CHAPTER - III

DISCURSIVE WRITERS IN INDIAN ENGLISH
- A SELECTIVE SURVEY : Gandhi and Nehru

Discursive writing as a genre in Indian writing in English, though a relatively recent historical phenomenon, has already been studied by pioneers in the field like Professor K.R. Srinivas, Professor M.K. Naik and many others. When the English language was introduced to Indians by their alien rulers and instruction through the medium of English was imposed on them for reasons political and administrative, the new education through English made an immense impact on Indians. English education not only broadened their views but also awakened them and prompted them to consider the enormity of their problems - social, religious and political. Subsequently reform movements were born, bringing to light eminent personalities in these fields. The 'renaissance' was soon followed by national awakening. The men, as also women, who awoke to the then prevailing problems gave serious thought to the reformation of Indian society and chose English to express their views and thoughts. Right from the 'Father of the Renaissance', Raja Rammohan Roy, to the 'Father of the Nation', Mahatma Gandhi, several eminent men wrote in English to convey their convictions and views in matters
philosophical, social, religious, cultural, economic and political.

The two predominant types of prose-writing produced during the 19th century were religious-cultural and historical-political, which reflected a strong awareness of the socio-religious and political problems of the day. During the pre-Gandhian age (1857 - 1920) Indian English prose was generally oratorical. During the Gandhian age (1920 - 1947), with the freedom struggle dominating all others, the prose produced was mainly political.

Against the backdrop of the late 18th century and 19th century socio-religio-political movements led by men whose thoughts found expression through their writings in English, an attempt is made here to consider the works of two men who dominated the field of nationalism, and, to some extent, social reform - Gandhi and Nehru. Both were men of action mainly, and their relationship was that between a teacher and a disciple. Their dynamic and powerful personalities, together with their writings in English, made a great impact on the Indian masses. Their writings, discursive in kind, have come to be recognised as part of Indian writing in English. A very brief, yet a focussed survey is made to highlight them as discursive writers of distinction. However, in the present study it is not possible to cover the vast range of their writings. Moreover the purpose is to examine their writings as a counter-foil to the writings of Dr. Ambedkar.
Consequent to the two World Wars and the British Rule, when India was going through a state of 'agony, resentment and frustration', at this 'phoenix hour'\(^1\) rose Gandhi to raise the country with hope. His influence was so pronounced during the period that it came to be called the 'Gandhian age'. The movements led by him and contained in his writings in Gujarati and English, had so great an influence on Indian masses, and languages and literatures, that K.R. Srinivas\(^2\) Iyengar asserts that 'no apology is needed for considering Gandhi as a writer since many of the political leaders of the time - Rajaji, Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, etc. - were themselves thinkers, writers, agitators and social reformers rolled into one.'\(^2\) Like several of his predecessors and contemporaries who were non-literary figures, Gandhi also chose to write in English although 'he was no writer, properly so called, nor was he at any time particularly interested in the art of writing but he had to write or talk even as we have to walk or eat or breathe.'\(^3\) His 'autobiography' entitled *My Experiments with Truth*, which appeared in book form in 1925 was originally written in Gujarati appearing in weekly instalments in *Navayug*, then in English in his *Young India*. As Gandhi himself explains in it he liked to narrate his experiments

---

In the spiritual field which were known only to him. In it he writes about the events and circumstances of his life from birth to the beginning of the Non-co-operation Movement in India in 1920, only because, after 1920, the story of his life was intertwined with the life of India. In its last instalment he wrote, "To describe truth as it has appeared to me... has been my ceaseless effort". In 1894 Gandhi organised the Natal Indian Congress in South Africa where he had sailed subsequent to his study of law in England after his matriculation in 1887. This organisation was the result of his experience of colour discrimination. There he established a weekly paper also, the Indian Opinion. A chance reading of Ruskin's Unto This Last captivated his mind and transformed his life: "The precept in it that the life of labour i.e. the life of the tiller of soil and the handicraftsman is the life worthliving" had, he confesses, ".... never occurred to me .... I rose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice."  

Gandhi's composition of Hind Swaraj, originally written in Gujarati and later translated into English as Indian Home Rule, contained his strong convictions and was the culmination of all his reading, thinking and experimenting with truth; K.R. Srinivas Iyengar observes that his reading was selective, not voracious, and his mind was a rich receptive soil to the seeds of creative thought that aimed at the regeneration of man.  

