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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### NEHRU'S ART OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY WRITING

# Nehru's Art of Autobiography Writing

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Autobiography is an important genre of literature. Great men and thinkers of the world have written autobiographies in order to reveal various facets of their personality. What fascinates a man most is his own self? Sir John Davies has rightly said:

My selfe am center of my circling thought.

Only my selfe I studie, learne and knowe.

Benvenuto Cellani wrote in the very beginning of his autobiography :

All men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence or which may properly resemble excellence, ought, if they are persons of truth and honesty, to describe their life with their own hand.<sup>1</sup>

Autobiography is a powerful medium of self expression which is an innate human faculty. It is a literature of personal revelation and its main interest lies in conscious or unconscious self-revelation or self portrayal by the author. Defining autobiography. Shipley writes :

The autobiography proper is a connected narrative of the author's life with stress laid on introspection or on the significance of his life against a wider background.<sup>2</sup>

In an autobiography great stress is laid on self introspection, sincerity, frankness and integrity. Autobiography according to *Encyclopedia Britannica* is the biography of a person written by himself. Its motivations are various among others self scrutiny for self edification, self justification, as Cardinal Newman's beautifully written *Apologia Pro Sua Vita* Ya nostalgic desire to linger over enchanting memories as Selma Lagerfof's *Marbacka*, confirms the belief that one's experience may be helpful to others. Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*, is an earnest attempt to orient self amid a world of confusion. Similarly, *The Education of Henry Adams*, demonstrates the urge for artistic expression, or it may be a pure commercial desire to capitalize on fame or position...<sup>3</sup> Thus the aim of autobiography has been to give a true and spiritual and religious beliefs or the truth of worldly or material achievements, or the truth of one's profession. It is a vivid recordation of the growth and development of human personality in the existing

milieu. So, it also presents a graphic picture of the time, the autobiographer lived in. An autobiography also comments on crucial incidents and personages the autobiographer comes across.

Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* ranks very high not only in Indian English literature but in the literature of the world. It occupies a conspicuous place with De Quincey's *Confessions of An English Opium Eater*. Rousseau's *Confessions*, Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Sua Vita*. Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*, E. Staurt Bates' *Inside Out*, A.T. Boisen's *The Experiment of the Inner World*, Mahatama Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiment with Truth*, Nirad C. Chaudhari's *The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* and Maulana Azad's *India Wins Freedom*. Ellen Wilkinson once remarked that Nehru's *Autobiography* very much influenced her. She thinks that it is an 'important book' and that he is 'magnificently objective' where he could 'have foamed with wrath'.<sup>4</sup> Madame Chiang Kai-Shek calls it "a great book." To her it is

...the record of pilgrimage of human soul lifted above the turmoil of daily strife into a realm of intellectual and emotional world unspoiled by sentimentality and so humanly moving that it will deserve to be ranked among the great documents of all ages.<sup>5</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru began to write his autobiography in Almora prison in June 1934 and finished it in February 1935. His primary object in writing his autobiography is first to engage himself in some work to relieve the 'long solitudes of gaol life' and 'review past events in India. It is written for his own countrymen and not for a foreign audience. Nehru himself writes in the Preface of the First Edition :

I began the task in a mood of self-questioning and to a large extent, this persisted throughout. I was not writing deliberately for an audience, it was one of my countrymen and countrywomen. For foreign readers I would have probably written differently, all with a different emphasis, stressing certain aspects which have been slurred over in the narrative and passing over lightly certain other aspects which I have treated at some length.<sup>6</sup>

As *An Autobiography* was written in dismal and monotonous surroundings of prison, it is naturally a

bit pessimistic but it is not depressing. It represents what the author felt at the time of writing it. Nehru writes in the post script.

