
Conclusion

CONCLUSION

Asunder though Together: Were they?

The two most important personalities in India in the twentieth century were Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964). One straddled the first half of the history of India up to 1947 like a colossus, while the other dominated a portion of second half up to 1964 (till his death), calling himself a disciple and follower of the former but often challenging and contradicting the former's ideas and ideologies. While Gandhi represented the traditional values, which are immanent in the history of India since time immemorial, Jawaharlal was an embodiment of western thoughts and culture.

Gandhi was a saint, an honest person to the core and profoundly gentle and a dignified personality, but at the same time he was also a practical man of action with full of enthusiasm and determination to pursue his target to its logical conclusion. Nehru was no less either: he was a visionary and a man with strict principle and fierce sense of perseverance and who knew no respite till he saw his goal coming to fruition. In spite of his strong emotional attachment to Gandhi, ¹ Nehru being perennially a youthful romantic used to feel hurt when he did not understand Gandhi's behavior on many counts and on such occasions he even did not hesitate to express his strong worded displeasure. Nehru writes, "...Gandhiji did not encourage others to think; his insistence was only on purity and sacrifice. I felt that I was drifting further and further away from him mentally, in spite of my strong attachment to him."² These were only temporary emotional outbursts far away from reality. "Are we rivals?" Gandhi asked, and he himself

answered, "I cannot think of myself as a rival to Jawaharlal or him to me."³ Gandhi knew Jawaharlal could never be his rival and the latter also knew his limitations. If Gandhi has assessed that he could never afford to lose Nehru, then the latter has also realised the indispensability of the former in India's struggle for freedom.

Nehru enjoyed life to its full, but Gandhi was extremely cautious. Even in his youth Gandhi lived a restricted life being bounded by the oaths he had taken before his mother before leaving for England, Nehru had no such restrictions. Gandhi was deeply religious, whereas Nehru admitted that religion was a woman's affair,⁴ in fact he had no faith either on religion or on any religious practices. Nehru had an appreciation for western life style and culture, Gandhi could never think of breaking away from Indian traditions. Nehru stood for technological advancement and industrialisation, for Gandhi these things were not in tune with India's past, he was in favour of developing traditional trade to cope up with mounting poverty and unemployment. 'Charkha' and 'Khadi' were Gandhi's pets.

Despite differences, like true soldiers, these two men fought shoulder to shoulder with the British valiantly and with undaunted spirit. It is quite strange that never did these two people take their differences to the public, perhaps they knew reaching any information before public means there would be no going back.

Hardly was there twenty years of age difference between them, but they were poles apart in their outlook, if one represented the primitive then the other modern. Born and brought up in different environment with different family background, they were bound to carry on those childhood mental imprints throughout their lives with them. A votary of the Ramayana and the Gita on the one hand and an agnostic

and an admirer of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater on the other could never be expected to be the same in nature and approach. It is really strange : how these two people walked together for almost half a century with so many unressembling characteristics ! But they did go together, it is like a jigsaw puzzle to a historian and a perfect nonplus to the common people.

True, these two people had deep ideological differences but their commitment to a single unwavering goal of India's independence was such a strong bond, which kept them cemented to each other for years on end. Gandhi admitted openly, "No doubt there are differences of opinion between us. They were clearly set forth in the letters we exchanged some years ago. But they do not affect our personal relations in any way whatsoever. We remain the same adherents to the Congress goal, that we have ever been."⁵

Gandhi and Nehru met in 1916 for the first time, but it does not seem this meeting left any impression upon the latter, a young man with a university degree from England. Though Jawaharlal was doing recruiting for the Indian Army, he was practically a political non-entity during this period. However, he had heard about Gandhi's exploits in Natal (South Africa) with 2,300 civil resisters and was impressed by this act,⁶ but Gandhi had yet to try out these methods in India.

Motilal Nehru was a prominent figure in the Congress during and after the war. Jawaharlal was yet to open his account in politics. Motilal and Gandhi differed on many counts, yet Motilal developed an attraction for Gandhi not as a saint but as a man. Writes Nehru, " He was attracted by Gandhiji as a man, and no doubt was a factor which influenced him. Nothing could have made him a close associate of a person he disliked, for he was always strong in his likes and dislikes.

