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# **Chapter-I**

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## **CHAPTER – I**

### **Introduction**

Gandhi, while describing his differences with Nehru to Durga Das, once remarked, "Jawahar wants Englishmen to go but Angreziat (English ways and culture) to stay, I want Angreziat to go and Englishmen to stay as our friends."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a question has always stirred the minds of all and sundry : whether Nehru being one of the closest among the followers of Gandhi pursued the course showed by the Mahatma or shaped his own path independently?

Amongst those who made history in modern India, Jawaharlal Nehru stood in a class by himself as a political force as well as a personality. As a political force he defied assessment, as a personality he challenged analysis. In India, his personality glowed next to none save Gandhi and then outside India, his reputation far exceeded that of Gandhi. Unlike that of most other contemporary Congress leaders, his popularity was not confined to his own province but he was a favourite of all and gathered admiration of multitudes wherever he went. If on the one hand, he impressed the intellectuals with his writings, and then on the other he intoxicated the crowd with his heart-stirring gift of the gab. All classes of people, the poor as well as the rich, pinned their hopes on him that he would fulfill their aspiration – even the revolutionaries, who wanted to achieve the goal of independence pursuing a different path, would highly applaud his fiery eloquence. Even to the ladies of the then fashionable society, he was an object of adoration because of his handsome appearance as well as his cultured conversation.

This was Nehru, a genius par excellence, but a genius like him could never be expected to pursue a path paved by another man. Nehru's pride of intellect could not permit him to speak another man's language. His mental make-up could never allow him to be shadow of someone else howsoever respectful he may be. In clear term Nehru advocated no blindfold pursuance of Gandhi's objectives. He encouraged honest criticism and public discussion of all problems as far as possible. But Nehru accepted that Gandhi's dominating position to some extent prevented such discussion because there was always a tendency to rely on him and to leave the decision on Gandhi, Nehru considered such tendency as wrong because, in his opinion, the nation could only advance by reasoned acceptance of objectives and methods, and a cooperation and discipline based on them and not on blind obedience of Gandhi. In his opinion, no one, however, great he might be, should be above criticism.

Like his other contemporaries, Nehru would also have been forgotten or simply relegated to an insignificant place in history but for his these distinctive qualities.

But the trouble lies there, when Nehru repeatedly harped that he obeyed Gandhi's mandate and would continue to lead India along the way Gandhi led her but all the while he framed his course differently.

It was Gandhi's intention to rid India of the Western culture, which he considered an imposition on the country. But, surprisingly, Nehru thoughtfully kept himself aloof from this thought of the Mahatma. In fact, he was an Indian in garb but in his heart's sanctum always appreciated English culture. When Nehru's 'Autobiography' was published, an English newspaper "The Statesman", published from Calcutta, complimented it as the writing of an Englishman. Gandhi, too,

had complimented Nehru, more or less, in a similar way. Although Gandhi knew that Jawaharlal was implacably opposed to imperialism in any shape or form, he still accepted that he was a friend of the English people. Even Gandhi commented that the latter was more English than Indian in his thought and make up.

The Mahatma was always conscious of his differences with Nehru, in spite of that he could not give up his fond conviction which he pinned on Nehru. Even he made a prediction that when he was gone, Nehru would shed his differences, which he often declared he had with the Mahatma.

Gandhi and Nehru were brought up in different environments with completely dissimilar approach towards life. Gandhi's father was a man with no education save that of experience. He had read, at best, up to the fifth Gujrati standard. On the other hand, Motilal Nehru (Jawaharlal's father) was a man with considerable learning and an eminent lawyer of Allahabad High Court. Gandhi's home had an inclination towards puritan living and strict observance of rituals, Nehru's Anand Bhawan echoed with modernity and aristocracy. According to Gandhi, no man could live without religion. However, to Nehru, religion seemed to be only 'a women's affairs'. Even his father Motilal treated the question related to religion humourously and refused to take it seriously. The rituals performed by his mother left little impression upon Nehru's mind. To Gandhi, all this was unthinkable. Gandhi's student life in England was one of restraint bound by the oath he had pledged before his mother. Nehru had no such inhibition. Different situation in which they grew up were bound to have their influence on these two souls differently.

Unlike Gandhi, Nehru was no enigma to the European; moreover there was nothing uncanny about his personality. His was not the mysterious east, which baffled the West. But Gandhi was unpredictable. Although Gandhi's personality could fascinate a European time and again, but he always felt ill at ease in the former's presence. But Nehru's ways were easily decipherable, and his idealism was always familiar to the European. His was the faith considered secular, the values ethical and the thoughts rational. Gandhi was a saint in the garb of a politician; renunciation was part and parcel of his nature. But to Nehru, he had never consciously renounced anything, which he had really valued.

Gandhi openly declared in public that his heart was in the village. He knew there lived in the village men in stark poverty and ignorance – even tilling hard for the entire day it was difficult for them to arrange for two square meals. To him, this was the picture of real India. He consistently told his followers to forget for a moment Swaraj and even also to forget 'haves' whose presence was always oppressive. He insisted upon them to take up the humble village work, which would be necessary even after the goal of Swaraj had been achieved. In fact, for him, if the village work became successful, then it would automatically take India nearer the goal. Even Gandhi shifted from Wardha to Sevagram to commence his village work in accordance to this pledge.

Following the mandate 'go to the villages', Nehru too accepted the Gandhian ideal of village work. While working in the villages Nehru tried his best to be one with the village people like Gandhi, but he miserably failed. What prevented him to reconcile with their ways was his intellectual constitution and aggressive self-consciousness. His love for the village folk prompted him to trust them and to go straight to them. Even he tried to feel at home in the dust and discomfort, the

pushing and jostling of large gatherings and in trudging miles in order to visit distant villages. This way he took to the crowd and the crowd took him, and yet he never lost himself in it. Nehru always wondered, how did he manage to obtain goodwill and confidence from the people, who were so different from him in terms of their habits, desires, and mental and spiritual outlook. This was so because people adored Gandhi, and in Nehru they sought to see the former's image. Nehru was not blind to this fact either. And yet Nehru could not get rid of the idea that their affection was not meant for him as he was but for some fanciful image of him that they had formed.

A continual stream of disagreements existed between them but Gandhi tried to negate them always by declaring in the public that they did not affect their personal relations in any way. Nehru adored and revered Gandhi for his greatness and services to India in spite of differences, and felt himself to be personally indebted to Gandhi on many issues. Politically he used to consider himself entirely Gandhi-made and on the other hand the master also extended his love and blessing on the disciple always. There are plenty of instances of favour and love displayed by Gandhi for Nehru. At the open Congress in Madras though Nehru supported Subhas Bose's amendment to Gandhi's resolution but notwithstanding the difference Gandhi recommended Nehru's name for Congress presidency for the following year and even justified his action by declaring that the battle of the future had to be fought by younger men and women since older men had already completed their innings.

After Nehru's return from Europe in 1936 he had been pushed into the role of leading the Congress, but he was hemmed in on all sides by the vociferous opposition of the rightist members of the working committee for his socialistic views, at times which made him

feel unnerved. Pitted against the opposition Nehru offered to resign and wrote to Gandhi.

Gandhi immediately consoled Nehru that the latter was in the office by virtue of the unanimous choice of working committee and not by any other consideration and hence the whole affair had to be treated simply as a tragic-comedy by him and nothing more.

Once in December 1927, Nehru was in Madras for attending the Congress session. Dr. Ansari was happened to be the president of the session. Here a number of resolutions were passed at the instance of Nehru. Gandhi could not spare time to attend this session. But when he read the resolutions adopted at this session, in which socialistic intonations were prominent, Gandhi immediately wrote a letter to Nehru expressing his displeasure but rather in a subdued tone. Even he went on the record to say that he did not mind these acts of Nehru so much as he minded the latter's encouraging mischief-makers and hooligans.

Gandhi's differences with Nehru sometime in 1928 had reached its bitterest level, which is reflected in Gandhi's letter of 17 January 1928 to Nehru, "The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us."

Immediately after this Gandhi left for Meerut to meet the accused persons of the Meerut case. Here, it seems, Gandhi forgot every grudge against Nehru because later on, it was observed, this Meerut case had become one of the important national issues.

