

Chapter-IV

WOMEN IN MOULDING OF NATIONALIST ORIENTATION IN NEHRU

Jawaharlal Nehru, an ardent nationalist and a great national leader played a leading and key role in the Indian freedom struggle. It is a well known fact that Nehru was born in a very wealthy family. Nehru's father Motilal Nehru, after the death of his elder brother Pandit Nand Lal, had been able to establish himself as a renowned and a successful lawyer which brought increasing income for the family, which in turn led to a marked change in their lifestyle. As Nehru recollects in his Autobiography about his father, "Full of spirit of play and fond of good living in every way, he found no difficulty in spending what he earned. And gradually our ways became more and more Westernized."¹ So Jawaharlal was brought up in "a world of material privilege beyond the dreams of most young Indian boys."²

An exotic and palatial building Anand Bhawan in Allahabad with its enchanting and mesmerizing looks was the place where the great Jawaharlal Nehru grew up to be a legend. His childhood was a sheltered and uneventful one as Jawaharlal mentions how during his childhood he used to often hear his elder cousins speaking of "the overbearing character and insulting manners of the English people, as well as Eurasians, towards Indians."³ However as he had been raised up by English governesses and he often used to see English friends of his father visiting him, Nehru harboured an admiration for the English in his heart. Motilal Nehru, in order to give the best of education to his only son and to lay the foundation of his future career and greatness, took Jawaharlal to England for his studies and got him

admitted to Harrow and later Jawaharlal joined Cambridge. He spent the seven years of his studentship in England in the affluent sectors of English society. Living like a prince, he led a very luxurious life and most of his vacations were spent travelling to different places, including the two long vacations in India in 1906 and 1908. But fortunately in all these adventures Jawaharlal had the support and the encouragement of his father. In fact, when Jawaharlal passed the second part of the trips, Motilal celebrated this occasion at Anand Bhawan in a princely manner. It is said that: “Motilal gave a gala dinner, champagne flowed freely for several days, the domestic servants received cash and increases in their salaries, and Jawaharlal in London received an extra hundred pounds from his proud father to spend on a holiday in France.”⁴ In this way father wanted to give Jawaharlal the best of everything. And during the last two years of his stay in England, when he was studying for the Bar, Jawaharlal developed expensive habits:

“in trying to live the life of a ‘man about town’, whose typical evening would consist of a visit to the theatre and then a late supper with champagne at the Savoy. His annual expenses rose above 800 pounds, a sum which in those days was enough to support a comfortable life in London for three years. This aroused his father’s anxieties, but he did not blame Jawaharlal, for at least in this respect he was proving himself his ‘father’s son’.”⁵

Jawaharlal called himself a prig later on. Such was the ostentatious and princely upbringing of the future great statesman, Jawaharlal Nehru, and it is usual or inevitable for a person brought up in the lap of luxury and comfort to ape and follow this lifestyle throughout his life. But Jawaharlal was an exception because his life and lifestyle changed drastically after he gave himself whole-heartedly for the cause of the nation which will be discussed below.

Nehru was not a born nationalist, but seeds of national feelings were sown when as a young child he used to often listen to the grown-up talks of his cousins relating to the arrogant behaviour of the British towards the Indians. Nehru's young blood boiled to hear of how the Indian were disallowed from traveling in railway train compartments reserved for Europeans. Though he admired the British yet as he wrote how he was filled with resentment against the alien rulers of his country who misbehaved in this manner, and whenever an Indian hit back he was glad.⁶

Jawaharlal's ideas on nationalism and national orientation began to develop since his student days in England, though it was not so aggressive. He was preoccupied by the intellectual pursuits and also he was not so mature enough to dedicate himself entirely to the cause. But he kept himself politically conscious with the political developments in his country with great interest and enthusiasm. While in Harrow, he kept himself updated with the news about India which greatly agitated his mind. Moreover his father Motilal Nehru through his letters also kept him updated about the political happenings in India. When he read in the newspaper about the news of Bipin Chandra Pal's decision to retire from public life, expressing his views to his father he wrote: "Has his zeal for his mother country worn out so soon?"⁷ Greatly agitated by the news about India through the years 1906 and 1907, Jawaharlal wrote:

"I got meagre enough accounts from the English papers; but even that little showed that big events were happening at home, in Bengal, Punjab, and Maharashtra. There were Lala Lajpat Rai's and S Ajjit Singh's deportation, and Bengal seemed to be in an uproar, and Tilak's name was often flashed from Poona, and there was Swadeshi and boycott. All this stirred me tremendously."⁸

In Harrow he also read the stories of Garibaldi which greatly fascinated him and stirred his young mind and as he writes in his Autobiography: "Visions of

similar deeds in India came before me, of a gallant fight for freedom, and in my mind India and Italy got strangely mixed together.”⁹ After Nehru joined Cambridge from Harrow, “young Nehru’s nationalist ardour was immediately fanned by the freer climate of the university, the intellectual stimulus of fresh reading, discussions with fellow Indian students and, above all, by the strong breeze of discontent from the Indian subcontinent.”¹⁰ He was attracted by the Sinn Fein¹¹ Movement of Ireland which he compared it with the extremist movement in India and he wrote with great interest to his father about it. Thus the nationalist in Nehru could be seen developing in his heart while still a student, but it was yet to bloom to its fullest and channelized at the right direction.

Jawaharlal was a shy and a timid boy and he feared public speaking. When he was in Cambridge, he was a member of a society called “Majilis” consisting of Indian students, which basically discussed about political problems. Jawaharlal says that though he went to the Majilis frequently during his three years, but he hardly spoke there since he was inhibited by his shyness and diffidence. He faced the same difficulty in his college debating society, ‘The Magpie and Stump’, “where there was a rule that a member not speaking for a whole term had to pay a fine.” And he often had to pay fine. It would be interesting to look into how women might have played an important role in transforming Nehru from a shy, withdrawn man to an outspoken public speaker, ultimately leading to the emergence of Nehru as a great political figure and a leading statesman of the country and of the world. Later on, it can be seen Nehru spoke vocally against the British colonial rule, spoke for the rights of women and on various other issues. The speeches which he delivered on

many occasions on many areas at different places have become a legend and also a field on which various researches can be carried on.

