

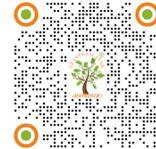
Original Article

## A TRYST WITH MODERNITY: VISION AND MISSION OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU IN NATION BUILDING

Dr. Shobha Karinchan <sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Shalima M. C. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of History, Government Brennen College, Thalassery, Kannur University, Kannur, Kerala, India

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of History, Co-operative Arts and Science College, Madayi, Kannur University, Kannur, Kerala, India



### ABSTRACT

Ever since the attainment of freedom, India is striving hard for the upliftment of the rural masses and there lies the real development of the country. The vision has been aptly conjured by the chief architect of modern India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who left a lasting impression on the socio-economic and political forces and processes in the country. Today, his ideals and goals are still considered the guiding principles for the formulation of the national policy our country, for which he shall be ever remembered.

**Keywords:** Jawaharlal Nehru, Architect of Modern India, Five Year Plan, Non-Alignment Policy

### INTRODUCTION

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), who served as India's first Prime Minister, was instrumental in framing and directing the country's internal and external policies during the years from 1947 to 1964. Born into a prosperous Kashmiri Brahmin family, he received his early education in England before studying law in London and returning to India in 1912. He practiced law for eight years first but gave up for the cause of political movement. The son of prominent congress leader Motilal Nehru, we are told that he imbibed the soul of a yogi whose blessings Motilal received for begetting a son. Akbar (1988) Mentored by Mahatma Gandhi, he quickly rose nationalist politics and became the youngest member of the congress working committee in 1918. He was pampered child surrounded by luxury. One Mubarak Ali, the chief retainer of his household, influenced him by his stories of heroism and tragedy of the years of the revolt. Gopal (1976) He emerged as a protégé of Mahatma Gandhi and entering the first rank in Indian Nationalist politics becoming the youngest member of the working committee of the Indian National Congress in 1918. The close partnership Motilal Nehru and Gandhi earned them the journalistic label of the 'holy Trinity' within the congress. During the first seventeen years after independence, Jawaharlal Nehru embodied series of striking contradictions. He was a sensitive idealist whose almost spiritual concern for the struggling peasantry coexisted with his upbringing as a privileged aristocrat holding strong socialist beliefs. Educated in elite British institutions such as Harrow and Cambridge, he nevertheless spent nearly a decade in British prisons and despite being an agnostic radical, emerged as an unexpected disciple of the deeply spiritual Mahatma Gandhi- thus becoming a reflection of India itself-was India. Tharoor (2012)

Nehru was imprisoned for the first time in 1921 and spent a total of eighteen years in jail. He served as President of the Indian National congress from 1929 to 1931 and later held the position on six different occasions. Although he did not fully endorse Gandhiji's doctrine of passive resistance in 1948, he nevertheless advocated a militant program that supported the use of all necessary measures, including armed resistance, against British rule. In 1946, when the British initiated steps toward transferring

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Dr. Shobha Karinchan (shobhakarinchan@gmail.com), Dr. Shalima M. C. (tanvi825@gmail.com)

Received: 13 January 2026; Accepted: 08 February 2026; Published 14 March 2026

DOI: 10.29121/granthaalayah.v14.i2.2026.6801

Page Number: 86-90

Journal Title: International Journal of Research -GRANTHAALAYAH

Journal Abbreviation: Int. J. Res. Granthaalayah

Online ISSN: 2350-0530, Print ISSN: 2394-3629

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

power, he was invited to head the interim government that oversaw the transition to independence. On the night of August 15, 1947, as British authority formally ended, Jawaharlal Nehru delivered his historic “tryst with Destiny” speech over All India Radio. Prior to his address and the ceremonial hoisting of the national flag, the occasion was marked by an enthralling Shehnai recital by Ustad Bismillah Khan. Despite the inclement weather, Nehru raised the national flag before a vast gathering. All India Radio broadcast a live commentary as the tricolor fluttered proudly in the gentle breeze.

