

Two great Indians, Nehru and Homi Bhabha FRS
(right) in friendly conversation on 2 June 1960.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) became the first Prime Minister of independent India in 1947, a position he retained until his death; he had studied natural science at Cambridge and took a tripos degree. He first used the term *The Scientific Temper*. [See Title 341]

Homi Bhabha, FRS a Parsee by birth, studied physics in Britain, specialised in nuclear physics, and at the young age of 41 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, London. After 1947 when India became Independent, he was appointed by Nehru to take charge of India's Atomic Science and Technology. He died tragically on 24 August 1966, when an Air India aircraft crashed on Mont Blanc in Switzerland. A non-denominational memorial service was held soon afterwards for him at the Royal Institution, London, a very unusual honour.

(Courtesy R. Kumar, Nehru Museum, New Delhi)



On Friday 6 November 1964, I invited Mr E.C. Allerdice to lunch at my Club, the Savile. I had met him on one of my previous visits to New Delhi as he was the Chief Administrator of the Indian Atomic Energy Authority. He told me that India had for the last five years carried out atomic research, but had never issued any publicity about it. All this had been under the direction of Homi Bhabha FRS, India's foremost nuclear physicist. Mr Allerdice invited me to come to India and write about it, and I suggested a formal invitation from Homi Bhabha should be sent to my Editor, Mr Maurice Green. I cannot now recall if such a letter was ever sent.

On Wednesday 9 June 1965, a group of British science correspondents including Anthony Tucker from the *Guardian*, Ronnie Bedford from the *Sun*, Hugh McLeave from the *Daily Mail* and Victor McElhenny from *Science*, as well as myself, left London's Heathrow airport for Bombay by Air India, first-class. I had some difficulty to be there on time, as I was back from America only the previous night.

I had been to Cape Kennedy to cover the space flight of *Gemini 4* and wrote on 7 June about the successful recovery of the astronauts, McDivett and White, who had just performed the first American spacewalk. It was a front page report on 8 June in the *Daily Telegraph*. Having filed my story early in the morning from Cape Kennedy, I drove to Melbourne, Florida, and reached Newark in New York that evening. Next morning 8 June I left at 9.30 and arrived in London at 20.30. By taxi to my flat in Little Venice, where I found my faithful secretary awaiting me with the Air India ticket for Bombay via Moscow.

On all my previous visits to India I had flown via the Middle East, so Moscow was the first novelty on this trip. At Moscow airport I was very fortunate to find five gold medals of Soviet kosmonauts for my collection of scientific medals. The flight over the Himalaya mountains to Delhi was a spectacular sight. Flying over the Alps in the centre of Europe takes normally about 15 minutes and is marvellous, but to fly over the Himalaya Mountains took over one hour and has always remained in my memory. A repeat occurred on the return flight.

On arrival at Bombay we were greeted by Homi Bhabha, one of the most cultured scientists I have ever met. A Parsee by birth, he was not only scientifically most eminent, a Fellow of the Royal Society of London, but also highly gifted as a painter, as our group saw later when he kindly invited us to his home in Bombay. There, his excellent oil paintings were hanging on the walls. Later, I had the sad task to write his obituary when he was killed in an aircraft crash on the slopes of the Mont Blanc in 1966. His death was the saddest loss to India's science and to his many friends.