With his return to India in 1912 after completing his studies from England, Jawaharlal turned into an ardent nationalist and plunged himself actively in the Indian freedom struggle that paved the way for his future greatness. It can be seen that he gave up the affluent and aristocratic lifestyle and to all the luxuries to which he had been accustomed to for the sake of his motherland. However, incidentally Nehru was not a born nationalist or a national leader but the nationalist aspirations and nationalist leadership and his vision of modern India must have also gradually evolved and developed over a period of time. The second chapter dealt with various ways how women played an instrumental role as a guiding and motivating spirit in the life of Nehru, that contributed to the making of a great statesman in him and apparently this chapter would attempt to look into the way how women, played a significant role in particularly shaping and moulding the nationalist orientation in Nehru.

The nationalist movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi greatly appealed to Nehru and it is undoubtedly true, that it was under the patronage and guidance of Gandhi that he entered in the politics of nationalism. But it is not easy for an individual to take such a radical step alone. So it seems important to study and understand the dimension of influence, particularly the profound influence of women in shaping his nationalist life. Family support and particularly the support of Nehru's women family members counted a great deal in the moulding and strengthening the nationalist temperament in him. Moreover during the early days coming under the influence of Annie Beasant Nehru's nationalist inclination for the

cause of the nation was also sown. Without their support perhaps, Nehru would not have been able to reach the pinnacle of glorious leadership and would not have been able to lead the country to freedom. In the course of the national movement and after, it will also be seen how some of his trusted women comrades also stimulated the nationalist in Nehru further.

Swarup Rani, mother of Jawaharlal Nehru, a conservative woman and over-possessive of her son found her family life disturbed with the advent of the Gandhi in their lives and the strong desire of her son to join the national movement. She disapproved of her son joining politics because of the sufferings and hardships involved in it. She found it difficult to adjust with the new changing lifestyle and the constant infringement of their privacy which her family came to face with the coming of Gandhi into their lives. Though Swarup Rani found it hard to imagine sacrificing family interests for supporting the political tide, but eventually she came to accept the national activities of her son and husband in order to preserve domestic peace, and her encouragement to them can be seen as a significant dimension of her contribution towards the nationalist movement. Though the pains of parting with her son frequently on account of his going to jail, could be visibly seen, yet she always bid him goodbye with a courageous smile. This in itself reflected the support of Swarup Rani in helping to make the nationalist orientation of Nehru more stronger.

“So says the mother of Jawahar,
Give up your life for the nation, my son,
Then only will I be a proud mother,
When one has taken the vow,
Then give your life to the nation.
Never worry about your happiness,

Not worry about your old mother.”¹²

Rameshwari Nehru, wife of Jawaharlal’s cousin brother Brijlal Nehru, had great faith in Nehru’s endeavours in life, as is evident from one of the letters which she wrote on 13 August, 1905 when he was in Harrow, where she said: “I am so very confident of your success that I have never for a moment thought of your failure.”¹³ It seems likely that Rameshwari anticipated the leader in Nehru in future and so trying to mould his young mind for the cause of the nation, she tried to inculcate in him love for the Indian nation and giving precedence to nation over caste she wrote to him: “I think, it is because half our love is given to the caste we belong to, that our love for the Indian nation is not as perfect as desired. When we lose the tribes, all our love will be directed towards the nation.”¹⁴ Incidentally, herself an ardent nationalist, by instilling love for the nation, Rameshwari tried to instill and inculcate the nationalist spirit in Nehru so that he could be an embodiment of nationalism and be a great national leader. Rameshwari already moulded Nehru’s young mind with nationalist feelings when he was still a student in England. Another occasion where she showed her firm faith in Nehru which was likely to have moulded his nationalist orientation and lighted the flame of patriotism for the country can be made out from a letter she had written to him appealing him to return to India and serve the motherland. Rameshwari’s patriotic appeal to Nehru must have certainly added zeal to the young mind of Nehru and in the long run, Nehru emerged as a great national leader of India and took an active and vigorous part in the anti-British struggle.

After Nehru’s return to India from England, he found the Indian political scene to be dull. Nothing seemed to excite him. He engaged himself by taking up

law and joined the High Court, and the work did not absorb him much. But gradually he did not find the profession to be enthusiastic and began to find his life to be dull and pointless with no freshness in life. He did not find the atmosphere intellectually stimulating as he describes in his Autobiography. He did not show any interest in politics too. He involved himself in some occasional meetings of the Congress and his participation in the agitation against Fiji indenture system for Indian workers or the Indian question in South Africa was temporary in nature. The liberal, moderate politics in India also failed to attract him. He held the view that both 'individual and national honour demanded a more aggressive and fighting attitude to foreign rule'.¹⁵ Therefore his political career was yet to begin on a full scale. So it was only after Annie Beasant emerged in the Indian political scene and with the establishment of the Home Rule League in 1919 that he started playing an active role in the political activities of India, and Nehru also began to take a keen interest in the nationalist activities of the country and thus his nationalism began to take deep shape.

