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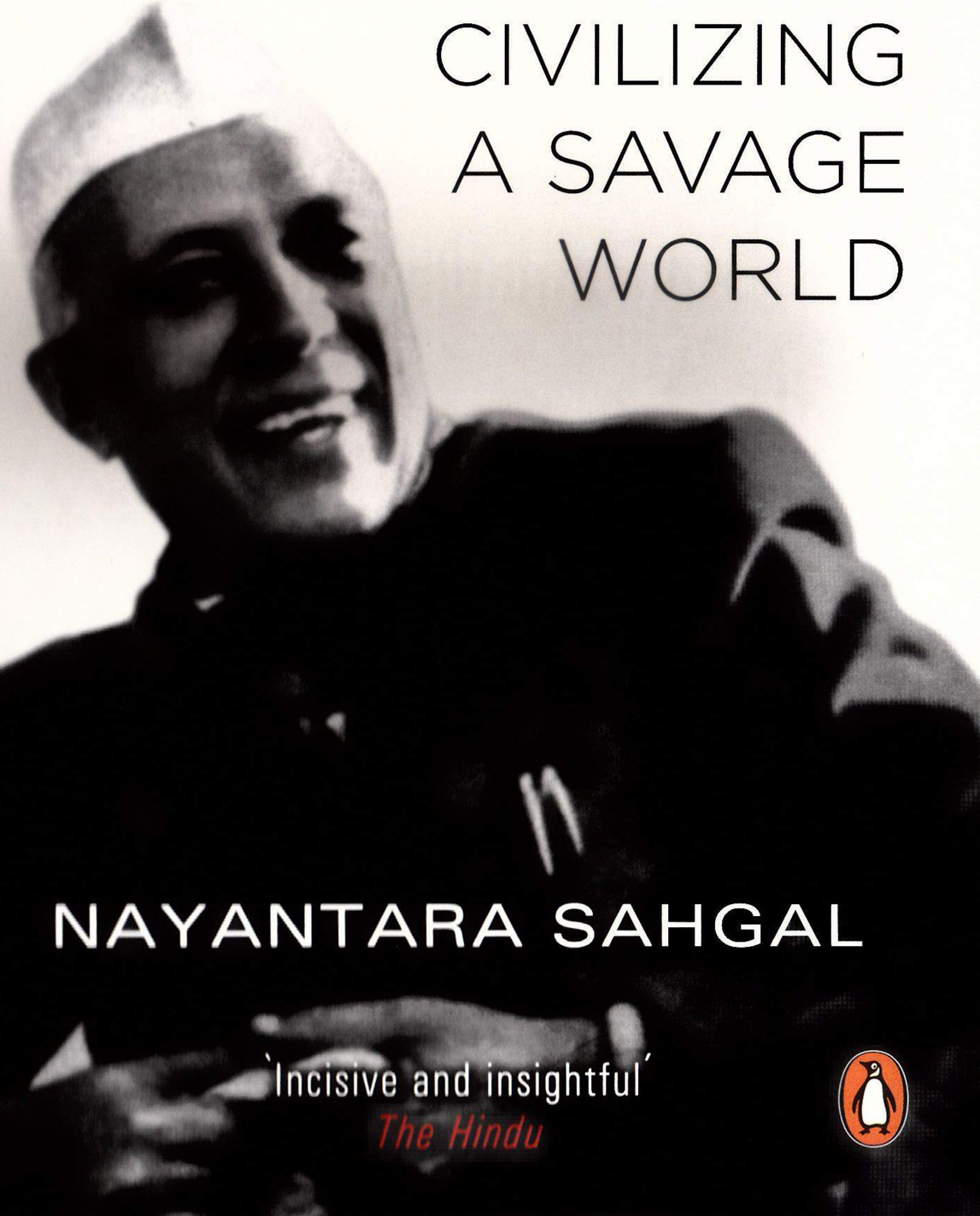
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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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CIVILIZING A SAVAGE WORLD



NAYANTARA SAHGAL

'Incisive and insightful'
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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Nayantara Sahgal is the author of nine novels, a short story collection, eight non-fiction works, and wide-ranging literary and political commentary. She has received the Sinclair Prize, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Sahitya Akademi Award, which she returned in 2015. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and has held fellowships in the United States at the Bunting Institute, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the National Humanities Center.

During the 1980s, she was the vice president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, and in 1990 and 1991, she served as chair (Eurasia) on the jury of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. In 1997, she was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Leeds. A resident of Dehra Dun, she has been awarded the Doon Ratna, and has also received the Distinguished Alumna Award from Wellesley College, Massachusetts, in 2003, and from Woodstock School, Mussoorie, in 2004.

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CIVILIZING A SAVAGE WORLD

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In memory of Jawaharlal Nehru

For

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

who speaks the same language

and

GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

for the language he speaks

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

TO BEGIN WITH, I am not a historian or an academic. This extended essay goes by no method and follows no rules of selection or sequence. I have written as I pleased and intruded on the scene with my own comments, reflections and conclusions. The subjects I have chosen were Jawaharlal Nehru's major concerns and which translated into policies at home and abroad, were a realist's response to the world of his time. The ground that world had rested on shifted, the assumptions it had taken for granted were shaken. Chief among these was the assumption that emerging nations must choose sides and take part in the Cold War.

The better part of Nehru's life was lived in the imperial era when countries with names and ancient civilizations of their own were known as Europe's 'possessions' and hung with European ownership titles: British India, Dutch East Indies, French Indo-China, German East Africa. His working life, until India gained independence, was spent in revolt against British rule and his years as Prime Minister, dealing with the fallout of untidily unravelling empires when two new dangerously armed Powers were competing for the space that empires had occupied. In this threatening scenario born out of the Second World War, his foreign policy refused alignment with either power. It seemed to Nehru a delusion that 'peace' could be stretched like a thin and ever more threadbare fabric over gargantuan preparations for war. Non-alignment stepped aside from this delusion to reduce tensions, enlarge the prospect of peace and allow for an independent, unsupervised judgement of world events and issues. The movement it became made way for Asians and

Africans to take their place in world affairs.

In Asia, Kashmir was an early example of Cold War-driven strategy which impeded settlement and solution. I have left Kashmir out of this book because it needs one to itself.

Peace was Nehru's prime objective, as a fundamental human need and as the condition for lifting India out of colonial stagnation and building a modern nation. Equally, he was pledged to the freedom of Asia and Africa and the removal of all colonial domination. He took an active part in international affairs primarily in pursuit of these objectives. That India's voice carried weight and was heard with respect in world councils was a unique tribute to a country without economic or military power. At home, his commitment to socialism within a democracy founded on universal suffrage was an enterprise without precedent. The direction he gave to domestic and foreign affairs was the direct outcome of his vision of the kind of world he wanted to see. He pursued it, with or without adequate support, from the establishment at home (as in his push for a planned economy) or from governments abroad (as in his championship of communist China's right to be seated at the United Nations). Going it alone when necessary was a matter of conviction and a feature of his functioning.

TO END WITH, I welcome this new edition at a time when Jawaharlal Nehru's legacy of a secular democratic India that celebrated its diversity and its many-faceted heritage is being systematically demolished. In this angry new climate, freedom of expression, whether in literature, history or the arts, or simply the right of all Indians to live, eat and worship as they choose, is under brutal and repeated attack. Writers have been shot dead for advocating reason and rejecting superstition. A helpless blacksmith has been lynched and

truck drivers murdered in the prevailing paranoia about beef. Myths and legends are substituting for the scientific temper built under Nehru's leadership. To remain silent in such a situation is not an option.

I am glad I wrote this book before the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) was taken over by Hindutva ideologues, who are committed to erasing his name and contribution from India's modern history. The title which is an apt description of Nehru's foreign policy was inspired by Ramachandra Guha's wonderfully titled book *Savaging the Civilized*.

The political–personal mix in my narrative has had the ballast of my mother Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's papers. She was present at the birth of India's foreign policy and served as ambassador in three key world capitals, Moscow, Washington and London, during the first fourteen years after Independence. To her, the Prime Minister, who was also her brother, wrote on 13 February 1957: 'So far as you are concerned, you should know that apart from my deep affection for you, I have a very high opinion of your capacity and ability, to that of course we must add the great value of your personality . . . It is a quality which not many persons possess—I think you and I possess it—that is, to speak in straight and firm language and yet not be personally disliked.'[1]

I gratefully acknowledge permission from Mrs Sonia Gandhi to access the Post-1947 Nehru Papers. Dr Mridula Mukherjee, who was Director of the NMML at the time of writing, warmly welcomed my project and gave me all the assistance I needed. I owe very special thanks to Deepa Bhatnagar for her invaluable help with the footnotes.

I am indebted to my son, Ranjit Sahgal, for reviving the pictures I have used in this book, some from my family

albums and some with permission from the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund; and to my daughter Nonika Sahgal for reading everything I write.

To my daughter Gita Sahgal, who is my most valued critic, I am indebted for her many keen insights and suggestions, and for the highways and byways of stimulating conversation we have shared over my chapters.

My deepest debt is to Jawaharlal Nehru who was part of my life and whose India has shaped my imagination.

Dehra Dun
July 2016

I

THE FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

My family belonged to the bourgeoisie spawned by British rule. Wealth and stability don't make for a life at the barricades, so drama must have been their fate. It started with my grandfather, Motilal Nehru, whose early success as a barrister in Allahabad enabled him in 1900 to buy a mansion on spacious grounds that he named Anand Bhawan. He engaged an English-Irish tutor recommended by Annie Besant to prepare his son Jawaharlal for Harrow, and later, an English governess for his daughters. He didn't send his laundry to Paris as rumoured, but on a trip to Europe in 1905, he did invite all the children at the hotel he was staying in at Baden-Baden to his daughter Sarup's fifth birthday party. His hospitality was famous and the patriarchal pride and bounty he lavished on his extended family were princely even by the standards of this hallowed Indian institution.

He loved a good fight, from a wrestling bout to intellectual combat, and was mildly contemptuous of the elite assembly known as the Indian National Congress that met once a year at sessions festooned with oratory to petition the sovereign power for greater Indian participation in India's civil and military services, as well as elbow room for Indian capital in an economy run for British profit. Mainstream politics went no further and Motilal must have found it a tame substitute for action.

A fierier patriotism had sent a string of Indian revolutionaries to the gallows, life imprisonment, death in prison, and agitation abroad. Moderate or extreme, the Indian

national consciousness smarted under an imperial language and outlook of insult and exclusion: 'the subject races' label, the 'Gunga Din' image and the all-pervading presence of a white superiority so secure that it did not need the prop of official apartheid. Nevertheless, railway carriages, station retiring rooms, clubs and park benches reserved 'For Europeans Only' testified to a sense of *herrenvolk* and master race.

The lawyers, professors and entrepreneurs of the Congress, which was a 'loyal opposition' to Her (and later His) Majesty's government, depended on their dignified petitions to bring out the best in the British. They believed this buried 'best' would respond and grant India the same self-government and equal status in the empire enjoyed by the white dominions. Trustfully, they rallied to the empire's defence in Europe's Great War. It was after the war, when the Rowlatt Act provided for arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without trial to ensure business as usual and the slaughter at Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April when General Dyer's troops opened fire on a crowd of thousands celebrating the spring festival, that the political agenda abruptly changed. Mahatma Gandhi, fresh out of South Africa, introduced the non-violent technique called satyagraha he had practised there as a strategy for India and took over the leadership of the Congress. Those who found civil disobedience, arrest and imprisonment too daunting, moved away from the action. Others, including my family, plunged into it. Here it was that national and family history met—not quite as they must have done in many families whose father or son joined the struggle, loyally supported by those who stayed outside it. In mine, the entire family—grandparents, parents, uncle and aunts, and also a servant—ended its old life and started a new one in thrall to a country whose destiny it now took to be its own. The connection became rooted, emotional, permanent. It brought

about a total and austere transformation in the family's lifestyle and life's goals.

Point four of Gandhi's strategy called on lawyers to give up their practice. Father, son Jawaharlal and the Maharashtrian son-in-law, who was my father Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, complied. Point nine required men and women 'to make as much sacrifice as possible'. The family made a blazing bonfire of all their British goods and apparel. In 1930, when Gandhi was on his Salt March, Motilal donated his mansion to the Congress and moved with his family into a newly built, smaller domed house on the estate, which was nevertheless fairly grand in size. But it was bare of rich carpets and ornaments, many of which had been seized during police raids in lieu of fines that satyagrahis refused to pay. The fine furnishings and household linen of the past were replaced by coarse khadi. Silks, satins and lace had no place in a lifestyle cut off from pursuits of wealth and leisure. Nor had gold and jewels. But the library overflowed with books. The new house was now called Anand Bhawan, and the old one was aptly rechristened Swaraj Bhawan. Both houses flaunted their patriotism by flying the Congress flag: a saffron band for Hinduism and a green band for Islam, divided by a spinning wheel representing cottage industry on a white middle band representing unity. Along with like-minded others all over the country, the family fell into the radical regime of organizing towns and villages for political action, wearing khadi, spinning it regularly, controlling their tempers, breaking laws and going to jail. Renouncing a property and a livelihood, and never knowing what tomorrow would bring seemed to have a high altitude effect on their personalities. My uncle Jawaharlal elatedly recalled a truncheon-battering he had been given by mounted police during a demonstration against the Simon Commission in 1928.

Point ten of Gandhi's strategy was about avoiding abuse

as well as violence, and it must have been more of a hurdle for the patriarch who had a roaring temper when roused. He had not reached the heights of his profession by suffering fools gladly or doing as he was told. The sacrificial role did not appeal to him at all. Gandhi wrote to him reprovingly on 3 July 1924: 'I have nothing to say to your return to wine drinking, if you have, but if the report is to be relied on, I cannot but be grieved that you . . . should publicly drink and, what's worse, chaff at teetotalism.' To this, Motilal sent a characteristic reply:

> The statement, as reported, is too silly even for an after-dinner speech. There were many good Muslims at this dinner who drank nothing but pure water. They heartily applauded my remarks and never for a moment dreamt that I was chaffing at teetotalism . . . I must express my utter inability to understand how you can possibly reconcile yourself to the suggestion that I might drink privately if at all. I had . . . fully made up my mind to revert to total abstinence before the 'prohibition' resolution was moved in the Assembly. But I am going to do nothing of the kind now. I simply cannot bring myself to yield to the puritanism affected in Congress circles . . . If there are idiots in the world who still think that after all I have gone through during the last four years and am going through now, I can be capable of selling my soul to the devil for party purposes, let them think what they like."[2]

Whatever their differences, their friendship, based on mutual respect, was rock-solid. Gandhi was a loved and cherished member and an irreplaceable solace to the family through its trials and tribulations as long as he lived.

*

Motilal died in 1931, and after my aunt Kamala Nehru's death from tuberculosis in 1936, the adults in the household consisted of my grandmother (who had herself been beaten up in a demonstration), my great-aunt (the only saint of my acquaintance), my parents—Ranjit and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit—and my uncle Jawaharlal, whom I thought of as my third parent. My aunt Krishna Nehru had married G.P. Hutheesing in 1933 and had gone to live in Bombay. The children in the house were my two sisters, Chandralekha and Rita, and me, Nayantara. Cousin Indira Nehru was a student in England after her mother's death and came back on visits, until she came home to marry Feroze Gandhi in 1942. At home, there was no mistaking the euphoria. All three parents were in jubilant bloom. The dreary monotony and harshness of jail conditions, and the countryside's lung-choking dust, all played havoc with their health as time went on, but never repressed their high spirits. I have searched my mind ever since for some hint of self-pity or neurosis or any other invisible state of being they might have been hiding, and have always come back to their radiant sanity instead. Whatever their strains and hardships, the aura they radiated was one of optimism, energy and adventure.

They saw themselves as people of their times and since the times had always been complex beside our stretch of the Ganga, they did not live by any simple, single formula. Located in the heartland of Hinduism, among the gardens and monuments of Islam, theirs was a city whose roads were named after Englishmen, but which had become the nerve centre of opposition to British rule. My grandfather had been educated in Urdu and Persian, my uncle at Harrow and Cambridge and my father in Bombay and Heidelberg—atheists all—while my grandmother and great-aunt were devout Hindus. Great-aunt Bibima taught me that if Krishna Bhagvan was on your side, let the armies of the world be on

the other side, it wouldn't matter. This assurance had a ringing resonance for me since the armies of the Viceroy were indeed on the other side while we were unarmed. My mother who needed the comfort of belief held on to it, though her intellectual and emotional sustenance came from the two men—her husband and her brother—who were central to her life. She read to us not only from the Bhagvad Gita and Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*, from which I learned passages by heart, but also from Bernard Shaw, Roger Casement's trial and Paul Robeson's biography. One of the poems she taught us, written by an American, Ralph Chaplin, who had been a conscientious objector during World War I, became starkly relevant for us before India attained freedom:

> Mourn not the dead who in the soft earth lie
> Dust unto dust—
> The cool, sweet earth that mothers all who die.
> As all men must;
> Mourn not your captive comrades who must dwell
> Too strong to strive each in his
> steel-bound coffin of a cell
> Buried alive;
>
> But rather mourn the apathetic throng
> The cowed and meek
> Who see the world's great anguish and its wrong
> But dare not speak.

Religion and atheism lived lovingly together in Anand Bhawan, and both were aspects of India's famously enquiring, assimilative mind. Our daily life was a seamless blend of tradition and modernity, of all that had gone into the making of it. My father was probably the most versatile example of this blend. He was a sports enthusiast and had been a keen

shikari until non-violence took over. He spoke several European and Indian languages and was a Sanskrit scholar who translated three classics, Kalhana's *Rajtarangini*, Vishakdutt's *Mudra Rakshasa* and Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara* into English. The family respected his scholarship, but what made him special among them was his singing voice. The Nehrus loved music too, but they couldn't carry a tune. My father taught us to sing *Vande Mataram* and *Hindustan Hamara*. While he shaved, he sang Marathi folk songs or *La Donna e Mobile* or *I want to cling to Ah-ha-hivy if Ivy will cling to me*. He shared more than a family bond with his in-laws. They were comrades in a lifelong struggle. He and Jawaharlal shared two prison terms, one in Naini Central Jail, and the other, in Dehra Dun Jail. From the latter jail Jawaharlal wrote to his friend, the English historian Edward Thompson, on 2 December 1941:

> Ranjit left me yesterday after a full year with me. A year together in jail means something much more than outside. We are together all the time, night and day, within a few feet of each other. It was fortunate that Ranjit was with me for his interests are varied and he is always surprising me with odd bits of knowledge. As an expert gardener he looked after our little garden and I was his willing but inefficient assistant. He used to spot and tell me the names of new birds that passed Dehra Dun, and this place is a good centre for birds of both the plains and the hills. Often, when the seasons changed, we would watch the migratory flights of geese or some other variety of bird to or from Mansarovar in Tibet. And then he would talk about ancient history, or Sanskrit literature and drama, or Kashmir, or the Marathas. (You know that he is a Maharashtrian himself and his mother tongue is Marathi.) Now that

he is gone I am alone and I have to support this burden of the garden he made. But I am not unused to being alone. Here in this jail I once spent seven or eight months all by myself with no companion.

Irreverence for the power structure came naturally to him. When Viceroy Lord Linlithgow asked Indians to pray for the British Empire's victory against Hitler, my father wrote to me from Almora on 24 May 1940: 'I was rather far from the Viceroy and was pretty sure he would not notice if I did not pray for the British empire, nor did I know if God existed. If he does exist, we may be sure he knows what to do with it.' In a world ruled by the West, where everything not Greek in origin was considered beyond the pale of civilization, where religion meant the Bible, and glory meant empire, my elders projected a robust contrary view whose highlights of intellect, aspiration and embattled courage were Asian. In a seismic shift of perspective from the Western point of view, my uncle wrote an alternative version of history while interned in different prisons between 1930 and 1933. *Glimpses of World History*[3] set out his own world view. Asia, from which European conquest had isolated us—cutting off ancient sea routes and opening up routes to serve Europe's insatiable appetites—represented more to the family than kinship and culture. They felt one with all others of the 'subject races' who, like us, were coping with the ruthless destruction of their economies, the falsification of their histories and the imposition of Europe's gun-barrel view. The Asian Conferences held in Delhi, one before and one soon after independence, were born of this bond. 'Far too long have we of Asia been petitioners in Western courts and chancelleries,' said Jawaharlal at the first Asian Relations Conference on 23 March 1947. Later, the Bandung Conference in 1955 found a European ally for non-alignment in Tito's Yugoslavia.

The pride my elders had in the awesome resilience of Hinduism made them reject the dogmas and orthodoxies that posed as religion. Motilal had refused to perform a purification ceremony on his return from his first voyage overseas and had been ostracized by orthodox Hindus for his misbehaviour. This caused much handed-down hilarity in the family, as did Indians who prospered by British grace and favour. Jawaharlal's rational approach to life and his attraction to science made him impatient with other-worldliness. In a book he gave my mother, *The Vision of Asia* by L. Cranmer-Byng, he wrote, 'To Nan with love on her birthday, 18 August 1934. This book contains a good deal of flabby mysticism. But there are some gems from old China.' Religion had inspired great monuments and like any sightseer in Italy, he had gone in June 1926 to St Peter's in Rome and to the Duomo in Milan. St Peter's had not impressed him in spite of its grandeur, 'But few things have given me as much inward delight and satisfaction as the Milan Cathedral,' he wrote on 14 June to his sister. 'I doubt if I can ever get tired of the cathedral at Milan. I went there repeatedly and spent hours there. I attended service on Sunday too.'[4] Above all, he was powerfully moved by the compassion of the Buddha and the personality of Jesus Christ, and he considered the Bhagvad Gita a supremely moral text: if every action has a result, it follows that every right action will have a right result. It was perfectly natural for this particular atheist to become the best-loved disciple of a deeply religious Hindu, and for his Master to choose him as his heir to lead the party and the country.

Their creed, if any, apart from freedom, was internationalism. It was almost in their blood. In his *Letters from a Father to His Daughter*, Jawaharlal wrote in 1929, 'If we want to know something about the story of this world of ours, we must think of all the countries and all the peoples that have inhabited it, and not merely of one little country

where we may have been born.'[5] During the 1930s, he condemned Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, Japan's of Manchuria, the fascist war on Republican Spain and the Nazi takeover of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. Speaking out against barbarism came from a passionate identification with causes outside India and his despair at the British government's silence on these aggressions. That he was the architect of Congress foreign policy and kept the portfolio of External Affairs to himself when he became Prime Minister was a sign of the critical importance he attached to India's voice in international affairs, all the more so since it was the first time this voice would be heard on the world stage.

The family admired the United States and the Soviet Union for throwing off the feudal/imperial yoke and making peerless progress thereafter. They loved American jazz and were thrilled by the Russian Revolution. My father did his spinning during the Moscow broadcast in English 'so that [I can] hear of the collective farming of the Soviets while [I ply] the charkha of Gandhi Baba'. Theirs was a multifarious canvas. Not for them one Path, one Book, one ism. In answer to a question I had asked him, my father wrote back on 19 September 1939:

> Taru darling,
> I have your letter of the 11th and was very happy to read your views and your questions. It is only the enquiring mind that finds a solution to difficult questions . . . Communism means working together in common and sharing benefits in common, with equal justice to all. It aims at producing a classless society . . . where there are no rich and high and mighty who have all the good things of the world and more on the one hand, and on the other, a vast mass of ill-clad, ill-fed, ill-housed humanity . . . This is the theory of Communism. But between theory and practice there is a world of difference. You know the Sermon on the Mount, and what a Christian should be like . . . Now watch what the Christian English, French and Germans and others are doing, and how different their conduct is from what it should be. And so it is with the Communists. The Nazi and Communist governments are tearing up the body of sorely stricken Poland bravely fighting against overwhelming odds.[6]

This was a frame of mind free of the barbed wire of doctrine and dogma and all that was narrow and confining. It was inevitable it would not 'take sides' in the Cold War clash of ideologies after World War II nor line up with any pact or bloc. Both superpowers were angered by this stand, but it took root as a pillar of independent India's foreign policy and provided a self-respecting platform for those in Asia and Africa who did not accept satellite status under either power. Domestic policy similarly announced its independence from doctrinaire thinking with the 'ic' in 'the socialistic pattern of society' adopted by the Congress resolution of 1955, indicating that the form and extent of socialism would suit itself to the country's needs.

Absorbed in the work and the daily grind of the fight for freedom, no one in the household foresaw the coming of independence or expected to live to see it. Only my uncle and my mother survived the struggle. My father fell mortally ill behind bars in 1943. Bareilly Jail was notorious for its lack of medical care, he was released too late and died in January 1944. Two years later, the transfer of power was under way and the direction India would take in national and international affairs bore the personal stamp of the man who took charge as head of the Interim Government.

*

Nehru was fifty-seven years old and physically fit in 1946. Staying fit had more than the usual importance for a man who had endured ten years of jail diet and unhealthy confinement. His day began with hatha yoga and he specially delighted in the shirshasana. He rode and swam with skill, had skied in Europe and trekked in the high Himalayas. The mountains held a great fascination for him. A mountaineering institute was set up in Darjeeling after the ascent of Everest in 1953 by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, which Nehru hoped would popularize mountaineering among the young. He himself took every opportunity to walk and ride in the hills. Acts of physical daring greatly appealed to him and made him impatient with timidity. A natural corollary was a disdain for his own safety. He enjoyed good food and fine fruit, but moderation had kept him slim and lithe, so he was a little scornful of paunches and double chins. He walked with a spring in his step and was inclined to take two stairs at a time when he went up a staircase. He had a chiselled beauty of face and feature that added to his personal charisma in an era when freedom fighters were national heroes.

Hindi cinema was up against the heavy hand of British censorship during World War II, yet progressive film-makers and songwriters smuggled their tribute to a beleaguered national movement into their themes and lyrics. These lines are from a song in *Naya Sansar* (1941) featuring Ashok Kumar:

Ek naya sansar bana lein, ek naya sansar,
Aisa ek sansar ki jisme
Dharti ho azad, ki jisme
Jeevan ho azad, ki jisme
Bharat ho azad,
Janta ka ho raj jagat mein, janta ki sarkar

Hindi cinema was consigned to a lowly status as entertainment during the British Raj. In Allahabad, American and English films were screened at two cinema halls in the Civil Lines. Going to a late show at 9.30 in the balcony seats was a social event for which a powdered and perfumed feminine elite put on their French chiffon and georgette saris. They were accompanied by their menfolk in suits and ties, and stood up to *God Save the King* when the lights came on after the show. Hindi cinema was reached by tonga through crowded lanes into the heart of the bazaar. Its films dug into myth and legend, made miracles happen and touched family and patriotic chords. Mass audiences watched and responded, including ladies in purdah for whom balcony seats were reserved. Hindi cinema was proof positive that there was an *Indian* India whose past and present, song, story, dance and language were vibrantly alive. The celebrated star of Hindi cinema, Devika Rani, was an ardent admirer of Nehru and sent him a photograph of herself in a silver frame. After independence, she and her husband, Svetoslav Roerich, were visitors to Nehru's official residence Teen Murti House whenever they came to Delhi from Bangalore.

Nehru's most memorable human quality was the way he dealt with human beings. Punctuality in his public and private appointments was a matter of courtesy and consideration. He did not like to keep people waiting. He strongly objected to VIP treatment that inconvenienced the general public. In February 1949, he went as a guest of the British High Commissioner to a performance of *Hamlet* at the Regal Cinema in New Delhi and heard afterward that the road in front of the theatre had been closed for three hours.

This has naturally been greatly resented not only by the public at large but by members of our Party in the

> Legislature . . . I can understand security measures, but this kind of closing the road for hours is highly objectionable and if this must be done then it is clear the Governor-General or I should not go out anywhere at all. Will you please enquire from the persons responsible for this exactly what happened and why they persist in a course which is so obviously wrong.[7]

Mahatma Gandhi's leadership had recreated the Indian National Congress as a grass-roots party built on tiers of elected local and provincial bodies. Its organization of a mass movement for non-violent action had been a triumph of teamwork. For Nehru, teamwork was indispensable to the gigantic challenge of nation-building. To induct expertise, experience and varying opinion, his first cabinet included members from outside the Congress. In the civil service, a smooth transition took place from the old regime to the new one. Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, who had been knighted for his loyal service to the previous regime, became an indispensable aid to the new government as Secretary General of External Affairs. In a letter to Sir Girja dated 21 March 1950, Nehru wrote, 'You have worked harder and probably put in more hours in the office than anyone else in External Affairs. I have deeply appreciated the work you have done and the manner of doing it, and it has been a pleasure to work with you.'[8]

In private life, Nehru cherished old friends and attracted new ones. A quality of abiding tenderness kept him in close touch, usually by letter, with those who were dear to him. A correspondence with his sister started with picture postcards in 1905 when Vijaya Lakshmi was five years old and he a student at Harrow. A few lines from two letters to her over the years reveal the closeness of that bond.

From Badenweiler, 31 December 1935:

> I write to you again so soon because I feel like doing so. The old year is passing as I write—it is almost the stroke of midnight—and the desire to write to you on this coming of the new year became strong within me. To send you all my love. The bells are ringing and the sound rolls up the valley in waves which seem to envelop one. There is also gun firing going on somewhere . . . [that] made me think of war and suffering and disaster.[9]

From Ahmednagar Fort, 5 October 1944:

> We have never been apart from each other completely cut off, for such a long time. Not even a glimpse in a jail office.[10]

For me and my sisters, growing up in Anand Bhawan, he was a special shining being, than whom all men were lesser men. The extracts below are from three among many letters he wrote to me over the years.

