

The  
**Equator**  
Line

JANUARY-MARCH 2020 ₹50

MAGAZINE OF THE NEW WORLD

# The Boatman and Other Stories



- Sucheta Mahajan
- Jad Adams
- Bibek Debroy
- Harish Khare





# The Nation will dance to the Tribal beats



For the Tribal culture and their identity,  
An Event organized by  
Government of Chhattisgarh

Inaugural Ceremony - 27 Dec. 2019, 10 AM

## National Tribal Dance Festival

27-29 December 2019  
Science College Ground, Raipur, Chhattisgarh

Performances in 4 categories

Each category

First Prize  
20  
Lakh Rs.

Second Prize  
12  
Lakh Rs.

Third Prize  
8  
Lakh Rs.

Consolation Prize  
1  
Lakh Rs.

More than 1300 dancers from 25 different states  
across the nation

Performances by artists from Sri Lanka, Belarus,  
Uganda, Bangladesh, Maldives, Thailand

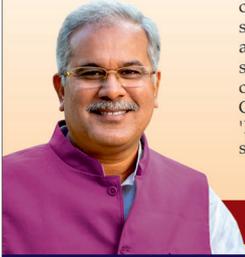
**Chief Guest**  
**Shri Rahul Gandhi**  
Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha

**Presided Over by**  
**Shri Bhupesh Bhagel**  
Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

**Special Guests**  
Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad  
Shri Ahmed Patel  
Shri K. C. Venugopal  
Ku. Meira Kumar  
Shri P.L. Ponia  
Shri B. K. Hariprasad  
Shri Motilal Vora  
Smt. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra  
Dr. Charan Das Mahant  
Shri Randeep Singh Surjewala  
Shri Kantilal Bhuria  
Shri Bhakta Charan Das  
Shri Anand Sharma

**You are cordially Invited**

“ In order to save the natural beauty and natural life of the world, it is our primary duty to save the folklore, to create awareness about the identity, culture and existence of the tribal society, continuously fighting for their survival and identity in the nation. The National Tribal Dance Festival is a significant initiative where various dance forms will get a platform to showcase their talent with zeal and enthusiasm, an event to establish coordination among artists, inquisitive minds and thinkers. The Government of Chhattisgarh feels proud to host the first of its kind 'National Tribal Dance Festival', a step towards reviving and showcasing the myriad shades of our Tribal Culture. ”



**Shri Bhupesh Bhagel**  
Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh



राज्य सरकार द्वारा आयोजित  
राज्य में सभी जिलों में आयोजित  
के लिए प्रवेश द्वार खोलें।

# The Equator Line

---

The Equator Line 30 | January-March 2020 | Volume 8 Issue 1

---

Editor in Chief	Bhaskar Roy
Copy Editor	Nikhita Nair
Marketing	Disha Thakur
Circulation	Sonam Chopra
Design	Rajender Negi

16 Community Centre, 3rd floor, Panchsheel Park  
New Delhi 110017, India  
email: [info@equator.net.in](mailto:info@equator.net.in)

To subscribe go to [www.theequatorline.co.in](http://www.theequatorline.co.in) or call +91 11 40503956

# The Equator Line

## CONTENTS

Editorial		3
Nehru: The Validity of His Vision	Jad Adams	8
Nehru's Nation and Its Architecture	Sucheta Mahajan	21
The Making of India's Socialist Idyll and Its Fallout	Bibek Debroy	31
Deep Roots of Indian Democracy	Harish Khare	44
A House for Mr Nehru	Tirna Chatterjee	54
Beyond Stereotypes	Photo Essay	68
Pandit Nehru: Through My Lens	Pashupati Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana	78
The Integrator of India	K. Aravindakshan	85
The Enlightened One of Our Times	Daya Dissanayake	92
When the Empire Wrote and Spoke Back	Nikhita Nair	104

Cover design: Sachin Kumar

Photo credits: online sources

## THE DANGER OF DEMONIZING THE BOATMAN



Every country that broke free of the colonial shackles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has its fables intertwined with the account of an iconic figure who occupied the central position in the struggle for freedom. In large parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America the legends of such national heroes have saturated the collective imagination of peoples. Patrice Lumumba, Nelson Mandela, Bogyoke Aung San, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – their journeys at one point became inseparable from the chronicles of the nationalist struggles in Congo, South Africa, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Though he preceded these larger-than-life figures by more than a century, Simón Bolívar had defined the role with his reckless bravery across Latin America beginning with Venezuela. But then, he was more of a swashbuckling military genius than a leader of the masses.

The Indian equivalent of such stalwarts is indisputably Jawaharlal Nehru, who strode across the country's political landscape like an unchallenged hero for almost half a century. More importantly, he cast a spell on his people with his magical words, avant-garde ideas and patrician good looks. India's Prince Charming. Quite appropriately American historian Stanley Wolpert calls Nehru 'India's royal figure, its matinee idol, its most gifted prime minister'.

Gandhi was more of a saint, a *yatri* on the rough terrain seeking truth, challenging the Empire from the standpoint of dharma, testing the moral fibre of the British Raj. Politics was the road he travelled but he resided on a more exalted plane. It's significant that in his long innings of 33 years in Indian politics (since his return from South Africa in 1915) he held the post of Congress president only once – in 1924, for a single-year term.

With his exposure to international politics, insights into the future, radical ideas in the context of the time and his phenomenal mass appeal, Nehru was the foremost leader of the freedom struggle and well-suited to interpret his country's gloom and aspirations. Of all his acolytes, Gandhi had the uncanny sense to know, that the India emerging out of the debris of colonialism and the feudal stranglehold would be speaking of its tomorrow through Jawaharlal. In the opinion of Judith Brown, a professor at Oxford and author of several books on Gandhi and Nehru, the reasons Gandhi had groomed Nehru for the leadership role were strong:

Nehru was a far more international figure, and a pan-Indian rather than a regional figure, and someone able to fashion dialogue across more of the political spectrum. This had been a strong element in Gandhi's nurturing of Nehru for leadership since the 1920s.

Things, however, were not that simple. Quite contrary to the prevailing impression, there were moments when Nehru's differences with his mentor sharpened. He, in fact, sought to distance himself from Gandhi at one point. And the older man was aware of this disenchantment. In a letter from Sabarmati Ashram dated 17 January 1928, Gandhi raised the matter:

The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I can't conceal from you my grief that I should lose a comrade so valiant, so faithful, so able and so honest as you have always been; but in serving a cause, comradeships have got to be sacrificed.

Of course the two did not part way but stayed close till Gandhi breathed his last. Nehru's moving speech after Gandhi's assassination counts among one of his best:

Friends and Comrades,

The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the Father of the Nation, is no more. Perhaps I am wrong to say that. Nevertheless, we will never 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, not to me only, but to millions and millions in this country. And it is a little difficult to soften the blow by any other advice that I or anyone else can give you.

He spoke these poignant lines, like the Tryst with Destiny speech, extempore.

Looking at the men and women who preferred police brutalities and British prison to more profitable propositions of life from the prism of our pygmy times is fraught with dangers. We tend to misconstrue their words and actions, for they were guided by an altogether different set of values. They did not live for the media nor did they put a very high premium on publicity.

In a letter from prison to his daughter, Nehru's admiration for the Mahatma acquired a rare poignancy:

My Dear Indira,

... In India a great leader, full of love for all who suffer and eager to help them, has inspired our people to great actions and noble sacrifices. He has helped to make the starving, the poor and the oppressed free and happy.

Bapuji is in prison, but the magic of his message has stolen the hearts of India's millions. Men and women, and even little children, come out of their little shells and become

India's soldiers of freedom. In India today we are making history, and you and I are fortunate to see this happening before our eyes...

This assessment of Gandhi's role in the freedom struggle, an appropriate tribute, was intended to let his little girl know about the situation in the country, not meant to be publicized. Going through the letter now one feels the deep bond of compassion and camaraderie that made them confront the world's biggest imperial power determinedly.

What lends lustre to the enduring Nehru mystique was the smooth transition he essayed from his role as the charismatic leader of the nationalist movement to the Prime Minister of a truncated, bleeding country. This is a crossover that trips many fiery leaders of nationalist movements. Think of Mao, think of Robert Mugabe. In the devastating Chinese famine during 1959-61 following the failure of Mao's ill-conceived Great Leap Forward, 15 million people died of starvation, overwork and state-sponsored repression. However, historian Frank Dikötter put the figures at 45 million. Mugabe who had challenged the minority white rule in British-controlled Rhodesia in his youth, ended up as a high-handed dictator responsible for atrocities against his opponents and Zimbabwe's economic ruination. Ousted in a military coup, the lonely despot died far away from home in a Singapore hospital in 2019.

As Prime Minister of a newly independent country Nehru had the choice of turning to the West and borrowing their technology which in the shorter term would have been easy and smooth. But he went the whole hog of building India's industrial base manufacturing trucks, tractors, pumping machines and HMT watches as well. Within years India started exporting some of these items to other countries.

A close look at India's neighbourhood by the mid-eighties would convince any observer that this massive landmass, despite poverty, illiteracy and awfully poor infrastructure, was a robust democracy surrounded by a cluster of failed States. In India, the hungry millions could vote out the most powerful of rulers and vote in the most unexpected. A court had the power to deliver a sensational judgement upsetting a redoubtable politician. Institutions like the Election Commission, Comptroller and Auditor General and some powerful parliamentary committees could censure the most powerful. In contrast, China was an irredeemably close and opaque society and a suffocating dictatorship. And the other countries on the Indian rim saw a hide and seek between democracy and dictatorship. Some of them were buffeted by civil war, state violence and popular unrest. India's success as a democracy could be entirely ascribed to Nehru's visionary leadership of this inchoate land for 17 long years after Independence.

When one looks at Nehru's durable achievements what stands out is a plural, composite society, and a fair, democratic system committed to improving the lot of the masses at the base of the pyramid. He strengthened the institutions so they could intervene in the event of the government or its agencies making mistakes. Brown faulted him for not according the priority that critical areas like literacy and health deserved and also overlooking governmental corruption.

Today, more than ever before, we realize we have survived as a nation because he ferried us across a turbulent river. Do we also know the danger of demonizing the boatman who rowed us to safety? ■

**Bhaskar Roy**

8

## NEHRU: THE VALIDITY OF HIS VISION

Jad Adams

For a long time I did not know Jawaharlal Nehru's first name. He was widely referred to in the UK as Pandit Nehru; as a child I did understand Pandit was an honorific and assumed it was a name. Nehru himself wanted his given name to be abbreviated and complained that friends like Lord Mountbatten could never get it right.

The point here is not that most British people were (until quite recently) bad at Indian names, but that even as a child in the 1960s I had heard of Nehru, which was how he was universally known, or 'Mr Nehru' to the *Times*. Even when I could not have named the prime minister of Australia or Canada, I knew who was in charge in India.

Nehru's story is frequently re-told as a fairy tale of nationalism. He was born into a home of almost legendary wealth surrounded by rich furnishings, a retinue of liveried servants, foreign furniture, tennis courts, a swimming pool and lawns with sparkling fountains. Unusually for the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a house with electricity, running water and flushing toilets.

His father Motilal was so Westernised that Nehru learned of Hindu religious philosophy not as part of structured lessons but in the rooms of an English tutor who was a theosophist and would have similarly minded Europeans round for tea to which the child Nehru was invited. There was little religion but as a cultured child he was expected to be educated in ancient Indian writing as

well as that of contemporary Europeans, and also to be able to recite Persian poetry.

Nehru was sent away to Harrow, one of Britain's top public schools (for those unaccustomed to the nuances of the class system that means a fee-paying private school). Inevitably, they had trouble with his name, and called him Joe. He remembered the place with affection and even at the height of the independence crusade, when anti-British feeling might have been understandable, Nehru when he was newly released from prison got out his book of Harrow school songs and led his family in singing them.



Harrow School where the story began



The Indian student with a vision

As a young man he went to Trinity College, Cambridge where he took a natural sciences degree then entered the Inner Temple to read for the bar. He thus became one of very few world leaders with qualifications in both the humanities and the sciences. Margaret Thatcher, who also qualified as a scientist and a barrister, was another. He took a different route to nationalism from Thatcher's, however, no free market system for him; he attended John Maynard Keynes' lectures on the virtues of a planned economy.



Trinity College, Cambridge  
where ideas take wing



A famous alumna –  
Lady Thatcher

He was influenced by socialism which was very much the coming movement. In this he was typical, and was not so unusual either in looking with sympathy on Irish nationalism.

The effortlessly superior Nehru glided into the English upper class, making lifelong friends. It was not just him, the whole family behaved as if born to rule – and continued to do so. I remember a reception in India House in London in the 1990s where members of the Nehru family and the Mountbatten family were present. These representatives of the ruling class of their respective nations had not met each other before, and I was mildly amused at their scenting each other out and seamlessly segregating themselves from writers, press officers and other functionaries in their world. The gathering was of Europeans and Indians, but that was of no consequence: they were the aristocrats and they knew they were apart from the rest of us. Nehru certainly fitted in to the Western world but it was most definitely the world of the Western ruling class, he didn't fit in to the East End's Petticoat Lane market where numerous Asian immigrants got their start in business.

Back in India, Nehru was feted as a son returning in triumph despite the fact that his achievements to date had been slight. The family were Kashmiri Brahmins though Motilal Nehru kept an Untouchable as his personal dresser in contempt of caste considerations. For him the India made by the caste system was 'the laughing stock of modern civilisation'. Young Nehru had an arranged marriage, within caste, however, and returned to the opulent dinner table set with wine glasses and European utensils where his traditional wife Kamala never felt comfortable.



Motilal Nehru – the rich lawyer who gave up everything for freedom

It was now that he chose to renounce a life of wealth and took the hard road of political protests. He joined Gandhi's campaign against the 1919 Rowlatt Act continuing civil wartime restrictions in India after the war. He changed his dress, food and language. He went out to the villages of India, far from the railway lines, where he would listen to the tales of sorrow, crippling rent, beatings, extortion, eviction and hunger. He discovered an ability to connect with the poor which served him well through the independence campaign and made him a key ally of Gandhi who needed a link between the Western-educated nationalists and the masses of the nation.

Nehru found it easier to relate to the poor than the aspirational middle class and still had the habit of treating educated Indians who spoke English with local accents as the British treated the 'natives'. As a commentator said, 'No one really minded the residual Anglicanism in him. They knew what a sacrifice he had made of

it in order to become a disciple of Gandhi.’ It was not a one-way transaction. Nehru lacked strategic ideas, so he was the ideal partner for Gandhi who had no shortage of big ideas but was bored by politics at which Nehru excelled.

Civil disobedience led him to serve more than nine years in British prisons. There were intermittent discussions with the



Benn who saw the undying pride

government, even while he was still in custody. The Secretary of State for India, William Wedgwood Benn, reported, ‘It was the apparent pride which depressed me, because it did not show the spirit of a defeated man.’ The British knew the value of spirit and national pride, it would have so pleased Nehru to have known that this was how he was regarded by his imperial opponents.

The isolation and sadness of his character made prison more like monasticism for him, particularly as he had access to books and writing materials. He made good use of his time, and seemed to bear no ill-will to his captors. His biographers (including me) consider him admirable in being one of the few world leaders who was capable of writing a book. Most leaders, such as Gandhi, only managed to write their memoirs. Nehru did that, he wrote his autobiography at the early age of 46; but he also wrote *The Discovery of India*, a history of the subcontinent, which included personal happenings, such as the death of his wife, along with national events. He also wrote *Glimpses of World History*, a history of mankind about which a *New York Times* reviewer said, ‘one is

awed by the breadth of Nehru's culture'. He could certainly have been a professor had he not been a politician.

It was his autobiography which first attracted Edwina Mountbatten to him. She had read the book long before she met him, and thought it gave a picture of a fascinating man. His relationship with the Mountbattens is a source of continuing interest, notably his affair with Edwina. As he wrote to her, 'some uncontrollable force, of which I was only dimly aware, drew us to one another'.

They corresponded from 1948, the year she left India, till her death in 1960. The question of how physically close Edwina and Nehru's relationship was has raised a deal of unnecessary comment. She explained it in a letter to her husband, 'You yourself well realise the strange relationship – most of it spiritual – which exists between us.' If it was 'mostly spiritual' then it was at least in part something more earthy.

Someone I knew who had the right of access to Nehru's apartments told me he once went in to find Nehru and Edwina in what he called 'a clinch,' though I was in little doubt they were physically intimate even without that anecdote. All three of them, Nehru, Edwina and Mountbatten were very sexually active people. There are records of many affairs they had which are not denied – Nehru had a long relationship with Padmaja Naidu, for example. Edwina had had relationships with many men including a jazz musician and an actor. When she met Nehru she was distraught over the marriage of her long-term lover Bunny Phillips. Mountbatten was, if anything, even more promiscuous, mainly with men, earning him the soubriquet 'Mountbottom'.

In 1947 Nehru was a widower and Edwina in a markedly open relationship. Given Edwina's sexual behaviour, she would have found it peculiar to the point of insult if Nehru had not wanted to have sex with her, it would not have been considered an expression of

gallantry. From this perspective, the question ‘did they have sex’ is rather juvenile – not whether they did, but why should they not have done? They were adult people with the usual physical drives. This relationship puts Nehru in the field of people who are revisited in fictionalised histories, TV drama series and books because there is a great romantic story to tell with an exciting backdrop. It means people who know little of India and nothing of its post-war politics still think of Nehru as a romantic figure and know his name.

*Viceroy’s House*, the 2017 British-Indian film about the last days of the Raj, omitted the affair to avoid offending Indian sensibilities. Such books as my own *The Dynasty: The Nehru-Gandhi Story* and Alex von Tunzelmann’s *Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire* showed no such restraint. Another revealing book, Rhiannon Jenkins Tsang’s *The Last Vicereine*, captures the essence of the relationship because being a novel it has no obligation to historical authenticity.

Nehru is remembered by averagely well-read Britishers as the most sympathetic of the post-war independence leaders, the most willing to negotiate an amicable divorce from the British Empire. His role as a hero with genuine compassion for all the people of India obscures some of his more questionable choices, and some of the dark times he lived through. He said in 1946, ‘When the British go, there will be no more communal trouble in India,’ a statement markedly lacking in predictive power.

