CHAPTER - II

MAN AND MILIEU

Man is the highest animal in nature. He is interesting because he has brought a new thing with him which the others do not seem to have had. Man, in spite of his great and vaunted progress, is still a very pleasant and self-animal. Jawahar means an ornament not only for his family but also for the land and abroad. Once, one of his ancestors called Raj Koul, lived in Kashmir. In appreciation of his knowledge, the Delhi Padhusha allotted him a building for his living. That building was beside a 'Canal'. As they lived beside a 'Nahar', they were named 'Nahars'. Gradually the Nahars' became 'Nehrus. Nehru's life story in his autobiography starts with a striking sentence, “An only son of prosperous parents is apt to be spoilt, especially so in India.”1 His primary education was at Anand Bhavan. Later he was entirely educated in England. Nehru says, “My childhood was a sheltered and uneventful one”2 Indhira Gandhi says

"Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the key figures of the Twentieth century. He is that of a man who evolved, who grew in storm and stress till he became the representative of much that was noble in his time"3.
Nehru was a disciple of Gandhi. He was an outstanding statesman whose services to the cause of human freedom are valuable. His life and work have had a profound influence on our mental makeup, Social-structure and intellectual development. His mind was an active organ. He was a responsive man to children. He was a man with many capacities. He was man with mind, with sensibility, with courage, and honesty. He was not one man but a procession of men. We can see in him a national hero, Statesman, Philosopher, Historian and Educator. An important thing about Nehru is that he continues to think young. He was a miraculous alloy of ages, cultures and ideologies.

His biographer Michael Breecher says about his appearance and interests:

“He was a very handsome, slim young man, with black hair and moustache, debonair, in his Bond Street Clothes”

He was a thinker, but he could not be associated with others in his thinking. He was a good Judge of people. He has no petty ambitions for wealth or personal power. His patriotism was of the highest order and he constantly thought of the welfare of the poor. He was the sole architect of the foreign policy of independent India. As Michael Breecher has pointed out in his penetrating Political biography, he was ‘the philosopher, the architect, the engineer and the voice of this country towards the outside’
Wren and Nehru were Master builders: Wren designed buildings, whereas Nehru built a nation. He is certainly not a fascist either by conviction or by temperament. He is a self-disciplined leader. Born an aristocrat he made himself a democrat. Physically, he has ruthlessly disciplined himself. His spatter diet and regular yogic exercises are mainly responsible for his enviable health and vitality. /The nobility of his character and his fine instincts amply make amends for the hard feelings he might have created on the spur of the moment. He is allergic to untidiness, rough manners and lack of etiquette. He is one of the greatest torch bearers of new concepts, new approaches and new attitudes toward new problems. He believed genuinely and sincerely in the value of international co-operation.

It is said that a wise man who stands firm is a statesman and a foolish man who stands firm is a catastrophe. He belongs to a rare blood group almost carries symbolic overtones. Walter Crocker rightly observes, "There were two men in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; there were more than twenty in Nehru." It is a measure of the artistic success of Nehru's Autobiography.

Nehru's *An Autobiography* is incontrovertibly one of the outstanding prose works in the annals of Indian writing in English. Written at the age of forty five it is a literary expression of a man at the height of his powers. Many and various are the motives which can inspire autobiographical writing: Sheer vanity, as in the case of Collycibber, Benvenuto Cellini and Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the urge for unbuttoned
self-revelation as in that of Rousseau and Gandhi; and self-defence of which Newman’s ‘Apologia provitasua’ is a notable example. Nehru’s own aim and objective is clearly stated both in his preface and at several places in *An Autobiography*.

First, a very practical motive obviously was to make constructive use of his enforced leisure in prison. As a political prisoner who was to spend, at different intervals, about ten years of his life in gaol, Nehru knew the importance of vigorous physical and mental discipline for a man, in prison. As he observes in *An Autobiography*:

“I managed to accustom myself to the gaol routine, and with physical exercise and fairly hard mental work kept fit”

Secondly, as he says, he began the task in a mood of self-questioning, and to a large extent this persisted throughout. His object was, he adds later, "primarily for my own benefit to trace my own mental growth." He also states that he "was not writing deliberately for an audience, but if I thought of an audience, it was one of my own countrymen and countrywomen." At another place in the book, he asks himself the question, "why am I writing all this sitting here in prison? and answers himself "I write down my past feelings and experiences in the hope that this may bring me some peace and psychic satisfaction." His real conflict lay within him, a conflict of ideas, desires and loyalties of subconscious depths struggling with outer circumstances, of inner hunger unsatisfied. He sought an escape from this; he tried to
find harmony and equilibrium, and in this attempt, he rushed into action. That gave him some peace; outer conflict relieved the strain of the inner struggle.

Nehru also makes it clear that his aim was not to write a survey of recent Indian history, and that he has purposely avoided discussing the issues in India today (that is 1936), 'except vaguely and indirectly and so this autobiographical narrative remains a sketchy, personal and incomplete account of the past, verging on the present but cautiously avoiding contact with it.'

But this putatively 'sketchy, personal and incomplete account,' nevertheless presents an unforgettable picture of both the man and his milieu and this is exactly what makes a successful autobiography. The book is essentially both a 'Discovery' of Nehru and a Discovery of India of the period roughly between the two world wars. In a reply to the critics of the book, Nehru observes,

"The primary test of the book is psychological ... For though I wrote as an individual to some extent I may claim to have represented the mental conflicts of large numbers of others who worked in over freedom movement."

Ernst Toller emphasizes these two main facets of the book in his description of it as "witness, not only to a great personality but to the admirable struggle of a whole people."
This book was written entirely in prison, except for the postscript and certain minor changes from June 1934 to February 1935. The primary object on writing these pages was to occupy himself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitude of gaol life as well as to review past events in India, with which he had been connected to enable himself to think clearly about them.

To him those years had brought one rich gift, among many others. More and more he had looked upon life as an adventure of absorbing interest, where there is so much to do. He has continually had a feeling of growing up, and that feeling is still with him and gives a zest to his activities as well as to the reading of books, and generally makes life worthwhile.

In writing this narrative he has tried to give his moods and thoughts at the time of each event, to represent as far as he could his feelings on the occasion. It is difficult to recapture a past mood, and it is not easy to forget subsequent happenings. He says:

"primarily for my own benefit, to trace my own mental growth. Perhaps what I have written is not so much an account of what I have been but of what I have sometimes wanted to be imagined myself to be."^{12}

His thoughts and approach to life were more akin to what was called Western than Eastern. They also created in him a feeling of spiritual loneliness not only in public activities but in life itself. He says, "If I were given the chance to go through my life
again, with my present knowledge and experience added, I would no doubt try to make many changes in my personal life; I would endeavour to improve in many ways on what I had previously done, but my major decisions in public affairs would remain untouched. Indeed, I could not vary them, for they were stronger than myself, and a force beyond my control drove me to them.

One day the publisher of this book asked him to add a new chapter to the book in order to bring it further up to date. But he had found it no easy matter to comply. We live in strange times, when life’s normal course has been completely upset. He wrote his autobiography entirely in prison, cut off from outside activity. He suffered from various humours in prison but gradually he developed a mood of introspection and peace of mind.

Nehru says:

“As I glance through the book again, I feel almost as if some other person had written a story of long ago.”

Physically, he was older of course, but it was the mind that had received shock and sensation again and again and had hardened or perhaps matured. His wife’s death in Switzerland ended a chapter of his existence and took away much from his life. He could not adjust himself without his wife. So he threw himself in his work, seeking some satisfaction in it. His mother’s death later broke a final link with the past. His daughter was away studying at Oxford and later under treatment in a
Sanatorium abroad. He sat in that deserted house all by himself trying to avoid interviews. He wanted peace after the crowds.

He finished his autobiography, sitting in his prison barrack in the Almora District Gaol. Eight months later, he added a post script from Badenweiler in Germany. That autobiography, published in England, had a kindly reception from all manner of people in various countries. His autobiography brought Indian nearer to many friends abroad, and had made them appreciate, to some extent, the inner significance of our struggle for freedom. Madame Chiang Kai-shek aptly described it as a book “to be ranked amongst the great documents of all ages.”

What he dislikes most in prison is “the utter want of privacy all day and night”. As he watches the brutality of prisoners being whipped, he feels, “a dull pain inside.” In gaol, he greets, “little lofts of grass and odd bits of stone as old friends.” He watches how winter yields to spring “how wonderful is the sudden change from bud to leaf on the trees.” Damodar Swaroop says:

“Jawaharlal is a jewel of a man. Nehru’s other home in Allahabad apart from Anand Bhavan, was Naini Central prison for quite a long time. Jawaharlal Nehru must have been naughty as a boy, obstinate, perplexed, chivalrous and cheerful.”
Nehru has written, "I have developed strange habits in prison like getting up early, earlier than the dawn." Days in Naini Central prison were dull and Wearisome, but he busied himself with reading, writing, spinning, gardening and in other activities. Very often Nehru in Naini Prison thought of his home, family and his comrades struggling outside. He gave real shape to his feelings and emotions in his letters. He observed, "I have had time enough here in Naini prison to read or write what I wanted to." He is a man one admires and loves at once.
REFERENCES


7. Ibid., p. 348.

8. Ibid., preface p.XV.

9. Ibid., xvi.


12. Ibid. p. 596.

13. Ibid., p. 599.

