

PROSE

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ANIMALS IN PRISON

Jawaharlal Nehru

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (1889-1964), India's first Prime Minister was popular among the children as 'Chacha Nehru'. He was a man of rare sensitivity. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge University, he became a barrister after studying Natural Science and Law and returned to India in 1921. Deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, he joined Indian politics and soon emerged as a leader of the country's youth. However, he was not a mere politician; he was also a dreamer, idealist, humanist, and artist in words as well. His works - *An Autobiography*, *The Discovery of India*, *Glimpses of World History* and *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* - are remarkable for a rare vigour and beauty. They establish him as a master of English prose. While in prison before Independence, he read books, observed nature, dreamt at times, and wrote in his powerful and poetic style about all that he thought and felt. His elegant poetical prose is best captured in his autobiography. The following extract, taken from *An Autobiography*, reveals Nehru's love for Nature. It is remarkable how he derives pleasure from watching different animals and gives respect even to the tiniest animals. The piece is a wonderful example of 'live and let live'.



A. Work in small groups and discuss these questions:

1. Make a list of the birds whose songs are sweet. Do you hear them often? When and where do you hear them?
2. What is the relation between birds and trees? Can you imagine birds without trees?
3. Do you love animals? How do you show your love to them?

ANIMALS IN PRISON

1. For fourteen and a half months I lived in my little cell or room in the Dehra Dun Gaol, and I began to feel as if I was almost a part of it. I was familiar with every bit of it: I knew every mark and **dent** on the whitewashed walls and on the uneven floor and the ceiling with its **moth-eaten rafters**. In the little yard outside I greeted little tufts of grass and odd bits of stone as old friends. I was not alone in my cell, for several colonies of **wasps and hornets** lived there, and many lizards found a home behind the rafters, emerging in the evenings in search of **prey**. If thoughts and emotions leave their traces behind in the physical surroundings, the very air of that cell must be thick with them, and they must cling to every object in that little space.
2. I had had better cells in other prisons, but in Dehra Dun I had one **privilege** which was very precious to me. The gaol proper was a very small one, and we were kept in an old lock-up outside the gaol walls, but within the gaol compound. This place was so small that there was no room to walk about in it, and so we were allowed, morning and evening, to go out and walk up and down in front of the gate, a distance of about hundred yards. We remained in the gaol compound, but this coming outside the walls gave us a view of the mountains and the fields and a public road at some distance. This was not a special privilege for me; it was common for all the A and B class prisoners kept at Dehra Dun. Within the compound, but outside the gaol walls, there was another small building called the European Lock-up. This had no enclosing wall, and a person inside the cell could have a fine view of the mountains and the life outside. European **convicts** and others kept here were also allowed to walk in front of the gaol gate every morning and evening.
3. Only a prisoner who has been confined for long behind high walls can appreciate the extraordinary **psychological** value of these outside walks and open views. I loved these outings, and I did not give them up even during the monsoon, when the rain came down for days in **torrents** and I had to walk in ankle-deep of water. I would have welcomed the outing in any

place, but the sight of the **towering** Himalayas nearby was an added joy which went a long way to removing the weariness of prison. It was my good fortune that during the long period when I had no interviews, and when for many months I was quite alone, I could gaze at these mountains that I loved. I could not see the mountains from my cell, but my mind was full of them and I was ever conscious of their nearness, and a secret **intimacy** seemed to grow between us.

'Flocks of birds have flown high and away;
A solitary drift of cloud, too, has gone, wandering on,
And I sit alone with Ching-ting Peak, towering beyond,
We never grow tired of each other, the mountain and I.'