4. Ibid., p. 251.  
5. Ibid.
of 'Satyagraha' from the seminal writings of Tolstoy and Thoreau for he considered it "the method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force." To him, this soul-force or Passive Resistance is not an act of cowardice; he argues, "Wherein is courage required, in blowing others to pieces from behind a canon or with a smiling face to approach a canon and to be blown to pieces? who is the true warrior? - he who keeps death always as a bosom friend or he who controls the death of others?" Gandhi expounded 'non-violence' which, according to him, is infinitely superior to violence. He brings home his conviction, using a metaphor, that forgiveness is more manly than punishment: "Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is power to punish. It is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her..."; he further explains: "Let me not be misunderstood. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will."

To M.K. Naik, Gandhi as a writer in Indian English mostly appears as a journalist, Gandhi's Indian Opinion and Young India


(later renamed as Harijan) were his mouth-pieces. From 1903, with the former in South-Africa to 1948 until his death when the latter was still appearing, Gandhi made his literary capacity felt through his editorials and essays. His own motives in taking to journalism were "... not for its own sake but merely as an aid to what I have conceived to be my mission in life..."; he worked faithfully "week after week. I poured out my soul into its columns. I cannot recall a word in these articles set down without thought or deliberation, or a word of conscious exaggeration or anything merely to please." M.K. Naik rightly observes that "judged by the dictum 'Literature that does not last is journalism and journalism that lasts is literature' much of Gandhi's journalistic writing qualifies as literature" because "for him the newspaper was always a 'viewspaper'". Gandhi used writings as a mere tool to convey his convictions on diverse subjects. His use of simple prose was adequate for this purpose and was appropriate to reflect his views. Through his deeds and words Gandhi strove not only to liberate India from alien rule but also to free her from social evils. He said: "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class or low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony.

8. Young India (YI), 2-7-1925.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability.... In this avowal it can be found that in the very sincerity of the words their strength lies.

Though Gandhi propagated non-violence and adopted passive resistance to achieve freedom for India thus proving to be a great leader and "Father of the Nation" steeped in politics, his primary concern was not political but moral and religious. And yet to him, religion and politics were Indivisible. Politics divorced from religion was, for him, "a corpse fit only to be burned." As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan quotes him, his motive in joining politics "has been purely religious. I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and this I could not do unless I took part in politics.... You cannot divide social, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity. My devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics." Not only religion combined with politics but all life was of one piece to Gandhi: "To see the universe and all pervading Spirit of truth face to face we must be able to love the meanest creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life.

13. Ibid., p. 6
That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics. And I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."

"I want to identify myself with everything that lives.... So my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion...."

Gandhi put forth his ideas and views about religion, caste, 'varna', and untouchability which found expression through his writings in English. Of the three great religions of the world he wrote: "The Hindu religion has survived the Egyptian, Aryan and the Babylonian. The Christian is but of two thousand years old. The Islam is but of yesterday. Great as both these are they are still, in my humble opinion, in the making. Christian Europe is not at all Christian but is groping and so, in my opinion is Islam still groping for its secret and there is today a competition healthy as also extremely unhealthy and ugly, between these three great religions." Subscribing to the Hindu ideal of socio-economic and also political life as regulated by political 'dharma' and 'varnashrama-dharma' Gandhi traced the ideal to 'our most ancient scriptures'. And 'Varna', according to him, 'means predestination

16. Ibid.
of the choice of man's profession. The law of 'varna' is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. 'Varna' therefore is, in a way, the law of heredity,...", but then he distinguished 'varna' from 'caste': "Varna is not caste, it is class. A man may call himself 'Brahmana' i.e. a teacher of religion if he is one in fact; or a Kshatriya i.e. a soldier, if he is one; or Vaishya i.e. a merchant or a farmer if he is that; or a Shudra i.e. an employee if he is one. These divisions are not castes but classes and have reference to callings." In his opinion, "Varnashrama is.... inherent in human nature and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his 'Varna' by choice. Not to abide by one's 'Varna' is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four divisions are all-sufficing." In a candid manner which is lucid and simple as well, Gandhi expressed his views on Hinduism: "I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world. Not that she has no faults. I dare say she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so I feel for Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me so much as the music of the Gita or

