

Editorial

Thursday, November 14, 2019

Subdued voice

Man, being a social animal has to exist with and amongst other humans and in order to adjust and make co-existence possible certain laws and regulations are drawn up to safeguard the welfare of every member of the group or community, curtailing certain personal freedoms and liberties that might infringe on other person's welfare. This is the basic idea of a social set-up. Leaders and arbitrators are then chosen to oversee the smooth working of the social system with adequate executive powers as deemed necessary to enforce the same - the Government as we know, create and accept in the contemporary world. A society, being made up of individual members, is bound to come up with conflicting interests and emotions. This is where the quality and the efficiency of the people entrusted to sort out these social issues are being tested. The problems being faced by the people of Manipur as a collective whole in recent times are uncountable and varied. Indeed an intimidating and daunting task for those entrusted to solve them.

Public memory is short lived - or so it is believed. But sweeping away these problems under the carpet and shrouding them with silence, putting the theory about public memory to the test is not the right step towards easing the problems. Nor is the polished method of prolonging the issues and tiring out the protesting parties to buy time and making these matters fade out of the mind of the public the prudent way of resolving things.

The recent assurances doled out to the different parties regarding their claims for parts of the state by the State Government smacks of the often repeated and always successful modus operandi. Instead of finding a lasting solution and bringing peace in the State, the Government shouldn't be promising something impossible to deliver. It's better to call a spade a spade and wind up the matter before things become irreparably damaged.

The threat to one's own space and liberty, whether personal or social, has always evoked reactions ranging from the passively defensive to the more aggressive and violent. The spontaneous reaction of the collective society on that eventful day in 2001 which saw the unrestrained outpouring of the frustrations of the Manipuris is no different. It would be prudent for us all to ponder over the issue without preconceived notions or personal feelings, and to try and understand the facts as they are.

The aspirations of the different communities to better their own kinds is understandable, but if and when that aspiration starts to infringe on the right and liberty of another community or the rest of the communities as the case may be, then differences and suspicions are bound to develop amongst the communities. There is also the bigger threat of the political system feeding on the concerns of these different groups to its advantage, and what was at first a credible issue, even if only from the point of view of a particular community without delving further into the legality or the practical aspect and its impact on the entire social setup, such genuine concerns almost always gets tainted with political overtures, making the whole process a farce and drama, played out to the interest of the very few who are orchestrating such social disruptions. U

Ultimately, the issue gets sidelined, or more seriously, gets diverted, eventually betraying the hopes and support of the very people who are made to suffer the consequences. The final step-resorting to brute force and irrational violence to subdue and suffocate the rational curiosity and dissenting voice of the society. The only way out of such undesirable situations, and indeed the most effective means of preventing the very fomentation of such divisive ideas is for the people to put a decisive, just and impartial Government which have the political will and the guts to implement even the most unpopular and drastic measures for the good of the society, state or the country - an impossible expectation?

Genuine issues should be resolved before things gets out of hand and peoples' uproar takes precedence for those whose voices has been gagged for so long and their grievances fallen on deaf ears.

Correction

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that my wife's and my children's name Puyam Manglembi Devi (wife) and Puyam Sanamatam Singh has been wrongly recorded as P Manglembi Devi (wife) and P Sanamatam Singh and that the correct name should be recorded as Puyam Manglembi Devi (wife) and Puyam Sanamatam Singh as my nominee of service in my service record, for my future reference.

Sd/-
Puyam Pocha Singh
S/o (L) Puyam Nila Singh
Thoubal Kshetrikeikai, P.O., P.S. & District Thoubal,
Manipur

Name Change

I, Enciben Mahungnao Risom, S/o Ngaranmi Mahung Risom, a resident of Hungnung, Village, P.O. & P.S. Ukhrul, Ukhrul District Manipur - 795142 have change my name from Enciben Mahungnao Risom to Enciben Mahung Risom vide Affidavit dated 11/11/2019 before the Oath Commissioner Ukhrul Manipur.

Sd/-
Enciben Mahung Risom

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The Nehru That India Cannot Forget

Courtesy The Wire
By : Sushil Aaron

Narendra Modi does not agree but the world has never hesitated in recognising Jawaharlal Nehru as a historical figure who left a mark on India and the world. When Nehru died in 1964, the *New York Times* plainly referred to him as the "maker of modern India"; the *Economist* ran a cover story titled "World without Nehru"; It recalled his "almost magical grip" on the masses and regretted that the world stage would be poorer without the "great man".

There has been a considerable shift in opinion about Nehru in India. He was idolised by the public while he lived but nowadays there is a tendency to try and actively forget him or diminish his role. Now Prime Minister Modi has told parliament that "India did not get democracy due to Pandit Nehru, as Congress wants us to believe." Nehru has been dropped from school textbooks of Class VIII in the state of Rajasthan. He did not find a mention in a National Archives exhibition on the Quit India movement. The Ministry of Culture has decided to convert the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library at Nehru's official residence "into a complex showcasing [the] lives of all Indian prime ministers." This is a mystifying form of equal opportunity emineence that perhaps has few parallels. Imagine if the Lincoln Memorial were to suddenly sprout statues of other luminaries.

