

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
5, Fitzhardinge Street, London W. 1
Bishopbriggs, Glasgow

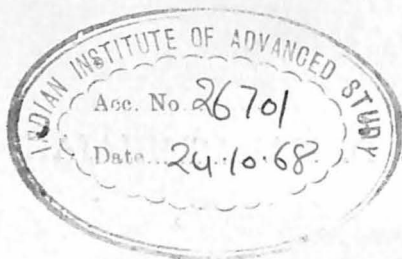
BLACKIE & SON (INDIA) LTD.
103/5, Fort Street, Bombay
285/7, Bipin Behari Ganguly St., Calcutta-12
2, Rajamannar Street, T. Nagar, Madras-17



Library IAS, Shimla



00026701



923.254
N315 N

PRINTED IN INDIA
BY K. A. KORULA AT THE WESLEY PRESS, MYSORE
AND PUBLISHED BY D. R. BHAGI FOR BLACKIE & SON (INDIA) LTD.
FORT, BOMBAY

PREFACE

We praise writers in cliches or run them down variously without ever taking the trouble to read them. Jawaharlal Nehru has suffered both. And yet hardly any other Indian writer of our time can help us to partake of what may be termed as the Indian consciousness both as inherited from the past and formed by eminent Indians of the first half of this century of whom the supreme was Mahatma Gandhi. It is a consciousness of India as it flows in our blood stream and generally determines our response as Indians to the rest of the world. In Nehru it comes to us not always in terms of art but as the most sensitive awareness of a pre-eminent Indian in public life who was essentially an artist.

I believe it is this consideration which has weighed with the Government of India in instituting the Jawaharlal Nehru lectures at university centres.

I wish to express my gratitude to Sri Vamana Rao, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Syndicate of Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati for the honour they have done in asking me to give these lectures for 1966-67. I am thankful to the audience (which included my colleagues and students from Mysore) for turning up in large numbers evening after evening on three successive days.

I cannot sufficiently thank Dr B. Gopala Reddy, His Excellency the Governor of U.P., a former colleague of Jawaharlal Nehru and himself a writer of distinction for his generosity towards me. To my Vice-Chancellor, Dr K. L. Shrimali I must express my profound gratitude for his interest in my Nehru studies.

It is a pleasure to record my indebtedness to my friend, Professor William Walsh of Leeds University for, while I

had invariably thought of Nehru's work in terms of 'human touch', 'human accent', it is Professor Walsh's book *A Human Idiom* which helped to make a sharper response to my subject. Hence the title *The Human Idiom* for these lectures.

Mr K. A. Korula of the Wesley Press has always been considerate to me but he and his Press have, I must say, excelled themselves in printing these lectures as though they too wished to collaborate with the author in paying their tribute to the memory of a great Indian who more than any one else in public life in India, paid keen attention to the aesthetics of book-production.

I feel reassured in the thought that Mr M. Tarinayya has been able to read the proofs of these lectures with me.

C.D.N.

'These lectures have been delivered under a scheme of the Union Ministry of Education entitled 'Promotion of the study of the teachings of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru' and are printed in this volume with their permission. The Ministry of Education are, however, not responsible for the accuracy of the material nor do the views expressed therein necessarily represent the views of the Government of India.'

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Author's Preface	iii
I. Jawaharlal Nehru: The Human Idiom	1
II. Jawaharlal Nehru: The Rithuraj of India	27
III. Jawaharlal Nehru: His Sense of History in International Matters	53



I

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

The Human Idiom

WRITING or speaking on Jawaharlal Nehru is to me not an academic exercise but, if I may say so, a desire to share a personal experience, the joy of an adventure, of something that has lured and baffled me by turns and yet continually beckons to me. My vocation as teacher of English and my critical pretensions have, I hope, given the edge to my interest in Nehru's work. My first acquaintance with his writing was in 1947 when I read with pencil in hand the just published *Discovery of India* on board ship bound for England. Reading it was a personal re-discovery of the India I had only known in fragments which were jumbled up in the half-conscious and the unconscious of my being. Thanks to Nehru, I thought, India became for the first time a significant part of my emotional being. As I re-read the book it became my constant source of reference in my attempt to gain a proper perspective of my own country and people from far off England. Critically speaking, I found it most congenial too, to look at India through the eyes of Nehru who had himself approached her as a friendly foreigner does. One book led to another and I became more and more involved in Nehru within five years of my acquaintance with his work.

It may sound strange but it is a fact that then, as now, I had some little reading to my credit in English literature but nothing I had read, I must have the courage to admit,

produced in me such a strong sense of personal urgency, nothing had made such a difference to my little self both as student of English literature and as a human being as these writings and speeches which I had now read with close attention. I reacted to him as I did to any other good writer in English or American literature, because Nehru *was* a writer in his own right. And here was something more. A writer who had *lived* it all in the market place and made up the whole—lock, stock, barrel, not, as W. B. Yeats has said elsewhere, out of his bitter soul, but out of intense living, by standing on the precipitous edge of a mountain and looking down into the valleys below—rejoicing, suffering, longing, and looking forward to, not personal salvation but the salvation of his country and humanity. Hasn't he himself told us that only those can sense life fully that stand on its verge?

To so few has it been given to achieve perfection of the life or perfection of the work. And to find them both in the same person, well, it just falls short of a miracle. But then that is India's way. The man of thought not merely contemplated but chose to live a life of action—such, one would suppose, were Valmiki, Janaka, Gautama the Buddha, Sankara, Ramanuja, Vivekananda, and in our own age, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru.

Creative man, it seems to me, must constantly grapple with things, ideas and problems though the means he employs vary according to the genius that shapes his tensions—with one it is stone, with another it is clay or canvas, with a third one it may be words or sounds, or only gesture. Except for words, these media have more or less fallen into the hands of the specialists but it is important to note that wood, stone, clay and canvas are not the means of social intercourse in the same way as words are, though all of them have from time immemorial made for social cohesiveness and human solidarity. Of course, the man of letters too, like his counterparts in other media, is a kind of a specialist because of his uncommon use of words. But his distinction consists precisely in the use of common words, though in

an uncommon way. 'Mass contacts' observes Nehru, 'give new life and sincerity to the language and the writers themselves would catch some of the emotional energy of the masses and do better work.' Indeed, the writer is absorbed into the people's affections in proportion to what he has absorbed of the people, including their language, with all its variations of accent and emphasis, its undertones and overtones, its echoes and associations, its stresses and strains. It is commonplace that what he has absorbed suffers a rich sea-change in the crucible of his creative being, but those around him will not fail to see themselves in it even when it is heightened by the finest consciousness of the artist. If it has its significance in however small a measure, it is because of the 'variousness and possibility' that so many speaking the language from the peasant to the philosopher, have imparted to the making of it. It has therefore been truly said that art speech is the only speech which matters.

Now unless we seek to isolate ourselves from society, indeed, from the intimate members of our own family, and live each unto himself, which virtually means each confined in his prison, we must take care to keep this instrument in constant repair and not allow it to 'decay with imprecision'. For our success or the lack of it depends in no small measure on the states of mind we evoke and the attitudes we bring forth from those to whom language is addressed. This is true of all people who use language from the humblest vegetable vendor to the most sensitive poet—merchants, civil servants, bankers, diplomats, prime ministers and foreign ministers. Newspapermen and advertising agents know it best though what they do with words is another matter. Not for nothing did W. B. Yeats say 'words alone are certain good'. He didn't amplify his remark as Coleridge did earlier when he said: 'If words are not things they are living powers by which things of most importance to mankind are activated, combined and humanised'. A little reflection should make us realise that friendships are broken or restored, marriages are made or wrecked, parents

and children live amicably or fall out, individuals and groups promote human well-being or cause bad blood, nations go to war or live as good neighbours depending on the way they use or abuse language. Indeed, nothing in the last analysis, seems to matter so much as the language we use. But its actual use tells a different story. An English critic of distinction, Professor William Walsh, puts it pointedly when he says that 'we see this medium bleached of humanity in every sphere'—in politics, administration, in social science, and everywhere else.

It is often said that in Jawaharlal Nehru literature lost a great writer to politics, not knowing that both poetry and politics gained through him. While his writing can quicken the pulse of millions of men and women, here and abroad, today and in times to come, he helped no less to redeem politics—not always an edifying game when played by others. Mr Attlee might think that Nehru didn't know where poetry stopped and politics began, but history knows better for he will be with the great ones of history precisely because he didn't keep them apart—that was to betray both, and not for him to betray either. If as Prime Minister he created power, as writer he questioned power. And happy that nation whose leaders combine in themselves both politics and poetry.

As I was looking for some striking examples of political writings and speeches by the world's statesmen for purposes of comparison with Nehru's, it occurred to me that Nehru himself had done all that I needed to do—the man, the occasion, the responsibility, the expectation and the disappointment—all done with detachment.

In 1938 London was in suspense; Hitler was going to declare war and Chamberlain, England's Prime Minister broadcast a speech, comments Nehru, without saying anything new, without making any reference to vital issues. Soon after, President Roosevelt sent a message and Nehru notices the contrast between the two speeches :

'What a vast difference between what he says and how he says it, and Mr Neville Chamberlain's pronouncements!

Even the printed word of President Roosevelt shows that there is a man behind it.'

Anyone can see Nehru looking at the power of words, for words must receive the pressure of personality of the writer or the speaker who uses them. Now here is a Prime Minister of a great Empire, leading the country in an hour of crisis and according to Nehru he has neither a 'striking appearance' nor 'nobility' in his countenance. 'He looks very much like a businessman. His delivery is fair. For an hour or so he speaks, a bald narrative with occasional personal touches, proud about his personal intervention, his talks with Hitler, the part he is playing in world affairs' etc., etc. Nehru cannot help remembering the great Prime Ministers of England and in doing so he shows his grasp of political history: 'a Palmerston or a Gladstone or Disraeli would have risen to the occasion; a Campbell-Bannerman would have put fire into what he said; a Baldwin might have lifted the house, (so would) Churchill in a different way (the way of rhetoric Nehru doesn't approve of, but simply passes over by using the word 'different'). Even Asquith would have spoken with dignity suited to the occasion. But there was neither warmth nor depth of intellect in what Chamberlain said. It was very evident that he was not a man of destiny.'

It is needless to ask if a mere politician would have thought the way Nehru did on this momentous occasion. It is not at the same time a dilettante account of a newspaper columnist writing for effect. It is clearly by a very sensitive man deeply alive to the human accent in a leader of men who knows from the inside how hard it is to approach great problems and win men's minds and hearts in a human way, a civilized way. That it is not the way of a demagogue or even an orator is shown by his reservations about Churchill. And in his references to the others, one will not fail to notice Nehru's preoccupation with the human touch—revealed in words like 'warmth', 'depth', 'fire', 'gripped'. It is as though an artist, a literary critic, is commenting on the speaker and the speech. Chamberlain suffers in

comparison even with Hitler, whom Nehru calls 'a neurotic personality'. But he had 'something elemental' about him while Chamberlain was 'of the earth, earthy'. Chamberlain could have matched Hitler's might with the 'force of organized democracy, the will of millions of people'—that acquired by one human being over other human beings in a human way. But Chamberlain did not possess that power, nor did he seek to possess it. He moved in his narrow sphere and thought in limited terms and never tried to develop or represent the urge that moves millions. Besides there was no mention in Chamberlain's speech of President Roosevelt or the sacrifices of the Czech people. At the end of the article, the abiding human concern still persists: 'Was there going to be another betrayal; the final murder of that nation?' A question of ideals, of ends and means. It shows how lucky a people must be in its leaders! Because individual leaders not merely involve their nations in bloody wars but bring them before the bar of world opinion when their actions become part of history.

Hardly any statesman of the world, at any rate in our time (John Kennedy is a possible¹ exception), seemed to appreciate the full value of the human idiom as Nehru did. It is as though he knew the truth of the Biblical saying:

¹ Even when Kennedy employed the human idiom, those who have heard both, will be constrained to observe that Kennedy's voice was gruff, at any rate sounded gruff to the Indian ear, most sympathetically predisposed to President Kennedy's high-mindedness so evident in his printed speeches.

The late Professor D. P. Mukherji has paid perhaps the finest tribute to Nehru's voice: 'It is probably the most cultured voice in India. Tagore's was a piping one and often ended in a shrill. Gandhiji carried persuasion through directness. Mrs Besant had a feminine rondure; Mrs Naidu's was clear and melodious; Sastri's had grace; Surendranath's had thunder; Malaviya's was mellifluous, but Jawaharlal has the somewhat cloudy overtones of a cultured man's voice without being gorgeous. That voice speaks with the sensitive hesitancy of thought process and a slight sensuality that is not quite male and yet must be very attractive for the female. It is definitely melancholy even when it lashes out in anger.'

'If the trumpet give an uncertain sound who shall prepare themselves to the battle?' But I should hasten to add that demagogues have invariably mastered the art of swaying people to their side by the power of the spoken word. And demagogues include not merely dictators but war-leaders like Winston Churchill too who, it is variously said, *spoke* his way to fame and 'brought victory' to his people by exhorting them to action employing the many resources (broad-sides) of the English language available to him in prose and verse. While a Churchill would 'smash', 'rout', 'destroy' the enemy, 'sink', his ships, 'shoot down' his planes and submarines etc. etc., what one heard from Nehru was the language of sweet reasonableness, of the accumulated wisdom of the ages. If that were not so he would not have described language as 'the poetic testament of the genius of a race and culture'; only he who knew the potency of words could say 'words are very tricky things'; words rule the world; and that he is a 'lover of words and phrases' because he can share his thoughts and feelings only through them. It looks as though Nehru is saying in modern western terms what the Indians of an earlier day had variously described as *akshara lakshmi*, *sabda brahma*, *vagartha viva sampruktau*. Even our country-folk speak of words as pearls, words as rubies, and the word as the living flame which is Iswara or Jyothirlinga. Interesting, though there may not be any causal connection, that two of the greatest Americans of the nineteenth century who felt the impact of India intimately should have spoken in the same strain. To Emerson the man is only one half, the other half is his expression; and to Thoreau standard speech is the utterance of a standard man.

It will be my endeavour in this lecture to try and show how Nehru's tremendous popularity at home and prestige abroad have been continually nourished by his humane expression. One wouldn't be so naive as to claim that where he used the human idiom he transformed a dismal failure into a shining success and there was chaos otherwise, for there are obviously several other factors contributing to

success or failure in life. Besides it takes two to make success of language—he who speaks and him that is spoken to. It must be conceded that in all cases Nehru generally tilted the balance in his favour by humanising his words; where he didn't score a success as such, he at least mitigated the harshness of a situation by what he said and how he said, and smoothed a rough surface; and thanks to him life became somewhat bearable.

How did this only son of prosperous parents, the blue-eyed boy from Harrow and Cambridge, the barrister of Inner Temple, and Prince Charming, come to be Gandhi's trusted lieutenant and sway the hearts of millions of his own countrymen for almost half-a-century, be the doyen of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, and the Prince of Peace for the rest of the world, now and in times to come? Is it the magic of his personality? Perhaps. But personality is too complex and elusive a thing to comprehend in its fullness. I am here only concerned with one aspect of it, perhaps a very important aspect of it, namely, the expression of (or is it 'escape from', since T. S. Eliot informs us so?) personality, in words. Here too, I must, for the sake of convenience impose on myself certain limits. I cannot obviously cover all his writings or his speeches, an appraisal of which I have attempted elsewhere. I shall, therefore, generally speaking, confine myself to his political life for it is that aspect that has intrigued me—how so sensitive a person, essentially an artist, who felt very lonely in a crowd, became a leader of the masses and retained his hold on them during his own life and continues to do so after death? And this in a country like ours, and in times like these?

