

Lecture No. 1  
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Jawaharlal Nehru - The Struggle for Independence

This is the first Memorial Lecture in honour of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. I am one of a number of Trustees under Lord Mountbatten's chairmanship appointed to control a Trust to do honour to the memory of Nehru. At the same time it has been proposed that a series of Memorial Lectures be inaugurated.

I was honoured to be invited by the President of India to give this first lecture, and the invitation arose out a conversation between the President and Lord Mountbatten. Apart from my family's long association with India, I feel sure that I have been asked as Master of Nehru's old college, Trinity.

Nehru's has long been an honoured name in Cambridge and it is fitting that you Mr Vice-Chancellor should take the Chair.

I hope that this lecture may help tie closer the bonds between Cambridge and India, but what is of even greater importance, the friendship between Britain and India. It is indeed fortunate that Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter is at present Prime Minister of India and I am sure we all wish her well. The maintenance of this friend-ship should be one of the most important objectives of peace lovers in the world today. Nehru himself used these words in broadcast from London in January 1951:

'You will remember the magnificent example of which both England and India have reason to be proud. Both of us, in spite of long continued conflict, approached our problems with this basic temper of peace and we not only resolved them but produced, at the same time, abiding understanding and friendship. That is a great example which we might well bear in mind whenever any other crisis in the relations of nations confronts us. That is the only civilized approach to problems and leaves no ill-will or bitterness behind'.

One of the most remarkable features of the man is that, after all he went through, there was no ill-will or bitterness left behind.

In assessing the man as a whole, it may truly be claimed that the story of his 74 years is an integral part of world history. For almost everyone, he symbolized the struggles and aspirations, the difficulties and achievements of post-war India, but so vast a subject cannot be compressed into the space of an hour, and my plan is to concentrate on the years leading up to 1947, leaving to someone else the formidable task of tracing the events of Nehru's Premiership. Only during the final period was Nehru's international stature definitely recognised and assured, and I shall close with an assessment of this. But long before he became the first Prime Minister of independent India he was a force to be reckoned with. The formative years of his boyhood and youth in England, moreover, are vital to a full understanding of the mature statesman. Let us glance briefly at those early experiences of Western culture.

#### Birth and Upbringing

Jawaharlal Nehru was born in Allahabad on 14 November 1889, the eldest child of Motilal Nehru a brilliantly successful, affluent and influential Brahmin lawyer. Of his early childhood and influence he wrote: 'My childhood was ... a sheltered and uneventful one. I listened to the grown-up talk of my cousins without always understanding all of it. Often this talk related to the overbearing and insulting

manners of the English people towards Indians, and how it was the duty of every Indian to stand up to this and not to tolerate it ... Much as I began to resent the presence and behaviour of the alien rulers, I had no feeling whatever, so far as I can remember, against individual Englishmen. I had had English governesses, and occasionally saw English friends of my father's visiting him. In my heart I rather admired the English'<sup>1</sup> This ambivalent combination of admiration for Western culture and of resentment of the patronizing and arrogant English rule in India appears to have been very characteristic of the Nehru household. It is evident too in Nehru's letters to his father from England, where he came at the age of 15 to complete his education at Harrow (for two years) and then here at Trinity.

There are not many records of Nehru's time at Harrow and Trinity. He says in his autobiography: 'Personally I owe too much to England in my mental make-up ever to feel wholly alien to her, and do what I will, I cannot get rid of the habits of mind and the standards and the ways of judging other countries as well as life generally, which I acquired at school and college in England'.

He says on leaving Cambridge: 'My general attitude to life at the time was a vague kind of cyrenaicism, partly natural to youth, partly the influence of Oscar Wilde and Water Pater', and 'At the same time risk and adventure fascinated me; I was always, like my father, a bit of a gambler, at first with money and then for higher stakes, with the bigger issues of life'.

But in the England of that time other influences than those of Pater and Wilde were at work. In the Edwardian age new critical attitudes towards the arrangements of human society were being brought home to the English-speaking public by Wells, Shaw, and Bertrand Russell; similarly this was an age of vast scientific progress, not least here in Cambridge with the work of J J Thomson.

