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## **NEHRU'S POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF HIS CONCEPT OF SOCIALISM, NATIONALISM AND GANDHISM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims at analyzing Nehru's political vision that how he had advocated three different political ideologies i.e. Socialism, Nationalism and Gandhism at one time, and in connection with ideologies he followed, another aim of this paper is to address the logic behind Nehru's acceptance of Fabian concept of socialism but not Marxism and Leninism in practice. It will be analyzed theoretically by definition and method applied by Fabian Society, and will be explored that either Nehru's inclination towards Fabian concept of socialism was a matter of ideology, his social background or political interests or even all these were prevailing at the same time?

**Keywords:** Socialism, Nationalism, Fabian Society, Marxism, Leninism, Gandhism.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Jawaharlal Nehru who belonged to a middle class family and he preached the ideas of socialism in Indian political system under British India especially he tried to instill these ideas in Congress ideology. Indian National Congress party which was represented by elitist initially then became a party of middle class politicians. But, the socialism was totally against of class system if it did not advocate the classless society but at least diminishing class system. In this condition, how it was possible for Nehru who was from bourgeois class to preach and amalgamate socialist ideology with the ideology of Congress? This paper will deal Nehru's socialistic ideas, and also his attempts to get socialist ideas accepted by the leaders of Congress. By looking at Jawaharlal Nehru's political ideas and his practical stance, this study will conclude that, why he followed different political ideas at a time and on what grounds he differed with socialist elements within Indian National Congress? It will be analyzed that whether it was a matter of political ideology or his personal interests in order to gain political benefits in future Indian political scenario after once British was supposed to leave India?

Jawaharlal Nehru is considered a very important political personality after Mahatma Gandhi in Indian political process under and after British India. These both great political personalities were founders of Indian nationalism against cruel and anti-democratic rule of British in India. But, at the same time, these both especially Nehru has remained a contradictory political figure as well. On the one hand, he differed with political right in many respects but at the same time, later he also came in conflict with political left because of his different concept of socialism and also on tactics was being used by communists of India.

However, this paper is an attempt to understand his political ideologies and also analyzing his political stance in practice that shows a clear picture of his conflict with some other political elements of India.

### **I. Nehru's attraction towards Socialist Ideas:**

Nehru was firstly attracted towards socialism during his days as a student in England when "he found in socialism a continuation of his love of nationalism."<sup>1</sup> He was ideologically an Indian nationalist but later on he became familiar with the ideas of socialism. In his youth, Nehru was drawn to British socialist ideas under the banner of the Fabian Society. His attention was also drawn to the works of Karl Marx and Lenin and to the practical achievement of the Soviet Union. Nehru himself said: "A study of Marx and Lenin produced a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light."<sup>2</sup>

Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union with his father strengthened further his belief in socialism. However, "he was horrified to violence of communism, although he believed that capitalism also could be violent."<sup>3</sup> Nehru's belief in socialism was strengthened when he participated in the 1927 Brussels Session of the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, where he met young leading nationalists like Ho Chi Minh and Leopold Senghor. He also visited Soviet Russia in 1927 for the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Russian Revolution. He was attracted by the progress made by the revolutionary government of USSR.

### **II. Nehru's attempts to instill Socialist Creed in Congress Ideology:**

Nehru believed that only Indian National Congress was a party which could lead the masses so he tried to instill socialist creed within Congress ideology rather supporting any faction of it. As once he made an attempt with the help of Subhas Bose and S. Iyenger to instill the socialist ideas

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<sup>1</sup>Jag Mohan, "Jawaharlal Nehru and his Socialism". In *Indian International Centre Quarterly*, 2. 3 (July 1975), 183.

<sup>2</sup> K.V. Viswanathaiah, "Jawaharlal Nehru's Concept of Democratic Socialism". In *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 26. 4 (October-December, 1965), 91-92.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 92

in political ideology of Indian National Congress in 1928 by founding the “Independence of India League”. But within the period of six years in 1934, he changed his previous opinion and declared that socialism might be propagated within the Congress at large but not through any faction.

