

'More History and Less Biography' in Nehru's An Autobiography: A Critical Study

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Autobiography is the most important of non-fictional genres. It has a long history since St. Augustine's *The Confessions*. One hand it is self relation of one's life and achievement to the public to boast of and other hand it is a historical document, revealing so many details about the historical, socio-economic conditions of the times. Nehru's *An Autobiography* is the most important one as he is our first Prime Minister and it is a great necessary to study it in depth. If one sees it through and through, one finds that there is more history than his 'biography'. It is, in a sense disappointing but we can defined his writing by saying that he, being a great man of history, it is inevitable on his part to include history of the times. But Nehru, somehow, could not strike balance between his 'history' and history of modern India. There is imbalance, which is in itself a minor digression. In the ultimate analysis, the excellence of the autobiography lies in its abundance of the material and high poetic language. These two literary virtues make it a great work of art.

Key Words: Autobiography, Nehru, biography, socio-economic conditions, modern Indian history, and poetic language, and work of art

An autobiography is a major non-fictional genre. Anyone cannot writer his or her autobiography provided he or she thinks that she or she is important in the society or nation. The persons who have achieved certain height of achievement in the particular fields of life, they attempt to write their autobiography to immortalize themselves or publicize themselves – their lives and the values for which they stood. The purpose of autobiography is also to boast him and her of one's achievement in life to show this is what have done and assert one's self importance. The great men write their autobiography because they are great by themselves and they are recognized by the history as great. The ordinary men and women who have achieved something in their lives may also writer. None can bar

you by writing your autobiography and publish it.

The autobiography reveals the details of one's life from the beginning of the life to the certain phase of achievement. In that sense it is incomplete compared to biography. The evens and years are accurate and incidents are vividly recreated done by one leading the pulpit of achievement as a poet, or novelist or politician or dancer t or artist etc. The showing the readers his path of success is the aim of autobiography. What I was in the beginning and what I became later in life is the subject matter of the autobiography.

Jawaharlal Nehru was born on 14 November, 1889 at Allahabad and educated in England at Harrow and Cambridge. In

1912, he returned to India to play a central role in India's freedom struggle from the colonial rule, and then, as a prime minister of independent India for seventeen years, went on to shape the nation's future as a modern, secular and democratic state. He died in his office on 27 May 1964. Visionary and idealist, scholar and statesman, of international repute, Nehru was also an outstanding writer. His three most renowned books are- An Autobiography, Glimpses of World History and The Discovery of India- have acquired the status of classics and are all published by Penguin.

Jawaharlal is Nehru is the first Prime Minister of India. Being the son of the rich wealthy Kashmiri lawyer Motilal Nehru he had his early education in Harrow and Cambridge and also had his Bachelor's degree. The Nehrus were in Allahabad and he was the first child followed by two sisters Krishna Hutheesingh and Vijayalaxmi Pandit. They had connections with the civilian population and he soon after coming back from England got married and then immediately plunged into Indian politics, especially the Freedom Movement, then led by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was at the core of the heart of the Freedom Movement from the beginning to the end; others were on periphery-all violent and non violent leaders. There was division in the later development of the Congress at the threshold of the Britisher's giving freedom that led to the two nations' theory.

Nehru wrote between 1934-35 his autobiography mostly in prison. It is very elaborately written autobiography having 655 pages and 70 chapters. It is "more than

personal story of an individual- it is also an account for the political awakening of a nation, its struggle for freedom from the British rule and its search to reshape itself as a modern society, rid of the cultural and economic shackles of the past." (back page blurb). Nehru himself in his preface to the first edition of his Autobiography that....The book was written entirely in prison, except the postscript and certain minor changes...from June 1934 to February 1935.

The primary object in writing these pages was to occupy myself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitudes of gaol life; as well as to review past events in India, with which I had been connected, to enable myself to think clearly about them." In the same place he says it was written during a particularly distressful period of my existence."(xiv). He supplements this statement by saying; "My attempt was to trace, as far as I could, my own mental development, and not to write a survey of recent Indian history. The fact that this account resembles superficially such a survey is apt to mislead the reader and lead them to attach a wider importance to it than it deserves. I must warn him, therefore, that this account is wholly one-sided and, inevitably egoistical; many important happenings have been completely ignored and many important persons, who shaped events, have hardly been mentioned. In a real survey of past events this would have been inexcusable, but a personal account can claim this indulgence."(xv). It is essentially an autobiography -"a personal document and therefore it reflects personal views and reactions. But the person who wrote it became merged, to a large extent, in the

larger movement of and therefore represents, in a large measure, the feelings of many others.”

