



# "Nehru's letters to Chief Ministers and building the imagination of the new state."

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Over sixteen and a half years, from 15 October 1947 to 21 December 1963, Nehru wrote nearly 378 letters to the Chief Ministers of the Indian States. These were published in five volumes and covered nearly 3000 pages. What was Nehru hoping to do when he wrote these letters, some of which were of considerable length, but most of which had a periodicity of a fortnight? Should they be seen as an example of a collaborative project of building a new nation from the embers of partition? Was it a forward looking management instrument to get leaders of the constituent units of the union to be on the same page and share an emerging imagination? Was it his method of public education? This paper will look at these letters and try and read them as an instrument of governance. It will extract from them some general themes of concern for the new government and it will reflect on Nehru's vision, and, in some cases, on the specific observations he makes, and on the moral political sensibilities that cause him to see some things as significant. Through such a reading one gets an understanding of Nehru's project of building a postcolonial democratic state in India. We could perhaps debate what has happened to that project today.

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