
UNIT 23 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Structure

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23.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to explain the main features of Nehru's views on nationalism and social revolution. His contribution to the thinking on socialism is also noted. All these are explained in the background of Modern Indian Political Thought.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was well-known as a political activist. But his contribution to Modern Indian Political Thought is as significant as his political activities. During the past phase of Indian nationalist movement, his status as its leader was only next to that of Mahatma Gandhi. When India became independent in 1947, he became its Prime Minister and until his death in 1964, he occupied that position. And for a long time, he was also the Foreign Minister. He was also an historian. He wrote an excellent autobiography while he dealt, among other matters, with the record of British rule in India, and the survey of the Indian nationalist movement. Before India became free, he spoke and wrote at length on various problems facing India and the world. Even after he had become the Prime Minister, he continued to speak on the problems facing free India and the nuclear world. He also corresponded with eminent writers and statesmen. From the written and verbal responses he made to them and from the explanations he made to defend and elaborate his ideas, his views on political thought in general and on nationalism and social revolution in particular emerged.

Nehru was influenced by Marxist thinking. He had a good grasp of Marxist Literature. Marxist philosophy gave a new orientation to his thinking. He acquired clarity in understanding on the Indian Society. He states "The Marxian philosophy appeals to me in a broad sense and helps me to understand the process of history." Nehru's socialist thinking had an other dimension. His visit to Russia helped him to understand the dynamics of the socialist economy. He could have a comparative view of the western capitalism as well as the soviet society. Lenin's contribution to Russian Revolution "produced a powerful effect" on him. The way Lenin applied Marxism in a backward society like Russia and brought a total transformation created high regard for Lenin in Nehru's mind. Henceforth, Nehru tried to look at India's problems from a different angle. Nehru states, "Our problems in India today are the same as those that faced Russia some years ago and they can be solved in the same manner in which Russians solved theirs. We should draw a lesson from the USSR in the way of industrialisation and education of our people."

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Briefly mention the influences on Nehru.

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23.2 BASIC FEATURES OF NEHRU'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Nehru wanted the model of Democratic Socialism which suits Indian traditions and ethos. He was influenced by Fabian Socialism of Britain. Many of the active members were his friends. He was of the opinion, that Parliamentary politics is the means of achieving socialism. Multiple social groups and ideological groups will strengthen Indian democracy. Pluralism will become the ideological foundation of individual liberty and societal demands must have a beautiful reconciliation.

23.3 NEHRU'S LEGACY TO THE INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

During the last phase of the Indian national movement, Gandhi was its most prominent leader. Next to him was Jawaharlal Nehru. He made a distinctive and specific contribution to it and to Indian nationalism.

The first was the international outlook developed by Indians under Nehru's guidance. Almost all the important resolutions of the Congress working committee on world affairs were drafted by him.

Nehru made visits to the Brussels Conference on anti-imperialism. He conceived India's struggle for freedom as a part of the struggle of other dependent peoples against imperialism.

He attracted the socialists, the communists, the representatives of trade unions and the peasants to the nationalist movement by making repeated statements that the national struggle for freedom was not only for political freedom from foreign domination, but for social equality and freedom from poverty as well. In other words, he gave an economic content to it.

23.4 NATION-BUILDING AFTER 1947

The tasks before a leader, who was the head of the government, were different from that of a leader of the nationalist movement, which had the objective of achieving freedom for the country. Until freedom was achieved the single objective of achieving independence kept different political forces united and the most dominant political force eclipsed all others. In India these different political forces before 1947 were : the liberals, the Hindu militants, the communalist Muslims, the Gandhians, the Congress socialists, the communists and regional political forces based on linguistic forces.

Nehru was historically called upon to unite these forces or fight against the secessionists and promote Indian nationalism. After the creation of Pakistan, the Muslim separatists were not a major force. Gandhi's martyrdom at the hands of a Hindu fanatic weakened the Hindu fanatics after 1948. But it was the relentless ideological fight against them led by Nehru which made them politically and administratively weak. If India remained as a modern state and civil society and the fact that a larger number of Muslims were living in freedom and security in India than in Pakistan, it was because of Nehru's continuous preaching of secularism in India.

