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Article:

The Pedagogical Account of Parliamentarism at India's Founding

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Abstract: *This article explores a distinctive approach to parliamentarism advanced by key figures from India's founding period in response to their anxieties about concerns about the masses' backwardness alongside a commitment to democratic self-rule. Both orientations, one democratic and the other, suspicious of the peoples' political capacities, existed alongside each other in tension, generating a dilemma: how could the seemingly backward masses facilitate the overthrow of their backwardness in a democratic process? The thinkers studied in this article responded, I argue, with a pedagogical conception of parliamentarism, which viewed parliament and legislators as bearing the function of preparing the masses for democratic citizenship. Their approach represented a critical departure from the ideal of a deliberative legislative assembly at the apex of the lawmaking process, while avoiding strategies of exclusion historically associated with parliamentarism.*

Anticolonial thinkers in India faced the predicament of claiming self-rule on behalf of a people who, because of their "developmental lack," could not yet authorize the founding of self-rule. From this perspective, the poverty or illiteracy of the Indian masses implied not just a social or moral lack but also an incapacity for popular sovereignty. Thus, the project of self-rule was trapped in a cycle of suspension because of the "underdeveloped" state of the masses, who could not yet be bearers of popular sovereignty (Mantena 2016; Sultan 2020, 304–06). In this article, I show how this developmentalist discourse operated in post-Independence India, now alongside a commitment to democratic self-rule, generating a distinctive pedagogical conception of parliamentarism.

I explore the expectations attached to parliamentarism and the role of legislators among three important thinkers of India's founding period— Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister; Manabendra Nath Roy, the founder of the Radical Democratic Party and, previously, the Communist Party of India, and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, chairperson of the Drafting Committee in India's Constituent Assembly and arguably the most prominent leader of the Dalit (formerly "untouchable") community. All three thinkers were committed to democratic self-rule. Yet, their commentary in the mid-twentieth century demonstrates a persistent concern with citizens' backwardness as an obstacle to democratic government. For Nehru, such backwardness consisted in severe poverty which fuelled and was, in turn, reinforced by sectional divisions in Indian society. Roy, on the other hand, understood backwardness in cultural terms, as a stagnation imposed upon India's masses by exploitative caste relations. Finally, Ambedkar viewed the problem of backwardness as a product of India's history of caste domination and the social exclusions it had perpetuated. These social circumstances—poverty, exploitative class relations, or caste hierarchies—signified a certain "lack" among India's population which needed overcoming in order to develop a democratic citizenry. The application of this social theory concerned with backwardness, and the simultaneous commitment to democratic self-rule generated a pedagogical conception of parliamentarism. In one sense, this approach was consistent with a wider, pedagogic style of politics, common among postcolonial elites, which held that the masses "needed to be educated in the habits and manners of citizens" (Chakrabarty 2005, 4814). But seen in the context of the specific institutional role of the legislature, this conception marked an important break from

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classical ideas about parliamentarism. The novelty of this conception lay in displacing or minimizing the legislator's task in actual legislative business. Rather than foregrounding deliberation and lawmaking as core functions of the legislative assembly, the pedagogical conception invested parliament and parliamentarians with the task of preparing the masses for democratic citizenship. And it did so, I shall argue, eschewing the strategies of exclusion and containment that were typical of the classical tradition. Instead, it manifested an attempt to help an underdeveloped citizenry authorize their own development within a democratic framework.

This article has two complementary aims. First, it contributes to an understanding of alternative trajectory of parliamentarism, exploring how it was conceptualized in the face of postcolonial concerns about peoples' political capacities. Classical theories of parliamentarism, as they developed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, understood parliamentarism as governance through deliberation by an elected legislative assembly. "Legislative deliberation," in such accounts was "*the* crucial factor in political decisions*" (Selinger 2019, 3; author's emphasis). All laws and actions of the government were to be debated in parliament. Legislators, in turn, constituted "spokesmen" of major interests and opinions in the country (Conti 2019, 2). The three thinkers in this article departed from this classical ideal of parliament. For figures like Nehru and Ambedkar, reversing the masses' backwardness necessitated a centralized executive, capable of delivering radical reform unencumbered by parliamentary delays and localist concerns. Executive dominance over parliament through the backing of the party machinery was deemed a necessary response to the problem of backwardness. Thus, the role of parliamentary deliberation, and indeed the legislator's function in governance, came to be minimized in light of the urgent task of developmentalist reform. Rather than centering legislative discussion, this vision emphasized the role of parliamentarism in developing the masses. Moreover, this pedagogical enterprise came to be *decoupled*, in a departure from previous understandings of parliament's educative role, from the legislature's traditional position as a deliberative lawmaking assembly.

Second, studying the pedagogical conception of parliamentarism also contributes to an ongoing debate in democratic theory over epistocracy as a response to citizens' incapacity for self-government. Recent years have seen renewed focus on the apparent incompetence of ordinary citizens for democratic citizens and an interest in epistocracy (rule by the wise) as an alternative form of rule (Brennan 2016; Mulligan 2015). The epistocratic view suggests that ordinary citizens, unable to meet the

relevant standards of competence, should be as far removed as possible from institutions of political decision-making. Instead, those with greater wisdom and ability should be awarded greater or even exclusive power to determine important decisions. The democratic view, challenged with concerns about the hazards of the incapacity of the people, responds by affirming its commitment to deepening political participation (Goodin and Spiekermann 2018). On the account now commonly associated with John Stuart Mill, greater participation in self-rule itself serves as a form of education, mitigating the challenge posed by ordinary citizens' putative incapacities.

The pedagogical conception of parliamentarism can be read as an attempt to reconcile both views. The thinkers studied in this article were, no doubt, concerned about the backwardness of the people and the challenge this posed for democratic government in post-Independence India. The primary aim of the postcolonial state was to deliver the social and economic conditions that the maintenance of a democratic order assumed. This project of establishing the prerequisites of democracy, though, risked straying or collapsing if power was handed to unscrupulous leaders by voters in their present state of backwardness. However, these epistocratic anxieties were embedded in a commitment to democratic self-rule. Irrespective of their backwardness, and indeed widespread poverty and illiteracy—barely 12% of the population was literate—it was the masses who had to authorize or enact conditions for the removal of such backwardness in a democratic process. Together, these two views generated a critical dilemma: how could the seemingly backward masses facilitate the overthrow of their backwardness in a democratic process?

