



## **Jawaharlal Nehru's Vision for India: A Nationalist Perspective**

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**PAKISTAN'S LEADING NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY  
ANALYSIS PLATFORM**

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## Abstract

The present study endeavors to provide a comprehensive overview of the life and times of Jawaharlal Nehru, a prominent Indian nationalist. Despite the inherent challenge of capturing such a multifaceted figure in a concise manner, this term paper attempts to touch upon various aspects of Nehru's political life. The paper argues that Nehru's rise to a prominent position of leadership was often facilitated by the support of Mahatma Gandhi. Furthermore, this study suggests that Nehru's handling of communal tensions within India may have played a role in the partition of the country. In sum, this paper serves as a brief yet insightful account of Nehru's contributions to Indian nationalism.

## Early Life of Nehru

It is no doubt few individuals have given so much to India as Nehru, though he would always be far behind Gandhi rather, it would be content to say that he was a nationalist who later became apex leader of India piggybacked by Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru was born in 1889. When he left India for Britain for education, he was leaving behind India which was just awakening to the realities of colonization and was preparing to set alarms among the British. His struggle for India cannot be written off from the history of India but it must be accentuated that he was given a cut-and-dried stage by his father and later Gandhi throughout his carrier in the Indian politics and the ground was already laid for his being great.<sup>1</sup>

Born to Motilal, Nehru was one of the great Indian nationalist leaders who contributed his whole life for the freedom of India from the British empire. During his early years in Britain Nehru felt, like other Indians, that Indians were discriminated against by the other well-to-do Europeans. He started disliking white masters who were enslaving his mother India. He often dreamt of fighting with a sword and freeing the Indian people from white masters' thralldom.<sup>2</sup> Despite having luxurious life, Nehru was sympathetic to the cause of poor people and their poverty-stricken state. He would often lament the miserable state of Indians which

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<sup>1</sup> Motilal to Nehru, 16 October 1905, London, quoted in B.N. Pandey. *Nehru*. London UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1976. P.17.

<sup>2</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru. *An Autobiography*. New Delhi India: Penguin Books India, 2004. p. 16.

was due to backwardness in science and technology as Indians still kept a medieval view of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Nehru's nationalist feelings were not unprecedented. There was a new surge in nationalistic feeling after the partition of Bengal took place in 1905. At this moment Congress, the leading party of Indians' struggle against the British, was split into two camps: moderates and extremists. While moderate opinion still favoured cooperation with the British, extremists went next line demanding 'Purna Swaraj', 'complete self-rule.' It was even surmised at that point in moment that India could get independent until 1913 if masses participation kept surging under extremist factions.<sup>4</sup> Nehru's love for India developed while studying in London. There was, then, the rise of internationalism which transcended national boundaries, but Nehru believed that nationalism was still a great force to be reckon with and it can unite people and can give them hope.<sup>5</sup>

The extremist faction of Congress led by Tilak and B.C Pal was critical of liberals and moderates whom Nehru also despised. He believed extremist to be real nationalists while others were serving their own vested interests.<sup>6</sup> His father was also on the latter's list, but he would argue with his father over his position as moderate when he became active in politics.<sup>7</sup>

#### Entry into Indian Politics

When Nehru got back to India extremist group was side-lined and moderates and liberals regained control of Congress. Tilak organized Home Rule League (HRL) in Maharashtra and by the same name Mrs Besant, a British Born lady organized Home Rule League all over India. As HRL politics was agitational and masses based so Motilal became Home Rule League president in Allahabad with Nehru as joint secretary.<sup>8</sup> He was critical of moderates

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<sup>3</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru. *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi India: Penguin Books, 2004. p.40.

<sup>4</sup> Many Indian leaders of extremist factions naively believed that they could get Independence if they kept strong resistance in few years. Famous Lal Bal Pan group is famous at that time for their extremism

<sup>5</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru. *The Discovery of India*. New, India: Penguin Books, 2004. p.44.

