THE FLUTE OF SHRI KRISHNA
(or A Study of the English speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru)

By C. D. Narasimhiah

While paying a tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru’s speeches, the late Mr B. G. Kher rightly asked “why does everybody, everywhere leave his or her occupation—men, women, children, young, old, sick, hale, all—and gather just to watch him almost reminding you of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, of the flute of Shri Krishna?” These meetings that Nehru addressed were hardly meetings in the ordinary sense; they were more in the nature of human earthquakes that shook a whole town or a rural area. As president of the Congress, before Independence, he travelled thousands of miles a week by every conceivable means of transport—by car, lorry, horse carriage, bullock cart, elephant, camel, horse, bicycle, paddle boat, canoe and of course on foot in some intractable areas. Sometimes, we are told, he spent as many as 18 hours in a car, in the course of which 12 meetings, big and small, were addressed and when he was speaking, men, women and children fixed their shining eyes upon him, devouring him as it were. Their contacts have been so intimate that he can somehow sense what they feel, even by looking at a crowd of 50,000 or 100,000 for as he says ‘it is my great good fortune to have had the affection of the Indian people’. So here is the nation’s darling, the light that never dims but shines steadily and kindles a flame in every individual heart even if it is a crowd that he is addressing.

How does he do it? Is it by eloquence? ‘Time and again Nehru reminds us that he is ‘no man of the fine phrases or trafficker in eloquence’. He confesses that he began what is called public speaking at a fairly late stage in his life. Although he was member of a well-known debating society while at Cambridge he never had the courage to speak there and paid the fine willingly for not speaking every term. Then through the force of circumstances rather than anything else, he started addressing public gatherings and began with the peasantry of his own province. We have it in his own words that neither they nor the others thought that he was delivering a ‘public speech’; they remained ‘personal talks’. He didn’t feel shy with them as they were simple folk. And so very slowly he got over this inhibition. But he ‘retained that manner of speaking to friends’ as if they were ‘having a quiet talk together even when audiences grew and became colossal in number’. He himself tells us “with a large crowd I speak my intimate thoughts always more than in a small Committee. I feel I have a desire to be frank with them because they are frank with me. I have a sense of communion with them, although I am very different from them”.
Before Independence

In spite of what he says about the 'quiet talk' he used to have with the peasantry of India, on formal occasions however, he did speak to 'move the masses'. This was particularly so in the pre-independence days. Here is rhetoric of an accepted kind, and there is nothing vicious about it, though it is somewhat loud:

"I marvel at my good fortune. To serve India in the battle of freedom is honour enough. To serve her under a leader like Mahatma Gandhi is doubly fortunate. But to suffer for the dear country! What greater good fortune could befall an Indian unless it is death for the cause, or the full realisation of our glorious freedom?"

It is by such speeches that he fired the imagination of his countrymen and became, in those days when the country was fighting a life and death struggle for independence, its 'winged messenger of freedom'.

But today he would describe these speeches of a fiery type as merely negative. Most of them were negative in their approach and content. He himself now admits that their main concern then was to fight for their country's freedom in 'a destructive way, in an oppositionist way and not in a creative way'. From whatever public platform he spoke in those days hardly a good word was said for British rule in India or elsewhere. On the contrary the speeches are full of unqualified denunciation of British imperialism. He makes a long list of the ravages of British rule in India, chiefly the oppression of Indian industries. Then he says 'it was bad enough, but worse followed gradually in as much as our ancient system of education was destroyed and we were disarmed'. This is far from the normal tone of his utterances today, when he refers to the indirect intellectual benefits and the educational advancement of Indians, thanks to our contact with the British. Again, what he would today describe as a 'mere feudal revolt', in 1927 he said with no lack of conscious sophistry: 'If fate had willed otherwise and the so-called rebels had been crowned with success, then today it would have been called the Indian War of Independence'. He would even go to the extent of saying that 'Amritsar was absolutely nothing in comparison with what took place during the Sepoy Mutiny'. It is a vague generalization and strong denunciation of the type that we commonly hear from half-baked politicians holding forth on public platforms. Besides even the facts don't bear out the truth of Nehru's statement. History of the Sepoy Mutiny does not record any gruesome incidents comparable to the inhuman and barbarous acts British soldiers committed on the helpless civil population at Amritsar. But Amritsar tragedy was still green in public memory and comparison with it would make Sepoy Mutiny look horrible and so it was done, regardless of its absolute fidelity to truth! That is not all. More interesting exaggerations follow: 'But since then such things have been constantly taking place..." Imagine the
Sepoy Mutiny and its consequent repression being constantly repeated! Again, catch him saying today: 'Four and forty years' or 'Brothers and sisters' or 'How can I thank you men and women of India? How can I express in words feelings that are too deep for utterance!' No one ever doubts his sincerity but he would not be so sentimental today as he was in 1929. But then, hardly anyone with Nehru's concern and urgency could have escaped some amount of exaggeration, rhetoric and sentimentality at mass meetings in those revolutionary days. All this however will help us understand how far Nehru has travelled in public speaking from 1929.

After Independence

In 1947 when the country achieved independence it was a great occasion and as one of the foremost fighters for Indian freedom he was naturally happy but he would not let himself off. The speech on the contrary is sober, solemn and befitting the occasion and what is most important he immediately addressed himself to the task before him. "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity." Yes, it is service of India and the larger cause of humanity. For today he would describe the nationalism of a country struggling against foreign domination as just an anti-foreign feeling. After the country is liberated, it may, he fears, become unhealthy and even reactionary. It may seek to promote its interests at the expense of other countries and it may repeat the very errors against which it has to contend. That is why when he explains India's foreign policy he wants it to be considered not in terms merely of our own petty success or failure because 'the success or failure of any foreign policy involves the success or failure of the whole world'.

Even when he loves India it is not so much for things of the past—there is no blind adoration of the past—but it is because of his faith in the present. The complexion of his nationalism has changed so much that instead of India it is the world he thinks of, instead of the past it is the present that engages his attention. He tells the world very proudly that he loves India and seeks to serve her not because of her geographical magnitude, not even because she was great in the past, but 'because of my faith in her today and my belief that she will stand for truth and freedom and the higher things of life'. 
Addresses to Conferences

As Prime Minister he called a Conference of Asian Nations soon after India attained her independence. It is a great event in the history of Asia and of the world. Poets and seers—Emerson and W. B. Yeats among them—saw the vision of a resurgent Asia taking shape before humanity after 2,000 years of 'stony sleep' when Europe dominated the stage and drowned the 'ceremony of innocence' everywhere and brought the world to a state when the 'best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity.' So it is at the end of an epoch and the beginning of a new one that we stand and surely it calls for seeing the sweep of history with its inexorable lessons, the vision of a great continent renewing itself and becoming glorious again. Nehru, if anyone in all Asia, is equal to the task and says what only the best of us could have said on such an occasion. Whole paragraphs from his speech are worth quoting. First he refers to his daring invitation, but soon there is self-effacement and attempt at enlisting the fellowship of Asian nations when he says 'it was not merely the call from us, but some deeper urge that brought you here'.