19. VI, 24-11-1927.
the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know."\(^21\) Using similes he further says, "Hinduism is a living organism liable to growth and decay and subject to the laws of nature. One and indivisible at the root, it has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches. The changes in the season affect it. It has its autumn and summer, its winter and spring. The rains nourish and fructify it too. Hinduism is like the Ganges, pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganges it is beneficial in its total effect."\(^22\) And yet he regrets that "Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability."\(^23\) He opined that untouchability, though part and parcel of Hinduism, is a plague which "it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat. It has received religious sanction in India and reduced lakhs and crores of human-beings to a state bordering on slavery."\(^24\) Giving his reasons and findings regarding untouchability he wrote, "Hinduism is a growth of ages. The very name Hinduism was given to the people of Hindustan by foreigners. There was no doubt at one time sacrifice of animals was offered in the name of religion. But it is not religion, much less is it Hindu religion. And so also it seems to me that when cow-protection became an article of faith with our ancestors, those who persisted in

---

22. *YI*, 8-4-1926.
eating beef were excommunicated.... Social boycott was applied not only to the recalcitrants, but their sins were visited upon their children also. The practice which had probably its origin in good intentions hardened into usage and even verses crept into our sacred books giving the practice a permanence wholly undeserved and still less justified. Whether my theory is correct or not, untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love."  

He preferred to be torn to pieces rather than disown the suppressed classes. He believed that the Hindus would never deserve freedom if they "allowed their noble religion to be disgraced by the taint of untouchability. And as I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint has become for me an untolerable burden ..."; hence he argued and pleaded, "... let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association on an equal footing." He drew a sharp distinction between untouchability and 'varna' or caste. According to him "untouchability has no scientific basis and it could not be supported by reason as it denies man the privilege of service to fellow-beings and deprives the untouchables in distress of the right of receiving service from their kind." But the caste system has, in my opinion, a scientific basis. Reason does not revolt

25. VI, 6-10-21.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. VI., 12-3-1925.
against it. If it has disadvantages, it has advantages also. It does not prevent a 'Brahmin' from serving his 'Shudra' brother. Caste creates a social and moral restraint. However, he would rather not extend the doctrine of caste. He would restrict it to four divisions, for, according to him, any multiplication would be an evil. He condemned the practice of untouchability as 'a heinous crime against humanity': "It is not a sign of self-restraint but an arrogant assumption of supremacy. It has served no useful purpose and it has suppressed as nothing else in Hinduism has, vast numbers of the human race who... are rendering in many walks of life an essential service to the country... I have no hesitation in rejecting scriptural authority of a doubtful character in order to support a sinful institution." Yet he felt that "caste does not connote superiority or inferiority. It simply recognises different outlooks and corresponding modes of life, but it is no use denying the fact that a sort of hierarchy has been evolved in the caste system."

In Gandhi's seemingly self-contradictory expression of views expressed in a manner of 'matter-of-factness' there can be found "little style, his prose mere purposive though clear, forceful and yet mechanical, monotonous, colourless, insipid." But Gandhi explains his own way of writing as: "I write as the spirit moves me at the time of writing. I write to propagate my ideas." Of

29. Ibid.
30. VI., 8-12-1920.
31. VI., 29-12-1920.
33. H., 18-6-1946.
how it is a training for him he states, "The reader can have no idea of the restraint I have to exercise... in the choice of topics, and my vocabulary. It is a training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and to make discoveries of my weaknesses." Often my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds." Equally candidly Gandhi admits his Inconsistency in ideas from time to time and gives reasons for it too: "I must admit my many inconsistencies... (but) there is a consistency running through my seeming inconsistencies, as in Nature there is unity running through seeming diversity." He states, "I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my pursuit after truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly." Yet again he says, "I have never made a fetish of consistency... As my vision gets clearer, my view must grow clearer." Gandhi wrote, It is truely said, on every conceivable subject and has left abundant documentation concerning everything he thought and did. His observations and statements, pronouncements and speeches scattered in the 'Harijan' (earlier called Young India) and his Autobiography were primarily in response to or reactions against

34. Yi., 2-7-1925.
36. H., 29-4-1934.
the events and happenings in changing contexts. The Great Sentinel, according to K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, is "among the classics of English prose and there is no one unsure sentence or inept word from the beginning to the end."\(^{38}\) His statement at the conclusion of the 'Great Trial' on 8-3-1922 is another imperishable classic: \(^{39}\) "...I have no desire whatever to conceal that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me.... I knew that I was playing with fire, I ran the risk and if I was set free I would still do the same.... Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed. But I had to take my choice."\(^{40}\) Gandhi, the writer, used language as a necessary tool to convey his convictions and views just as he used his "spectacles, walking stick or safety razor. Writing for him was not for writing's sake.... but for converting people to his point of view": Busy as he was always in the arena of politics perhaps he had no time to cultivate the art of writing. He merely wrote or spoke straight on, though the words, often, now, seem insipid or anaemic, with no straining after emphasis, no irradiating brilliance, yet they are Gandhi's words, and their very bareness constitutes their strength.\(^{41}\) Despite the bareness which is their strength, the words used by him are adequately functional, his