4. I am afraid I cannot say with the poet, Li T'ai Po, that I never grew weary, even of the mountain; but that was a rare experience, and, as a rule, I found great comfort in its **proximity**. Its solidity and calm looked down upon me with the wisdom of a million years, and mocked at my varying moods and soothed my fevered mind.
5. Spring was very pleasant in Dehra Dun, and it was a far longer one than in the plains below. The winter had **denuded** almost all the trees of their leaves, and they stood naked and bare. Even four magnificent peepal trees, which stood in front of the gaol gate, much to my surprise, dropped nearly all their leaves. **Gaunt** and cheerless they stood there, till the spring air warmed them up again and sent a message of life to their innermost cells. Suddenly there was a stir both in the peepals and the other trees, and an air of mystery surrounded them as of secret operations going on behind the scenes; and I would be startled to find little bits of green peeping out all over them. It was a gay and cheering sight. And then, very rapidly the leaves would come out in their millions and glisten in the sunlight and play about in the breeze. How wonderful is the sudden change from bud to leaf!

B.1.1. Read the following sentences and write T for true and F for false statement :

- (i) Nehru disliked his little cell.
- (ii) Nehru lived with other prisoners in his cell.
- (iii) Nehru was allowed to go out and walk up and down in front of the gate.
- (iv) Nehru was imprisoned in the European Lock-up.
- (v) Nehru loved the sight of the Himalayas.
- (vi) Spring in Dehra Dun is longer than that in the plains.
- (vii) The change from bud to leaf is sudden.

B.1.2. Answer the following questions briefly:

- 1. How long did Nehru live in his little cell in Dehra Dun jail?
- 2. Whom did Nehru treat as his old friends? Can you make friends with them?
- 3. Who were the other occupants of the little cell? Did Nehru like them?
- 4. '... but in Dehra Dun I had one privilege.' What is the privilege Nehru is referring to? Was it Nehru's special privilege?
- 5. What was European Lock-up meant for? How was it different from the other jail?
- 6. 'Only a prisoner who has been confined for long behind high walls can appreciate the extraordinary psychological value of these outside walks and open views.' What does Nehru mean by this? Explain.
- 7. How did the sight of the towering Himalayas move his heart? What lesson did he derive from the mountains?
- 8. Which sight does Nehru call 'gay' and 'cheering'? How does he describe it?

- 6. I had never noticed before that fresh mango leaves are reddish-brown, russet-coloured, remarkably like the autumn tints on the Kashmir hills. But, they change colour soon and become green.
- 7. The monsoon rains were always welcome, for they ended the summer heat. But, one could have too much of a good thing, and Dehra Dun is one of the favoured haunts of the rain god. Within the first five or six weeks of the break of the monsoon we would have about fifty or sixty inches of rain, and it

was not pleasant to sit **cooped up** in a little narrow place trying to avoid the water dripping from the ceiling or rushing in from the windows.

8. Autumn again was pleasant, and so was the winter, except when it rained. With thunder and rain and piercing cold winds, one longed for a decent habitation and a little warmth and comfort. Occasionally there would be a hailstorm, with hailstones bigger than marbles coming down on the **corrugated** iron roofs and making a tremendous noise, something like an **artillery** bombardment.
9. I remember one day particularly: it was the 24th of December, 1932. There was a thunder storm and rain all day, and it was bitterly cold. Altogether it was one of the most miserable days, from the bodily point of view, that I have spent in gaol. In the evening it cleared up suddenly and all my misery departed when I saw all the neighbouring mountains and hills covered with a thick mantle of snow. The next day - Christmas Day - was lovely and clear, and there was a beautiful view of snow-covered mountains.
10. Prevented from **indulging in** normal activities we became more observant of nature's ways. We watched also the various animals and insects that came our way. As I grew more observant I noticed all manner of insects living in my cell or in the little yard outside. I realized that while I complained of loneliness, that yard, which seemed empty and deserted, was teeming with life. All these creeping or crawling or flying insects lived their life without interfering with me in any way, and I saw no reason why I should interfere with them. But there was continuous war between me and bed-bugs, mosquitoes, and, to some extent, flies. Wasps and hornets I tolerated, and there were hundreds of them in my cell. There had been a little **tiff** between us when, **inadvertently** I think, a wasp had stung me. In my anger I tried to **exterminate** the lot, but they put up a brave fight in defence of their temporary home, which probably contained their eggs, and I **desisted** and decided to leave them in peace if they did not interfere with me any more. For over a year after that I lived in the cell

surrounded by these wasps and hornets, and they never attacked me, and we respected each other.