<sup>6</sup> B.N. Pandey. *Nehru*. London UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1976.p.21.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 60

and liberals and lambasted Indian politicians who were given honorary titles and positions in the British government.<sup>9</sup> Nehru actively organized protests against the government during WW1. He agitated for the release of Indian nationalists who were interned even if they were Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

During the war, Nehru was not in such limelight to be mentioned in Gandhi's autobiography. This was because India lacked coherence of political leaders and Gandhi was busy individually practicing Satyagraha and agitating with Muslims against the British on the Khilafat cause. It was after the war that Nehru would turn towards Gandhi's leadership.<sup>11</sup> Though the two were exact opposites there would never be a break between the two till independence.

Nehru's active political life which started in 1915 reached new shores when he came under Gandhi's spell. Gandhi started the non-cooperation movement in 1920-21. Gandhi urged Indians to boycott everything that is non-Indian. It included giving up honorary titles from Raj, the boycott of schools and colleges withdrawal of lawyers from courts and opening of national educational institutions, and the campaign against foreign cloth.<sup>12</sup> Though Nehru was a great admirer of Satyagraha but never give in to nonviolence his absolute allegiance. He would often consider agitational tactics. He was a firm believer in science and technology, so he had a disliking for Gandhi's hostility to modernity. In the age of metropolitan, village life as a basic unit of government where people made only subsistence made no sense to Nehru.<sup>13</sup>

Gandhi was excessively using religion with his new movement which Nehru resented. Nehru considered these religious idioms use a way to exploit the people.<sup>14</sup> During non-cooperation, the moment came for Nehru to rise on the occasion. Congress announced the boycott of the prince of Wales in 1921 so the government started preventive measures. Nehrus were at the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.65.

<sup>12</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. London: Yale University Press. 2003. p.68.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.69.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

forefront and Jawaharlal Nehru openly distributed strikes notices in Lucknow in December. Nehru was arrested with his father, and he went with his father to jail happily.<sup>15</sup>

Gandhi suspended non-cooperation when Nehru was in jail due to the outbreak of violence and the Chauri-Chauri incident, but he consoled Nehru that the movement would get benefit from the retreat. He advised Nehru to concentrate on studying in jail and do some work, especially spinning of the wheel. Nehru would thread cloth in jail, play volleyball and started reading. His intellectual calibre started growing in jail when he studied history, poetry and literature in jail.<sup>16</sup>

He was content with jail life as he was away from the doldrums of life, he was released in March 1922 but soon imprisoned in May on charges of extortion and intimidation in Allahabad. When Nehru came out of prison, Congress was divided into two groups. One of his father's sides, wanted Congress to participate in impending elections and oppose the government constitutionally while the other was of Vallabhbhai Patel who was old Gandhites, a believer in non-cooperation.<sup>17</sup> Nehru was to play an arbitrator's role so he tried to intermediate though he favoured the former group as he believed sometimes it was beneficial to backtrack from direct action as people became tired so constitutional opposition must be provided.

## Rise to Leadership

He became general secretary of Congress from 1923 to 1925 and worked under Muhammad Ali and Gandhi presidencies. Gandhi's politics was incomprehensible for Nehru. Moreover, communal violence shocked Nehru at that time and he started looking for ways to subdue religious leaders who dupe people in the name of religion. He started looking for alternatives. The moment came when he visited Europe in 1926 and remained there 1927. He found ways to Indian problems in socialism, though he did not like communism tooth and nail but 'good things could be picked from their movement.' He admired the Chinese communist movement

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<sup>15</sup> B.N. Pandey. *Nehru*. p.91.

<sup>16</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. p.71. This included books on Indian and European history and modern politics, the decline and fall of Romans by Gibbon, poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron and Tennyson and several plays of Shakespeare and essays by Tolstoy.

<sup>17</sup> B.N. Pandey. *Nehru*. p.102.

which was not only fighting the nationalistic war but was fighting against capitalism, a weapon of imperialism.<sup>18</sup> While in Europe, he closely studied and observed world politics. The world was probed with conflict so he apprehended the big conflict that would soon engulf the world. He wrote back to Congress to make it plain to the British that India would not be pulled into war without her consent.