There are several reasons why Nehru has become a target. The RSS has long despised him for banning the organisation after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination and it vehemently disagrees with the form of secularism that he instituted as state practice. It has been easy to rouse public sentiment against Nehru by invoking the humiliating defeat in the 1962 war against China. Nehru's foreign policy of nonalignment and his faith in state planning have also been questioned. Many also resent his prominence in public life - for the way the Congress has appropriated him politically with statues, roads and government programmes named after him, the numerous advertisements in newspapers bearing his image and so on. In some ways, his ubiquity has obscured the detail that makes Nehru great.

Nehru's life is worth recalling to get a sense as to what he meant to India then and what he offers to the country now. There are fewer biographies of Nehru than he deserves. Part of the reason may have to do with the difficulty in taking on his daunting oeuvre, given how much he wrote and said by way of books, articles, private correspondence and speeches. Historian Judith M. Brown's excellent 2003 biography, *Nehru: A Political Life*, is very helpful in that regard. Drawing on existing material and Nehru's post-1947 papers made available to her by Sonia Gandhi, Brown offers a fascinating, even-handed assessment of his career. Born into a privileged home with a wealthy lawyer and political leader for a father in Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal grew up around the time when colonial rule was, to paraphrase Brown, challenging India's religious and social conventions while affording material and political opportunities for educated Indians. Nehru's political opinions were shaped by his education at Harrow and Cambridge, where he developed a strong distaste for imperialism. After a few desultory years on return, Nehru is drawn to politics, inspired by Gandhi and the protests around 1919-20. The nationalist movement then is marked by debates between moderates and radicals over tactics and strategy, over the use of non-cooperation,

questions over pushing for full independence or being content with gradualist approaches. In this fractious climate, Nehru stands by Gandhi and sees him as being central to India's path to independence, even if the Mahatma's political approaches and emphasis on moral transformation often frustrate him. Nehru's outlook is shaped by other factors as well. One, that he grew up in a household marked by Hindu-Muslim cultural mingling; Motilal's early education from a Muslim tutor was only in Arabic and Persian and being a Kashmiri family in Allahabad, the Nehrus could never really be considered locals and were not prone to narrow, provincial loyalties. Nehru was in some ways always a perennial outsider - a fierce nationalist who admired Britain culturally, he felt deeply about India's subjugation under foreign rule but disapproved of its beliefs and customs.

Nehru soon became preoccupied with politics and Congress matters. He also read voraciously. Being in prison a lot helped. In the 23 years from 1921 to 1945 he was sent to jail for nine terms in periods ranging from 12 days to 1041, a total of 3,259 days - which was nearly nine years of his life. He acclimatised to prison life and wrote of the friendships and hobbies he developed and the irritations of lacking privacy. "His greatest solace was reading", Brown writes. He read on politics, economics, science, literature and contemporary affairs. "Solid reading is a necessity in prison; without it the mind stagnates and rots," he was to say. In one phase, between February 1934 and September 1935, he read 188 books, averaging 15-20 volumes a month. This no doubt shaped his ownability to produce magical prose, as seen through his own writing in *Autobiography* and the *Discovery of India* and the deeply evocative letters and speeches he wrote. Through his years in India and Britain and his travels to Europe and interactions with leaders from other countries, Nehru developed strong convictions about colonial rule, equality within and between nations, the need for land reform and state intervention in the economy and society, the place for science in a nation's life (as opposed to faith, which he was dismissive of), the need for a greater role for women in nation-building and on India's place in the world.

This form of intellectual development was critical to India's future as Nehru was to attain prominence in the Congress in the 1930s, including as president of the party, and as the nationalist movement wound through phases of agitation, accommodation, factional division and stasis. Gandhi was ceasing to be a "serious political leader" in the decade and was focusing his energies on the condition of the "untouchables" instead. Around 1936, Gandhi was "publicly proclaiming that Nehru was his heir, and felt that Nehru with his many gifts and total commitment to India rather than to any sectional cause or personal concern was the one who could be relied upon" to achieve unity in the Congress. Nehru was at this stage not only a key player in party deliberations but also a mass leader attracting a good deal of public adulation.

As is well-known, Nehru went on head an interim government in 1946 and was the central figure in the negotiations leading up to Partition and independence alongside Lord Mountbatten and M.A. Jinnah. Nehru, who insisted on full independence for India long before Gandhi was prepared to agitate for it, was to vehemently oppose Mountbatten's proposal to devolve power to the provinces

before transferring power - as that would amount to the Balkanisation of India. Mountbatten recanted but Nehru and his colleagues were to face a range of challenges in the weeks leading to independence, including, as Brown writes, raging communal violence, provincial choices about joining India or Pakistan, the future of the Indian princes, the division of assets of British India and so on. Nehru also had to deal with the crisis in Kashmir soon after - and the assassination of Gandhi within six months of independence.

