



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU'S SOCIALISM AND FABIANISM

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Abstract:

Jawaharlal Nehru, a prominent leader of the Indian independence movement, is often associated with the implementation of socialist policies in the early years of the country's independence. Nehru's commitment to socialism influenced various aspects of India's governance, economy, and foreign policy. However, historians provide nuanced evaluations of Nehru's socialism, drawing from their ideological framework. This paper investigates his own views on his ideas with comparison to others on Nehru's socialism, exploring the strengths, weaknesses, and contradictions they identify.

Key Words: Marxist, Historian, Socialism, Jawaharlal Nehru etc.

Introduction:

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was a central figure in India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule and went on to become the Prime Minister of independent India. Nehru's leadership spanned from 1947 until his death in 1964, and his policies had a profound impact on the newly formed nation. Nehru was deeply influenced by the ideals of socialism which he encountered during his education in England and through his association with socialist thinkers and activists. He firmly believed that socialism was essential for addressing the socio-economic inequalities inherited from colonial rule and for achieving social justice in India. Nehru's socialist policies aimed to transform India into a modern and egalitarian society by promoting economic development, social welfare, and equality. His vision was reflected in the principles outlined in the Indian National Congress' Avadi Resolution of 1955,¹ which advocated for socialistic patterns of society. One of the key aspects of Nehru's socialism was the emphasis on state-led economic planning and industrialization. Nehru believed that a strong and interventionist state was necessary to steer the economy towards rapid industrial growth and to reduce dependence on agriculture. Under his leadership, the government established public sector enterprises and implemented five-year plans to promote industrial development in sectors such as steel, coal, and heavy machinery.²

Jawaharlal did not exactly fit into the aristocratic milieu. He came from England not only as a strange mixture of East and West; he had a strange mixture of bourgeois and proletarian philosophies. Although he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, it was a socialist silver spoon. Even during the "lotus years" of aristocratic birth and upbringing and in a bourgeois educational pattern, Jawaharlal had an affinity for socialist philosophy. Such an undercurrent was manifested either by an interest in the study of the lives of the underdogs, or by expropriating the expropriators in miniature." He was a socialist and a communist even at the age of five, a believer in the equal distribution of property."³ When on the birth of a sister to Jawaharlal the doctor attending his mother cracked a joke at Jawaharlal that he was not going to lose a part of his patrimony, he lost part of his inheritance, it irritated him and infuriated him. He was angry at the thought that someone should have such a nasty idea about him.⁴ "He believed then, as he believed to the last, in the equal distribution of all the gifts of mother India among his sons and daughters".⁵

Hitherto Jawaharlal's socialist trend of thought was more a matter of his finer sensibility and intuition than the result of any outside influence or intellectual conviction. Furthermore, they were rudimentary in nature and rather in the form of sporadic eruptions. But his studies at Cambridge gave him ample scope to sharpen his socialist inclinations. His curriculum didn't require much attention and allowed him to dabble in socialism relatively freely. Thus he was vaguely attracted to Fabian socialist ideas.⁶ Of course, it was intellectual curiosity rather than deep conviction that shaped his attachment to socialist ideas." Nehru states : "I would say that it was really in Cambridge where, broadly speaking, certain socialist ideas developed - partly Fabian socialism, partly some slightly more aggressive socialist ideas. But it was all very academic."⁷

Bernard Shaw, Russell and other scientifically minded early socialists were drawn to him like magnets. The magnetic force was contained more in their conception of the logical order of society than in their anti-colonial slogans. Jawaharlal's socialism went hand in hand with the Indian socialist movement. The development process is absolutely identical and the steps taken are similar. The influences that shaped his stream of socialist thought are not inconsistent with those that shaped the Indian socialist movement. Marxist economic interpretation, Gandhian social ethics and Western democratic and liberal traditions came together at the confluence of Indian socialism. Parallel to this, Marxian scientific analysis, Gandhian plea for continuity and

preservation of things of permanent value mixed and mingled with British liberal democratic and humanist and Fabian influences to create Nehruian democratic socialism.

So Jawaharlal's socialism is three-dimensional. It is based on Gandhian ethics, Marxist economics and democratic politics. It has two more layers, with the lower and lower substructure being material and the upper superstructure and transcendental superstructure being moral and ethical.

