



## International Journal of Arts & Education Research

### JAWAHARLAL NEHRU'S IDEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGION AND SECULARISM

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#### ABSTRACT

The son of a prominent lawyer and nationalist statesman, Nehru was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge and the Inner Temple, where he trained to be a barrister. Upon his return to India, he enrolled at the Allahabad High Court while taking an interest in national politics. Nehru's involvement in politics would gradually replace his legal practice. A committed nationalist since his teenage years, Nehru became a rising figure in Indian politics during the upheavals of the 1910s. He became the prominent leader of the left-wing factions of the Indian National Congress during the 1920s, and eventually of the entire Congress, with the tacit approval of his mentor, Gandhi. As Congress President, Nehru called for complete independence from Britain, and initiated a decisive shift towards the left in Indian politics. He was the principal author of the Indian Declaration of Independence (1929).

#### INTRODUCTION

Nehru and the Congress dominated Indian politics during the 1930s as the country moved towards independence. His idea of a secular nation state was seemingly validated when the Congress under his leadership swept the provincial elections in 1937 while the separatist Muslim League failed to form a government in any of the Indian provinces. But, these achievements were seriously compromised in the aftermath of the Quit India Movement in 1942 which saw the British effectively crush the Congress as a political organisation. Nehru, who had reluctantly heeded Gandhi's call for immediate independence, for he had desired to support the Allied war effort during the World War II, came out of a lengthy prison term to a much altered political landscape. The Muslim League under his old Congress colleague and now *bête noire*, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had come to dominate Muslim politics in India. Negotiations between Nehru and Jinnah for power sharing failed and gave way to the independence and bloody partition of India in 1947.

Nehru was elected by the Congress to assume office as independent India's first Prime Minister although the question of leadership had been settled as far back in 1941, when Gandhi acknowledged Nehru as his political heir and successor. As Prime Minister, Nehru set out to realise his vision of India. The Constitution of India was enacted in 1950, after which he embarked on an ambitious program of economic, social and political reforms. Chiefly, he oversaw India's transition from a monarchy to a republic, while nurturing a plural, multi-party democracy. In foreign policy, Nehru took a leading role in Non-Alignment while projecting India as a regional hegemon in South Asia.

Under Nehru's leadership, the Congress emerged as a catch-all party, dominating national politics and winning consecutive elections in 1951, 1957, and 1962. He remained popular with the people of India in spite of political troubles in his final years as exemplified by the defeat in the Sino-Indian War. Guha writes, "[had] Nehru retired in 1958 he would be remembered as not just India's best prime minister, but as one of the great statesmen of the modern world." Nehru, thus, left behind a disputed legacy, being "either adored or reviled for India's progress or lack of it."

Although Nehru was disdainful of religion, his theological interests had induced him to the study of the Buddhist and Hindu scriptures. According to B.R. Nanda, these scriptures were Nehru's "first introduction to the religious and cultural heritage of [India]...[they] provided Nehru the initial impulse for [his] long intellectual quest which culminated...in the Discovery of India."

Nehru became an ardent nationalist during his youth. The Boer War and the Russo-Japanese War intensified his feelings. About the latter he wrote, "[The] Japanese victories [had] stirred up my enthusiasm ... Nationalistic ideas filled my mind ... I mused of Indian freedom and Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe." Later when Nehru had begun his institutional schooling in 1905 at Harrow, a leading school in England, he was greatly influenced by G.M. Trevelyan's Garibaldi books, which he had received as prizes for academic merit.<sup>[16]</sup> Nehru viewed Garibaldi as a revolutionary hero. He wrote: "Visions of similar deeds in India came before, of [my] gallant fight for [Indian] freedom and in my mind India and Italy got strangely mixed together."

Jawaharlal Nehru, also known as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was one of the foremost leaders of Indian freedom struggle. He was the first Prime Minister of independent India. He was a member of the Congress Party that led the freedom movement against British Empire. He was also the chief framer of domestic and international policies between 1947 and 1964. Nehru is widely regarded as the architect of modern India. He set up a Planning Commission, encouraged development of science and technology, and launched three successive five-year plans. His policies led to a sizable growth in agricultural and industrial production. Nehru also played a major role in developing independent India's foreign policy. In 1955 Nehru was awarded with Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour.

