



Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehrus A Progressive-Reformist

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13**Research Paper - Political Science**

Abstract

NEHRU HAS Gandhi's and Lincoln's faith in the common man. He knows that India's elections are solid evidence of his faith and also that literacy and intelligency are not synonyms. The discriminating way in which even illiterate electorate exercises the ballot has been shown over and again. The nation celebrates Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru's 122nd birth anniversary, a crisis stalks his legacy. For the past twenty years, since the beginning of economic reforms, it had become a fashion to decry Nehru, especially his economic policies. Nehru was seen as the harbinger of a 'notorious' quota-permit Raj, which stifled India's growth. He was blamed for Partition, the Kashmir crisis and a foreign policy which ensured India's isolation from the American orbit.

Introduction

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru [1889-1964] was among those few on the forefront, who struggling under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi for 22 years [1920-1942], achieved freedom from the shackles of British Empire. It was he who presided over four sessions of the Indian National Congress [1929, 1936, 1937 and 1946] before country's independence. Undoubtedly, he possessed multi-dimensional personality, and no one, even from his critics or opponents, can be doubtful of this fact. It was in June 1920 that an attractive youth Jawaharlal Nehru educated from Harrow and Cambridge Universities and who was a son of Pandit Motilal Nehru, a prosperous and eminent lawyer of Allahabad, and also a national figure, turned towards the peasantry of Oudh; he sat beside farmers,



dined with them and engrossed in their problems and hardships. As it was the early phase of Gandhian era of National Liberation Movement of India, Jawaharlal Nehru first emphasized upon peasant's organization if they really desired to get rid of their centuries old problems and hardships. Then he laid foundation of the Oudh Kisan Sabha [1920], the United Provinces Kisan Sabha [1930] and the All India Kisan Sabha [1936].

Economy

Pre-Independence India had a negative growth rate. Nehru ensured 3-4 per cent of consistent growth. This was a huge jump which pulled millions out of poverty. At present, India enjoys 8 per cent growth - but poverty alleviation stands at a meagre 0.8 per cent. The huge Indian market that the world doesn't tire talking about has a lot to do with Nehru's investment in education, health, employment and human resources. Though an unapologetic socialist, Nehru was never a supporter of the command economy. While giving a major role to the public sector, Nehru retained private ownership. At the same time, he curbed monopolistic capitalist practices for he understood that unchecked capitalism could only wreak havoc in India's small peasant economy.

In 1944, Indian business houses themselves brought out a 'Bombay plan', which called for a massive investment by the state. In this plan, businessmen acknowledged their critical weakness with regard to nation building.

The ABC of political economy defines that it is impossible to build a truly dynamic capitalist economy, and a modern nation, without demolishing feudalism and initiating land reforms in villages. India could create a middle class in the countryside only because Nehru distributed zamindari land amongst the peasantry. Land reforms released labour, stuck in medieval practices in villages, for India's expanding industries. Yet, along with feudal elements, the conservative right wing lobby of moneylenders-traders-black marketers blocked Nehru's every move. The sad part is that more often than not India's nascent capitalist class also did not fully back Nehru's progressivism. Nehru faced conservative- non modern- right wing opposition from within the Congress; he also had to bear the brunt of regressive pulls exercised by the RSS. The right wing and the RSS did not even support parliamentary democracy and the equal rights given to the minorities, women and Dalits by the Indian Constitution.

Right wing forces blame Nehru for Partition - the communal-fascist RSS does



not see the contradiction in its advocacy of akhand Bharat, while upholding, at the same time, blind hatred for Pakistan. Nehru was an intellectual- politician, an academically sound but a practical historian with a deep, intuitive- political grasp of the currents of Indian and world history and statecraft: His Discovery of India and Glimpses of World History remain classics to this day.

