Contributions of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru towards National Development

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Abstract: This research article very emphatically presents the collaborative understanding of two intellectual giants during the era of Indian freedom struggle: Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, whose thoughts’ locus rested on making India tread the path of development. Mahatma’s ideas were practically implemented by Nehru during his tenure as the Prime Minister of India which evolved India to be known as a modern one.

1. Introduction

The uniqueness of Gandhi-Nehru relationship lies in its acceptability, functionality and applicability in all spheres of Indian life by majority of the population in spite of certain strong disagreement between them. If Gandhi’s role was all pervasive in the pre-independent era, Nehru had his comprehensive part to play during the first two decades of post-independent period. It is rather fascinating to observe that both these stalwarts started their academic and intellectual orientation in the cradles of the western world and felt an urge to participate in public life quite early. Gandhi got admission into the prestigious Inner Temple at the age of 20 and Nehru went to Cambridge when he was only 17.

Gandhiji’s magical effects upon the Indian polity were obvious due to his expertise in understanding the problems of Indians and finding suitable solutions to them. Nehru’s charisma over people rested in his communicational ability, both oral and written, and his unique vision, for an independent India. While Gandhiji’s contributions, till his death, were to lead from the front, to free the nation from the British Raj and establish moral and ethical values in Indian minds, Nehru, on the other hand, as the disciple of Gandhiji, was credited with establishing India as a democracy and transformed the nation as a modern and secular nation with scientific temperament.

It is simply an arduous task for anybody to record their contributions towards nation building and national development in a limited time and space scope. Yet we find many of their contributions are quite common in nature and they also have their important individual contributions for the national development.

Nehru first met Gandhiji at the time of Lucknow Congress session during Christmas, 1916. The Mahatma was so moved and overwhelmed by young Jawaharlal after their initial encounter that his entire life was changed thereafter. Nehru writes in his autobiography-

“I was simply bowled over by Gandhi…I worked as a kind of secretary to him… He was like a current of fresh air…” [1]

The following are some of the common grounds between Gandhi-Nehru where they have contributed towards national development:

1.1. A New Meaning and Shape to Political Freedom

Though Gandhi returned from South Africa to India in 1915 not to go there again so as to serve the motherland, Gandhian era of Congress did not actually begin until 1919. His success to tackle the Indigo-farmers’ problem and the Ahmedabad Mill workers’ strike had already established Gandhi as an acceptable leader. He changed the course of freedom movement and the approach of the Congress towards it.

Political freedom took new shape and acquired new content when the young Congress members, including Nehru, who had extreme views to obtain freedom, also changed their minds and joined the path shown by Gandhiji.

Nehru returned to India in 1912 and was quite involved in the political activities for the freedom of India. Gandhi had been in jail for several times in South Africa and in India but Jawaharlal was sent to jail for the first time in 1920 and before the end of 1947 he was jailed 9 times. Both Gandhi and Nehru gave a new dimension to the freedom movement that of a struggle and sacrifice.

1.2. Instilling a Sense of Equality
Both the leaders were aware of the socio-economic condition of Indian people and how deeply-caste-ridden and poverty-stricken majority of the population was suffering. Gandhi took the tour of India and Nehru came to know the abject poverty in 1920.

Both of them felt that in order to obtain real freedom they must work to bridge the gap between people and make them confident that all the citizens of India are equal. The essence of Gandhi’s teaching was fearlessness and truth and keeping the welfare of the masses in view.

1.3. Communal Harmony

For a nation like India where multiple religions are practiced by people, communal harmony becomes the bedrock of its independence and development. Hence, both the leaders continuously worked relentlessly for communal harmony. In 1946 when communal riots were broken up in East Bengal and Bihar, both Gandhi and Nehru risked their lives to tackle it. Gandhi went to Noakhali and fasted whereas Nehru promised to be in Bihar till the end of the riot.

1.4. Co-operative Movement

Gandhiji had laid down a clear-cut economic agenda for the holistic development of Indian poor and farmers and artisans. He understood that these are the people who are exploited by the wealthy business class and landlords. Therefore, the basic of Gandhian economy is co-operative farming, cattle-keeping cottage and house-hold industries, etc.

Nehru was also convinced that co-operative movement was indispensable for India’s development. It would load to economizing the use of resources and binding the people together. His inaugural address to the third All India Co-operative Congress made it clear. He also made it clear that he emphasized on the co-operative movement in the year 1929 during the Congress session at Lahore.[2] Hence, the first and second five year plans were dedicated to agriculture.

1.5. Co-operative Movement

Both Gandhi and Nehru had ready agreement on giving importance to science, especially health and hygiene and also skill development through the promotion of education. Gandhiji showed the path and Nehru walked on it.

After independence, the institutions for imparting science education were established. The IITs, central Universities and premiere institutes like Regional Science Centres were also set up. The top-class health centres were also established.

Nehru as the Prime Minister of the nation worked hard to develop India to be modern nation with a scientific temperament.

While delivering his speech on the occasion of inauguration of Mahatma Gandhi College, Thiruvananthapuram on April 24, 1958, Nehru clearly demonstrated his clear understanding of Gandhiji as a person and his ideas. That is why, Gandhiji declared Nehru as his best disciple. He reminded the people: “Gandhiji taught us equality. He taught us that we had no business to ask for independence or freedom if we exploit or suppress any of our own people.”[3]

Both Gandhiji and Nehru were quite successful in the foreign front. Gandhiji’s ideology of truth and non-violence were followed by great leaders across the world to make their country free.

Nehru’s policy of non-alignment and achieving world-peace through ‘panchasheel’ was also quite popular. His vision was to make India self-reliant worked effectively. As the first Prime Minister, Nehru made full-proof plan and invited people like Mahalnovis and Dr. Swaminathan to work in this direction. It was under his leadership India achieved faster economic growth in all sectors.

2. Conclusion

Nehru’s great contributions as a nation builder and as leader of international stature were born out of his intense patriotism. As a pragmatic and practical person he emphasized on public and private sector industrial growth. He believed science and technology only can add to the growth of country like India. The initiatives taken by him at that time are bearing fruits now.

3. References
