



An analysis on socialist perspectives of Pandit Nehru and its relevance

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Abstract

Socialism is a well acclaimed concept in the modern world. The idea of Socialism has been prevailing in the world since the ancient times. We find many examples of Socialism in ancient and medieval era of human civilization. But the concept was neither studied nor established scientifically in any part of the world. It was Karl Marx who evolved the term in systematic way and analyzed the whole concept of Socialism from the logical point of view. His two-great works in the form of Communist Manifesto and Das Capital published in 1848 and 1867 respectively is regarded as the earmark in the development of Scientific Socialism. The idea of Socialism became popular with the innovative philosophy like class less society and community life. The freedom fighters of India were largely influenced from this concept. Many Indian leaders and freedom fighters like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Manabendra Nath Roy, Joy Prakash Narayan, Yusuf Meherally, Ram Monohar Lohia, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, etc. was influenced by Marxian view of Socialism and as such they worked for establishment of a Socialistic Society in India. Among these leaders, Pandit Nehru was lucky enough to become the First Prime Minister of independent India. He tried his best to lead the country to the height of development and to establish equality in the society. His dream was to make bridge between rich and poor and to provide equal status in all respect of state life. Therefore, we had come forward with a vision to adopt socialistic policy with a slide different concept. This led to the discussion of Pandit Nehru's perspectives of Socialism in India and to explore the objectives behind it.

Keywords: Socialism, Independence, Development, Different, Objectives

1. Introduction

The term 'Socialism' advocates for social ownership and democratic control of the means of production, aiming to distribute resources and opportunities more equitably. It wants to meet societal needs, opposing capitalistic concept of private ownership. Socialism is closely associated with strong welfare states, free healthcare and education facility, equal opportunity to all, economic planning, community development, state control over private property, etc.

According to M.K. Gandhi, socialism as a society is one in which 'members of society are equal none low, non-high' (Drishti IAS Academy, n.d.).

Narayan defined socialism as the 'system of social reconstruction'. For him, socialism means reorganizing economic and social life through the process of socialization. This involves reorganization of the means of

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production and promoting collective means of ownership thus abolishing private ownership (Drishti IAS Academy, n.d.).

Russel defined socialism as 'the advocacy of communal ownership of land and capital'. By communal ownership means the democratic mode of ownership by the state which is for the common interest of all (Drishti IAS Academy, n.d.).

The above definitions indicate that 'Socialism' is an economic and political concept characterized by social ownership of the means of production, as opposed to private ownership. It describes the economic, political, and social movements associated with the implementation of such systems. Social ownership can take various forms, including government control of wealth, community, collective, cooperative ownership of means of production and distribution system. It tries to abolish class conflict by establishing cooperative society where all people will lead a healthy equal life. There will be no upper- or lower-class people or rich and poor people in the society. All will have equal status in the society.

The roots of Socialism: The roots of socialism may be found in the different era of human civilization. These are as follows-

Socialism in Ancient Era: Socialism in its present form has emerged only in the 19th century, but its roots lie in ancient ideals of collective ownership, resource sharing, and social equality as quoted by Plato in his Republic. In ancient Egypt, a centralized, theocratic state managed large projects and distributed grain, with a system which was sometimes called "theocratic socialism" for its collective management of resources for the public good.

In ancient India which is mainly the Vedic Period, the Texts prescribed punishments for hoarders and advocated for sharing surplus wealth, with ideas of spiritualizing the rich or forcibly redistributing wealth for societal balance. The economic condition of the Mauryan's specially under the reign of Chandragupta Maurya may be cited as an example of ancient socialism in India, although this was not in the line of present-day form of the term. During his rule, Kautilya was believed to be the chief adviser of Chandragupta Maurya who in his book 'Arthashastra' mentioned that the state controlled the economic activities extensively and performed various welfare works for the people. *The Mauryan economy (c. 322 BCE – 185 BCE) was one of the most organized and centrally controlled economic systems in ancient India.*⁴ Certain historians and political analysts has described this system as a " sort of state socialism", and also as the "world's first welfare state".