The classical tradition of parliamentarism frequently raised concerns about who would be represented in the legislature generating attempts at exclusion or containment of people whose political capacities were as yet suspect. The thinkers studied in this article departed from this approach. While the backwardness of Indian society was deemed responsible for the arrested development of its peoples' moral and intellectual capacities, the question of popular sovereignty was not up for negotiation. Rather than aiming to exclude those with dubious capacities, their account approached parliamentarism in a pedagogical vein, emphasizing its role in facilitating political education among an underdeveloped citizenry. In doing so, they offered a way out of the dilemma underscored above. The legislator, or in Ambedkar's case, parliament as an institution, was expected to perform a pedagogical function, steering the masses toward social and economic reforms aimed at developing the prerequisites of a democratic order. Attention to this vision of

parliamentarism, therefore, reveals how the "democratic" and "epistocratic" can serve as *coexisting orientations* toward politics rather than simply as contrasting ideal-types of government; and it demonstrates, further, an important way in which founding era thinkers in India attempted to resolve the tensions generated by their simultaneous commitment to democratic government and their anxieties around peoples' capacity for self-rule.

The Pedagogical Conception of Parliamentarism: A Comparison with Westminster Parliamentarism

Before exploring how parliamentarism was conceptualized in India's postcolonial context, it is worth situating this discussion alongside the trajectory of Westminster parliamentarism, which exemplifies the classical tradition introduced above. As we shall see, the thinkers studied in this article departed from their Westminster counterparts in important ways. Rather than attempting to establish "weighted" representation, strengthen parliamentary deliberation, or restore legislative supremacy, these Indian thinkers sought to re-signify parliamentarism on a primarily pedagogic note, concerned with facilitating the development of the peoples' capacity for self-rule rather than with law-making or legislative deliberation.

Twentieth-century British constitutional commentators noted that parliamentary practice in their time had undergone significant transformation, fuelled by the rise of an organized party system in the legislative process. Whereas legislators had previously exercised a considerable degree of autonomy in their parliamentary conduct, party whips had now increasingly become key to how they acted. It was no longer parliamentary debate that shaped the content of laws enacted at Westminster (Jennings 1957 [1939], 8). It was also futile to think that Parliament could hold the executive accountable. After all, it was the party with a majority that formed the government; and thus, the Cabinet would "discipline" the House of Commons, by virtue of the "restraint [that] is effected by the fact of its party composition" (Laski 1938, 221–22; also see Greaves [1938] 1956, 23–26). Yet, Parliament did not become a defunct entity with the rise of partisan legislative organization. It was not important, wrote Harold Laski, that "the result of a debate is known before the discussion is taken. That, after all, is what the party system is for" (1938, 156–57; see also Jennings [1936] 1951, 439). To put it differently, parliamentary discussion within the legislature could still benefit voters whose views were amenable to change. With their keen eye on parliament, voters could learn from debates staged in its chamber and obtain better insight into major policy issues discussed there.

The suggestion that parliamentary debate served an educative function was far from unique to mid-twentieth century constitutional commentators. Their counterparts in the Victorian period had pointed to the significance of this task, which Walter Bagehot ([1867] 2001, 96) had described as the "teaching function" of Parliament. On this view, Parliament was "a grand institution of national education" (Mill 1977, 348), and its deliberations offered "means of enlightening the minds of the People and dispelling Prevailing errors" (Grey 1858, 65; see Conti 2019, 117–18). Such continuities, though, hide important ways in which parliament's educative function had changed in the twentieth century. First, such education had historically been viewed as a matter of helping a newly enfranchised population think in political terms. That is, it involved a process of instruction where the citizen, ordinarily tied to parochial concerns, less able to rise above conflicts that centered the "limited domains of his region, religion or occupation" would be socialized into a national political debate (Conti 2019, 117; see Mill 1977, 322, 469). The need for such instruction did not appear as pressing less than a century later (Laski 1938, 17). For midtwentieth century thinkers, the educative function of parliamentary discussion consisted in alerting citizens to salient political debates, highlighting points of disagreements between parties, and shedding light on information relevant to discussions about policies. Second, until the twentieth century, the discharge of parliament's educative function had been closely connected with its role in "daily practical supremacy" (Bagehot, [1862] 1974) or share in governance—the power to pass (or reject) bills and the ability to remove the executive. It was precisely because the House of Commons had real power that its deliberations attracted both genuine engagement from its participants and the attention of the public outside. Bagehot, for instance, noted that it was the dependence of the executive on the legislature's confidence that afforded its deliberations such weight: a change in government, which parliament was able to effect, was a momentous occasion. Its debates, therefore, "which have this catastrophe at the end of them" were "sure to be listened to, and sure to sink deep into the national mind" ([1867] 2001, 15; also see Selinger and Conti 2015). The reliance of the executive on the House of Commons, therefore, distinguished parliamentary debate in England from its counterpart in the United States, where Congress debates "come to nothing" (Bagehot, [1867] 2001, 14–15; also

see Grey 1858, 34–35). As a result, press commentary on these debates failed to occasion the educative discussion that a potent House of Commons was able to motivate in England.

