

SELECTED WORKS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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China and Tibet

1. Inaccurate Maps Issued by the Chinese Government¹

I think that our High Commission in London should certainly take up this matter with the Chinese Embassy. We might also refer the matter here in Delhi to the Chinese Embassy and express our regret at such maps being issued on behalf of the Chinese Government.

On the whole, I am inclined to think that we need not at this stage ask our Embassy in Peking to take up this matter. Thus, our present approach will not be too formal and at the same time the Chinese Government will know what we feel about the issue of such maps.

I have a vague idea that one or two of the border issues are going to be discussed soon here with the Chinese representatives. When such a discussion takes place, we might draw their attention to the inaccuracy of their maps generally.

2. Trade with Tibet²

¹ Note to S. Dutt, the Foreign Secretary, New Delhi, 8 April 1958. JN Collection.

² Extracts from reply to questions in the Lok Sabha, 22 April 1958. Lok Sabha Debates (Second Series), Vol. Xv, cols. 10788-10790.

Jawaharlal Nehru: So far as I know, there are no Chinese trade interests.³ It is Chinese Government's. If he is referring to the Chinese Government policy, it is a different matter. There are no private Chinese trade interests that interfere. It is true that the Chinese Government's trade policy is not the same as it used to be on the border and that has affected our people. There is no question of our taking any steps about it, except that this matter is discussed by our representatives on the border on this side or that side. And possibly, the situation might be better later on; I cannot say, because conditions have changed so much in Tibet.

But the deputation that came to me did not even raise this question; they hardly referred to it. They were concerned naturally with the general conditions all along this border and they wanted help in improvement. They presented a memorandum with, I think, 16 demands, some of them important, some less important and some rather trivial. The last demand, I think, was that when they come for interviews to Delhi, Ministers should give them priority and give them interviews immediately. Of course, that is a justifiable thing to say, because they come from far, but it rather took away from the balance of the demands.

I entirely sympathise with them, if I may say so, about these areas which are roughly in three States, namely Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. The Punjab area, of course, is chiefly Lahaul and Spiti, above the Kulu Valley. It has been hopelessly neglected in the past, so have many of these areas. The very first thing is communications, to get at them, to

³ . Hem Barua, PSP Member of the Lok Sabha from Gauhati, Assam, had asked whether a delegation of traders representing trans-Himalayan trade interests had met Nehru to discuss the situation arising out of the proposed closure of trade with western Tibet. Replying to it, the Parliamentary Secretary to Nehru, Sadath Ali Khan, confirmed the meeting and informed the House that the delegation had submitted a number of demands. Hem Barua enquired about the steps taken by the Government to keep the Indo-Tibetan trade alive as it was facing acute competition from Chinese trade interests.

reach them and to open them out. Roads have been built, and more are being built by the various State Governments and by the Central Government. But still the programme is a tremendous one, and roads in these mountain areas are difficult and expensive.

T. Sanganna:⁴ May I know whether these petty traders are nomadic people having no permanent avocation to lead their lives, and if so, whether Government contemplate to take any firm measures for their permanent living?

JN: They are certainly not nomadic people. I do not know how this idea has entered the honourable Member's head, and what firm measures he wants us to take. Suppose they are nomadic; he wants us to take firm measures to make them less nomadic. I do not understand it at all. I like nomadic people. They are sometimes more advanced than those who are fixed, who sit in the slum.

Bhakt Darshan:⁵ The Prime Minister has now stated that they had submitted 16 demands. May I know the important demands among them and what do they deal with?⁶

JN: It is a long list, as I said. The first is, I think, that a full socio-economic survey should be made of all these mountain regions. It is a very good demand, no doubt. In fact, something of that kind has been done in the last two or three years and it is still being done, though not in a very integrated way, because the area is a vast area. One must realise that this border area, that is, the Himalayan border is 2,000 miles long, apart from several

⁴ Congress Member of the Lok Sabha from Koraput, Orissa.

⁵ Congress Member of the Lok Sabha from Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh.

⁶ This question was asked in Hindi.

hundred miles' breadth. That is one thing. But, I think, the first thing is road, that is, communications. Whatever we undertake, we can undertake with greater facility with roads than without roads. As a matter of fact, the UP Government has taken some action in this regard.

The other demands are about services, about being sent for education to foreign countries, about getting scholarships, about being declared Scheduled Castes so that they may get representation or reservation of seats. These are the types of demands that they have made.

H.N. Mukerjee:⁷ In view of a report in the papers that the Prime Minister is likely to have a holiday in Tibet,⁸ can we expect that whatever difficulties there are would be smoothed over in the course of whatever discussions he might have there?

