

Chapter-II

GUIDING SPIRIT OF WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF NEHRU- MOTIVATION AND EVOLUTION

“Women are the builder and moulder of nation’s Destiny Though delicate and soft as a lily, she has a heart, far stronger and bolder than of men.... She is the supreme inspiration for man’s onward march”

Rabindranath Tagore¹

The aforesaid statement can be seen in the light of the study of life of any personality, but here since it is intended to focus on the study on Jawaharlal Nehru, it would delve into how far women played a significant role as the moulder of his destiny and life. It is a fact that Jawaharlal Nehru was a high-minded, strong-willed and impetuous person, a politician, a nation-builder par excellence, an advocate of women rights and an extraordinary scholar who represented modern scientific values and notions. The greatness of Nehru has been aptly described by his daughter Indira Gandhi who in a foreword to the *The Selected Works of Nehru* wrote “Jawaharlal Nehru is one of the key figures of the twentieth century. He symbolized some of the major forces which have transformed our age.” In assessing and understanding the evolution of the multi- dimensional personality of Nehru, the nature of his leadership and his contribution to the making of modern India, one must delve into the ethos and environment that Nehru grew up during his early years and the various influences with special reference to women, which had shaped and moulded his thought and personality that contributed to the making of a great leader and a statesman.

Since this chapter attempts to study the role of women in influencing the life of Nehru, it would look into the various ways, how various women including his women family members exercised a vital and positive influence on his entire mental and emotional make-up and shaped his attitudes and approaches to the manifold problems to life thereby, having a very important bearing on the shaping of his mind and personality that contributed to the making of Jawaharlal Nehru. They were the colossus who strode across and influenced the various aspects of life of Nehru.

It is well known fact that, in the upbringing of a child, the mother plays an important role. In this respect, a recent observation made by a scholar on Nehru writes: “The young Jawaharlal Nehru’s mind was shaped by two sets of parental influences that he never saw as contradictory- the traditional Hinduism of his mother and the other womenfolk of the Nehru household, and the modernist secular cosmopolitanism of his father.”² Speaking on the same line, Aruna Asaf Ali, one of the woman freedom fighter and political comrade of Nehru also points out that as a young boy his mother Swarup Rani’s influence was paramount and he “grew up in the ambience of motherly indulgence.”³ The way how Nehru perceived his mother can be seen from his Autobiography wherein he writes:

“Though my admiration and affection for him (his father) remained as strong as ever, fear formed part of them. Not so with my mother. I had no fear of her, for I knew that she would condone everything I did, and because of her excessive and indiscriminating love for me, I tried to dominate over her a little. I saw much more of her than I did of father. She was petite and short of stature and soon I was almost as tall as she was and felt more of an equal with her. I admired her beauty and loved her amazingly small beautiful hands and feet.”⁴

In this way it can be assumed that during his childhood Nehru looked upon his mother as a pillar of strength and confidence in whom he confided and felt secured, and in later phases of his life too, Nehru could be seen relying on women on many instances for their guidance and support.

Influence of Women Family Members

The women members of Nehru's family played a big role in the traditional upbringing and mental make-up of Nehru. The Indian and mostly Hindu influence of the womenfolk of his family also had a direct influence on him. While as a child Nehru often used to hear stories of Indian epics- Ramayana and Mahabharata from his mother and aunt. His aunt Nandrani, the widow of his uncle Pandit Nandlal Nehru was particularly adept at story-telling. She was well versed in the old scriptures and tale of mythology to which the young Nehru child listened with great wonder and imagination. They took him regularly to temples and for baths in the Ganga river. Seen in this light it is likely that Nehru had a deep regard for river Ganga and the Indian mythologies. These mythologies formed part of his earliest memories and reminiscing over it he writes,

“There was for me both adventure and the fairy element in them. And then I used to be taken every year to the popular open-air performances where the Ramayana story was enacted and vast crowds came to see it and join in the processions..... In this way Indian mythology and old traditions crept into my mind and got mixed up with all manner of other creatures of the imagination.”⁵

Describing the impact made by the mythologies on his mind he further wrote:

“I do not think I ever attached very much importance to the stories as factually true, and I even criticized the magical and supernatural element in them. As I grew up other pictures crowded into my mind: fairy stories, both Indian and European..... These and many other filled my mind

in strange confusion, but always there was the background of Indian mythology which I had imbibed in my earliest days..... that influence is a good influence both culturally and ethically, and I would hate to destroy or throw away all the beauty and imaginative symbolism that these stories and allegories contain..... Most of these myths and stories are heroic in conception and teach adherence to truth and pledged word whatever the consequences, faithfulness unto death and even beyond, courage, good work and sacrifice for the common good.”⁶

Though Nehru did not believe in the factual content of these mythological stories, yet he was of the view that it was full of lessons. For him the Indian mythology was rich, vast, very beautiful and full of meaning.⁷ According to Nehru, the Ramayana and Mahabharata had tried to build up a unity of outlook among the people, which survived and overshadowed all diversity and the influence which it had exercised was a good influence both culturally and ethically. He wrote: “I would hate to destroy or throw away all the beauty and imaginative symbolism that these stories and allegories contain.”⁸ For Nehru, the mythology whether fact or fiction, “had become living element in the lives of the people.....ever pointing towards the path of endeavour and right living, even though the ideal might be far off and difficult to reach.”⁹

This clearly shows that through the stories of Mahabharata and Ramayana his mother and aunt were able to instill and inculcate ethical, moral and cultural values in him, which moulded his character formation and development of his personality. Though Nehru never followed religion in a formal sense, yet his life was rooted in deep abiding, spiritual and cultural values. No doubt, the mythologies created in his mind a deep love and affection for the culture and tradition of his motherland which he valued throughout his life that lended value and flavour to the varied facets of his life, and this certainly was due to the traditional upbringing by his mother and aunt. Later on when he was to lead the nation’s freedom struggle, he emulated the similar role of Rama, Arjuna

who had been embodiments of righteousness who fought against evil, and Nehru fighting against the evil British rule for the freedom of his country. Therefore in his fight against the British rule, his mind was set with the traditional values of India as he donned the old traditional garb of ancient Indian heroism to fight against the evil.

That Nehru was deeply influenced by the “fundamental unity of India” emphasized in the Mahabharata was reflected later on when Nehru strongly condemned communal riots that occurred preceding and following partition of the country and expressed his strong desire to see the people of India united together. Addressing the students of Aligarh Muslim University in 1948, he said India would be moving towards “a national state which includes people of all religions and shades of opinion and is essentially secular as a state.”¹⁰ The unity of India was uppermost in his mind when the Constitution of India was framed which eventually led to the establishment of a Secular State by Nehru. Such was the deep imprint left by the Mahabharata in the mind of Nehru that he adopted the principle of “fundamental unity of India” when he framed the Constitution for this country.

In 1905 Nehru was sent to England for studies. Being educated in England, Nehru developed a highly modern and rational outlook and developed a high admiration for the British culture and British way of way of life. His stay in England had made him more an Englishman than an Indian. But still his temperament was set and developed against the traditional values which had been instilled and inculcated in him by his mother and aunt which was greatly valued by him and his mind was set towards it and

these values were reflected in his outlook and his approach towards life, especially his approach towards women in all walks of life.

When Nehru was in Harrow, though he was not constantly in touch with his mother, yet the few letters which he wrote to her showed his respect, love, care, concern and adoration for his mother. This in a way also reflects the respectful attitude of Nehru towards women, and this concern for women was reflected during the later years when he fought for the cause of women upliftment and emancipation. He assured his mother that “he would observe all the Hindu rituals on his birthday, including wearing the sacred thread (brahmanical cord) but excluding the distribution of alms among the poor, of whom there were few in the town.”¹¹ Though his mother was traditional and conservative, Nehru had high respect for his mother and making her feel his everlasting respect assured her in a letter written from London on 24 June 1910 that

“You asked me in your previous letter if I would treat you with respect after my return to India. I was really surprised to read that. What do you think of me that you ask me such a question? If an illiterate man does not respect his mother, people have a very low opinion of him. So if I, who have a little education, behave so badly, it would be still worse. What is the use of a man being educated if he does not know how to behave towards his parents?”¹²

Nehru’s mother “constituted for him an unbreakable link with the Indian culture and tradition which he could never entirely abandon.”¹³ This deep regard and respect for his mother clearly shows that though Nehru studied in England, was more an Englishman than an Indian in his likes and dislikes picking up the British etiquettes, manners and ways of life, yet the Indian traditional values and customs of giving

respect to the parents and elders, women remained strong in him and he remained an ideal son to his mother.