Jawaharlal Nehru was born on 14 November 1889, to a wealthy Kashmiri Brahmin family in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh. His father Motilal Nehru was a well-known advocate and also a leading politician. Jawaharlal Nehru received education in some of the finest schools and universities of the world. He did his schooling from Harrow College and completed his Law degree from Trinity College, Cambridge. During his stay in London, Nehru was attracted by the ideas of liberalism, socialism and nationalism. In 1912, he had returned to India and joined the Allahabad High Court Bar. He married Kamala Nehru in 1916. On 19th November, 1917 she gave birth to Indira Priyadarshini, widely known as Indira Gandhi.

Jawaharlal Nehru was elected President of the Allahabad Municipal Corporation in 1924, and served for two years as the city's chief executive. He resigned in 1926 citing lack of cooperation from civil servants and obstruction from British authorities. From 1926 to 1928, Jawaharlal served as the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee. In December, 1929 Congress's annual session was held in Lahore and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected as the President of the Congress Party. During that session a resolution demanding India's independence was passed and on January 26, 1930 in Lahore, Jawaharlal Nehru open out free India's flag. Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested in 1942 during Quit India Movement. Released in 1945, he took a leading part in the negotiations that culminated in the emergence of the dominions of India and Pakistan in August, 1947. In 1947, he became the first Prime Minister of independent India.

Soon after independence, the Indian nation, under his guidance, achieved the first political objective of the renaissance by giving to itself a Constitution proclaiming India a sovereign democratic secular republic. Through his vigorous policy of planned industrialization and economic development, aided by scientific research through a chain of national laboratories and the nation-wide community project movement, Jawaharlal Nehru has laid firm foundations for the achievement of another important objective of the Indian renaissance, namely, the economic redemption of the Indian masses. All the time he would contemplate over the issues pertaining to the economic sector of the country. In 1951, Jawaharlal Nehru launched the country's "First Five-Year Plan" emphasizing on the increase in the agricultural output. Nehru believed in planned economy for maximum utilization of resources. He did not favour nationalization of private capital. In his scheme of economic development, by increasing business and income taxes mixed economy should play a prominent role. He believed that the both public sector and private sector must help each other in removing poverty and the other basic problems of Indian Society. He realized the importance of setting up mega industries and usher in industrial growth so as to transform the traditional society into a modern one. Nehru felt that the state should play the crucial role in development and attributed high credentials and role to both the bureaucracy and public sector. Nehru wanted the public sector to have commanding heights in the economy. That is why he wanted the public sector to play a vital part in regard to the development of heavy industries like steel and the exploitation of oil resources in India. He encouraged the construction of large irrigation works and the generation of hydro electricity. Tungabhadra Dam, which irrigates 1.03 million acres of land, is a classic example for these projects. By the mid-1960's, as Jawaharlal Nehru has pointed out, India had made commendable progress in the field of Nuclear Research. The Atomic Energy Act was passed by the Constituent Assembly, creating the Atomic Energy Commission. During the early years of independence, India pursued what Nehru called "A peaceful nuclear programme", implying that the programme was developed not to manufacture nuclear weapons, but instead to provide energy to the people. The peaceful use of nuclear energy was the official policy of the Government of India. This point was highlighted in bilateral agreements with Canada, UK, USA and USSR.

Nehru highly concerned on the control of private Industry and State Investment in Industry. In consequence, the Industries Act (1951) was passed to control private industry to work in the interests of state-regulations of private companies along with the Companies Act (1956) to control monopolies. By these policies the Indian economy enjoyed a steady rate of growth at 2.5% per annum.

Jawaharlal Nehru was interested in education for India's children and youth. He is praised for creating a system providing universal primary education, reaching children in the farthest corners of rural India. Nehru oversaw the creation of mass village enrollment programmes and the construction of thousands of schools. Nehru's education policy is also credited for the development of world-class educational institutions such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Indian Institutes of Technology, and the Indian Institutes of Management. Adult education centres, vocational and technical schools were also organised for adults, especially in the rural areas.

