

THE HUMAN IDIOM

THREE LECTURES ON
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH

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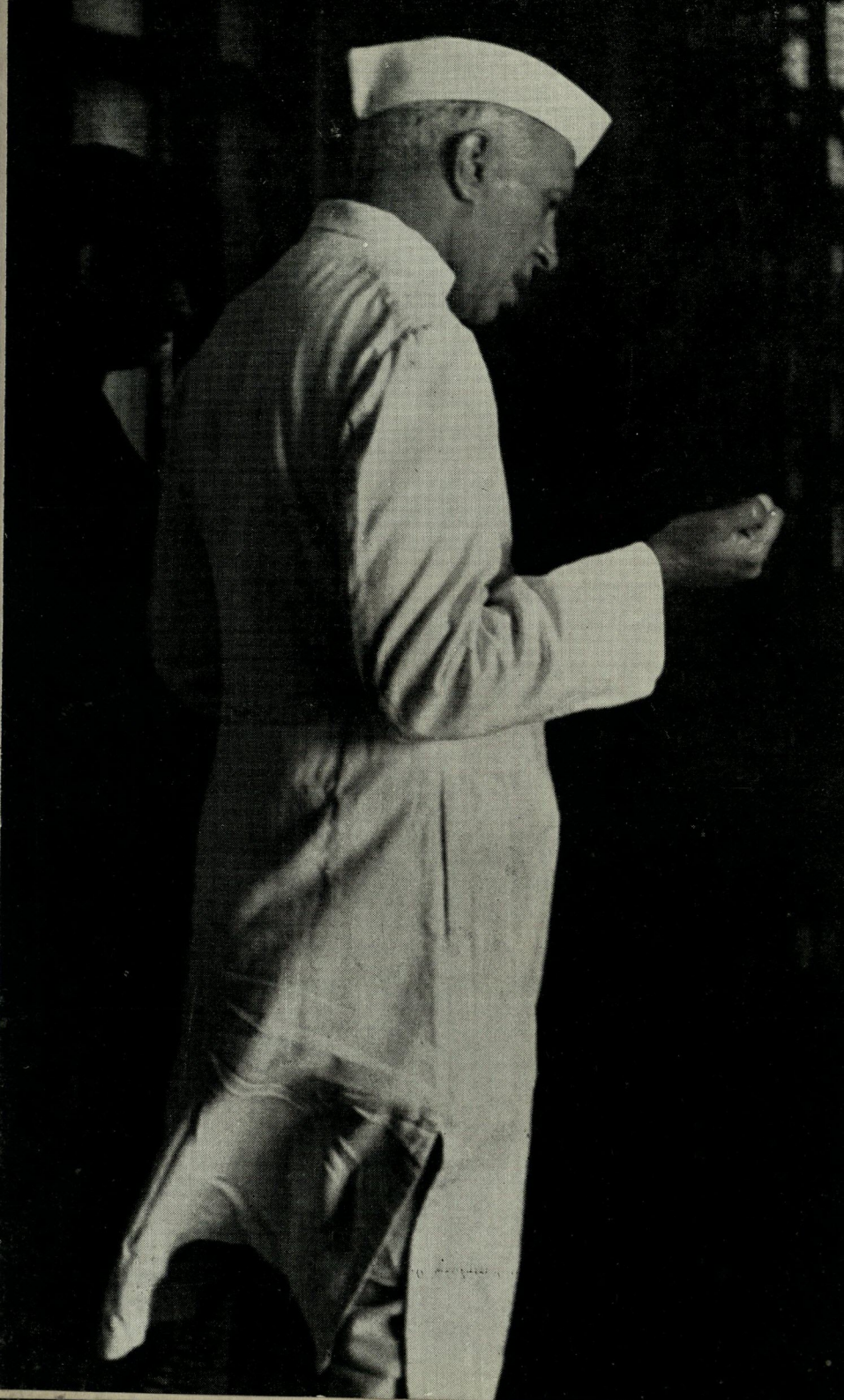


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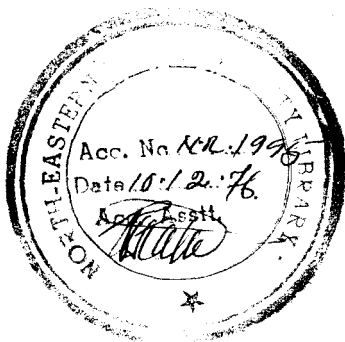
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PREFACE

We praise writers in cliches or run them down variously without ever taking the trouble to read them. Jawaharlal Nehru has suffered both. And yet hardly any other Indian writer of our time can help us to partake of what may be termed as the Indian consciousness both as inherited from the past and formed by eminent Indians of the first half of this century of whom the supreme was Mahatma Gandhi. It is a consciousness of India as it flows in our blood stream and generally determines our response as Indians to the rest of the world. In Nehru it comes to us not always in terms of art but as the most sensitive awareness of a pre-eminent Indian in public life who was essentially an artist.