Returning to the mid-twentieth century, why would a mere "talking shop," subordinate to the Cabinet and engaged in debates with predetermined outcomes, capture the attention of the external public? Shorn of its role in the legislative process and overseeing the executive, why would parliament nevertheless retain its ability to serve as a focal point of public debate? For some, this was partly due to the unique status of the "mother of parliaments" and its privileged place in British political life, where it held the "esteem of the nation" (Jennings [1939] 1957, 517; Laski 1938, 142]. But others underscored the close link between parliament's role in governance and its ability to educate the public. From their perspective, parliament's ability to hold the public's attention had in fact declined over the years as a result of its diminishing powers. Ramsay Muir insisted that "The newspapers now have little space tor the proceedings of Parliament, the records of which, fifty years ago, filled their columns" ([1930] 1940, 3). This decline was a result of the "unreal" nature of parliamentary discussions undertaken against the background of "predetermined results" (6). According to such thinkers, the educative function of parliament risked being undermined by executive dominance. Key to its revival was the restoration of a balance between executive power and legislative discussion— a "fair equipoise between Government and Parliament" such that Parliament "remain(s) the centre and focus of our political life, both in fact and in public interest" (Amery ([1947] 1956, 49). The need for such rebalancing lay at the heart of their proposals for parliamentary reform, which included the introduction of proportional representation (Muir [1930] 1940, 179–96) and the formation of a third chamber comprising nonpartisan members (Amery [1947] 1956, 67).

A contrast with these debates over parliamentarism in the metropole can help shed light on the distinctiveness of the approach to parliamentarism advanced by mid-twentieth-century Indian figures like Nehru, Roy, and Ambedkar. Victorian-era commentators like Mill, too, were concerned with the inadequate political capacities of the masses. Their response to such anxieties consisted in the *gradual* incorporation of the lower classes, whose capacities were particularly suspect, into parliamentary representation. This was to be achieved through means like plural representation, on the one hand, and suffrage restrictions on the other, so as to contain or "balance" the political power of the working classes even as they were incrementally integrated into parliamen-

tary government (Saunders 2011). Rather than pursuing such exclusions or attempts at containment, the thinkers studied in this article approached parliamentarism in a pedagogic frame. Their commentary on parliamentarism takes universal adult suffrage as a given and proceeds to ask how, within this democratic framework, the underdevelopment of India's masses could be prevented from derailing the removal of their backwardness. Their pedagogical conception of parliamentarism, therefore, focused on facilitating political thinking among the masses, helping them overcome the bounds of their narrow community attachments, so their backwardness could be rectified through a *democratic* process.

Further, as we have noted, the educative potential of parliamentarism in nineteenth-century Britain was tied to parliament's role as an apex lawmaking body. And mid-twentieth-century commentators acknowledged that the shrinking ability of the House of Commons to influence policy or hold the government accountable was jeopardizing its role in educating voters. The Indian thinkers examined in this article, however, were not concerned that parliament would, when unable to exercise such powers, be hindered in discharging its pedagogical function. For Roy, the move away from affording parliament a governing function stemmed from his commitment to a decentralized model of direct democracy that was suspicious of all representative government. The more dominant case for divesting the legislature of its share in governance, though, emerged from a faith in a centralized executive as the appropriate agent for enacting social and economic reform. Thus, for figures like Nehru and Ambedkar, executive dominance over parliament with the use of the party machinery was an entirely legitimate—even desirable— practice. Neither a return to pre-twentieth-century notions of legislative supremacy nor attempts to correct the imbalance of power in favor of parliament were necessary in their view. Instead, parliament's pedagogic role came to be decoupled from its traditional functions of lawmaking and parliamentary deliberation.

Nehru's Account of Parliamentarism

Nehru, like many of his colleagues in the Congress party, held an objective-driven view of the democratic state in independent India, according to which the value of democracy lay in its ability to deliver specific goals. One goal, particularly salient in the Nehruvian vision, can be subsumed under the broad heading of *development*, which came to serve as the "rationality of the new state"

(Chatterjee 1993, 202). For Nehru, the postindependence state had to concern itself, first of all, with the speedy realization of objectives like "sufficiency of food, clothing, housing, education, sanitation etc." ([1945] 1988a, 508; see Dasgupta 2017, 653–56). Its success would be judged by its promotion of economic development. Thus, Nehru argued that "We talk of swaraj (self-rule) and independence, but in human terms it means relief to the masses from their unutterable sorrow and misery" (*SWJN* 8: 69).[1] The new state was to serve, through a program of centralized planning, and with industrialization as its focus, as an agent of economic progress, addressing the pressing material needs of the masses.

Crucially, development, conceptualized in this way, was not merely an important objective for the postindependence state but a *precondition* for the sustenance of a democratic regime. Like his contemporaries, Nehru remained nervous about the implementation of mass democracy against the background of a preindustrialized society, in a departure from the usual trajectory of universal adult suffrage in Europe (Parekh 1991, 36–37). This view assumed a distinction between the "rational" orientation of an advanced, industrialized society and the "regressive" mindset of an agrarian society. Moreover, Nehru's idea of economic development was linked to a teleological view of social transformation since progress in the economic sphere, alongside the spread of science and education, would ostensibly diminish the salience of "pre-modern forms of social life and behaviour" (Zachariah 2005, 295; see *SWJN* 7: 82, 96–97). Thus, describing India as "backward" on several occasions (e.g., *SWJN* 15: 16, 22; *SWJN* 16:74; *SWJN* 23: 24), Nehru noted that India had stopped "growing as a nation" (*SWJN* 24: 60). This lack of growth was not merely economic but also "mental and intellectual" (*SWJN* 24: 60). India's social backwardness was, from this perspective, largely a product of its poor economic conditions, remediable through industrialization and redistribution, rather than "any essential cultural failings of Indian civilization" (Chatterjee 1986, 137). This account, therefore, lent further urgency to the project of national development in a country characterized by a divided, occasionally turbulent, social landscape.

