Abstract
A Critical Study of Nehru’s Attitude Towards the Palestine Problem

ABSTRACT

Palestine has a great strategic position because it connects three big continents of the world - Asia, Africa and Europe. India’s links with Palestine are old and historic and have been generally cordial. History is strewn with the evidences of mutually advantageous relations between India and the Arabs. Britain since the days of her empire in India had an eye on Palestine because it was the only route to India. So for maintaining a hold Britain decided to settle a foreign group in the area which would constitute a majority and a defensive offensive garrison. When Britain was developing plans for Palestine and looking for the ways and means to fulfill them the Jews were already on the scene, they were being persecuted all over the world, they had no home and no nationality for them, but a big majority. The British government realised very easily the necessity of controlling Palestine and began to pay attention to the mutual interests of the Jews and British imperialism. In 1830s the British Jews began to build Jewish charitable settlements in Palestine and presented a memorandum to British Lord Palmerstone, entitled, 'a scheme for the colonisation of Palestine'.

Competition within the world colonialist movement was on the increase because of the rise of the new imperialist forces. Also new areas suitable for the colonisation began to appear especially in the Arab East because of the signs of the collapse of the
Ottoman empire. British imperialism after a thorough survey of the political situation of the world arrived at a conclusion which emphasised utmost importance to Palestine, because Palestine constituted for the British an exact point where the three continents meet. Its control was essential for the Sinai and the Suez Canal that was the only road to India. It also formed the area from where any expansionist plan could be launched. Before World War I, Palestine was under Turkish occupation as a part of Ottoman empire. In the war the Palestinians helped the British in the overthrow of the Turkish hegemony, and in return got British promise of complete national independence for the Arabs. As the war ended the British government went back on its solemn assurances and resumed the role of divide and rule as it was doing in India. In 1915, another memorandum was presented to the British government, and in 1916, Arthur Balfour, the then Foreign Secretary, approved it. After some months of redrafting, it finally received official approval as the famous Balfour Declaration, which was formally made on November 2, 1917. The clauses in the Declaration were a deliberate exercise to mislead the Arabs. These clauses did not mention Palestine as the Arab people's territory, whether Christian or Muslim, who comprised 90 percent of its population and 97 percent of land ownership. Following the Balfour Declaration the Jews from all parts of the world began to pour in Palestine. The sudden increase in Jewish immigration caused widespread unemployment and a serious economic depression, the Palestinians saw their country slipping from their grasp. They saw their land being bought up by foreigners. They saw European immigrants flooding into their ports. The tragedy of Palestine had shivered the world. Indian reaction to the Palestine problem was
represented and articulated by the Indian National Congress and its leader like Nehru, Indian nationalism was never reconciled to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The Palestinian struggle and the Indian struggle for freedom was underlined by Western imperialism as the common enemy of both. India expressed its full sympathy with the Palestinian Arabs in their struggle for liberation from the imperialist clutches. In 1922, with the British efforts Palestine was declared a British mandatory by the League of Nations. Now Britain was free to do any thing with that particular piece of land. The mandate for Palestine substantially incorporated the major clauses of the Balfour Declaration. The mandate placed Palestine on the level of a British colony it enabled the British authorities to avoid the expected and natural opposition of any local administration to the Jewish plans. With the mandate more and more European Jews started to come in Palestine. They sprang up overnight like mushrooms. The Jewish agency was given open license in every kind of depredation against the Arabs, so as to make them flee for life. The reaction of the Palestinians to the appointment of Britain as mandatory was first angry and then violent, they demanded immediate self determination and independence but who was there to hear them.

The mandate system was condemned by the Indian National Congress. To Nehru, the problems faced by the Palestinians were not to be viewed in isolation but were part of an international phenomenon which had been generated by conflicting interests of democracy and Fascism, nationalism and imperialism, socialism and the decaying capitalism. Nehru viewed the Arab struggle against British imperialism in the context of India's struggle for freedom. Nehru held the British government responsible for the breach of promises they made to the Arabs. He visualised the problem of
Palestine as purely a national struggle for independence. Nehru appreciated the common bond of friendship between India and Palestine because of the sharing of common experience and circumstances.

India's involvement in the Arab liberation movement in Palestine was not confined to the level of leadership, it extended to the masses as well, for instance, September 27, 1936, was observed as Palestine Day. Meetings and demonstrations were organised all over India to express support for the struggle of the Palestinians against British imperialism and Zionist movement.