11. Bats I did not like but I had to endure them. They flew soundlessly in the evening dusk, and one could just see them against the darkening sky. **Eerie** things; I had a horror of them. They seemed to pass within an inch of one's face, and I was always afraid that they might hit me. Higher up in the air passed the big bats, the flying-foxes.
12. I used to watch the ants and the white ants and other insects by the hour. And the lizards as they crept about in the evenings and stalked their prey and chased each other, wagging their tails in a most comic fashion. Ordinarily they avoided wasps, but twice I saw them stalk them with enormous care and seize them from the front. I do not know if this avoidance of the sting was intentional or accidental.
13. Then there were **squirrels**, crowds of them if trees were about. They would become very **venturesome** and come right near us. In Lucknow Gaol I used to sit reading almost without moving for considerable periods, and a squirrel would climb up my leg and sit on my knee and have a look round. And then it would look into my eyes and realize that I was not a tree or whatever it had taken me for. Fear would **disable it** for a moment, and then it would **scamper** away. Little baby squirrels would sometimes fall down from the trees. The mother would come after them, roll them up into a little ball, and carry them off to safety. Occasionally, the baby got lost. One of my companions picked up three of these lost baby squirrels and looked after them. They were so tiny that it was a problem feeding them. The problem was, however, solved rather **ingeniously**. A fountain pen filler, with a little cotton wool attached to it, made an efficient feeding bottle.
14. Pigeons **abounded** in all the gaols I went to, except in the mountain prison of Almora. There were thousands of them. Sometimes the gaol officials would shoot them down and feed on them. There were mainas, of course; they are to

be found everywhere. A pair of them nested over my cell door in Dehra Dun, and I used to feed them. They grew quite tame, and if there was any delay in their morning or evening meal they would sit quite near me and loudly demand their food. It was amusing to watch their signs and listen to their impatient cries.

15. In Naini there were thousands of parrots, and large numbers of them lived in the crevices of my barrack walls.



Their courtship and love-making was always a fascinating sight, and sometimes there were fierce quarrels between two male parrots over a lady parrot, who sat calmly by waiting for the result of the encounter and ready to grant her favours to the winner.

B.2.1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the lesson:

- (i) The monsoon rains were always welcome, because
- (ii) One longed for decent habitation because of
- (iii) The prisoners became more observant of nature's ways because...
- (iv) Nehru wanted to exterminate wasps because.....

B.2.2. Answer the following questions briefly:

1. What is the colour of fresh mango leaves? When do they become green?
2. What made Nehru cooped up?
3. What made noise like an artillery bombardment?
4. Why does Nehru remember 24th of December 1932? How does it throw light on Nehru's love for Nature?
5. 'I realized that while I complained of loneliness, that yard, which seemed empty and deserted, was teeming with life.' Which life is being referred to here?
6. How was the problem of feeding the lost baby squirrels solved? What was ingenious about it?
7. What behaviour of the parrots does Nehru describe here? Does it have any resemblance to human behaviour?