Modernity

Nehru was pro-technology. In diction and speech, his English stood second to no one - not even Churchill and Roosevelt. Yet his chaste Urdu and love for Persian - as well as his Indo- Persian dress - shamed Josh Malihabadi- the great Urdu poet. In a famous incident, during a mushaira in Pakistan, Malihabadi was rendered speechless when confronted with the sight of Pakistani Muslims dressed in western suits while Nehru, who was present, wore his trademark sherwani. Eaton and Harrow co-existed with Allahabad and its liberal but rugged city-culture in Nehru. He was comfortable with the India of clubs, Anglophiles and sophomores, while standing tall and rooted in Indian reality, sensitive to the language and expressions of the peasant ethos. Anecdotes reflect Nehru's rich dialectic. Even as a Prime Minister, Nehru, the intellectual-politician, was not averse to chasing RSS goons, stick in hand- such a thing actually happened in October 1947 in front of Delhi's Odeon cinema.

Progressive-reformist

Progressive-reformist elements from all caste and creed in India supported Nehru's unrelenting quest. Maulana Hussein Ahmed Madani, the leading Deobandi ulema of pre-Independence India, wrote a pamphlet on composite nationalism, which debunked Jinnah's idea of nation building based on religion. India's Left movement channelled its immense energy to help establish socialistic ideas and practices in the field of culture and cinema. Despite adjustments to the new post- Soviet word order, Nehru's anti-Imperialist foreign policy has withstood the challenge of time and change. It still guarantees India a leading role in world affairs.

Pluralism

Conservatives contrast Patel's toughness on Hyderabad with Nehru's soft approach on Kashmir. Nehru believed in the will of the people. His decision to use force in Hyderabad was premised on the popular movement there, which was being suppressed



by the armed forces of the Nizam. In Kashmir, popular sentiment, represented by Sheikh Abdullah, Nehru's personal and ideological friend, tilted towards India, while Hari Singh, the King, wavered and even considered ceding his territory to Pakistan. Nehru acted swiftly by sending Indian troops in Kashmir during the 1947-48 crisis - but knowing well the history of Kashmir, and popular aspirations for autonomy within India, Nehru, while reaffirming Kashmir as an integral part of India, allowed Kashmiris their own pace and time. It was geopolitics, mistakes by post-1970s Indian and Kashmiri politicians, and distortions emerging out of America's beguiling, proxy anti-Soviet war - not Nehru - that created terrorism in Kashmir.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru [1889-1964] was among those few on the forefront, who struggling under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi for 22 years [1920-1942], achieved freedom from the shackles of British Empire. It was he who presided over four sessions of the Indian National Congress [1929, 1936, 1937 and 1946] before country's independence. Undoubtedly, he possessed multi-dimensional personality, and no one, even from his critics or opponents, can be doubtful of this fact. It was in June 1920 that an attractive youth Jawaharlal Nehru educated from Harrow and Cambridge Universities and who was a son of Pandit Motilal Nehru, a prosperous and eminent lawyer of Allahabad, and also a national figure, turned towards the peasantry of Oudh; he sat beside farmers, dined with them and engrossed in their problems and hardships. As it was the early phase of Gandhian era of National Liberation Movement of India, Jawaharlal Nehru first emphasized upon peasant's organization if they really desired to get rid of their centuries old problems and hardships. Then he laid foundation of the Oudh Kisan Sabha [1920], the United Provinces Kisan Sabha [1930] and the All India Kisan Sabha [1936]. Not only this, along with his colleagues, he played a significant role in the progressive land reform, the abolition of Zamindari system and landlordism and to implement the concept of land to the tiller, which were some of the great achievements of modern India.

Commitments to secularism

Commitments to secularism, waking together for the cause of the nation and to honour democratic values were other facets of Pandit Nehru's personality. His secularism, in my view, was completely within the domain of the Indian Way, which is like an ocean, several rivers from different directions mingle in it; they intermingling with the water of the



ocean and by doing so make themselves grand on the one hand and contribute to the vastness of the ocean on the other. The way Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel walked together for the cause of the country was a unique example in the entire history of India; it is exemplary and to be followed by those who talk of nation or express concern over national interest. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru always recognized healthy criticism, for he encouraged even his opponents and critics and it was his extraordinary quality. Thus, Nehru was a multifaceted personality; he was a great leader and an international figure. Broad thinking and progress was his message to his compatriots, which is adaptable and completely relevant today.

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