UNIT 6: JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- get an idea about the life of Jawaharlal Nehru
- list down the major works of Nehru
- develop an awareness about his political career and the time that he had spent in prison as a political prisoner
- explain the context of the prose piece “Animals in Prison”

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit acquaints you with the key areas which will make you understand the importance of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, as one of the foremost Indian writers writing in English. Besides, you will also get to know much about Nehru’s life, personality, and contribution as a statesman and chiefly as a multifaceted personality. In this unit, we will straight way move to the life and works of Jawaharlal Nehru. As Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Prime Minister of India, his life was closely intertwined with the history and destiny of modern India. He is a lover of children and animals, and therefore, in the prescribed essay, that will be discussed in the next unit, he describes a period of solitary confinement in Dehradun Gaol and narrates his experiences with the different insects,

birds, small animals, stray dogs, kittens and so on. Before we deal with his work in particular, it becomes necessary to be aware of the background of the writer. This unit is aimed at introducing you to the writer, Jawaharlal Nehru and draw your attention to his essays and writings in general.

6.3 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: LIFE AND WORKS

Freedom fighter, nationalist, politician, secularist, lawyer, world statesman, uncle (Chacha) and patriot are some of the words that are used to describe Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. But his distinction as a writer and as one of finest practitioners of non fictional prose in English in India, contend with his other achievements in the field of politics and public affairs. So let us discuss his life and works to assess his importance as a multifaceted personality.

It was the 14th of November, 1889, when this most illustrious son of India was born. He was the son of Motilal Nehru and Swaroop Rani Nehru. He was the first Prime Minister of independent India. He was born and brought up in a political background with his father being a lawyer as well as a prominent figure in the Nationalist Movement.

His family was politically influential and he had rather a privileged childhood with European governess and tutors to guide him through the tender years of his childhood learning. He later studied at Harrow school and the acclaimed Trinity College, Cambridge. He took the Tripos in Nature Science at Trinity College and then joined the Inner Temple, London. After a stint at the English Bar, he returned to India in 1912 and joined the Allahabad High Court Bar. In the year 1916, he got married to Kamala Kaul and their only child Indira Priyadarshini was born the following year.

It was in the year 1916, that Jawaharlal Nehru met Mahatma Gandhi for the first time at an Indian National Congress Party Meet, and this meeting proved to be a turning point in his life. Another major turning point came when Nehru, while travelling on a train,

overheard General Dyer gloating over the Jalianwalla Bagh Massacre, and he vowed to fight against the British.

Though Nehru was close to Gandhi there were frequent differences between them because Nehru's international outlook clashed with Gandhi's simple Indian outlook and views. Yet it was under Gandhi's influence that Nehru entered into an active political life. In 1929, Nehru, who associated himself with the more radical wing of the National Congress, was elected its President.

Nehru was frequently arrested by the British for political activities and the Civil Disobedience Movement. The next 18 years of his life were rather eventful in terms of his political activities and of these he spent almost 9 years in different stints at various jails around the country.

He is esteemed as one of the most forward looking, progressive and candid of Indian leaders, though at some levels there is also the tendency to view him as Gandhi's blue-eyed boy whose family background went a long way in giving him a privileged position in Indian politics.

After the independence of India, he assumed the office of the Prime Minister and served the country in that capacity from 1947-1964. He was an able leader and led his country through the difficult transition period of post independence, partition and integration of the princely states into the Federal structure. His tenure also saw two wars, with Pakistan over Kashmir in 1948 and with China in 1962. He was a strong upholder of Non-alignment and Democratic Socialism. In January 1964, after 17 years in office he suffered a stroke and succumbed to it four months later. Thus an eventful life drew to a close.



LET US KNOW

1947: Nehru became the first Prime Minister of Independent India.

1950: Charted the course of Indian's development with the five year plan.

1950: Nehru outlined India's foreign policy with disarmament as its focus.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In which year was Nehru born?

Q 2: In what kind of atmosphere did Nehru spend his childhood years?

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Popularly known as 'Pandit Nehru', 'Panditji' or 'Chacha Nehru', he is one of the key figures of post colonial India as well as one of its best prose writers. He was a charismatic man who held liberal views. He was also a profound scholar and thinker. These are some of the aspects that are found in all of his writings, which include an autobiography and other writings. He studied in some of the best schools in India and England, and then at Trinity College, Cambridge, and then at Inner Temple in London. He had a sound base in education, a fact which also contributed to his perfect writing skills. His writings include his *An Autobiography: Towards Freedom*, *The Discovery of India*, *Glimpses of World History, Letters from a Father to his Daughter,* and also *Tryst with Destiny,* the historic speech made by Jawaharlal Nehru, considered in Modern India as a landmark oration that captures the essence of the triumphant culmination of the hundred-year Indian freedom struggle against the British Empire in India.