Speaking of Fabian Socialism, Alexander Gray wrote "As his birth and baptismal certificates attest, he arose from a rather vague impulse towards moral and ethical regeneration".⁸ Such Fabian moral and ethical influences are responsible for Jawaharlal's adoption of socialism and democratic and constitutional techniques. Jawaharlal's initial reaction to socialism was Fabian. The logical order of society, as conceived by men like Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell, had a lasting appeal to him. Later, when Jawaharlal threw himself headlong into the maelstrom of nationalist struggle, socialism provided him with a clue to end imperialist exploitation. It is quite fascinating for a nationalist to think that imperialism, as the last state of monopoly capitalism, is about to be swept overboard by the storm of socialism. Yet the anti-colonial gesture of socialism was only an afterthought as far as Jawaharlal was concerned. During his Cambridge days, Fabian then shed light on Jawaharlal's intellectual horizon, the appeal being largely moral and ethical, humanitarian and altruistic. Referring to the Irish movement, he said that he was very interested in it because "this kind of vague well-nationalist freedom movement towards some equality".⁹ In connection with his "Life's Philosophy", Jawaharlal revealed his talent for humanitarian treatment of the problem. "A kind of vague humanism appealed to me."¹⁰ Although Jawaharlal's early approach to life's problems was "more or less scientific" and hardly indulged in metaphysical speculation, an ethical approach to life had a strong appeal for him. Such an ethical and humanitarian approach persists in Jawaharlal. Socialism is not justified on the basis of its inevitability, but on the basis of social justice or an egalitarian society.

In 1939, Jawaharlal wrote: "Today the community must be organized to bring about social and economic justice".¹¹ Jawaharlal maintained such consistency for decades. Despite his scientific approach to the problem and subsequent Marxist influence on it, his socialist faith was anchored on the granite rock of an ethical approach. After about 30 years, the same ethical approach is evident in his speeches and writings. He is said to have said in 1962, "The country has set itself the goal of social justice for the greatest number of people".¹² This approach is therefore ethical and humanitarian and therefore still Fabian.

As for Jawaharlal's claim; "Marxism is an attempt to reduce human history, past, present and future, to a rigid logical system, with something of the inevitability of fate, or 'kismet' about it."¹³ One social order must necessarily give way to another social order, more in accordance with the current stage of history. The advent of socialism was therefore part of the Marxist evolutionary development of history. Jawaharlal had an unwavering faith in Marxist analysis of history and social system, he is by no means a rigid doctrinaire Marxist. Although much impressed by Marxist monism and the non-duality of mind and matter and the dialectic of constant change through a system of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, Jawaharlal was still not completely satisfied with Marxist philosophy. His idealistic approach explains his scepticism and non-conformity with 100% Marxism. The Marxist approach explained the material world or the socio-economic political aspect of life. But there was much more left. "Whatever the ultimate reality may be, and whether we can grasp it in whole or in part, there certainly seems to be enormous scope for the extension of human knowledge."¹⁴

A general Marxist approach "fitting more or less into the present state of scientific knowledge" further offered him considerable assistance "the implications that flow from it and the interpretation of past and present events were by no means always clear". Furthermore, he did not consider Marxism to be a rigid dogma to be strictly adhered to, without necessary modifications. With Lenin he may think: "We do not in any sense regard Marxist theory as something complete and unassailable."¹⁵ This is only a general principle that can be applied differently in different countries to suit different climatic and national needs. Thus, a scientific and non-dogmatic approach remained in the background of Jawaharlal's adherence to Marxism. "I have always found the Marxist analysis of the past very scientific and very instructive."¹⁶

Analysis:

Jawaharlal's socialism was enriched by these three different schools of thought i.e. Fabianism, Gandhism and Marxism. Each stream carrying its own alluvial soil added to the fertility of the Jawaharlal socialist concept, and this mixture distinguished it from other brands of the same name. Jawaharlal's socialism is unique. He drew from three different sources and therefore combines three different scents. By a strange alchemy and extraordinary genius, he made Marx and Gandhi great in their own ways, but diametrically opposed except for one common factor, which is the co-existence of the masses. He borrowed from the Fabians, Marx and Gandhi, but when he aligned all these elements he created his own brand of socialism. Such a synthesis of Fabianism, Gandhism and Marxism is possible because Jawaharlal's approach to socialism is fundamentally ethical. Fabianism, Marxism and Gandhism, despite their differences, are united in their contempt for the prevailing exploitation of man by man. Although they differ in technique, they all agree on the goal, the end of such exploitation and the elimination of inequality. The criterion is the investment of a non-negligible interest.

