



The influence of humanistic concept on Jawaharlal Nehru's political philosophy

Anamika Pandey¹, Sanjay Kumar Shukla²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Ewing Christian College, An Autonomous College of University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Professor, Department of Philosophy, Ewing Christian College, An Autonomous College of University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

This paper examines the influence of humanist thought on Jawaharlal Nehru's political philosophy, highlighting its impact on his views on internationalism, secularism, democracy, socialism, nationalism and global citizenship. Through a qualitative analysis of Nehru's writings and speeches, this study explains how humanist principles shaped his political vision and practice. The findings demonstrate that Nehru's humanist beliefs inspired him to defend a more just, equitable and peaceful environment, and underscore the relevance of humanist thought in contemporary political discourse. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the enduring significance of humanist ideals in shaping Nehru's political philosophy, leadership and vision.

Keywords: Jawaharlal Nehru, political philosophy, humanist thought, human dignity, scientific humanism, socialism, human rights, social justice, human development

Introduction

'The best and noblest gifts of humanity cannot be the monopoly of a particular race or country; its scope may not be limited nor may it be regarded as the miser's hoard buried underground'. These beautiful lines given by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, is one of the key figures who expanded and shaped the political and economic landscape of the country. The contribution of Jawaharlal Nehru is rightly acclaimed as the maker of modern India. His life was full of continuous hard work, inspired by his humaneness and sense of duty. Jawaharlal Nehru's relevance lies not only in his contribution to the political structure, the creation of the nation-state in India and national integration, but also in his special focus on the development of science and technology. As the first Prime Minister of independent India, Nehru shouldered the biggest responsibility of taking India on the path of development and prosperity. His political philosophy, rooted in a commitment to democracy, socialism and secularism, has had a lasting impact on Indian politics and international relations. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the influence of humanist thought on Nehru's political philosophy. The aim of this study is to bridge this gap by exploring the relationship between humanist principles and Nehru's political ideas.

"The word 'humanism' is derived from the latin word 'humanus' which means 'human being. It means a system of thought concerned with 'human affairs in general. Its tradition is as old as Greek philosophy and the Sophists and Epicureans of Greece were perhaps the first among the humanists in history. Protagoras, a Greek philosopher of the fifth century B.C, is considered as one of the earliest humanists of the West, if not the father of humanism. He proclaimed that 'Man is the measure of all things.' Though traces of humanistic tradition can be seen in the thoughts of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the European Renaissance is regarded as representing a golden era of humanist revival.

The thinkers of the period of Renaissance were preoccupied with a serious concern for man and their studies were centred on the problems like the dignity of man, immortality of soul and the unity of truth. It was also an age of free thinking and creativity. The Renaissance saw the rise of humanism that recognised human reason, passion and values. It also asserted the intrinsic worth of man's life and the vastness of his potentialities. Breaking away from the authority of church, the Renaissance thinkers claimed freedom of thought and expression leading to the beginning of a great era of all round development of man. God, who had remained as the most powerful force in the medieval period, yielded place to the sovereignty of man. Man and his world reached the apex of evolution and it resulted in the greatest mental and intellectual revolution. The writings of Marx displayed his deeply humanistic outlook."^[1]

Humanism is a philosophical and ethical outlook that emphasizes human dignity, reason and compassion. It is a philosophy of vigorous optimism and profoundly dynamic. Humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress. The core concepts of humanism recognize the inherent worth and significance of each human being and emphasize compassion, reason, individualism, universalism, social justice, human flourishing, empathy, ethics, and education. It encourages critical thinking, science, and intellectual inquiry, while promoting autonomy, freedom, and personal responsibility. Humanism advocates equality, fairness, and human rights, and promotes personal growth, creativity and fulfilment. It grounds decision-making in human values and ethical principles, promoting knowledge and personal development. These principles underpin humanist thought, guiding its approach to ethics, politics, and personal development, and placing human welfare above all else. In the modern era, humanist thought has evolved to encompass a variety of principles, including internationalism, democracy, and social justice. Nehru, indeed a variable intellectual giant of

the generation. To see the influence of humanist ideas on his political philosophy, focusing on six key areas including internationalism, secularism, democracy, socialism, nationalism, and global citizenship. By analysing Nehru's writings and speeches, this study will demonstrate how humanist principles influenced his political beliefs and practices, and explore the implications of this legacy for contemporary political discourse.