Moreover a system of reservations in government services and educational institutions was created to eradicate the social inequalities and disadvantages faced by peoples of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Nehru also championed secularism and religious harmony, increasing the representation of minorities in government. While differences of culture and, especially, language threatened the unity of the new nation, Nehru established programs such as the National Book Trust and the National Literary Academy which promoted the translation of regional literatures between languages and also organized the transfer of materials between regions.

Apart from his careful handling of India's tumultuous domestic situation in the years immediately after the Independence, Nehru's major contribution lies in the field of foreign policies. As the first Minister for External Affairs, Nehru was responsible for developing an independent foreign policy for the country. In the initial statements explaining India's foreign policy Nehru claimed that it was an independent foreign policy. Reviewing the problem of cold war and bi-polar politics, Nehru designed the equidistance concept towards big powers while engaging with them in all possible fronts. Along with Nassar, Sukarno, Tito, Nehru played a crucial role in shaping the policy of Non-Alignment and institutionalized the Non-Aligned Movement. Nehru wanted that the non-aligned countries should function as a power block; they should share their wealth for their prosperity. NAM had clear objectives that included the gradual decolonization of the world, and a strong statement that the member countries were not party to the ever escalating tension of the Cold War. By his policy of non-alignment and active support to the United Nations Organization, he has not only helped to reduce international tensions, but also helped to project an image of India abroad as a creative force for peace and international fellowship.

Nehru's greatest success was that he promoted the spirit of conciliation and negotiation between different political groups and gradually built up political stability and consensus. He played a

constructive, mediatory role in bringing the Korean War to an end and in resolving other international crises, such as those over the Suez Canal and the Congo, the arbitration of the UK and World Bank, offering India's services for conciliation and international policing. He contributed behind the scenes toward the solution of several other explosive issues, such as those of West Berlin, Austria, and Laos. After Nehru's successful mediation in the Korean War and the Congo problem, putting an end to a long and violent struggle, his status as a commendable and efficient statesman reached new heights. India also contributed to the UN efforts in peace-keeping by sending its forces to many war-torn areas.

The seventeen years of his leadership gained a steady progress of India on many fronts. All aspects of Indian life blessed with his enlivening touch. Although critics would attack him on many issues like the setback in China policy, issue of Tibet imbroglio in Kashmir, the policy of non-alignment, issues and developments that led to the Partition, failure of public sector in contributing to socio-economic development, we could on the other side point out that, undoubtedly, Jawaharlal Nehru would remain a towering personality in modern Indian landscape.

Nevertheless, one could not ignore the role and major contributions of the Nehru towards building modern Indian state. It had contributed significantly in improving the levels of health, education, food, housing, employment etc. The Chinese invasion in 1962 came as a great blow to him and probably hastened his death. In 1964, this great leader of modern India, Jawaharlal Nehru suffered a stroke and a heart attack. On 27 May 1964, Nehru passed away. Nehru was cremated at the Shantivana on the banks of the Yamuna River, Delhi.

It is true that Nehru failed on certain areas, aspects and policies. But he played a phenomenal role in providing a strong socioeconomic foundation to India's growth and development. He was a statesman, institution-builder, secularist, pacifist, democrat with scientific and humanist values and temperament. As a true democrat he appreciated dissent and yielded to his critics' point of view. He was responsible for taking India to the pride of place among the nations of the world. Being a believer of Mahatma Gandhi, peace and moral values prevailed on him tremendously. His own vision and instinct, besides the international exposure he received, influenced his perspectives considerably. Modern India owes a great to this unique nation-builder of the 20th century.