Even in early Christianity, we find examples of Community practiced sharing goods and labour, a simple form of socialism, a tradition continued in some monastic orders.

Socialism in Medieval Era: In Iran, Mazdak (died c. 524 or 528 CE), a priest and political reformer, preached and instituted a religiously based socialist or proto-socialist system in the Zoroastrian context of Sassanian Persia (Nehru, 1965). Mazdak was a Zoroastrian priest during the reign of the Sessanian king Kavadh-I (488-531 CE). He advocated for an egalitarian society and abolition of private property providing importance on redistribution of wealth.

Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 652 CE), a companion of Muhammad, is credited by some scholars, such as Muhammad Sharqawi and Sami Ayad Hanna, as originating a form of Islamic socialism.⁶ Some Twentieth

Century Scholars and thinkers like Muhammad Sharqawi and Sami Ayad Hanna of Egypt described that Abu Dharr Al Ghifari was an early predecessor or even the instigator of a type of Islamic Socialism.

It is seen that medieval society had proto-socialist ideas rooted in Christian charity, community obligations, and shared resources, seen in guilds, some monastic orders, peasant communes, and thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas, who emphasized the common good over radical individualism, though feudalism itself wasn't socialist. But the medieval socialism exhibited quasi-communist practices, but these were distinct from modern socialism and often short-lived.

Socialism in Modern Era: Karl Marx is widely regarded as the father of modern socialism. His concept of socialism is also known as scientific socialism. He developed theories on class struggle, capitalism, and historical materialism, with Friedrich Engels. Socialism in the modern era adapts traditional concepts like public ownership, equality, classless society, etc. focusing on democratic norms, social welfare and critiques of extreme capitalism, seen in movements advocating universal healthcare, income, and stronger worker rights, etc. Socialism in the modern era has evolved from state-controlled economies to broader democratic movements, focusing on social justice, wealth redistribution, and public services through democratic means, often called Democratic Socialism, seen in Nordic models with strong welfare states and mixed economies. It confronts challenges from globalization and neo-liberalism but sees a resurgence, especially among youth, advocating for greater equity and worker's share within existing systems or through significant reforms, incorporating democratic planning and market conditions to deal with poverty, inequality, and resource exploitation.

Countries like India blend socialist roots with market economies, demonstrating evolving approaches beyond state-controlled models. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the pioneer thinker turned politician to evolve this type of socialism in India.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's role in Post Independent India as a leader

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was no doubt one of the key leaders and path finder of India's independence. He served as Prime Minister of India from 1947 to 1964. During his long Prime ministerial tenure, he did many valuable works towards the development of India.

Although India achieved independence on 15th August, 1947, but it brought many monumental challenges. The division of the nation in the name of religion had created serious chaos and clashes between Hindus and Muslims across Bengal, Bihar and Punjab. *Faced with the immediate prospect of losing their homes and livelihood, and with their security at risk, people took to the streets as wanton killings and violence escalated among communal lines* (Nehru, 1972).

During this time, the leaders of our nation spent many sleepless nights to find out amicable solution of the clashes. They tried to bring back communal harmony, universal brotherhood and unity in the society. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had to led this noble process from front line. Millions of Hindus and Sikhs migrated to India and so as the Muslims to Pakistan. *Nehru was conscious with the grave threat posed by communalism to the unity and integrity of India and he personally carried out a massive campaign against it through radio broadcasts and public speeches. He demonstrated through personal example with fearless response to communal violence* (Nehru, 1972).

With the establishment of Pakistan, Hindu communal forces became increasingly strident in India declaring 15th August as a day of mourning and attacking the government for what they saw as a policy of Muslim appeasement. Gandhiji was criticized by Hindu communal forces through various publicity cells. This criticism led to the increase of hatred politics and he was shot dead on 30th January, 1948 by a well-known culprit that everyone knows.

In such a situation Nehru had to raise his voice against this type of anti-social elements and criticized the communal forces boldly. Even he termed RSS as a '*Fascist organization*'. *Sardar Patel, with Nehru's support, banned the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha* (Nehru, 1972).

This action clearly prove that Pandit Nehru was firm and determine to stop communal activities and to build up a nation based on unity and brotherhood. For this purpose, he repeatedly announced the notion 'unity in diversity, a notion, that was coined by Pandit Nehru to bring Indian people under one umbrella irrespective of caste, creed, religion, language, region, colour etc. This notion still helps us to come together in any case of national crises.

We can find Nehru's aims and objectives towards nation building if we analyze his lecture which was delivered on 15th August, 1947. The title of the lecture was "Tryst with Destiny" where he said, "*Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of Humanity*" (Zakaria, 1960).

Socialist Perspectives of Pandit Nehru

Nehru described that it is difficult to offer a accurate response to define socialism. There are innumerable definitions of it. Some people probably think of Socialism hazily as something which does good and which aims at equality. That does not take us very far or near. Socialism is obviously a different move toward from that of capitalism. But to me, Socialism is after all not only a way of life but a certain reasonable approach to social and economic development.

Pandit Nehru's socialist perspective, often called Nehruvian Socialism, aimed for a democratic, welfare state in India, blending Marxist ideas of economic planning and social justice with Gandhian non-violence and democratic values, focusing on nationalization of industries. He also advocated for mixed economy, redistribution of wealth and reducing disparities through peaceful, consent-based methods, not force, to achieve equality, liberty, and all inclusive for growth and development.

Pandit Nehru was a great visionary leader. He always thought to make a modern India, where science & Technology will play key role. He undertook many futuristic plans and schemes revolving science and technology to achieve such objectives. It was Pandit Nehru's efforts that made India a socialist country with some capitalist ideologies. *Pandit Nehru explains, "Socialism is for me not merely an economic doctrine, which I favour; it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart. I work for Indian independence because the nationalists cannot tolerate alien domination; I work for it even more because for me it is the inevitable step to social and economic change. I should like the congress to become a socialist organisation and to join hands with the other forces in the world who are working for the new civilization* (Nehru, 1965).

In short, it may be termed as mixed pattern of India's economy having both capitalism and socialism in its pocket. *Nehru's socialism visualized 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, fair play, justice and equality through socialism* (Ran, 1967). The intention of such mixture was clear on the ground that capitalism will build India's bold economic base depending upon establishment of heavy industries whereas socialism will cater the basic need of the mass people of the country. But, out of these two ideologies, Nehru paid much importance to socialism. *His views on the idea of socialism may be extracted here for better analysis of his contribution towards nation building* (Paul & Nayak, 2000).

Key Aspects of Pandit Nehru's Socialism

The key aspects of Pandit Nehru's Socialism may be discussed under the following heads:

Democratic Socialism: Pandit Nehru championed a gradual transition from capitalism to socialism within a democratic framework, emphasizing political freedom along with economic and social equality and justice, influenced by Fabian Socialism.

Mixed Economy: He advocated for a mixed economy where both state-owned and private sectors co-existed. He was in favour of state control on heavy industries, like steel, energy, railways, etc. for equitable distribution of wealth and resources.

Planned Economy: Pandit Nehru believed national planning for both short- and long-term period and utilization of science and technology. He thought that these are crucial for development and addressing India's complex and diverse problems.

Social Justice & Welfare: Pandit Nehru's goal and vision were to remove disparities, reduce poverty, ensure a safety net and provide healthcare and education. He wanted to focus on the dignity of individuals in the journey of nation building.

Non-Violence & Consent: Unlike revolutionary communists he sought to implement socialism through peaceful, democratic means, depending on public opinion and consent. He did not want to use force. In fact, he was influenced by Gandhian techniques of non-violence and peaceful method of resolving conflict.