JN: I do not think that question arises. But whenever possible, it is my intention to go to Lahaul and Spiti.

Hem Barna: May I know whether one of their demands is that there should be a thorough economic survey of the trans-Himalayan regions and also that in case of a complete breakdown of Indo-Tibetan trade, there should be an alternative source of livelihood for these people?

JN: That is just the point that has been repeatedly examined. The honourable Member talks about a survey. Perhaps, they have not got much...

⁷ CPI Member of the Lok Sabha from Calcutta Central, West Bengal.

⁸ On his way to Bhutan from Gangtok in Sikkim, Nehru arrived at the Tibetan Plateau on 18 September 1958. And on his way back from Bhutan, Nehru reached Tibet on 29 September. He returned to Delhi on 2 October 1958.

Hem Barna: That is what has been stated.

JN: I know. Perhaps, they do not realise that movement is terribly difficult there. To go there, it may take a month to go to places which are relatively near, at a distance of 60 or 70 miles or less, it may take a month. There are hundreds and hundreds of miles to be surveyed.

Therefore, the first thing is communication. As a matter of fact, we have a fairly long report from UP about the steps they have taken in regard to horticulture and small industries growing up and community schemes. All this kind of thing is being done, but the problem is a big one and can be tackled only in a big way when communications are developed.

Hem Raj:⁹ Lahaul people traded pashmina with Tibet earlier, but it has nearly stopped these days. May I know if there is a way to continue this trade?

Speaker:¹⁰ How can answers to every question be given separately?

JN: I cannot answer this without enquiring- about the background of the whole issue.¹¹

Mahavir Tyagi:¹² May I know how the balance of trade with Tibet is squared up, and through what agencies?

JN: The balance? The balance being according to the honourable Member in our favour or against us?

⁹ Congress Member of the Lok Sabha from Kangra, Punjab.

¹⁰ M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar.

¹¹ Hemraj's question, Speaker's intervention and Nehru's answer were in Hindi.

¹² Congress Member of the Lok Sabha from Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh.

Tyagi: Whether in favour or against, and what is the agency through which we square up our balances from year to year?

JN: The balance of trade with Tibet is normally very much in our favour, because goods from India go to Tibet. India is the main supply region for Tibet for all kinds of odd goods, consumer goods. That is partly settled, or used to be partly settled, by some special things, like wool and such like things coming, and partly in solid currencies.

N.G. Ranga:¹³ In currencies?

JN: True; it is so; it is foreign exchange

3. Proposed Visit to Tibet¹⁴

The other day there was a telegram from Peking about the proposed visit to Tibet. It was stated there, I think, that owing to weather conditions, the Chinese Prime Minister¹⁵ could not visit Tibet before the second half of April.

I think that you might inform our Embassy in Peking that while I shall try my best to adjust my programme to the Chinese PM's programme in regard to the visit to Tibet, I have to be here in Delhi early in October. There is a big International Conference of the World Bank in Delhi beginning on the

¹³ Congress Member of the Lok Sabha from Tenali, Andhra Pradesh.

¹⁴ Note to S. Dutt, the Foreign Secretary, New Delhi, 13 May 1958. JN Collection.

¹⁵ Chou En-lai was the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China till his death in 1976.

5th October.¹⁶ This is a very big affair and over a thousand delegates are coming from all over the world. These include some eminent personalities whom I have to meet. Indeed I have to inaugurate this conference.

Therefore, I have, in any event, to be in Delhi by that time.

I would not mind going to Tibet about the middle of September so as to be able to come back by the end of September, although this will interfere with our sessions of Parliament.

This information is to be conveyed to our Embassy merely for them to keep it in mind when the question of a date for the visit to Tibet arises.

Air Marshal Mukerjee¹⁷ told me yesterday that he now intended taking me to Lhasa by the Viscount as he thought this was a safer and more convenient method. But, for this purpose, he will have to make a trial flight by Viscount to Lhasa and he intended doing this in the near future.

Probably he will write to you about it as we shall have to get the permission of the Chinese Government for this.

4. To Humayun Kabir¹⁸

New Delhi June 10, 1958

My dear Humayun¹⁹,

Your letter of the 10th June about my taking some Buddha relics to Tibet when I go there. To begin with, my going to Tibet is by no means certain.

¹⁶ The thirteenth annual joint session of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation was held in New Delhi from 6 to 10 October 1958.

¹⁷ Subroto Mukherjee

¹⁸ JN Collection

¹⁹ Union Minister of State for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs.

