

Jawaharlal Nehru in Historical Perspective

Jawaharlal Nehru can be justifiably considered an architect of modern India. One of the great Indians of the twentieth century, he has been variously described as a democrat, socialist, humanist and visionary, but he was all these and more. Any assessment of his role in the making of independent India would need to take cognizance of his immense stature and extraordinary personality and would, therefore, inevitably be complex and somewhat controversial.

What was it about Nehru which makes so many Indians today look back on the Nehru era with such nostalgia? That period was even more full of misery and poverty than the present. Then why did his presence make so much of a difference? What are the abiding elements of Nehru's contribution to the making of independent India; what is his legacy? What did he, and under his leadership the Indian people, achieve? What abiding values did he try to inculcate among Indians that are today treated as a guide and measure of their own and their leaders' actions, pronouncements, and ideas? And was he 'equal to his opportunities'? It is the answers to these questions which will determine his place in history and not what he failed to achieve and what remains to be done.

Space does not permit a discussion of Nehru the person here, but there was a great deal about his personality which is admirable. It is no accident that all those who came in contact with him fell under his spell. The range of his interests and concerns was wide indeed; from basic education to heavy industry, from statistics collection to world peace, from women's liberation to tribal welfare, and from art to mountain climbing and cricket. He was a veritable Renaissance man, besides being a product of the Enlightenment with his commitment to rationality, humanity, respect for the individual, independence of spirit and secularism. Wide and generous in his outlook on every facet of life, he tried to inculcate the same among the people as also his co-workers. As he wrote to the chief ministers in 1954: 'If India is to be really great, as we all want her to be, then she is not to be exclusive either internally or externally. She has to give up everything that is a barrier to growth in mind or spirit or in social life.'¹

A child of the Indian national revolution, Nehru was above all a nationalist. As a British political scientist put it, 'Even his enemies could never accuse him of thinking in any but national terms; caste, creed, town, tongue—none of these loyalties meant anything to him; it was India first and India last.'² Nehru adhered to this commitment to nationalism, national unity and national independence after 1947. It was the mainstay of his thinking and policies and is integral to any understanding of them.

For Nehru independence had to go beyond mere political independence. He was also strongly committed to change and development, the building of an equitable and egalitarian, just and democratic society—a socialist society—laying down the foundations of a democratic and civil libertarian polity and the consolidation of India as a nation. And he tried all his life—both before and after the attainment of independence—to link his dual commitment to nationalism and

socialism.

This was an uncharted path. Neither Marx nor Gandhiji, two long-term influences on him, provided guidelines on how to go about building a nation. But he set upon this hard task with a degree of excitement and optimism. He had always believed that India's greatest need was 'for a sense of certainty concerning her own success'. This sense of excitement and faith in the coming success he did not abandon even after the defeat and betrayal of the India-China war of 1962. And, what is more important, he succeeded in imparting this sense to millions of Indians.

Democracy, rule of law, respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, social equity and equality, non-violence, rationality in the guidance of human affairs and morality-based politics were the pillars of his basic approach to nation-building. Personal integrity, love for and confidence in the Indian masses were his major assets in this task.

Consolidation of Indian Independence

Maintenance, strengthening and consolidation of India's independence were among Nehru's most pressing tasks. In a world that was sharply divided between the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—which were determined to extend their hegemony over the rest of the world, Nehru resisted all pressures and refused to become their pawn. India's internal policies—right or wrong—developed outside the direct influence of the superpowers, and India remained in full control of her internal as well as her external policies. Nehru also successfully resisted penetration of India's political and economic structure and institutions by outside agencies.

Clearly, independence depended on the economic strength of a country. Given this, Nehru set out, with a great deal of success, to build an independent and self-reliant economy and made an all-out effort to break out of colonial underdevelopment and to ensure self-sustaining and self-generating growth, both in agriculture and industry. He put a great deal of emphasis on self-reliance and cautioned against dependence on other nations. Rapid industrialization, particularly growth of heavy industries, planning, development of the public sector, atomic energy and science and technology, technical modernization and the training of a large technical and scientific cadre were regarded by Nehru as necessary parts of the effort at independent economic development and self-reliance. The biggest achievement he claimed for planning and for Congress rule was the creation of 'a feeling of confidence . . . a feeling of self-reliance'.³ This would further strengthen national independence by increasing the self-confidence and self-respect of the people.

