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The great
bring-togetherer

Nehru Didn't Like Being A Pandit

Nehru carried on the fight for socialism in the eight months between the Lucknow Session of the National Congress (April 1936) and the one at Faizpur. Earlier, during his long stay in Europe, he took time to write, to look after his family and friends. Volume Seven of his *Selected Works* reveals another facet of his versatile personality.

by Dr RAFIQ ZAKARIA

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU is an inexhaustible subject; the more light is thrown on him, the more fascinating he becomes! In Volume Seven of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, which Orient Longman has just published, there is enough of political material, covering the period from the Lucknow Session of the Congress in April 1936 to the Faizpur Session in December 1936. Rather a dull period in revolutionary terms, but the various asides, with which this volume bristles, makes it interesting reading.

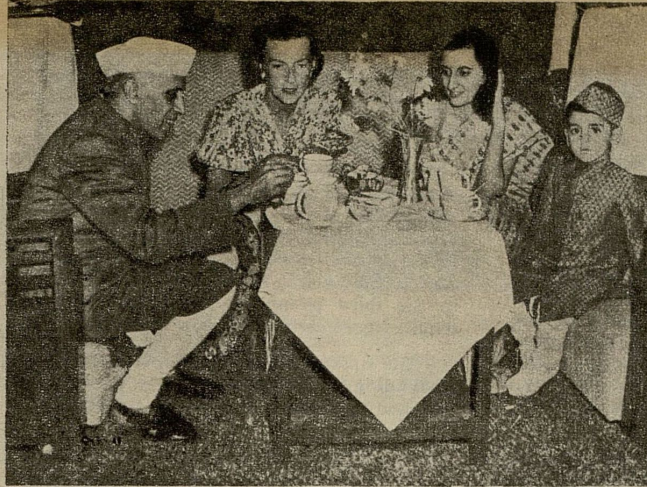
They also reveal the real Nehru—a caring husband and loving father, a good friend and gentle soul and withal an uncompromising idealist, who refused to give up his advocacy of socialism in the face of the fiercest opposition, both from his close colleagues in the Congress High Command, and from the big business tycoons outside the Congress but sympathetic to its cause. As one goes through the rejoinders and counter-rejoinders on this topic in the pages of this volume, one realises how much Indian socialism owes to the valiant pioneering efforts that this gallant soldier of freedom put in.

Socialism Made "Respectable"

In those days, the word—socialism—was anathema to many patriots; Nehru, however, persisted and made it respectable. The Old Guard headed by Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel and C. Rajagopalachari considered young socialists like Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan to be cranks. Nehru, on becoming Congress President in 1936, appointed them as members of the Working Committee, thus elevating them to a position of equality with the Old Guard. This was no mean achievement and shows Nehru's depth of involvement in ideological pursuits.

In a letter to his friend, V. K. Krishna Menon, in London (June 1936), Nehru vividly describes his wondrous plight:

"You will no doubt get some faint idea of happenings here from the Indian Press. But I should not be surprised if you get a confused notion. It is difficult enough to get a clear view on the subject. I am being attacked and criticised by a variety of people, big business, Liberals, Responsivists, some Congressmen and, of course, our beloved Government. And yet behind all this lies the fact that wherever I go, I get a



prodigious welcome and the response is such that it puts out the critics. It is a tiring business to carry on wars on numerous fronts and there are few to help. But I carry on. The process is not without its exhilaration."

Politics apart, this volume reveals many delightful facets of Nehru's lovable personality. There is, for instance, his irritation at the use of the prefix "Pandit" to his

name. He reacts against it on more than one occasion. In a letter to Agatha Harrison (September 25, 1935), he writes: "...I have a peculiar dislike to 'Pandit'. It sounds so pompous and I hope that whatever my other demerits might be, I am not pompous."

The prefix continued to be used by his friends and admirers despite protest; Nehru, however, banned its use when he became Prime Minister. Officially, he became "Mr Jawaharlal Nehru", but to the millions of his people he remained "Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru" or, more affectionately, "Panditji".

Harassed And Worried

The present volume begins with a graphic description of Nehru's sudden release from the Almora Jail and journey to Badenweiler in Europe in September 1935 to be with his ailing wife Kamala. Air travel was then in a primitive stage and the Dakota that carried him did not fly more than 10,000 ft above sea-level. As he wrote: "Soon we shall be flying over the Indus and then Karachi, where we change over to a larger plane. We are only three passengers in this plane—one other, an Australian, I think, besides Perin and me."