### **GANDHI-NEHRU TRADITION AND INDIAN SECULARISM**

Among the developing countries, India is distinguished by its proclaimed commitment to secularism as the guiding principle of state policy and action. The conception of Indian secularism is not just an intellectual abstraction; it is not a product only of logical constructions and academic debates. It acquired flesh and blood, a moral depth and intensity through the martyrdom of the foremost leader of India's freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi, and through the death-defying courage of Jawaharlal Nehru in the pursuit of the secular ideal. Further, the sacrifice of countless unknown Indians who stood up for secular nationhood at critical moments

in India's national evolution has qualitatively transformed Indian secularism from an intellectual abstraction into a powerful moral force.

Secularism was no doubt the intellectual child of the West. From a broad historical perspective, the modern secular ideal and conception originated in the West and crystallised as a world-view under the impetus provided by three major forces of the modern age—Religious Reformation, Industrialisation and the Democratic Revolution. Even though certain cultural ingredients of secularism lie deep in certain aspects of Indian historical tradition, India's introduction to the ideal of modern secularism was the result of the Western impact. At the same time the Western impact, which was conducive to the secular idea, has to be distinguished from the colonial impact, which created formidable impediments on the path of transition to a secular state and society. The Colonial State was far from being a secular state. Specially in the post-1857 Rebellion period, "the British abandoned their role as social reformers" (Daniel Thorner 1980:25) As a part of its new policy of divide and rule, it had mastered the art of exploiting one religion against another.

Further, it did not consistently and vigorously pursue a policy of secularising Indian education and culture. Besides, the identification of colonial rule with India's backward-looking classes and social strata converted colonialism into a formidable constraint on the processes of secularisation of Indian society. The most important constraint created by colonial rule was in the perpetuation of "a static economy in progress", in the stagnation of productive forces and in the emergence of a social and economic pattern neither traditional nor modern, which provided the soil for the growth of the forces of social obscurantism and anti-secularism. (Daniel Thorner 1980: 25-26)

The promoter of the secular idea in India was thus not the colonial power-elite; the pioneers of the secular ideal were the anti-colonial sections of the Indian elite, which derived inspiration from modern Western thought and specially from the English industrial and French political revolutions. The secularisation process also received stimulus from the Indian religious reformation pioneered by Swami Vivekananda, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and many others. Further, the secular idea gathered momentum from the historical compulsions and necessities of India's struggle against colonialism and from her striving to evolve a unified national identity out of its multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual diversities.

Indian nationalism from its very inception faced the challenge of evolving a set of normative principles defining clearly, among other things, the relation between religion and politics and between religion and the nation-state suited to a multi-religious country with Hindus in a majority and Muslims, Christians and others being significant minorities. In other words, leaders of Indian nationalism had to clarify whether the Indian nation-state will be based on predominance of the religion of the majority community or will be based on clear dissociation and demarcation of the state from religion—on secularism.

Hindustan belongs to all those who are born and bred here and who have no other country to look to. Therefore, it belongs to Parsis, Beni Israelis, to Indian Christians, Muslims and other non-Hindus as much as to Hindus. Free India will be no Hindu raj, it will be Indian raj based not on the majority of any religious sect or community, but on the representatives of the whole people without distinction of religion. I can conceive of a mixed majority putting the Hindus in a minority. They would be elected for their record of service and merits. Religion is a personal matter, which should have no place in politics. (M.K. Gandhi, 1947: 277-278)

The logical sequel to this premise of denial of religion as the basis of the modern polity or modern State leads Gandhi to question Quaide-i-Azam Jinnah's affirmation of religion as the basis of nationhood. In a well-known statement quoted by Gandhi, Quaide-i-Azam had presented the following thesis:

In other words, Gandhi's basic approach to secularism in India was derived not only from abstract principles and ideals; his insight into the processes of secularisation was derived from his empirical view or insight into the complexity of the Indian social structure. Gandhi had a dynamic and not a static view of the Indian social structure. He recognised from the point of view of reconstruction of the Indian polity not the primacy of the religious divisions but the existence of multi-religious, regional economics, societies and cultures in a country of sub-continental dimensions like India. Again in Gandhi's view "the division between classes and masses" is more basic than the division between Hindus and Musslamans. Gandhi's Ramrajya is an idealized expression of a society free from "the division between the classes and the masses", it was a peasants' Utopia and not a Hindu Raj.