Apparently therefore it could be seen that Nehru along with some young nationalists was again drawn to Annie Beasant and her Home Rule League in her fight against the British rule. Earlier during his early young days, Jawaharlal had come under the Theosophy of Annie Beasant. Not only this, the Home Rule League of Annie Beasant was also instrumental in transforming Nehru's temperament who had, so far been shy as a student in England and unassertive as a lawyer in his profession. Her Home Rule League gave him confidence and courage to come forward and take part in the anti-British movement and gradually also developed the art of public speaking. He also had a fear of addressing public gatherings, and

terrified of public speaking. But under her impact, visible and marked changes could be seen in him when he started to voice his protest against the Moderate politics and British government. He gave his first public speech probably in 1916 against a Press Act of 1910¹⁶ in one protest meeting held in Allahabad. In the concluding speech he also acknowledged the “great and noble lady” Annie Beasant for the indirect cause of the meeting. He remarked, “Don’t fail at this moment, follow her faithfully and let it not be said that you flinched when you ought to have supported her.”¹⁷ This shows that the fire of nationalism which was burning in Jawahar’s heart was further intensified by this great woman Annie Beasant, who had a direct bearing on Nehru’s further development of nationalism. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, a Moderate leader who had presided over the meeting was highly elated at Jawahar’s attempt to speak in public and greatly showered his praise on him by embracing and kissing him in public. The gradual emergence of Nehru as a public leader was thus coming into shape which led to the emergence of Nehru as one of the great leaders of the world.

Nehru started to involve himself actively in the Home Rule League activities. He wrote in his Autobiography that though he joined both the Home Rule Leagues of Lokmanya Tilak and Annie Beasant, he worked especially for Beasant’s League.¹⁸ Beasant’s active role in the Indian political scene greatly excited the young nationalist including Nehru. They felt exhilarated and expected big things to happen in future. Nehru had come so much under the impact of Annie Beasant that when she was interned by the British Government in June 1917 he expressed his deep resentment and agony to this act of the government. He said “Home Rule has come and we have but to take it if we stand up like men and falter.”¹⁹ Nehru felt that mere holding of demonstrations, giving eloquent and moving speeches, passing

resolutions would not be sufficient enough to mark the protest of her internment. He wanted to show his protest in a bigger and significant way. In a letter to the editor of The Leader Nehru wrote:

“Ours have been the politics of cowards and opium eaters, long enough and it is time we thought and acted like live men and women who place the honour and interests of their country above the frowns and smiles of every Tom, Dick and Harry who has ICS attached to his name..... Everyone of us who holds an honorary position under the Government should resign it and refuse to have anything to do with the bureaucracy.”²⁰

As a leading organizer of the protest movement, Nehru founded the Allahabad Home Rule League in June 1917, with Motilal as its President and himself as its joint secretary. At the same time, Nehru had been involved in the forming of a committee in Allahabad on the scheme of the Indian Defence Forces, where he held the opinion “that Indians should avail themselves of the opportunity of acquiring military training offered by the Defence of India Force Act, inspite of the many invidious distinctions.”²¹ But now with Annie Beasant’s internment, he decided not to join the Force and he persuaded the committee members which consisted of his father Motilal Nehru, Dr Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mr C.Y. Chintamani and other Moderate leaders to cancel the meeting and other work in connection with the Defence Force as a mark of protest against the Government action. According to the historian B.N. Pandey “for Jawaharlal and the young nationalists she (Annie Beasant) became the symbol of courage, defiance and suffering.”²² Since Nehru was deeply motivated by Beasant’s Home Rule League he “put his heart and soul into the movement and became its leading organizer.”²³

Annie Beasant was released from her internment on Sept, 1917 after which her name was proposed for the Calcutta Congress session. Nehru enthusiastically took upon the task of mobilizing a large group of delegates for the Congress session.

This showed how Nehru was motivated immensely by the ideals and work of Annie Beasant and her Home Rule League for which he worked actively, which also guided him later on during the course of his participation in the freedom struggle. Rafiq Zakaria, who was closely associated with the Indian independence movement and the Indian National Congress also pointed out that: “Mrs Beasant always exercised almost a hypnotic influence on Jawaharlal. He admired her bold and fearless revolt against the British; in particular, her arrest in 1917 moved him greatly.”²⁴

It can thus be seen that Nehru’s admiration for Annie Beasant was deep and immense and though his association with Beasant and her Home Rule League was shortlived, yet she had undoubtedly played an instrumental role in igniting and guiding the nationalist spirit in Nehru. Nehru who had till Beasant’s emergence in the political scene, just remained confined to his legal profession and to attending some meetings of the Congress, burst into political activity with great enthusiasm under her influence. He followed her footsteps and took a leading role in organizing the activities of the League which served as a stepping stone for him to enter into the national struggle against the British rule with full force and vigour and emerge as a great national leader and dedicate himself for the cause of the nation.

Wife’s role plays a vital part in the life of a husband. Kamala Nehru, played a key role in the moulding the nationalist spirit of Nehru. Kamala Nehru, an accomplished lady was a strong, spirited and courageous wife of Jawaharlal Nehru. Though she did not live long to be by the side of her husband throughout the ups and downs of his life, but as long as she was alive, the role she played in influencing the life and moulding the nationalist orientation of Nehru was significant and counted a

great deal in the making of this great man, who has left an indelible mark not only in the history of the country, but also of the world.