---


39. Ibid., pp. 267-268.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 263.
vocabulary clear and simple, and are effective in bringing out the intended meaning. He projected his meanings effectively through occasional use of similes and metaphors. His writings including serious prose articles in the form of essays, and pithy sayings invariably form part of Indian literature in English. e.g. "Non-violence is the weapon of the brave." "The cow is a sermon on pity." Incidentally, writing about English education in India, he regretted its imposition, its tyranny over students like him in high school for they had to spend half the time "learning English and mastering its arbitrary spelling and pronunciation..... it was a painful discovery to have to have a language that was not pronounced as it was written...": However, he did not decry English-

"The columns of Harijan are sufficient evidence of my love of English," but then he felt that"... the nobility of its literature cannot avail the Indian nation any more than the temperate climate or the scenery of England can avail her. India has to flourish in her own climate and scenery and her own literature." His words were not always dry or serious; he was at times witty and humorous too. Horace G. Alexander, an Englishman, recalls his first visit to the Sabarmati Ashram in 1928, when he asked Gandhi what should he tell his countrymen when he got home to England, Gandhi had simply replied,

"You must tell the English people to get off our backs."

Gandhi has left behind 'literature of knowledge' if not 'literature of power'. M.K. Naik rightly points out that though Gandhi lacks the rhetorical amplitude of Shastri and Radhakrishnan, the poetic splendour of Sarojini Naidu, the imaginative and emotional overtones of Nehru and idol-breaking candour of Nirad Chaudhuri, yet the athletic vigour of his direct, simple prose establishes him as a prose writer of distinction among Indian masters of English.

A contemporary-stateman of Gandhi, also his disciple, was Jawaharlal Nehru. Like Gandhi he too made contributions to Indian literature in English and enriched it. With his background of English education—at Harrow and Cambridge— he naturally chose to write in English. On his return from England where he had been for the purpose of education, he came directly under the influence of the dynamic leadership of Gandhi. Gandhi then was leading the freedom struggle in India. A lover of freedom that Nehru was, he too plunged into the turmoil. Though basically a man of action and reason unlike Gandhi who was primarily a man of religion, Nehru wrote several letters, prefaces, memoranda, resolutions and books even amidst active public life. His Letters From a Father to His Daughter (1930)


later published as *Glimpses of World History* (1934), *An Autobiography* (1936) and *Discovery of India* (1946) are classics of their kind. Being prison-born literature, all these are autobiographical, analytical and introspective.

Nehru's *Autobiography*, known to be among the best of its kind, was written entirely in prison from June 1934 to Feb., 1935. This "autobiographical narrative - a sketchy, personal and incomplete account of the past, verging on to the present," was an attempt, in his own words "to trace as far as I could, my own mental development and to write a survey of recent Indian History." As he himself writes, "The primary object in writing these pages was to occupy myself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitudes of gaol life, as well as to review past events in India with which I had been connected, to enable myself to think clearly about them." However, in prison he preferred solitude, for he could get privacy by leaving his barrack and sitting in the open plain of the enclosure. With a poet's heart he even enjoyed it.

His *Autobiography* which tells the story of his life and struggle, writes Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "without a touch of self-pity or moral superiority, is one of the most remarkable books of our time. It is a master-piece, like all master-pieces of literature,

47. Ibid.
is personal and universal.... you will see a distinguished mind at work, a delicate sensibility, a mind which is lost in the battles of life.... yet.... with so much of feeling, spirit and vigour." Prof. C.D. Narasimhalah considers it "the most moving, candid account of the sufferings and heartaches of the most sensitive of our public men.... analyses the moving springs of his actions with that rare intellectual integrity which belongs to the truly great." Humayun Kabir holds the view that the Autobiography, "At once lyrical and epic.... displays his many fold qualities as a writer and a man. The story of his own life infused in the story of the nation and its struggle for freedom and liberty.... sincerity, directness and vigour are in evidence on every page."  

