JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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CHAPTER VIII

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Jawaharlal Nehru’s educational thought is influenced on the one side by socialist thinkers Karl Marx and on the other side by the ideas of Gandhi, though he never became a blind devotee of Gandhi. Their mutual relationship can be exemplified through the relationship between Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle, one of the prominent disciples, gave full respect to Plato and accepted his teachers’ ideas on many aspects, but he also differed from him on some essential Points. Similarly Nehru differed with Gandhi on some issues. For example on non-violence, Nehru believed that use of force is necessary, on certain occasions.

Naturalistic Humanism

Jawaharlal Nehru can be considered mainly as a social and political thinker though he did not take much interest in ‘Philosophizing’. His ideas are based on some metaphysical and epistemological position and he had his own philosophy of life and being a scholar and thinker, he had clear ideas on educational issues.

Nehru is basically a humanist. He is a rationalist, empiricist and positivist, so his theory of Knowledge is based on these positions. Being a rationalist, Nehru wanted to submit every fact of Life to the test of intelligence and reason. As a result he had greater faith in science than in religion. As an empiricist he wanted validity of every statement. The listed philosophical assumptions on the basis of reason and experience and as a positivist he considered that it is useless to cogitate upon Philosophical problems. He was also opposed to religion, in the accepted sense of the word. The sole focus of his
faith was man, and so he formulated the religion of humanity, substituting humanity for God.

Nehru has consistently criticized organized religion of every kind. He also disliked mysticism because in his view it cannot be proved by any epistemological method.

Nehru was a proponent of secularism and gave importance to the present experiences, present life and present world. He did not bother about other world and after life.

He thought that there is no need of religion. He felt religion did more harm than good and the World could progress, faster by abandoning religion. Here, Nehru’s views are nearer to manifest naturalistic humanism.

Nehru in his later works does not appear to be a vehement critic of religion. His opposition was mainly to superstitions and blind faith. He wanted to spread rational and scientific view on life.

However Nehru has admitted that Gita has immeasurably benefited human society. His thoughts bore the influence of the teachings of the Gita, One copy of which he used to keep in his side. According to Dr. Radha Krishnan, Nehru was not a religious man in the sectarian sense but he had the deepest faith in spiritual values. He opposed Ritualism and adherence to religious dogmos. If religion is faithful quest for truth in which the individual is willing to sacrifice, he is not opposed to such religion.

However, Nehru was liberal enough to accept that religion does satisfy one of man’s basic urges, without which it could not have been such a mighty force as it has,
through the ages. He also felt that some form of faith is essential for maintaining zest and a sense of purpose in human life.

**Importance of Education**

Jawaharlal Nehru has accepted education as the most important means to social change. Political thinkers and Educational philosophers admit that it is not possible to establish a democratic society without an adequate and suitable system of education. He says ‘only through right education can a better order of Society be built up’\(^{233}\). He further says that Education is the most important requisite to open up the individual\(^{234}\). He thinks that freedom from ignorance is as essential as freedom from hunger\(^{235}\).

Nehru thinks that the problems of a country cannot be solved merely through economic and political reform, since they require improved human relations, and social development is inconceivable without mental development.

**Aims of Education**

Nehru views on the aims of education bear resemblance to Tagore’s ideas, because both of them are firm internationalists and humanists. In his address to the students of Allahabad University he said “a university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth”\(^{236}\). When Viswabharathi was established, Tagore expressed similar ideas.

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\(^{233}\) Nehru J N Soviet Russia P.85  
\(^{234}\) Nehru- Speeches-vol IV.P.183  
\(^{235}\) Ibid  
\(^{236}\) Nehru J.L Independence and after.P 143
Nehru too like other contemporary thinkers, stressed the spiritual aspect of social development. He said “without that spiritual element, probably the disintegration of society will proceed in spite of all material advance”\textsuperscript{237}.

Nehru was basically a socialist in his ideas. He says, “When we consider the whole subject of Education, we have to think in terms of the state and the society we are aiming at; We have to train our people to that end; we have to decide what our citizens should be like and what their occupations should be….. We have to produce harmony and equilibrium in their private and social and public life”\textsuperscript{238}.

Nehru liked the Russian, approach and aims of education and its social concerns. He says, “The object aimed at is to produce a desire to serve the community as a whole and to apply the Knowledge gained not only for personal but for public welfare”\textsuperscript{239}.

**Means of Education**

The objective of Nehru’s education was to do away with narrow views such as Linguism, Communalism, religiosity etc. and to generate scientific, humanistic, materialistic and ethical attitude. He considered that English education brought some good to India. He said “English education bought a widening of the Indian horizons …..A revolt against some customs and aspects of Indian life, and a growing demand for political reform”\textsuperscript{240}. He expressed similar view when he said “I am all for opening our minds to every kind of knowledge and information that can be obtained. I am all for free intercourse with the rest of the world.”\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{237} Nehru J.L. Speeches. Vol IV P.169.
\textsuperscript{238} Nehru J.L. Eighteen months in India p.284
\textsuperscript{239} Nehru J.L. Soviets Russia 94
\textsuperscript{240} Nehru J.L. The discovery of India. P.337
\textsuperscript{241} Nehru - J.L. Speeches vol II P.72
The economic objectives of education are as important as its social purposes because while on the one side it must aim at man’s cultural improvement, on the other it must enable him to generate wealth in society.

He said “what is important is that each person should produce something of value to society. Each one of you consume what society produces by way of food, clothing and so on, unless you produce the amount you consume you are a burden to society”\(^{242}\). For this purpose the country had a dire need of practical, scientific and technical education. He said that we need a system which can train the right type of personnel for the speedy execution of development plans.

**Types of Education**

There are many types of education. Some of the important types are as follows.

