

[Editorial Notes] India's tryst with Nehruvian ideology

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Introduction:

Fifty-six years after Jawaharlal Nehru left the world stage on 27 May, 1964, his ideology stands apt and necessary in a country as vast and diverse as India. There is no doubt that he was a man with a far-sighted vision.

Approach of Nehru:

- Nehru was a proponent of **socialist and secular India**.
- Nehru's sincere commitment to secularism, evinced in his espousal of the principles of religious equality, is often criticised as "**pseudo-secularism**".
- It has been accused of **being biased in favour of the minorities** or as an impractical exercise in futility given how the majority's religion is compared to the minorities.
- The criticism is touted as if **Patel and Nehru had divergent opinions** on the meaning of secularism even though there is no such evidence.
- As per **Granville Austin's observation**: Nehru and Patel were the **focus of power in the Constituent Assembly**, when they were divided on an issue, as in the case of property clause, factions could line up behind them and the debate would be lengthy.
- But when they settled their differences, the factions among the rank and file would do little else but shake hands and **make the decision unanimous**.
- Nehru used **every available opportunity to not only propound the benefits of a 'socialistic democracy'** as opposed to the 'Hindu Nation' prescribed by the Hindu Mahasabha, but also to **reassure India's Muslim minority of their future in India**.

Approach of Patel:

- Patel's **view on secularism is moderate** and as chairman of the advisory committee on fundamental rights, he had to review the report of the sub-committee on minorities in the Constituent Assembly.
- His tenor there was very much that **India should follow the principle of secularism**.
- Nevertheless, Patel is often **identified as a Hindu traditionalist**.
- On the other hand, on June 6, 1948, Sardar Patel urged the **Hindu Mahasabha** to amalgamate with the Congress. He made similar pleas to the RSS.
- Patel's favourable inclination towards the RSS reached its peak when a resolution was passed in the **Congress Working Committee** on October 10, 1949, authorising Swayamsevaks to become members of the party — all during the absence of Nehru who was then travelling abroad.

Secular India:

- It is a historical fact that Hindu traditionalist leaders like **Madan Mohan Malviya** and **Lala Lajpat Rai** favoured the idea of an **Indian nation built around the majority** (Hindu) community to which Nehru was strongly opposed.
- When **K.M. Munshi** (then a Union Minister) tabled in Parliament the matter of reconstruction of **Gujarat's Somnath Temple** which had been damaged by the army of **Mahmud of Ghazni** in the 11th century, Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Patel announced in November 1947, that the **government would provide funds for rebuilding the temple**.
- However, at the insistence of Nehru, **Gandhiji suggested that the project should be financed by public subscription**.
- Nehru was **strongly committed to keeping the government distanced from religion** — an attitude that defined the character of new-born India.

Need for science and logic:

- The approaches of Nehru and Patel in dealing with Hindu nationalist ideology may be divergent but they are clearly two sides of the same coin — that **coin being secularism**.
- History recounts that **Patel's approach was based on his faith and trust**, not on logical

inferences.

- Nehru felt that **India needed to favour science and logic** instead of orthodox religiosity.
- He believed that '**education is meant to free the shackles of the human mind** and not to imprison it in pre-set ideas and beliefs'.
- His motto, namely **cultivating scientific temper and nurturing the spirit of tolerance** are the foundations of his concept of secularism.

Hindu Code Bill:

- Nehru was committed to the adoption of the **Hindu Code Bill** introduced by the then Law Minister **B.R. Ambedkar**.
- According to Ambedkar, "The Hindu Code Bill was the **greatest social reform measure** ever undertaken by the legislature in the country....."
- The Bill was **vehemently resisted by every Hindu nationalist** in the Congress.
- **President Rajendra Prasad** even expressed apprehension that it may cause disruption in every Hindu family.
- However, **Nehru's continuous struggle to get the Bill passed** (even if with some amendments) is credible testimony to his commitment to **uphold secularism**.
- Nehru had **dreamt for a modern India to have an exalted position** on the world stage, rising above sectarian politics and divisive forces.
- In January 1948 he said, "As far as India is concerned, I can speak with some certainty. We shall proceed on secular lines... in keeping with the **powerful trends towards internationalism**."

Conclusion:

An effective democracy and the **nurturing of unity and solidarity** are the need of the day for our nation. Nehruvian ideology continues to remain essential even today to fight against the **dark forces of communalism** and to kindle the light of social harmony.