

Gandhi and Nehru

Siddhartha Dash

During the last two thousand five hundred years and more of India's history, two individual combinations made tremendous impact both on India's civilisation and polity. The first duo was that of Kautilya and his trusted disciple Chandragupta Maurya who together laid the foundation of the first great historical empire of ancient India (Maurya Empire 321-184 B.C.). The other duo was that of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru who were instrumental in laying the base of a modern Indian state and giving shape to ideas in the realm of education, culture and democracy.

Nehru met Gandhi for the first time in 1916. That was the year of his marriage with Kamala. In his autobiography, Nehru writes " My first meeting with Gandhiji was about the time of Lucknow congress during the Christmas, 1916. All of us admired him for his heroic fight in South Africa, but he seemed very distant and different and unpolitical to many of us young men. He refused to take part in Congress or national politics then and confined himself to the South African Indian question. Soon afterwards his adventures and victory in Champaran, on behalf of the tenants of the planters, filled us with enthusiasm. We saw that he was prepared to apply his methods in India and they promised success."

Nehru's admiration for Gandhi grew when the latter set up a Satyagraha Sabha in 1919 to defy the notorious Rowlatt Act and two years after in 1921 launched the non-cooperation movement. Nehru eulogised the Satyagraha movement and non-cooperation movement of Gandhi.

Gandhi and Nehru were completely different people as regards their social status, age, way of thinking and individuality. Each of these two men had his own world outlook. There were always deep ideological differences between them.

Nehru strongly criticised the suspension of non-cooperation movement by Gandhi in 1922 on the plea that violence occurred at *Chauri Chaura*. He could not reconcile how the violence of a stray mob of excited peasants in a remote village could justify the reversal of a national struggle involving thousands of people for freedom. Likewise, Nehru differed from Mahatma on the question of non-violence. For Gandhi, non-violence was the very breath of his life. Nehru, on the other hand, did not accept non-violence as a method for all situations, for all times. Nehru did not believe that non-violence could destroy the monstrous war machines built by Hitler and Mussolini. He believed that for the preservation of law and order in a country coercive authority of the state is indispensable.

Gandhi was a staunch critic of western civilization based on technology. He wanted to preserve his country from the curse of commercialisation, the horror of machine exploitation and production, the slavery of the wage labour, the whole black systems of capitalist life. He favoured small scale and cottage industries including Khadi. His intention was to provide employment to all and thereby solve the problem of poverty and unemployment. Nehru was enamoured of western science and technology. He supported heavy and large scale industrialisation. In his autobiography, he wrote "we cannot stop the river of change or cut ourselves adrift from it and psychologically we who have eaten the apple of Eden cannot forget the taste and go back to primitiveness."

In their attitude on life, Nehru and Gandhi differed from each other. Nehru was absolutely secular and scientific whereas Gandhi was out and out a man of religion. For Gandhi, religion and morality constituted the whole of life. They are inseparable. He laid great stress on truth and non-violence and expected the Congress to be instrumental for the moral regeneration of the country. Nehru attached much importance to moral values but not so much to religion. For Nehru, religion was a woman's affair. He wanted the Congress to play role effectively in the political and economic sphere.

Gandhi and Nehru differed in their composition and emphasis on the social idea. While the former put emphasis on liberty, the latter on equality, though both of them stood for liberty and equality. In a stateless society of Gandhi's dream, the individual enjoys unlimited, unbridled freedom where no outside authority will interfere with his life. On the contrary, Nehru was convinced that unrestricted freedom induces an individual to interfere with the freedom and rights

of other individuals. In order to distribute freedom equally to all the members of the society, it had to be rationed and each individual was to be given his legitimate share. Gandhi was not in favour of the state control of individual actions. He wanted to give a negative, passive role to the state. Gandhi was in favour of autonomous village republics. Nehru on the other hand wanted the state machinery to gear up to achieve the socialistic goals.

Gandhi's 'Hind Swaraj' (1909) contains the pith and kernel, the sum and substance of his philosophy. In that small book he condemned the western civilisation and all that it stands for. Nehru criticised what was written by Gandhi in Hind Swaraj. Gandhi wanted to banish western civilisation from India but liked to retain the Britishers as welcome friends in the service of the country. Nehru, on the other hand, wanted to drive out the British with bags and baggages but to keep their culture and civilisation.

Gandhi formulated the principle of trusteeship for the rich and the propertied class. He was of the opinion that as the rich did not require all their wealth for the satisfaction of their personal needs, they should utilise the surplus wealth for the benefit of the society at large. They should act as trustees of the surplus wealth. Nehru, though allows important place to private sector, he consider the *Zamindari* system as a semi-feudal system which was out of date and a great hindrance to production and general progress.

To Nehru, Parliamentary system was the ideal state craft and democratic practices. Gandhi considered the British parliament like a sterile woman and prostitute. So far as the general aims and ideals of education for the improvement of the individual outlook are concerned, there is hardly any difference between Gandhi and Nehru. But when we look into the content, methodology

priorities and language policies of the two, we find many basic glaring differences.