From Ahmednagar Fort, 24 November 1942:

> Darling Taru,
> I was happy to receive your letter of the 10th and to have news of you and Rita, as well as of Anand Bhawan. I am glad all of you keep cheerful and happy and it is right that you are proud to be living in such stirring times. Merely to exist and carry on is of course not good enough, anybody can do that. We have to be thoroughly alive and vital, awake in mind and body, and eager to play our part worthily in the great dramas that surround us. Those who are very young, like you and Rita, have to prepare yourselves in every way to

play that in the future, with a body that is fit and strong and a mind that is sensitive and keen as the edge of a sword and a character that is firm and steadfast and wedded to high ideals . . . My love to you and Rita—
Your loving Mamu

From Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London W1, 5 December 1946:[11]

Darling Tara,
It was a delight to hear your voice over the telephone after so many years. I had so much to tell you and so much to hear from you that I hardly knew what to say within a few minutes. I have had such good accounts of you from various people that I am looking forward greatly to your return. Among your various accomplishments the knowledge of Russian is going to be particularly useful. If I go to Russia, as I intend to do, I should like you to accompany me. But about that we shall talk later . . . Keep healthy and sound in body and mind and fit yourself for the work ahead. Love to you and Rita—Mamu

From the Prime Minister's House, New Delhi, 2 February 1961:

Darling Tara,
It was sweet of you to come to the Vice President's house yesterday to say goodbye to me. I knew you were leaving but I was vague about your time of departure. If you had not come to say goodbye and I had returned to the house to find you gone, I would have been unhappy. Even as it was, I missed you greatly. During these past few days your presence here and Rita's was a joy and now there is a certain emptiness. Tomorrow

the remaining members of the family will go off to Lucknow and I shall be left all alone here.
All my love to you, darling—Mamu[12]

Few men could have written such a wealth of letters as he wrote all his life to family and friends. He used the letter-writing form as a favourite means of educating his child Indira in *Letters from a Father to His Daughter* and later, in *Glimpses of World History*. Few men could have been in continuous unbroken communication with colleagues in government as he was through his fortnightly letters to Chief Ministers, keeping them abreast of initiatives the union government was taking at home and abroad, and informed of his personal thinking on the events and issues of the time. Few men in power, caught up in a relentless schedule of work, could have been so accessible to those of the family and public who came to him with their problems.

Nehru was not 'the last Englishman' in India as he has been labelled by some. He was clear about the debt he owed to England and felt that he owed too much to England in his mental make-up ever to feel wholly alien to that country. He had the emotional discipline we associate with Englishness, though this could have been as much the result of solitary years spent in prison. Small episodes brought it to light. His cousin B.K. Nehru (Bijju) had married a Hungarian in 1935. The bride met 'Jawahar Bhai' in a brief jail interview in Calcutta, to which she had gone with my mother. He came into the jail superintendent's office and Fory Nehru says she fell in love with him 'at once'! He welcomed her affectionately into the family and they talked until a warder came in and laid a hand on the prisoner's arm to take him back to his cell. Fory could not bear this and began to cry. 'Jawahar Bhai' looked back and said to her, 'No tears. In this family we keep a stiff upper lip.'

'No tears' was instilled into children and adults and the family complied, meeting his exacting standards. In 1943, my father had a heart attack in Bareilly Jail. My mother got word of it in Allahabad only a week later through the Civil Surgeon of Lucknow, Colonel Clyde, who was a friend. Colonel Clyde had also learned that my father was suffering from pneumonia and pleurisy. My mother was refused an interview with him on grounds of the new rules now in force for political prisoners. Permission was finally granted by the Governor of the United Provinces when she wrote to him enclosing the jail superintendent's confirmation of the heart attack. She went to Bareilly. She wrote in her autobiography *The Scope of Happiness*,

> It was a tremendous shock to see Ranjit brought in to the superintendent's office on a stretcher. His head had been shaved and he was emaciated and almost unrecognizable. It cost me a tremendous effort to restrain my tears. He had been seriously ill for more than a month and was not receiving proper medical care and I had not been informed. I was shocked by his appearance, did not know what to talk about, and did not dare mention that I had asked the Governor's special permission for this interview, for even in extreme illness he would have reacted angrily to this. The office of the superintendent of any Indian jail is a sordid and often dirty place. Warders, jailers, and various others besides the superintendent are in and out, listening to every word exchanged. Knowing how Ranjit hated any show of emotion I just sat by the stretcher holding his hand and trying to give him news of Khali, the garden at Anand Bhawan . . . I did not know how I got to the car and reached the place where I was spending the night.[13]

There can be too much stoicism and there is much to be said for a storm of tears. This was not a luxury the family allowed itself. The first and last time Nehru's iron discipline was breached was the outpouring of grief he could not control when he knelt beside Gandhi's blood-covered body on the evening of 30 January 1948.

No facile category fits Nehru. He had identified himself with other nationalisms and was better known as an internationalist than any figure of his time. In his own mind there was no unbridgeable divide between the Occident and the Orient. One had had the opportunity to industrialize and prosper, the other had not, and the gap would close in time. Most significantly, his involvement with India—through actual journeys over the length and breadth of the country, and his vividly imagined journeys into her past—had an impassioned ingredient that kept its hold on him. An incident towards the end of his life illustrates the strength of his involvement. The family was at the breakfast table at Teen Murti House. A visiting nephew said the country was in a mess, its problems would never be solved and he, for one, was getting out to settle abroad. Nehru who had remained silent suddenly spoke in a rage, 'Go where you like, but if I am born a thousand times, a thousand times I will be born an Indian.'

The last paragraph of his Will and Testament requested that 'the major portion' of his ashes be scattered from a height 'over the fields where the peasants of India toil so that they might mingle with the dust and soil of India and become an indistinguishable part of India'.

2

DEALING WITH THE SUPERPOWERS: WAR AND PEACE

When Nehru came to power, India emerged out of more than a century of colonial isolation into a fractured world riven by the rivalries of the Cold War and the ferocious competition of the two superpowers for humanity's allegiance. America's atomic experiment during World War II had been kept a secret from the Soviet ally. The atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to any remnant of alliance and heralded a reign of terror in the shape of an escalating arms race in which the superpower arsenals matched weapon for weapon and kept the world on the brink of a third world war. Nehru reacted forcefully against America's atomic test on the Bikini Atoll a year later, and wrote in the *National Herald*,

> This is not the way to lay the foundations of peace . . . Peace seems far distant now, a dream that has faded, and mankind apparently marches ahead to its doom . . . Have words lost all their meaning and have men's minds lost all anchorage? For this is surely the way to madness, and the great men who control our destinies are dangerous self-centered lunatics who are so full of their conceit and pride of power that they will rather rain death and destruction all over the world than give up their petty opinions and think and act right.[14]

The new government in India did not see life or politics in the either-or terms laid down by the superpowers. For Nehru, either-or was an absurdity implying that the human brain was too tiny to accommodate two ideas and draw on the best of both. At the practical level, the best chance of resurrecting India from crippling conditions of prolonged bondage was to seek the friendship and cooperation of both sides. Refusing to join the blocs and pacts of either side also marked India's aversion to raising the temperature in an inflammable global environment where the possibility of nuclear war was ever present. The fragile international climate was Nehru's ongoing concern and the reason why foreign policy took the middle path it did. 'The world is full of strife today and disaster looms on the horizon,' he said in a broadcast to the country on 10 May 1949. The post-war era—its politics, diplomacy and popular fiction—was in fact overcast by this imminent threat of the deadliest of wars. The novels *Fail Safe* by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler and *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute captured this atmosphere. The Cold War gave birth to James Bond and a generation of spy fiction. For India, whose prime necessity was peace, keeping out of the Cold War was not only the best guarantee of peace for nation-building at home, but an opportunity to insert a calm, neutral perspective into a scene making ready for war

India's non-alignment was roundly denounced by both superpowers, each convinced it 'tilted' towards the enemy. The determination of a newly independent nation to remain independent did not figure in the assessment of either country. Both appeared to have forgotten their own history. The nascent American republic had declared itself against 'entangling alliances' and stayed clear of them for nearly a century and a half. The Soviet Union had stood guard over its revolution, brooking no interference. Nehru treated the

blast of often bitter and vituperative criticism with a degree of resignation and welcomed help in different areas of development from both sides. Yet, to start nationhood under frontal attack from those of whom one had had high hopes of friendship and understanding was unexpected and bewildering. It also had its nonsensical aspect. While Nehru was being labelled a communist—which amounted to a word of abuse in America—he was a 'running dog of imperialism' according to *Pravda* in a scathing reference to India's connection with the Commonwealth.

Referring to Nehru's impending first visit to America in 1949, the Soviet newspaper *New Times* had an article titled 'Chiang Kai Shek's Successor', which read, 'Nehru will be informed by Acheson . . . of an aggressive Pacific bloc directed against the liberation movement of the peoples of Asia. The British and American imperialists assign a special place in their unscrupulous plans to India and its present reactionary leaders . . . The vacancy left by Chiang Kai Shek is being offered to Nehru.' *Izvestiya* backed this up on 23 October, saying, 'Having suffered a reverse in China in their gamble on the reactionary Kuomintang, American ruling circles are furiously seeking a new obedient agent in Asia.'[15]

A message of congratulation from Stalin on 15 August 1948 had led Nehru to hope it might lead to good relations. On 19 August, he wrote to Vijaya Lakshmi, then accredited as India's ambassador to the Soviet Union, 'Unfortunately the attitude of the Soviet Press and Government are producing a most unfortunate impression on the mind of the public here.'[16] This was a time when P.C. Joshi of the Communist Party of India (CPI), who had urged cooperation with the Congress Party, had been thrown out of the party executive, and the CPI, on Moscow's orders, was waging war against the Government of India. The government's White Paper listed passages from seized pamphlets and booklets with the

following orders: 'Set fire to the whole of Bengal. Attack them suddenly and without notice at different places . . . Set fire to Government buses . . . Destroy Ministry. Attack houses of Ministers and create chaos.' Seized secret circulars gave detailed instructions with diagrams on how to destroy telegraph and telephone wires, trains, bridges, motor and road communications.[17] Nehru had written to Vijaya Lakshmi on 15 April 1948:

> You have mentioned the article about India which Kharlamov has written. I might inform you that this man delivered a very virulent speech at a private Communist Party meeting in Calcutta. It was he who was chiefly responsible for kicking out P.C. Joshi from the CP Executive here. He criticized Joshi strongly for his appeasement of the Congress and of the present Government. In public Kharlamov behaved with propriety. But he showed his hand at this private meeting.[18]

In an effort to understand the trend of Soviet policy, Nehru invited the Russian ambassador M. Novikov to dinner on 12 September 1948, with Vijaya Lakshmi as the only other person present. In over an hour and a half's talk with them, Novikov maintained that the Soviet press did not necessarily represent the government's view and that it was free to discuss internal conditions in any country 'from the Marxist point of view', while keeping in mind the government's principles regarding foreign policy. Further, he said the Soviet government was only concerned with a country's foreign policy, not its internal affairs. If India complained of some articles in the Soviet press, Novikov said he could with much greater reason charge most of the Indian press with hostility to the Soviet Union and wanting India to line up with the

American bloc. None of this seemed to make matters any clearer in view of Moscow's instructions to the CPI and only thickened the haze through which diplomacy appeared to function, though dinner passed off pleasantly enough. But, during Nehru's absence to answer a telephone call, Novikov told Vijaya Lakshmi that while he found some constraint in speaking to the Prime Minister, he would gladly talk frankly with Jawaharlal Nehru.[19]

In the United States, apart from the American government's demand 'Are you with us or against us?', the hysteria unleashed by Senator Joe McCarthy's campaign against citizens whose activities were deemed 'un-American' savaged many a distinguished American reputation, put careers in jeopardy and the country virtually under surveillance. In both America and the Soviet Union, the psychology of the times bode ill for any impartial assessment of human affairs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit who was India's first ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1947 to 1949, and to the United States from 1949 to 1951, had the task of interpreting her government's position in a fraught climate where the mere fact of choosing to use one's own judgement was reason enough for suspicion and accusation. These notwithstanding, she wrote to her brother, on 18 August 1947, two weeks after her arrival in Moscow, 'Sometimes I feel overwhelmed at the privilege of representing free India and at the responsibility which has been placed on me.'[20] There were hitches in the presenting of credentials, which the Foreign Office pointed out should have been addressed to Shvernik, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and not to Marshal Stalin! And why, asked the Foreign Office, had they been signed by King George VI? The fact was this form had had to be observed as India was not yet independent at the time of her appointment.

After presenting her credentials, she paid her first formal

call on Andrei Vyshinsky, the Soviet delegate she had become well acquainted with the year before when she had led the Indian delegation to the first session of the United Nations General Assembly and won a memorable two-thirds majority in the debate on racial discrimination in South Africa. The colonial Powers had united in formidable opposition to her in the debate. The Soviet delegation led by Molotov was impressed by her performance and delighted with her victory and sent her an enormous bouquet of red roses. Molotov had, in fact, heard her speak eloquently for India's freedom in 1945 outside the official portals of the UN Conference on International Organization in San Francisco. Later, after hearing the British government's delegate speak at the conference, he had got up to say, 'I hope the voice of independent India will be heard in this hall before long.'[21] Vyshinsky had been the prosecutor in the 1936–38 trials, the orgy of purges that had rid Stalin of his opponents in the party, mostly by execution. In the late 1940s, he was Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and told Vijaya Lakshmi he welcomed her as a friend, not an ambassador. Next, she called on Mikhailov, head of the South Eastern Asian Division.

'All your books were on the office shelves,' she wrote to her brother in her letter of 18 August 1947.

> They had all been well read and held passages underlined and marked. Referring to one passage in *Discovery of India*, Mikhailov said that he had some difficulty in grasping its real significance, so an expert was sent for, who explained it to him. This will show you how thorough these people are. The talk with me was largely confined to the work of the UP Ministry with special emphasis on agrarian reforms and the Gaon Hukumat Bill. It is obvious these measures have been followed with interest. Mikhailov . . . quoted from

a number of my own statements and speeches in connection with the Bill and congratulated me warmly on the measure . . . He discussed the question of compensation to the zamindars in some detail and I was thankful that I could give him some information. He required confirmation of the names of the members of the new Cabinet and a background sketch of each member . . . He wanted to know which States, besides Kashmir and Hyderabad, were still outside the two Unions [of India and Pakistan] and whether it was true that British capital was being imported into Karachi and Hyderabad for so-called industrial purposes.[22]

Vijaya Lakshmi was struck by the Soviet Union's meticulous knowledge of her work as Minister for Health and Local Self-Government in the United Provinces, and its interest in the landmark legislation—still pending before the state assembly—that would pave the way for panchayat elections in the province. It contrasted vividly with America's superficial acquaintance with Indian and Asian affairs at the time.

Extracts from letters to her brother describe her impressions of a city in the grim aftermath of a devastating war and the claustrophobic tenor of diplomatic life in the capital, to which foreigners, including diplomats, were virtually confined. It needed special permission to move more than fifty kilometres out of Moscow. She wrote on 8 August 1947,

> Moscow is like the city of the dead. No sounds anywhere. The streets are so big and wide that even though a great many people are hurrying to and fro, they look curiously empty. Very few cars are visible and those one sees are small and battered and ancient.

> The keynote of the city is shabbiness—a drab dirty shabbiness which depresses. Food is severely rationed and things like butter and sugar are only allowed on diplomatic ration cards. There are no vegetables or fruit in the market—only meat, fish and black and white bread. But curiously enough there is a supply of rich looking pastries everywhere.[23]

She wrote about life in Moscow on 31 August 1947:

> Life here is entirely different to anything one has experienced before. Opportunities for meeting the people of the country are few—such meetings, I am told, are not encouraged and one lives in the rather restricted diplomatic circle, meeting the same people all the time. It has distressed me to find that many of the diplomats have preconceived views about Russia and the general opinion is that since one cannot really understand the situation here, let's just forget all about it and have a good time. Large quantities of food are served and as one eats one pities 'the poor Russians whose government gives them practically nothing to eat'. I am wondering just how long I can stand this. Fortunately I have made it clear that I have better uses for my time so I shall fall out of the social swing when my initiation is over.[24]

But five months later, on 1 January 1948, she wrote,

> Moscow is definitely a winter city. In her snow garments she glows with the radiance of an expectant bride. All the drabness has given way to a sparkling beauty and the city has become alive. It is a great experience to have been here at this time and I wish so

much it was possible for you to spend a few days here and see and feel the magic of the place.[25]

I give below my own post-Wellesley College impressions of Moscow where I spent six months, from March to September 1948, with my mother and sister, Chandralekha:

> The quality of Russia that reached us was an indomitable spirit rising from the smoking ruins of war. It was, somehow, a gallantly feminine spirit, so that the heartbreakingly shabby white-faced women who had probably lost their husbands and sons, suffered bombardment, and a regime that even before the war had never been other than starkly austere, still walked unbent. There were so many women everywhere, walking along the streets with their small bundles of belongings, crowding the bleak shops where only the bare necessities were available and where grocers and bakers put cardboard loaves and sausages in their display windows. Women flocked to the ballet and the theatre in thick wool skirts and blouses, handkerchiefs tied about their heads. Women danced with women to the brassy band at the Metropole Hotel, to tunes almost unrecognizable as *Melancholy Baby* and others that had been popular in the West much earlier. Women and young men who had been too young to fight massed in Red Square on May Day after the parade and strolled through Moscow's streets celebrating their national holiday . . . This was not the Moscow of Anna Karenina . . . but whatever had been destroyed had been replaced by a determined vitality.[26]

Every fortnight, Vijaya Lakshmi attended a Commonwealth meeting at the British Embassy. The main

item for discussion on 17 August was a British Note to the Soviet government protesting a scene in a film being made about the Battle of Stalingrad in which Stalin accuses Churchill of deliberately delaying the opening of the second front during World War II and claiming it was opened only after Russia had borne the brunt of the war and the Western Allies realized that Russia would reach Berlin before them. The British government demanded the elimination of this scene and the modification of language throughout the film. The second item was the UN agenda and a brief survey of events in Greece, Egypt and Indonesia. 'I think my presence was a little embarrassing when the Indonesian issue came up,' she wrote to her brother, 'as Britain, in the Security Council, had voted against including the Indonesian issue in the General Assembly's agenda. I cannot help being surprised at the British approach to vital international problems. Britain's foreign policy seems to be completely divorced from reality.[27]

She had the same doubts about realistic assessments when General Georges Catroux, French ambassador to the USSR, 1945–48, paid her a farewell visit before leaving for Paris where he was to take up the post of diplomatic adviser to the French government. General Catroux said the Soviet Union's military strength far surpassed any other power's, in spite of the losses and devastations of the war. He believed France and Italy were in grave danger of passing into the Soviet orbit of influence, as were Norway and Sweden. If the communists won the next election in Italy, he was sure Berlin would go out of Allied control. He was certain India would throw her weight on the Allies' side, should it come to a final choice. 'I explained our desire to keep free of blocs and gave him our reasons,' Vijaya Lakshmi wrote. 'In passing he mentioned very delicately the issue of Viet Nam saying that the Viet Nam struggle had been much misinterpreted and

that the real issue was Communism. [Catroux had been Governor-General of Indo-China for many years where he committed terrible atrocities in the name of democracy!] The leader of the movement, Dr Ho Chi Minh, had been educated in Bulgaria and Moscow and was Stalin's man. The question of independence of Viet Nam therefore was not as simple as it looked.'[28]

The atrocities referred to may have been the response to rebellion in the French empire. Battalions, planes, and all the weapons of modern warfare had been used to crush ill-equipped nationalist insurrections in 1940. In March 1945, there were eight to ten thousand Indo-Chinese (mostly Vietnamese) political prisoners in French jails located in Indo-China. The Governor-General after July 1940 was Catroux's successor, Admiral Jean Decoux, though policy on rebellion remained the same.

General Catroux's appraisal, which reflected that of the Western Allies, and saw the Soviet Union as poised for war, was the reverse of an Indian appraisal two years later. Yezdi Gundevia, posted as counsellor to the Indian Embassy in Moscow, wrote to K.P.S. Menon, Foreign Secretary, on 11 October 1950:

> The whole world outside the Embassy is a bit dirty and universally shoddy from the streets to the shop windows. But at the risk of being dubbed 'tainted already' I cannot help admitting that I am terribly impressed by Moscow . . . On every inch of ground in Moscow construction of some kind is in progress. Whether it is 24-hour shifts on the nine skyscrapers that are going up—one for Moscow University for the opening of which Dr. Radhakrishnan has been invited in 1951—or some digging and straining at every roadside corner, drains, electric cables or tree planting

> on sidewalks. Lorryloads upon lorryloads of shoddy men and women toiling day and night is the picture that meets the eye. The same story comes from visitors to Tiflis or Tashkent. Construction by the million-brick. It is indeed a truism that the whole of the USSR is a little bigger than the few streets of Moscow that I have seen, and the seven-to-one strength in tanks, aeroplanes and infantry divisions can be concealed in odd bits and pieces of the country which you are forbidden to visit. But if they want war it would be a waste of time putting brick on brick towards a 24-storey skyscraper, nine times over, in the capital city, to be atomized tomorrow for a certainty . . . In the few diplomats I have so far met, there is nothing but hate for the Russians—just undiluted hate . . . but if this is the state of personal feelings, what chance is there of any peace?[29]

At a time when the Soviet press was hostile to India and Stalin was not receiving heads of missions, Vijaya Lakshmi's own relations with the Foreign Office and with Foreign Minister Vyshinsky were markedly friendly. Among the boxes allotted to the diplomatic corps in the Bolshoi Theatre for the celebration of Moscow's eighth centenary, she was given pride of place. Writing to her brother on 8 September 1947, she described the vast, lavishly decorated stage with its 'gigantic bronze bust of Lenin draped with flags and flowers,' where the mayor and members of the municipality sat along with delegates and some members of the Supreme Soviet, including President Shvernik and Vyshinsky.[30]

> The proceedings began with the *Internationale* and then the Mayor welcomed the guests. Afterwards each delegate spoke and finally messages were read out. Our Embassy had sent a brief message but apparently no

other Embassy had done so. When it was announced that we had sent a congratulatory message there was tremendous applause—it swept the huge theatre in waves and echoed and re-echoed. The Mayor stood up and bowed toward my box and the entire audience turned around and cheered and waved in my direction. It was the most thrilling and spontaneous ovation I have ever received.[31]

Describing a lavish reception by the Soviet government for the visiting Polish Prime Minister, Vijaya Lakshmi wrote to Nehru on 19 January 1948:

> . . . food and drink of every kind in great abundance. Molotov was extremely cordial and himself took me around and introduced me to all the prominent Russians present. I met men and women whose names one reads about but never hopes to meet. The atmosphere was very friendly and Vyshinsky even forgot his dignity so far as to have several jokes with me, and to introduce me to his wife and daughter. But the studied indifference with which the American and British Ambassadors were treated was amazing . . . The Polish Prime Minister took me aside and expressed regret that we had no diplomatic relations with his country . . . Molotov strolled up and joined in. 'Ah,' he said, 'I hope you have explained to Madame how vital it is for the future, for us—Russia and Poland—to have India's friendship and understanding.'
>
> This evening the Polish Embassy had a reception similar to the one of last evening. I learnt that the Russian Government paid the cost on the ground that it would be deducted from the loan to Poland![32]

Vijaya Lakshmi paid her farewell call on Vyshinsky in March 1949. She wrote,

> In saying goodbye he said he hoped I would leave the Soviet Union with the same feelings of genuine friendship with which I had arrived and which had endeared me to those with whom I came in contact. I replied there was much that had baffled and confused me but my feelings for this country continued to be friendly and I hoped for closer understanding between India and Russia in future.[33]

Requesting Dr S. Radhakrishnan to accept the post of ambassador to the Soviet Union after Vijaya Lakshmi, Nehru wrote to him on 7 May 1949 to say:

> Although all three [posts at London, Washington and Moscow] are of equal importance, the Moscow one is the most delicate and for the moment, the most important . . . the type of work there is not somehow the normal routine work in an embassy . . . It is much more a psychological approach to the Soviet mind and an attempt to make them realize that we mean what we say. In spite of bitter criticisms they have made of India and the present Government of India, we still want to be friendly with them and to help in the preservation of peace in which they are so very much interested. All our foreign policy is directed to that end . . . Thus, in a sense, our activities in Moscow bear directly on our work for world peace.[34]

When Stalin began receiving heads of missions, Dr Radhakrishnan, who succeeded Vijaya Lakshmi, was the first, after the American and British envoys, to be received.

Rajeshwar Dayal, counsellor at the embassy, reported on 27 January 1950 that this had created a flurry in the diplomatic corps and there followed 'quite a scramble among foreign envoys to seek an interview with Stalin'. The Italian ambassador who was doyen of the corps was informed that the Generalissimo's grant of an interview to the Indian ambassador had nothing to do with seniority in the diplomatic corps but with his 'eminence and moral authority'.

The Austrian minister generously concluded it was but natural the Indian envoy should be received after the American and British, as India was the most significant country in the world today and could tilt the scales in favour of peace or war. The Netherlands' envoy who was due to retire soon said he had no intention of leaving Moscow until the Generalissimo granted him an interview![35]

A record number of Foreign Office officials, along with Vyshinsky, attended the reception on 26 January to celebrate the proclamation of the Indian republic. Vyshinsky, who had declined to meet three Western ambassadors a few days earlier citing illness, was at his cordial best, enjoyed all the Indian dishes and talked to members of the staff. 'The British ambassador asked what we had done to put him in such a good mood!' wrote Rajeshwar Dayal. 'There is little doubt that our relations with the Soviets which had been somewhat uneasy, have now been steadied, and the ground has been prepared for still closer relations and better understanding in the future. This, in view of the Soviet psychology of extreme caution, is no small achievement.'[36]

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The openness and opulence of America were the greatest possible contrast to post-war conditions in the Soviet Union and the restrictions there on movement and mingling. Vijaya

Lakshmi was well known in America and had attracted sympathy and support as the Indian freedom movement's authentic voice in 1945 outside the San Fransisco Conference, where the official Indian delegation were appointees of the British governement. Following that, she had made her mark as leader of the Indian delegation to the UN General Assembly every year. She had good friends in the United States and the personal regard of two presidents, Truman, to whom she presented her credentials as the Indian ambassador, and later, Eisenhower, who invited her for talks as President of the UN General Assembly in 1953–54. But her assignment in Washingtom was overlaid with strains of the domestic and international climate. Senator McCarthy's campaign accused citizens as unlikely as Pearl Buck, Lillian Hellman and Mrs Roosevelt of communist leanings, and Owen Lattimore, a leading authority on the Far East, of being a high-powered Soviet agent. She went to the trial of Judge Dorothy Kenyon and was shocked and frightened by the way it was conducted. 'The rising tide of hate frightens me,' she wrote to her brother on 27 March 1950. 'There is a very real danger of its overflowing the banks and inundating the rest of the world.'[37]

At the time, a draft of the Japanese Peace Treaty was under prolonged discussion. The US wanted the consent of its signatories to make Japan an anti-communist bastion in Asia. Nehru held that a peace settlement that excluded China and Russia would do nothing to relieve tensions in the Far East. He did not favour the continued presence of foreign troops in Japan after American occupation ended and did not agree to participate in a collective military guarantee. No guarantee of this kind should be necessary if the Treaty had general consensus and the backing of the UN. He also urged that the effects of the peace settlement on the Japanese people be taken into account, apart from security and economic factors. India's ambassadors in China (Panikkar),

Russia (Radhakrishnan) and Britain (Krishna Menon), along with Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon, were all opposed to India signing the treaty as drafted by the United States, which, in turn, accepted no changes in the draft. Nehru wrote to Vijaya Lakshmi who wanted India to sign the treaty after recording objections to it:

> I need not go into all the arguments, but I want you to appreciate the far-reaching consequences of our signing the treaty. It means a reversal of what we have been saying and acting upon thus far. It means a submission, under pressure or fear, to American policy in the Far East and Asia. The consequences of not signing it means greater ill-will in the United States. I realise that, but still my mind is clear that we cannot sign this treaty . . . We would prefer to sign a simple bilateral treaty with Japan.[38]

Vijaya Lakshmi had to convey her government's view to John Foster Dulles, American Secretary of State, who invited her to breakfast for a discussion. Pacing the room, he assured her he had prayed all night for guidance on the Treaty. 'He would have had me believe the Lord himself had blessed America's stand,' she told her brother afterwards. 'It was tough explaining that my Prime Minister disagreed with the Lord.'

The Japanese Peace Treaty was signed at San Francisco on 8 September 1951. India was not a signatory. On the same day, India informed Japan of her desire to end the state of war with Japan as soon as the Treaty was signed.

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The colour bar was an ugly reality in Washington. Ralph

Bunche's refusal of the post of Assistant Secretary of State was making news. Ralph Bunche, a political scientist, had joined the Permanent Secretariat of the UN in 1947 as director of its Trusteeship Department. In 1949, he served as chief negotiator of an Arab–Israeli truce, for which he was to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace a year later.

'The reasons he gave,' Vijaya Lakshmi informed Nehru on 17 June 1949, 'were firstly that the salary of $10,000 a year was less attractive than the $14,000 tax-free he now receives from the U.N., and secondly that he does not wish to expose his family again to the humiliation of life in Washington. In a private talk I had with him he complained with great bitterness of the restrictions and indignities he and other Negroes suffer in the nation's capital. In spite of his position he can still not have a meal in one of Washington's big hotels or restaurants. His children cannot go to a movie theatre in the white quarter, nor to a white school. "Life in Washington," he said, "is still the life of the ghetto for us Negroes and I shall never again subject my family to what we went through for sixteen years."'[39]

Planning Nehru's forthcoming first visit to America in the autumn of 1949, Vijaya Lakshmi wrote to him on 16 September 1949:

> I am counting the days for your visit . . . As you know, we have not been able to provide for you to visit a Negro university owing to distance and lack of time. There are some proposals for a few people like Ralph Bunche and Walter White etc. to get together and have a very free and frank talk with you 'off the record' regarding the growing hostility against Negroes and the increased lynchings which are taking place here now. This would not, in my opinion, be a proper subject

towards which you could contribute in your present status, but Bunche and White both feel that a completely private meeting with a few leading Negroes and two or three white people, including Mrs Roosevelt, would be of enormous benefit. Even if the topic they wish to discuss is taboo, I think it will still be worthwhile meeting Bunche and others in a private and informal way . . . I have not met Paul [Robeson] as he has been touring a great deal. The other day my plane arrived at the airfield while he was on his way out. He knew I was within a few yards of him and wanted to meet me, but kept away not knowing whether I would care to greet him in public. This is making me very sad, but the situation in the States vis-à-vis the Robesons is utterly fantastic . . . To speak of him or to be seen with him or his family is tantamount to an unfriendly act toward the State Department.[40]

Nehru asked her to arrange a meeting with Negro leaders—the word black did not come into use until later—and with Professor Albert Einstein whom he had long wanted to meet. 'As for Paul and Essie Robeson, I would be unhappy if I did not meet them. That is not my way. So I hope you will arrange some private meeting.'[41] This was with reference to how difficult it was to meet Paul Robeson, who under attack by Senator Joe McCarthy, was fighting back, aggressively proclaiming his communist sympathies.