This study's analysis of Nehru's writings and speeches reveals the profound influence of humanist ideas on his political philosophy. Mulk Raj Anand wrote brilliantly that "there emerges the image of Jawaharlal Nehru as a humanist, full of the deepest tenderness for men everywhere, a polytheist who accepted all the Gods of the world, a universalist, who felt it right to express his disagreements without denouncing them,—the Prophet of a new contemporary Indian civilisation which would experiment in the making of man, who might inherit the most vital things of the world and usher our planet into a future of one world culture, where the individual may seek his own unique perfections" [2]. Nehru had great faith in human nature and believed that the only power that is higher than God is man. He argued that "we may deny God, but if we deny man and thereby make everything futile, what hope is there for us?" [3].

Nehru had great faith in the human spirit that overcomes nature and gives rise to the noblest human impulses. Nehru was essentially a scientist. In fact, he was the first among the nationalist leaders to recognise the importance of science and technology for the modernisation of Indian society. Addressing the Indian Science Congress in late thirties, Nehru stated, "Politics led me to economics and this led me inevitably to science, and the scientific approach to all our problems and to life itself. It was science alone that could solve these problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and literacy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people. For a hungry man or hungry woman, truth has little meaning. For a hungry man, God has no meaning. And India is starving and to talk of truth and God and many of the finer things is mockery. We have to find food for them, clothing, housing, education and health are absolute necessities that every person should possess. When we have done that we can philosophise and think of God. So, science must think in those terms and work along those lines on the wider scale of coordinated planning." He advocated a new concept of Humanism, 'Scientific humanism' which presents a Union of humanism and the scientific spirit. The scientific humanism advocated by Nehru is ethical and social, practical, and humanitarian. It is governed by a pragmatic idealism for social advancement. Nehru's scientific humanism was an important component of his political philosophy, which emphasized the importance of science, reason and intellectual inquiry in human progress. Scientific humanism holds that "humanity is its only God and service to society is its only religion". It holds that every culture has certain values which are determined by that culture. It also accepts that human nature is such that every person is under the illusion that his or her way of looking at things is the only correct way or the closest approach to the truth in any situation to which they give permanent validity. It thus rejects the philosophical or doctrinal approach of humanism which focuses primarily on ultimate reality and individual salvation.

One thing was clear to Nehru even before independence, the cultivation of science and its benefits to humanity. His visionary outlook could decipher the long term benefits of such an investment. He believed strongly that science and technology could be powerful tools for social and economic development, and he strongly advocated their application in solving India's problems. Nehru writes that science does not tell us much, or rather nothing at all, about the purpose of life. But it is now stretching its boundaries and may soon invade the so-called invisible world and help us understand this purpose of life in its wider sense, or at least give us some glimpses that clarify the problem of human existence.

[4] Nehru's scientific humanism was therefore characterised by an emphasis on rational thinking and scientific inquiry, a belief in the power of science and technology to improve human life, support for scientific education and research, and the application of science in solving social and economic problems. He also stressed the importance of integrating science with human values and ethics.

Nehru's scientific humanism was influenced by his admiration for the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment thinkers, and he saw science as a way to foster critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and innovation. He believed that science could help India transcend traditional stages of development, and his vision continues to shape India's scientific and technological development. Through a variety of initiatives and policies, Nehru's scientific humanism has had a lasting impact on India's approach to innovation, research, and development, making science and technology integral to the country's progress. Nehru classified the era's highest ideals into two categories, humanism and the scientific. Nehru writes "There has been apparent conflict between the two, but There is a growing synthesis between humanism and the scientific spirit, resulting in a kind of scientific humanism" [5].

Nehru's humanist thought has had a lasting impact on Indian politics and intellectual discourse, shaping the country's democratic values, social policies, and international relations. His commitment to humanism continues to inspire scholars, policymakers, and social activists around the world. Nehru's definition of human dignity is rooted in his humanist ideology, which emphasizes the inherent worth and potential of individuals. Through a careful analysis of his writings and speeches, it is possible to identify key components of his understanding of human dignity. He believed that every person has inherent worth and significance, regardless of their social, economic, or political circumstances. He emphasized that human dignity is not something that can be given or taken away by external forces, but rather it is an intrinsic aspect of human existence. Nehru saw human dignity as closely linked to autonomy and freedom. He believed that individuals should have the freedom to make their own choices and decisions without fear of oppression or coercion.

