

# Relevance of Nehru's Ideas in the Era of Globalisation

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The present age is the age of globalisation. Globalisation is a phenomenon, which has affected the life of millions of people across the globe. It is dismantling the physical barriers but at the same time increasing the gap between the rich and poor. It has benefited some, whereas, others have suffered because of its ill affects. Globalisation is inevitable and no country can afford to ignore it. Therefore, the nation-states from the different part of the globe introduced globalisation in 1970s and 1980s.

India has also gone global, for fifteen years now. Under this process India opened-up its economy to the outside world by introducing the first-generation economic reforms in 1991. The main stress of these reforms has been on liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation. India further tried to consolidate the process of globalisation of Indian economy by introducing the second-generation economic reforms in 2000. Through these reforms, India is trying to integrate its economy to the world economy and thereby enjoy the benefits of globalisation. These reforms have resulted into paradigm shift in the Indian economy from mixed to market friendly. This shift has posed a qualitative as well as quantitative change in the nature of Indian economy. As this paradigm shift is due to globalisation, which has posed a huge question to Nehruvian socialism, which India introduced by opting for mixed economy in the 1950s along with the policy of non-alignment. Therefore, the main thrust of this paper will be to explore the relevance of Nehru's idea of socialism, nationalism and his policy of non-alignment.

## *Socialism*

In order to understand the relevance of Nehruvian socialism in the era of globalisation, it is essential to have a quick survey of his views on socialism. In 1933, in a series of articles entitled 'Whither

India?', Nehru spelt out his socialist faith at some length and argued that the capitalist system had outlived its day and had to give way to a better and saner order of human affairs.<sup>1</sup>

In 1936, he wrote to Lord Lothian that the transition to socialism would require nationalisation of the instruments of production and distribution. One of the most emphatic statements of Nehru's socialist faith was made during the same year in his presidential address to the Lucknow Congress. There was, he said, no way of ending the poverty and subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. Nehru's avowed faith in socialism evoked controversy within the Indian National Congress, however, his presidential speech thrilled members of the Congress Socialist Party, which had been formed in 1934 when he was in prison. The crisis of 1936 was resolved; but it had a chastening effect upon Nehru; he decided to subordinate ideological considerations to his overriding loyalty to Gandhi's leadership and to the Congress party as the chief instrument of the anti-imperialist struggle. This tactical flexibility was facilitated by the fact that Nehru's socialism had never been doctrinaire. The advantages of pragmatic approach became clearer to Nehru when he presided over the National Planning Committee of the Congress in 1939-40.<sup>2</sup>

In 1944, in his book, *Discovery of India*, Nehru advocated economic planning in the context of democratic freedom and with a large measure of cooperation of some, at least of the groups, who were normally opposed to socialist doctrine.... If (class) conflict was inevitable, it had to be faced; but if it could be avoided or minimised that was an obvious gain.<sup>3</sup> This was a far cry from the call for a full-blooded socialist society Nehru had made from his presidential chair at the Lucknow Congress. Socialism was to be ushered in not at one blow, nor was it to be imposed on the country; its introduction was to be graduated to fit in with the needs of the country. Nationalisation of key industries was to be undertaken, but a wide field was to be left for private enterprise; both the public and private sectors were to coexist in a system of mixed economy. This was of course, a compromise.<sup>4</sup>

Not until December 1954 did he ask the Parliament to pass a resolution declaring that the object of the country's economic policy was a socialist pattern of society. In January 1955, a similar resolution was adopted by the Indian National Congress at its Avadi session on planning in India with a view to the establishment of a socialistic pattern of society when the principal means of production are under social ownership or control, production is progressively speeded

up, and there is an equitable distribution of national wealth. He resisted the temptation of indulging in ideological polemics and populist rhetoric. His emphasis was on the content rather than on the definition of socialism.<sup>5</sup> He said in March 1949:

'Our problem is to raise the standard of the masses, supply them with their needs, give them the wherewithal to lead a decent life... I do not care what 'ism' it is that helps me to set them on the road provided I do it. And if one thing fails, we will try another.'<sup>6</sup>

The basic philosophy of the second and third Five year plans—which were launched in Nehru's lifetime—was the development of the Indian economy along socialist lines to achieve rapid economic growth, expansion of employment, reduction in disparities of income and wealth, and promotion of values and attitudes of a free and egalitarian society.<sup>7</sup>

D.R. Gadgil, who became Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission under Indira Gandhi, wrote in 1959, that 'planning as such does not operate in India today. There are only schemes of public expenditure or of aid to private or cooperative enterprises. Gunnar Myrdal, the Nobel-Laureate Swedish economist, detected the same lacunae in Indian planning:

The core of all the plans was the programme and in some respect a forecast of public and private investment. The plans were not operational in the sense that they avoided giving even broad directions for various levels of government policy, as for instance, interest rates and exchange controls.<sup>8</sup>

Nehru's belief that public ownership of the means of production would promote a high degree of social responsibility and work-ethic stemmed from his socialist creed, but it proved illusory. There were unconscionable delays in the execution of several public sector projects, and after they were completed, their utilisation often fell short of their capacity because, their management tended to be bureaucratised and the workers' unions were more intent on extracting their pound of flesh than on raising productivity. Despite its huge size and massive investment, the public sector failed to generate enough surplus for further investment.<sup>9</sup>

In the recent liberalisation of the Indian economy, there is an understandable temptation to decry Nehru's socialist proclivities and economic planning. He has been accused of an obsession with the public sector and an antipathy towards private enterprise. T. Thomas, who had the opportunity of watching the Indian industrial scene

from close quarters, both in the Nehru and post-Nehru eras, has effectively refuted this charge against Nehru:

Many people have forgotten and the young people have experienced the period following our independence when the government actually encouraged and facilitated the entry of private sector businessmen into several manufacturing industries. That is when the Tatas, Birlas, Escorts, Thapars, MRF and many others began to spread their wings.<sup>10</sup>

India's economic crisis in the early 1990s could have been avoided or at least considerably moderated if Nehru's successors had modified his policies to suit the changed economic realities in the 1970s and 1980s. There was nothing inherently wrong in using the state as a catalyst for economic development and social justice. What was wrong was not state intervention, but the kind of state intervention practiced under the Indian planning regime.<sup>11</sup>

Globalisation thus does not altogether do away with economic nationalism, it only spurs it to new forms and to the working out of new balances between the two. While globalisation has limits, so does economic nationalism. While some state protection of the national economy may be justified in relation to external markets, excessive amounts of it can forestall taking advantage of the growth-inducing impulses that the international economy may provide. Similarly, excessive state intervention internally is likely to lead to serious economic distortions.<sup>12</sup>

But India being a developing country cannot do without state intervention. Although the liberalisation cure is justified where serious economic distortions exist, as a wholesale prescription it is likely to encounter obstacles if it fails to take into account the legitimate role of states in the economy. States are compelled to intervene in market, because markets exist for human groups, and not human groups for markets. Human groups are prior to markets and they organise themselves into political entities, called states in the modern era, for important and compelling reasons. With their two key concerns of national security in relation to the outside world and legitimacy in relation to domestic society, states have a paramount interest in the economy and therefore intervene in it. Capital may be internally mobile, but legitimacy is rooted in states. Accordingly, for states to surrender entirely to markets, whether external or internal, would be to destroy the very basis of states. It is, therefore, no surprise that economic nationalism continues to be very much alive, not least in the developed countries.<sup>13</sup>



### *Non-alignment*

Globalisation also posed a big question to the relevance of policy of non-alignment. After independence, India adopted non-alignment as its foreign policy posture but now the question arises regarding its relevance in the age of globalisation. At the turn of the 1990s, the Congress party, which was the architect of the NAM abroad and state socialism at home during the 1950s, now had the charge to lead India's economic reforms. The imperatives of economic globalisation and reconstruction of Indian foreign policy in a world without the Soviet Union compelled India to reject the old commitments to non-alignment and the NAM. The inertia of non-alignment continued in India's public pronouncements, but more as a matter of routine and without any sense of the old fire. The Leftists, who denounced the economic liberalisation of the 1990s, inevitably targeted the foreign policy changes. India's new attempts to get closer to the United States and the West was seen by the Left as giving up on India's independent foreign policy.<sup>14</sup>

In the parliamentary elections that took place in the 1990s, the BJP made no reference to either non-alignment as the principal feature of India's foreign policy or renewed commitment to the NAM. The Congress was far more circumspect, emphasising the non-aligned roots of India's foreign policy but making a bow to the demands of the new global order. In its manifesto for the general elections of 1998, the Congress party paid 'a great tribute to the foresight and wisdom of Jawaharlal Nehru' for creating a foreign policy framework that remains intact in its basics and fundamentals. At the same time the manifesto made no reference to either non-alignment or NAM. Instead it went on to argue that in the new situation, 'economics, commerce and trade are the new languages of diplomacy. The party at once acknowledged the diplomatic legacy of Nehru and implicitly endorsed the changes introduced by the last Congress government under Narasimha Rao.<sup>15</sup>

Although Vajpayee attended the NAM Summit in Durban, South Africa, in 1998 and offered to host the next summit when Bangladesh backed off from its initial offer in 2001, the movement was not one of his political priorities. India's former Principal Secretary and National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, summed up the shift in India's attitude towards non-alignment.