How to be understood by America was much on his mind before the visit. He wrote to Vijaya Lakshmi:

I think often, whenever I have the time to think, of this coming American visit. In what mood shall I approach America? How should I address people etc.? How should I deal with the Government there and

businessmen and others? Which facet of myself should I put before the American public—the Indian or the European, for after all I have that European or English aspect also. I shall have to meet some difficult siuations. I want to be friendly with the Americans but always making it clear what we stand for. I want to make no commitments which come in the way of our basic policy. I am inclined to think that the best preparation for America is not to prepare and to trust to my native wit and the mood of the moment, the general approach being friendly and receptive. I go there to learn more than to teach.[42]

Nehru was greatly affected by the welcome he received in the United States and Canada. He felt it had a strong element of popular support and affection far beyond the standard official welcome accorded to every state guest. Similarly, his enthusiastic reception in the Soviet Union a few years later showed how far the Indo-Soviet relationship had travelled. At an informal get-together with members of the Indian High Commission in London soon after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1955, I heard him tell them how alike the Americans and Russians were in their outgoing warmth and spontaneity.

Between 1949 and 1951, Vijaya Lakshmi's letters to her brother describe the war psychosis in America and the extreme intolerance towards India's non-aligned position. On 13 July 1950, she wrote, 'The hysteria and tension in Washington are growing daily and I cannot understand how any sane decisions can be reached in this atmosphere. Today Acheson has hinted at the use of the atom bomb.'[43] On 31 July, she said, 'The press continues to attack your peace moves and the latest effort is by *Time* in a most vicious and vulgar manner.'[44] On 5 February 1951: 'The hymn of hate against India continues at a high pitch and a large section of the

press is devoted daily to arguments in support of rejecting India's request for foodgrains . . . I am shocked at the way in which public opinion is being whipped up against us because of our independent policy in the U.N., the way in which all sorts of extraneous issues have been linked up with our food shortage. Since all roads lead to Moscow these days even our natural calamities are in some strange fashion influenced by our "leanings" towards Communism. The whole situation would be fantastic were it not so full of dangerous consequences for the whole of Asia.'[45] In the same letter, she describes a picture in *Time* of Sardar K.M. Panikkar presenting his credentials to Mao Tse Tung, with the caption:

> Contact man between Peking and New Delhi bowing low to Mao Tse-Tung whom he greatly admires. Oxford-educated Panikkar loves to parade his nodding acquaintance with European history. He served under several maharajas, calls himself a 'reformed landlord', and cultivates his resemblance to Lenin by wearing a Leninesque beard.

A chilling climax to her growing unease over the prevailing political climate in America came two weeks later with a telephone call from Robert Oppenheimer, the renowned physicist who had headed the experiment that produced the atom bomb. On 21 February 1951, she wrote to her brother,

> Two days ago I had a phone call from Professor Oppenheimer from Princeton saying that he wanted to communicate something of a very urgent nature and that he was sending Amiya Chakravarti because he could not come personally for reasons I would understand. He sounded agitated on the phone. Amiya arrived next day and delivered the following verbal

message to be communicated to you 'as early as possible':

Oppenheimer wants you to know that work of a most 'horrible and deadly nature' is being done on the atom bomb, that step by step America is 'deliberately' moving towards a war of annihilation. The recent promises given by Truman to Attlee regarding the atom have resulted in research for a weapon of the same deadly quality which will be kept very secret and used INSTEAD of the atom. This research is going on at a furious pace. Many of those engaged in this work are going to pieces as it is against all accepted standards of civilized decency, and the secrecy imposed on them is almost more than some of them can bear, Oppenheimer among them. For this purpose more and more thorium is required and the U.S. desires to stockpile all available thorium. Oppenheimer has reason to believe that an approach will be made very soon to India directly, and through Britain. In fact he believes that one reason why the Indian request for wheat has been so readily sponsored by the State Department is because of what they themselves require from India. The argument used for obtaining thorium will be that it is intended for humanitarian purposes. According to Oppenheimer NO such purpose can at present be achieved.

Oppenheimer 'begs' the Government of India not to sell any thorium to the U.S. voluntarily or through pressure. He thinks India holds the key to peace at present, but if India's vast resources of thorium are placed at the disposal of the U.S., the greatest war ever fought will be made possible.

Secret talks have been going on between the U.S.

and Britain. Oppenheimer wants you to know that in spite of the general belief that Britain has the atom, the only bombs she has have gone from the U.S. That is the hold the U.S. has on her and it may be used to put pressure on India.

In conclusion, Oppenheimer 'begs India in the name of humanity' to maintain her present foreign policy and not be swayed by any pressure, national or international, to depart from it.[46]

This remarkable letter marked Top Secret and never, to my knowledge, made public before, from the American scientist who knew what the ghastly consequences of a war worse than nuclear war would be, carries no hint or smear of betrayal, only a desperate bid to avert catastrophe. It appeals to a man whom Oppenheimer regards as the sole dependable advocate for peace in circumstances where preparations for a destructive war are proceeding behind a façade of peace.

Oppenheimer's messenger, Amiya Chakravarti was a Bengali poet and academic who had been closely associated with Tagore and Gandhi. At this time, he was Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton.

Oppenheimer's anguish over his part in the atom bomb had turned him to the study of Hindu philosophy and Gandhi's doctrine of ahimsa. He had unbounded admiration for Nehru and had written to him in his search for comfort during his own period of soul-searching. Vijaya Lakshmi had once had lunch with him at Princeton and found him 'as rare a human being as he was a great scientist'.

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India stood firm on non-alignment and at the same time sought

the cooperation of both superpowers. Policy differences with both Powers remained, yet a decade after independence, both had greater confidence in Nehru than they would ever have in each other. A working example had been set of civilized discourse and cooperation with each of two hostile Powers, irrespective of their ideology.

I had no access to Soviet comment on Nehru's death on 27 May 1964, but American tributes to him on the occasion, of which I give two below, the first by Adlai Stevenson and the second by the *Christian Science Monitor*, were extraordinarily moving:

> He was one of God's great creations in our time. His monument is his nation and his dream of freedom and of ever-expanding well-being for all men.
>
> The ancient has become modern. This living India, its momentum and vitality and its very spirit, are uniquely Mr Nehru's masterpiece.

A note of bitter regret and remorse marked a letter dated 6 April 1964 from Owen Lattimore to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit a few weeks before Nehru's death. Owen Lattimore, a brilliant and perceptive analyst of Asian affairs, had been one of Senator McCarthy's most savagely attacked victims. He was the author of some dozen books and numerous articles on Asia and international relations, and had urged America to shed a policy based on illusions. 'Until we get some of the illusions shaken out of us, we are certain to go on stumbling into the same kind of mess that we stumbled into in China in 1948,' he wrote in *The Situation in Asia*, published in 1949. He had come to India in 1949, had met Nehru and went to Kashmir at his request:

> . . . The last time I was in India, about Christmas 1949,

he [Nehru] did see me, and sent me up to Kashmir. Things were going well then (in spite of that silly imitation Colonel Blimp, Loy Henderson) and there was hope and the possibilities were great. I feel bitterly that we Americans have been responsible for a good deal that has gone wrong since. The suspicion and misunderstanding of your brother have been fantastic. There was nothing a man in my position could do, because having been put in a false position about China, anything that I had to say about India was suspect. Two major things have been wrong about American policy. Under the guise of a non-partisan approach we have in fact always been partisans of Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, and have urged settlement in a manner which has helped to prevent settlement.

Even more fundamental has been our suspicion of the socialized sector in India's economic program, and our persistent upsetting of the balance by pushing for private enterprise, regardless of the merit of the particular investment. If Wall Street were half as Machiavellian as the Communists accuse it of being, it would have lobbied in Washington for a crash program in aid of State enterprise in India, as the only way to create on time the economic stability, on the basis of which then, and only then, openings could have been made for private enterprise, with the benefits of competition and increased production which private enterprise can stimulate.

We have now, I fear, compounded our previous errors by throwing our weight about on the Tibetan frontier crisis in such a manner as (a) to exacerbate the Kashmir issue, and (b) give aid and comfort to those who, under a smokescreen of super-patriotism, are out to break up your brother's life's work, carving out

footholds of power (and mutual rivalry) for themselves.[47]

Owen Lattimore's letter, written in April 1964, reflects the power play of the period, in this case, Western interference in Kashmir and Tibet. Asia, controlled in large part by Europe, was ignored as an entity in its own right by the West until the collapse of empires after World War II. Yet, with a covert ('cold') war replacing the one just ended, the attempt to direct the course of Asian affairs continued, contributing to instability in the region and making it a breeding ground for Great Power designs.

3

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

During the imperial heyday, the European Powers recognized each others' respective spheres of ownership or influence in Asia and Africa. This version of an old-boy network guaranteed the status quo needed to exploit the wealth of their colonies and send it westward unimpeded. When they fell out with each other in World War I, the defeated Powers lost their colonies while the victorious Allies made their wartime occupations official under 'mandates' blessed by the League of Nations. Iraq and Palestine went to Britain, Syria went to the French. The League described these mandates as 'sacred trusts of civilization' and my history textbook at Wellesley College defined this noble purpose in these words: 'Great Britain and France undertook to guide the Arabs toward political independence and membership in organized international society.' Jawaharlal Nehru put it rather differently in his *Glimpses of World History*, comparing this arrangement to appointing 'a tiger to look after the interests of a number of cows or deer'. An alternative history had to be written, an alternative viewpoint projected, and another choice of words assembled to deconstruct the reigning point of view.

Hinduism believes the world is an illusion. For those who live in it, it is more accurately a matter of perception, dependent on where they are located on the map and the point of view this gives them. Thus, there is no single exclusive view. The West's reach across the globe for land and resources and its division of spoils among the European Powers had

looked to non-Europe like 'You take this mountain and I'll take this river and we'll slice up this valley between us.'

In that realm of arbitrary decision-making, imperialism's most arbitrary diktat had been the establishment of a Jewish state on Palestinian soil by a British government mandate. An alternative view of history would have argued that the persecution of Jews through the centuries and the horrors of the Holocaust had been European crimes inflicted on fellow Europeans. The guilt was Europe's. Why not, then, a homeland for the Jews on European soil? Why not in Britain or America or in the vast empty spaces of Australia or in Canada? Why on the tiny tract that was Palestine? Other devout religionists did not have countries located on the soil of their scriptures. Muslims and Christians have traditionally travelled great distances on pilgrimages to their holy lands, as have Buddhists: witness the epic journeys of Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang from China to Buddhist shrines in India. Locating Israel on biblical terrain had less to do with sympathy for Zionist sentiments than Britain's need for a European ally in West Asia to safeguard the Suez Canal route to India. In 1947, the British government admitted its mandate had not worked, and handed over the problem to the UN. The Indian representative on the UN's Special Committee on Palestine gave her government's view on 11 October 1947: 'Palestine should be an Arab state in which Jews would be allowed wide powers of autonomy. Palestine should be given independence. Palestine is predominantly an Arab country and in any solution that we may find, this position of predominance should not be altered to the disadvantage of the Arabs.' Nevertheless, India recognized Israel on 18 September 1950 and continued her support for a Palestinian state.

Eight years after handing its mandate to the UN, the British government seemed to be counting on an unlikely thesis for a way out of the festering wound it had created in West

Asia. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, then Indian High Commissioner to Britain, reported her meeting with Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan on 30 November 1955 to her brother. She wrote that European Jews were re-emigrating from Israel to Europe. The only Jews left in Israel would be those 'who came from North Africa, the Middle East and Asian regions. These Jews will not present such a contrast to the surrounding Arabs and it is hoped that in about five years' time the Arab countries will accept the fact of Israel and settle down in a harmonious relationship.'[48] A similar encapsulation of identity as exclusively racial or religious emerged in the Commonwealth Secretary Lord Home's remark a few days later when Vijaya Lakshmi raised the subject of South Africa. 'Home disclosed,' she wrote to her brother on 9 December the same year, 'that the High Commissioner for the Union [of South Africa] here had told him they would like to see all Indian nationals returned to India.'[49] Nehru's view—'There is no Indian national there, but people of Indian descent who are South African nationals'[50]—found no echo in the approach that identity comes neatly packaged in compartments labelled race and religion, instead of the complex amalgam it really is of racial and cultural mixture, of ideas and aspirations.

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Viewpoints are implicit and embedded in our choice of language, and language had played a star role in creating a mythology, and upholding the morality, of empire. A massive scaffolding of words and images had invested the enterprise with a mystique. 'Land of Hope and Glory' was an emotive combination of hymn and battle cry, glorifying British conquest and sanctifying occupation with god's blessing. Love became a hopeless dilemma in a romantic novel of the 1930s

when the English heroine discovered that the swarthy hero she had met in an outpost of the Empire had a drop of 'native' blood. A tragic ending was averted when the drop of blood turned out to be Spanish. Nowhere was the mystique of superiority so picturesquely enshrined as in Hollywood films of the 1930s. In *Gunga Din*, Cary Grant and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., battle heroically with a band of Indian thugs led by a vicious old thug made up to look exactly like Mahatma Gandhi! *Lady of the Tropics*, set in 1930s' Saigon, has Robert Taylor as a clean-cut American who falls in love with the alluring, half-'native' (the other half being French) Hedy Lamarr. She is deceitful and duplicitous, and can be nothing else, because of her 'native' blood. 'It's the way they are made,' explains the wise Catholic priest to the dejected lover, 'you can never really know them.' Inscrutable, unknowable, untrustworthy is what 'natives' are, he tells the trusting American. The French priest has spent long years in the East and knows what he is talking about.

Films such as these spread ignorance about Asia far and wide. Fiction and non-fiction, learned treatises, official assessments and ordinary conversations took European rule and white supremacy for granted as the normal and only possible state of affairs. Rising nationalisms and demands for independence that challenged these were put down with armed force. It is the triumph of any mystique that it appears to be eternal. It looks as permanent as the solar system and as much a part of the cosmic order. In 1936, the Dutch Governor-General of Indonesia could say, 'We have ruled here for three hundred years with the whip and the club and we shall still be doing it for another three hundred years.' Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* and his other writings gave birth to another view and vision in a language as emotive, poetic and powerful as the words that had built the literature of empire. They gave readers in and outside India

a close acquaintance with the Indian, who more than any other, except Gandhi, symbolized Indian nationalism. These extracts from his autobiography *Towards Freedom* describe what it was like to be imprisoned in Alipore Central Jail in Calcutta during 1934:

> Again the Black Maria carried me back to prison. On our way we passed plenty of troops on the march with machine guns, armoured cars, etc. I peeped at them through the tiny openings of our prison van. How ugly an armoured car is, I thought, and a tank. They reminded me of prehistoric monsters . . .
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> . . . Two chimneys, right in front of my cell and yard were belching forth dense volumes of black smoke, and sometimes the wind blew this smoke in my direction, almost suffocating me . . . From sunset to sunrise (more or less) we were locked up in our cells, and the long winter evenings were not very easy to pass. I grew tired of reading or writing hour after hour, and would start walking up and down that little cell—four or five short steps forward and then back again. I remembered the bears of the zoo tramping up and down their cages . . . A sign and a perpetual reminder of the might of the British Empire was the cry that prisoners had to shout out when high officials approached them. 'Sarkar salaam' was the cry, lengthened out, and it was accompanied by certain physical movements of the body. The voices of the prisoners shouting out this cry came to me many times a day over my yard wall, and especially when the superintendent passed by daily. I could just see over my seven-foot wall the top of a huge state umbrella under which the superintendent marched.

> Suddenly I felt very lonely in that cell of Alipore Jail. Life seemed to be a dreary affair, a very wilderness of desolation. Of the many hard lessons that I had learned, the hardest and the most painful now faced me: that it is not possible in any vital matter to rely on anyone. One must journey through life alone; to rely on others is to invite heartbreak.[51]

For those who thought of empire in terms of benevolence, words such as these were reminders of what faced those who crossed swords with it.

A strong element of mystique was attached to Nehru's outlook too, the mystique of a fight for freedom. The relationship it forged for him with India—as idea, entity, inspiration, and most of all, as a living flesh-and-blood bond with her people—made him what he was. The *Discovery of India* vividly resurrected her past—'For we are very old, and trackless centuries whisper in our ears'—but was as concerned with the kind of future that should arise from it.

> There is a stillness and everlastingness about the past . . . Unaffected by the storms and upheavals of the present, it maintains its dignity and repose and tempts the troubled spirit and the tortured mind to seek shelter in its vaulted catacombs. There is peace there and security, and one may even sense a spiritual quality. But it is not life, unless we can find the vital links between it and the present with all its conflicts and problems . . . To combine it with the present and extend it to the future, to break from it where it cannot be so united, to make of all this the pulsating and vibrating material for thought and action—that is life.[52]

The end of World War II and the departure of Britain from

India brought no radical change in imperial reckoning. The psychology of empire persisted. France was still fighting to retain hers. After Japan's surrender in 1945, she had regained possession of Laos and Cambodia, but the other three states (Annam, Tonkin and Cochin-China) of Indo-China had been proclaimed the independent Republic of Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh. France, Britain and the United States did not recognize the republic and backed a united Vietnam within the French Union under Bao Dai, the ex-emperor of Annam. Ho Chi Minh's resounding victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 left Vietnam divided, with the north under Ho's communist control. The United States reacted by embarking on its 'collective security' agenda to stop the expansion of communism in Southeast Asia. Britain had left India, but British forces were fighting insurgency in Malaya and Cyprus and suppressing the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. The colonial Powers saw no challenge to Western supremacy as such, least of all that political changes could disturb their long-established economic and strategic order. It came as a shock to Britain when Egypt wanted British troops out of the Suez Canal Zone. Anthony Eden's Conservative government feared for the passage of its oil supplies through the Canal. France feared for her major international investments in the Suez. The very word stirred memories of imperial grandeur. Suez was a monument to empire, another saga that had been celebrated in Hollywood's film of that name. It had been the brainchild of the great Disraeli and the engineering marvel of France's Ferdinand de Lesseps.

On 26 July 1956, President Gamel Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company, saying Egypt would use the income of US$100 million a year to build the Aswan Dam on the Upper Nile because the United States and Britain had withdrawn their offers of aid to this project. On 8 August, Nehru spelt out the situation in detail in the Lok Sabha. His

survey balanced India's friendship with Egypt and concern for her sovereign rights with India's 'good and close relations' with the Western countries involved, saying that India, 'a principal user of the waterway' herself, was 'passionately interested in averting a conflict'.[53] What followed reveals the impotence of a balanced approach in a crisis involving the European Powers' interests, where their strategy brooked no interference.

A conference called by Britain in London on 16 August sought to impose a plan authored by John Foster Dulles on the invited participants. Most of the twenty-two participating countries opposed armed intervention in Egypt and were suspicious of the plan, but seventeen of them were persuaded to endorse it, thus providing the diplomatic fig leaf of international backing needed for the American plan. The Indian delegate at the conference, Krishna Menon, rejected it outright as being incompatible with Egypt's sovereign rights. He produced an alternative plan, backed by Indonesia, Ceylon and Russia, that would protect the interests of the user nations without infringing Egypt's sovereignty, and would open the way to a negotiated settlement. The American plan must have been delivered to Nasser in the expectation that he would reject it. The Indian plan for negotiation was rendered redundant in circumstances where Britain and France were already in massive preparation for war, with the declared aim of overthrowing the Nasser government. Anglo-French aerial bombardment of airfields and military objectives in Egypt began on 31 October, with Israel already having made a preliminary attack on the Sinai Peninsula two days earlier. The British government had consulted some Commonwealth countries before the attack, but its Asian member countries were not included.

'We know now,' wrote Vijaya Lakshmi in her memoir *The Scope of Happiness*, 'that Britain was determined to force

the issue from the time the nationalization of the canal was announced and also that secret meetings were held by Britain, France and Israel . . . It was interesting for me as High Commissioner in London to note that the British Government had been in consultation with some of the Commonwealth countries before the Suez crisis broke out in the press, but they had not informed the Asians in the Commonwealth of their intentions.'

The UN Security Council was prevented by the British and French veto from halting the war. An emergency session of the UN General Assembly demanded the withdrawal of British, French and Israeli forces from Egypt, but Israel refused to vacate Gaza, and the two European Powers laid down conditions for withdrawal. An uneasy armistice prevailed. India contributed a contingent of her armed forces to the UN International Force in Egypt, whose main task was to ensure that Israel remained within the boundary set by the armistice agreement. On 19 November, Nehru informed the Lok Sabha that India was sending medical supplies and relief goods to both Egypt and Hungary, which was then caught up in a suppression of a popular uprising by Soviet troops. 'The fiery speeches made by Nasser at this time,' wrote Vijaya Lakshmi in her memoir, 'were aimed at the Arab world as much as toward his own people, and on Nehru's advice he modified many of his statements.'

The Suez crisis revealed vivid contrasts in international behaviour. Egypt behaved with propriety and restraint under provocation and aggression.

India worked for a negotiated settlement that would protect Egypt's sovereign rights as well as the interests of the international community. Failing to prevent war, she sent officers and men (who proved popular with the Egyptian people) to safeguard the armistice. The two European Powers chose war instead of negotiation.

The attack on Egypt also illustrates the umbilical cord binding superpower rivalry across the world. On 23 October 1956 the Soviet-backed leader of Hungary called on Soviet troops stationed near the capital to break up a popular demonstration in Budapest. The revolt spread to the provinces. Imre Nagy formed a new popular government and announced Hungary's neutrality and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact which united the countries of the Communist bloc. A divided Kremlin debated the issue over 28 and 29 October. The Stalinists—Molotov, Suslov and Kaganovich—wanted Russian rule to continue. Mikoyan and Khrushchev, on the other hand, favoured the withdrawal of Soviet troops and support for Hungary's neutrality. Soviet forces had begun their withdrawal and Moscow had announced a meeting of the Warsaw Pact Powers when news came of the Anglo-French ultimatum to Egypt followed by reports of Allied bombings of the country. Soviet forces immediately re-occupied Hungary. Imre Nagy was arrested and later executed. The Suez War had resulted in what the Western Allies least wanted. It entrenched the Stalinists and sidelined the tide of liberalism in the Soviet Union. Hoping their military assault on the Suez would serve as a warning to Russia to stay out of the Middle East, it had the opposite effect, alerting Russia to maintain an increased interest in the region.

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Did Nehru speak louder against the attack on Egypt than on Hungary? Lacking embassy-level diplomatic relations with Hungary until 1959 and no information other than from Western sources, Nehru expressed his grave concern to the Russian ambassador in Delhi and directed the Indian ambassador in Moscow to tell the USSR government that India's sympathies were with the Hungarian nationalists

fighting for freedom. He also asked him to seek full information about developments in Hungary. Addressing a UNESCO conference in New Delhi on 5 November 1956, he said, 'We see today in Egypt, as well as in Hungary, both human dignity and freedom outraged and the force of modern arms used to suppress peoples and to gain political objectives.' A joint communiqué by the prime ministers of India, Burma, Ceylon and Indonesia had called for the removal of Soviet forces from Hungary and the peoples' right to make the democratic changes they wanted. An Indian resolution at the UN requested the Hungarian government to receive observers and was carried by a large majority against the Soviet Union's opposition. Nehru followed this up with messages to Bulganin, the Soviet Prime Minister, Kadar, head of the Hungarian government, and Tito, leader of Yugoslavia, urging them to support the resolution and to invite Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary General of the UN, to visit Hungary.

In a detailed statement in the Lok Sabha on 16 November, he explained why India had voted against the UN resolution on Hungary, sponsored by Pakistan, Cuba, Italy, Ireland and Peru, saying its wording would have defeated India's effort to secure the withdrawal of Soviet forces and might have brought in outside intervention, leading to 'Hungary perishing in the flames of war.'[54] (He had in mind the Korean War when US-led forces had crossed the 38th Parallel into North Korea and were pushed back by China's intervention. In a worsening situation, the UN had branded China as aggressor and President Truman had threatened to use the atom bomb.) The 'most objectionable part' of the resolution had proposed elections under UN supervision, which would have set a bad precedent for intervention in other countries. India had abstained on every paragraph of the resolution but voted against the 'most objectionable' paragraph, and therefore, against the whole resolution in the final vote.[55]

The wait for impartial information about developments in Hungary (unlike the first-hand information available at every step of the Suez crisis) made Nehru proceed with initial caution on Hungary, laying him open, in India and abroad, to the accusation of double standards. When the full facts of the popular uprising were established, all caution was abandoned in his speech in the Lok Sabha on 19 November.[56] Reporting it the next day as 'tremendously significant', the BBC correspondent Gerald Priestland said, 'It [Nehru's speech] was delivered without text or notes, not a calculated speech but one straight from the heart. Never before has Mr Nehru spoken out so positively against Russian imperialism and for the oppressed peoples behind the iron curtain. And it seems from India's latest resolution before the United Nations, that she means to follow this up.'[57]

The tragic misadventures in Egypt and Hungary were linked for Nehru as move and countermove in the deadly retaliatory game of the rival Powers, kept in motion by the Cold War. His words to the UN General Assembly in New York on 20 December 1956 sound profoundly weary of war games: 'Cold Wars mean nourishing the idea of war in the minds of men . . . all these pacts and military alliances are completely out of place . . . They only create hostility, leading to a piling up of armaments and making disarmament more and more difficult.'

The Suez War did not achieve the removal of Nasser.[58] He survived this open attempt at regime change. Prime Minister Mossadeq of Iran had not been as lucky when Iran's parliament voted to nationalize its oil industry to rid it of British control in 1951. Broadcasting to the nation on 20 June of that year, he had said, 'Fifty years of imperialism in Persia ended today.' An Anglo-American coup overthrew the elected government in 1953, jailed Mossadeq and brought back the compliant Shah who had fled the country two years earlier.

In other regime-change scenarios that did not recognize the new realities of the post-colonial world, Milton Obote was ousted by a British-backed coup and replaced by Idi Amin in Uganda, the American CIA assassinated Patrice Lumumba in the Congo and later, Salvador Allende in Chile, both democratically elected leaders and popular icons. Fidel Castro has survived numerous assassination attempts. Opposition to the Powers' interests was efficiently eliminated, ironically, by democracies that upheld opposition at home as being fundamental to democracy. These need hardly have been covert operations when the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson, at least, had frankly stated in the early 1950s, 'No legal issue arises when the United States responds to challenges to its position, prestige or authority.' For those outside the bastions of superior military might, it was a dangerous world to gain independence in, and to act independently could invite extermination.

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Why wasn't Nehru assassinated? India turned down unacceptable terms by British and American oil companies when their cooperation was first sought for oil exploration, and went ahead with Soviet assistance. (Our first oil rig came from Romania.) A professed socialist, his 'mixed economy' provided no unfettered access to foreign investment. He kept his own counsel and pursued the policy he thought fit on international issues, often in outright opposition to the Powers, and he might well have been targeted as a threat to Western dominance. Yet by the mid-1950s, Nehru's active role as mediator and peacemaker in international crises was seen as symbolizing reason, sanity and the common longing for a world without war. India's relationship with the West prospered.

Britain valued India's association with the Commonwealth and was grateful for Nehru's influence within it. A fulsome accolade came from an unexpected British quarter. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit paid her first formal call as Indian High Commissioner to Britain on Prime Minister Winston Churchill on 22 March 1955 and wrote to her brother the next day:

> He was very conscious of past mistakes but [he said that] since the Commonwealth Conference and his talks with Nehru he was convinced that 'Asia is with us.' He said, 'It is Nehru who is bringing this about. He can and will interpret the best we have given him to the Asian people. Nehru is the light of Asia . . . yes, and a greater light than Buddha.' He asked me to remember and repeat this to the Prime Minister . . .[59]

This radical reassessment from a die-hard imperialist went even further. Churchill told her that her brother had conquered mankind's two worst enemies, hate and fear. On another occasion, invited to lunch by the Prime Minister, she had been taken aback when Churchill suddenly asked, 'We killed your husband didn't we?' Recovering her poise, the reply she heard herself giving was, 'No. Every man lives only to his appointed hour.' 'Nobly spoken,' Churchill responded.

One 'past mistake' Churchill may not have been conscious of, but of which Vijaya Lakshmi reminded him, was the segregation practised by the British in India after the Mutiny of 1857. There was no social mixing except of a limited formal variety between the Raj and its supporters. Had there been a coming-and-going in the normal course of social interaction, there might have been a meeting of minds, an attraction of personalities over a meal or a conversation, and history might have been altogether different. Late had Churchill discovered in his adversary a man he could whole-heartedly admire.

Coming together as equals opens up endless possibilities, as Vijaya Lakshmi discovered in the good fellowship that flowered with the Churchills. On a teatime visit to their home, Lady Churchill asked her please to try and keep Winnie off the brandy. Much to Winnie's irritation, the ritual tea tray arrived. At the same time, there was a phone call for Vijaya Lakshmi informing her of the birth of a son to her youngest daughter, Rita, in Tokyo, where her diplomat husband was posted. 'Take it away,' roared Winnie at the tea tray, 'we must have champagne. Mrs Pandit has just had a grandson.'

At the other end of Britain's political spectrum, British scientist J.B.S. Haldane spoke of Nehru's India to Oxford University's Socialist Club in January 1956, saying that in India, 'One has the absolute impression of being in a highly civilized community. I feel far more at home there than I do in some European and most American cities. I was born in 1892 and became automatically a subject of Queen Victoria as I am now of Queen Elizabeth. Neither was my own choice. It is entirely possible that I shall die as a citizen of the Indian Republic, if they will have me.'

Professor Haldane was made welcome as an Indian citizen.

