

## **Nehruvian Socialism: Public Administration Paradigm and Administrative Responses**

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### **Abstract:**

After independence from the colonial rule, Jawaharlal Nehru, as the first Prime Minister of India, was at the helm of the chores of nation-building and reconstruction in India. He made various administrative innovations during his stewardship with the help of erstwhile ‘global experts’ while being determined to the ‘democratic socialism’ as principal force behind his thought and action.

Answering the question ‘Whither India?’ in October 1933, he wrote: ‘Surely, to the great human goal of social and economic equality, to the ending of all exploitation of a nation by nation and class by class’. In Lucknow Congress in December 1936 he said in unequivocal and passionate words, ‘I am convinced that the only key to the solution of world’s problem and of India’s problems lies in socialism....’ To Nehru, socialism was *panacea* for all sufferings that Indian masses inherited from hundreds of years of colonial exploitation.

India opted for a ‘mixed economy’ and administrative measures; policy regimes and institutional development that followed were to buttress this socialistic pattern. In his quest to establish most responsive and most efficient administrative system-cum-promising social and economic policy regimes, Nehru, on the other hand, invited many non-socialist intellectuals as his interlocutors.

This research paper tries to answer certain questions like: Was Nehru’s faith in socialism as an elixir withered away with his ascension to the highest post in parliamentary democracy? Was Nehru’s Government orienting itself not only towards London but also Washington while undermining socialist principles? Was administrative machinery thus developed on exogenous tenets unable to cater to the needs of indigent population?

Incorporation of British inspired 'steel-framework' in civil services and subsequent consolidation on similar exploitative premises resulted in burgeoning corruption in economy and political system. What kind of socialism was Nehru envisioning with the volume of direct foreign investment rising from Rs. 2176 million in 1948 to Rs. 6185 million in 1964? People living under Below Poverty Line at the turn of the 20th century exceeded the total population of India at the time of independence. How can this be attributed to the administrative innovations undertaken by the Nehru?

**Keywords:** *Nehruvian Socialism, Planning and Public Administration in India, Indian Administration in Nehru era, Nehruvian Socialism and Public Administration.*

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Public Administration is the visible part of the government. And the government in a democracy, like India, works on the philosophy of the Constitution. As far as the Constitution of India is concerned, this document, in general, was an outcome of almost a century long struggle against the British rule and in particular, of the Objective Resolution drafted and moved by Jawaharlal Nehru and adopted by the Constituent Assembly. Later, providence favoured Nehru and he, as the first Prime Minister of independent India, was at the helm of all politico-administrative affairs.

Nehru always visualized free India as 'popular' union of self-governing masses where nothing but *the People* would have the primacy. Speaking to the colleague leaders in Jhansi (October 27, 1928), he said, "Our very method of referring to masses betrays that we think ourselves something apart from the masses. By virtue of our intellects and our material possession we consider ourselves something apart from the masses. It is the way of hypocrisy..." (Gopal, 1972, Vol. 3, p. 257) Speaking to the administrators at the Indian Institute of Public Administration(IIPA) he said, 'India is not me and you. India is the lot whom we presume to treat with contempt and discourtesy. It is therefore very important how we deal with the public (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 17).

As far as the concept of 'socialism' is concerned, it has been variously described and diversely practiced by different persons. From Karl Marx, who initially popularized the idea of socialism, to Albert Einstein, to Bertrand Russell, to Jaiprakash Narayan, to Ram Manohar Lohia and to Bhagat Singh, the term had different connotations. To Albert Einstein (1879-1955), the famous physicist, socialism defined and fixed the social-ethical ends of human development that 'science could not define and instill in human beings' (Einstein, 1949).

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), on the other hand, calls it a tendency rather than a strictly definable body of doctrines that called for democratic and communal (community-based) ownership of land and capital (Russell, 1919). Karl Marx gave the scientific content to the concept of socialism with his thesis of class struggle and rational interpretation of human history. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) had a deep faith in the socialism. Answering the question 'Whither India?' in October 1933, he wrote: 'Surely, to the great human goal of social and economic equality, to the ending of all exploitation of a nation by nation and class by class' (Nehru, 1934, p. 24). In the Lucknow Congress of 1936, he seemed unambiguously and passionately convinced that the only key to the solution of world's problem and of India's problems lied in the socialism (Nehru, 1936). To Nehru, socialism was panacea for all sufferings that Indian masses inherited from hundreds of years of colonial exploitation at the hand of the British.