The Karachi session of the Congress held in March 1931 was a great step towards inclusion of socialist ideology in framework of Congress. In this Congress session, a resolution entailed “Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes” was presented by Nehru, which stated; “The state shall own or control heavy industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of transport.”<sup>4</sup>

Karachi Resolution was also backed by Gandhi who seemed supporter of capitalists. According to Gandhi; “Capitalists were fathers and workers were their children.”<sup>5</sup> Nehru did not declare himself just a socialist but he seemed nationalist first then socialist. Even he advocated socialism at every session of the Congress party but he kept nationalism along with socialism in his speeches and statements always. In his presidential address at Lucknow he said;

“I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world’s problems and India’s problem lies in Socialism.”<sup>6</sup> In his same address he tried to mix both the concepts i.e. socialism and nationalism. He said; “Socialism is thus for me not merely an economic doctrine which I favour; it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart. I work for Indian independence because the nationalist in me cannot tolerate alien domination. I work for the inevitable step to social and economic changes.”<sup>7</sup> Another achievement of Nehru’s efforts in order to promote socialism within the orbit of Congress was giving importance to socialistic orientation in the election manifesto in 1935. The manifesto states;

“In regard to industrial workers, the policy of the congress is to secure to them a decent standard of living, condition of labour in conformity with international standard as far as the economic condition in the country.”<sup>8</sup>

### **III. Nehru’s logic behind acceptance of Fabian Concept of Socialism but not Marxism and Leninism in practice:**

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<sup>4</sup> C. P Bhambhri and C. P. Bhamberi, “Nehru and Socialist Movement in India (1920-47)”. In *The Indian Journal of political Science*, 30. 2 (April-June 1969), 142.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 144

<sup>6</sup>Jag Mohan, “Jawaharlal Nehru and his Socialism”. In *Indian International Centre Quarterly*, 2. 3 (July 1975), 187.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 188

<sup>8</sup> Subodh Bhushan Gupta, “Growth of Socialism in Congress and Nehru’s Role”. In *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 29. 4 (October-December 1968), 363.

Although Nehru called himself a socialist but he never accepted the socialism advocated by Karl Marx and Lenin. He followed the Fabian Society which was founded in British in 1884. “The Fabians put their faith in evolutionary socialism rather than in revolution.”<sup>9</sup>

Nehru declared him nationalist first and then socialist, and also he did not join Congress Socialist Party which was founded through his suggestions. There could be multiple causes behind it but the main causes could be his social status, ideological difference and to serve his political interests.

### **Nehru’s Social Status:**

He belonged to a bourgeois class, about his social status he stated: “I am a typical bourgeois, brought up in bourgeois surroundings, with all the early prejudices that this training has given me.”<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, he tried to instill socialist ideas within the orbit of Congress but on the other hand, because of attraction towards his own social class, he declared Indian National Movement a bourgeois movement and Congress was actually not leading the masses at that time. Writing about the character of the Congress, he wrote: “The Indian National Movement is obviously not a labour or proletarian movement. It is a bourgeois movement, as its very name implies, and its objective so far has been not a change of the social order, but political independence.”<sup>11</sup>

He also favoured liberal ideas because of his social class i.e. bourgeois. He said: “My roots are still, perhaps, partly in the nineteenth century, and I have been too much influenced by the humanist liberal tradition to get out of it completely. This bourgeois background follows me about.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Ideological Difference:**

Nehru believed in Marxian analysis of socialism but he was not agreed to the method and tactics applied by communists, and also the dogmatic approach of communists. He found the same tactics applied by Indian communists which were applied in West. He believed that every country’s condition was different to other country. Therefore, a political party must be flexible to its ideology so that changes could be made according to prevailing situation. He was not agreed with Indian communists because in his opinion, they were following socialism and communism

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<sup>9</sup> Encyclopedia Britinica. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/199691/Fabian-Society>

<sup>10</sup>C. P Bhambhri and C. P. Bhambhari, “Nehru and Socialist Movement in India (1920-47)”. The Indian Journal of political Science, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April-June 1969) P135

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, P142

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, P134

on the basis of blind faith. About communists' dogmatic thought and the attitude of Indian communists, he said:

“One of the reasons for the weakness in numbers as well as influence of the communists in India is that, instead of spreading a scientific knowledge of Communism and trying to convert people's minds to it, they have largely concentrated on abuse of others. This has reacted on them and done them great injury.”<sup>13</sup>

Nehru was a believer of Marxism as an economic and political theory but he had no blind faith in violence as a means of political change that was followed by majority of Indian communists and also communists of some other countries. Because of this, at the same time, he was following Gandhism which was totally against of violence. It can be said that Nehru believed in Marxian analysis of political change in theory but because of violent tactics used by communists, he kept himself aloof from communism and ultimately he inclined towards Gandhism.