Although Nehru was not deeply caught up in these adventures of ideas, it is not too much to say that he derived from his education in England his rationalist approach to the problem of life and his scientific attitude of mind. He read the Natural Sciences tripos while he was here, his subjects being Chemistry, Biology and Botany. For those who wish to be Prime Minister, it is a consolation to know that he got a second class.

Nehru, while at Trinity, lived in Whewell's Court. He does not appear to have taken much interest in debating. He attended the Majlis, but was irritated by their joking manner. He also attended the Magpie and Stump, but was fined on several occasions for not speaking during the term. We read in his autobiography how long he took to get used to public speaking after his return to India, and how after his first speech he was embraced and kissed by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru.

It was while at Cambridge that Nehru was influenced by the first thoughts of Fabianism and Socialism, by the works of Lowes, Dickinson and by Meredith Townsend's *Europe and Asia*. While I cannot join him in the first enthusiasm, and only partly in the second, I must confess a powerful link exists between us on the third, namely that as young men we were both inspired by Meredith Townsend. His remarkable book which I have mentioned was published in 1905. It encouraged Nehru to start slowly but surely on his path of non-cooperation, and it fortified me to work for Indian constitutional reform and for a long period of disagreement with Churchill and his friends. I lived with Meredith Townsend and his family when I was young and my parents were in India.

When I compared notes with Nehru in later life we agreed that it was the following prophetic paragraph in Meredith Townsend's book which had impressed us. This refers to the precarious nature of the British hold on India long before it was threatened: "The Indian Empire is not a miracle in the

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<sup>1</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal, *Toward Freedom*, pp. 20-1 (The John Day Co., New York, 1941)

rhetorician's sense, but in the theologian's sense. It is a thing which exists and is alive, but cannot be accounted for by any process of reasoning founded on experience. It is a miracle, as a floating island of granite would be a miracle, or a bird of brass which flew and sung and lived on in mid-air. It is a structure built on nothing, without foundations, without buttresses, held in its place by some force the origin of which is undiscoverable and the nature of which has never been explained'.

Nehru also drew my attention to the following short passage: 'The clearness of the European's brain never tells him when the revolt of the Asiatic is near at hand, and all the subtlety of the Asiatic never tells him when a threat will make the European halt, and when it will pass him like the idle wind'. This so acutely diagnoses much of the long and painful misunderstandings which arose between the races.

### Return to India

Nehru returned to India after only seven years in England, but they had been seven very formative and influential years. In October 1908, on returning to England after a brief vacation in India, he had confessed to a feeling 'akin to that of home-coming'. Nehru was aware that India was in his blood and that there was much in her that instinctively thrilled him; and yet he felt concerned because he approached her 'almost as an alien critic, full of dislike for the present, as well as for many of the relics of the past'. 'To some extent' he wrote, 'I came to her via the West and looked at her as a friendly Westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts rose within me. Did I know India, I who presumed to scrap much of her past heritage?'<sup>2</sup> Nehru's love of India was fierce, passionate: but never uncritical. We can glimpse here already the makings of the portrait he later painted - anonymously - of himself in the following words: 'He has all the makings of a dictator in him - vast popularity, a strong will, energy, pride ... and with all his love of the crowd an intolerance of others and a certain contempt for the weak and inefficient ... His overwhelming desire to get things done, to sweep away what he dislikes and build anew, will hardly brook for long the slow processes of democracy.' The seeds of future greatness are apparent in this ruthless piece of self-analysis. But so, too, is the *paradox* of the mature and powerful statesman who was later to prove more culpable of hesitancy and of an excessive concern for the irrevocable and irreconcilable divisions of national and world opinion than of Caesarism. I shall return at the end to this tendency to tolerate the obstruction and watering down of those policies which Nehru himself believed to be vital when we consider his attitude to the 'slow processes of democracy'.

The India political scene had sharply changed during Nehru's absence in England. The Congress leadership, originally a moderate group anxious only for a share in the ordering of India affairs, was now being challenged by critics openly calling for self-government. By the end of the First World War the Indian national movement went further along the path of opposition when Gandhi launched his programme of non-cooperation against the British Raj.

