

NEHRU: THE VALIDITY OF HIS VISION

Jad Adams

For a long time I did not know Jawaharlal Nehru's first name. He was widely referred to in the UK as Pandit Nehru; as a child I did understand Pandit was an honorific and assumed it was a name. Nehru himself wanted his given name to be abbreviated and complained that friends like Lord Mountbatten could never get it right.

The point here is not that most British people were (until quite recently) bad at Indian names, but that even as a child in the 1960s I had heard of Nehru, which was how he was universally known, or 'Mr Nehru' to the *Times*. Even when I could not have named the prime minister of Australia or Canada, I knew who was in charge in India.

Nehru's story is frequently re-told as a fairy tale of nationalism. He was born into a home of almost legendary wealth surrounded by rich furnishings, a retinue of liveried servants, foreign furniture, tennis courts, a swimming pool and lawns with sparkling fountains. Unusually for the 19th century it was a house with electricity, running water and flushing toilets.

His father Motilal was so Westernised that Nehru learned of Hindu religious philosophy not as part of structured lessons but in the rooms of an English tutor who was a theosophist and would have similarly minded Europeans round for tea to which the child Nehru was invited. There was little religion but as a cultured child he was expected to be educated in ancient Indian writing as well as that of contemporary Europeans, and also to be able to recite Persian poetry.

Nehru was sent away to Harrow, one of Britain's top public schools (for those unaccustomed to the nuances of the class system that means a fee-paying private school). Inevitably, they had trouble with his name, and called him Joe. He remembered the place with affection and even at the height of the independence crusade, when anti-British feeling might have been understandable, Nehru when he was newly released from prison got out his book of Harrow school songs and led his family in singing them.

As a young man he went to Trinity College, Cambridge where he took a natural sciences degree then entered the Inner Temple to read for the bar. He thus became one of very few world leaders with qualifications in both the humanities and the sciences. Margaret Thatcher, who also qualified as a scientist and a barrister, was another. He took a different route to nationalism from Thatcher's, however, no free market system for him; he attended John Maynard Keynes' lectures on the virtues of a planned economy.

He was influenced by socialism which was very much the coming movement. In this he was typical, and was not so unusual either in looking with sympathy on Irish nationalism.

NEHRU'S NATION AND ITS ARCHITECTURE

Sucheta Mahajan

Of the leading figures of India's independence struggle Jawaharlal Nehru perhaps has been most vilified on social media in recent years. He is portrayed as the 'other', a closet Muslim and a womaniser. His contribution has been erased from school textbooks lest young minds come to know something about this leader and statesman. As he is seen as the flag-bearer of secularism, the political invective is the strongest against him. What is at work is a sustained, sinister attempt to undermine the Constitution and its much-cherished values.

In contrast, there is a concerted drive to place Vallabhbhai Patel on a high pedestal, the Iron Man, now iconized in the Statue of Unity, to present the argument that if he were the Prime Minister, rather than Nehru, India would have been better off. Policy in Kashmir particularly comes up for comment. Therefore, appropriation of one leader and vilification of another goes on. The way to stop this is to recall that along with their common mentor, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel stood at different poles of the political spectrum, but the spectrum was the same.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a stalwart of the national movement which overthrew British colonial rule. After Independence, as the first Prime Minister of the country, till his death in 1964, he was an unparalleled nation builder.

The Indian National Congress, the premier party of the freedom movement, was an umbrella organization under which different strands of anti-colonial politics co-existed; a platform for varied parties. These strands represented distinct ideological perspectives but shared a commitment to an idea of India. This idea was composed of democracy with elements like secularism, sovereignty, a pro-poor orientation in economic policies and non-alignment in world politics.

Jawaharlal's father, Motilal Nehru, was a major leader of the Congress. Jawaharlal turned to political activity in his youth. He was fired up by the determination of the peasants of Pratapgarh in the United Provinces. Gandhi was the leader of the national movement in the years after the First World War, transforming the Congress into a mass party with a new constitution and four-anna membership. The non-cooperation movement took the struggle along the path of boycott of legislatures, courts, schools and colleges. 'Swaraj in one year' was Gandhi's cry. The non-cooperation movement was intertwined with the Khilafat Movement, which protested against the dissolution of the Caliphate. The country witnessed unity between Hindus and Muslims on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Jawaharlal, too, was affected by the new wave that swayed the masses, especially the youth. When Gandhi called off the movement after the violent turn it took in Chauri Chaura with a mob setting fire to a *thana*, Jawaharlal was dismayed, if not disillusioned. However, his faith in Gandhi at a personal level and as a mass leader survived this crisis and he was to remain a loyal follower, despite the emergence of differences in their ideological persuasions.