In the Autobiography one comes across innumerable pieces of poetic prose. For instance, the circular wall of the Naini Central Prison in which he was kept before the Civil Disobedience was to break out, "reminds one of captivity than a rectangular one. The absence of corners and angles adds to the sense of oppression. In the day time that wall even encroached on the sky and only allowed a glimpse of a narrow bounded portion.... and I felt as if I was at the bottom of a well. Or else that part of the star-lit

50. Ibid., p. 27.
sky that I saw ceased to be real and seemed part of an artificial planetarium."

Jawaharlal Nehru excelled in giving pen portraits. This is what he writes about his father; "... there was strength of personality and a measure of kingliness... whatever the place where he sat at the table it would be the head of the table. He was neither meek nor mild and ... he evoked great loyalty as well as bitter opposition ... with a broad forehead, tight lips and a determined chin he had a marked resemblance to the busts of the Roman emperors in the museums of Italy..."

Equally candid and vivid is the portrait of Gandhi: "Consciously or deliberately meek and humble, yet he was full of the power and authority and he knew it and at times he was imperious enough, issuing commands which had to be obeyed. His calm deep eyes would hold one and gently probe into the depths; his voice, clear and limpid, would purr its way into the heart and evoke an emotional response... mind and reason definitely had a second place." Of Bhagat Singh whom he met for the first time in prison, he writes, "... weak and bedridden with hunger... strike... he had an attractive intellectual face remarkably calm and peaceful" and guesses that "... I suppose that anyone who has been fasting for a month will look spiritual and

Jawaharlal Nehru possessed in his armoury ready wit, humour and irony which he used sparingly. His quiet humour is evident when he says that his barrack and the enclosure in the prison were popularly known as 'Kutta Ghar', the Dog house, though "This was an old name which had nothing to do with me." Speaking of the two halves into which the Congress Party was divided - the Swarajists and no-changers - Nehru narrates that his father was enraged to see that the "Individuals here and there began to slip away to the otherside. My father shouted and thundered and talked about cutting the diseased limb" and Nehru comments, "this threat has no great effect when the limb is eager to walk away by itself." Yet again, one cannot help being amused and suppress laughter reading Nehru explaining his feelings, when the most extravagant and pompous language was used about him in public functions, in addresses by bodies like the Municipality and local boards, in processions, etc.; it would be "a great strain on my nerves and my sense of humour and reality" so that when "everybody would look so solemn and pious that I felt an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, or to stick out my tongue, or stand on my head, just for the pleasure of shocking and watching the reactions on the faces of that august assembly." 

55. Ibid., p. 218.
57. Ibid., p. 206.
But then, "Fortunately for my reputation and for the sober respectability of public life in India, I have suppressed this desire and usually behaved with due propriety." 58

However, in contrast to such passages in his Autobiography one comes across sober and pathetic descriptions. For instance Nehru writes about the life of the 'lifers' - the convicts sentenced for life - in Naini prison: "For years and years many of these lifers do not see a child or woman, or even animals.... They brood and wrap themselves in angry thoughts, fear and revenge and hatred; forget the good of the world, the kindness and joy, and live only wrapped up in the evil, till gradually even hatred loses its edge and life becomes a soulless thing, a machine-like routine. Like automatons they pass their days each exactly like the other, and have few sensations.... From time to time the prisoner's body is weighed and measured. But how is one to weigh the mind and the spirit which wilt and stunt themselves and wither away in this terrible atmosphere of oppression?" 59 While he was engaged in the freedom struggle he came face to face with reality; his direct contact with the Indian peasant changed his outlook: "A new picture of India seemed to rise before me, naked, starving, crushed and utterly miserable." 60 This, he says, his first visit to rural India,

58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., p. 219.
was 'a revelation to me.' And this is how he felt: "Looking at them, I was filled with shame and sorrow, shame at my own easy going and comfortable life and at our petty politics of the city which ignored this vast multitude of semi-naked sons and daughters of India, sorrow at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India." 61 Listening to their innumerable tales of sorrow, of 'their crushing and evergrowing burden of rent, illegal extraction... beatings... surrounded on all sides by vultures who preyed on them - zamindar's agents, money lenders, police; toiling all day to find that what they produced was not theirs and their reward was kicks and curses and a hungry stomach....." 62 Nehru says, "... ever since then my mental picture of India always contains this naked, hungry masses." 63 Hence he emphatically vows, 'I work for Indian independence because the nationalist in me cannot tolerate alien domination; I work for it even more because for me it is an inevitable step to social and economic change." 64 The cause of the common people and peasants and workers to him became identified with the cause of the country.

