

Jawahar Lal Nehru Influenced by Gandhi Politics

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ABSTRACT

Gandhiji insisted that freedom had to be granted in 1942 and he would wait no longer, but Jawaharlal Nehru did not support this. However, irrespective of the differences, Jawaharlal Nehru respected Mahatma Gandhi. He had influenced Nehru's personal, social as well as political life to a great deal. Correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru reveal a complex, nuanced relationship. They differed with each other sharply but also influenced each other greatly.

Nowhere is this trend more conspicuous than in Gandhi-Nehru encounters stretching over three decades. No two leaders of the freedom struggle were so different from each other, and also so intimately connected to each other, as were Gandhi and Nehru. Superficially it would appear that the two were poles apart. There could be hardly anything in common between Nehru, with his Marxism, universalism and focus on modern science and technology and Gandhi with his spinning wheel, evening prayers and inner voice. Yet there existed an extremely deep bond between them which often helped to tide over an otherwise extremely stormy and contentious political relationship.

KEYWORDS: Gandhi, politics, jawahar lal Nehru, relationship, struggle, freedom, complex

INTRODUCTION

During the course of the freedom struggle, there was another image of a young and radical Nehru rebelling against Gandhi and developing as a rival to him. This image of the two representing two different and rival strands in the freedom struggle was dispelled by Gandhi himself when he wrote in 1936: "Are we rivals? I cannot think of myself as a rival to Jawaharlal or him to me. Or, if we are, we are rivals in our love for each other in the pursuit of the common goal." In 1942, Gandhi declared that Nehru would be his political heir.

However the image of an opportunist Nehru using Gandhi as a crutch to make it to the top has been much more enduring in independent India. Of late it has gained some momentum. This image also fits in with a climate in which Nehru-bashing has become the order of day. It is therefore necessary to highlight the multiple dimensions of their relationship and bring out its true essence. There are broadly speaking three dimensions to this relationship. First, it followed the classical Hegelian pattern in which a thesis encountered an anti-thesis and the two culminated into the synthesis. Secondly, through a process of

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criticism and mutual correction, they were able to restrain each other and, in the process, shape each other's political universe. And thirdly, cumulatively and together, the two transformed the struggle for independence and also created the blueprint for India's social transformation along modern lines. The examples of the three kinds can be easily found in their interactions and correspondence with each other and also in their political activities.

Nehru started his political career as a self-proclaimed follower of Gandhi. He met Gandhi in 1916 and soon came under his spell. In particular the programme of non-cooperation with the British really appealed powerfully to Nehru and he jumped at it. Nehru was "simply bowled over by Gandhi straight off". He threw in his lot with Gandhi without thinking of any consequences.

A visit to Europe and the USSR in 1927 radicalised Nehru's politics and he began to show signs of impatience with what he considered to be a slow pace with which the national movement was proceeding. He wanted Congress to emphatically declare in

favour of complete independence instead of a mere 'Swaraj' or self-rule.

Nehru also wanted to integrate India's struggle against British imperialism with the global struggle against imperialism and colonialism in general. This was really a big leap forward in India's freedom struggle as it stood in 1927. Nehru decided to give full expression to his new ideological worldview and he persuaded the Congress at its Madras session to pass a resolution in favour of complete independence. Nehru also denounced feudalism and capitalism and talked of mobilising workers, peasants and students. This was a new language for the Congress and brought Nehru into his first major confrontation with Gandhi, who totally disapproved of the new ideological flavor within the Congress. He called the resolution for complete independence "hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed." This was the first expression of Gandhi's open disapproval of Nehru's language and politics.

He also followed it with a warning to Nehru in a letter: "You are going too fast, you should have taken time to think and become acclimatised. Most of the resolutions you prepared and got carried could have been delayed for one year. Your plunging ... was a hasty step. But I do not mind these acts of yours so much as I mind your encouraging mischief-mongers and hooligans If careful observation of the country in the light of your European experiences convinces you of the errors of the current ways and means, by all means enforce your own views, but do please form a disciplined party."

The reprimand from Gandhi brought a sharp reaction from Nehru. In his reply, Nehru wrote that Gandhi's response to the Congress resolutions was "wholly unjustified." He also alleged that if the Congress did not declare complete independence as its goal earlier, it was largely because of Gandhi's restraining influence. "I hope you will agree with me that it is not healthy politics for any organisation to subordinate its own definite opinion on a public issue out of personal regard only."