Kamala Nehru was only sixteen when she got married with Jawaharlal aged twenty six in 1912. Motilal Nehru had taken great pain to find a suitable match for his only son, and finally after several years of search, selected Kamala to be Jawahar's bride. Kamala Nehru came from an orthodox Hindu family of Delhi. Writing about her father's choice of bride for her brother Nehru, Krishna Hutheesing writes:

“What made Father like her, apart from her sweetness and beauty, was that she looked very healthy. My mother had been a semi-invalid most of her life and, though Father treated her and taught us to treat her as a very precious delicate piece of china, he wanted a strong wife for his son.”²⁵

Motilal Nehru's choice of Kamala was indeed a blessing in disguise for Jawaharlal, for she was to play a crucial role in awakening and guiding the nationalist spirit of Nehru after their marriage. Though shy and withdrawn, Kamala was a strong spirited woman and played an important role in Indian freedom struggle and women emancipation movement. She made great sacrifices for the freedom of the country. Admiring Kamala, Krishna Hutheesing wrote, “Kamala, for all her sweetness, was a spirited girl-as she was to show when the going got rough in our long fight for independence.”²⁶ Nehru, after his return from England had been taking part in the political activities of the country, but his participation was not that vigorous and visible to be recognized nationally, except that he had involved himself with the Home Rule League of Annie Beasant which has been discussed above. Moreover Motilal Nehru, had also not approved fully of his son participating in the nation's freedom struggle. As the only son, and brought up in princely manner, who

had not known what suffering was all about, Motilal did not want his son to bear the hardship that would crop up eventually after getting involved in active politics. When Gandhi launched his Satyagraha Sabha in 1919 in protest against the Rowlatt Bill, Nehru was ablaze with enthusiasm and determined to join it immediately and he hardly thought of the consequences-lawbreaking, jail-going, etc.²⁷ Mentioning about the situation that prevailed in their house on the question of Nehru joining in the Gandhian movement Krishna Hutheesing wrote:

“Those were the days and nights of the bitterest arguments between father and son, with Bhai, unable to sleep at the thought of going against his father, wandering alone through the grounds in misery; and Father trying to sleep on the floor of his room, to see what it would be like for his beloved son in a British jail.”²⁸

In such difficult moment, it was Kamala who acted as a guiding spirit and soothed and uplifted Nehru and encouraged him in his nationalist endeavours, and made it easy for him to come out of this dilemma and throw himself completely for the cause of the nation. Moreover, incidentally since Kamala herself had come more under the forceful influence of Gandhi, she played a significant role in supporting her husband’s desire to be more militant, encouraged his radicalism and pushed him to change his way of life. Since Kamala herself was utterly dedicated to the cause of the country’s freedom and actively took part in it, it made it easier for Nehru to pursue his national goals single-mindedly and with whole hearted devotion.

Therefore it can be seen that Nehru’s initial political apprenticeship started with his deep involvement in the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920-1922. During this period he became wholly absorbed, threw himself actively into the movement by speaking at meetings, writing to the press and involved himself both with the provincial Congress and the UP peasant movement.²⁹ Admitting to his daughter

Indira later on how “totally abnormal” he had become because of his one-sided attention and involvement in the political activities he wrote:

“I had a flame-like quality, a fire within me which burned and consumed me and drove me relentlessly forward; it made me oblivious of all other matters, even of intimate personal relations. I was in fact wholly unfit as a close companion of anyone except in that one sphere of thought and action which had enslaved me.....My very good qualities which made me an efficient instrument for political action, became defects in the domestic field. Yet I found, to my infinite joy, that those I cared for above all else had gladly and willingly tolerated me and put up with my vagaries.”³⁰

So since Nehru was totally wrapped up in his political activities, apparently, it was Kamala who perhaps suffered the most. He himself also admitted that unconsciously he “overlooked her and left her to her own resources, just when she required my full co-operation.”³¹ Admiring Kamala’s endurance he said, “and what amazing patience and tolerance my wife had shown towards me.”³² But Kamala, despite being neglected by Nehru never complained or made a fuss about her husband’s negligence of her, but as long as she was alive, as a true soldier, she supported and encouraged her husband in all his national activities, and she herself also took an active and vigorous part in it. In fact Nehru acknowledging the significant role played by Kamala in his nationalist endeavours wrote, “...how much I owed to my wife for her splendid behaviour since 1920. Proud and sensitive as she was, she had not only put up with my vagaries but brought me comfort and solace when I needed them most.”³³ Though Kamala must have suffered with this indifferent attitude of Nehru, Krishna Hutheesing marveling at the brave spirit of Kamala remarked:

“With an unflinching courage Kamala confronted everything smilingly. Not once did I hear a word of complaint or dissatisfaction-no grouse against fate as most of us have when things do not work out the way we want them to. When Jawahar dedicated his life to his country and none for self, with an energy that ever flagges and a courage the like of which one rarely comes across, that soldier was Kamala.”³⁴

By the end of 1925 since Kamala's health was deteriorating, doctors attending to her advised that she should be taken to Switzerland for treatment. Therefore Nehru, Kamala and Indira sailed for Europe for Kamala's treatment in March 1926. It was a quiet and restful period for both mind and body for all of them. Nehru stayed by Kamala's side most of the time taking care of her. But later when her health improved slightly he travelled a little to places like England, France and Germany. Though the presence of Nehru was crucial even at times when Kamala was feeling better as it would give a soothing effect and psychological and mental strength to her, but Kamala never complained to Nehru on his pre-occupation to other activities. This also showed that Nehru could travel to places, meet people, widen his knowledge about the world affairs with great ease and light heart without having to worry about Kamala. Though his sister Krishna was there with Kamala to take care of her, but the constant presence of husband would have given her more mental security and strength. Since Kamala was proud of her husband's patriotism and wanted to see him achieve the heights of glorious leadership by playing an important role in the country's freedom struggle, it is likely that unobtrusively, she must have approved of his involvement in various activities in Europe. Therefore Krishna observed Nehru, "growing in ease and authority as his knowledge of the world and, particularly, its economic problem expanded under the influence of the liberal leaders from many nations whom he met."³⁵ She mentioned further, "that his long stay in Europe was an essential element in his education for the great role he was to play."³⁶ Hence Kamala's unobtrusive support perhaps played a significant role in further strengthening his nationalist orientation which indeed helped him

greatly in his political activities and to remain committed to the nation after he returned to India.

