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Public Health

RELEVANCE OF NEHRU VISION AND PERSPECTIVE ON SCIENCE AND RELIGION DURING COVID 19

KEY WORDS:

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Introduction

Religion is a way of life in India. During COVID 19 pandemic there were instances of religious reaction and responses in the form of prayers and lighting lamps to fight the virus. (Dawn News,2020)

There was also scientific approach to tackle the COVID 19 through National Health Care system (Sheriff, 2020). India with a population of 1.3 billion is multicultural and multi-religious. Constitution of India gives every citizen to exercise the right to follow any religion. Slowly there seems to be the dominance of religious dogmas and beliefs. Religion and politics have been kept apart because India believed in a secular policy. But slowly religion seems to influence scientific research and scientific freedom. It is said that there are three perspectives related to science and religion; a traditional view that keeps religion above science, a modern view that keeps science above religion and the third a secular view. (O'Brien, Timothy and Shiri, 2015). The founding fathers of India laid the foundation for Science to guide governance. India became a nation of science and scientific achievements through the vision and legacy of Nehru. (Nehru,2004)

Freedom of India

Nehru the first Prime Minister of India is one of the confidant of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's fight for freedom had no political ambition and therefore once India became a free nation he requested the Party members to work for the welfare of the nation. But when the party decided to become a political party Nehru was asked to form the Government as Prime Minister.

It is said that their relationship reflected Hegelian pattern initially. They had their differences regarding the political policy with negative reaction from Nehru and followed by a mutual consensus. Between their contradicting political ideologies appeared a social transformation with modern outlook to bring out a blue print for an Independent India. (Hegelian Dialectic,2017)

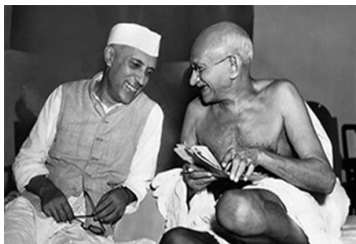


Fig.1. Nehru and Gandhi

Nehru

Nehru belonged to an Aristocratic family born to a famous lawyer Motilal Nehru who donated the properties belonged to the family to Congress worth millions of dollars. Nehru was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge and the Inner Temple, where he trained to be a Barrister. He was born on 14th November, 1889 in Allahabad. He had two sisters, Vijayalakshmi Pandit who was the first female President of United Nations General Assembly and the other sister a well-known writer who wrote many books on Nehru. Nehru went to jail for seven times and spent nearly 3000 days in Prison. (Discovery of India, 1984)

He had the tough job lifting India from the blanket of colonial rule into an Industrial nation. He laid the foundation for a socialist secular democracy and followed the foreign policy of non-alignment.

His feelings of nationalism and deep love for his countrymen were expressed during his iconic speech "Tryst with Destiny". (Guardian,2008)

He said that

"At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom." He went onto express how "a moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance."

The choice of the word utterance reflects that the soul of the nation will have the freedom to express its gratitude and longings. Nehru was considered as one of the Towering Statesmen of the world.

Martin Luther King Jr. would later state, "In the struggles of mankind to rise to a true state of civilization, the towering figure of Nehru sits unseen but felt at all council tables."

As a mediator between the great powers of the East and the West, according to King, "Nehru had the prestige, the wisdom and the daring to play that role." (Natwar Singh, 1965)

Every leader has its own frailties and his policy on China became the Achilles Heel. When he died Prime Minister A.B Vajpayee, felt Nehru's death as a "dream being shattered, a song silenced and a flame vanished in the infinite." Vajpayee went on to warn that Indian democracy, which Nehru "established" and "made a success," now faced a "doubtful future."

That legacy as envisioned by Vajpayee seems to be under the shadow of narrow vision where religion seems to over-ride science. (Menon,2019)

Nehru's Vision

Nehru's belief in Science and disbelief in religion is mirrored by the following words:

"It is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, or a rich country inhabited by starving people... Who indeed could afford to ignore science today? At every turn we have to seek its aid... The future belongs to science and those who make friends with science." **Jawaharlal Nehru** (Indian Science Congress, 1937)

While presiding over the Indian Science Congress on December 26, 1937 he said:

"It is science alone that can solve the problems of India."

He was responsible for building reputed scientific institutes like Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Indian Institute of Technology and Bhabha Atomic Energy commission.

He gave the scientific freedom for these great scientists to lay the foundation stone for science and research institutes Homi J Bhabha, Sir C.V.Raman, Satish Dhawan, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, J.C. Ghosh, Meghnad Saha and S.S. Bhatnagar. These institutes stand as monumental pillars of science and the legacy of Nehru for India.