In this connection, it may be mentioned that Nehru was never a blind follower of the Mahatma. He was bold and frank enough to point out the mistake of his mentor. To cite an example, at the Madras session of the Indian National Congress in 1927, Nehru moved a resolution claiming complete independence which was passed almost unanimously. Gandhi could not appreciate the resolution and called it " hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed ." Due to the passing of this historic resolution Gandhi was so much perturbed that he went to the extent of asking Nehru to ' please form a disciplined party'. To this in his characteristic fearlessness, Nehru reminded Gandhi of his own breach of discipline. " May I remind you that you are a member of the working committee and it is an extra ordinary thing to remember on the morrow of the Congress to criticise and run down the Congress and its principal resolutions." Gandhi never got such a stern reply, he was upset and said " the differences between you and me, appear to me vast and radical and there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I cannot conceal from you my grief that I should lose a comrade so valiant, so faithful, so able and so honest as you have always been, but in serving a cause, comradeships have got to be sacrificed." Nehru was equally shocked. In order to avoid misunderstanding he wrote back " No one has moved me and inspired me more than you and I can never forget your exceeding kindness to me." And to further soften he wrote " put even in the wider sphere am I not your child in politics, though perhaps a truant and errant child ?"

Despite all these differences, it will be wrong to assume that Nehru was anti-Gandhi or non-Gandhian. It is Nehru's credit that he himself

first studied Gandhi's mysterious personality, grasped its essence and then revealed his master's message to the world. His extempore words at the time of Gandhi's assassination are revealing, "the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere..... the light that has illuminated this country for these so many years, will illuminate this country for many more years and thousand years later that light will still be seen in the country and the world will see it and will give solace to innumerable hearts."

A careful analysis of the views of Gandhi and Nehru reveal that both the master and disciple had vast area of agreement. There was no doubt a personal and spiritual bond of union between them. Both of them wanted India to be a secular state. Both believed in the establishment of a liberal democratic state. Though Nehru was not wholly devoted to the concept of non-violence as cherished by his master, he was very much attracted to its moral aspects. He said " it attracted me more and more and the belief grew upon that situated as we were in India and with our background and traditions, it was the right policy for us." In this context Gandhi said of Nehru, " Jawaharlal is my political heir. He may differ from me while I am living, but when I am gone, he will begin speaking my language. There is no denying the fact that after the exit of Gandhi from the political scene, Nehru fully realised the significance of non-violence and exhorted the nations of the world both at NAM and UN General Assembly, to follow it not only as a policy but as a creed. As the first Prime Minister of independent India for long seventeen years, he made non-violence a key stone of his domestic and foreign policy.

Gandhi described self-reliance as one of the essential ingredients of the individual's character. Jawaharlal Nehru made self-reliance

the pivot around which the entire programme of community development revolved. Both Gandhi and Nehru were cosmopolitans. They stood for internationalism. Gandhi did not want India to remain isolated from the rest of the world. Jawaharlal rejoiced on the freedom struggle of the subject countries. Both Gandhi and Nehru were humanists. Both of them gave greater importance to human qualities than to political expediency. The guru as well as his sishya stood for the toiling humanity. Their hearts bled for the poor and down trodden.

There are many reasons as to why Nehru was drawn towards Gandhi. Nehru recognised the heroism and spirit of defiance of Gandhi. He also found that Gandhi's unique leadership and political action brought important results to the country. Besides, Gandhi acted as a bridge between the past ideals and the future modernising aspirations of India.

Gandhi had tremendous liking for Nehru. To Gandhi, a man like Jawaharlal is rare. A man of sterling character, fearless, a prince by birth and giant among intellectuals, Nehru had no match among galaxy of workers that were picked up by Gandhi. He therefore reposed a deep trust in

Nehru. It was because of his liking that he projected Nehru on the national scene. He thought that the success of national movement and national reconstruction depends on the sacrifice of the young generation. Nehru symbolised the aspirations of them. It was because of all these that Nehru was elected as the president of Indian National Congress in 1929 when he was hardly 40 years of age. Infact, Gandhi had a hand in getting Nehru elected as the Congress President in 1946 and thereby enabled him to become the first prime minister of India.

Indian history during the first half of the 20th century is inconceivable without these two worthy sons of mother India. To write about one of them in isolation from the other is to distort the realities of the times and to fail to comprehend the country's recent history. If Chanakya chose Chandragupta to build India, it is Gandhi who slightly before his assassination (on 18th January 1948) wrote to Nehru " Bahut Barash Jio Aur Hindka Jawahar Bane Raho" (May you live long to be the jewel of India).

Siddhartha Dash lives at N4/205, IRC Village, Bhubaneswar-751015



Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik switching the Panchyat Street Light facility at Nachuni on 9.11.2006. Shri Biswabhusan Harichandan, Minister, Rural Development, Industries and Law is also present.