Nehru then added in the same letter: "... you chastise us like an angry school master, but a school master who will not guide us or give us lessons but will only point out from time to time the error of our ways." Nehru also expressed his full disagreement with Gandhi's ideas in his book *Hind Swaraj*, published in 1909. "I have often felt how different my ideas were from yours. And I have felt that you were very hasty in your judgements, or rather having arrived at certain conclusions you were over eager to justify them by any scrap of evidence you might get.... You misjudge greatly I think the civilisation of the West and attach

too great an importance to its many failings. You have stated somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and that she has reached a pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I entirely disagree with this viewpoint and I neither think that the so called Ram Raj was very good in the past, nor do I want it back."

It was a long letter in which Nehru emphasised all those points where he fundamentally disagreed with Gandhi and disapproved of his ideas.

Discussion

Gandhi's reply to this letter was brief but carried a ring of finality: "Though I was beginning to detect some differences in viewpoint between you and me, I had no notion whatsoever of the terrible extent of these differences.... I see quite clearly that you must carry an open warfare against me and my views. For, if I am wrong I am evidently doing irreparable harm to the country and it is your duty after having known it to rise in revolt against me.... The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I can't 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. The cause must be held superior to all such considerations." Gandhi then suggested that their correspondence, containing all the differences, should be published so that the people know where the two leaders stand vis-à-vis each other on most political issues.

Nehru in the meanwhile may have realised that he had overstated their differences and that it was still possible for them to work together. He had in the same letter written that Gandhi was infinitely greater than all his little books and ideas and that Gandhi's importance lay primarily in his "action and daring and courage". Gandhi's suggestion of making their difference public carried a possibility of political separation of the two leaders. This possibility clearly disturbed Nehru.

He replied back: "Your letter came as a bitter shock and was painful reading. Painful because with relentless logic you had contemplated certain eventualities which I had not considered possible or even thought of in their entirety.... No one has moved me and inspired me more than you and I can never forget your exceeding kindness to me. There can be no question of our personal relations suffering. But even in the wider sphere am I not your child in politics, though perhaps a truant and errant child?"

Thus came to an end their first major encounter. It would appear to everyone that this encounter

culminated in Nehru's complete surrender to Gandhi. Indeed if the march of events could be halted at this point, it would seem that Nehru gave in to Gandhi and his reservations about any radical action.

However in a year's time, Gandhi insisted on Nehru being made the president of the Congress at its Lahore session in 1929. Nehru insisted on Congress declaring complete independence as its goal. This time Gandhi backed him fully and served an ultimatum to the British government. He followed it up with his famous Dandi March in 1930 and the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Soon both the leaders were in separate jails and Nehru, obviously thrilled with the new atmosphere of struggle, wrote to Gandhi: "May I congratulate you on the new India you have created by your magic touch! What the future brings I know not, but the past has made life worth living and our prosaic existence has developed something of the epic greatness in it."

So who won this round of the encounter? Basically Nehru triggered in Gandhi a creative process of dialogue and introspection. A thesis met its anti-thesis and flowed into the synthesis of complete independence. The real gainer of this encounter was Indian nationalism and the struggle for freedom.

Quite apart from arriving at a synthesis through mutual conflict, the two also restrained each other and in the process enriched each other's politics. Nehru's commitment to Marxism and a great resolve to transform the Congress in a Socialist direction during the early 1930s brought him into a serious conflict with Right wing Congress leaders such as Patel and Rajendra Prasad, and threatened to split the entire movement into two. This developed into a serious crisis within Congress.

Nehru was aware of it but did not seem to mind taking the crisis to its logical culmination, i.e. a split in Congress and in the national movement. Gandhi too was aware of it but approached it differently. He decided to put the crisis itself to a test by making Nehru the president of the Congress in 1936, with the majority of the Working Committee members against him. Nehru decided to use his new position as an opportunity to preach both socialism and class war from the Congress platform.

This antagonised the Right wing members of the Congress Working Committee and seven of its members resigned, refusing to work under Nehru. Nehru too appeared inclined to put in his resignation. The national movement was thus plunged into a deep crisis and stood on the verge of a split. Gandhi, who had been watching these developments, decided to intervene and he did it by restraining Nehru.