A lot has been debated on the style of socialism adopted and practiced by Jawaharlal Nehru from time to time, especially before his visit to the Europe in 1927, then after his visit and later after the independence of India with his ascension to the office of the Prime Minister. We are not discussing here in details on how did Nehru's views on socialism evolve with the passage of time? Nevertheless, it can be said that Nehru essentially subscribed to the socialism for he, as Rabindra Chandra Dutt opines, (i) identified the class conflict that existed in the Indian society, (ii) believed in and strived for a change of property relations for (iii) creation of a classless society (Dutt, 1980, pp. 7-11). A champion of civil liberties on one hand and greatly inspired by the Marxism on the other, Nehru believed in *scientific socialism* and rejected to follow slavishly any dogma or any other country's example to suit to India's contemporary outlook (Gopal, 1972, Vol. 06, p. 61). He disapproved the communist methods of violence and force to put in to action the communist principles for which he otherwise had good affinity.

Nehru's socialism was directed towards the betterment and welfare of the Indian masses and he had devised 'planned development' as a strategy to achieve his goals. After achieving the independence from the British rule, when India embarked upon the new journey of planned development through Five Year Plans (FYPs), a great emphasis was laid upon the restructuring of the administration as it was the only agency to implement the plans. Nehru's perseverance for the planned development was not instantaneous with the achievement of independence, rather it was a realization of what had been sought since 1938 with the

inception of National Planning Committee set up by the Indian National Congress (INC) under the president ship of Subhash Chandra Bose. Nehru was the chairman of the committee and there were twenty-nine sub-committees. Sub-committees submitted reports in 1940, the year Nehru was arrested and later was not allowed to continue planning work in the jail.

Nehru was determined for a 'clean, impartial and efficient administration' (Parthasarathi, Vol. 2, p. 353) by making the public services a model of 'integrity and efficiency, of cooperation and courtesy' (JNS, 1964, Vol. 04, p.11). He questioned the old rules and procedures in the administration that were framed 'some 50 years back...', which were not only 'pre-Independence but pre-many-things' (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 13). Those old rules were not to benefit India in any sense as the spirit with which they were framed was not that of socialism. Thus, administrative machinery needed an overhaul and Nehru seemed very vigilant when he spoke to the administrators and experts at the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), '...it does not fit in with the objective we have and there is a constant conflict between these two. I am not referring to the individual; I am referring to the pattern of the organization right from the recruitment, promotion etc' (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, pp. 13-14).

Nehru had a strong dislike for capitalist system for it was based upon '*competition*' and not on '*cooperation*' as he could find in the socialist system. He, nonetheless, invited many non-socialist intellectuals from the United States of America (USA) like Paul H. Appleby, Albert Meyer etc. It was Paul Appleby who was instrumental in foundation of IIPA, a special institution at New Delhi dedicated to the focused study of administrative dynamics of the newly born democracy.

Moreover, India went for greater collaboration with the private organisations of the USA like Ford Foundation, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Nehru did not believe in ideological compartmentalization of things. He believed in 'administrative realism' when he said, "we shall have to find our own path guided by other people's advice and wisdom but not blindly following any either. (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 15). In his address to the twenty-second annual meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), he made his categorical remarks thus, "...I am not enamoured of these "isms" and my approach is...rather a pragmatic approach in considering the problems of today..." (JNS, 1958, Vol. 01, p.141)

Nehru was not in oblivion with the global developments in the theory and practices of the Public Administration, the discipline that emerged in the USA as an academic enquiry in 1887 with the publication of *The Study of Administration* by Woodrow Wilson. He was very critical of administrative terminologies like neutrality, hierarchy etc. that the global literature on Public Administration was replete with. Nehru held that the concept of civil service neutrality should have no relevance in Indian scenario; for how could public servants afford to be 'neutral' to the popular needs and aspirations of masses! In his address at IIPA, he said, "civil service neutrality is fiction. How a thinking person can be neutral, I have not been able to understand. India stands for socialistic pattern of the society, for which mere head clerk are not required but people with mind and vision are required who must be responsive to the demands of masses" (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, pp. 27-28 ).

As far as relation of public servants with political executive is concerned, they should have *organic* relation with the political executive to serve the popular expectations. For Nehru, hierarchies and excessive file-notings promoted delays in the public administration and delays, in turn, promoted corruption in the administration. He made references to the Appleby Report (1953) that the old rules were not in line with democratic setup of India, they were meant for leisurely times and not for a five-year development plan to be worked out with speed!

