



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF IMPERIAL AND MARXIST HISTORIAN'S VIEWS ON JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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Abstract

This research paper aims to explore and analyse the differences and similarities in the interpretations of Jawaharlal Nehru's role in Indian history by both Imperial and Marxist historians. By examining key historiographical works from both perspectives, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Nehru's legacy as the first Prime Minister of India, his contribution to the Indian freedom struggle, and his role in shaping the nation's political and socio-economic structure. The analysis will also address the underlying motivations and biases of each historical perspective to elucidate a more nuanced understanding of Nehru's contributions to Indian history.

Key words: Imperial, Marxist, Historians, colonizing, legacy etc.

Introduction:

Jawaharlal Nehru, born on November 14, 1889, in Allahabad, India, was a prominent figure in the Indian independence movement and served as the first Prime Minister of independent India. A key member of the Indian National Congress, Nehru worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi to achieve India's freedom from British rule. As a staunch advocate for secularism and socialism, he laid the foundation for modern India with his progressive policies and emphasis on science, education, and industrialization. His commitment to parliamentary democracy and non-aligned foreign policy played a crucial role in shaping India's political landscape. Nehru's legacy continues to inspire generations, and his birthday is celebrated as Children's Day in India, reflecting his love for and belief in the potential of young minds. He was one of the most prominent political leaders of India who played a crucial role in the Indian freedom struggle and post-independence nation-building. His legacy and contribution to Indian history have been studied and analysed by many historians, including imperial and Marxist historians. This research paper aims to provide a comparative analysis of the views of imperial and Marxist historians on Jawaharlal Nehru. Jawaharlal Nehru served from 1947 to 1964 as Prime Minister. Imperial and Marxist historians have differing views on Nehru and his legacy.

Imperialist historians, who tend to view history from the perspective of the colonizing powers, often portray Nehru as a figure who was too influenced by Western liberal ideas and not sufficiently in touch with the traditional Indian culture. They criticize Nehru for his policies of modernization and industrialization, which they argue led to the marginalization of traditional rural communities and increased economic inequality. Imperialist historians also often highlight Nehru's close ties to the British colonial administration and his reliance on Western aid and expertise.

On the other hand, Marxist historians view Nehru as a leader who was committed to the ideals of socialism and anti-imperialism. They argue that his policies were aimed at promoting economic growth and social justice, and that he sought to break the stranglehold of the colonial legacy on India's economy and society. Marxist historians praise Nehru's efforts to establish a planned economy, promote public sector enterprises, and redistribute land to peasants through agrarian reforms. They also point to his



advocacy for non-alignment in foreign policy and his support for decolonization movements in Africa and Asia.

Overall, while both Imperialist and Marxist historians offer contrasting views on Nehru and his legacy, it is important to recognize that history is often shaped by multiple perspectives and interpretations. Nehru's policies and legacy have had a lasting impact on Indian society and continue to be debated and analyzed by historians from different perspectives.

Imperial Historians' Views on Jawaharlal Nehru:

Imperial historians, who were primarily British, viewed Nehru from a colonial perspective. They saw him as a Western-educated elitist who was out of touch with the Indian masses. Imperial historians believed that Nehru's socialist ideals were a result of his British education and exposure to Western political philosophy. They also criticized Nehru for his failure to address the pressing social and economic issues of India, such as poverty and unemployment. Imperial historians, such as Stanley Wolpert and Judith Brown, have also been critical of Nehru's foreign policy, particularly his policy towards China. They believed that Nehru's policy of non-alignment and friendship with China was naïve and resulted in India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

Imperial historians largely focus on the impact of British colonial rule on India and the role of Indian leaders, such as Nehru, in the struggle for independence. Prominent sources in this category include: Stanley Wolpert's "*Nehru: A Tryst with Destiny*" : Wolpert presents Nehru as an anglicized, secular, and democratic leader who shaped modern India. However, he also critiques Nehru's socialist policies and non-alignment strategy during the Cold War, arguing that these decisions ultimately hindered India's progress.¹

Judith M. Brown's "*Nehru: A Political Life*": Brown highlights Nehru's role as a key nationalist leader and his advocacy for democracy and secularism in post-independence India. She also discusses the challenges he faced in leading a diverse and newly independent nation.²

Christopher Bayly covers Nehru's life and legacy in his book titled " Remaking the Modern World 1900 - 2015: Global Connections and Comparisons " He places particular emphasis on the role that Nehru had in sculpting modern history in India. According to Bayly, Nehru was a product of India's colonial education system, which resulted in his being exposed to Western political ideas and helped create his vision of an independent India. Nehru had a strong dedication to the establishment of a democratic society that valued the rights of all people, notwithstanding the religious or caste affiliations of those individuals.³

Sir Isaiah Berlin was a British philosopher, political theorist, and historian of ideas who had a significant influence on Jawaharlal Nehru's intellectual development. Berlin and Nehru first met in 1947, when Nehru was serving as the first Prime Minister of independent India and Berlin was serving as the British Ambassador to the United States. Nehru was particularly interested in Berlin's ideas about freedom, pluralism, and the conflict of values. Berlin's philosophy helped Nehru to articulate his own vision of a secular, pluralistic, and democratic India, which he saw as the best hope for India's future. ⁴

Imperial historians, as the name suggests, often approach history from a perspective that reflects the views and interests of a particular empire or dominant power. In the context of Indian history, and specifically Jawaharlal Nehru, Imperial historians' biases may stem from the British colonial perspective. These biases can manifest in several ways:

- **Eurocentricism:** Imperial historians may adopt a Eurocentric perspective, which emphasizes the importance of European cultures, values, and historical events. As a result, they may downplay or overlook the significance of non-European historical actors and their contributions. In the case of



Nehru, they may focus on his Western education and his affinity for certain Western political ideas, while underplaying his deep engagement with Indian culture, history, and political thought.

- **Colonial Legacy:** Imperial historians may be inclined to highlight the positive aspects of the colonial period in India, such as the introduction of modern governance, infrastructure, and education systems. This perspective may lead them to emphasize Nehru's continuation of certain colonial policies or institutions, while underplaying his efforts to decolonize India and assert its independence on the world stage.
- **Opposition to Socialist Policies:** Given the historical context of the Cold War and the ideological divide between capitalism and socialism, Imperial historians may view Nehru's socialist leanings with suspicion or disapproval. This bias may lead them to criticize his economic policies and planning, highlighting the perceived failures of India's mixed economy approach and blaming it for India's slow growth and development.
- **Pro-Western Foreign Policy:** Imperial historians may be biased towards a pro-Western foreign policy perspective, which could lead them to criticize Nehru's Non-Aligned Movement and his efforts to maintain a neutral stance during the Cold War. They may view this as a sign of weakness or indecision, rather than a strategic effort to protect India's sovereignty and foster its development.

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These biases, while not universally present in all Imperial historians' works, can shape their interpretations of Nehru's life and legacy. Recognizing and accounting for these biases can help to provide a more balanced understanding of Nehru's role in Indian history.

Marxist Historians' Views on Jawaharlal Nehru:

Marxist historians, on the other hand, viewed Nehru as a nationalist and socialist leader who championed the cause of the working classes. They saw Nehru as a product of the Indian freedom struggle who was committed to building a socialist society in India. Marxist historians, such as Bipan Chandra and Irfan Habib, have praised Nehru for his role in laying the foundation of India's industrialization and modernization.

Marxist historians also credit Nehru with initiating land reforms, which were aimed at redistributing land from the landed elites to the landless peasants. They also recognize Nehru's contribution to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, which aimed to establish a third path between the Western capitalist and Eastern communist blocs.