Western education had exposed him to the new horizons of sciences, which turned him into a rationalist. Yet the traditions remained strong within him as Krishna Huthseeingh, his sister mentions in her autobiography "*We Nehrus*" that though her brother was the epitome of modern man, yet during his marriage he observed all the ancient ritual proudly and happily. Narrating the event she writes:

"Jawahar was capable of taking part in an ancient ritual which had been handed down from a world even further removed from present reality than that scientifically managed future on which he had set his sights. Not only did he take part in it, he did so with grace and aplomb and serious dignity, completely unself-conscious in his glittering clothes, under hundreds of watching eyes. It was not that he believed in the chanted prayers and the sacred fire and all the other mumbo-jumbo of the rite; but he did believe in the sanctity of marriage and of the family, and in the value of traditional Indian culture and customs."¹⁴

Nehru had two beautiful sisters Swarup Nehru (Vijayalakshmi Pandit) and Krishna Nehru, whom he greatly loved, adored and took care of. Though surrounded by women family members mostly, Nehru never looked down upon anyone of them, and the sense of respect, dignity and affection which he had for them acted as a guiding spirit also in his attitude to other women in general. The same type of mindset was also noticeable in his dealing with other women in his life.

Rameshwari Nehru, wife of Jawaharlal Nehru's cousin Brijlal Nehru is also likely to have played some role too in influencing the life of Nehru. Rameshwari Nehru came from a well to do family background and married at an early age to Brijlal Nehru, who was a senior civil servant. Her father Narendranath was a high ranking officer in

the British government and she was born on 10th December, 1886 “at the large Haveli of Lahore bestowed to her great grandfather Dewan Ajodhya Prasad, by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab appointing him as his Military Commander during the decade of 1830s.”¹⁵ Though she did not receive any formal school education, yet she got the opportunity for the best available education at home. “With all the privileges of a high social status, affection of her well-to-do parents, careful attention of domestic assistants, Rameshwari grew up with perceptive eyes and ears, sensitive to influences from the outside world far beyond the walls of the Haveli where she was born.”¹⁶ She grew up to be a courageous and determined lady and she played an important role in many important areas of social and political life of the country. Since her childhood she always dreamt of India’s independence and she actively participated in the freedom movement. Her role as an ardent advocate and champion of women’s legitimate rights made her an embodiment of Indian womanhood. With her mouthpiece, *Stree Darpan*, she made the women aware of their rights and voiced her protest against the social evils that affected the position of women in the society. Not only this, she also criticized the British policies. Her feminist bent of mind and her relentless work for the cause of women and the freedom of the country could also have left some imprint in the mind of Nehru.

There was an incident when Nehru was studying at Harrow, Rameshwari Nehru addressed a letter to Nehru as Joe where she advised him to “Return soon to India. Your motherland is waiting for you so that you liberate her and alleviate her suffering.”¹⁷ This incident embarrassed Rameshwari since the letter reached the Headmaster of Harrow School, whose name incidentally was also Joe, and the Headmaster came to

know from Motilal that it was his daughter in law Rameshwari who had written the letter. He replied back to Motilal on May 19, 1906, "I am intensely amused to hear that it was charming young lady who defied the British Raj. Give her my regards."¹⁸ This heroic letter which she wrote to Jawaharlal, reflected Rameshwari's revolutionary spirit to fight against the British rule and the part she played in instilling in the mind of Nehru the zeal to do something for his mother country. After his return from England, it could be seen that Nehru did give himself completely for the cause of his motherland

When Nehru was still a student in London, his father Motilal Nehru had taken up the task of searching a suitable bride for him. Numerous letters had been exchanged between Nehru and his parents on the question of marriage. Nehru had even expressed his opinion of remaining unmarried rather than marry a girl whom he may not like for the rest of his life. He confided in his mother saying: "I accept that any girl selected by you and father would be good in many respects, but still, I may not be able to get along well with her."¹⁹ In spite of all long correspondence between the son and his parents, Nehru ultimately yielded to the choice of his parents. He was to marry Kamala Kaul during the Basant Panchavi day in February, 1916. It is said that the marriage was celebrated with great pomp and splendor and the celebrations went on for ten days.

Kamala had been only seventeen years old when she married Nehru. She came from a traditional and orthodox family background and was not placed socially like the Nehrus. As Nehru himself writes about Kamala in the *Discovery of India*:

"Except for a little schooling, she had no formal education. Her mind had not gone through the educational process. She came to us as an unsophisticated girl, apparently with hardly any of the

complexes as which are said to be so common now.... She was not the type of modern girl, with the modern girl's habits and lack of poise"²⁰

Infact Motilal Nehru had undertaken the responsibility to train his future daughter-in-law before marriage with his son. She was brought to Allahabad from Delhi and placed under the European governesses of Jawaharlal's sisters, to groom her to pick up the graces and accomplishments required for adjusting to live in a westernized home of Nehru family. After marriage she had to face problems of adjustment especially with her sister-in law Vijayalakshmi Pandit who often dominated over her. Motilal Nehru had also taken up the task of educating of Kamala soon after her marriage, but she often complained of headache, when she was made to write, which Motilal took this to be utter sign of nervousness. Worrying about Kamala, Motilal wrote to son saying: "The first thing is to strengthen her and make her feel so entirely at home with us so as to get rid of all nervousness. That is what I am doing now."²¹ Though it is opined that Kamala languished in the 'aura of helplessness and jealousy', it could be seen that, with the passage of time a shy and undistinguished Kamala turned out to be an outgoing, spirited and courageous lady and proved to be a great pillar of strength and support to Nehru. She was not only an ideal housewife of Nehru but also a strong companion of Nehru. Like the Rajput ladies who were known for the brave role they played along with their husband Kamala too stood by her husband and faced every situation bravely and courageously till her end. According to one historian Kamala "became a brave, spirited and politically active woman. Visits to Europe with her husband strengthened both her notions of racial identity and her eminent tendencies."²²

Behind every successful man, there is a woman and Kamala Nehru, no doubt played a dominant role in making Nehru successful in his endeavours as long as she remained alive. Kamala Nehru though unsophisticated, in nature had a great hand in influencing Nehru's temperament and personality. By and large, it was after marriage that the political activities of Jawaharlal Nehru began earnestly. He started developing interest in the nationalist activities and began to engage himself for the cause. His entry into politics synchronized with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a national leader of India. However his father Motilal Nehru did not want his son to follow the footsteps of Gandhi and did not want him to join the political struggle. But Nehru earnestly wanted to participate in the national freedom struggle. This differences of opinion led to friction and conflict between father and son. Writing about the mental conflict that arose in Nehru's mind on account of his father's reluctance to let him join the Satyagraha movement he wrote: "Both of us had a distressing time, and night after night I wandered about alone, tortured in mind and trying to grope my way out. Father- I discovered later- actually tried sleeping on the floor to find out what it was like, as he thought that this would be my lot in prison."²³ Under such difficult situation, his wife Kamala Nehru stood by his side and wholly influenced him to join the freedom struggle. She remained an unobtrusive but potent influence throughout Nehru's life. Writing on the impact Gandhi made on Kamala's mind and her role in influencing Nehru to follow the footsteps of Gandhi and join the freedom struggle and in this respect we may recall the statement of Aruna Asaf Ali who wrote:

"Kamala was strongly attracted by the Mahatma's precept and personal example of simple living and dedicated public work. She was a source of encouragement to Jawaharlal in

abandoning the affluent life-style to which he had been accustomed, and taking to the hard path of Gandhian satyagraha.”²⁴

Promila Kalhan one of the biographers of Kamala Nehru also echoing on the same line wrote about Kamala: “She herself had come under the powerful influence of Gandhiji even more, perhaps, than Jawahar. She took Gandhi’s call for self-sacrifice seriously, encouraged Jawahar in his radicalism and urged him to change his way of life.”²⁵ Therefore it could be seen that since Kamala herself had come under the strong influence of Gandhi’s principles and philosophy, she strongly supported Nehru to be actively involved in the freedom movement. With the strong moral support of Kamala, Nehru started to participate actively in the Gandhian movements, and became actively involved in the cause of the peasants after he had met the farmers from Pratapgarh, which made him realize the ground-reality of the rural problems. Had Nehru not received the strong support of his wife, perhaps he would have had to yield to his father’s command and would have missed the golden opportunity to be a part of the national struggle and a leader of the great struggle. One may not know what would have happened in the life of Nehru in terms of his involvement in political struggle had Kamala not been by his side.

