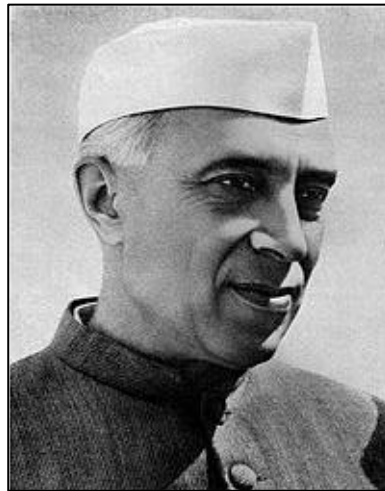




Pandit Nehru in Historical Perspective

Dr. Atul Chandra Pradhan

Once the beloved Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has been of late both lauded and criticized for different reasons. Admirers view him as a dauntless revolutionary who sacrificed a life of comforts to dedicate himself to the struggle for freedom, a leftist who incorporated radical ideas for the uplift of workers and peasants into the Congress Party's programme, a leader who planned and implemented India's economic development on a scientific and dynamic basis, a doughty champion of scientific temper, secularism and humanism, an intellectual par excellence who had the insatiable curiosity of a polymath and produced masterpieces like *An Autobiography*, *Glimpses of World History* and *Discovery of India* and above all a statesman dedicated to world peace and international amity and good will. Detractors view Nehru as an idealistic statesman who misdirected India's economics development by centralised planning, overemphasis on public sector, imports control and undue protection to domestic industries and faulted the country's Kashmir policy as well as China policy and thereby left behind a perpetual legacy of problems for the posterity.



Jawaharlal Nehru met Mahatma Gandhi in the Lucknow Session of the Indian National Congress held in 1916 and along with his father joined the latter's Non-cooperation movement in 1920. Jawaharlal provided leadership to the Non-cooperation movement in United Provinces (now known as Uttar Pradesh). In December 1929 he presided over the annual session of Congress held at Lahore, which adopted the resolution on *Purna Swaraj* (Complete Independence) and thereby prepared the ground for the Civil Disobedience of 1930's. Motilal Nehru, his father had become the President of the Congress session, held at Calcutta in 1928. There are conflicting views regarding his father's role in making Jawaharlal the party's President in 1929. In 1929 he presided over the All India Trade Union Congress held at Nagpur. Once again Jawaharlal Nehru became the President of Congress in 1936-37 when he tried to incorporate radical ideas about the uplift of workers and peasants in the Congress party's programme, and bring about the participation of trade unions and Kisan Sabhas as the constituent parts in the Congress. In 1938,



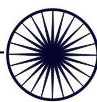
with Subhas Chandra Bose as the Congress President, Nehru acted as the Chairman of National Planning Committee. In 1946, on the eve of transfer of power, Jawaharlal again became the President of Congress. As a leader of the nationalist movement he was sentenced to imprisonment for various terms, totalling a period of nine years. At the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, initially Nehru sympathised with the Allied powers on ideological grounds, but when it became clear that Britain's so-called fight for democracy had nothing to do with democracy and self determination for colonies like India, the Congress leaders like Gandhi and Nehru followed a policy of confrontation, leading to the Quit India Revolt and incarceration of Congress leaders including Nehru himself; he was jailed in Ahmadnagar fort.

In 1934 a socialist forum was organised within the Congress party by the leftists like Jaya Prakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva and others. They formed the Congress Socialist party. Jawaharlal and Subhas, while subscribing to socialist ideology did not join the Congress Socialist Party. The Congress Socialists radicalised the nationalist movement by organising and supporting movements of workers and peasants and states people's movements. Jawaharlal associated himself with such movements. He presided over the annual session of All India States People's Conference, held at Ludhiana on 15 and 16 February 1939. The Socialists dissociated themselves from the Congress after independence and formed a party of their own. At one stage, in early fifties, Prime Minister Nehru unsuccessfully tried to induct socialists like Jaya Prakash Narayan and J.B Kripalani into his Cabinet. Nehru's socialist leaning, and influence of Communists, Socialists and friendly Soviet Russia account for the acceptance of Socialistic Pattern of Society (1955) and

Democratic Socialism (1964) as the goals of Congress party and overemphasis on public sector in early post-independence decades. It is a strange irony of history that for many years the failure of socialist experiments in Russia remained hidden and that socialism was considered an alternative model of development and was a cause of gnawing worry for capitalists in Europe and America. Nehru followed a mixed economic policy. He was aware of the role of private sector in the economic development of nation. But his policy of protection to domestic industries, imports control policy, unwillingness to accept foreign capital and aid, industrial licensing policy in favour of public sector, and overmanning in public sector proved counter-productive. Because of imports control policy the foreign suppliers became unwilling to sell technology. Because of protection the domestic industries became uncompetitive. Overmanning in public sector made the commodities costly. As a result of Nehruvian economic policy India became technologically backward and got caught in a low-growth trap.

As the head of interim government and Prime Minister of India after independence Nehru played a pivotal role in maintaining communal harmony. In 1948 he wrote to the state Chief Ministers, "We have a Muslim minority who are so large in numbers that they can not, if they want to, go anywhere else. They have got to live in India. This is the basic fact about which there can be no argument". Nehru's non-communal and secular approach which was the need of the hour was appreciated by people on the other side of the border. It is said that when Nehru died in 1964, people in Pakistan wept.

As Prime Minister Nehru played an important role in hammering out a new Constitution for the country. Patel no doubt played the leading role in integrating princely states with



the Indian Union, but Nehru's charisma and appeal played a significant role in maintaining unity and integrity of the nation.

Unlike his mentor Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru considered the development of heavy and large scale industries indispensable for the economic development of India. He was a great believer in the application of science and technology for solving the problems of poverty and backwardness. During his tenure as Prime Minister steel plants were installed in Rourkela, Bhilai and Durgapur through foreign collaboration, forty five research laboratories were established in different parts of the country and Indian Institutes of Technology were established in places like Bombay, Madras, Kanpur and Kharagpur. In 1937 Nehru articulated the world view of the Congress Party in the following words : “Congress represents science and science is the spirit of the age and the dominating factor of the modern world. Even more than the present the future belongs to science and to those who make friends with science and seek its help for the advance of humanity”². In this spirit Nehru employed physicists like Homi Bhabha and Meghnad Saha to carry forward researches in Physics and Atomic Energy.

At a time, when Cold War had divided the world into two blocs - the capitalist bloc led by USA and Marxist bloc led by USSR and each super power was trying to win satellites, Nehru, along with President Nasser of Egypt, President Tito of Yugoslavia, President Sukarno of Indonesia and Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus started the Non-Aligned Movement which defused the tension caused by the Cold War. The Bandung Conference of 1955 adopted Panchasheel as the basis of a new world order. Non-alignment which became the sheet anchor of Indian foreign policy gave India a voice in

conformity with her civilizational dignity and future potential. Nehru played a critical role in decolonisation which became a major political development after the Second World War.

India's border dispute with China owes its origin to the fact that it had remained undemarcated since the colonial period. Because of his deep love for Chinese civilisation and Hindi-Chini Bhai reception accorded to him in Beijing in 1953 Nehru developed a naive trust in China, and was hopeful of settling the border dispute in the spirit of Panchasheel. His China policy was a complete failure. In diplomacy he was found to be no match for the shrewd Paris-educated Prime Minister of China, Chao En Lai. He got the rudest shock when China invaded India in the autumn of 1962 and due to lack of defence preparation Indian army had to stage a disastrous retreat. A disillusioned Prime Minister observed in the Parliament, “I have lived in a world of illusion out of touch with reality”. Nehru should have heeded Patel's warning in 1950 about the future implication of China's military expansion in Tibet.

Wrongly advised by the Governor General Lord Mountbatten Nehru mishandled the Jammu & Kashmir question after independence. He referred the question of Pakistan's invasion of Kashmir to UNO expecting that through UNO's intervention the invasion would be withdrawn. Actually reference of Jammu & Kashmir issue to UNO complicated it; it became an issue of Cold War, as Anglo-American bloc supported Pakistan. After the signing of Instrument of Accession with the Government of India by Hari Singh, the Maharaja of Kashmir the Government of India should have tackled the problem of Pakistani invasion by her own military strength. Being guided by idealism and Lord Mountbatten, Nehru took the issue to UNO and later on promised to hold plebiscite in Jammu Kashmir.



Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India was the first External Affairs Minister and the founder of Indian foreign policy and foreign service.

Nehru did not subscribe to any organised religion. He was an agnostic. Once Mahatma Gandhi observed about him that although Jawahar did not believe in God, he was nearer God than many who claim to be worshippers of God. Deeply influenced by western culture, he had profound knowledge of Indian culture which is reflected in his book *Discovery of India*. Of all the teachers of world religions Buddha and his teachings impressed him most.

Nehru was a democrat. He derived his ideas on democracy from British liberalism, French revolution and the goal of Russian revolution. Despite 'vast popularity', 'strong will directed to well-defined purpose', 'organisational capacity, 'an intolerance of others' and 'a certain contempt for the weak and inefficient', he wanted to remain a democrat³. According to Hiren Mukherji, Nehru had "an innate respect for Parliament as the symbol of people's power" and a "good repository of the country's wisdom", in Lok Sabha he "bowed deeply to the chair and with intent interest followed the proceedings"⁴. He loved Indians and wanted to be loved by them. He wrote in his Last Will and Testament : "If any people

choose to think of me, then I should like them to say this was a man who with all his mind and heart loved India and the Indian people. And they in turn were indulgent to him and gave him of their love most abundantly and extravagantly.⁵ A few months before death poet Iqbal told Nehru, "What is there in common between Jinnah and you ? He is a politician, you are a patriot."⁶

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