In writing this narrative I have tried to give my moods and thoughts at the time of each event to represent as far as I could my feelings on the occasion. It is difficult to recapture a past mood, and it is not easy to forget subsequent happenings.<sup>7</sup>

Nehru's prime object has been 'to trace my 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 or imagined myself to be.'<sup>8</sup> Mahatma Gandhi in his famous autobiography, *The Story of My Experiment With Truth* describes his experiments with truth and thus reveals his spiritual and moral growth. Both Gandhi and Nehru did not aim at writing a survey of recent Indian history but in their autobiographies historical and political events and great contemporary personalities are vividly described, because they grew up in one of the most turbulent epochs in Indian history. They played vital roles in shaping the course of events and in making modern India. Nehru says in the Preface of the first Edition :

My attempt was to trace, as far as I could, my own mental development and not to write a survey of recent Indian history.<sup>9</sup>

In the Preface to the 1962 edition he wrote :

Essentially an autobiography is a personal document and therefore it reflects personal views and reactions. But the person who wrote it became merged, to the large extent, in the larger movement and therefore represents in a large measure, the feelings of many others.<sup>10</sup>

As an Autobiographer Nehru differs from Nirad C. Chaudhuri who wrote *The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* with the intention of telling :

The theory of the struggle of a civilization with a hostile environment, in which the destiny of British rule in India became necessarily involved. My main intention is thus historical, and since I have written the account with utmost honesty and accuracy of which I am capable, the intention in my mind has become mingled with the aspiration that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history.<sup>11</sup>

Nehru's *An Autobiography* is of momentous importance because it offers insights into the life and work of Nehru, one of the most outstanding figures in modern history. It is a marvellous piece of self introspection. He succeeds in telling his life story with utmost frankness and candidness. It records Nehru's intellectual and political growth and development. Here, Nehru exaggerates nothing. He conceals nothing. He tells us of his dreams and aspirations, of his successes and failures, of his doubts and despairs, of his conflicts and determinations with perfect honesty

and truthfulness. Nehru "explodes any legend concerning himself with admirable candour and analyses the motive springs of his actions with that rare intellectual integrity which belongs to the truly great. And the result is a narrative which is charming, indignant, humorous and poignant by turns, and always human and aspiring".<sup>12</sup> His autobiography contains 'neither mock-modesty nor over-statement'.<sup>13</sup>

Nehru's autobiography opens with a striking sentence : "An only son of prosperous parents is apt to be spoilt, especially so in India."<sup>14</sup> It reminds us of the opening lines of Jan Austen's famous novel *Pride and Prejudice*: It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."<sup>15</sup> The opening sentence imparts fictional character to *An Autobiography*. But it is neither fiction nor fictionalized. It has "ample fictional potential in the progress of the narrative, in the creation of the elements of expectation, surprise and suspense, portrayal of character, presentation of situation and implicit comment on the socio-political scene."<sup>16</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru was left to 'himself'. His two sisters were very much younger than him, and so he grew up and spent his early years as a somewhat lonely child with no companions of his age. He did not even enjoy the companionship of children at school because he was not sent to any school. His cousins were much older than him and they considered him too young for their work or their play. So, 'in the midst of that big family he felt rather lonely and was left a great deal to his own fancies and solitary games'. Loneliness became a part of his personality from the very beginning.

Like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru gives a brief history of his family. His childhood was 'sheltered and uneventful'. His father Motilal Nehru, was the most vividly recollected figure of his childhood. He admired his father tremendously and he seemed to him "the embodiment of strength and courage and cleverness for above all the other men I saw".<sup>17</sup> Nehru vividly narrates his bits of temper. Once he beat Jawaharlal Nehru blue when he took one of his father's pens. His body ached for many days and various creams and ointments were applied to his aching and quivering little body. Motilal Nehru also had a strong sense of humour and an iron will. His laughter became famous in Allahabad. Once he saw his father drinking claret or some other red wine. He was filled with horror and he rushed to his mother 'to tell her that father was drinking blood.'