He lifts them from the present and transports them to an immemorial antiquity when Asia was the cradle of human civilization:

'We stand at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period of history. Standing on this watershed which divides two epochs of human history and endeavour, we can look back on our long past and look forward to the future that is taking shape before our eyes. Asia, after a long period of quiescence, has suddenly become important again in world affairs. If we view the millenia of history, this continent of Asia, with which Egypt has been intimately connected in cultural fellowship, has played a mighty role in the evolution of humanity. It was here that civilization began and man started on his unending adventure of life. Here the mind of man searched unceasingly for truth and the spirit of man stood out like a beacon which lighted up the whole world.'

After exhorting the Asians he tells them of their sad plight, of how life in Asia became 'static and unchanging', and how the other continents with their dynamism spread out and took possession of great parts of the world. 'This mighty continent,' he deplors, 'became just a field for the rival imperialisms of Europe, and Europe became the centre of history and progress in human affairs'.

From the immemorial antiquity, through centuries of stagnation and oppression Asia has passed and its star is shining again: 'A change is coming over the scene now and Asia is again finding herself ... and takes her rightful place with the other continents'. Briefly but most exquisitely he leads them on to the present: 'It is at this great moment that we meet here and it is the pride and privilege of the people of India to welcome their fellow Asians from other countries'.
Lest there should be whispers by interested outsiders of India's attempt at dominating the Asian political scene he declares that 'in this Conference and in this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavour'. He therefore speaks not merely of the vitality of India's culture which spread out and influenced vast numbers of people in distant parts of Asia, but tells the Conference of the 'commingling of various cultures' from Egypt and Arab countries and from Iran. Then he reminds them of the intercourse between India and China, Indo-China and all the countries of South-East Asia to make them feel the oneness of Asia in their bones.

Thus, a great occasion is sure to bring forth the best in Nehru. Even in a brief message which he gave to the International Buddhist Cultural Conference at Sanchi he plunges right into the heart of the subject and views the Conference in the context of history, in relation to himself as an individual and in relation to the nation and the world. First of all he sees 'something of history' in the Conference. Then 'this Conference has a deep significance for us in India and must have the same significance for the whole world because the latter is at a turning point in history. 'The message of the Buddha may well solve the problems of our troubled and tormented world. I came to Sanchi, not to give you a message but to search for something myself. In this torn and distorted world, I am a very confused person. I see no light and often stumble. I try to search for what is lacking in me and to find out what is wanted of me by my country and my people'. The utter integrity of the speaker will at once make an impact on the hearers and they begin to feel humble too.

Now, he is in far-off America and he has been there for just 3 or 4 days but even that, he says, has helped him to get an emotional awareness of the land and its people. He gives an unexpected turn to a mere formality, but it is not a mere turn of expression, it is a new way of looking at things. He tells them he has paid visits to memorials of the great builders of this nation: 'I have done so not for the sake of mere formality but because they have long been enshrined in my heart and their example has inspired me as it has inspired innumerable countrymen of mine'. He goes further and reflects in general terms on memorials: "These memorials are the real temples to which each generation must pay tribute and, in doing so, must catch something of the fire that burned in the hearts of those who were the torchbearers of freedom, not only for this country but for the world; for those who are truly great have a message that cannot be confined within a particular country but is for all the world.'

Immediately he uses the opportunity to drive home the lesson of his master not only because the great names of America remind him of Gandhi but because of the quality of his great message. And how movingly he conveys that message! 'In India there came a man in our
own generation who inspired us to great endeavour, ever reminding us that thought and action should never be divorced from moral principle, that the true path of man is the path of truth and peace.

When he pays homage to the greatness of America he is only giving expression to his sincere belief and not paying a mere lip service. He thinks that the United States would not have this amazing growth in material well-being and scientific and technical advance unless she had been 'anchored in the great principles laid down in the early days of her history, for material progress cannot go far or last long unless it has its foundation in moral principles'. This is more than being fair to America, the land of material prosperity. It is always this kind of a friendly, understanding approach to peoples and problems that has lessened tensions, and increased the area of peace among the nations of the world. And blessed be this peace-maker!

It is an address to the South East Asian Regional Air Navigation Meeting. He no doubt considers all aspects and possibilities of air travel, but his fine mind does not forget to look at Air Navigation as the conquest of Air and this conquest as a tribute to the spirit of man and an event which changed human history. He says that 'it is a major event that the human being crawling about on the surface of the earth, more or less in a two-dimensional way suddenly leaps up to the third dimension'. This is, of course, scientific observation by one interested in the advance of science but the humanist and philosopher in Nehru would naturally ask whether man's mind has kept pace with this scientific advance: 'Somehow events go faster than men's minds and there is a tremendous lag. We get the wherewithal to do things. We do accomplish all manner of great deeds, and yet we do not have the wisdom to know how to do them well'. He is aware that this is for the philosophers to discuss and not for the Conference, but adds 'Nevertheless, it is good to bear that in mind, because technical excellence, important as it is, has to be allied to some other kind of mental quality if it is to be used for proper ends'.

From Air Navigation to Irrigation and Power. He is just as facile. He can lift a dull and dry subject like irrigation and power to a high plane by his imaginative approach. The words 'irrigation and power' excite his mind and all kinds of ideas come to him—'ideas of history, and long perspective of human progress'. The occasion even reminds him of the way history books are written depicting 'kings and big individuals'. To him the biggest development in the history of humanity was... 'the discovery of agriculture' and hence his excitement. His fertile mind thinks of the tremendous source of power running to waste and of the potential energy which is there for the engineers to tap. He visualizes the wonderful story the rivers of India would make. He wants them to consider the story of Ganga in particular. His vision at once presents before the Engineers the story of Ganga, for that is the story of India. 'This story will be far more important, far more living and
real than all the trumpery history books that you have.' He gets warmed up and perceives its manifold possibilities: 'It will be the story of the growth of Indian Culture and Civilization; it will be the story of the great cities on the Ganga; it will be the story of the Gangetic valley and the water of the Ganga helping irrigation and so on; it will be the story of the rise and fall of empires; it will be the story of development of life, of people, Aryans as well as other races, coming down from the north-western frontier to the broad plains of India right up to the Ganga. It will be a magnificent story if it could be written properly. Of course it is not the engineer's job to write it but I want the engineer who works on these rivers to have an imaginative approach to his work. Then the water he deals with will become alive. Even the stones will tell a story'. He wants the engineers and bricklayers to realise that they are also working with live material, even though it might be stone or steel and then it will give birth to further life.