61. Ibid., pp. 71-73.
62. Ibid., p. 73.
Nehru had his own views regarding religion and these views did not match with those held by Gandhi. He condemned organised religion in his *Autobiography*, in the section 'What is Religion'. He thought "India is supposed to be a religious country above everything else," but "the spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate organised religion in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it." He refuses to believe in 'life after death'.

Besides religion, he was not greatly interested in the 'after life' either, for he found "the problems of this life enough absorbing to fill my mind .... the usual religious outlook does not concern itself with this world.... It seems to me to be the enemy of clear thought for it is based not only on an acceptance without demur of certain fixed and unalterable theories and dogmas, but also on sentiment and emotion and passion. It is far removed from what I consider spirituality and things of the spirit.... It is narrow and intolerant of other opinions and ideas; it is self-centred and egotistic."

Religion, however, as Nehru understood it, "consists of the inner development of the Individual, the evolution of his consciousness in a certain direction which is considered good." The inner evolution and outer environment 'act and react on each other':

---

66. ibid., p. 377.
67. ibid., p. 379.
as a downtrodden and exploited class cannot progress inwardly, and a politically and economically subject nation can never achieve inner growth, it is obvious, according to Nehru, that "even for inner development, external freedom and a suitable environment become necessary." Nehru agrees with John Dowey that religion is "Whatever introduces genuine perspective into the piecemeal and shifting episodes of existence" or, "any activity pursued on behalf of an ideal and against obstacles, and inspite of threats of personal loss, because of conviction of its general and enduring value, is religious in quality." Nehru emphasises that "If this is religion—then surely no one can have the slightest objection to it." According to Nehru India must be viewed in the world context; "We must get rid of that narrowing religious outlook, that obsession with the supernatural and metaphysical speculations, that loosening of the mind's discipline in religious ceremonial and mystical emotionalism, which come in the way of our understanding of ourselves and the world. We have to come to grips with present, this life, this world, this nature which surrounds us in its infinite variety." Yet, the very word religion is repugnant to him for it does not give a certain common meaning and arouses different ideas and images in

68. Ibid., p. 377.
69. Ibid., p. 379.
70. Ibid., p. 380.
minds of people - the ideas and images of rites and ceremonial, of sacred books, of a community of people, of certain dogmas, of moral, love, fear, hatred, reverence, charity, sacrifice, asceticism, fasting, feasting, prayer, ancient history, marriage, death, the next world, etc., creating confusion, evoking strong emotional response, however. Hence he suggests that "... it would be far better if it was dropped from use altogether and other words with more limited meanings were used instead such as: theology, philosophy, morals, ethics, spirituality, metaphysics, duty, ceremonial, etc., which have more limited range than 'religion.'..." 72

"The quest.... the men of might.... the clashes of races, the fall of empires, the liquidation of dynasties.... the dazzling climbs of epic and drama - the variegated kaleidoscopic successions of comedies and tragedies of unpredictable circumstances played on the vast theatre that is India over a space of 3000 years... (are) recaptured with a sure but unlaboured artistry" 73 in Discovery of India written in Aga Khan palace after his ninth trial and arrest during the 'Quit India' movement. The semi-historical work of over 600 pages was written by Nehru between April and September 1944. The lines of poetry - "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought I summon up remembrance of things past...." quoted at the beginning

72. Ibid., p. 378.
of the *Discovery of India* sum up the whole book, the book being 'history rewritten', the theme being 'India's past; present and a bit of the future'; India's history is retold by Nehru with the aid of poetry, paintings, inscriptions, treatises, etc. The work, though factual, is artistically imaginative too. The significance of the work lies, according to Nehru himself, in relation to past and present: "The past becomes something that leads upto the present, the moment of action, the future something that flows from it; and all the three are inextricably intertwined and inter-related... past history merged into contemporary history...."\(^{74}\)

Nehru the nationalist was Nehru the socialist too. He intended to build a socialist society. Declaring that "Our objective is to build a socialist pattern of society" he said, "a society in which there is equality of opportunity and the possibility for everyone to live a good life.... we have.... to lay a great stress on equality, on the removal of disparities... the essential thing is there must be wealth and production."\(^{75}\) In consonance with this view of socialism he condemned caste system. According to Nehru caste system had become a citadel of social reaction and a basis for the exploitation of the masses; that caste divided the country into many factions and sapped the nation's strength. He maintained that"....


the caste system and much that goes with it is wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive and barrier to progress. There can be no equality in the status and opportunity within its framework, nor can there be political democracy and much less, economic democracy.  