He wrote in a letter explaining the real significance of Nehru being the Congress president: "You are in office... but you are not in power yet. To put you in office was an attempt to put you in power, quicker than you would otherwise have been. Anyway that was at the back of my mind when I suggested your name for the crown of thorns [Congress president ship]. Keep it on though the head be bruised."

Gandhi urged the other members to take back their resignations and insisted on Nehru to carry along with him the dissenting voices within the Congress. From this point onwards, Nehru developed a remarkably accommodating spirit in always highlighting the common consensual areas among vastly differing personalities. The stress on this common baseline consensus made it possible for leaders as divergent as Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari to work together, even while retaining their differences. Nehru was restrained by Gandhi, and restrained for good.

Results

Gandhi's politics too was influenced by Nehru in many ways. Nehru imparted some new dimensions to Gandhi's politics. For instance Gandhi had never shown much enthusiasm for constitutional matters. This was understandable given Gandhi's antipathy towards formal structures of power. He had all his reservations about the Swaraj party which had been formed in 1924 to extend the national movement into the legislative bodies.

He was also not very enthusiastic about the Nehru Report, a proposed constitution for India drafted in 1928 by Motilal Nehru and Tej Bahadur Sapru, as the Indian response to the Simon Commission. In his Hind Swaraj, Gandhi had used some very harsh words for parliaments in general. He had likened parliament to a "prostitute and a sterile woman".

However in the 1930s, Gandhi developed a great inclination for constitutional matters. He began to argue for a great need of a constitution for India to be prepared by a duly elected Constituent Assembly. Such was his enthusiasm for a Constituent Assembly that, in an interesting debate with Nehru, he argued that the task of the Constituent Assembly need not wait for independence and can actually precede it. Later Gandhi admitted that he had been converted into a great votary of the constitutional matters largely because of his interactions with Nehru. He called Nehru his general guide in all such matters.

The two leaders were not simply transforming the national movement; they were transforming each other too. Gandhi had declared in Hind Swaraj that Indian society had reached near perfection in the past

and did not need to learn anything from the West. This was obviously a very blinkered view. However three decades later, when Nehru organised the Asian Conference in March 1947, Gandhi made the most remarkable speech.

He said that he would refuse to live in a world that was not one. He urged all members of the Asian Conference to work together to bring about such a world. From a blinkered Indian isolationism to a most profound universalism was a great journey for Gandhi. There is no doubt that Nehru played an important role in this journey.

Nehru too went through many such transformations in which Gandhi's influence was quite indelible. Of particular relevance was the change in his attitude to religion. In the 1920s and 30s Nehru equated religion with irrationality, superstition and intolerance. Deeply disturbed by the emergence of communal politics in the 1920s, Nehru saw religion as a major social problem.

In a letter, written in 1926, Nehru argued that the only solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem was to "scotch our so called religion.... How long that will take I cannot say but religion in India will kill that country and its people if not subdued." However, he developed a more complex and nuanced position on religion and its role in social life, particularly after 1947.

On the one hand Nehru looked at religion as "blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and the preservation of vested interests." But, on the other hand, he also saw it as a moral force "which supplied a deep inner craving of human beings ...[and] which has brought peace and comfort to innumerable tortured souls." Gandhi's stamp was very clear in this change in Nehru's perspective. It is clear that the two leaders brought about the most important transformations in each other's politics.

The relationship between Gandhi and Nehru was multi-dimensional. At a personal level, it was marked by a deep love and mutual admiration. At a political level, the two leaders restrained, shaped, modified and corrected each other in a long process of dialogue, debate and working together. Both of them together transformed India's struggle for freedom and played their part in creating a blueprint for the future of India.

All this could become possible because the two understood each other very well and their insights about each other carried deep and profound social and psychological dimensions. Perhaps it would be true to say that nobody else in politics understood Nehru

better than Gandhi did. And certainly nobody else understood Gandhi as well as Nehru did.

It is therefore not surprising that after Gandhi died, the most evocative and profound commentary came from Nehru: "As he grew older, his body seemed to be just a vehicle for the mighty spirit within him. Almost one forgot the body as one listened to him or looked at him, and so where he sat became a temple and where he trod was hallowed ground."

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, nonviolence 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 nonviolence 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 semifeudal 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.

Conclusion

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).

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