It appears that both Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru had attached high hopes with Salt Satyagraha movement. However, their high hopes were dashed to the ground when the movement ended with Gandhi-

Irwin Pact. Nehru felt extremely depressed and great emptiness as if something precious gone, almost beyond recall:

“This is the way the world ends,

Nothing with a bang, but a whimper.”

Gandhi learnt of this distress of Nehru and went to appease the latter. At Karachi convention of the Congress, Gandhi made his whole-hearted attempt to clear up the proposals framed by Nehru. About the proposal Vallabhbhai Patel had his reservations considering them to be untimely. In fact, in order to get his proposals passed, Nehru had given an ultimatum to Gandhi either to accept this or to face his opposition on the Delhi Pact issue. Gandhi had no option than to accept it as a sop to Nehru, and forwarded it down on a tired subjects committee and Congress on the concluding day.

Nehru made very clear in his ‘Autobiography’ that there were basic differences between Gandhi’s ideals and his socialistic objectives.

Once again in 1936, Nehru was elected to lead the Congress. This was due to the blessing of Gandhi because Sardar Patel was also a contender for this post. In fact, Gandhi had objected to Sardar’s candidature. It was also Patel’s contention that most of the Congressmen did not have faith in the socialistic principles advocated by Nehru. But Gandhi did not agree to this and expressed his full support in favour of Nehru.

It was a fact that in the Congress Working Committee most of the members did not subscribe to socialism and it was also a fact that Nehru was aware of this reality. However, for Nehru socialism was not merely an economic doctrine, which he favoured but it was a vital

creed, which he held with all his head and heart. Even Nehru liked the Congress to become a socialist organization and to join hands with the other forces in the world that were working for the new civilization.

Gandhi had always cherished a special favour for Nehru and which fact was known then to almost all in the Congress. A letter sent from Austria by Subhas Chandra Bose to Nehru before the Lucknow Convention also substantiated this.

".....Your position is unique and I think that even Mahatma Gandhi will be more accommodating towards you than towards anybody else."<sup>2</sup>

In one place Frank Moraes writes, "It was whispered that the gulf between the Mahatma and Nehru was widening, and Gandhi was alleged to have said, 'My life work is being ruined by Jawaharlal's utterances.'<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps Gandhi had come to know about this whisper and thus immediately after he contradicted it in an article 'Are We Rivals' published in 'Harijan'.

Even at the beginning of the Second World War difference in opinion persisted in between Gandhi and Nehru, but in spite of the differences Gandhi never made his feelings public. He wanted to settle the differences mutually. A letter he wrote to Nehru, ~~in which he wrote~~, evidences this, "I see no good in entering into a guerilla warfare when the American and Chinese forces enter India."<sup>4</sup>

The constitution of human mind is very peculiar, and its ways are difficult to comprehend. Thoughts and norms change gradually with the change in circumstances. But in every case realization is important.

Nehru was no exception. His mind too fluctuated in respect of his stand on certain principles, especially 'Ahimsa'.

The history of Congress in the fourth decade of the 20th century is remarkable for gradual conversion of Nehru to the views and practices of Gandhi. Nehru himself used to comment on Gandhi that 'ideologically he was sometimes amazingly backward' and again much that he said seemed to fit in with a medieval Christian saint and not at all with modern psychological experience and method.

The change in him was an enigma, but Nehru himself furnished the answer that though he did not agree with Gandhi's philosophy of life or even with many of his ideals and often he did not understand him, the action proposed by Gandhi was something tangible.

When the Cripps Mission failed, the British government resorted to the coercive measures in order to suppress all opposition. As a sequel to this policy, the Congress AICC office at Allahabad was also raided and certain papers were seized. From these papers one very important point came to the light – that of Nehru's subscription to Gandhi's faith in the matter of non-violence as the only possible defence against any invasion and as only method left to the people.

The subsequent chapters will try to arrive at certain assessment whether Nehru in subsequent years remained the true follower of Gandhi or paved his own path deviating from the Gandhian ideologies.

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## Notes & References :

1. India from Curzon to Nehru and after, Durga Das, Rupa, p. 261.
2. A Bunch of Old Letters, Jawaharlal Nehru, Asia Publishing House, 1958, p.172.
3. Jawaharlal Nehru – A Biography, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1956, p.259.
4. A Bunch of Old Letters, op. cit., p. 480.