To me one of the most fascinating problems about Nehru's career is to discern the moment at which he passed over from being what he describes himself when he left England as 'a bit of a prig' to when he launched into his long career of opposition against an Imperial Britain. I have not found this moment clearly defined either in his autobiography or any biography which I have read. I think it developed slowly from the atmosphere in his own home from his time in London and from his experience when he returned to India. There is an independent testimony by a close friend at Cambridge published later in the *Manchester Guardian* of 17 April 1942: 'By the time he went up to Trinity there already burned in him the ideal of a united, autonomous, self-sufficient India'.

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<sup>2</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery of India*, pp. 37-8. (Meridian, London, 1951)

‘We don’t need you English to rule us’, I can hear him exclaim in his slightly high-pitched voice. ‘It is an insult to our self-respect and intelligence’. That note of pride and self-respect was ever present in his objection to the British Raj. It seemed to blind him to the practical difficulties of the problem.

To understand the situation we must study the two Nehrus, his father Motilal and himself. Now Motilal was a very powerful man and lived in circumstances of considerable affluence in Allahabad. He was a close friend of my uncle Sir Harcourt Butler who was the Governor of the UP. Jawaharlal indignantly denies in his autobiography that my uncle sent his father champagne in goal but my family sticks to the story. My researches in family archives go to show that the champagne was sent by a Jemadar but it does not appear to have been delivered or consumed, except perhaps by the bearer.

Jawaharlal was brought up in his youth in circumstances of considerable loneliness. He greatly admired his father and depended on him for sustenance for most of his early career. This was a dispensation which enabled Nehru early to leave the Bar and to devote his whole life to public affairs.

His father Motilal from quite an early date took considerable interest in the moderate side of the nationalist movement. It was therefore all the more galling to Jawaharlal that jokes should be made about their wealth and connections, that their linen was alleged to be sent from India to a Paris laundry and that Jawaharlal had been sent to school with the Prince of Wales, whom in fact he had never met.

However, in the history of the world, conversions like that of St Paul of the rich and prosperous are sometimes the most effective, and there is no doubt that two events, the arrest of Mrs Besant and (in 1919) the ruthlessness of General Dyer converted Motilal to the militant wing of the Congress, and thereafter father and son were to work closely together.

Edwin Samuel Montagu said in his diary about Mrs Besant’s imprisonment ‘I particularly like the Shiva who cut his wife into fifty-two pieces, only to discover that he had fifty two wives. This is really what happened to the Government of India when it interned Mrs Besant’.

### Early Influences

But before we pursue the post First World War militant campaign of the Congress and consider the first impact of Gandhi we must look at the picture which Nehru himself has provided of the India to which he returned. He attended the Bankipore Congress of 1912 as a delegate and described it as very much an English-knowing, upper-class affair where morning coats and well-pressed trousers were greatly in evidence: ‘Essentially it was a social gathering with no political excitement or tension’.

The First World War had the effect of heightening political consciousness. Two events of great political significance occurred at the Lucknow Congress of 1916, the reunion of Moderates and Extremists in a common cause, and the achievement of agreement between Hindus and Muslims about the future constitution of India. This was called the Congress-League Scheme and it laid down, among other things, the proportion of seats to be reserved for the Muslim minorities. This Congress-League relationship was to be turned by 1940 into rivalry and by 1947 into Partition. My own view is that this course of history was inevitable, although some have blamed the Congress for not carrying the Muslims with them.

Nehru met Gandhi for the first time at the Lucknow Congress. Of that meeting, Nehru wrote: “All of us admired him for his heroic fight in South Africa, but he seemed very distant and different and

unpolitical to many of us young men'.<sup>3</sup> Gandhi remained in the background of Indian politics until 1919 when he responded to the Rowlatt Bills with the direct challenge of the formation of a Satyagraha Society, whose members were pledged to disobey the law as a symbol of passive resistance. This public proclamation of Gandhi's ideal of political action and the ensuing Amritsar massacre combined to jolt the young Nehru out of his inactivity. His reaction to Satyagraha was one of tremendous relief. Here at last, he felt, was a way out of the tangle, a method of action which was straight and open and possibly effective: 'I was afire with enthusiasm and wanted to join immediately. I hardly thought of the consequences - law-breaking, jail-going, etc - and if I thought of them I did not care'.<sup>4</sup>

Nehru's sudden determination to espouse the cause of Satyagraha disturbed his father greatly, however, and Gandhi urged him not to precipitate a rift, between father and son and indeed himself.

