

Introduction

A critical study of Nehru's contribution to the freedom movement in India can neither be merely a chronological citation of events spread over some decades, nor a descriptive narrative, for it must transcend the obvious and ephemeral, analysing at depth the various factors that compelled Great Britain to wind up her empire in India. An examination of the numerous manifestations of the Indian people's urge for freedom will be attempted, hopefully contributing something new on the subject.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse and assess Nehru's role in India's national movement. It is the contention of the author that Nehru played a crucial role in India's national movement by giving it shape, direction and momentum in its critical phases.

Contemporary writers on Nehru and on national movement have either taken for granted his role in the national movement or appeared to have missed his significant contribution. It has widely been asserted that Nehru was one of the most prominent freedom fighters, but this fact has not been systematically discussed, resulting

in the tendency to ignore, overlook or underestimate the monumental role he played in India's quest for freedom. This thesis will therefore attempt to fill this gap and place Nehru's role in an eventful period in India's modern history in the proper context with the help of primary source material, unpublished and published, collected at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

The focus naturally will be on those events in which Nehru took a leading part in formulating the policy of the Indian National Congress of which he was an intrinsic part. Nehru was intimately connected with the Congress organisation and therefore it becomes a difficult task to define his role independently of that organisation. The Congress was the vehicle through which the hopes and aspirations of the Indian people were reflected. Nehru was a giant among men who fiercely clung to his cherished views on the problems of the day, though he operated through the Congress. It was natural that Nehru carved out for himself an independent role within the organisation. He influenced the Congress as much as it influenced him.

Nehru's personality and stature were not dependent upon his connection with the Congress, but he frequently rose to Olympian heights to give it a typical Nehru touch. This is exemplified by the incorporation of his cherished economic ideals into the Congress programmes. Nehru was an individualist par excellence. He built his reputation by the sheer force of his captivating personality, the love and support he commanded from the vast millions of his countrymen, and as the acknowledged heir-apparent of Gandhi.

This thesis will also draw broad conclusions on the conditioning factors of the national movement. The role of charismatic leadership, revolutionary consciousness and the impact of time, environment, the prevailing temper of the people in the success of the national movement will be discussed at relevant places in this study. An attempt will be made to assess the extent to which Nehru created the conditions for the success of the movement.

Chapter one of the thesis discusses the early years of his life -- childhood and education. An examination of his early experiences throws a vivid

light on a number of his actions and thinking in his later life. In these formative years the basis for his prognostications in adulthood were firmly laid. From a psycho-analytical perspective, Nehru's love of the country, total dedication towards the cause of freedom from British imperialism, his sense of sacrifice were the result of the foundations laid in his early formative years. His life and education cast in a Western mould shaped his economic and political philosophy which was to feature very prominently during the national struggle.

Chapter two covers the period beginning with Nehru's return from England in 1912 to 1920 when he became deeply involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement. This phase of Nehru's life may be considered as an apprenticeship for his later endeavours and he was also influenced by the play of politics in the country that was on the verge of discarding the age-old quiescent tradition. Fresh from his English sojourn and endowed with a perceptive mind, he drank deeply of the flow of events which were characterised by the rising consciousness of the classes and the masses. In this phase Nehru's burning spirit of nationalism was subdued as he was in

the process of sorting out his ideas and life's philosophy. His mind full of curiosity was groping for action but he had not as yet devided hard conclusions on the modalities of combatting British imperialism.

The emergence of Gandhi and Nehru's early acquaintance with him, which was to mature later into a deep bond of affection and understanding, influenced the latter acutely. The urge for drastic and comprehensive change in the existing set-up was there, but he was still groping for a clear vision of the transformation. Nehru also came into direct contact with the problems of the kisans, which deeply influenced and shaped his future thinking on the freedom of India and its implications for the masses. The plight of the peasants, clad in rags, naked, emaciated and living a life of penury, was a revealing and overwhelming experience. Henceforth, Nehru was to look at India's freedom from the point of view of the socio-economic emancipation of the less priviledged.

In the third chapter an attempt is made to assess Nehru's roles as a fervent nationalist, as a valiant fighter for freedom and as an ardent socialist.

His nationalism represented the passionate urges of a subject people and it was not a thing of the past with no future significance. Nehru's idea of freedom was comprehensive being co-extensive with the freedom of man in all his majesty. Freedom to him was meaningless unless freedom from political bondage was accompanied by freedom from economic dependence, which meant the welfare of masses at large. His socialism visualised a new social order free from political, economic and social injustice. Nehru's philosophy of life for the individual and the society combined in one sweeping whole, fairplay, justice and equality through socialism.

