

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (1889-1964)

Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the new nationalist leaders who remained critical both in the freedom struggle and its aftermath. Politically baptised by Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru was not blind follower of his leader, but redefined the nationalist ideology as and when he deemed it fit. In the aftermath of India's independence he strove to guide India towards a socialist pattern of society following a path based on his interpretation of socialism. He was both a philosopher as well as a practical political leader. He acquired a deeper appreciation of Indian history and philosophy and enriched the basis for subsequent thought and action.

Jawaharlal Nehru began his political activities by his association with the Home Rule Leagues established by Tilak and Mrs Annie Besant. His main contribution in the late twenties was that he stood for the ideal of complete independence for India. With Gandhi's blessings Nehru became the president of the Indian National Congress at Lahore and the historic independence resolution was passed on the midnight of December 13, 1929. He was the president of the Congress again in 1936, 1937 and 1946. In 1946, he formed the Interim government of India till his death on May 27, 1964. He was an author of reputation and his 'Glimpses of World History', 'Autography' and the 'Discovery of India' are notable contributions to the realm of learning in Indian history and Indian political thought .

HIS VIEWS ON SECULARISM

Nehru had no attraction for any religion. According to him, behind every religion lay a method of approach which was wholly unscientific. But he recognises that religion provides some kind of satisfaction to the inner needs of human nature and give a set of moral and ethical values of life in general. Nehru was not a religious man, nor would he ever spend time, as a routine, for morning and evening worshipping. As Nehru had scientific temper, it was natural that he would be a secularist. Jawaharlal Nehru was an agnostic and not emotionally involved in

religious disputations. Nehru's approach to the role religion played in social life is described by him in the following manner. He wrote thus: Religion as I saw it practised, and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it a reliance on the super natural".

Nehru's understanding of secularism was a product of personal attitudes and historical circumstances. Secularism is basically the separation of religion from politics. Politics is associated with public activities. Religion is an individual or personal affair, giving every one the right to practise one's own religion. Referring to the concept of secularism, Nehru says 'Some people think that it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state which honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; that as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the state religion".

Nehru did not take religion in a narrow sense; religion does not teach hatred and intolerance; all religions speak the truth ; that is the essence of each religion. He believes that the religious basis of politics does not help social progress. At the same time, Nehru had respect for Gandhi's view on the role of religion in politics. He was of the view that Gandhi had a moral view of politics. For Gandhi religion can teach that politicians to be moral and ethical; it has a role in society for teaching moral values and maintaining an ethical order. But at the same time he opposed the formation of political parties on communal or religious grounds. This will create hatred between different religions and hatred breeds violence and intolerance among people. Without social harmony, no social progress is possible.

Nehru was an out and out secularist. He disapproved both the Hindu communalism as well as the Muslim communalism. His loyalty to secularism has been a great relief to the minorities in India. He was a secularist in the sense that he transcended parochial consideration and

looked from a broad humanistic perspective. His secularism was founded in India's extraordinary variety culture which was a product of unbroken history. According to Nehru, the Muslims were converts belonging to the original Indo-Aryan stock. In his *Discovery of India* he wrote that the 'fact of subsequent conversion to other faiths did not deprive them of their heritage, just as the Greeks, after their conversion to Christianity did not lose their pride in the mighty achievements of their ancestors, or the Italians in the great days of the Roman republic and early empire. 'Nehru's understanding of secularism has been strengthened due to his liberal cultural upbringing.

The concept of secularism as perceived and defined by Nehru constitutes the bedrock of Indian nationalism, which was subsequently incorporated into the Indian constitution. Nehru's understanding of secularism is primarily rooted in his emphasis on political and social equality. His exposition of secularism emphasises the following dimensions.

1. The State does not either encourage or discourage religion. It means freedom of religion and conscience, including freedom for those who have no religion.
2. It conveys the idea of social and political equality;
3. Nehru promoted secularism through social transformation and development. It means eradicating inequality and backwardness.

Despite his liberal approach towards religion, it is not easy to declare Nehru irreligious; he was, not opposed to religion. He frankly recognised that religion supplied a deeper craving of human beings'. His major concern was that the state should not intervene in religious matters. It is beyond dispute that Nehru was sincere in his advocacy of secularism as a political and cultural value. Due to his secular approach he succeeded in solving intra party and interstate politics.

Nehru view on Socialism

Nehru's socialism always remained 'humanism in action' by which the creative energy of man seeks liberation from the forces of insecurity

of tomorrow and are utilized for creative purposes. He tried throughout his life to associate the entire Indian people in the great enterprise of a socialist India. He laid the firm foundations but left the word "Socialism to acquire further connotation and denotation with the passage of time... he ensured that there would be no going back on socialism."

Nehru's socialism was in fact enriched by three different streams of thought viz Fabianism, Gandhism and Marxism. From Marx he inherited inevitability of socialism and its scientific approach; from Gandhism purity of means and ethical aspect and from Fabianism he derived reformism, constitutionalism and gradualism. Nehru's socialism synthesises various trends of thought at the level of the ideal. There lay its appeal. In the words of P.C. Joshi "... Nehru neither propounded nor conformed to any single socialist theory or doctrine. His conception of socialism was synthetic to the point of being eclectic, it is best to characterise it... as a vision which is as much socialist as humanist."

Nehru views on Non-Alignment

India's standing for the oppressed and expressing sympathies for the aggrieved, prior to the achievement of independence, reflects that Nehru construed India's struggle for freedom as a part of the global struggle. Nehru's international outlook is evident from his pursuing the foreign policy on these lines.

Nehru represented the best traits of an Indian which were tolerance, sagacity and love for peace. Nehru was an internationalist in his outlook. He developed his international outlook by keeping himself interested in the international problems. In his ideas he always cherished to have a world free of wars and nuclear threats, a world of oneness, of growth and development to better the lot of masses or humanity.

Speaking in Constituent Assembly on December 4, 1947 he said, "We have proclaimed during this past year that we will not attach ourselves to any particular group. This has nothing to do with neutrality or passivity or anything else. Nehru favoured the polarisation of power and an increase in the number of non-aligned countries resulting in the isolation of super powers. In such an atmosphere of international

relations, Nehru believed that there could be a possibility of replacement of mutual fear, suspicion, hostility and cold war by mutual good will, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Nehru's policy of non-alignment was not a negative policy. Some people regarded it as negative policy which meant India would remain neutral at all the time and in every situation. Nehru's doctrine of non-alignment was also positive and dynamic in its nature. In positive term it charted out an independent foreign policy posture for" the nation which object to lining up for war purposes, to military blocs, to military alliances and the like and wanted to work in the pursuit of peace".

India would try her best to have friendly relations with the countries of both the blocs and would extend all co-operation for ensuring peace among the family of the nations of the world. It will also be helpful for new independent countries of Asia and Africa. Thus according to Nehru the policy of non-alignment on the part of a big state like India was conducive to her own ultimate national interests as well as to the interests of peace in the world.

Nehru also defended the policy of non-alignment on economic grounds. Nehru believed that Economic Exploitation and economic backwardness also undermine the cause of peace. He contended that non-alignment policy was an absolute necessity for newly emerging and underdeveloped countries .The primary aim of these countries was economic development without economic development political stability was not possible. Political instability could become a hurdle in the way of world peace. Thus according to Nehru, the maintenance of universal peace was an economic as well as political necessity for these countries.

=====