For Nehru, the twin keys to this objective-driven project lay with the executive wing of the state and the Planning Commission, an advisory committee, comprising administrators, businessmen, and politicians. This represented an attempt to couple a constitutional system of parliamentary government with Soviet-style planning (Purushotham 2017, 858). As an unelected body of experts, the Planning Commission would stand above the "squabbles and conflicts of politics" (Chatterjee 1986, 160), supplying the competence necessary for development. But while the anointed experts of the Planning Commission were to bear on executive-led policymaking, the role of parliament was less prominent for Nehru. His approach to economic development prioritized "monologic instruments of the state and its bureaucracy" over "dialogical" forms of planning (Kaviraj 2010, 29). At a seminar on parliamentary democracy, Nehru drew on the transformed nature of Westminster politics as an alibi to support his view of executive-legislature relations. In Britain, he noted, the function of lawmaking had increasingly shifted from parliament to executive bodies. Nehru attempted to strengthen the justification for this move by appealing to distinctive concerns about India's present backwardness. The urgency of national development in India meant that action, rather than constant discussion, was critical, he argued. However, parliament as an institution was prone to interminable discussion, functioning like "debating societies." The problems facing India were so "vast and intricate that it is impossible for any democratic parliamentary assembly to give enough time for their consideration" (*SWJN* 16.1: 6). Further, as Madhav Khosla notes, Nehru, like many of his contemporaries, assumed a distinction between the centralized state, a potential vehicle for development, and "local" politics, characterized by their "narrow horizons." Outside elite centers of state power lay a field of politics "captured by rigid social and cultural bonds and prejudices" (2020, 22; also see Dasgupta 2017). The move away from a dispersal of power across individual legislators, and its consolidation in a centralized executive, ostensibly served to insulate national development from these adverse localist influences.

In Parliament, it was the party that was expected to serve as the driver of the decision-making process. "Suppose our parliament at Delhi had 500 chosen men of integrity and ability, each thinking according to his own lights," Nehru stated; "the result would be that, while they would be the chosen of the nation in regard to ability, nothing will be done by the Parliament because all the 500 will pull in 500 different directions" (1951, 6). This was more than a theoretical concern. The Congress, after all, had been a "platform for anti-imperialist struggle" more than a standard political party (Zachariah 2004, 142). If its status as a broad umbrella organization was a virtue in the anti-imperial movement, the conflicting forces that the Congress comprised could also easily become a liability in the postindependence democratic

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[1]All references to Nehru, other than those cited separately, are abbreviated as follows: SWJN for *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Nehru, 1972–2019 [1903–1963]) with volume number followed by page number.

process. Nehru, of course, was keenly aware of these contradictions. To ensure the efficient functioning of the legislative procedure, he insisted that his party colleagues in parliament must comply with the decisions taken by the parliamentary party wing of the party, which he, as Prime Minister, headed. This claim inevitably sparked tensions with the Congress's extraparliamentary organization, which was placed in the uneasy position of having to relinquish authority over the party's legislative wing to Nehru in his capacity as head of the government (Kochanek 1968, Chap. 1). Ultimately, Nehru won the battle, taking over as Party President in addition to his premiership of the interim Congress government in 1951. This institutional fusion, alongside his personal popularity, played no insignificant role in his ability to exercise control over the Congress' policy agenda in the early years after independence. In sum, the urgency of national development—the task of transforming the masses into capable democratic citizens—demanded a strong executive able to dominate over parliament through the use of the party machinery. To authorize this project, the masses required educating but locating this pedagogical function in legislative deliberation was a false start insofar as this would impinge on the government's ability to deliver on the pressing objective of removing the peoples' backwardness.

What role, then, did parliamentarians bear in the postcolonial polity if not that of legislative deliberation? As previous commentators have noted, Nehru's view of political leadership was a pedagogical one. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, describes Nehru's approach to his electors as a "pedagogical style of leadership," noting that in this vision, "leaders were like teachers" (2005, 4812). Partha Chatterjee, similarly, notes that the peasant in particular posed a challenge for Nehru. These "poor and ignorant" masses, "unthinking and subject to unreasonable excitements" needed to be "controlled and led by responsible leaders" (Chatterjee 1993, 149; also see Roy 2007, 20). Nehru's view of the legislator's role, I will shortly argue, should be read as part of this broader view of leadership he espoused.

First, however, it is important to understand the salience of this pedagogical view of leadership within the Nehruvian account of postindependence politics. Nehru's approach to elections highlights an important dimension of his pedagogical approach. It underscores both the need for education during elections while underscoring the usefulness of election campaigns as a medium of instruction. On the one hand, elections offered an opportunity to socialize the electorate into democratic citizenship (*SWJN* 16.2: 505). They generated "some interest in national issues," shaking parties out of their "lethargy," and compelling them to educate the public (*SWJN* 17: 82, 58). This platform, in turn, offered political leaders an opportunity to cultivate attitudes of common citizenship that transcended "unreal" divisions of caste, language, and religion. On the other hand, elections also served as potentially heightened moments of division where particular identities could overshadow considerations of the common good. From this perspective, the "dizzying, often fractious, and potentially centrifugal diversity" of India's social life posed a threat to the cultivation of "national unity" (Mehta 2009, 34–35). The electoral arena was one where "the larger vision gives place to narrow and parochial outlooks and ideals are sometimes sacrificed for the expediency of the moment." Such fissiparous tendencies "disclose some essential weakness in our body politic" and "a certain immaturity in our public life," Nehru ([1957] 1988b, 484) complained. This was ultimately a function of the country's "primitive" thinking which made its masses susceptible to "momentary passions," deflecting attention from the pressing issue of economic progress (*SWJN* 18: 615; *SWJN* 17: 83). Such backwardness would be addressed through economic progress, as development would herald a society where conflicts grounded in caste or religion would fade away. Yet the challenge consisted in bringing about conditions for such order in a society that was presently vulnerable to turbulent conflict, and to do so through an electoral process that risked accentuating its divisions.

Leadership, conceptualized in pedagogical terms, was Nehru's answer to this challenge. Whether conceptualized as a positive educational opportunity or as a potential liability for the developmentalist project, elections required enlightened leaders to steer the people to support the nation's urgent objectives. Nehru's understanding of parliamentarism, I argue, should be read in the context of this broader understanding of leadership. On this account, legislators, like other political elites and leaders in postcolonial India, needed to educate the masses in the proper exercise of their democratic powers so as to facilitate the emergence of a democratic citizenry. As a practitioner rather than a theorist, Nehru did not often offer a systematic statement of his views on matters like the relationship between parliament and the people, or the role of legislators. However, his advice to legislators from his party demonstrates how he viewed their role as consistent with the "pedagogical" one he ascribed to political leaders more generally. The legislator's proper function, Nehru argued at his 1954 Presidential address to the Congress party, was not to interfere in the work of the executive, but to "render the people conscious and alert about the great obligations which Independence has

enjoined on all of us." The legislator needed to serve as the "guide," helping his constituents "develop a balanced judgment" (*SWJN* 24: 371). Two years later, addressing his Congress colleagues, he encouraged them to "divert people's attention from the smaller problems and conflicts and arguments and controversies which from the all-India point of view are parochial and provincial" (*SWJN* 32: 263). His party colleagues, after all, had "an obligation to prepare the masses for shouldering heavy responsibilities involved in a democratic form of government." This placed upon them a "duty to inspire the masses to cultivate a social and moral outlook and work for the psychological and cultural integration of the country" (*SWJN* 27: 259).