When he returned from Europe, first thing he did was pass the resolution for independence. Gandhi was alarmed as Nehru was going too radical. To Gandhi, it was too early to embark on such a radical step that would lead towards violence.<sup>19</sup> Her parleys with Nehru in letter exchange manifested his attitude. Though he did not break with Nehru and gave him open hand to debate his differences publically. Nehru would backtrack as he was 'truant child but not too rebellious.'<sup>20</sup> The radicalism of Nehru was curtailed by the realities of the politics of India. The British government appointed a statutory commission to look into the workings of the 1919 Constitution and propose a new act. Indians boycotted it as no Indian was included. So British left it to Indians to decide on the constitution. Congress formed the body under Motilal Nehru which presented the famous Nehru Report. Nehru too was part of it but he resented the report. Nehru Report demanded dominion status for India which was not acceptable to young minds like Nehru. He wanted demand of full independence. Gandhi wanted the full support of Congress for report, but Nehru resisted it.<sup>21</sup>

Gandhi was successful in getting support for report. He also had to pacify radical elements so he nominated Nehru for presidentship because it would help him find some middle way between radical Socialism and compromise with the British. Nehru found it difficult to compromise with the British. Viceroy already announced that dominion status was the ultimate goal of government and proposed Round Table Conference for the Indian constitutional problem. Nehru knew that the British government would not contemplate solving core issues Congress put up to the viceroy, but Congress was still accepting compromise. He thought of resigning from Congress presidentship but was prevented by

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<sup>18</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. p.85.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.87.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.88.

<sup>21</sup> From the start of his career to the end, Nehru made grave miscalculation about communal problems. It would keep brewing until it became out of his control.

Gandhi who wanted Congress unity at London Conference.<sup>22</sup> Nehru would not contemplate compromise short of Independence but was constrained by the realities of politics.

As it was evident that the viceroy would not cave into Gandhi's demands, he proceeded with the resolution of independence and civil disobedience. He started the movement through his famous Salt March from Allahabad to the Dandi coast in Gujrat and on 6 April picked up salt to officially started civil disobedience.<sup>23</sup> Nehru was arrested on 14 April under Salt Act and confined in Naini Jail Allahabad.

Motilal was also arrested afterwards but he became severely ill and was released. Nehru too was released to see his father. Soon after his release in October he started political activities. He declared that all Indians must become rebels and not rest until they drive the British out of India. He was incarcerated soon.<sup>24</sup>

After the death of his father, he was deeply distressed and lonely but was succoured by Gandhi. Soon Gandhi was invited for parlays by Irwin which Nehru did not like because he now did not favour compromise with the British government. But to his chagrin, Gandhi and Irwin reached an agreement and Gandhi on part of Congress accepted that Congress would take part in Round Table Conference. The government in response would release all prisoners and revoke ban on the illegalization of Congress and its organization.<sup>25</sup> But Gandhi was a player of the slow game with immense cleverness. He presented a resolution that cannot be disapproved. Congress was to stick to sawraj while it would go to London Round Table Conference and Nehru himself moved resolution.<sup>26</sup> Nehru was also able to pervade his socialist ideas in later resolutions which showed what type of government of sawraj would be. He included provisions such as right of free speech, religion, association, equality of genders, reduction in land revenue and rent, progressive taxation on agriculture income, control of

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<sup>22</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. p.91.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.92.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.95.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.98.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.p.99.

usury, state control of few industries and mineral resources, abolition of Salt duty, prohibition and exclusion of foreign cloth from India.<sup>27</sup>

Round Table Conference failed, and Gandhi parted ways with Government. The situation in cities became tense and due to fear of another disobedience Nehru was arrested when left Allahabad for Bombay. Gandhi too was interned on 4 Jan, the same day when the second civil disobedience movement was started.<sup>28</sup> Civil disobedience continued and was suspended in tandem with the release and arrest of Gandhi. Nehru in prison was infuriated by the suspension of movement. Once out of prison, he started new vigour in the movement trying to curtail communal jinn that split two great communities of Hindus and Muslims. To him, the card of communal politics was being played for the personal interests of leaders.<sup>29</sup> He was of the view to start civil disobedience to foreshadow communal problems. He made seditious speeches on 17 and 18 Jan 1934 and was sentenced to two-year imprisonment where he started writing his autobiography. When Nehru was languishing in prison, Gandhi openly defied the socialist programme of the left-wing group of Congress and even made way for Rajendra Prasad, an old Gandhites for the presidency. Moreover, there was the introduction of the new act of 1935 which made Congress divided into two camps on the issue of accepting office under the new act.<sup>30</sup>

### **Congress Ministries and the Communal Question**

When Nehru became president, he had to decide on contesting elections under the new act and rejecting the constitution altogether. The decision was that Congress would contest the election and rack the constitution from within.<sup>31</sup> Congress won a clear majority in elections.

