

Jawaharlal nehru essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was a great Indian nationalist leader who worked for independence and social reform. He became first prime minister of independent India, a position he retained until his death. He initiated India's nonalignment policy in foreign affairs.

Jawaharlal Nehru was born on Nov. 14, 1889, in Allahabad into a proud, learned Kashmiri Brahmin family. His father, Motilal Nehru, was a wealthy barrister and influential politician. Jawaharlal was an only child until the age of 11, after which two sisters were born.

The atmosphere in the Nehru home was more English than Indian; English was spoken. It was also a luxurious home, with an impressive stable and two swimming pools. Jawaharlal was educated at home by tutors, most of them English or Scottish. Under the influence of a tutor Nehru joined the Theosophical Society at 13.

At the age of 15 Nehru left for England, where he studied at Harrow and Cambridge and then for the bar in London. He was called to the bar in 1912. His English experience reinforced his elegant and cosmopolitan tastes. As Nehru said of himself at Cambridge, "In my likes and dislikes I was perhaps more an Englishman than an Indian." In London he was attracted by Fabian ideas; nationalism and socialism from this time on provided his intellectual motive force. Early Political Moves

Back in India, Nehru began to practice law with his father.

It was not until 1917 that Nehru was stirred by a political issue, the imprisonment of Annie Besant, an Irish theosophist devoted to Indian freedom. As a result, Nehru became active in the Home Rule League. His

involvement in the nationalist movement gradually replaced his legal practice. In 1916 Nehru was married to Kamala Kaul, of an orthodox Kashmiri Brahmin family.

They had one daughter (later Indira Gandhi, third prime minister of independent India). Apart from his father and Besant, the greatest influence on Nehru politically was Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi had been educated much like Nehru but, unlike him, remained basically untouched, essentially Indian. A second issue which fired Nehru's nationalism and led him to join Gandhi was the Amritsar massacre of 1919, in which some 400 Indians were shot on orders of a British officer. The year 1920 marked Nehru's first contact with the Indian kisan, the peasant majority. Nehru was " filled with shame and sorrow ... at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India.

" This experience aroused a sympathy for the underdog which characterized many of Nehru's later political moves. The plight of the peasant was a challenge to his socialist convictions, and he attempted to persuade the peasants to organize. From this time on Nehru's concerns were Indian. He began to read the Bhagavad Gita and practiced vegetarianism briefly.

Most of his life he practiced yoga daily. In 1921 Nehru followed Gandhi in sympathy with the Khilafat cause of the Moslems. Nehru was drawn into the first civil disobedience campaign as general secretary of the United Provinces Congress Committee. Nehru remarked, " I took to the crowd, and the crowd took to me, and yet I never lost myself in it." Nehru here articulated two of his most distinctive traits throughout his career: his

involvement with the people and his aloof and lonely detachment. The year 1921 also witnessed the first of Nehru's many imprisonments.

In prison his political philosophy matured, and he said that he learned patience and adaptability. Imprisonment was also a criterion of political success. International Influences In 1926-1927 Nehru took his wife to Europe for her health. This experience became a turning point for Nehru. It was an intellectual sojourn, highlighted by an anti-imperialist conference in Brussels. Here Nehru first encountered Communists, Socialists, and radical nationalists from Asia and Africa.

The goals of independence and social reform became firmly linked in Nehru's mind. Nehru spoke eloquently against imperialism and became convinced of the need for a socialist structure of society. He was impressed with the Soviet example during a visit to Moscow. Back in India Nehru was immediately engrossed in party conferences and was elected president of the All-India Trades Union Congress.

In speeches he linked the goals of independence and socialism. In 1928 he joined the radical opposition to proposals for dominion status by his father and Gandhi. In 1930 Gandhi threw his weight to Nehru as Congress president, attempting to divert radicalism from communism to the Congress. In 1930 Nehru was arrested and imprisoned for violation of the Salt Law, which Gandhi also protested in his famous " salt march.

