PREFACE TO THE 1962 EDITION

I am glad that a cheap paperback edition of my autobiography is being issued in India. This book was written by me more than a quarter of a century ago. Much of it, therefore, perhaps deals with matters which are no longer of topical interest. But it may still be of general interest to many people in India because it deals with a period of our national struggle in which many of us were personally involved.

People are apt to forget the inner content of that struggle and how it helped in changing the face of India, especially the rural masses. It is out of that struggle that present day India has arisen. The problems today are naturally different from those of a generation ago. But there is a connecting link and, in order to understand the India of today, we have to have some understanding of what preceded it and what gave rise to it.

Many of us were moulded by that struggle and are what we are today as a result of that struggle and the ideals and objectives that governed us then. This is past history now, but sometimes it is worthwhile knowing that past in order to know better the present. Essentially an autobiography is a personal document and therefore it reflects personal views and reactions. But the person who wrote it became merged, to a large extent, in the larger movement and therefore represents, in a large measure, the feelings of many others.

I trust that this book will revive something of the past in the minds of many of those of the newer generation who did not have personal experience of what it describes.

Jawaharlal Nehru

New Delhi
20 February
PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This book was written entirely in prison, except for the post-
script and certain minor changes, from June 1934 to February
1935. The primary object in writing these pages was to occupy
myself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitudes
of gaol life, as well as to review past events in India, with which
I had been connected, to enable myself to think clearly about
them. I began the task in a mood of self-questioning and, to a
large extent, this persisted throughout. I was not writing deli-
berately for an audience, but if I thought of an audience, it
was one of my own countrymen and countrywomen. For foreign
readers I would have probably written differently, or with a
different emphasis, stressing certain aspects which have been
slurred over in the narrative and passing over lightly certain
other aspects which I have treated at some length. Many of
these latter aspects may not interest the non-Indian reader, and
he may consider them unimportant or too obvious for discussion
or debate; but I felt that in the India of today they had a
certain importance. A number of references to our internal
politics and personalities may also be of little interest to the
outsider.

The reader will, I hope, remember that the book was written
during a particularly distressful period of my existence. It bears
obvious traces of this. If the writing had been done under more
normal conditions, it would have been different and perhaps
occasionally more restrained. Yet I have decided to leave it as
it is, for it may have some interest for others in so far as it
represents what I felt at the time of writing.

My attempt was to trace, as far as I could, my own mental
development, and not to write a survey of recent Indian his-
tory. The fact that this account resembles superficially such a
survey is apt to mislead the reader and lead him to attach a
wider importance to it than it deserves. I must warn him, there-
fore, that this account is wholly one-sided and, inevitably,
egotistical; many important happenings have been completely ignored and many important persons, who shaped events, have hardly been mentioned. In a real survey of past events this would have been inexcusable, but a personal account can claim this indulgence. Those who want to make a proper study of our recent past will have to go to other sources. It may be, however, that this and other personal narratives will help them to fill the gaps and to provide a background for the study of hard fact.

I have discussed frankly some of my colleagues with whom I have been privileged to work for many years and for whom I have the greatest regard and affection; I have also criticized groups and individuals, sometimes perhaps rather severely. The criticism does not take away from my respect for many of them. But I have felt that those who meddle in public affairs must be frank with each other and with the public they claim to serve. A superficial courtesy and an avoidance of embarrassing and sometimes distressing questions do not help in bringing about a true understanding of each other or of the problems that face us. Real co-operation must be based on an appreciation of differences as well as common points, and a facing of facts, however inconvenient they might be. I trust, however, that nothing that I have written bears a trace of malice or ill-will against any individual.

I have purposely avoided discussing the issues in India today, except vaguely and indirectly. I was not in a position to go into them with any thoroughness in prison, or even to decide in my own mind what should be done. Even after my release I did not think it worthwhile to add anything on this subject. It did not seem to fit in with what I had already written. And so this ‘autobiographical narrative’ remains a sketchy, personal, and incomplete account of the past, verging on the present, but cautiously avoiding contact with it.

Jawaharlal Nehru

_Badenweiler_

2 January 1936