Reading Nehru's approach to the legislator's role as part of his wider view of political leadership and its pedagogical function has important implications for the account of parliamentarism that it represents. In applying his understanding of mass backwardness and his pedagogical approach toward politics to reflections on the role of the legislature, he offers an approach of parliamentarism that differs starkly from the ideal of a deliberative assembly at the apex of the lawmaking process. The role of parliamentary discussion and the legislator's role in governance in this account were, as I have argued, minimized given the urgent task of developmentalist reform. Instead, what emerges from these views is an account of parliamentarism that is pedagogical—concerned with the education of backward voters—but one where this role has been decoupled from the legislator's traditional legislative functions.

Roy's Parliamentarism

Manabendra Nath Roy returned to India in 1930 after having spent several years in the Soviet Union while developing the émigré Communist Party of India. On his return to India, he was imprisoned by the colonial government for 6 years. He went on to join the Congress party upon his release, with the aim of transforming the organization from within. Later, he was expelled from the party, leading him to form the Radical Democratic Party. It was during this time, shortly before independence, that he authored his *Draft Constitution for Free India.*

Roy's dispute with the dominant Nehruvian view of democracy consisted in his insistence that representative democracy in its present form was a "surrender of power" ([1949] 1960a, 52; [1946] 1960b, 96). Given his suspicion of delegated power, he also departed from Nehru in his attitude toward parties, which he re-

garded as antithetical to democratic government. Between elections, he argued parliament was simply out of power: "During that period, a party having a majority in parliament can constitutionally assume dictatorial power" ([1947] 1981, 8). While Nehru found in twentieth-century British parliamentary practice support for party government, Roy noted that the party system was a novelty that had perverted the practice of democracy ([1949] 1960a, 67). His point of reference, by contrast, was parliamentarism in Britain in its early years where there was "some element of direct democracy" by virtue of "a relation between a group of voters and an individual" ([1949] 1960a, 52). It was with the rise of the party system that this relation disappeared. Now, responsiveness to constituents was sacrificed at the altar of party discipline in Westminster. Similar practices, Roy warned, were beginning to surface in India's legislature. Under Nehru, the Congress party's senior officials ensured that "members of the parliament are responsible to the party to the incredible extent that they are not entitled to speak freely even in the parliament" ([1951] 1960a, 93).

Parties, Roy insisted, were instrumental in generating a concentration of power in the hands of a few. He was aware of the instrumentalist argument for a centralized democratic state of the kind advanced by Nehru. Ultimately, however, he denied that the urgency of economic reform pardoned the "benevolent dictatorship" that centralization of power entailed ([1953] 1960a, 184; also 1944a, 25). His *Draft Constitution* attempted to remove parties as intermediaries and disperse power across local republics through "people's committees" elected under universal adult suffrage. Citizens would not, Roy argued, delegate power away to the Federal Assembly. Rather, the democratic structure proposed by his constitution was "so constructed as to enable the people, operating through the local republics, to wield sovereign power from day to day" ([1946]; 1960b, 95). To this end, the local committees retained the ability to recall any member of the Federal Assembly, as well as to initiate legislation and demand a referendum on any legislative matter. In sum, under Roy's constitutional scheme, power exercised by the people through local people's committees came to substitute power exercised by centralized executive backed by party whips in Nehru's vision of parliamentarism.

Despite his radical departure from the Nehruvian view, there remained an important parallel in the way both figures characterized the condition of India's masses. Roy, too, worried about the implementation of a democratic regime in a society presently marked by backwardness. The masses in India, he argued, were

"culturally and intellectually" at a stage where Europe found herself in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ([1949/1950] 1960a, 170). Their uncritical deference to authority and acceptance of the inevitability of their social circumstances were, for Roy, a product of their primitive stage of development. If Nehru explained India's arrested historical progress as a consequence of imperial rule and its economic impact, Roy placed the blame on India's economic elites who perpetuated, and benefited from, the peoples' primitiveness. Enabling self-rule required, therefore, radical reorganization of economic life, which involved "leaving in the possession of the peasantry a larger share of the values produced by them" and "encroachment on the privileged position of the landed aristocracy" (1944b, 34). Bottom-up economic organization through peoples' committees, rather than rule by a centralized authority, would deliver such reforms that would rectify India's backwardness. However, until this reconfiguration of economic relations was realized, Indian society remained in a "transition period," where democracy was yet to "come of age" ([1947] 1981, 47).

In this transitional moment, the appointment of legislators by mere "counting of heads" would ensure that "society will remain deprived of the best available leadership, which alone can guide it toward true democratic freedom" ([1947] 1981, 47), Roy argued. As such, he proposed the formation of the "Council of State" (1944c, 8), the second chamber of parliament, comprising nominees of professional groups like engineers, economists, scientists, as well as individuals who had made "outstanding contributions to modern thought in philosophy or the social sciences." Roy's expectations from members of the Council of State exemplify what I have described as the educative role of the legislator. The Council had little role to play in *governance*. It was intended to act as an advisory body, explicitly subordinated to the first chamber (the Federal Assembly) of Roy's proposed parliament which, in turn, was subject to significant direct control by the peoples' committees.