India's condemnation of Anglo-French aggression against Egypt did not damage her relations with Britain. Nehru was seen as having tried to rectify the damage done by Anthony Eden (with whom he shared a relationship of mutual respect). The Labour Opposition, which had relentlessly attacked Eden's 'folly', shared Nehru's concerns. In his introduction to Paul Johnson's book *The Suez War*, Aneurin Bevan wrote, 'The beginnings of a positive peace policy, which some of us had come to hope for, were wrecked by the withdrawal by the United States, followed by Britain, of finances for the Aswan Dam in Egypt . . . it was foolish beyond all belief to imagine that the populations of the Middle East would continue docilely to see wealth flowing from their lands to sustain the higher standards of living of Western Europe and

to create oil millionaires in Europe and in the United States without at the same time demanding their share.'[60]

In America, the State Department's suspicion of Nehru did not reflect informed opinion of his leadership. Experienced American observers, among them Adlai Stevenson, Democratic candidate for President against Eisenhower, and Chester Bowles, twice United States ambassador to India, urged support for him. 'Mr Nehru says what Asia thinks,' Chester Bowles said at a meeting arranged by the India League in New York in May 1953. 'We owe a debt to Mr Nehru for making Asia's attitude clear, even when we disagree with him. The military power we can apply to Asia is sharply limited. The Korean War should have taught us by now that a stubbornly determined Asia cannot be defeated by push button methods. The future of Asia will be determined not by Americans, but by Asians. The most dynamic force of the Asian Revolution is the overwhelming desire for human dignity . . . Indians should be supported in their brave struggle to make the Five Year Plan a success.' The *New York Post* described him as 'One of the most incandescent figures of world history' on 30 September 1956. He was warmly received by Eisenhower on his visit to the US in December 1956 and referred to by the *New York Times* as 'One of the great figures of our time—and it is a time of giants.'

The Indo-Soviet relationship improved dramatically as changes took place in the Soviet Union following Stalin's death in 1953. *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* came out with leading articles hailing the fifth anniversary of the Indian republic. The *Pravda* article concluded, 'On the fifth anniversary of the Republic of India the Soviet people express feelings of deep sympathy to the great Indian people [who are] defending [their] independence, and peace in Asia and in the whole world.'

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Nehru may well have been too interesting to assassinate. India's open democratic society together with socialism was something new under the sun—significant for being the world's first experiment of its kind—and the world was watching it. Nehru himself was no inscrutable Oriental. He was a known factor. What you saw was what he was. What he said was what he meant. If there were still some who thought him an enigma, it was no fault of his. He had written extensively and revealingly about himself and his ideas. He had spoken all over rural and urban India, sharing his thoughts and feelings about developments in the country and abroad, in public speeches that often became as personal as private conversations. Transparency was his public and private style. He had become widely known during the decade before independence for his stand against fascism and Nazism and had an admiring constituency abroad among writers, artists and intellectuals, including Diego Rivera, Andre Malraux, Yehudi Menuhin, Octavio Paz and Isamu Noguchi. The sculptor Noguchi, who was removed to an internment camp in Arizona along with other Japanese Americans during World War II, later revealed how he felt when he had first heard Nehru's voice on the radio: 'It came over the air like a clarion call for freedom.'

In the post-war world, Nehru saw both superpowers as locked into their respective ideologies, neither one allowing nations their right to exist outside the ideological divide. Their military moves and countermoves looked dangerously like the build-up to World War II, with the Warsaw Pact, along with Russia's refusal to vacate the East European countries the Red Army had liberated as a counterweight to NATO, SEATO and the Baghdad Pact. In these circumstances, non-alignment made sound sense. 'I can understand alignments in times of war; they are probably inevitable,' Nehru said during a debate on foreign affairs in Parliament on 28 March

1951. 'But I fail to understand why this wartime psychology of alignment should be imported into times of relative peace and why any country should be persuaded to line up with one group or another . . . Our present policy flows from what we have thought and said in the past, while incidentally it also helps in the maintenance of peace and the avoidance of war in the world today.' Non-alignment was not conceived as a third 'force' or 'bloc', both of which carried a military innuendo, but a third 'area' that would act as a deterrent to war. Broadly, it was an alternative to taking sides, making it possible for nations to coexist and cooperate regardless of their internal political systems. To sticklers for definition, there was in any case no true ideological divide between the two Power blocs since the 'free world' outside the Iron Curtain was a mixed bag of democracies, despotisms and dictatorships. Siding with either Power boiled down to strengthening its military presence and aiding its interventions across the map. Against the warlike prescription of 'collective security' Nehru set forth the alternative of 'collective peace'.

The twenty-four widely differing Asian and African countries that met at Bandung in 1955 to consult together were not a formal grouping. They did not always speak with one voice. They were no more united than the UN. The significant fact was that they met—many of their leaders coming face to face for the first time—and planned to cooperate through the UN, which they considered the best hope for peace. Each major decision of the Bandung Conference referred to the UN, an approach that set this group apart from the blocs and pacts of the Powers which seemed to exist outside the UN and left them unaccountable to the world opinion it represented.

Non-alignment marked more than the coming of age of developing countries and the beginning of their voice in world affairs. It was the catalyst that wrought a historic shift of

perspective in a Europe-centred world, where the West had presided, as of right, over human affairs. An alternative perspective now found a place at the high table. Its impact on international issues grew through its vote at the UN. Twentieth-century art had made much the same shift artistically when it set aside the hallowed techniques of realism. Two noses appeared on a face, three breasts on a body, fish bloomed in flower vases, limbs were foreshortened or elongated. Anything became possible on canvas as it now did on the international canvas. A political presence representing half of humanity—absent until then from the halls of decision-making—had to be taken into account. During the Suez crisis, for example, John Foster Dulles warned Britain and France not to take the issue to the UN. By then its membership of seventy-six nations had upset the old majority through which the Atlantic nations had controlled the General Assembly since the war.

As decolonization proceeded and African countries gained independence, they joined the Organization of African Unity (as it was then called) and became non-aligned countries. By 1961, however, there was a divergence of approach in the Movement, with some favouring a non-aligned 'bloc' that would take a common stand. Nehru argued that this would destroy the Movement's original purpose: the freedom to judge each issue on its own merits. Against a background of mounting superpower tension, he saw the imminent danger of a nuclear war as the agenda to be urgently addressed, now that colonialism was on its way out. At his insistence, the Belgrade Conference, meeting on 1 September 1961 recognized this priority in its final resolution. A.N. Rosenthal of the *New York Times* saw Nehru as the lone figure of vision and stature at the conference, isolated from its general trend and wrote on 24 September 1961:

> Almost alone in the world, Jawaharlal Nehru has struggled against allowing the people in their ignorance and poverty to be caught in the trap of the easy way out. The others—the Nassers, the Titos, the Nkrumahs, the Toures, the Castros, the Soekarnos—have built their pedestals on their people's despair and strivings. At Belgrade Nehru sat among men he must have despised . . . he is no longer the automatic leader of the non-aligned nations. There are some interesting reasons why this happened [the bypassing of Nehru at Belgrade] and they bear on Mr Nehru's future influence among the uncommitted nations. He found himself among many leaders with whom he had absolutely nothing in common and small-time dictators who are contemptuous of the methods by which he lives and governs. Beyond tactics, how much influence can a man like Nehru have on a man like Soekarno? They live in different political and moral worlds.

In spite of the evident 'political and moral' isolation Rosenthal observed at Belgrade, Nehru was able to divert the non-aligned Movement from its beaten track of anti-colonialism and give it a new direction. With the completion of decolonization and on into the 1970s, it focused on the twin issues he had highlighted: development and disarmament. The UN also held a special session on development in 1974. Arundhati Ghosh, who represented India at the UN during that decade, recalls, 'Those were heady days in terms of non-aligned strength.'

The price rise in 1973–74 of oil, set off by the Arab nations who were part of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), hit the developing countries badly. When joint efforts to get a dual-price arrangement from the OPEC failed, they had to look for other solutions. Meanwhile, the

Cold War deepened cracks in the Movement. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, America threw her weight behind the mujahideen to combat it and allegiances became sharply divided, led by Cuba, which said the non-aligned were natural allies of the Soviet Union. Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union ended the literal need for non-alignment, but an aspect of the Movement continues as a forum to discuss policy.

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The first flush of non-alignment had an emotional content made up of ties that had been formed during struggles for freedom. India had supported Indonesia in her fight for independence from Dutch rule. Returning home from his first visit to India in 1950, President Soekarno wrote to Nehru from Djakarta on 14 February 1950:

My dear Panditji, Jawaharlalji,
During the days following my return from India I have had ample time to reflect on my visit to your country . . . I can look back on it as one of the most important phases of my life, and when I say it I do not in the first place speak as President of Indonesia but as one who has discovered new boundaries of fraternity and friendship beyond the cold interests of present-day politics. I am more than ever convinced that there is nothing artificial about the brotherly relations between our countries, for Padma and I (as indeed everyone who was with us on my trip) have found brothers and sisters everywhere we went. The atmosphere of warm spontaneity that we encountered everywhere could have been occasioned only by an instantaneous realization of the fact that we stood as people whose histories have run parallel for so many centuries, whose

cultural monuments—spiritually and materially—are so closely akin and who are now meeting each other on the convergent course of current world affairs.

The many contacts I made in India, in particular with you, have contributed a great deal to my insight of Asian relations in particular and world affairs in general. Indeed my whole outlook on current affairs has been enriched tremendously in the brief scope of my visit. Padma joins me in expressing the most sincere thanks for the cordial hospitality we received while staying with you and your charming family and relatives. We felt completely at home with you, and that, more than anything else made us really feel that sense of 'belonging'. Will you please send our warmest regards to Vijaya Lakshmi, Indira and Tara, and our kisses to your beautiful grandchildren. How are they all?

We (and the whole Indonesian people) are all looking forward to your visit to Indonesia . . .
Jai Hind.
Soekarno[61]

Nehru replied on 28 February:

My dear Soekarno,
Thank you for your letter of February 14th. I cannot tell you how happy all of us were to have you and Padma with us for a few days. I am afraid we treated you rather informally and did not lay too much stress on the official aspect. But as you were so much of us, it was difficult to treat you merely as distinguished strangers. As you say, you fitted in completely not only in our general environment but in our family circle.

I have long thought that the whole course of history,

both of the distant and recent past, brings our two countries together. That course of events can be somewhat helped or somewhat checked by personalities and their relationship to one another.

Fortunately for us, you and I as individuals have so much in common that we take to each other spontaneously.

Our ambassador, Dr Subbarayan, will be going to Indonesia soon and I hope to send you with him a pair of field glasses made in India. This is one of our first attempts at making these things, probably it is the very first of its kind made in India. I am trying to get for your children an electric train. We could not get anywhere here the kind I wanted, so I have asked our High Commissioner in London to try and get it.

With all our good wishes and love to you and Padma.
Merdeka.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru[62]

POSTSCRIPT: THREE RINGSIDE VIEWS OF THE NON-ALIGNED

On her visit to Indonesia as President of the UN General Assembly 1953–54, Vijaya Lakshmi was drawn into the Soekarnos' marital problems. Padma, Soekarno's pretty young wife who had won hearts in India and was the mother of his five children, now had a co-wife who also had children. Vijaya Lakshmi told her brother afterwards she could do little but sympathize with Padma, since Soekarno's susceptibility to feminine charms was well known.

Seeing Nkrumah off on the steps of 9, Kensington Palace Gardens, London, in 1959, at the end of a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, Nehru said in a half-puzzled,

half-exasperated outburst, 'What do you mean by putting your head on a stamp?' Nkrumah only smiled in answer. Standing there with them, I seem to remember Nehru saying 'coin', not 'stamp', though the latter word has figured in other accounts.

India's association with Marshal Tito was untroubled by romantic or political surprises. On an official trip to India in 1954, he and his party visited Himachal Pradesh over Christmas. The state's Lieutenant Governor, Major-General Himatsinhji, wrote a detailed account of the visit,[63] which he described as highly successful, to the Prime Minister on 5 January 1955, saying Tito had been forthcoming, frank and friendly, and enormously interested in the hill state, which reminded him of his own hilly country. Tito had been amazed to hear that the government had already built '350 miles of motorable roads, 250 miles of jeepable roads and a thousand miles of new alignment in the hills'. As one army man to another, Major-General Himatsinhji told Tito he had been in Italy, Malta and Cyprus during the last war and seen 'tough-looking women in battle dress who, [he] was told, belonged to the Yugoslav army, brought to these places by air. Marshal Tito said that the majority of their army personnel consisted of women who made fine soldiers in guerrilla warfare and who were better disciplined than men.' The most critical moment in their guerrilla warfare had come when seven hundred German commandos had been parachute-dropped about a furlong from Tito's headquarters. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting took place. The Yugoslavs won, killing 550 Germans and capturing the rest.

On the road to Theog, PWD gangs of one mate and ten men each were working all along the route, carrying out repairs. When our car passed, the men drew smartly to attention and the mates saluted. Tito was curious to know how they came to be so smart and to salute with military

precision. I informed him that all these mates were ex-servicemen who had been released from the army. He was happy to hear that ex-soldiers were being provided with employment.

At Theog, Tito jumped to his feet when the folk dancing started, saying it was just like Yugoslav folk dance and looking as if he was longing to join in. Himatsinhji and the Chief Minister therefore went down to the arena where they were soon joined by members of Tito's party. 'The Marshal could no longer hold back; running down to the arena he joined us and danced with the people, going from group to group and dancing with all the groups. It was difficult to get him away. When the Yugoslav admiral who was in the party hesitated to dance because he was in uniform, the Marshal asked him to put a coat over his uniform. He did so and also joined the dancers.'

On the drive back from Theog, the Marshal talked about his military career. Selected as an officer in Austria–Hungary, he learned to speak fluent German. He spent six years in Russia and Siberia and also spoke Russian.

> I ventured to ask him about Stalin. He considered Stalin to have been clever, cunning, ruthless and cruel but not intelligent . . . If Stalin had been intelligent he would have changed his ruthless methods once Communism had been firmly established. He fell foul of Stalin on account of his policy, and he described the two nights of vodka drinking with him, trying to come to an understanding with him. The year 1948, he said, was the hardest year for Yugoslavia, as the country was poor, with shortage of food and a shattered economy—and with the Russian, Rumanian and Bulgarian armies on their borders. I said it was amazing how Yugoslavia had come through. He said it was the unity and determination of the people that had saved the country . . . When asked about Beria, the Marshal said he was the stooge of Stalin and carried out purges of various groups and individuals. Everyone had feared him and the present regime took the first opportunity of liquidating him.
>
> When I expressed our thanks and our appreciation of his mixing with the people at Theog, he said he was happy to have done so. He mixed with his own people and felt hill people to be his own. [He told me] 'Besides, General, the leader who is afraid of mixing with his own people is not fit to be the head of a State.' He said some people who did not like him described him as a dictator, but the Yugoslavs were amused because they knew him to be one of them.

Mountain trout and pheasant were part of the buffet lunch served to them at Wildflower Hall and when the Indian hosts said how happy they were to have Tito and his party with them at Christmas, they were told that in Yugoslavia churches and cathedrals were used for storing foodgrains; religion took second place, and the people's welfare came first.

Later, on 21 January 1955, 'a tremendous ovation greeted Marshal Tito as he appeared on the rostrum' at the Avadi session of the Indian National Congress. The *Hindustan Times* reported the next day, 'The occasion was unique for here was the head of a European State addressing a Congress session in person . . . Prolonged cheers greeted the Marshal's concluding remarks that peaceful cooperation and coexistence was the only path to lasting world peace.'

The Indian Foreign Service officer accompanying Tito and his party through India described the Marshal as beautifully bronzed and handsome, as splendid in his uniform as 'The Chocolate Soldier' and looking as if he had stepped straight out of that operetta.

4

A PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Britain was no longer in a position to hold India after World War II and a transfer of power became inevitable; but only Indians could have believed that independence for India would be a matter concerning only Indians. It was inseparable from Britain's calculations of what losing control over India would mean. The British would lose control over the Indian Ocean and the military stronghold India had been for the defence of British interests in West Asia. The Soviet Union had emerged a power and influence after the war and it was another factor to contend with in the region. Imperial solutions in Asia had proceeded from their own imperial imperatives. The ground realities or aspirations of the region itself did not figure foremost in these calculations—as they had not in Palestine, Iraq and Syria. One ground reality the negotiations for transfer of power disregarded altogether was that the Interim Government of India in 1946 was an elected body. The election held in the winter of 1945–46 under the old British dispensation of the 1935 Government of India Act was based on a restricted franchise providing for general constituencies as well as Muslim constituencies for Muslim seats. It was the only way of ascertaining the strength of political parties and had been called for by Britain's Labour government for this purpose. It resulted in a Congress victory in eight out of eleven provinces, and a coalition with Khizr Hayat Khan in the Punjab. The Muslim League won the two remaining provinces, Bengal and Sindh.

On 30 August 1946, Dean Acheson, then the US Assistant Secretary of State, advised President Truman to immediately establish diplomatic relations with the Interim Government, saying, 'Although the second most important Indian political party [the Muslim League] has refused to participate thus far in these developments, it is believed that the new Government will be representative of at least 80 per cent of the Indian people.'[64] This was recognition of elected strength that Viceroy Lord Wavell did not consider sufficient basis for a transfer of power. The tortuous negotiations ending in the cul-de-sac of Partition ignored this evidence. The democratic hurdle that the elections symbolized was neatly disposed of when Wavell invited the Muslim League to join the Interim Government, which was still known as the Viceroy's Executive Council, without the required commitment on the Muslim League's part to join the Constituent Assembly. According to Colonel Louis Johnson who had been President Roosevelt's emissary to India in 1942, Wavell (then the Commander-in-Chief) 'hates and distrusts Nehru'.[65] He also believed the 'Muslim League [was being] used by Britain as a counterforce to Congress'. This seemed manifest in Wavell's moves as Viceroy.

For Britain a satisfactory solution would have been an undivided India entering the Commonwealth as an ally in foreign policy and defence, and allowing a continued British military presence on the subcontinent. Alarm bells rang when on 9 December 1946, the first day of the Constituent Assembly, Nehru introduced a resolution declaring that India, on achieving freedom, would become a sovereign independent republic—three words that upset calculations and raised fears of India leaving the Commonwealth. Nehru also wanted India's armed forces placed under Indian command as soon as possible. The original date for the transfer of power had been June 1948. When this date was brought forward, the

change of command was delayed for another year for reasons that were claimed to be normal delays in affecting the transfer. This (perhaps calculated) delay effectively obstructed the new Indian government's military strategy when Kashmir was invaded on 24 October 1947.

Partition must have become a foregone conclusion when Jinnah announced that Pakistan, if conceded, would join the Commonwealth, provide military bases for Britain, and keep its forces under British command. Carving a new country inside India that would be a reliable ally, with the critical North West Frontier under Britain's continuing command, made sound sense to British strategists, and backing Jinnah was rewarded a hundredfold when Pakistan joined the Western-backed Baghdad Pact and later, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).

It is a point of human interest that France's Napoleon was not French but Corsican, Germany's messiah between the two world wars was not German but Austrian, and Jinnah, a Khoja who belonged to a minority within Islam, was not a practising Muslim, but became the founder of an Islamic state. He had never read the Koran and had never performed Haj. He did not observe the five daily prayer rituals. He ate pork and drank alcohol. Before the advent of Gandhi in Indian politics, he had cooperated with the Indian National Congress for Hindu–Muslim unity and been hailed for his secular credentials. He had fallen in love with and married a beautiful young Parsi girl half his age. Ruttie Petit's revealing style of dress and her westernized upbringing were the furthest distance from the burkha and its attendant lifestyle. As young women, she and my mother Vijaya Lakshmi, who were the same age, had been friends and my mother had envied Ruttie's sophistication and flamboyance. Jinnah's own lifestyle was western. He saw himself, and was regarded as, a modern man. Unlike Napoleon and Hitler who had no regrets, he is

reported to have regretted the founding of Pakistan, calling it 'the greatest blunder of my life'.

Jinnah as the founder of a state based on religious identity is a paradox not yet explained. Maybe some of the explanation lies in the personality of the man who was seventy years old in 1946. He did not appear to have known the give-and-take or the mellowing influences of married life and his political ambitions had been kept frustratingly in check during an era dominated by Gandhi in Indian politics. In the course of an incompatible marriage, Ruttie Jinnah had sought distraction in drugs and séances. She died in 1929 at the age of twenty-nine, believed to have driven herself to suicide. Jinnah became alienated from his only child, a daughter, when she married a non-Muslim, Neville Wadia, against his wishes. He never spoke to her again. Dina was not interested in politics or in Pakistan and remained in Bombay after Partition. I met her several times in a friend's home in Bombay during the 1950s. She was small and angular, her hair cut short and shaped to her head, informal in her trouser-clad elegance. She had a dry wit and a quiet self-assurance—it must have taken character to go against her father's stony disapproval of her marriage—and she had none of her mother's reputed frivolity or flamboyance. She once introduced me as 'this clever young thing who's just written a book'. She told me pastel colours suited me. When her daughter, Diana, was admitted to Wellesley College, she asked me to talk to Diana about Wellesley and told me to impress her with the academic excellence that would be required of her.

If the violence preceding Partition was a factor in hastening the decision for it, could the violence have been controlled? In early 1946, naval ratings mutinied on a ship in Bombay port. On 19 February, the sailors hoisted the Indian tricolour. The mutiny spread to other ships, involving thousands of sailors—backed by demonstrators and police on the streets

of Bombay—and to the port of Karachi. Prime Minister Attlee called for immediate action. British naval ships were sent from Trincomalee and British army personnel arrived from Manora Island. The Congress, opposed to the mutiny, but in sympathy with the sailors' grievances, promised support for the sailors' demands if they surrendered unconditionally. The mutiny ended on the fourth day. In contrast, on 16 August, of the same year, no action was taken to prevent a massacre in Calcutta. The British Governor of Bengal had warning of Jinnah's Direct Action Day—to demonstrate the fury of the Muslim League's demand for a separate state—and had forwarded it to New Delhi and London. Chief Minister Suhrawardy, who headed the Muslim League government in Bengal, chose to give his government servants a three-day weekend holiday for the occasion and the British brigadier in charge of Calcutta ordered his troops confined to barracks for the day, giving free rein to the murderers of thousands on the streets of the city. According to General Sir Francis Tuker, who was in charge of India's eastern command, 'It was unbridled savagery with homicidal maniacs let loose to kill and kill and maim and burn . . .' Platoons under British command removed hundreds of stinking corpses still lying on the streets three days later and the Great Calcutta Killing set off a chain of butchery and bloodletting in other cities. The horror of Direct Action Day was compounded by the fact that Britain had emphasized the need to keep British officers in command to prevent the breakdown of law and order.

It is curious that the British with their long experience in West Asia could have thought an Islamic nation would be an ally in India's northwest and would strengthen their relations with the Arab world. When had Islam been a unifying factor? It proved a fantasy when civil war broke Pakistan twenty-four years after its formation. The Partition of India seems to

have been devised from equal parts of strategy and fantasy. Imperial policies that drew arbitrary lines arbitrarily across land masses were bound to be unrelated to ground realities. In fact, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the man who presided over the boundary lines drawn across India, had never before been to India.

In Europe, the separation of church from the state in modern times recognizes that the state has no religion and that religion is a personal affair between man and God—wisdom culled from Europe's religious wars. Indian secularism derives from an opposite source: its pre-modern memory of religions coexisting on its soil and reinterpreting themselves in contact with each other. Out of this grew the consciousness that there is no Indian history or civilization divorced from the food and fat of other civilizations, no India without the strangers who have crossed her path, to come and go, or to stay, who left their cultural tracks upon her, and no Indian who was not a product of some aspect of this mix. Where does one culture begin and another end if strands of both are housed in the same person? For Gandhi, though his own upbringing and home influences had been exclusively Hindu, India's religious and cultural variety was a sacred trust. Channelling this multi-faceted identity into an all-inclusive national movement for independence was the natural outcome of this frame of mind. At independence, the party that had fought racial supremacy and superiority ruled out superior status to any one religion, believing India's religions would be best respected and best protected by a state that had no religion. Perhaps it was just as well that those who felt otherwise departed from India.

Even so, the colossal human tragedy of Partition left the pain of torn flesh and limbs hacked off a living breathing body. Partition was also the death of the dream two generations of Indians had fought for. Faiz Ahmed Faiz gave

it sorrowful expression in his poem *The Dawn of Freedom*.

> This blemished light, this dawn by night half-devoured
> Is surely not the dawn for which we were waiting
> This cannot be the dawn in quest of which,
> Hoping to find it somewhere, friends, we all set out.[66]

Faiz Ahmed Faiz never left India. Pakistan came up around him.

*

India became a sovereign independent republic as well as a member of the Commonwealth. As a republic, she could not agree to owe allegiance to the Crown and the law was changed to meet her objections. In the new formula drawn up by Nehru and Prime Minister Attlee, the word British would be dropped from the title, transforming the Commonwealth into a free association of nations as equal members. 'My dear Jawaharlal,' wrote Sir Stafford Cripps on 28 April 1949,

> . . . I am very happy and I do believe that you have done something really big in world history. It is not only—or perhaps so much—what we have written down and arranged but it is that eight nations have settled a most difficult and potentially troublesome question with great friendliness and simplicity . . . It is good that we have been given this chance to work together—not always seeing eye to eye—but always working heart to heart. You know how extremely Isabel and I wish you and India an ever growing happiness in achievement. God bless you always—Stafford.[67]

India's example, and Nehru's leading role in the Commonwealth during the 1950s, encouraged other newly independent countries to join it, and Nehru used this expanding platform to advance India's foreign policy objectives. These often differed radically from Britain's, as over the Suez and the Mau Mau movement in Kenya. Declaring his sympathy for the latter, Nehru said in 1953, 'I am interested in standing by people who are in great trouble and who have to face tremendous oppression by a powerful government. I should condemn, of course, every species of violence and give no quarter to it. But I shall stand by the Africans nevertheless. That is the only way I can serve them.'[68] The British government reacted angrily to public statements of this kind. Nehru sent a categorical reply:

> Our Government is not used to being addressed in this way by any Government and I can only conclude that he [the British Commonwealth Secretary] has for the moment forgotten that he is addressing the independent Republic of India . . . It has been our constant endeavour not to embarrass the British Government and we have tried to cooperate with them to the largest possible extent subject to our own principles and policies. We shall continue to do so, but we are not prepared to change these policies because of any pressure exercised by any outside authority.[69]

Irreconcilable differences arose over apartheid, and South Africa quit the Commonwealth in 1961 when a no longer exclusively white membership called for an end to its racist policies. The following year, when China attacked, India had the support of all Commonwealth nations, except for Pakistan.

Apart from its practical advantages for trade and defence equipment at the time, joining the Commonwealth served a

major foreign policy objective. Nehru explained it to Vijaya Lakshmi, India's ambassador to Washington, in a letter on 8 June 1949:

> An India which was isolated completely from the Commonwealth would inevitably have had to slope in some direction. Practically speaking, that is in terms of capital goods and money or credit required, that sloping could only have been in the direction of the US. America wants very much to tie ourselves with her foreign policy and in a sense relies a little more on us in regard to her Asian policy . . . I am quite clear in my mind, as I have been for some time past, that it was the right policy for us to continue in the Commonwealth on the terms and conditions we laid down and which were accepted. It would have been dangerous for us to isolate ourselves and risky for us to slope too much towards the US in the present context. That would have made it more difficult for us at any time to play the role of a friendly neutral to any of the parties concerned.[70]

None of this reasoning prevented heated debate in the Indian Parliament and outside it against India's entry into the Commonwealth, even on her own conditions. In 1949, Jayaprakash Narayan called it an implicit commitment to one of the power blocs. In 1952, Shyama Prasad Mukerjee said the Commonwealth countries had never stood by India. In 1956, the opposition parties wanted India to quit the Commonwealth and the Communist Party of India held a demonstration outside Parliament on 14 November demanding India's withdrawal.

India stayed in the Commonwealth. Nehru's growing international prestige made him a trusted voice in its councils and led to joint foreign policy initiatives. Through

Commonwealth membership, India also stood her ground as equidistant from the superpowers, both of whom had been surprised by her decision to opt for this association. The Soviet Union distrusted the connection as an imperial hangover that could impede an independent outlook. The US, under President Roosevelt, had tried to persuade Churchill to set up a national government in India during the war, for cooperation in the war effort, as well as from a genuine desire to hasten independence. His successors envisaged America's presence moving into the void left by the empire after the war. In this scenario, India's Commonwealth connection, added to her non-alignment, was not an encouraging sign.

Britain viewed her India connection as invaluable. In an appraisal in the *Observer* on 31 May 1964, written after Nehru's death, Lord Attlee refers to him as 'A great man, a great European as well as a great Indian . . . [he] may be said to have done more than any other man to make possible, if not sure, the transformation and survival of the Commonwealth. And it is difficult to imagine how the United Nations could have developed to its present stage without the contribution made by India under his leadership. He did much to make the non-alignment of the new nations not only respected, but in its way, constructive.'

5

ALTERNATIVE POLITICS

Ideas have no life of their own. Something has to be done about them or they languish for centuries with no impact on the living. Ahimsa, said Mahatma Gandhi, was as old as the hills. But it was his absolute belief in it that made it relevant to modern times when he sent it into battle as a weapon of war. No stranger command could ever have been given to troops than Gandhi's command to his followers: 'If blood must be shed in this battle, let it be your own.' War without violence redefined political strategy and political conduct. An alternative politics shaped India's national consciousness.

In the winter of 1947, there was no prime ministerial residence in a bleak and sombre New Delhi. Nehru lived at 17 York Road in a double-storeyed bungalow whose compound was full of tents housing refugees. This was the home I returned to after graduating from Wellesley. Here it was, on the evening of 30 January 1948, that Indira and I, having a late tea in the dining room, got news that Gandhi had been shot and lay dying at Birla House. Two days later, I wrote to my mother who had been posted as ambassador to Moscow five months earlier, and my sister, Chandralekha, who was with her:

> We were stunned but did not for a moment believe that he would die. Just a few days before there had been an unsuccessful attempt on his life . . . Bapu died just as we reached there. He had been shot while going to prayers by a man (Hindu) standing barely a yard away

> from him. Afterwards the assassin tried to commit suicide but did not succeed and was caught. Bapu's body was covered with blood. Even then we hoped against hope that some miracle would revive him. Where he is concerned it is possible to believe in miracles. Sardar Patel and Maniben were in the room with him, among others. Indi and I controlled ourselves till Mamu came in and then it was impossible. He came in and knelt down beside Bapu and sobbed. I had never seen him so grief-stricken before, like a lost child . . . Birla House was surrounded by gigantic crowds. To get rid of them Bapu's body had to be shown to the people from a balcony upstairs. At 8.30 the same evening Mamu and Patel broadcast. I don't know if you heard it. Mamu spoke most beautifully, and it was heartbreaking to listen. Even now I cannot bear to look at his face . . .