As for Marx: "He did it because the ethical appeal of socialism¹⁷ was too strong for him", the ethical approach of socialism is dominant in Jawaharlal as well. The ethical basis that was stimulated by the Fabian contact was further strengthened by Marxist influence. While Jawaharlal emphasized the reduction of inequality and the end of poverty, he is aware that "we must not forget the ethical and spiritual aspects of life which are ultimately the basis of culture and civilization and which have given life some meaning".¹⁸

Thus Jawaharlal brought about a synthesis between Fabianism, Marxism and Gandhism. Moreover, the scientific non-dogmatic and pragmatic nature of his socialism has Marxist origins. Purity of means and adoption of non-violent technique to achieve a socialist society is the inspiration of Gandhi. Jawaharlal's commitment to Fabianism is evident in his emphasis on reformism, constitutionalism and progressivism. Jawaharlal adopted the Hegelian technique to create his brand of socialism, which for the sake of brevity can be called democratic socialism. The technique of dialectical development through thesis, antithesis and synthesis was adopted as his analytical tool. In his scheme of things, if the Marxist concept of class exploitation and class antagonism continues, it will lead to class struggle and class conflict, which, if unhindered, will culminate in violence of an unprecedented form as witnessed in Russia. This naturally paved the way for the adoption of Gandhi's non-violent technique, Jawaharlal brought about a synthesis. While understanding socialism requires admitting the existence of class conflict and accepting scientific inquiry as the proper apparatus for achieving socialism instead of violent method, Gandhi's technique of non-violence gained paramount importance for the formulation of the democratic technique. He is fascinated by getting rid of the means of violence as much as he is interested in ridding the world of the exploitation of man by man. "The question is how to get rid of it and have a classless society with equal opportunities for all."

An assessment of the role of the state in Nehru's socialism can be multifaceted, reflecting different views of people of different ideologies. Although there can be no uniform consensus among historians, as he offers several key points of analysis. Speaking about Jawaharlal's approach to Indian socialism, Dr. K.H.Raj wrote: "There was not one society divided into simple Marxist categories such as landlords and peasants, capitalists and workers, but a conglomeration of small pre-capitalist societies further divided by various forms of tribal and other totems and taboos, extremely conscious of their separateness and only very loosely connected by economic and other interests. This could only reinforce his conviction that progress in the direction he desired could not be forced by violence and revolutionary upheaval because the result could be confusion and chaos and a return to the conditions that weakened India in the past and required outside intervention."¹⁹

Nehru's socialism included a significant role for the state in managing and leading the economy. They see Nehru's state-led industrialization efforts and economic planning as steps to challenge capitalist modes of production and establish a more just society. According to this perspective, the state played a key role in mobilizing resources, implementing land reforms, and supporting public sector enterprises.²⁰ These measures were seen as essential to address socio-economic disparities inherited from colonial rule. Jawaharlal demonstrated a better understanding of the objective conditions of Indian society than Marxists and other socialists and therefore played a more appropriate and effective role in the development of Indian socialism than others.²¹

Professor Arnold Toynbee has rightly remarked that Jawaharlal Nehru is evidently of the type who moves mankind not by coercion, but Jawaharlal suffered no nefarious ambition to appease reaction in order to remain long in the seat of power.²² He was brave and gallant enough to risk his happiness, but not the fate of his country. If he suffered from a certain hesitancy in matters of detail, it may be explained by his fear of the costs involved in introducing rapid and phenomenal changes. One of the sharpest critics remarked: "However much one might deplore Jawaharlal's inability to ride the wave of social revolution, it would be rude and wrong to ridicule it. Jawaharlal and others like him are brave men who are ready to suffer and offer all that is right. But they retreat from actions when they consider the enormous cost of fundamental change in such indecision."²³ Even if the world hopes to take advantage of the "new civilization" while avoiding a bloodbath and a return to barbarism, it will have to put its faith in Jawaharlal's "progressive socialism" or "democratic collectivism." Here Jawaharlal might have agreed with Bertrand Russell that "the new world must be built by slower and less ostentatious methods."

Conclusion:

Jawaharlal Nehru as a nation-builder, a democrat, a world statesman, a planner and a socialist, even after so many years of his death, Nehru is the topic of searching study, for he had both world-view of thought and thought of world-view, which holds relevance till today, He had immense faith in socialism and appreciation for the new-civilization that it promised to achieve on a world wide scale. He admired the socialism, being carried out in other countries like Russia and China but was very much sure about the type of socialism that would have to be adopted in India. Socialism to be meaningful to India would have to speak the language of India. The principles of socialism had a dominant impression, which was evident in the various ideas he formulated and the activities that he took up till his death. Overall, the assessment of the role of the state in Nehru's socialism reflects different perspectives. While some emphasize progressive state interventions and attempts to challenge capitalist dominance, others criticize the compromises made with capitalist interests and

the persistence of class inequalities. These divergent views contribute to ongoing debates in society and offer insight into the complex relationship between the state and socialism in the Nehru era.

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