16. Dehra Dun had a variety of birds, and there was a regular **jumble** of singing and lively chattering and twittering and high above it all came the koel's plaintive call. During the monsoon and just before it the Brain-Fever bird visited us, and I realized soon why it was so named. It was amazing the **persistence** with which it went on repeating the same notes, in day-time and at night, in sunshine and in pouring rain. We could not see most of these birds; we could only hear them as a rule, as there were no trees in our little yard. But, I used to watch the eagles and the kites gliding gracefully high up in the air, sometimes swooping down and then allowing themselves to be carried up by a current of air. Often a horde of wild ducks would fly over our heads.
17. There was a large colony of monkeys in Bareilly Gaol and their antics were always worth watching. One incident impressed me. A baby monkey managed to come down into our barrack enclosure and he could not mount up the wall again. The warder and some convict overseers and other prisoners caught hold of him and tied a bit of string round his neck. The parents (presumably) of the little one saw all this from the top of the high wall, and their anger grew. Suddenly one of them, a huge monkey, jumped down and charged almost right into the crowd which surrounded the baby monkey. It was an extraordinary brave thing to do, for the warders had sticks and *lathis* and they were waving them about, and there was quite a crowd of them. **Reckless** courage triumphed, and the crowd of humans fled terrified, leaving their sticks behind them! The little monkey was rescued.
18. We often had animal visitors that were not welcome. **Scorpions** were frequently found in our cells, especially after a thunderstorm. It was surprising that I was never stung by one, for I would come across them in the most unlikely places on my bed, or sitting on a book which I had just **lined** up. I kept a particularly black and poisonous-looking **brute** in a bottle for some time, feeding him with flies, etc., and then when I tied him up on a wall with a string he managed to escape. I had no desire to meet him loose again, and so I cleaned my cell out and hunted for him everywhere, but he had vanished.
19. Three or four snakes were also found in my cells or near them. News of one of them got out, and there were headlines in the Press. As a matter of fact

I welcomed the **diversion**. Prison life is dull enough, and everything that breaks through the monotony is appreciated. Not that I appreciate or welcome snakes, but they do not fill me with terror as they do some people. I am afraid of their bite, of course, and would protect myself if I saw a snake. But there would be no feeling of **repulsion** or overwhelming fright. **Centipedes** horrify me much more; it is not so much fear as instinctive repulsion. In Alipore Gaol in Calcutta I woke in the middle of the night and felt something crawling over my foot. I pressed a torch I had and I saw a centipede on the bed. Instinctively and with amazing rapidity I **vaulted** clear out of that bed and nearly hit the cell wall. I realized fully then what **Pavlov's reflexes** were.

20. In Dehra Dun I saw a new animal, or rather an animal which was new to me. I was standing at the gaol gate talking to the gaoler when we noticed a man outside carrying a strange animal. The gaoler sent for him, and I saw something between a lizard and a crocodile, about two feet long, with claws and a **scaly covering**. This animal, which was very much alive, had been twisted round in a most peculiar way forming a kind of knot, and its owner had passed a pole through this knot and was merrily carrying it in this fashion. He called it a 'Bo'. When asked by the gaoler what he proposed to do with it, he replied with a broad smile that he would make *bhujji* – a kind of curry – out of it! He was a forest-dweller. Subsequently, I discovered from reading F.W. Champion's book – '**The Jungle in Sunlight and Shadow**' – that this animal was the Pangolin.
21. Prisoners, especially long-term convicts, have to suffer most from **emotional starvation**. Often they seek some emotional satisfaction by keeping animal pets. The ordinary prisoner cannot keep them, but the convict overseers have a little more freedom and the gaol staff usually does not object. The commonest pets were squirrels and, strangely, mongooses. Dogs are not allowed in gaols, but cats seem to be encouraged. A little kitten made friends with me once. It belonged to a gaol official, and when he was transferred he took it away with him. I missed it. Although dogs are not allowed, I got tied up with some dogs accidentally in Dehra Dun. A gaol official had brought a bitch and then he was transferred, and he deserted her. The poor thing became a homeless wanderer,

living under **culverts**, picking up scraps from the warders, usually starving. As I was being kept in the lock-up outside the gaol proper, she used to come to me begging for food. I began to feed her regularly, and she gave birth to a **litter of pups** under a culvert. Many of these were taken away, but three remained and I fed them. One of the puppies fell ill with a violent **distemper**, and gave me a great deal of trouble. I nursed her with care, and sometimes I would get up a dozen times in the course of the night to look after her. She survived, and I was happy that my nursing had pulled her round.

22. I came in contact with animals far more in prison than I had done outside. I had always been fond of dogs, and had kept some, but I could never look after them properly as other matters claimed my attention. In prison I was grateful for their company. Indians do not, as a rule, approve of animals as household pets. It is remarkable that in spite of their general philosophy of non-violence to animals, they are often singularly careless and unkind to them. Even the cow, that favoured animal, though looked up to and almost worshipped by many Hindus and often the cause of riots, is not treated kindly. Worship and kindness do not always go together.