There had, according to Nehru, been just one major change in his life: Gandhi, who had come like a thunderbolt that transformed the landscape of his life. There was no way he could mourn this loss. It had no measure. It joined the immense scale of sorrow and suffering and the multiple burdens that had accompanied Partition. It became one with the food crisis, the search for consensus among contrary opinions, and the effort to keep one's head above water—without Bapu. A week before the assassination, he had written to his sister in Moscow:

> Problems and difficulties seem to increase day to day. The only compensation is that one's sensitiveness to them decreases and, therefore, one's capacity to face them indirectly increases. Perhaps this results from a certain dullness of the mind after receiving shock after

shock. Looking into the future I do not see any relief for at least a year, or maybe two years. I think there is little chance of semi-normal life before 1950 . . . How can there be normality so soon with millions of people displaced and uprooted? And even if we recover somewhat, the world goes more and more awry and we drift towards war on a major scale . . . Bapu is recovering rapidly from his fast. He has been a tower of strength to all of us, and it is a little difficult to imagine what we could have done if he had not been here.'[71]

The refugee problem was not over. West Bengal had already admitted some two million refugees at Partition. It was now facing another flood of migrants from East Bengal and feelings were inflamed on both sides of the border. Writing at length to Prime Minister Attlee on 20 March 1950, Nehru had ascribed this development to 'The whole conception of the state in Pakistan, that is, a theocratic Islamic state, [was] such that non-Muslims could only have some kind of inferior position in it. The atmosphere was oppressive and religious bigotry and hatred of the Hindus were the prevailing sentiments . . . That in itself prevents minorities in Pakistan from settling down and tension and trouble continue . . . '[72] In February, with Gandhi in mind, he had written to Sardar Patel saying he felt the need to relinquish his other responsibilities and devote himself entirely to the mounting crisis in Bengal.

The problem itself demands that. But in addition to that, the memory of Bapu and all that he did in Bengal comes back to me and I grow restless and unhappy . . . It is just conceivable that some action of this kind on my part, with its dramatic implications, will strike the



Nehru speaking at Trafalgar Square during the Spanish Civil War, undated photograph.



Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 1936–37.



Ranjit Sitaram Pandit and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 1938–39.



Left to right: Nayantara Sahgal (then Pandit), Krishna Hutheesing (author's aunt), Chandralekha Pandit (author's sister), Mahatma Gandhi, Rita Pandit (author's sister), Dr Jivraj Mehta. In Allahabad, 1941.



Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, with Sardar Patel on her left and
Chandralekha Pandit on the extreme right, 1947.



Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in Moscow, 1948.



Nayantara Pandit with Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit
at a dacha in Moscow, 1948.



Nehru with Svetoslav Roerich and Devika Rani, 1950s.



Nehru with Padmavati Soekarno, 1950.



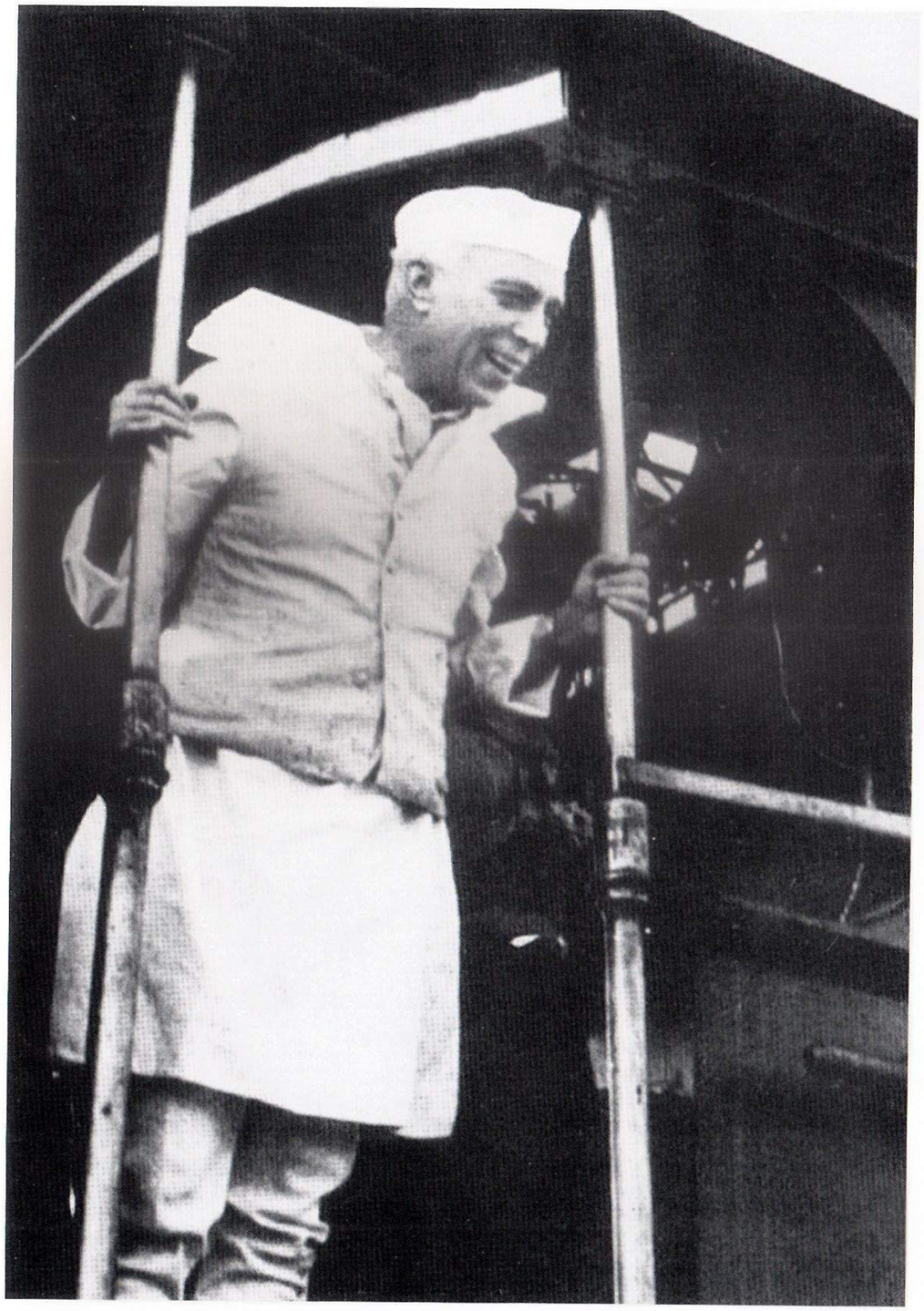
The Soekarnos holding Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi.



Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit with Soekarno.



The Non-aligned: Nkrumah, Nasser, Soekarno, Tito.



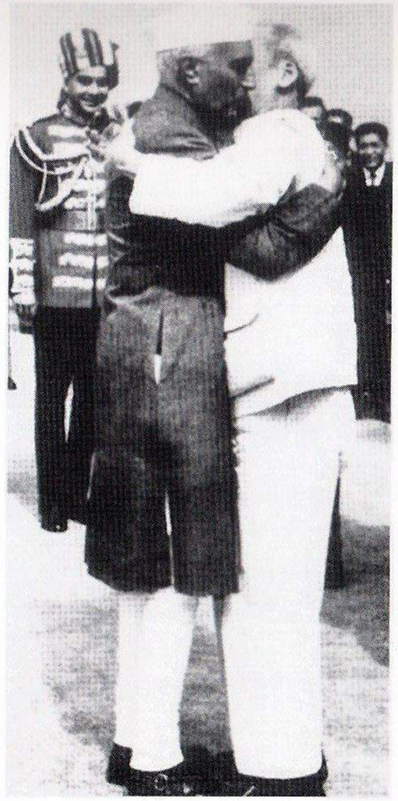
Jawaharlal Nehru, 1950s.



Nehru, 1960s.



Ho Chi Minh between Dr Rajendra Prasad and Nehru, 1958.



Nehru with Ho Chi Minh, 1958.



Fidel Castro with Krishna Menon and Nehru, undated photograph.



Nayantara Sahgal with Nehru at the prime minister's residence at 17, York Road, New Delhi, 1947.



Nayantara Sahgal with Sardar Patel, 1947–48.



Nayantara Sahgal, 1955.



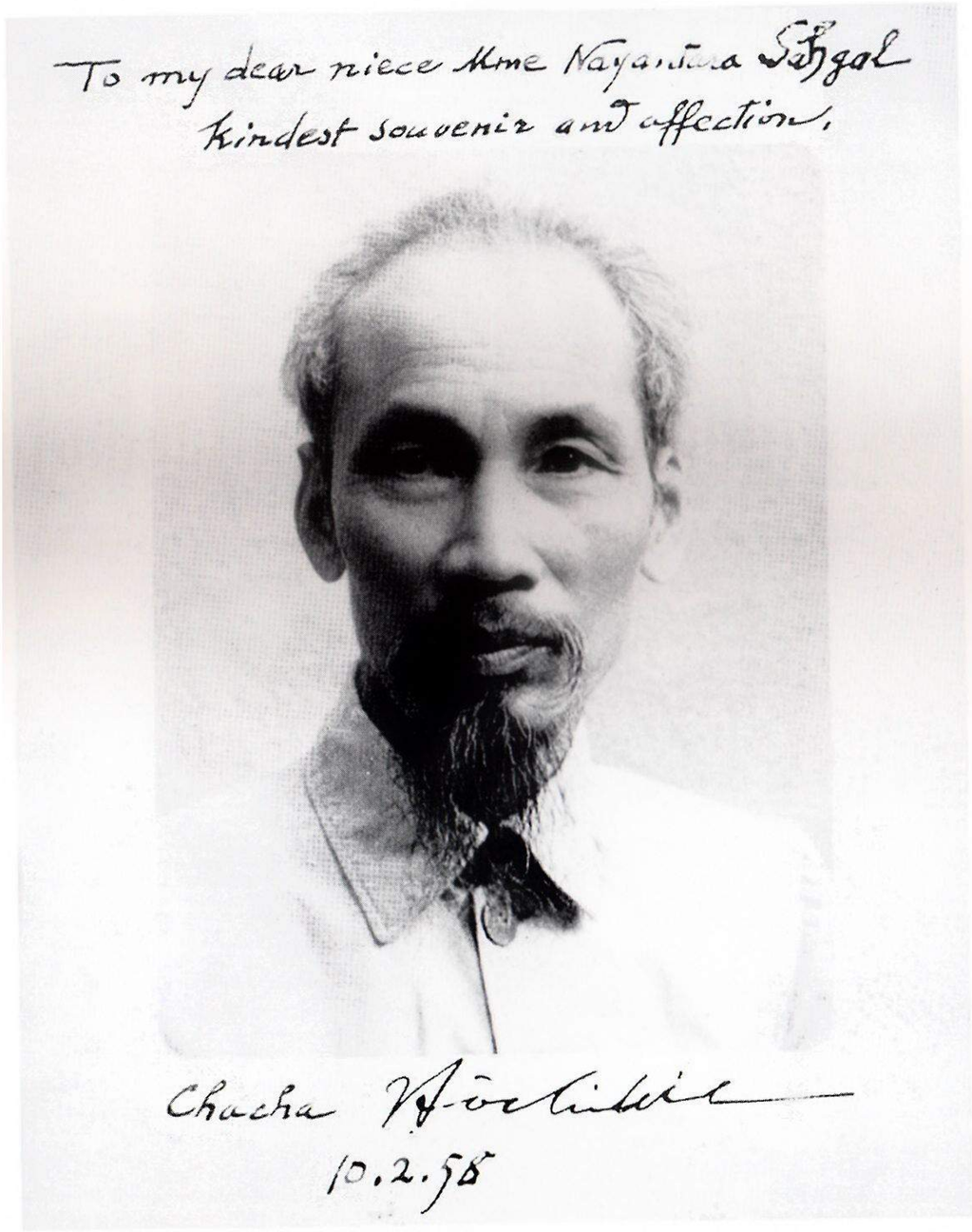
Nayantara Sahgal, undated photograph.



Nayantara Sahgal showing Nehru a letter, Bombay, 1958.



Nayantara Sahgal with Nehru, 1961–62.



Ho Chi Minh's souvenir for Nayantara Sahgal.

imagination of people both in West Bengal and East Bengal, and make them pause and think. That will not solve the problem, but it will gain precious time, and time gained for thought might well make all the difference.[73]

This was followed in March by a letter from Nehru informing President Rajendra Prasad that he wanted to resign, making way for a new council of ministers. Nehru wrote, 'This impending change gives me the opportunity, without any fuss or trouble, to give effect to the powerful urge which has been moving me for some time. I feel that I have practically exhausted my utility in my present high office and that I can serve my country and my people better in other ways. My heart is elsewhere and I long to go to the people and to tell them how I feel . . .'[74]

His 'utility' in his high office was, however, just beginning. The Congress had been a countrywide amorphous movement merging its differences into the broad agenda of freedom, and now, governing demanded a brass-tacks agenda. Nehru's was spelled out under three heads: foreign policy, economic policy and an end to the communalism of Hindu revivalists. As the architect of Congress foreign policy and its spokesman in the years before independence, it was generally regarded as his domain and left to him. But in the past three years, he had felt obstructed by his party and cabinet's resistance to his economic priorities and his anti-communal stand. Communalism was uppermost in his mind as the gravest threat to the fledgling republic's harmony and secular foundation. By mid-1949, the ban imposed on communal parties after Gandhi's assasination had been lifted. A militant Hindu revivalism, fuelled by the refugee influx from East Bengal, was on open display in the right wing of the Congress and in several members of his cabinet. In April 1950, Syama

Prasad Mookerjee, Minister for Industry, and K.C. Neogy, Minister for Commerce, resigned over the refugee question, demanding it be settled by a compulsory religion-based exchange of populations with East Bengal. (Mookerjee went on to form a Hindu party, the Jana Sangh, a year later.) Nehru gave an uncompromising Churchillian reply to this demand in Parliament on 9 August 1950:

> They put us in a position in which we have to say to people who are our fellow-citizens, 'We must push you out, because you belong to a faith different from ours.' This is a proposition which, if it is followed, will mean the ruin of India and the annihilation of all that we stand for and have stood for. I repeat that we will resist such a proposition with all our strength, we will fight it in houses, in fields and in market places. It will be fought in the council chambers and the streets, for we shall not let India be slaughtered at the altar of bigotry.[75]

In 1950, Minister of Finance John Matthai, who was opposed to planning, resigned. He was not alone in Nehru's cabinet in disapproving of the Planning Commission set up earlier that year or a policy aimed at a welfare state that would reduce the importance of private industry. For Nehru, far more serious than desertions from the cabinet was the Congress Party's discernible shift from its basic ideals. 'It is this inner rot that is the most distressing symptom of today,' he had written to Sardar Patel concerning their differences of outlook.[76]

An outsider's view of the Congress and of Nehru's isolation within it comes from Dr Solomon Trone, an American engineer with experience of economic development and planning in widely differing environments. He had been sent by the

General Electric Company to the Soviet Union during the First Five Year Plan and had helped to build the Dnieper Dam. He had later been industrial adviser to the governments of Nationalist China and Japan. Dr Trone was in India during 1949–50 on Nehru's invitation to advise on a course of action for the economy. He wrote to Nehru on 21 November 1949:

> Dear Sir,
> I am writing this letter to you personally on the insistent urge of my conscience and of my life's experience. I have now travelled for months through the width and breadth of India. I have talked with people in all walks of life, people who came to me to tell me their grievances in the hope that I would take these directly to you.
>
> There is widespread discontent; there is general distrust of the Congress. People feel betrayed in their faith that [the] Congress Government would carry out its promise of full employment and a better standard of living. But the people's faith in you, personally, is unshaken. You, to them, do not share Congress policy.
>
> I have heard throughout that YOU ALONE—and not [the] Congress—carry the love and the confidence of the country and that YOU ALONE can turn the tide and realise the hope for a better life. No human being can expect more than the love of a whole nation. Such love puts upon you the greatest responsibility. In the mind of the people YOU ALONE can recreate the common purpose and, with it, the common spirit needed to carry this purpose out.
>
> In my opinion India is at the crossroads. She has the chance, if properly led, to develop peacefully into a social democratic society—or she will have to experience long years of struggle and human

suffering—as China did—while going into a new life. There is no doubt which of the two ways you would prefer. I know that you and Congress do not live in the same mental world. But you have the people behind you—and this gives you the strength to resist the forces of vested interests and of other group interests.

Seldom has a man had the opportunity which history now gives to you: to help the people to create the new social order peacefully. The people are waiting for your call . . .[77]

Among the remedial measures Trone advised was that Nehru surround himself 'with the best progressive brains of the country', as President Roosevelt had done 'at the time of the American crisis, when an economic and social breakdown seemed unavoidable, and Congress and the Cabinet, not understanding the very nature of the crisis, were helpless in face of it . . . Here he got the knowledge, here he got the inspiration from which resulted the practical means and ways that brought the country out of the emergency.'[78]

Differences between Nehru and the Congress came to the boil with the election in August 1950 of Purushottam Das Tandon, backed by Sardar Patel, as President of the Congress. Tandon was Nehru's old and venerable friend, but was also a believer in Hindu Raj and a belligerent policy towards Pakistan. Nehru's desire to resign had come out of a need to break out of the confines of office and 'go to the people' and the Bengal crisis had given it a stark urgency. Ultimately, the anguish that drove him to give notice of his resignation was as responsible for his decision to stay on. The overwhelming magnitude of the work ahead and the direction he felt compelled to give it could not be abandoned in the circumstances of Tandon's election as Congress President, which went against the party's historic values and repudiated

his own policies as Prime Minister. It needed surgical precision to cut away the gangrene afflicting the party.

At its annual session at Nasik in September that year, he demanded that it 'declare itself in the clearest language' on his three-point agenda, and in effect choose between the medieval outlook of the president it had elected and the policies that would take India forward. Well aware that the Congress President had been democratically elected, he issued a battle cry in the open session on 21 September: 'Democracy can ask me to quit the Prime Ministership and I will obey this order. If Congressmen think of giving up their ideals simply for the consideration of a few votes in the coming election, the Congress will be lifeless. I do not need such a corpse.'

It was a curious session where though Tandon unfurled the Congress flag, the delegates shouted '*Jawaharlal ki jai*', and where Nehru won a vote of confidence for his leadership because the opposition realized that opposing him would have led to a showdown in which his unrivalled popularity with the mass of workers and delegates would have carried the day. Nasik marked the first move towards the shaping of Nehru's India, but the way ahead needed a party leader committed to the government's programme. A year later, on 3/4 August 1951, he wrote to Vijaya Lakshmi:

> The Congress is in a bad way. Not because of defections but rather because of some inner disease which eats into it. The wrong people run it and take it in a wrong direction. It passes the right resolutions, more or less, but functions differently. Tandonji, whatever his virtues, has proved a bad and obstinate president without any vision or understanding. The Congress weakens and yet no one else gains real strength . . .
>
> I am troubled and cannot see my way clearly. I doubt if I shall continue in the Working Committee. If I go out of it, that will create another major crisis. For

> whatever my failings, I still hold the crowd. The other day I addressed an enormous meeting of over 100,000 in pouring rain. I spoke for an hour and people remained till the end.[79]

A month later, Nehru resigned from the Congress Working Committee. Other committee members followed suit and Tandon too was forced to resign. Nehru then became Congress President and held the office until 1954, when he chose U.N. Dhebar as his successor. In his report to the All India Congress Committee on relinquishing the presidentship to U.N. Dhebar at the Avadi session in Tamil Nadu in January 1955, Nehru said a strong foundation for progress had been laid in the last seven and a half years. Land reform had ended zamindari, jagirdari and talukdari, all relics of the feudal order. The late Sardar Patel's genius had integrated the princely states into the Union. All this had been peacefully accomplished when 'other countries have waded through blood towards their objectives'. As a result, India's prestige in the world was high. The Avadi Congress officially endorsed the 'socialistic pattern of society'.

Going 'socialistic' restricted the import of luxury goods. Elizabeth Arden and Max Factor disappeared off shop shelves. Those whose skins couldn't do without them had to buy them abroad. Colman's mustard, Tiptree's strawberry jam, Lea & Perrin's Worcestershire Sauce and the like also had to be done without. But Indian products began to fill the spaces where there had only been goods of British manufacture. Quite suddenly, or so it seemed, nearly everything Indians needed was being made in India. Not as glossy or as classy to begin with, but it was there. To be sure, I had no basis for comparison since foreign goods had been unknown at home, having been tossed into a celebratory bonfire before I was born.

The first Indian general election in 1952 demonstrated an alternative model of democracy. Universal adult suffrage had not sprung full blown in the citadels of democracy. Britain came to it by slow and gradual stages through Acts of Parliament and women had to put up a fierce fight of their own for the vote. Thomas Jefferson's America had declared all men equal and had seen no paradox in the fact that he and other signatories to the Declaration owned hundreds of slaves. Black Americans had no vote until 1965 after a grim struggle for civil rights. In a clear departure from Western precedent, India launched democracy, based from the start, on universal suffrage. Analysts abroad used the word 'experiment' to describe this risky, hitherto untried venture, doubting it was possible in Indian conditions of poverty and mass illiteracy. For Nehru, it was no experiment but the fulfilment of a promise. If there were risks involved, they would have to be taken. Politics could not be practised as the age-old art of the possible when impossibles were being attempted. And the impossible could not be attempted without the fervour of belief to back it. In 1952, 173 million largely illiterate voters took part in an orderly election that brought the Congress to power and twice again in the elections that followed in Nehru's lifetime. If parliamentary democracy became a settled fact, it was because an old idea had been lit by the passion of a living commitment and had worked in circumstances where no such thing had been deemed possible. Of this unparalleled achievement, the *Manchester Guardian* wrote on 26 May 1954:

> All that is happening in Asia throws a spotlight on the Indian Federal Parliament at Delhi as the one institution of the kind which is working in an exemplary way. Pericles said that Athens was the school of Hellas; Mr Nehru, without boasting, may say that Delhi is the school of Asia.

The second 'experiment' of interest to the world was the adoption of socialism within a parliamentary democracy. The belief that 'planning' could achieve the conditions for economic progress had been part of Congress thinking before independence. Nehru's adviser Trone urged drastic and immediate action through a five-year plan under the Prime Minister's personal supervision to set up additional steel plants, a machine tool industry and electricity-generating equipment to build secondary industries. He also advised agricultural cooperatives and the mobilization of 'inner reserves' of hoarded gold, silver and jewellery.[80] The committee of civil servants who examined his proposals found his concept of planning 'totalitarian'. It ruled out agricultural cooperatives as a disguise for collectives, and access to hoarded wealth as impractical. Trone, whose views on bureaucratic interference in policy had been bluntly stated, may not have been surprised by this response, but his ideas on planning fortified Nehru's own. A planning agency was formed without delay, and Trone's suggestions figured in the first and second Plans.

The Planning Commission set up in 1950 discarded the premise—taken for granted by every nation that had been through an industrial revolution—that inequality has to be accepted as a condition of economic progress. An alternative view of development identified poverty as the country's main concern. To a country come late to the management of its own resources, with an infrastructure to build virtually from scratch, planning was to aim for all-round progress to benefit the whole and not part of the nation, particularly in providing opportunities and social services for the common man. Development would have to take directions that would release national energies for vast projects: dams for urgent irrigation and electrification and institutes and laboratories for scientific, agricultural and atomic research.

The first of five Indian Institutes of Technology was set up in 1951. The Bhakra Nangal project on the Sutlej, the Damodar Valley Scheme and the Hirakud Dam were launched. The manufacture of locomotives began at Chittaranjan and sulphate ammonia production began at Sindri. On 3 November 1951, the *Hindu* dramatically reported: 'As the clock struck midnight on October 30–31, the Government of India's Sindri Fertilizer Factory in Chota Nagpur went into production—an important step forward in taking India towards agricultural self-sufficiency. At zero hour, the first quantity of crystallized ammonium sulphate was delivered by the Rs. 23 crore plant . . . '

Agriculture was the main source of government revenue and the British Raj had periodically raised the tax on land to meet its growing civil and military expenditure, a policy that had enlarged rural indebtedness and impoverishment. Bad management had multiplied famines. A series of famines during the 1930s had been followed by the most terrible of famines in Bengal, which by 1943 had killed three million people. The celebration over fertilizer production at Sindri was not Indian alone. Sir Percival Griffiths, retired from the Indian Civil Service, remarked that foodgrain production since the transfer of power had been 'spectacular'. 'She [India] has, in fact, succeeded in doing what many observers, including the present writer, regarded as impossible.'[81] An atomic reactor set up in Bombay attained criticality in 1956—an achievement that was the climax of ten years of Nehru's accent on science and his sponsorship of scientists. (It is fitting that the Chandrayan planted the Indian flag on the moon in 2008 on 14 November, Nehru's birthday.) Of the irrigation projects, research institutes and laboratories, and the three steel mills built with British, German and Russian cooperation, each with a fixed date for completion and targets for production, the American writer, Vincent Sheean,

wrote in 1957, 'In themselves they are often so tremendous that they inspire something of the awe one feels before the monuments of the ancient empires . . . and of all the new works it may be seen by the cornerstone that Jawaharlal Nehru was there.'[82] The Integral Coach Factory at Perambur, wrote Sheean, was 'as modern as the year after next'.[83] Both Griffiths and Sheean noted the psychology of hope and adventure that was producing results. Griffiths wrote that the new spirit was born of cooperation between the public and the Government: 'It is impossible to travel round India today without feeling that the country has entered a new, dynamic phase. In the towns, industrial progress is sometimes overshadowed by the problem of unemployment and by the serious economic difficulties of the middle classes. In the villages, on the other hand, the signs of a rise in the standard of living are unmistakable . . .'[84]

The choices made for agricultural and industrial development yielded rewarding results. Statistics showed that the first two five-year plans produced a steady growth in the national income. No ideological quirk was responsible for the decision on a 'mixed' economy of public and private enterprise. It was the fastest way forward. Indian private enterprise, kept in check under British rule—even during World War II when it could have doubled industrial production—to reserve the market for British goods and enterprise, could not provide the capital investment required, nor did it have the capacity to cope by itself with the size, scale and hurry now demanded of national development. Of the superpowers, the Soviet Union approved both the socialist slant and that India kept her own counsel on economic decisions. The West was asked to understand, if it did not entirely accept, that industry would be mainly owned and resources controlled by Indian nationals.

The political opposition was in no mood to understand or

to accept. The Left clamoured for outright state control, the Right demanded unfettered private enterprise. On both sides of the divide, a free and voluble press hit out at the ruling party. Critics on both sides drew their inspiration from models outside India. There is that in human nature that needs to tread the known path, to do what has been done before, and this was true alike of the votaries of Moscow and the West. But communism and capitalism were more than a hundred years old, and the blueprints of the two gospels had been conceived in vastly different societal conditions than prevailed in mid-twentieth-century India. Nehru, in contrast, was acutely conscious of the daily and hourly realities of the present, and of dealing with conditions in a different time and place. He looked for the balance between blueprints that would serve present needs, drawing on the best of both but succumbing to neither, and correcting his course when mistakes were made. Indians who wanted society torn up by the roots in the name of revolution did not get their way. Nor did those who wanted to tread the beaten path empire had laid down. From here on, it would be a question of improvisation and adaptation to changed circumstances that required other solutions. In a changing world, no solution could be permanent.

In 2008, I asked a civil servant, Profullo Vaishnav (who had joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1956 and ended his service as Chief Secretary, Punjab. He died in May 2009.), what he thought of the progress made during the Nehru era. Vaishnav had lost none of his zest for the adventure he had taken part in. He recalled, 'We had to begin at the beginning. We had to make our own discoveries. We had to practically reinvent the wheel. It took much money, much labour, much time, because we didn't have access to foreign technology. But we built border roads where there had been no roads, we harnessed rivers for huge needs, we made giant

strides in research, we laid the foundations of atomic energy and space launches. And we did it all in freedom.' On reflection, he added, 'We were a modern nation in Nehru's time. Hindu fundamentalism is ensuring our backwardization.'

On the republic's ninth birthday there was recognition from abroad of the problems faced and the results achieved.

> There have been delays in the fulfilment of India's Five-Year-Plans but this sort of thing has occurred with other nations whose experience in self-government was considerably longer than that of the Indian Union. Under Prime Minister Nehru India has recorded truly substantial progress, not only in things material, but as a force for world understanding and peace.
>
> —*Ottawa Journal*, 28 January 1959

> . . . In China a ruthless dictatorship is making the revolution and millions have been executed who stood in its way . . . India is achieving the same ends by democratic means. In ten years there have been two general elections in India, in China there have been only purges.
>
> —*Montreal Gazette*, 28 January 1959

> She [India] starts her tenth year as a mighty power, as one of the strongest pillars of the commonwealth of nations, as the most dependable bastion of Asian security, as a bulwark of peace, progress and democracy throughout the world.
>
> —*Straits Echo* and *Times of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, 27 January 1959

At home during these years, a curious reversal had taken place in terms of the support for Nehru. A bureaucracy that had served British rule now became the bulwark and agent of the Indian government's programmes. Senior civil servants, whose job it had been to arrest freedom fighters and crush rebellion, recognized a man of integrity. The best minds among them gave him their loyal support and put their long professional experience into the tasks they were assigned. Among the new recruits to the administration there were young men and women (such as Vaishnav) who were enthused and inspired by his idealism. It was old comrades Nehru had counted on who fell away. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai resigned from the cabinet and joined the Praja Party. Rajagopalachari, Minister of Home after Sardar Patel's death on 15 December 1950, was convinced that communism, not communalism, was dangerous to the nation, and resigned on the plea of ill health at the end of 1951. He finally broke with the Congress in 1959 when he founded his own conservative Swatantra Party. The Socialist Party separated from the Congress, thereby—in Nehru's opinion—weakening socialism, though he hoped the break would at least help to develop a healthy opposition.

