

Nehru *speaks*

Among the world's statesmen and thinkers Jawaharlal Nehru is a towering figure. As Prime Minister of India, as successor to Gandhi in the affection of the masses of that sub-continent, as a spokesman for much of the Orient, and as a citizen of the world, he is one of the remarkable personalities of our day.

Born into a distinguished and wealthy family of Kashmiri Brahmans in 1889, he acquired most of his early education from English tutors. At 15 he went to England and studied at Harrow and Cambridge, later taking his law training in London.

Returning to India, he soon identified himself with the independence movement. His sheltered youth and years abroad made it difficult to adjust to the poverty, disease, and ignorance he saw on his extensive travels throughout India. But the misery of his compatriots deepened his determination to bring economic as well as political freedom to India.

The price he paid for his ideals was high. Over and over again he was arrested, spending 16 years all told in prison. But his commitment to the cause of Indian independence was not shaken. "In the midst of strife, and while we ourselves encouraged that strife, we had a sense of inner peace."

Throughout the early years he was aided by his beautiful, devoted, and gifted wife, Kamala, and her death in 1936 was a great blow to him. His friendship with Gandhi was another source of strength to him in those trying times.

When India gained her independence on August 14, 1947, Nehru became Prime Minister. Today he speaks not only to his people, but to the entire world.

ON HIS LIFE . . .

"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 worth while."

"I have been one of a mass, moving with it, swaying it occasionally, being influenced by it; and yet, like the other units, an individual, apart from the others, living my separate life in the heart of the crowd."

"I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. Perhaps my thoughts and approach to life are more akin to what is called Western than Eastern, but India clings to me, as she does to all her children, in innumerable ways; and behind me lie, somewhere in the subconscious, racial memories of a hundred, or whatever the number may be, generations of Brahmans. I cannot get rid of either that past inheritance or my recent acquisitions. They are both part of me, and, though they help me in both the East and the West, they also create in me a feeling of spiritual loneliness not only in public activities but in life itself. I am a stranger and alien in the West. I cannot be of it. But in my own country also, sometimes, I have an exile's feeling."

"If I were given the chance to go through life again, with my present knowledge and experience added, I would no doubt try to make many changes in my personal life; . . . but my major decisions in public affairs would remain untouched. I could not vary them, for they were stronger than myself, and a force beyond my control drove me to them."

ON HIS PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE . . .

"The world as it is constituted today is in a stage of revolutionary change so that you just cannot help trying to change yourself; otherwise you get into trouble."

"The real problems for me remain problems of individual and social life, of harmonious living, of a proper balancing of an individual's inner and outer life, of an adjustment of the relations between individuals and between groups, of a continuous becoming something better and higher, of social development, of the ceaseless adventure of man."

"Religion as I saw it practiced and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs. . . . Yet it was obvious that religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and that the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religion."

"It is therefore with the temper and approach of science, allied to philosophy, and with reverence for all that lies beyond, that we must face life. Thus we may develop an integral vision of life which embraces in its wide scope the past and the present, with all their heights and depths, and look with serenity towards the future. . . . While we advance on the external plane, we have also to win peace with ourselves and between ourselves and our environment, a peace which brings satisfaction not only to our physical and material needs but also to our inner imaginative urges and adventurous spirit. . ."

"I wish all of us would give up the idea of improving others, and improve ourselves instead."

ON INDIA YESTERDAY . . .

"No country except China can trace back its language and literature, its religious beliefs and rites, its dramatic and social customs through an uninterrupted development of more than 3,000 years."

"The conception of the Buddha, . . . seems to symbolize the whole spirit of Indian thought, or at least one vital aspect of it. Seated on the lotus flower, calm and impassive, above passion and desire, beyond the storm and strife of this world, he seems, out of reach, unattainable. Yet again we look and behind those still, unmoving features there is a passion and an emotion, strange and more powerful than the passions and emotions that we have known. His eyes are closed, but some power of the spirit looks out of them and a vital energy fills the frame."

"India's strength has been twofold; her own innate culture which flowered through the ages, and her capacity to draw from other sources and thus add to her own. She was far too strong to be submerged by outside streams, and she was too wise to isolate herself from them, and so there is a continuing synthesis in India's history."

ON GANDHI . . .