Indira Gandhi his daughter has also stated several times that her mother Kamala Nehru had influenced her father in many ways and approved whole-heartedly of her father’s activities and always gave him support. In this light, Indira Gandhi, writing about her mother in her book *My Truth* says,

“Many people know the part played by my grandfather and my father. But in my opinion a more

important part was played by my mother. When my father wanted to join Gandhiji and to change the whole way of life, to change our luxurious living, to give up his practice, the whole family was against it. It was only my mother's courageous and persistent support and encouragement which enabled him to take this big step which made such a difference not only to our family but to the history of modern India."

Indira reiterated the same point in an interview when she said:

"She (Kamala) was a very intense person, and whenever she took up anything, she felt very strongly about it. Firstly, when my father came into the political scene, there was a certain amount of opposition from the family. They did not want him to go to that extent, to submerge himself, and I think that was the time when my mother's influence counted and she supported him fully."²⁶

Though Jawaharlal remained preoccupied with his activities in the national freedom movement and Kamala did not get sufficient attention and care from her husband, yet it can be said that it was the national movement, which brought Nehru and Kamala closer to each other and Nehru started appreciating his wife more. She gave a strong support to him in all his political endeavours and activities. Not only this, Kamala, inspite of her ill-health also worked vigorously for the women's cause and also participated in the national movement, which made Nehru proud of her. Nehru himself acknowledging how he had earlier neglected his wife and failed to give her "that comradeship which was due"²⁷ and confessing about his negligence of Kamala in the early years of their marriage wrote that:

"For I was then like a person possessed, giving myself utterly to the cause I had espoused, living in a dream-world of my own, and looking at the real people who surrounded me as unsubstantial shadows. I worked to the utmost of my capacity and my mind was filled to the brim with the subject that engrossed me. I gave all my energy to that cause and had little left to spare."²⁸

Now this new change in their ways of life gave opportunity to Nehru to understand and know his wife more and more. He valued the presence and importance of his wife in his life. He admired her qualities and he also wanted his daughter to emulate the virtues of her mother. He also came to realize that Kamala wanted to be his political comrade and also “she wanted to play her own part in the national struggle and not be merely a hanger-on and a shadow of her husband.”²⁹ In this way, the national movement marked changes in Nehru’s approach to his wife, and he looked upon his wife more and more as his confidante and greatest support. Not only that, both of them inspite of their differences and difficulties, had been able to keep that spark alight in their relationship since “life was always unfolding new adventure and giving fresh insight into each other.”³⁰

But unfortunately, on the other side, it also brought with it long spells of separation which kept them away because of Nehru’s frequent terms of imprisonment. Though she may have stoically accepted this situation yet, this did not weaken the spirit of Kamala. She greatly valued the wonderful mission of her husband more than her personal happiness. She never grieved nor grumbled at her difficulties.³¹ This is evident from an occasion in September 1934, when Kamala’s health was deteriorating, the government offered to release Nehru who was then lodged in Naini prison, if he gave assurance to refrain from political activity for the rest of his term. Though he had the strong desire to be by Kamala’s side when her condition was becoming worse, but he refused the government’s suggestion. Later when he was released again for a brief visit of his wife, Kamala in a very weak condition then managed to whisper with much required strength to her husband, “What is this about your giving assurance to

Government? Do not give it.”³² This reflected how Kamala inspite of her critical health condition, always stood like a pillar of courage, strength, support to her husband and made him realize that he was a nationalist and motivated him to continue to fight for the country’s cause and not come out of jail and never to bow down for her sake. She made him realize that the country’s cause should be his first priority than her and never wanted her ill health to become a barrier or hindrance for her husband’s political activities. Rabindranath Tagore also while commenting upon the relationship between Kamala and Jawaharlal Nehru wrote the constant long separation of her husband was always borne by Kamala with a smiling face and during the troubled and crisis days, she never insisted her husband to come back.³³ This strength, firmness of spirit and determination and constant support of Kamala did have a positive impact in the life of Nehru. Krishna Hutheesing also pointed out that Kamala was a great source of comfort to her husband. Inspite of her illness, she never made Nehru feel how much she needed him and infact she always infused positive courage into him whenever he was in anxiety and disillusionment.

Kamala wanted to see her husband fight against the British till the goal was reached. She reminded him of his role, duty as a national leader who should fight till the end and never to yield no matter what the situation and circumstances be. Perhaps, it would have been difficult for Nehru also to undertake such hardships of leading the country’s freedom, spending long years in jail, had Kamala not been his constant strength and support. Nehru also confesses that

“If I was away for a number of days the thought of her cooled my mind and I looked forward eagerly to my return home. What indeed could I have done if she had not been there to comfort

me and give me strength, and thus enable me to recharge the exhausted battery of my mind and body?"³⁴

This frequent incarceration of Nehru had also made Kamala strong and courageous to face any eventualities. This can be made out from one of the letters she wrote to Nehru when he was in jail where she wrote:

“Jawahar! I have your letter. I was waiting for it. The days of your release are nearing. But I have little hope of your remaining free. If perchance you are set free you will be re-arrested. I do not worry about this because I am prepared for all eventualities.”³⁵

Nehru's love and concern for his wife grew more when he was in prison as Kamala was suffering from serious illness. Kamala's ill-health pre-occupied Nehru's mind most of his time when he was in prison. Kamala appears in his jail diaries of the 1930s frequently which shows that his love and concern for his wife grew more and more. In August 1934, when Kamala's health deteriorated, Nehru was let out of prison on parole and sent back to prison after every two or three weeks when her health showed signs of improvement. This strengthened their bond more and more and both of them came to value each other immensely. This can be made out from Nehru's prison diary where he records:

“The New Year has begun well for me-yesterday I went to Bhowali and saw the New Year in with Kamala. Hardly ever before have I had such a long and comforting time with her. We talked and talked about the past, present and future and I think we succeeded in unravelling many a knot. I have left her today full of peace and goodwill for the future. And it really surprises me how attached we are to each other. How much she means to me and I to her.”³⁶

Kamala faced the pangs of loneliness, sufferings and hardships silently, but she did not let this reflect on her face, nor did she complain about her life with her husband nor with anyone. Instead she kept herself busy by involving herself for the cause of the women and the country. Dr B.C. Roy while talking about Kamala's active participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 in an interview to *Forward*, a weekly published from Calcutta some years later said:

“During her brief but eventful political life, on the occasion of the enforced absence of her husband and father-in law, she took up the leadership of the Congress in her province and with a grim determination took upon herself the duties which a person with lesser courage and will would have found difficult. She never considered herself, her health, her comforts, even the happiness of a home life when she was called upon to do her duties by her toiling, suffering countrymen.”³⁷

Appreciating Kamala's spirit and support to him and proud of her companionship Nehru remarked: “How much she could do for the larger cause, how much for me! Is that not to be? I could have her as a companion even if she remained an invalid if that were possible.”³⁸

In 1935, Kamala suffered her last illness from which she could never recover. In May 1935, along with Indira and her cousin Madan Atal she sailed for the Badenweiler sanatorium in the Black Forest of Germany for her treatment. On September 4, 1935 Nehru was released from Almora jail as news reached that Kamala's condition was critical. He flew immediately to Germany to be by the side of Kamala. At the end of January 1936, Kamala was shifted to a sanatorium near Lausanne in Switzerland. It was here that Nehru came to learn that he had been made President of the Congress for the second time for the next session at Lucknow in April. Kamala also came to know about

it. Since nationalist feelings were still alive in Kamala's heart, without bothering about her ill-health, she told Nehru not to worry for her and encouraged him to go back to India and serve the nation.³⁹ Such was the guiding spirit of Kamala in the life of Nehru. However early on the morning of February 28th Kamala breathed her last. Expressing his innermost feelings at the loss of Kamala, Nehru wrote: "All our bright dreams were also dead and turned to ashes. She is no more, Kamala is no more, my mind kept on repeating."⁴⁰ He cremated Kamala in Switzerland and brought back her ashes with him to India. For the rest of his life he kept a part of her ashes always with him in his bedroom or gaol cell which was to be mingled with his own after his death. Such was the love and affection of Nehru for his high spirited and strong willed wife who had stood by his side like a pillar of strength throughout the ups and downs of his life. In this connection it may be pertinent to refer to the observations made by Nehru's biographer: "It was after Kamala's death that he fully realized the debt he owed this girl who came into his life when she was seventeen and saw him, in twenty years, evolve from a bored lawyer to one of the great men of the twentieth century."⁴¹ In a statement to the press in Allahabad on 17th March, 1936, on Kamala's death, Nehru remarked: "A brave and a true comrade of ours has left us and I feel lonely and desolate."⁴²