There had been a change of atmosphere in government offices as soon as the Interim Government took office. In place of name boards such as 'Sir Olaf Caroe KCSI', 'Sir Hugh Weightman CIE', and others dignified by titles and initials, the door to the External Affairs Ministry simply had 'Jawaharlal Nehru' printed on it. Indian policy, as distinct from Britain's and the Commonwealth's, immediately made itself felt. In 1946, Nehru's official position was still 'Vice Chairman of the Viceroy's Executive Council and Member for External Affairs' and it was expected that India, not yet independent, would follow protocol and attend a preliminary meeting of Commonwealth countries before going on to an international trade meeting. Both the Commerce and Foreign departments expected it. Nehru, for whom foreign policy was

the acid test of independence, ruled it out. 'It is always the first few minutes that count on a horse,' he said. 'During those few minutes the horse will know whether you are going to be the rider or it is going to be the rider.'[85]

Before independence, only two semi-diplomatic missions had been set up by the British government during the war—one in Washington, headed by Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, and the other in Chungking under K.P.S. Menon, both of the ICS. A foreign service had to be built and its first group of officers were chosen from the army, navy, air force and the general public. Interpreting foreign policy had run into personality problems. In 1946, K.P.S. Menon was appointed member of the first Indian delegation to the UN, led by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, and met Krishna Menon, also a delegate, for the first time. K.P.S. Menon recalled, 'He seemed to have a set idea that the ICS people belonged to the opposite camp and that they were sort of potential, if not actual, opponents. He and I had a right royal row . . . in the presence of Mrs Pandit . . . and the whole delegation. And then Mrs Pandit wrote a lengthy letter to Panditji telling him about the row . . . ' When he met Nehru on his return to India, the Prime Minister remarked, 'So, I see the two Menons could not get on.' K.P.S. replied, 'Well, sir, I am the sort of chap who gets on with anybody but I found Krishna really insufferable.' 'You know,' said Nehru, 'the world consists of all manner of people. There are some people who have great ability but whose abilities are not used and who suffer from a sense of frustration . . . The path of wisdom is to harness such people, too, to our cause.'[86]

A Foreign Affairs Committee of the cabinet was soon set up. The Portuguese ambassador was summoned and told that Portugal would have to leave Goa as the British had left India. The ambassador refused to accept the Note. A long discussion followed in the Committee about the next step to be taken.

Suddenly, Sardar Patel who had seemed to be asleep woke up and said, 'Shall we go in? It is two hours' work.'[87]

*

Nehru had moved into Teen Murti House by the middle of 1948. It had been the imposing official residence, in spacious grounds, of the British Commander-in-Chief and it was full of guns. On 23 September 1949, Nehru wrote to the Indian Commander-in-Chief:

> My dear Cariappa
> As you know, there are a large number of guns of various sizes, shapes and ages round about this house. I suppose they were appropriate enough when they were originally placed here. Now that appropriateness has gone. I suggest that you remove them and have them placed somewhere, where they fit in better. There is no hurry about it. You can do it at your convenience.
> Yours sincerely,
> Jawaharlal Nehru[88]

Only a cannon stands in front of the residence which is now the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

Indoors, the house began to reflect its occupants' taste. A giant elephant tusk carved in ivory and the statue of a thirteenth-century Madonna gifted by the French author Andre Malraux decorated a small sitting room. The main drawing room had a tormented painting of the Partition by Satish Gujral.The desk in Nehru's study had a bronze cast of Abraham Lincoln's right hand given to him in 1949 by Arthur E. Morgan, the former Chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and member of the Indian University Commission at this time. Nehru wrote on 13 April 1949:

My dear Mr Morgan,
I write to thank you for the very precious gift you made to me today. I can think of nothing else I would have appreciated more than this cast of Abraham Lincoln's hand. The very sight of it strengthens one and reminds one of a very great man. It will rest on my study table.

It has been a great pleasure to meet you. My only regret is that our meetings were few.
Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru[89]

Seven years later, during an official visit to Washington, he referred to the gift in a talk in Washington on 18 December 1956:

It is a beautiful hand, strong and firm and yet gentle. It has been kept ever since on my study table and I look at it every day, and it gives me strength. This may, perhaps, give you some idea of our thinking and our urges in India. For, above all, we believe in liberty, equality, the dignity of the individual and the freedom of the human spirit. Because of this, we are firmly wedded to the democratic way of life, and in our loyalty to this cause we will not falter.[90]

Nehru spent the better part of every night in his study, leaving no backlog of work for the next day, and walked down the long corridor to his bedroom long after midnight.

6

ALTERNATIVE TEMPLES

In his fortnightly letters to Chief Ministers, Nehru kept them in touch with the steps his government was taking at home and abroad, and his itinerary. On 16 March 1952, he wrote of his visits on the 1st and 2nd of the month to the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works, the Damodar Valley, the fertilizer factory at Sindri and the Institute of Technology at Kharagpur: 'The visit was very heartening and exhilarating, because I saw great new structures rising up and new townships being built, symbolic of what we want the new India to be.' He described these and other major projects, planned or in the making, as the new 'temples' that were changing the face and outlook of India.

In the same letter, Nehru noted that the workers' houses at Kharagpur 'were very bad indeed. I visited Kanpur also and saw the slum dwellings of the workers there . . . I was horrified and I have not yet recovered from the shock . . . I cannot reconcile myself to the continuation of these horrible slums. My immediate reaction in Kanpur was that these slums should be burnt. That reaction holds still and I am convinced that it is better to have no houses at all and for the workers to be given an open space to live in temporarily than to be made to live in places which are not fit for domestic animals . . . I have a sensation that we do not feel this quite as acutely as we ought to feel. There is no sense of horror and urgency about it.' Nehru's sense of 'horror and urgency' also kept him informed of the housing conditions of his domestic staff and of the workers at the projects he visited.[91]

Appalling slums, taken for granted as an inevitable accompaniment to the construction of magnificent new edifices, were no more to be tolerated than the evils that flourished within the grand edifice of Hinduism. Gandhi had identified untouchability as the most inhuman of these. Nehru also drew attention to the servitude of women. The reform of Hindu personal law was undertaken to free Hindu women from their inferior legal status and covered property, marriage, inheritance, divorce, guardianship and adoption. Nehru saw it as a moderate measure, a way to introduce vital changes in an ancient social structure 'without shaking it up too much'. Hard-core conservatives, including those in his party, condemned it as an undoing of Hindu heritage. A draft Hindu Code Bill, prepared in 1947, was discussed in the Constituent Assembly in 1948. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly, refused to support it. (Later, he also said 26 January 1950 was an inauspicious date for the inauguration of the republic, an objection Nehru brushed aside saying he could not let astrology decide the nation's destiny.) On 12 December 1949, about five hundred demonstrators burned Gandhi caps and Gandhi effigies outside Parliament and shouted slogans against Nehru and the Bill.

Hindu revivalists within and outside his party were also hostile to the Nehru–Liaquat Ali Pact of 8 April 1950 that aimed at easing tensions caused by the refugee exodus from East to West Bengal. Opponents of the Pact called for military action against Pakistan and compulsory exchange of populations. Nehru was as determined to guarantee safe and equal citizenship to Indian Muslims and to avoid war with Pakistan. An anonymous letter dated 23 March 1950 from a Hindu refugee from East Bengal whose sanity had not survived his extreme suffering during Partition, is indicative of the roused revivalist temper, and is signed with the name of

Mahatma Gandhi's murderer.

> Pandit Nehru
> I saw you twice in Calcutta from within a crowd and wanted to see you taking immediate action or more properly a revenge. You failed and so today your day is also drawn nigh. You will leave this world with me—you for indulging in idealism and me for murdering a foolish coward anaemic and misleading leader of India . . . Today is 23rd March. I shall reach Delhi by the 25th and wait there for a declaration of something like an armed intervention from your lips. If not, the 5th day after my starting from Calcutta will be that historical day when a Nathuram Godse from Bengal will shoot the Prime Minister of India.
> Yours
> A Nathuram Godse[92]

The outcry against the Hindu Code Bill further ignited an already charged communal atmosphere. Nehru was certain that sentiment against the Bill had to be taken into account. The acrimony and controversy it engendered ruled it out for him as strictly a party issue necessitating a whip. The purpose of Parliament, he felt, was to provide a forum where opposing opinions could be heard. A committee of various points of view was set up so that common ground—which in the nature of this measure could mean some kind of broad emotional consensus—might be achieved, and such modifications made as were thought necessary. He did not think of the delay as time wasted. He felt that it had kept this important subject before the public and made people think about it.

He had not foreseen interminable delay. The Bill was the size of a book and was lengthily debated in every session of Parliament. By October 1951, it had been pending for four or

five years. B.R. Ambedkar, who had been chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution and was now Law Minister, resigned from the cabinet, giving his frustration and anger at the shelving of the Hindu Code Bill as one of his many reasons. The decision to take it up piecemeal, starting with Part II, the section on a uniform law for marriage and divorce, made its passage no easier. Its provisions included giving daughters equal shares, along with sons and the widow, in the intestate succession to a father's estate. It also made Hindu marriage monogamous and allowed the dissolution of marriage in certain conditions. Divorce raised hackles among the orthodox as a measure that would lead to licentiousness in society. The Hindu Mahasabha leader, N.C. Chatterjee, said Hindu marriage was a sacrament. Nehru retorted, 'Hindu marriage is a religious ceremony. Nobody denies it. But this does not mean to tie people together to hate each other and make life hell for each other. In all human relationships there should be this element of sacrament involved, not only in the relationship of husband and wife.'

Shortly after the first general election in March 1952, the main parts of the Bill were introduced as separate Bills in the new Parliament. Between 1952 and 1956, Nehru threw the weight of his personality and popularity behind the Bill in discussions with Members of Parliament who were directly concerned, and took the battle for reform to the general public whom he regarded as his enduring constituency. He appealed across the country for an understanding of its provisions. Social change, he maintained, must accompany political and economic change, and without the emancipation of women from degrading and oppressive conditions, there could be no real change. The codified Bill was finally passed with a considerable majority in 1955–56.

Nehru hoped the modernization of Hindu law would serve as a forerunner for the reform of their personal laws by other

communities, an expectation based on the belief that the urge for reform must rise within a community. No such follow-up towards modernization took place. Recent years have seen the opposite trend. With the upsurge of retrograde elements in all religions, and community leaders here and elsewhere taking the whip and the scourge to every aspect of modernization in the name of religion, women's rights and aspirations, as well as social reform, have received a devastating blow.

Should a uniform civil code have been attempted at the start? The Hindu Code Bill had to battle Hindu opposition through a stormy and laborious passage, in spite of a climate of reform from as far back as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and some of the results achieved by enlightened Hindu reformers. It is daunting to imagine how a uniform law for all communities would have been received, how it could have been framed so that it would win national consensus, and how it could have avoided the charge of a majority's imposition on minority communities. But now may be the right time to take on fundamentalism and obscurantism, and ensure uniform rights by law to citizens of all religions.

Along with the Hindu Code Bill, Nehru regarded decentralization as his government's most important measure—even more important than industrial progress and the river valley projects. For him, it was essential for the regeneration of the countryside through people's direct participation in change. A rural revolution was launched with the Community Development Programme. Land reform was set in motion with zamindari abolition. The passage of the Gaon Hukumat Bill in the United Provinces led to panchayat elections. Nehru dwelt on these developments at length on his first visit to New York on 19 October 1949, at a joint meeting of four influential organizations: the East West

Association, the Foreign Policy Association, the Institute of Pacific Relations and the India League of America:

> Our basic problem is the land problem as it is all over Asia. And we have gone pretty far in changing the whole antiquated and unfair land system in India. We are putting an end to the great landed estates and giving the land to the peasant, compensating the previous owner. This process is going on now. Some months ago, in my own province in India, that is, the United Provinces, which is the biggest province, and has the enormous population of about sixty millions, we introduced a great reform in local self-government. In all the villages, a vast number of villages, every adult voted in what was probably one of the biggest elections that any country has had. We are going to have that all over India . . . It is a tremendous experiment in democracy, important perhaps because it is more basic than the assembly we may choose at the top.

Land legislation was a state subject and made abysmally slow progress.The 162-year-old zamindari system installed by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 ended in West Bengal in a historic ceremony on 15 April 1955, but in some states, it remained a dead letter until a constitutional amendment put zamindari abolition outside the purview of the courts. The system was abolished by 1956.

A resolution on cooperative farming was passed at the annual session of the Congress at Nagpur in January 1959. Nehru wrote on 11 January to Sri Prakash, his old friend and colleague, now Governor of Bombay, that it had been a remarkable session: 'I have attended more than forty sessions of the Congress and I do not remember greater enthusiasm shown at any one of them, even in the great Gandhian days

of the Congress.' The enthusiasm was not shared by Rajagopalachari who made his exit from the Congress Party, warning that cooperatives would lead to communist collectives. He went on to found the Swatantra Party. Writing to Chief Ministers on 2 July 1959, Nehru was surprised by the Swatantra Party's 'ferocity of attack on what are called the Nagpur resolutions'. He pointed out that cooperatives were to be voluntary associations, under no compulsion, and that a delegation of Punjabi farmers—'very sturdy and tough peasant proprietors'—had heartily welcomed the idea.

The *New York Times* had an editorial titled 'For India's Villages' in praise of the Nagpur resolution of 12 January 1959:

> In the just concluded convention of India's dominant Congress party . . . the Prime Minister led the party into a sweeping commitment in regard to India's villages, that is by far the most important act of the convention. It is proposed to move with all urgency to transform as many as possible of these 650,000 villages into genuine working cooperatives. There have been many cooperative experiments in India and at this time Mr Nehru is fully convinced that they must be put on a nationwide scale. Against some rather formidable opposition he has carried the party with him.
>
> What is planned is a far cry from any sort of Russian 'collective' or Red Chinese 'commune'. Land titles will be retained by individuals, although Mr Nehru hopes that at some time in the future there can be a village ownership. Meanwhile the village will become the unit for pooling resources. Cooperative credit is the first need. This goes along with seed selection and seed procurement. Also involved must be cooperative marketing.

> This program is sound, in part because it is not some theoretical Marxian innovation but is firmly grounded in the age-old village economy. The pressure on land, fragmentation and substitution of money for barter, have all but destroyed that old pattern. What is proposed is the restoration of some of the best of it.

S. Gopal, Nehru's biographer after this death, says the decline of the Community Development Programme after Nehru (and, in my view, the neglect until the mid-1980s of decentralization) would have been seen by Nehru as 'the long-term weakness of the democratic system in India'. His contemporary biographer, Michael Brecher, lists setbacks and shortcomings 'especially in the fields of land reform, population and the public sector', attributing them to weaknesses of policy and Nehru's 'frequent reluctance to act resolutely'. He adds:

> Having said all this, it remains to be emphasized that India's progress is most impressive, measured both against its own previous conditions and against the record of any other under-developed country which has chosen the democratic route to social and economic change. No less vital is the point, which cannot be overstressed, that whatever progress has been achieved is primarily due to the efforts of the Prime Minister. Indeed, he is the heart and soul and mind of India's heroic struggle to raise the living standards of 390 million people. There can be no doubt that he has been the prime mover in India's massive planning effort. He has also been the champion of the Community Development Programme, India's novel people's revolution. From the outset of independence he has striven

> valiantly, almost single-handed, to establish firm foundations for a secular order of society. He has waged a ceaseless one-man campaign against the evils of casteism, notably the maltreatment of 50 million Untouchables . . . And he has set in motion a reformation of Hindu society through the Hindu Code Bills.[93]

The above assessment is interesting for the recurring theme that runs through assessments of Nehru as a lone figure in his determination to establish scientific progress, participatory democracy and secularism as permanent fixtures in India. Yet, as against his lone stand at times in his party, he had overwhelming popular support, without which no measure could have been carried out. Also critical for the success of his drive to modernity was the scientific community that thrived and rose to high accomplishment under his sponsorship, and the ardent following he had among intellectuals and in the arts. Cinema transformed his social, economic and secular messages into songs and stories for the masses, aroused and nurtured an awareness of the issues at stake in the country, and involved the national imagination with an India envisioned by Nehru.

POSTSCRIPT

The family's personal and political commitment to women's emancipation brings three recollections to mind. One, family legend has it that Ranjit Pandit joined a suffragette procession in London while he was qualifying for the Bar at the Middle Temple. Two, the children of the Anand Bhawan family were four daughters, Indira Nehru, and Chandralekha, Nayantara and Rita Pandit, brought up with the opportunities and freedoms that sons would have had. There was not the ghost

of a sigh or a hankering for a son. The third association is of tragedy.

A Hindu widow, before the passage of the Hindu Code Bill, had no rights. She was at the mercy of the 'Hindu Undivided Family' she was married into. Ranjit Pandit died intestate on 14 January 1944, and his elder brother Pratap Pandit froze Vijaya Lakshmi's account immediately, on the ground that she had no right to jointly owned money and property, although my father's assets in this case were not all jointly-owned. She would be entitled, he said, to a Hindu widow's maintenance of Rs 150 a month and each of her three daughters would be paid Rs 50 a month until they were married. The news of Ranjit's death was conveyed to Jawaharlal, jailed in Ahmednagar Fort. He wrote to his bereaved sister, who had been released from Naini Central Jail six months earlier. Vijaya Lakshmi was alone in Allahabad with her youngest daughter Rita. Her other two daughters, Chandralekha and myself, were at college in the United States.

Ahmednagar Fort, 14 January 1944
O my dear, what am I to write to you? Day before yesterday, your letter of 5th January reached me and I tried to read it again and again, attempting to find some basis for optimism. A phrase or two would attempt to create the illusion. But then your last line, saying that Ranjit's struggle for breath reminded you of Papa's illness, hit me as a blow. I was haunted by this thought. Again and again I thought of Ranjit frantically struggling for breath, fighting for life, with all the odds against him. Yet I refused to allow myself to believe—how we delude ourselves!—that he would die. He must live for many more years.

My mind was full of this tension and I could not see

him or you or talk to you. So I decided to seek some relief from this tension by writing to you today. A poor kind of relief, and not an easy thing to write. From early morning I was thinking of Ranjit and you. And then I was informed that a message had arrived by telephone. Ranjit had died this morning.

So I am writing—but it is a different letter and I do not know how to set about it. We get hardened in this hard and cruel world and yet there always remain enough soft spots which hurt tremendously. That is our lot—to suffer such blows—a lot partly self-chosen, partly ordained by circumstance. Ranjit was more than a brother-in-law to me, he was a brother and a comrade.

But I talk of myself. What of you? And Chand, Tara, far away? I can only send you my deepest love which grows with the years, as loneliness steals upon me, and the world and its ways seem strange and far away. Yet we have to bear with this world and to face it and even to defy it. That is our heritage and by that we live. You will know how to face this sorrow and this burden. Sometime, I suppose, we shall meet. But it does not matter much when we do so for however far apart we may be, we hold together and meet in mind and spirit.
So again my love to you, darling sister—
Your loving brother
Jawahar[94]

Two weeks later, he wrote, 'All my companions here have been greatly moved and they have asked me to convey to you their deepest sympathy—more particularly Maulana, Pantji, Mahmud, Asaf, Narendra Dev, Vallabhbhai and Kripalani.'[95]

The full implications of his sister's predicament took longer to reach him. Helpless to do more from jail, on 17 May 1944,

he sent her a payment order of Rs 2000 on Bachhraj and Co. with whom he had an account[96] and wrote at length to her with suggestions about what could be done: 'In this, as in other matters, we have to make sure that we act rightly and correctly . . . The financial aspect is the least important of all, or should be so for you and me. We are both capable persons who can look after ourselves and each other . . . [Pratap] should know that neither you nor the children are prepared to live on charity even from him.'[97] Five days later, he wrote, 'The tragedy was Ranjit's death. That is over and one has to adapt oneself to life without him. But there is nothing tragic about Pratap's doings; they are just sordid.'[98]

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, friend of Motilal Nehru and staunch friend of the family, was outraged by Vijaya Lakshmi's brother-in-law's treatment of her and filed a suit against him on her behalf even though there was no chance of winning it. He himself appeared in court. At this stage, Mahatma Gandhi, who had been released from imprisonment, asked her to visit him at Juhu in Bombay. His advice to her was typical of him: to end the dispute by surrendering her claim to her husband's share and that of any grandsons she might have in the future. She did exactly that. She had no idea how she would face the future without her husband and bereft of all financial support when she went back to work in the famine area of Bengal where she had gone on her release from Naini Central Jail in 1943. Of the fortnight she spent with Bapu in Juhu, she wrote in her autobiography, '[His] tender care . . . was like balm to my wounded heart.' So had Bapu's been a healing presence for her grieving mother after Motilal's death. It seems to have been literally true for those closest to Bapu that the world was well lost if something more valuable was gained.

Gandhi's was sensible advice. Taking recourse to the law when the law was not in her favour, at a time when she was

under severe financial stress, cut off from her only source of support—her brother—and alone in a hostile political environment, would have been a draining and defeating experience. One advantage of abandoning her case was that she retained the goodwill of her in-laws and the family bond which her husband had cherished. The inestimable advantage of the decision was that she walked away free, leaving the whole soiled situation behind her and forgot it in her resolve to face whatever the future held for her. How Nehru would have reacted to Gandhi's advice had he been out of jail, I can only speculate. He had an instinctive revulsion against giving in to bullies and no stomach for injustice, especially against the defenceless—he had spent his political life breaking unacceptable laws! He might have seen his sister's painful predicament as a broader issue affecting all women that could not be given up without a fight.

Gandhi stepped in like destiny two years later, in a move that was a turning point in Vijaya Lakshmi's life and set her on a career in diplomacy. She was Minister for Health and Local Self-Government in the United Provinces, preparing the ground for the Gaon Hukumat Bill in the state legislature and was loath to be called away when she was summoned to Delhi. The Interim Government had decided to make its first vigorous thrust into foreign policy by sending a delegation to the 1946 General Assembly of the UN. Gandhi wanted India to put racial discrimination (in this instance, against Indians in South Africa) on the UN agenda and he wanted her to lead the delegation. Viceroy Lord Wavell had concurred. With no experience in diplomacy, the prospect was forbidding. She went to Bhangi Colony to meet Gandhi who would not take no for an answer. He told her that winning or losing was not as important as setting an ethical example of debate. He reminded her that Field Marshal Jan Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa, was his friend though they had been

adversaries. She was launched on the world stage with nothing more than this vague instruction and won a tumultuously greeted victory.

K.P.S. Menon, a member of the Indian delegation, reported to Nehru from New York on 9 December 1946:

> My dear Pandit Nehru,
> I wrote to you my usual weekly letter only three or four days ago but our great success in the South African case last night prompts me to write this letter . . . The support we received in the final voting was beyond our wildest expectations. All Asia and Africa voted with us, with the disgraceful exception of Turkey which abstained . . . Countries in Western Europe (except France which gave us splendid support throughout) voted against us, and those in Eastern Europe, for us. Northern Europe was, on the whole, on our side. North America—both USA and Canada—voted against us; but for once the South American States did not vote in a bloc. Twelve voted for us, six against us, and three abstained.
>
> India and all Asia owe Mrs Pandit a debt of gratitude which cannot be repaid. It was her personality, charm, eloquence and obvious sincerity which finally turned the scales in our favour. She made a moving appeal to Great Britain and the Commonwealth 'even in this eleventh hour' to stand by their own professed principles. To [the UK delegate, Sir Hartley] Shawcross [who] used every weapon in his advocate's armoury to destroy the effect which Mrs Pandit's speech had produced . . . [she] in her reply, gave a devastating retort . . . Neither at San Francisco nor here have I seen a speaker so enthusiastically cheered as Mrs Pandit was last night.[99]

On 26 November 1946, Vijaya Lakshmi wrote to Nehru from New York: 'Among those who congratulated me [on the first day of the debate] was Gromyko who said many nice things. He is like an automaton and looks entirely without feeling, so his praise has some value.'

She had earlier delivered Gandhi's warm regards to Field Marshal Smuts. A day or two after the debate, she asked him to forgive her if she had in any way failed to measure up to Gandhi's high standards. He took both her hands in his and said, 'My child'—she was in her forties, and he in his eighties—'this is a hollow victory. I will be out of power in the next election, but you will have gained nothing.' He was right. Apartheid became the law of the land and unspeakable humiliation and persecution the lot of South Africa's people. It fell to India, during Nehru's lifetime and after, to lead an unceasing attack on apartheid at the UN.

Vijaya Lakshmi returned to India and to the Gaon Hukumat Bill, when she wrote to her brother from Lucknow on 18 April 1947:

> I'm having a hectic time with my Gaon Hukumat. The general debate went on for four days and the air was poisonous with abuse. Yesterday, I wound up the discussion and we are now doing the clauses. The [Muslim] League is determined to delay and hamper progress in every possible way and the Bill will drag on. We feel it must be pushed through even if it means sitting throughout May . . . The Party is eager and are willing to sit through the best part of the summer but the Opposition is likely to object.[100]

Gandhi had been part of the family since Vijaya Lakshmi was in her teens and she had been sent to his ashram for a short and trying spell as a young girl, as an exercise in

character building and spartan discipline. He had also been a guest at Anand Bhawan during her wedding in May 1921. When she and Ranjit had gone to him for his blessing after the ceremony, he had advised them to abstain from sex. Vijaya Lakshmi told him they would take no such vow because they loved each other. He gave them his blessing all the same.

Sex as sin, and contraception as evading the consequences of sin, was not a view the family (or most of Gandhi's countrymen and women, including his own children) shared with him. Nehru, for one, categorically did not. Quoting Gandhi in *Towards Freedom*, he wrote:

> For him 'any union is a crime when the desire for progeny is absent' and 'the adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration . . . Personally I find this attitude unnatural and shocking, and if he is right, then I am a criminal on the verge of imbecility and nervous prostration . . . I presume I am a normal individual and sex has played its part in my life, but it has not obsessed me or diverted me from my other activities. It has been a subordinate part.[101]

The great lovers of history must have had a lot of time on their hands. Struggles for liberation involving years spent in jail, followed by the monumental task of nation-building, leave scant leisure for the pursuit of love. Yet, through the intense political involvement that claimed him in the years following his wife's death in 1936, Nehru found two relationships of abiding worth. With Padmaja Naidu, apart from the personal bond, there was the closeness between their families and their shared involvement in the fight for freedom. Her sense of humour was as irreverent as her mother Sarojini Naidu's and made for much laughter when she came from

exotic far-off Hyderabad—where we fancied she was courted in elaborate Urdu by elegant nawabs—to stay at Anand Bhawan, usually to parent us 'orphaned' children when our parents were in jail. A woman of sensitivity, sophistication and exquisite taste, she was also an individualist who spoke her mind, surrounded herself with her favourite colour, green, dressed in splendid silk saris and wouldn't have dreamed of wearing anything so drab as coarse khadi. Padmasi, as we called her, was our favourite person after our parents. In retrospect, she appears to have been one of the genuinely liberated women of her own or any other generation. No wonder she attracted that rarity, a liberated man.

A letter written by Padmaja, from Anand Bhawan, Allahabad, on 13 January 1940 to Nehru's friend, Edward Thompson, reveals the texture of her relationship with my family, as well as the aura of confinement in prison:

> Dear Dr Thompson
> I am writing to you on behalf of Mrs Pandit to thank you for your letter to her. She is not entitled either to write or to receive any letters, having given up her right to receive and write a fortnightly letter in order to have a weekly interview instead of a fortnightly one. But I was allowed to show her your letter at my interview with her and she asked me to write to you and tell you that I was sending your message about the melon seeds to Ranjit who is now in jail with Jawahar, sharing his very cramped quarters in what used to be at the time of the Mutiny the gallows house of the jail. I went to Dehra Dun a few weeks ago to see Jawahar and visited him in the barrack which Mr Amory [Secretary of State for India] gaily described as his 'private quarters'! Mrs Pandit lives alone in a great dreary barrack at Naini Jail a few miles away from this house, and her children

and I are allowed to visit her every week . . . I am glad of this opportunity of thanking you for the pleasure your books have given me—not only pleasure but comfort and faith because there is at least one Englishman who loves and understands India—If only there were a few more!
With salutations—
Yours sincerely,
Padmaja Naidu

There was no preparation for Nehru's encounter with Edwina Mountbatten. It was an immediate attraction that drew two strangers of widely different backgrounds and life experiences together in a relationship that both of them recognized might never have happened but for an accident of history. It partook of the high drama of that unfolding history, becoming indistinguishable from the elation of independence and the heartbreak and suffering of Partition, with both of which Edwina wholly identified herself, becoming a participant, and not a Vicerene, on the complex canvas of India's birth into freedom. The situation made for an unusual bond and a mutual enchantment that must be one of life's most magical gifts to its elect. In a relationship that had to be spent mostly apart, letters mattered and were written to each other over thirteen years. When she died in her sleep during a visit to North Borneo on the night of 20 February 1960, she had a collection of Nehru's letters at her bedside. Her body was flown home and there, according to her wish, committed to the sea. A wreath of Indian marigolds was cast on the waves from *Trishul*, an Indian frigate sent by Nehru.

7

VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE

In the 1950s and 1960s, prohibition years in Bombay, I had babies, wrote books and kept house while I adjusted to a lifestyle in business circles, very different from the one I had grown up in. I was vividly aware of a changing India and became increasingly conscious of the unchanging elite who populated my social environment. In a politically conscious country, politics was of absorbing interest and New Delhi's doings made for the crackle of for-and-against arguments. Fashionable society, on the other hand, seemed embedded in the grooves of our imperial past. The Viceregal Palace in Delhi was now called Rash-tra-pa-ti Bha-wan, such a mouthful to pronounce. And what was wrong with our feudal moorings? And wouldn't we have been better off with a golf-playing general for a leader? You knew where you were with the army. There was incredulity at illiterate millions having been given the vote and at the 'dhotiwalla' in politics, distress over non-alignment when we should have sided with America and Britain. And now this last straw—cooperative farming—heading us into communism. It looked as if the mind of the Indian upper crust was not as limber as the lower-level mind which must have been embracing change if voting Congress was any indication.

The Finance Minister Morarji Desai, respected in the private sector for his sound conservative views, had given his backing to cooperative farming as the only way to meet the 'threat of communism'. The *New York Times* wrote of the Nagpur resolution, 'Nehru is an outstanding socialist in

theory and practice. But he is an enemy of tyranny and totalitarianism and a foe of violence. And precisely because his voice is strong and his influence great, he is a man to be feared and hated by the communists. He has won new honour and new ground for esteem.' Nehru's credentials as a democrat were by now accepted worldwide, but this had not dispelled the fear on Malabar Hill and its environs that communism was about to take over. There was alarm and lament over free-flowing Scotch and buffets of delectable food displayed in dazzling silver. 'What can Uncle be thinking of?' I was asked. The old order was now represented by the Swatantra Party—welcomed by Nehru as an opposition in Parliament, but likened by him to a bullock-cart mentality in an atomic age. It had attracted displaced royalty, the landed aristocracy and one-time socialist Minoo Masani, who asserted (in support of America's war in Vietnam) that India's borders were on the Mekong River.