"And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths; like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India. . . . The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth, and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view."

ON INDIA TODAY . . .

"We aim at a strong, free, and democratic India where every citizen has an equal place and full opportunity of growth and service, where present-day inequalities in wealth and status have ceased to be, where our vital impulses are directed to creative and co-operative endeavor. In such an India communalism, separatism, isolation, untouchability, bigotry, and exploitation of man by man has no place, and while religion is free, it is not allowed to interfere with the political and economic aspects of a nation's life."

"It can hardly be challenged that, in the context of the modern world, no country can be politically and economically independent, even within the framework of international inter-dependence, unless it is highly industrialized and has developed power resources to the utmost. Nor can it achieve or maintain high standards of living and liquidate poverty without the aid of modern technology in almost every sphere of life. An industrially backward country will continue to upset the world equilibrium and encourage the aggressive tendencies of more developed countries. Even if it retains its political independence, this will be nominal only, and economic control will tend to pass to others."

"The major problem of India today is that of the land—of rural poverty and unemployment and a thoroughly out-of-date land system."

"The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity."

"We talk of the production of many things, but perhaps the most important thing for a nation is to produce men and women, good and true."

ON REVOLUTION . . .

"For a person to dabble in revolutionary methods, he must be prepared to lose everything he possesses."

"In considering a method for changing the existing order we have to weigh the costs of it in material as well as spiritual terms. We cannot afford to be too shortsighted. We have to see how far it helps ultimately in the development of human happiness and human progress, material and spiritual. But we have always to bear in mind the terrible costs of not changing the existing order, of carrying on as we do today with our enormous burden of frustrated and distorted lives, starvation and misery, and spiritual and moral degradation."

ON SOCIALISM . . .

"I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in socialism, and, when I use this word, I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense. Socialism is, however, something more than an economic doctrine; it is a philosophy of life, and as such also it appeals to me. I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian states system. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of co-operative service. It means ultimately a change in our instincts and habits and desires. In short, it means a new civilization, radically different from the present capitalist order."

ON WORLD COMMUNITY . . .

"There really seems no alternative between world conquest and world association; there is no choice of a middle course."

"The world of today hangs together, and it will survive or perish together. Only a world order of free nations co-operating together for the common good, and based on social justice, can solve the problems that overwhelm us. It is fantastic to imagine that India or China can be excluded from this order or can be given a subordinate place."

" . . . Europe can no longer be the center of the world politically speaking or exercise that influence over other parts of the world which it had in the past. From that point of view, Europe belongs to the past, and the center of world history . . . shifts elsewhere."

"The Pacific is likely to take the place of the Atlantic in the future as a nerve center of the world."

"Obviously there are large regions of the world which have suffered from this question of racial inequality. We also feel that there is no part of the world where it can be tolerated in the future."

"We know a great deal more about one another than we used to do. Nevertheless, I have a feeling that our knowledge . . . is often extraordinarily superficial, and we, living in our grooves, big or small, seem to imagine, each country seems to imagine, that we are more or less the center of the world, and the rest is on the fringe, that our way of living is the right way of living and other people's way of living is either a bad way or a mad way, or just some kind of backward way."

ON THE FUTURE . . .

"The future is dark, uncertain. But we can see part of the way leading to it and can tread with firm steps, remembering that nothing that can happen is likely to overcome the spirit of man which has survived so many perils; remembering also that life, for all its ills, has joy and beauty. . . ."

"It is folly to be merely optimistic and not to see facts as they are. But it is at least as great a folly to be pessimistic and imagine all kinds of evil happenings overtaking us."

"Perhaps we are living in one of the great ages of mankind and have to pay the price for that privilege. The great ages have been full of conflict and instability, of an attempt to change over from the old to something new. There is no permanent stability or security or changelessness; if there were, life itself would cease. At the most we can seek a relative stability and a moving equilibrium."

"But the past does not exhaust our duty or obligation. We owe a duty to the future also, and perhaps that obligation is greater than the one we owe to the past. For the past is past and done with, we cannot change it; the future is yet to come, and perhaps we may be able to shape it a little."

Grateful acknowledgment is made to The John Day Company for permission to quote from Nehru's books—"The Discovery of India", "Glimpses of World History", "Independence and After", "Nehru on Gandhi", and "Visit to America."

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