By and large it can thus be seen that this positive support of Kamala motivated and guided Nehru in his eventful career as a leader and a great statesman. She always showed her strong support and encouragement especially at the hard time when he was in prison and encouraged him not to lose hope and remain confident about the country's future and to carry on with his leadership with full vigour and enthusiasm. Kamala's influence was thus paramount in the life of Nehru and indeed, she laid the foundation

for the greatness and the heights of success of Nehru .The nationalist orientation and the leadership temperament in Nehru was indeed moulded and nurtured by his wife Kamala. Perhaps Nehru's rise to great heights of power would not have reached the mark, had Kamala not been with him in the initial phase of his leadership and political activities. In this regard Indira's assessment of Kamala may be relevant here when Indira Gandhi said that, had her mother not stood out with her father, perhaps he would have hesitated to join the political struggle.⁴³

At the death of Kamala many tributes were paid to Kamala Nehru in glowing terms by highlighting the role she had played in her husband's life. Mrs Ramarao told Reuter in London on 28 February that "..... She had a great regard for Mrs. Nehru. Although quiet and reserved, she was a great inspiration to her husband." ⁴⁴ Mr. David Erulkar, President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce while expressing his heartfelt condolences to Nehru said that "Pandit Jawaharlal had lost his wife, who was a great inspiration to him, at a time when he required all her support in the critical work ahead. Mrs. Nehru was a fine example of India womanhood and contributed to the cause of her motherland." ⁴⁵ Rajendra Prasad the then Congress President also said that "in Mrs. Nehru the country loses a brave fighter and her husband a devoted help-mate."⁴⁶One of the leading political personalities of the time Sarat Chandra Bose echoed that "she was a splendid partner of Nehru. Nehru himself said in one of speeches he delivered in Delhi that with Kamala's death he had lost a strong and powerful companion."⁴⁷

Indira Gandhi, or Indu as she was so called was Nehru' only daughter and she also played an important role in Nehru's life. Indira was born to her parents on 19

November, 1917. She was indeed a child who was born in the midst of revolution that had engulfed the country against the British rule, and as she grew up, she also gradually took an active part in it and later on destined to become the First Lady Prime Minister of the country. Nehru had also been proud to associate his daughter's birth with the great events that occurred in India and the world which can be revealed from the letter which he wrote to Indira on her thirteenth birthday from Naini Prison in 1930. He wrote:

“The year you were born in – 1917- was one of the memorable years of history In the very month in which you were born, Lenin started the great Revolution which has changed the face of Russia and Siberia. And today in India another great leader, full of love for all who suffer and passionately eager to help them, has inspired our people to great endeavour and noble sacrifice, so that they may again be free and the starving and the poor and the oppressed may have their burdens removed from them.....In India today we are making history, and you and I are fortunate to see this happening before our eyes and to take some part ourselves in this great drama.”⁴⁸

This showed that Nehru looked upon the birth of his daughter as symbolizing the forces of great events that was to have an immense impact on her growing and upbringing. It is a well known fact that Nehru played a notable role in guiding the growth of his daughter to glorious womanhood and Indira also, proved to be a worthy daughter of a worthy father. However here, another aspect of father daughter relationship can be studied i.e. the role played by Indira in influencing the life of her father Jawaharlal Nehru. Children too, to some extent also play some role in their parents life. Indira though grew up as a lonely child, with her family members preoccupied in the national movement and the frequent imprisonment of her father, and constant illness of her mother , yet Indira grew up to be a strong willed and distinctive woman. She also played a crucial role in the later phases of Nehru's life especially after

he became the First Prime Minister of India. In spite of his long years in jail, Nehru never failed to communicate with his daughters with his inspiring letters.

As a father Nehru had great faith and expectations from his daughter. When he was in Dehra Dun jail in 1941, Indira's decision to get married with Feroze Gandhi, have children and lead a life of her own had greatly disturbed him. At that point, not only was he concerned about her ill-health, but also he had also wanted to train her and make her a person who would be able "to face life and its problems serenely and with confidence"⁴⁹ and do well in any activity or work she took up in life. To make Indira realize how important she was in his life, he wrote,

"There are very few persons in India, I think, who could give effective help not only in public life but almost for any activity, other than technical, better than I could. Hundreds and thousands of young men and girls have wanted to serve with me as secretaries or in some way to get this training. I have never encouraged anyone and have shouldered my burdens alone, for I had always imagined you to occupy that niche. Till you come, that niche had better be left empty. No one else could take your place."⁵⁰

This clearly reflects the sense of confidence and faith Nehru had in his daughter. He was of the firm belief that his daughter would be his greatest confidante who would be able to guide and help him in his great tasks that he would have to face. Indira did fulfill the dream of her father of discharging her duties as his Secretary in the later years when Nehru became the Prime Minister of India. She proved to be a very efficient hostess and an assistant to her father and this also gave opportunity to both to learn from each other through each other's experiences.

By and large, it could be seen that Nehru's relation with his daughter Indira became more close after independence when he became Prime Minister of the country.

In fact independence, saw great changes taking place in Nehru' life and also of his daughter Indira. At the time when Jawaharlal was the Prime minister of India, his daughter Indira was always by his side. Indira stayed with her father and became his hostess till his end. After independence, on the suggestion of Lord Mountbatten, Nehru, who was reluctant at first, moved into palatial house in New Delhi which had once served as residence of the British Commander-in Chief. The place came to be known as Prime Minister's House (presently Teen Murti Bhawan). Indira had helped her father to set up the house which later on became her permanent house. At first Indira with her children spent half of the time looking after her father's house and the other half in Lucknow with her husband Feroz. But as Nehru's responsibilities increased manifold he required Indira more to be by his side. As Krishna Huthseeing wrote:

“But as Jawahar's burden of office increased and the tension in the country continued, it seemed essential for her to remain in New Delhi, not only to act as hostess when important visitors came from abroad but also to manage the household and see her father's comforts. As his daughter, this was her rightful place..... Feroz realizing that Indira should be with her father during these crucial days, suggested that instead of her travelling the 270 miles to Lucknow with the children from time to time, he would make frequent visits to Delhi.”⁵¹

Nehru during his Premiership made many official visits abroad, and in most of the visit, Indira accompanied him. This way both father and daughter had contact with all the important political leaders of the world. Incidentally in 1948, Indira Gandhi went with her father to Paris where he addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations held there. She also accompanied her father on his first and third trip to United States in 1949 and 1959 respectively. Apart from this they visited around several countries between 1949 and 1956. Although Indira said little, she was almost always present

while her father negotiated or discussed world problems with the head of nation they were visiting. But Indira also acted as an advisor to Nehru when circumstances or situations demanded. In April 1955, they attended the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia. During that conference, when Nehru in a temper, threatened to walk out in protest against an anti-Communist resolution moved by the Ceylonese Premier, Indira was heard admonishing her father sharply and telling him to control himself.⁵² This clearly showed that apart from being a housekeeper and hostess for her father, Indira acted as his most valuable friend, adviser, and confidante.

Another incident which shows that Indira, also played important part along with her father in negotiations was at the time when she had accompanied her father to Soviet Russia in 1955. In an interview with Pupul Jayakar, Indira's biographer, Indira said, how her father was shy to ask for aid and she had the feelings that the talk between the Russian Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev and her father was not going on well and this made her worried while she was waiting for her father in the waiting room.⁵³ Pupul Jayakar while recording about his incident writes in her book titled *Indira* :

“Suddenly Khrushchev came into the room and seeing her came up to her to tell her that the dialogue was blocked and there was little progress. Her response was instinctive. Knowing her father so intimately she could sense his difficulties. She knew that the Communist Party of India (CPI) had briefed the Soviet Government before her father's visit. She said to Prime Minister Khrushchev that the Soviet Government should remember that her father's voice was the voice of the people of India and that the CPI did not represent the Indian people. Khrushchev was taken aback, but responded warmly, went back to the meeting and solutions emerge.”⁵⁴

By and large, Indira assisted and guided Nehru in many of the important political tasks of the country on various occasions. On 14th May, 1948, she wrote a letter

to her father from Kashmir apprising him of the economic hardships the people of Kashmir were going through due to lack of visitors and transport difficulties in the country. Since Indira herself personally felt that instead of political talks, solving the economic problem would bear positive results, she suggested Nehru to take necessary steps to help people of Kashmir overcome her economic crisis and in this connection she wrote:

“The only thing that can save Kashmir for India and the Kashmiris will be an influx of visitors this summer, preferably from Bombay and Ahmedabad, since those are ones who buy most. I am sure if there had been enough publicity, people would have flocked to Srinagar. Both the Kashmir and Indian Govts should go all out to assure people that Srinagar is SAFE. Just now it is cheaper, cleaner, healthier and more beautiful than any other hill station. But whatever is done must be done NOW to have any effect. Even if Govt could ask Govt Servants to send their families up, it would make a difference. Papu, please do consider these things seriously. I am sure if you appealed to people to spend the summer here, they would come in thousands.”⁵⁵

Nehru in reply acknowledged the useful information given by Indira. He assured her and wrote back saying “The points you have mentioned had been vaguely before us, but they have now been emphasized by you. We should do what we can in this matter.”⁵⁶

Indira’s sharp presence of mind, her canny attitude and nevertheless the great concern for her father also prompted Nehru to look upon his daughter for advice and help. In one case, Nehru completely depended on Indira for taking decision. This related to Dwarka Prasad Mishra, “a strong and assertive politician from Central India who had been driven into the political wilderness shortly before independence by his rashness in aligning himself with Nehru’s opponents and coming into direct conflict with him.”⁵⁷ He was now eager to seek Nehru’s forgiveness after nearly a decade of realizing his

folly and wanted to join him. Through Madan Mohan Malaviya, Mishra sent Nehru his regrets for the past and his desire to join his camp. But Nehru was not willing to forget the past and assign Mishra any responsible position in Madhya Pradesh. But Nehru still advised Malaviya to seek Indira's advice on this matter. Indira was quick enough to realize the importance of Mishra in the party. She reminded her father that the death in 1956 of Ravi Shankar Shukla, Madhya Pradesh's powerful Chief Minister, had created a void in party leadership in the state that might be well be filled with Mishra's return.⁵⁸ Nehru yielding to his daughter's farsighted advice readmitted Mishra into the party again and in due course of time became the state's Chief Minister. This clearly showed how Nehru was becoming so dependent on Indira and was being guided by her advice in taking decisions in almost every important political matters.

At times when Nehru tended to act unreasonable, Indira would intervene unobtrusively to check his activities. Forewarning Nehru of the negative consequences, that might follow following his docile attitude on the territorial redefinition of the States of the Indian Union on the basis of language, Indira wrote a stern letter on 23rd April, 1956 saying:

“There is a growing feeling in Congress circles-this extends to many members of the Working Committee also-that you are tending more and more to accept almost without question, the opinions of certain people with regard to certain parts of the country. Morarjibjai for Bomaby, Gujarat, Maharashtra, etc, Bidhan Babu for Bengal, Bihar, Kamraj for Tamilnad. These are very fine men and our top leaders, but no one is big enough or detached enough to be the only word on matters of their area. This complete trust in very few creates dissatisfaction in many and cuts at your contacts with all those who hold different views.”⁵⁹

By and large it could be said that since Indira was able to sway Nehru in various spheres of political activities. Congress partymen also knew that “increasingly Nehru was turning to her to help him solve his problems.”⁶⁰ In February 1959 the Congress members insisted her to accept the post of President of the Congress Party which she took up. Under her dynamic leadership, Indira was able to give renewed vigour and strength to the Congress Party, which had so far lost its former authority and prestige. Though there were rumours that Nehru had a hand in getting this important position for his daughter, yet from the other side it can be seen that he was putting his full confidence and faith in Indira’s ability to lead him and also the country. At a party meeting which was presided by his daughter as President, Nehru proudly remarked, “At first Indira Gandhi had been my friend and adviser, then she became my companion and now she is my leader.”⁶¹

In the capacity of Congress President, in many works she even inflicted her views on her father to take strong decisions for the welfare of the country. There were various instances where Indira’s views prevailed upon her father and Nehru acted under her influence. One such issue related to the problem in Kerala where the Communist government had been democratically elected. Subsequently, however, differences cropped up between the central and state government on such issues as the Agrarian Relations Bill and the Education Bill.⁶² The Communist Government introduced measures designed to wrest control of the schools from the hands of the Catholics and Nanyars, thus diminishing the patronage enjoyed by the leaders of the two communities.⁶³ This was stoutly opposed by the Nanyar Hindus and the Catholics. Indira was greatly agitated when she came to know that the Communists included the

speeches of Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung in the school text books. She considered this to be an 'anti-national bias in education'. Therefore she resented strongly against the dictatorial rule of the Communists and the Congress joined hands with the Nayyars and Catholics in denouncing the Communist administration. But Nehru who was true democrat did not want to disturb the duly elected government in Kerala. However, Indira forced Nehru to use the central government's special powers to dismiss the Communist government on grounds of its alleged failure to preserve law and order. Finally Nehru yielding to the pressure exerted by Indira, he dismissed the Communist government in Kerala and the state was brought temporarily under President rule.

Another occasion where she exercised her influence over her father to was in the case of Tibet. In 1959, a serious international problem arose when the Dalai Lama fled Tibet with many of his people and sought asylum in India. In this respect again: "Indira played a major role in persuading her father to agree to provide refuge for the fleeing monk-king and the vast number of monks who accompanied him from Tibet." ⁶⁴

The other area where Indira displayed her high-mindedness and sagacity was the role she played in influencing Nehru to create a separate state of Gujarat and Maharashtra. In the then Bombay Presidency decision was taken to bifurcate Gujarat from Maharashtra on linguistic basis. However the problem was with Bombay city as it consisted of majority Marathi speaking people and on the other hand, it had emerged as the country's commercial capital because of massive investment by the Gujaratis and Parsees. Widespread riots occurred in Marathi-areas when an attempt was made to make Bombay as a separate city state . So in November 1956, Nehru had made the

decision to leave Bombay as a bilingual state. But the sentiments in favour of linguistic states were too strong on both sides. Now Indira visited Maharashtra and returned to Delhi to advise her father that Bombay should be partitioned and thus the new States of Gujarat and Maharashtra were formed and ultimately Bombay was merged with the state of Maharashtra.

In 1963, the Kamaraj Plan was devised by K. Kamaraj and Nehru in 1963, to oust all the senior leaders from Chief Ministerships and Central Ministerships and make them work at the grassroot levels to revitalize the party. Among these were Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram, Lal Bahadur Shastri and S.K. Patil, including Kamaraj. It has been suggested that the plan was aimed at clearing the way for Mrs Gandhi by depriving all her rivals of their ministerial patronage and power, and Morarji Desai, in particular, of his advantage as the top-ranking Cabinet Minister after Nehru.⁶⁵ Nijali ngappa, who had been superseded by her for Congress President in 1959, noted later in his diary that Nehru was always grooming her for the Prime Ministership, obviously and patently. Pupul Jayakar pointed out that the in the enactment of the Kamaraj Plan the voice was the father's but the strategy was the daughter. According to her Indira was, at the time, acting as her father, conscience, a guardian of his doorways.⁶⁶ Indira felt that attempts were being made to undermine her father's position and displace him. Since she was suspicious and unable to trust her father's colleagues, she had once again influenced her father to act with strength and at one stroke all the leaders detrimental to his position were deprived of their power base and removed from positions from where they could step into the prime ministership.⁶⁷

With the death of many of Nehru's colleagues in the Congress like Govind Vallabh Pant, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai- who had always been of great help and support in solving many of the problems of India- he had to now fight battles alone. Moreover some of his colleagues in the Congress he felt, lacked a vision of a better future. So therefore Nehru often took the advice of his daughter Indira. As Krishna writes, "Having been an observer at diplomatic conversations concerned with negotiations, both at home and abroad, she had a clear understanding of historical developments, and Jawahar trusted her judgement."⁶⁸ Moreover Nehru needed her as hostess and as consultant when perplexing problems came up.⁶⁹ Indira herself stated that in the later phases Nehru depended a great deal on her and valued her judgement on people and affairs.

Indira had a great taste and like for the wide variety of India's cultural tradition. She liked the folk music of the different regions of the country that it was she who suggested Nehru that the Republic Day Parade on January 26 each year be enlivened by a pageant of India's colorful folk dances.⁷⁰ Involving herself with the women's department of the Congress, Indira did strenuous work for the improvement of the status of women. She travelled widely to almost every remote village mobilizing and stimulating women into a force for constructive work, and made her own discovery of India. She addressed the women workers in district, villages and in this way they got to know the average mind. She showed her great concern for women, and in this way for India. The women's department under Indira's leadership took upon the work of screening all the women candidates and on many occasions she played an instrumental role in getting women adequately represented by putting pressure on the Central

Election Committee to include more women. Apart from this she encouraged women to take to kitchen gardening as not only a worthwhile element of home economy but in the context of India's situation as a matter of national urgency in the Grow More Food Campaign.⁷¹ She thought the women had a key role to play in the National Savings Campaign.⁷² Indira herself said that her influence over Nehru was predominant on the status of women.

Influence of other Women

During his young days, Nehru had come under the strong influence of Mrs. Annie Beasant and her theosophy. It was his tutor F.T. Brooks who had generated interest in him on the ideas of theosophy and he used to attend with great enthusiasm the weekly meetings of theosophists in his rooms. Annie Beasant, who visited Allahabad in those days delivered several addresses on Theosophical subjects and Nehru wrote in his Autobiography how he “was deeply moved by her oratory and returned from his speeches dazed and as in a dream.”⁷³ Irresistibly fascinated by Annie Beasant and her Theosophy, Nehru decided to join Theosophical Society at the age of thirteen. He writes that “Annie Beasant herself performed the ceremony of initiation, which consisted of good advice and instruction in some mysterious signs, probably a relic of freemasonry. I was thrilled”⁷⁴. However the long term impact of his association with Theosophy was his exposure to the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, and the knowledge he acquired about the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and the *Dharmapada*, which made him to appreciate and value the religious and cultural heritage of his country. “This served as the initial impulse for that long intellectual quest which found its

culmination forty years later in *The Discovery of India*.⁷⁵ In the *Discovery* he has beautifully explained his understanding and appreciation of the philosophy of life contained in the Upanishads and the Gita.⁷⁶ About the Upanishads he wrote in his *Discovery of India*: “I am impressed by the approach to a problem which has often been shrouded by dogma and blind belief. I like the vigour of the thought, the questioning, the rationalist background.”⁷⁷ The call to action in the spirit of detachment, to meet the obligations and duties of life in Gita specially appealed to him as this was in conformity to modern India which was full of frustration and had suffered from too much quietism.⁷⁸ So Annie Beasant’s theosophy introduced him to the ancient Indian philosophies on the basis of which his understanding of life henceforth came to be based on and he explained them beautifully in his *Discovery of India*.

Sarojini Naidu was another great and dynamic woman, who worked shoulder to shoulder with the great nationalist leaders of the day, including Jawaharlal Nehru in the freedom struggle, and she also played an important role in influencing and guiding the life of Nehru to a great extent. Sarojini Naidu was born in 1879 in Hyderabad in a Brahmin family. She was brought up in a cosmopolitan atmosphere of her father’s home in Hyderabad. She grew up to be a great poetess and she inherited this poetic instinct from both her parents. She was well renowned for her oratorical skills and she is said to have cast spell on the people by her words. Later she involved herself actively in the women emancipation movement and campaigned vigorously in favour of women’s franchise. She projected the “modern face of Indian womanhood, confident, assertive and politically motivated.”⁷⁹ With her brilliant oratory and poetry, Sarojini was able to

project the real condition of Indian women creating a stir and upheaval which generated a resonance throughout India.

Coming under the influence of Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu plunged into full fledged political and social activities from 1916 onwards when she began to be “well launched on a nation-wide campaign of speeches, many of them to youth and women’s groups, where she exhorted them to take social ills and join hands in the struggle for freedom.”⁸⁰ In fact it was at the Lucknow Congress in 1916, that Sarojini became widely recognized both as a speaker and a national leader of pre-eminence. Again it was during this session that Nehru met Sarojini for the first time and the charisma of Sarojini appealed to Nehru so much that created a long term impact on his mind and personality. He was charmed by the oratory and the bold personality of Sarojini, and the magnificent speeches which she delivered had a strong and forceful effect on his mind. She became a “tremendous source of inspiration to the younger leaders of the day and she had a forceful effect on Jawaharlal Nehru at the beginning of his political career.”⁸¹

Fascinated by her moving speeches he wrote in his Autobiography:

“I remember being moved also, in those days after the Lucknow Congress, by a number of eloquent speeches delivered by Sarojini Naidu in Allahabad. It was all nationalism and patriotism and I was a pure nationalist, my vague socialist ideas of college days having sunk into the background.”⁸²

This shows that the Lucknow Congress proved to be a turning point in Nehru’s life especially the brilliant speech Sarojini Naidu delivered at the session, no doubt created a lasting effect on Nehru’s mind. Speaking on self-government, she enthralled the audience including Nehru by her speech where she said:

“..... We stand united but united with such strength that nothing from outside, not even the tyranny of colonial domination, shall withhold from us our rights and privileges, withhold from us the liberties that are due, which we claim by our united voice.... To each of us has come that living consciousness, that is in united service for the motherland that constitutes the uppermost hope of tomorrow.....that in the service of the Motherland lies the joy greater than all personal joys.... to live for her is the most victorious triumph of life; to die for her is to achieve the priceless crown of immortality.”⁸³

This patriotic speech of Sarojini must have inspired the patriotic temperament in Nehru. The inspiring words of the speech might have been attractive to Nehru after which Nehru's life was devoted completely for the cause of the nation. Moreover since Sarojini in her private as well as public life acted as a modern 'liberated' woman and devoted her life to the cause of women's emancipation, this must have also inspired Nehru for the cause of the womanhood of India.

It was in the course of the freedom struggle that Sarojini Naidu and Nehru came to know each other more closely and deeply. Sarojini Naidu was older to Nehru by ten years and he was like a younger brother to her. She was also one of his close confidante and political companion. In fact, Sarojini Naidu had close personal relations with all the members of Jawaharlal's Nehru's family. “She became, over the years, virtually a member of the Nehru household.”⁸⁴ She was a frequent visitor in Anand Bhawan, Allahabad and her presence in the Nehru family brought cheerfulness, warmth and liveliness, which has been described by Nehru's niece Nayantara Sahgal who said “There was laughter in the house whenever she was there, and a festive lively atmosphere of a kind which only she could create.”⁸⁵ “Sarojini Naidu shared the joy and the sorrow of the Nehru family and was one with them not only in the struggle for freedom but in their everyday life.”⁸⁶ Both Nehru and Sarojini kept constant touch with

each other through letters which reveal a blend of kindness, concern, humour and admiration, which reflect the many facets of her relationship with the Nehru family. In 1917 she had written a letter to Nehru congratulating him on the birth of his daughter Indira describing her as “the new soul of India”. This in a way shows that Sarojini, a feminist and a modern liberated woman, had great confidence and pride in she being a woman, by the gesture and warm comment she made about the arrival of daughter in Nehru’s life. This incidentally shows that she was trying to make Nehru realize the significance of a birth of a daughter in his life by which she was trying to emphasize on the invincibility of a woman and the great role that woman could play in the society and nation. So this was likely to have left an impress on Nehru’s mind on his attitude towards his daughter in particular and women in general. Apart from being personal friends, they were also political comrades who fought shoulder to shoulder in the struggle for freedom of India. Sarojini also greatly influenced Nehru by being a constant source of motivation and inspiration to him. She always held a very high and optimistic view of Nehru and had great confidence and faith in his ability and capability as a great leader of India. She saw in him the ‘rising star of Indian nationalism’.

Sarojini showed her confidence on Nehru’s ability to guide the destiny of the country which is evident from one of the letters he wrote to Nehru on his fiftieth birthday:

“Your first half century of life has already passed into history, song and legend. May the early years of the next half century bring you the fulfillment of your great dreams and visions, and immortalize you in the chronicles of human progress as one of the Supreme Liberators.....Sorrow, suffering, sacrifice, anguish, strife...yes, these are the predestined gifts of life for you. Somehow you will transmute them into the very substance of ecstasy and victory-and of freedom.... You are a man of destiny, born to be alone in the midst of crowds, deeply

loved and but little understood. May your questing spirit find its goal and realize itself in splendor and beauty... This is the benediction of your poet-sister and fellow seeker.”⁸⁷

When Nehru had been elected President of the Lahore session in 1929, that time he had expressed his doubtfulness to Sarojini of whether he would be able to discharge the duties of the office properly and carry up the ideals of the Congress. At this time Sarojini encouraged Nehru to take up the challenge and boosted up his morale. This explains that Sarojini acted as his guiding spirit. Again on another occasion, when Sarojini was to go to Africa, before her departure in a letter dated 20, November, 1929 she assured Nehru that she would come back in time for his Congress session on the 21st December. The tremendous faith she showed on Nehru’s capability to lead the Congress party must have certainly enhanced Nehru’s confidence and determination and given him the zeal to lead the Congress party and take up the call of the nation. It can be said that Sarojini Naidu’s role and influence on the political activities of Nehru was immense and she acted as his political companion in his political activities.