But it was a strange combination – the saint, the stoic, the man of religion, one who went through life rejecting what it offers in the way of sensation and physical pleasure, and one who had been a bit of an epicure, who accepted life and welcomed and enjoyed its many sensations, and cared little for what may come in the hereafter. In the language of psychoanalysis it was a meeting of an introvert with an extrovert. Yet there were common bonds, common interests, which drew the two together and kept up, even when, in later years, their politics diverged, a close friendship between them.”⁷

In a nutshell, Jawaharlal combined in himself the characteristics of both of these men. He was an epicurean like his father but at the same time he was also a dedicated soldier of non – violence non-cooperation movement, but like his father he was not ready to accept anything at its face value, unless he himself was convinced that a particular thing was best in country’s interests.

When the Government expressed its determination to pass the Rowlett Act in spite of Gandhi’s strong objection, Gandhi declared ‘Satyagraha’ against it and formed a Satyagraha Committee. Jawaharlal joined this Committee. Motilal and C.R. Das characterised it as a lawless law because once passed, the Act would have empowered the police to arrest any person and punish him without producing him in the court of law merely by declaring him a revolutionary.

When being asked how he would oppose this law, Gandhi said, once the Bills became law, he and the people would resist it by resorting to Satyagraha. Jawaharlal’s reaction to this proposal was in affirmative. “When I first read about this proposal in the newspapers my reaction was one of tremendous relief. Here at last was a way out of

the tangle, a method of action, which was straight and open and possibly effective. I was afire with enthusiasm and wanted to join the Satyagraha Sabha immediately.”⁸

Nehru had a high admiration for non-violent and non-co-operation movement of Gandhiji but he did not express his absolute allegiance to the doctrine of non-violence nor was he ready to accept it forever but he accepted it as a right policy for India in the backdrop of India’s background and tradition. He writes, “What I admired was the moral and ethical side of our movement and of satyagraha. I did not give an absolute allegiance to the doctrine of non-violence or accept it forever, but it attracted me more and more and the belief grew upon me that, situated as we were in India and with our background and tradition, it was the right policy for us. The spiritualisation of politics, using the word not in its narrow religious sense, seemed to me a fine idea. A worthy end should have worthy means leading upto it. That seemed not only a good ethical doctrine but sound, practical politics, for the means that are not good often defeat the end in view and raise new problems and difficulties.”⁹

This was an indication that Jawaharlal was gradually drifting towards Gandhi’s non-violence and non-co-operation movement headlong.

Jawaharlal took an active part in 1921 and 1922 movement with tremendous enthusiasm but when Gandhi suddenly called off the programme of civil disobedience on the ground that the movement had turned violent, Jawaharlal felt totally crestfallen. He writes that his mounting hopes tumbled to the ground with the sudden suspension of the movement.¹⁰ It suddenly dawned upon Nehru that this type of abrupt suspension usually disappoints the people and fuses their zeal,

which is not desirable in the greater interest of freedom movement. Nehru writes, "...but for us and for National Congress as a whole, the non-violent method was not, and could not be, a religion or an unchallengeable creed or dogma. It could only be a policy and the method promising certain results, and by those results it would have to be finally judged."¹¹

Gandhi could not afford to dissatisfy Jawaharlal on any count. He realised that the sudden suspension of civil disobedience movement was not taken lightly, either by the Congressmen or by his disciple Jawaharlal. He ammended his standpoint sometime in 1930. Nehru writes, "He (Gandhi) stated that the movement should not be abandoned because of the occurrence of sporadic acts of violence... For him the method, being the right method, should suit all circumstances and should be able to function, at any rate in a restricted way, even in a hostile atmosphere."¹²

Nehru questions himself whether this interpretation given by Gandhi was an indication of an evolution of Gandhi's mind or something else.¹³

Nehru's visit to the Brussels Congress of Oppressed Nationalities and then to the Soviet Union prompted him to draw up a clear-cut goal for the Indian politicians. On his persuasion the Madras Congress passed resolutions in favour of 'complete independence', which did not find favour with Gandhi. Ultimately Nehru had to fall in line with Gandhi's compromise formula of Dominion Status provided the British Government conceded it to the Indians before the end of 1929. Nehru never dared to break away from Gandhi, though sometime or other his hasty acts attracted Gandhi's ire. Whenever Nehru felt that he was going too fast, he immediately retracted. For this

reason he did not come out in support of Subhas Bose's radical views, though he had fascination for them. Subhas Bose wanted to toe an independent line of action away from Gandhi's strategy, but unlike Subhas Nehru wanted to restrict his movement within the ambit of the Gandhian strategy. It was very much known to Nehru that Gandhi's leadership was indispensable for India's independence movement.

On Gandhi's dominating position, Nehru writes, "In trying to analyse the various elements in the Congress, the dominating position of Gandhiji must always be remembered. He dominates to some extent the Congress but far more so he dominates the masses. He does not easily fall in any group and is much bigger than the so-called Gandhian group. Sometimes he is the single-minded revolutionary going like the arrow to his goal and shaking up millions in the process.