He held that not only must equal opportunities be given to all, but special opportunities for educational, economic and cultural growth must be given to backward groups so as to enable them to catch up with those who are ahead of them. According to Nehru, the individual was a nucleus around whom all activities and all human relations evolved; hence the real problem was that of an adjustment of the relations between individuals and between groups. Society being a mob of social relationships, Nehru maintained that real social progress will come only when opportunity is given to the individual to develop. According to him the caste system ".... was meant to be an all-inclusive order without any common dogma and allowing the fullest latitude to each group" which survived for long centuries giving security, stability and a sense of freedom to each group; he held the view that "It held Indian life together for thousands of years and it could only do so, not by preventing change or growth, but by allowing this to take place." But he regrets, that such a system, with the passage of time, "Instead of holding


together the social structure... split it up into hundreds of divisions and makes us weak and turns brother against brother." However, the problems of individual and social life, according to Nehru, can be solved following the ways of observation, precise knowledge and deliberate reasoning—the methods of science.

Nehru's imaginative insights into India's past can be seen in his description of places during his extensive journeys through the length and breadth of India. Nehru travelled in order to know, to learn the cultural stability of his mother land, to 'discover' India. He relates that these journeys gave him an insight into her past. He travelled through India of her past—the Himalayas, Kashmir, the Gangas and Brahmaputra, Ajanta, Ellora, the Elephantine Caves, Saranath, Fatepuri Sikri, etc. He writes: "At Saranath, near Banaras, I would almost see the Buddha preaching his first sermon... Ashoka's pillars of stone... would speak to me in their magnificent language and tell me of a man who was greater than any other king or emperor. At Fatepur Sikri, Akbar, forgetful of his empire, was seated holding converse and debate with the learned of all faith..."; but "this panorama of the past gradually merged into the unhappy present, when India... was a slave country..." And yet, "the hundred and eighty years of British rule in India were just one of the unhappy interludes in her long story" compared to the situation

78. Ibid.
where "all over the world terrible and devastating war was ranging and brutalizing humanity." 80

It is in a mode of a story - teller that Nehru writes, to his daughter in her early teens, in the Glimpses of World History. He relates: "... this story of the earth is more interesting than any other story or novel that you may have read" and takes the child from the fairy like story of the earth to the happenings in history. 81 The Letters from a Father to His Daughter convey the story of the formation and growth of the world. It is interspersed with touches of personal feelings; there is an integration in the large movement of the planetary life, the universe and our personal hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows. Basil Mathews to whom the Glimpses... has been dedicated, imagined that 'one day Nehru's niche in the world temple of immortality will be carved up by his pen rather than by his statecraft.' 82 Comparing the Glimpses.... with H.G. Wells' An Outline of History Prof. C.D. Narasimhan points out that the latter lacks the human touch which the former has; while Wells calls European history the career of Alexander the Great, to Nehru, Alexander is 'a great conqueror but a conceited young man'; arousing the curiosity of the young reader Nehru says, "Alexander has a glamour attached to his name. In fits of anger or whims of the moment he killed some of his best friends and destroyed great cities

80. Ibid.
together with their inhabitants." The Letters.... is a book giving 'a brief account of early days of the world written for children' as he puts it. Each letter with a title such as 'The Book of Nature', 'The First Living Things', 'The Making of the Earth' and 'What were the Aryans in India like?' gives delightful information to children in a charming way. In it he relates scientific facts in an interesting narrative. For instance, writing about the Solar System in 'The Making of the Earth' Nehru relates: "You know that the earth goes round the sun and the moon goes round the earth. You also know perhaps that there are several other bodies which like the earth go round the sun. All these including our earth are called planets of the sun. The moon is called a satellite of the earth because it hangs on to it.... At night you see thousands of stars in the sky.... Can you distinguish between a planet and a star?.... Stars twinkle, planets do not." These Letters.... later published as Glimpses of World History running to almost a thousand pages.

"Constituted something of a liberal university education, ranging as it did, over the whole of the human historical record - European, Asian, African, American, Australian.... What made the book unique in the history of literature was that his prison was totally bereft of historical materials. He wrote its thousands of facts and events and names, without reference books or notes of any kind. As a demonstration of human intellectual capacity the book stands by itself." In providing the Glimpses of the World.... Nehru does

emerge as a historian though he denied it when he once said, "I am not a literary man and I am not a historian; what, indeed, am I? .... I have been a dabbler in many things; I began with science in college. And then took to the law and after developing various other interests in life, finally adopted the popular and widely practised profession of gaol-going in India." However, in writing the Glimpses... he even proves a writer of great potential and vitality. He narrates in it significant episodes in simple lyrical prose and lucid diction giving us 'better English' if not 'better history'.

Thus has he established a place for himself as a literary man and a historian. But, a writer of moods that Nehru was, his writing is uneven. At times he writes like the most objective historian and at other times he writes with extreme sensitivity, and in describing a natural setting he is all a poet. Abundant instances of idiomatic English too can be found in his writings. He compares 'freedom' to a 'Goddess hard to win', who 'demands, as of old, human sacrifice from her votaries': 85 Comparing life to a flowing river he says, "The river of life is never still, it flows on and sometimes it rushes forward, pitilessly, with a demon energy, ignoring our little wills and desires, making cruel mock of our petty selves, and tossing us about like straws on its turbulent waters, rushing on and on, no one knows whether - to a great precipice.

which will shatter it into thousand bits, or to the vast and inscrutable, stately and calm, ever changing and yet changeless sea."  

The Nehru who wrote such poetic prose was the Nehru who rationalised the decisions of others and drafted resolutions also. Such 'Resolutions' passed by the Indian National Congress were essays which make a rich 'contribution to political literature in India', in which "the precise, unique word comes pat, the citations... are engagingly apt, and the fusion of reverie and argument, reminiscence and self-examination rings sincere and rings true." Besides this, Nehru was keen on good editing and efficient management also, as is pointed out by Chalapati Rau. He wrote incessantly for the National Herald as to the character of the newspaper and what it stood for. Chalapati Rau brings out the fact that "The early issues of National Herald are littered with his articles on national and international issues and some times he wrote unsigned editorials which surprised me with their mastery of journalistic diction which never descended to journalese.... The promised articles came in time, neatly typed or in his beautiful calligraphy."  

With a liberal-scientific training, Nehru the humanist was a  

89. Ibid.
nation-builder who sought to give economic and social substance to the idea of Indian nationality. Problems such as caste-system, according to him, created hindrance in economic progress. He held, "Caste petrifies society, prevents mobility of labour and change of occupations." In his Azad Memorial lecture in 1959 Nehru insisted on a society advancing in all respects - "to fulfil her five year plans to raise the standard of living of her vast population; I want the narrow conflicts of today in the name of religion or caste, language or province to cease, and a classless and casteless society to be built up.... In particular I hope that the curse of caste will be ended for there cannot be either democracy or socialism on the basis of caste." The same idea of a classless society is reflected in his Autobiography, in the chapter entitled 'Conversion or Compulsion': "Our final aim can be a classless society with equal economic justice and opportunity for all, a society organised on a planned basis for the raising of mankind to higher material and cultural levels to a cultivation of the spiritual values of co-operation, unselfishness, the spirit of service, the desire to do right, goodwill and love, and ultimately a world order. Everything that comes in the way will have to be removed gently if possible and forcibly if necessary." In this is evident Nehru's uncompromising attitude towards reformation of Indian society. In Independence and After


also Nehru insists that the curse of untouchability and other forms of enforced inequality must be eradicted. And in his memorable speech as the Prime Minister of India he reiterated the idea: "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge... At the stroke of midnight.... we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends..... It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity....". Thus it can be seen that his writings and speeches display reason and humanism, his commitment to social justice, material progress, and that his passion for freedom was combined with a passion for the building of India with economic and social liberation realised.

M.K. Naik aptly remarks that Nehru's prose was 'just a reflection of the man himself - sincere and idealistic, urbane and cultured, rigorous yet graceful - a man endowed with a clear and sharp mind, strong emotions, a love of beauty...' whereas Gandhi's prose is remarkably 'direct, precise and critical.... in consonance with his personality.' Indeed, as G.S. Balram Gupta points out, the idiom of Gandhi's writing is the replica of his life itself - unadorned simplicity, rigorous restraint, stringent economy, transparent honesty and saintly austerity.

The two eminent personalities in modern India, Gandhi and Nehru, made rich contribution in various capacities: Great statesmen-humanists that the two were, they were writers too. Their contributions to the field of literature - to Indian literature in English- has been rich and great; Gandhi contributed 'literature of thought' whereas Nehru, mainly to 'literature of power'. Prose writers of distinction that they were, they have earned for themselves a lasting place among Indian discursive writers in English.

Another statesman-writer, a contemporary of Gandhi and Nehru, was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. A brief survey of his writings is made in an attempt to project him as yet another discursive writer, in the next two chapters.