Nevertheless, it can also be seen in times of sadness, sorrows and loneliness too, Sarojini Naidu acted as his pillar of strength and support which is evident from the various encouraging letters she wrote to Nehru. This also shows how close she was with Nehru and how deeply she understood him. In one of the letter which she wrote on 13th November, 1937 to Nehru, the day before his birthday, she says,

“I have been watching you these years with a most poignant sense of your suffering and loneliness..... what shall I wish you for the coming year? Happiness? Peace? Triumph? All these things which men hold supremely dear are but secondary things to you- almost incidental. I will wish you, my dear, unflinching faith and unfaltering courage in you, my dear, unflinching faith and unfaltering courage in your *via crucis* that all must tread who seek freedom and hold it more precious than life.... Walk steadfastly along that perilous and steep path.... If sorrow or

pain or loneliness be your portion, remember that liberty is the ultimate crown of all your sacrifices.... But you will not walk alone.’⁸⁸

The concern and affection expressed by Sarojini in these letters reflects how she understood Nehru’s deep feelings and thoughts and acted as a source of motivation to pull him up in moments of crisis. Nehru also, in many of his writings had humbly acknowledged ‘to the enormous influence she exercised upon him.’⁸⁹

Nehru acknowledged the value and place she occupied in his and the nation’s life, while paying tribute to her in the Parliament on 3rd March, 1949 where he said:

“.....My mind feels afflicted and confused as if a intimate part of it were cut off from it and because it is difficult to speak or to judge people for whom one has a great deal of affection. It was the affection of unity. It was the affection of one who even in his younger days was tremendously inspired by her speech and action and who during the succeeding decades grew more and more to love her and to admire her and to think of her as a rich and rare being.....the India of our generation produced such rare spirits as have inspired us and as will inspire us in the future.”⁹⁰

Highlighting the greatness of Sarojini and acknowledging her contributions in various spheres of life, Nehru in a broadcast from Lucknow station of All India Radio on the death of Sarojini Naidu, 2 March, 1949 said:

“.....She was a nationalist and a great international figure...For 50 years she led a full and dynamic life and what she touched, she dignified.... We remember her as a comrade, a spirit full of joy and laughter, and because of that she will never die.... I pay homage to the great daughter of India and through her to the womanhood of India; whatever we have achieved I think we owe it to Sarojini Naidu. What I am today is partly due to the inspiration from Sarojini Devi. When I heard her 33 years ago from the platform of the National Congress, I was greatly thrilled as I was thrilled later whenever I heard her.”⁹¹

The place Edwina Mountbatten (Lady Mountbatten) occupied in Nehru’s life is an intriguing chapter in the history of Nehru’s later years of his life. Their relationship

has been looked from different perspectives by various writers and historians. Edwina's entry into Nehru's life perfectly synchronized at the time when Nehru was at the outset of the most important phase of his life and the role Edwina played in influencing and bringing about marked changes in Nehru's life is an interesting area to be looked into.

Edwina Mountbatten was the wife of the last British Viceroy of British India Lord Louis Mountbatten. The British Prime Minister Atlee incidentally had specially chosen Mountbatten for supervising and arranging for the final transfer of power to India since he was convinced that only Mountbatten "had an extraordinary facility for getting on with all kinds of people. He was also blessed with an unusual wife."⁹² So with that mission he arrived with Edwina in India on 22 March 1947, when India was aflame with communal riots. It may be noted that when Mountbatten's appointment of Viceroy of India was announced, Edwina was unenthusiastic of the prospect of coming to India since she wanted to continue with her post-relief work in Europe and Britain and also she considered the assignment given to Mountbatten a 'horror job'.⁹³ But the fifteen months stay of the Mountbattens in India changed the destiny of India and the most important and inevitable of all was the germination and blossoming of close friendship between Nehru and Edwina and the significant role Edwina was to play in Nehru's life, both personal and political as is manifested in the major political decisions he took and changes that marked his life as a whole.

Before knowing Nehru as a person, Edwina had come to learn from Krishna Menon⁹⁴ that Nehru was a "man of immense charm and erudition" and since then she had a desire to meet him. Their first meeting took place in 1946 in a canteen of Indian

soldiers at Singapore where Lord Mountbatten, who was then Supreme Allied Commander in South East Asia, had taken Nehru. The meeting was an unusual one, as Nehru himself remarked that it “was in a rather remarkable fashion”⁹⁵, as Edwina was almost crushed by the soldiers that had rushed in to see Nehru and she eventually crawled and presented herself, and that was his first introduction to Edwina, the future Vicereine of India.

Edwina was an intelligent and fascinating woman and had an elegant and warm personality that led even Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to remark that Lady Mountbatten ‘had a most attractive and friendly temperament.’ Nehru was also attracted to her charm, intelligence and the sympathetic companionship she gave to him at the most critical times of his life. It was also surmised by many people that, “Nehru could not have withstood the strain and stresses of those early years of his premiership without the strength and stimulus Edwina provided.”⁹⁶ Not only this both Edwina and Nehru were remarkable people and possessed high intellect which attracted them to each other. Moreover, he needed a true friend and strong companion who could guide him and be his wise and true confidante. Edwina truly filled up this void and indeed gave him the most sympathetic companionship and also guided and influenced his life in many ways. Indira also pointed that they were great friends and Nehru was very fond of her and he used to feel relaxed in her company. Since their intellectual level also matched so they could discuss things intellectually.⁹⁷ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit also felt good that her brother had found a strong companion in Edwina and pointing out Edwina’s importance said:

“at a very difficult time when he had no wife and was doing a very important job. He responded to her intelligent companionship and her warm personality. They were always able to talk intelligently to one another.... She was a big influence on his life because she brought warmth and friendship based on a sharing of values and intellectual pursuits.”⁹⁸

Lord Mountbatten and Edwina came to India with the mission from Britain to successfully work out on the partition of the country and the transfer of power to India and in this respect, Edwina also played an equally important role in this mission along with her husband. In order to clear the way for achieving the said objective the first thing she did immediately after the magnificent swearing-in ceremony was meeting and getting the wives, sisters and daughters “of the men of influence and power onto her side and into favourable frame of mind towards the intentions and work of transferring power smoothly, which was the sole *raison d’etre* of this last Viceroyalty.”⁹⁹ The other task in which she involved herself was the plunging into the social and missionary activities in India. Infact the zest and commitment with which she worked in the crisis of human suffering following communal riots made a great impact on Nehru that he began to view her with an “undying admiration” according to his friend Marie Seton.¹⁰⁰

Edwina met and was able to make friendship with some of the leading women personalities of the time like Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Maniben Patel, Kamaladevi Chattopadhaya, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Begum Liquat Ali Khan, Aruna Asaf Ali, and took great interest in what they were doing. Infact her biographer Janet Morgan pointed out, “Edwina’s conversation with leading Indian women were a help to Dickie in his negotiations with their husbands, fathers and brother.”¹⁰¹ It can be said that it was with “Jawaharlal Nehru that she formed the most important connection of all.”¹⁰² Nonetheless this warm and imaginative approach of Edwina to win over Indian women

leaders to her side was of tremendous help to Lord Mountbatten to build goodwill with Indian leaders and discuss and convince them about the final transfer of power to India along with partition. Vijaya Lakshmi indeed became a very close confidante and aide of Edwina and these two women is likely to have exercised their influence on Nehru in the final phase of the transfer of power.

V.P. Menon¹⁰³'s daughter noted that it was Edwina who played a very important role in extracting concession from Nehru to offset the revisions to the partition plan¹⁰⁴ and persuaded him to accept an initial phase of dominion status for India.¹⁰⁵ Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a freedom fighter and a close associate of Nehru had seen closely how Nehru was averse to the idea of partition of the country at first. But later seeing Nehru acquiescing to the idea of partition Menon wrote:

“I have often wondered how Jawaharlal was won over by Lord Mountbatten. He is a man of principle but he is also impulsive and very amenable to personal influences. I think one factor responsible for the change was the personality of Lady Mountbatten. She is not only extremely intelligent but has the most attractive and friendly temperament. She admired her husband very greatly and in many cases tried to interpret her thoughts to those who would not at first agree with him.”¹⁰⁶

Although no corroborative evidence has been found regarding this particular instance cited by Azad of Edwina influencing Nehru to accept the partition of India, however it can be inferred that since Edwina was a close confidante and Nehru valued her judgement, it is likely that Nehru could have been partly influenced by her in accepting the partition of the country to calm the crisis. Moreover in terms of his political life Nehru could find in his relationship with Edwina one of the rare people on whom he could rely upon entirely and with whom he could share his thoughts.