Yet, precisely because the people would, despite their backwardness, now enjoy a considerable share of political power, it was imperative that they be guided by an enlightened elite in its exercise. Under such circumstances, democracy was conditional on a form of education that would aim to "quicken the political consciousness of the masses, to raise their general intellectual level, [and] to remove their cultural backwardness" (1942, 125). The Council of State was designed to facilitate this pedagogical exercise, since members of learned groups were presumed to possess the "creative genius, intellectual detachment and moral integrity" necessary for training the masses (1981 [1947], 46). This was

consistent with Roy's (1942, 113) broader claim that it was the intellectual classes who, because of their "intellectual ability, cultural achievements and education" were responsible for creating consciousness among India's backward masses and making them aware of their true interests. This class "would not ask for their vote" but would "help and teach and educate" the people ([1949] 1960a, 64). It was this class, untethered from party loyalties that plagued parliamentary government, and tendencies for demagoguery in electoral politics, that Roy's proposed Council of State sought to house. In applying this thinking about the intelligentsia's role to the legislature, Roy offered a conception of parliamentarism that—as the reduced powers of his Council of State suggest—decentered deliberative lawmaking as the legislator's function. Instead, members of the Council would serve as a "modern version of philosopher-kings," who would educate the citizenry and be responsible for the "creation of conditions under which democracy can be possible". They would "stimulate amongst the people the urge for freedom, the desire to rely upon themselves and to be the makers of their destiny, the spirit of free thinking and the will never to submit to any external authority" ([1947] 1981, 45). It is unsurprising, then, that Roy's *Draft Constitution* stipulated that "Preference shall be given to those engaged in teaching" (1944c, 8) in the appointment of members for the Council of State.

Roy's specification of the legislator's function can be best understood by contrasting his understanding of their pedagogical task with the kind of leadership delivered by the Congress party. The problem was not merely, as Nehru too had emphasized, the injection of religious and communal appeals into politics. Rather, the emphasis on "national unity"—central to Nehru's politics—generated its own set of problems. He argued that under the new Congress, "Contradictions and antagonisms in the national life of the country—not only communal and religious, but social and economic—will be declared as subservient to the mystic will of the nation expressed through the National State" (1944a, 43). This was a continuation of Roy's long-standing critique of the Congress party, which he believed, was led by men driven by selfish interests, who sought to replace imperialism with their own domination of India's workers. At the Second Comintern, Roy had argued this point fiercely, emphasizing the need for a vanguard to guide the Indian masses after the successful removal of the imperial regime. (Haithcox 1971, 11–20). "In the hands of a communist vanguard," he claimed, the masses behind a successful revolution "will not be led astray." Instead, they would go "through the successive periods of development," culminating in a communist revolution (quoted in Ganguly 1984, 14). In

the years leading up to independence, Roy reiterated his critique of the Congress Party, albeit this time, without the communist trappings of his argument from his Soviet years. Rather than "loafers, lunatics and careerists" (1942, 54), political activity after independence had to be guided by an enlightened elite class, which would help remake the world with its thorough knowledge of science and philosophy.

Roy's account is insightful in demonstrating how, despite his rejection of the need for a centralized executive and the value of political parties, it nevertheless endorsed the pedagogical function of the legislator. There was, moreover, a further sense in which, for all his disagreements, Roy's views on parliamentarism represent an important continuity with contemporaries like Nehru. Both these thinkers' understanding of the legislator's function reflected what Bernard Manin describes as "the principle of distinction," where representatives should be "distinguished citizens, socially different from those who elected them" (1997, 94). With respect to parliamentarism, as conceived by figures like Nehru and Roy, the principle of distinction did not concern the relationship between governors and the governed. After all, it was not parliament's role to *govern*: that was the prerogative of the executive (in Nehru's case) or the people themselves (according to Roy). For these thinkers, concerns about distinction reflected an expected hierarchy between pedagogues and their tutees. Nehru privileged moral qualities like the willingness to refrain from sectional political appeals and unite discordant voters, while Roy relied on a learned elite capable of using its knowledge to alert the masses about the need for economic change. In each case, the assumption was that legislators would, for the proper discharge of their pedagogical function, need to demonstrate some degree of superiority in relation to the immature or backward masses whom they would guide in the exercise of political power. As we shall see, turning to Ambedkar, this was not the only available option in conceptualizing parliamentarism in a pedagogical perspective.

Ambedkar's Alternative Vision of Pedagogical Parliamentarism

While figures like Nehru and Roy foregrounded their analysis of Indian democracy in the country's economic development and reorganization, the starting point for Ambedkar's analysis was the centrality of caste in the country's social life (Rao 2009, Chap. 3) For Ambedkar, the backwardness of Indian society, and the threat

it posed to democratic life, were located in the continuing wide-reaching impact of caste dominance. Thus, as we shall see, he offered an alternative account of the developmental lack or incapacity for democracy among India's masses—one that focused on the epistemic and affective pathologies that the hierarchical caste system had generated (primarily among the upper castes, but also, through internalization of inferiority, among Dalits). Self-rule would mean little if power merely passed from imperial officials into the hands of "communally minded" caste Hindus, Ambedkar argued (1948, 38; *BAWS* 2: 224, 406).[2] This was especially true of rural communities which, despite the passage of time, "remain the same," characterized by ongoing prejudice and moral stagnation. The primary task of the postcolonial state was, therefore, to eliminate caste, a precondition for the existence of a democratic regime. Such transformation, moreover, demanded intervention in society's economic structures. Postulating economic democracy as a precondition for political democracy, Ambedkar underscored the close links between the political disempowerment of Dalits and their economic exploitation. It was crucial to dismantle the oppressive economic hierarchies in which the caste system was embedded, and which it, in turn, reinforced (Thorat 2007). But like his contemporaries, this meant that Ambedkar, too, faced the dilemma of navigating the pursuit of the prerequisites of a democratic regime through the vehicle of the new democratic state.