His mother excessively loved him. He admired her beauty and loved and respected her. Munshi Mubarak Ali, his father's munshi, was Nehru's confidant in childhood. He narrated to him stories of the *Arabian Nights* and accounts of the happenings of 1857. Nehru always treasured his memory as "a dear and precious possession". His mother and aunt told him stories from the old Hindu mythology, the

Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Nehru also participated in both Hindu and Muslim festivals.

Although Nehru was brought up in a deeply religious family, he did not believe in rituals and ceremonies. How fairly and frankly he describes his attitude to religion:

Of religion I had very hazy notions. It seemed to be a woman's affair. Father and my older cousins treated the question humourously and refused to take it seriously. The women of the family indulged in various ceremonies and pujas from time to time and I rather enjoyed them, though I tried to imitate to some extent the casual attitude of the grown up men of the family. Sometimes I accompanied my mother or aunt to the Ganges for a dip, sometimes we visited temples in Allahabad itself or in Benaras or elsewhere, or went to see a sanyasi reputed to be very holy. But all this left little impression on my mind.<sup>18</sup>

Nehru was born in a family in which English values and manners were held in high esteem. But the unjust had unmannerly behaviour of Englishmen towards Indians was as well severely criticized. At the age of eleven he came under the influence of his European tutor Ferdinand T. Brooks, a keen theosophist. He developed in him a love for reading a great many English books. Nehru cultivated a liking for poetry and science. Under Brooks influence he imbibed theosophical phraseology and ideas. From Brooks talks on theosophy, Nehru came to realize the importance of the Hindu religion. He did not appreciate the ritual or ceremonial part but the *Upanishads* and *The Gita* 'seemed very wonderful to him. At the age of thirteen Nehru joined the theosophical society. Mrs. Annie Besant herself performed the ceremony of initiation. He lost touch with it soon after the departure of Brooks.

It was the time when Russo-Japanese War was going on. It filled his mind with nationalistic ideas and he "mused of Indian freedom and Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe" and "dreamt of brave deeds of how sword in hand, I would fight for India and help in freeing her".<sup>19</sup>

The opposite sex fascinated him at the age of fourteen and the sight of pretty girls thrilled him.

At the age of fifteen, Nehru was sent to Harrow and then he went to Cambridge. The news from the motherland-the happenings in Bengal, Punjab and the Maharashtra, the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai and Sardar Ajit Singh, Tilak's fiery speeches and active participation in freedom movement, the love for the Swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods-tremendously stirred him.

At Harrow, he got a prize for good work. It was one of the books of G.M. Trevelyan on Garibaldi who inspired him to participate in India's Freedom Struggle. Nehru writes about Garibaldi's influence:

Visions of similar deeds in India came before me, of a gallant fight for freedom and in my mind India and Italy got strangely mixed together.<sup>20</sup>

Harrow seemed to him a small and restricted place for such ideas and after two years stay at Harrow, he joined Trinity College, Cambridge. He took the Natural Sciences Tripos, his subjects being chemistry, geology and botany. A youth of varied intellectual interests. Nehru read literature politics and economics. Shaw and Lowes Dickinson also influenced him.

At this time his general attitude to life was a vague kind of cyrenaicism which he imbibed due to influence of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Among the books that influenced him politically was Meredith Townsend's famous book *Asia and Europe*. He joined the 'Majlis' a society, formed by Indians at Cambridge but being shy and diffident he could not speak there and also in the College Debating Society. Nehru came in contact with eminent Indians-Bepin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai, G.K. Gokhle and A.M. Khwaja. He also met Har Dayal, an illustrious Indian.

At Cambridge Nehru got the opportunity to discuss sex with his friends and read Ivan Block and Havelock Ellis. He did not attach an idea of sin or religious inhibition to it. It was amoral, neither moral nor immoral. His knowledge about sex continued to be theoretical for many years after he had left Cambridge.

