



Jawaharlal Nehru's concept and programme of socialism

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Abstract

Jawaharlal Nehru was an Indian statesman who was the first prime minister of India, from 1947 until 1964. His Socialism had three dimensions. It was founded on: (1) Western liberal influence, (2) Marxism philosophy, and (3) Gandhi an ethics. Nehru was not a pioneer in the socialist field in India. Nehru attended lectures of progressive intellectuals like Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell and J.M. Keynes. As a result, he was drawn towards Fabien socialistic concept and became interested in the political movements of the day. Speaking about the influence of Russell, Shaw and the Webs, Nehru said, "I do not remember any special anti-colonialism in all that, except of course that I was against British rule in India, very strongly, so and perhaps there was some connection between their ideology and this (anticolonialism)". Nehru was not a theoretician of socialism but a fine intellectual with liberal mind which was exposed to democratic, Marxist and Gandhian philosophies. In the early period of the freedom struggle, Nehru emphasized socialism as an economic theory or doctrine.

Keywords: Socialism, anticolonialism, Jawaharlal Nehru's Concept

1. Introduction

Socialism as an Economic Theory

Nehru considered socialism as a dynamic, growing, developing idea which eludes definition. It was a way of life, a way of thinking and functioning. His approach to socialism was scientific and pragmatic. His main emphasis was on the economic aspect of socialism. Dr. Gopal suggests that "Nehru's socialism was a broad tendency and not a precise body of rigid beliefs" [2]. Nehru considered socialism as a system which was inevitable for social economic change in India. Looking at the poverty and misery of the Indians he could think only of socialism as the remedy. "I am convinced that the only key to the solution of world's problems and of India's problems lies in socialism. I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people, except through socialism" [3]. For Nehru socialism was the vision of a new civilization and the science of a new society. Under such an order of society, a distributive justice would be ensured and unjustifiable inequalities eliminated. Nehru was a democratic socialist and believed that socialism could be achieved only when India was ready for it and the great majority of the people accepted it. The democratic method of convincing the people was an essential part of Nehru's socialist programme. Nehru in his speech repeated same point. "I look upon it as a growing, dynamic conception, as something which is not rigid, as something which must fit in with the changing conditions of human life and activity in every country. I do not see why I should be asked to define socialism in precise, rigid terms. What I want is that all individuals in India should have equal opportunities of growth, from birth upwards and equal opportunities for work according to their capacity" [4]. The vital point of socialism was the end of exploitation and the belief in co-operation. Socialism believed in human welfare

and development. Nehru emphasized that material development was necessary for raising the general standard of living of the people and for the cultivation of higher types of individuals. For Nehru the quality of human personality was equally, if not more, important than the material welfare of individuals, though material prosperity was the basis for the development of man's creative spirit and energy and spirit of adventure, and individuality. "A rising standard of life or material welfare as it is sometimes called is of course not an end itself. Essentially it is a means to a better intellectual and cultural life" [5]. Nehru felt that we should aim at higher production, equal distribution and employment so as to promote the equality of individuals in the community. Nehru asserted, "To say that we want greater wealth, higher standards of living and greater production will, I take it, not be contradicted. We have to achieve these objectives, not merely mechanically but also in a social sense which is very important. I have been driven almost against my will to the conclusion that material well-being is just as important in human life as anything else" [6]. Nehru supported socialism on rational grounds as a means for human development and also as a means of attaining greater equality. He was firm that unless India's basic economic problems (food, housing, and clothing) were solved her freedom would be incomplete. Nehru asserted, "Our approach, being socialist is primarily an economic approach which has made politics revolve around economic policies" [7].

2. Nehru's Faith in Individualism, his Socialism was not contradictory to Individual and Freedom

Nehru's whole philosophy of life revolved round the individual. He believed in individual freedom and attached great importance to the growth and all-round development of individual in society. For Nehru socialism and individualism

"were not contradictory terms. In his correspondence with Subhash Bose in 1939 April 3, Nehru was faced with the question whether individual freedom could be reconciled with socialism? He wrote: "I hope that socialism does not kill or suppress individuality; indeed, I am attracted to it because it will release innumerable individuals from economic and cultural bondage" ^[8]. Nehru's socialism was based upon individual personality fully expressing itself. In June 1956 he told his biographer Michael Brecher, "Every individual has an importance and he should be given full opportunities to develop-material opportunities naturally, food, clothing, education, housing, health, etc. They should be common to everybody" ^[9]. Nehru believed that socialism provided greater freedom to individual. He felt that the good of individual could be possible under socialism. So whatever might be form of the state, he was not ready to sacrifice individuality. According to him good life consisted in the satisfaction of essential economic needs which freed him from oppression and provided him chance for creative development. Nehru's idea of freedom was very comprehensive; it consisted of social, economic and religious freedom. Basically he believed that it was dangerous to suppress the freedom of thought and expression. Nehru asserted, "Freedom itself is a means, the end being human well-being, human growth, the ending of poverty and disease and suffering, and the opportunity for everyone to live the 'good life', physically, and mentally. For every restriction and inhibition stops growth and development and produces, apart from economic disorders, complexes and perversions in the nation and individuality" ^[10].