It is true there is not much on irrigation in this speech but then, he is not an engineer; he is a statesman and the statesman's duty is to stir a dead people to intense activity by appealing to their best and noblest instincts. That Nehru does. He is trying to relate irrigation and power to a human centre. In the past under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi he would soar high while reflecting on the fundamentals of life. Now as Prime Minister he has to deal with many dull and sordid things and humdrum life but such is his imagination and sensibility that he can invest them with a charm that makes sordid things beautiful.

Now it is the Community Project. Measuring and calculating and balancing the budget are important no doubt but, he says, they are 'secondary matters'. The primary matter is 'the human being involved, the man who is going to work, the man who is going to translate the feeling into action... and rightly he exhorts the officers-in-charge to 'reach the mind and heart of the human being'. He makes it plain that this can be done not by 'doling out advice but by doing the job yourself'—'Do it and others will follow' he assures. No wonder that such a mind looks upon the two heavy volumes of the Planning Commission not as deadbooks but as 'the mighty theme of a nation building and re-making itself'. His mind conjures up the vision of something vast—the prosperity of India's millions. He dares and always stands for trial and error and does not want to fall into ruts but to follow the dynamic way. Even the Constitution, he says, is 'not so sacrosanct that it cannot be changed even if the needs of the country or the nation so demand.'

It is a Newspapers Editors Conference and he impresses it with the stamp of his own personality. He administers a shock to the men of the Fourth Estate: 'I rather doubt myself if newspapers have any great influence on political opinion. You have seen in other countries—democratic countries—how a great number of newspapers have supported one party while another has won the elections'. Nevertheless,
he appeals to them to encourage that 'common humanity and that friendliness' which exist among all the peoples of the world and not to 'lose our heads, whatever happens.'

Addresses to Universities

It is still the University audiences which stimulate his mind to some fine thinking. An uncompromising democrat, and one who has faith in the present and hope for the future of mankind, he yet feels sorry that 'modern life does not encourage the life of the mind; if the life of the mind is not encouraged then inevitably civilization deteriorates, the race deteriorates and ultimately both collapse in a big cataclysm'. If he is addressing University audiences he almost instinctively dwells on the vitality of Sanskrit, the nobility of our architecture, the extreme ornamentation of our recent sculpture; the patterns of our culture and the dangers of excluding other cultures from our study. He even develops interesting formulas as he did while addressing the University of Saugar: 'Every process of exclusion means lack of culture; every process of inclusion indicates growth.' A good tip for judging the culture of an individual or a nation! In fact, the history of our own country illustrates the truth of Nehru's formula. This country progressed when it opened its doors to other cultures and assimilated them and it decayed when it developed exclusiveness. On another occasion he is amused to watch people talk loudly of culture. In his judgement they are not cultured at all and culture to him 'first of all is not loud, it is quiet, it is restrained, it is tolerant.' He judges the culture of a person 'by a gesture, by a phrase, or more especially by his life generally.' At Saugar, he explains, in very refreshing terms, the function of a University: it is to produce creative minds. But then he knows that creative minds cannot be manufactured by a University. 'What it can do' and he speaks like a first-rate educationist, 'is to provide an environment in which creativeness and vitality of mind and body have a place and can prosper'.

But what does he see around him? He is addressing the University of Allahabad and does some plain speaking: 'when I look around me, I see not an atmosphere of work, not a psychology of things being done, but only talk, only criticism, and running down and finding fault, petty factions and the like. I see them in all grades, above and below, the younger generation and the older generation, everywhere'. All this is expressed in general terms, and then comes the personal approach, the uneasy thought of his advancing age and the few years left for work. There is no self-pity or unbecoming reference to his own achievements, no undue modesty either, but plain facts! 'I may have only a few years to live and the only ambition that I have is that to the end of my days I shall work my hardest and then when I have done my job there is no need to bother about me further. It is the job and the work that count, not thinking and shouting about
people who have done the job and gone. So I shall go on doing my job as best I can.' This loud thinking and introspection is not merely a slap on the cheek of those of his own generation, who might have put a high premium on their own achievements but a gentle rebuke to the youth who, with a delightful and amusing naiveté, proclaim themselves the hope of the future. He diverts their attention from the man to the work. This must have put them to shame and sent them to their desk, for more work. Their love and affection for him and the thought that he will only be with them for a few more years must have incidentally awakened them to an awareness of their responsibility. Indeed the address is intended to achieve that effect. For his faith in them is deep and abiding.

University youth, whether at home or abroad, stirs his mind equally and he loves to give them a jolt and occasion in them some hard thinking. At Columbia University in America he asks the Americans feverishly preparing for war: 'Must the 20th century differ from primitive barbarism only in the destructive efficacy of the weapons that man's ingenuity has invented for man's destruction?' But he does not stop there; he makes a constructive suggestion and that, in the name of Mahatma Gandhi. He misses no opportunity to spread his master's message. He says 'I do believe in accordance with my master's teaching that there is another way to meet this situation and solve the problem that faces us'. He speaks of ends and means, quite extraordinary for a statesman of the 20th century and says that 'truth should guide our actions as otherwise we get caught up in a vicious circle of evil when one evil action leads to another.'

It is at the University of California that he really grows very lyrical and forgets the boundaries that divide him from Americans. He puts himself in tune with the spirit of the place and allows the past to crowd in upon him. For he knows the sequestered walls of the University will, at any rate ought to, provide the meeting place of various cultures and put us in the main stream of human consciousness. The rough and tumble of life are forgotten and he remembers the best that has been thought and done in the world and while giving expression to his reactions his prose gains a rare imaginative quality:

'As I stand here in the beautiful campus of this University, surrounded by the peace and beauty of nature and the creative genius of man, the conflicts and troubles of the world seem far away. The past crowds in upon me, the past of Asia, of Europe and of America and standing on this razor's edge of the present I try to peep into the future. I see his repeated martyrdom and crucifixion but I see also the spirit of man rising again and again and triumphing over every adversity. Let us look at this perspective of history, gain wisdom and courage from it and not be oppressed too much by the burden of the past and of the present. We are the heirs of all these ages that have gone before us and it has been given to us to play our part during a period of great transition in this
world. That is a privilege and a responsibility and we should accept it without fear or apprehension.'

He does not dole out advice to youth but stirs their depths and arouses them to action.

**Tributes to Gandhiji**

But it is Gandhi’s death which showed the supreme heights to which he could rise in public speaking.

Within a couple of hours after the assassination of Gandhiji, Nehru had to pull himself together and speak a few words of comfort to his countrymen who were enveloped in darkness. He breaks the news in the tenderest of words. There is no rhetoric, no pre-meditation and he speaks straight from the heart:

‘Friends and Comrades, the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu, as we call him, the Father of the Nation, is no more.’

Suddenly he checks himself and realises that he lives for ever and so he says ‘I am sorry to say that’. But he is after all human and the feelings of utter desolation rush to his mind and like a forlorn child longing for its departed mother he speaks in the language of our common clay. To talk high and mighty doesn’t become this occasion and Nehru isn’t guilty of it. He only says: ‘We will not see him as we have seen him for very many years. We will not rush to him for advice and seek solace from him and that is a terrible blow, not to me only but to millions and millions in this country. And it is a little difficult to soften the blow by any other advice that I or anyone else can give you.’

So, he doesn’t pretend or venture to comfort the country in its great loss. He throws himself in their midst; for the loss is his as well as the country’s. It is only after he has prepared them to receive the loss by telling them that he himself has no one to go for advice or solace that his hearers all over the country are with him in that terrible moment. For otherwise a loss like this would have stunned them beyond measure and words won’t do.

After this first hushed experience of sorrow, he slowly gathers himself, feels slightly strong and endeavours to share the strength he has mustered with his countrymen. He says he was wrong in saying that the light has gone out. For the light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years and a thousand years later, the light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts.

Starting from an utter sense of sorrow, poignancy, and desolation, he lifts himself and his hearers to a height from which they can look serenely. Now, as a leader, he must use this occasion to warn the people against any hasty act which will be ruinous to the country.
And he says, 'A mad man has put an end to his life, for I can only call him mad who did it. ... We must face this poison, we must root out this poison ... not madly or badly but rather in the way that our beloved teacher taught us to face them.' He drives home the point, after feeling his way and gaining some confidence: 'The first thing to remember now is that none of us dare misbehave because he is angry ... for he believed that Gandhiji's spirit 'looks upon us and sees us; nothing would displease his soul so much as to see that we have indulged in any small behaviour or any violence'. Far from being angry with the assassin, his heart only imagine themselves as being watched by Gandhiji's spirit and believe that they should not do anything which would hurt his soul. Besides, he tells them: 'A great disaster is a symbol to remember all the big things of life and forget the small things of which we have thought too much'—again, a reminder that the disaster should call for the utmost sacrifice from all. So when they are still sorrow-stricken, he asks them to pray. And what kind of prayer is it? It is to 'take a pledge and dedicate ourselves to the truth and to the cause for which this great countryman of ours lived and for which he has died.'

Here is a true leader of men. Sorrow moves him as it does any frail mortal; but he pulls himself and lifts himself as well as others who are similarly smitten with sorrow and when they are feeling elevated he warns them against petty squabbles, for the spirit of their departed leader would frown upon them and therefore they should dedicate themselves to the truth and to the cause for which this great countryman of theirs lived and died.

Three days after the assassination of Gandhi, he admits: 'I have a sense of utter shame both as an individual and as the head of the Government of India that we should have failed to protect the greatest treasure that we possessed.'

From the moment of Gandhi's death, he is perpetually thinking in terms of being lightless. He can sustain that image of light and darkness, of warmth and cold with great success in spite of the fact he is speaking extempor and under stress of emotion:

'A glory has departed and the sun that warmed and brightened our lives has set and we shiver in the cold and dark. Yet he would not have us feel this way. After all that glory we saw for all these years, that man, with the divine fire, changed us also—and such as we are, we have been moulded by him during these years; and out of this divine fire, many of us also took a small spark which strengthened and made us work to some extent on the lines that he fashioned.'

'All we know is that there was a glory and that it is no more. All we know is that for the moment there is darkness, not so dark certainly because when we look into our hearts we still find the living flame which he lighted there. And if those living flames exist, there will not be darkness in this land and we shall be able, with our effort remembering him
and following his path, to illumination this land again, small as we are, but still with the fire that he instilled within.'

But he must steel the nation's heart and put it on the right track and that should be done not in cold, philosophical language but in very human terms:

'We mourn him; we shall always mourn him, because we are human and cannot forget our beloved Master. But I know that he would not like us to mourn him. No tears came to his eyes when his dearest and closest passed away—only a firm resolve to persevere, to serve the great cause that he had chosen. So he would chide us if we merely mourn him. That is a poor way of doing homage to him. The only way is to express our determination, to pledge ourselves anew, to conduct ourselves in a befitting manner and to dedicate ourselves to the great task which he undertook and which he accomplished to such a large extent.'

Sarojini and Radhakrishnan, two of our renowned speakers also spoke on this occasion and they were conventional funeral orations. Radhakrishnan is heavy, perhaps scholarly, and there is no personal urgency anyway. Radhakrishnan says:

'This puny figure of seven stone was a giant among men, measured by the greatness of his soul. By his side, other men, very important and famous men, big in their own way, big in their space and time, look small and insignificant. His profound sincerity of spirit, his freedom from hatred and malice, his mastery over himself, his human, friendly, all-embracing charity, his strong conviction, which he shared with the great ones of history that the martyrdom of the body is nothing compared with the defilement of the soul, a conviction which he successfully put to the test in many dramatic situations and now in this final act of surrender, show the impact of religion on life, the impact of the eternal values on the shifting problems of the world of time.'

This is the opening paragraph of Dr. Radhakrishnan's speech two days after Gandhi's death. Except perhaps for the first two sentences which are short and somewhat free from pedantry the whole paragraph (there is just one more sentence in it and it occupies a space thrice as much as that of the first two sentences, put together) is an attempt on the part of a professor of Philosophy to illustrate something he has been expounding all his life, namely the impact of religion on life. And it is stated in the philosophical jargon. What we miss is the freshness and the first-hand response which are so conspicuous not merely in the speeches of Nehru but in those of quite a few foreigners notably Mr. E. M. Forster and Mr. Clement Atlee, both of whom spoke so feelingly after Gandhi's assassination. Do all charms fly at the mere touch of cold Philosophy?

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu who was associated with Gandhiji quite closely for many years fares no better than Dr. Radhakrishnan (his speech, at least, is scholarly and respectable) and that is shocking from a close
associate and poet. The following extracts from her tribute to Gandhi will speak for themselves:

'Some of us have been so closely associated with him that our lives and his life were an integral part of one another. Some of us are indeed dead with him. Some of us, indeed, had vivisection performed on us by his death, because the fibres of our being, our muscles, veins and hearts and blood were all intertwined with his life . . .'

'Of what avail will be our faith, our loyalty to him, if we dared to believe that all is lost because his body is gone from our midst? Are we not here, his heirs, his spiritual descendants, legatees of his great ideals, successors of his great work? . . .'

'We are his living symbols; we are his soldiers, we are the carriers of his banner before an embattled world. Our banner is truth, our shield is non-violence, our sword is the sword of the spirit that conquers without blood. Shall we not follow in the footsteps of our master, shall we not obey the mandates of our father; shall we not be his soldiers, and carry his battle to triumph; shall we not give the world the completed message of Mahatma Gandhi? Though his voice will not speak again, have we not a million, million voices to bear his message to the world? And not only in this world of our contemporaries, but in the world, generation after generation?'

'Here and now, I for one before the world that listens to my quivering voice, pledge myself as I pledged myself more than thirty years ago, to the service of the Mahathma.' And the last paragraph:

'May the soul of my master, my leader, my father, rest not in peace. Not in peace, my father, do not rest. Do not rest. Keep us to our pledges. Give us the strength to fulfil our promise, your heirs, your descendants, your students, guardians of your dreams, fulfilling of India's destiny.'

A very breath-taking speech! And what a torment it must have been to the discerning section of her audience! May be the speaker is sincere but she loses herself in the fine frenzy (I use the word advisedly) of her eloquence, and fails very sadly to achieve any effect. It must have been a torture to hear the speech as it is distressing to read it now on the printed page. Indeed it is a warning for young aspirants to fame as speakers as how not to make a speech. To say the least, it is very regrettable.

Compared with Radhakrishnan and Sarojini, Nehru's speech is a fine example of a deep tension in the mind and in the heart and the tension has been sufficiently externalised—it is a feeling of desolation, of intense sorrow and at the same time of the keen realisation that the only important thing in life is to go on. We expect it of a great leader. He must use disaster and death as a means of animating people to high thinking and noble living. By so doing what looked like a deep disaster has been converted, not by rhetorical devices but by the true voice of feeling, into one of proud thankfulness: 'All of us sense
that feeling of having been left desolate and forlorn. I do not know when we shall be able to get rid of it, and yet together with that feeling there is also a feeling of proud thankfulness that it has been given to us of this generation to be associated with this mighty person. In ages to come, centuries and may be millenia after us, people will think of this generation when this man of God trod on earth and will think of us who, however small, could also follow his path and tread the holy ground where his feet had been. Let us be worthy of him.'

His sorrow-stricken statements and immediate corrections (which look like contradictions) show the deeply agitated state of his mind but no betrayal of uncontrolled emotion. It is demonstration of the working of the two layers of his being—the surface and the deeper sides of his nature. On the surface he shares all our emotions, all our weaknesses and impulses but deep at heart there is the patriot, the interantionalist and the great humanist.

First he says 'the light has gone out' and soon he thinks he is wrong in saying so for 'that light will shine . . . . . for immemorial ages.'

In the second speech on Gandhi, first he says that 'we mourn him, we shall always mourn him, and cannot forget our beloved Master.' And soon, 'But I know that he would not like us to mourn . . .'

Again: 'He is gone and all over India there is a feeling of having been left desolate and forlorn. All of us sense that feeling and . . . yet together with that feeling there is also a feeling of proud thankfulness that it has been given to us of this generation to be associated with this mighty person.'

In the third speech: 'Many of us are moved to grief and this is proper and natural.'

Soon he asks: ' . . . why should we grieve! Do we grieve for him or for something else . . . . Let us grieve rather for ourselves, for our . . . weaknesses . . .

'Our pillar of strength is no more.' But why do we say that? His image is enshrined in the hearts of the million men and women who are present here today . . .

'Gandhiji used to observe silence for one day in every week. Now that voice is silenced for ever and there is unending silence. And yet that voice resounds in our ears and in our hearts.'

These agitated utterances have such a ring of sincerity and sound as though his whole being is speaking. Even on the printed page where we read his tributes to Gandhi's memory we see blood for ink, recalling to us the words of Alcibiades on Socrates:

'Besides when we listen to anyone else talking, however eloquent he is, we don't really care a damn what he says; but when we listen to you or to someone else repeating what you've said, even if he puts it ever so badly and never mind whether the person who is listening is man, woman or child, we are absolutely staggered and bewitched. And speaking for myself, gentlemen, if I wasn't afraid you'd tell me I was
completely bottled, I’d swear on oath what an extraordinary effect his words have had on me and still do, if it comes to that. For the moment I hear him speak I am smitten by a kind of sacred rage worse than any corybant, and my heart jumps into my mouth and the tears start into my eyes—oh, and not only me but lots of them.’

One wonders whether anyone, Indian or foreigner can read Nehru’s tributes to Gandhi’s memory without his eyes being wet or at least without a catch in his throat. Of course, the subject, the speaker, the occasion, the manner, all have contributed to this great effect. There are hardly any parallels to them in all the collection of world’s funeral orations from remote antiquity to the present day; and these with some other speeches of Nehru will remain the classics of English language.

In the Parliament

The Pre-Independence revolutionary has become the Post-Independence Prime Minister and as Prime Minister he still addresses mass meetings besides expert committees and international conferences. But as head of a democratic Government he must also be a good parliamentarian and the art of the good parliamentary speaker is different from that of the orator. Even in British Parliament unlike the speeches of days gone by, those now delivered have little literary merit. For in the present pressure of work to be done, there is no leisure and the finding of time in the past must have been due to an ‘inadequate appreciation of parliamentary responsibilities.’ The business of the nation, like the business of an industrial company should surely be determined by interchange of ideas as concisely and accurately and with the minimum of verbal display. There is so much to do and even with the quickest despatch so much will be left undone. Judged by this standard, as Mr Lloyd George said: ‘The finest eloquence is that which gets things done, the worst is that which delays them.’

When pressure was brought by Members of Parliament to appoint a Commission to go into the conditions of Scheduled Castes and tribes in the country, it was open to the Prime Minister to accept the suggestion and charge the proposed commission, in very high-sounding terms, with the task of recommending ways and means of improving their conditions, all the while knowing that the appointment of a Commission was the best means of shelving the real question. But he means business and he tells the House very frankly: ‘It is easy enough to appoint a Commission. But as the House knows, the appointment of a Commission is sometimes only a way out of a difficulty, for it makes people think they are doing something when they really are not doing much. We do not deliberately want to delude the public when we know that we don’t have the wherewithal to do much good.’

The tribes of Assam came in for particular discussion and he analyses the general reactions to the tribes and states them in clear terms. ‘We have,’ he says, ‘treated them either as specimens for anthropological
examination and analysis or ignored the fact that they are something different requiring special treatment, and have attempted forcibly to absorb them to the normal pattern of social life. The first is insulting, the second is wrong. Nehru’s solution to the problem is more imaginative, but most practical. He would give them means of communication, schools, health relief, cottage industries and so on and would not interfere with their way of life but want to help them live it.

Here is a very controversial issue, namely, the question of linguistic states and he does not take sides but true to his role as educator of public thinking he presents both sides of the problem so that the country may discuss the issue at length and come to a decision without endangering its future progress. He says:

‘The idea of linguistic provinces will intensify provincial feelings and that, undoubtedly, will weaken the concept of a united India. That is one aspect.’

‘Another equally important aspect is that we have certain very important languages in India. A language by itself may be good or bad, but round that language are clustered certain ways of living and sometimes ways of thought. It is but right that this particular aspect of cultural manifestation should have an opportunity of full growth.’