Of their relationship at this time Nehru wrote, 'It was perhaps a triangle, Mr Gandhi, my father and myself, each influencing the other to some extent. But principally, I should imagine, it was Gandhi's amazing capacity to tone down opposition by his friendly approach ... Secondly, our closer association ... brought out that Gandhi was not only a very big man and a very fine man, but also an effective man ... Father was forced to think because of my own reaction. I was his only son; he was very much interested in me'.<sup>5</sup>

Motilal's affection for his son was very deep; he wrote to him once of 'the pleasure of seeing you which is never expressed in words but felt and felt as any has been or will be felt'.<sup>6</sup> For Jawaharlal, however, the strength of this bond meant that, even at the age of 30, his decisions could not be entirely his own. I want to make this point since among great leaders, Nehru is distinguished up to his later age by a certain dependence on men older than himself.

Before I go further, I will dwell on another potent influence on the life of Nehru.

In May of 1920 an order of externment - i.e. exclusion from the district - the first of many such communications from the Government was served on Nehru, who had taken his mother and wife to Missoorie. Nehru accordingly went back to Allahabad where, left to his own resources, he fell in with a company of peasants on the banks of the Jumna River,. They pleaded with Nehru to help them with relief from the exactions of the *taluqdars*. He accompanied them back to their villages and was deeply impressed by the abject poverty he met. They spoke of the rapacity of the money-lenders and the orders of exaction which were served upon them.

Nehru wrote that 'looking at their misery and overflowing gratitude he was filled with shame at his own easy-going and comfortable life'. 'A new picture of India seemed to be before me; naked, starving, crushed and utterly miserable'. Henceforth Nehru was to have perpetual contact with the Indian peasant with whom during his education and upbringing, he had had no touch. It was from this date that his power of speaking to the people and opening his mind to them developed. In all the agrarian problems of the U.P. which featured so largely in the Congress programme Nehru was next to Gandhi to have the greatest influence on the masses. As a footnote to this episode I will only mention that Motilal was very indignant about the externment order and wrote to my uncle Harcourt, the Governor, who gave orders for it to be rescinded, but not before the experience had made an indelible impression on Nehru's mind.

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<sup>3</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal, *Toward Freedom*, p. 14 (The John Day Co., New York, 1941).

<sup>4</sup> *Toward Freedom*, p. 48 loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Mende, Tibor, *Conversations with Mr Nehru*, pp. 22-4 (Secker and Warburg, London 1956).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Nanda, B R, *The Nehrus: Motilal and Jawaharlal*, p. 129. (Allen & Unwin, London, 1962)

This year of 1920 is really very important for the unfolding of Nehru's purpose and lifelong endeavour, for it was on 1 August that Gandhi published in *Young India* his article explaining his doctrine of non-violence.

'Non-violence', he said, 'is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute'.

'Working under this law of non-violence it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust Empire, to save his honour, his religion, his soul and to lay the foundation for that Empire's fall or regeneration'. As a young man he approached issues directly, as an arrow to the target; but as he neared middle age he became more contemplative.

After involving himself in politics he toured India at a frantic pace; always on the move and hardly resting; addressing gatherings at one village, moving on to the next and then to the next. He described one time when his day started with a function at eight o'clock in the morning. The programme for the rest of the day included half a dozen mass meetings and many smaller ones. His last engagement came at four o'clock the following morning, and then he was faced with a seventy mile journey to his resting place for the night (*sic*). He arrived there at seven o'clock: it had been a twenty-three hour day and an hour later he began his next day's programme. In spite of this activity Nehru had the ability to turn his mind in on itself, and become a dreamer living for a while the contemplative life. He might be startled as he journeyed along the road by a fine type of man or a beautiful woman who reminded him of some ancient fresco. Then he would slip away into the past and live for a while another life. Just as possibly the same figures could set his mind grappling with the vast practical problem of India's poverty. As he described it, his two lives marched together, inseparably tied up with one another and yet apart. This was the way Nehru discovered India and his people. It was a two-way exchange for the crowds were drawn as instinctively to him as he was to them. 'People do not want to hear him', wrote Gandhi, 'they simply want to see him. And that is natural. You cannot deal with millions in any other way'. Nehru, too, felt the almost physical quality of his relationship with the crowd. 'I was getting in touch with ... the people of India in their millions; and such message as I had was meant for them all, whether they were voters or not; for every Indian man, woman, or child. The excitement of this adventure held me, this physical and emotional communion with vast numbers of people. It was not the feeling of being in a crowd. My eyes held those thousands of eyes; we looked at each other, not as strangers meeting for the first time, but with recognition, though of what this was none could say'. Out of this experience grew a profound sense of patriotism.

### The Prison Years

We ought now to sense with Nehru his years in prison where he spent the best part of nine years. In 1930 he wrote: 'From time to time the prisoner's body is weighed and measured. But how is one to weigh the mind and spirit which wilt and stunt themselves and wither away in this terrible atmosphere of oppression?'<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, he considered his lot unfairly fortunate: 'The thought that I was having a relatively easy time in prison, at a time when others were facing danger and suffering outside, began to oppress me. I longed to go out; and as I could not do that, I made my life in prison a hard one, full of work'<sup>8</sup>

Nehru relished the leisure for reading: 'I am not a man of letters and I am not prepared to say that the many years I have spent in goal have been the sweetest in my life, but I must say that reading and writing have helped me wonderfully to get through them'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by D Norman, *Nehru, The First Sixty years*, Vol. 1, p. 227 (The Bodley Head, London 1965)

<sup>8</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal, *Toward Freedom*, p.169 (The John Day Co., New York, 1941)

<sup>9</sup> *Glimpses of World History*, p.949 (Drummond, London)

His main works from prison are the *Glimpses of World History*, *The Discovery of India* and *The Unity of India*.

Nehru's letters to his daughter Indira are called *Glimpses of World History*. In them, Nehru touched on the early history of the world and the way man thought and lived; he established a relationship between those times and the present day and sometimes introduced his own ideas. It was common experience for the child to find that prison separated her from other close members of her family circle - her grandfather, her aunt and uncle and even Kamala, her mother. The health of Kamala was precarious and when Indira was not yet fifteen her mother died in a Geneva sanatorium. It was an event which had brought about one of the few occasions when father, mother and daughter had been together. Immediately after her mother's death, Indira spent a few days with Nehru at Montreux. Then, because he was needed back in India, he returned alone. She too, alone, returned to boarding school in Switzerland. 'I hope', wrote Gandhi to Nehru, 'Indu bore well the grief of Kamala's death and her almost immediate separation from you'. Poor child, her whole short life had been an extended lesson in bearing partings well!

*Glimpses of World History* is a series of loosely connected sketches of the history of mankind. It is introspective and 'romantic', but it reveals Nehru's moods and beliefs. In it he is as critical of Britain as he is appreciative of Indian culture, though he is critical of caste and of orthodox religion. He takes up three strands of history, the classical nineteenth-century belief in perpetual progress, the stressing of the role of the great man and the sociological analysis of groups in societies in motion, with especial reference to Marxism. Nehru sets his aims in perspective; Freedom for India is the goal but even greater is the cause of humanity itself. What is remarkable is that Nehru was able to write an outline of world history despite the limitations of prison life and without access to books for reference except for Wells's *Outline of History*.

I will quote one further passage from *The Discovery of India* and that is about religion. It is important if we are to know Nehru to understand his attitude on this subject.

'Religions have helped greatly in the development of humanity. They have laid down values and standards and have pointed out principles for the guidance of human life. But with all the good that they have done, they have also tried to imprison truth in set forms and dogmas, and encouraged ceremonials and practices which soon lose all their original meaning and become mere routine. While impressing upon man the awe and mystery of the unknown that surrounds him on all sides, they have discouraged him from trying to understand not only the unknown but what might come in the way of social effort instead of encouraging curiosity and thought, they have preached a philosophy of submission to nature, to the established church, to the prevailing social order, and to everything that is. The belief in a supernatural agency which ordains everything has led to a certain irresponsibility on the social plane, and emotion and sentimentality have taken the place of reasoned thought and enquiry. Religion, though it has undoubtedly brought comfort to innumerable human beings and stabilised society by its values, has checked the tendency to change and progress inherent in human society'.<sup>10</sup>

From *The Unity of India* I choose the following moving extract about Kashmir.