23. Different countries have adopted different animals as symbols of their ambition or character - the eagle of the United States of America and of Germany, the lion and bulldog of England, the fighting-cock of France, the bear of old Russia. How far do these **patron animals** mould national character? Most of them are **aggressive**, fighting animals, beasts of prey. It is not surprising that the people who grow up with these examples before them should mould themselves consciously after them and **strike up** aggressive attitudes, and roar, and prey on others. Nor is it surprising that the Hindu should be mild and non-violent for his patron animal is the cow.

B.3.1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the lesson:

- (i) Nehru could not see most of the birds, he could only hear them, because.....
- (ii) In Alipore jail Nehru woke in the middle of night because
- (iii) Long-term convicts often keep animal pets because
- (iv) The bitch used to come to Nehru for food because
- (v) The puppy survived because
- (vi) Nehru could not look after his pet dogs properly because.....

B.3.2. Answer the following questions briefly:

1. 'Dehra Dun had a variety of birds.' Make a list of the birds that make this variety :
2. Why was 'Bird-Fever' named so?
3. How was the little monkey rescued?
4. 'We often had animal visitors that were not welcome.' Name the animals Nehru is referring to.
5. 'As a matter of fact I welcomed the diversion.' Which 'diversion' is Nehru talking about?
6. What made Nehru vault clear out of the bed?
7. How did Nehru get tied to some dogs?
8. What did Nehru do when the puppy fell ill? Do you have a similar experience of your own?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

gaol (n): jail, prison

dent (n): fissure, imprint

moth-eaten (adj): something with holes, material damaged by moths

rafters (n): wooden bars that hold up the ceiling

wasps and hornets (n): yellow insects with sting

prey (n): kill, something caught by an animal for food

privilege (n): something pleasant granted by official permission

convicts (n): prisoners, lawbreakers

psychological (adj): mental,

torrents (n): streams (of water), fast-moving water

towering (adj): very high

intimacy (n): close friendship

proximity (n): nearness

denuded (v): striped

gaunt (adj): thin, emaciated

- russet (adj): chocolate, coffee
 tint (n): hue, colour
 haunt (n): stamping ground, a place frequently visited
 cooped up (adv): sitting in a small place
 corrugated (adj): with ridges
 artillery (n): big guns
 indulging in (v): taking part in
 tiff (n): a brief quarrel
 inadvertently (adv): accidentally
 exterminate (v): destroy, eliminate
 desisted (v): stopped, gave up
 eerie (adj): weird, something strange which frightens
 squirrel (n): a bird fond of accumulating
 venturesome (adj): daring, enterprising
 disable it (v): to make it unable to do anything
 scamper (v): run quickly
 ingeniously (adv): very cleverly
 abounded (v): be plentiful
 crevices: narrow crack
 courtship (n): time taken by the youths to know each other (especially with a view to marrying)
 grant her favours (idiom): to become the wife of
 jumble (n): a mixture, confusion
 persistence (n): perseverance, determination
 a horde of (phr): a large number of
 reckless (adj): wild, thoughtless
 scorpions (n): creatures with a bad sting on their tails
 lined (v): lifted
 brute (n): an unpleasant creature
 diversion (n): happy change
 repulsion (n): feeling of strong dislikes
 centipedes (n): long creatures with many legs
 vaulted (v): jumped
 Pavlov's reflexes (n): Reflexes are physical reactions which a scientist, Pavlov, observed in dogs
 scaly covering (noun phrase): covering as of fish
 emotional (adj): related to the feelings
 starvation (n): difficulties, hunger
 culverts (n): covered drains or pipes
 a litter of puppies (n): a group of puppies
 distemper (n): a disease of dogs
 patron animals (n): Animals which are taken as the symbol of a nation
 aggressive (adj): unfriendly, violent
 strike up (phr): take up