Naturally, from Almora to Badenweiler in Germany was a sudden change and, because of the deteriorating condition of his wife, he wasted no time. But the plane was slow and flew night and day in order to make up for lost time. Harassed and worried, Nehru felt depressed at the sight of Kamala, who had "very much changed for the worse".

Then there was the problem of his only child—Indira, who was in Badenweiler with her mother. "But I do not fancy," he wrote to the poet, Rabindranath Tagore (September 10, 1935), who had taught Indira at Santiniketan, "her remaining too long continuously in an atmosphere of illness and anxiety. Perhaps she may go soon to a place in Switzerland. She seems to have a special aptitude for picking up languages and I want to encourage this. She is likely to remain in the Continent for the whole



WITH HIS BRIDE KAMALA IN 1916. Kamala was of frail constitution. In September 1935, after his release from Almora Jail, Jawaharlal went to Badenweiler (Germany) to be with his ailing wife. In a letter to Tagore, he wrote: "I found Kamala very much changed for the worse. It is surprising how she has been able to withstand all that she had gone through. She has made a gallant fight of it and the chances are still evenly balanced."

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IN 1935, in a letter to Agatha Harrison, Nehru wrote: "I have a peculiar dislike to 'Pandit'. It sounds so pompous and I hope that whatever my other demerits might be, I am not pompous." When he became Prime Minister, he banned the use of the prefix, but to millions of his admirers he remained "Panditji". Here, he is seen with Lady Mountbatten, Mrs Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi in November 1947.

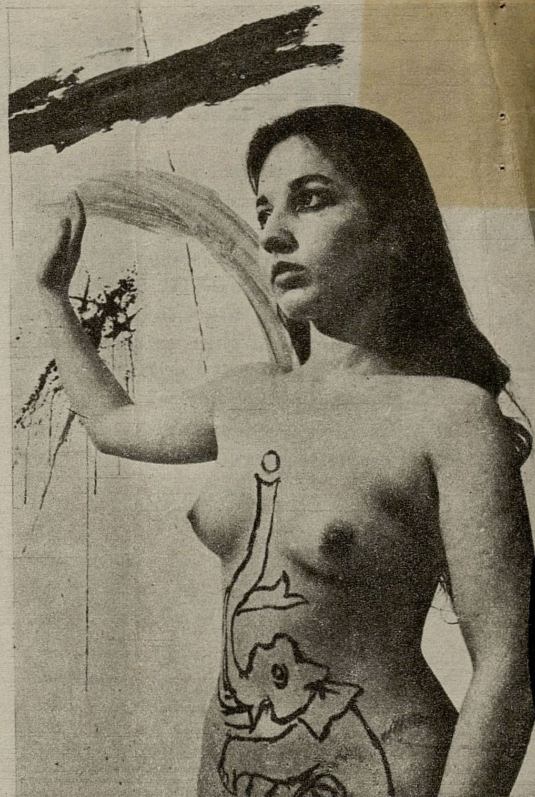
A figure appears in each picture. It is treated more or less abstractly, which fits into the general style. To that extent, the figures are perfectly acceptable to the viewer (at least to me) and it is easy to appreciate the unity of each water-colour. In addition, the artist maintains a certain unity in this entire group of pictures which he exhibited recently, the variations, some of them radical, are still within a broad controlling impulse. There is also a strong continuity of expression which runs through the worst as much as through the best of Husain's works.

Husain's signature is never blurred, though scores of paintings in the last several years fail to satisfy because of an overconfident and often vacuous productivity. Husain obviously believed that anything he dashed off would have the authority of the Master. It was certainly received with great deference by the public and sold well at high prices. Nevertheless, I don't think I am revealing a secret when I say that many knowledgeable artists, art critics and others developed serious reservations about the authenticity of much of Husain's later work.

It is felt, and I share this feeling, that Husain relied rather heavily on the incomplete element in his paintings, that he felt things left out spoke as eloquently in his picture-space as those he put in, with the qualification that hints and suggestions would do duty even for the things put in. A kind of shorthand notation, Husain appeared to believe, was enough.