Much more important is Nehru's whole-hearted and clear-headed acceptance of the "spiritual and moral legacy" of the saints and sages of India, which have contributed "moral standards" and the "spiritual element" to Indian life. It is this tradition of the saints and sages, which is a source of "fundamental reality", which has given the Indian people "a moral foundation and certain moral concepts which hold together our ideals and our life in general", (Jawaharlal Nehru 1965: 530-536) In Nehru's view it will be a poor concept of secularism, which does not encompass but excludes this rich tradition in the name of breaking away from religiosity.

The concept of secularism as defined above by Gandhi and Nehru constitutes the bedrock of Indian nationalism. It evolved in and through the national struggle for political independence and it was ultimately incorporated and embodied in the Constitution of the sovereign republic of India. The upholding of secularism then became the constitutional obligation of the Indian nation-state. It is clear that Indian secularism grew not in the process of direct encounter and clash with religion as in the West. Secularism in India grew as an integrative concept, transcending religions on the one hand and tapping the unifying forces promoted by the secularisation process within the religions of India themselves on the other. Indian secularism is the fruit jointly of Religious Reformation and Modern Enlightenment in the Indian context. The thoughts of Gandhi provide a bridge between these two major thought-streams in modern India.

One of the major connecting links between these two epoch-making thought currents is the idea of social equality. Indeed, Indian secularism acts as a bridge between religions in a multi-religious country via the secular concept of equality.

In other words, the concept of secularism, if it is to serve as an instrument of national integration, must not be treated as a static concept emphasising only the practice of religious tolerance within the framework of social and economic status quo. It must become a dynamic concept, embracing the idea of actively promoting social and political change in the direction of eliminating inequality. Moreover, according to Nehru, the fight against inequality is clearly tied up with the fight against economic backwardness and underdevelopment. Secularism and economic backwardness do not go together. Nehru thus evolved a design of promoting secularism through social transformation (eradicating inequality) and development (eradicating backwardness).

Again, Nehru carries forward Gandhi's concept of the primacy of the division between "classes and masses" over the division into religious communities. Nehru's interpretation of the socio-economic basis of secularism and the socio-economic roots of communalism finds a crystallised expression in his critique of middle class constraints of Indian nationalism. His view that anti-secularism derives strength from the reluctance of the leadership to broaden the socio-economic or mass base of Indian nationalism is a major sociological or politico-economic insight into the phenomenon of secularism. The basic question posed by Nehru was: "For the freedom of which class or classes are we especially striving"? (Jawaharlal Nehru 1965: 308).

The important point to note is that this national debate and dialogue must not exclude elements which are rooted in religious approach and which derive their inspiration from the religious worldview. In fact, the national debate and dialogue will assume a wide national character and sweep only if it encompasses elements belonging to all the religions of India.

It must further be noted that the secularisation process has evolved in India not only in the form of intellectual encounter of the secular forces with and against religion, but as a fight within religion itself, specially against certain obscurantist and retrogressive features of religion. V.S. Naravane's *A Philosophical Survey of Modern Indian Thought* (1964) sums up this aspect of recent Indian cultural history in the following words.

Without the powerful support of the religious reformers of all religions, the secular forces of the nation-state and of the modern intelligentsia cannot reach the vast masses of India for whom religion, interpreted in the widest meaning of the term, provides not only a philosophy of life but also the categories of understanding and communication. So far as the vast masses are concerned, the secular message must acquire intelligible Indian form in terms of Indian images, symbols and meaning patterns. Some of the basic failures of contemporary Indian secularism arise from the lack of rootedness in the Indian cultural traditions which, to a large extent, still mean the Indian religious traditions. To ignore that Indian religions and the Indian cultural traditions are closely intertwined is to ignore basic historical and sociological facts and processes.



