen elites in Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and others but today it is lead by politicians whose efforts are concerted mainly on electoral dynamics.

Giving brief accounts of Europe, Canada, US, UK, etc. the author argues that societies have progressed through the intervention by citizen elites, from ensuring universal health and education to minority rights, gender equality, abolition of child labour etc. Likewise in India, Mahatma Gandhi campaigned against untouchability while Nehru fought against communal forces post- partition and also against polygamy, not in the interest of the mere popular will but as visionaries of a better citizenship. There is no harm in drawing inspiration from

democracies of the world for our own sake, their approach, vision, etc., the ideologies and context vary but the experiences can help build the perspectives of the leaders of today.

Thereby, the author reflects on determining the role and kind of leadership that is needed in India, leading it towards the path of democracy and citizenship. How the country shall progress had the political leaders adopted the role of the citizen elites or the elites of calling who fight for what is right and work to bring about change in the current context, and, not remain as the passive politicians who succumb to the given situation and constantly attempt to mend the already distorted, disillusioned and distracted path that the country is trudging on in terms of health, education, public welfare, economic growth, public deliverables etc.

The author sternly criticises the targeted approach that the policies in India adopt while comparing the situation with western democracies. He says that so long as we target the poor in our development projects, we might succeed in keeping them alive but this compartmentalised or sectional approach shall keep the nation a long way from development. It is the universalisation of public deliverables that is the agenda i.e. equalising their availability to all people across all denominations thereby ensuring citizenship as elaborated by T. H. Marshall.

Universal health, education, human rights, etc. cannot be achieved through target based approach because universalisation enables mere access to the facilities and not the equitable distribution of the public services as it might not hold any value for the haves' who are not usually affected whether they do benefit from such provisions or not. What suffers is the overall delivery mechanism becomes dysfunctional and wasteful. Thus, policies in India need an improved focus not only on inputs (as in the current scenario) but also on the process and outputs or results.

The author keenly observes that planning in education in segregated and stepwise manner has actually hampered the growth of R&D in education since we end up catering to the present, while we need to adopt a wider and futuristic approach which is integrative and across levels. This shall enable us to focus not only on the end results/ outcome as Amartya Sen argues in his Idea of Justice but on the comprehensive whole where the quality of education becomes the prime concern.

On occasions there are glimpses of utopia in the book but the author substantiates his opinions through the eyes of a citizen elite. A realistic utopia is one that begins from what exists and then strains at every level to change it. It thus encourages the people to aspire for a better life and a true democracy, because it is the aspirations that ignite the flame in the hearts of the elite of calling, and look beyond the present needs. India suffers several handicaps in terms of poverty, illiteracy, social disparities, etc. but it is time to not glorify the issues in political parlance anymore but rather charge them with priority.

However, in certain aspects the author has just skimmed through the details. This includes that while discussing about Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru emphasis has been on their efforts instead of validating their credibility in great extent. Secondly, a comparative statistical analysis of health model in America and Europe has been given without describing what that model is since without the knowledge of these it is difficult to realise the potential of the illustrations cited with respect to the context. Also, the success story of Basque, Spain was elaborated on how it reached great heights in just 3 decades but analysis of what measures they took wasn't explained.

The book focuses only on the provisioning of equal opportunities in order to equalise each individual at the base who shall forge ahead on the basis of their innate capacities which make some better off and some not so much. But in a historically stratified society like India where individuals are born into inequalities, can such efforts make an impact without developing capacities in all citizens, limits their choices in life.

The author's attempt to universal orientation in policy planning is at the risk of homogenising all human being and virtually ignoring the diverse and multi-cultural attributes that characterise them. Thus, in order to bring about democratic citizenship and equality, target based approach is inevitable since some are more advantaged than others and by virtue of their socio-cultural capital the dominant groups may remain dominant forever. Thus, reinforcing inequity and subjugation of the disadvantaged. However, we may shift towards affirmative action which will be a more substantive methodology for promoting equity rather than reservation policies which lead to segregation and eventual disintegration in the society.