It was not that Nehru was insensitive towards the plight and sufferings of the Jews, but he made it clear that no one could sympathise with the Zionist movement aiming at the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine under the protection of the British imperialism. Nehru regarded the Balfour Declaration as a gross betrayal of Arabs by British imperialism. Nehru from the very beginning condemned the idea of the partition of Palestine, when the matter was reached to the U.N. General Assembly and the UNSCOP was established of which India was a member, India sided with the minority plan for a federal state of Palestine consisting of Arab and Jewish states with its capital at Jerusalem. But the UNSCOP's majority plan of the partition of Palestine was passed by the General Assembly on November 29, 1947, with an international status for Jerusalem. The termination of the British mandate on May 14, 1948, saw not only the creation of Israel but also the attack on Israel by the forces of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Transjordan to safeguard the rights of the Palestinian Arabs. The turn of events at the U.N. and on the ground of
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Palestine had greatly disappointed Nehru, according to him, the Palestinian question had become more complicated than ever due to the new Arab-Israeli conflict. He strongly felt that neither side would be able to achieve any settlement through military means. India formally recognised Israel in 1950 and did not maintain diplomatic relations with it. India always remained to the forefront in the U.N. in defending the Arab cause either it was the Suez crisis of 1956 or the Arab-Israel war of 1967, India always played an important role in the West Asian politics.

The crux of the West Asian turbulence, since the time of the Second World War has been the Palestinian problem. The human tragedy imposed upon the people of Palestine by the creation of Israel has been unprecedented in the world history. The Palestinian people became refugees and driven out of their homes and hearths. They were illegitimately punished for the crimes that Hitler perpetrated on the Jews. The neighbouring states of Palestine were equally subjected to the Israeli aggrandisement, when she expanded her frontiers through aggression. The Palestine problem is getting worst every moment, millions of innocent people have been slaughtered. The whole population became refugee in its own land. After this much of blood bath it was felt that if Nehru’s plan would have been accepted there might have been peace in the region.

The present study consists of five chapters revealing Indo-Palestinian relations and the attitude of Jawaharlal Nehru towards the problem of Palestine and how after his death his policies gained momentum.
In the first chapter an attempt has been made to evaluate the pre-independence foreign policy of India and Nehru's contribution to it. India's entire background was consistently anti-imperialist and she necessarily sympathised with the struggle against Western colonialism. From the 1920s onwards Jawaharlal Nehru utilised the Foreign Department of the Indian National Congress as an agency to oppose British imperialism in India and abroad. In 1927, Nehru participated in the Conference of the Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels, which left a deep impression on him and brought him into personal contact with the leaders of the freedom struggles in various countries. During the course of the independence struggle Nehru through the Indian National Congress had spearheaded a global anti-colonial movement and had acquainted himself with various nationalist organisations. This was the beginning of the India's policy towards West Asia in general and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular. India fought a prolonged struggle for freedom and got independence in August 1947. At that time the Cold War had started and the world was divided into two power camps, India was too immature and too big a country to become a camp follower, so Nehru very wisely beckoned towards an independent foreign policy stance and adopted non-alignment as the principle of India's foreign policy.

The second chapter discusses the historical perspective of West Asia, its geo-strategic location, political history, Suez Canal crisis and its oil wealth which rendered West Asia as the biggest trouble spot in the world. The 1973 oil embargo and India's support to it. West Asia because of its location and strategic significance, has played an important role in the international affairs, it was here that great power interests clashed, and it was here that decisive
battles were fought. British policy since the development of her empire in India regarded West Asia as the life line of the empire and attempted to control all possible approaches to the area and prevented the penetration by other great powers. Though India had relations with the West Asian countries much before the advent of the British rule in India, but it strengthened more and more after the similarities between the freedom struggle of India and Palestine against the British imperialism and Nehru's stand in the U.N. and outside in tackling the Suez problem.

The Third chapter discusses the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and its consequences on the region, how it violated the rights of the Palestinian Arabs and how far India condemned this Declaration. After this Declaration the Palestinian people were reduced to the status of refugees and derived out of their homes. All the evidences suggest that the Declaration was a violation of the principles of International Law. The British or any country had no right to establish a national home for Jews on the Palestinian soil. If they had sympathy with them why didn't they establish them in England or any other European country.

The Fourth chapter deals with the study of the Palestine question being brought to the U.N. and India's selection to the UNSCOP. Formation of the Israel state which led to the Arab-Israel wars and India's response to it. The June 1967 war after which the situation in West Asia wretched out of perspective, the torrential violence abruptly unleashed by Israel against the Arab countries. India considered the 1967 attack on Palestine as totally unjustified and against the principles if International Law and practice of morality.
The Final chapter covers the recent major incidents in the West Asian region and their effect on the entire international community. The 9/11 terrorist attack on U.S. and America's call to the world to join the international coalition against terrorism. Its war with Iraq where thousands of innocent people have been killed. India condemned the attack on trade towers and pledged support for the U.S. led campaign against terrorism but it opposed the unilateral military action by U.S.A. and U.K. and also a regime change in Iraq imposed from outside forces not having proven popular legitimacy. The Iranian opposition to the Israeli dictate. The Jewish withdrawal from the occupied territories and the U.S. politics to safeguard its interests in the whole of West Asia. The inhumane crime done with the lives of the Palestinian Arabs and how the dirty British politics disturbed innocent lives and the West Asian stability. The partition of Palestine brought permanent trouble in the region, now it is thought that if Nehru's plan of a federal state would have been accepted then the lives of thousands of innocent people might have been saved, but its too late to realise.

The purpose of this study is to throw some light on the attitude of Nehru towards the Arabs in particular and in general to see India's foreign relations and its assistance to the countries in difficult circumstances.