



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU'S LETTERS AS LITERARY SUB-GENRE

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The epistolary art, like other forms and genres of literature, is a significant and independent genre. It is an autonomous and self-satisfying form and is complete in itself. It is all-embracing genre which combines the strategies and techniques of drama, poetry, fiction and essays. The letter has been used as an effective and visible medium for transformation of ideas and has in the hands of men of genius, achieved a state of magnificence and excellence. We see brilliant specimen of this particular mode in the eighteenth century as well as in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The novels of Richardson employ the epistolary method which is not only a natural one for him and an inevitable one in view of the road but also the appropriate one for novelist concerned with the moment to moment recording of the fluctuations of emotion in the midst of moral struggle. It acts towards the same purpose as does the soliloquy in drama and the stream-of-consciousness in modern fiction. Pamela's and Clarissa's letters take the reader into the heart of the developing situation and enable him to follow with extraordinary immediacy the psychological implications of the working out of the moral pattern. The letters of John Keats, Lord Byron, D. H. Lawrence, Carlyle, Dickens and Charles Lamb are the important signposts and epitomes of artistic excellence through their characteristic tenets differ from one another.

Shakespeare wrote letters in his plays to present an urgent piece of information. In the tragi-comedy "**The Merchant of Venice**", Bassanio received a letter from Antonio. When he read it in his face turned pale. The letter revealed that Antonio could not repay the money in time to the creditor which would entitle him to chop off one pound of flesh from his bosom:

Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried,
my creditors go cruel, my state is very low, my
bond to the Jew is forfeit; and since, in paying
it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are
between you and I, if I might but see you at

my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure
-if your love do not persuade you to come, let
not my letter.¹

It is pertinent to note that Nehru's **Glimpses of World History** displays his wit and wisdom and the synthesis of the basic qualities. Nehru was a man of subtleties and complexities, private individuality and universal humanity. Nehru has woven the dry bone of history with flesh and blood and presented a mighty procession of living men and women of every age. Like Romantic poets, he is a delicate observer of Nature. Nature has been concretely visualised as a biographer writing her own history in a language which is very lucid, humane and analytic:

Nature has a very way of writing, her own
history, in her rocks and stones, and all
who wish to may read it there. It is a kind
of autobiography- that is one's own history.²

The letters of Nehru, in fact, trace the evolution of man from the first simple animal. Nehru explores that with the passage of time the simple animals disappeared from the scene and the complicated ones held the stage which was ultimately to be dominated by the master animal called man. Man is the cousin of ape as well as the monkey. But today he is the master of the world and he makes the animals do what he likes. At best, it is intelligence that separates man from other animals. Nehru observes:

The elephant is big and strong, far stronger
than the little mahaut sitting on his neck.
But the mahaut can think, and because he
can think he becomes the master and the
elephant is his servant.³

An epistolary artist explores the mysteries and uncommon happenings of the world. Nehru's letters display his poetic sensibility coupled with his learning towards science. The artist in its transforms the scientific preparation into a deeper vision of human life. He observes day-to-day affairs with the strategies of a scientist. He presents scientific truth through his letters in a language charged with poetic emotions: Geologists-the people who study the history

of the earth-tell us that this cold spell was
succeeded by a warm spell when it was even
warmer than it is to-day in Europe. Owing to
this warmth, dense forests grew up in Europe.⁴

Nehru sees human life in the light of the earth's revolution. Days and nights are caused by the rotation of the earth round the sun. The scientist observes the reality and the artist sees it in the context of a deeper reality and feels pity for human ignorance. Human beings take a lesson from the ceaseless movement of the earth. They are irregular in their duties. One can find a blending of thought and imagination in Nehru. Nehru's letters mirror his liberal outlook and rational approach. Though Nehru is not bound to any particular tradition yet he remembers the deep faith of the pilgrims marching in thousands singing and cheering 'Ganga Mai Ki Jai' for their morning dip at Sangam on the occasion of Sankranti, the first big day of the Magh Mela forgetting their misery and poverty. Nehru's throws a flood of light on the continuity of the tradition in a lucid manner:

Men may come and men may go, and
governments and empires may lord it
a while and then disappear into the past;
but old tradition continues, and generation
after generation bows down to it.⁵

Nehru is a man of realistic sensibility with the daring flights of imagination. His telescopic insight finds better expression when he juxtaposes destruction and creation like Eliot who puts the past and the present side by side. He observes the theory of conservation of the art of letter writing: "*Generation after generation comes and goes and towns grow into great cities and then crumble away and fresh cities take their place*".⁶ Words like 'comes', 'goes', 'grow' and 'crumble away' point to the balance and survival of the world and it also shows Nehru's optimistic seal charged with reason and logic.

Nehru's letters depict enlightened persons and thinkers of the world such as Mahavira, Buddha, Christ, Confucius, Lao-Tse, Zoroaster, Pythagoras and Gandhi. They were very great believers in ahimsa or non-violence, and were wholly against doing anything which might cause injury to any living being. Good and great deeds have been done in the name of religion. In the name of religion thousands and millions of people have been killed and every possible crime has been committed. But many crimes are caused either by ignorance or by a deliberate attempt to commit an act of irreligiosity. The question posed by the old woman Angela in John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" may be enough to shake the conscience of religious hypocrites who fight even at religious places and on holy days:

St. Agnes : Ah : it is St. Agnes Eve –
Yet men will murder upon holy days....⁷

As a whole **Letters from a Father to His Daughter**, at best, is an account of the early history of the world, from making of the earth to the writing of **The Ramayana** and **The Mahabharata**. But above all, it shows a blending of reality and imagination in Nehru. However, **Glimpses of World History**, at close quarters is a survey of the world history from the beginning of civilization to the nineteen thirties. **A Bunch of old letters**, far and wide, is a study of his letters written to important personalities of his time. It is reference to the past of his life and revives old reminiscences as well as controversies. All these books are written in the form of letters, they are not quite personal in nature and have cosmic appeal. Thus, they precisely bring out the fusion of thought and action, imagination and reality, emotion and intellect, practical dynamism and lofty idealism combined with the intensity of vision.

REFERENCES

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3. J.L. Nehru: *Letters from A Father to His Daughter*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1994, p 5.
4. Op. cit.: *Glimpses of World History*, p. 19.
5. Op. cit.: *Glimpses of World History*, p. 21.
6. Op. cit.: *Glimpses of World History*, p. 28.
7. John Keats: *The Eve of Si. Agnes*, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, 1972, p 24.