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<sup>27</sup> It seemed that Gandhi was giving Nehru little space for his socialist ideas because of his allegiance to Gandhi despite differences on political matters to pacify him.

<sup>28</sup> B.N. Pandey. *Nehru*. p.172.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid p.174. Gandhi had similar views and declared there is no communal problem as such but vested interests of politicians. That is why he resisted reserved seats announced by the Communal Award of 1932 and started fast until reaching an agreement with Ambedkar leaders of untouchables.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.p.184.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.p.192.

When Congress was going to form ministries in eight provinces, Nehru made the mistake of taking so light communal problem and made no space for the league in government.<sup>32</sup> It was grave miscalculation that would cast him Pakistan as the League embarked on lambasting the Congress government as Hindu Raj and cry of 'Islam in Danger' would create a huge influx of masses to congregate behind the Muslims League.<sup>33</sup> ( though there were negotiations before government formation which failed).

On September 3, 1939, India was dragged into war without her consent which Nehru already predicted. Nehru lambasted the British and Congress resigned from ministries in protests on 23 Oct. The road left clear for Jinnah, leader of Muslims, he soon declared, on 22 December, the day of Deliverance from the Congress government. He was invited by Viceroy to come up with a constructive policy to pressurize Congress.<sup>34</sup>

### Road to Freedom

On 6 and 7 October, Nehru's speeches were used as the pretext for his internment as he was causing a stir in people against the government so he was interned.<sup>35</sup> With Congress side-lined Jinnah demanded separate states for Muslims of India promulgating the famous Lahore Resolution on 23 March 1940.<sup>36</sup> To Nehru, the idea was fantastic as it made no sense to him when important Muslims were part of Congress.<sup>37</sup> On the question of Indians to support to war, he presented a resolution which Congress working committee rectified that subject India would not be able to support British authoritarian government which was no different from fascist government it claims to be fighting.<sup>38</sup> British was into the quagmire of its own

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<sup>32</sup> Ayesha Jalal. *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*, Harvard University Press, 2017. p.26

<sup>33</sup> Nehru declared that he looked at so called communal question through the telescope and found nothing.

<sup>34</sup> Ayesha Jalal. *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, 1994. She argues that Jinnah used 'Pakistan' as ploy to bargain power for Muslims at the center. He did not want partition but security of Muslims rights in United India.

<sup>35</sup> B.N. Pandey. *Nehru*.p.222.

<sup>36</sup> For details on Pakistan movement and its afterwards see Khalid Bin Sayed. *Pakistan: the Formative phase*, Oxford University Press, 1968.

<sup>37</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. p.142. Nehru rejected Muslim separatism as there were many prominent Muslims' names in Congress such as Dr. Ansari, Abul Kalam and many others.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.p.146

contradictions of supporting the self-determination when 'Macaulay's children proved unruly adolescent and demanded self-government in India along the lines with what prevailed in Britain.'<sup>39</sup> The anguish in India increased further with the arrival of Cripps Mission in 1942 which failed to satisfy Indian demands. After failure of Negotiations, Nehru moved the 'Quit India Resolution' in Congress Working Committee in early August which was ratified, and Congress leadership was interned including Gandhi and Nehru.<sup>40</sup> Nehru was going to serve his longest jail term till June 1945.

Nehru devoted himself during this period to writing his famous book, *The Discovery of India*. He delved deep into the Indian past to divulge Indian richness of history and culture. Though he disliked Indians being too narrow-minded and medieval in world view often imitating foreign cultures. One must learn from foreign cultures but not blindly imitate as true cultures spring from one's own home.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, he has to deal with the traumatic news of Jinnah Gandhi's talks which was bestowed on Jinnah the Sole Muslim representative.