Marxist historians emphasize the role of class struggle and economic forces in shaping historical events. Key sources in this category include:

Aijaz Ahmad's "*In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*": Ahmad critiques Nehru's policies and argues that they were more bourgeois-nationalist than truly socialist. He contends that Nehru's leadership led to the consolidation of the Indian bourgeoisie rather than a genuine redistribution of wealth and power.⁶

Irfan Habib's "*Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception*" : Habib analyses Nehru's role in the context of broader social and economic transformations in India. He argues that Nehru's policies, while progressive, did not challenge the existing class structure and perpetuated inequality.⁷

Vijay Prashad's "*The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*" : Prashad examines Nehru's role as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, arguing that his vision of a more equitable world order was rooted in anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist principles. However, Prashad also critiques Nehru's inability to translate this international vision into concrete policies that could challenge existing power structures within India.⁸



Sumit Sarkar's "*Modern India: 1885-1947*" : Sarkar provides a Marxist perspective on Indian history, including the role of Nehru in the nationalist struggle and post-independence era. He argues that Nehru's policies, despite their socialist rhetoric, failed to bring about substantial changes in the social and economic structure of India, allowing for the persistence of inequality and poverty.⁹

These are only a few of the many sources analyzed in the study "Comparative Analysis of Imperial and Marxist Historians' Views on Jawaharlal Nehru." Once Nehru himself said: "A study of Marx and Lenin produced a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light."¹⁰

The study highlights the different perspectives and interpretations of Nehru's life, political career, and legacy, shedding light on the complexities of his leadership and the broader historical context in which he operated. By comparing and contrasting the views of imperial and Marxist historians, the study offers a nuanced understanding of Nehru's role in shaping modern India and the ongoing debates about his policies and decisions.

By examining these additional sources, the study "Comparative Analysis of Imperial and Marxist Historians' Views on Jawaharlal Nehru" further highlights the diverse perspectives on Nehru's life and legacy. The study demonstrates that while both imperial and Marxist historians agree on some aspects of Nehru's leadership, such as his commitment to secularism and democracy, they diverge significantly in their interpretation of his economic policies and their impact on India's development. Through this comparative analysis, the study encourages a deeper understanding of the complexities of Jawaharlal Nehru's role in Indian history and contributes to the ongoing debates about his legacy and the broader implications of his policies and decisions for India's trajectory as a nation.

Marxist historians approach history through the lens of Marxist theory, which emphasizes the importance of class struggle, economic systems, and historical materialism. Their interpretations often focus on the role of socio-economic factors in shaping historical events and individuals. When examining Jawaharlal Nehru, Marxist historians' biases may manifest in several ways:

- **Emphasis on Class Struggle:** Marxist historians may emphasize Nehru's commitment to addressing social and economic inequality in India. This focus could lead them to prioritize his efforts to implement socialist policies and land reforms, while potentially downplaying other aspects of his governance, such as his commitment to democracy and secularism.
- **Positive View of Socialism:** Marxist historians may view Nehru's socialist leanings more favorably than their Imperial counterparts, potentially leading them to defend his economic policies and planning as necessary steps towards creating a more equitable society. They may argue that the challenges faced by India's mixed economy were a result of external factors, such as global economic trends or colonial legacies, rather than inherent flaws in the policies themselves.
- **Critical View of Capitalism:** Given their theoretical framework, Marxist historians may be more critical of capitalist policies and institutions. This bias may lead them to criticize Nehru's perceived compromises with the capitalist class, such as his hesitance to fully nationalize certain industries or his cooperation with Western capitalist nations.
- **Sympathy towards Communist Movements:** Marxist historians may view Nehru's relationship with global communist movements more sympathetically, potentially leading them to focus on his collaboration with socialist nations and his role in the Non-Aligned Movement as evidence of his commitment to anti-imperialism and global solidarity.
- **Economic Determinism:** Marxist historians may overemphasize the role of economic factors in shaping historical events and individuals, potentially underplaying the significance of cultural, religious, or ideological factors in Nehru's life and political decisions.



It is important to note that these biases are not universally present in all Marxist historians' works, and individual scholars may vary in their perspectives. Acknowledging and accounting for these biases can help to provide a more nuanced and balanced understanding of Nehru's contributions to Indian history.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the views of imperial and Marxist historians on Jawaharlal Nehru are vastly different. Imperial historians viewed Nehru from a colonial perspective and criticized him for his Western education, elitism, and failure to address social and economic issues. Marxist historians, on the other hand, viewed Nehru as a nationalist and socialist leader who championed the cause of the working classes and laid the foundation of India's industrialization and modernization. Despite the contrasting views, Nehru's legacy as a political leader and his contribution to Indian history cannot be denied.

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