He personally abhorred communal violence, to the extent of intervening himself. A journalist interviewed for *The Dynasty*, the BBC series on which I worked, recalled, ‘Connaught Circus had a lot of shops owned by Muslims, and Hindus were ransacking them. The police were just spectators. Nehru rushed in just with his small baton saying, “Get out, get out, get out!” People did say “Look here, how can the prime minister do this kind of thing?” but he was a man.’ With Nehru’s guidance India embraced a

separation of the State from religion as in the US constitution – not that of the UK, by the way, where the monarch is head of the State and of the church.

He was determinedly secular, holding out against the notions of Jinnah who wanted India divided into Pakistan for Muslims and Hindustan for Hindus. Nehru insisted Pakistan had seceded from India which is how the world has viewed it, a considerable propaganda coup. Nehru was like the westerners who took Gandhi's message of freedom but discarded the religious element; others like Vallabhbhai Patel embraced the Hindu element of Gandhi's teaching but omitted the universal love.

Aristocrat though he may have been, Nehru was definitely not in favour of hereditary rule – a democratic India had to bring the princes to heel. This was mainly done under Patel's direction, while Nehru looked away from such horrors as took place in Hyderabad.

Kashmir, which was of course Nehru's ancestral homeland, was another question. Following the Pakistani invasion and the Indian counter invasion, Nehru took Mountbatten's advice to refer the matter of the province to the United Nations. This went some way to legitimising Pakistan's claim, so they refused to leave the land they had taken, resulting in a problem that is still with us. Nehru said the name Kashmir was engraved on his heart, as well it might be.

Napoleon, when asked what quality he most wanted in his generals, replied, 'Luck.' Nehru had tremendously good luck. He was fortunate to be born rich so he had the benefits of travel and education; he was good looking and high caste; he was of the right age to take a leading role in the independence movement. All the stars came together in a propitious constellation in the late 1940s. Within a space of a few years, all his rivals for the central role in

subcontinental politics were gone. Gandhi had been murdered, but more importantly for national stability, Hindutva as an alternative vision of India to Nehru's secularism was discredited owing to the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic.

Jinnah was at death's door when Pakistan was born, leaving the nation with no leader of stature. Subhas Chandra Bose might have returned from the war as a man of action but he was lost, presumed dead. Vallabhbhai Patel's health failed and he was dead before the end of 1950. Nehru was on his own for most of the 17 years of his rule.

A consummate player, when Prime Minister Nehru called himself 'the last Englishman to rule India'. The phrase was to please the English, who still had considerable influence in India and the world, and to forestall criticism which might be made of him by conservatives within India: if he made the joke against himself, it took the sting out of it.

He managed to hold together a secular State and embraced the constitution fashioned by Dr BR Ambedkar granting equal rights to the 'scheduled castes'. However, many of the problems of India such as food scarcity, a shortage of education and communal ill-feeling were problems of the nation whoever sat in government in New Delhi.

In economic policy, what JK Galbraith, the US ambassador and economist, called Nehru's 'post-office socialism' had more in common with the post-war British Labour government than with the Soviet Union. It was a commitment to make sure public enterprises operate at no profit, preferably at no loss, with no particular efficiency and with no other clear purpose in mind.

Nehru was more a nationalist, interested in Indian autonomy, than a socialist with an economic objective. His five-year plans

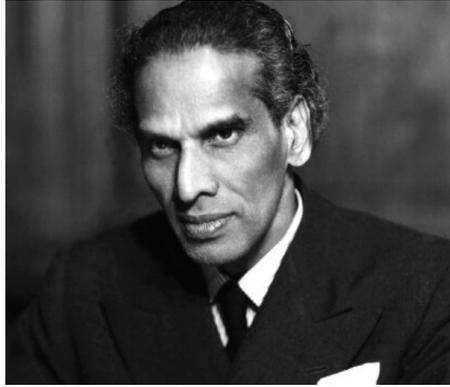
intended to attain Indian self-sufficiency but the years of excess were based on spending the sterling balances – the money owed to India by the UK, mainly through wartime debt incurred for war supplies and troops. By 1958 with Nehru's second Five Year Plan the money had been spent. The economy was floating on foreign aid and deficit financing.

Money went into dams, bridges and aircraft. Nehru's scientific understanding came to the fore with his grasp of the importance of nuclear power which he saw as the fuel of the future. His commitment to nuclear energy was far-sighted; that it put India on course to develop nuclear weapons was hardly Gandhian, but Gandhi's vision of village India was lost even if it had ever been grasped by more than a handful of his followers. It was due to Nehru that India had a nuclear industry able to create a weapon, for good or ill.

In foreign policy Nehru argued for non-alignment which, while the world was in the middle of the cold war, was not an option calculated to enrich India. The mild socialism of the nation made it look as if it were in the Soviet camp to Americans who were accustomed to binary divisions. America had more money to invest and was, for a developing country, a better bet. Nehru risked losing US support when he developed sympathetic policies towards China, and was then humiliatingly obliged to call on President Kennedy for military support when China invaded in 1962. The failure of 'non-alignment' as a foreign policy was shown in sharp relief over the Indo-Chinese conflict where the non-aligned nations stayed non-aligned and did not help India. It was the US, the UK and the Commonwealth which did so. Nehru had run out of luck.

Defence minister Krishna Menon was disgraced by his unpreparedness for the invasion. He resigned which was one beneficial result of the debacle. Nehru may have been grooming

Menon for the top job after he was gone, despite Menon's temperamental unsuitability to be anything except Nehru's friend.



Krishna Menon who misread the Chinese

The enduring success of Nehru was and remains the democracy of India, buttressed by the rule of law, imperfect though it often is in operation. Most post-independence nations went

with a one-party State, they started with high hopes of dignity and nationhood and ended with an elite kleptocracy headed by a raving madman blaming every national problem on the receding bogey of imperialism. India could have gone the way of intermittent rule by the army and the religiously intolerant as undergone by Pakistan. That it did not is very much due to the democratic conscience of Nehru, a man who once wrote an anonymous article on the dangers of giving Jawaharlal Nehru too much power.

The first general election, in 1951-2 was notable as the first free election in India but in world terms it was an epochal event, being the largest democratic exercise ever undertaken in human history. Nehru set up structures and endorsed a constitution strong enough to ensure continuation of democracy after his death. There are few countries of the former British Empire which have had such an uninterrupted process of democracy as India.

It is evidence of the enduring strength of Nehru's vision of India that the nation is able to elect a government with a completely different world view from that of its predecessor. The essence of democracy is putting a genuine choice before the public. By nature, that choice will usually be the opposite of what many

individual voters want. More than 50 years after his death the current government, not one of which he would have approved, owes its authority to the structures he developed.

The beginning of his 'Long years ago now we made a tryst with destiny' speech is often quoted, not so much this passage near the end: 'All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action.' They are still wise words. ■



**Jad Adams** is a writer and television producer. He is the author of *Gandhi: Naked Ambition* and of *Women and the Vote: A World History*. He has written biographies of Tony Benn, Emmeline Pankhurst and Rudyard Kipling. He worked on the television series *The Dynasty: The Nehru-Gandhi Story* and wrote the book which accompanied it.

NEHRU'S NATION AND ITS  
ARCHITECTURE

Sucheta Mahajan

21

**O**f the leading figures of India's independence struggle Jawaharlal Nehru perhaps has been most vilified on social media in recent years. He is portrayed as the 'other', a closet Muslim and a womaniser. His contribution has been erased from school textbooks lest young minds come to know something about this leader and statesman. As he is seen as the flag-bearer of secularism, the political invective is the strongest against him. What is at work is a sustained, sinister attempt to undermine the Constitution and its much-cherished values.

In contrast, there is a concerted drive to place Vallabhbhai Patel on a high pedestal, the Iron Man, now iconized in the Statue of Unity, to present the argument that if he were the Prime Minister, rather than Nehru, India would have been better off. Policy in Kashmir particularly comes up for comment. Therefore, appropriation of one leader and vilification of another goes on. The way to stop this is to recall that along with their common mentor, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel stood at different poles of the political spectrum, but the spectrum was the same.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a stalwart of the national movement which overthrew British colonial rule. After Independence, as the first Prime Minister of the country, till his death in 1964, he was an unparalleled nation builder.

The Indian National Congress, the premier party of the freedom movement, was an umbrella organization under which different strands of anti-colonial politics co-existed; a platform for varied



The Statue of Unity?

parties. These strands represented distinct ideological perspectives but shared a commitment to an idea of India. This idea was composed of democracy with elements like secularism, sovereignty, a pro-poor orientation in economic policies and non-alignment in world politics.

Jawaharlal's father, Motilal Nehru, was a major leader of the Congress. Jawaharlal turned to political activity in his youth. He was fired up by the determination of the peasants of Pratapgarh in the United Provinces. Gandhi was the leader of the national movement in the years after the First World War, transforming the Congress into a mass party with a new constitution and four-anna membership. The non-cooperation movement took the struggle along the path of boycott of legislatures, courts, schools and colleges. 'Swaraj in one year' was Gandhi's cry. The non-cooperation movement was intertwined with the Khilafat Movement, which protested against the dissolution of the Caliphate. The country witnessed unity between Hindus and Muslims on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Jawaharlal, too, was affected by the new wave that swayed the masses, especially the youth. When Gandhi called off the movement after the violent turn it took in Chauri Chaura with a mob setting fire to

a *thana*, Jawaharlal was dismayed, if not disillusioned. However, his faith in Gandhi at a personal level and as a mass leader survived this crisis and he was to remain a loyal follower, despite the emergence of differences in their ideological persuasions.



Chauri Chaura – a turning point

By the late 1920s Jawaharlal was attracted towards leftist ideas, which deepened into a belief in Marxism. He attended the League Against Imperialism in Brussels in 1927, visited the Soviet Union, took a keen interest in the Spanish Civil War and kept a watchful eye on the emergence of fascist forces in Europe in the 1930s.

By the late 1920s, along with Subhas Bose, he was an icon of the youth. His elevation as President of the Congress in 1929 at the Lahore session coincided with the adoption of the *poorna aazadi* (complete independence) resolution. His popularity was soon second only to that of the Mahatma. In an article titled 'Rashtropati' which he wrote, under a pseudonym, Chanakya, in the *Modern Review*, he warned of the dangers of Jawaharlal turning a dictator, in pursuit of popularity, and with contempt of the weak<sup>1</sup>.

When he again became President of the Congress at Lucknow in 1936 and Faizpur in 1937, his election reflected the spread of

socialist ideas in the party, and indeed in the country. The Congress Socialist Party was formed as a bloc within the party in 1934 and the Communist Party of India, under the influence of the United Front thesis of the Comintern, worked together with the Congress. The role of peasants and workers in the freedom struggle was highlighted and they were expected to have greater influence on the Congress Party. Jawaharlal spoke of collective affiliation of *kisan sabhas* and trade unions to the party, a proposal which was not accepted. However, unlike Subhas Bose he did not break with Gandhi over differences in ideology and strategy, which were considerable.

When World War II broke out, Jawaharlal was cognisant of the dangers posed by Nazism and fascism to the world. He was in favour of joining the fight against the fascist forces on the side of the Allies provided there was a genuine promise of self-determination after the War and inclusion of Indians in the pursuit of the war effort. However, in response to his sensible proposal, the British rulers arrested him on the launch of the Quit India Movement. He was detained in Ahmednagar Fort till the end of the War. It was there that he wrote *The Discovery of India* during the long days of his imprisonment. Nehru's magnum opus is breathtaking in its reach and inclusive in its approach; it searches for and finds an emblematic figure neither Hindu nor Muslim – Ashoka, who had embraced Buddhism.

With the end of the War, Nehru returned to active politics, spearheading the cause of the Indian National Army officers who were put on trial at the Red Fort. They were accused of treason and waging war against the King and of brutalities against the loyal prisoners of war. Nehru donned his lawyer's robes after decades, arguing in court that Britain no longer had any right to decide any matter concerning Indians. By the time the INA trials took place in early November, the Commander in Chief of the British forces in India, Claude Auchinleck, was reporting to his superiors that all Indian officers were nationalist minded. Hence it would be best to quietly dismiss them and bury the matter.

Three Cabinet Ministers of the Labour Government, collectively known as the Cabinet Mission, arrived on 24 March 1946 to explore a settlement. Both the Congress and the League accepted the statements of the Mission in as much as their position was accommodated. This did not make for agreement. Curiously, in the historical writings on the period, Nehru is painted as the villain who stymied the Cabinet Mission Plan and paved the way for Partition. Nehru's statement, 'We are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided to go into the Constituent Assembly'<sup>2</sup> may have been a bit tactless but it echoed Gandhi's editorial in the *Harijan* of 26 May 1946 that the Constituent Assembly would decide its own procedure and the Mission Plan was not binding<sup>3</sup> and was in fact, a correct interpretation, as the constitution making body was indeed sovereign.

What is forgotten is that the Muslim League, too, had taken a similar but identically opposite position, namely that it accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan 'in as much as the basis and foundation of Pakistan are inherent in the Mission Plan by virtue of the compulsory grouping of the six Muslim provinces.'<sup>4</sup> While Nehru is depicted as the villain who destroyed the prospects of unity held out by the Cabinet Mission Plan in 1946, what is elided are the British assurances to both sides that allowed both parties to interpret the Plan in their own way.

By the spring of 1947, the Congress leaders were willing to accept Partition as a temporary measure, in order to stop the civil war which enveloped many regions of the country. Nehru exhorted his countrymen to look to the days ahead: 'But of one thing I am convinced that ultimately there will be a strong and united India. We have often to go through the valley of the shadow before we reach the sunlit mountain tops.'<sup>5</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru led from the front to suppress the communal riots in Bihar in 1946, where Hindu peasants, provoked by news of violence in Calcutta and Noakhali in Bengal, turned upon their

Muslim neighbours. Nehru warned Hindus that he would order firing and even bombardment from the air. He continued to take the lead in strongly quelling the communal violence which exploded in the aftermath of Partition. He defended the rights of Muslims, for which he faced threats to his life.

The memoirs of HM Patel,<sup>6</sup> senior civil servant, relate how nationalist leaders, Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru, worked together with civil servants

to restore peace in Delhi in September 1947, when the state was under threat from organised Hindu and Sikh communal groups.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, after the assassination of the Mahatma on 30 January 1948, by a Hindu communal fanatic who saw him as an obstacle in the pursuit of a Hindu *rashtra*, Nehru came down very heavily on the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, because he believed that Hindu communalism was a serious threat to the secular fabric of the nascent Indian nation.<sup>8</sup> Nehru and Patel were one in their assessment of the communal challenge. Patel was clear that '... as [a] result of the activities of these two bodies [the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha], particularly the former, an atmosphere was created in the country in which such a ghastly tragedy became possible. There is no doubt in my mind the extreme section of the Hindu Mahasabha was involved in this conspiracy. The activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of the Government and the State.'

In recent times, Nehru has been made a target of Hindu communal propaganda. Nehru is presented as power hungry, cornering



The Mahatma with Pethick-Lawrence

the Prime Ministership, with the help of Gandhi, who favoured Nehru over Patel, in choosing him as head of the Congress and hence, Prime Minister. Nehru is portrayed as a weak-minded ruler who was responsible for the Kashmir problem. No less than Prime Minister Modi said: ‘Had Sardar Patel been India’s first



Through the smokescreen of propaganda:  
Nehru and the Sardar

Prime Minister, a part of Kashmir would not have been under control of Pakistan.’<sup>9</sup> The fact of the matter is that Patel shared Nehru’s stand on Kashmir that it was the will of the people of Kashmir that mattered and that will was in favour of being in India.

A charge made from the other end of the political spectrum against Nehru was that his government rebuilt the Somnath temple and allowed Hindu idols to be set up in what was then a mosque in Ayodhya. Apropos the allegation that the government allowed the idols to be set up at Ayodhya in December 1949, the facts are that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel, were sharply critical of the actions of the district magistrate who had allowed it. Similarly, in a letter to the Chief Ministers, dated 2 May 1951, Nehru states categorically: ‘You must have read about the coming ceremonies at Somnath temple. Many people have been attracted to this and some of my colleagues are even associated with it in their individual capacities. But it should be clearly understood that this function is not governmental and the Government of India as such has nothing to do with it. ...we have to remember that we must not do anything which comes in the way of our State being secular. That is the basis of our Constitution... There, are, unfortunately, many communal tendencies at

work in India today and we have to be on our guard against them. It is important that Governments should keep the secular and non-communal ideal always before them.'

Jawaharlal Nehru assumed the mantle of leading the country after Independence. Of the trio – Gandhi, Nehru and Patel – Gandhi had been assassinated and Patel had passed away by 1950. The socialists, his fellow travellers since the late 1920s, had left the Congress and the Gandhians had retired to their ashrams after Gandhi's death. Nehru had to increasingly fall back on the strength of his personality to effectively push through the policies of his government. This was evident in the first general election in 1951-52, based on adult franchise, when the Congress Party won a huge victory. The Hindu communal parties together won only 10 seats in the first Lok Sabha. Nehru made the election campaign a referendum on popular support to his policies. He personally toured the entire country, travelling 40,000 km and addressed about 35 million people for elections in 4,500 constituencies of which 497 were parliamentary.

After the achievement of political independence, Nehru stressed the importance of economic democracy. If the first big challenge was how to create a democratic polity, the second task was promoting industrialization in an agriculturally dominant country. India was able to break out of the mould of colonial-style economic growth and develop an economy which was based on heavy industry. The Indian economy grew over 7 per cent in the years 1950-1965. This was the period of the first three Five-Year Plans. Land reforms in agriculture were carried out with the objective of ensuring food security.

This independence and equidistance from the two blocs were reflected in the share of foreign trade with the United Kingdom coming down from 45 per cent in 1947 to 20 per cent in 1977. Here again, the independent economy allowed India to maintain a non-aligned foreign policy. From the time she became independent, India was disinclined to be part of the Anglo-American bloc,

especially its treaty organizations, given its history of colonial rule and exploitation. The Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in 1947 was an expression of pan-Asian unity and diversity; a call to Asia to come together and assume the leadership of the world. The Americans and the British were apprehensive about the likelihood of Soviet influence over India and tried their best to counter this. India under Nehru gave the leadership to the non-aligned movement, along with Yugoslavia's Tito and Nasser from Egypt. In the mid-1950s this represented a powerful challenge to the established international order.

