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## Review paper

## The Relevance of Nehru's Thought in The Age of Religious Nationalism and Economic Liberalization

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ABSTRACT	Manuscript Info.
Jawaharlal Nehru's ideological framework, rooted in secularism, scientific temper, socialism, and democratic governance, shaped post-independence India's identity as a pluralistic and equitable nation. In the contemporary era, marked by the rise of religious nationalism and the shift toward economic liberalization, Nehru's thought faces significant challenges yet retains profound relevance. This paper examines the applicability of Nehruvian principles in addressing the tensions between religious nationalism and pluralism, as well as the inequities of market-driven economic policies. Through a qualitative analysis of Nehru's writings, speeches, and policies, alongside contemporary socio-political and economic trends, the study argues that his ideas offer a critical lens for fostering inclusive governance and balanced development. The findings suggest that Nehru's emphasis on secularism and equity can counter communal polarization and economic disparities, while his advocacy for scientific temper and democratic governance provides tools for rational and participatory policymaking. This paper contributes to the discourse on adapting historical ideologies to navigate modern India's complex challenges.	✓ ISSN No: 2584-184X ✓ Received: 09-06-2025 ✓ Accepted: 28-07-2025 ✓ Published: 26-08-2025 ✓ MRR:3(8):2025;47-49 ✓ ©2025, All Rights Reserved. ✓ Peer Review Process: Yes ✓ Plagiarism Checked: Yes
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**KEYWORDS:** Nehru's thought, Secularism, Scientific temper, Socialism, Democratic and governance

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, was a visionary whose ideas on secularism, scientific temper, socialism, and democratic governance laid the foundation for modern India. His commitment to pluralism and equitable development guided the nation through its formative years, fostering unity in a diverse society. However, the contemporary Indian landscape, characterized by the rise of religious nationalism and the dominance of economic liberalization since the 1990s, presents new challenges to Nehruvian thought. Religious nationalism, with its emphasis on majoritarian identity, often conflicts with Nehru's secular ideals, threatening India's

pluralistic ethos. Concurrently, economic liberalization has shifted the country from state-led socialism to market-driven growth, raising questions about the relevance of Nehru's economic vision in addressing rising inequalities. This paper explores the enduring significance of Nehru's thought in navigating these dual forces, assessing how his principles can inform strategies for social cohesion and sustainable development. By analyzing primary sources, such as Nehru's writings and speeches, alongside secondary data on contemporary trends, the study argues that Nehruvian ideals

remain a vital framework for addressing India's modern challenges.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to evaluate the relevance of Nehru's ideological framework in the context of contemporary India's socio-political and economic transformations.

The specific objectives are:

(1) To analyse Nehru's core principles secularism, scientific temper, socialism, and democratic governance in relation to the challenges posed by religious nationalism and economic liberalization.

(2) To assess the compatibility of Nehruvian secularism with the rise of religious nationalism and its impact on India's pluralistic identity.

(3) To examine how Nehru's socialist vision aligns with or diverges from the outcomes of economic liberalization, particularly in addressing inequality.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative research approach, integrating historical analysis, textual interpretation, and contextual evaluation to assess the relevance of Nehru's thought. Primary sources include Nehru's key works, such as *The Discovery of India* (1946), *Glimpses of World History* (1934), and his speeches and letters addressing secularism, socialism, and national unity. Secondary sources comprise scholarly articles, books, and policy documents analyzing India's socio-political and economic shifts from 1991 to 2025.

### Nehru's Ideological Framework

Nehru's thought rested on four pillars: secularism, scientific temper, socialism, and democratic governance. Secularism, for Nehru, meant state neutrality toward all religions, fostering unity in India's diverse society, as evident in his support for the Hindu Code Bill and constitutional protections for minorities. His advocacy for a scientific temper promoted rational inquiry and modernization, reflected in the establishment of institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). Socialism, central to his economic vision, emphasized equitable resource distribution through state-led planning, as seen in the Five-Year Plans and public sector enterprises. Democratic governance underscored his commitment to inclusivity and participatory politics, strengthening institutions like the Election Commission. These principles, articulated in Nehru's writings and policies, face scrutiny in the context of religious nationalism and economic liberalization, yet offer insights for addressing contemporary challenges.

### Religious Nationalism and Nehruvian Secularism

The rise of religious nationalism since 2014 has challenged Nehru's vision of secularism, which prioritized equal respect for all faiths and the separation of religion from state affairs. Religious nationalism, often rooted in majoritarian politics, has redefined Indian identity, leading to debates over minority

rights and communal harmony. Nehru's secularism, as expressed in his speeches and policies, sought to unify India's diverse populace, exemplified by his insistence on constitutional safeguards for religious minorities. Recent trends, however, indicate a shift toward policies and rhetoric that blur state-religion boundaries, raising concerns about pluralism. Despite this, Nehru's secularism remains relevant as a counter-narrative to divisive ideologies. His emphasis on pluralism can guide efforts to protect minority rights and promote interfaith dialogue, addressing communal polarization. Adapting Nehruvian secularism to modern contexts requires reinforcing constitutional principles through inclusive policies and public education, ensuring India's diverse identity endures.