Questions may however be raised over the compatibility of the democracy with the bureaucracy, particularly that inherited from the British police state; for the bureaucracy in the Marxian parlance is another form of exploitative instrument of the state. India rechristened Indian Civil Services (ICS) and Indian Police as Indian Administrative Services (IAS) and Indian Police Services (IPS) respectively. Nehru was still doubtful if it could serve the purpose of a *pro-people* democracy? But Patel somehow made it to embark upon the journey with the meagre manpower and diminutive resources available at that time.

After independence, out of about 1200 officers more than 600 moved to the Britain and about 100 migrated to Pakistan. Moreover, there was no personnel recruitment in post-war period for the last two years. With mountains of problems like integration of states coupled with the paucity of manpower and resources, India was on the verge of a huge collapse. Nehru wrote to the Premiers of the Provinces (5<sup>th</sup> May 1948), "one of the great dangers to the Indian states...is the administrative vacuum that has been created since the 15<sup>th</sup> August. So long as

the paramount power was in existence a certain rather low standard of administration was maintained. With the lapse of paramountcy and the unleashing of popular forces, it is of utmost importance to create in the states an administrative apparatus that will deal efficiently and sympathetically with the urgent needs of population”(Parthasarathi, Vol. 1, p. 122). Such were the exigencies of the hour that India started with the existing structure and its piecemeal democratization instead of replacing and restarting it anew.

Apart from this, Nehru was giving his own pragmatic orientation to the terminologies defined so far. “As a matter of fact, in a way”, he said, “all public administration is bureaucracy. The growth of socialism is the growth of bureaucracy” (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 21). While making such out-of-the-box remarks, Nehru had a strong sanction when he emphasized, “instead of summoning the people, and their coming again and again, let the official go and sit in the village and call the village people to give them their share of what government had for them” (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 22). He said, “bureaucracy is essential. It means organized work. There should not be procedural delay (Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 34). Nehru wanted that the malaise of administrative class, differences of official and non-official must be done away with for the stratification in to ‘officials and non-official’ was not correct; while Nehru found it balmy using the terms ‘serviceman’ and ‘non-serviceman’ instead”(Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 31). Here lies the greatness of Nehru, in essence that he let Indians build their faith in new system called ‘democracy’.

In Nehru’s socialistic vision of India, administration was not obviously just doing some odd job, putting a note on the file, etc. It had got to aim at an objective. That is ‘Where are we going to?(Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 36)’ With such a socialistic vision, five year plans were formulated and we see in the very first plan document an entire chapter on “Reforms in Administration”. In the last years of his life, Nehru was asking the administrators and experts of public administration “to learn new techniques because while making very good and well-conceived plans, agencies fumble in execution.(Reddy & Tiwari, 2004, p. 61).

A serious and genuine criticism can be made with regard to the prospects of administrative machinery in independent India and that criticism would not be applicable only to the Nehru, but to the whole leadership of nationalist movement. It may be asked as to why the nationalist leadership did not have any blueprint for an alternative administrative system in place of exploitative British machinery, suiting to both scientific and democratic needs in the *would*

be free India? If there was no such system devised during the struggle days by the nationalist leadership, for what was the struggle being pursued by the Indian leaders during freedom struggle?

The third five year plan which evaluated the outcomes of the first and second plan with regard to land reform initiatives was clear in stating that the lower performance had as one of the reasons the “insufficient attention to the administrative aspect of land reforms” (Planning Commission, Ch. 14). Answer to such question lies in the erstwhile scenario in which real test of Nehru’s socialism was on. From a staunch supporter of socialism in pre-independence period up to his becoming a champion of ‘gradualism’ i.e. gradual fading away of private sector, Nehru was changed in response to dynamics of national and international politics, socio-economic condition of Indian masses and a quest for ‘stable and productive’ India. Regarding a question about changes in his basic ideas and conviction, he replied, “...I suppose they have changed somewhat”(Mende, 1956, p. 33) and subsequently Nehru died with grim conviction, “I could not change the administration, it is still a colonial administration”. (Potter, 1986)

Nehru with such a pro-people orientation allowed the whole exploitative bureaucratic machinery of the British India be incorporated in the free India! This would be a sweeping generalisation if proper attention is not paid to the erstwhile national and international scenario of World Wars, partition of India, post-independence communal clashes, accommodating people from the other side of the border, poverty, diseases, squalor, hunger and so on.

Now at this juncture in 21<sup>st</sup> century, one may decide if Nehru was right at that time? It is now the prerogative of the academia to decide on how to preserve democracy. Nehru said in the Lok Sabha on December 15, 1952, “Of course, you and I cannot lay down what will happen or what the next generation might do. You and I cannot even say what the next generation will be like... For the present, we have to deal with the facts as they are”.

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