From this perspective, the religious world-view must not be treated as intellectually obsolete and practically irrelevant and retrogressive. The possibilities of creative re-interpretation, adaptation and renewal within religion must be explored so as to promote compatibility and complementarity between religious conceptions and prescriptions on the one hand and progressive social and political action on the other. Just because religion has become obsolete for the modern educated class or a part of it, it must not be assumed that religion has become obsolete for the vast masses.

India has still to accomplish its socio-economic transition from the predominantly agrarian stage and here the non-literate rural and urban masses outside the modern sector still constitute the major social force. In such a social milieu, the religious world-view is still a living force, encompassing not only obsolete beliefs and superstitious mental orientations, but also values and morality, myths and legends, images and symbols and, above all, categories of understanding and modes of cognition and communication. In this social and cultural context the battle against false religiosity and superstition and against the alliance between vested interests and religious obscurantism should not be equated with the battle against the entire religious tradition.

Religion as a whole is much deeper and wider than the part which is tapped by the fanatics and the fundamentalists. The absence of a conscious and well-thought-out approach towards religion has resulted in accretion of tremendous strength to negative tendencies in the religious sphere (for instance, to obscurantism, fatalism, hostility between religious groups, political and economic exploitation of religious loyalties and sentiments, accumulation of privilege and property by religious institutions and their exploitation for socially retrogressive purposes etc.). The neglect of the religious question has also meant tolerating decline and decay of the positive concepts and constructive forces within religion, which gave primacy to values and morality, to compassion and humanism, to cooperation and service and which acted as a powerful check on individualism and acquisitiveness.

Within the religious tradition are still locked up deep reserves of idealism and social energy capable of being directed to collective good which, if tapped, can be powerful forces for promoting national integration and egalitarian development. Any conception of secularism which is ignorant of the positive potentialities of the religious-cultural heritage and which is disinclined to tap it for realising the basic values and motivations underlying the modern secular idea requires serious reconsideration and fundamental reformulation.

To highlight the positive potentialities of religious reforms is not to underestimate the great dangers from religious superstition, obscurantism and fundamentalism at the present moment. This means an unrelenting fight against these religious deformations in thought and practice, which disorient the consciousness of the people, which impede the realisation of the secular ideal, which thwart the pursuit of national self-reliance and of a just society. The history of the freedom movement shows religious obscurantism to be a force of internal acts of subversion. It has been the principal vehicle of colonialist and neo-colonialist forces of external subversion. We

must also not ignore that religion has been and is being exploited by vested interests for promoting false consciousness, for thwarting reforms and for preventing the unification and organisation of the toiling poor.

The most effective way of preventing this alliance of religious fanatics and vested interests from spreading their influence among the poor and the underprivileged is to accelerate the process of mass-oriented development and the implementation of urgent social reforms. The cause of secularism has suffered the most by the failure to effectively involve the masses in the processes of development and social reforms and to take the message of literacy, education and science to every home and every member among the deprived and the underprivileged.

Past and present history tells us that the cause of secularism has suffered serious reverses whenever the modern forces have adopted a strategy of direct attack on religious conceptions, institutions and authorities. In contrast, the strategy of indirect encounter with forces of religious obscurantism through persuasive mass education, active promotion of social change and acceleration of development processes has paid very rich dividends by eroding the social and economic base of these anti-secular forces. It must be noted that the soil for the growth of those forces is provided by ignorance and backwardness on the one hand and inequality and exploitation on the other. The more effective the strategy in overcoming economic backwardness on the one hand and ignorance and exploitation on the other, the greater the successes in meeting the challenge of the anti-secular forces.

In other words, development processes which promote not enlightenment but ignorance and superstition, not equality but inequality, not justice but exploitation, are the best allies of the forces of religious obscurantism and fanaticism. In many developing countries, class-biased development policies adversely affecting the masses have helped not the growth of secularism but anti-secularism. Secularism, development and social justice are thus indivisible.

Much insight is provided on the question of a right attitude to religion in the fight for secularism by the Marxist approach which is uncompromising in its characterisation of “religion (that is organised religion) as the opium of the people”, which is eloquent and articulate in its affirmation of atheism and expression of hostility to religious fundamentalism. At the same time, Marxism has directed its attention towards undermining the socio-economic basis of religious obscurantism and opposed all concepts of “a war on religion—on religious beliefs, symbols, institutions and authorities” as infantile and anarchistic.