In one sense, Ambedkar attached considerable significance to parliament. His commentary on the constitutional design of postindependence India's parliament was embedded in his insistence on the necessity of adequate legislative representation for India's minorities, especially its Dalit population. Ambedkar had led a long campaign for the representation of Dalits in the legislature through a scheme of separate electorates under the imperial regime. Yet, for all his emphasis on the need for Dalit leaders in the legislature, he recognized the salience of partisan constraints. The party was an "essential adjunct to popular government," without which concerted action was impossible (*BAWS* 1: 236; also see *BAWS* 17.2: 415). Speaking on the Hindu Code Bill, differences on which led to his resignation from Nehru's cabinet in 1951, Ambedkar (*BAWS* 14.2: 1324–25) expressed displeasure that the mechanism of the party whip was denied to him. By allowing members of the Congress party a free vote, Nehru had essentially assailed the core aims of the bill and prospects for its success. He had, moreover,

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[2]All references to Ambedkar, other than those cited separately, are abbreviated as follows: *BAWS* for Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches (1982); volume number followed by page number.

reneged on a key tenet of parliamentary democracy: that legislators would act in accordance with the directives of their party. This perspective derived from Ambedkar's anxiety, similar to Nehru's about the risk of locality; in the former case, this generated fears over the capture of state power by upper-caste interests. From this standpoint, individual representatives would remain vulnerable to local pressures which, in turn, would tether them to sectional caste interests (*BAWS* 2: 334; *BAWS* 9: 410). By broadening the coalition of interests involved, the party could help transcend the traditional primacy of particularistic interests in Indian political life, which were especially important with respect to upper-caste legislators. On the other hand, the less powerful groups in society, such as laborers, also needed the party machinery, in order to feasibly pursue their goals through the state apparatus. A party would provide the necessary unity to achieve social progress through combined action on behalf of the disempowered (*BAWS* 10: 110–11).

What, then, was the function of parliamentarism in Indian democracy? I argue that Ambedkar's vision of parliamentarism, too, was cast in a pedagogical frame, but departed from Nehru's and Roy's in two significant ways. First, it viewed India's intelligentsia as mentally and emotionally impoverished, itself in need of learning, rather than positioning it as responsible for educating the masses. Second, such learning was expected to be a function of parliament, diversely constituted, rather than individual parliamentarians acting as pedagogues to the masses.

In 1945, Ambedkar published *What Gandhi and Congress Have Done to the Untouchables.* There, he rested the case for the future constitution's cognizance of caste on the lack of social endosmosis between caste groups (*BAWS* 9: 192–94). The term "endosmosis" was borrowed from John Dewey, who taught at Columbia University when Ambedkar was a student, and whom he cited several times during his political career (Mukherjee 2009, 353; Ramesh 2022, 738). For Dewey, despotism led to a situation where "the separation into a privileged and a subject-class prevents social endosmosis." In such circumstances, "the experience of each party loses in meaning, when the free interchange of varying modes of life-experience is arrested" (1916, 99). Such modes of association, for Dewey, closely tracked those that Ambedkar highlighted in relation to caste. Hierarchical social segregation rendered groups antisocial and concerned with the narrow interests of their respective members, rather than the shared interests of the wider community. Moreover, it facilitated an impoverishment of emotional life, generating "feelings of sympathy for some and antipathy for others" (*BAWS* 9: 230). Here, Ambedkar pointed to

an epistemic failure generated by the caste system, which went beyond the naked pursuit of self-interest. The caste system was, no doubt, grounded in, and led to selfishness. But it did so at least partly by hollowing out capacity for understanding the "other," such that the Brahmin's concern for the progress of Dalits was never "more than a passing thought of a rare moment" (*BAWS* 2: 349–50; *BAWS* 9: 481–82; 193–94). In this context, a political system could work successfully only if it altered the terms of social intercourse, enabling greater, and more equitable, communication between hierarchically ordered groups. It required endosmosis, the kind of social contact which "must and does dissolve custom, makes for an alert and expanding mental life and not only occasion but demand reconstruction of mental attitudes" (*BAWS* 3: 113).

The idea of social endosmosis was closely related to the value of fraternity, which required "varied and free points of contact with other modes of association." Reproducing Dewey verbatim, he suggested that democracy was not just a mode of government. Rather, it was "a mode of associated living, of conjoint *communicated experience.*" Social endosmosis could facilitate fraternity by inculcating "an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen" (*BAWS 1:* 57). Political institutions that ensured the participation of Dalits could promote the development of fraternity and the weakening of exclusionary communicative practices. Reserved places for Dalits would "bring together men from diverse castes who would not otherwise mix together into the Legislative Council" (*BAWS* 1: 266). Such fraternal social interaction would not, crucially, remain restricted to the floor of the legislature. Rather, it would percolate down into wider society, fostering an endosmosis between citizens from different groups:

> The Legislative Council will thus become a new cycle of participation in which the representatives of various castes who were erstwhile isolated and therefore anti-social will be thrown into an associated life. An active participation in an associated life, in its turn, will not leave unaffected the dispositions and attitudes of those who participate… the existing set attitude representing the diverse castes and groups will be dissolved only if the diverse groups meet together and take part in a common activity…- Such changes of disposition and attitudes will not be ephemeral but will, in their turn influence associated life outside the Council Hall. (267)

Historically, parliamentarism in India had been connected to the idea of the "educated classes" ruling over the "unfit" masses (Parasher 2022, 450–451).

For Ambedkar, though, the targets of the legislator's pedagogical function included the "intelligentsia," constituted disproportionately of the Brahmins. This move dislodged socially privileged groups in India as apparent repositories of wisdom or virtue. Having already made this point in his critique of suffrage qualifications under colonial rule (Cabrera 2020, 82), Ambedkar applied the same thinking to the allocation of places in the legislature. Here, he would draw on Dicey to support his case: "As Professor Dicey rightly argues, it has never been a primary object of constitutional arrangement to get together the best possible Parliament in intellectual capacity" (*BAWS* 2: 349). His appropriation of this argument pointed to the cognitive and affective defects that the caste system had produced among Brahmins. Ambedkar saw the blockage of democratic communication fueled by the caste system as epistemically damaging for Brahmins: it resulted in emotional coldness and, ultimately, failures of understanding. A group that could neither relate with, nor understand, the needs of the most disadvantaged sections of society could hardly be entrusted with moral or intellectual leadership, according to Ambedkar. On the contrary, Brahmins were most in need of learning, for they were presently too "busy or too prosperous" to properly appreciate the concerns of their fellow citizens (*BAWS* 2: 349–50; also see *BAWS* 17.3: 522). The privilege of not being reminded of adversity meant that they did not possess the motivation to seek social progress.