Rejection of Extremism: Although Pandit Nehru was inspired by Marxism, he was cautious about replicating Soviet methods in India, instead adapting socialist ideals to suit India's unique conditions and diversity. He opposed fascism, colonialism and imperialism. His vision and mission were to build peace, harmony and equality in the society on the basis of universal brotherhood.

Ethical Foundation: His vision was deeply rooted in humanism, secularism, and morality. He wanted to establish a society with equal opportunity and dignity for all.

If we study the socialist perspectives of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru we can find out some basic features of his concepts. The main features of Nehru's socialism are:

To eradicate income and resource related gapes.

Social justice and individual liberty will be the basis of this kind of socialism.

Resources and wealth should not be confined to a small number of people.

Poverty and economic exploitation will be abolished from society under this system.

Economic progress may be achieved through proper economic planning.

Living standard of people should be up-graded.

Production and distribution system will be both private as well as public.

Cottage industries and heavy industries will go hand to hand but on their own direction. Special economic facilities will be provided to poor and backward people of the society.

After becoming the Prime minister of India, Nehru tried his best to form a socialistic pattern of Indian politics. His socialism was completely democratic but not totally liberal.

Nehru's socialism was basically agrarian in character. That is why he paid much attention to eradicate agriculture related problems and for this purpose he initiated various steps. Dr. S. Swaminathan was provided the task to find out means and ways to develop our agricultural sector. Under his guidance, green revolution took place in India.

Vision of Pandit Nehru

It is in this context, need not to mention that Nehru not only thought for leading a country like India into the path of development, but also fascinated the idea of healthy India. *Nehru is an eclectic. Nehru wanted to know and assimilate as much as possible of the experience accumulated by mankind and to select the best of it. He inevitably tended towards eclecticism, which he wanted to avoid at all costs. He preferred 'a mental or spiritual attitude which synthesizes differences and contradictions, tries to understand and accommodate different religions, ideologies, political, social and economic systems* (Karanjia, 1961). He directed his colleagues and other dignitaries to work relentlessly to make healthy India. Besides, *Pandit Nehru's government oversaw the establishment of many institutions of higher learning, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), The Indian Institute of Management (IIM), and the National Institute of Technology (NIT), etc. Nehru also outlined a commitment in his five-year plans to guarantee free and compulsory primary education to all of India's children. For this purpose, Nehru planned to create mass village enrolment programmes and the construction of thousands of schools. Nehru also launched initiatives such as the provision of free milk and meals to children to fight malnutrition. Adult education centre's, vocational and technical schools were also organized for adults especially in the rural areas* (Kalita, 2011).

Pandit Nehru was not only a visionary of modern India, but he chalked out plan and programmes to execute his dreams into reality. *Nehru's services to the making of modern India makes him our greatest nation builder, the founder of our secularism, our socialism, and our democracy* (North Bengal University, n.d.). He left a lifelong notion on India's social and economic principle and pressed them on to the height of a revolution. Pandit Nehru established indomitably the planning process and the root of parliamentary form of government.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can say that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was a great visionary leader of India. He not only planned to make India self-sufficient and self-dependent, but also executed them with time bound policies. India was lucky enough to have a dynamic leader like Pandit Nehru. His concept of socialism was essential contribution to build public sector Undertakings (PSU's) and scientific institutions, like 'ISRO' that underpin modern India's economy and technological proficiency. But in 1991, the government of India initiated economic liberalization under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao which marked a significant exodus, moving towards market-oriented reforms and reduced state control. Again in 2015, the government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi, the "National

Institution for Transforming India Aayog” (NITI Aayog) has replaced Planning Commission of India, making a shift from socialism to capitalism. These policies of the government of India indicate that the economic policy is transforming from erstwhile socialism to market based liberal economy. But the concept of social welfare, inclusive growth, and poverty alleviation remain central to Indian politics, although the methods differ from past to present. Modern debates often contrast the early focus on state-led development with the current emphasis on private enterprise, but the foundational structure (mixed economy, concept of welfare state) still shapes policy making process in India leading to the relevance of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s perspectives of Socialism even in the changing global situation.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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