Nehru made it clear that religion has no function in public life, particularly in politics. Nehru's secular thinking shaped under the influence of liberal western education. As a liberal, he separated politics and religion. Religion has no function in politics, when religious forces get active in politics, they become communal. Nehru differentiated majority communalism from minority communalism. He thinks that majority communalism can grow into fascism. In making the Indian constitution secular and in providing equal rights to all religious groups Nehru's contribution is significant. The Indian state remains a secular and democratic state without any allegiance towards any religion.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) What were the basic features of Nehru's thought?

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2) Briefly discuss Nehru's legacy to the national movement.

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23.5 VIEWS ON SOCIALISM AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Nehru believed in planned economy for maximum utilisation of resources. He did not favour nationalisation of private capital. In his scheme of economic development, mixed economy should play a prominent role. Both public sector and private sector must help each other in removing poverty and the other basic problems of Indian Society.

The above was based on the socialist idea that the market economy and the unregulated capitalism, based on profit-making basis, alone, should not determine the character of economy. Nehru wanted the public sector to have commanding heights in the economy. That is why he wanted the public sector to play a vital part in regard to the development of heavy industries like steel and the exploration of oil resources in India.

Industrialisation must aim in creating an equalitarian society. In Nehru's scheme, big industries with advance technology have a major role. As Nehru states that "I am all for tractors and big machinery. I am convinced that rapid industrialisation of India is essential to reduce the pressure on land to combat poverty and raise standards of living, for defence and a variety of other purposes. But I am equally convinced that the most careful planning and adjustment are necessary if we are to reap the full benefits of industrialisation and avoid any of its dangers."

23.6 NATIONAL ECONOMY AS THE BASIS OF NATIONALISM

Nehru thought that the national economy should also be the strength of nationalism. No other Indian, liberal or Gandhian fully grasped this matter and gave attention to it. The communists wanted to disentangle India from the Western capitalist economy grouping. But they never realised the implication of India going too far in the direction of communist style of planning and depending too much on the Soviet Union. But Nehru took a series of steps and threw up scattered ideas in his speeches and writings on the development of a national economy of the country. He was not against international co-operation, but he wanted India to diversify her economy contacts and develop her own economy with self-reliance.

Nehru realised fully well that the formal political independence achieved by India in 1947 could be subverted by the foreign powers by their economic penetration and that India could be converted gradually to a semi-colony. This was the economic basis of Nehru's political thought in relation to Indian nationalism. The development of a national economy was possible only by taking the following steps:

- 1) National Planning for economic development and distribution of wealth to the people;
- 2) Development of Indian agriculture by "a green revolution" with the limited help from the West and
- 3) The development of heavy industries like Steel and the exploration of oil with Soviet Union's help.

23.7 NEHRU'S SCIENTIFIC OUTLOOK

This takes us to one important aspect of Nehru's thought connected with his scientific outlook. India could have self-reliance in the economic field only with her developing science and technology in a big way and her applying them on a large-scale in her economic activities. Among the Congress leaders, Nehru alone openly expressed his difference of opinion with Gandhi on this matter.

Nehru believed that the methods and approach of science have revolutionised human life more than anything else in the long course of history, and have opened doors and avenues of further and even more radical changes, leading up to the very portals of what has long been considered the unknown. Nehru said: "It is the scientific approach, the adventures and yet critical temper of science, the search for truth and new knowledge, the refusal to accept anything without testing and trial, the capacity to change previous conclusions in the face of new evidence, the reliance on observed facts and not on pre-conceived theory, the discipline of the mind, all that is necessary not merely for the application of science but for life itself and the solution of its many problems."

One of the reasons Nehru advanced for India's extensive use of science and technology was that it would bring economic power and independence to the country.

His intention to promote a scientific outlook in the country and the extensive use of science and technology for the promotion of economic development was also in the direction of settling in motion a social revolution. These steps, weakened the irrational traditions of India which was based on status and gradually replaced it by the bourgeois outlook which was based on contract.

Another advantage of the extensive use of science and technology was that it would make India an independent and self-reliant economic, political and military power. Nehru wrote to Gandhi in 1945: "I do not think it is possible for India to be really independent unless she is a technically advanced country. I am not thinking for the moment in terms of just scientific growth. In the present context of the world we cannot even advance culturally without a strong background of scientific research in every department. There is today a tremendous acquisitive tendency both in individuals and groups and nations, which lead to conflicts and wars."

According to Nehru, India should resist the foreign pressures by herself developing

her science and technology. Among many other factors, this was one of the reasons for India's refusal to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Primarily, India wanted to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. And she also did not want to give up the option to make any weapons for self-defence. This takes us to India's independent foreign policy.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Briefly comment on Nehru's views on Socialism.

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2) What steps did Nehru envisage for the development of national economy?

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3) Briefly discuss Nehru's scientific outlook.

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23.8 INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL FREEDOM

In the initial statements explaining India's foreign policy Nehru claimed that it was an independent foreign policy. Nehru developed an independent thinking in the area of foreign policy. He could understand the dynamics of global politics. There are basically two power blocks in international politics: Western Imperialist Block and Soviet Socialist Block. India and other newly liberated countries should follow an independent line. They should not be member of any block. Nehru states that, "we should approach these problems, whether domestic or international problems in our own way. If by any chance we align ourselves definitely with one power group, we

may perhaps from one point of view do some good, but I have not the shadow of a doubt that from a larger point of view, not only India but of world peace, it will do harm." Nehru wanted that the non-aligned countries should function as a power block. They should share their wealth for their prosperity.

Nehru was by no means for an India which would be isolated from the rest of the world. His independent foreign policy was not negative. He realised that India is a part of the world in regard to science, culture, economy and politics. He made the following observation making his views clear on this matter: "Our entire society is based on this more or less. This basis must go and be transformed into one of co-operation, not isolated which is impossible. If this is admitted and is found feasible then attempts should be made to realize, if not in terms of an economy which is cut off from the rest of the world, but rather one which co-operates. From the economic or political point of view, an isolated India may well be a vacuum which increases the acquisitive tendencies of others and thus creates conflicts."

23.9 INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

After India became independent, Nehru's international outlook shaped his views and action. He was against the cold war and the division of the powerful states into two blocs. He tried to reduce international tension and in some cases tried to mediate between the conflicting blocs.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) What were the assumptions of Nehru's foreign policy?

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23.10 LET US SUM UP

In the years immediately following World War II, the conflicts between capitalism and communism were so intense that when Nehru declared India's intention not to join any bloc, he was considered as being unrealistic and only idealistic. Now the disintegration of the blocs had made Nehru's outlook very relevant and realistic. There is also a clear indication of international co-operation between the two Super Powers now.

Inside the country also, Nehru's greatest success was that he promoted the spirit of conciliation and negotiation between different political groups and gradually built up political stability and consensus.

He did not succeed in setting in motion a revolution — with blood or without blood. He succeeded in modernizing the society and economy to a large extent. The Hindu Code Bill was a typical example of a legislation which helped the Hindu society to have a transition from a feudal society to a modern one. This was a step in the right direction. To sum up, Nehru created political and social stability in India and helped in the achievement and the extension of political freedom of the country.

In his era the promotion of a national consensus was possible. All kinds of concessions could be made and conciliation among different political groups were possible. They were not helpful to a democratic socialist revolution. But they helped the emergence of political stability in the country, which was helpful to a gradual social change and social revolution. And this stability also helped India's emergence as a major power in South Asia and a middle power in the international field.

23.11 KEY WORDS

Nationalism: That human group identity that is based on common linguistic-cultural traits in its most developed and modern form.

Social Revolution: A radical and complete transformation of society — its economy, polity, culture, values etc.

Scientific outlook: An outlook that rejects all irrational and superstitious beliefs rooted in traditional conceptions and accepts science as the sole truth.

Secularism: The conception that religion has no role in politics and political life.

Socialism: The political theory that believes in replacing the capitalist system with one that is non-exploitative and based on social ownership of the means of production.

23.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Primary

Nehru, Jawaharlal

- 1) *Letters from a father to his daughter* (Allahabad, 1929).
- 2) *Glimpses of World History* (end Volume, Allahabad, 1934).
- 3) *An Autobiography*, London, 1962.
- 4) *The Discovery of India*, Calcutta, 1946.
- 5) *India's Foreign Policy*. Selected Speeches, 1961, p.70.
- 6) *Nehru on Socialism*,. Edited By V.B. Singh, Delhi, 1988.

Secondary

- 1) Norman D., Nehru: *The first sixty years*, London, 1965.
 - 2) Gopal S., Jawaharlal Nehru : *A Biography, Three Volumes*. Oxford University Press: 1984.
 - 3) A Gorey V. Uimyania, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Moscow, 1982.
 - 4) Brecher, Michail, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, London, 1950.
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23.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

See section 23.1

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See section 23.2
- 2) See section 23.3

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) See section 23.5
- 2) See section 23.6
- 3) See section 23.7

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

See section 23.8