I believe it is this consideration which has weighed with the Government of India in instituting the Jawaharlal Nehru lectures at university centres.

I wish to express my gratitude to Sri Vamana Rao, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Syndicate of Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati for the honour they have done in asking me to give these lectures for 1966-67. I am thankful to the audience (which included my colleagues and students from Mysore) for turning up in large numbers evening after evening on three successive days.

I cannot sufficiently thank Dr B. Gopala Reddy, His Excellency the Governor of U.P., a former colleague of Jawaharlal Nehru and himself a writer of distinction for his generosity towards me. To my Vice-Chancellor, Dr K. L. Shrimali I must express my profound gratitude for his interest in my Nehru studies.

It is a pleasure to record my indebtedness to my friend, Professor William Walsh of Leeds University for, while I

had invariably thought of Nehru's work in terms of 'human touch', 'human accent', it is Professor Walsh's book *A Human Idiom* which helped to make a sharper response to my subject. Hence the title *The Human Idiom* for these lectures.

Mr K. A. Korula of the Wesley Press has always been considerate to me but he and his Press have, I must say, excelled themselves in printing these lectures as though they too wished to collaborate with the author in paying their tribute to the memory of a great Indian who more than any one else in public life in India, paid keen attention to the aesthetics of book-production.

I feel reassured in the thought that Mr M. Tarinayya has been able to read the proofs of these lectures with me.

C.D.N.

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I

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

The Human Idiom

WRITING or speaking on Jawaharlal Nehru is to me not an academic exercise but, if I may say so, a desire to share a personal experience, the joy of an adventure, of something that has lured and baffled me by turns and yet continually beckons to me. My vocation as teacher of English and my critical pretensions have, I hope, given the edge to my interest in Nehru's work. My first acquaintance with his writing was in 1947 when I read with pencil in hand the just published *Discovery of India* on board ship bound for England. Reading it was a personal re-discovery of the India I had only known in fragments which were jumbled up in the half-conscious and the unconscious of my being. Thanks to Nehru, I thought, India became for the first time a significant part of my emotional being. As I re-read the book it became my constant source of reference in my attempt to gain a proper perspective of my own country and people from far off England. Critically speaking, I found it most congenial too, to look at India through the eyes of Nehru who had himself approached her as a friendly foreigner does. One book led to another and I became more and more involved in Nehru within five years of my acquaintance with his work.

It may sound strange but it is a fact that then, as now, I had some little reading to my credit in English literature but nothing I had read, I must have the courage to admit,

II

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

The Rithuraj of India

I PROPOSE to speak to you, today, on an aspect of Jawaharlal Nehru on which practically nothing has been said. Only Rabindranath Tagore with his poet's discernment, and by a sure stroke of genius, once called him the *Rithuraj* of India, a name which summons up all that that royal season, spring or *vasanta* connotes to lovers and poets in the traditions of the East as well as the West. But there is no doubt that Tagore, like Sher Gil, spoke for all of us who saw, or heard, or read Nehru and felt the freshness, the vitality and the life-giving quality of the man. It is as though we witnessed a dry twig bloom in his hands. I am afraid I am repeating something I have said before, but what I have not so far said, and would have liked to say but for Tagore's incomparable metaphor is what that enchanting line in Wordsworth's sonnet suggested to me when I re-read it some years ago. I mean:

'Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea'

Ancient Greeks represented Nature by Proteus who drives flocks, knows all things and has the power of assuming different shapes. According to post-Homeric legend Proteus was an early king of Egypt where, in later times, he was worshipped as a god. But I am not concerned with this later version. According to the earlier version Proteus is the symbol of dynamic nature, *Natura Naturans*. Nature has also a passive role, *Natura Naturata*. It is interesting

III

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

His Sense of History in International Matters

IT WAS the year 1948 soon after Gandhiji's assassination, and I was in the Netherlands, ostensibly for attending a conference, but really to see the country a bit. I went to some place, I forget now, quite far from Amsterdam. It was a fishermen's village and an elderly woman who was selling curios to tourists exclaimed on seeing me 'Gandhi!' 'Gandhi!' She hardly knew any English, not the verbs anyway, but with a sparkle in her eyes which spoke of her transparent sincerity and with the simple folks' concern and hopes for the future of man, tried to carry on a kind of dumb discourse with me. 'Gandhi! Gandhi!' she repeated and for a moment closed her eyes with touching sadness and then her eyes opened with a gleam which flushed her face and showed a sense of triumph as she let out the name of Nehru twice and christened him 'Gandhi boy'. 'Nehru! Gandhi boy!' she asserted again. The theme had been elaborated by leading newspapers and learned periodicals all the world over while paying their homage to the memory of Gandhi.*

But, for this valuation to come from a simple, apparently unlettered woman from a far-off fishermen's village in, what

* I have taken this paragraph from my article, 'Nehru, a World Figure' which appeared earlier in an occasional magazine, *Kautilya*, Mysore.