Nehru's vision of Asian unity was predicated on China reciprocating friendship. This was not to be. *Hindi Chini bhai bhai* remained a hollow slogan despite Nehru's efforts to build bridges and was not the paper it was written on as China moved to aggression and eventually war by 1962. The defeat in the China War was a blow to Nehru personally from which he never recovered. ■



**Sucheta Mahajan** is Professor and former Chairperson, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She was Gillespie Visiting Professor, College of Wooster, Ohio, US. Her publications include *Towards Freedom: Documents on India's Freedom Struggle, 1947*, parts one and two (editor), 2013 and 2015; *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India* (2000) and *India's Struggle for Independence* (with Bipan Chandra et al), 1988.

**THE MAKING OF INDIA'S SOCIALIST  
IDYLL AND ITS FALLOUT**

Bibek Debroy

31

Every play, as Aristotle says, ‘has a beginning and middle and end’. The story of Indian socialism is no exception. Let us begin at the very beginning, in 1931 when the Karachi session of the All India Congress Committee adopted a resolution that articulated notions of fundamental rights and stressed what the State should do, its role in the economic and social programme. It, for instance, says, ‘The state shall provide for free and compulsory primary education.’ And again, ‘The state shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping, and other means of public transport.’

A view was forming about the role of the State in working out the economic strategy and this inevitably led to the need for planning. All this led to the formation of the National Planning



Planning Commission: chartering India's socialist route

Committee in 1938. Jawaharlal Nehru was its Chairman. The National Planning Committee recommended that an all-India National Planning Commission should be established. In 1946, the National Planning Committee became dysfunctional, since the Interim Government established an Advisory Planning Board.

In many accounts of the history of economic development and planning in post-Independence India, it is suggested that the sense of continuity in the planning process was disrupted after the Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61). This is a gross simplification. Several 'Plans' were developed outside government – one by M. Visvesvaraya, then there were the Bombay Plan, People's Plan, Gandhian Plan and the Sarvodaya Plan. Across these plans, there was a consensus on (a) public investments in key industries; b) state intervention in distribution, to prevent a widening of income disparities; and (c) peripheral roles of external trade and foreign investments. These tenets represented the wisdom of the day. In 1948, there was the Industrial Policy Resolution. This stated the government proposed to set up a National Planning Commission. For industry, it also clearly articulated the principles of complete state monopoly in some sectors, state monopoly for new enterprises in other sectors,



M. Visvesvaraya – father of Indian engineering

possible nationalization of existing private sector enterprises and majority Indian equity in enterprises with foreign capital. Statutory formalization of these principles came through the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act (IDRA) of 1951.

The Bill, ready by 1949, provided for the federal government's powers to license new undertakings and register and regulate the existing ones. To the 1951 statute, bits and pieces would continue to be added. For instance, a 1953 amendment gave the federal government powers to assume control of an existing industrial undertaking. That 1953 amendment also gave the Centre powers to control supply, distribution and prices.

In the list of statutes that form the bedrock of India's economic policy, the most important is the Constitution that came into force in 1950. Of course, today's Constitution is not the same as adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 26 November 1949. The Constitution has been amended 104 times till date. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution has the word 'socialist' now. It didn't then.

Participating in the Constituent Assembly debate on 15 November 1948, BR Ambedkar opposed an amendment that sought to introduce the word 'socialist' in the Preamble. 'What should be the policy of the State, how society should be organized in its social and economic side are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether. If you state in the Constitution that the social organization of the state shall take a particular form, you are, in my judgment, taking away the liberty of the people to decide what should be the social organization in which they wish to live. It is perfectly possible today, for the majority people to hold that the socialist organization of society is better than the capitalist organization of society. But it would be perfectly possible for thinking people to devise some other form of social organization which might be better than the socialist organization of today or of tomorrow. I do not see therefore why the Constitution should tie down the people to live in a particular form and not leave it to the people themselves to decide it for themselves. This is one reason why the amendment should be opposed.'



Chronicler of the Constitution – BR Ambedkar

On the other hand, the Constitution has, and had, Article 39, from the Directive Principles of State Policy. ‘The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing... that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub-serve the common good; that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment.’ There were Fundamental Rights and there were Directive Principles of State Policy paving the way for conflict and tension between the former and the latter.

This was the context in which the Planning Commission was set up through a Cabinet Resolution on 15 March 1950. The Resolution mentioned both Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. The First Five-Year Plan was for the period 1951-56. It actually achieved a 3.6 per cent rate of growth. When the plan period was over, no alarm was raised because the outlook for the economy was certainly not gloomy. And certainly, a growth rate of 3.6 per cent was better than what had been hoped for. The Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61) was projected as a more determined choice of the socialist path. Consider the backdrop against which it was formulated.

The Imperial Bank of India, the oldest and largest commercial bank of British India, was nationalized with the Reserve Bank of India assuming a controlling equity in it. It became State Bank of India with the passage of the State Bank of India Act in Parliament in 1955. Industrial Finance Corporation of India was set up in 1948 and in 1955, Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) came into being. The insurance industry was nationalized in 1956.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) was set up in 1956, the first IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) and IIMs (Indian Institute of Management) came up five years later, in 1961. There were public sector steel plants in Bhilai and Durgapur, not to forget power and irrigation. Damodar Valley Corporation, independent India's first multipurpose river-valley project, came into being in 1948. It was followed up by the Bhakra-Nangal Project in Punjab in 1954, and Hirakud in Odisha in 1957 and Nagarjuna Sagar in Andhra Pradesh a decade later. There is an impression that Jawaharlal Nehru coined the expression 'temples of new India' at the inauguration of the Bhakra-Nangal canal. (Some people even think he said it about all public sector enterprises.) The speech was actually in Hindi and was delivered



Edifices of excellence – IITs

on 8 July 1954.

In the official translation, the speech was titled 'Temples of the New Age'. Nehru said, 'As I walked around the site I thought that these days the biggest temple and mosque and gurdwara

(are) the place(s) where man works for the good of mankind. Which place can be greater than this, this Bhakra-Nangal (project), where thousands and lakhs of men have worked, have shed their blood and sweat and laid down their lives as well?... Then again it struck me that Bhakra-Nangal was like a big university where we can work and while working learn, so that we may do bigger things.'

The preparations for drafting the Second Five-Year Plan started in 1954 and the Plan document was finalized by March 1956. Around that time the air inside the Planning Commission, itself almost a literal translation of Gosplan, the State Planning Committee of the Soviet Union, was thickly socialist. The Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission was VT Krishnamachari, a Raj-era bureaucrat handpicked by Nehru for his 'better economic credentials'; eminent statistician PC Mahalanobis became a Member in January 1955 and continued in that position till September 1967. In most discussions of the Second Plan, the growth document was seen as a replication of the Feldman-Mahalanobis model. The Soviet economist Grigory Feldman developed a model for economic planning and submitted it to the Gosplan in 1928. In it he examined the growth-rate theory in the context of national income. However, it was translated into English much later. In a similar work Mahalanobis focused on a two-sector model. This was published in 1953. Shorn of the complicated theory and for the understanding of the common man, in a closed economy there are two sectors – consumer goods and capital goods. Investments can be made in consumer goods or capital goods. Massive investment in consumer goods leads to high output initially but it slumps down eventually. Therefore, in the longer run, it is better to channel investments into capital goods, which can be equated with heavy industry.

By the time news about Feldman's model travelled, Mahalanobis had already published his work. Together they were called the



PC Mahalanobis,  
the renowned statistician

Feldman-Mahalanobis model. The model which provided the basis for the Second Plan, generated a great deal of interest among economists and started a debate that went on for a long time. Along with criticism surfaced alternative models at regular intervals. Taking an impartial stance one can argue that the model did not

entirely put its stamp on the Second Plan. Economists love mathematics, algebra and rigour, and here was a model one could lay hands on, even if one disagreed with its assumptions. The First Plan didn't quite have a model. However, apart from the obvious emphasis on heavy industry, the defining attribute of the Second Plan lay elsewhere.

From 1950 to 2014, the Planning Commission formulated 12 Five-Year Plans. The last one was for the 2007-2012 period. Despite being chaired by the incumbent Prime Minister, the Planning Commission and the corresponding Five-Year Plan remained relevant as long as both were in sync with what the political system desired, not otherwise. Therefore, the relevance of the Planning Commission varied from time to time with changes happening within the political system. The plan body, however, routinely carried out academic exercises to generate ideas.

The Second Plan was a period of relevance. The Avadi session of the Congress Party, held in 1955 in a Chennai neighbourhood, adopted a resolution stressing a socialistic pattern of society as the explicit goal. The Avadi resolution was anticipated by Prime Minister Nehru's opening remarks at the third meeting of the National Development Council in November 1954: 'Therefore, we have to think on these lines and get out of the static habit of thinking, and I think we should be clear, broadly speaking,

about the picture we are aiming at. The picture I have in mind is definitely and absolutely a Socialistic picture of society. I am not using the word in a dogmatic sense at all, but in the sense of meaning largely that the means of production should be socially-owned and controlled for the benefit of society as a whole. There is plenty of room for private enterprise there, provided the main aim is kept clear.'

There were no dissenting voices at that NDC meeting. At least, none were recorded. The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 was replaced by a new Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956. It stated the new priority: 'This policy must be governed by the principles laid down in the Constitution, the objective of socialism, and the experience gained during these years...These basic and general principles were given a more precise direction when Parliament accepted in December, 1954 the socialist pattern of society as the objective of social and economic policy. Industrial policy, as other policies, must therefore, be governed by these principles and directions. In order to realize this objective, it is essential to accelerate the rate of economic growth and to speed up industrialization and, in particular, to develop heavy industries and machine making industries, to expand the public sector, and to build up a large and growing cooperative sector... Equally, it is urgent, to reduce disparities in income and wealth which exist today, to prevent private monopolies and the concentration of economic power in different fields in the hands of small numbers of individuals. Accordingly, the State will progressively assume a predominant and direct responsibility for setting up new industrial undertakings and for developing transport facilities. It will also undertake state trading on an increasing scale... The adoption of the socialist pattern of society as the national objective, as well as the need for planned and rapid development, require that all industries of basic and strategic importance, or in the nature of public utility services, should be in the public sector. Other industries which are essential and require investment on a scale which only the State, in present circumstances, could provide, have also to be in the public

sector, the State has, therefore, to assume direct responsibility for the future development of industries over a wider area.’

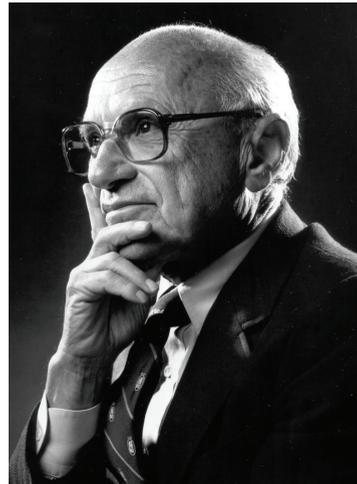
This is how Nehru put his stamp on the process of planning. The Planning Commission and the Second Plan document were part of this jigsaw puzzle. The First Plan document may have referred to the Directive Principles of State Policy, but had not used the expression ‘socialist pattern of society’. The Second Five-Year Plan document shed the hesitation using this motto at the outset. This is how India embarked on the path of a socialist pattern of society. The seeds had been sown for public and private monopolies, leading to protected domestic markets and inefficiencies. The seeds had been sown for import substitution. The seeds had been sown for export subsidies, to ensure that inefficient domestic enterprises survive in competitive global markets. The seeds had been sown for neglect of agriculture, consumer goods and small-scale industry. Perhaps most devastating of all, the seeds had been sown for a maze of controls and regulations.

Alexander Campbell, *Time* magazine’s India correspondent in the fifties, published *The Heart of India*. The 1958 book has never been published or printed in India and there is a ban on its imports into India. It is an extremely patronizing book, though that should hardly be a reason for a ban. There is a chapter about a meeting with Vaidya Sharma of the Ministry of Planning. ‘He (Vaidya Sharma) put away the housing-development papers, and talked again about the Five-Year Plan. “We have now entered the period of the second Plan. The first Plan built up our food resources; the second Plan will lay the foundations for rapid creation of heavy industry. Delhi, as the capital of India, will play a big part, and we are getting ready to shoulder the burden. We are going to build a big central stationery depot, with a special railway-siding of its own. There will be no fewer than 12 halls, each covering 2,000 square feet. They will be storage halls, and,” said Sharma triumphantly, “we calculate that the depot

will be capable of an annual turnover of 1,400 tons of official forms, forms required for carrying out the commitments of the second Five-Year Plan!” This might very well be concocted and exaggerated, but there is a grain of truth somewhere.

Milton Friedman, winner of the Nobel Prize in economics and a strong advocate of markets, came to India in 1955. Closely studying the dimensions of the government's economic policy, he submitted a memorandum to Finance Minister CD Deshmukh. His paperwork which would go down in history has a celebrated document warning against 'an attempt to do too much in the public sector'. Talking about the possibilities, he said, 'A 5 per cent per annum rate of increase in real national income, seems entirely feasible, on the basis of both the experience of other countries and of India's own recent past.' Pointing to the country's strength, he said, 'The great untapped resource of technical and scientific knowledge available to India for the taking is the economic equivalent of the untapped continent available to the United States 150 years ago.'

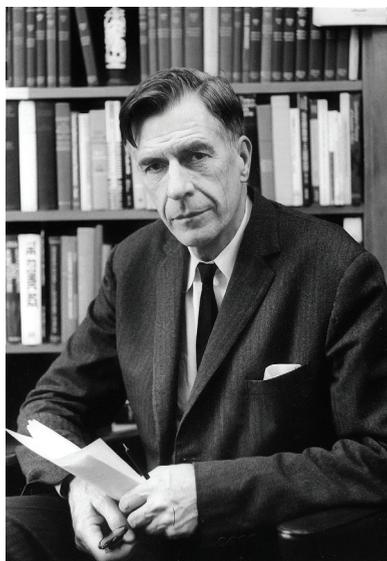
'There are two reasons why the amount of investment and the increase in output can be, and empirically are, only loosely connected,' he sought to explain. 'First, the form and distribution of investment are at least as important as its sheer magnitude. Second, what is called capital investment is only part of the total expenditure on increasing the productivity of an economy... The form of investment is no less important than its kind. The chief problem in the Indian program that impresses on



The influencer: Friedman

the tendency to concentrate investment in heavy industry at one extreme and handicrafts at the other, at the expense of small and moderate size industry. This policy threatens an inefficient use of capital at the one extreme by combining it with too little labour and an inefficient use of labour at the other extreme by combining it with too little capital...' There is much more that was prescient.

John Kenneth Galbraith was ideologically far removed from Milton Friedman. In 1955, he spent some time in India, as an Adviser to the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI). In 1961, he returned as the US Ambassador to India. In 1958, he authored a perceptive piece on India, titled, 'Rival Economic Theories in India'; this was published in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1958. 'If we are to understand the impact on India of foreign economic ideas we must first recognize how immune the Indian economy is to influence from any source, including that of the Indian Government... Out of the depths of this experience the village has a deeply ingrained mistrust of the world outside, and this mistrust is directed first of all at those



Liberal economist JK Galbraith

who presume to govern... The economic life of the village is concerned, indeed, preoccupied, with the production of food. And so, therefore, is Indian economic life as a whole...It seems to be recognized that Russian and East European agricultural experience is inapplicable to India. But other agricultural suggestions strike one as having a rather uncertain or even academic tone... Perhaps the greatest success of both the First and Second Plans has been the Village Development Program.'

Already familiar with India because of his stint with the Indian Statistical Institute, when it was announced that he was going to be the next US Ambassador in New Delhi, he disparagingly described the Indian experience as 'post office socialism'. There was some furore over the remark at that time. The Indian experiment with socialism thus got the stick both from the right (Friedman) and the left (Galbraith). What needs to be noted is that there were very few Indian economists who opposed it at the time. Before I am criticized for saying this, let me clarify there were indeed a few but not many. In general, the economist community went ahead with what the political system wanted.

This is how Nehru took India down the socialist path with its pros and cons, costs and benefits. Increasingly, in the 1970s and 1980s, the costs proved disproportionately high, compared to the benefits. Therefore, undoubtedly, India committed a mistake in sticking to this path in the 1970s and 1980s. What about the 1950s? It is not that there were no other options. But as I said, the wisdom of the day sided with Nehru's point of view. ■



Educated at Presidency College, Kolkata, Delhi School of Economics and Trinity College, Cambridge, **Dr Bibek Debroy** is a well-known economist. Presently he is Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, and President, Indian Statistical Institute.

**DEEP ROOTS OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY**

Harish Khare

February the 27<sup>th</sup> in 1967 was a satisfying day for Pakistan's military strongman, Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan. He had shot 137 partridges on the sprawling estate owned by his friend Ghulam Mohammad Khan Mahar on the west bank of the Chenab River in Khangarh, in Pakistan's Punjab province. That bountiful yield put Pakistan's dictator in a contented mood. Only the previous evening he had found himself reflecting on the sombre state of affairs in India.

The fourth general election in India had just been held – the first one after Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress Party barely managed to secure a working majority in the Lok Sabha while losing power in eight major states. Ayub Khan's senior ministers and bureaucrats were unanimous in their view that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government in New Delhi would be weak and unstable.

Ayub Khan condescendingly noted in his diary on 26 February:

...the Indian election results are due to the ravages of the direct adult franchise and election to the assemblies. How can people whose orbit of interest is confined to a few miles from their village, produce balanced judgements on matters of national implications. Their reasons can only be based on personal grievances, trials and tribulations as exploited by demagogues, fanatics and parochialism. True that the Indian people have come to complain against the Congress for mismanagement and misgovernment, but look at what they have wrought instead. Can these people they have elected resolve their problems? Surely not. So the Indian vote and

election results have been negative. *I have my doubts if the country will ever recover from the shock. That is why I keep on telling our people not to play with the fire of direct adult voting for election to assemblies. They will only burn their fingers and themselves in the process too.* [emphasis added]<sup>1</sup>

The military dictator was purring that he and his generals had kept their country away from the unpredictability and messiness inherent in a democratic arrangement.



Dismissive of democracy:  
General Ayub Khan

But the good soldier overlooked just one thing – India had had Jawaharlal Nehru at the helm for the first 17 years of Independence, and his legacy of robust constitutional institutions and political manners had already insulated India and its democracy against the very dangers the Field Marshal suspected were lurking around every corner in New Delhi. By the time the Pakistani military dictator was smugly making that diary entry, Nehru's India had already passed the ultimate test of a mature democracy – peaceful transfer of power.