Nehru had given himself to the cause of the nation whole heartedly since the 1920s onwards. But his family's support especially his women family members support and encouragement, played an important role in moulding his already formed nationalist spirit further, which he could channelize at the right direction and their support also acted as a strength to him when he was in prison. In 1930 when the country was in a grip of Civil Disobedience Movement, many menfolk landed up in prison and this stimulated the women to come to the forefront and take charge of the struggle. Apart from display of courage, women also showed exceptional organizational power which earned them admiration of the menfolk. When Nehru was in prison, his nationalist spirit received further boost when he got the news of the active participation of his women family members. Nehru was greatly moved to hear his aged and frail mother and his sisters picketing before foreign cloth shops under the hot summer sun. Krishna and Kamala who were Congress volunteers donned male attire for the purpose. Nehru was taken away by the women's sacrifice but particularly by Kamala's approach to the crisis. Expressing his satisfaction at Kamala's active role he wrote:

“She threw herself into the movement with an energy and determination which amazed me, who thought I had known her so well for so many years. She forgot her ill-health and rushed about the whole day in the sun, and showed remarkable powers of organization.”³⁷

These long spells in prison would have weakened Nehru's nationalist spirit. But the support and encouragement of the women family members particularly Kamala and also their active participation in the national movement certainly played

a very important role in casting Nehru's spirit for the love of the nation and keeping the flame of patriotism in him alive.

Kamala showed her great pride at the wonderful mission and nationalism of Nehru. She encouraged Nehru to fight till the end and never to yield. She was such a bold and courageous lady that when Nehru would be in jail, she always gave his morale a tremendous lift and made him realize that his national duty was his first priority than her. On one occasion when Nehru was in Naini prison and Kamala's health deteriorated for the worst, the government agreed to release him to attend on Kamala if he gave an assurance, even an informal assurance, to keep away from politics for the rest of his term.³⁸ But Kamala had moulded his nationalist mind and spirit in such a way that he could not think of being disloyal to his pledge to the cause of the nation. And he was also very confident of Kamala as he wrote in his Autobiography: "I knew that Kamala herself would strongly disapprove of my giving any undertaking, and if I did anything of the kind it would shock her and harm her."³⁹ Thus in this way Kamala was a great source of inspiration and motivation for Nehru for the nationalist cause.

Sarojini Naidu, a very good friend and a political comrade of Nehru also played a remarkable role in the beginning of his political career and in strengthening his nationalist spirit. The powerful and eloquent speeches which she delivered during the Lucknow Congress in 1916 which was full of nationalism and patriotism left a powerful and a lasting imprint on the young nationalist mind of Nehru which acted as a guiding and moral force on him during the course of the national movement. Later on as political comrades, they fought together in the struggle for freedom and the bond between them grew deeper and personal relationship

developed between the two of them. As a result, Sarojini could play a more profound role in further arousing and strengthening the passion of nationalist feelings in Nehru. Sarojini always acted as a pillar of strength and showed her remarkable faith and confidence in the leadership capability of Nehru and tremendously valued his presence in the Indian political scene. She had expressed her innermost delight and pride when Nehru had been elected President of Lucknow Congress in 1929. During that time Nehru confided on Sarojini as he thought that he did not have the personal strength nor a significant backing to pursue his own ideas and ideals into effect under the burden of the new office. But Sarojini having tremendous faith in Nehru's sincerity and passion for liberty comforted and encouraged him to take up the challenge as it would transform and transfigure all his noblest qualities into dynamic force, courage and vision, and wisdom. She is also said to have told to Nehru that even though she might not be able to give concrete help to Nehru for carrying out the tremendous task of the country, yet she could give "full measure of understanding and affection"⁴⁰ to him. Therefore in this way through her vibrant spirit she was able to kindle the flames of the national spirit in Nehru. Nehru himself acknowledged the important role she played in the history of modern India and to the enormous influence she exercised upon him.

At the time when India was going through a political crisis because of the British imperialist rule, there were many leaders of various countries who sympathized with India's cause and stood by her side. One such country was China. Since the chapter is on women's role in shaping Nehru's nationalist orientation, the role of Madame Chiang Kai-shek would be relevant here. Nehru was immensely struck by the charming and pleasing personality of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, wife

of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of China. Her original name was May-ling Soong. She was a powerful figure in Chinese politics and she played a very important role in guiding her husband and the political affairs of China and the world. She acted as a political confidante to her husband and on behalf of her husband maintained cordial relation with Nehru and India. She along with her husband “watched with interest and anxiety the developments in India.”⁴¹

Holding a high opinion of Madame Chiang Kai-shek Nehru remarked:

“Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who is his (Chiang Kai-shek) consort, is not only his partner in his life’s journey but has been a fellow-warrior with him, standing side by side with him in China’s battle for freedom. She has inspired the women of China, the youth and the men of China, and has become the invincibility and her magnificent spirit of resistance”⁴²

Moreover Nehru also felt strong affinity with China because of “ancient contacts and cultural and commercial relations between the two countries through thousands of years.”⁴³ Impressed by China’s heroic struggle against the Japanese forces, he also wanted the Indians to emulate the courageous spirit from the Chinese brothers and sisters and “face any aggression and any aggressor who dares to think of subjecting India.”⁴⁴

It is known that Nehru had visited the Chiangs in 1939 and after that he had developed a special relationship and friendship with the Chinese leaders and particularly he had been drawn towards Madame Chiang Kai-shek. After that Nehru and Madame Chiang Kai-shek kept in regular touch and shared about the happenings and developments in their respective countries through letters. The letters which Madame Chiang Kai-shek wrote to Nehru is likely to have moulded the nationalist spirit of Nehru at the time when India was also fighting its battle for independence. China was also going through a serious calamity because of Japanese

aggression upon China. But the letters of Madame Chiang Kai-shek to Nehru on the situation of her country reflected her strength of mind and the optimism which she held for the nation's future. As she wrote: "We are confident that we who have been struggling so hard will win to victory. We survive to show the world that it does not always pay to strike at weak countries with impunity."⁴⁵ In another letter, she narrated Nehru that, inspite, of how the Japanese had ruthlessly bombed and destroyed Chungking and all parts of Free China and made it unrecognizable, yet the morale of the Chinese people were not broken and "that all life resolves itself into patient endurance and resolute efforts to continue resistance against aggression so that for all times to come China will survive."⁴⁶ This positive outlook of Madame Chiang Kai-shek to her country's problem is likely to have kept Nehru's patriotic feeling high inspite of many pitfalls and to have an optimistic view of India's future and work towards achieving the desired goal.