After coming out of prison, Nehru had to be prepared for the great task of Indian freedom. The British now wanted to get rid of India and relegate power to the responsible government that should claim the representation of India. Ideally, League and Congress had equal claims. League represented most Muslims while Congress claimed itself to be above communal differences and was claiming secular organization open to all. There would be staunch opposition of the League and Congress to each other on the issue of independence. Muslim League wanted a separate state which Congress was hell-bent on resisting. First movement of disagreement came at Shimla Conference. League demanded all Muslims who would be part of the Viceroy Executive Council from the Muslim league which Congress and the Viceroy equally resented and eventually conference collapsed.<sup>42</sup> Nehru and Viceroy put blame on Jinnah for creating so much fuss over the communal problem.

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<sup>39</sup> Ilhan Niaz. *The State During the British Raj: Imperial Governance in South Asia, 1707-1947*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2019. p.xii

<sup>40</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. p.151.

<sup>41</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru. *The Discovery of India*.p.579.

<sup>42</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. p.160.

However, it was soon evident to Nehru in the elections of 1945-46 when League swept on Muslim seats and Congress on the general seats forming government in eight provinces. To end the impasse, the British government sent a Cabinet mission for a constitutional settlement. Provinces were assorted into three groups and each province could opt out of the group and form its own constitution. League saw in it vaguely Pakistan as Muslim provinces could opt out to form a new confederation of their own getting full provinces of Bengal and Punjab. Nehru rejected the plan on grouping issues. Later, League too backtracked as they thought it breach of faith because it was not invited to form the government. On 16 May Cabinet Mission suggested three-tier governments with the centre above, area groups in the middle which provinces could form and provinces below. Congress and League reluctantly formed a coalition government and Nehru became vice president equal to that of PM in authority.

In the position of government Nehru find it very difficult to work when especially League was non-cooperating. League was adamant in opposition to the mission plan in long term and would not stop campaigning short of Pakistan.<sup>43</sup>

With violence surging among Hindus and Muslims British government not only changed Viceroy but also announced that the British would leave India no later than June 1948. Nehru Viceroy was Mountbatten who befriended him on his visit to Singapore. When Mountbatten arrived, June 1948 too appeared as a distant date for delegating power to successor states, so he hastened the process of British departure.

Amity of Nehru and Edwina Mountbatten was not unknown.<sup>44</sup> The friendship benefited Nehru too much He was able to see a secret British plan for partition which was even altered according to his apprehension.<sup>45</sup> The partition plan ratified by London was soon accepted by major Indian players and India would be divided into two dominions of India and Pakistan.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.p.167.

<sup>44</sup> The pinky-panky relations of Nehru with Edwina were no secrets. It went to the extent that Mountbatten himself allowed them to meet in solitude. He never complained to Edwina. For details see Akbar S Ahmed. *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*. Routledge, 1997. For favorable view see Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins , *Freedom at Midnight*, Vikas Pub, Reprint Edition, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Judith M. Brown. *Nehru: A Political Life*. p.172.

Nehru worked day and night on minute details of the partition and government. He had been able to force on Jinnah partition of Punjab and Bengal as he forced partition on India.

As a nationalist he was defeated. He could not solve communal problem of India. Had he been considerate towards communal problem in 1937 or during Cabinet Mission plan, he could have saved united India. But his trivializing of communal problem led to his defeat as territorial nationalist.

The struggle which started with his father's letter to Nehru that the stage has been set for your greatness reached its apex when he got free India on 15 August and succeeded in his tryst with destiny. But more work lay in future as now he had to venerate India with the ideals he was contemplating for years. He would rule new India from 1947 to 1964 till his death as an uncontested leader of not only India but of a non-aligned world of free nations. Nationalists won the nation-state, but he had to now embark on nation-building.

## **Conclusion**

There are two kinds of leadership described by Henry Kissinger in his book, "*Leadership: Six studies in World Strategy*", one is prophetic, and the other is statesman. Prophetic leaders bring whole new doctrine and want to transmogrify whole society. Gandhi was prophetic leader but there are few prophetic leaders who succeed. The other is statesman leaders. Their focus is on state building and statecraft. Nehru was statesman who had plans for India after Independence but not for how to get independence. He envisaged India's great role in world after she gets free. But it is also equally important to mention that his role in freedom struggle is equally important and inspiring. It must be noted that 'Gandhi alerted world to India's struggle, it was Jawaharlal who alerted India to world struggle.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John Keay, *India: A History*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000, p.484.

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