'Like some supremely beautiful woman whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire, such was Kashmir in all its feminine beauty of river and valley and lake and graceful trees. And then another aspect of this magic beauty would come to view, a masculine one, of hard mountains and

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<sup>10</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery of India*, p.622 (Meridian, London, 1951)

precipices, and snow capped peaks and glaciers, and cruel and fierce torrents rushing down to the valleys below. It had a hundred faces and innumerable aspects, ever-changing, sometimes smiling, sometimes sad and full of sorrow. The mist would creep up from the Dal Lake and, like a transparent veil, give glimpses of what was behind. The clouds would throw out their arms to embrace a mountain-top, or creep down stealthily like children at play. I watched this ever-changing spectacle, and sometimes the sheer loveliness of it was overpowering and I felt almost faint. As I gazed at it, it seemed to me dream-like and unreal, like the hopes and desires that fill us and so seldom find fulfilment. It was like the face of the beloved that one sees in a dream and that fades away on awakening'.<sup>11</sup>

### The 1935 Act

It is now important to get the 1935 Government of India Act into focus. Those of us who like myself dedicated five years of concentrated effort to preparing the way for Indian Independence against the powerful cohorts organised by Mr Churchill, were astonished and not a little chagrined by the Indian nationalist response.

During much of the short but vital period immediately preceding the 1935 Government of India Act, Nehru was in prison. His initial reaction to this important piece of legislation was basically hostile. He spoke of 'this new charter of slavery', and when - free once again - he presided over the session of Congress held at Lucknow in April 1936, Nehru claimed that the new British policy for India conferred 'responsibility without power'. There have of course been many other critics, both British and Indian, of the 1935 Act. It is common knowledge that the Act had been preceded by long years of careful investigation, reflection and Anglo-Indian consultation: but serious disagreements as to the way ahead for India persisted, and the Simon Commission's Report of 1930 had already been anticipated by the Congress counterblast of the Nehru Report. Yet, it remains incontrovertible that the 1935 Act - piloted between the Scylla of British hesitation in the face of 'die-hard' opposition in Parliament, and the Charybdis of Indian ambitions and impatience as personified in Congress - was the final major, constructive achievement of the British in India.

Thus in terms of immediate fulfilment, the hopes expressed by me in the House of Commons, when winding up the first day's debate on the India Bill, were only partly realised. I said: '... I would like to take up the words of the honourable member for Morpeth who expressed the hope that we had stumbled on a future line of development in regard both to a Constitution for India and, possibly, a model Constitution for the world. I believe that in this Constitution are the features of the strong Executive known to the East, and of the democratic form known to the West; and I sincerely hope that we have found a future form of government that will not only provide a possible modification of democracy which may work satisfactorily, but may also tie together the best in the East and the West'.<sup>12</sup>

But it would be wrong to conclude, from the failure of the central federal structure to materialise, that the 1935 Act had failed itself. On the contrary, later in his life Nehru told me that it proved to be an organic connecting-link between the old and the new.

As the *Oxford History of India* says: 'The mists of contemporary uncertainty and patriotic impatience shrouded the merits of the Government of India Act when it was passed; but twelve years later the new Independence Act was seen to be, in large measure, the conception of 1935 developed and completed'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Unity of India, Collected Writings, 1937-1940*, (Drummond, London)

<sup>12</sup> *H. C. Debates*, 7 February 1935

<sup>13</sup> *Oxford History of India* (3rd edn. 1958) p.814

## The War

The war period was wasted as far as Nehru was concerned, since he was in prison, so we can jump to the vital independence period, the accession to power of Mr Attlee and the Viceroyalty of Lord Mountbatten.

I pass over the effects of the Cabinet Mission and Nehru's growing impatience until a talk which I remember well in the first few days of December 1946. I was invited to 10 Downing Street to speak with Mr Attlee, the then Prime Minister. He said that he would like to ask my personal opinion as a Conservative as to whether the Government would do right to choose Lord Mountbatten as the last Viceroy of India. I agreed when Mr Attlee said to me 'I feel sure that the first Empress of India would be glad to see a descendant complete the last part of a century's work'. Mountbatten was asked in mid-December and gave his acceptance on 15th January 1947. Thereafter Nehru found close friends and events moved swiftly.