In the post-Nehru period, non-alignment became a mantra just as Gandhiji's non-violent struggle had become the moral path; the fact

that these policies were grounded in strict rationality-and realpolitik was lost sight of. Escapism was often couched as being principled, and I can safely state that neither Gandhi nor Nehru would have appreciated being made into icons to propagate dogma. There is a new India today that is ready to question these shibboleths and take decisions on the basis of national interest.

India's non-alignment also had a pragmatic economic content, the foreign policy establishment argued. In refusing to align with either bloc, it was believed, India could make considerable economic gains in the all-pervasive rivalry between East and West. These sort of rationalisations for non-alignment, however, could no longer be sustained in New Delhi in the aftermath of cold war. The old economic strategy needed to be modified amidst a new wave of globalisation and India's own relative political decline in the world. India had to come to terms with the reality that it was on the losing side of the cold war, the Soviet Union was a footnote in history, and its own finances were in shambles. The challenge of the 1990s for India was to discover ways beyond non-alignment to restore India's standing in world affairs. Even as the domestic debate on the national policy of non-alignment moved ahead, India also had to deal with the implications of the marginalisation of the NAM.<sup>16</sup>

### *Nationalism and Secularism*

Nehru's ideas about nationalism and secularism are also being confronted with new challenges in the era of globalisation. He was a great champion of secularism and tried to base Indian nationalism on secularism and a common national language like Hindi. Keeping in view the diversity of Indian society, Nehru used to talk about composite culture and tried to construct the Indian national identity on the bases of the ideology of nationalism and principle of unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

Both the ideas of nationalism and secularism along with national unity faced rough weather in the 1990s, which is considered as the phase of globalisation. In this phase, the politics of identities has replaced the politics of ideas in the Indian politics. The identities are being constructed on the bases of religion, caste, market and gender etc. For instance, Hindu identity on the basis of ideology of Hindutva, OBC identity on the basis of caste, market identity on the basis of globalisation and women identity on the basis of gender have dominated the Indian politics in the recent past. Not only that

globalisation further reinforced the local and regional social cultural identities in the Indian politics.

Thus globalisation, while providing for greater inter-communication between and within nations, was also causing increased fragmentation of broad national identities. At the national level, local cultures stood in danger of losing their individual identities. Smaller identities were getting reinforced; for example, ethnic, cultural, religious, language, and gender identities. Thus globalisation while on the one hand was inter-connecting the world, on the other hand was providing a threat to local and regional cultures. Hall (1997: 200) argues that the present era was characterised not by cultural uniformity, but by the resurgence of ethnic identities throughout the world, i.e. racism in western Europe, neo-fascism in Russia, Islamic fundamentalism throughout Middle East and in Africa<sup>18</sup> argued that the medium may integrate people globally, but the message may promote political and social fragmentation.

### *Concluding Observations*

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that Nehru's ideas of socialism, nationalism and non-alignment are confronted in the era of globalisation. The economic reforms introduced by India in the 1990s, have made a significant departure from Nehruvian socialism, which was incorporated in the mixed model of Indian economy immediately after independence. Nehru was not against globalisation but he was against indiscriminate globalisation. In his socialism, he recognises the role of market but he was not in favour of market economy. His conviction was that the state as a legitimate institution has to play an important role in the economy of country. Actually he wanted to establish a balance between the market and state in the economy. For the former profit is the sole motive, whereas for the latter the well being of the people is major consideration. That is why he argued that the state should regulate the economy. It can be argued that Nehru was in favour of Indian brand of globalisation, which suits to the Indian requirements. But at present, India introduced globalisation in indiscriminate manner, which is a cause of concern for every Indian.

Nehru's idea of non-alignment has lost its relevance, if we have a quick look at the foreign policy of India in the post cold war period. The foreign policy decisions taken by India under the rule of Congress, the NDA and UPA dispensations in the post Soviet world indicate

that India has made a departure from its policy of non-alignment, which gave India a unique identity in the world politics during the cold war period. It appears that after Soviet disintegration India has come close to the United States of America. Now India's foreign policy does not believe in the principle of equidistance or non-alignment but in principle of engagement and containment.

His idea of nationalism is also facing rough weather. India tried to build the national identity on the basis of the ideology of nationalism. His ideology of nationalism was based on secularism, common national language and composite culture. He was a great believer in the politics of ideas. This is replaced by politics of identities in the 1990s. The national identity of India is being confronted by the local cultural identities. Globalisation has further reinforced the local cultural identities, which is a potential threat to the national identity of India.

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