"The commanding position he has in the country has nothing to do with any office, and he will retain that dominating place in the hearts of the people so long as he lives, and afterwards."¹⁴

Though on many occasions Nehru could not compromise with Gandhi's views, the former had absolute faith in the latter's ability to organise the masses in the liberation movement. "You know how intensely I have admired you and believed in you as a leader who can lead this country to victory and freedom."¹⁵ Gandhi too knew it would be only Nehru who would speak his language when he would be gone. In fact, Gandhi was on the look out of a young leader who would represent the youths of India, and in Nehru he found this faculty embedded.

Gandhi and Nehru were neither political opponents nor antagonists, their differences were simply ideological and nothing

more. Nehru once asked Gandhi, "Am I not your child in politics, though perhaps a truant and errant child?"

What was the strongest issue between these two people, which kept them together beside other things? This is the frequently asked question. That indissoluble issue was their commitment to the poor people of India, i.e., 'daridranarayan'. Gandhi's concern for the poor people led him to issue a warning to the capitalist class in India as early as 1928. He said that unless these people "help to avert that tragedy by becoming trustees of the welfare of the masses, and by devoting their talents not to amassing wealth for themselves but to the services of masses in an altruistic spirit, they will end either by destroying the masses or being destroyed by them."¹⁶ Gandhi hoped, as trustees the capitalists and the landlords would use the bulk of their earnings not for themselves, but as a trust for the benefit of the society. He wanted the capitalist class to revise their notions of God-given right of all they possess and turn the villages into abodes of peace, health and comfort. "There is no other choice than between voluntary surrender on the part of the capitalist of superfluities and consequent acquisition of the real happiness of all on the one hand, and on the other the impending chaos into which, if the capitalist does not wake up in time, awakened but ignorant, famishing millions will plunge the country and which not even the armed force that a powerful Government can bring into play can avert."¹⁷ For Gandhi, trusteeship seemed to be the best antidote to uplift the exploited, the oppressed and the down-trodden. However, his entire concept of trusteeship was based on his basic philosophy of truth and non-violence. Besides trusteeship, Gandhi also advocated in favour of wearing khadi to uplift the general condition of the poor people. To quote him, "You need clothes. If you wear khadi worth one rupee, 13 annas will be paid out of

that to the poor people. But if you were to buy foreign cloth that money would go out of the country. The poverty witnessed in this country is not to be found elsewhere in the world, and if you wish to remove it, you should wear khadi."¹⁸

Nehru's objective was the same to remove the poverty, but his approach to the problem was different. To quote Nehru, "You have advocated very eloquently and forcefully the claims of Daridranarayana – the poor in India. I do believe that the remedy you have suggested is very helpful to them and if adopted by them in large numbers will relieve to some extent their misery. But I doubt very much if the fundamental causes of poverty are touched by it. You do not say a word against the semi-feudal zamindari system which prevails in a great part of India or against the capitalist exploitation of both the workers and the consumers."¹⁹ Therefore, Nehru espoused planned system of development and rapid industrialisation for India. But he knew industrialisation would bring in its train capitalism and exploitation. He wanted to put a check to this trend by giving stress on developing public enterprises. Though Nehru claimed that he was a socialist, he did not opt for public enterprises straight away since his was democratic socialism. Consequently, he pleaded for gradual introduction of public enterprises side by side with private enterprises.

Sometimes Gandhi seemed amazingly back ward because he stressed on reduction in wants and simplicity of habits. In fact, these were high ideals and difficult to be implemented. In economics development is need-based. The more the need, the more the production and the more the production means the more the power to consume because with increase in production the power of people to purchase consumer items goes up manifold. Prosperity comes with development because more money flows into the market with a

simultaneous increase in power to purchase. Gandhi missed out this point of economic development, when he talked in terms of removal of poverty. Poverty cannot be reduced by simply asking, the people to reduce their wants. It is not that easy. Nor could we expect to develop the economy by adopting primitive technologies such as charkha and producing khadi. Nehru was very well aware of the fault in the Gandhian concept of economic development. For a hungry man God has no meaning, his first concern is food. Similarly truth and non-violence may not carry any meaning for a starving villager, he too wants food. Gandhi was an idealist, but Nehru was a realist. Nehru analysed every aspect of proposed solution on the anvil of its practicability.