In a major policy pronouncement on “The Attitude of the Workers Party to Religion” (1909) Lenin wrote as follows:

Religion is the opium of the people—this dictum is the cornerstone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion. Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches and each and every religious organisations as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class.

At the same time, Engels frequently condemned the efforts of people who desired to be “more Left” or more revolutionary to introduce, into the programme of the workers’ party, an explicit proclamation of atheism, in the sense of declaring war on religion. Engels called such vociferous proclamation of war on religion as a piece of stupidity and stated that such a declaration of war was the best way to revive interest in religion.... (V.I. Lenin 1977: 403)

Lenin further clarified the Marxist understanding of the social roots of religion as follows:

Marxism is materialism. We must combat all religion—that is the ABC of all materialism but Marxism goes further. It says: We must know how to combat religion and in order to do so, we must explain the source of faith and religion among the masses in a materialist way. (We must ask the question:) Why does religion retain its hold on the backward sections of the town proletariat, on broad sections of the semi-proletariat, and on the mass of the peasantry? Because of the ignorance of the people, replies the bourgeois progressivist... The Marxist says that is not true. It does not explain the roots of religion profoundly enough... In modern capitalist countries, these roots are mainly social. The deepest root of religion today is the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their complete helplessness in face of blind forces of capitalism... ‘Fear made the gods.’ Fear of the blind force of capital is the root of modern religion... No educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of the masses who are crushed by hard capitalist, hard labour until these masses themselves learn to fight this root of religion.

▪ (V.I. Lenin 1977: 405-406)

Lenin’s insight into the social roots of religion, into the link between inhuman capitalism as the soil for growth of heightened religiosity, is fully confirmed by the historian, Eric J. Hobsbawm, who shows how in England and France during the age of transition to capitalism, there was a return to “militant, literal, old-fashioned religion”. Explaining this “religious revival”, Hobsbawm observes:

For the masses it was in the main a method of coping with the increasingly bleak and inhuman oppressive society of middle class liberalism. In Marx’s phrase (but he was not the only one to use these words) it was ‘the heart of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions... the opium of the people.’ More than this: it attempted to create social and sometimes educational and political institutions in an environment which provided none and among politically undeveloped people, it gave primitive expression to their discontents and aspiration. Its literalism, emotionalism and superstition protested both against the entire society in which rational calculation dominated and against the upper classes who deformed religion in their own image.

▪ (E.J. Hobsbawm 1979: 279-280)

To the extent our development patterns reproduce some of the oppressive conditions and features depicted above, they have the potentiality to promote (and, indeed, are already promoting)

revivalism and obscurantism. The latter cannot be resisted without altering the oppressive economic patterns and condition which provide a favourable soil for the growth of these anti-secular forces.

And finally, it is in the proximate realm of politics, that is, in the realm of mobilisation of political support or votes in a democracy and in the realm of management of state institutions that the principle of secularism encounters the most formidable obstacles. Political support in a democracy can be mobilised either by appealing to the enlightened self-interest and progressive urges and aspirations of the people or by tapping their primordial instincts and loyalties and their loyalty to retrograde customs and social practices.

Similarly, those in charge of the institutions of state power can either maintain total independence from religious partisanship and pressures and resist being exploited by powerful pressure groups; or they can allow, for acquiring cheap popularity and for other short-term gains and interests, the state apparatus or their position within the state apparatus, to become an instrument of appeasement of vested interests and thus be guilty of sacrificing the long-term interests of the nation and society.

#### **THE PLACE OF ENGLISH IN INDIA BY JAWAHARLAL NEHRU**

Prime Minister Nehru had inaugurated a conference of education ministers where he expressed his views on the language policy of the central government. A section of the press in India criticized his views.

In his inaugural speech Nehru had stressed on the need for a number of persons to learn some foreign languages, English in particular. He said this in connection with various development programmes, the second Five Year Plan and the subsequent Five Year Plans.

He contended that for the success of the plans a high standard of scientific and technical education was needed. Knowledge of at least one foreign language was essential for this purpose. Scientists of other countries know several foreign languages in order to be able to read and understand scientific literature published in various languages.

Nehru clarifies that he had not spoken anything against Hindi. He rather spoke something in its favour. He said that Hindi would be more and more used in education and administration everywhere in India except in those states where regional languages would be used. He added that the medium of instruction would be Hindi or other regional languages. He reiterates that he stressed on learning at least one foreign language adequately.

In the circumstances prevailing English was the foreign language he had in mind, though one could learn other foreign languages, such as, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Chinese. But English was undoubtedly the most widespread foreign language in the world. Two-Thirds of the scientific and technical books in the world were published in English.

Most people in India, Nehru continued, did not understand the full implications of industrialization. They thought that it meant that a number of factories would be coming up. But the most important aspect of industrialization was the proper training of personnel. A vast number of scientists, technologists and engineers of various kinds were needed for rapid and meaningful industrialization. There ought to be an appropriate background for the growth of these technical personas. Moreover, it was not enough to get some engineers and agricultural specialists trained in a few colleges. Such persons are needed in vast numbers and they should be adequately trained.

The future progress of India depended largely on industrialization, and use of sophisticated higher techniques. It usually takes a long time to train a first class scientist or a first class technician. The time needed to train a metallurgist is twice that is needed to setup a steel plant. It takes five times as much time to train a competent atomic scientist as it takes to install an atomic reactor. We have to organize training of the specialists needed for the second and the third Five Year Plan. It could not, Nehru said, be delayed. It had to be addressed urgently.

Without the knowledge of a foreign language high class technical training cannot be given. It was possible and desirable to give elementary scientific and technical training in Hindi or any regional language. Some scientific books could be translated into Hindi and some technical terms could be built up in this language. But this alone was not enough. Books dealing with higher scientific thought could hardly be translated into Indian languages; changes in science and technology are so rapid that books published today become out of date soon. All scientists in India should be up to date in their knowledge by reading scientific journals published in different languages. It is essential for this reason that teaching and learning of English as a second language should be continued in a big way.

English was the easiest language to learn and it was the most important language in the world. Apart from our economic and technological development knowledge of foreign languages was also necessary for our cultural development. This would enable us to keep in touch with different streams of thought in the world and it would also enrich Hindi which would gradually become a vehicle of new thoughts.

There were many people in our country, Nehru said, who were unaware of this world of automation and atomic energy, great changes were taking place in the world and if we did not keep pace with it we would slide downwards. There should be rapid and through development of Hindi and other regional languages. Our languages were continuously burdened with jargon. Therefore rapid thoughtless translations would deprive languages of their spirit and essence.

Mass progress would be possible, Nehru said, through our own languages, not through any foreign language. In British India unfortunately a new caste, the English knowing class, came up as education was limited. It would no longer happen as education was widespread. In future English could not be the medium of instruction. The medium would be Hindi or any regional language. Then only the administration could remain in touch with the masses and uniform

growth would be possible. For the sake of our scientific and technological development we should know English or any foreign language. Secondly for our cultural development we should also know English and/or any other foreign language. Otherwise, we would be culturally isolated.

Hindi should be given every encouragement to develop properly, shorn of jargon, journalize and superficiality, so that it is effectively used for educational and administrative purposes. Secondly, Hindi or any other regional language should be used as the medium of instruction. Thirdly, English should be an obligatory second or third language. All people in India, Nehru continued, could not know English, because it was not possible. But a large number of people should know it for reasons states earlier. They could know it in two ways. One, they could have thorough knowledge of English and two, they could have working knowledge of English for comprehension purposes so that they could read and understand books and periodicals. They need not have the ability to speak it. Scientific terminology should be uniform throughout India. Wherever possible, scientific terms could be in tune with international usage. In many countries, Nehru concluded, learning and teaching of English has been made compulsory in schools because of its importance throughout the world.

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