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Pick out instances that show Nehru's love for small animals.
2. How did the parent monkey rescue its baby? Why does Nehru call its courage 'reckless'?
3. Does the parent monkey's behaviour in saving its baby tell anything about the human nature?
4. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of the monsoon? How did it affect Nehru's life in jail?
5. Why does Nehru say that worship and kindness do not always go together? How does he show it?
6. What does Nehru say about people and their patron animals?
7. 'We could not see most of these birds; we could only hear them as a rule, as there were no trees in our little yards.' What light does it throw on the relation between the birds and plants?
8. All animals, howsoever small they might be, deserve respect. Pick out instances from the lesson in favour of this statement.
9. A good autobiography is honest. In what ways do you think Pandit Nehru is honest in writing about his life in jail? Use specific references from the lesson as examples.
10. A good autobiography is also very self aware. How self aware do you think the author has been in the personal statements contained in the work? Use examples from the work to support your opinions.

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs** :

- a. The company of nature is most soothing.
- b. Life would be dull if there was no variety of life on the earth.
- c. Live and let live.

C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph of about 100 words on the following

- a. Ecological balance
- b. The need and importance of plantation drives

D. WORD STUDY

D.1. Dictionary Use

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

inadvertantly	interfare	ordinary	persistance
avoidence	squirels	ocasionally	ingeniaously
efficiante	erie	presumably	divertion
centipides	goaler		

Ex. 2. Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of each of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common:

cell	prey	privilege	convict
tint	gaunt	intimacy	

D.2. Word-formation

Look at the following example:

*I knew every mark and dent on the **whitewashed** walls and on the **uneven** floor and the ceiling with its **moth-eaten** rafters.*

You see that in the above sentence '**whitewashed**' is made of two words '**white**' (adj) and '**washed**' (verb) and '**moth-eaten**' of '**moth**' (n) and '**eaten**' (verb). You also see that '**uneven**' is derived from '**even**' by adding prefix '**un-**' to it.

Ex.1. Pick out from the lesson the compound words and tell, as illustrated above, which words have been combined together to make a compound word.

Ex.2. Pick out from the lesson the words which have been derived by adding a 'prefix' or 'suffix' to it.

D.3. Word-meaning

Ex. 1. Match the words given in **column A** with their meanings given in **column B**:

Column A

patron animals

haunt

tiff

inadvertently

desisted

eerie

venturesome

crevices

diversion

repulsion

culverts

distemper

Column B

narrow crack

a place frequently visited

gave up

weird

a brief quarrel

happy change

daring

Animals taken as the symbol of a nation

accidentally

feeling of strong dislikes

a disease of dogs

covered drains or pipes

Ex.2. Fill in the blanks with suitable forms of words or phrases given below:

vanish

transfer

inadvertently

startled to find

ordinarily

privilege

aggressive

much to my surprise

remarkable

worship

interfere with

- (i) An person can hardly put up with criticism.
- (ii) Kalyan is a late riser; but this morning it was he who woke me up.
- (iii) By the time the people assembled, the snake had
- (iv) The bird escaped as he had left the door undone.
- (v) The Hindus several different gods.
- (vi) I was that so many species have disappeared from the earth.
- (vii) Do not those wires; they are very dangerous.
- (viii) Mr Paswan is a teacher.
- (ix) To address such an august gathering is a great
- (x) Ms Pandey has been to another section.

D. 4. Phrases

Ex.1. Read the lesson carefully and find out the sentences in which the following phrases have been used. Then use them in sentences of your own:

look down upon	indulge in	put up a brave fight
interfere with	abound in	get tied up with
teeming with	pull someone round	

E. GRAMMAR

Study the following sentences from the lesson

- (a) And then, very rapidly the leaves **would come** out.....
- (b) Occasionally there **would be** a hailstorm.....
- (c) In Lucknow Gaol I **used to sit** reading almost without moving....

You see that **used to/ would** in the above sentences are followed by an infinitive and they suggest habitual action in past.

Ex. 1. Pick out from the lesson sentences with **used to** and **would**.

F. ACTIVITY

Do a **project work** on the relationship between plants, human beings and other animals. Also consider what will happen if the existence of any one of them is threatened.