Within three years of Nehru's death, democratic India had successfully negotiated three successions at the very top – Lal Bahadur Shastri got anointed as Prime Minister in May 1964, Indira Gandhi in January 1966 after Shastri's untimely death in far-away Tashkent, and, Indira Gandhi, again, in February 1967 after a new Lok Sabha got voted in. A smooth, peaceful transfer of power in a land that had only known wars and feuds over succession among the rajas, maharajas, sultans and Nizams!

And why did India not disintegrate or stray away from the path of democracy? The answer is unequivocal and stunningly simple: Nehru's stewardship for the first 17 years of Independence.

Those 17 years transformed this vast country – the eighth largest in the world and more than four times the size of Pakistan – giving it a remarkable stability, political, administrative and constitutional. This ancient land of unbridgeable differences of caste, religion, region, tribe, and language was metamorphosed into a democratic republic wedded to a set of modern values. It would be historically erroneous to overlook the fact that India in 1947 was an extremely poor country, indescribably backward, teeming with millions and millions of impoverished citizens, battered and drained by two centuries of ruthless colonial exploitation; the middle class was a minuscule presence, and the capitalist class – or the bourgeoisie, if you would – was a nascent entity, just past the toddling years and had come into its own only on profiteering during the Second World War. It was not strong enough to undertake the massive task of economic transformation. So it fell on the national leadership to fashion a new political order and create a legitimate authority to carry out the job.

This unprecedented stability in its turn enabled Nehru and his colleagues to lay the foundations of a modern economy and a constitutional democracy. Those were the years of a young nation propelled by a progressive vision, imbued with idealism and wedded to the values of democracy and secularism. This stability and political coherence prevailed throughout the 1950s.

Compare this with Pakistan, which saw seven prime ministers between 1947 and 1958 before the Army Chief declared himself as the Chief Martial Law Administrator; or take the case of France, which experienced between 1946 and 1958 as many as 17 prime ministers.

That means India has never ever toyed with the idea of inviting the generals and colonels to step in and restore some kind of vague ‘order’ and impose ‘discipline’ suspending democracy. It is incumbent upon us to try to recall the tone and tenor of the

post-World War II years. That was a time when even before the newly independent countries succumbed to the allure of the uniformed generals, the United States had already opted for a soldier [General Dwight Eisenhower] to govern from the White House, and France, too, was soon to beseech General Charles de Gaulle to take up residence at the Élysée Palace.<sup>2</sup> It was against the trend of the times that Nehru and his colleagues kept the Army at a respectably safe distance. Ironically it is this refusal to get taken in by the starred generals that is now held against Nehru as part of the revisionists' wider charge of national defence having been neglected in those years.



The general in the White House: Dwight Eisenhower

And, it could *not* be otherwise. After all, here was a leadership that had had its baptism by the noble fire of the freedom struggle, high on idealism and values, and, consequently, had no reason to bend their knees to the Indian counterparts of Field Marshal Ayub Khan or General Yahya Khan. If today we have a national consensus that the Indian Army's place is in the barracks, it has to be celebrated as the finest part of that enduring Nehruvian legacy. Perhaps the reason Ayub Khan got it all wrong about India was his failure to appreciate that unlike Pakistan, India had embarked

on a purposeful journey of national reconstruction after centuries of colonial exploitation. It was Nehru who for 17 years, week after week, month after month, year after year, kept humming the theme song of a national renewal. In *The Discovery of India*, he had already talked of recharging 'the battery of India's spirit' and wakening 'her from long slumber'. This was a noble mission, an enterprise morally worthy. 'We aimed high and looked far', noted this clear-headed man.

Nehru cajoled, goaded, prodded a whole generation to take pride in building a New India, the nation all over again, a strong, forward-looking nation-state, seeking to discover, once again, its civilizational élan and take its respectful and legitimate place in the community of nations. For Nehru, it was a *tapasya*, an undertaking that renewed him and re-energised a dormant society.

After all the task of the leadership, at any given time and place, is to define the national goals then proceed to marshal the nation's resources and its people, firing them up with a new imagination. The helmsman inspires them to participate in the collective endeavour of a better tomorrow. Fortunately, the final phase of the freedom struggle, with Gandhi's return from South Africa in 1915 as its starting point, spearheaded by the Mahatma himself, had imbued the land with a thrilling sense of nationalism and renewal. The task of the post-Independence leadership was to inject a new sense of purpose into the people. It was Nehru's historical responsibility to reignite the nation's imagination to build a 'New India'.

Of course, any leader can work up a nation by stirring its emotions and prejudices. Indeed the 20<sup>th</sup> century is full of determined, purposeful but ultranationalist demagogues – Adolf Hitler, Mussolini and Joseph Stalin in Europe, Sukarno and Mao Zedong closer home in Asia – who ended up as disasters and their reigns blackmarked as catastrophes causing their peoples indescribable pain and suffering.

What distinguished Nehru from the other charismatic leaders was his conviction that a 'New India' could only be built with popular participation, support and endorsement.



His Long March ended in dictatorship

It was not a megalomaniac imposing, inflicting himself on a hapless citizenry. Nehru was unwavering in his belief that the legitimacy of the new constitution, new democracy and the new state was to be firmly anchored in the masses' approval and not in the conceited grandiloquence of a muffasil mind. And, he was convinced that without an emotionally united and morally upbeat citizenry no government could accomplish much.

Soon after Independence, Nehru repeatedly reminded his colleagues – as at the Congress workers' meeting in Nagpur on 12 March 1948 – that 'the strength of the Government is the strength of the people and not the strength of its police or army.'<sup>3</sup> It was this clarity, conviction and belief in the approval of the masses that made Nehru the quintessential democrat. And, it is because of this legacy that no soldier can arrogate to himself – as Field Marshal Ayub Khan could in Pakistan – the role of 'guardians of the State'.

It is absolutely important to remember that when Nehru and his colleagues began crafting a new modern State, there was no bluebook for building institutions which would be in consonance with a constitutional democracy. The point to be noted here is that Nehru was totally unambiguous about the 'New India' being a joint enterprise of the rulers and the ruled.

Let's listen to Nehru addressing a public meeting in Jamshedpur on 26 November 1950. Here he is talking of a mutual understanding, a rapport between the power and the people, a two-way communication and an ongoing conversation:

If you and I, who are responsible for running the country's affairs today do not understand one another, do not have faith in each other and do not comprehend our mutual problems and miseries, then the work cannot progress smoothly. However powerful a government may be, either in Delhi or in (a) state, whatever great efforts it may make, it cannot go very far without the cooperation and understanding of the people.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, the Nehruvian elites inculcated a culture of democratic humility and could never be found talking arrogantly down to the masses. As long as Nehru lived, the political circle around him had to refrain from propounding, at least publicly, 'the State knows the best' maxim. All constitutional institutions had to justify themselves in terms of public good and national welfare and in accordance with the values and objectives spelled out in the Preamble to the Constitution. It was a simple *mantra* to ensure a *democratic control of the State*.

In addition to this democratic humility, Nehru's single most enduring legacy is his gift of political decency. By the time Independence came, he had acquired through trial and error the ideal temperament that would help inculcate a culture of political decency.

On 4 February 1939, Nehru had, in a letter to Subhas Bose, revealed his approach:

Public affairs involve principles and policies. They also involve an understanding of each other and faith in the bona fides of colleagues. If this understanding and faith are lacking, it is very difficult to cooperate with advantage. As I have grown in years I have come to attach more and

more importance to this faith and understanding between colleagues. What am I to do with the finest principles if I do not have confidence in the person concerned? The party rivalries in many provinces illustrate this and we find extreme bitterness and often an utter lack of scruple among people who are ordinarily honourable and straight. I cannot stomach this kind of politics and I have kept absolutely aloof from them for these many years. I function individually without any group or any second person to support me, although I am happy enough to possess the confidence of many. I feel that this provincial deterioration is now being transferred or extended to the all-India plane. This is a matter of the most serious concern to me.<sup>5</sup>

This is the very antithesis of Machiavelli, or if you would prefer, Chanakya. Differences over principles and policies were natural and honourable; factionalism, groupism and partisanship not. Nor were there political differences that were allowed to be degenerated into personal rivalries.

It was his sense of righteousness and political fortitude that came in handy when Nehru had to navigate through the torturous demands of politicians' egos and partisanship. After Independence, differences over policies and direction were natural but Nehru insisted that old colleagues and comrades who differed with him be treated with courtesy and consideration.

It was this temperament and disposition that enabled the nascent democracy to work out a civilized code of conduct among politicians and parties. Dissent was natural and was naturally put up with. Beyond the political arena, the same insistence on courtesy, honour, dignity, diligence and scruples spawned a liberal ambience enabling the newly created institutions of the State to find their feet. Without these virtues the institutions would have been autocratic pigeonholes. Civilized procedures and protocols came to invest institutions in keeping with the plural nature of the

republic. By the time Nehru left the scene his legacy of a civilized political culture was very much sanctified.

\* \* \*

We began with Ayub Khan and his bafflement over the quirks of Indian democracy. Within two years of his diary entry, the dictator was ousted by another decorated general, who in turn was to preside over the disintegration of Pakistan.

Indeed it is the Nehruvian notion of democratic control of the State that remains the most efficacious defence against usurpation of power and authority by any individual or group or faction. Many have argued that Nehru lacked the requisite 'ruthlessness' to radically transform this ancient land. Indeed, history records wise rulers often have to find a harmonious balance between toughness and gradual incrementalism. It is this Nehruvian legacy that rejects the possibility and potential of an authoritarian strong man.<sup>6</sup> If we survive as a democracy it is perhaps because Nehru did not allow power to go to his head. ■



**Dr. Harish Khare**, a former Media Advisor to the Prime Minister of India, holds a doctoral degree from Yale University. He was awarded the Nehru Fellowship for 2012 for his project: *Governing India in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. A former Editor-in-Chief, *The Tribune*, Khare is a Nehru scholar.

54

## A HOUSE FOR MR NEHRU

Tirna Chatterjee

**I**t's still cold in Allahabad. But the excitement of the city's young men over the visit of an important leader had already raised the temperature a few notches up. With a showdown between the hardliners and moderates in Congress billed for later that year, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, leader of the moderate group, arrived in the city, a major nerve-centre of national politics, on 3 February 1907. The enthusiastic supporters unhorsed his carriage and pulled it themselves shouting 'Vande Mataram...'



Besant: backer of Indian freedom

The very next day Gokhale addressed a gathering of students on the Anand Bhavan premises with his host Motilal Nehru in the chair. Interestingly, the topic he chose for his speech was 'Work Before Us'. Gokhale was opposed to 'extremists' like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal.

Exactly 10 years later, there was another avid gathering at the city's railway station to receive an important visitor. Both Motilal and his son Jawahar, Sarojini Naidu and Tilak were among the Congress leaders waiting for Annie Besant,

the world-renowned Irish theosophist, to arrive. Only a year ago she had founded the Home Rule League, a movement demanding self-governance for India.

Looking back on those events with detachment now, a pattern emerges crystal clear – whatever shades of their politics, moderates, hardliners, radicals, middle-path proponents – the majestic Nehru residence was the common destination of Indian nationalists in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Tilak, Gokhale, Lala Lajpat Rai – they all went to Anand Bhavan to debate, take stock of the political issues of the day. The Nehru home, a major landmark in the Raj-flavoured Allahabad at the turn of the last century, was at the centre of history that was in the making. For the Indian nationalists, Motilal Nehru's 'palace of bliss' was the obvious address.

There's always a beginning, as they say, before the beginning. The excessively rich lawyer's sprawling mansion is no exception. In the year 1900, Motilal, a brilliant lawyer at Allahabad High Court with a flourishing practice, purchased the estate from one Kanwar Parmanand of Moradabad for ₹19,000. 1 Church Road, Civil Lines close to the Government House, was the best address one could aspire for. Originally the 20-acre property belonged to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the liberal educationist who founded the Aligarh Muslim University. The new owner carried out extensive renovation and added extensions to give shape to his idea of a Westernized Indian professional's residence. When ready, it stood stately and regal.

A posthumous child who had to fight against heavy odds at every stage in life, for Motilal the 42-room mansion was a statement of his success. With its spacious rooms, hallways, balconies and grand terraces, Anand Bhavan was very different from the bare hulk it had been. It was the first house in Allahabad which had a swimming pool, running water, electricity and a tennis court. In its garage were gleaming cars brought from Europe. Realizing his dream, Motilal spent

lavishly buying furniture, fittings and crockery in Europe to give the place the feel of an English country house. In 1904, he imported Allahabad's first car. A few years later he brought from Europe a few more. Bicycles, a rarity those days, stood on their stands in its courtyard. In the stable were kept sleek, fleet-footed Arabian horses.



Anand Bhavan: lavish palace turned freedom's temple

In the museum on the house premises a gripping picture greets the visitor now: Motilal dressed smartly in breeches, with his two daughters – Vijaya Lakshmi and Krishna – on horseback. A brilliant crack, he would often go hunting. In his younger days Motilal was fond of wrestling, but when he grew older, he arranged wrestling bouts between servants in a part of the garden known as akhara. He arranged such wrestling matches for his guests too, cheering on the players and treating them to grand meals and almond milk.

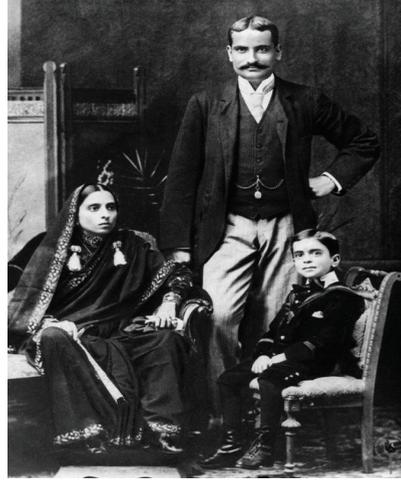
Motilal's hospitality was fabulous. His house, located at the centre of the British settlement in Allahabad, was the meeting point for the city elite – both English and Indian. The cream of Allahabad society ambled around in fashionable dresses while tea was served in fine china. And the band played on to turn the evenings celebratory. In winter they played tennis on perfectly manicured grass and garden-parties were animated by laughter and merrymaking.

At the time of its inauguration, William Muir, Lt Governor of North-Western Provinces, hoped that the lavish mansion in the heart of the city would serve as a glue bringing the British Raj and the educated, upwardly mobile Indian community together. Well, neither Muir nor the owner of the palatial house knew then that within years the rich man's palace would become the epicentre of India's freedom struggle.

Every evening Motilal played perfect host to a select group of friends – both European and Indian – treating them to choicest imported wine, good food either in his part of the mansion or in the garden. The evening got convivial over the noise of cutlery, clinking of glasses, banter and lively conversations. However, mindful of his role as the family patriarch he would wind up the socialite sessions by nine to join his wife and children for dinner.

An invisible but unbreachable line separated the eastern and western wings of the mansion screening off the private from the public. The dichotomies between the two parts were more cultural than physical. The western part was presided over by Motilal, the Cambridge educated, Westernized, dapper lawyer, and the interior by Swarup Rani and her widowed sister Rajvati. Motilal's side of the house had furniture brought from Europe and furnished impeccably in keeping with his taste. The east wing was sanctified by the Kashmiri Brahmin puritanism at the exclusion of outsiders. Swarup Rani's territory had typical Kashmiri hand-carved wooden furniture and elegant carpets. People would sit on the carpeted floor with Kashmiri mattresses as bolsters. This part of the household had its own vegetarian kitchen conforming to the Kashmiri Pandit ethos. The other kitchen serving Motilal and his guests was Western-style, serving both Mughlai and Western cuisines and had Muslim and Christian chefs. The patriarch reigned over the front part of the house overlooking the garden – the reception, his offices and the main dining area. The large dining table could seat over 25 guests who could look forward to both

Indian and continental dishes washed down with imported liquors from Motilal's cellar. He was a surprisingly liberal man for his time. Alongside his close contact with the British officials and apparent Anglicization, Motilal was appreciative of Islamic culture as well. His father had worked in Delhi's Mughal court before relocating to Agra. Proficient in Persian and Arabic, he let his house absorb certain amount of Mughal influence – etiquette, art, culture, music, literature and cuisine.



Motilal before he embraced khadi

Swarup Rani Thussoo was from a Kashmiri Pandit family of Lahore. She understood English but never spoke the language despite Anand Bhavan being at the centre of an exclusive English neighbourhood. She played a gracious hostess at her husband's dinners and garden parties. Though her world was essentially the interiors of the huge mansion, she was comfortable meeting the sundry political leaders, satyagrahis, freedom fighters and the intelligentsia. Needless to say, there were English men and women among the guests.

An Englishman, recommended by Annie Besant, came to live in Anand Bhavan in 1902 to help 13-year-old Jawahar with his studies. Ferdinand T Brooks, himself a theosophist, remained the boy's tutor for three years. To meet his pupil's curiosity, Brooks designed a miniature laboratory in Anand Bhavan. Determined not to spare any effort for his children's education, Motilal hired some of the finest English governesses for them.

Motilal's Anglophilia came very close to earn him new laurels from none other than the British royalty. Around the time of the

1911 Delhi Durbar there were speculations of the dashing lawyer being considered for a Knighthood. However, his son, then studying in England, did not favour the idea. Though Motilal attended the Delhi Durbar in 1911 in honour of the visiting King George V and Queen Mary, his name did not figure in the honours list.

There are years that stand out in their significance and clues to the future. One such year was 1916. The Lucknow Pact between Congress and the Muslim League raised new hope for reconciliation between the two major sides of the freedom movement. The First World War was raging on. Early that year Nehru had married Kamala Kaul, a simple Kashmiri girl from Delhi without formal schooling. Around that time English theosophist Annie Besant who had adopted India as her home, started the Indian Home Rule League supporting Indian independence. She was a regular at Anand Bhavan, a friendly figure adored by the children. Both Motilal and his son joined the Home Rule League lending crucial support to Besant. When Besant was placed under house arrest in 1917, the Indian intelligentsia strongly protested.

With the nationalist movement packing unprecedented speeds the spell of amiable socializing at Anand Bhavan got broken. As Gandhiji got a firm hold over young Jawaharlal, his father began to distance himself from his English friends. His house of luxury and opulence turned into a political hub. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 had a numbing effect on India; Nehru increasingly got closer to Gandhi. The room where the Mahatma stayed on his first visit to Anand Bhavan in 1919 was reserved for him. Even now, the room has an air of the man's sparse lifestyle stressed by the charkha, charpoy, a few journals on the floor, the Bhagavad Gita. There are neither any expensive fittings nor fancy European furniture. The austere khadi furnishings do not escape the onlooker's notice.

Motilal came back from the 1920 special Congress session in Calcutta an entirely different man. He resigned his membership of the United Provinces Council, a forum facilitated by the British rulers. He closed his flourishing legal practice, withdrew his daughters from the exclusive English school and curbed his ostentatious lifestyle. The Arabian horses disappeared from the stable, so did the crystals and china. The fabled cellars ran dry and many servants were asked to go. Instead of fashionable elites coming for gorgeous dinners and fine liquor, there appeared another crowd – khadi-clad activists, Congress functionaries, satyagrahis and even firebrands. Austerity, non-cooperation, Gandhi – those were the buzzwords.

In a letter to the Mahatma, Motilal wrote, ‘The brass cooker... has taken the place of two kitchens, a solitary servant, not over-intelligent that of the old retinue – three small bags containing rice, dal and masala that of the mule-loads of provisions...’ The picture could not be starker.

As the Mahatma’s hold over the Nehru household grew the women in the family discarded their Western clothes in favour of khadi. Swarup Rani, too, evolved with the changing times. Her daughters were married in simple khadi saris dyed shell pink in keeping with the Kashmiri Brahmin tradition. The proud matriarch caught the hint of turmoil in the air and broke free of her self-drawn circle when the war from the street crashed against her door.

Police arrived at the gate of Anand Bhavan on 6 December 1921 and placed Motilal Nehru under arrest. The man Muir thought would strengthen the bond between the Raj and the educated Indians was now to be prosecuted under the second clause of Section 17 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. But there was a bigger blow to come – the cops had a warrant to arrest his son as well. The news of the police arresting the city’s most famous man spread like wildfire. In no time a huge crowd gathered on the estate. The aristocrats turned into the people’s heroes.

When trial began, both father and son unequivocally stated that they would not defend themselves. A four-year-old Indira in his arms, Motilal dismissed the trial as a farce. They were sentenced to a six-month jail term plus slapped a ₹500 fine. They declined to pay the fine. Using this as a pretext, police began raiding Anand Bhavan. But the Nehru women steeled themselves in the face of adversity. Swarup Rani, Kamala, Krishna and Indira travelled to Sabarmati to meet the Mahatma. The austere ashram life was a lesson for them used as they were to the extravagance of Anand Bhavan.

Swarup Rani was transformed by the incarceration of the two most important men in her life. She started visiting the small towns and villages around Allahabad addressing public meetings and gathering crowds. She broke the salt law and urged women to participate in the Non-Cooperation Movement in larger numbers. The wife of Allahabad's richest lawyer who had rarely stepped out of home, Swarup Rani presided over a public meeting. She visited her son in jail, ran the household and emerged as a rallying point for other women as the pull of the freedom movement felt irresistible. The curtain between her vegetarian kitchen and Motilal's extravagant parties, between her Brahminical austerity and his lavish ways, was blown away with the first gust of turbulence.

In 1927, when Nehru had left for Switzerland with Kamala hoping her tuberculosis – still at an early stage – would get cured in the restorative climes of the Swiss Alps, Motilal thought of joining them over there at some point. But he had started building a smaller but elegant two-storey house on the same premises. He had given up his legal practice to get wholly involved in the nationalist movement; the extravagance of Anand Bhavan seemed to be a hindrance. Despite his other engagements Motilal took a keen interest in building the new house. An engineer from the Tatas came to help with the project.

Perhaps both Motilal and his son had begun to realize that the luxury mansion was not in keeping with their rising stature as

senior leaders of a political party at the forefront of the freedom struggle. Jawahar was by then fascinated with socialism. The fancy mansion, they knew, was not in tune with the radical mood of the time. When the new house was built over the next two years, the family moved into it. This house, too, was called Anand Bhavan.

Jawaharlal was Congress president when Gandhiji set out from Sabarmati Ashram on the 384-km Dandi March, the most challenging campaign of his long political career; on 12 March 1930. The Nehrus reached Jambusar, a small village in Baroch district where Gandhi was scheduled to rest for a while on his way to the sea coast. In the early morning hours of 23 March when the air was steeped in symbolism, Motilal formally gifted Anand Bhavan to Congress. The house to be called Swaraj Bhavan, or House of Freedom. With this handover an interesting chapter in history came to an end.

Until after Independence, it remained the headquarters of the All India Congress Committee. In 1970, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi donated Anand Bhavan to the nation. The building was turned into a museum.

Postscript.

More than a century after Motilal Nehru purchased Anand Bhavan, the liberal cultural ambience the house has always stood for, is being severely challenged. To begin with, the city is no longer Allahabad but Prayagraj. The statue of Jawaharlal Nehru at Balsan Crossing right outside Anand Bhavan, was moved to an obscure corner in September 2018. The reason: it was hindering the beautification drive in the city ahead of the Ardh Kumbh Mela.

\* \* \*

## HOUSE OF MEMORIES

**O**n 14 November, Jawaharlal Nehru's birth anniversary, a distinguished speaker is usually invited to the Teen Murti Bhavan auditorium to deliver the annual Nehru Memorial Lecture. This time round, too, the cultured elite of Delhi gathered there early in the evening for the event.

But a discordant note had already been struck. At the main entrance to the stately complex and also outside the auditorium everyone's attention was drawn to a clumsy notice stating that the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) was celebrating the achievements of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The purpose behind the abrasive move by the authorities in control of the government-run institution was to drive a wedge, provoke a controversy. To many attending the lecture it was in bad taste and testifying to a lack of decency given the sentiment around the event. It was Nehru's 130<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. Gandhi, Nehru and Patel were the troika that had successfully transitioned Congress from the movement for freedom to the ruling party after Independence. And Teen Murti House was his residence for 16 long years, from 1948 till his death on 27 May 1964.

Robert Tor Russell, the architect of Connaught Place, designed Teen Murti House. After the capital of British India moved to Delhi from

Calcutta in 1911, this became the residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the British armed forces in India. Originally called Flagstaff House, it took its present name from the sculpture at the traffic roundabout right in front of its main gate. Sculptor Leonard Jennings' creation seeks to pay tributes through the statues of three soldiers to the princely states of Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore for their significant contributions in the First World War.



Teen Murti Bhavan – witness to history

Nehru who had earlier lived in a bungalow on York Road (later renamed Motilal Nehru Marg), moved into Teen Murti House in August 1948. Over the next 16 years, the 32-room mansion standing majestically on a 30-acre estate, recorded the visits of a large number of world leaders and dignitaries. One very special visitor over the years of course was Edwina Mountbatten who, coming back again and again from London, would stay here.

More importantly, it is here that Indira Gandhi learnt her first steps of world politics and had an opportunity to personally know so many leaders from other countries. Since Nehru was a widower, Indira had to willy-nilly accept the role of the hostess for



Nehru and Indira with the Kennedys

many state functions. ‘I used to stay for a period of time [at Teen Murti] and then go,’ she wrote. ‘My husband was then working in Lucknow and I used to go there. But, invariably, I would get a telegram: “Important guest coming, return at once.” My father would feel so hurt if I didn’t come that it was very difficult to say no.’ Her predicament comes out touchingly in

Carol Dommermuth-Costa’s *Indira Gandhi: Daughter of India*.

In 1962, Indira entertained the Kennedys at Teen Murti. ‘I hated the thought of housekeeping, and what I hated most was to be hostess at a party, as I always disliked parties and having to smile when one doesn’t want to. But if one has to do a thing, one might do it well, so I grew into it.’ Her words, quoted by Ross Marlay and Clark Neher in their book, *Patriots and Tyrants: Ten Asian Leaders*, shed light on an interesting side of Indira – her strong will.

In cloaking affluence of Anand Bhavan Jawaharlal was initiated into politics by his redoubtable father but, then, over the years, he carved his own way into radical ideas leaving behind Motilal’s middle path. In the elegant hallways, courtyards and dining halls of Teen Murti, Indira Gandhi lent grace to official functions and dinners under the watchful eyes of her father – only to pick up her own way in politics leaving an impression as strong as her father’s.

Postscript.

More than a quarter century after Teen Murti Bhavan ceased to be the Prime Minister's residence, the majestic building loomed over the lives of the Nehru-Gandhis once again though with tragic overtones. When the reconstructed body of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi arrived from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences – after he had been blown to bits by a terror bomb in Sriperumbudur – it lay in state at Teen Murti Bhavan. Members of his family sat around the body draped in white to keep vigil. Indeed tragedy has an uncanny way of linking generations. ■

**Tirna Chatterjee**



**Tirna Chatterjee** is a doctoral candidate in the department of cinema studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

## PHOTO ESSAY

### BEYOND STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes refuse to go away; so are the impressions they make about people. Because of the accident of his birth in a rich, privileged home and his elite upbringing, Jawaharlal Nehru got associated with certain notions that have never been erased from popular perceptions about him. The fair-complexioned sensitive man with his aquiline nose, educated at some of the most exclusive institutions in England, his impeccable manners, chaste English, a single rose buttonholed in his jacket, an unstated aristocratic mien and an unmistakable sense of dignity – he was all this and a lot more.

Now that the political right is on the ascendant, India's first Prime Minister has come under blistering attack with his detractors not stopping at anything: as a Prime Minister he was a wimp wilting under the slighted pressure; personally he was a ladies' man... Internet is flooded with even more horrific accusations.

But there was another side to the man that often gets overlooked. He had actually spent nine years of his life in prison under British rule. He was the most charismatic leader of the masses in his time, an indefatigable campaigner who could connect splendidly with his audiences. A leader with an appeal to every part and segment of India, he was the biggest crowd-puller for Congress. The party performed remarkably well in every outing when Nehru electioneered for it. In fact, Congress suffered its first reverses in the elections it fought after his death.

Following the trail of the leader from prison or rough roads round the country before elections was like coming back with dispatches from the battlefield. The Nehru who directly sought approval for his policies from the humble masses gathered to listen to him, was not an aristocrat and certainly not a mild-mannered aesthete. He was out there electrifying rallies, in direct communication with his audience for he had been ordained to guide the destiny of a great nation going through a difficult time. ■

**Nikhita Nair**



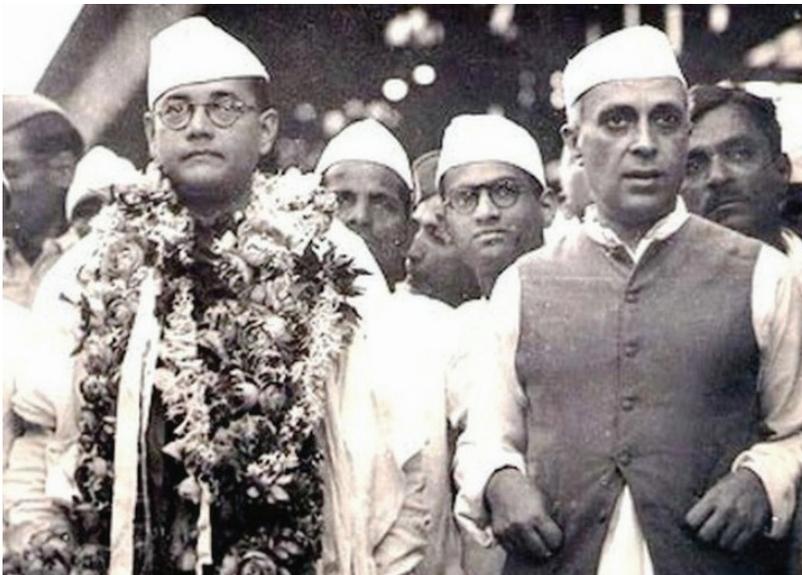
Behind bars: Naini Central Prison



Nehru at Ahmednagar Fort



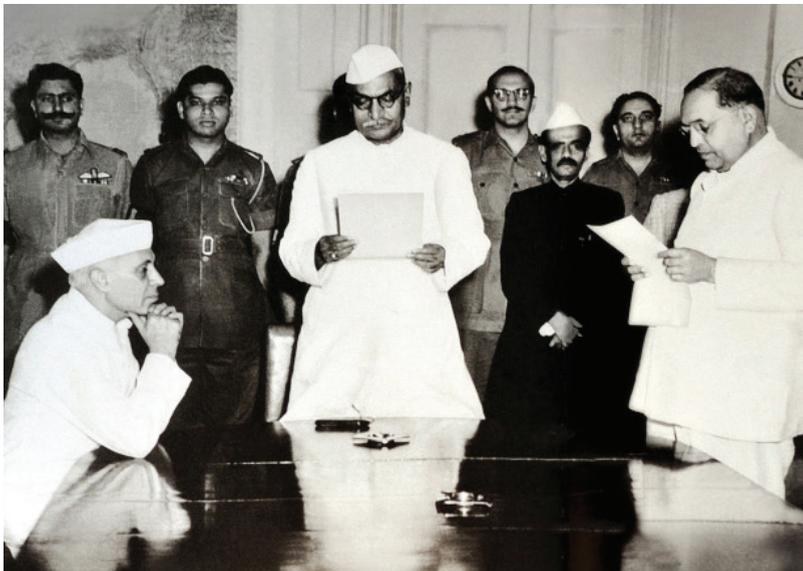
Deep in conversation – about the next phase of the struggle



Bose and Nehru – a less-talked-about side of their comradeship



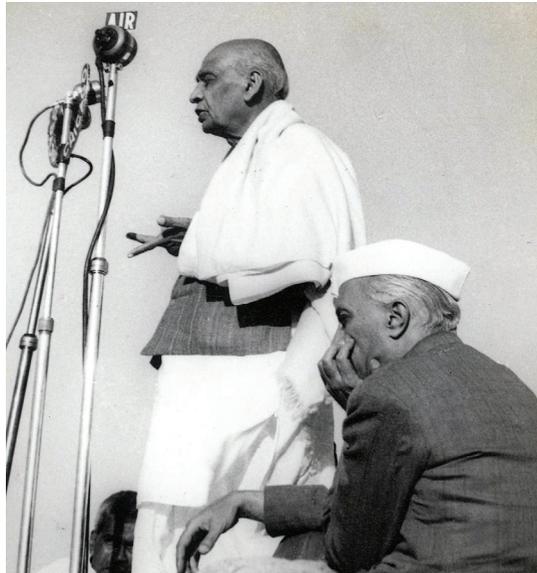
Chacha Nehru



A historic moment – BR Ambedkar being sworn as law minister



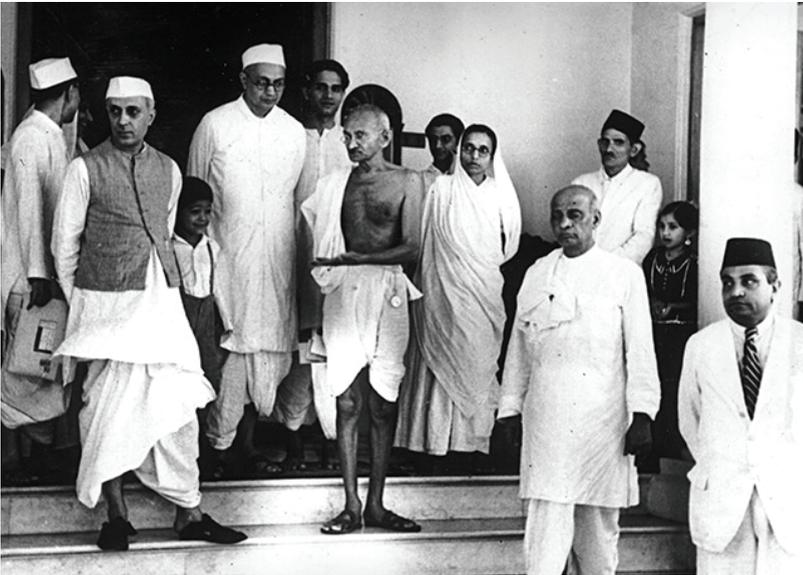
Directly in communication with his people



By the side of the Sardar



Never away from the people



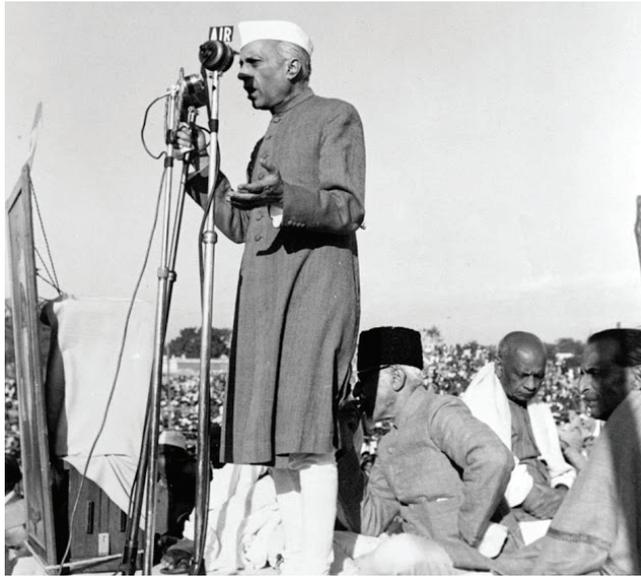
Waiting with his colleagues



His outreach



Flanked by Gandhi and Azad: the two men who mattered most to him



The man, the microphone and the multitude in front



When the crowds were ecstatic in Moscow



In Shanghai in the heyday of Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai



The man of the crowd – in Indonesia

78

## PANDIT NEHRU – THROUGH MY LENS

Pashupati Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana

Jawaharlal Nehru's name shone like a beacon amongst our generation of young South Asians. His memorable 'Tryst with Destiny' speech made at midnight of the 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 reverberates in my mind even today. His books including *The Discovery of India* and his autobiography impressed me greatly.

Our family's association with Prime Minister Nehru began from my grandfather's time. Indeed he played a pivotal role in ending my grandfather's rule as the last Rana Maharaja of Nepal, although he also helped make him the first democratic Prime Minister of Nepal. So in a sense I should have resented the role he played against our family at the time. But then there was quite a different leitmotif to his relationship with my father, whom he met at the Asian Relations Conference on 25 March 1947.

My father's speech at the conference was widely praised and much publicized. Nehru was struck by his intelligence and liberal attitude. Coming as he did from what Nehru perceived as the hidebound ruling aristocracy of Nepal and despite being the son of the Maharaja who Nehru considered a reactionary autocrat, he apparently found my father surprisingly open-minded and receptive to new ideas.

Later on, my father, General Bijay Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, became the second most important man in the first Nepalese delegation negotiating terms for the political change in Nepal

with their Indian counterparts. During the second and final round of negotiations, he was appointed the leader of the delegation conducting the parley with the Indian team.

I personally think the relationship that my father had forged with Pandit Nehru served an important purpose in bringing about the peaceful transition from the dynastic rule of our family, the Ranas, to a democratic Nepal. Of course Pandit Nehru's own view that there should be continuity with change played a pivotal role in this peaceful transformation to democracy in Nepal. Such political safe landings are rare in history and difficult to make.

After Nepal became a democracy, my father was appointed the first Nepalese Ambassador to India. During his stint as Ambassador to India Pandit Nehru took a great liking to my father. At that point in time, there were many things that had to be ironed out between the nascent Nepalese democracy and a dominant India. There were shades of opinion and interested lobbies favouring Nepal's merger into India. The lobbies behind such a cynical move combined imperious inclinations on one side and treacherous trends on the other. Without getting into the nitty-gritty of the matter, the relationship between Pandit Nehru, who respected the autonomy of other independent countries, and my father, as Nepal's Ambassador to India, greatly helped to prevent such a preposterous thing from happening. Most importantly, Nepal's sovereignty was thus safeguarded.

An interesting anecdote comes to mind. Sardar Bhim Bahadur Pandey – then Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi – recounts how during the Hyderabad integration crisis, Nehru threw a reception for the Nizam. However, he found it difficult to keep the dour Nizam engaged in a conversation. He asked my father to take care of him. After racking his brains my father came up with Indian classical music as the subject for a tête-à-tête and managed to engage the Nizam in a lively conversation for almost an hour!



Pandey – a Nepalese diplomat

Pandit Nehru, it goes without saying, was duly grateful. This was a measure of their mutual trust and understanding.

My father died in a totally unnecessary accident in 1953 at the young age of 38. I remember Pandit Nehru coming to the embassy after that; he spent an hour with me in silent grief. Then he walked the whole way in my father's funeral cortege with me. That was the extent of his affection for my father. You

can well imagine how touched I was by these gestures.

Much later, I think it was in 1960, when Nehru visited Oxford. I was a member of the Majlis, a debating society founded by Indian students more than a century ago. The Majlis held a reception in Pandit Nehru's honour. When I was introduced as the son of Gen. Bijay Shamsher Rana, he took me by the hand and made me walk by his side during the entire reception. So profound was the effect he had on me that I sat down and wrote a poem as my personal tribute to him when news came of his death:

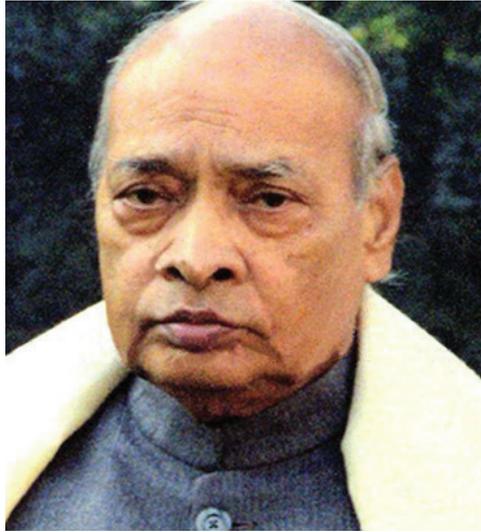
One morning he woke up with a pain,  
And died in royal understatement.  
That day there was no rose in the achkan,  
No paradox in the lean, bent  
Hope behind the rose. He's dead the old  
Kind stranger in his own home, the dreamer  
Who from his conscience unrolled  
His early nation to world power.  
The beloved autocrat who ran a  
Giant democracy...

In the people he led  
His love keeps him alive, all in all  
A love five hundred million tall.

The challenge before Nehru when the British hurriedly handed over a partitioned India to his government in 1947 was enormous. The Hindu-Muslim conflagration in the wake of Partition triggered off a flood of 15 million refugees and at least a million deaths. Hundreds of princely states had enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy. Ensuring their smooth merger into the republic was a tough task. Governing a country of India's vastness was of course an enormous challenge; its linguistic and ethnic diversity is mindboggling. Out of this mad chaos Nehru created a unified, orderly nation. Of course, the support of extraordinarily able colleagues like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was critical in integrating India and enforcing order. But the overall credit for establishing order and unity in that vast, inchoate landmass, forging a nation out of it goes to Nehru. Most wonderfully, he channeled those exceedingly diverse, mostly unlettered, poor Indian masses into a viable democratic system. In those early days most people expected India to fall apart. Virtually nobody expected Indian democracy to succeed. He shocked the world by his success.

In the economic field, his infatuation with the Soviet model and his (perhaps even the Congress') subconscious equating of capitalism with colonialism led him astray. His vision was 'socialistic', implying that the means of production should be socially-owned and controlled. The private sector was only tolerated as an afterthought. The state should run all major industries of strategic importance and all public utilities. The public sector had to own the commanding heights of the economy. So, despite major infrastructure projects like the Damodar Valley Corporation, Bhakra-Nangal Dam, Nagarjuna Sagar Dam coming up in the public sector, and though the State built massive steel plants at Bhilai and Durgapur, the economy suffered from the natural suffocating inefficiencies and bureaucratic

stranglehold inherent in a controlled socialist system. Foreign private capital fled the country. India was condemned to what was derisively called the Hindu rate of growth, while the Asian Tigers roared ahead on an export-led, private sector reliant, free-market strategy. As a result, the economy of post-Deng Xiaoping China is five times the size of the Indian economy today.



Rao: Prime Minister of the Indian reforms

Though there were some redeeming features – those outstanding educational institutions like the IITs and IIMs – it needed a major foreign-currency crisis and that unlikely leader, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to release the Indian economy from the socialist chains that Nehru had imposed on it.

In the area of foreign policy, he found the US and UK backing Pakistan and isolating India. I think he invented the idea of non-alignment to get India out of that diplomatic predicament. It was an idea that helped India put her best foot forward in the face of Western coldness. As a leader of this movement he created a place in the sun for India and made her a world leader. For a country as poorly developed as India to achieve such prominence required nothing short of diplomatic brilliance.

Towards the end of his life, Nehru's failure to understand that there was an iron fist hiding beneath the Chinese velvet glove and his over-reliance on Krishna Menon in security-related matters

led to India's spectacular defeat in the face of a brief but decisive Chinese incursion into India in 1962. This marred a career of some magnificent achievements.

Overall, Nehru's achievements in nation building and consolidating democracy in such an extremely difficult context and his pioneering role in heading the non-alignment movement far outweigh his failures in the economic sphere and particularly the 1962 military debacle. Above all this, he was a man who upheld values, a man of innate and rare decency. In a political world in which decent people have become an endangered species, Pandit Nehru's courtesy and decorum stand out. He was a rare ethical statesman mindful of his civility on a stage crowded with narrow-minded pigmies. He was the glowing lighthouse giving direction to young South-Asians like us then. More than half a century after his death Pandit Nehru remains just that – a beacon to leaders going astray. ■



**Pashupati Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana**, a descendant of Nepal's Rana dynasty, is Chairman, Rastriya Prajatantra Party (United). Educated at New College, Oxford, he has held several ministerial portfolios in Nepal and played a key role in the country's transition to democracy.

**THE INTEGRATOR OF INDIA**

K. Aravindakshan

85

For a man in his early eighties with fading memories it's not easy to recollect everything from a distant past. More so if he has not been in the habit of keeping a journal. The experiences from the past decades come crowding in without any single one of them standing out. Still, for me there must be some strong reason why and how in my student days I became an admirer of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our intellectual mentor and free India's first Prime Minister. Maybe as a human being he had some negative traits. But Nehru did have the rare quality of leadership and commitment towards the cause he held dear. I first discerned these qualities in Nehru when my father, a voracious reader himself, persuaded me to read his masterpiece, *The Discovery of India*. I was only a high school student.

It took me more than three months to finish the book. However, the effort did not go in vain. Once I read the book, I discovered not just India but its author as well. I could also improve my vocabulary and style of writing. Most certainly I came under the spell of the book's author. I would just lap up every book and article that came my way either by Nehru or about him. This was my way of knowing how others looked at Nehru and assessed him. What impressed me most was Nehru's writing, simple and effortless, coming out of the core of his belief and expressing his robust vision. For youngsters like me it was worth emulating.

As the Second World War came to an end, India won her freedom with many other countries becoming independent breaking the



Maharaja's College, Ernakulam

shackles of colonialism. Around this time when socialism was embraced as the new credo, Nehru stood tall as our icon. On campuses, in street-corner teashops, on the veranda of middle-class homes there was an intense debate going on about Nehru's action and what he was saying. I grew up soaking in the heat of that discourse.

There is something more that comes back to mind from a distance of almost six decades. It was about the time when I had just entered student politics. A high-school student, my only

choice was All India Student Federation (AISF); that was the outfit with a presence and identity throughout the country. The Student Federation was particularly active in Kerala. When some of my friends suggested we start a unit of the AISF in our school I was all for it. When we enquired more about it, many more things came to light. A left-leaning student organization, the first leader to head the AISF was the legendary communist stalwart S.A. Dange. I was excited learning that Nehru had inaugurated the first AISF national conference. This fact further served as evidence of Nehru's proximity to the left. My admiration for the Prime Minister went up manifold.

An ardent Nehru acolyte active in the AISF, I had an opportunity to have a glimpse of my idol when Nehru came to Cochin to participate in a couple of programmes – a closed-door meeting of the Congress Party leaders at TDM Hall and a massive public rally at Maharaja's College Ground. The year, as far as I remember, was 1957-58.

I knew this was a great opportunity to get close to the man I had grown up admiring. Now, to enter the venue of the closed-door meeting I needed a pass that was not easily available. Through a classmate in the Economics BA Honours class at Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, I approached a CBI official. Perhaps seeing my enthusiasm, he obliged me with one.



TVR Shenoy – the liberal journalist

My wish was fulfilled as I waited on every word he spoke and not for a moment did I take my eyes off him. Jubilant about this achievement, I unwittingly had incurred the wrath of TVR Shenoy, a well-known journalist with known Congress sympathies. His grouse was that while I, an AISF activist, had entered the hall and had a close view of Nehru, he had been pushed away by the security guards since he did not have the entry pass. Shenoy went on to become a well-known journalist and media commentator. Sadly, he left us in April 2018.

The meeting was in the morning. In the evening Pandit Nehru addressed a sellout crowd on the college grounds. Following the convention for such events, the organizers had the Congress leader CM Stephen, a brilliant orator, stand next to Nehru interpreting his speech in Malayalam for the audience. The crowd, however, could follow Nehru's lucid English perfectly well and found the interpretation rather redundant. Sensing the audience mood, Nehru suggested to Stephen that he stop. A group of students – I among them – were relieved that a lot of time going into interpretation was saved.



Nehru's interpreter – CM Stephen

A beaming smile on his face, Nehru told the crowd he had dispensed with the services of the interpreter. The announcement was greeted by loud applause from all around the ground. The intent faces, I knew, had gathered here just for a glimpse of the Prime Minister. To me it became clear in that instant that Nehru represented the soul of India; he could feel the pulse of the people very correctly.

As a college student I experienced the correctness of Nehru's approach to planning as a grassroots initiative involving the maximum number of people. It offered a great opportunity to mobilize students in nation building. Planning forums were set up in every college. Maharaja's College, too, had one such forum. I was unanimously elected its Secretary in 1958. Significantly, 1957-58 marked the second year of the Second Five-Year Plan; the Government of India had a resource crunch to finance its implementation.

It was then that the National Savings Scheme was launched to mobilize small savings from ordinary people. Students were told to carry out the campaign to promote the NSS. The universities in Kerala announced merit certificates to College Planning Forums which had taken steps to spread the message of planning among the student community and people in general.

We organized a number of camps in villages for this purpose, besides mobilising the maximum savings from the students, teachers and the non-teaching staff. As Secretary of the College Planning Forum I felt rewarded when the university selected us as

the best forum. My real gain was an invite to attend the meeting of the All India University Planning Forums in New Delhi. Along with Prof. PKC Pillai, the staff Secretary of the Forum, I went to the national capital in 1958.

The Conference was inaugurated by none other than the Prime Minister. There were nearly 200 delegates from all over India, a majority of them Hindi speaking. In his inaugural address, Nehru explained the purpose for convening the conference and appealed to the participants to express their views openly on the achievements and failings of the government in implementing the Five-Year Plans and sought their suggestions as to how the planning process could be made a greater success. Nehru concluded with a request to the delegates to come forward voluntarily to express their opinion as briefly as possible. He also announced his decision to sit through the session.

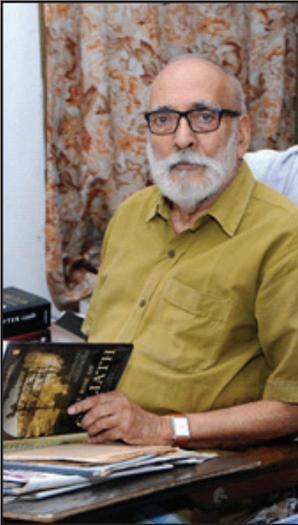
More by accident than design, the front rows were all occupied by delegates from the northern states – Bihar, UP, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and so on. The middle row was occupied by delegates from Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, West Bengal and Orissa. And we from the southern states were seated at the back. There were delegates from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Since nobody had specified the language for the proceedings, the general feeling was it would be English, especially since the Prime Minister had chosen



Nehru on another southern sojourn

to address the delegates in English. But, delegate after delegate from the northern states spoke in Hindi which we, from the south could not follow. Delegates from Punjab and West Bengal, too, were very upset by the way the proceedings were going on. One delegate from Punjab sought the permission from the Prime Minister to speak in Punjabi while I goaded one delegate from Tamil Nadu to seek permission to speak in Tamil and when I, too, stood up seeking permission to speak in Malayalam, the situation took a curious turn. Nehru who was keenly watching the whole show, suddenly intervened and issued the ruling that thereafter all the speeches and the proceedings would be in English. The confusion ended instantly.

Nehru, one could make out, did not want language to be a source of discord but a unifying force. Let Hindi continue as the national language whereas English could be the link language. For the present-day powers-that-be at the Centre and in the states, let the example set by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru six decades ago be an eye-opener. ■



**Prof. K Aravindakshan** is a left-leaning educationist active on Kerala's academic scene for almost half a century. Among the positions he has held in his long career was Principal, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam. Author of several books, he writes in both English and Malayalam. Some of his articles were published in journals like *Link*, *New Age*, the *Economic and Political Weekly*.

92

**THE ENLIGHTENED ONE OF OUR TIMES**

Daya Dissanayake

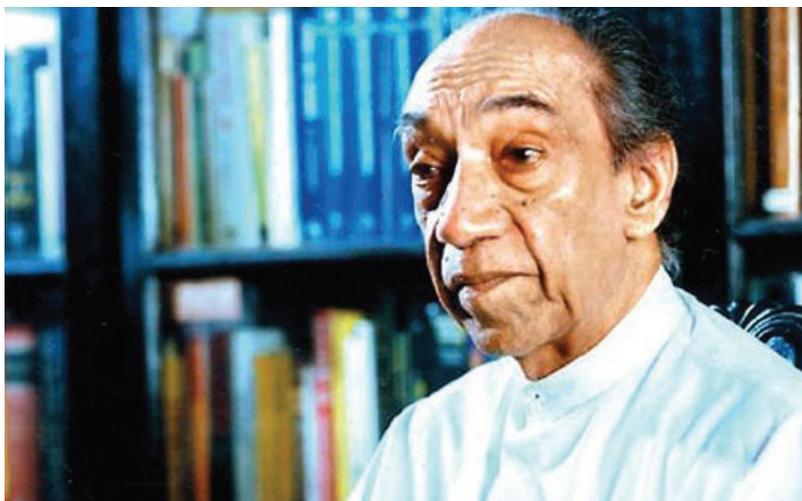
**A**t Anuradhapura, I liked greatly an old seated statue of the Buddha. A year later, when I was in Dehra Dun Gaol, a friend in Ceylon, sent me a picture of this statue, and I kept it on my little table in my cell. It became a precious companion for me, and the strong, calm features of the Buddha's statue soothed me and gave me strength and helped me to overcome many a period of depression.<sup>1</sup>

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had visited Anuradhapura, the ancient Sri Lankan capital, in the North Central Province during his month-long holiday with his wife and daughter in April 1931. Since then he had sought to go back to Anuradhapura whenever he was in Sri Lanka, to spend a little time for contemplation of the Enlightened One.

Nehru was deeply impressed by the message of peace and cultural asceticism inherent in Buddhism. His convocation address at the University of Ceylon makes this succinctly clear: 'The bond of the Buddha and all that it conveys is a bond between India and Ceylon which nothing can break. Whenever one thinks of the Buddha, one inevitably thinks of his great teaching; and I often feel that perhaps if we think more of that basic teaching of the avoidance of hatred and violence, we may be nearer the solution of our problems.'

JR Jayewardene, the first executive president of Sri Lanka, like many of his contemporaries in South Asia, had come under Nehru's spell. 'Internationally, he was the one who first coined

the word “non-alignment”, he said. ‘And gave the world the Non-Aligned Movement. He was, apart from strictly following these high principles, a very human and humane personality. I am proud that I not only met him but was able to be on terms of friendship with him...’



Under Nehru's spell – JR Jayewardene

JRJ, as he was commonly known, was charmed by the senior statesman. Pulled by Nehru's gravitas, he said, 'Ecce homo,' (behold the man). He first met Pandit Nehru in 1931 during his holiday in Sri Lanka. Then in 1940, representing the Ceylon National Congress, he along with a couple of other party colleagues, attended the Ramgarh session of the All India Congress Committee. During this trip he went to Allahabad and stayed at Anand Bhavan for further discussion with Nehru.<sup>2</sup> 'Like all other youths of our generation throughout the British Empire, we hero-worshipped Jawaharlal Nehru and his leader, Mahatma Gandhi,' Jayewardene later wrote.

In their long struggle to come out of the colonial rule and emerge as a democratic nation, generations of Lankan leaders turned to

Nehru for inspiration. SWRD Bandaranaike, former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, wrote:

I have known Nehru personally for over twenty-five years. Nehru is one of the few statesmen of the world who have a background of culture and learning and who are thinkers besides being also men of action. Such men are necessary as leaders particularly at a troubled period of world history – men with a background of learning, men who can think clearly, men who can see a problem not merely from one point of view, but in all its aspects and who can come to decisions, sometimes very difficult decisions, with a knowledge of factors not only in respect of the past and the present, but also of the future. Nehru has not only a knowledge of history, so important for statesmen to have, but something much more than that. He understands the philosophy of history. (Centenary Vol. p. 674)<sup>3</sup>



Stalwarts across the Palk Strait: Nehru and SWRD

Both Bandaranaike and Jayewardene came from the same social class as Nehru, with similar backgrounds and education, and they could easily get along well.

Ceylon is a little island at the tip of India. Culturally and historically, it is almost a part of India. The Sinhalese look up to India as their holy land because of the Buddha, but

they are a little afraid of this great big giant of a country overlooking them and fear always leads to wrong action. If we threaten them we only increase their fear. Therefore, I have avoided speaking the language of threats and have tried to be friendly to them even when they have acted in an improper way.

We have every right to speak for Indian nationals abroad, but we have no such clear right to speak for those whom we ourselves do not consider our nationals.

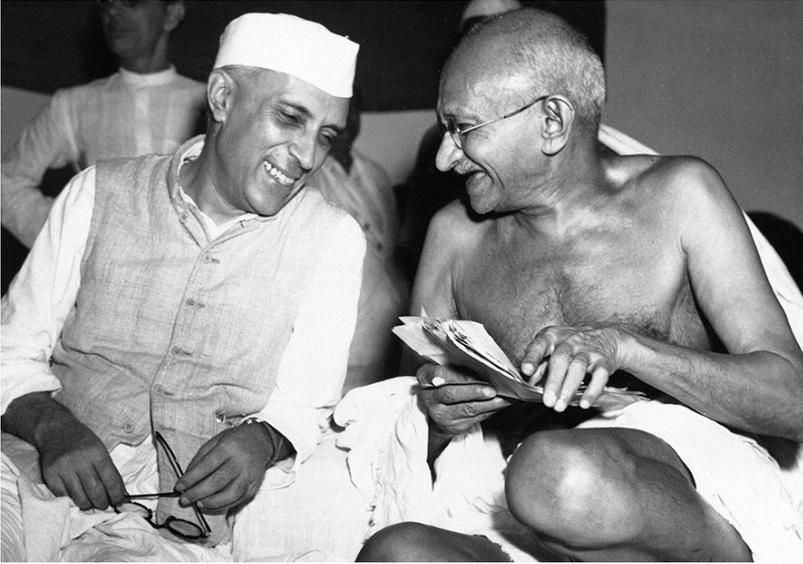
*(Letters for a Nation: from Jawaharlal Nehru to His Chief Ministers. 5 July 1952)*

Sadly, the successive Indian Prime Ministers made a departure from the Nehruvian doctrine of mutual respect. In the early eighties, the LTTE allegedly held training camps in South India, and a few years later, 25 tons of food and medicine was airdropped with the support of fighter jets entering Sri Lanka airspace. It was a threat to President JR Jayewardene causing a strategic setback to his attempt to contain the guerrillas. At the time the rebels were besieged by the Sri Lankan army and were facing a certain defeat. This airdropping of food led to subsequent deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) resulting in many casualties sustained by the forces. If that intervention had not happened LTTE could have been wiped out in 1987.

Nehru could look ahead and see the future, not only in the context of India and its neighbourhood but for others as well: 'We should not do things now which may come in the way of the future, whether in regard to Pakistan or Ceylon or any other country. We should treat and continue to deal with Ceylon in a friendly way, even though Ceylon's response might be unfriendly.'<sup>4</sup>

In an article in the Sunday newspaper *Silumina* on 13 April 2019, Ashraf Aziz, president of the Aziz Democratic Workers Congress, a political outfit of the tea-plantation workers in Sri Lanka, made

allusions to a purported conversation between Mahatma Gandhi and his father Abdul Aziz. If this could be confirmed then it offers a pointer to the faith the Indian community in Lanka has always had in Pandit Nehru.



Bapu and Jawahar: together along the rough road

When Abdul Aziz met Gandhiji on a visit to India, he had asked the migrant plantation-workers' leader an obvious question.

'Do you know Jawaharlal Nehru?'

'Yes'

Gandhiji, according to Ashraf Aziz, then talked about the possibility of Nehru becoming the Prime Minister and sought Abdul Aziz's opinion about it. The Mahatma said it was important to know what the Indian expats in Ceylon would think about the choice for independent India's top political office. Senior Aziz, his son recalls, responded with approbation to the possibility.

The Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) was founded by Abdul Aziz in 1939 when Jawaharlal Nehru visited Ceylon. Later, the CIC

was renamed CWC, which subsequently split with Aziz forming the Democratic Workers Congress (DWC), which he headed as its president.

The leader of the Indian community was born in Porbandar, Kathiawad in 1914. The story goes that his mother had lost all her previous children at birth; so to save this one she was led by the Khoja mantra custom and 'left' the newborn by the roadside only to 'pick' him up as if he were a 'foundling'. By adopting this ploy, she sought to beat the curse of losing her children. Abdul Aziz went on to study at the best high schools in Karachi and later at Bombay University. He was soon part of Gandhi's freedom struggle, going on to be elected to the Executive Committee of Bombay Students Movement in 1935, a frequent target of the British police for harassment. Hounded out by the colonial rulers, he fled to Ceylon after graduation. He played a key role in fighting for the rights of the South Indian people who had been brought to the island as indentured workers by the colonial rulers to work the plantations. Since Aziz had already met and shared perceptions with Nehru about the issue of Indian immigrants, his opinion about Nehru would have been important to the Mahatma.

From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the East India Company, as historian William Dalrymple has poignantly brought out in *The Anarchy* with a wealth of evidence, wrought demographic havoc by shipping thousands of people from one part of the world to another to work their plantations of tea, coffee, rubber and spices. Since insensate greed was the leading motive, East India Company bosses never bothered about the long-term human cost of the massive displacement they had presided over. The forced migration of plantation workers from the southern parts of India decades later strained the relations between the neighbours across the Palk Strait. People from all over India have been coming to Sri Lanka as traders and entrepreneurs and some of them have settled down keeping alive the long process of cultural interaction

over the past two millennia. This normal entrepreneurial activity, however, was twisted to the advantage of colonial rulers causing irritants in the bilateral ties.

When the British authorities in Sri Lanka summarily dismissed 1,400 Indian daily wage earners it flared into an India-Ceylon issue. 'The AICC has done well in choosing its best man to proceed to Ceylon as the nation's ambassador of peace,' Mahatma Gandhi remarked when the Congress deputed Nehru to meet the Board of Ministers trying to persuade them to reinstate the retrenched workers. Given the shared spiritual traditions, mythical links, intertwined geography and economic interests, Gandhi had realized, the two neighbours needed to live without tension. 'It is, at least it should be, impossible for India and Ceylon to quarrel. We are the nearest neighbours. We are inheritors of a common culture. But even as blood brothers sometimes differ, so do next-door neighbours. And like brothers they usually adjust their differences and are often more closely knit together after the clearance. So may it be between Ceylon and India through the efforts of Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru.'<sup>5</sup>

Nehru came not as a representative of the Indian government but as a goodwill messenger of the Indian National Congress. Concerned at the situation of the overseas Indians, he met with the representatives of the Indian community in Sri Lanka. He persuaded the different Indian associations on the island to merge into the Ceylon India National Congress.<sup>6</sup>

'I do not consider Ceylon as a foreign country at all,' Nehru observed speaking in Chennai on 25 July 1939. 'In fact, it is practically joined up with India. If the two countries are isolated, it would mean a great misfortune to Ceylon. There is no reason why they should be separated... The people of Ceylon are just like the Indian people. I, therefore, feel aggrieved to find that any kind of conflict should arise between the two... Whether I have succeeded in the mission or not, my visit has resulted in

increasing the goodwill between India and Ceylon. Although, superficially, some bitterness of feelings has been noticed among certain people there, still the Sinhalese people have feelings of friendship towards India, and they gave me a magnificent welcome wherever I went.'

A couple of days before he made this speech, the *Ceylon Observer* reported: 'Perhaps the happiest person in Kandy yesterday was the little girl whom Mr. Nehru garlanded. The incident occurred when his car stopped at Kingswood College on his way to town and the staff and students greeted him. Mr. Nehru returned the greetings and taking one of the numerous garlands presented to him earlier, placed it around the neck of a girl of the school's kindergarten class.'

Delivering the convocation address at the University of Ceylon on 12 January 1950, Nehru said:

There is something that is deeper than national culture and that is human culture. if you do not have that human culture, then even that national culture of which you may be so proud has no real roots and will not do you much good. Today, more specially, it has become essential for us to develop, in addition to such national cultures that we may have something that can only be called a world culture...

There is much talk about a One World and I believe that, at some time or other, that talk must bear fruit or else this world will go to pieces. Probably fear is the (greatest) evil of sensations and we are living under this dominance of fear. Perhaps if we could get rid of that fear to some extent, it would be far easier for us to solve our problems. You are an independent country, as you should be and we are an independent country, as we should be; political barriers should not be allowed to come into play when culturally our people look to each other.

How Sri Lanka bonded with Pandit Nehru through Buddhism and Emperor Ashoka is an engrossing story.

‘The Buddha has always had a great appeal for me,’ Nehru writes in his autobiography. ‘It is difficult for me to analyse this appeal, but it is not a religious appeal, and I am not interested in the dogmas that have grown up round Buddhism. It is the personality that has drawn me. So also the personality of Christ has attracted me greatly.’

Pandit Nehru perhaps saw the personality of the Buddha in the Samadhi statue at Anuradhapura in the surroundings of what was then a bucolic Tapovan. Perhaps he would be utterly disappointed if he were to visit the statue now, a crowded pilgrimage site with a concrete shed over the statue and street vendors swarming around.

If we think of the real Ashoka hidden behind the legends and myths, perhaps we can see him now in Pandit Nehru because he, too, tried to practise what he preached.

On 3 Oct 1960 Nehru spoke at the UN General Assembly: ‘In ages long past a great son of India, the Buddha, said that the only real victory was one in which all were equally victorious and there was defeat for no one. In the world today that is the only practical victory; any other way will lead to disaster.’



Impressed by Nehru: Toynbee

Arnold Toynbee compared him to Ashoka. ‘Jawaharlal Nehru is evidently a representative of the type that moves mankind, not by coercion, but by persuasion; and the other representatives of this kind of leader who first come into my mind are all Indians, like Nehru himself. One of them is the Emperor Ashoka, who was converted, by his experience of life, from being a coercionist into becoming a missionary, but who

did his life-work, throughout, on the political stage.’ (Centenary Vol. p. 720).

Yet Nehru was closer to the teachings of the Buddha because he did not appear to thirst for victories. Ashoka, let us recall, did not follow his grandfather in conquering more land and he did not appear to have used force to keep all the land he inherited. However, he tried to use Dharmavijaya, establishing his Dharma around neighbouring countries to the west and south of Magadha. If we are to believe the Sri Lankan Pali chronicles, the only country he imposed Dharmavijaya on was Sri Lanka, sending his son and daughter to propagate Buddha Dhamma. Nehru had not tried to expand his India territorially. He had tried to avoid any conflicts with his neighbours. We do need more such humane world leaders today, with no greed for power and territory, but striving for a One World.

Asghar Ali Engineer, a reformist leader of the progressive Dawoodi Bohra community, made a succinct assessment of India’s first Prime Minister: ‘Nehru stood for secularism, enlightenment and tolerance. He expected the majority to be magnanimous towards the minority. He wanted to allay the fears of the minorities and took a sympathetic view of minority communalism, saying that “honest communalism is fear; false communalism is political reaction.”’ (Centenary Vol. p. 219)

This is why, whenever I hear people say that Buddhism disappeared from India long ago, I always disagree. I believe that Buddha Dhamma never took leave of India. Most people in India are following Buddha Dhamma, the path shown by the Buddha, irrespective of religious beliefs and practices. In the past century we had Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Babasaheb Ambedkar – all of them followed the Buddha in more ways than those who call themselves Buddhists.

Nehru was closer than others to the Buddha in his ability to look ahead, see the future before it actually confronted us. Perhaps he foresaw the situation in our part of the world when he said, 'The majority community must show generosity in the matter to allay the fear and suspicion that minorities, even though unreasonably, might have.' The underlying wisdom of the observation is as valid today as on the day he made it. ■

*The author is indebted to Gopalkrishna Gandhi, former Indian high commissioner to Sri Lanka, and his meticulous collection of speeches, letters and other writings relating to Jawaharlal Nehru published as Nehru and Sri Lanka (Vishva Lekha, Colombo, 2002). He acknowledges his gratitude to the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre library, Colombo for having access to its impressive collection of books on Nehru.*



A well-known Sri Lankan writer, **Daya Dissanayake** won the SAARC Literary Award in 2013. He has received Sri Lanka's State Literary Award three times in the Best English novel category. He shared the first-ever Swarna Pusthaka Award for the best Sinhala novel in 2007.

104

**WHEN THE EMPIRE WROTE AND  
SPOKE BACK**

Nikhita Nair

**E**minent West Indian writer CLR James pithily observed that the two things the former British colonies had accepted from their imperial masters without circumspection were cricket and English literature. The reason was their aspiration to beat the white men in both areas. In his celebrated memoir *Beyond a Boundary*, James explained the pull of cricket for the colonized people in terms of their confidence to breach the boundary drawn by their rulers. And when the metaphorical circle was extended to the field of writing it was defied with easy élan by the likes of VS Naipaul and Salman Rushdie.

In a wry comment on the American TV show *The Empire Strikes Back*, Rushdie punned, 'The Empire Writes Back to the Centre.' The rich crop of writing from the erstwhile British colonies that literary critic Bill Ashcroft describes as a 'diverse and powerful body of literature' is summed up by Rushdie's phrase.

True, language, as James sees from the prism of his Caribbean experience, has a strong political component. During the long spell of the Raj, the British rulers in India used the English language as a tool to define the 'native' and also to create a privileged class of educated Indians loyal to them. They were the beneficiaries of the system having access to opportunities and plum government jobs. If anyone could fit into this description among the colonial Indians, undoubtedly it was Jawaharlal Nehru. The son of a fabulously rich and successful lawyer in Allahabad, he attended the elite Harrow public school in London, the cradle of eight British and Indian

Prime Ministers – Palmerston, Baldwin, Churchill among them. From there he went to Cambridge, and later studied law at the Inner Temple Inn, London.

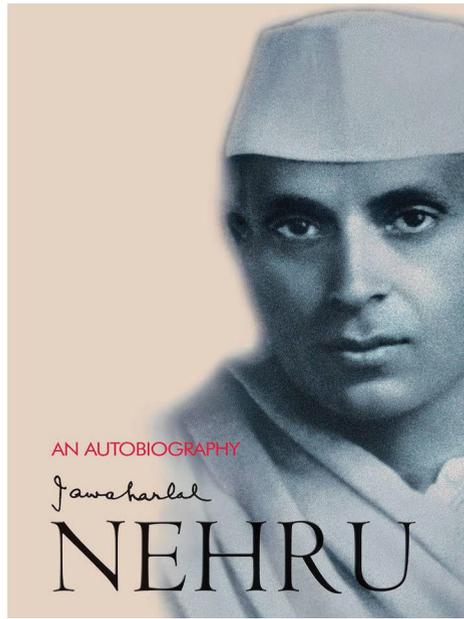
This man with his brilliant command over English, his stunning good looks and glowing fair skin, was ideally suited to be in the front row of the Raj's 'loyal' Indians. But he went the other way plunging headlong into the turbulence of the nationalist movement. In dealing with him as their antagonist the British often faced a dilemma – not moral as in the case of Gandhi but cultural since he had been from the English institutions the lowly civil servants themselves could not imagine entering. And in his mastery of English, informed by a wide range of reading and varied experiences, he excelled most of them.

Much before James explored the phenomenon or Rushdie interpreted it as a weapon of subversion, it was actually Nehru who challenged the imperialist structure with the power of language. With his civilizational vision and literary sensibility, he could raise the level of a political document to a memorable piece of writing. Sample this:

We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them the people have a further right to alter it or abolish it. The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence.

That's Nehru's draft of the declaration of Independence adopted by the Congress at its Lahore session on 19 December 1929.

Nehru undoubtedly had the making of a writer even though he never studied literature as a subject. It's through books that he acquired a fine literary taste and entered the world of writing. Australian writer and diplomat Walter Crocker famously said, 'Had he never been prime minister of India he would have been famous as the author of the *Autobiography* and the autobiographical parts of *The Discovery of India*.'



Looking inwards

When he was an impressionable teenager studying in England, the intellectual world was being dominated by the socialist, left-leaning writers. GM Trevelyan, celebrated author of *English Social History*, was an early influence on Nehru. His books on Italian nationalist hero Garibaldi deeply moved Nehru. He got some of these books as prizes for academic excellence at Harrow.

After he went to Cambridge, he began to read voraciously the leading writers of the time in addition to the prescribed ones for his course. Among them were playwright Bernard Shaw, prolific writer HG Wells, economist JM Keynes, philosopher Bertrand Russell, political scientist GL Dickinson, journalist Meredith Townsend and archaeologist Gordon Childe. These writers impacted Nehru deeply and infused his mind with new ideas. He had already come under the spell of the socialist thinkers and writers and begun reading them. One of his favourite books was HG Wells' *Outline of World History*.

In the preface of *Glimpses of World History* that he wrote years later, Nehru acknowledged Wells' influence on him: 'Other books of course helped me greatly, among them inevitably, HG Wells's *Outline of World History*.' Of course he had read the writings of ancient India, its epics, sacred texts and mythology.

Mapping the Indian civilization in its breathtaking diversity in *The Discovery of India*, Nehru recalls Childe's observation about the prehistoric Indus Valley Civilization:

"The Indus civilization," writes Professor Childe, "represents a very perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment that can only have resulted from years of patient effort. And it has endured; it is already specifically Indian and forms the basis of modern Indian culture." Astonishing thought: that any culture or civilization should have this continuity for five or six thousand years or more; and not in a static, unchanging sense, for India was changing and progressing all the time. She was coming into intimate contact with the Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Chinese, the Arabs, the Central Asians, and the peoples of the Mediterranean. But though she influenced them and was influenced by them, her cultural basis was strong enough to endure. What was the secret of this strength? Where did it come from?