After independence, Nehru became the first Prime Minister of India and continued in office when the nation became a republic in 1950. He remained in that position until his death on May 27, 1964. As Prime Minister, he played a central role in implementing India’s Five Year Plans and promoted a foreign policy based on peaceful coexistence. He regarded the United Nations as an essential platform for fostering global political, economic, and social cooperation. Under his leadership, India assumed a significant role in the Non-Aligned Movement, whose expansion highlights the lasting relevance of non-alignment in a changing global order. The enduring relevance of the doctrine of non-alignment is underscored by the proliferation the non-aligned movement in today’s vastly changed circumstances. [Malhotra \(1987\)](#) Nehru had to face a turbulent home and a hostile abroad. [Mishra \(n.d.\)](#) He had the courage to face this complicated domestic and international situation. [Mishra \(n.d.\)](#)

During the early years of independence, Nehru confronted numerous internal and external challenges. These included the large-scale migration of Hindu refugees from Pakistan, the integration of princely states into the Indian Union, and tensions arising from the linguistic reorganization of states. Nehru’s commitment to parliamentary democracy, combined with his concern for the marginalized and disadvantaged, shaped policies reflecting his socialist orientation. He introduced several legislative reforms aimed at advancing women’s rights and social equality, including raising the minimum age of marriage from twelve to fifteen and granting women rights to divorce and inherit property, while also prohibiting the dowry system.

He was instrumental in building lasting democratic institutions, strengthening an independent and socially responsible judiciary, and ensuring civilian control over the armed forces. His tenure witnessed the expansion of scientific education, the establishment of nuclear and space programs, the development of an extensive railway network, and the growth of pharmaceutical sector. Despite threat of violence, fears of revolution, rising population pressures, unemployment, and economic disparities, Nehru persuaded Parliament to enact laws abolishing absentee landlordism and granting ownership rights to actual cultivators.

To promote rural progress, Nehru launched the Community Development Program aimed at physical reconstruction and economic advancement, along with social transformation. The initiative sought to transform villager’s attitudes, nurture responsible local leadership, encourage self-reliance, raise incomes through improved agricultural practices and village industries, train rural youth for active citizenship, and provide organized support to families to enhance their standard of living. It also aimed to strengthen relationships within villages and promote awareness of health, sanitation, and preventive care to reduce disease and early mortality.

The transformation of Indian village occupied an important place in the economic strategy of Nehru. Nehru exerted a great influence on shaping and implementing the economic policy. His policy was aimed at the consolidation of national independence and revival of the country. The role of Jawaharlal Nehru in choosing the path of economic development was not determined solely by his position as a national leader. It was determined by his profound realization of the crucial importance of the national economy being the foundation and the guarantee of national independence. [Kotovsky \(1980\)](#)

The tribe in India is an isolated group. The essence of tribal culture was maintenance of group solidarity through a process of social co-operation with the help of different institutions of its own. Nehru wanted to protect the interests of the tribal people. He laid down five fundamental principles for tribal development, which are known as Tribal Panchshila.

Nehru wanted democracy to start from grassroots. Masses according to him must participate in the democratic process. The Balwantrai Mehta committee set up in 1957-58, to study community development felt that ‘*Panchatati Raj*’ system would help to promote people’s participation in development. The Balwanthrai committee suggested the creation of a three-tier system of *Panchatati Raj* i.e., Gram Panchayat s(village level), Panchayat Samiti (Block Level), Zilla Parishad (district Level) Members to the latter two higher levels are elected indirectly from tier below and in addition members are drawn from amongst the legislators, co-operate officials and others. Panchayat Raj system initially helped people towards self-development, but later people lost enthusiasm and started depending upon government. Hence the main aim of inspiring people towards self-development was not achieved. He believed that Panchayat Raj system combined with community Development Program will revolutionize the whole system in rural area. The transfer of authority and of developmental work to the Panchayath Samitis is likely to change the whole background in our rural areas and make the people there more self-reliant and conscious of their responsibility.

At the national level Nehru believed in a multi-party parliamentary democracy. A newly independent country chose to move straight into universal adult franchise. In March 1950, Sukumar Sen was appointed as the Chief Election Commissioner, and within a month the Representation of the People Act was enacted by Parliament. The character of the electorate introduced several new practices in India’s electoral process. A notable innovation emerged under the guidance of a former judge who had served as Chief Election Commissioner. To assist illiterate voters in identifying their preferred parties, easily recognizable symbols drawn from everyday life were introduced. To avoid confusion, every polling station was equipped with separate ballot boxes bearing the respective symbols, allowing voters to simply drop their ballots into the correct box. The General Elections legitimized Congress rule and Jawaharlal Nehru’s Prime Ministership of India. [Tharoor \(2012\)](#)