Forging National Unity

Nehru succeeded in maintaining and strengthening the national unity forged during the freedom struggle and rendered fragile by the manner of the transfer of power in 1947. He also succeeded in checking disruptive forces, consolidating the nation and the independent state, and promoting the psychological integration of the Indian people. This was no mean task. Casteism, provincialism, tribalism, linguistic chauvinism—largely transcended during the freedom struggle

—were surfacing again; the princely states were there, and, of course, there was the ever-present danger of communalism.

Nehru recognized that India was not yet a structured nation but a nation-in-the-making. He also kept in view and made allowance for India's immense variety and diversity. He constantly urged the people to develop 'an outlook which embraces all this variety and considers it our very own'.⁴ A specific expression of this strategy of unity in diversity was his policy towards the tribal people. Overall, despite the persistence of many disruptive forces, at times dormant, at times active, there is no doubt that Nehru succeeded in keeping them under check and provided the much-needed political stability and push forward to the process of national integration, of nation-building. In fact, he subordinated all other questions and issues to this task. Behind the Five Year Plans lay the concept of national unity.

Nehru also saw that in India's case unity and independence were closely related. 'We live in a dangerous age,' he wrote in 1953, 'where only the strong and the united can survive or retain their freedom'.⁵

Nurturing Democracy and Parliamentary Government

Carrying on the traditions of the national movement, Nehru carefully nurtured and entrenched democracy and parliamentary government in independent India. He fought three general elections on the basis of universal adult franchise and secret ballot and made elections the norm, not an exception.

Nehru's commitment to democracy and civil liberties was total. To him they represented absolute values and not means to an end. He would not subordinate them to any other goals, whether of social change or socio-economic development. He was aware that the parliamentary system had its weaknesses, and made efforts to remove some of them. But he would not, he declared, 'give up the democratic system for anything'.⁶

Even his immense personal power and popularity could not corrupt the democrat in Nehru. On the contrary, Nehru used this strength to reinforce the democratic process and the libertarian tradition. Though dominating politics after 1950, within the Congress party too he promoted internal democracy and open debate. He also helped create an institutional structure which was democratic and in which power was diffused: a constitution with basic civil liberties enshrined in it, a sovereign parliament elected on the basis of universal suffrage and regular elections, a free Press, a cabinet government and an independent judiciary.

This commitment to democracy was rooted in Nehru's deep and unqualified faith in and respect for the common man. 'That is enough religion for me,' he once declared.⁷ He was willing to stand fully 'the free market of ideas' because he believed that in the long run people could discriminate between different ideas. At the same time, he was aware of the authoritarian tendencies in the country and even in his own party. 'Our democracy,' he said in 1951, 'is a tender plant which has to be nourished with wisdom and care'.⁸ And so he tried his best to instil in

the commonfolk, a taste for democratic concepts. He regularly toured the land sharing his ideas with the people, trying to educate them in the ways of rational and democratic thinking. When asked what his legacy to India would be, he repeated: 'Hopefully, it is four hundred million people capable of governing themselves.'⁹

Democracy was intrinsic to Nehru's idea of social and political development. Democracy would enable the people to mobilize themselves and to exert pressure from below to achieve social justice and equality, as well as reduction of economic inequality, which over time would lead to socialism. The political party in power would either implement the popular mandate or would get swept away. He was aware that this process might take time, for parliamentary system and universal suffrage gave the right to govern but not necessarily the power to do so. But sooner or later, he believed, the power would follow the right; and he did his best to bring this about. This is one reason why he placed so much emphasis on elections, besides community development projects, Panchayati Raj, cooperatives and decentralization of all kinds of power.

Particularly, to ensure the unity of a diverse society like India's, Nehru argued, democracy was essential. No amount of force or coercion could hold India together. 'In India today,' he said in 1960, 'any reversal of democratic methods might lead to disruption and violence.'¹⁰

Nehru was aware of the formidable, novel and unprecedented character of his effort to develop the country economically on the basis of a democratic and civil libertarian political structure. No other country had attempted this so far. Most other nations and societies had used authoritarian and administrative measures and institutions during the period of their economic take-off. Nehru was aware that his path of development might slow down the rate of economic development. But Indian people, he felt, were willing to pay this price for the sake of a democratic political order.

Throughout his life Nehru opposed dogma and a dogmatic mentality. This was his major objection to religion and became a major ground for his favouring a scientific temper and outlook on life and its problems.