When laying the foundations stone for Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (in 1954), Nehru said:

“Lots of people may not know, why such an emphasis is being put on science. Why so much money is being spent? Why did I take the trouble to come from Delhi? The big countries have more power while our country has remained poor....If we wish to empower our country, which is now independent, we have to create a strong base—so we can learn the basics...This may not show immediate results but finally result in the uplift of the country.”

The scientific community of India owe their gratitude to the vision of Nehru who kept science above religion. He wanted science to build India trying to free it from the clutches of British rule, grips of religious dogmas and superstition. (David Arnold.,2013: Guadian,2008)

It was Nehru who established the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) of the country on August 10, 1948 with Bhabha as its head. Being a statesman he wanted atomic energy to be used for constructive purposes and he understood the disastrous consequences of atom bomb:

He said:

“Today there is conflict in the world between two things, the atom bomb and what it represents, and the spirit of humanity. That is the paradox of the atomic energy-sputnik age. The fact that nuclear tests continue even though it is well-recognized that they are very harmful in the present and in the future, because of the fact that all kinds of weapons of mass destruction are being produced and piled up even though it is universally recognized that their use may well exterminate the human race”.

He was instrumental in starting scientific plants like the Fertilizer plant in Sindri (March 10, 1954), the Hindustan Antibiotics Limited in Pimpri, Five Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) on the recommendation of the Sircar Committee.

When he inaugurated the first IIT in Kharagpur, he said:

“Here in the place of that Hijli Detention Camp stands the fine monument of India, representing India's urges, India's future in the making. This picture seems to me symbolical of the changes that are coming to India.”

British and Indian Economy

Tharoor in his speech to the Oxford University categorically pointed out that the legacy of a rich Nation India was destroyed by British colonialism. He said when the British landed in India, India's share of the global economy was 24%, and that by the time they left, it had shrunk to 4%. He also spoke about India's enormous contribution — in terms of human and monetary terms — to Britain during the two World Wars. (Shashi Tharoor, 2015)

Building a Colonial Nation to a Developing country

It was a Herculean task for Nehru to build a nation from rags to riches.

Being enslaved for more than two hundred years his vision was to provide food, shelter and clothing the basic Fundamental Rights of a Citizen.

“For a hungry man or hungry woman, truth has little meaning. He wants food. For a hungry man, God has no meaning. And

India is starving and to talk of truth and God and many of the finer things is mockery. We have to find food for them, clothing, housing, education and health are absolute necessities that every person should possess. When we have done that we can philosophies and think of God. So, science must think in those terms and work along those lines on the wider scale of coordinated planning.”

The wish of Nehru to start All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi got fruition in Feb.18, 1956 through Health Minister Rajkumari Amrit Kaur,(Rajkumari Amrit Kaur,2020)

He believed strongly in science and felt strongly against religion and religious bodies that undermine the rights of Indian Citizens. His following words vouch for that expression and act:

“If any person raises his hand to strike down another on the ground of religion, I shall fight him till the last breath of my life, both as the head of the government and from the outside”

Jawaharlal Nehru

He wanted the nation to unite and work for the development of the country. He said that

“Fine buildings, fine pictures and books and everything that is beautiful are certainly signs of civilization. But an even better sign is a fine man who is unselfish and works with others for the good of all. To work together is better than to work singly, and to work together for the common good is best of all.”

Jawaharlal Nehru

Therefore, the Nehruvian vision of science was intended to free India from the imperial ideology of the old colonial services (dedicated to upholding empire) to overcome deprivation and backwardness. (Arnold,2013)

The greatest obstacle in the postcolonial condition remains the dilemma as to how to fashion a science that is both local and universal, and this conundrum remains at the heart of much current debate about what science and the history of science mean to, and for, the non-West.

Nehruvian science offers one means of trying to establish how that dilemma was articulated and how attempts were made, intellectually and materially, to resolve it. (Arnold,2013)

Conclusion:

Erstwhile leaders who shed their blood and sweat for the freedom of the country stand as statues on the pedestal of democracy. Different forms of democracy or political parties and their leaders have kept the welfare of the party above the welfare of the nation. Even if the leader wishes to work for the nation political ideology and power make these leaders helpless. The recent political happenings in the world have made democracy a mockery and political will of the people secondary to the policies of parties. The human tragedy where millions of innocent lives are lost to the COVID 19 want science to save the world. Science and scientists stand as mute witnesses to the drama of politics that unfolds before the eyes of the citizens. Nations and the world need statesmen Like Nehru to stand and speak for the common man who is at the mercy of men with tunnel vision.

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