The eighteen years from 1920 to 1938 also bring to light Nehru's initiative and boldness in the role of a mediator in the nationalist movement. Time and again in the party squabbles of the 1920's between pro-changers and no-changers and in the 'Tripuri Crisis' of 1939 he offered a formula which broadly reflected the consensus of the party.

Chapter four analyses Nehru's views on the war and its impact for the national movement in India. With a mind ranging over the universe of problems, Nehru was

undoubtedly the most knowledg^eable and sensitive to the moving currents of world politics and their impact on the freedom struggle.

His prognosis of the situation unmistakably pictured a period of conflict between Indian nationalism as represented by the Congress and British rule. Congress policy towards World War II was basically shaped by Nehru, whose main theme was a dual policy of indicating support and sympathies for the allied cause but on the condition that India would be given its freedom. Throughout the War the Congress struck firmly to the 'war aims' resolution, while the British were equally determined not to transfer power for the duration of the War. This explains why the Cripps Mission, for all the pious words and resolutions, did not involve an immediate transfer of substantial power to Indian hands. Nehru was one of the key-figures in the negotiations with the Cripps Mission and he was largely instrumental in shaping Congress policy. On this occasion, the Viceroy and members of the bureaucracy in India — buttressed by the support of Churchill, a die-hard who believed in imperial glory — put a number of impediments, specially raising the bogey of communalism. This policy of divide and rule, the

playing off of one community against another was a trump card with which they successfully sabotaged the negotiations between Britain and the nationalist forces in India.

In chapter five Nehru's role at the time of the Simla Conference and the Cabinet Mission is assessed and the dominant impression one gains is that he persisted with the goal of a united India in these discussions. It was only after the bitter experiences he had as Vice-Chairman of the Interim Government that he realised the impossibility of working with the Muslim League whose main intention was to create deadlock and chaos. Partition could have been avoided if Nehru had sided with Gandhi, but on the basis of his knowledge of the inner working of the government and as a result of the direct action launched by the Muslim League in different parts of India, he saw no alternative to independence with partition.

In chapter six an assessment of Hindu-Muslim relations and the case for the partition of India are examined, along with Nehru's views on the communal problem and the issue of partition. Nehru with his

upbringing in a secular atmosphere could not gauge the strength of communal forces which were deep-rooted, fanned by the tacit support of the Government. His theoretical predilections and the sense of priority in the hierarchy of values he attached to the freedom of India made him take a simplistic view of the communal problem. There were strong reasons like the flow of history and contingent circumstances which made partition inevitable.

But it is the view of this author that had leaders like Nehru, Gandhi and Patel stood firm and persevered with the goal of freedom and an united India, the course of history would have been different. It was expected of a great leader like Nehru to rise above the ephemeral by seizing the initiative and moulding the shape of events in a nation's destiny in the desired direction. It was surprising that even while Nehru did not accept Jinnah's two-nation theory, he consented to the partition of India. This inconsistency can be explained only in terms of Nehru's belief that a separate homeland for the Muslims would not be economically viable and politically stable and that in a matter of years they would rejoin the common fold.

In chapter seven Nehru's relations with Gandhi and their frequent dialogue on the strategy and tactics to achieve the goal of the national movement are discussed with a view to spell out the unique and independent role of Nehru. For more than a quarter of century the close ties between Nehru and Gandhi were further strengthened by the passage of years. Each took the other into confidence on all matters pertaining to independence, but differences could not be avoided as they were mentally and emotionally quite apart. Nehru had the courage of conviction or the capacity to oppose Gandhi whenever his views diverged from him. Though he disagreed often, he did not break away from Gandhi, but on the contrary gave him unflinching loyalty and recognised his hold over the masses of India.

Nehru was not captivated by Gandhi's magnetism, but he rose above this environment and carved out an independent role for himself in the national movement. Nehru influenced Gandhi as much as Gandhi's ability to command Nehru's loyalty was beyond doubt. Time and again Nehru forcefully reasoned out the issues with Gandhi and in a measure shaped his thinking, which was reflected in the progressive and appropriate policies of the Congress.

The concluding chapter makes an assessment of Nehru's role in the national movement. His immense contribution to the success of the movement is indicated by highlighting the issues in which he had a crucial role to play. The infusion of the fervour of socialism into the national struggle, the linking up of the national movement with the main currents of world politics, mobilization of the classes in urban areas and bridging the gap between them and the rural masses, among others were all typical of Nehru's distinct role in India's national movement.