Building Socialism

Nehru rejected the capitalist developmental and civilizational perspective and, instead, worked for fundamental transformation of Indian society in a socialist direction. Clearly, he did not succeed in building a socialist society and there was a large gap between his precepts and practice. But he did, over the years, grapple with the problem of initiating socialism in an underdeveloped country with a democratic polity. It was Nehru, above all, who carried the socialist vision to millions and made socialism a part of their consciousness. Moreover, his ideas on socialism and his strategy for its establishment and development, as also his political practice, provided deep insights into the problem of socialist transformation in the modern world.

What did socialism mean to Nehru? In fact, Nehru never defined socialism in terms of a definite scheme or rigid general principles. To him, generally, socialism meant greater equality of opportunity, social justice, more equitable distribution of higher incomes generated through the

application of modern science and technology to the processes of production, the ending of the acute social and economic disparities generated by feudalism and capitalism, and the application of the scientific approach to the problems of society. Socialism also meant the eventual ending of the acquisitive mentality, the supremacy of the profit motive, and capitalist competitiveness and the promotion instead of the cooperative spirit. It also meant the gradual ending of class distinctions and class domination. Socialism also laid down the large-scale social ownership or control over the principal means of production. But Nehru insisted that, first of all, socialism concerned greater production, for there could be no equal distribution of poverty. In fact, to him socialism was equal to greater production plus equitable distribution.

In Indian conditions, Nehru regarded socialist transformation as a process and not as an event. Socialism was then not a clearly pre-defined, pre-laid-out scheme towards which the process of transformation moved. Instead, socialism was expected to go on being defined, stage by stage, as the process advanced. There was to be no sudden break but gradual change. Socialist transformation was to be viewed in terms of a series of reforms which would occur within the orbit of the existing socio-economic structure, but which would, over time and in their totality, amount to a revolution or a structural social transformation. Nehru described these reforms as 'surgical operations'. Socialist revolution would, thus, consist of a series of 'surgical operations' performed through the due process of law by a democratic legislature.

Nehru believed that democracy and civil liberties had to be basic constituents of socialism, and were inseparable from it.

On the basis of his experience of the national movement, Nehru came to the view that basic social change can be, and should be, brought about only through a broad societal consensus or the consent of the overwhelming majority of the people. As he told Tibor Mende in 1956: 'One has to carry people with one.' They must be willing to 'accept changes'. Parliament could, of course, legislate, but it was far more important that 'a very large section of the people must also accept it—or, at any rate, actively or passively, be ready to accept it'.¹¹ On another occasion he told the presidents of the Provincial Congress Committees that he was convinced of the importance of 'carrying our people along the line of progress. We are not a sectarian body consisting of the elect. We are fellow-travellers with the people of India.'¹² There were several major corollaries of this approach. First, the process of social transformation might have to be slowed down, for the process of reconciling different views inside and outside the Congress party and of winning the active or passive consent of the people was a time-consuming one. Nehru was willing to slow down the pace of socialist development in order to persuade and carry the people and his colleagues with him rather than to ride roughshod over their opinions or to ignore and show disrespect to the autonomy of the various institutions of the state. Besides, to endure and strike deep roots, socialism required popular acceptance and a democratic approach.

Learning from the experience of the rise of fascism in the 1930s, Nehru argued that in the absence of a broad societal consensus, any radical steps towards socialism would invite the danger of fascism. 'An attempt at premature leftism,' he wrote to Jayaprakash Narayan in 1948, 'may well lead to reaction or disruption.'¹³ Nehru was aware of the social presence of the

powerful landed elements with their social prestige and economic power and numerical strength. He was also conscious of the fact that his party had, despite his charisma and personal popularity, secured less than 50 per cent of the votes cast in the 1952 and 1957 elections. On the other hand, the different rightist political elements had together secured more than 25 per cent of the popular vote for the Lok Sabha elections in these years; and this was apart from the right-wing strength inside the Congress itself. Above all he felt that the middle strata, urban as well as rural, had to be handled with care and caution for they constituted a very large section of the people—and it was the middle strata which had formed the backbone of fascism in Germany. Any frontal attack on the propertied classes was likely to push them and the middle strata to taking a fascist position. Any effort at making a minority revolution or when the overwhelming majority of the people had not been won over was more likely to result in counter-revolution and the overthrow of democracy than in the coming of a socialist revolution. Even apart from fascism, such an effort would divide the Indian people when their unity was both essential and fragile.

