

Nehru was no friend of the Tibetan cause¹

During the recent Assembly Elections, 'Common Men' have created history in India; for the first time, the dominance of established political parties has been challenged. In the future, parties will have to seriously think of the *vox populi*.

The South China Morning Post in Hong Kong commented: "For the power elite, the party's arrival poses some difficult questions. ...The imponderables would trouble India's ruling class as much as those pondering Hong Kong's political future."

It should trouble Communist China even more; for the past 60 years, the Middle Kingdom swore by 'the People'. The State is called the People's Republic of China; the Army is the People's Liberation Army; the Parliament, the People's National Congress; the main newspaper is the *People's Daily*, the list is as long as that of organizations labeled 'Gandhi' in India.

Despite using 'People' for everything, the common man in China has no space; in Tibet things are worse, the voice of the 'People' has been suppressed for the past 60 years. In the recent times, this has resulted in 124 immolations and a latent bitterness against the Chinese People's government.

The voice of the people has also been suppressed in India. I was shocked when I recently came across a telegram sent by Prime Minister (and Foreign Minister) Jawaharlal Nehru to G. Parthasarathi (GP), the Indian Ambassador to China. This cable, sent on May 10, 1959, just months after a popular uprising in Lhasa, is part of the latest volume of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Volume 49).

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The telegram describes India's 'China Policy' just after the Dalai Lama had crossed the Indian border in Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh (then the Kameng Frontier Division of the North East Frontier Agency).

The cable clearly shows that the Indian Prime Minister did not realize the Indian common men's strong sentiments for the Tibetan people soon after the Dalai Lama had been forced to leave his homeland to take refuge in India. Nehru believed that the People's Government in Beijing could only do 'good' (even if, in a painful manner) to the Common Men in Tibet.

Nehru tells GP that the Opposition was just making a noise and 'saying hard things about China chiefly to embarrass our Government'. This is far from being correct.

Only three years later, when China entered into India's territory in NEFA and Ladakh, Nehru realized the cultural and strategic importance of Tibet and its people; but then it was too late.

In 1959 in India, ordinary folks had a genuine feeling for the cause of the Tibetans; but Nehru only saw "some kind of anti-China propaganda will be carried on by some opposition parties and individuals, chiefly as an attack on our Government."

It is not worth commenting on the Indian Communist leader's attitudes quoted by Nehru; S.A. Dange, the founding member of the Communist Party of India believed that it was the 'masses' which revolted against the 'feudal landlords' in Tibet; the Communist theory soon became void of truth as it was mostly common men and women of Tibet who followed the Dalai Lama in exile.

More surprising is Nehru's attitude. When he got to know that an All India Convention on Tibet was to be presided by Jayaprakash Narayan in Calcutta

at the end of the month, the Prime Minister used strong words to condemn the event; he writes to Parthasarathi: "we have disassociated ourselves from it and disapproved of it. I made this clear in my speech in the Lok Sabha yesterday."

Why? The answer can be found in Nehru's speech. On May 8, three weeks before the Conference, Nehru tells the Parliament: "Whatever I have seen till now and whatever that convention appears to aim at or whatever it seems to represent, to me it seems to be very wrong."

He strongly disapproves JP and others leaders supporting the ordeal of the Tibetan people: "It is a wrong approach, an approach which will do no good to anybody at all, and may do a good deal of harm if really it was the approach of any responsible people in India."

He asks "What do we want? What are we aiming at? I take it that we are sad, we are distressed at events in Tibet", and again questions "Why are we distressed? Presumably because we feel that a certain people are being sat upon, are being oppressed."

Though stating that he does not agree with the Indian Communists, he affirms: "I have no doubt in my mind that it is difficult to draw the line in such cases between the top feudal elements and others. They all can be mixed together. And as a result, for the moment, the [Tibetans] are all uprooted."

He then makes this startling remark: "where a society has existed for hundreds and hundreds of years, it may have outlasted its utility", adding "any kind of a forcible uprooting of that must necessarily be painful, whether it is a good society or a bad society."

He had decided that Tibet was not modern enough and 'forcible uprooting' was the only solution.

But it is not all, he asserts: "All these difficult things are happening. They should have happened; they would have happened, may be a little more slowly but with a greater measure of co-operation [from the Tibetans who did not participate in their own uprooting?]. ...Every good thing that is done by imposition becomes a bad thing."

Was Tibet such a primitive society? Had it outlasted its utility?
Retrospectively, we can say that it was not.

Nehru believed that the Tibetan society needed to be 'uprooted'. Fifty-four years later, Beijing is still in the process of uprooting the Tibetans ('liberating' in their terminology), and India's policy of Nehru has not changed much.

Nehru admits that his Government's attitude has been 'much more moderate than Indian public opinion demanded'; the Prime Minister was however not ready to listen to the voice of the people (he probably thought that he knew better).

Then the Prime Minister tells GP that the Dalai Lama did 'not fully appreciate the situation' and 'imagined that [India] can issue demands and bring pressure on the Chinese Government', adding "I am trying to explain to him that this does not fit in with the facts of life."

Other perception about 'facts of life' is not considered.

Another extraordinary comment of Nehru is worth mentioning, he tells GP 'the impression here that Mao Tse-Tung [Zedong] is a man of wisdom'. One wonders where this 'here' is. In the PMO? In Delhi? or Nehru's mind only?

The Great Leap Forward (which resulted in 40 or 50 million deaths) was then going on full swing in China. The man-made carnage was the consequence of the agricultural and industrial policies of this 'man of wisdom'; it was one of the saddest chapters of China's history.

The fact that India's ruler was not ready to listen to the People has had so many tragic consequences.