In 1941 when Nehru was in prison, Madame Chiang Kai-shek expressing her distress at his imprisonment wrote him a heartening letter which certainly was meant to cheer up his spirits and keep his nationalist sentiment intact in the face of adverse situation. She wrote:

"The Generalissimo and I both felt that our spirits and yours met in perfect harmony, and because of our common purpose and aspirations, you are a real comrade..... We are convinced that India's cause will emerge triumphant. Our hearts and prayers for your victory will never fail you."⁴⁷

This shows that Madame Chiang Kai-shek was likely to have played an important role in elevating the nationalist spirit of Nehru in the face of political crisis of his country and in further shaping his nationalist orientation.

China had been bearing the brunt of Japanese aggression for many years and though she belonged to the Allied groups⁴⁸, she was apprehensive that “even if the Allies won the war in Europe and the Pacific, China might not still win equal status and treatment.”⁴⁹ So incidentally now the Chiangs tilted more towards India and started supporting Indian aspirations for independence. In early February 1942, Japan’s rapid advance to Rangoon made it apparent that Rangoon would be soon lost to the Japanese. So Chiangs were apprehensive that India would gear its military forces against Japan if the latter strike the subcontinent.

“They feared Indian might regard an Asiatic colonial master as no worse than a European one, and possibly better. Only independence, the Chiangs concluded, could ignite India’s fighting spirit..... They decided to visit India to warn of the danger of Japanese aggression and rally the Indian people for war.”⁵⁰

So they felt only independence would ignite India’s fighting spirit. Therefore on February 1942, “they decided to visit India to warn the danger of Japanese aggression and rally the Indian people for war.”⁵¹ Incidentally, after coming to India, the Chiangs tried to persuade both Nehru and Gandhi to fight against Japan who was a common enemy. But unfortunately they failed to convince them. On the last day of their visit, Madame Chiang Kai-shek “broadcast a message from her husband to the Indian people, calling on them to support the Allied struggle against the Axis nations but adding the wish that the Indians would be given the right to run their own country.”⁵² Enroute to China she wrote a letter to Nehru saying:

“We shall leave nothing undone in assisting you to gain freedom and independence. Our hearts are drawn to you, and.... the bond of affection between you and us has been strengthened by our visit....when you are discouraged and weary....remember that you are not alone in your struggle, for at all times we are with you in spirit.”⁵³

In spite of their setback of the negotiations with India, Madame Chiang Kai-shek as a strong confidante of Nehru continued to strengthen his nationalist ardour

which served as an inspiration to fight against the British rule till the goal was achieved.

When the Cripps Mission came to India on March 1942 to secure full Indian cooperation and support for their efforts in the Second World War, the entire burden of negotiations had rested on Nehru's shoulder. Madame Chiang Kai-shek appreciated the way Nehru conducted the whole procedure of the Cripps Mission with 'marvellous and masterly statesmanship'. She praised the efforts of Nehru and all he did to come to terms with Cripps. This support and optimistic attitude shown by Madame Chiang Kai-shek on the ability and the manifold task undertaken by Nehru is likely to have left a positive impact on the mind of Nehru and motivated him in all his nationalist endeavours for the cause of the nation.

Therefore in this way, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, Nehru's strong political comrade, played a remarkable role in Nehru's life and especially at a time when India was going through a great crisis on account of the British rule. Her correspondences to Nehru truly reflected her concern for him and she served as his true friend, true inspiration and she is likely to have had a great hand too, in making up his nationalist orientation as can be made out from her letters. Lastly in this context in order to show again how Madame Chiang Kai-shek's soothing and inspiring words must have guided and encouraged Nehru in his political activities can be seen in the following letter she wrote to Nehru:

"I am sorry that you get tired of life as it is. You, of all people, should not feel that way, for it should give you deep satisfaction to know that without you Indian independence and unity could not have made such strides, and that you are necessary, absolutely necessary, to her future. You, by your sacrificial spirit, have changed the whole course of Indian history..... I realize what a terrific struggle you must be undergoing to take an opposite stand to

Gandhiji's non-violence policy; and I respect you all the more because in spite of your personal affection and devotion to him you have followed the dictates of your conscience."⁵⁴

Again on 17 November, 1939 Madame Chiang Kai-shek trying to toughen the nationalist spirit in Nehru wrote:

"The Generalissimo has remarked to me several times that India has a great destiny to fulfil in the stabilization of the Far East. I need not tell you how fervently we wish and hope and pray for the eventual fulfillment that destiny. I believe that India will succeed because with such leadership as yours.....she cannot help but be guided from the pitfalls and emerge triumphant."⁵⁵

After independence Nehru symbolized the resurgence of India. "It has been seen how Nehru who for almost thirty years had laboured for the cause of freedom, had suffered personal hardships and prolonged spells of imprisonment."⁵⁶ Again after independence Nehru being at the helm of affairs was now faced with difficulties and formidable challenges of nation building and nation-making process as India was a newly born nation. The nationalist spirit in Nehru had to remain alive in him so as to act as guiding force to help him achieve the goal of building the nation and also deal with the crisis that emerged after partition of the country. Though there were various factors but here it would be interesting to find out again how women might have played a role to some extent to help Nehru in maintaining his nationalist spirit vis-à-vis the process of building the nation after independence. However, after independence and after Nehru became the Prime Minister of independent India, the communal riots which gripped the country as a result of partition of the country, and the rehabilitation of the refugees overtook the attention of Nehru and he had a harrowing time dealing with the situation. Orgy of violence, arson and crime took place in East and West Punjab. The whole of Punjab, East and