India of the Nehru era was quite often criticized for being a soft state and Nehru was accused of being a weak ruler. But Nehru did not agree, for he was aware of the danger of authoritarianism posed by too strong a state and too strong a ruler. Just before his death, he said in 1964: 'One should not mistake gentleness and civility of character for weakness. They criticise me for my weakness, but this is too large a country with too many legitimate diversities to permit any so-called "strong man" to trample over people and their ideas.'¹⁴

One reason Nehru adopted an open-ended approach towards socialism was because of his belief that it was not possible to mobilize a large majority around a clear-cut, structured, ideological definition of socialism. A large majority could be mobilized only by uniting diverse interests and multiple views and ideological strands around a common socialist vision or broad framework.

Over time Nehru came to believe that a socialist society could be achieved through peaceful and non-violent means. While recognizing the existence and significance of the class struggle, he believed that it could be resolved through non-violent means and the rule of law.

One other aspect of Nehru's approach to politics and socialism deserves to be stressed. With the passage of time he came very close to Gandhiji in emphasizing that in building a socialist India as much importance should be attached to the means as to the ends. Wrong means, he said, would not lead to right results. His belief in the inseparability of the means and the ends was another reason why he increasingly condemned all recourse to violence even for a worthy objective like socialism.

Planning for Economic Development

Nehru looked upon rapid economic development as basic for India's independence and unity and for the removal of poverty and implementation of his social welfarist policies. In the chapter on 'Objectives of Planned Development' which he wrote for the Third Five Year Plan he observed: 'A high rate of economic growth sustained over a long period is the essential condition for achieving a rising level of living for all citizens, and especially for those in low income groups or

lacking the opportunity to work.¹⁵ And he told the Avadi session of the Congress: 'We cannot have a Welfare State in India with all the socialism or even communism in the world unless our national income goes up greatly. Socialism or communism might help you to divide your existing wealth, if you like, but in India there is no existing wealth for you to divide; there is only poverty to divide . . . How can we have a Welfare State without wealth?'¹⁶ In other words, production was essential whatever the nature of society—socialist or capitalist.

The three pillars of Nehru's development strategy, representing 'a fairly widespread intellectual consensus of the time',¹⁷ were planning for rapid industrial and agricultural growth, a public sector to develop strategic industries, and a mixed economy. Nehru popularized the concept of planning and made it a part of Indian consciousness. India was to have a mixed economy as a transitional stage, with the private sector functioning for a long time to come though within the framework of planning. In the long run, the state was to occupy the commanding heights of the economy, owning or controlling all basic industries and strategic sectors of the economy. The public sector was not to be based only on state-run enterprises. Nehru was very clear that the cooperative principle should be encouraged and cooperatives in trade, industry and agriculture should play an increasingly larger role.

In the long run, the role of market forces and the profit motive was to become less significant. At the same time, Nehru was quite clear that over time the public sector must generate additional sources. According to the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956, which he helped draft, the public sector was expected to 'augment the revenues of the state and provide resources for further development in fresh fields'. Taking a pragmatic view of the question, he also held that where the public sector performed well, it should remain, and where it did not, it was to be replaced.

Above all Nehru wanted to build an independent self-reliant economy, for independence depended on economic strength and the capacity to resist economic and political domination. Emphasis on rapid industrialization and agricultural self-sufficiency, planning, public sector and heavy, capital goods industry, minimal use of foreign capital and aid, science, technology and technical modernization, the training of a large technical and scientific cadre, and atomic energy was seen by Nehru as a necessary part of the effort at independent economic development. In achieving this, there is hardly any doubt that he was eminently successful. India did make the transition from a colonial to an independent economy, though a capitalist economy. Whatever the weaknesses that emerged later, Nehru's economic policy did prove to be the right one for India and as a result India's economic achievement was quite substantial.

Opposing Communalism

Nehru's commitment to secularism was unsurpassed and all-pervasive. Communalism went against his grain, and he fought it vigorously throughout his life. He helped secularism acquire deep roots among the Indian people; and he prevented the burgeoning forth of communalism when conditions were favourable for it. Though on almost all issues he believed in consensus and compromise, communalism was the exception, for as he said in 1950, any compromise on

communalism 'can only mean a surrender of our principles and a betrayal of the cause of India's freedom',¹⁸

Keeping in view India's specific situation, Nehru defined secularism in the dual sense of keeping the state, politics and education separate from religion, making religion a private matter for the individual, and of showing equal respect for all faiths and providing equal opportunities for their followers. He defined communalism as the ideology which treated Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians as homogeneous groups in regard to political and economic matters, as 'politics under some religious garb, one religious group being incited to hate another religious group'.¹⁹

Nehru was one of the first to try to understand the socioeconomic roots of communalism, and he came to believe that it was primarily a weapon of reaction, even though its social base was formed by the middle classes. He also most perceptibly described communalism as the Indian form of fascism. In contrast, he regarded secularism as an essential condition for democracy.