However, Nehru himself justifies the Gandhian ideology and standpoint, "He was a unique personality, and it was impossible to judge him by the usual standards, or even to apply the ordinary canons of logic to him. But because he was a revolutionary at bottom and was pledged to political independence for India, he was bound to play an uncompromising role till that independence was achieved. And in this very process he would release tremendous mass energies and would himself, I half hoped, advance step by step towards the social goal."²⁰

Gandhi was a seer, who could look into the future. He was an idealist, but his ideals were never shallow in nature. He developed his ideals after much contemplation and in the context of its usefulness in future. Nehru could not wait for long for the result, however Gandhi could wait, he was never in a hurry. It is wrong to think Gandhi was against the development of science and technology or against the use of mechanised power to increase production, he was, in actuality, against the craze for machinery and against the labour-saving machinery. He feared if men go on saving labour then thousands would

be without work and thrown on open streets to die of starvation. His supreme consideration was man. He did not want the machine should make atrophied the limbs of man. Therefore, Gandhi was not a ruralist who advocated unconditional return to village. He wrote.

“...I believe that some key industries are necessary”, but like Nehru he favoured state-ownership, “where a large number of people have to work together. The ownership of the products of their labour, whether skilled or unskilled, will vest in them through the State... I would not dispossess moneyed men by force but would invite their co-operation in the process of conversion to State ownership. There are no pariahs of society, whether they are millionaires or paupers.”²¹

Both of them loved humanity., though they differed in their approaches. The delicate string which pulled them together and made their bondage unbreakable was their concern for their poor, semi-starved and half naked countrymen.

Nehru was against casteism and religious prejudice because they were counter-productive and retrogressive to his vision of modernisation, industrialisation and socialism. Gandhi was also against caste-related differences and stood for equality but he wanted to develop every village as a self-sufficient unit. Perhaps Gandhi was wrong on this count. It is difficult to make a village as self-sufficient, because there is hundred and one article, the need of which will be difficult for a village to arrange on its own. Nehru had analysed this fact in depth, therefore he favoured industrialisation. He explains, “It is essential to have heavy industry even for preserving your freedom and independence. It might be said that no country is thoroughly and fully independent today which has to rely on another country for various essential articles, whether for defence or other matters.”²²

To sum up, Gandhi and Nehru were antithetical to each other in the field of economics, science and technology, education and health, and political organisation. "Gandhi did not believe in technological determinism. He was against want-driven technologies and disapproved self-alienating modern modes of production. He stood for production by the masses and not for the masses. He was against massive mechanisation. Moreover, he pleaded for decentralisation rather than centralisation. He favoured popular participation rather than representative political system."²³

The relation between Gandhi and Nehru was more emotional or sentimental rather than either intellectual or ideological. Intellectually and ideologically they professed divergent opinions, it was a fact, but Nehru was always a dear child of Gandhi. Ignoring the claim of every other equally able contemporary Congress leader, Gandhi's choice rested on Nehru. It was known to Gandhi Nehru was going too fast bypassing the former, but still Gandhi thought Nehru would be his true successor and would follow the path shown by him. Was it not a wild hope of Gandhi? Without deep sentimental pull or attachment none would speak in such a language, when one knew the other was defying him in one or the other occasion. Indeed, Nehru was the truant child of Gandhi. Jawaharlal was no less behind in expressing his gratitude to the Mahatma, "Great as this man of God was in his life, he has been greater in his death and I have not the shadow of doubt that by his death he has served the great cause as he served it throughout his life. We mourn him: we shall always mourn him because we are human and cannot forget our beloved Master."²⁴

The sentimental relation between the master and the disciple is unparalleled and the affection that bound these two men is equally

unprecedented. Their attachment to each other was mutual no less no more on either side.

“Oh, the comfort — the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words, but pouring them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together; knowing that a faithful hand will take them — keep what is worth — keeping — and with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.” (From ‘Friendship’ Anonymous).

Notes & Reference

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5. Jawaharlal Nehru – A Biography, Frank Moraes, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1956, P. 259.
6. An Autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru, op. cit., p. 35.
7. Ibid. p. 65.
8. Ibid, p. 41.
9. Ibid. p. 73.
10. Ibid. p. 82.
11. Ibid. p. 84.
12. Ibid. p. 85.
13. Ibid. p. 85.
14. From Jawaharlal Nehru's essay in 'Unity of India', February 1939.
15. From a letter of Jawaharlal Nehru to Gandhi, 11.1.1928.
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17. Young India, 5.12.1929.
18. From Gandhi's Speech at the Banaras Hindu University, 25.9.1929, occurs in the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1970, Vol. 41, p. 463.
19. From Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Gandhi, 11.1.1928.
20. An Autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru, op. cit., p. 365.
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24. Statement by Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly, 2.2.1948.