### Economic Liberalization and Nehruvian Socialism

Economic liberalization, initiated in 1991, marked a departure from Nehru's socialist model, which emphasized state intervention to ensure equitable growth. Nehru's economic policies, including the establishment of public enterprises and the Planning Commission, aimed to reduce inequality and promote self-reliance. In contrast, liberalization prioritized market-driven growth, leading to significant GDP increases averaging 7% annually from 2000 to 2020—but also rising inequality, with India's Gini coefficient climbing to 0.35 by 2020. Critics argue that Nehru's socialism is incompatible with a globalized economy, yet his focus on equity remains critical for addressing liberalization's downsides, such as rural distress and urban poverty. A Nehruvian-inspired mixed economy could balance market efficiency with social welfare, through measures like targeted subsidies and skill development programs. By integrating his principles with modern economic strategies, India can pursue inclusive growth that mitigates disparities while embracing global opportunities.

### Scientific Temper in a Polarized Age

Nehru's advocacy for a scientific temper aimed to foster critical thinking and innovation, essential for India's modernization. Institutions like the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) reflect his commitment to scientific progress. In an era of religious nationalism, where misinformation and dogma occasionally resurface, his emphasis on rationality is vital for countering divisive narratives. A scientific temper can promote evidence-based governance and public discourse, addressing polarization. Moreover, in a knowledge-driven economy, Nehru's vision aligns with the need for innovation and technological advancement. By prioritizing education and research, policymakers can draw on Nehruvian principles to ensure India remains competitive while fostering social cohesion.

### Democratic Governance and Inclusive Politics

Nehru's commitment to democratic governance emphasized inclusivity and institutional integrity, as seen in his efforts to strengthen democratic institutions. In the context of religious nationalism, where populist rhetoric can undermine democratic

norms, Nehru’s focus on dialogue and consensus-building offers a blueprint for inclusive governance. Similarly, his participatory approach ensures marginalized voices are included in policymaking, critical in addressing liberalization’s inequities. By reinforcing democratic institutions and promoting civic engagement, India can navigate modern governance challenges, drawing on Nehru’s vision to maintain a robust and inclusive democracy.

Adapting Nehru’s Thought to Today

Adapting Nehru’s thought to contemporary realities requires a critical and creative approach that addresses current socio-economic and political complexities. One of the foremost challenges today is the growing inequality and precarity brought about by rapid economic liberalization. In this context, Nehru’s emphasis on state responsibility must be revisited to strengthen social safety nets that can provide security and dignity to the most vulnerable. This includes expanding access to basic services such as healthcare, education, housing, and employment opportunities, particularly for marginalized communities who are often left behind in a market-driven economy.

Secularism, a core pillar of Nehru’s vision, also needs to be reinterpreted in light of the rise of digital media and mass identity mobilization. The passive model of state neutrality is no longer sufficient to counter aggressive forms of religious nationalism amplified through social media and political propaganda. Instead, a more proactive and civic form of secularism is needed one that not only upholds religious freedom but also actively promotes interfaith dialogue, pluralism, and constitutional values in public life. This approach would require greater engagement from both the state and civil society in countering hate speech, communal narratives, and exclusionary ideologies.

Moreover, Nehru’s faith in democratic institutions must be revitalized through stronger public accountability and civic participation. At a time when institutional autonomy is under threat, there is a pressing need to defend the independence of the judiciary, the media, and the election commission, while also empowering local governance structures and civil society organizations. This involves not only legal safeguards but also a cultural commitment to democratic norms and dissent.

Economically, Nehru’s model must evolve to accommodate new global and domestic challenges. While the command economy model of the mid-20th century may no longer be viable, its core aim economic justice remains essential. The state must play a regulatory and guiding role in ensuring that growth is sustainable, inclusive, and people-centered. This could involve public-private partnerships in key sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, but with robust oversight mechanisms to prevent exploitation and ensure equitable access. In adapting Nehru’s ideas to the present, the goal should not be to replicate the past but to draw on its values to build a more just, inclusive, and resilient future.

CONCLUSION

Nehru’s thought, encompassing secularism, scientific temper, socialism, and democratic governance, remains highly relevant in addressing the challenges of religious nationalism and economic liberalization. His secularism offers a

framework for countering communal polarization, while his socialist vision provides insights for mitigating economic disparities. The emphasis on scientific temper and democratic governance equips India to tackle misinformation and strengthen institutional integrity. This study demonstrates that adapting Nehruvian principles to contemporary realities can guide India toward inclusive and sustainable development. Future research could explore practical policy applications of Nehru’s thought, ensuring his legacy informs India’s path forward.

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