He tells us in his *Autobiography* that after he came back from Cambridge and joined Gandhi's national movement he went up and down the country meeting Indian people in their hundreds of thousands. He saw them in miserable rags, their faces full of excitement, and their eyes glistened. Nothing could have sensitized him more than these moving sights and he simply responded to this human situation not as a politician or a philosopher, but as an artist. For

only an artist could tell us that they 'looked on us with loving and hopeful eyes as if we were the bearers of good tidings, the guides who were to lead them to the promised land'. He confesses, such is his capacity for introspection, that he was filled with shame and sorrow, shame at his 'own easy-going and comfortable life and our petty politics of the city which ignored this vast multitude and sorrow at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India'. He is sarcastic of his own father: 'if ever there was a bourgeois democracy my father will be pillar of its constitution'; and sarcastic of himself too—he speaks of the Communists' reference to him as 'petty bourgeois' and now they think, he says, that he is one of the repentant bourgeoisie. His very conception of India underwent a change and he felt an added responsibility, and he evokes in us that sense of impending social tragedy and that same sense of responsibility he himself felt towards these unfortunate people. 'A new picture of India seemed to rise before me, naked, starving, crushed and utterly miserable. And their faith in us, casual visitors from the distant city embarrassed me and filled me with a new responsibility that frightened me.'

Now faced with these dumb, starving masses what would he do? He can only feel humble. He says: 'I am vain enough in many ways but there could be no question of vanity with these crowds of simple folk. There was no posing about them, no vulgarity'. And so he wouldn't try to gain their goodwill by false pretences. In any case he didn't know the arts of oratory; disliked 'flamboyant addresses' so common on Indian platforms and so he spoke to them as man to man. 'Whether the gathering consisted of a few persons or of ten thousand or more', he says he 'stuck to his conversational and rather personal method of speaking'. He could not possibly respond to their 'artless story' in any other way. There was also the example of Gandhiji who knew his peasant India and had an amazing knack of reaching the hearts of the people. As to peasants, Nehru's attitude towards tribes also is not of the do-gooders, who would 'uplift' and 'improve' the backward people. Nehru

is interested in them because he likes them, because he feels very happy with these simple folk,—the nomad in him found congenial soil in their company. His respect for the 'otherness' prompts him to ask: 'Why should we try to make them conform to some other ways of living? Why make them second-rate copies of ourselves?'

He stands by them as a friend who fights for their rights, defends their modes of living as against those of the so-called civilized man when he talks of head-hunting of the tribes: 'It's better to cut off a head than to crush and trample on a heart'. He receives their 'gracious gifts' and 'the garlands that the bright-eyed Naga children' gave him. He does not of course forget to record in his characteristic way how he felt 'shamed and humbled before their clear gaze, full of faith and affection' as against the 'intrigues and money-grabbing' of townsmen.

Nehru's human idiom must have wrought miracles for the time being at least in the context of a wooden civil service; which in its attitude towards peasants and tribes in the past 'stiffened its back and tightened its hold' and used such terms as 'crush', 'squeeze', 'suppress'. It is against this background that we have to understand his attraction to the idea of losing his house during the national movement, because he felt 'this would bring me nearer to the peasantry who were being dispossessed'. It is this fellow-feeling that prompted him to 'go straight to the crowd and trust it', though he knew he was different. Different, but not aloof. He had always realised despite his aristocratic upbringing that if the poor behave in a manner we do not like, it is because no one took the trouble to teach them drawing-room manners. On another occasion, moved by their miserable plight and in self-admonition, since he frequently speaks of the graces of life, he says it is 'easy enough to admire the beauties of the universe and live in a world of thought and imagination but to try to escape from the unhappiness of others is no sign of courage and fellow-feeling.'

Consider for instance, Nehru's definition of a vote. A

vote to the electorate as well as to those that are elected is often: my man, my family, my party, my ideology or beat the other fellow because he is opposed to what is good for me. But Nehru the leader of the foremost political party looks at a vote in the most human possible way and not in terms of power and political influence. Perhaps he felt that articulation of it would be vulgar. So he plays it down, but here as elsewhere, where it concerns him, the negative suggests the positive and is there only by implication but he never *states* it directly. Nehru says:

‘A vote is a message of farewell to ease, comfort, domestic happiness and the intercourse of friends and the invitation to lonely days and nights, and physical and mental distress’.

Perhaps that is what a vote meant in India at a time when it did not lead to influence, prestige and power, politically. But to one like Nehru the vote continued to have the same meaning, the same obligations. If that were not so he wouldn't have thought as Prime Minister he had four hundred million problems; and would not certainly have left a will that his ashes should be scattered over the fields where the peasants of India toiled so that they might meet and mingle with the dust and soul of India and become an indistinguishable part of it.

The humane disposition was not only to the mass but reached also individuals, his comrades in arms. Loyalty to colleagues was his great virtue—some say his weakness too, for that virtue was there sometimes at the cost of efficiency and a clean administration. But then Nehru argued that a politician or statesman had to deal not only with truth but ‘men's receptivity to truth and if this is ignored truth is banished into wilderness till men's minds are ripe for it’. And so human affairs require of a leader a capacity to compromise but no one knew better than Nehru that if you started compromising you wouldn't know where you ended—the reason why he felt lonely, why he felt an exile in his own country, why he thought he was a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere, for he was certainly not of the West; he didn't

belong there. It was a very sad predicament—the predicament of a poet in the position of an *operating leader*. On all such occasions perhaps he had some comfort that his compromise was not based on opportunism.

Anyone who is familiar with Nehru's writings and speeches would bear witness to the fact that he was far more uncompromising in dealing with people in public life before independence than after when in office. Of course he was younger and was in those days dealing not so much with individuals as with causes and principles and parties. Consider for instance his relentless attack on the Liberals, the so-called Moderates in politics, in particular V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, the favoured child of the British Government, 'the Imperial Envoy'. Nehru was angry that Mr Sastri was carried away by his own enthusiasms and eloquence; that he had 'lost his roots and had no understanding of modern convulsions like the great French Revolution and the Russian Revolution—these eruptions of human desires must have frightened him.' Those who think Nehru was unfair and intemperate in his attack on Mr Sastri do not seem to have realised that the issue was far too profound for him to ignore. Nehru conceded that Mr Sastri was entitled to criticise and condemn Congress policy. But it was painful to him that as an Indian, as a lover of freedom and as a sensitive man Mr Sastri was unappreciative of the wonderful courage and sacrifice of his countrymen. Nehru asks: 'Did he not feel any pain and anguish when our rulers plied with a hatchet on India's heart? Was it nothing to him that scores of thousands were refusing to bend before the physical might of a proud empire, and preferred to see their bodies crushed, their homes broken, their dear ones suffer, rather than yield their souls?'

After this attack on human considerations he now mounts it on artistic grounds. He is angry that the Liberals are 'sombre and serious in their looks, dull in their writing and conversation, and lacking in humour'. It is an affront to his literary rather than political susceptibilities that the

Liberals should mouth such clichés as 'Patriotism is not the monopoly of the Congress' without varying the phrase a bit. He summons against them all the literary and intellectual resources to his aid—from the Bible, Blake, Pope, Lloyd George, A. N. Whitehead to Roy Campbell who had made fun of the plea for restraint on the part of South African novelists in the following lines:

You use the snaffle and the curb all right,
But where's the bloody horse?

Nehru quotes these lines with all the force at his command because of his deep disdain for the Moderates of Indian politics.

He does not spare his own party men—the Congress ministers in the provisional governments in the thirties when he sees them 'sink to the level of ordinary politicians governed by day-to-day opportunism'. His hope is that there are still men of good will in the Congress to cope with the situation. But he is distressed to find that 'their minds are full of party conflicts and the desire to crush this individual or that group'.

He is a different man, a man whose generosity and high-mindedness will flow freely to erring individuals everywhere. For example, M. N. Roy had for some years written 'a great deal in condemnation' of Nehru politically and as he puts it he had often 'succeeded in hurting' him a little. Nehru adds there was 'a great deal of difference' between them and yet he 'felt attracted towards him'. All this he recalls when Roy was arrested and in trouble. He writes not patronisingly but with real poignancy that he wanted to do what little he could to help him and in the brackets he takes care to play it down lest he should give a vulgar impression of striking an attitude: '(and that was little enough)'. His admiration and warmth for Mr. Roy flow freely when he recounts his reasons. He is attracted to Roy for his 'remarkable intellectual capacity'. Apart from intellectual considerations it is the human aspect that touched him deeply. He says he is attracted to Roy because he

‘seemed such a lonely figure’: ‘The British Government was naturally after him; nationalist India was not interested in him’ (and this when it reflects directly on him as the pre-eminent leader of nationalist India after Gandhi), and ‘those who called themselves Communists in India condemned him as a traitor to the cause . . . But this desertion of a man like him by almost everybody pained me . . .’

It is by such humanity that Nehru won the affection and regard of men who had marked, even violent, political differences with him—a Churchill in England, a Kripalani, a Jayaprakash Narayan and a Rajaji in India—the last of whom described him when he was alive as ‘a gift of the gods to India’, and when he died as ‘the most civilised of us all’. The two notable instances of meanness were those of Mr Chou En-lai who thought Nehru was the most arrogant man he had met; and Mr Ram Manohar Lohia who charged him with maintaining his grand-children at the expense of the Government of India and brought out in the most painful terms a public explanation from the maker of Modern India giving the trivial details of petty expenditure on a daughter who was the First Lady and her children who formed this great patriot’s only link with the future.

But Nehru was no more angry with him, it may be presumed, than with the two young men who belonged to a terrorist group in pre-independence days and who met him to warn that if he continued to speak disapprovingly of the terrorist activities they would deal with him as they had dealt with others. Recalling their pale nervous faces and brilliant eyes, he admits that he was long haunted by those excited faces ‘full of life and nervous energy they were; what good material if only they turned the right way! I was sorry that I had dealt with them hurriedly and rather brusquely . . . Often I have thought of them in these after years.’

The generosity that he showed towards those young men is the same that went on to describe Gandhi’s assassin later as a ‘madman’ and subsequently, ‘he too is a child’ of Gandhi.

This deep and abiding humanity must not lead us into thinking that Nehru did not fret and fume. His notorious flashes of temper have been part of the modern Indian legend, but these too are perfectly human. Indeed, not to have exhibited such passing tempers would have made him a saint or a monster and we should be thankful to bountiful Nature that he was neither. Once when he was in jail he received news of his old mother being beaten by the police during the Freedom Week and blood flowing from an open wound on her head, and Nehru reacted in the only human way a son should without resorting to heroics as might befit a respectable public figure serving a great cause. He wondered what would have happened to all those lessons of non-violence which he had learnt over a length of years if he had been there, then. And adds 'I would have recked little of the consequences, personal or national'.

On another occasion, a Paris correspondent of a well-known London newspaper wrote that when the Prince of Wales visited India, Gandhi 'burst in dramatically and unannounced . . . fell on his knees and clasped the Prince's feet and weeping copiously, begged him to give peace to this unhappy land'. Nehru must have been amused but also exasperated. But he could not ignore or dismiss it as a mere figment of the Fourth Estate man's customary fancy. The human idiom takes a moment's respite and he lashes out. For an insult to Gandhi is an insult to the country and he can hit back in the choicest words and appropriate literary form too, worthy of a Pope or a Swift. He wrote:

'The story was an incredible and ridiculous one, comparable perhaps to a fanciful account of the Archbishop of Canterbury suddenly bursting in upon Mussolini, standing on his head, and waving his legs in the air in token of greeting.'

While he is stung to the quick by the insult hurled by a paltry Paris correspondent on the greatest man of his generation, he is still careful enough to choose meticulously the Western counterpart of Gandhi *vis-à-vis* the Prince of

Wales (the Archbishop of Canterbury and the irreverent Mussolini) including the manner of greeting (standing on head and waving his legs in the air). Man for man, situation for situation, gesture for gesture! English vocabulary and English idiom, of course, but not very humane, though well-deserved. It may be imagined that hardly at any time was the Englishman likely to have regretted teaching his language to the Indian more than now—the colonial has ‘the profit on’t’, Nehru knows, though he seldom permits himself ‘to curse’ his vulgar masters.

But once freedom comes to India he forgets the past, the inevitable bitterness between the rulers and the ruled and extends his hand of friendship to the British people and the Commonwealth of Nations. Apart from the noble exhortation when he speaks of a ‘tryst with Destiny’, what is noteworthy about the speech of August 14, 1947 is his humility, and compassion for the suffering masses of India. The Prime Minister, he knows, is the ‘First Servant of the Indian people, pledged to their service and their betterment.’ He spells it out too, in moving words:

‘The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. . . . The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over’.

He fears communal bitterness because of partition and applies the healing touch:

‘This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill-will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.’

His sympathy for the victims of partition is apparent in the words and images he employs: ‘The unhappy land of the Five Rivers’; as for Kashmir, it ‘has gone through fire’. His recurring words are ‘heal’, ‘build’, ‘create’.

It is the assassination of Gandhi that brings out the deepest, and the profoundest human side of the man. Within a few hours of this great tragedy he has to speak to the nation. He is confused, benumbed, but recovers to tell his

countrymen that 'the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, is no more'. It is this feeling of being orphaned that is uppermost now after he recovers from the first announcement of shock. 'We will not see him again as we have seen him for these many years. We will not run to him for advice and seek solace from him, and that is a terrible blow.' There is superb logic in the sequence of his sentences, a logic of the heart, that is. One witnesses the supreme manifestation of his humanity when he tells us that 'a madman has put an end to his life'. There is not a trace of anger—the occasion is far too overwhelming for anyone to be merely angry. Anger would have been a cheap and ignoble emotion in the face of such a disaster. It must transcend all pettiness and ordinary reactions that flesh is commonly heir to. He is now thinking not so much of the fact as the symbol—'A great disaster is a symbol to us to remember all the big things of life and forget all the small things'. And later: 'He was done to death by one of our own brothers and compatriots. How did this happen?' Now goes the warning: 'If we have learnt anything from Gandhiji, we must bear no ill-will or enmity towards any person'. After all, he remembers, that many of our youth were misled and took to wrong paths. 'Are we to drive them away and crush them? . . . we have to win them over and mould them and train them to right action'.

In speech after speech after Gandhiji's assassination he gives himself to sorrow and tears and self-condemnation: 'I have a sense of utter shame', he says, 'both as an individual and as the head of the Government of India that we should have failed to protect the greatest treasure that we possessed.'