Nehru remained indecisive about his future career. The news of political unrest in India and his desire to participate in it negated the idea of joining the civil service. He acceded to his father's wishes and joined the legal profession. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru began to ape the English gentleman:

I was merely trying to ape to some extent the prosperous but somewhat empty-headed Englishman about town.<sup>21</sup>

His English years developed in him a political outlook. The suffragette movement, Shaw and the Fabian Society acquainted him with socialism. His visit to Ireland in 1910 brought him under the spell of the Irish patriotic movement.



His father, Pandit Motilal Nehru, had started taking part in national politics. He disapproved rebellious nationalism and supported the moderates.

In the summer of 1912, Nehru was called to the Bar, and in the autumn of that year he returned to India finally after a stay of over seven years in England. On return home he found that politically India was very dull.

Jawaharlal Nehru shows great and minute observation and objectivity in describing the political condition of India. He joined the Allahabad High Court as a lawyer. He felt restless in his surroundings and he found himself quite unsuitable for the legal profession.

Gokhale's Servants of India Society, attracted him. Political life in India grew anew when Tilak came out of prison. Nehru joined Home Rule League started by Tilak and Annie Besant and attended the sessions of the Congress. Motilal Nehru, a man of strong character and powerful will, did not like too much submission to authority and he gradually shifted from the orthodox moderate position. In the Congress session of 1916, the Congress and the Muslim League joined hands but in 1918 the Muslim League opted out of Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru too did not appreciate the moderate leaders. He came in close contact with great leaders and his father greatly influenced him in the early formative period of his life.

Nehru's marriage took place in 1916 in the city of Delhi. The day was the festival of Vasant Panchmi. After his marriage, he went to Kashmir where the higher valleys and mountains fascinated him.

The emergence of Mahatama Gandhi on Indian Political scene brought about a great change. Nehru saw the Mahatama for the first time in the annual conference of the Indian National Congress held at Lucknow in 1916. Nehru was highly impressed by Mahatama Gandhi's Civil Disobedience programme against the Rowlatt Act. He wanted to join it and this precipitated a tussle between the father and the son. Both underwent a great tension and conflict. Nehru, once and for all, decided to join the non-cooperation movement:

I became wholly absorbed and wrapt in the movement, and large number of other people did likewise. I gave up all my other associations and contacts, old friends, books, even newspapers, except in so far they dealt with the work in hand.<sup>22</sup>

Nehru writes about his growing popularity with the masses who always held him in high esteem. Although he was one with the crowd, he always kept himself away from it:

I took to the crowd and the crowd took to me and yet I never lost myself in it, always I felt apart from it.<sup>23</sup>

Due to his active participation in Civil Disobedience, Nehru was arrested. The whole of India was under the spell of the Mahatama whose doctrine of *Ahimsa* left an ineffaceable mark on Nehru. The suspension of civil resistance in 1922 due to violence in Chauri-Chaura dismayed Nehru and many Congressmen. After three months' imprisonment, he was released. He met Gandhiji in Sabarmati prison. He was again arrested and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment.

Nehru got more and more involved in freedom movement. He gives a comprehensive picture of the freedom movements and his active participation in it. He was so much engrossed in the freedom movement that it is difficult to distinguish between Nehru, the man and Nehru, the freedom fighter. He played a pivotal role in Indian National Congress. For many years he remained General Secretary of Congress and in 1929 at the age of forty, he was elected its President for the first time. His growing participation in the freedom movement, his selfless service and his sympathy for the poor and the under dog endeared him to the people. He writes:

Yet there they were, these people looking up with shining eyes full of affection, with generations of poverty and suffering behind them, and still pouring out their gratitude and love and asking for little in return, except fellow feeling and sympathy. It was impossible not to feel humbled and awed by this abundance of affection and devotion.<sup>24</sup>

Intelligentsia appreciated him; young men and women admired him as a hero, and a halo of romance seemed to surround him in their eyes. All these effusions of applause could not satisfy him and he felt a sharp and pointed conflict in his conscience. How poignantly Nehru reveals his inner conflict:

My real conflict lay within me, a conflict of ideas, desires and loyalties of subconscious depths struggling with outer circumstances of an inner hunger unsatisfied. I became a battleground, where various forces struggled for mastery. I sought an escape form this: I tried to find harmony and equilibrium, and in this attempt, I rushed into action. That gave me some peace. Outer conflict relieved the strain of the inner struggle.<sup>25</sup>

The celebration of Independence Day on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1930, the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Salt Satyagrah and the Dandi March are some memorable landmarks which have been graphically described in Nehru's *Autobiography*.

Pandit Motilal Nehru had been ailing for sometime. He continued to participate in the struggle for freedom. He had a premonition of his death and he said to the Mahatama : "I am going soon, Mahatamaji, and I shall not be here to see *Swarajya* but I know that I would have won it and will soon have it." On February 6, 1931 Pandit Motilal Nehru

breathed his last. Nehru delineates a vivid pen portrait of his ailing father:

And though he could not speak much, sometimes he would say a few words, and even then his old humour did not leave him. There he sat like an old lion mortally wounded and with his physical strength almost gone, but still very leonine and kingly.<sup>26</sup>

Gandhi-Irwin pact was accepted by the Congress Working Committee. The provisional settlement with the Viceroy was accepted and Civil Disobedience Movement and no tax campaign were suspended. Mahatma Gandhi went to London to attend the Round Table Conference. During his absence the repression against the peasants in U.P. increased and the U.P. Congress tried its best to negotiate with the government, but the negotiations were not of much use. In Bengal and the Frontier Province the situation worsened. The leaders anxiously awaited the arrival of Gandhiji from London. Nehru and many national leaders had been arrested before Mahatma Gandhi's arrival to India. The Congress and all allied organizations were declared illegal. Nehru's ailing wife, Kamala, was in Bombay but his mother and sisters plunged into the Movement.

With the coming of the new Viceroy in 1932 the political frame in India was in turmoil. Sir Samuel Hoarse, the secretary of state for India ridiculing the congress movement said: "Though the dogs bark, the caravan moves on." The frenzy of communal riots seized the nation. Nehru was shifted from Bareilly jail to Dehradun jail.

Mahatma Gandhi thought that India's freedom would remain a distant dream without the abolition of untouchability and he made nationwide efforts to eradicate this great evil.

In 1933 the language problem upset the country. Nehru thought that it could be solved only by adopting Hindustani as national language. On February 11, 1934 he was arrested and taken to Alipur jail. In jail he was deeply pained by Mahatma Gandhi's decision to suspend Civil Disobedience. He did not agree with Gandhiji on many fundamental issues.

Nehru was released only for eleven days to look after his wife's illness. He often felt that her days were numbered. He was confined first to Naini jail and then to Almora jail. Nehru stopped writing his autobiography, which he called "egotistical narrative of my adventures through life", on February 14, 1935.

Nehru's autobiography is a record both of the national life and of his own life through the troubled years. But his outlook on life is neither depressing nor pessimistic. It is exalting and bespeaks of his courage and determination. He says:

To me these days have brought one rich gift, among many others. More and more I have looked upon life as an adventure of absorbing interest, where there is so much to learn, so much to do. I have continually had a feeling of growing up, and that feeling is still with me and gives a zest to my activities as well as to the reading of books, and generally makes life worthwhile.<sup>27</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru refers to his family – to his parents, sisters, wife and daughter with deep feeling of love and attachment. He recapitulates with great delicacy and tenderness the eighteen years of his married life when Kamala was seriously ill, with little hope of recovery. Nehru regretfully confesses that his political activities had forced him to neglect her. Out of eighteen years of married life, he spent long years in prison and Kamala in hospitals and sanatoria. But Nehru carefully avoids sentimentality and he maintains restraint and objectivity. For example, once Kamala was seriously ill and he was in gaol, the government proposed that if he gave an assurance to abstain from political activities till the rest of his jail term, he would be released to attend on her. A man of principles, Nehru refused to give any assurance.