#### **Political Interests:**

There was a matter of Nehru's social status as well ideological differences in choosing Fabian Concept of socialism and opposing Indian Communists. But it seemed that it was a matter of political interests more than social status and ideological difference.

Nehru started to play an active role in politics in 1919 when he joined Civil Disobedience Movement. His ultimate goal was to remain in mainstream politics especially parliamentary politics. At the same time, he knew that INC was only party who had support of masses. It was a great opportunity for him to start his political career under the banner of INC.

As for as following Gandhian political philosophy was concerned, he was aware of this thing that, Gandhi was a recognized and well known charismatic leader and Mahatma Gandhi was also following anti-violence path that was ideal for Nehru as well. Hence, for Nehru, it was better to follow Gandhi in order to continue his political career but at the same time, it was quite possible that because of remaining a part of Gandhi's company, Jawaharlal Nehru could get an important position in Congress as well. If he followed Marxism and Leninism in such a way that Subhas Bose and some others followed then definitely he could not make a better place for him in Congress and he could be ignored in Congress that he never wanted.

Although, at initial stage, he tried hard to instill socialist ideas in the framework of INC but he did not know that it was not bearable for rightwing that was important part of Congress at that time. The Congress Socialist Party couldn't be formed if he did not play his role as a mentor, but

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 135-36

after its formation, he realized that the central leadership of Congress especially right force was not in mood to accept it. It was a main reason that he had to stay away from Congress Socialist Party. After disowning Congress Socialist Party he made statement that, he never wanted to support any faction within congress that was why he never supported CSP. The response of Congress central leadership with regard to adopt socialism can be understood in this statement given by Sardar Patel who said with reference to CSP leaders:

“Let me make it very clear that we have tolerated you for two years but the time has come when we shall no longer tolerate you. We shall now give it back in your own coin.”<sup>14</sup>

The majority of Indian Communists was not in favour of parliamentary politics, even when Congress was negotiating with British for freedom after the end of World War II, the left wing wanted another mass resistance but not negotiation with British imperialists. Nehru supported rightist on many occasions in contradiction with left wing. It was witnessed during the congress elections in 1939 when Subhas Bose secured highest votes. But in spite of that Nehru supported ‘Pant Resolution’ aimed to reconcile the leadership of Gandhi and Bose was asked to follow the wishes of Gandhi. Likewise on many other occasions Nehru did so.

## **CONCLUSION**

Jawaharlal Nehru tried to amalgamate many ‘isms’, like Marxism, Leninism, Gandhism and Marxian analysis of Socialism, Fabian Society’s conception of socialism etc., with the ideology of Indian National Congress. But, by analyzing Nehru’s political concepts and actions in practice, it can be concluded that, he created confusion because these all isms couldn’t go along. Marxism talks about a classless and stateless society but Nehru was influenced by his bourgeois class so definitely he was not in mood to struggle for a classless and stateless society. He declared that the National Movement launched by Congress was actually a bourgeois movement. Likewise, Leninism is a practical form of Marxism who brought concrete change in USSR Russia according to Marxian analysis, in which definitely the violent means was also applied. But Nehru was following Gandhism as a practical method of political change i.e. peaceful means. He chose Fabian concept of socialism which was not advocating revolutionary changes but evolutionary one. Also in Fabian society’s concept of socialism, reforms were important rather complete change i.e. direct revolution.

Nehru basically was impressed by Marxian analysis of socialism but firstly his social background was not allowing him to follow it completely. Secondly, in contradiction with other communist elements of India, he believed in peaceful means of political struggle. Thirdly,

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<sup>14</sup>Subodh Bhushan Gupta, “Growth of Socialism in Congress and Nehru’s Role”. In *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 29. 4 (October-December 1968), 362.

because of following Gandhian political philosophy, he could become able to gain central position in INC that was most beneficial for his political career. In nutshell, Jawaharlal Nehru was following and taking steps according to prevailing conditions of India, and this method has been opted by populist political leadership. In this context, Nehru continued his political career wisely by following populist means in order to get better results.

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