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Uncharted Territory

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In 1945, our father Kaushal Vajpeyi, a Hindi poet, then just about 30 years old, published his first collection of poems, *Samudra* (Ocean). He belonged to a younger generation of angry and highly politicised poets; one of his poems, a scathing commentary on the last days of Jawaharlal Nehru's administration, was banned from broadcast on All India Radio; another was the subject of a heated debate in the Indian parliament. When Nehru, the young prime minister, returned the next day, he sheepishly acknowledged his mistake by saying, "Why speak, if it is wrong?"

In poem after poem, India's capital New Delhi became a symbol of political delay, rampant corruption and a dehumanised bureaucratic-capitalist complex. In 1962, a so-called "confession" of 20 poems by the poet in *Kurukshetra* magazine, written in 1967, mournfully painted an unflattering picture of India's greatest Parliament House: 

"...In every sky Aborg sky..."

It is drowning from the roof of the Round Building
And keeps on walking
And starts walking
From the roof of the Round Building
It clambers down
And vanishes at last
Into public life...

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In three successive administrations spanning 17 years, elected to power with overwhelming majorities, Nehru and his Congress Party put in place not only the "steel frame" of the Indian Constitution, but also the entire edifice of the functioning Indian state: its legislature, executive, foreign policy, economy and a sense of mission. These institutional and economic commitments to socialism and to state-led economic policy have been jettisoned since 1990, in most respects, India still retains the imprint of his vision, partly because he had laid another reality on his intellectual and moral stature in the 40 years since his death. For better or worse, the "idea of India," as Haul Kothari pointed out in an important book by the same title in 1977, is still pretty much Nehru's idea of India.

But is independent India entering its seventh decade, there seems to be both a popular and a scholarly effort to reassess the career, character and personal life: the friendships and personalities, dynamics and thinking of history's protagonist. We also seem consistently searching for the meaning of the Nehru Years and his first book suggests that he is a gifted and promising historian who refuses to allow the public access to his archives – as if stopping a movie at its climax without watching its denouement, as if stopping a movie at its climax without watching its denouement, as if stopping a movie at its climax; the historian's silence on all historical bombs: Nehru's bizarrely untimely death in a car crash, which occurred the day he had arrived in Delhi to preside over the budget and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. This may be partly because the field of Nehru studies as the founder and leader of the 45 years since his death. For better or worse, the "idea of India," as Haul Kothari pointed out in an important book by the same title in 1977, is still pretty much Nehru's idea of India.

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