**Basic Education**

Jawaharlal Nehru, welcomed ganshis concept of basic education, because he believed that “Real Education…..must be based on the actual environment and experiences of the child and it must fit him for the work he will have to do in after life”\(^{243}\).

Nehru accepted the importance of manual skill in education, Nehru said “the mind is stimulated there by and there is coordination between the activities of the mind and the hands”\(^{244}\). Thus accepting the importance of basic education for India. He said “it is the most modern concept meant to make a Person fit intellectually and other wise”\(^{245}\).

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\(^{242}\) Speeches vol iii P.405  
\(^{243}\) Nehru J.L. Soviet Russia P.86-87  
\(^{244}\) Nehru Discovery of India P.43  
\(^{245}\) Nehru speeches vol IV P.163
Nehru considered its utility in India. He felt that a poor country like India, with millions of children, who need education, the question of cost (of education) is very important. Eulogising basic education he said that, “it gives the child some cultural attainments. Character and the capacity to work, with his hands and to coordinate manual labor with mental and intellectual ability.” In basic education he saw a way out of massive unemployment existing in the country.

**Scientific and Technical Education**

Nehru gave importance to industrialization and it needs the development of science and technology. Without technology and industry, there is no scope for reducing poverty and unemployment. Consequently, he laid great emphasis upon rapid growth of scientific and technical education in India.

Nehru’s government introduced the concept of five year plans for the rapid growth of Industry and economy and for overall development of the nation. For such a stupendous task there is need for a large skilled and technically trained work force. It is also necessary for the defense and protection of the nation. He said “strictly from the point of view of defense we have to go a head rapidly with the production of trained people engineers and the like….education will raise the level of our industrial effort and agricultural efforts.”

Thus education is necessary for both peace and war, but this does not imply that Nehru wanted to thrust the values of the western industrial world on India through scientific and technical education. In fact he warned the nation against excessive

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246 Speeches – vol iii P 406
247 Nehru Speeches Vol IV P.149
industrialization when he said “we should accept technology without leaving basic values which are the essence of civilized man”\textsuperscript{248}.

**Culture and Education**

Nehru considered cultural education as equally important for the integral development of the human Personality and from this viewpoint he regarded education in literature art and the humanities as of equal importance.

To ensure that education in art and culture should grow rapidly in the country. He advised that special institutions devoted to their propagation should be established in the country. He was also the president of the Sahitya Academy, and he considered that the state should have as little interference as possible in artistic, literary and educational activities. He said “it is only when they manifestly become a social menace or a social danger that government must move and move with a firm determination.

**Education for Different Sections of Society**

All the sections of the society are not at the same, Socio-Economic level in any society. In developing countries this gap is wider. In India, the large sections of scheduled castes, and tribes and backward communities have a high level of illiteracy. Similarly the women literacy is also very less. The purpose of any educational policy should be to alleviate them and to bring them on par with others. Having seen the backwardness of Indian women, he realized the need and said, “women should be given the best of education in every department of human activity and be trained to play an effective part in all \ldots spheres”\textsuperscript{249}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{248} Speeches Vol. IV P 170  
\textsuperscript{249} Nehru JL Recent essays and writings P 146
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In his opinion, women should be provided education and training, if not for their own sake, at least for the sake of their children. He also pointed out that education would put women on the path to economic independence. He said “Everybody should be a producer as well as a good citizen and not a sponge on another person even though the other person may be one’s own husband or wife”\textsuperscript{250}

Nehru felt the need of education in rural India. The rural women also should be educated for rapid social change; He also felt that education of rural women makes family planning and other rural development schemes successful.

To make educational programmes successful, along with English, regional languages must be given primary importance as medium of instruction. Thus we find that Nehru’s ideas on education, like his thoughts on the other fields of thought, evinces a scientific, rational, progressive, liberal and humanistic attitude.

**Critical Evaluation**

Our discussion of the Educational philosophy of Vivekananda, Aurabindo, Dayananda, Rabindranath show unanimity of opinion on many aspects in their Philosophy of education. These philosophies agreed upon metaphysical basis, integral viewpoint. Integral Psychology, spiritual explanation of human nature. Multi sided curriculum, mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Synthesis of nationalism and internationalism in education and the value of Brahmacharya.

They advocated education, for all the sections of society and they wanted to build a spiritual society through education. Their educational philosophy was based upon Neo-Vedanta Meta–physics.

\textsuperscript{250} Nehru J. L, discovery of India P 356
Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other was an educational thinker brought up in western tradition. His Humanism was based upon naturalism, in contrast to the idealistic humanism of other contemporary Indian educational thinkers.

Nehru was impressed by the scientific progress of the west. He supported the western model of education and as the first Prime Minister of independent India, he formulated the educational policy and thus considered as the architect of modern educational system in India.

It was due to Nehru’s respect for Gandhi, he supported some aspects of Gandian scheme of Education. Poverty and illiteracy of the large masses of India made him support Gandhian model to some extent. Left to himself he would have planned a different system of education, even for rural India.

At every stage of education, primary, secondary and university, Nehru visualized western aims and means. This is his weakness and this again is the strength of his philosophy of education.\(^{251}\)

No one can deny that an ideal system of education in the present day India requires a synthesis of ancient Indian values and modern western means and techniques like western Educational thinkers. In general he aimed at overall development of the educand and never admitted, salvation or any other spiritual goal as the aim of education.

Nehru as a strong notary of science and technology, planned for the expansion of scientific and technological education in the country. He started IITs, national science laboratories in main areas of science in all corners of India, which are mainly

\(^{251}\) Indian philosophy of education P 162
responsible for the technical development of India. India is one of the top five nations in
the world in overall development and it is mainly due to educational thinkers and
visionaries like Jawaharlal Nehru.