Another occasion where Edwina is likely to have influenced Nehru's mind and complied with her advice was the joining of the Commonwealth of Nations. Nehru had been averse to the idea of joining the Commonwealth as he considered it to be 'a device of the stronger races to exploit the weaker ones.' In fact during the Presidential address at the Lahore session of the Congress in 1929, Nehru had sternly pointed out that, "Independence for us means complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism. The British Empire of today dominates many millions of people and holds large areas of the world's surface against the will of their inhabitants. The embrace of the British Empire is a dangerous thing."¹⁰⁷ In Shimla when Lord Mountbatten and V.P. Menon discussed with Nehru the idea and procedure by which India might join the British Commonwealth, Nehru had disagreed. Though Edwina did not directly participate in the discussions, but she kept track of the progress of the negotiations. It is said that "V.P. Menon told his daughter afterwards that Lady Louis's conversations with Nehru played a significant part in helping him to make up his mind to go for Commonwealth membership."¹⁰⁸ Since Nehru considered her judgement wise even than her husband, that he used to tell her that her mind was acute and masculine in its approach to business¹⁰⁹, it is likely that he valued her advice and guidance and came under her strong influence to take major decisions for the future of the nation.

After partition which came along with independence in 1947, the bloody communal riots and refugee problem gripped India. But the zest and mercy with which Edwina worked to alleviate the sufferings of the people earned her appreciation from different quarters. She was able to unite the fifteen voluntary organizations under the banner of United Council of Relief and Welfare and undertook voluminous relief work

among the refugees. She was constantly on the move to work in the camps set up for the refugees. Nehru was likely to have got inspiration from Edwina to work together with her on relief and welfare policy. Before leaving India when Edwina offered the vice-presidency of the United Council of Relief and Welfare, Nehru accepting it replied: "If there were no other adequate reason for associating myself with the Council, the fact that it might enable me to work with you in a common task would be reason enough."¹¹⁰ Acknowledging the great humanitarian work done by Edwina Nehru said:

"The gods or some good fairy gave you beauty and high intelligence, and grace and charm and vitality-great gifts-and she who possesses them is a great lady wherever she goes. But unto those that have even more shall be given: and they gave you something that was even rarer than those gifts- the human touch, the love of humanity, the urge to serve those who suffer and who are in distress. And this amazing mixture of qualities results in a radiant personality and in the healer's touch."¹¹¹

Nehru was therefore attracted to the strong personality of Edwina and looked upon her as his strong companion on whom he could confide upon in times of both joy and sorrow. During the summer of May 1948, Edwina had suggested to Louis Mountbatten that they invite Nehru to the retreat in Mashobra. Nehru without any hesitation accepted the invitation at once. Nehru at that point of time had been going through melancholic feeling and considerable mental disturbance due to the death of his loved leader Mahatma Gandhi who had been his mentor and patron and the tragic of partition. He also needed break from the stress of Delhi politics. So therefore he was in need to talk to someone who could understand him and help him get out of the depressed mood. In this weary situation, Nehru knew it was Edwina who could understand his sensitive mind and feelings and help him soothe his disturbed mind. In this connection it can be seen that when Nehru confirmed his coming to Mashobra with

the Mountbattens, he wrote to her saying that he needed someone “to talk to me sanely and confidently as you can do so well.... I am in some danger of losing in myself and in the work I do.”¹¹² So it was inevitable that the sympathetic nature of Edwina drew Nehru towards her for getting solace.

After completing their work in India, when it was time for the Mountbattens to leave the country, Nehru was struck by a deep sense of melancholy as he hated to part with Edwina. She had come to occupy a special position in his life as she was his source of inspiration, fun, solace and strength. He wanted Edwina to stay more in India and continue on her work with the refugees. Since Edwina had become Nehru’s closest confidante, the thought of her leaving him made him extremely sad and pouring out his innermost feelings to Edwina he said, “A feeling of acute malaise is creeping over me, and horror seizes me when I look at a picture in my mind of you shaking thousands of hands on the night of 20th and saying your final goodbye.”¹¹³ But Edwina here played an important role by reminding him to be practical as he used to tell her. This shows how Edwina acted as a guiding spirit trying to help him remain strong psychologically.

After Edwina left India, they corresponded each other through letters. He used to read her letters number of times and would lose himself in her thoughts. “Nehru loved words. Edwina was his inspiration. Writing to her his solace.”¹¹⁴ From Kashmir Nehru sent to her gift of a piece of Indian birch bark, which in olden days was used in place of paper for writing manuscripts.¹¹⁵ This symbolized Nehru’s desire to write to her to enliven his spirits and feelings and vice versa. Apart from this since their intellectual mind worked along the same line, Nehru used to update her about the country’s affairs

and activities and various work as he wanted her to understand how his mind was working in all the matters.

Another instance when Edwina truly stood as a strong support of Nehru was during the time when disturbances arose in Hyderabad on the question of accession in September 1948. When the Indian troops invaded Hyderabad and took control over everything, Mountbatten is said to have disapproved the invasion, as India would be considered an aggressor in Britain. But here again Edwina agreeing and upholding Nehru government's decision said, "Right is right and wrong is wrong." So Edwina stood as a loyal supporter of Nehru's decision which must have certainly encouraged Nehru at the time of country's crisis.

Mountbatten was very well aware of the attachment between Edwina and Nehru. But he never looked at their relationship from a different angle. Instead he respected their relationship. Whenever Edwina went to Delhi, Mountbatten would write to Nehru ahead begging him to see that Edwina got some rest. In fact, whenever Nehru used to visit their home in Broadlands, Mountbatten used to give space to them so that they could talk and spend time together separately. Nehru, too in spite of his close relation with Edwina knew his boundaries and he would never let Mountbatten down, since he considered "it disloyal, ill-mannered and wrong to deceive his friend."¹¹⁶

There was an instance when Edwina played an important role in guiding Nehru's political life. In 1958, Nehru again began to talk of resignation¹¹⁷ and told a press conference shortly afterwards that he was feeling "rather stale and flat."¹¹⁸ Here Edwina as a good friend and well wisher saved him from this hot headedness and impulsive

decision. Though there might have been other factors too which made Nehru to change his decision, yet Edwina's role cannot be overlooked. Edwina suggested him to take a holiday and in late May, he went with Indira trekking in the Kulu Valley. During this time, Edwina asked Nehru whether she should continue to write to him or not. She said, "I shall well understand if you say 'not a note for the next few months.'"¹¹⁹ Nehru with great passionate feeling wrote back, "And how do you think I would fare if months passed without a letter from you?...Have you realized what your letters mean to me?"¹²⁰ This clearly reflects the special kind of force which drew Nehru towards Edwina inspite of their distance and that he longed for her letters, since it was with her he could share everything.

Therefore, it can be assumed that Edwina's entry into Nehru's life brought about sweeping and marked changes in his life. Her influence went to the extent of guiding Nehru to take important political decisions for the country. Nehru came under her vivacious, strong and magnetic personality and moreover Edwina also turned out to be a dependable and trustworthy friend, that Nehru considered her to be a very important part of his life. She left a powerful impress on his mind. "She was a friend who had stimulated and encouraged him most."¹²¹ In this way, Edwina became his strongest confidante and a guiding spirit of his life.

Looking at the great personality and leading figure of the age, Jawaharlal Nehru was not only the first Prime Minister of independent India, but he was endowed with an alert and profound mind which was turned in different directions and was clearly visible in his temperament. He was a man who had a background of culture and learning, man

who could think clearly, man who could see a problem not merely from one angle or aspect, but in all aspects and who could come to decisions with knowledge of factors not only in respect of the past and the present, but also of the future. So there was a need of such a type of a leader who could guide and handle the destiny of the country at a time when India was struggling under British domination and later on mould the destiny of the newly independent country in the face of global challenges. Such a temperament and mental make-up in Nehru had been developed and moulded by women as has been discussed above. However, it does not imply here that Nehru was not inspired by man, but since the attempt of the chapter had been to delve into the guiding spirit of women in the life of Nehru, therefore the role of women and the making of the manhood in Nehru is inseparable. There are many biographers on Nehru, but very scanty light has been thrown on this particular aspect of Nehru. This chapter has thrown light on this aspect. What India had achieved under his able leadership has therefore been discussed in the light of the role played by women in guiding him in directing the destiny of the nation. The women no doubt therefore acted as an inspiration, guiding force in the make –up of his personality, temperament, his outlook towards life which had a direct bearing in the full-fledged blossoming of a person of exceptional quality, and India is indeed proud to have had such an outstanding leader who had steered the future of the nation by his exceptional leadership and moulded the future of our country.

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