Nehru felt that freedom demanded self-discipline. Good of the society and good of the individual were inter-dependent. Real progress was possible when equal opportunities were provided to all. Nehru was careful enough to stress that the good of the individual belonging to a privileged class would not lead to social good. Individuals were supposed to develop themselves in a way which would serve the larger interests of the community. Nehru insisted on the individually, dignity, and the importance of human personality for the progress and betterment of society as a whole. Nehru believed that for the protection of the individual there should not be misuse of law. Though Nehru kept the individual uppermost in his thought he equally remembered that individual and society were inseparable. Rights of the individual must be balanced by his obligations; without obligations there could not be real rights. In the ultimate analysis Nehru aimed at the growth of the individual as well of the State. Nehru's faith in the individualism resulted in his faith in democracy and aversion for any form of authoritarianism. Nehru asserted, "Our approach to socialism or anybody else's takes - the important thing is that every individual should be given equal opportunity in a more or less egalitarian society with no great inequalities or disparities at any rate none so far as opportunity is concerned" ^[11]. It was interesting that Nehru could combine his socialism with individualism and freedom. Nehru considered he free to examine the claims of every ideology which served the social purpose. He always revised his ideas in the light of new experiences, new influences.

3. Socialism and Democracy

Democracy was a basic principle of Nehru's thought. Nehru's

democratic thought was the expression of his humanism and liberalism. Nehru's faith in the individual was the basis of his faith in democracy. For Nehru, democracy was a dynamic concept, not a narrow or static idea, he remarked, "Democracy is not only political, not only economic, but something of the mind. It involves equality of opportunity to all people, as far as possible, in the political and economic domain. It involves the freedom of the individual to grow and to make the best of his capacities and ability. It involves a certain tolerance of others and even of other's opinions, when they differ from yours" ^[12]. Nehru considered democracy as a scheme of values applicable to the resolution of all political, and economic problems. Basic faith in the dignity of men, both in their totality and in their individuality, led Nehru to lay faith in the democratic system and democratic methods. Democracy to Nehru was a state of mind as well as quality of living. He regarded state as democratic in which the individual was free to realize higher values of life. "Because we think that in the final analysis it promotes the growth of human beings and of society; because, as we have said in our Constitution, we attach great value to individual freedom, because we want the creative and the adventurous spirit of man to grow" ^[13]. Freedom for the individual meant not only the freedom to live but to grow according to his capacities and ability. Nehru was also not in favour of unlimited freedom. During a debate in the parliament Nehru laid down that: "In a democratic society, the concept of individual freedom has to be balanced with social freedom and the relations of the individual with the social group. The individual must not infringe on the freedom of other individuals" ^[14]. For Nehru the state was an agency and instrument for protecting the freedom of the individual. He did not appreciate violence in the name of freedom and did not mind the use of coercive methods by the government for suppressing such violence. For Nehru, democracy meant removal of disparities. He insisted that political democracy or liberty was not enough. For a starving man, liberty and formal equality had little use. Nehru felt therefore that economic democracy, and equal distribution of goods was essential. "The good things of life must become available to more and more people and gross inequalities must be removed" ^[15].

Nehru believed in parliamentary system, in which people were consulted and their attitudes, wishes were respected. The parliamentary system allowed free discussion and rested on the consent of the people. Nehru favoured parliamentary democracy but felt that it demanded ability, devotion to work, co-operation, self-discipline and restraint: Nehru favoured the democratic methods of discussion, argument and persuasion. Nehru considered that to awaken the masses the establishment of democracy and universal adult franchise was necessary. Nehru had complete faith in democratic method of people's participation. He said, "We believe in democracy. Speaking for myself, I believe in it, first of all, because I think it is the right means to achieve ends and because it is a peaceful method. Therefore, democracy means to me an attempt at the solution of problems by peaceful methods. If it is not peaceful, then to my mind, it is not democracy" ^[16]. In Nehru's thought democracy and socialism were inseparable. He repeated that political democracy would be meaningless if it does not embrace economic democracy. Socialism was the inevitable outcome of democracy. The problem before Nehru "was to

combine democracy with socialism, through peaceful and legitimate methods" ^[17]. Nehru was not ready to sacrifice democratic methods for speedy progress and was firmly committed to democratic socialism. According to Dr. Gopal, this was a flaw in the thinking of Nehru. Nehru felt that democracy and socialism were equal partners and could not be divorced. "But Nehru, although a radical in the European tradition, set out with confidence to work for this unprecedented, almost superhuman experiment of democratic socialism in a setting of Asian tradition and economic backwardness" ^[18]. Nehru represented a unique type of socialism in his time. Nehru always remained a socialist wedded to democratic practices. He made the Indians aware of the value of the parliament as an instrument of social change. His conviction was that socialism without democracy would be tyranny in any, and especially in the Indian context. Further, according to his estimate, radical solutions were impossible in the Indian situation, where super-situation, fatalism, ignorance, and class distinctions were age-old features. In such a situation socialism could be brought about by gradual, peaceful and democratic means, by a steady conversion of the people and by enlisting their support and participation. Nehru always considered democracy and socialism as means to the end, not the end itself.

4. Nehru on Equality

Nehru contended that liberty and democracy had no significance except in the context of equality. Laying stress on the importance of equality Nehru asserted, "Democracy means equality and democracy can only flourish in an equal society" ^[19]. Nehru realized that political liberty brought the vote but was of little use when society was riddled with poverty and economic inequality. Long back Nehru stated, we have to build up a new social order in which everyone will have the fullest opportunity for development, no exploitation, and in which there will not be merely political democracy, but economic democracy, which means economic equality without which political democracy will be a hoax. What does it matter to one whether he has a vote or not, when he is hungry and starving" ^[20]. By equality, Nehru did mean equalization of all persons and groups. Though he realized that all human beings were not equal in capacity or ability, he felt that no one should be denied opportunities - educational and economical - for full development. Nehru's concept of equality was not one of violently levelling down distinctions. Its emphasis was on the provision of equal opportunities to all, and on enabling all to utilize such opportunities equally. Nehru stressed that honour and merit should come from ability and hard work and not because of caste, wealth or birth. He had always in his mind the transformation of the Indian social structure into a classless and casteless and fraternal society. Nehru consistently insisted on the removal of special privileges and vested interests. Democracy would not last without a strong and just economic structure ensuring a certain standard of living for the common man. The ultimate aim of democracy was to put an end to all the differences between the haves and the have notes. Nehru emphasized that a genuine democratic structure could be established only by granting adult franchise ensuring free and fair elections encouraging the establishment of political parties and providing civil

liberties and the rule of law. Nehru believed that political democracy was a step towards the goal of real equality and not the final objective. He stated, "If there is economic inequality in the country, all the political democracy and all the adult suffrage in the world cannot bring about real democracy" ^[21]. Nehru held the opinion that capitalism had failed to solve the problems of society, that capitalism had indeed created problems for free societies. Nehru realized that capitalism has failed to meet the greater challenge of distribution. It was inevitable because its basic inequalities and faith in the blind forces of the market made it impossible to organize equitable distribution of wealth and purchasing power". Nehru was firmly convinced that socialism was the only way to end inequality and poverty and to save human beings from utter degradation, to provide equal opportunities in order to remove social distinctions. He realized that real economic progress could not be achieved by any other methods except by an integrated scheme of planning. The Congress Working Committee in 1950 endorsed Nehru's resolution on the economic programme which set forth the Congress objective. "That objective is the establishment of a welfare state wherein there is economic democracy, a national minimum standard in respect -of the essentials of physical and social well being, a rise in the standard of living of the people, full employment, elimination of exploitation, the progressive narrowing down of disparities in income and wealth so that there may be equality of opportunity to all for self development and the growth of personality" ^[22]. Thus, Nehru considered that economic equality was just as necessary as individual freedom for the development of human personality. In his Autobiography he asserted, "Our final aim can only be a classless society with equal economic justice and opportunity for all, a society organized on a planned basis for the raising of mankind to higher material and cultural levels, to a cultivation of spiritual values of co-operation, unselfishness, the spirit of service, the desire to do right, a goodwill, and love, ultimately a world order" ^[23].

5. Socialistic Society and Socialistic Pattern of Society

Nehru's concept of socialism assumed the form of a socialistic pattern of society in independent India. He made a distinction between the welfare state and a socialist pattern of economy. He explained that without increasing national income a welfare state was not possible. Enough wealth must be created before we decide to distribute wealth. Nehru admitted that the socialistic pattern of society and socialism in content were the same and that there was no distinction between them. By a socialistic pattern of society, "We mean a society in which there is equality of opportunity and the possibility for everyone to live a good life. We have; therefore, to lay great stress on equality, on the removal of disparities and it has to be remembered always that socialism is not the spreading out of poverty" ^[24]. Nehru mainly believed in raising the standards of living, enlargement of opportunities, and the direct responsibility of the state for the development of industries. Socialist pattern of society was to be classless and casteless. Nationalized industry would be an important limb of such a society and its aim would be increase of production to meet the demands of a formula of just distribution. This would also provide higher employment opportunities and help to provide

for a more egalitarian type of society in India. Nehru had the firm belief that socialism without democracy would not produce a socialist society. He believed in democratic socialism. He recognized the principle of parliamentary democracy, a democratic constitutional system, uncoercive and gradual transformation, extending the democratic principle to all walks of life. The features of socialist society as visualized by Nehru are as follows:

1. Socialism means a just society. The essence of socialism lies in the ideal of sharing the material benefits of society, and sharing in the making of important decisions in society. Socialist state believes in cooperation and altruism rather than competition. Its basic motto is maximum production and equal distribution of material benefits. Socialist society asserts the socialization of the means of production as a step towards the attainment of social justice.
2. The dream of equality, equal rights and opportunities for all people, in short, socio-political, economical equality is the basic principle of socialist society. Removal of all disparities is the kernel of such society. Hence, it rejects class domination and individual self-aggrandizement at the expense of others. It totally rejects the idea of special privilege to any individual or group.
3. Socialist society is dedicated to the realization of socioeconomic justice. It relates providing the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, education and medical facilities to all its citizens. According to Michael Brecher, "Socialism is more than a set of human values, it is a process. Socialism means democratic, decentralized and participatory control"^[25].
4. Socialist society is based on a concept of secularism. Socialism according to Roy A. Medvedev, "Socialism presupposes the complete freedom to practice any religion or none at all. Neither socialism without democracy or democracy without socialism can produce a genuinely just social order"^[26].
5. In socialist society production is determined by the social needs of the community and not by individual interests. It enforces control on prices and incomes and provides employment, or guarantee of employment.
6. Socialist society's basic feature is the decentralization of economic and social power. Socialist society believes in social welfare, social security and a wider concern for those who are in need. It aims at the realization of a casteless and classless society and raising the standards of the people to higher cultural, economical levels.
7. Socialism, its method and technique vary from country to country. European socialism is different from Russian socialism. Socialism in a highly developed industrial community would be different from socialism in an agricultural country. Socialism calls for social consciousness of all men and women to create conditions for free and rational development of all, and creates a community in which free men work together as equals in a spirit of fraternity.

6. Planning

Nehru was not interested in economics as such, but was eager to plan development and modernization in free India. For

planning is a part of Socialism, the indispensable way of creating a socialist economy within a democratic set up. From the middle of the twenties, Nehru became interested in economic problems. Nehru realized that the ultimate solution of the agrarian problem lay in the abolition of landlordism, feudal socio-economic structure and intermediaries. This was the basic element in Nehru's thought. It was his deep study of Marxism and socialist literature and his visit to Soviet Russia in 1927 which attracted Nehru towards Socialism and Planning. Soviet Russia was the first country to initiate planned development; Nehru regarded the First Five Year Plan of Russia as a "struggle against the backward conditions of Russia, against the remains of capitalism, against the low standards of living"^[27]. Socialist programmes were to be achieved through planning. Socialism was based on planning for the benefit of the common man, raising his standards greatly, giving him opportunities of growth, and releasing an enormous amount of latent talent and capacity. And all this was to be attempted in the context of democratic freedom and with a large measure of co-operation of some at least of the groups who were normally opposed to socialist doctrine. That co-operation seemed to me worthwhile even if it involved toning down or weakening the plan in some respects". Nehru's idea of planning had the support of intellectuals. It reflected some of the ideas of industrialists who favoured large-scale industrialization. His objectives were a planned development creating economic equality, equal opportunities and an adequate minimum standard of life. Nehru's admiration for Russia lay in the fact that its leaders boldly adopted scientific planning as the key to progress and prosperity. At the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931 resolution on fundamental rights which was drafted by Nehru stated that basic and key industries such as railways, mineral resources, shipping and other measures of public transport should be controlled by the State. It was an important decision on economic matters and as Mr. Brecher pointed out "a broadening of the Congress programme beyond the purely political goal of complete self-government"^[28]. Nehru was convinced that the economic backwardness and poverty of the Indians was not only due to alien rule, but also due its outdated socio-economic structure. The only solution he could think of was to increase production by applying technology and scientific methods to Indian agriculture and by adopting industrialization on a sufficient scale. Nehru was aware that industrialization and agricultural development envisaged by him needed careful economic planning. To Nehru planning was not an end itself but a means to achieve the well being and development of the people as a whole, providing equal opportunity to all. It was essentially an integrated approach to development. Planning was essentially linked with industrialization and self-reliance of the country. Nehru upheld the idea of modernization of Indian society and economic progress through planning. The development of large-scale industry was necessary for removing want and providing a strong base of economic independence. Nehru, however, also conceded a place for village industry, because of scarcity of capital and unemployment especially rural employment. He believed that planning would benefit the common man providing great opportunities of development and a higher standard of living.

7. References

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