Neither the stimulus of a new personality nor the threat of the political vacuum which might follow Britain's imminent withdrawal from India could break the Congress-League deadlock. Mr Jinnah - 'Qaid-i-Azam' - saw victory for Pakistan in sight, and the new Viceroy came to realise that Pakistan was the single viable alternative to anarchy.

Nehru's broadcast of 3 June 1947, is one of the most important I have to record. He paid tribute to the labours of the Viceroy 'since his arrival here at a critical juncture in our history'. He referred to the blessings and wise counsels of Mahatma Gandhi. He asked cooperation and he was wrung by the terrible difficulties through which the country had passed, economic political and communal. 'These months have been full of tragedy for millions, my mind is heavy with the thought of the thousands who are dead, of the innumerable people who have been uprooted from their homes and rendered destitute'.

Such was the travail and such was the dark side of 'a Tryst with destiny' on 7 August 1947, when each member of the Constituent Assembly took the following pledge: 'at this solemn moment when the people of India through sacrifice and suffering have secured freedom I do dedicate myself in all humility to the service of India and her people to the end that this ancient land attain her rightful place in the world and make her full and willing contribution to the promotion of world peace and the welfare of mankind'.

## Conclusion

Thus ended nearly two centuries of British political power in India. If, in part, Macaulay, Elphinstone and their contemporaries would have been astonished and disappointed at the unexpected fulfilment of their dreams, they would nevertheless have conceded that Britain's presence in India had left an indelible mark. In 1947 the British left India a very different country from that archaic land which their diplomacy and their arms had mastered: 'Not only the external conditions of life but the soul of India itself had been greatly changed'. And the 'very weapons and arguments used by Congress against the British were largely of western provenance. India broke her British fetters with western hammers'.<sup>14</sup>

It will fall to the future lecturer to describe Nehru's premiership and his rise to the summits of international statesmanship. Before his death Nehru had become what he himself had earlier declared Gandhi to be: 'the father of India'. To the post-war government of a free India Nehru gave the stamp of his personal character - pragmatic, secular, humane, international, democratic.

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<sup>14</sup> Spear, T & P. *India: A Modern History*, p.389. (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1961).

Since the death of the Mahatma in 1948 and that of Patel two years later, Nehru was, overwhelmingly, the dominant figure of India politics. After his passing, the *New York Times* was moved to record: 'A pattern of politics concentrating power and influence in a single revered man who leads the country by virtue of a special personal magic had ended'.<sup>15</sup> And because Prime Minister Nehru was so great a man in his own vast country of over 400 million inhabitants, he also ranked very high amongst the elite of international statesmen for almost seventeen years, from 1947 until 1964.

New Delhi possessed then, and retains, the ear of Washington and Moscow, London and Peking, Paris and Djakarta. Nehru himself said in *India and the World* that national isolation is neither a desirable nor a possible ideal in a world which is daily becoming more of a unit. His life reflected that belief.

We have seen that Nehru earlier wrote that an 'overwhelming desire to get things done' tempted him to ignore the slow processes of democracy. A glance at the troubled political map of present-day Africa reveals how great (and how dangerous) a temptation it is for any ruler of a newly independent country to try to govern with the iron authority of virtual dictator. But Nehru - perhaps to his own surprise - resisted any urge to override Congress and public opinion. It was not that he lacked the power to do so. As Prime Minister his prestige was, for long periods up to the early 1960s, so vast and so unquestioned that he might have been excused for believing that recourse to parliamentary methods was superfluous.

But his humanity - as shown in a speech to the Mountbattens on their departure from India, New Delhi, 20 June, 1948, 'You may have many gifts and presents but there is nothing more precious than the love and affection of the people' and his idealism turned him and the vast country he governed towards the political avenues of democratic and parliamentary government.

One of the secrets of Nehru's stature as an international statesman was his determination to respect human values in the political sense: his democratic principles, in other words. Today a number of voices are raised in criticism of his undoubted tendency at times towards hesitation delay and compromise, towards unfinished plans and an inconsistent 'Weltanschauung'. At the bar of history, however, Nehru will emerge as a great Indian and a great world figure: not unscathed, perhaps, but as man whose contribution to the cause of effective democracy ranks as high as those Himalayan mountain peaks which towered above his erstwhile prison walls.

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<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, 14 June 1964