

EVENT REPORT

LECTURE: WHAT DID NEHRU MEAN BY REVOLUTION AND SOCIALISM?

(Organised by Ramjas Political Review on 19 February 2026)

1. The Ramjas Political Review (RPR) organised a lecture titled *What did Nehru mean by Revolution and Socialism?* on 19 February 2026. The objective of this lecture was to reflect upon the novelty and originality of Jawaharlal Nehru's ideas and their continued relevance in the search for an idea of India.
2. The lecture was held after the offline release ceremony of the Ramjas Political Review, Volume 3(1), with Professor Madhavan K Palat, Former Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, gracing the event as the Chief Guest.

THE LECTURE BY PROFESSOR MADHAVAN K PALAT

3. Prof Palat highlighted the importance of understanding India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, as an intellectual thinker, emphasising that Nehru's political vision was inspired by the socialist thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
4. He outlined Nehru's socialism as having the following strands: economic growth and prosperity, land reforms, industrialisation, advanced social welfare, cooperation, universal adult franchise, local democracy or panchayats, and non-alignment.
5. Prof Palat noted that Nehru's socialism was more in sync with the ideas of British socialist thinkers such as Sidney Webb and proponents of the Fabian Society, along with German socialist thinker of evolutionary socialism Eduard Bernstein.
6. Further, the lecture delved into Nehru's novelty in differing from Sidney Webb's idea of nationalisation in key sectors of the economy and instead opting for a set of controls and regulations for the economy that would boost growth and build institutions.
7. The lecture also dispelled many myths about Nehru's relationship with the Soviets and their model of socialism. The Communist Party reminded Nehru of the Catholic Church, which further led to his deep aversion towards Lenin and Bolshevism.

8. Prof Palat provides a glimpse into Nehru's travel to Moscow in 1927, leaving an impact on his vision for India. In this visit that was spread across four days, Nehru was impressed by the pursuit of universal education in the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).
9. He noticed a reign of social equality, where he could not differentiate between the poor and the rich by appearance. He was also equally impressed by a prison administration which did not punish the prisoners but tried to rehabilitate them by providing work. The visit resulted in a series of articles written by Nehru offering his critical insights about the USSR. The compilation of these articles was published as a book in 1929 titled *Soviet Russia: Some Random Sketches and Impressions*.
10. Prof Palat further noted that Nehru's politics can be viewed as one of consensus rather than the pursuance of a particular ideology, which, however, led to Nehru being portrayed as a stooge working for both sides: the capitalist and the Soviet. However, this criticism, Prof Palat highlights, is misplaced, as Nehru was not in favour of either. Capitalism for Nehru was an extension of colonialism, and Soviet Bolshevism suffered from the problems of a perpetuating dictatorship, lack of civil liberties, and religious dogmas.
11. Prof Palat underscored that Nehru's attitude towards the USSR has largely been misunderstood due to a literal reading of his texts, improper assessment of his ideas, and lack of contextual study. On Nehru's esoteric and often rhetorical style of writing, Prof Palat further noted the shortcomings of the literal interpretation of his works on the USSR by contemporary scholars such as the likes of S Gopal, Shashi Tharoor, and Ramachandra Guha, and drew attention to the importance of situating his ideas within their broader historical and intellectual context.
12. An example of this is evident in Nehru's book on his visit to the USSR, where, while talking of the Russian Revolution, he invokes the words of William Wordsworth's ode to the French Revolution, 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive; but to be young was very heaven.' The use of these words is widely misread as Nehru's tryst with violent revolutions, but the words of Wordsworth teased the English for their brutal repression of their people after the French Revolution of 1789.
13. Nehru's other liking, Prof Palat highlighted, was socioeconomic planning, which further led to national integration and unity. Similar to how the electoral processes unite the country, Prof Palat noted that the Planning Commission was expected to have a similar impact.

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

14. The audience session opened with a question about Nehru's politics of accommodation, facilitating the rise of right-leaning centrism in contemporary Indian politics, to which Prof Palat responded by stressing that Nehru was a politician who led by building consensus, and a causal link between his politics and today's times requires further research.
15. This was followed by a question on Nehru's views on caste and caste-based reservations and how they escape from annihilating caste completely. Prof Palat answered by dwelling on Nehru's socialism that viewed economic equality and prosperity as a prerogative of the state and a solution to end caste-based inequalities.
16. On a question about Nehru's views on revolution, Prof Palat illustrated Nehru's five understandings of revolution. *First*, he took the rise of social democracy and a welfare state as a revolution too. *Second*, Nehru was mesmerised by Georges Danton's view of a military-led social revolution in the context of the French Revolution. *Third*, Gandhian non-violence and peaceful resistance were seen by Nehru as a revolution in their own right. *Fourth*, Nehru saw the rise of nationalism across the globe as a political revolution that was going to become an invincible aspect of modern politics. *Finally*, the revolutions of modernity that ushered in the print revolution, industrial revolution, the Enlightenment, et cetera, led society into economic growth and prosperity along with the rise of a scientific temper.
17. The subsequent question addressed JGA Pocock's presentation of a historian as a political actor and whether Prof Palat agreed with the same. Moreover, the question also sought his perspective on tackling the battle between disinformation and information in the domain of history. Prof Palat responded to the question by solemnly agreeing with Pocock's opinion and stressed that the role of a historian is not just in making people understand the past but in shaping the future as well. Prof Palat stressed the importance of historians continuing to do their jobs with passion and zest, just like Nehru, whose writings reflect his aim for India to be a much more prosperous and inclusive nation-state.
18. The session concluded with a question on the usage of artificial intelligence (AI) by researchers in academia. Prof Palat advised young scholars to take advantage of each technological advancement. Prof Palat said that the AI deserves to be dealt with just like the Internet Revolution. Furthermore, he stressed that historians ought to be accommodating of all advancements taking place across the globe and use them to their advantage.

Ends.