On 17 October 1954, Nehru had jotted down his impression of Ho Chi Minh whom he met when he passed through Indo-China on his way to China: 'He came forward—almost leapt forward—and embraced and kissed me. Obvious that this was not a showpiece. He felt it and meant it. Fine frank face, gentle and benign—not at all one's idea of a leader of a rebellion.'[102] In 1958, he asked me to receive Ho Chi Minh at the airport on his arrival in Bombay. On the telephone from Delhi, he said, 'Don't be surprised if he hugs and kisses you. He is a very warm and affectionate man. And take the children with you. He will enjoy meeting them.'

I did as I was told and the meeting on 10 February 1958 went as Nehru had said it would, complete with the fond embrace, the kiss and delight at meeting my children. I have that fine face on the mantelpiece in my drawing room in Dehra Dun, with the message, 'To my dear niece Mme. Nayantara Sahgal—kindest souvenir and affection' and

signed 'Chacha Hochiminh—10.2.58'. Describing this meeting at a lunch party in Bombay, I was greeted with amazement. Gentle? Affectionate? That monster? My listeners were aghast. The demons of others had become their demons.

*

Empires had been bloodily established, glued and hammered into place by the force of arms, after which their possession became the law. Strangely, their departure was expected to take place through polite appeals and laboured negotiations, with meticulous recourse to the law. The end of forcible occupation was praised as graceful withdrawal, as when the French departed from Chandernagore in 1951, and three years later from Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam and Mahe. The Dutch held on to their empire to a bitter, hard-fought end. I am told by a Dutch business consultant that Dutch history textbooks suffer from amnesia on the subject of empire. It is a blank page.

In Africa, the story was no different. The Congo attained independence from Belgium in 1960, but Belgium had no intention of losing control of the mineral-rich south. Two weeks after independence, the Belgian government encouraged the southern province of Katanga to secede and supported its declaration of independence under Moise Tshombe. The *danse macabre* of empire continued when Prime Minister Lumumba appealed to the US, the Soviet Union and the UN for help—a non-aligned appeal that did not find favour with the West. The Cold War spread to the civil war in the Congo and raged in a faraway United Nations that was thrown into confusion by rival prescriptions for action. When the Soviet Union sent troops in support of Lumumba for an attack on Katanga, Britain and America backed Tshombe.

Lumumba was murdered in January 1961. In September that year, Dag Hammarskjold was killed in an unexplained airplane crash when he was on his way to Katanga.

The colonial frame of mind had kept its firm hold on the Portuguese who, in 1947, had no plans to give up Goa, Daman and Diu. They found an ally in the Nizam of Hyderabad, who had acceded neither to India nor to Pakistan after 15 August 1947, and was holding out for independence with Pakistan's active support. Portugal signed a treaty with the Nizam, granting him use of Goa for his war preparations in return for the development of port facilities there. The Nizam's government was buying war material from British armaments firms and flying it from Karachi in bombers manned by British crews. Men of the British secret service were on loan to the Nizam and he had hired a British legal expert, Sir Walter Monckton, to delay negotiations with the Government of India until he was in a position to push for sovereignty. Meanwhile, fanatic storm troopers—the razakars—terrorized the Hindu-majority population of Hyderabad and extended their terror beyond Hyderabad's borders into south India, attacking trains, looting property and raping women. In India, militant Hindus threatened reprisals against Indian Muslims. When it was clear that the Nizam's government would not protect its own people or stop attacks on Indian soil, an Indian army contingent moved into Hyderabad on 7 September 1948. Accession to India followed, accompanied by a blast of condemnation from the Western press at what it termed an illegal, immoral and violent act by the Nehru government. In a letter to Nehru commenting on the hostile criticism from abroad, Rajagopalachari had written with characteristic irony:

> We are in a sad pass. If the substance is in our favour, we are up against legalities, paramountcy, lapse and all that. If the law is in our favour, then morality is brought up against us. If both are right, then they say our non-violence is against us. Every way or some way we are wrong! We have put Bapu aside—so the Western democracies have taken him up. There is some compensation![103]

India's military action in Goa in December 1961 roused the same wrathful response from abroad. Six years earlier, the Portuguese government of Goa had opened fire on an Indian satyagraha campaign organized by opposition parties. Satyagrahis led by Madhu Limaye had tried to cross the border into Goa on 25 July 1955 and thirty of them had been killed. Limaye was arrested, beaten and confined in a solitary cell. A Portuguese military tribunal sentenced him to twelve years' imprisonment. On 26 July, there was an angry uproar in Parliament, demanding retaliation against the Portuguese government. Acharya Kripalani wanted to know if the Indian government was pledged to non-violence. Nehru replied, 'The answer to that is no, the Government is not. As far as I can conceive, under the existing circumstances, no Government can be pledged to non-violence. If we were pledged to non-violence, surely we would not keep an army, navy or air force—and possibly not even a police force.' Yet Nehru remained, according to the opposition, mired in inaction amounting to paralysis.

The action being taken was on the international front. Portuguese atrocities in Angola and Mozambique, the brutal repression of civil liberties in Goa and its government's primitive treatment of political prisoners were abhorrent to Indians and to world opinion. Nehru's approaches to the Powers relied on international pressure to bring an end to the last dregs of colonialism in Africa and on Indian soil. The Vatican responded and the Pope's intervention secured an

amnesty for Indian political prisoners in Goa in February 1957. The UN General Assembly denounced Portugal in 1960. But no pressure was exerted by Britain or America on this fellow member of NATO. Lord Home, Commonwealth Secretary, had told Indian High Commissioner Vijaya Lakshmi in 1955 that the Portuguese were 'adamant' they would not give up Goa and so Britain had to abide by its 700-year-old treaty with Portugal. She had conveyed this to Nehru on 9 December 1955:

> I told him that if the Western Powers would not understand India's attitude on the Goa issue, and insisted on closing their eyes to facts, they should not be surprised at public opinion in India welcoming the unconditional backing which Russia gives on issues about which we feel strongly.[104]

The US State Department, in need of military bases across Europe during the Cold War, supported the Salazar regime and opposed the forcible expulsion of the Portuguese from Goa. Here was a case of propping up a foreign dictatorship on Indian soil in the confidence that the Indian government with its reputation for ethical international behaviour would not take the ultimate step of marching in. The colonial government in Goa, assured that the status quo would never be disturbed, stayed obdurate, firing across the border and on Indian ships at sea. In deteriorating conditions, with no hope of pressure on Portugal from the Powers, Indian troops entered Goa on the night of 17 December 1961, fourteen years after the end of British rule. The Governor-General surrendered without a fight and the operation, though not over in two hours as Sardar Patel had promised, was over in twenty-four.

America and Western Europe condemned this resort to force all the more strongly because the Soviet Union had approved the removal of this last remnant of colonial presence in India. There was general rejoicing in India and in the 1962 Parliament—with the exception of the Swatantra Party's eighteen MPs. No votaries of non-violence themselves, they expressed shock and disillusionment at Nehru's departure from non-violence. Another disillusioned observer, Dom Moraes, then a rising young poet, said the immorality of the Indian government's action had made him renounce his Indian nationality. He became a British subject.

Much has been made of Nehru's inaction on Goa—a description ill suited to a policy that waited out a negotiated solution and counted heavily on civilized pressure to end an intolerable impasse in India and Africa. Nehru was no Hamlet and there was no 'to be or not to be' on the principle that Goa was Indian territory and belonged in the Union. The fourteen-year wait for a settlement resembled nothing so much as a far too long-drawn-out essay in non-violence.

The outcry from Western Europe and the United States against Nehru's 'betrayal' of non-violence had one refreshing aspect. It recognized a leader on the world stage unlike their own, against whom such a charge could be made.

Non-violence was not state policy. It was set aside with Gandhi's blessing when raiders armed and backed by Pakistan invaded Kashmir in October 1947. It worked, or failed to work, depending on the host of factors governing international relations, including the reluctance of the colonial Powers to come to terms with the end of empire. (The term 'post-colonial' has lingered on in the language like Anno Domini from which all else must be dated.) It succeeded best as a two-pronged practical approach applied to reducing world tensions. The first of these was non-alignment with the two power blocs. The other was active cooperation with the UN for a constructive solution to end war, as in Korea, and in

peacekeeping operations, as in the Congo. India's goal of a united Korea was not achieved, but in 1953 under India's chairmanship of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, and with an Indian Custodian force, the deadlock on the question of how prisoners of war were to be repatriated was finally resolved and peace restored. It had been a difficult and delicate task no other country had been willing to undertake. In the Congo, an Indian brigade—more troops than sent by any other nation—arrived in March 1961 and remained there for two years until it completed the job of bringing the whole country under the central government's control. Nehru had promised all available assistance to the government set up under Adoula in August 1961 to prevent Katanga's secession and to restore unity. The conduct of those who carried out these missions gave India a reputation for trustworthiness and impartiality; meanwhile, the success of Nehru's initiatives bestowed an unsought moral authority on him, to which a man such as Robert Oppenheimer could appeal for help to prevent a catastrophic war.

The pursuit of peace called for rare dedication on a planet where every conflict became a remote-controlled war with international repercussions and where peace appeared to have the lowest priority. At a party for Indian ambassador Gagan Vihari Mehta in Washington, hosted by the Indian military attaché and attended by high officials of the Pentagon, General Obregon (head of military aid to foreign countries) had a conversation with the ambassador, which Vijaya Lakshmi thought worth reporting to her brother on 25 November 1952:

> Obregon, whilst appreciating our efforts in the interest of peace, said that there could be no immediate armistice in Korea because this would immediately require a further step, namely discussion of the Far Eastern question, for which the Americans were not ready. They were not prepared in Japan and for the next two years would not be in a strong enough position in the Far East. Continuation of hostilities in Korea was in a way helpful. By keeping American boys in Korea, a certain tension was maintained and appropriations could be readily demanded. He also mentioned the extension of war in Korea itself as a possibility.
>
> A few days ago I met Ruth Fisher (the German ex-Communist who now works at Harvard University and is also employed by the Central Intelligence here). You will remember you had a brief interview with her when she was last in India. She told me that things are going to be stiffened on the Korean front, that the whole purpose of Eisenhower's visit is to explore possibilities of enlargement of the war.[105]

Nehru had already received a report of General Obregon's remarks from Mehta. He acknowledged his sister's letter on 7 December:

> That was a revealing conversation. There can be no doubt that there are many forces in America, and powerful ones, which do not want an armistice chiefly because they do not know what to do afterwards. At the same time, Russia apparently does not want an armistice either, because they seem to like the present position. As for China, it is difficult to say. But, on the whole, they appear to think that the military situation is in their favour.[106]

An initiative that Nehru hoped would prove decisive for peace in Asia was his six-point plan for Indo-China where hostilities fuelled by foreign intervention on both sides

continued after Ho Chi Minh's victory over the French at Dien Bien Pu in May 1954. The main points of Nehru's plan called for a ceasefire, and afraid that American intervention would cause China to retaliate as had happened in Korea, the plan required the US, Britain, Russia and China to agree not to intervene. The aim was for French sovereignty to end and Indo-China (Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam) to be recognized as independent. Though Vietnam was divided, with the north under Ho Chi Minh and the south under Bao Dai, its unity was to be recognized in principle and an election held in both regions in two years' time.

This plan was endorsed by the Colombo Powers: Ceylon, Burma, Indonesia and Pakistan, besides India. Pakistan was persuaded this move would not harm her new alliance with the US. Nehru's views were conveyed to the Geneva Conference on Indo-China in June and July 1954 by his emissary Krishna Menon and figured in the armistice settlement that followed. An International Control Commission—composed of Canada, Poland and India, with India presiding—was established to supervise the ceasefire, the exchange of prisoners of war and related matters . India had not been a participant in the conference but Nehru told Parliament on 25 August 1954 that every participant had proposed her name for the commission, and finally, for India's chairmanship. He said, 'When this responsibility was offered to us, we could not refuse, for our refusal would have meant imperilling the whole agreement . . . To the people of Indo-China, in all their grim travail, irrespective of their former antagonisms to one another, we send our sincere and warm wishes and hopes for peace, unity and prosperity. Asia has greater hopes of peace and stability as a result of the Indo-China settlement.'[107]

Nehru's persistent efforts towards a lasting 'collective peace' in an Asia cleared of foreign intervention, and allowed

to work out its own destiny, was a wisdom appreciated by Western opinion that did not share America's obsessive anti-communism. The *Economist* stated wryly on 1 May 1954: 'At the moment Labour's attitude to the Indian Prime Minister falls little short of canonization. Most Labour questions to Sir Winston implied that he should not move a step in Asia without Mr Nehru's approval.' But the idea of 'collective peace' was up against John Foster Dulles's 'collective security', whose military pacts and treaties provoked the Soviet Union to make her own countermoves. Peace had no chance of survival in the region.

President Roosevelt had kept himself informed of facts and opinions in India by way of his two emissaries, Colonel Louis Johnson and Ambassador William Phillips, during World War II. He also kept in touch with experienced foreign correspondents such as Edgar Snow and Louis Fischer. His immediate successors do not seem to have been accurately informed concerning Asia, and in one case, not kept abreast of an ongoing international crisis. Vijaya Lakshmi was invited to Washington by President Eisenhower in her capacity as President of the UN General Assembly and had a forty-minute interview with him on 12 October 1953. Eisenhower had had flu and had cancelled all engagements, but had especially wanted to meet her to express his government's confidence in India's integrity and impartiality in the work of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Korea. He wanted her to convey his warm congratulations to her Prime Minister for the conduct and achievements of India's Generals and troops. And he expressed the hope that India would come into the picture as an honoured adviser very soon. He realized no setttlement could be permanent unless India's voice was heard. She wrote to her brother immediately on returning to her hotel, giving him Eisenhower's message and adding that she had spoken to him at some length on conditions in Korea.

He was concerned about the 'coercion' of prisoners, and she had told him this was not confined only to the communists. Atrocities had been committed in Korea, both on prisoners of war and civilians especially after the recapture of Seoul, sometimes by American forces, but usually by the South Korean troops. Complaints made to the UN office there as well as to the military authorities had produced no results.

> I gave him a resumé of your telegram as well as reports received independently by me. He expressed himself as being shocked as he was not well posted and he could well understand the reason for my concern.[108]

The telegram and the reports referred to gruesome accounts given to Nehru in 1950 by a reporter and a photographer of the *Picture Post* of London, who were 'dazed with horror' by what they saw being done after Seoul was retaken, by South Korean troops, and sometimes, by Americans, of which the UN office had taken no notice. A separate report from Tokyo described a scene of carnage and attributed a remark to General MacArthur, who had led UN troops into North Korea that the spectacle of four dead North Koreans, including two whose bodies were 'literally sizzling', were for MacArthur 'a good sight for [my] old eyes'.[109] Nehru had sent the information to B.N. Rau at the UN and the Tokyo report to Vijaya Lakshmi, asking her to bring it to the attention of Philip Jessup, who was the US representative at the UN.

Vijaya Lakshmi's letter continues:

> I said I would appreciate knowing the State Department's mind regarding the recent communication received from Peking. To my surprise—or should I say amazement—the President gave me a blank look and

> said, 'What communication?' I looked at Dulles and found he was somewhat embarrassed. He then explained that the President had been indisposed for some time and had not been troubled with official business. He then asked my permission to explain the position to the President and proceeded to tell him about the last UN note sent through Sweden to Peking and Chou En Lai's reply of 10th October. The President did not seem to have much knowledge of the background. Obviously he is not kept informed of day-to-day developments regarding Korea. Later on Dulles explained to me—I thought rather elaborately—that there was no need to trouble the President on details but only on policy matters. I could not help asking him whether he thought that the deadlock in Korea was a detail . . .[110]

Given Eisenhower's reaction to the information Vijaya Lakshmi gave him, and his evident distance from Dulles's approach, one would wish that his own vision had been better served. She wrote in the same letter:

> The President [said] that as far as he was concerned he was prepared to drop all thoughts of prestige and leave no stone unturned to end the Korea war and to see to it that the causes of future wars were eliminated from the world. This was his sole interest as President of the United States and to this end he would work. He would like the US to respond immediately to Chou En Lai's message and he hoped his advisers would not restrict [Arthur H.] Dean's authority too much. He would in such a situation prefer to take a risk rather than miss an opportunity by being too cautious.[111]

POSTSCRIPT

Gandhi brought the common man to the centre stage of Indian politics. Nehru kept him there. Gandhi made non-violence an active force against oppression. Nehru made it his approach to world politics and the foundation of his foreign policy.

Neither Gandhi nor Nehru was awarded a Nobel Prize for Peace. Nor would Galileo have been for science, had there been such prizes in his century. The Inquisition found him guilty of heresy in 1632 for saying the sun, not the earth, is the centre of the universe. Prizes are governed by the mentality of their times. The two men, who more than any others in the last century advanced the cause of peace on earth, were far ahead of their times.

8

THE COLD WAR ENDANGERS INDIA

Nehru's foreign policy was built on the conviction that there was a way out of the 'power' syndrome that had run Europe for centuries, driven European rivalry across the world and left millions of corpses in two worldwide and uncounted lesser wars. After World War II, when warring European ideologies split Europe into two armed camps, he proposed that non-Europe, beginning to come into its own in the mid-twentieth century, did not need to be captive to the politics and policies of either camp. Non-European countries could occupy a third zone, which by its aloofness from the network of military alliances could enlarge the area and prospect of peace. Non-alignment was based on a principle that was not acceptable to either superpower, each of whom demanded an exclusive, supranational, ideological allegiance. Nehru invited non-Europe to an alternative order, outside the superpower struggle for dominance. In the new order, emerging nations would not need to barter any aspect of their independence for 'security', whose ever-escalating armaments race was itself the major danger to world peace. It was possible for nations to reject this recipe for Armageddon by taking no part in it and by accepting the principle of co-existence among themselves, regardless of their internal political or ideological differences. This invitation had many takers.

To this alternative system, Mao Tse Tung's China posed something of a challenge. An ancient civilization with its own bruising share of Asia's colonial experience, national pride and an assertive nationalism were manifest in the new China.

At the same time, nationalism had no place in the communist ideology of international dominion. Would China be propelled by her Asian nationalism or her ideological commitment? Nehru believed she would evolve her own distinct path. He wrote to Vijaya Lakshmi on 30 August 1950:

> What will happen to China during the next few years is anybody's guess. But it is a complete misunderstanding of the China situation to imagine that they function like a satellite state of Russia. Only one thing will push them in that direction to some extent. And even then this cannot go far. That one thing is isolation from the rest of the world. The US policy is the one policy that will make China do what the US least want. That is the tragedy or comedy of the situation.[112]

Nehru's admiration for Chinese civilization and support for China's fight against Japan had led to the Congress Party sending a medical mission to China. He had also paid a brief visit to Chungking in 1939 to acquaint himself with Chinese resistance as he had to Barcelona to identify himself with the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War. The Chiang Kai Sheks had become his friends during their official visit to India in 1942 when they had tried to persuade the British government to form a national government in view of the Japanese advance. The communist victory over the Kuomintang in 1949 called for the acceptance of a new political reality.

On 1 July 1949, Nehru wrote to Vijaya Lakshmi in Washington: 'With all my friendship for the Chiangs, I cannot, as Prime Minister or Foreign Minister, shut my eyes to facts and to my own convictions . . . The Communists have won in China not so much by their strength, but by the innumerable mistakes and errors of Chiang Kai Shek and the Kuomintang

. . . What indeed does Madame Chiang expect India to do? . . . We have to take facts as they are and the biggest fact of this decade is this continuing Chinese revolution . . . I am very sorry for Madame Chiang and I want you to be gentle with her and give her my answer in the best language you can find. But I do not wish to delude her about India's attitude.'[113]

India recognized the new government in China on 30 December 1949, and strove thereafter to get the People's Republic of China seated in the UN, insisting that the question of 'admission' for China did not arise. Indeed, China was a founder member of the UN and not a new country seeking admission. In shutting out the established government because it was communist, the West, in Nehru's opinion, was repeating the fatal mistake it had made in treating the Soviet Union as a pariah, with its unending confrontational consequences. During a foreign policy debate in the Lok Sabha on 29 September 1954, Nehru pointed out the continued folly of outcasting China:

> Here is a great country, and the United Nations, or some countries of the United Nations, refuse to recognize it. There are all kinds of conflicts as a result. I am convinced that there would have been no Korean war if the People's Government of China had been in the United Nations, because people could have dealt with China across the table.

Being isolated and outlawed by the world community, China began acting in a predictable manner. In June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. When UN troops led by General Douglas MacArthur crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea, China entered the war and demonstrated her military strength by forcing them to retreat. In the same month, October, China moved a contingent into Chamdo in

eastern Tibet. When Nehru expressed his concern for Tibet's autonomy, he was informed that Tibet was an integral part of China, and 'no foreign interference will be tolerated' in an entirely domestic problem. In a latter-day version of 'running dogs of imperialism', China's reply also accused the Government of India of consulting the British government on the issue and of being 'affected by foreign influences hostile to China in Tibet'. Nehru recalled in Parliament in his reply to the debate on Tibet on 4 May 1959, 'There was no question of our consulting the British Government. Our view on Tibet was different from that of the British Government.'[114] Earlier, he had defined India's position on Tibet as:

> The position of all previous Governments in India and elsewhere [which] has historically been the recognition of some kind of suzerainty or sovereignty of China over Tibet, and Tibetan autonomy. The measure of autonomy has varied depending upon the relative strength and weakness of China and Tibet, which have varied in the last hundreds of years. Every Government in China has claimed suzerainty there. Many Governments in Tibet have repudiated it.

In his fortnightly letter to Chief Ministers, he had sounded a realistic note on India's limitations regarding Tibet on 1 December 1949:

> We have recognized the autonomy of Tibet under some kind of vague suzerainty of China. Strictly speaking, in law we cannot deny that suzerainty. We would like Tibet to be autonomous and to have direct dealings with us and we shall press for this. But it is clear that we cannot bring any effective pressure to change the course of events in Tibet. Therefore, we must be

> cautious about the steps that we might take so as not to get entangled in enterprises which are beyond our strength.[115]

New Delhi's fears for Tibet's autonomy were not entirely allayed by the Sino-Tibetan agreement of May 1951, which asserted China's sovereign rights over Tibet with control of defence and foreign affairs, but guaranteed regional autonomy over political institutions, internal administration and religious affairs. Mao Tse Tung repeated the assurance to the young Dalai Lama in Nehru's presence during the Prime Minister's visit to China in 1954. According to Mao, Tibet would enjoy autonomy 'which no other Chinese province enjoyed in the People's Republic of China'.[116] Chou En Lai raised the same subject on a visit to New Delhi, laying stress on autonomy for Tibet. Nehru had replied, 'If this had been fully acted upon and was well known to Tibetans, possibly the difficulties would be much less.'[117] He was referring to China's land reforms east of Tibet, which the Khampas, a mountain tribe, had been vigorously and violently resisting.

At an indecisive tripartite conference involving Britain, China and Tibet held at Simla in 1914—when the McMahon Line (named after the British delegate) was devised and roughly mapped as British India's north-eastern frontier—the British government had recognized Chinese 'suzerainty' in return for Tibet's 'autonomy'. At the time, two years after the fall of the Manchus, the Chinese government had been in no position to claim or to re-claim either suzerainty or sovereignty over Tibet. It appears to have kept its options open by not ratifying the treaty. Until 1950, Tibet's status, in effect, remained autonomous by default since China, weakened by war with Japan and divided by civil war, was powerless to assert any form of authority. On 5 June 1959, the report of an International Commission of Jurists to the

UN called Tibet 'a fully sovereign state' since 'the expulsion of the Chinese in 1912' with a status of 'de facto independence'.[118] However, no country at any time recognized Tibet's independence.

Neither legality nor treaty, but the forbidding natural barrier of the Himalayas and the armed might of the British empire had maintained the frontier of British India, which was much longer than the McMahon Line. At independence, the territory from the northwest of Kashmir to the western end of Nepal was undemarcated. Efforts to demarcate a border had been attempted by the British and the Chinese in the mid-nineteenth century, and had been given up when the Chinese Emperor's representative suggested, and the British agreed, to go by maps prepared on the basis of old usage and convention because 'the borders of these territories have been sufficiently and distinctly fixed so that it would be best to adhere to this ancient arrangement, and it will prove far more convenient to abstain from any additional measure for fixing them'.[119] The undemarcated border bequeathed by the British government to independent India was further bedevilled by the Partition, which created an additional border with Pakistan where none had existed before. Tibet, likewise, faced a new situation in October 1949 when the Chinese government whose writ now extended over a united China made its authority felt a year later. Their entry into the Korean War and the move into Tibet delivered the same forceful message: a country outlawed by the world assembly, and accountable to no international forum, was giving notice of its presence and proceeding to make its own laws.

Nehru had taken stock of the border situation earlier, writing to John Matthai, the Finance Minister, on 10 September 1949. Copies of the letter were sent to Sardar Patel, B.V. Keskar, the Deputy Home Minister, and the Secretary General, Ministry of External Affairs.

My dear Matthai,
Recent developments in China and Tibet indicate that Chinese communists are likely to invade Tibet some time or other. This will not be very soon. But it may well take place within a year.The governmental structure of Tibet is feeble. A Lama hierarchy controls the whole country, the majority of whose population is very poor. Any effective attempt by the Chinese communists can hardly be resisted, more especially as the greater part of the population is likely to remain passive and some may even help the communists. On the other side at Sinkiang, Soviet influence is already strong.

The result of all this is that we may have the Chinese or Tibetan communists right up on our Assam, Bhutan and Sikkim border. That fact by itself does not frighten me. But all along this border are tribal areas. In the past British officers carried on a policy of encouraging separatist tendencies in these areas. They have to be tackled very carefully. It seems to me essential from every point of view that these areas should have good communications, that is, roads. This means a certain road development programme for these areas. There was, I believe, some such programme in the Assam scheme. But much of it has been cut down for reasons of economy. I think it is a risky business not to develop these communications at this stage or in the near future. Later we might have to spend much more. At present we can proceed relatively slowly, as we have some time. I am putting this to you, so that you might consider how far we can go in this direction in the near future.
Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru[120]

Sardar Patel's memorandum to Nehru on 7 November 1950 carried these concerns further, warning that China, now in control of Tibet, was directly on India's border. Not having accepted the McMahon Line, China would seek to infiltrate border regions and question the whole frontier. On 20 November, Nehru told Parliament the McMahon Line was non-negotiable, 'map or no map'. Treaties were negotiated with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan to define borders. The North Eastern Frontier Agency was brought directly under the control of the Ministry of External Affairs. An Intelligence Bureau and an Indian Frontier Administrative Service were created for the region. A committee under General Thimayya worked out national defence requirements. Army and administrative control were extended according to the watershed principle of the Himalayas, in some areas beyond the McMahon Line. Tawang, never administered by British India, was incorporated into India in 1951. The policy decision taken to consolidate control over Indian territory corresponded to China's decision to move troops into Tibet and later Chinese intrusions along the frontier far across the boundary line that China claimed in 1956.

On 29 April 1954, India and China signed an agreement on Tibet relating to Indo-Tibetan trade, travel and pilgrimage. Both countries adopted Panchsheel as the basis for their relationshp with its accent on peaceful coexistence and mutual non-aggression. The Indian government withdrew its garrisons and gave up control of posts and telegraphs and other extra-territorial rights which the British government had claimed for itself in Tibet. Nehru emphatically repudiated these extra-territorial privileges as 'a relic of British imperialism . . . which we do not seek to have in any country in the world, Tibet or any other'.[121] In a letter dated 29 June 1954 to Ambassador G.L. Mehta in Washington, he said what had been given up had been replaced by something more

important, 'a friendly frontier and an implicit acceptance of that frontier'.[122]

Against the better judgement of Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, Panikkar, India's ambassador to China (1950–53), felt that an 'implicit' acceptance was enough and a good relationship should not be put at risk by pushing for China's explicit recognition of India's boundary. Though Nehru had come to believe that Panikkar, in his susceptibility to the Chinese point of view, had not conveyed the Indian government's views to Beijing fully and accurately, his own assessment of the right course to pursue with China was producing positive results. By the end of 1954, India's stand on the Japanese Peace Treaty, her key contribution to the settlement of the Indo-China crisis and her continued efforts to seat China at the UN had found favour with the Chinese government. By then, Nehru and Chou En Lai had established a cordial relationship. Nehru had visited China and Chou En Lai had come to Delhi in 1954. A letter dated 28 December 1954 from Chou En Lai to Nehru reads, 'I have the firm conviction that the deep friendship between our two peoples and their common desire to work for peace have provided the prospect of broad development for the friendly cooperation between China and India.'[123] Chou thanked Nehru for his gift of Indian coffee and tea, said he was sending him 200 tins of Chinese cigarettes and agreed to the proposal to establish wireless telephonic communication between Beijing and Delhi. He ended, 'At the close of the year 1954, please allow me to congratulate you for the remarkable progress made in the friendly relations between our two countries during the past year, and to wish a further development in the relations between China and India in 1955.'[124]

They met again at Bandung in April 1955. Chou En Lai's presence at Bandung signified China's engagement with Afro-Asian nationalism and her earlier espousal of Panchsheel had

been a step out of ideological confinement at a time when post-Stalin communist ideology was in transition. Chou and Nehru had meetings again in December 1956 and January 1957.

In 1957, China announced the opening of the Sinkiang–Tibet highway. The road into Aksai Chin went partly through Indian territory which unlike the northeast had no clearly marked boundary for long stretches. Meanwhile, India had established border posts and expanded her intelligence network all along the frontier from Karakoram in Ladakh to Kibithoo in the NEFA, in some cases, beyond the McMahon Line. Both countries had consolidated their positions in areas where they had established ground control, and had *implicitly* accepted these arrangements.

In 1959, China's language and claims to large tracts of Indian territory in Chinese maps marked an abrupt and incomprehensible change of mood. At a loss to understand this, Nehru described China as using 'the language of the Cold War, regardless of truth and propriety', making fantastic charges against India of having expansionist designs and after giving asylum to the Dalai Lama (who had crossed over into Indian territory on 31 March that year), of keeping him in India under duress. The White Paper Nehru placed before Parliament, detailing Chinese incursions and developments connected with the border dispute, caused an explosion of anger and anxiety. The Prime Minister had to appeal to a roused press and Parliament for restraint. He himself was caught between the necessity of avoiding violent conflict with a now hostile neighbour—'a powerful country bent on spreading out to what they consider their old frontiers, and possibly beyond'[125]—while protecting India's territorial integrity.