When he is somewhat composed there arises the artist's question: 'We praise people in well-chosen words and we have some kind of a measure for greatness. How shall we praise him and how shall we measure him, because he was not of the common clay that all of us are made of'. This is really the artist's problem: no one individual is like another individual, no human situation is the same as another; each

has a uniqueness and the artist has to capture that uniqueness. Unless an artist is a very distinguished person he will fail to capture it as we have proved it to our cost in this country. Gandhi made us men out of dust; he meant so much to us; and yet so few of our writers seem to have responded in a deeply personal way to that great disaster of his assassination. One speech was like another, one write-up was a verbatim reproduction of another, except for names and dates; and one condolence message had the same deadness about it as another. Fortunately the few that filtered down to this country from abroad were voices rather than echoes. But how few, if any, even of those could touch the heights of poetry and strike the tenderest chords of our hearts as Nehru has done! One has only to turn the pages of anthologies of elegiac poetry and funeral orations of the world to realise that by these few speeches alone—the few that he made after Gandhi's death Nehru is entitled to our respectful attention as writer and speaker. Indeed if I have to compile an anthology of the world's, say, dozen best speeches on the deaths of great men, I expect that one or even two of them by Nehru on Gandhi will be there and their omission will only reflect my poor critical standards or defective sensibility, if not a warped mind and a callous heart. And this not because I am an Indian.

The texture of his expression was the same even when Gandhi was alive. Nehru had sharp differences with Gandhi on economic and political issues and as for religion he protested he was not a religious man. He has criticized Gandhiji openly in several sections of his *Autobiography*; he accused Gandhi of taking the nation back to the pre-industrial age; he could not understand Gandhiji's glorification of the poor as *Daridranarayana*, and pampering of the rich as the trustees of society, etc. etc. Above all, his chief grievance against Gandhi is that the way of faith is not the right way to train a nation. He disapproved of Gandhi's fasts but was puzzled by his language, which was at one time a peasant's, at another time a rebel's, and a third time that of a mystic.

Nehru had the true artist's appreciation of the contraries and his own reactions to Gandhi are full of ambivalence, possibly because he despairs of Gandhi's defiance of our attempts to place him under known categories. Nehru recognises Gandhi's 'inexhaustible spiritual reservoir' when he remarks: 'he was obviously not the world's ordinary coinage; he was minted of a different and rare variety, and often the unknown stared at us through his eyes'.

Consider the famous Gandhi-Irwin pact according to which Civil Disobedience was to be called off, prisoners released, and salt manufacture permitted on the coast; Congress to attend the next Round Table Conference but neither independence nor dominion status was assured. This gives Nehru a tremendous shock, but he says nothing to Gandhi and lays bare the tensions of his heart only subsequently: 'There was nothing more to be said. The thing had been done. Our leader had committed himself; and even if we disagreed with him, what could we do? Throw him over? Break from him? Announce our disagreement? That might bring some personal satisfaction to an individual but it made no difference to the final decision.'

What did the final decision mean? It meant that the 'objective of our independence was jeopardised' and so he works himself to an emotional pitch from where he gives expression to the laceration of his heart: 'Was it for this that our people had behaved so gallantly for a year? Were all our brave words and deeds to end in this? . . . So I lay and pondered on that March night, and in my heart there was a great emptiness as of something precious gone, almost beyond recall.' An apt quotation from T. S. Eliot's 'Hollow Men', then, by the way, only a name to most professors of English in India, completes the rest:

'This is the way the world ends,
Not with a bang, but a whimper.'

Incidentally, a good scholar can write a full-length essay on the evocative use of Nehru's quotations from poets. He

quotes lines like the above as much to come to the finest articulation of things which he thinks he only knows or feels vaguely as to seek spiritual relief from a crisis in which he is caught up. Poetry with him is truly functional, never a mere ornament.

On another occasion when Gandhiji decided to go on 'fast unto death' in disapproval of Government's policy of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, Nehru felt angry with him at his religious, and sentimental approach to politics. Fear and confusion seized him and he writes: 'If Bapu died! What would India be like then? And how would her politics run? There seemed to be a dreary and dismal future ahead, and despair seized my heart when I thought of it.'

At the other end Gandhi, too, was thinking of Nehru and he sent him a telegram in which he said:

'During all these days of agony you have been before mind's eye. I am most anxious to know your opinion. You know how I value your opinion. . . .'

Nehru sends a reply in which he explains a few things but mainly his mental agony and confusion and points out the danger of real issues being obscured but adds: 'how can I presume to advise a magician? Love.' For he 'attached great value to Gandhiji's word' and in a personal matter like that he thought it wrong to break his resolve.

A few days before his fast Gandhi wrote him again and since he asked for a reply Nehru sent him the following telegram:

'Your letter. What can I say about matters I do not understand? I feel lost in strange country where you are the only familiar landmark and I try to grope my way in dark but I stumble. Whatever happens my love and thoughts will be with you.'

All the while Nehru was struggling against two divergent things simultaneously—his disapproval of Gandhiji's fast and fear of hurting him. But the telegram had been sent. He felt, however, that he had not sent him a cheerful message. He realised, as he put it, that 'little things make

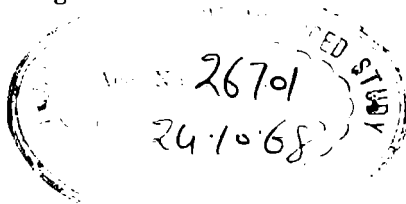
a difference psychologically' and so he sent him another telegram:

'Now that you are launched on your great enterprise may I send you again love and greetings and assure you that I feel more clearly now that whatever happens it is well and whatever happens you win.'

These extracts are from the chapter entitled 'What is Religion?' in Nehru's *Autobiography*. Nehru frequently declared that he was not religious and that he could not understand Gandhiji's language. But Gandhiji himself once remarked: he knew that when he was gone Jawaharlal would speak *his* (Gandhi's) language—that language, we might presume, is the language of love, tolerance, non-violence, purity of means and generally all those values which men live by. Even rest is a betrayal of the millions who never rest. He writes to his sister 'There is so much sorrow everywhere and we cannot understand it unless we become part of it. Out of sorrow comes a new understanding and a new strength.'

The time of testing came soon enough when Nehru became Prime Minister of this most problematic country in the world. Nothing was so important to Gandhi as wiping every tear from every eye. Now Nehru shared Gandhi's concern fully but there were behind this sophisticated intellectual Marx, Lenin and international socialism. How is he to reconcile the two? If he had learnt anything from Gandhi, he frequently repeated, it was the purity of means to achieve the desired end. And so the Prime Minister who is Chairman of the Planning Commission and therefore must give a direction to the Planners is obviously not going to be deluded by economic labels. What each step means in human terms is to him the paramount thing. He says:

'We take steps, one by one, consolidate them, and prepare for the next step. We don't talk too much about nationalizing or socializing (how could this artist talk in dogmatic terms?—that goes against the grain); we talk only in terms of the steps we are taking.'



Interesting that he uses the same word that Gandhiji had used years ago. Gandhi's favourite expression, when people talked big and pointed out imaginary obstacles, was 'one step enough for me'. The pity of it is as Nehru himself said in an address at Mysore in 1960 or so: Our people have grown conscious of their rights and privileges before they have realised their duties and responsibilities and demand the good things of life without realising the difficulties. Besides, it may be added, though Nehru wouldn't say so, that in their wishful thinking, they readily respond to fanciful stories of the 'enormous progress' made in totalitarian countries, not realising the price their people have had to pay in human terms. To his critics Nehru's answer was: 'This generation is sentenced to hard labour'; 'We cannot sell our tomorrow for today.' Poor as this country is he could never be so callous as to say: 'tighten your belts'; he would rather use a manly expression: 'work with your upper lip firm'. When a Member of Parliament drew Nehru's attention to an earlier statement of his that he would stop all imports of food by 1952, Nehru didn't attempt to evade the question or give ingenious answers but frankly confessed: 'I regret, however, that my words have been falsified and I feel thoroughly ashamed that what was almost a pledge to the country has been broken'. Asoka Mehta who later became Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission observed that 'because of his honesty Nehru makes many reservations in his formulations. These reservations weaken implementation, introduce intractable knots in execution. The intellectual sensitivity somehow weakens the firmness of will'. The point is that neither Mr Asoka Mehta nor anyone of his colleagues had either Nehru's sensitivity or his courage to introduce the 'knots' that Mr Asoka Mehta speaks of. Indeed all their brave words from positions of authority have made much less impact on the people than the hesitations and reservations and self-admonitions of Nehru did. His transparency was his virtue. The people knew in what desperate hurry he was to build up India's economy. Indeed, as a foreign

critic of Nehru observed he was 'the focal point from which radiated much of the enthusiasm for planning'. Another said 'All India was pressing in on this one man'.

In accordance with the genius of India Nehru could win the attention of the people to the country-wide factories as 'the temples of the new age'. Perhaps the expression might have pleased Gandhiji in spite of his prejudice against these factories. For much depends on how you look at it. If khadi was the 'livery of freedom' (Nehru's phrase) and Gandhi liked it he should now accept a factory because it is a temple where he offers his worship and works out his and his country's salvation. The words 'Irrigation and Power' 'excite' Nehru's mind and 'all kinds of ideas come to my mind—ideas of history, and the long perspective of human progress'. He speaks of the Ganga on whose banks civilizations have flourished and decayed and new ones have taken their place. Of course it is not the engineer's business to be concerned with the story of the Ganga. What Nehru means by all this is that they must make an imaginative approach. 'Then 'the water they deal with will become alive. Even the stones will tell a story'. If the engineers and the stone-cutters realise they are working with live material, even though it might be stone or steel it will 'give birth to further life'.

It is said that politics is the 'art of the possible' and no one knew the truth of it better than Nehru; and their very failure to do so has meant that Hitlers and Mussolinis, Maos and Chou En-lais, Sukarnos and Nkrumahs appear like bubbles of the earth and after their short-lived personal glory they will be gone for ever, hated by the people on whose graves they tried to build their temples of fame.

Who can swear that any of these heads of States mentioned above and those that are living around us today would ever have permitted themselves to speak to their people or their representatives with the candour and humility of Nehru when something for which neither he nor his Government was responsible but was brought about by the forces of history, for example, the refugee problem and all it

entailed to thousands and thousands of men, women and children in the Indian sub-continent? No Government could possibly cope with the problem which had the magnitude of a succession of earthquakes, floods and famines rolled into one veritable deluge. But Nehru takes the responsibility squarely:

'In fact I have often wondered why the people of India put up with people like me who are connected with the governing of India after all that has happened during the last few months. I am not quite sure that if I had not been in the Government I would put up with my Government.'

After this regret what attack? How could his critics hurt a man who had already hurt himself? I am reminded of a newspaper heading the day after Nehru made an angry remark on the floor of Parliament that since the Committee charged with the task of preparing the Hindu Code Bill had not done its work, a new Committee might have to be constituted. Several senior Members of Parliament including ministers were its members and they were smarting under the pain of an open rebuke by the head of the Government. Nehru who came to know of it promptly tendered his apology the next day on the same floor, before the same audience, and this when it was not expected of him, and when it was perhaps well-deserved by those responsible for the delay. The newspaper heading, quoted in all likelihood from a victim's remark, was: 'his nobility is our difficulty.'

In one of the longest letters anyone has written to Nehru Subhas Chandra Bose accuses Nehru of talking too much at meetings and imposing his own views. The letter is venomous and so full of the language of abuse that anyone else might have destroyed it or suppressed it from publication, because it was from one so high and so close to Nehru as Subhas Chandra Bose. And it speaks of Nehru's magnanimity and courage (who knows, Nehru might have been aware of these himself) to have included it in his *Bunch of Old Letters*, published in his own life-time. In his reply, a relatively short one, Nehru says that it is true he is guilty of many things that Subhas Bose accuses him of but 'I

am afraid I cannot see the beam in my own eye'. In any case 'I am a dull subject to discuss especially at the end of a lengthy letter'.

I mentioned *A Bunch of Old Letters*. Consider the other titles of his books. *Letters From a Father to His Daughter*: You will be interested to know that of the several titles suggested by Nehru Gandhiji selected this and recommended it as the best. He had called his autobiography 'In and out of Prison', because he had become 'a shuttlecock' in those days—between gaol and home—India itself was a large prison in those days. What else can such a gaol-bird call his book? But later he agreed upon a bare, modest title *An Autobiography*. But what an inscription for so bare a title: 'To Kamala who is no more' which touches the depth of profound pathos. Consider *Glimpses of World History*. He thinks he is 'not a historian, nor a man of letters. What am I?' Such a man can only give you 'glimpses', which means 'to follow the moment of illumination without having seen it'. In his own words 'the letters are not meant to give you history, but just to give you glimpses and awaken your curiosity'. And he gives the effect of the journey as something urgently felt. It is the exploratory process that makes us see in the dark.

Nowhere is the exploration or search brought out so beautifully as in *The Discovery of India*. There is a certain inevitability about the title, the search for the past had become so compelling. He had been for over thirty years deeply involved in the fight for the freedom of India—so much that he had been obsessed with it like a scientist dedicated to his discovering the thing he has been looking for, like an artist whom the unwrought urn or the unheard melody or the unuttered word challenges perpetually to give shape and substance to the airy nothings of his mind and heart. So too India—this lady with a past, who had obsessed him, possessed him and beckoned to him continually. So he who thought of freeing India must seek to understand what he wanted to free. And he made voyages of discovery into the past seeking a clue to the understanding of the

present. He gives the impression of someone digging a well, digging and digging to get at the deep well of strength and life. Hence the title. Even there his constant question is: 'What have I discovered?'

If a certain tentativeness is the mark of a cultivated man, a civilized man, here are some of Nehru's recurring expressions: 'generally speaking', 'by and large', 'if one may say so in all humility', 'somewhat', 'I fear', 'I am afraid', 'I think', 'to my thinking', 'to my knowledge', 'I have suggested'; or asking a question when he is expected to give an answer, for example, when he is asked to send a message to an International Conference of Philosophers on Traditional Values: 'What are traditional values? I don't know. Will the Conference of Philosophers deliberating in Mysore for three days help us a little in understanding?' Amrita Sher Gil, the renowned painter writes on reading his Autobiography: As a rule I dislike biographies and autobiographies. They ring so false. But I think I will like yours . . . You are capable of saying: 'When I saw the sea for the first time' when others would say 'When the sea saw me for the first time'.

I think Amrita Sher Gil spoke for all of us when she commented upon Nehru's modesty, a humility which we have seen in his voice, in his gestures whether he is speaking to Tagore, Gandhi or Vinoba Bhave, a peasant or a little child—as though he was constantly saying to himself in the words of T. S. Eliot:

'The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.'

II

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

The Rithuraj of India

I PROPOSE to speak to you, today, on an aspect of Jawaharlal Nehru on which practically nothing has been said. Only Rabindranath Tagore with his poet's discernment, and by a sure stroke of genius, once called him the *Rithuraj* of India, a name which summons up all that that royal season, spring or *vasanta* connotes to lovers and poets in the traditions of the East as well as the West. But there is no doubt that Tagore, like Sher Gil, spoke for all of us who saw, or heard, or read Nehru and felt the freshness, the vitality and the life-giving quality of the man. It is as though we witnessed a dry twig bloom in his hands. I am afraid I am repeating something I have said before, but what I have not so far said, and would have liked to say but for Tagore's incomparable metaphor is what that enchanting line in Wordsworth's sonnet suggested to me when I re-read it some years ago. I mean:

'Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea'

Ancient Greeks represented Nature by Proteus who drives flocks, knows all things and has the power of assuming different shapes. According to post-Homeric legend Proteus was an early king of Egypt where, in later times, he was worshipped as a god. But I am not concerned with this later version. According to the earlier version Proteus is the symbol of dynamic nature, *Natura Naturans*. Nature has also a passive role, *Natura Naturata*. It is interesting

that like the ancient Greeks ancient Indians also invested Nature or *Prakriti* with this dual aspect—now passive, now active. The active and the passive are the first and second secrets of Nature. She is both motion and rest, suggestion and satisfaction, challenge and response. Hence her endless attraction to us.