After this the choice is not simple to anyone who is honest with himself, but the tone is set for genuine differences of opinion until an agreeable formula is hammered out.

‘The same clarity of thought, sympathy, understanding and realistic approach to problems is seen when he replies to fears expressed by M.P.s about the possible abuse of the Preventive Detention Bill, when it became an Act. The Prime Minister goes into the smallest details and provides for all unforeseen circumstances and thus carries the House with him when he explains:

‘It is the State Governments and our services who have actually to deal with difficult situations like these. A district magistrate almost in all cases except in a grave emergency, has to consult the Home Minister concerned. If he does not refer the matter to the Home Minister because he has to act quickly, you can always provide in the law that the Home Minister be consulted within a period, say, of twelve days. The responsibility then becomes that of the State Government. You can also provide for a reference of the case to be made to the Advisory Council which can be assisted by eminent judges or persons with some experience of the judiciary. You can also provide for the Government of India to be informed of the action taken. You may vary the provisions, add to them and change them if you want to. But I submit that there are enough safeguards to prevent injustice being done. After all I can never guarantee that injustice will never be done. In any case, the Hon. Members can always draw the attention of the wide world to the injustice, as they have done in the past. I shall certainly welcome it if they do. The members of the State Legislature can do likewise.’
There is no eloquence and the occasion does not demand it either, but eloquence, of which he is certainly capable, would have evaded the real point at issue and might have brought forth resistance to the passing of the Bill, but after his convincing explanation and provision of ample safeguards against injustice being done, the House gave its assent to a Bill which, looked like an outrageous violation of the basic principles of democracy and it was carried because of the confidence the House reposed in its leader. The leader was so honest that he would not give false promises that there won’t be miscarriage of justice. All that he says is that it is most unlikely and that necessary safeguards would be provided.

We see the same honesty and disarming frankness when he replies to criticism of MP’s, about the failure of his Government in achieving self-sufficiency in food. A Member of Parliament reminds him of his determination to put an end to all imports of food by April 1952; without making an ingenious attempt to defend himself he admits that he made that statement in all sincerity and with every intention of trying his best and adds, much to the discomfiture of his critic, ‘I regret, however that my words have been falsified and I feel thoroughly ashamed that what was almost a pledge to the country has been broken.’

But the most ruthless let-down of himself as head of the Government was yet to come. He was explaining the tremendous refugee problem and the brutalities that followed in the wake of partition and his own failure to cope with this difficult problem: ‘In fact I have often wondered why the people of India put up with people like me who are connected with the governing of India after all that has happened during the last few months. I am not quite sure that if I had not been in the government I would put up with my government.’ It must be remembered there was, during that period, mass-killing of Hindus and Muslims, molestation of women and, to top it all, the assassination of the greatest man of our time. So it isn’t mock-modesty but a real heart-search. But the fact that even his political adversaries didn’t turn it back on Nehru in their criticism of the Government shows that they still had faith in his leadership and cared for his feelings. Hadn’t he hurt himself sufficiently for his critics to do anything in that direction?

Nehru has seldom been assailed by opponents to feel provoked and come out with his rapier thrusts or resort to passionate self-defence for it is said that the more an orator is attacked the more he thrives. But when occasionally somebody treats a serious matter lightly he is provoked and speaks sharply to put down loose, irresponsible talk in Parliament. He says, ‘There has been criticism of our policy but I have waited in vain these two days for one concrete suggestion....’ ‘Brave words? Yes; forensic eloquence? Yes; melodrama? Yes; but no constructive suggestion.’ On another occasion he warns the House: ‘Surely it is necessary for us to function as a mature nation.
We are not children; we are not in a debating Society. 'Melodrama does not become this Honourable House. We are the Parliament of India and have to face great problems; we cannot afford to adopt melodramatic attitude, and repeat the slogans of the market place here.'

When he is accused of not giving enough publicity to India’s foreign policy he replies 'Let not honourable members imagine that the Government of India can sit on a high perch and deliver humilies to the world. That India should take charge of the world is surely not only gross presumption on our part but also inconsistent with the way responsible governments function.' He feels very humble before the problems of the world and he wants his countrymen to take the problems of India and look at them in the context of the world. But if a Member of Parliament is so naive as to want the frontiers of his country to be somewhere in East Africa, Malaya, Burma and quotes Bismark in support of his stand Nehru can hit hard: 'I am sure that the Honourable Member himself spends his time mostly in another century. I am sure he will find sooner or later that not only has Bismark been long dead but his politics are still more dead'. Nehru is the last statesman to confirm the people in their own prejudices and hatreds.

If he snubs irresponsible Members of Parliament neither does he believe in placating the masses although their welfare has been the main preoccupation of his life: 'With all my admiration and love for democracy I am not prepared to accept the statement that the largest number of people are always right'. Besides 'Democracy wants today the good things of today' without 'weighing the demands of tomorrow' which should always be done when you are building up the country. The practical person, he says, 'looks at the tip of his nose and sees little beyond and the result is he is stumbling all the time'.

Unlike the commonplace orator he never uses his speeches to whip up the frenzy of the crowds or of parliament against other countries and peoples. To the kind of loose talk about American imperialism and American dollars in a hostile fashion he says, 'you cannot condemn or ignore the whole nation just because you don’t approve of some aspect of the myriad shades of American life.'

He even justifies the Great Powers playing an important role in world affairs and does not feel aggrieved that India is not included among great powers. They are nations with great resources, he maintains.

While he recognises their importance he says he is not interested in power blocs; he is only concerned with 'my policy on each specific issue'. He, if any statesman, has understood the meaning of foreign policy in the modern world: 'Let us not imagine that foreign policy is like a game of chess played by superior statesmen sitting in their chancellories. It is much more complicated than that, for it is governed by the aspirations of hundreds of millions of people whose economic needs and objectives are motivated by a variety of causes.'
When China's interference in Tibet is condemned in the United Nations he does not want to indulge in condemnation for it would have meant 'reducing the chances of a settlement by peaceful methods.' But he does not hesitate to make known very politely that China's approach is not proper: 'The Government of India can only express their deep regret that in spite of friendly and disinterested advice repeatedly tendered by them the Chinese Government should have decided to seek a solution of the problem of their relations with Tibet by force instead of by the slower and more enduring method of peaceful approach.'

Although he denounces imperialism he has the courage to tell his people at a time when it did not make for popularity to favour England: 'Since the war years I have nurtured considerable respect for England because I like brave people fighting against odds and the British people have fought against heavy odds.' When, after the division of the country, Members of Parliament including Congressmen suggested that an exchange of population between India and Pakistan would bring about a lasting solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem, Nehru analyses the proposed solution thus:

'It means acknowledging our inability to cope with any national problem in a civilised manner. This brutal and barbarous approach would be unique in the annals of History... such proposals shame us in the eyes of the world. They show that we are narrow, petty-minded, parochial bigots who talk of democracy and secularism but who, in fact, are totally incapable of even thinking in terms of the world or of this great country. This is a proposition which, if it is followed, will mean the ruin of India and the annihilation of all that we stand for and have stood for. I repeat that we will resist such a proposition with all our strength, we will fight it in houses, in fields and in market places. It will be fought in the Council Chambers and the streets, for we shall not let India be slaughtered at the altar of bigotry.' Here is a statesman who leads and not just accepts the lead of interested and influential sections or of angry multitude as a measure of expediency. He exercises a civilizing, ennobling influence on his people. When Churchill exhorted his countrymen to fight the enemy on the land, in the air, over the sea he was no doubt speaking rhetorically but appealing to the patriotic feelings of his countrymen and the words are only valid in a given context. But when Nehru speaks out his determination to resist the exchange of population his noble rhetoric will ring true in all countries and at all times. There is hardly anything in his public or parliamentary speeches which will 'date' and of which he or his countrymen might be ashamed in a different set of circumstances. Germans of the war-time have today become England's allies and Mr Churchill's rhetoric, called forth by the passing enmity of Germans, will be amusing or embarrassing to those concerned and might only interest the student of the history of oratory today. Nehru endures where Churchill 'dates' for he has his eye not on winning his case in the immediate present and for his own country.
In domestic as well as international dealings he has constantly appealed for decency, tolerance and friendship: 'I do not think it is right for us—either as individuals or as a nation—to follow a path which coarsens and degrades us and which leads to the international vulgarity we see all around.' He even goes so far as to say: 'All of us, wherever we might be, have to bear in some measure the responsibility for the state of the world today. Our most urgent need today is charity of thought and the touch of healing.'

It is for the touch of healing that he appeals to the statesmen of the world. When there is a debate on Korea in Parliament his agonised heart thobs for the Koreans who are dying and desolate and if proof be needed he quotes from a letter received from a Korean lady only that morning. She says 'My country is sick and dying of cold, disease and starvation...' It is not mere rhetorical pleading. He himself feels it deep down in his heart and we can see it from the concrete images that he evokes in the MPs and he does so by allowing them to get into the chambers of his mind and heart: 'As I am listening to the speeches of Hon. Members, many pictures floated before my mind, pictures of the Korean battlefields, of marching armies and dying people, of statesmen holding earnest converse in a room in Washington to find a way out of the present predicament and countless other pictures.' All this on the floor of the Parliament! And by doing so he gives his audience the thrill of being witnesses to the workings of a complex personality. They witness also the warmth and softness of his heart, that sympathy with human suffering and that hatred of cruelty and injustice wherever they might take place. An English friend, Horace Alexander, not long ago wrote of Nehru: 'And in my best moments I know that five seconds of the searing white heat on his face are worth more than all the weary hairsplitting of the men who have never been moved to wrath by oppression.'

Some General Remarks

One of the admittedly greatest speakers of modern times, Mr Churchill, the man who, some believe, spoke his way to fame and victory, wielded the English language with great effect. His speeches have 'the march and speed, the flash and thud, the rumble and crash of a cavalry display with its traditional gaiety of lance and pennant.' He is the kind of speaker (like the kind of poet who was guilty of the dissociation of sensibility) who would distract our attention from what he says to the manner of saying it. So long as a thing was told effectively it did not matter whether it was true or false, whether it would 'date' or endure for ages. All that mattered was winning the case and oratory served as handmaiden to this 'star performer in political melodrama.' Mr Churchill, for example, opposed all progressive reforms like self-rule for India; opposed the unification of Ireland; did not work for any economic and social improvement of the poor in his own country; and described
Gandhi, the greatest man of our age, as a half-naked fakir striding the viceregal steps to hold talks with the representatives of his Majesty’s Government on equal terms. The Labour Party in his own country remembers his compliments to Mussolini and even to Hitler for the 'strong arm' methods the dictators had made so effective against Socialists in their respective countries. He says of Hitler and Mussolini in his Into Battle, ‘Both in the early stages rendered great service to their countries’ and later when they stood against England especially when he was at the helm of affairs, they were devils incarnate! It is interesting to note, in passing, that Nehru didn’t want to have anything to do with the dictators—that was to soil his hands: at a time when India was waging a life and death struggle for freedom with the British Government he turned down an invitation of Mussolini to visit him although he was in Italy waiting to board his plane. To go back to Churchill, his efforts were prepared and memorised long in advance and he has ‘confessed to having undergone agonised searchings of heart about the best way to link on his own speech to that to which he was supposed to be replying.’ Nehru’s speeches on the contrary, have, almost always, been extempore. Great orators did not get up on every occasion to speak but held themselves in reserve. Not so with Nehru. He has had to speak the most as revolutionary, as Prime Minister, foreign minister, as president of this or that conference and as an indispensable personage at all important functions, social and official. Indeed there is hardly a world’s statesman who has had to make so many speeches as Nehru. We are told that it is an unusual day when he does not make at least one speech. Somebody unkindly, but not wrongly altogether, described him as being, in effect, the Chief Publicity officer of the Policies of the Congress as well as of the Government. And his speeches reflect the anxiety of a patriot who has assumed the role of an educator of men and women, who looked up to him for a lead in all matters from the mode of dressing to the manner of finding individual salvation. That is why Dr Radhakrishnan sympathetically observed 'we hear it said that Nehru speaks too often. But leaders have to spend a good part of their time capturing the imagination of the people.' Here again it is a very curious phenomenon that the things which actually affect the lives of a people and the destiny of a veritable continent have to be put across in a language which neither the speaker nor the hearers have learnt at the mother’s knee. By force of circumstances Nehru, of course, has an inwardsness with the English language but his speeches in English are quite often addressed to men who have no gift to enjoy the romance of words and he was, when addressing rural audiences in non-Hindi speaking areas, at the mercy of semi-literate translators. All this must have naturally imposed certain limitations on his speaking, that is, whenever he spoke in English but not when he employed Hindustani and of that nothing will be said in this paper. But then, the days of oratory, in the grand Victorian manner (we are told that Queen Victoria protested to Gladstone: ‘Sir,
you address me as if I were a public meeting’) are over. The great names of the early part of this century and of the preceding years, known for speaking in periods and in the true oratorical vein, might today leave us cold. As someone said ‘people gather to hear politicians even with indifferent voices and no gift of phrase', provided they have personality and a reputation for integrity or sacrifice. The speaker of today, we are told, must voice forth the people’s aspirations and ideals, and those that have heard Gandhiji, agree that he had a feeble voice and did not care for effect and yet his words were charged with such inner fire that few could move the people so well as he. His mere presence was enough to affect the people deeply.

This is true of Nehru as well although his speeches could still he heard and read with respect on their own merit regardless of the speaker’s standing. He has never aimed at making the worse appear the better or vice-versa for scoring a point to enhance his prestige or for crushing his adversary. Prof. N. G. Ranga truly said that he has not seen another such first-rate and delightful dialectician so completely ignorant of the need to please or defeat anyone! Besides he has never been known to wave his hand, throw himself forward or backward and thump the table when he speaks. It is a steady voice. Prof. D. P. Mukerji has perhaps paid the finest tribute so far to his voice. He says: “It is probably the most cultured voice in India. Tagore’s was a piping one and often ended in a shrill. Gandhiji carried persuasion through directness. Mrs Besant had a feminine rondeur; Mrs Naidu’s was clear and melodious; Sastri’s had grace; Surendranath’s had thunder; Malaviya’s was mellifluous, but Jawaharlal has the somewhat cloudy overtones of a cultured man’s voice without being gorgeous. That voice speaks with the sensitive hesitancy of thought process and a slight sensuality that is not quite male and yet must be very attractive for the female. It is definitely melancholy even when it lashes out in anger*. There is not a single false note or accent, no woolly sentiment, no dramatic emphasis, no play-acting about it. But he adds he does not care for speeches which are too unprepared for his donnish taste. One cannot understand with what justification a statement like this can be made. It is true Nehru is given to elaboration, but then when he speaks about men and affairs it is not in black and white but it is a ‘fascinating complex of human characteristics that he delights to disentangle.’ Almost always his efforts are attended with success but not always.

If the speech is proceeding with his satisfaction and if he thinks he has not sufficiently impressed his point on the audience it will last an hour or two. Very often ‘its length will not improve it’, for he goes forwards and backwards and rambles a lot.

* D. P. Mukerji, P. 174. Nehru Abhinandan Granth
sunburst" and he will not finish without some lofty declamation. The speech delivered on the eve of the departure of the Mountbattens from Delhi is an example of this. At a public meeting arranged in honour of their departure he is of course genuinely moved and referring to the various parties they had had and the words of praise they received, he says they did not affect him very much. They were ‘rather formal on the whole.’ He is averse to speaking on this occasion and yet tries to spin a speech, which is decidedly not among his great speeches. Indeed, it should be quoted as proof of his worst performance in speech-making. In the course of the speech he says: ‘May be we have made many mistakes, you and we. Historians a generation or two hence will perhaps be able to judge whether we have done right or whether we have done wrong. Nevertheless whether we did right or wrong, the test, perhaps the right test, is whether we tried to do right or did not, for if we did try to do right with all our might and main, then it does not very much matter although it does matter in the sense that it turned out to be a wrong thing. I cannot judge our motives, but I do believe that we did try to do right and I am convinced that we tried to do the right thing by India, and therefore many of our sins will be forgiven us and many of our errors also.’

Surely for triteness of expression, monotony of tone, most exasperating repetition of commonplace words and ideas without any attempt at heightening the argument; and for looseness of construction there is hardly a parallel in all Nehru’s collection of speeches although in most of them there is elaboration of an important idea, illustration of general statements, and repetitions, which are necessary for the kind of audience he is addressing.

But if the audience have the patience to sit through this dull cloudy weather as they did on this occasion and as they always do whenever Nehru speaks, they will not miss to witness the brightness of the sun and feel his warmth. For after the trite remarks comes the graceful expression of a genuinely felt emotion when he apostrophises Lady Mountbatten:

‘To you, Madam, I should like to address myself also. 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 which was even rarer; those gifts ... and this amazing mixture of qualities resulted in a radiant personality and in the healer’s touch.’

All these are shorter, simpler, and easily grasped sentences and don’t smack of stuffy academic or premeditated quality. Even his words are concrete, rather than abstract, familiar rather than far fetched, single rather than circumlocutious, short instead of long.

It is such words, phrases and sentences of Nehru that have found their way to common use. Static and dynamic life; a tryst with destiny;
emergence of India in world affairs; dynamic neutrality; international
gangsterism and international vulgarity; co-existence; subliminal adver-
tising; looking at the world with blood-shot eyes; this generation is
sentenced to hard labour; we cannot be enemies for ever; the light has
gone out of our lives; success often comes to those that dare and act;
seldom to the timid; Asia is renascent; we cannot be enemies for ever
(with Pakistan); India has nothing to conceal; etc., etc., Educated
men in India not merely know them to be Nehru's but can very
ten assign them to their contexts and, what is more, have learnt
to cherish their significance in their daily lives. In this respect he
is rather with Lincoln than with Burke, Sheridan or Churchill who will
be remembered as orators and platform heroes. Some of their greatest
triumphs in oratory are connected with the tradition of thrills, of electric
stocks, of drum beating and of the pomp of a Mughal Durbar. Cicero,
himself the greatest orator of his time, wrote in his treatise, De Oratore:
as to what, in his view the consummately accomplished orator should be
He must not be the mere rhetorician; neither should he be the “mere
technical lawyer or the keen political partisan, but he should be the man
of thorough education and perfect taste who can speak on all subjects of
the fullness of his mental store with variety and copiousness.” Cicero was
primarily a man of letters and his speeches were literary masterpieces
although he was ‘wordy’ at times and ‘over-ornate’ on occasions. But
prior to him in ancient Greece was Demosthenes who assiduously
activated the art of public speaking. After the glory of Greece and
Rome, we witness what is called the Golden Age of religious oratory in the
Reformation period. After the Reformation in England the gift of
cloquence was considered a passport to high office. Later, it was the
question of war against the American colonies, the misdeeds of British
proconsuls in India, the French Revolutionaries, and those who were
associated with Catholic Emancipation, Abolition of the Corn Laws and
Liberation of the Blacks. In modern democracies we are ‘deluged by
veritable avalanche of insistent verbiage’. But this ‘mass loquacity’ shows
no progress in quality. Inspite of the vulgar uses to which eloquence is
put and in spite of the glamour that surrounds a successful speaker in
popular circles, for a speaker today to make his way in the world it is
not enough if he talks well but it is necessary that he must be a man of
action. Today before a speaker can be listened to, he must have attracted
attention either by reaching a high political office (although by the methods
he reaches these offices he quite often forfeits the respect of the public), or
by writing a popular book or by exploring an unknown region or by
discovering a mysterious phenomenon or inventing something that
promotes human welfare, that is, by achieving something noteworthy
for the good of mankind. This is a primary condition for attracting an
audience although a man’s success as speaker depends largely on what
he says and how well he says it. The words of William Cowper describe
most aptly such an ideal speaker:
His speech, his action full of grace
And all his Country beaming in his face

This is a healthy development from sophistry and it may be said without exaggeration that Jawaharlal Nehru exemplifies in himself, not merely the recent development in that direction, but some of the best criteria of successful speaking at all times and for this reason his best speeches will always be read along with his masterpieces in writing. And it is a rare achievement.