Recently published accounts of the CIA offensive mounted in Tibet to destabilize China have, in retrospect, made China's

switch to an aggressive posture clearer. The doctrine of encircling and isolating communism had planted the Cold War squarely in Asia, with SEATO and the Baghdad Pact, and in 1956, the US government had sanctioned a covert operation against China in Tibet. The Dalai Lama apparently knew of the CIA's involvement, but was plainly unaware of its size, scope and intent. He writes in his autobiography:

> Although there was no talk at this time [that is, in early 1957] of an armed struggle against the Chinese, my brothers, unbeknown to me, had already made contact with the American Intelligence Agency. Apparently the Americans felt that it was worthwhile to provide limited assistance to the Tibetan freedom fighters, not because they cared about Tibetan independence, but as part of their world-wide efforts to destabilise all Communist governments. To this end they undertook to supply a limited amount of simple weaponry to the freedom fighters by air-drop. They also made plans for the CIA to train some of them in techniques of guerilla warfare and then parachute them back into Tibet. Naturally my brothers judged it wise to keep this information from me. They knew what my reaction would have been.[126]

The Dalai Lama's brothers had been in close touch with the CIA since 1951 and in the first phase of CIA involvement, one brother, Thubten Norbu, had come to Kalimpong in 1956 to organize Tibetan émigrés, thus making Kalimpong what China later called 'the commanding centre' of the Tibetan rebellion. CIA operations in Tibet encouraged the revolt against collectivization and land reform in the Khampa region, which is a part of China proper and proceeded to take an active part in the Tibetan resistance by training and equipping

Tibetans for sabotage and guerrilla warfare in a military camp in the Colorado Rockies, and parachuting them back to carry out regular raids in Tibet. China dealt with armed resistance by bombing towns and villages, and ruthlessly and grotesquely eliminating resisters. An uprising in Lhasa in March 1959, orchestrated by the CIA, ended bloodily in mass slaughter, left thousands of Tibetans dead and forced thousands more, including the Dalai Lama and his entourage, to flee. China, which had moved a small contingent of troops into Chamdo in eastern Tibet in 1950, swept into Lhasa in full force after the 1959 uprising. The Dalai Lama told Nehru in Mussoorie on 24 April 1959 that up to the last minute he had not wanted to leave Lhasa. The decision was taken suddenly when shells fired at his palace fell into a pond nearby. He escaped the same day, assisted by CIA operatives. The extension of the Cold War into Tibet had dangerous consequences for India. China—aware of US and Kuomintang involvement—appeared convinced that India, having given asylum to the Dalai Lama, was colluding in destabilizing Tibet. The Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya writes:

> . . . from the Chinese point of view the American involvement in Tibet transformed the entire situation. It was no longer a question of revolt by some troublesome Tibetans but an international conspiracy to undermine the victory of the Communist Party in China. Moreover, it presented a direct threat to China's security. This may explain the ferocity of Chinese suppression of the Tibetan revolt.[127]

This may also explain China's hostile turn towards India though Nehru had been consistent in his hands-off policy towards Tibet. When the Dalai Lama had been invited to India in 1956–57 to take part in the 2500th Buddha Jayanti

celebrations and had wanted to remain, Nehru had advised him to return home as he was the rallying force for his people. The Prime Minister said he would use his influence with Chou En Lai, who was arriving in Delhi the following day, concerning the guarantee of Tibet's political and cultural identity in China's 17-Point Agreement with Tibet, and he arranged for the Dalai Lama to meet Chou. In circumstances where Tibet was not recognized as an independent country, and the Dalai Lama staying on in India would have been seen by China as an unfriendly act, the Indian government could do little else. That India had no accurate knowledge of events in Lhasa in 1959 is evident from Nehru's statement of 30 March in Parliament when he spoke of firing in Lhasa 'in a country from which no news comes except rumour. The only news that has come to us or to the wide world—leaving out China—is our Consul-General's telegrams to us. We got them pretty rapidly. But what can the Consul-General report? He reports by and large what he sees from the window of his Consulate.'[128] Neither Nehru nor Indian Intelligence knew of the extent of CIA activity (believing the airdrops to be the Kuomintang's) until the 1962 war. The American ambassador to India, J.K. Galbraith, and the CIA chief in India, had both—to no effect—opposed meddling in the Himalayas, saying this would poison America's relations with India. The operation that began in 1956, ended in December 1961, when Roger E. McCarthy, who created the CIA Tibetan Task Force and the Tibetan guerrilla army, went on to head similar professional operations in Vietnam and Laos. However, it continued under another code name until official sanction for it was withdrawn after President Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972.[129]

In a deteriorating climate, Indian and Chinese officials held three meetings in Delhi, Beijing and Rangoon through 1960 to examine the boundary question. The Indian report was released on 12 December 1960 and the Chinese released

their report only in January 1962 with new material that had not been discussed. The prospect for agreement must indeed have been bleak when India claimed the crest of the Himalayas as her geographical and historic boundary, while China claimed an arbitrarily drawn boundary along the foothills in the eastern sector and refused to discuss the Ladakh–Sinkiang boundary. Nehru offered to refer the dispute to any international authority, including the International Court at the Hague, but China wanted no legal settlement. Meanwhile, in May 1962, an agreement with Pakistan yielded her territory in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, making it clear she did not share the Soviet Union's view that Kashmir was an integral part of India. Tsering Shakya believes, 'If it had not been for the Tibetan revolt, the border issue would have been confined to diplomatic exchanges of notes'[130]—so closely were the revolt and the border issue linked with China's perception of her security. Is it conceivable then that without the Cold War that made use of Tibet to destabilize China, there would have been no Chinese attack on India? Could the border issue have settled into acquiescence in terms of ground realities had the two countries abided by a century-old agreement on 'ancient arrangements'?

Is it conceivable, too, that, without the Cold War's intrusion, gradual change may have been possible in Tibet? That the Tibetans would have been spared terrible reprisals and the Dalai Lama's revered status would have been left unaltered? Chinese policy had recognized Tibet as different and distinct from its other regions and proposed to allow it its way of life for an undefined period. When one of the Chinese cadres objected, saying reforms in Tibet would proceed at the pace of a tortoise, Mao Tse Tung had replied that even this pace would be too fast. Mao spoke of transforming the Tibetan polity and economy without shedding blood. By the end of 1953, the ruling elite had begun

to look to China as a modernizing influence that would end Tibet's isolation from the world. After the Lhasa revolt and the Dalai Lama's flight, Beijing scrapped the 17-Point Agreement and no longer treated Tibet as an autonomous region.

China attacked India in October 1962, ended the fighting in November, and after a non-aligned meeting in Colombo to discuss ceasefire terms, whose proposals were later amended to accommodate some of India's concerns, moved back to the line of actual control. (In the eastern sector, this meant Chinese withdrawal to twenty kilometres north of the McMahon Line.)What then was the purpose of this attack? Clearly, it had nothing to do with a territorial dispute and it made no difference to territory. The border remained undemarcated. Was it the need, as in the Korean War, to demonstrate superior military power and presence in a beleaguered situation where China's communist government was targeted for removal by the United States and had been up against a US-aided armed rebellion in Tibet? By 1962, China's growing ideological rift and border dispute with the Soviet Union completed her isolation. Russia had withdrawn technicians and cut off oil supplies during 1960–62, and had refused to side with China in the border dispute with India, choosing to remain neutral. Ideology was taking a back seat at the Kremlin with Khrushchev moving towards an understanding with the West on the question of nuclear testing. At home, Mao's Great Leap Forward had failed disastrously and grain scarcity was causing severe hardship. China did not want to be seen as unnerved by the Tibetan revolt. Somewhere authority would have to be asserted, a point would have to be made. It was made militarily on India's border. An army superbly trained in mountain warfare and long acclimatized to fighting at high altitudes demonstrated its strength and preparedness with devastating effect, as it had done earlier in North Korea. With winter closing in,

withdrawal had to take place before the Himalayan passes closed. The attack had to be short and sharp.

The punishment China administered seems to have been directed at India's success story as a country going her way unencumbered by ideological prescriptions or propped up by any military alliance. The spectacle of a newly emerged Asian nation choosing to overcome poverty and industrial backwardness without the use of force; socialist yet committed to individual freedom and government by consent, represented an alternative model to China in Asia. India's mature and cooperative role in helping to resolve international crises had brought her respect and her non-alignment policy had not deterred either superpower from cooperating with her in nation-building. More galling to China's sense of her own place in history was that India was now recognized as Asia's voice on the world stage.

Nehru's requests for military aid in this crisis brought assistance from both sides of the ideological divide—the United States and the Commonwealth, as well as the Soviet Union. He believed his own non-aligned efforts towards peace between the two sides had contributed to a new era of civilized discourse in international relations when the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union signed a partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in Moscow in August 1963.

Non-alignment as a policy had been condemned by critics in India as relations with China deteriorated in 1959. Nehru had clarified his government's stand in his letter to Chief Ministers on 26 October 1959:

> I am asked by some of our countrymen and by people abroad: are you still going to adhere to your policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence? Some say that our policy has failed. I entirely disagree. Far from failing, this policy has had, in a sense, marked success

> in the world as a whole and has contributed, I think, in some small measure to the favourable developments that are taking place in the western world as between the two mighty powers, the United States and the Soviet Union . . . It is a fact, however, that our attempts at friendship with the Chinese Government have failed . . . To say that this is due to our policy of non-alignment is to misunderstand the situation completely. Any other policy would not have prevented this happening but would have accelerated it, and made it more difficult for us to play the part we did in the furtherance of world peace.[131]

The non-alignment policy, continued though the 1962 attack, resulted in close cooperation between the CIA and Indian Intelligence services into the 1970s. Pressure from the West during the Chinese advance to settle the Kashmir issue by talks with Pakistan later led to talks, but no results. The attack confirmed Nehru's assessment that isolating the People's Republic of China from the world assembly had been a grievous mistake.Ten years later, America appears to have come to the same conclusion.

Within India, the attack rallied Indians. On 14 November 1962, while the Chinese were still advancing into NEFA, the Lok Sabha (including its communist members) passed a resolution 'to drive out the aggressor from the sacred soil of India however long and hard the struggle may be'. The Prime Minister spoke on the resolution, giving a characteristic view of the crisis at a time of present and growing danger:

> I have almost felt it would be suitable to add a small paragraph to the resolution thanking the Chinese Government for taking this action against us which has suddenly lifted a veil from the face of India. During the

last three weeks, we have had a glimpse of the strong and serene face of India, strong and yet calm and determined, that ancient face that is ever young and vibrant. This has been an experience worth having for all of us and it has been our high privilege to share in that emotion and experience. Any person who gives thought to these matters will realise, and I hope other countries, especially the Chinese Government, would realise—what this signifies.[132]

B.N. Mullik, who was director of Intelligence services from 1950 until after Nehru's death in 1964, recalls that the Prime Minister in his regular briefings to Intelligence reminded them of a historically expansionist China and the necessity for unceasing vigilance and preparation along India's border, and at the same time of the need to avoid war—not merely as an abhorrent way to solve poblems, but because peace was essential for development. All India's resources would be needed for economic and industrial development for many years to come. His ongoing efforts to seat China at the UN had the same objective in mind: a stable, responsible neighbour and peace in the region. America, said Nehru, could afford to close her eyes to China's existence, India could not. Mullik also describes the extensive measures taken to establish administrative control over Indian territory and checkposts at disputed points.[133]

There was no ambiguity about the fact that the Indian government, Parliament and public wanted no more Chinese intrusions. Answering correspondents before his departure for Colombo on 13 October 1962, Nehru told them, 'I have ordered the Army to turn out the Chinese,' and when questioned further, he added he could not fix a date. That was for the army to decide. The first part of this general statement defining future policy along the entire border has

often been mis-quoted as an order for an immediate strike to oust the Chinese from a particular position in the northeast. It is, however, unlikely that the quoted statement made any difference to China's course of action, for which preparations had been made and put in place much in advance. It is significant too that China's 1962 attack benefited from a historic reversal of positions, when a united China faced a partitioned India whose territory and military resources had been cut down by Partition and was now bordered by an ally of the invading power.

Mullik blames 'divided counsel and want of determination to fight the Chinese'[134] within sections of the army command—who were ultimately responsible for the military decisions taken and the moves made—for India's humiliating defeat. In contrast, he praises the troops who fought at forbidding heights of 10,000–18,000 feet where the Chinese engaged them simultaneously at four places—three in NEFA and one in Ladakh. Though pushed back from the heights they 'fought well—very well indeed' at three engagements 'and withdrew after inflicting maximum casualties on the enemy and in good formation to predetermined positions'.[135] Only on the Nyamkachu front, 'The brigade disintegrated and practically disappeared.'[136] He adds, 'In deciding to hold this territory the Government had acted on the highest military authority in the land.'[137] For this debacle, he holds the decisions made and the confusion at command level responsible. This, and not defeat itself, was the tragedy of the Sino-Indian war. More powerful armies had suffered defeat in war when western Europe fell to the Nazis and Japan drove Britain and the United States out of Southeast Asia and the western Pacific. Mullik also points out the vulnerability of defensive Indian positions while the Chinese took the offensive from the advantage of great heights, and compares the Chinese tactic of multi-pronged simultaneous

attack with General Giap's TET offensive in Vietnam in January 1968. The Americans, believing the Viet Cong had been broken and were on the run, were holding defensive positions all over South Vietnam. Giap launched a simultaneous attack on all American positions—during which the Americans nearly lost Saigon—and destroyed forty per cent of the American air force on the ground.

Shankar Bajpai, a former Indian ambassador to China, believes, as did his father, Girja Shankar Bajpai, that Nehru should have negotiated a demarcated boundary with China, which would once and for all have settled this issue. But obviously, this was not an issue to be so simply settled or it would not have eluded definition and demarcation through the forty-five years after Nehru. Again, would the border issue have settled itself had the Cold War not made an ongoing battleground of Asia as it had of Europe, and Asia had been left to work out its own destiny in Nehru's vision of a new order? But then this is where my extended essay began . . .

9

LIVING LEGACIES

Nehru laid siege to the orthodoxies of his era—imperial rule, white superiority and the politics of power—and compelled change on a scene where there had been no change. Art changes the world by offering us another way of looking at it. International politics had not seen such a shift until Nehru rejected power and the race for dominance as the basis of international relations and proposed a world order based on coexistence, regardless of ideology. What might have been a candle in the winds of the Cold War became an energy and a political strategy that enabled Afro-Asia—which until then had played the role assigned to it by Europe—to assert itself as a confident player on the world stage. On her part, India pursued freedom for Afro-Asia in and outside the UN without pause, and was as persistently obstructed in her endeavour by the colonial Powers, backed by the United States. The two examples listed below are from the 1952 session of the UN:

Vijaya Lakshmi to Nehru, 18 October 1952:

> Casey of Australia tried to argue about the undesirability of bringing up the South African race conflict issue at a period when more important items on the agenda required calm consideration. I told him that I regret I could not accept his views and that we were pledged to the ending of issues like the one in South Africa, and which we believed constitute a threat to world peace.[138]

Vijaya Lakshmi to Nehru, 15 December 1952:

> The defeat of the Tunisian resolution was expected. Both the U.S. and the U.K. had pledged their support to France and much pressure was brought to bear on the Latin American countries. This session has proved conclusively that we must devote more time to South America. The Middle East and Latin America are going to be important to us in the future.[139]

On 19 March 1953, she wrote of 'the changing of the name of our Group from "Asia-Arab" to "Asian-African". This was done at the suggestion of Liberia and Ethiopia who have recently been taking greater interest in the activities of the Group and who were anxious to have their names associated with it. The new name is now more appropriate.'[140]

*

After his death, the Asian and African press deeply mourned Nehru as one of their own, paid homage to his support for their liberation struggles and to non-alignment as a force for peace. The tribute below sounds like a cry of personal bereavement. A few others are listed at the end of the chapter.

> Peace be on you, O great, liberal man, real lover of peace . . . Your death has plunged into deep sorrow and grief the mind and soul of persons who are really interested in world peace . . . You were following the way which has been the ideal of mankind. You knew the afflictions that pained them and used to put ointment on their wounds . . . peace, peace, peace be on you.
>
> —*Post-e-Tehran*, 27 May 1964

India under British rule was fragmented into British and 'native' states, Muslims and Hindus, majorities and minorities. As an independent entity, her regional, linguistic, religious and political differences became the fulcrum of her national identity and demolished the religion-ruled proposition that sanctioned Partition. On the development front, Nehru refused the sterility of doctrine and dogma and repeatedly described the way forward as a day-to-day grind based on improvisation and experience, open to change where change was needed. 'What does matter to me,' he said in an interview in 1955, 'is that things I have worked for should prosper and the country should continue in the same direction, *or in some better way if that is devised* later' (emphasis mine).[141] Nehru's India took a giant stride out of colonial stagnation towards industrialization and modernization. Succeeding governments, lacking his ground-based realism and the practical approach that rejected hidebound ideological constraints, failed to take off from the foundations laid during the Nehru era and to make the changes required for changing conditions. India lost invaluable time, held back from the next natural stages of her stride towards modernization.

Two articles of faith—secularism and democracy—were not open to compromise. There could be no deliberate deconstruction of India into a single Hindu identity on a subcontinent where cultures had criss-crossed and bloodstreams mingled in a tapestry that could not be unwoven. It is one of the triumphs of Indian secularism that in a country where religion matters and whose rural masses are deeply religious, the people placed their trust in an avowed atheist dedicated to removing all obstructions to scientific progress and modernization. Nehru envisaged democracy as the people's participation from the ground up, drawing its ultimate strength from local roots through panchayats and community development. The local and national institutional

framework for democracy built during the Nehru years ensured that this legacy, if given like nurture, would endure. In his time the progress achieved at home grew out of these commitments.The reputation achieved abroad rested on the fact that they were seen to work. India, an alternative to classic theories of progress and nationhood, set her own example. On 30 May 1964, *The Star*, an English daily published in Beirut, declared that this had been 'at the root of the Communist Chinese aggression'.

> A democratic India, if it were to succeed as the champion for the developing world of Asia, Africa and Latin America, was a big ideological challenge for the Communist Chinese. Its humiliation militarily or otherwise would greatly advance the Communist cause, and consequently Peking's leadership of the third bloc. Rallying to the support of India and Nehru at the time was thus a moral duty of every nation.

The 1962 war dealt a blow to the economy. The Third Five Year Plan (1961–66) called for austerities, heavy taxation, sacrifice and increased defence spending. The war's effect otherwise was to strengthen unity and resolve.

A border that remains undemarcated forty-seven years later may have much to do with the practical and geographical problems of demarcating 2,680 mountainous miles. Its political solution will need acceptance of a world of infinite variety that accommodates infinite differences, in which Nehru's formula of coexistence is the only creative alternative to conflict.

Nehru had a positive aversion to any form of aggrandisement or glorification in the form of statues, road names or the like. 'My dear Chaudhury,' he wrote to Major-General J.N. Chaudhury on 8 January 1949, 'I attach a press

cutting. I am alarmed. I dislike all names being changed. More specially I dislike my name being attached in this way. Fateh Maidan is a historical name and an attractive one. Why is it anybody's business to change or forget history with all its associations and to attach people's names in this way? Please do not let this happen in this case.'[142]

When asked how he would like to be remembered, he wrote an epitaph for himself:

> This was a man who with all his mind and heart loved India and the Indian people. And they in turn were indulgent to him and gave him their love most abundantly and extravagantly.[143]

The obituaries from Asia and Africa below mourn an irreparable loss:

> But it is in the heart of the Afro-Asian world that the grief has been more strongly felt, because it is to this world that Mr Nehru devoted his life . . . The liberation struggle in Asia and Africa . . . was led by the great departed.
>
> —*Le Peuple*, Algiers, 28 May 1964

> Nehru the Great possessed strong nerves whenever the world stood in need of such nerves. He had a big brain, a great heart, calm thought, deep insight, confident steps and the right opinion whenever the road was dark and humanity was on the brink of an abyss of disaster. More than once he rescued the world as well as civilization from catastrophe.
>
> —*Al-Baath*, Damascus, 29 May 1964

> He was one of the very few who has been able to pass from political theory to positive action, a creator of

the concept of non-alignment and promoter of dignity among the weaker nations . . . He conceived the idea of a formidable third force which . . . has put a limit to servitude and despotism.

—*Al Jarida*, Beirut, 30 May 1964

A light has gone out, an era has passed. Jawaharlal Nehru is dead . . . Should we say he was a great man? But he was more than that. He was a Man. Should we say he had been our friend? But he was more than that . . . a man whose love for humanity shone through the darkness of our nuclear age . . . There is nothing to do except to look for determination in the sparkle of the tears of all who weep for him today to work ever more for peace and love among mankind.

—*The Commoner*, Kathmandu, 28 May 1964

How sad to think of a world without Nehru . . . without his stately wisdom, his mature judgement, his undiminishing courage. How sad to visualize the Afro-Asian group and the whole non-aligned community carrying on the struggle for the upliftment of the lot of their people within a world of peace without this man who . . . did so much to assert the presence of the once downtrodden millions on the stage of history.

—*The Ghanaian Times*, Accra, 28 May1964

But above all, Nehru's most outstanding contribution to the anti-colonial struggle and world peace lies in the development of the policy of non-alignment at a time when the so-called Cold War threatened to blow the world into pieces. Non-alignment today is an established principle of international diplomacy.

—*The Evening News*, Accra, 28 May 1964

No policy is relevant for all time and non-alignment has no literal meaning today in a changed international situation. But like any significant movement—from the Suffragettes, to America's Civil Rights struggle, to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to feminism and the green movement—the higher level to which it raised consciousness is here to stay. Its legacy is the psychological empowerment it conferred on the powerless and the political results it achieved, together with a vigour of mind that continues to reserve the right to judge and act on each international issue on its own merit, independent of Great Power-driven imperatives and strategies. These have left scars across Asia that still bleed. Nehru's policy of steering clear of alignment and alliance, of rejecting the role assigned to us by others and choosing to lead, not follow, may still be the wisdom needed for sane solutions.

NOTES

1. VLP papers, 1st Instalment, File 50, p. 24.
2. Letter in family possession.
3. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd, 1949).
4. Nayantara Sahgal (ed. and compil.), *Before Freedom: Nehru's Letters to His Sister*, 1909–1947 (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2004), p. 51.
5. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters from a Father to His Daughter* (Allahabad: K.P. Dar, Allahabad Law Journal Press, 1931). The quote is from the Foreword.
6. Nayantara Sahgal, *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1954), p. 89.
7. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 21, Part I.
8. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 39.
9. Sahgal, *Before Freedom*, p. 176.
10. Ibid., pp. 344–45.
11. He had been released from prison on 15 June 1945. This letter was written after his phone call from London to me at Wellesley College, Massachusetts.
12. Sahgal, *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (Harper Perennial edition, 1997), pp. xviii, xix.
13. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1979), pp. 174–75.
14. Editorial in *National Herald*, 2 July 1946.
15. Articles enclosed in Rajeshwar Dayal's letter to K.P.S. Menon, 27 October 1949, Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 30.
16. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 8.
17. Ibid., File 30, p. 209.
18. Ibid., File 8, p. 106.
19. Ibid., File 13, Part I, pp. 97–98.

20. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit Papers (henceforth, VLP Papers), 1st Instalment, File 48, p. 7.
21. Ibid., File 53, p. 8.
22. Ibid., File 53, pp. 17–18.
23. Ibid., File 53, p. 2.
24. Ibid., File 53, pp. 22–23.
25. Ibid., File 53, p. 68.
26. Extract from Nayantara Sahgal, *From Fear Set Free* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1962).
27. VLP Papers, File 53, p. 15.
28. Ibid, File 53, pp. 12–13.
29. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 59, 1st Instalment, pp. 103–04.
30. VLP Papers, File 53, 1st Instalment, p. 45.
31. Ibid., File 53, 1st Instalment, p. 46.
32. Ibid.
33. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 21, Part I, p. 154. Telegram dated 12/13 March 1949 from the Indian Embassy, Moscow: VLP to Bajpai.
34. Nehru's letter of 7 May 1949 to Radhakishnan, requesting him to go to Moscow. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, 1st Instalment, File 23, Part 1.
35. Ibid., File 35, pp. 200–201.
36. Ibid.
37. VLP Papers, File 59, p. 86.
38. Ibid, File 60, pp. 227–28.
39. VLP Papers, 1st Instalment, File 59, pp. 20–23.
40. Ibid., pp. 52–54.
41. VLP Papers, File 60. Letter dated 28 September 1949, para 5.
42. Ibid., File 60, pp. 46–48.
43. VLP Papers, File 59, pp. 12–14.
44. Ibid., File 59, pp. 125–26.
45. Ibid., File 59, pp. 152–53.
46. Ibid., File 59, pp. 166–67.
47. Letter in family possession.
48. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's statement on 11 October 1947 in th UN. Referred to in a letter of the same date in the VLP Papers, 1st Instalment, Sub-file 48, p. 11 .
49. Ibid, File 62, 1st Instalment, p. 43.
50. Nehru in the Lok Sabha, 9 April 1958.

51. All three quotes from Jawaharlal Nehru, *Towards Freedom* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941–42), pp. 304, 305, 312.
52. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: The John Day Co., 1946), pp. 8, 9.
53. Nehru speaking on the Suez crisis in the Lok Sabha on 8 August 1956. From Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946–April 1961* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961).
54. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 171.
55. Ibid., pp. 555–56.
56. Ibid., File 62, p. 55.
57. Gerald Priestland, 20 November 1956, quoted in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol II: 1947–1956 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 296.
58. Paul Johnson, *The Suez War* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1957).
59. VLP Papers, 1st Instalment, File 62, p. 7.
60. Johnson, *The Suez War*.
61. VLP Papers, 1st Instalment, File 60, p. 96.
62. Ibid., File 60, p. 95.
63. Letter dated 3 January 1955. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, 1st Instalment, File 308.
64. Quoted in Narendra Singh Sarila, *The Untold Story of the Partition* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2006), page 229.
65. Johnson to State Department, 9 April 1942, quoted in Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. I: 1889–1947 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 283.
66. Savat Rahman (tr.), *100 Poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2002), p. 43.
67. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 22, Part II, p. 360.
68. From a letter dated 20 April 1953 to Apa Pant, Post-1947 Nehru papers, 1st Instalment, Part 2, File 175.
69. Post-1947 Nehru Papers.
70. Ibid., File 24, Part II, p. 243.
71. Ibid., File 5, pp. 138–42.
72. Ibid., File 39, p. 167.
73. Ibid., File 37, Part I, pp. 148–50.
74. Ibid., File 39, p. 169.
75. Quoted in B.N. Pandey, *Nehru* (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1976), p. 299.
76. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 40, p. 154.
77. Ibid., File 31, Part I, p. 151–52.
78. Ibid.
79. VLP Papers, File 94, p. 191.
80. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 31, Part I, pp. 151–52.
81. Sir Percival Griffiths, *Modern India* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1957), p. 207.
82. Vincent Sheean, *Nehru: The Years of Power* (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 60–61.
83. Ibid., p. 47.
84. Griffiths, *Modern India*, pp. 205–6.
85. K.P.S. Menon speeches, The Oral History Project (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1981).
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 29, Part II, p. 342.
89. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 10 (Second Series) (New Delhi: Sangam Books, no date) p. 98.
90. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 496, Part II, p. 276.
91. Letter dated 16 March 1952 from JN's letters to Chief Ministers, Vol. II (1950–1952), pp. 571–72.
92. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 39, p. 261.
93. Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 553.
94. Sahgal, *Before Freedom*, p. 304.
95. Ibid., p. 305.
96. Ibid., p. 312.
97. Ibid., pp. 322, 324.
98. Ibid., pp. 327–28.
99. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 1, p. 66.
100. VLP Papers, File 47. Letter dated 18-4-1947.
101. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Towards Freedom* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941–42), p. 316.
102. Diary entry 17 October 1954, quoted in Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. II: 1947–1956, p. 227.
103. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 13, Part I, p. 182.
104. VLP Papers, File 62, 1st Instalment, p. 42.
105. Ibid., File 47, 1st Instalment, p. 112–16.

106. Ibid., File 47, 1st Instalment, p. 117.
107. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 403.
108. Ibid., File 51, p. 3. Letter dated 12 October 1953.
109. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, 1st Instalment, File 58. Part I, note from Nehru to Secretary General dated 5 October 1950, and Nehru to Indiadel, New York, dated 5 October 1950.
110. VLP Papers, File 51, pp. 1 and 2.
111. Ibid., p. 3.
112. VLP Papers, File 60, p. 137.
113. Ibid., File 60, pp. 32–33.
114. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 327.
115. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 32, Part I, p. 22.
116. Frank Moraes, *India Today* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 191.
117. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 314.
118. Dalai Lama of Tibet, *Freedom in Exile* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 69.
119. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 332, Nehru's statement in the Rajya Sabha on 31 August 1959.
120. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 29, Part I, p. 126.
121. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 313, Nehru's statement in the Lok Sabha on 30 March 1959.
122. Ibid.
123. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, 1st Instalment, File 314, p. 191.
124. Ibid..
125. JN's letters to Chief Ministers, 26 October 1959.
126. Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile*, pp. 133–34.
127. Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Shadows: A History of modern Tibet Since 1947* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2000), p. 171.
128. Nehru, *India's Fireign Policy*, p. 315, Nehru's statement in the Lok Sabha, 30 March 1959.
129. CIA intervention in Tibet has been cited in several publications such as Kenneth J. Conboy and James Morrison's *CIA's Secret War in Tibet*; Richard M. Bennett's article on 25 March 2008 in *Asia Times* 'Tibet, the Great Game and the CIA'; Kenneth Canavas's *Orphans of the Cold War*; and Tsering Shakya's *The Dragon in The Land of Shadows*.
130. Shakya, *The Dragon*, p. 281.

131. Quoted in B.N. Mullik, *The Chinese Betrayal: My Years with Nehru* (Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1971), p. 458.
132. Ibid.
133. Ibid.
134. Ibid., p. 391.
135. Ibid., p. 388.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid., p. 392.
138. VLP Papers, File 47, pp. 159–162.
139. Ibid., 1st Instalment, File 48, pp. 37–38.
140. Ibid., File 48, pp. 70–74.
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142. Post-1947 Nehru Papers, File 18, Part I.
143. Nehru's epitaph for himself quoted in *Statesman*, 21 January 1954.

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