What Ambedkar was advancing was essentially a more *experiential* understanding of parliamentarism's pedagogical role. Against the classical tradition, Ambedkar's notion of political education was not merely limited to citizens' learning about salient political issues through parliamentary debate. Nor indeed was legislative deliberation, through its supremacy in governance, expected to serve as the vehicle for such education. In this respect, Ambedkar's conception of parliamentarism, like Nehru's and Roy's, was novel in foregrounding political education for an underdeveloped citizenry rather than parliament's traditional legislative functions and in decoupling this educative function from parliamentary discussion and lawmaking. At the same time, though, intergroup learning of the kind Ambedkar envisaged was not a product of tutelage either. Instead, it was expected to follow from greater interaction between citizens. In other words, intellectual and moral transformation would be effected by a change in citizens' attitudes and dispositions. That change, in turn, required social intercourse of the kind that the greater presence of Dalit legislators in democratic life would facilitate. The legislator was not cast in the mold of a "teacher" preaching to their ignorant constituents. Rather, a politics of *presence* would gener-

ate breaches in social barriers that the caste system had erected. Consequently, traits like competence, skill, or superior political consciousness were not prerequisites for the role Ambedkar envisaged for legislators. Facilitating endosmosis required a diversity of social backgrounds and communities, not the kind of individual *distinction* that figures like Nehru and Roy expected from parliamentarians. It was parliamentarism, conceived in terms of diversity within a national public forum, rather than the elite parliamentarian pedagogue, that would facilitate the educative processes of "expanding mental life" and encouraging the "reconstruction of mental attitudes." (*BAWS 3: 113*) Could this approach, one might ask, still be characterized as a *pedagogical* one to parliamentarism? As I have previously suggested, Ambedkar offered an epistemic account of caste domination and its pathologies. Such domination was grounded in, and reinforced, failures of understanding. Experiential learning of the kind facilitated by a diverse parliament was important in rectifying such failures through a process of endosmosis. If this no longer seems like an educational exercise, it is because, as I noted, Ambedkar has divested the pedagogical process of its elitist implications.

Conclusion

Contemporary commentary over democracy is characterized by widespread concerns over voters' pervasive ignorance (Brennan 2016), irrationality (Caplan 2011), and inability to rise beyond the confines of their narrow identities (Achen and Bartels 2016). In the present, such concerns have triggered inquiry over alternatives to democracy and appropriate epistocratic institutions that can replace self-government with rule by enlightened elites. The thinkers studied in this article approached the problem in a different way. Rather than seeking epistocratic alternatives to democracy in the light of concerns about the masses' political capacities, they were concerned with the removal of the people's backwardness through a democratic process. For them, epistocracy and democracy were not alternative choices but contrasting orientations held together in tension with each other. This, in turn, generated a distinctive predicament about how the masses could, despite their backwardness, overcome this condition through a democratic process. For figures like Nehru and Roy, the legislator, tasked with facilitating political education among voters, served as a response to this predicament. On the other hand, Ambedkar offers a less hierarchical account of parliamentarism's pedagogical function. This account

focused on the benefits of interaction between hitherto segregated groups in the legislature and the educative process this would trigger outside the narrow confines of parliament. From his perspective, it was this democratic communicative exchange propelled by a diverse parliament, rather than elite pedagogues, that would facilitate greater appreciation of the interests of those subject to caste domination.

The reframing of parliamentarism in a pedagogical vein is one is only one part of the story. The other side of parliamentarism in India's founding period consisted in the consolidation of power in the executive. These two aspects were closely connected. Rhetorically, focusing on parliament's task of educating the masses allowed the eclipsing of its traditional role in governance. But more importantly, parliament was divested of its share in governance by the very same logic of developmentalism that drove the pedagogical framing of its function. The figure of the underdeveloped people imposed limits on what political education, by itself, could achieve. Suspicions around peoples' fitness for self-rule could not be addressed merely through "learning by doing," a process of participation in democratic government. Nor indeed could the relevant dispositions or capacities be attained by "absorption" from a set of enlightened pedagogues, serving as "teachers" to the people (Villa 2017, 6). Rather, overcoming this condition necessitated social and economic transformation. For Nehru, it was imperial rule that had impoverished India's people while fostering divisive communal tendencies among them; for Roy, it was the wealthy elite that had injected ideas of religiosity that legitimated status quo and blocked peoples' ability to question their economic structures; and Ambedkar suggested that the caste system had resulted in social and psychological pathologies that affected both the Dalit's self-confidence in her capabilities and the Hindu's capacity for concern toward the Dalit. The task of the postindependence state was to remove these conditions responsible for the failure of the masses' moral and cultural progress. The education of the masses alone would not resolve their backwardness; it was merely a way of enabling them to undertake—or authorize the government to enact—transformation that would ultimately remedy their unfitness.

From a contemporary perspective, the classical vision of rule by a deliberative assembly seems a distant ideal, displaced by the ascendance of the executive wing and its managerial arm around the world (Manin 1997, 193–235; Rosanvallon 2018). Mid-twentieth-century constitutional commentators in India underscore an alternative discursive maneuver in configuring this historical shift: one that focused not on

a unified representation of the peoples' will, but their historical underdevelopment. It was this concern with undoing backwardness—and doing so *democratically*—common among postcolonial states of that time, that led to a conceptualization of parliamentarism as pedagogical and the decoupling of this pedagogical function from parliament's traditional role in governance. At a time when the idea of parliamentarism continues to offer democratic theorists a foothold for advocating values like political deliberation and pluralistic representation (see Selinger 2019, 204–06; Waldron 2016, Chap 3), the varied origins of its subordination—or in India's case, reconfiguration—are important as ever.

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