THE MAKING OF INDIA'S SOCIALIST IDYLL AND ITS FALLOUT

Bibek Debroy

Every play, as Aristotle says, 'has a beginning and middle and end'. The story of Indian socialism is no exception. Let us begin at the very beginning, in 1931 when the Karachi session of the All India Congress Committee adopted a resolution that articulated notions of fundamental rights and stressed what the State should do, its role in the economic and social programme. It, for instance, says, 'The state shall provide for free and compulsory primary education.' And again, 'The state shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping, and other means of public transport.'

A view was forming about the role of the State in working out the economic strategy and this inevitably led to the need for planning. All this led to the formation of the National Planning Committee in 1938. Jawaharlal Nehru was its Chairman. The National Planning Committee recommended that an all-India National Planning Commission should be established. In 1946, the National Planning Committee became dysfunctional, since the Interim Government established an Advisory Planning Board.

In many accounts of the history of economic development and planning in post-Independence India, it is suggested that the sense of continuity in the planning process was disrupted after the Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61). This is a gross simplification. Several 'Plans' were developed outside government – one by M. Visvesvaraya, then there were the Bombay Plan, People's Plan, Gandhian Plan and the Sarvodaya Plan. Across these plans, there was a consensus on (a) public investments in key industries; b) state intervention in distribution, to prevent a widening of income disparities; and (c) peripheral roles of external trade and foreign investments. These tenets represented the wisdom of the day. In 1948, there was the Industrial Policy Resolution. This stated the government proposed to set up a National Planning Commission. For industry, it also clearly articulated the principles of complete state monopoly in some sectors, state monopoly for new enterprises in other sectors, possible nationalization of existing private sector enterprises and majority Indian equity in enterprises with foreign capital. Statutory formalization of these principles came through the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act (IDRA) of 1951.

The Bill, ready by 1949, provided for the federal government's powers to license new undertakings and register and regulate the existing ones. To the 1951 statute, bits and pieces would continue to be added. For instance, a 1953 amendment gave the federal government powers to assume control of an existing industrial undertaking. That 1953 amendment also gave the Centre powers to control supply, distribution and prices.

DEEP ROOTS OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Harish Khare

February the 27th in 1967 was a satisfying day for Pakistan's military strongman, Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan. He had shot 137 partridges on the sprawling estate owned by his friend Ghulam Mohammad Khan Mahar on the west bank of the Chenab River in Khangarh, in Pakistan's Punjab province. That bountiful yield put Pakistan's dictator in a contented mood. Only the previous evening he had found himself reflecting on the sombre state of affairs in India.

The fourth general election in India had just been held – the first one after Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress Party barely managed to secure a working majority in the Lok Sabha while losing power in eight major states. Ayub Khan's senior ministers and bureaucrats were unanimous in their view that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government in New Delhi would be weak and unstable.

Ayub Khan condescendingly noted in his diary on 26 February:

...the Indian election results are due to the ravages of the direct adult franchise and election to the assemblies. How can people whose orbit of interest is confined to a few miles from their village, produce balanced judgements on matters of national implications. Their reasons can only be based on personal grievances, trials and tribulations as exploited by demagogues, fanatics and parochialism. True that the Indian people have come to complain against the Congress for mismanagement and misgovernment, but look at what they have wrought instead. Can these people they have elected resolve their problems? Surely not. So the Indian vote and election results have been negative. *I have my doubts if the country will ever recover from the shock. That is why I keep on telling our people not to play with the fire of direct adult voting for election to assemblies. They will only burn their fingers and themselves in the process too.* [emphasis added]¹

The military dictator was purring that he and his generals had kept their country away from the unpredictability and messiness inherent in a democratic arrangement.

But the good soldier overlooked just one thing – India had had Jawaharlal Nehru at the helm for the first 17 years of Independence, and his legacy of robust constitutional institutions and political manners had already insulated India and its democracy against the very dangers the Field Marshal suspected were lurking around every corner in New Delhi. By the time the Pakistani military dictator was smugly making that diary entry, Nehru's India had already passed the ultimate test of a mature democracy – peaceful transfer of power.

A HOUSE FOR MR NEHRU

Tirna Chatterjee

It's still cold in Allahabad. But the excitement of the city's young men over the visit of an important leader had already raised the temperature a few notches up. With a showdown between the hardliners and moderates in Congress billed for later that year, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, leader of the moderate group, arrived in the city, a major nerve-centre of national politics, on 3 February 1907. The enthusiastic supporters unhorsed his carriage and pulled it themselves shouting 'Vande Mataram...'

The very next day Gokhale addressed a gathering of students on the Anand Bhavan premises with his host Motilal Nehru in the chair. Interestingly, the topic he chose for his speech was 'Work Before Us'. Gokhale was opposed to 'extremists' like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal.

Exactly 10 years later, there was another avid gathering at the city's railway station to receive an important visitor. Both Motilal and his son Jawahar, Sarojini Naidu and Tilak were among the Congress leaders waiting for Annie Besant, the world-renowned Irish theosophist, to arrive. Only a year ago she had founded the Home Rule League, a movement demanding self-governance for India.

Looking back on those events with detachment now, a pattern emerges crystal clear – whatever shades of their politics, moderates, hardliners, radicals, middle-path proponents – the majestic Nehru residence was the common destination of Indian nationalists in the early decades of the 20th century. Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Tilak, Gokhale, Lala Lajpat Rai – they all went to Anand Bhavan to debate, take stock of the political issues of the day. The Nehru home, a major landmark in the Raj-flavoured Allahabad at the turn of the last century, was at the centre of history that was in the making. For the Indian nationalists, Motilal Nehru's 'palace of bliss' was the obvious address.

There's always a beginning, as they say, before the beginning. The excessively rich lawyer's sprawling mansion is no exception. In the year 1900, Motilal, a brilliant lawyer at Allahabad High Court with a flourishing practice, purchased the estate from one Kanwar Parmanand of Moradabad for ₹19,000. 1 Church Road, Civil Lines close to the Government House, was the best address one could aspire for. Originally the 20-acre property belonged to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the liberal educationist who founded the Aligarh Muslim University. The new owner carried out extensive renovation and added extensions to give shape to his idea of a Westernized Indian professional's residence. When ready, it stood stately and regal.

HOUSE OF MEMORIES

On 14 November, Jawaharlal Nehru's birth anniversary, a distinguished speaker is usually invited to the Teen Murti Bhavan auditorium to deliver the annual Nehru Memorial Lecture. This time round, too, the cultured elite of Delhi gathered there early in the evening for the event.

But a discordant note had already been struck. At the main entrance to the stately complex and also outside the auditorium everyone's attention was drawn to a clumsy notice stating that the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) was celebrating the achievements of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The purpose behind the abrasive move by the authorities in control of the government-run institution was to drive a wedge, provoke a controversy. To many attending the lecture it was in bad taste and testifying to a lack of decency given the sentiment around the event. It was Nehru's 130th birth anniversary. Gandhi, Nehru and Patel were the troika that had successfully transitioned Congress from the movement for freedom to the ruling party after Independence. And Teen Murti House was his residence for 16 long years, from 1948 till his death on 27 May 1964.

Robert Tor Russell, the architect of Connaught Place, designed Teen Murti House. After the capital of British India moved to Delhi from Calcutta in 1911, this became the residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the British armed forces in India. Originally called Flagstaff House, it took its present name from the sculpture at the traffic roundabout right in front of its main gate. Sculptor Leonard Jennings' creation seeks to pay tributes through the statues of three soldiers to the princely states of Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore for their significant contributions in the First World War.

Nehru who had earlier lived in a bungalow on York Road (later renamed Motilal Nehru Marg), moved into Teen Murti House in August 1948. Over the next 16 years, the 32-room mansion standing majestically on a 30-acre estate, recorded the visits of a large number of world leaders and dignitaries. One very special visitor over the years of course was Edwina Mountbatten who, coming back again and again from London, would stay here.

More importantly, it is here that Indira Gandhi learnt her first steps of world politics and had an opportunity to personally know so many leaders from other countries. Since Nehru was a widower, Indira had to willy-nilly accept the role of the hostess for many state functions. 'I used to stay for a period of time [at Teen Murti] and then go,' she wrote. 'My husband was then working in Lucknow and I used to go there. But, invariably, I would get a telegram: "Important guest coming, return at once." My father would feel so hurt if I didn't come that it was very difficult to say no.' Her predicament comes out touchingly in Carol Dommermuth-Costa's *Indira Gandhi: Daughter of India*.

PANDIT NEHRU – THROUGH MY LENS

Pashupati Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana

Jawaharlal Nehru's name shone like a beacon amongst our generation of young South Asians. His memorable 'Tryst with Destiny' speech made at midnight of the 14th August, 1947 reverberates in my mind even today. His books including *The Discovery of India* and his autobiography impressed me greatly.

Our family's association with Prime Minister Nehru began from my grandfather's time. Indeed he played a pivotal role in ending my grandfather's rule as the last Rana Maharaja of Nepal, although he also helped make him the first democratic Prime Minister of Nepal. So in a sense I should have resented the role he played against our family at the time. But then there was quite a different leitmotif to his relationship with my father, whom he met at the Asian Relations Conference on 25 March 1947.

My father's speech at the conference was widely praised and much publicized. Nehru was struck by his intelligence and liberal attitude. Coming as he did from what Nehru perceived as the hidebound ruling aristocracy of Nepal and despite being the son of the Maharaja who Nehru considered a reactionary autocrat, he apparently found my father surprisingly open-minded and receptive to new ideas.

Later on, my father, General Bijay Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, became the second most important man in the first Nepalese delegation negotiating terms for the political change in Nepal with their Indian counterparts. During the second and final round of negotiations, he was appointed the leader of the delegation conducting the parley with the Indian team.

I personally think the relationship that my father had forged with Pandit Nehru served an important purpose in bringing about the peaceful transition from the dynastic rule of our family, the Ranas, to a democratic Nepal. Of course Pandit Nehru's own view that there should be continuity with change played a pivotal role in this peaceful transformation to democracy in Nepal. Such political safe landings are rare in history and difficult to make.

After Nepal became a democracy, my father was appointed the first Nepalese Ambassador to India. During his stint as Ambassador to India Pandit Nehru took a great liking to my father. At that point in time, there were many things that had to be ironed out between the nascent Nepalese democracy and a dominant India. There were shades of opinion and interested lobbies favouring Nepal's merger into India. The lobbies behind such a cynical move combined imperious inclinations on one side and treacherous trends on the other.

THE INTEGRATOR OF INDIA

K. Aravindakshan

For a man in his early eighties with fading memories it's not easy to recollect everything from a distant past. More so if he has not been in the habit of keeping a journal. The experiences from the past decades come crowding in without any single one of them standing out. Still, for me there must be some strong reason why and how in my student days I became an admirer of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our intellectual mentor and free India's first Prime Minister. Maybe as a human being he had some negative traits. But Nehru did have the rare quality of leadership and commitment towards the cause he held dear. I first discerned these qualities in Nehru when my father, a voracious reader himself, persuaded me to read his masterpiece, *The Discovery of India*. I was only a high school student.

It took me more than three months to finish the book. However, the effort did not go in vain. Once I read the book, I discovered not just India but its author as well. I could also improve my vocabulary and style of writing. Most certainly I came under the spell of the book's author. I would just lap up every book and article that came my way either by Nehru or about him. This was my way of knowing how others looked at Nehru and assessed him. What impressed me most was Nehru's writing, simple and effortless, coming out of the core of his belief and expressing his robust vision. For youngsters like me it was worth emulating.

As the Second World War came to an end, India won her freedom with many other countries becoming independent breaking the shackles of colonialism. Around this time when socialism was embraced as the new credo, Nehru stood tall as our icon. On campuses, in street-corner teashops, on the veranda of middle-class homes there was an intense debate going on about Nehru's action and what he was saying. I grew up soaking in the heat of that discourse.

There is something more that comes back to mind from a distance of almost six decades. It was about the time when I had just entered student politics. A high-school student, my only choice was All India Student Federation (AISF); that was the outfit with a presence and identity throughout the country. The Student Federation was particularly active in Kerala. When some of my friends suggested we start a unit of the AISF in our school I was all for it. When we enquired more about it, many more things came to light. A left-leaning student organization, the first leader to head the AISF was the legendary communist stalwart S.A. Dange. I was excited learning that Nehru had inaugurated the first AISF national conference. This fact further served as evidence of Nehru's proximity to the left. My admiration for the Prime Minister went up manifold.

THE ENLIGHTENED ONE OF OUR TIMES

Daya Dissanayake

At Anuradhapura, I liked greatly an old seated statue of the Buddha. A year later, when I was in Dehra Dun Gaol, a friend in Ceylon, sent me a picture of this statue, and I kept it on my little table in my cell. It became a precious companion for me, and the strong, calm features of the Buddha's statue soothed me and gave me strength and helped me to overcome many a period of depression.'

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had visited Anuradhapura, the ancient Sri Lankan capital, in the North Central Province during his month-long holiday with his wife and daughter in April 1931. Since then he had sought to go back to Anuradhapura whenever he was in Sri Lanka, to spend a little time for contemplation of the Enlightened One.

Nehru was deeply impressed by the message of peace and cultural asceticism inherent in Buddhism. His convocation address at the University of Ceylon makes this succinctly clear: 'The bond of the Buddha and all that it conveys is a bond between India and Ceylon which nothing can break. Whenever one thinks of the Buddha, one inevitably thinks of his great teaching; and I often feel that perhaps if we think more of that basic teaching of the avoidance of hatred and violence, we may be nearer the solution of our problems.'

JR Jayewardene, the first executive president of Sri Lanka, like many of his contemporaries in South Asia, had come under Nehru's spell. 'Internationally, he was the one who first coined the word "non-alignment"', he said. 'And gave the world the Non-Aligned Movement. He was, apart from strictly following these high principles, a very human and humane personality. I am proud that I not only met him but was able to be on terms of friendship with him...'

JRJ, as he was commonly known, was charmed by the senior statesman. Pulled by Nehru's gravitas, he said, 'Ecce homo,' (behold the man). He first met Pandit Nehru in 1931 during his holiday in Sri Lanka. Then in 1940, representing the Ceylon National Congress, he along with a couple of other party colleagues, attended the Ramgarh session of the All India Congress Committee. During this trip he went to Allahabad and stayed at Anand Bhavan for further discussion with Nehru. 'Like all other youths of our generation throughout the British Empire, we hero-worshipped Jawaharlal Nehru and his leader, Mahatma Gandhi,' Jayewardene later wrote.

In their long struggle to come out of the colonial rule and emerge as a democratic nation, generations of Lankan leaders turned to Nehru for inspiration. SWRD Bandaranaike, former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, wrote:

I have known Nehru personally for over twenty-five years. Nehru is one of the few statesmen of the world who have a background of culture and learning and who are thinkers besides being also men of action.

WHEN THE EMPIRE WROTE AND SPOKE BACK

Nikhita Nair

Eminent West Indian writer CLR James pithily observed that the two things the former British colonies had accepted from their imperial masters without circumspection were cricket and English literature. The reason was their aspiration to beat the white men in both areas. In his celebrated memoir *Beyond a Boundary*, James explained the pull of cricket for the colonized people in terms of their confidence to breach the boundary drawn by their rulers. And when the metaphorical circle was extended to the field of writing it was defied with easy élan by the likes of VS Naipaul and Salman Rushdie.

In a wry comment on the American TV show *The Empire Strikes Back*, Rushdie punned, ‘The Empire Writes Back to the Centre.’ The rich crop of writing from the erstwhile British colonies that literary critic Bill Ashcroft describes as a ‘diverse and powerful body of literature’ is summed up by Rushdie’s phrase.

True, language, as James sees from the prism of his Caribbean experience, has a strong political component. During the long spell of the Raj, the British rulers in India used the English language as a tool to define the ‘native’ and also to create a privileged class of educated Indians loyal to them. They were the beneficiaries of the system having access to opportunities and plum government jobs.

If anyone could fit into this description among the colonial Indians, undoubtedly it was Jawaharlal Nehru. The son of a fabulously rich and successful lawyer in Allahabad, he attended the elite Harrow public school in London, the cradle of eight British and Indian Prime Ministers – Palmerston, Baldwin, Churchill among them. From there he went to Cambridge, and later studied law at the Inner Temple Inn, London.

This man with his brilliant command over English, his stunning good looks and glowing fair skin, was ideally suited to be in the front row of the Raj’s ‘loyal’ Indians. But he went the other way plunging headlong into the turbulence of the nationalist movement. In dealing with him as their antagonist the British often faced a dilemma – not moral as in the case of Gandhi but cultural since he had been from the English institutions the lowly civil servants themselves could not imagine entering. And in his mastery of English, informed by a wide range of reading and varied experiences, he excelled most of them.

Much before James explored the phenomenon or Rushdie interpreted it as a weapon of subversion, it was actually Nehru who challenged the imperialist structure with the power of language. With his civilizational vision and literary sensibility, he could raise the level of a political document to a memorable piece of writing.