The first six chapters- “Descent from Kashmir”, “Childhood” , “Theosophy”, “Harrow and Cambridge”, “Back Home and War-time Politics”, “My Wedding and An Adventure in the Himalayas” deal with personal life. After twelfth chapter “My Father and Gandhi” is of personal nature. The thirty-three chapter “Death of My Father” deals with the death of his father. The chapter thirty-six “A Southern Holiday” narrates their tour in the south. Fiftieth chapter “A Visit to Gandhiji” describes is visit to Gandhiji. He traces the history of his family from the immemorial times and come down to the present. Out of seventy chapters only ten chapters really deal with his life; and remaining sixty chapter deals with history of the modern India, that too not completely as he himself admits that he left many important events and mention of other important leaders who shaped the history of India.

Nehru has expressed his deep reverence to Gandhiji in many places and he accepts as his leader. Indirectly he portrays Gandhiji also. His emotional attachment with his father is simply great; but his attachment with his mother is not mentioned anywhere. But there is less about his children like Indira Gandhi and his sisters, Krishna Huthee Singh and Vijayalaxmi Pandit; the autobiography needed more of his married life with Kamala to whom he dedicates the great book. At the same time we find going deep into the very complex and intricate web of freedom struggle in and out of India, revealing many incidents about the all kinds

of freedom strugglers. His narration of Kamala illness and hospitalization in Switzerland is heart rending. It reveals that the great men also have also the private pains and sufferings of the human life. His personal ideas, his principles of life, values to which he was attached much, and philosophies are also intervened in the narrative. He seems to be a really gentleman with all his honesty and sincerity of human soul without any pretensions and prejudices against any one. He was kind hearted and harmless person in his private and public life. Hi entry into Indian politics and taking role of a politician were causal not deliberate. Nehrus were stinking rich and politics was secondary to them; they had no craze for power. The Prime Minister ship came to him by it caused more by the socio-political circumstances than by the personal contrivances.

On the bakpage blurb it is sad that through this narrative “written with the extraordinary eloquence and honesty, and illuminated with vibrant descriptions of Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders of the national movement, emerges the portrait of the author himself –a complex and introspective personality with brilliant and questing mind, a deep love for nature, an engaging zest for life and, above all, a passionate commitment to democracy and secularism.”(back page blurb). Rabindranath Tagore has praised Nehru’s autobiography as this: “Through all its details there runs a deep current of humanity which overpasses the tangles of facts and leads us to the person who is greater than his deeds ad truer than hi surroundings.”(back page blurb)

Indira Gandhi, his dearest daughter and later Prime Minister of India comments: “The Autobiography has been acclaimed as not merely the quest for one individual for freedom, but as an insight into the making of the mind of new India.””(Foreword)

Sonia Gandhi, the daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi, writes in the foreword of 2004:” these books address issues that remain vitally relevant today-the choice between non-violence and terrorism to attain political goals, the perilous politics of caste and religion, the struggle to conquer hunger, disease, and ignorance ,the importance of cultivating a ‘s scientific temper.’ Nehru has vision of ‘secular polity’ as projected through this autobiography. They are remarkable for their ‘absence of bitterness’ towards any person. That was the characteristic of his personality as were, the deep humanity and delightful joie de vivre which illuminates these pages.

Reference:

1. Jawaharlal Nehru. *An Autobiography*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004 Edition

By writing more about history, he proves that he is great man whose life is “intertwined with history an destiny of the modern India.” He at the same time, could avoid writing something really important events and incidents in his private life so that extent he is insincere to himself. Reading his autobiography appears like reading more a history of the contemporary Indian than the life of Nehru. The life of Nehru is very less in his autobiography. One can say it is historical autobiography; not true autobiography of the true sense of the term. But one should appreciate the beauty and excellence of the poetic mode of writing he does. One enjoys his English and the way he uses the words and phrases. One feels like reading and rereading his autobiography not for the sake of his lie but for the sake of his poetic language.