Nehru regarded Parliament as the primary platform for articulating public opinion and regularly participated in Question Hour as well as parliamentary discussions. Nehru gave full play and respect to the opposition parties and was quite responsive to their criticism. Nehru's parliamentary debates, Nehru's parliamentary democracy had produced the best results in the long run as it provided ensuring change with continuity. Nehru was fascinated by Soviet Union's Five Year Plan and tried to implement the same for Indian Economy. The Planning Commission was created on March 15, 1950 with Nehru himself as its chairman. During the first Plan period, abolition of poverty was the important need and hence agriculture was given importance. In the second Plan period, under Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy, planning commission directed investments towards heavy industries, including steel manufacturing and hydroelectric venture, while also supporting the revival of cottage industries. P.C. Mahalanobis (1893-1972) suggested that unless and until a rapid industrialization India could not be economically independent. The second Five Year Plan (1956-61), implemented under Nehru's leadership, aimed to advance a development strategy that would pave the way for the creation of a socialist society in India. Overall, the plan focused on building a welfare state. Whether through the production of advanced defense equipment or the manufacture of everyday consumer goods, industrial establishments expanded throughout the country. This growth was supported by the widening of scientific research and higher education across universities, institutes of technology, and research organizations.

Nehru maintained that industrialization was essential for any society that sought to uphold human dignity. Although he criticized the excesses of modernization and industrial growth for overstressing materialism and undermining non-material values, he emphasized that without a stable material foundation, people would remain confined to hardship and deprivation. [Patil \(1983\)](#) A defining aspect of Nehru's ideological outlook was his commitment to socialism, shaped not only by thinkers such as Harold Laski and Krishna Menon but also by his own engagement with the Russian Revolution. The roots of his socialist belief lay in his interpretation of India's realities. He viewed economic planning as a pathway towards establishing a new social order and believed economics to be as crucial as politics, alongside the broader dimensions of human rights. While Nehru drew inspiration from certain Soviet practices and adopted Planning Commission, his socialism was pragmatic rather than doctrinaire. Deeply influenced by Gandhian thought, he did not align himself blindly with Soviet ideology, even though he admired by many of his contemporaries. National interests always took precedence over ideology for him, which was evident when he demanded that communists renounce external political loyalties during the 1952 elections. He believed himself at liberty to critically assess the claims of all ideological systems that professed to serve society, consistently re-evaluating his views in light of newly acquired experiences and insights. [Meherally \(1945\)](#) Nor was he a skin-deep Soviet. He was critical when they went wrong. He said, "I have the greatest admiration for many of the achievements of the Soviet Union. But is said, and rightly, that there is suppression of individual freedom there unfortunately, communism has become too closely associated with the necessity for violence, and thus the idea, which is placed before the world, became a tainted one. Means distorted ends. We see here the powerful influence of wrong means and methods" [Meherally \(1945\)](#)

The cornerstone of Nehru's social philosophy was his vision of a secular, socialist democracy, which stood in sharp contrast to an entirely privatized, profit-driven economic model. Drawing from his experiences in the national movement, he believed that fundamental social transformation should emerge through broad social agreement or the consent of the vast majority. He was strongly critical of the rising consumerism among the middle class, which he felt had contributed to the moral and economic failures of capitalist elites. Nehru observed that while science and technology had brought unprecedented progress, they had also resulted in a profound moral fatigue within civilization itself. He ultimately aspired for India to achieve a balanced synthesis of socialism and capitalism.

Once he said: "on the one side there is this great and overpowering progress in science and technology and their manifold consequences; on the other, a certain mental exhaustion of civilization itself." Nehru wanted India to have the best combination of socialism and capitalism and tried to implement Democratic socialism in India. He wanted the state to be a principal entrepreneur and all its citizens to be equal shareholders. He strengthened the democratic pillars of nation immensely by creating proper wealth distribution systems at all levels. Nehru's conviction was that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in socialism and its use not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense. Socialism is, however, in the words of Nehru, "something even more than an economic doctrine; it is philosophy of life and as such also it appeals to me. I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment and the degradation of Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian state system. That means the end of private property, except in a restricted sense and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of co-operative service. It means ultimately a change in our instincts, habits and desires. In short, it means a new civilization radically different from the present capitalist order. Some glimpse we can have of this new civilization in USSR. Much has happened there, which has pained me greatly and with which I disagree, but I look upon that great fascinating unfolding of a new order and a new civilization as the most promising feature of our dismal age. If the future is full of hope, it is largely because of Soviet Russia and what it has done, and I am convinced that if some wild catastrophe does not intervene, their new civilization will spread to other lands and put an end to the wars and conflicts which capitalism feeds". [Gilbert \(2006\)](#) I do not know how or when this new order will come to India. I imagine that every country will fashion it after its own way and fit it in with its national genius. But the essential basis of that order must remain and be a link in the world order that will emerge out of the present chaos. [Gilbert \(2006\)](#) Nehru's efforts to move to socialism and to promote equality and opportunity

as personal growth and moral development proved to be an even more difficult position than the goals of legally abolishing untouchability and reserving opportunities for those previously excluded. His vision of socialism depended on an industrial base with high levels of productivity, opportunities for full employment and sufficient surplus to provide necessities for everyone. Despite substantial industrialization, underemployment, poverty, and illiteracy still plague much of India. Moreover, communalism, caste regionalism, and linguistic issues still retard the development of the open tolerant personality Nehru expected to result from equality of opportunity. Until these issues are settled, no amount of material progress would lead to the idealized personality Nehru envisaged. [Patil \(1983\)](#)

Nehru like socialism but was not a blind communist. He believed that there was class conflict in the societies but he did not want to be ruthless in ending it. He admired communists' vision of classless society but did not approve of violence adopted by the communists to correct the imbalances of the society. He, unlike communist, believes in free expression and freedom of thought. He thought that a good society could be built with the help of socialism. So he preferred state ownership of the means of production so that exploitation by the rich is not possible. He believed that, for India, socialism is most suitable. By socialistic pattern of society he meant, a society in which there is equality of opportunity and the possibility for everyone to have good life. For Nehru, social justice mean the removal of economic injustice which the individual in a society was compelled to suffer.

He believed that only planning and co-operation could improve the general conditions and it was possible by increasing production. That is why he wanted large scale and quick production in agriculture and industry. Industrialization was, to him, the only way to economic salvation in order to raise standard of living, absorb the unemployed and bring greater social justice and equality. He not only favored heavy industries to be set up so that the employment opportunities might be increased. He gave the idea of public sector industries. He thought these industries would end capitalistic exploitation. Nehru did not like concentration of economic power; he wanted industries to be on co-operative basis even in private sector. Nehru admired considerably the Marxist analysis of the economic system prevailing in the western countries, which curiously combined political democracy with capitalism. And yet, he had rejected the pattern of dictatorial regime as well as the economic system established in communist countries. [Mukherjee \(1971\)](#) Nehru's economic policies are often confused by critics with those of his daughter, Indira Gandhi, who was more left wing.

Nehru accepted Mahatma Gandhi who believed that village development was more important but he also concentrated on construction of huge dams and power units as India's new temples, which promotes rapid industrialization. And yet Nehru supported wholeheartedly the khadi and village industries believing that it was a social, political and economic necessity for Indian conditions at least in the period of transition. As a Prime Minister, Nehru could not wholly implement policies to spread his brand of Socialism. He nationalized many industries but these public sector industries mostly ran into loss. He could not control big business houses, showing thereby that both Private and Public Sector can co-exist. He gave sanction for even a joint sector. The village and cottage industry which to his mind was to flourish only for a period is continuing till today. As for giving food and shelter to the hungry masses, employment to the unemployed, eradication of poverty and the raising of the standard of living one can only say, our progress has been slow, but steady.

Jawaharlal Nehru was independent India's finest secular leader and humanist. He was the first among the founding fathers of the Constitution. He said: "India is supposed to be a religious country above everything else, and Hindu and Muslim and Sikh and others take pride in their faiths and testify to their truth by breaking heads. The spectacle of what is called religion or at any rate organized religion, in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and the preservation of vested interests". [Gilbert \(2006\)](#) His secular focus flowed from his universalism. He was a secularist in a new semantic dimension. He wrote, "We talk about a secular India...some people think that it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is state, which honors all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; India has a long history of religious tolerance....in a country like, which has many faiths and religions, no real nationalism can be built up except on the basis of secularity". [Gilbert \(2006\)](#)

In foreign affairs Nehru adopted a policy of neutralism. He strongly believed that if India's foreign policy was to be effective then it had to be based on a broad national consensus. He wanted to formulate the policy through "consensus and accommodation" and the policy of non-alignment was best suited for present situation. In Nehru's words, "we are convinced that there is a keen desire on the part of Asian countries to work together possibly this is due to certain resentment against the behavior of the Europe in the past". [Nehru \(1962\)](#)

Nehru, Mahatma's disciple and an admirer of Buddha and Emperor Asoka, abhorred violence and war. He relentlessly opposed military alliances as catalysts of polarization and conflict and urged a moratorium on all nuclear testing. Non-Alignment was neither a rigid doctrine nor a fixed policy; rather, it was a pragmatic framework that helped a young nation find its direction amid international uncertainties. [Chandra \(n.d.\)](#) The non-aligned position of India got the support of all political parties. Nehru assured the people to continue the policy because it "had its roots deep in the soil". [Nehru \(1961\)](#) Many critics argued that Nehru's image as a proponent of peace was diminished by the military action in Kashmir and the take over of Goa from Portuguese rule. Nehru's struggle to formulate a constant strategy towards Pakistan and remained uneasy about its increasing alignment with the United States. Although Nehru attempted to strengthen ties with China through the principles of peaceful co-existence, these efforts

ultimately collapsed with the outbreak of war in 1962. The conflict proved to be a harsh and it reveals India's inadequate military preparedness along its northern frontiers. Although Chinese troops later withdrew in part and an informal demilitarized zone emerged, India's international standing and national confidence severely affected. Exhausted both physically and mentally Nehru eventually succumbed to stroke, leading to his death in 27th May 1964.

By all means a perfect leader, Nehru is remembered as an exemplary leader – reflective yet at times impulsive whose affection for children is commemorated through the observance of Children's Day in India. His commitment to a democratic, federal and secular India continues to introduce autocratic or theocratic alternatives. Jawaharlal Nehru was a great humanitarian. His books and articles contain unique conceptions of mankind, its place, role and purpose in the world. An outstanding amalgam of outstanding intellectual abilities and supreme moral values, a man of thought with an infinite capacity for action, a born aristocrat with deep democratic commitments, in his upbringing, education, outlook as well as achievements, he represented a rich synthesis of East and West, of science and culture, of the hoary past and the modern age of science and technology. [Nehru \(1989\)](#)

To conclude, it shall be perfect to say that Nehru stepped into history as a most outstanding leader of the Indian people. A multifaceted personality, whether one fully agree with his belief or not, Nehru's legacy remains collectives shaping the foundations of modern India in profound ways. [Tharoor \(2012\)](#) Both in the sphere of social thought and in economic life, he emerged as a distinguished personality of 'Enlightenment'. The credit of transformation of colonial society into a genuine independent society goes to him, even more than others.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

## REFERENCES

- Akbar, M. J. (1988). *Nehru: The Making of Modern India*. Viking.
- Gopal, S. (1976). *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography (Vol. 1, 1889–1947)*. Oxford University Press.
- Tharoor, S. (2012). *Nehru: The Invention of India*. Penguin Books.
- Malhotra, I. (1987, November–December). Nehru's Founding Role. *World Focus*, 95–96, 33.
- Mishra, S. N. (Ed.). (n.d.). *Jawaharlal Nehru, A Builder of New India*. In *Nehru and the People's Movement (2)*. Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- Kotovskiy, G. G. (1980). *The Legacy of Nehru and Indo-Soviet Co-operation*. In *Nehru in Soviet Perspective (29)*. Sterling.
- Patil, V. T. (1983). *Studies on Gandhi (84)*. Sterling.
- Meherally, Y. (1945). In N. Dev (Ed.), *Socialism and National Revolution (200)*. Bombay.
- Gilbert, G. J. (2006). *Contemporary History of India (69)*. Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- Mukherjee, G. K. (1971). *Nehru the Humanist (17)*. Trimurti Publications.
- Nehru, J. (1962). *An Autobiography (591)*. Penguin Books.
- Nehru, J. (1961). *India's Foreign Policy (348)*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publication Division.
- Nehru, J. (1989). *The Discovery of India (245–248)*. Oxford University Press.
- Chandra B. (n.d.). *Op.cit.*, (171).