He also did not distinguish between Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian communalisms. They were, he said, different forms of the same ideology and had, therefore, to be opposed simultaneously. While he was very clear that secularism meant giving full protection to the minorities and removing their fears, at the same time, he was as opposed to minority communalisms as to the communalism of the religious majority. He also argued most convincingly that secularism had to be the sole basis for national unity in a multi-religious society and that communalism was, therefore, clearly a danger to national unity and was anti-national.

There was, however, a major lacuna in Nehru's approach to the problem of communalism, which can be seen as a certain economic, deterministic and reductionist bias. Believing that planning and economic development and the spread of education, science and technology would automatically weaken communal thinking and help form a secular consciousness, he ignored the need for struggle against communalism as an ideology. As a result he paid little attention to the content of education or to the spread of science and a scientific approach among the people. While very active himself, he failed to use the Congress as an organization to take his own brilliant understanding of communalism to the people. He also compromised with his own stand when he permitted the Congress in Kerala to enter into an alliance with the Muslim League and Christian communal groups in 1960. Further, he was unable to persuade the state governments to take strong administrative steps against the instigators or perpetrators of communal violence. Sadly, sorrow over the large-scale communal violence marked the last years of his life.

Opposing Conservatism

Nehru did not devote much time and effort to social reform in the narrow sense of the term. But he was opposed to social conservatism; and, realizing that men and women do not live by bread alone, he regularly emphasized the necessity of bringing about changes in the social sphere along with economic and political changes. One of his greatest achievements as prime minister was the passage of the Hindu Code Bills. Another was the care with which he promoted education among girls and public employment of middle-class women.

Pursuing Foreign Policy

Nehru's foreign policy was a many-splendoured phenomenon. Nehru used foreign policy as an instrument to defend and strengthen India's newly won independence and to safeguard India's national interests and to develop the self-reliance, self-confidence and the pride of the Indian people, even while serving the cause of world peace and anti-colonialism. It is significant that successive prime ministers after Nehru, till today, have continued to follow the broad framework of his foreign policy.

Assessing Nehru

Nehru's place in history should rightly take into account his political weaknesses. This in no way diminishes him for he still emerges as a person who towered over his contemporaries.

A critical weakness of Nehru's strategy of consolidation of the Indian nation, economic development and social transformation flowed from his non-adherence to the Gandhian strategy of non-violent struggle in one crucial aspect—its emphasis on the mobilization of the people. Nehru did see the necessity of involving a large number of people in nation-building. But he had an overpowering belief in spontaneity, in the poor mobilizing on their own; he believed in the reductionist notion that the exercise of franchise would gradually educate the masses to vote in their own interest. He also harboured the nineteenth-century liberal notion that his speeches or those of other respected leaders would be enough to arouse and spur the masses.

There is no doubt that Nehru felt deeply and passionately for the people; his sway over the masses was immense as was his capacity to communicate with them, to sense their feelings and to win their love, affection and trust. But an active involvement of the people in politics and their own social liberation required organization and mobilization: a party, however loosely structured, cadres, however democratically organized, and a minimum of ideology, however broad, non-dogmatic and open-ended. In fact, Nehru's own model of development and social transformation depended on active pressure from below by the deprived, the exploited and the dominated. Such active popular participation in politics alone would enable parliamentary democracy to serve as an instrument of nation-building, social change and equity.

But Nehru failed to help create any institutions or structures or agents through which the people or even the lower-level cadres of his own party could be mobilized and politically educated. The only form of mobilization was his extensive tours through which he communicated with the people, educated them and created popular support for his policies. Before 1947, the political harvest of his tours had been gathered by the local Congress committees and the nationalist cadres. But after 1947, in the absence of any popular-level organization to follow up the outcome of his tours, the political and organizational benefits were more often than not reaped by the party bosses from the local to the state level.

The Nehruvian period, it is noteworthy, did not witness greater participation by the people in the political processes except in the form of elections. Actually, there was gradual demobilization

of the people and the weakening over time of the link between politics from below and the national leadership in power as also between politics and social and constructive work; at least in the medium run—to be calculated in decades—electoral politics strengthened the hold of the local economic and political elite.

Nehru also failed to build institutions and organizational structures to implement his vision or policies or to mobilize the people behind them; he created no social instruments and this led to a general weakness in execution of his policies and ideas, and was a major reason for the shortcomings in the implementation of the land reforms, the execution of the Community Development programme and the management of the public sector.

The Congress party could have played the role of organizing secular and nationalist forces to back Nehru's policies and to popularize and to mobilize the people behind them. But Nehru also neglected party-building, even after he acquired complete control over it in 1951. He had never been a builder or organizer of the party before independence. But this weakness became a serious flaw after Gandhiji and Sardar Patel, stalwart organizers of the party before 1947, left the scene and Nehru became its sole leader. One result of this was that Congress was increasingly weakened as an organization and began to lose its role as an instrument for social change or the implementation of government policies or even education in the party ideology. Instead, it gradually veered towards machine politics.

The consequence was that Nehru increasingly started relying on government administration and bureaucracy for implementing his policies. Even the Community Development programme and the Panchayati Raj, the two great efforts to involve the people in their own development, ended up under bureaucratic control; and the village-level social worker, the kingpin in rural reconstruction, became a cog in the bureaucratic machine and spent as little time as possible in the village. Furthermore, the administrative structure and the bureaucracy remained unreformed and unreconstructed and as distant from the people as before.

Nehru also did not vigorously attack through mass mobilization and mass educational campaigns those aspects of the social structure, such as the caste system, male domination, kinship networks, economic dependence of the rural poor on the rural rich and growing corruption, which were bolstering the existing socioeconomic system. He also went too far in stressing the role of consent and conversion of the dominant social classes. He had inherited this belief from Gandhiji. But, then, Gandhiji had also believed in organizing active political and ideological struggles against the current targets of his politics whether they were the British, the princes or the orthodox among the upper castes. A major part of Gandhiji's strategy had been to 'convert' them by isolating them from public opinion. Nehru did not pursue this part of his mentor's strategy.

Nehru could set goals and objectives, he could formulate people's desires, he could inspire people with a vision, he was also a skilful politician, but he lacked the capacity to design a strategic framework and to devise tactical measures to achieve the goals he set. This proved to be a failing for Nehru as a nation-builder. While strongly opposed to political opportunism and manipulation, he could replace these only with *ad hoc* political and administrative measures. This often left the field open to manipulators. This weakness was heightened by the fact that he was a poor judge of

men and women. To his credit, Nehru could see the process of the political manoeuvres taking over, but could do little to counter it. And so, acting as his own leader of the Opposition, he observed and denounced the corruption, careerism, bureaucratization, and the many other emerging ills of a developing ex-colonial society, but was unable, apart from exhortations, to take the necessary concrete steps to control them. We may point to some of the large areas of neglect which have today assumed monstrous proportions: the entire educational system was left untouched and unreformed, and failed to reach the majority of the population; no worthwhile political and ideological mass struggle was waged against communalism as an ideology; the tardy and inadequate implementation of land reforms left a legacy of economic inequality, social oppression and political violence in rural India; the inadequate steps taken to curb corruption in its initial stages, later led to its assuming shocking dimensions and pervading almost every area of life, administration and politics.

To conclude, as the first prime minister of independent India, Nehru was faced with daunting tasks. In spite of this, measured by any historical standards his achievements were of gigantic proportions. He rooted certain values, approaches, objectives, goals and an outlook and made them an integral part of the ethos of the Indian people. As one of his biographers, Geoffrey Tyson, has said, 'If Nehru had been a different kind of man, India would have become a different kind of country'.^{[20](#)}

Nehru and the Nehru era have receded into historical memory—only those above fifty years of age would remember him as a person. Most Indians—even those who during his lifetime were his harsh critics—hark back to the Nehru era, identify with him, and draw inspiration from his life and work, his social vision, and the values he sustained in the endeavour to build a happier and healthier society in which class, caste and gender oppression would cease to exist. The legacy he left behind is in many respects a sheet-anchor for the Indian people who are today buffeted about in a sea of despair. What more could a people ask from a leader? Has any society, any people, the right to ask a leader, however great, to solve all its problems once for all?