West became a graveyard of destruction and death. The situation depressed Nehru so deeply that in this moment of deep depression he wrote to Lord Mountbatten:

“I suppose I am not directly responsible for what is taking place in Punjab. I do not quite know who is responsible. But in any event I cannot and do not wish to shed my responsibility for my people. If I cannot discharge the responsibility effectively, then I begin to doubt whether I have any business to be where I am.”⁵⁷

Nehru might have lost his strength of mind in the midst of such tormenting situation, but the efforts undertaken by the women and the remarkable courage they displayed in dealing with the communal riots and refugee problems must have served to lift up the nationalist spirit of Nehru to undertake the work of rehabilitating the refugees and work towards national reconstruction. Though there were men too who assisted Nehru in handling the crisis, but since the chapter deals with role of women, so women's contribution in this respect is being highlighted briefly. In this connection the part played by Edwina Mountbatten with the refugee problem was remarkable. Even before independence she had worked with great missionary zeal amongst the refugees when she visited Rawalpindi, towns of Dera Ismail Khan and Tank, Amritsar, Lahore and was greatly touched by the human misery. The undaunted courage and attachment shown by her in visiting these riot-afflicted areas earned the “undying admiration” of Nehru. The communal holocaust which came with partition that gripped the country made Edwina to intensify her work to work with the refugee's problems. The fervour with which she worked with the refugees was always remembered by the Indian people and the Indira Gandhi also remarked about Edwina in these words: “how much she really endeared herself to the ordinary Indian public.”⁵⁸ Indira recalling one incident said:

“.....suddenly we got the news that the whole train had arrived, full of dead bodies. The news went first to Home Minister, and he phoned various people. But as soon as Lady Mountbatten heard, she just took off her high-heeled shoes and came to our house...Edwina said, ‘I am just going to the station’. And of course there was no security, no arrangement. She just went.”⁵⁹

On 26 August, Edwina along with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the new Minister of Health left for a three-day tour of East and West Punjab. In fact they worked together with great vigour and energy. It has been said that: “Gentle Rajkumari Amrit Kaur had qualities of endurance, will, and sacrifice which belied her gentle, frail exterior.”⁶⁰ They visited Ambala, Lahore, Sialkot and found the situation to be very dreadful. The two women made up a list of what was needed.

When the Mountbattens were in Shimla for ten days rest, they got the news that violence had broken in Delhi and hundreds of refugees were making their way to the capital. Edwina could not bear to remain silent and she told her husband that she had to return. With Delhi itself becoming a refugee camp, Edwina achieved the phenomenal feat of uniting fifteen organizations under the banner of the United Council of Relief and Welfare.⁶¹ It was to deal with the relief and welfare problems and co ordinate the work of all the refugee relief organization. As Philip Ziegler, the official biographer of Lord Mountbatten stated about Edwina:

“With.....Rajkumari Amrit Kaur..... she toured the refugee camps, organizing, inspiring, consoling bullying the apathetic and resentful inhabitants into following the rules of hygiene, galvanizing the bureaucrats into activity by her energy and fierce determination. Working seventeen to eighteen hours a day, constantly on the move in the intense heat and under conditions of extreme hardships..... she allowed nothing to deter or deflect her. Not merely did she gain the respect of those with whom she worked; by her compassion and warmth she won the love of all those victims of the violence with whom she came in contact..... during the massacres she achieved miracles for India and humanity.”⁶²

It is also said about Lady Mountbatten that: “Her husband’s A.D.C.s became chary of going out with her, because she would stop in the midst of sniping to pick

up bodies and take them to the local infirmaries. Her gigantic efforts explains Nehru's reference to 'her healing touch' when the Mountbattens were about to leave as liberators."⁶³ Nehru and Edwina worked together in the relief efforts which strengthened their friendship and Nehru also got motivation to work amidst the grim situation.

Such was the phenomenal work done by Edwina Mountbatten in dealing with the crisis aftermath of the partition. In this regard it would be apt to quote the words of Krishna Hutheesing: "It was amazing to see her in those terrible places, neither patronizing, nor oversympathetic, but just talking naturally to the inmates. This is the hardest thing of all to do when people are destitute, hopeless or dying."⁶⁴

Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal's daughter also played an active role during the partition riots that broke out in Delhi in September 1947. During that time she was in Mussoorie with her children and everybody told her not to come back to Delhi. Her husband Feroze Gandhi told her that the situation was very dangerous and they hadn't got much to eat. But Indira a fearless and courageous woman was not that kind of a person who would stay quiet and she hurried back to Delhi immediately. On the way when the train had stopped somewhere between Shahdara and Delhi, she saw some people chasing somebody. Indira got off the train and showing exemplary courage tried to control the situation. After reaching Delhi, she started to work in the refugees camps along with Mrs John Mathai.⁶⁵ She visited the Muslim areas and found out that the Muslims were in a terrible state, having no food to eat and the places had not been cleaned out for about a month. So she worked hard to provide food grains for the people and also took doctors into the locality because of cholera. In this way Indira also worked whole heartedly with the victims of partition.

There was Nehru's cousin Rameshwari Nehru who gave herself to refugee rehabilitation after partition. Prior to that she along with her husband had stayed back in Lahore risking their lives to be with the refugees and made arrangements for their safe journey to India. Even when Jawahar send a message to her through her son Braj Kumar to get ready to return to India, she firmly replied saying that "she and her husband could not abandon the hundreds and thousands of displaced people in these dreadful circumstances. She said, 'treat us as dead'."⁶⁶ Only after the last batch of refugees was evacuated by October 1947, then she returned to Delhi at the end of October 1947. Rameshwari's active work in dealing with the partition crisis might have also encouraged Nehru in the time of country's crisis.