Three important legacies

Nehru owes much of his reputation to his post-1946 career. He made at least three decisive interventions that have made India the republic it has become. First, he ensured that his vision of India was inscribed in the Constitution. He drafted and moved in the Constituent Assembly a resolution that set out its objectives, which included the declaration of India as an independent republic in which all power was derived from the people. Everyone was to be guaranteed "social, economic and political justice, equality of status and opportunity, and freedom of thought, religion and association." There were to be safeguards for minorities, backward and tribal areas. All of this was not a given. The 1937 provincial elections were limited by property ownership and had given the vote to only about 30 million Indians. There were, by contrast, 173 million eligible voters in the 1951 elections in independent India. Historian Ramachandra Guha writes in *Patriots and Partisans* that "Nehru was without question the chief architect of our democracy. It was he, more than any other nationalist, who promoted universal franchise and the multi-party system."

Brown writes that "at the heart of Nehru's vision of India was the conviction that it was a composite nation, born of a civilisation which over centuries had drawn from and assimilated the many religious and cultural traditions present on the subcontinent." Nehru also worked in a context when India as an independent nation emerged as a political compact where units like princely states and other communities were open to alternative political futures. The Indian Union could hold together based on guaranteed fundamental rights to all, secularism and a state policy that addressed social inequalities and divisions. Nehru instinctively understood the utility of a constitutional democracy for a people with disparate identities; India was also lucky to have a generation of other gifted leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad and C. Rajagopalachari and together they crafted a political framework for Indians to coexist and evolve a shared imagination of the nation while preserving specific identities.

Second, Nehru's impact on world politics is widely acknowledged. He emerged as an authoritative voice and critic of racism, imperialism and an advocate of Asian unity, Afro-Asian solidarity and world peace. He presciently crafted the policy of Non-Alignment to steer clear of power blocs in order to benefit from contacts with both sides as Guha points out, and it also enabled India to emerge as a mediator between nations and as a leader of developing countries. Nehru's conduct of foreign affairs had, as Brown puts it, "created for his country a distinctive, independent international identity."

Third, Nehru was also focused on domestic social change and saw state planning as a driver of growth and an agent for addressing inequality. This socialist mode of governance with a measure of mixed economy has been discredited in recent years as it stymied innovation and growth but such policies did not lack support - Indian industrialists, for example, also wanted protection from competition. Leaders, in any case, should be judged by the standards of their time. As Brown suggests, Nehru did not have very many governing models to choose from; then; he was impressed by the pace of Soviet industrialisation and wanted to replicate it in India without the attendant violence. It's worth noting where India was setting out from: it's literacy rate at independence, for instance, stood at 14% and poverty levels were high; state intervention was indeed necessary in several sectors and yielded significant results in many instances, such as in its nuclear and space programmes.

Mistakes and failures too

Of course, Nehru had many failures. He completely misread China's intentions and didn't expect Mao to launch an offensive in 1962. Worse, he allowed his assumption to affect India's defence preparedness. He held on to his friend Krishna Menon as defence minister way longer than he should have. Nehru's failure to delegate undermined the development of political talent and cost India dearly in inestimable ways. Many of his aspirations on the domestic front like land reform were thwarted by state level leaders who had ties to rural landed elites. As Guha has written, the Right thinks he was too statist, some on the Left think he wasn't interventionist enough. The big dams that he initiated have displaced indigenous communities. Kashmir's alienation with India in some part began with the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah for long periods. In turn, Nehru often found himself at odds with his countrymen; he was frustrated with administrative incompetence, communal rhetoric, venality in the Congress, and narrow provincial and casteist outlooks that were out of step with the spirit of nation-building.

The scale of his achievement, however, remains. Guha cites a telling tribute by Nirad Chaudhuri who once wrote that Nehru's leadership was "the most important moral force behind the unity of India." He said properly speaking there could not be a successor to Nehru, "but only successors to the different elements of his composite leadership." In some ways that speaks to the range of his influence. Gandhi is understood to be a sage but Nehru was no less a counsellor to India, constantly drawing attention to the principles and direction of its politics and society. He inspired, he cajoled, he rebuked. He also failed. He worked tirelessly to the point of exhaustion several times in his career. Guha recalls the Australian diplomat Walter Crocker writing that the "great bulk of the people sensed, and they never lost the sense, that Nehru wanted only to help them and wanted nothing for himself..."

His was truly a full life lived for India - and there is scarcely any public institution or aspect of the republic that Nehru did not shape or influence. There is plenty in his legacy to both celebrate and contest. Belittling his role - or worse, forgetting him - only betrays India's degradation, even if it cannot alter Nehru's place in history.

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Note: This article is being republished on November 14, 2019, Jawaharlal Nehru's birth anniversary.