I say this because one finds that both the Vedic attitudes of India and the classical attitudes of Greece towards Nature gave shape and colour to all later poets and writers. I shall first make a brief comment on the Greek and later European attitudes because of certain striking resemblances and differences between the Indian and the European views of Nature. That distinguished English scholar Harold Nicholson writes in an essay on Nature in Greek Poetry: 'To the Greeks, people who enjoyed mountains were either mad or impelled by some wild Dionysian frenzy . . . Forests and trees, moreover, either frightened or bored them.' Perhaps the only aspect of Nature that affected them sentimentally was 'the advent of spring and the renewal of the youth and vigour of the soil', perhaps because as Socrates says in the *Republic*, 'the aim of culture is the passion for the beautiful'. Essentially the Greeks were more interested in the human foreground than in the natural foreground: 'Mortals must think of mortal thoughts', though Plato had said that 'whatever in Nature is beautiful or charming is only a faint shadow of the first Beauty.'

Now compare with this attitude the 'reckless spirit of exploration' of the *Upanishads* in India which should put a modern scientist to shame: 'My body will be reduced to ashes and my breath will join the restless and deathless air, but not I and my deeds. O mind remember this always, remember this'. I take this quotation from Nehru's section on the *Upanishads* in *The Discovery of India*, where he also quotes the address to the sun in the morning prayer: 'O Sun of refulgent glory, I am the same person (perhaps it means *Purusha* here) as makes thee what thou art!' 'What superb confidence!' exclaims Nehru. It is true we find a pale shadow of this in the western world when in the age of

Enlightenment in the 18th century the Deists claimed that Reason could approach through Nature Nature's God.

Perhaps it is unfair to compare 18th century Englishmen with ancient Indians, who chanted hymns on the banks of the Ganga to the great gods that dwelt on the snow-covered mountain tops and peopled the sky, the air, the sea, the woods and the streams. And who were these gods? The elements themselves: Earth, Air, Fire, Water (Bhumi, Vayu, Agni, Varuna). Having for centuries lived in the lap of nature our thinking and feeling, indeed, the very core of our being have obviously been fostered and fed by these elements of nature: In the *Rig Veda* the formula of blessing is:

'Live, waxing in thy strength, a hundred autumns, live through a hundred dewy seasons, a hundred springs'

And

'May we enjoy the favour and protection of these seasons through a hundred years'.

Nature to the Indian is verily the giver of breath and bread, the cause of his pleasant sensation and the source of all his moral being. No wonder then that the ancient Indian poet turned to Nature as to his first love. How lovingly he lingered over descriptions of the seasons—Vasanta, Varsha, Hemanta though in later times this degenerated into an accepted formula! Valmiki, the first of our classical poets has given graphic descriptions of the seasons, of river Sarayu, and Lake Pampa. To Vyasa, Bhasa and Kalidasa poetry must have sounded dull without moonlight, gentle breeze, trees, tendrils, buds and blossoms, the sweet notes of the cuckoo and plaintive cries of the chakravaka. To these Indian poets the earth is 'the seat of generosity', the blue ocean is *sagarambara*; Kailasa is the 'mountain of sapphires', 'the looking glass of heavenly nymphs' and 'the accumulated laughter of Siva'. Sumeru is the golden mountain and *lokalo* which divides 'the world of light from the region of darkness'. As for trees and flowers, the Asoka tree burst into flower when touched by the foot of a beautiful maiden; the Kadamba which blossoms soon

after a shower is compared to the human body with the hairs on end; the petals of lotus to the eyes of a lovely woman; the round bud is the tear drop; 'Indumati is a walking flame' and 'Parvati a roaming creeper'.

To Adikavi Valmiki the sky with the clouds looks like the 'tranquil sea jagged here and there by projecting rocks'. To him the rain 'inaugurates a musical concert in the forest'; the 'humming bees play the sweet symphony of music'; the 'croaking frogs keep the time and the rumbling clouds beat the tabor'. The night is a 'lovely woman' to this poet, the moon 'her charming face', the stars her 'twinkling eyes', the moonlight her 'white gossamer robe'.

As for Kalidasa, he is our poet of nature *par excellence* and has the distinction of composing perhaps the first poem in any literature with the express object of describing Nature. Virgil's *Georgics* is one of them but so much of it is devoted to agriculture. Beside Kalidasa, if one may say so, Wordsworth 'the high-priest of Nature' looks insipid, if not crude, for Nature to Kalidasa is not a separate entity but inextricably woven into the very texture of man's life. Trees and creepers are Sakuntala's sisters; the cloud is the 'wreck's aid', 'affliction's friend' and so the Yaksha separated from his love seeks comfort from the cloud which becomes his messenger.

While this had been the dominant note of Sanskrit poetry in the Vedas, the upanishads, the epics, and the plays, in later ages (when exactly, one cannot tell) our people must have lost the zest for life; perhaps creativity dried up and Nature became a mere ornament, and descriptions of Nature merely decorative, just a matter of convention. Fortunately our contact with the British in the last two hundred years or so brought us a blessing (not always an unmixed blessing) from their poets. The Romantics particularly were great dreamers; their passion for nature was inordinate and their poetry suffused with the colouring of nature's manifold gifts immediately fired the decaying imagination of our poets and brought forth a new crop of romantic poetry in several Indian languages, chiefly Bengali which gave us Rabindranath

Tagore. Some, notably Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, easily a major poet of modern times, and Sarojini Naidu have romanticised nature in English verse. Except for Aurobindo Ghose in formal poetry so few of these poets seem to belong to the rich vital tradition of Nature poetry in India. So many of them seem to be faded copies of second rate English romantic poets.

Jawaharlal Nehru is probably the only writer of any note in the English language in India who uses Nature so pervasively—there is hardly a page of his writings and printed speeches that is not permeated by Nature—and thus provides opportunities for a fruitful examination of his treatment of Nature. It is important to remember that in him many strands meet and mingle, and nourish him in a vital and central way though they will be visible only to those who are prepared to shed their prejudice and take the trouble to read him closely. Nehru's first and foremost advantage is his Indian inheritance: the poetic tradition (*Kavya* which does not exclude prose) with Nature woven into its labyrinth; and the living religious tradition in which Nature has been a major factor; his participation in the scientific temper of our age; the impact of English Romantic poetry of which he was a keen student till the end of his life: his familiarity over the years with the physical aspects of Nature at home and abroad; and above all his rare capacity to respond to all of these and use them creatively in English prose which remains the expression of his authentic self.

It is customary to speak of imagery in respect of poetry and drama and seldom in relation to prose. But what C. Day Lewis says in a different context is true of Nehru's prose as well: 'there is a constant traffic to and fro over the frontier between prose and poetry'. And this is understandable in one who looked upon himself as 'a child of the mountains, who, as a boy, played on the banks of the Ganga' and as an adult 'wandered in the enchanted woods of Nature'; and lingered over the pages of Sanskrit and English poetry; was a keen student of the natural sciences at Cambridge, a passionate fighter for freedom, an undoubted leader of

four hundred millions, a man of destiny, a prince of peace, but also a Prime Minister who had to clear the cobwebs of ages, start from scratch, give a practical direction to the people a vast majority of whom live in rural areas; listen to planners and administrators, and run an office with notings and orders on files. It is obvious that cliches and jargon do not suit a mind so perilously cast, for they were, in his own words, 'the cast off shells of his predecessors' and no natural habitat for a living organism. With such a one imaging becomes an inner necessity, a mode of exploring and no mere stylistic device. What images would come more spontaneously and appropriately than those that bountiful Nature can give to her chosen child? And he drew them not laboriously, but luckily.

In his first ever-known publication, *Letters From a Father to His Daughter*, he tells his little one to begin her education with the story of the earth. And to understand this it is not enough to read other people's books but to go to 'the great Book of Nature itself, for it is a kind of autobiography'. Theologians have called the objects of Nature God's style in His first book and poets have described the universe as 'word of, worded by', God. 'Follow Nature' was the cry of Cynics, Stoics, and Epicureans in ancient Europe. This was revived by the Humanists of the Renaissance, though 'forgotten for a while during the struggles of the 17th century'. Scholars have written whole books and essays on the use of Nature in Shakespeare. When something goes against the grain Shakespeare says 'It is against Nature still'. To come back to Nehru's letters to his daughter. He writes:

'Imagine how fascinating it is! Every little stone that you see lying in the road or in the mountain side may be a little page in nature's book and may be able to tell you something if only you know how to read it.'

He now gets down to the level of the pupil—a ten year-old—he is instructing, and drives home an abstract point in the most concrete possible terms and what was virtually a

closed book opens out in his deft hands and the cliché comes to life: 'To be able to read any language, Hindi or Urdu or English you have to learn its alphabet. So also you must learn the alphabet of nature before you can read her story in her books of stone and rock'. And this story he tells is 'more interesting than a fairy tale'.

Almost a quarter of a century after (when it would not be unnatural, in the dust and din of Indian politics, to expect him to have lost the joy and wonder of creation) when he is called upon to send a message to the Children's Number of *Shankar's Weekly*, he becomes a child again and 'sits' and 'talks' to them about 'this beautiful world of ours'. He warns them to be 'more sensible than the grown-ups' who sit in offices and don't open their eyes and ears to the beauty and life that surrounds them. He asks children if they can tell the flowers by their names and the birds by their singing. They are told to make friends with them and learn to read the Book of Nature for the world itself is 'the greatest fairy tale'.

What he says to children he practises himself, there is no need to add. Sitting in a tiny cell, looking at a dull map in an atlas his imagination can invest with life the dead lines and dots and patches on a piece of paper. To him 'an atlas is an exciting affair'. It can bring all manner of past memories and dreams and places he had visited and places he wanted to go to. 'And the longing to go again to those haunts of past days, and visit all the other inviting marks and dots that represented great cities, and cross the shaded regions that were mountains, and the blue patches that were seas and to see the beauties of the world and watch the struggles and conflicts of changing humanity—the longing to do all this would seize us and clutch us by the throat'. It is a nostalgic picture by one so vital and alive now languishing in a prison and yet even the worst critics of Nehru cannot call it pathetic fallacy. What has also saved it from degenerating into pathetic fallacy is the restraint and precision of the language. Comparing the Sanskrit poet's treatment of Nature with the Anglo-saxon's or even

the Celtic, Sri Aurobindo Ghose has observed that 'the Hindu has been always described as a dreamer and mystic. Perhaps true but the Hindu mind is in a sense the most concrete in the world. It seeks after abstraction, yet is it never satisfied so long as it remains an abstraction. The Hindu is not contented till he has seized things behind the subject also as concrete realities . . . He insists on mapping the infinite, on seeing the unseen, or visualising the spiritual'.

Consider those passages of Nehru which look like mere descriptions of nature by a prose stylist. The extracts are from an occasional essay called 'Escape' which Nehru wrote in the thirties. What might in poets and novelists sound merely escapist becomes excusable escape in one so sensitive, caught up in the thick of political life. That was before independence. While he 'answered questions and spoke as amiably as I could to comrades and friends, my mind was elsewhere. It was wandering over the mountains of the north with their deep valleys and snowy peaks and precipices, slopes, gently covered with pine trees and deodars'. 'Trouble was brewing in Allahabad, but', he argued: 'was I going to be thwarted and prevented from going to the mountains because fools and bigots wanted to create communal trouble? Besides the situation would improve and there were plenty of sensible men about'. And so he says: 'like a coward I crept away when my work lay in Allahabad'.

When the intoxication of the mountain air filled him, troubles receded to the background and the world's ills seemed far away and unreal. I said earlier that the title of the essay is 'Escape' and here are samples of escape:

'In the early morning I lay bare-bodied in the open, and the gentle-eyed sun of the mountains took me into his warm embrace'.

'Sometimes I would lie under the pine trees and listen to the voice of the wandering wind whispering many strange things into my ears, and lull my senses, and cool the fever in my brain. Finding me unguarded and open to attack, it would cunningly point out the folly of men's ways in the world below, their unceasing strife, their passions

and hatred, their bigotry, in the name of religion, the corruption of their politics, the degradation of their ideals. Was it worthwhile going back to them and wasting one's life's effort in dealings with them? Here there was peace and quiet and well-being'.

One is reminded of Tennyson's Lotos-Eaters, but here there is rare self-awareness. Mark the words: 'So whispered the wind softly and cunningly and in the enchantment of the spring day I allowed her to whisper'. So we see, it is what the wind says and not what he thinks that is given to us; he only *allowed* it to whisper in the enchantment of the spring day. Besides, the reader has been forewarned of what will come thanks to the title of the essay, and thanks too for the dexterous fusion of language and thought to produce the effect of escape.

But Nehru being what he is cannot dally with false surmise for long. Nature to him stands for permanence as against mutability, the fleeting ills of the world and the power to minister to the needs of man, reminding one of Wordsworth or Keats. And he takes full advantage of her ministry:

'Slowly a measure of peace returned to me as I gazed at those white mountains, calm and inscrutable and untouched by human folly. They would remain there whatever man did, and even if the present generation committed suicide or went to oblivion by some slower process, the spring would still come to the hill sides and the winds rustle through the pine trees and the birds sing.'

Even this mood will not last long. For, he is essentially a man of action and there is no sentimental nonsense about his getting lost in Nature's woods:

'There was no escape except to some extent in action. No Khali could smother the mind or drug the heart into forgetfulness.'

Now he has to exhort himself and others to a life of action. For this too he must draw on Nature's resources and there is really no escape from Nature and he who seeks mastery over nature is seen drawing his vast energy from her:

'We may be specks of dust on a soap bubble universe but that speck of dust contained something that was the mind and spirit of man. Through the ages this has grown and made itself master of this earth and drawn power from its innermost bowels as well as from the thunderbolt in the skies. It has tried to fathom the secrets of the universe and brought the vagaries of nature itself to use. More wonderful than the earth and the heavens is this mind and spirit of man which grows ever mightier and seeks fresh worlds to conquer'.

Are they so easy to conquer? The ascent is steep and perilous but the attempt must be made. Earlier I spoke of the dual aspect of nature: the active and the passive, the suggestion and the satisfaction, the challenge and the response. With his soul so full of adventure Nehru cannot miss the challenge which that great hero of the Everest experienced when he said by way of answer to a question why he wanted to climb the peak: 'Because it is there!' Now listen to Nehru:

'The distant mountains seem easy of access and climbing, the top beckons, but as one approaches difficulties appear, and the higher one goes the more laborious becomes the journey and the summit recedes into the clouds. Yet the climbing is worth the effort and has its own joy and satisfaction. Perhaps it is the struggle that gives value to life, not so much the ultimate result.'

He seems to minimise the 'result' while valuing adventure itself highly but he knows that when he loses this fascination of the difficult he will, like most leaders of men after a time, come 'down from the mountains into the dark valleys below and faith grows dim and energy grows less'.

'Not long ago', says that distinguished anthropologist, the late Verrier Elwin writing on Nehru: 'Nehru spoke nostalgically of his adventures in Kulu and deplored the fact that today New Delhi with its strange and rather unreal atmosphere and its multifarious occupations "held him prisoner" and he spoke with pity of the unfortunate people who always live in the plains and know little of the joys

and risks and dangers of the high mountains'. Mr Elwin recalls a remark that Nehru made. He is quoted as saying: 'I prefer the frontier, not only in a physical sense but because the idea of living near a frontier, appeals to me intellectually.' Who knows what the frontier would have meant to Nehru had he been an early American settler? But there were different and more formidable challenges in India and not a day was spent in Nehru's life without his pushing the frontier a few inches at least.

Thanks to him so many of our so-called intellectuals, who had erected high walls around them and lived in worlds of their own, have often been challenged to break the barriers between department and department, discipline and discipline. Such was the inclusive mind of Nehru and such the lead given to the country by him that on many an occasion we found the frontiers blur and we learnt to look on our own little intellectual disciplines as parts of a larger scheme of things. Sitting in a solitary cell in the Dehra Dun Jail, while he could not gaze on his favourite mountains he could still think a 'secret intimacy seemed to grow' between them. He says: 'I found great comfort in its proximity. Its solidity and imperturbability looked down upon me with the wisdom of a million years, and mocked at my varying humours and soothed my fevered mind'. The cluster of consonants in the words 'solidity' and 'imperturbability' has already evoked the rocky image in the readers' minds and understanding precedes the dictionary meanings of words. It may sound far-fetched but it is true that in the *Ramayana* Sri Rama sitting in Chitrakoota speaks to Sita of the beauty of the hill in precisely the same terms as Nehru does several thousand years later. Rama says (in an imperfect translation), 'As I am seeing this hill, my auspicious one, I feel not the pain of loss of kingship and of a separation from those I love. Look at this unshaken eminence!'

For Nehru, the child of the Himalayas and a frequent visitor to the Alps in Switzerland, even in picture books of these mountains, he says, he 'gazed at the glaciers when the temperature of my cell or barrack was 115°F. or even

more'. It is a matter-of-fact, prosaic, and treacherous usurper, Bolingbroke, that wails in Shakespeare's *Richard II*: 'Oh! who can hold a fire in his hand/By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?' but Nehru is a man of faith, more in tune with the mountains than the intrigues of the court. And so it doesn't disturb the reader as the high-flown poetic diction of Bolingbroke does by its falseness.

To this idealist with an extraordinary sense of adventure—a far cry from opportunism—the lure of the mountains is different: He says in his *Glimpses*, in the very last letter, at the top of the 'mountain of letters' he has written to his daughter:

'Many people go up high mountains and risk life and limb for the joy of the climb and the exhilaration that comes from a difficulty surmounted, a danger overcome; and because of the danger that hovers all around them, their perceptions get keener, their joy of the life which hangs by a thread, the more intense.'

Emerson says in his celebrated essay on Nature that man is the broken giant and in all his weakness both his body and his mind are invigorated by habits of conversation with nature. In the Greek legend when Antaeus felt suffocated by the grip of Hercules, every time he touched his mother earth his strength was renewed. It seems also that the ancient Chinese when they came back to their land, after a period abroad, kissed the soil. That is how we can explain Nehru's love of Nature.

Before he went into a prison he accepted the fact of imprisonment and because he did it 'the eyes turn back involuntarily to take a last good look outside at the greenery and wide spaces'—a look that should sustain him for quite some months while surrounded by drab colourless high walls. No wonder he talks so incessantly of nature's beauty in its varied manifestations.

One night sitting in his *Kuttahar* in prison he found it 'extraordinarily comforting' to look at the sky and the stars. Here even the sight of the sky (Nehru soon corrects himself

since it was not the spacious sky that bends over us all), a 'patch of it, was a great relief.' An appropriate quotation will do the rest:

'Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went
With sails of silver by.'

This sight of the sky and a gay cloud sailing by, a wonderful monsoon phenomenon, a dark blue of amazing depth, which seemed to be 'a portion of infinity' were his comfort during the day. And at night the stars were his companions. 'Nightly we would await their appearance and greet them with the satisfaction of seeing old acquaintances.' It is as though the stars took the place of the loved ones whom he missed in prison. The sight of the Pole Star 'peeping over the wall was extraordinarily comforting. Surrounded by a revolving sky, it seemed to be a symbol of cheerful constancy and perseverance.' He who put his faith in the Pole Star and waited for the other stars to greet them as one does one's old acquaintances must surely find his recompense. His father, to whom Jawaharlal was greatly devoted, and who in his turn doted on his only son, died and after cremation they all 'crept silently home' to emptiness but there they are, his old acquaintances whose turn it is now to greet him in his sorrow. Perhaps in Nehru's mind was also implicit the contrast between the life of death and eternity, and between the sad human predicament and Nature's bounty.

Nature has always kept him company and he has been her ardent votary. He has described lovingly all the seasons of the year—winter, spring, summer, and autumn in his *Autobiography*. But his is neither Kalidasa's *Rithu-samhara* nor Thomson's *Seasons* in prose. Nehru's response is far too fresh and immediate to be imitative or derivative. Even when the descriptions were somewhat consciously done, he brings his artistic resources into play lest he should give the impression of being a virtuoso luxuriating in

describing Nature's moods. He has enough art in him to conceal art, for he advances a very convincing excuse for writing about Nature at length: 'Prevented from indulging in normal activities we became more observant of nature's ways'.

Now winter and spring both pass by as it were by one stroke of the pen: 'Spring was very pleasant in Dehra Dun and it was a far longer one than in the plains below. The winter had denuded almost all the trees of their leaves, and they stood naked and bare.' Well, this could be a vague general description and could have been done by any one who hasn't known the ravages of winter first hand. But Nehru has a meticulous eye and has seen the difference between winter and spring right in front of him and so he writes: 'Even four magnificent peepal trees, which stood in front of the gaol gate, much to my surprise, dropped nearly all their leaves. Gaunt and cheerless they stood there, till the spring air warmed them up and sent a message of life to their innermost cells. Suddenly there was a stir both in the peepals and the other trees, and an air of mystery surrounded them as of secret operations going on behind the scenes; and I would be startled to find little bits of green peeping out all over them. It was a gay and cheering sight. And then very rapidly, the leaves would come out in their millions and glisten in the sunlight and play about in the breeze. How wonderful is the sudden change from bud to leaf!' The last sentence, an exclamation, is not merely an expression of his wonder at Nature's mysterious operations within her millions of green workshops but also a summing up of his own observations of winter and spring, because it looks back and collects the whole paragraph in one clean sweep.

Now the attempt to capture the local life faithfully and so he goes back to more details and the result is a fine concretisation of the details he perceives afresh:

'I had never noticed before that fresh mango leaves are reddish brown, russet coloured, remarkably like the autumn

tints on the Kashmir hills. But they change colour soon and become green.'

He has gone through winter and spring. The season of pleasant autumn and occasional rain are in store and I shall quote Nehru's own words to complete the description of seasons: 'Autumn again was pleasant, and so was the winter, except when it rained. With thunder and rain and piercing cold winds, one longed for a decent habitation and a little warmth and comfort. Occasionally there would be a hailstorm with hailstones bigger than marbles coming down on the corrugated iron roofs and making a tremendous noise, something like an artillery bombardment'. Now cast a backward glance on the last sentence in which Nehru describes the tropical rain. If you haven't heard the rainfall accompanied by hailstorm in the marvellous way the author has packed his resources of sound and sense to achieve his effect, my comment will not improve. Consider the heavy consonantal insistence in a succession of words: hailstorm, hailstones, piercing, corrugated, tremendous, artillery, bombardment, all meant to evoke the effect of tropical rainfall onomatopoeically.

Description of rain in *Varsha-rutu* is a commonplace in Sanskrit poetry and precisely for that reason it poses a challenge to a writer of original impulse—which is not in question where Nehru is concerned. That is what one finds in his little essay 'The Monsoon Comes to Bombay'. In the first place he writes not to conform to a convention. The monsoon in Bombay has a place, time, and a manner, which is traditionally unique. He writes with an innocuous beginning: 'I like Bombay.' The second, and part of the third paragraphs keep the same deceptive tone. We are gradually prepared by the author for the coming monsoon which, even in this multiple monsoon-deluged country, is said to be very exceptional in Bombay. It seems he has been told that the monsoon is quite an event in Bombay—it comes with 'pomp and circumstance'. 'There was a ferocity in this sudden first-meeting of the rain-laden clouds with land. The dry land was lashed by the pouring torrents

and converted into a temporary sea. Bombay was not static then; it became elemental, dynamic, changing.'

All this is not *his* observation but the traditional account of the coming of Monsoon to Bombay. He has his rapier ready and now the sharpening before the pre-meditated thrust into the Bombayite's proud fat belly. And with the same studied innocence that marked the opening of the essay he builds up the suspense in the next few sentences:

'So I looked forward to the coming of the monsoon and I became a watcher of the skies, waiting to spot the heralds that preceded the attack. A few showers came. Oh, that was nothing, I was told; the monsoon has yet to come. Heavier rains followed, but I ignored them and waited for some extraordinary happening'.

And now the thrust: 'While I waited I learnt from various people that the monsoon had definitely come and established itself'.

After the thrust the triumph:

'Where was the pomp and circumstance, and the glory of the attack and the combat between the cloud and the land and the surging and lashing sea?'

And now the final inevitable resolution:

'Like a thief in the night the monsoon had come to Bombay as well as it might have come to Allahabad (would this native of Allahabad yield the palm to Bombay?) or elsewhere. Another illusion gone!'

I have often wondered if the best known English essayists of our time could surpass the superb play of suspense and expectation, the irony of understatement and over-statement, and the inescapable anti-climax within a compass of barely 300 words. And the wonder is the greater when we realise that the effect is achieved while playing so conventional a game as description of the rainy season in India. This and the other which we have already considered, namely, 'Escape', if not one or two others also in addition in the collection entitled *Unity of India* edited by V. K. Krishna Menon, deserve frequent prescription in college anthologies of prose for compulsory study. Perhaps the Structure dragon

in English teaching forbids entrance to Nehru. If so, all one can say is: 'Slay the dragon, make room for warm, pulsating human life'. Like the seasons and the stars, like the charm and witchery of the tropics and the tropical jungles of Ceylon, the moon too receives a fresh treatment at Nehru's hands. But the freshness comes only after recurring clichés: At one time the moon and the dawn are in conflict with each other; another time the moon shines in the solitary sky lighting the path of lonely travellers; or 'the crescent moon hangs over the horizon, with its silvery brightness gone and looking gloomy and yellow'. After these somewhat stale images, consider this most beautiful description of the moon in which Man and Moon are bound up with each other's lives, or as he himself says later in the same section of *The Discovery of India*: 'Human destiny appears to become a part of nature's rhythmic energy'. He spells it out:

'The moon, ever a companion to me in prison, has grown more friendly with closer acquaintance, a reminder of the loveliness of this world, of the waxing and waning of life, of light following darkness, of death and resurrection following each other in interminable succession'.

And now he states his response in the most intimately personal terms; and sounds as though he has overcome the last possible temptation to describe the moon for its own sake, and not for his sake:

'Ever changing, yet ever the same, I have watched it in its different phases and its many moods in the evening, as the shadows lengthen, in the still hours of the night, and when the breath and whisper of dawn bring promise of the coming day. How helpful is the moon. . . .'

Although Nature has almost always formed an essential part of the furniture of his mind, there are moments when nature as metaphor informs the life of his prose in a significant way. It is here that his maturity and originality are much in evidence. But let us first take a look at an ornate passage of his earlier years, for the sake of comparison:

'Keep smiling! . . . why should we not smile even though the fight rages fiercely and clouds occasionally darken the horizon? Behind the clouds lies the sun of freedom and presently it will break through the mists and vapours and rejuvenate us with its life-giving energy.'

Now compare this consciously flowery passage with that justly famous speech of Nehru after Gandhi's assassination and how in an unpremeditated speech he could show his consummate mastery in the organisation of images! Ever since the moment of Gandhiji's assassination he has been wrapt in gloom and seized with the tragedy that has befallen the nation and himself and it looks as though he can only think in terms of light and darkness, warmth and cold. He can sustain the image for a considerable length, and a whole complex act of life and death is worked out through one central image:

'A *glory* has *departed* and the sun that *warmed* and *brightened* our lives has *set* and we shiver in the *cold* and *dark*. Yet, he would not have us feel this way. After all, that glory we saw for all these years, that man with the divine *fire*, changed us also—and such as we are, we have been moulded by him during these years; and of this divine *fire* many of us also took a small *spark* which strengthened and made us work to some extent on the lines that he fashioned.'

Poignant sorrow like this can never be expressed once and for all; it will come back bursting the bounds again and again, and he muses: 'All we know is that there was a *glory* and that it is *no more*; all we know is that for the moment there is *darkness*, not so *dark* certainly because when we look into our hearts we still find the living *flame* which he *lighted* there. And if those *living flames* exist, there will not be *darkness* in this land and we shall be able, with our effort, remembering him and following his path, to *illumine* this land again, small as we are, but still with the *fire* that he instilled within.' (Italics mine)

This is no embellishment for he was too much under the stress of emotion to run after similes and metaphors; it is the language dictated by the poignant nature of the theme.

If it is successful it is because the images are intensely felt and most passionately realised or as Coleridge would have said, they are 'modified by a predominant passion' without which far from creating the desired effect they would have put out the central flame.

It is astonishing how Nehru has assimilated into his total sensibility the dual aspect of Nature, the active and the passive. Perhaps it suits the dual aspect of his own temperament—the primitivist and the progressivist are ever alternating in him, now this, now that, each clashing with the other, correcting the other, each invigorating the other, and thus making for an unusual richness and vitality.

Let me recall to you the essay I have already dealt with, namely, 'Escape'—the escape into Nature's bosom from the communal riots of the plains. Lying bare-bodied how he felt the warmth of the sun in his embrace! The news of fresh troubles in the plains below disturbs him but he soon succeeds in getting a measure of peace by looking on the million-year old mountains. But as though the world was 'jealous' of his 'care-free state' there was news from abroad that Hitler was marching into Austria and, he says, he heard the tramp of barbarian feet over the pleasant gardens of Vienna (on another occasion he had heard of Barcelona, that Flower of Fair Cities of the world crushed by the enemy hands) and he is filled with shame and sorrow. He writes:

'I forgot Khali and the snows and the mountains and my body became taut and my mind tense. What was I doing here in a remote corner of the mountains when the world was on the very brink of war?'

He soon realised he had to face the world's passions and endure the world's anguish. It is the same with his own Kashmir—it is a dream and a disillusionment:

'Kashmir is like some supremely beautiful woman almost impersonal and beyond human desire . . . 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 fades away on awakening.'

But here, if anywhere, is it true to say that in the very temple of delight does 'sovrain melancholy' set her 'shrine'. The slender, graceful poplars, the lordly chinar form an appropriate background to the 'beautiful women' and 'bonny children' of Kashmir. But the loveliness of nature and man will only help to set off the appalling poverty and misery and now the man-made ugliness of the politics of Kashmir. Nature can redeem all this sorrow and ugliness: One vital moment is worth more than years of stagnation and vegetation—a vital moment which to Nehru only Kashmir can give.

From the province of Kashmir to the whole of India—it is still the same pattern that predominates. From the dawn of history conquerors and settlers, students and pilgrims have all come to India but India has remained her old self absorbing them all. Only the sea image can help to impose order over a seeming disorder:

'Like the ocean she received the tribute of a thousand rivers, and though she was disturbed often enough, and storms raged over the surface of her waters, the sea continued to be the sea.'

India, this lady with a past, lures him and teases him by turns with her 'sphinx-like smile and he describes her in a variety of ways—in terms of well, river, sea, earth, air and fire—each time gaining a little more understanding.

He accepts the British rule as a challenge and this is how he responds to it: 'The British came to India on the crest of a wave of new impulse in the world and representing mighty historic forces'. And Nehru asks 'Are we to complain of the cyclone that uproots us and hurls us about or the wind that makes us shiver?' At another time the British rule becomes the fire 'that is needed to test and challenge' us and 'before India is reborn it will have to go through again and again the fire that cleanses and tempers and burns up the weak, the impure and the corrupt.'

Again: India, he thinks, must have drawn its vitality from some deep well of strength. And if so, did it dry up or did it have hidden springs to replenish it? Finally the

complex personality of India seems to yield a clear picture in his most mature work, *The Discovery*, in geological and archaeological images:

'She was like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.'

This is how Nehru accepts and accommodates tradition and change, the night and the dawn. He knows that out of this conflict the sun will rise, though some of them fighting for independence, may not live to see it.

The functional use of nature imagery is so pervasive that we can simply list from his writings and speeches scores of casual phrases and common terms of expression which reveal the abiding quality of the influence of natural objects on his sensibility. It looks as though Nehru couldn't love or laugh, get angry or crystallize a state of mind or understand natural or human phenomena without recourse to natural imagery: For him 'civilization blooms'; the 'stream of life goes on'; he prefers 'the open sea with all its storm and tempests to a safe harbour'; man is 'no puppet of destiny and mere foam on the surface of waters'. On Gandhi's decision to make salt at Dandi there was unusual excitement throughout the country and it seemed as though 'a spring had suddenly been released'; people 'think of the past to find some oasis in the harsh and fiery deserts of modern existence'; 'truth hides somewhere at the bottom of the well'; he wouldn't lose himself in 'a sea of speculations' or in 'a sea of anger'. He 'plunged into the whirlpool of Congress politics'; he saw 'a forest of hands' go up in salutation at mass meetings; made himself 'responsive to waves of thought and feeling that came from the living and the dead'; 'he had drawn enduring vitality from some deep well of strength'; finds Kamala's eyes were 'still pools behind which storms rage'; he sat during the pre-independence days 'on the edge of a volcano not knowing when it may burst'; from 1935 to 1938 the world had to face many ills and each year brought its 'full crop of disaster'; 'was it for this that

India had struggled so manfully? Must we exchange this murky air for the rare atmosphere of fine idealism and sacrifice?; a revolution is 'a flash of lightning' and reveals 'the whole landscape especially the dark places'; *The Glimpses* is a 'mountain of letters'; he is sick of the 'fog of pious phrases'. Babar goes back not to Kabul, but 'to the flowers he longed for'.

It is not in the least surprising that a month before his death this earnest traveller through life should have copied down Robert Frost's

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

which must have symbolised for him the conflict between death and life, between Nature and suffering humanity. But it is nature that helped him to keep his promises. Without such a view of Nature 'the flowers jilt us, and we are old bachelors with our ridiculous tenderness'. For Nehru life had both the red rose and the cub. When he died, his breath as the *Upanishads* say joined the 'restless and deathless air' and his body was reduced to ashes which were either immersed in the Ganga, the river of India or became 'indistinguishable from the soil where the peasants of India toil'. But he and his deeds live for ever. And all have become a portion of the loveliness which he once made more lovely.

Nehru might have angrily protested that he was not a religious man; that Hinduism had become kitchen religion; and that he was against any religious rites performed after his death. But it is obvious that he was only protesting against the debris of religion which has choked the life of our people. He was most truly religious in the Vedantic sense of the term. Few of us seem to have realised that his persistent reference to the Himalayas and the Ganga have unmistakable undertones of religion. When someone flying with Nehru over the Himalayas remarked that he liked

best the graceful outlines of Kanchanajanga, Nehru quickly differed that he 'preferred the Everest in its austerity'—which as we know is the chief quality of Siva who had his abode in Kailas in the Himalayas. When at the end of a holiday he had to come back to Delhi he saw lying before him the mountain range where were Badarinath and Kedar-nath and just across them lay Kailas and Manasarovar. He was angry with himself that he had 'missed so long this magnificent sight of overwhelming beauty'. And before age crept on him he hoped to return to the mountain and the lake of his heart's desire. Elsewhere he speaks of 'sanyasins and weary pilgrims for Badarinath trudging slowly on foot, their living faith making light of their burdens and their sufferings'. This surely is not the attitude of one who escapes to a hill merely from 'the dreary intercourse of daily life'.

The Ganga on whose banks he played as a child is associated with the same Himalayas. He has followed the course of the river from Rishikesh to Devaprayag where the Bhagirathi meets the Alakananda and becomes the Ganga, 'the river that has held India's heart captive for so many thousands of years'. He remembers her eager and joyful youth, her bubbling and gurgling childhood grown into her rich stately maturity.

Sitting in the Naini prison on the Sankranti day he tells us he hears voices which cried *Gangamataki jai*. Nehru could not fail to see the power of faith which drew vast numbers to the river and made them forget for a while their poverty and misery. After all, the Indians who built temples on mountain tops and on the banks of the rivers and installed shrines in the caves of islands amid the stormy seas could not have done so without a living faith in Nature or Prakriti which has for ever challenged and beckoned to the Indian man. (Only the philosophers of the Sankhya school seemed to take a different view of Nature). All this aspect of India had flowed into Nehru's blood stream from early childhood when he went with his mother or aunt for a dip in the Ganga at Triveni. The spot had a holiness because of the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.

Right opposite their home in Allahabad he knew Bharadwaj Ashram and he knew too the story went that Sri Rama visited Bharadwaj in his Ashram during his exile.

On the banks of the same Ganga is Banaras too. Nehru writes to his daughter in the *Glimpses*, of 'Kashi, that most ancient of cities', Kashi which has 'gone on while empires have decayed, of Buddha who came to her with his new gospel, of the millions who have gone . . . for solace. You see the past of India, and in the murmur of her waters you can hear the voices of ages long gone by'. In his hometown of Allahabad on the banks of the Ganga is the old Asoka pillar—'you can almost hear his voice across 2000 years'.

And against this background, is it any wonder that the Ganga figures so conspicuously in his Will?—the strangest and noblest will I have known. How it must have disappointed kings and princes, mine-owners, and oil and tin and tinsel magnates! How it may have shamed, and exalted them too! But it is all in its place for one who uttered with feeling, the words of the poet:

'Lord, though I lived on earth, the child of earth
Yet was I fathered by the starry sky.'

That one who was by occupation a politician and believed in the scientific approach to life's problems should restore to modern man who has lost contact with Nature and whom therefore Nature treats as an 'unwanted step-child', should help to put us again in harmony with nature at the stage when 'man's mind gazed with wonder and delight at the mystery of the universe, when heaven and earth seemed very near to each other, and gods and goddesses came down from Kailas to play with men and women'—is a fine tribute to Indian culture. Thanks to him we, who are too much involved in buying and selling, seem to appreciate, if not practise, what appears to be his final testament of Nature. It is 'man's destiny to control the elements, to raise the thunder-bolt, to bring the raging fire and the rushing and trembling waters to his use, but most difficult to hold in check the passions that consume him'. This he can learn, according

to Nehru, if he knows how to 'sense the mysterious life of nature, to hear the whisper close to our ears, to thrill and quiver at her touch'. And that is something for our drab lives. As for him who has done this ministry to us, I know I will shock you, but because of the rich and complex interaction of man's life and nature as I have seen it in Nehru, to me his writings and speeches have more meaning and significance and immediate relevance than, I am afraid, the poetry of Wordsworth who more often than not simplifies and states his reactions rather in the manner of a 'philosopher' than 'a seer blessed'. Or, am I unduly prejudiced in favour of Nehru?

III

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

His Sense of History in International Matters

IT WAS the year 1948 soon after Gandhiji's assassination, and I was in the Netherlands, ostensibly for attending a conference, but really to see the country a bit. I went to some place, I forget now, quite far from Amsterdam. It was a fishermen's village and an elderly woman who was selling curios to tourists exclaimed on seeing me 'Gandhi!' 'Gandhi!' She hardly knew any English, not the verbs anyway, but with a sparkle in her eyes which spoke of her transparent sincerity and with the simple folks' concern and hopes for the future of man, tried to carry on a kind of dumb discourse with me. 'Gandhi! Gandhi!' she repeated and for a moment closed her eyes with touching sadness and then her eyes opened with a gleam which flushed her face and showed a sense of triumph as she let out the name of Nehru twice and christened him 'Gandhi boy'. 'Nehru! Gandhi boy!' she asserted again. The theme had been elaborated by leading newspapers and learned periodicals all the world over while paying their homage to the memory of Gandhi.*

But, for this valuation to come from a simple, apparently unlettered woman from a far-off fishermen's village in, what

* I have taken this paragraph from my article, 'Nehru, a World Figure' which appeared earlier in an occasional magazine, *Kautilya*, Mysore.

is to an average Indian, a back-of-beyond country shows the extent to which Gandhi's name and the nature of his influence had spread. Not merely Gandhi's but that of the 'Gandhi boy' of whom Gandhi himself had said: 'I know that when I am gone he (Jawaharlal) will speak my language'.

Now my point is, this simple woman's sense of events and concern for the human kind shamed me as my ignorance of the Second Law of Thermodynamics did not when I read Mr C. P. Snow's lecture on 'Two Cultures'—that major cultural scandal of our decade. For I do not know, I simply cannot be expected to know (life is far too precious to be wasted on learning definitions) the Second Law of Thermodynamics any more than I know the research work done on a dog's saliva. But I do know that if a dog is foaming in the mouth I should be at safe distance from it because it might be a mad dog. What I must know as an educated man of my age is, I think, not so much the Second Law of Thermodynamics as its impact on society, which will give me some sense of the age I live in. What I *should* know to live life intelligently and decently is not so much fact as the sense of fact. Now I repeat that the simple fisherwoman is more likely to have had a sense of fact on many matters that affected her and her small village community as part of the larger world she lived in, than possibly Mr C. P. Snow for all his erudition stored in the ill-furnished chambers of his brain. To me she demonstrated in one moment of her life the truth of what that great Tamil classic the *Kural* seems to have said: 'The world is my village'. T. S. Eliot has rightly observed that Shakespeare knew more history by reading Plutarch than most of us by reading all the books in the British Museum. He says too that if someone came across Shakespeare's laundry bill he must take care to preserve it for, some intelligent scholar might some day with its help, throw some considerable light on our understanding of a scene or play of Shakespeare which is shrouded in the dark. Nehru writes as though he had read this passage of T. S. Eliot's, for he says, in his *Glimpses of World History* that there are 'a hundred and thousand

one things in family budgets of a hundred or thousand years ago which make us realise something of what the life of humanity was in the past age'. It is only then that we can clothe the dry bones of history with life, flesh and blood. He says that 'the only way to read, write or understand history is to evoke in the mind a picture of living society functioning, thinking, and having all the virtues and failings which the human being has possessed'.

Nehru thinks too that all of us are making history, and history is the resultant of the actions of millions and millions of human beings. But unfortunately historians swoop down upon kings, emperors, battles won, battles lost, because it is easier to collect materials for writing their tomes than by going to the unspectacular day-to-day life of the people. Major historians often forget the truth which a minor poet apprehended intuitively when he said

'Princess and lords may flourish or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied'

even as Shakespeare had understood the rottenness, and therefore evoked in us a vivid picture of that rottenness, of Denmark when he said 'There's something rotten in the State of Denmark'—I mean, that Shakespeare showed in one line a better understanding of the rottenness of Denmark than most historians who had meticulously collected the minutest details about the history of Denmark of the period in question.

It is my opinion that Nehru was gifted with this horse-sense in respect of world events perhaps because of his profound interest in the struggles and aspirations of humanity and his concern for the future of man. His concern, his interest, his mode of apprehension, and methods of treatment and presentation, are all those of a writer of fiction though he has not written any. Hence the claim for him that he was 'not a poet but thought poetically', though some critics of his were mean enough to comment in Parliament that the Prime

Minister was a minor poet who had missed his vocation. After all Thucydides, reputed to be one of the greatest and most exact of historians, has demonstrated that the entire presentation of his subject was 'governed by the conventions of a Greek tragedy'. Gibbon and Macaulay were historians, but they were primarily men of letters. So is H. G. Wells who wrote a competent, though not a great, history of the world. So is Churchill who incidentally, is neither a *great* historian nor a *great* man of letters though a great war leader. It is interesting, too, that Mr Toynbee the distinguished historian got the clue for his major work, *A Study of History*, from his reading of Goethe's *Faust* which Mr Toynbee must have considered a convincing illustration of 'challenge and response'—which subsequently becomes the central theme of his history.

Perhaps here is my peripheral claim for seeking entry into Clío's corridors. Ever since I gained some acquaintance with Nehru's writings and speeches I have marvelled at his historical sense—as to how one who was a scientist by training, a lawyer by profession, and a politician by occupation had acquired such a sensitive and almost unerring (almost, because of two mayor miscalculations) awareness of the world in its totality as so few statesmen of the world and even writers of history had done. It is that which I thought was worthy of emulation by us all, especially by the young people in our universities including their teachers, who are not historians. And so I stand before you to present a layman's view of history, written by one who said he was no historian, neither a historian nor a man of letters. In Plato's terms I am therefore twice removed from the reality of history, and historians must therefore bear with me, and not banish me from their charmed circle. But if as one of those millions of Nehru's camp followers I should be banished, I shall flatter myself that I have the satisfaction of being damned with him rather than saved with the great unread—the dry-as-dusts of history who by natural kinship have attracted the dust of ages to settle on them.

I made a passing reference to Nehru's training. I must

add that Nehru was most fortunate to have been born as Motilal's son, for to his father's house came many an Englishman in those days. He had English governesses too. His teacher at home was an Englishman named F. T. Brooks who introduced him to the great books of the World. When he was 13 or so he met Mrs Annie Besant, the theosophist and developed an interest in theosophy which he soon lost. Then, he lived in England for seven years—at Harrow, Cambridge, London; as a boy at school he read the story of Italian liberation by Mazzini and Garibaldi, and while at Cambridge acquired a scientific temper and admired Bertrand Russell, was fired by the ideas of the Socialists, chiefly Bernard Shaw, felt attracted to the aestheticism of Walter Pater, and marvelled at the technological possibilities of the future when the Wright Brothers made their first flight by aeroplane.

It is with this kind of equipment that he joined Gandhi's national movement for the liberation of his country from foreign domination. It is not surprising in the least that a young man of his intellectual equipment should take interest in the Irish Freedom movement, in the International Trade Union and Labour Organizations, in the Russian Revolution and in the invasion of China by Japan—some of the most important events happening in the world around him then. Mr A. N. Whitehead says in his book, *Aims of Education*, it is the mark of an educated man to see the connections of things which do not *seem* to be connected. If so, here surely was a highly educated man. For it soon became apparent to Nehru's mind that colonialism and capitalism are blood brothers and that most of world's events could be explained from this angle and that if India's independence to decide her own destiny is not conceded by the British Government this domination is part of a desire of some European powers to dominate the world. And so is India's fight for freedom a part of the freedom struggle that was going on in the rest of the world. If peace is indivisible, he was to argue later, freedom is indivisible too.

But the way events were moving in Europe convinced

Nehru that nationalism in the West had become the parent of aggressiveness, intolerance, and brutal violence, though he knew well enough that it is nationalism which built up the nations of Europe and nationalism was the driving force today in the countries of the East. But where his sense of history comes in is precisely in the context of intense national aspirations of a people. He feared that a nation seeking freedom, like a man who is sick, can hardly think of others' needs. Which means intense nationalism is not a sign of health, health, that is, in the long run, for the larger world. It becomes the basis of exploitation and suffering through wars. And in these matters, Nehru seems to say, we have to advance on both the fronts simultaneously.

He exhorted the young men of Bengal in 1928: 'Are you prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with the youth of the world, not only to free your country from an insolent and alien rule but to establish in this unhappy world of yours a better and happier society?' He warns them that national independence should not mean for us merely an addition to the warring groups of nations. It should be a step towards the creation of a World Commonwealth of Nations.

In the same year Nehru tells the Punjab Provincial Congress, a branch of the Indian National Congress, which was waging a life-and-death struggle for Indian independence from the British that nationalism is not in keeping with reality. The world has become internationalised; production is international, markets are international; and transport is international; only man's ideas continue to be governed by a dogma which has no real meaning today.

Himself in chains and fighting for the freedom of his own country long in chains, he yet had the courage and vision of the future to tell his colonial comrades in arms that 'nationalism is not in keeping with reality'. Such a one, one need hardly say, has acquired the moral right to tell the world, when his own country gets the freedom, where the world has gone wrong and what must be done. It is the right of a human being, and not merely of an Indian or of a Prime Minister of the largest democracy that he was exer-

cising when he made his comments on world affairs. It is the voice of a father who had told his 13 year old daughter, 'what a lucky one' she was to be living in such stirring times so that she could later say to herself

'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven.'

After all, the poet who wrote these lines had himself returned from France of the Revolution, a 'patriot of the world'. It is the voice too of a fighter whose Master was to withdraw a civil disobedience movement against the British Government because he would not make England's difficulty his opportunity. Gandhi also added, when he heard of the bombing by Hitler of St Paul's Cathedral in London, that he was pained as though the Kashi Viswanath temple was bombed. It is the same Gandhi who told Nehru before he went into a British prison in 1942: 'We must look the world in the face with calm and clear eyes even though the eyes of the world are bloodshot today'. And where did Gandhi get these ideas from? It was part of the Indian heritage which told its children

*'Matame Parvati devi
Pita devo Maheswarah
Bhartra manujas sarve
Swadeso bhuvanatravam.'*

(My mother is Parvati, my father is Maheswara, my brothers are the whole of mankind, my country all the three worlds.)

Nehru who belonged to this heritage knew it exemplified historically. Here the great religions of the world lived side by side for centuries; many religions, many philosophies, many languages, all woven into a beautiful tapestry which is Indian culture. He said so, in effect, in an article he contributed to *Foreign Affairs* in the Twenties. Precisely because India was a world in itself, Nehru told Tibor Mende in his *Conversations* with him that there was a danger of India shutting herself up and imagining that that was the world. Indeed India did it from time to time. Nehru says: whenever India opened out to the rest of the world

she has always prospered and when she shrank into herself she has decayed. And based on that he gives a working definition of culture: Every attempt to be inclusive is a sign of culture and every attempt to be exclusive is lack of culture.

We have seen how Nehru has always disapproved of aggressive nationalism and exclusionism and has even said in very clear terms that nationalism is anti-feeling. The burden of his song has been: 'We are Indian and to India we owe much but we are human beings also, and to humanity we also owe a debt'. But it is not some vague frothy sentimental ineffectual love of mankind. It has manifested itself in very concrete forms on various occasions. While from time to time he has expressed himself strongly in favour of China and the brave Chinese people and branded Japan an aggressor he has always realized that Asia had a personality and all the nations of Asia had shared a common heritage and later a common fate having been exploited by the European nations, and the time had now come for Asia to play her part nobly and well. He became conscious of it both as an Asian and as a historian who had realised that history today meant not of this country or that, but of the world as a whole. We have ample proof of the purity of his motivation and interest when we see his remarks at the Asian Conference which he called soon after India attained her independence.* It is a great event in the history of Asia and of the world. Poets and prophets—Emerson and W. B. Yeats among them—saw the vision of a resurgent Asia taking shape before humanity after two thousand years of 'stony sleep' during which Europe dominated the stage and drowned the 'ceremony of innocence' everywhere and brought the world to a state when 'the best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity'. So it is at the end of an epoch and the beginning of a new one that we stand when surely the 'second coming' is inevitable and surely it calls for seeing the sweep of history

* The following remarks on the Asian Conference I have taken from my Introduction to *Jawaharlal Nehru: India's Spokesman*, (Macmillan, 1960).

with its inexorable lessons, the vision of a great continent renewing itself and becoming glorious again. Nehru, if any one in all Asia, is more than equal to the task and says what only the best of us could have said on such an occasion. I find that whole paragraphs from his speech are worth quoting, but I shall resist the temptation and quote a few sentences only. First he refers to his 'daring invitation', but soon there is self-effacement and attempt at enlisting the fellowship of Asian nations when he says, 'it was not merely the call from us, but some deeper urge that brought you here'.

He lifts them from the present and transports them to an immemorial antiquity when Asia was the cradle of human civilization:

'We stand at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period in history. Standing on this watershed which divides two epochs of human history and endeavour, we can look back on our long past and look forward to the future that is taking shape before our eyes. Asia, after a long period of quiescence, has suddenly become important again in world affairs. If we view the millennia of history, this continent of Asia, with which Egypt has been intimately connected in cultural fellowship, has played a mighty role in the evolution of humanity. It was here that civilization began and man started on his unending adventure of life. Here the mind of man searched unceasingly for truth and the spirit of man shone like a beacon which lighted up the whole world.'

After exhorting the Asians he tells them of their sad plight, of how life in Asia became static and unchanging and how the other continents with their dynamism spread out and took possession of great parts of the world. 'This mighty continent', he deplores, 'became just a play-field for the rival imperialisms of Europe, and Europe became the centre of history and progress in human affairs'.

From immemorial antiquity through centuries of stagnation and oppression Asia is beginning to emerge and its star is shining again: 'A change is coming over the scene now and Asia is again finding herself . . . and takes her

rightful place with the other continents'. Briefly, but most exquisitely, he leads them on to the present: 'It is at this great moment that we meet here and it is the pride and privilege of the people of India to welcome their fellow Asians from other countries. . . .'

Lest there should be whispers by interested outsiders, of India's attempt at dominating the Asian political scene he declares that 'in this Conference and in this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavour'. He therefore speaks not merely of the vitality of India's culture which spread out and influenced vast numbers of people in distant parts of Asia, but tells the Conference of the 'commingling of various cultures' from Egypt, the Arab countries, and from Iran. Then he reminds them of the intercourse between India and China, Indonesia and Indo-China and all the countries of South-East Asia to make them feel the oneness of Asia in their bones.

Thus a great occasion is sure to bring forth the best in Nehru. Asia to him is also the continent of Buddha and Buddha's message has a meaning to the whole world today and so when there is a Buddhist Conference at Sanchi he views the Conference in the context of history, in relation to himself as an individual, and in relation to the nation and the world. 'This Conference', he says, 'has a deep significance for the whole world because the latter is at a turning point in history. The message of the Buddha may well solve the problems of our troubled and tormented world. I came to Sanchi, not to give you a message but to search for something myself. In this torn and distorted world, I am a very confused person. I see no light and often stumble. I try to search for what is lacking in me and to find out what is wanted of me by my country and my people'. The utter integrity of the speaker and his complete involvement in the situation make an immediate impact on the assembly and thanks to him the teachings of Buddha which might have lost their edge to his followers with the

passing of time now come home through the force of a living personality which has received its nourishment from Buddha and his teachings.

While there is no doubt that his immediate interest is in India and Asia because he belongs there first, he is anxious that we should not isolate ourselves or ask for special privileges. Indeed he hastens to correct any misleading impressions about his attitude to the rest of Asia and Africa, and to the rest of the world. For example, he did not like Indians in African countries and elsewhere in Burma, Ceylon, Malaya to retain a dual relationship. He tells them firmly: 'We do not want Indians to have any rights or privileges in a country which, in any way, would come in the way of the inhabitants of that country'. Elsewhere he goes to the extent of saying that if Indians do not choose to identify themselves with the land they live in they must be prepared to take a back seat. And finally he sums up his position with regard to Asia and Europe: 'I talk of Asia and Europe. But they are just geographical expressions, and the problems that face us are not Asiatic or European problems, but world problems or problems of humanity. And unless we solve them for the whole world, there will continue to be trouble'.

In the same spirit he dismisses such sweeping statements as the 'materialistic West' and the 'spiritual East.' In the first place Asia contains large chunks of humanity with different backgrounds and to talk about them all as one entity is to confuse oneself. He believes above all that the difference is really between an industrial West with all its good and bad points and an East which is still largely pre-industrial and agricultural. It is true, he adds, that the growth of toleration was a slow process in Europe. And when he says so he is possibly thinking of that 'disgusting episode', the crusades or the holy wars in the name of religion in which Christians fought fellow Christians and the Muslims and the Jews. He must be thinking too of the burning of scientists as heretics and the banishing of philosophers because they had praised Confucius or slighted

Christianity. He may be thinking too of the diverse missions of western countries—the white man's burden' of England, 'the civilizing mission' of France, the '*Kultur*' of Germany, the Communism of Russia, the Fascism of Italy, and the 'God's own country' (now 'the Great society') of America. But luckily Asian countries have no missions except those peripheral ones conceded to them by patronising Orientalists in the west.

What really hurts him is the aggressive and exploiting instincts of European nations in the name of superior civilisation. His grievance is chiefly against the imperialism of Great Britain, and the subsequent fascism and nazism of Italy and Germany. In 1938 a year before the war broke out, he wrote a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* on the betrayal of Czechoslovakia. He had the courage to tell the British people, himself then right in the heart of England, that the British attitude had 'done everything to encourage Hitler to bully and threaten Czechoslovakia. So if war comes the British Government can have the satisfaction or otherwise of feeling that they were largely responsible for it and the people of Britian, who have put that Government in power can draw what comfort they can from this fact'. Now it is obvious he is talking not as an Indian or as an Asian but as a civilized man; not about the fate of an Asian or African power but of a European power. He is careful to distinguish too, between the British Government and the British people, because he ranges himself on the side of the people and they will understand, for he tells us repeatedly that even when he felt like fuming against the British Government he remembered the kindnesses of many of his English friends and softened towards the Government. Nevertheless he does think that the British Government has 'a special responsibility for the growth of fascism and for bringing the war nearer'. He accuses them of 'tolerating aggression in Manchuria', 'betraying Abyssinia' and 'aiding Fascist rebels in Spain'. He tells his own countrymen repeatedly of his visit to Barcelona that 'Flower of Fair Cities of the World' as Cervantes called it,

and her being strangled not by the enemies but those who 'called themselves friends of democracy'. His heart, he says, is full of the tragedy of Spain. It is a personal sorrow to him. Above all it is the ancient home of liberty which struggled for freedom even in the days of Ferdinand and Isabella. It is clear that what Nehru is fighting for is a human value that has given meaning to people through the ages and not just what pertains to Asia or Europe.

Now he describes the crumbling world of Europe—the minor countries in it with the same concern: 'The map of Europe has changed suddenly and many nations have ceased to be. Poland went, Denmark and Norway succumbed, Holland collapsed, Belgium surrendered, France fell suddenly and completely. All these went into the German orbit. The Baltic countries and Bessarabia have been more or less absorbed by Soviet Russia'. Now here is proof of his being keenly alive to the tragedy around him. He writes of the fates of nations, as of individuals, each with a distinct personality of its own. He knows too that they did not go into the German orbit the same way. This concern is not that of a politician nor a closet historian, but of a sensitive historian committed to the alleviation of human suffering. We must not fail to see the artist's hand in this account. He shows himself most resourceful with his verbs to indicate precisely the manner in which a country went out of the map. One has 'ceased', another 'succumbed', a third one 'collapsed', a fourth 'surrendered' and a fifth 'fell' suddenly and the small fry were simply 'absorbed'. He writes of the plight of smaller powers as though they resemble the moth in the presence of fire. But the disappearance is best brought out by the title itself: 'Crumbling World' is a very vivid image.

It is the Hitler of this Germany that invited Nehru with a proviso that they knew his opposition to Nazism and yet they wanted him to see Germany for himself. He could go as guest or privately, in his own name or incognito and he would have perfect freedom to go where he liked. Nehru's comment on the invitation is: 'I declined with thanks'—the reply that he subsequently gave also to Mussolini who

had sent a top official to meet Nehru at the airport on his way home from Europe. Such is the integrity of this man that he will not join hands with the enemies of democracy although it might have suited him and his country to do so at a time when his hostility to British imperialism was the strongest, the reason why he parted company with Subhas Chandra Bose who joined hands with the Axis powers during the last war.

The fact is he had no regard for the political or the military might of a nation. The considerations that have weighed with him are nobler and never based on mere expediency. He always expressed his antagonism to warring nations, be they European or Asian, even as he has no kind word for empires whether they are in Europe or in Asia. While he is denouncing the British Empire his mind goes back to the Roman Empire, for all empires are the same. And now the two Asian empires—the Empire of Srivijaya and of Abbasiya Khalifas. ‘Angkor the Magnificent’ engages his attention in quite a serious way. While he speaks admiringly of it, because Angkor was a city of a million people and larger than Rome of the Caesars had been and it lasted longer than the British empire, he does not forget to say ‘it went the way of all empires’. He doesn’t miss the sad irony of this empire either: the river Mekong with its mouth blocked overflowed the city when the waters rushed back, and beasts of the forest now crouch where stood a proud empire. The second empire he thinks of is in the Middle East—the empire of Abbasiya Khalifas. He mentions it only to draw the great lesson of history for few today have heard of the existence of this grand empire but they know of Baghdad, the city of mystery and romance. And from this follows his shattering generalisation: ‘the empire of imagination is more lasting than the empire of fact’.

We have in Nehru’s life and work endless examples of his admiration and esteem for the empire of the imagination rather than of fact. Greek civilisation to him was a civilisation of the top few; and Alexander of Macedonia was a great

conqueror, yes, but a conceited young man; he had not left even good roads in his kingdom and he got all those he feared near to the throne massacred. But while talking of Greece he is sorry that the glory that was Greece—the Greece of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the Greece of Pericles, and the great Greek tragedians should not find a place in books of history. Of Rome, he thinks the Roman rich were a fickle minded crowd—he hasn't read Shakespeare's *Julius Ceasar* in vain. The same is the case with Florence of the Renaissance. When he visits that great city, he knows his history, literature and art well enough to remember just that appropriate thing which made it an important landmark not merely in the history of Italy, or Europe but in all world's history. That is the Florence of the Renaissance. What he remembers is: 'the lovely Arno (which) flows through; and Dante goes by, Beatrice the lady he loved passes leaving a faint perfume trailing behind her'. And in the narrow streets he sees 'Leonardo lost in thought'. Not merely Leonardo da Vinci's many splendoured genius but his melting humanity in buying caged birds and releasing them to freedom. And a crowning remark which shows his realism: much may be forgiven Florence including her money lenders because of her great poets and painters. Perhaps he would extend his forgiveness to Germany too in spite of Bismarck and Hitler, because of Goethe, because of her philosophers and scientists and musicians. While he had no sympathy for empires or emperors he writes in his letters to his daughter what is virtually a tragedy in three acts—Of Napoleon Bonaparte, the man who thundered across Europe, dreamed of founding a dynasty, but ended in the small island of St Helena, a prisoner of Europe. Nehru does not fail to notice the irony in this great soldier's testament to his son not to put his faith in the sword. And one or two final touches to deepen the personal tragedy and universalise it because, it is the great figure of Napoleon—one who shook all Europe, not as an adventurer but as a man of destiny. It seems Napoleon while he loved power loved it as an artist, the reason why perhaps his soldiers

loved him and at 24 he earned from them the title of 'young father'. When after a brief unpopularity Napoleon's statue was restored to Vendome column while he was still prisoner and had lost contact with the outside world, Nehru remembers his unhappy mother who, blind through age, came out of the house to say: 'Once again the Emperor is in Paris'.

While British historians are harsh and condemnatory in their verdicts on Napoleon, here is Nehru, a sworn enemy of all kings and emperors, of autocrats and military conquerors but who exalts and elevates Napoleon to tragic heights because of his personal greatness. But the British Empire is different to Nehru.

If any power on earth invites Nehru's sharpest denunciation it is the British empire, the hypocrisy that tried Warren Hastings and installed Clive's statue in front of the India Office; the same that sent Byron to far off Greece to fight for freedom and sent all good wishes to Italy but guns and bullets to next door neighbour Ireland as to Egypt, India and Afghanistan; and imprisoned the greatest man of his generation for demanding the freedom of India. But the England that brought imperialism and the penal code also brought Shakespeare and Milton and noble speech and science and technology though the British who brought them were 'agents of a historic process which they themselves did not understand'. Nevertheless his sympathy is the strongest when he remembers how 'a brave people' fought against the forces of aggression and went through a good deal of suffering during the war. Courage and suffering for a good cause are sure to win Nehru's unqualified admiration and fellow feeling.

Now a word or two on Russia. Of all the countries of the world in modern times Nehru's admiration is the greatest for Russia because, one would suppose, of the immediate relevance of the Russian experiment to the Indian context. He wants his countrymen to understand 'the vast forces which have upset the old order of things and brought a new world into existence'. Russia, he thinks, cannot be ignored 'because she is our neighbour, a powerful neighbour,

.which may be friendly to us and co-operate with us, or may be a thorn in our side'. In either event his stand was: 'we have to know her and understand her and shape our policy accordingly'. In article after article, speech after speech, he explained the Soviet system and showed its implications for India including its parallel in Indian history: 'Soviet means Sabha and a village soviet corresponds to a panchayat'. He thus helped to bring about even some sort of emotional integration with a great power which was later to stand by us on the Kashmir question against the machinations of imperialistic powers. The Russian Revolution is important to this student of world history because 'it is the greatest since the French Revolution and its story is more absorbing from the human and the dramatic points of view than any talk of phantasy'. He thinks so well of Russia because it stood as the bulwark of socialism against the imperialism and capitalism of the Western powers and remembers how those that harassed Russia and humiliated her started wooing her when she built up her economy and made incredible advances in science and technology and became a big power. But Nehru disapproved of the methods of violence employed by Russia in reaching her goal. He tells us again and again that 'you can achieve quick progress if you are prepared to pay a high price for it in human terms.'

That his praise is not for the ideology so much as for what a nation has achieved in the heroic mould is seen by his enthusiasm for what Kemal Pasha did to modern Turkey almost as a dictator—how a defeated, backward, disorganised and dogma-ridden Turkey changed suddenly, almost overnight! As in connection with Russia, so also here, he did not approve of the interference of the Government in the private lives of the people—he gives a humorous touch to it by saying, 'what head-dress one wears (Kemal Pasha insisted on a fez) is not so important as what is inside the head'.

His admiration for Russia and Turkey is based on the tremendous problems the leaders faced and the enormous good they did to their people who had gone down, lost hope

and lived in the dark. When he writes of Russia and Turkey he feels as though some personal good has come to him, as though he has himself won his salvation, because it is the greater good of humanity. In thinking over the troubles and conflicts of the world, he says, 'I forgot to some extent my own personal and national troubles. I would even feel buoyant occasionally at the fact that I was alive at this great revolutionary period of history'. He derived great comfort and stimulus for his own fight in India. He knew enough history not to complain against British rule either, for the Indians have brought it upon themselves, after all. Radhakrishnan somewhere remarks that Indian philosophy deteriorated with the loss of Indian freedom. Nehru's retort is: But why did it lose its freedom? Something rotten must have preceded the loss of freedom. It is the same attitude that is operative when he notices that Indians withdrew into their shells and were wrapt up in conceit in their relations with the Arabs in the 8th century. Nehru's grievance is that the Arabs learnt much from the Indians including Mathematics to which India has made the greatest single contribution in the zero. But the Indians did not learn much from the Arabs. And yet this was the time of the Arab renaissance, and decadence was beginning in India at the time. Our Arab contact carefully fostered would have helped to revitalise us, but just at that time we isolated ourselves. Nehru is sorry because this isolation arrested our growth and cheated us of our destiny.

It is because he notices this vital energy, which preserves a people from going down, among the Americans, Russians, and the Chinese that he admires them vastly. But he is careful enough to perceive the good and the bad of each of them so that one may presume how Nehru's discrimination saved India. The Americans he knows, are a new people though they have their roots in the old world. And he tells critics of America that even material prosperity cannot come without character. But he is sorry that money values should dominate a people's outlook on life so much. Of Russia he is happy that it broke with the past, as with death,

and started a new life but it had to pay a heavy price by the methods she employed, whereas to him, thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, the means are as important as the end. He is concerned with the means because he fears that if the means are impure the end stands self-defeated ultimately. Nehru's sympathy and admiration for the Chinese have been the warmest of all because of their antiquity, because of their high civilization and culture and their contribution to the graces of life but largely because of a tremendous vitality that has preserved them through centuries of poverty and suffering. He says that he can 'never think of a people so richly endowed going under'. His shock was the greater because of this abiding faith in the Chinese, when there was a treacherous attack on India. What Nehru didn't like was their arrogance and aggressive mentality for 'a few miles this way or that on the mountains does not very much matter'. Even so, the harshest thing he said at the time of the Chinese invasion was that we were dealing with an 'unscrupulous neighbour'.

Similarly with Japan. Of course Japan had at no time been India's enemy. But it had harassed China and bombed the civilian population and joined the fascist group in Asia and that was enough to provoke his wrath although there was no personal or national affront. All the same when, after the war, in 1946, a Japanese newspaper correspondent approached Nehru for some frank advice as to what Japan should do to recover her lost respect and confidence from other nations this is how he puts it: (He starts so humbly, disarmingly for the most important thing for this civilized man is not to hurt a people in their defeat and sorrow.) 'It is not easy to give advice, it is always difficult and often presumptuous to advise other nations and peoples, and it is still more difficult to advise those who have been stricken by defeat and misfortune. I cannot speak for the U.N. as a whole. Perhaps I can have some insight into the mind of India and to a lesser extent into the mind of Asia, and so I shall have a few words to say as an Indian'. After this lengthy and modest preface he suggests that 'Japan must now

seek friendship especially with her neighbour members of the Asiatic family. Japan has caused deep injury to China both materially and spiritually and must now seek the goodwill of the Chinese people . . . India and other countries of Asia will outlive yesterday's anger and resentment and join hands with Japan in the furtherance of Asiatic freedom and co-operation within the larger framework of world peace'.

When Nehru becomes the Prime Minister of newly awakened India he who has seen the ways of big powers (like 'Vultures' they 'swoop down' upon defenceless countries and share the spoils between them)—the Big Two, Big Three, Big Four, Big Five and back again now to Big Two—desires to keep his emergent country away from power politics. Why make their quarrels his own? Nehru refused to join them because in the first place he had enough problems of his own to face and overcome and also because he did not like to perpetuate mutual rivalry. No responsible statesman will, certainly not Nehru with his sense of history.

He objected to joining either bloc on economic considerations. It was hateful to his national self-respect. He could not have put it more forcefully than he did once: 'I say with a challenge that even if Jawaharlal Nehru went mad, the Congress and the country will not depart from the policy of non-alignment and socialism. We will never change our policy. If somebody does not want to give us aid, well, let him keep his money with him, we will go on without aid'. Again: both U.S. and the Soviet Union, he says, 'to our thinking, they attach too great a value to their great material power, and to their atomic bombs. Now, frankly speaking, I do not care two pence for their atomic bombs. Really, I am not afraid. If they want to bomb India, well, let them bomb it and let them put an end to it. But why should I spend sleepless nights over it? Why should I waste all my time, and work myself up into a passion of hatred just because something may happen'.

Elsewhere he says: 'If this is what is to be practical' (Nehru, the idealist naturally denounces it), 'the sooner we are not practical, the better'.

It can be imagined that the great western powers who had been for some more than two centuries used to looking upon Asia and Africa as inferior, impractical, illiterate and therefore less civilized did not like a beneficiary of their gifts and aids and loans and exchanges and experts to talk back to them. And why shouldn't Nehru, whose moral stature and whose sense of values are greater than those of the great powers, give them a bit of his mind especially when these gifts did not flow out of a great natural generosity of heart but of 'enlightened selfishness' as has been claimed by their own leaders?

The Washington Post, of all papers, could take a sane and sympathetic view of his stand because Nehru after all what the founders of the Republic of the United States did—to give his country peace for a few generations by isolating itself from power politics. The remarkable thing which even this paper could not notice is that Nehru did not 'isolate' himself, he only refused to join military or power blocs but pursued an independent policy. Only Mr Attlee among the elder statesmen of the West was able to see that 'Nehru is far too civilized a human being to fall for the aid doctrines of Marxism-Leninism and far too respectful of human dignity "to introduce totalitarian practices".' Even so, Mr Attlee only spoke as a Western statesman and a Russian could have said something similar against imperialistic designs in defence of Nehru's non-alignment.

More than economic aid or military help, to Nehru the artist and man of destiny the objection to two blocs is intellectual. To think of only *two* blocs is to face too great a limitation of the power of thinking or action!

The Bandung Conference and the part Nehru played in it is the strongest proof of his defiance of the two blocs and a sure tribute to his sense of history and statesmanship. It brought the emergent nations together, gave them dignity, and a sense of purpose. Nasser appreciated Nehru's dynamic neutrality when it did not deter him from taking sides with Egypt as against the British on the question of Suez Canal. Nehru's stand was: 'If colonialism succeeds in

coming back to Egypt, it will reverse the entire course of history and mean the return of the enemy to other countries from which it had been forced to go'.

Nasser who knew where the shoe pinched paid a handsome tribute to Nehru when he said, 'What a quick comprehension of a complicated situation! And with what scintillating and brave words he conveyed it! It gave us courage and stirred us to fight back'. Because of the trust and courage he gave to minor powers and his own championship of justice as against international gangsterism the oppressed people of the world could say what Vincent Sheean has said of him:

'We are willing to wait for him to make up his mind—a privilege we are reluctant to accord to any other head of a Government on earth, because we know he is struggling honestly, sincerely . . . to reach the right decision. The others crackle and snap or fizzle down . . . Jawaharlal thinks, feels, suffers, finds his way and the whole world is willing to wait until he has done so. During the present century there is nothing at all comparable to this phenomenon'.

It is in this attitude of fighting against extreme nationalism, formalism, and dogmatism that Nehru took the great decision of staying within the Commonwealth—the first stabilizing decision he took for his country after its independence. Some said it was a great blunder, others called it an outrage on national sentiments. But Nehru knew better and he assured his countrymen that he never did anything against the honour and self-respect of her people. His chief reason for staying in the Commonwealth is:

'The world is full of strife today and disaster looms on the horizon. Every step therefore which leads to lessening of the tension in the world should be a welcome step. I think it is good any way that the old conflict should be resolved in a friendly way. Old wounds must be healed.'

After this assurance there was nothing more his critics could say against him.

When a Member of Parliament spoke of the dead concept of 'greater India' after India became independent, Nehru

made fun of him and compared him to Bismarck. The thrust went deeper when he added: 'But Bismarck is dead and his politics are more dead. And the Hon'ble Member seems to be living in a remote past'.

There were moments when rebuke would not work or he did not care to rebuke. When he was moved by distress anywhere in the world it was as though one of his own limbs was turned and twisted and he went through an agony of heart. Consider, for instance, Korea. The Korean situation was being discussed in Parliament and at the end of the debate the Prime Minister stood up to win his country's sympathy and support for the unfortunate Korean people and now he has recourse to first-hand evidence—a letter he received from a Korean woman who writes: 'My country is sick and dying of cold, disease and starvation'. Nehru remembers it and remarks when his turn comes, 'As I am listening to Honourable Members many pictures are floating before my mind—pictures of marching armies and dying people, and statesmen holding converse in a room in Washington'.

Historians, we have seen, concern themselves with the past, for they argue they are not prophets. All that Nehru seems to say is: we read about the past not to repeat like parrots that history repeats itself, for the object of reading history is to see that history does not repeat itself, as otherwise we haven't learnt anything from history. Besides, history does not exhaust our duties or obligations to the past. For the past is dead and done with. It is the future that is yet to come. But the present is 'in labour'. How shall we escape? asks Nehru. 'Ostrich-like, shall we hide our heads? Or play our brave parts in the shaping of events?' 'Brave', but not arrogant, for he has said times without number that he feels 'very humble before the problems of the world'.

That is why when he is discussing a dynasty, a battle, an alliance, an attempt at conquest or rebellion, the questions he invariably asks are moral:

'But what good came of it at last? Why was it a famous victory?' etc. etc.

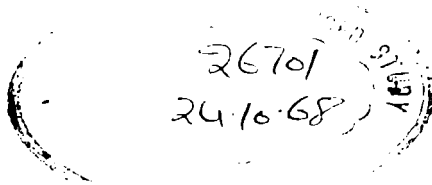
He realized more than most historians or statesmen how fate and events had placed him in the centre of the Indian stage—and he knew India must count in promoting the good of the world and so at every turn he took, he thought of things in a big way. Nothing can explain his grasp of history, his sense of history better than the series of questions he asks again and again:

'What kind of a world will we have?'

'Will it be a fairer and happier world where the good things of life will be reserved not for a few but are freely enjoyed by the masses?'

And to such a world wherever we live and whatever may happen anywhere we have an obligation. Nehru thinks we all have a responsibility for the state of the world and we must apply the touch of healing.

Well, if this is not to have a sense of history, I do not know what is.



THE HUMAN IDIOM



THE HUMAN IDIOM

Three Lectures on
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH



BLACKIE & SON (INDIA) LIMITED
BOMBAY • CALCUTTA • MADRAS