One important aspect of large scale migration was the issue of rehabilitation of abducted women. Rameshwari Nehru, Lady Mountbatten, Indira Gandhi, Mridula Sarabhai, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sushila Nayar played crucial role in the rehabilitation of the abducted women. The Central Ministry of Rehabilitation created a special section for the problems of women only. Rameshwari Nehru was appointed Honorary Advisor to the Ministry of Rehabilitation as she did not want to accept any remunerative post. Rameshwari Nehru organized camps for women and children, who had lost their menfolk in Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi and elsewhere.⁶⁷ Indira Gandhi recalls: "We used to go out at five in the morning and come back long after dark. We got the streets cleaned. We went to the Town Hall."⁶⁸ Efforts were made to help the women to contact their relatives. Under Manmohini Sehgal, who was the Director of the Directorate for Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in Delhi, a centre for Sewing and Tailoring was opened in 1950 to train refugee women. This way employment opportunities were provided to women to make them self-reliant.

In his letter of 8 February 1948 to Rameshwari Nehru, Nehru directed her, as she desired, to send Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya to “the Frontier for the rescue of abducted women” and also to ask “United Council of Women⁶⁹ to interest itself specially in regard to the recovery of Muslim abducted women from the Punjab States.”⁷⁰ Mridulal Sarabhai helped in the recovery of abducted women from East and West Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir state. Sushila Nayar worked with the rehabilitation of women in Patiala.

Thus the partition of the country which resulted in the mass exodus of people from one part of the subcontinent to the other amidst scenes of appalling riots, loot and arson brought in its wake problems – political and economic of wide dimension. This must have been a terrific disillusionment to Nehru. But the undaunting courage shown by women and the bold efforts they took to quell the communal strife that arose from partition and working in the grim situation with the refugees and the rehabilitation work they undertook must have certainly sustained Nehru’s spirit who then as Prime Minister had to deal with this horrifying state of affairs that had engulfed the country. Therefore the nationalist spirit which he had shown during the freedom struggle had to be kept alive even after independence so that he could work towards the building of the newly formed nation of India.

Nehru had always argued that the progress of a nation depended on the position of women and that it is the women who could mould and build the nation. So it was very important that women be made “powerful symbols of India’s new nationhood, as well as contributors to national reconstruction.”⁷¹ So the new Constitution gave rights to women equal with every other citizens of the country which led to their empowerment. In this way women could also come forward and

participate fully in the nation building process. Women themselves had been involved in the deliberations of making of the Constitution which itself shows that in the framing of the Constitution for a new nation, Nehru is likely to have got many significant insights into what women really desired for themselves and this guided him in the process of Constitution making.

When Jawaharlal Nehru was criticized for agreeing to join India in the Commonwealth, Begum Aizaz Rasul, one of the woman member of the Constituent Assembly, strongly supported Nehru's decision in the Constituent Assembly. Justifying Nehru's stand she said in her speech:

"I think it stands to the greater credit of India and to its Prime Minister that he has been able to shake away the old ties of suspicion and mistrust that were prevalent in India against Great Britain and has been able to accept the hand of friendship extended to India in order that India may progress on the lines of peace and prosperity."⁷²

In this way women were supporting Nehru's cause and in this way was making the nationalist in him strong that guided him in the building of the nation of his dreams.

The objective of Nehru's foreign policy had been the preservation of world peace and enlargement of human freedom. After independence, India had to grapple with the herculean task of building up of a country of 360 millions, with its legacy of poverty and the manifold problems that stemmed from it.⁷³ Therefore in such a difficult time when India needed time to raise her standards and adjust to the new responsibilities crowding on her, there was no time for her to think of following an aggressive foreign policy with anyone. In fact at this time she needed the sympathetic understanding of the world in order to help her build up the nation. This

resulted in India 'proclaiming friendship towards all nations', and remained non-aligned to the military blocs. Therefore Non-alignment became the keystone of Nehru's foreign policy and in this way India earned the respect of Asian countries that achieved independence after India, 'and newly emerging African states, made non-alignment an important plank in their foreign policies' for reasons similar to India.⁷⁴ The assignment of diplomatic missions in various countries to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit by Nehru indeed proved to be of great help to him because Vijaya Lakshmi being his sister he could depend on her perspective and conduct of world affairs. As he told her when she was sent to the United States.: "I am quite sure that you will be able to serve India to great advantage. There is no doubt that America can help us tremendously in many ways."⁷⁵ Through her Nehru perhaps got the motivation to apply his spirit in his mind towards the conduct of the foreign affairs. He could talk of the crisis of his country to the world through her as is evident on various occasions. For instance when India suffered from famine in the early fifties and it became necessary for her to ask for wheat loans from abroad, Vijaya Lakshmi approached Washington for foodgrains. Vijaya Lakshmi's official assistance to Nehru at the time of the country's crisis perhaps served to keep the nationalist in Nehru intact. In this way there were many instances how Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit sought to help him in many occasions in the conduct of the foreign policy and this in a way sought to keep his nationalist spirits in good stead and help him in the cause of building the new nation.

Therefore Nehru whole-heartedly devoted his mind, energy and active life to leading his country into freedom and then steering the nation into the path of modernity. Such was Nehru's greatest contribution to the country and the people of

India. But the discussion above reveals that the greatness of Nehru was not only due to Nehru himself. Though many factors contributed to the emergence of Nehru as a great leader and as a leading nationalist of his time, but one of the most important factor was certainly the role played by women in influencing the life of Nehru and particularly in keeping the nationalist spirit vibrant and intact in him so that he would not lose his way in achieving his grand dream of directing the country to freedom and in the making of modern India.

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