" Nehru's wife was also arrested. From the end of 1931 to September 1935 Nehru was free only 6 months. During the 1937 elections the Moslem League offered to cooperate with the All-India Congress Committee in forming a

coalition government in the United Provinces. Nehru refused, and the struggle between the Congress and the Moslem League was under way. Nehru also established the precedent for economic planning in a suggestion that the Congress form a national planning committee. In 1938 Nehru paid a brief visit to Europe.

On his return he was sent briefly as envoy to China until war intervened and made it necessary for him to return. War in Europe drew India in, together with England. For Indian leaders the question was how an honorable settlement could be reached with England and still allow India to participate on the Allied side. Negotiations toward this end culminated in the Cripps mission and offer of dominion status in March 1942.

Nehru refused to accept dominion status, as did the rest of Congress leadership. There followed the Congress "Quit India" resolution and the imprisonment of Nehru, Gandhi, and other Congress leaders until June 1945. There were nationwide protests, a mass demand for independence. Prime Minister In 1945, as Congress president, Nehru was pressed into negotiations with the Moslem League and the viceroy. Congress-Moslem League negotiations were marked by communal killings in Calcutta, followed by sympathetic outbreaks throughout India.

Final decisions were reached in conversations between the last British viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, and Nehru, Gandhi, and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. According to the Mountbatten Plan, two separate dominions were created. Nehru became prime minister and minister of external affairs of independent India in 1947. Following Gandhi's assassination in January 1948, Nehru felt

very much alone facing economic problems and the possibility of the Balkanization of India. In 1949 he made his first visit to the United States in search of a solution to India's pressing food shortage.

Free India's first elections in 1951-1952 resulted in an overwhelming Congress victory. Economic planning and welfare were the first claims on Nehru's attention. He inaugurated a diluted version of socialist planning: concentration of public investment in areas of the economy that were free from private interests. The Planning Commission was created in 1950 and launched the First Five-Year Plan in 1951, stressing an increase in agricultural output. Nehru also took pride in the Community Development Program, established to raise the standard of living in the villages. He saw the Third Five-Year Plan operative before his death on May 27, 1964, in New Delhi.

Nehru was the architect of nonalignment in foreign policy. Economic weakness and the Indian tradition were powerful factors in formulating the policy. The other influence on Nehru's foreign policy was his controversial minister of defense, Krishna Menon. Nehru sought closer relations with nonaligned Asian states, with India in the role of leader.

Nehru's nonalignment policy was criticized by many Westerners and some Indians as giving preference to totalitarian countries rather than to democracies. Some critics believed that nonalignment left India no effective means to deal with China, national defense, the Great Powers, or the underdeveloped community. On the other hand, nonalignment had many Indian defenders, even in the face of the Chinese invasion of Indian border

territory in 1962. Some held that nonalignment was a strategy for deterrence and peace, a force for protecting Indian independence and preservation of the international community on ethical grounds. Nevertheless, nonalignment as implemented by Nehru did not prevent the government from resorting to force in Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Goa. Nehru the man and politician made such a powerful imprint on India that his death on May 27, 1964, left India with no political heir to his leadership.

Indians repeated Nehru's own words of the time of Gandhi's assassination: "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere."

Further Reading A useful collection of Nehru's speeches and writings is *Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, selected and edited by Dorothy Norman (2 vols., 1965). Major biographies are Frank Moraes, *Jawaharlal Nehru* (1956); Donald E. Smith, *Nehru and Democracy: The Political Thought of an Asian Democrat* (1958); Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (1960); and M.

N. Das, *The Political Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru* (1961). A journalistic account, written by an intimate of the Nehru household, is Marie Seton, *Panditiji: A Portrait of Jawaharlal Nehru* (1967), a valuable book for students of Indian politics and history. A somewhat simplified biography, particularly suitable for young adults and casual readers, is Bani Shorter, *Nehru: A Voice for Mankind* (1970).