Secondly, I can only take any relic or something after reference to the Chinese Government. We have to be very careful about these matters. I do not propose to make any reference to the Chinese Government at this stage. I must wait till we are certain of my going there.

Therefore, it will be rather premature for you to write to the Mahabodhi Society or to the Maharaja of Sikkim²⁰ on this subject.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

5. Presentation of a Buddha Relic²¹

The Mahabodhi Society of India²² has decided to present a sacred Buddha relic to the Dalai Lama²³ and they want me to take this with me when I go to Tibet. In fact, it is my proposed visit to Tibet that has made them think on these lines. They have asked me if they should send a formal letter making the offer, and if so to whom they should send it. I wrote to them that my going to Tibet itself was not quite certain yet and it will be better, therefore, to wait for the present before taking any other step.

2. On thinking again about this matter, I feel that we should let the Chinese Government know about this and then watch their reactions. You will remember that when Premier Chou En-lai came here a year and a half

²⁰ Tashi Namgyal.

²¹ Note to S. Dutt, the Foreign Secretary, Manali, 17 June 1958. JN Collection

²² The Mahabodhi Society of India was established in Calcutta in 1892 by the Ceylonese Buddhist leader Darmapala Angarika

²³ Recognised as the fourteenth incarnation; temporal and spiritual leader of Tibet.

ago,²⁴ he brought some of the relics of Hieun Tsang.²⁵ He gave them over to the Dalai Lama who presented them to me at Nalanda. They are being kept at Nalanda.²⁶ I do not quite remember who I gave them to. Did I give them to the Bihar Government on the understanding that they will keep them at Nalanda or did I give them to some museum at Nalanda?²⁷ Did the Mahabodhi Society of India come into the picture then?

3. I should like to know all the facts of this last episode. Then, keeping these in view, I should like you to send a message to our Embassy in Peking telling them of the desire of the Mahabodhi Society of India to present a sacred Buddha relic to the Dalai Lama through me when I go there. A Buddha relic of course is the most precious thing that a Buddhist could give or receive.

4. We need not ask the Chinese Government's permission about this matter. It would be better to request them to inform the Dalai Lama of this wish of the Mahabodhi Society of India.

²⁴ Between 28 November 1956 and 30 January 1957, Chou En-lai was in India from 28 November to 9 December 1956; from 30 December 1956 to 1 January 1957; on 24 and 25 January; and on 30 January he reached Santiniketan via Calcutta.

²⁵ (c. 602-664 A.D.); Chinese Buddhist scholar and traveller, who spent fourteen years in India from 630-644 A. D.

²⁶ On 12 January 1957, Nehru received the relics of Hieun Tsang from the Dalai Lama in the premises of Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, situated in the valley of Rajgir Hills, a mile away from the ruins of the Nalanda University. See also *Selected Works (Second Series)*, Vol. 36, pp. 185-186.

²⁷ The casket containing the relics had been deposited in the little museum at Nalanda. Nehru suggested that the casket should be kept in the Patna Museum. See also *Selected Works (Second Series)*, Vol. 36, p. 186.

5. After that, privately we might ourselves inform the Dalai Lama. But I should not like to send any message to the Dalai Lama till I have taken steps to inform him through the Chinese Government.

6. To Humayun Kabir²⁸

New Delhi 26th June 1958

My dear Humayun,

There has been for some time past a proposal to send some Indian scholars to Tibet to visit some monasteries there with a view to examining manuscripts there and taking copies. I have seen a note in which it was mentioned that four such scholars should go carrying with them four servants, apart from an interpreter and some technical personnel. Several monasteries were mentioned.

The Chinese Government informed us that in some monasteries there were no particular manuscripts. But they were agreeable to our men visiting some monasteries and staying there for some time.

The question has arisen whether in the present circumstances we should pursue this idea. Present circumstances mean certain developments on the international scene which have resulted in making the Chinese attitude more rigid than it was previously. Also there is the question of our saving money, especially foreign exchange.

I must say that I was surprised to see the estimate for these scholars to go to Tibet. Why each one of them should carry a servant is more than I can understand. I have never heard of scholars going in this way, carrying

²⁸ JN Collection.

servants with them. I can understand perhaps one man accompanying them to help them.

I am inclined to think that a smaller number should go this year and should concentrate on one of the principal monasteries. Thus, two scholars can go. Indeed, one would at present be enough. I should like this to be done quietly without fuss and without publicity. We have to move rather cautiously in this matter of Tibet, as Indian intentions are suspect in China.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru