

# SELECTED WORKS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS — China and Tibet

## **1. To Rajendra Prasad<sup>1</sup>**

New Delhi

November 16, 1957

My dear Rajendra Babu,

Thank you for your letter of the 16th November about Rahul Sankrityayan.<sup>2</sup> So far as we are concerned, there will be no difficulty about his pas sport, which he has already got, being endorsed for China.<sup>3</sup> But, I do not think it will be at all appropriate or proper for you to give him a letter of introduction to Chairman Mao Tse-tung. In any event, that will not be right. I do not think it would even be correct for me to give any such letter, or for

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<sup>1</sup> JN Collection

<sup>2</sup> A scholar of Buddhism and a linguist

<sup>3</sup> President Rajendra Prasad wrote that Rahul Sankrityayan had visited Tibet on several occasions and brought a large number of manuscripts from there, and he now wanted to visit the libraries in the monasteries in Tibet which had thousands of manuscripts valuable from the Indian point of view. Rahul Sankrityayan also proposed to visit China where a large number of manuscripts and books were available, some of them being translations of Sanskrit works whose originals were lost, and wanted a letter of introduction to Mao Tse-tung. Rajendra Prasad asked for Nehru's advice as to whether it would be "desirable for me to give an introduction to President Mao Tse-tung or by you or the Ministry.

anyone else to do so. The most we can do is to inform our Ambassador<sup>4</sup> in Peking about his visit, and tell him the object of the visit and that he is desirous of meeting Chairman Mao Tse-tung and others.

A year or two ago, Dr Raghu Vira<sup>5</sup> went to China and Mongolia. He went on his own account, but we asked our Ambassador<sup>6</sup> to put him in touch with the Chinese Government<sup>7</sup>. As a matter of fact, the Chinese Government was not at all pleased with much that he did there. I could not quite make out what had happened, but it appeared that he pushed himself too much everywhere and spoke in a manner which was not appreciated there at all, and we were informed of this by the Chinese Government, politely of course. He brought away with him a very large quantity of manuscripts, scrolls, pictures, etc. He got these chiefly because the Chinese authorities thought that he was our representative and these gifts might be said to be gifts to India. Dr Raghu Vira, however, treated them more or less as his private property.

There is always a slight difficulty in sending people to China or Tibet or, indeed, to any country, under official auspices. We become responsible for all they do there.

It is probable that Rahul Sankrityayan will have no difficulty in getting a visa for Tibet or China, because of his leanings towards Communism.<sup>8</sup> But, I am not at all sure that he will get a visa for Tibet. These are not easily given.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R.K. Nehru.

<sup>5</sup> Sanskrit and Hindi scholar and Member of the Rajya Sabha

<sup>6</sup> N. Raghavan was India's Ambassador in China when Raghu Vira went there

<sup>7</sup> For references to Raghu Vira's visit to China, see Selected Works (Second Series), Vol. 30, p. 222 and p. 405

<sup>8</sup> He was a founder-member of the Communist Party of Bihar.

<sup>9</sup> Rajendra Prasad replied on 17 November that "I understand the situation and will write to him that it would not be right for me to give any introduction."

Yours sincerely,  
Jawaharlal Nehru

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## 2. To Soong Ching-ling<sup>10</sup>

New Delhi  
November 25, 1957

Dear Madame Soong,<sup>11</sup>

I was delighted to receive your little note from Moscow. How well I remember that day, thirty years ago, when I paid a visit to you in your hotel in Moscow with my father. I had not remembered the exact date though I knew it was round about the 10th or 11th November.<sup>12</sup>

Ever since that day a multitude of happenings have taken place and the world is very different from what it was. Great changes have come to your country China and my country India. I am happy that between these two countries there is friendship and a large measure of understanding.

I hope you are keeping well.

With warm regards,<sup>13</sup>

Very sincerely yours,

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<sup>10</sup> JN Collection

<sup>11</sup> Widow of Dr Sun Yat Sen and a Vice Chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China. Soong Ching-ling was best known for her work in women's and children's welfare. She had visited India in December 1955.

<sup>12</sup> For Nehru's reference to his meeting with Soong Ching-ling at Moscow in November 1927, see his letter of 12 November 1927 to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in Selected Works (first series), Vol. 2, p. 374.

<sup>13</sup> Asking R.K. Nehru, the Indian Ambassador in China, to pass on this letter to Madame Soong Ching-ling, Nehru observed, "It was rather odd that she should write to me this brief letter from Moscow when she had not written anything from Peking."

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### **3. Message to Chou En-lai<sup>14</sup>**

I thank you for your kind message about Dr Atal and am deeply grateful to Your Excellency for the great care taken of Dr Atal during his illness in Peking.<sup>15</sup> When Dr Atal was invited by the China-India Friendship Association to visit China, I was anxious about his health and tried to dissuade him from undertaking this long journey. But he was very anxious to go and when a slight improvement in his health took place here, he insisted on going to China. In view of his special desire, I did not wish to come in his way anymore.

2. He was a friend and a colleague to us here and his death is naturally mourned by many people. He died as he lived a warm friend of the Chinese people desiring greater friendship between them and his own people in India. While I am grateful to Your Excellency's Government for all the help given to him, I am particularly beholden to you for your personal interest.

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<sup>14</sup> New Delhi, 3 December 1957. JN Collection.

<sup>15</sup> Madan Atal, physician and a cousin of Kamala Nehru, passed away on 1 December in the Peking Union Medical College Hospital because of cirrhosis. Conveying the news to Nehru the same day, Chou En-lai wrote to him: "During the hardest days for the Chinese people, Dr Atal led the Indian Medical Mission to China and selflessly served the broad masses, both military personnel and civilians, in the Chinese bases against Japanese invasion... In Dr Atal, we see the friendship and warm affection of the Indian people towards the Chinese people. The Chinese people will forever remember Dr Atal with feelings of respect and will make further efforts to strengthen the great friendship between the people of our two countries."

#### **4. A Perspective on Tibet<sup>16</sup>**

I have read Shri B.K. Acharya's<sup>17</sup> summary as well as the full note of Shri Apa Pant.<sup>18</sup> The note is interesting not only because of what it tells about conditions in Tibet, but also because it gives us an insight into the mind of Shri Apa Pant and his broad approach to these problems.

2. I might say at the outset that I agree with the Foreign Secretary that this note should not be circulated. I do not think the full note should even be sent to our Ambassador in China. Many parts of this note are such that I should like extreme care to be taken that they do not reach unauthorized persons. Any circulation involves the risk of the wrong persons also seeing them. If that happens, it might well involve us in difficulties. Even authorized persons tend to talk about these matters rather loosely.

3. What might be done, if it is considered necessary, is to prepare a brief summary which can be sent to our Ambassador in Peking. For this purpose I do not think that Joint Secretary's summary is the kind of thing that I should circulate. In preparing such a summary only the broadest reactions of our Political Officer should be given in regard to the major developments in Tibet.

4. Shri Apa Pant's report is both important and interesting, and I have no doubt that its factual part gives a correct representation of the present situation in Tibet. But the note goes much further than this and gives one the impression of the writer being so much impressed by certain facts as to lose perspective. The note thus ceases to be completely objective.

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<sup>16</sup> Note to Foreign Secretary, Darjeeling, 26 December 1957. JN Collection.

<sup>17</sup> Joint Secretary, MEA.

<sup>18</sup> Political Officer in Sikkim and Bhutan.

5. There can be no doubt that Tibet is under the forcible occupation of Chinese armed forces and that a considerable majority of the Tibetans resent this. Also that the Chinese Government is anxious, as any suzerain power would be, to weaken this opposition and, insofar as possible, to gain the goodwill of the Tibetan people. But even if that goodwill is not gained, the Chinese control and occupation will continue. I have no doubt that any Chinese Government, whether Communist or non-Communist, would have the same basic policy though it may adopt different means to carry it out. That indeed has been the historical policy of China towards Tibet. It is only when China has been weak that it could not enforce it. It is also, I believe, true that Tibetans have never really reconciled themselves in the past to Chinese sovereignty or even suzerainty.

6. In the past, the problem had an entirely different aspect, because however powerful the Government in China, it could not really interfere in the internal affairs of Tibet. A Chinese army could come there and subdue the Tibetan authorities and compel them to recognize Chinese sovereignty. But, in the circumstances, there could not be any effective control from China. Now conditions are different.

7. The Chinese Government is proceeding warily in Tibet. It has even lessened its interference in internal affairs because of the difficulties they had had to face. This policy may continue for some time. But it is clear that the basic policy of China will be to absorb Tibet more and more and make it accept the major pattern, in political and economic matters, which is in line with China. Whether this can be successfully done or not I do not know.

8. I would hazard the guess, however, that it will be an exceedingly difficult task for China to bring about this process of absorption and acceptance. No one can say what will happen in twenty or thirty years time because conditions in the world are changing so rapidly that the problems of today will take an entirely different shape later. For ought I know, the very existence of national independent states may not continue. We live in a world where national boundaries become more and more anachronistic.

9. I think that it is becoming increasingly difficult for communism to be imposed on people against their will just as it is equally difficult for a colonial regime to be re-imposed. Tibet is perhaps one of the most inhospitable countries that exist in the world today from the point of view of an unwanted foreigner going there. This is due more to the terrain and the climate than anything else. I have been a little surprised to read in Shri Apa Pant's note that there are "innumerable fertile and well watered valleys in the vast areas of Tibet east and south-east of Lhasa which are almost empty of human habitation and which are excellently suited for settlement." If this is so, then I might have to change my opinion about the difficulties of colonization in Tibet. Communism apart, the tremendous pressure of Chinese population will inevitably bring large numbers of Chinese to these valleys, if they are so suitable for colonization. I say this just as I might say that in the long run large areas of Australia might be colonized. Under pressure of an increasing world population, empty spaces are not likely to remain empty or uninhabited for long.

10. Shri Apa Pant repeatedly refers to the Tibetans maintaining the purity of the message of the Buddha and their attachment to dharma. The average Buddhist outside Tibet will not accept the statement about Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism being considered the essence of Buddhism. Religion

apart, the social structure of Tibet is obviously completely out of date. It has managed to last so long because of its complete isolation from the rest of the world. That isolation cannot continue any longer. With the impact of other forces from the rest of the world, that social structure is bound to crumble. If Buddhism in Tibet is tied up with this out-of-date social structure, Buddhism also will suffer. This fact should be kept in mind regardless of Communism.

11. Reference is made in Shri Apa Pant's note to the absence of any real centralized authority in Tibet except in the vaguest sense. (I am not referring to Chinese authority.) Apparently, regional councils or elected headmen were practically independent except for acknowledging the overlordship of the Dalai Lama and paying him some tribute. It is pointed out by Shri Apa Pant that the fight there is not so much against the Chinese but against this new system of Government which he says would do away with the traditional way of life. Shri Apa Pant appears to be enamoured of this "traditional way of life", which is completely feudal under a garb of religion. If one thing is certain, it is this that this traditional way of life cannot continue, now that Tibet has come face to face with the modern world. This is not merely a question of modern amenities, but rather of the basic structure of the State. There is bound to be land reform. If the monasteries, who own vast estates, resist this land reform, they will fail in doing so ultimately, and the whole structure of Buddhism based on these monasteries will also suffer. If Tibet wants to keep the essence of Buddhism, it will have to give up these accretions which have nothing to do with religion and which are opposed to modern conditions, both capitalistic and communist.



12. Shri Apa Pant refers to the possibility of enormous power resources being available from the Brahmaputra. Our own experts gave us a note on this subject pointing out that nowhere in the world was there such a concentrated source of power as in the Brahmaputra at the place where it enters India. This power could be made available not only to Tibet but to India.

13. I must repeat that I do not understand what Shri Apa Pant means by saying that the Tibetan society has been built on the teachings of the doctrines of the Buddha. I do not think that society has any particular relation to Buddha's teachings.

14. Shri Apa Pant refers repeatedly to the pressures we may have to feel or to resist on our frontiers in the future. This may well be so. But on the whole, this seems to me rather a static and even out-of-date view of the forces that are at work in the world. If these pressures come, other and new forces will also arise in India or in the rest of the world.

15. It seems to me that Shri Apa Pant has been emotionally moved so powerfully that his broad judgement of the present and the future has been somewhat affected, even though his general conclusions are correct. The danger in Tibet arises more from the false steps that the Tibetans might take than from the deliberate policy of the Chinese Government. Shri Apa Pant has himself hinted at this fact. While it is clear that the Tibetans are intensely averse to Chinese dominance, their ideas about any steps which they might take to end this are extraordinarily confused and immature. Foolish steps taken might well injure them greatly. We are naturally very friendly to the Tibetans and we are going to continue to be so. But we cannot allow ourselves to be dragged into wrong courses, wrong both from

our point of view and that of Tibet. We should take every opportunity of maintaining and developing our cultural and like contacts with Tibet. But, at the same time, we should take care not to be pushed into some wrong activity because of our sympathy for the Tibetans, or under their pressure.

16. Shri Apa Pant's report is full of exclamatory marks. Presumably these denote a state of continuous surprise and wonder at what he saw or came across. This approach rather comes in the way of the balanced consideration of events. Also there is a good deal of repetition in his note. This note could have been improved if it was made more concise. The various factors referred to in the note are important. There appears to be, however, little thought given to the understanding of social forces or to the dynamic situation in the world today. These social forces, emerging out of the progress of science, technology, communications, etc., dominate the world, and Capitalism and Communism as well as intermediate forms of political or economic structures, are ultimately progressively more and more governed by them. There is no particular reason why the ethical and moral side, as represented by religion, should come in conflict with these social urges or forces. But if religion becomes too closely associated with static social conditions and vested interests, then its moral and ethical value lessens greatly and there may be a direct conflict with those social forces.

17. In Tibet there may well be fairly high development of individuals in some spiritual plane. Yet, these very individuals are driven to talk of armed resistance, etc., without knowing much about conditions in the world today. They cannot have it both ways. Spirituality by itself, if widely acknowledged, may well be a strong shield. Combined with primitive weapons, it ceases to be spiritual or effective.

18. The reference in Shri Apa Pant's note to weapons and hand-grenades being smuggled into Tibet, presumably from Nepal, deserves further enquiry.

19. As I am seeing Shri Apa Pant in another two days in Gangtok, I am giving him a copy of this note.

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