Nehru, despite his reverence for Mahatma Gandhi, frankly and clearly reveals his fundamental differences with him. He could not imagine India without Mahatma Gandhi. He taught Nehru restraint and fearlessness. Nehru differed from him on many issues. He differed with Gandhi on economic and political issues. But these differences did not diminish his reverence for the Mahatma.

Nehru frankly admits his partiality for England because he got his education and intellectual nourishment there. He opposed British rule in India as a matter of principle. His formative years at Cambridge coincide with the rise of liberalism in England. Between Fascism and Communism, he sympathized with the latter. He was fascinated by Marx and was inclined towards a socialist philosophy.

Nehru is at his best while writing about his experiences in jail. He spent several years of his life in gaols. The fact that he wrote his autobiography in jail has "set the tone of the book contemplative and analytical. In order to relieve himself of the unending boredom and monotony of writing. Nehru most acutely felt the absence of workmen's voice and children's laughter. Once in the Lucknow District Gaol, he suddenly realized that he had not heard a dog bark for many months. Nehru describes natural scenes as the clouds scudding across the sky or a distant view of the Himalayas from the Dehradun jail. Physical exercise and fairly hard mental work kept him fit. He always keenly awaited interview days which "were the red letter days in gaol. How one longed for them and waited for them and counted the days."<sup>28</sup> But after the interview, there was "a sense of

emptiness and loneliness.”<sup>29</sup> Long terms of imprisonment fostered the spirit of introspection in Jawaharlal Nehru. He says:

Perhaps suffering is necessary for clear thought, but excess of it may cloud the brain. Gaol encourages introspection, and my long years in prison have forced me to look more and more within myself. I was not by nature an introvert, but prison life, like strong coffee or strychnine, leads to introversion.<sup>30</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru has not only dispassionately described political situation and events of India, he has also presented vivid pen-portraits of great personalities of his time. His father, as we have seen, has been graphically delineated. The most attractive vivid and impressive portrait is of Mahatma Gandhi. Nehru, political mentor and guide:

People who do not know Gandhiji personally and have only read his writings are apt to think that he is a priestly type, extremely puritanical, long-faced. Calvinistic and kill-joy, something like the “priests in black gowns walking their rounds.” But his writings do him an injustice: he is far greater than what he writes, and it is not quite fair to quote what he has written and criticize it. He is the very opposite of the Calvinistic priestly type. His smile is delightful, his laughter infectious, and he radiates light heartedness. There is something childlike about him, which is full of charm. When he enters a room he brings a breath of fresh air with him which lightens the atmosphere.<sup>31</sup>

The portrait of Raja Mahendra Pratap whom Nehru met in Switzerland recurs in memory:

His composite attire suitable on the highlands of Tibet or in the Siberian plains, his Russian books, his numerous large pockets all bunging with photographs and papers, innumerable documents and pictures, because he had lost a box containing valuable papers and so he considered it safer to carry his papers on his person. He was still a delightful humorist, living completely in the air and was the founder of “Happiness society” whose motto was “Be happy” and which met with success in Latvia.<sup>32</sup>

Nehru employs bitter sarcasm to expose the Moderates led by Srinivas Sastri, but he is capable of boundless humanism even to his political adversary like M.N. Roy whose intellectual capacity Nehru admired. Nehru cared for him because “he seemed such a lonely figure, deserted by everybody. The British Government was naturally after him ; nationalist India was not interested in him, and those who called themselves communists condemned him as a traitor to the cause.”<sup>33</sup> Other eminent freedom fighters, portrayed in *An Autobiography*, are Maulana Mohamad Ali, Charles F. Andrews, Maulana Azad, C.R. Das, M.A. Jinnah, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Pandit Madanmohan Malviya, Sarojini Naidu and R.N. Tagore.