I read her history and read also a part of her abundant ancient literature, and was powerfully impressed by the vigour of the thought, the clarity of the language, and the richness of the mind that lay behind it. I journeyed through India in the company of mighty travellers from China and Western and Central Asia who came here in the remote past and left records of their travels. I thought of what India had accomplished in Eastern Asia, in Angkor, Borobodur, and many other places. I wandered over the Himalayas, which are closely connected with old myth and legend, and which have influenced so much our thought and literature.

Apart from giving an idea about the wide range of his intellectual interests, this passage has a sublimity one comes across only in

great literature. Colonized for over two centuries, the effervescence of Indian culture expressed itself in the writing of Nehru at a time when freedom was beckoning the country.

After finishing his course, Nehru left Cambridge for London in 1910 for his law studies. It was around this time that he got close to the Fabians and read writers like Beatrice Webb. The Fabian contempt for capitalism took him close to socialism and much later to the collectivisation experiment in the Soviet Union. The new India of his dream, he was very clear, would have to take the socialist path.

Through his long years in politics, Nehru was acutely conscious of his role as a protagonist of history. That his every move and uttering would be recorded for the future generations. This awareness seems to have worked at the back of his mind whenever he wrote something or held the microphone. Philosopher UG Krishnamurti explains what distinguishes Nehru as a writer: 'He is a child of his age but has outstepped it. In his writings, critical conception and warmest of patriotism meet together.'

The appropriateness of this assessment was attested by Nehru's address to the Constituent Assembly on 13 December 1946:

As I stand here, Sir, I feel the weight of all manner of things crowding around me. We are at the end of an era and possibly very soon we shall embark upon a new age; and my mind goes back to the great past of India, to the five thousand years of India's history, from the very dawn of that history which might be considered almost the dawn of human history, till today... We have come here at a strange moment in Indian history. I do not know but I do feel that there is some magic in this moment of transition from the old to the new...

Michael Brecher, the Yale educated professor who wrote the much-acclaimed political biography of Jawaharlal Nehru, traced his flair for writing to the influence of Ferdinand T Brooks, an Irish

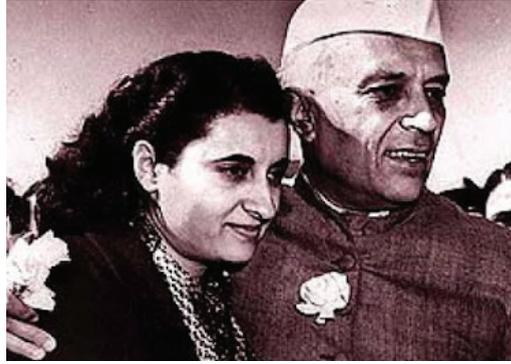
theosophist who was his tutor for three years at Anand Bhavan in Allahabad. Brecher writes: 'Under Brooks' inspiration he developed a taste for serious reading which he retained throughout his life. Like many boys of his age in the West, Nehru derived much pleasure from the fable of Lewis Carroll, the Kipling stories, the adventures of Don Quixote, and the more serious real-life adventures of the great explorers at the turn of the century. Mark Twain and Sherlock Holmes also intrigued his youthful mind, as did the writings of Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray...'

About his first intellectual mentor, Nehru later wrote, 'For nearly three years he was with me and in many ways influenced me greatly... FT Brooks developed in me a taste for reading and I read many English books... Apart from studies, FT Brooks brought a new influence to bear upon me which affected me powerfully – this was theosophy.'

Nehru's entire literary corpus consists of *The Discovery of India*, *An Autobiography*, *Glimpses of World History*, a collection of letters from different prisons to daughter Indira introducing her to the history of the world, and other collections of his letters to her, his sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, and the Chief Ministers of different states. Written in his inimitable prose, full of insights and enriched by his powerful observations, these letters are now read as a literary genre. Some of those letters, almost a hundred years old now, continue to inspire readers. Hanan Ashrawi, the Palestinian scholar and activist who pleaded the Palestinian cause so effectively before the media once, attributed her grasp over the English language to a close reading of Nehru's *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* which she read as a young girl.

During his long years in prison, Nehru wrote his major books. *The Discovery of India*, for instance, was written during the three years he was in the Ahmednagar Fort jail where he was incarcerated

after his arrest on 9 August 1942, the day the Quit India Movement was launched. In *Nehru: The Invention of India*, Shashi Tharoor dwells on this point: 'It is all the more astonishing that much of his writing took place

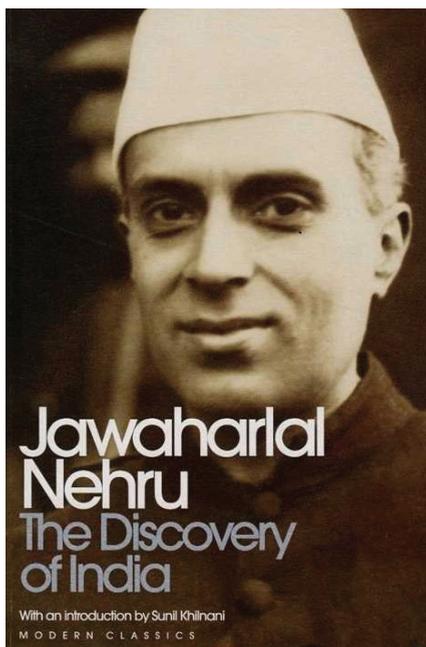


The daughter as inheritor of the flame

amid the privations of imprisonment, the only periods of his life that afforded him the sustained quiet needed to produce memorable prose.' In his appreciation of Nehru's masterpiece, Albert Einstein said that *The Discovery of India* 'gives an understanding of the glorious intellectual and spiritual tradition of (a) great country.'

Nehru was an avid reader. Afraid to lose his touch with French, he used to read French plays. Though his inclination was more towards nonfiction, he did read the great novels. Among them were Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Anatole France's *The Revolt of Angels*. His range was wide and taste eclectic. The man who was fascinated by Shakespeare's plays, also took interest in political adversary Churchill's historical works.

This intellectual giant with friends among the world leaders and eminent English writers, was an enigma to the British rulers in India. He was much taller than most others the imperial satraps had till then accounted for. They could be brutally harsh to an ordinary political activist but Nehru was an altogether different proposition. Pursuing his 'civilization mission' in India, premised on the perceived superiority of Western culture and intellect, Thomas Macaulay once said, 'We must at present



A book of discovery

and passion, from the standpoint of an ancient civilization and above all using the Queen's language. In Nehru, both Macaulay and his post-colonial critics faced a conundrum. His 'Tryst with Destiny' speech delivered at the midnight of 14 August 1947 is considered one of the finest oratorical specimens of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Harrow boy began his political journey in the rough turmoil of the kisan protests against exorbitant rents, illegal levies and forcible evictions in the rural areas of Avadh. Nehru took note of the farm unrest and organized the first *Kisan Manch* in Pratapgarh. In 1920-21, he had to serve two terms in prison for participating in the Non-Cooperation Movement. These seemingly irreconcilable facts of Nehru's life only helped raise his stature as a titanic figure of his time. The man who had charmed refined London society with the magnetism of his personality and intellect, was an undisputed leader of the masses.

do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.'

Macaulay's theory, however, fell flat in the face of Nehru's passionate espousal of Indian nationalism. He was more of an Englishman than Macaulay had intended to make out of an Indian but he represented the fiercest challenge to the Empire with his political argument



Tryst with Destiny – Nehru's oratory at its best

Macaulay's hope of raising 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste' was badly dashed with Nehru, the finest representative of this class, using his English, taste, opinions, morals and intellect to deconstruct the Empire. Fitting into the colonial aspirations defined by James, Nehru not just breached but set the boundary on fire with skills acquired from his English education. ■



**Nikhita Nair**, who has a master's degree in Sociology from Delhi University, is associated with this publication.

## Endnotes

### NEHRU'S NATION AND ITS ARCHITECTURE

Sucheta Mahajan

- <sup>1</sup> S. Gopal, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Oxford University Press and Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, Series 1, Vol. 8, pp. 520-23.
- <sup>2</sup> 7 July 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works*, (hereafter *JNSW*) ed. Sarvepalli Gopal, Vol. 15, p. 236.
- <sup>3</sup> 25 May 1946, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, hereafter *CWMG*, Vol. 84, p.170.
- <sup>4</sup> 6 June 1946 Resolution, forwarded to the Viceroy, *Transfer of Power*, *TOP*, Vol.7, p. 836.
- <sup>5</sup> Nehru to Cariappa, 29 April 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works*, (hereafter *JNSW*) ed. Sarvepalli Gopal, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 2, p.377.
- <sup>6</sup> Sucheta Mahajan edited, *H.M. Patel: Rites of Passage, A Civil Servant Remembers*, New Delhi, 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> Nehru to Patel, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1947, *JNSW*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 4, p. 114
- <sup>8</sup> Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, pp. 319-321.
- <sup>9</sup> *Indian Express*, 12 February 2018

### DEEP ROOTS OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Harish Khare

- <sup>1</sup> *Diaries of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, 1966-1972* (edited by Craig Baxter), Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- <sup>2</sup> General de Gaulle made it absolutely clear he was to have absolute authority: 'In short, the prospect was one of chaos, culminating in civil war, in the presence and eventually with the participation of in one way or another of foreigners – unless a national authority, outside and above the political regime of the moment as well as the movement which was preparing to overthrow it, could immediately rally opinion, take over power and restore the State. And that authority could be

none other than mine.’ – Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavor*. [translated by Terence Kilmartin, New York: Simon and Schuster,

<sup>3</sup> Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, second series, Vol. 5. p. 345

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 15/part III, p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Nehru letter quoted in Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch, India 1921-1952* [New Delhi: Time Books International, 1987.] p. 515.

<sup>6</sup> The strong man argument of the kind Field Marshal Ayub Khan advanced for the subcontinent was later taken to a higher plane by Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore:

‘We have stated that Western Democracy in its complete undiluted form is workable in a revolutionary situation in Southeast Asia, when loyalties are more to persons and personalities than to institutions of state. It is, therefore, essential that the government in power must be equipped to govern, and govern effectively while it is in government.’ [interview to Bernard Kalb, *New York Times*, May 24, 1960.]

## THE ENLIGHTENED ONE OF OUR TIMES

Daya Dissanayake

<sup>1</sup> Nehru, J. 1936. *An Autobiography*, Bodley Head, London.

<sup>2</sup> Jayewardene, J R *Treasured Memories*. Jawaharlal Nehru. Centenary Vol. p. 288-9

<sup>3</sup> Bandaranaike, SWRD, 1959. *A Study of Nehru*

<sup>4</sup> Speech in Lok Sabha, 30 September 1954

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Gopalkrishna Gandhi. 2002. p 9.

<sup>6</sup> *A Decade of Confrontation*. Gooneratne, John. 2000

## UNITED COLOURS OF TRIBAL DANCE

Disha Thakur

The still winter air vibrated with drumbeats and the far-off forests swayed in expectation as scores of participants from all over India and quite a few from the other parts of the world, moved rhythmically to the tune of age-old musical instruments. It was sheer rhapsody infused with celebration of recovering a great heritage that marked the three-day National Tribal Dance Festival in the Chhattisgarh capital of Raipur recently.



At the inauguration: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, senior UN official Renata Lok-Dessallien & others

The mood was effervescent with the tribal dancers, exuberant in their traditional attire and headgears, moving with small quick steps side to side and then forward, swinging their bodies in a synchronized movement. Their serried feet seemed to be moving in tune with the beats of the percussion drums.

The figures are mindboggling and they tell their own tale: 1800 artistes from 25 states, three Union Territories and six other countries from around the world. For three days starting from

27 December 2019, Raipur resonated with music – not Bollywood remix but tunes coming back from a distance of a millennium or more.



Rahul Gandhi playing the tribal dholak

Among the participating countries were Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Belarus and the Maldives. The big moment that hundreds of cameras captured was youthful Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s appearance on the massive stage wearing a traditional bison-horn headgear, a drum slung from his neck. With Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel for company, the Congress leader in spotless kurta-churidar seemed to be enjoying every moment.

On the part of Chhattisgarh Government this was an appreciable initiative to showcase the vignettes of India’s original culture



Foreign participants at the festival

which is being constantly threatened by the deluge of pop music. Altogether 43 dance forms on a wide variety of themes were presented to an ecstatic audience.

Inaugurating the festival, Rahul Gandhi said there



was an urgent need to preserve the pristine culture of the indigenous people facing threat with the changing times. Pointing to the impressive line-up of performers from all over India and other parts of the world, he said this was indeed a unique way to save the rich tribal heritage.

The tribes, Baghel said, have built on their long traditions insulating their highly advanced sense of social arrangement, preserving their language and dialects, and cultivating their culture. He, however, expressed concern over the tribal identity facing challenges with the changing times. The process of development, the Chief Minister observed, has eluded the tribal heartland. In the tribal district of Bastar, he said, 50 to 60 per cent of people live below the poverty line whereas the national average of BPL families is 22 per cent. He regretted that despite allocation of massive funds the economic backwardness of the tribal people had not be removed over the past fifteen years for misplaced priorities. He was optimistic that with the support and guidance from Congress president Sonia Gandhi and party leader Rahul Gandhi, he would be able to bring prosperity to the tribal heartland.



*'Despite allocation of massive funds the economic backwardness of the tribal people had not be removed over the past 15 years for misplaced priorities.'*

**CM Baghel**

# The Equator Line

## SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Yes, Please send me the next four issues of **The Equator Line** at  
25% discount for Rs 150.\*

### PERSONAL DETAILS

Please complete this order form, detach and return to the address

Mr                       Mrs                       Ms                       Other title

First name ..... Last name .....

Address .....

.....

City ..... Pin.....

Telephone ..... Mobile .....

Email .....

Pay via Cheque / DD

Cheque No./DD No. .... of .....

(Payable to The Equator Line Pvt. Ltd.)

Date : ..... Bank : .....

\*Please add another ₹ 700 for overseas subscriptions.

The Equator Line Pvt. Ltd.

16 Community Centre, 3rd Floor, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110017

[www.theequatorline.co.in](http://www.theequatorline.co.in) | [info@equator.net.in](mailto:info@equator.net.in) | 011 40503956

Wherever you are, India stays with you



toshakhana™

...exploring Indian heritage

offers a breathtaking collection: Gifts wrapped in  
Indian heritage

Available at: •amazon.in •flipkart.com •paytmall.com

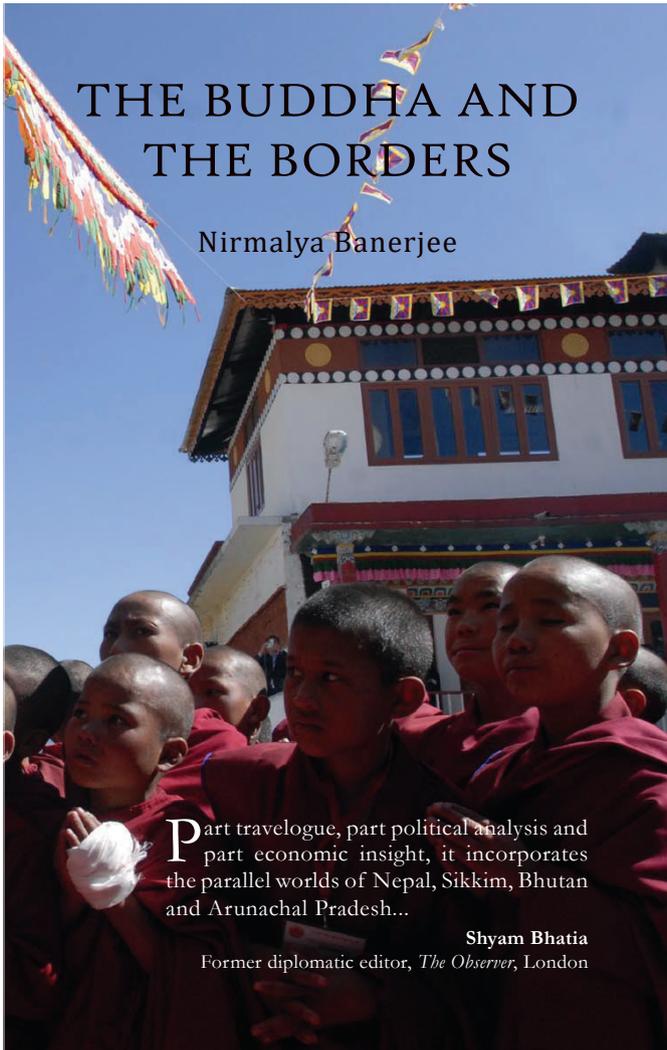
 toshakhana\_india  @toshakhana

info@rajinfratrade.com  
www.toshakhana.in

Part travelogue, part political analysis and part economic insight, it incorporates the parallel worlds of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh.

**Shyam Bhatia**

Former diplomatic editor, *The Observer*, London



# THE BUDDHA AND THE BORDERS

Nirmalya Banerjee

**P**art travelogue, part political analysis and part economic insight, it incorporates the parallel worlds of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh...

**Shyam Bhatia**

Former diplomatic editor, *The Observer*, London

ISBN: 978-93-82622-30-7

₹500

[www.palimpsest.co.in](http://www.palimpsest.co.in)



# Tiger State Madhya Pradesh



Let's come together to conserve the king of the jungle – the Tiger.



"The great dedication of forest workers, sacrifice of forest dwellers, better forest management and efforts taken for tiger conservation along with state's biodiversity have resulted in Madhya Pradesh becoming the tiger state once again.

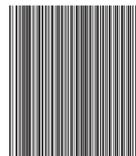
Madhya Pradesh has the highest tiger population of 526 in the country."

**Kamal Nath**  
Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh

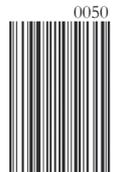
Publisher: Yogesh Malik  
Published by him from 16 Community Centre  
3rd floor, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110017  
Printed in India  
Editor: Bhaskar Roy

₹50

\$5



978-93-83076-26-0



[www.theequatorline.co.in](http://www.theequatorline.co.in)