Nehru was deeply concerned about the realisation of human potential, and saw human dignity as closely linked to the ability to develop one's abilities and talents. He believed that human dignity was closely linked to the principles of equality and justice. He advocated a society in which all individuals have equal opportunities and are treated with respect and dignity. Nehru's understanding of human dignity was also influenced by humanist values such as compassion, sympathy and kindness. He believed that these

values were essential to the creation of a society in which human dignity could flourish.

On examining Nehru's writings and speeches it is evident that his definition of human dignity is multi-faceted and comprises several key components. His understanding of human dignity is rooted in humanist principles and emphasises the inherent worth of individuals, autonomy, competence, equality and humanist values. Nehru's advocacy of a secular state and equal status for all religions coincided with the humanist principles of religious tolerance and pluralism. He believed that a secular state was necessary to promote religious harmony and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs. This approach reflects the humanist emphasis on reason, individual liberty and the separation of religion from the affairs of the state. His humanist approach to life directed all his thoughts and actions to work for the welfare of mankind. Nehru was known for his belief in the freedom and welfare of the individual. His belief in the bright future of man emerged from his faith in science and his belief in man's progress towards a better life through it. He explained that "Science answers more and more questions, and helps us understand life, and thus enables us, if we choose to use it, to live a better life, directed towards a meaningful purpose. It illuminates the dark corners of life and enables us to face reality rather than the vague illusions of irrationality"^[7] For him science meant an approach to all problems of life. It should be applied to problems related to our family, religion and everything else. He affirmed, "In the solution of these problems, the method of observation and exact knowledge and deliberate reasoning according to the method of science should be adopted, a living philosophy should answer the problems of today."^[6]

Thus we can hope only through science to solve our problems as it can prove to be of immense benefit to humanity. But the immense powers of science can be used for construction as well as destruction. Hence Nehru always stressed the need for the development of the spiritual side of man. At the Indian Science Congress of 1963, Nehru said that "Without science, no society has any future, but even with science there is no future unless it is controlled by some spiritual impulses. Science must be supported by moral values"^[9].

Nehru's emphasis on democratic participation and civic engagement reflects humanist values of human dignity. He believed that democracy was necessary to ensure that power rested with the people and that citizens had a voice. This approach resonated with humanist ideals of human dignity, autonomy, and the importance of individual participation in shaping public life. Nehru's commitment to economic and social equality resonated with humanist concerns for social justice and human welfare.

He believed that economic development and social justice were essential to building a more equitable society, and that the state had a key role in promoting these goals. This approach reflects the humanist emphasis on social justice, human rights, and the importance of addressing the root causes of inequality and discrimination. Nehru's approach to national integration and overcoming communal differences resonated humanist ideals of shared humanity and global citizenship. He believed that national integration was essential to promote social cohesion and to ensure that all citizens had equal opportunities regardless of their caste, creed, or religion. This approach underlines the importance

of shared humanity, global citizenship and going beyond narrow identities and interests.

Pt. Nehru maintained his faith in a bright future which emerged from his philosophical self analysis, faith in science and faith in man's capacity to march upwards to a better life. This great humanist who was passionately interested in the welfare of man stated that "a living philosophy must answer the problems of today. Scientific Humanism, according to him, was this living philosophy and he made it the basic faith and creed of his life"^[10]. He believed that "great increases in knowledge do not necessarily make us better or wiser. We need to know how to use that knowledge properly, only then we can reap full benefit from it"^[11].

As we face the complex challenges of the 21st century, Nehru's humanist legacy demonstrates the importance of prioritising social justice, democracy, and global cooperation in building a more just and equitable world. Ultimately, this research highlights the continued relevance of humanist thought in promoting a more just, peaceful, and equitable world, and underscores the need for continued engagement with humanist values and principles in contemporary political discourse. Currently, the attack against science in our country which is linked to the political class is really dangerous because it is putting faith and religion in direct conflict with science. Today, it is very important to remind people the scientific legacy of Nehru. Especially to the coming generation of Indians, so that they can be protected from the influence of fanaticism and antiscientific rhetoric coming from the highest echelons of government.

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