The three water-colours reproduced on Page 25 are described in the captions, which express the artist's ideas. How far do the images we see do justice to those ideas? Is the cockroach in the first picture really an "emblem of survival"? Can we attach any importance in aesthetic terms to the "man and woman at the base" of *The Fall*, or accept the "masks" near the face of the falling figure as expressive of "Woman's two-sided aspects"? Do we, in truth, *experience* the city in the third picture and believe that the female figure casts its shadow across it?

The answer to all these questions is a resounding "No". Much as I enjoy the freshness and the technical mastery of devices in



THE DREAM. A luscious live model "poses" for the artist in a sense different from the conventional. Husain imprints an image directly on the nude body, adds a dash (literally) of colour on the wall or canvas behind her and photographs the creation for our enjoyment. We hear that the girl is proud to bear a Husain Original on her person.

these pictures, which please the eye, I cannot allow them that fullness of symbolic interpretation which the artist claims.

The two nudes on this page illustrate another aspect of Husain's genius, his willingness to take experimental risks. The captions, which are not Husain's, describe "technique". Serious comment is perhaps out of place. The elephant is snug enough between the lady's belly and breasts, the tiger stretches with no sinister intuitions from shoulder blades to base lines.

Husain is as at home these days with camera as with brush, and duplicates his artistic playfulness on the nudes by photographing quite professionally. If some trimming was needed for one photograph and retouching for the other, Husain cannot be blamed. He does not share our inhibitions. The critics need not be heavy-handed. An artist (or any man, for that matter) may amuse himself as he pleases. If he decides to do so with brush and colour on a nude female figure, that is his business. But when he offers the pictures for publication, I suppose one may ask if they have any specific interest other than that normally offered by the contemplation of female nudity.

I think there is a possibility in the "medium", even if a limited one. Husain's elephant and tiger, though slight, have a curiously informal naivete. The lady's heavy banality is in strong contrast.



THE TIGER RIDES THE LADY. The lady is real, the tiger is Husain's "creation". What he has in mind is an ancient myth. What the viewer has in mind is neither the myth nor the tiger.

of next year and I am suggesting to her to devote herself chiefly to French and German during this period. After that I am vaguely thinking of her joining an Oxford college but nothing is definite. Charlie Andrews, who was here for a few hours last week, encouraged this notion."

In the midst of all these worries and anxieties, Nehru found time to correspond, not only with the great ones, but also with some of his young friends, with whom he seemed to be more at home. One such was Bharati Sarabhai—his letters to her are free and frank and full of warmth. Apparently she was most enthusiastic about his proposed visit to London and wrote eagerly about the various programmes that were being arranged for his reception. Nehru replied:

"But there is another ordeal which I have to face. I am told that there is—horror of horrors—a 'Nehru Reception Committee' in London and I am to be exhibited and carried about from place to place and generally made pretty miserable. And then I must meet and hold solemn converse with many earnest and excellent persons and hollow-eyed politicians (my own kind) and behave in a dignified and leader-like manner. The 'wild plans' seem rather far-off, like so many things that we desire. There will not be many changes, I fancy, and yet the nuances go a long way to change the exterior. But the picture remains a little vague and undefined though it is pleasant to contemplate. Must I also teach myself how to behave as 'heroes' are supposed to, so that I might impress your friends? That is a tiring prospect and, in any case, is not likely to be a successful attempt, for I am only a bogus hero. The heroes of our childhood days stand unmasked when we grow up and we look at them disenchanted and disillusioned."

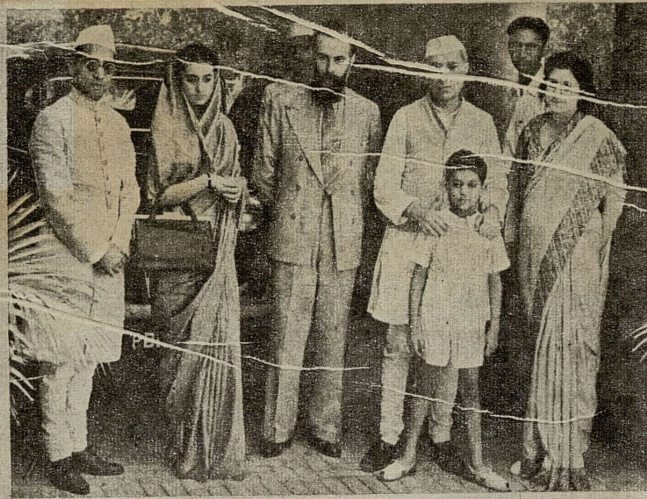
"I Am Greedy About Books"

In another letter (November 21, 1935), Nehru wrote to Bharati about his love of books: "I am greedy about books and I buy them rather extravagantly and many friends pamper me by sending them. So I sat surrounded by this pile, glad of the books and also rather envious of them and of the lore they contained, for I doubted if I would have the time to read many of them."

There are not many in Indian politics who can claim this distinction now; of the few exceptions, the most outstanding is the present Congress President, D. K. Borooah, who is not only a voracious reader and a massive collector of books, but who is also gifted with almost a photographic memory, recording most of what he reads!

Bharati wanted to know from Nehru where he would spend his Christmas vacation. He wrote back (November 25, 1935): "I have no such vacations. Sundays and weekdays, term-time and vacation are all alike to me."

He worked hard and stuck to his schedule. He explained to Indira (November 27, 1935) that "a strict time-table is really very necessary to get work done regularly and efficiently. Otherwise one drifts. One of my virtues (so I think!) is that I work to a time-table."



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A GET TOGETHER AT LAHORE. Nehru and Indira Gandhi seen with Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din and his Begum on their arrival at Lahore. In the centre is Svetoslav Roerich, the well-known Russian artist.

This habit helped Nehru greatly not only in his public activities but also in utilising the long, lonesome hours in jail. He read many books and took copious notes. During his imprisonment in Almora Jail in 1933-34, he wrote his famous *Autobiography*, which earned him instant fame in English literary circles. In Badenweiler he revised the manuscript—in the midst of all his worry and care for Kamala. In a letter to a friend (December 12, 1935), Goshiben Captain, he remarked:

"The task of authorship is like blood to the tiger and I am beginning to think of myself sometimes as a writer. Have I not joined the P.E.N. Club? As you know, one has to give one's profession all over the place—in every hotel, pension, etc. I am hard put as to how to describe myself. Subhas Bose, I found, had taken to describing himself as a writer. Being more modest, I could not quite bring myself to do that. But what am I? In a recent application for a passport, I decided to call my profession 'public affairs', whatever that might mean. I suppose the term is wide enough to cover a multitude of activities, good and evil. And yet, in spite of public exhibitions and the like, I have never ceased to feel a singularly private person."

Lavish Praise From Gurudev

Before his *Autobiography* was out, Kamala had passed away. He dedicated the book to her "who is no more". There was much praise but some criticism. Nehru was touched by Tagore's high commendation. "Need I say," he confessed to the Poet in a personal letter (June 10, 1936), "how proud and grateful I feel to have your commendation in such generous language? Many friends have used words of praise for my book, some have criticised it. But what you have written goes to my heart and cheers and strengthens me."

However, many of his colleagues in the Congress could not appreciate his literary effort. He found even Dr Syed Mahmud, who was a highly educated man, rather unresponsive; in a sarcastic tone he wrote (in a letter dated June 17, 1936): "I presume you received my *Autobiography* from my publishers in London. I wonder if you have had time or have cared to read it. You often ask me questions and love to talk at length. But if you want to know a person, you can do so more easily through his books. I was sorry when you told me that you had not read, as a whole, my *Glimpses of World History*. You could have learnt much about me in it and found much material for

thought, as well as perhaps answers to some questions which trouble you. But I find that in India there is no habit or desire to read or think. We live superficially, on the surface, or rather in the ruts. It is an astounding country."

Friends often used to ask Nehru, during the days of the freedom struggle, when did he find the time to read books. In an article, he answered the question: "It is not easy to make friends with books and live in their charmed world when the horrid business of politics consumes our youth and eats up our days and nights which, under a better dispensation, would be given to happier pursuits. Yet even in this dreary round I try to find a little time at night to read some book that is far removed from politics. I do not succeed always. But most of my reading takes place in railway trains as I journey to and fro across this vast land."

Feeling 'Comfortable' With Books

In these days, Nehru travelled widely but mostly in a Third Class compartment: "Not that I love discomfort or seek it. Nor do I indulge in travelling Third Class because there is any virtue in it or principle involved. The main consideration is one of rupees, annas and pies."

During such travels, Nehru always carried a "box full of books". Often, he took far more books than he could possibly read. "It is a comforting feeling," he observed, "to have books around one even though one may not read."

The present volume contains many such reflections which give us an inner peep into the sensitivities of the man who became the Maker of Modern India. He went through all the travails and sufferings with a smile, with no trace of bitterness in him. He found virtue in every situation. Some people have said that Nehru was a vain man; let them go through some of the personal letters, written by him to some of his intimate friends and published in this volume, and they will realise how wrong they are!

To Nehru life was a continual challenge, a long adventure; what he wrote about Edward Wilson, "that lover of birds and animals and comrade unto death of Scott in the Antarctic regions", applies equally to him:

*I count life just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on...*

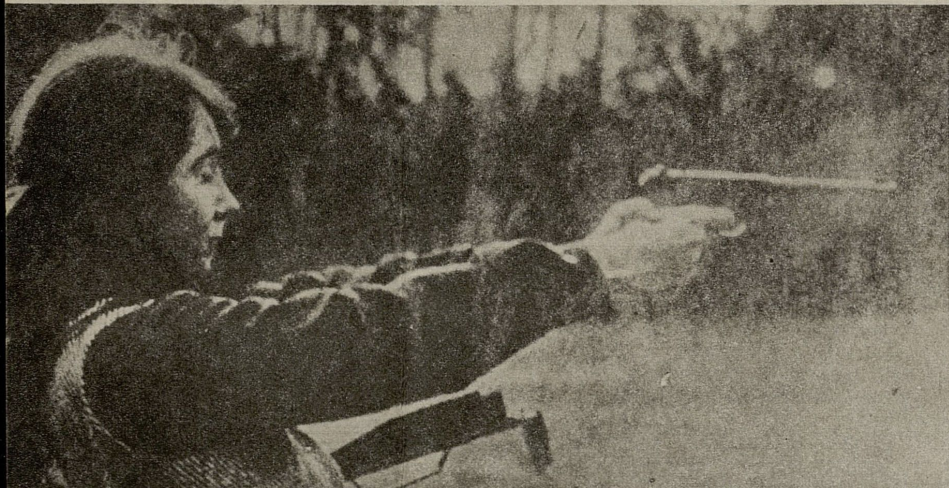
"Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru", Volume Seven; Orient Longman; Rs 70



GUJARAT'S AGONY IS THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONCERN. Mrs Indira Gandhi discussing the flood situation in the State with Chief Minister Babubhai Patel (left) and Mr Madhavji Solanki, President of the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee. Rain and flood waters inundated nearly 600,000 hectares of cultivated land and destroyed crops worth Rs 44 crores in eight districts; 13,165 huts and 5,000 other houses collapsed. The damage: Rs 148.54 lakhs; 19 people lost their lives, 300 head of cattle were washed away and the life of some 2.5 million people in 2,216 villages was disrupted by the deluge. Right: Volunteers of the Sad vichar Parivar distribute food packets to the affected people.

In The News...

HIS HOLINESS BASELIUS PAULOSE calls on Maharashtra's Governor Nawab Ali Yavar Jung. Baselius Paulose arrived in Bombay from Damascus on September 27, after being ordained as the Catholicos of the East by Ignatius Jacob III, the Prince Patriarch of Antioch and all East. He succeeds Baselius Augen I, who has been stripped of all his "authorities, dignities, prerogatives and privileges" because he flouted the "supremacy of the Patriarch over all spiritual matters of the grace". Baselius Augen had declared in 1972 that he was the only spiritual head of the Indian Syrian community. The new Catholicos will be the head of the Jacobite Syrians in India, whose numbers exceed one million.



—Shukhdev Bhachech

FORD UNDER FIRE. A second attempt on the life of American President Gerald Ford (right) was foiled by an alert policeman who deflected the gun pointed at him. The 46-year-old would-be assassin, Sarah Jean Moore, who claims she was an FBI informer until a year ago, fired the shot as the President stepped out of his hotel in San Francisco to greet a crowd of admirers. Ironically, Mrs Moore, who was on the list of potential threats to the President, was "examined and passed" by the Secret Service. Eighteen days earlier, Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, 26, had been caught aiming her pistol at the President (above). "I wasn't going to shoot him," she pleaded. "I just wanted to get some attention for a new trial for Charlie (Manson) and the girls" ... who had been sentenced to jail for life for the murder of actress Sharon Tate and six others in 1969. Both women have been recommended for psychiatric examination before being put on trial.

Svetoslav Roerich with Pandit
Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira in ⁴
May 1942 in Lahore prior to their
visit to the Roerich's home in Kulu.

(Note: Mrs. Indira Gandhi was not
married then.)