LET US KNOW

- During his time in Britain he was known as 'Joc Nehru'.
- He was to be frequently seen at theatres, museums and operas in England.
- It was under the influence of Gandhi that the Nehru family gave up a western lifestyle and wearing western clothes and took to wearing home-spun khadi.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Name some of the important works of Jawaharlal Nehru.

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Q 4: What do you think are the factors that contributed to the development of Nehru's excellent writing skills?

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ACTIVITY 6.1

"Tryst with Destiny" is Nehru's landmark speech on the occasion of India's independence. Try to know more about it and if possible, read it for a better understanding of Nehru's power of elocution and his vision for India.

6.4 CONTEXT OF THE PROSE PIECE "ANIMALS IN PRISON"

The prescribed prose section that will be elaborately discussed in the next unit is an excerpt from Nehru's *Towards Freedom: An Autobiography* of Jawaharlal Nehru. In this section he describes a period of solitary confinement that he had to undergo at Dehra Dun Gaol and has given a detailed account of the sights and sounds he observed from his cell. He particularly mentions his experiences with the different insects, birds, small animals, stray dogs, kittens and so on. In reading the prose piece our attention is constantly drawn to his keen observation and his profound love for animals. Nehru sacrificed his own comforts and his family life in order to embrace imprisonment for his fight against the foreign rule. Often he had to stay away from his near and dear ones very frequently. He also had to live in the most unfavourable conditions in the various prisons where he was lodged during his association with the freedom struggle and civil disobedience movements. In his autobiography, he has given a faithful

representation of these years and of the zeal that fired the Indians during those trying times. The essay offers one of Nehru's most keenly felt moments of joy amidst the birds, animals and insects seen from within the four walls of the prison in Dehradun.



LET US KNOW

Jawaharlal Nehru's imprint on the history of post colonial India is extraordinary. Placed at the helm of affairs of a fledgling democracy in 1947 to 1964, the year of his death, Nehru had to take many decisions that had far reaching impact and ramification in the political and social history of India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: In which book did the prose piece "Animals in Prison" appear?

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Q 6: Mention any two qualities of Nehru as a writer.

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6.5 LET US SUM UP

Nehru is one of the greatest prose writers India has produced. His extraordinary contribution to Indian public life from the days he joined the freedom movement to assuming the most onerous responsibility as the first Prime Minister of the fledgling democracy is recalled by the people of India with awe and reverence. This unit provides you with a brief background of Nehru who was a freedom fighter, nationalist, politician, secularist, lawyer, world statesman, uncle (Chacha) and a patriot. You have been familiarised with Nehru's love for nature which gets reflected through his writings. While this unit serves as an introduction to Nehru, the next unit shall particularly deal with one of his essays that encompass a description of his life at jail

highlighting the quality of compassion, love for nature and power of observation inherent in him. However, the learners are advised to read the autobiography of Nehru so as to get a better picture of the man and his times.



6.6 FURTHER READING

1. Gopal, S. (2003). *The Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Nehru, Jawaharlal. (1961). *Towards Freedom: An Autobiography.* Boston: Beacon Press.
3. Rao Chalapathi, M. (1973). *Jawaharlal Nehru.* Publication divisions, Govt. of India.



6.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: 14th of November, 1889.

Ans to Q No 2: His family was politically influential and he had rather a privileged childhood with European governess and tutors to guide him through the tender years of his childhood learning.

Ans to Q No 3: *An Autobiography: Towards Freedom, The Discovery of India, Glimpses of World History, Letters from a Father to his Daughter, and Tryst with Destiny.*

Ans to Q No 4: His views, profound thinking as a thinker and scholar etc.

Ans to Q No 5: *Towards Freedom: An Autobiography* of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Ans to Q No 6: Keen observation and his profound love for animals.



6.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: Describe the significance of Jawaharlal Nehru as a post-colonial prose writer.

Q2: Write a note on Nehru's association with Mahatma Gandhi.

Q3: Write short notes on:

i) Life and works of Jawaharlal Nehru

ii) Nehru's political life

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