*An Autobiography* reveals Nehru's love for nature and his artistic quality to depict various moods of nature and landscape in picturesque and sensuous terms. While expressing his feelings for future, he rises to “heights of poetic prose his academic training in botany left the aesthetic component untouched. Nature soothes him and exhilarates and the experience is first hand, hence the evocation is original, not bookish. Nature pulsates with life in these pages and enlivens and relieves the monotony of political and social upheaval.”<sup>34</sup> He is at the best in picturing mountainscape, for example:

Higher and higher we went: the gorges deepened: the peaks lost themselves in the clouds: the vegetation changed till the firs and pines covered the hillsides. A turn of the road would bring to our eyes suddenly a new expanse of hills and valleys with a little river gurgling in the depths below.<sup>35</sup>

Nehru believes that nature pulsates with life and cools “the fever in the brain, and the petty conflicts and intrigues, the lusts and falsehoods of the cities and plains and the cities seemed trivial before their eternal ways”.<sup>36</sup> Such picturesque and poetic descriptions which bring to light Nehru's poetic and emotional nature and his infinite capacity of minute observation and plentiful in his autobiography.

Nehru's style in his autobiography is simple, lucid, easy, graceful, lyrical and eloquent. It is a true expression of his personality. He copiously quotes from English poets. He shows incredible detachment when summons come to him to go to prison and the following lines from *Hamlet* come to his lips:

Absent thee from felicity a while

And for a season draw thy breath in sorrow.

He calls liberal leaders “the Hamlets of Indian politics”, “sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought”, ever doubting, hesitating and irresolute :

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite !

That ever I was born to set it right.

(*Hamlet*)

To express a sordid state he quotes from T.S. Eliot

This is the way the world ends,

Not with a bang, but with a whimper.

Commenting on appropriateness of quotations to situations and mental states in Nehru's autobiography, C.D. Narsimhaiah says,

...but Nehru knew the poet, the poems, the lines and occasion which would suit them so well that his own

experience and the poet's expression fuse with such authenticity that they hardly sound like a quotation.<sup>37</sup>

Nehru's attempt to express Indian sensibility through foreign language is laudable.

Nehru's autobiography is a 'great book' through which runs a 'deep current of humanity'. It is the greatest of all his writings. It gives a comprehensive picture of the political life of the country but his personal life is intimately blended with the life of the nation. Nehru emerges as a brave, heroic and adventurous character, who, in spite of a powerful undercurrent of melancholy and feeling of isolation in his personality, remained calm and unperturbed and wholly devoted to the cause of nation building. His autobiography holds out the message of heroic courage and determination, patriotism and self sacrifice to his countrymen. Mahadev Desai said that "the study of these pages has a tonic and educative and ennobling quality which no student of our history can afford to miss."<sup>38</sup> Commenting on its general interest, Nehru wrote:

But it may still be of general interest to many people in India because it deals with a period of our national struggle in which many of us were personally involved.<sup>39</sup>

*An Autobiography* is a timeless book in which "Nehru finds scope for the excellent exercise of almost every literary gift. Above all, here is an individual who is absorbed in his subject matter and the vision of a whole people. Such an individual is found discovering himself in the *Autobiography* : that is the secret of the interest which the book holds for us. He has so many ways to express himself now and after so many years of tension it was so very worth expressing."<sup>40</sup>

(Pannikar)

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34. *Moving Frontiers of English Studies in India*, p. 15.
35. *An Autobiography*, p. 568.
36. *Ibid*, p. 569.
37. *Moving Frontiers of English Studies in India*, p. 18.
38. Quoted from C.D. Narasimhaiah : *Nehru : A Study of His Writings and Speeches*, p. 39.
39. Preface to the 1962 Edition of *An Autobiography*.
40. *Nehru : A Study of His Writings and Speeches*, p. 62.