ABSTRACT

With its hoary past, India characterised by its oriental flavour, remains still a mystery to be explored time and again. Writers vye with one another to depict an image of India in their writings. The various images of India projected by the contemporary writers both foreign and Indian would themselves constitute a vast area of study. Of which three distinguished Indian writers of this century, M.K.Gandhi (1869-1948), Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), and Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897- ) who have given their authoritative versions of India in their works are chosen to arrive at the 'Indianhood of India' in this study.

Gandhi, an avowed Hindu, is typically Indian in his approach; Chaudhuri, an Anglophile, is western in his outlook; and Nehru, a secularist, seems to synthesize the two. In their dealing with the problems of India, they do not directly influence one another. However, as three sensitive men deeply committed to human problems and their solutions, they reacted to the circumstances that prevailed at the time in their characteristic way. Yet owing to fundamental differences in their cultural background, philosophical approach and personality make-up, their reactions are quite often absolutely dissimilar and even conflicting. And this comparative study is devoted to
deriving a composite image of India from their diverse versions of it in their works.

Chapter I: Introduction - Image of India states the aim of this study - how Gandhi, Nehru and Chaudhuri, the three observers of contemporary India, are representative enough to merit a comparative study of this kind to arrive at a comprehensive image of India.

Many of the writers, foreign as well as Indian, have given only an imaginative/partial account of India in their attempt to present a total India. There are essentially two foreign images of India: India as heaven/hell and India as a dream/nightmare. The foreign writers, on the whole, cannot present the 'total India', because they are just interlopers who can view India only superficially from the outside. All those writings that claim to deliver the genuine India do not tell us much about India. The Indian writers on the other hand who have painted a portrait of India have also selected only a few aspects from the whole panoply of Indian life. That is the reason why there is a familiar pattern in the characterization of India in their works.

On the prominent display is the India divided by the religious practice, sexual barriers, and unbelievable filth and poverty. It is thus clear that the images of India both
foreign and India are either imaginative or personal. The real India may not be the sum total of all these images but something more than those partial perceptions of India.

The impulses of people toward tradition and modernity have divided the real India into three parts; spiritual, secular and iconoclastic. These three major aspects of India to which may be subsumed its other aspects are not mutually exclusive but coexistent in the real India. The three faces of India are represented by Gandhi, Nehru and Chaudhuri respectively in their writings. Gandhi pictures a spiritual India; Nehru, synthesizing tradition and modernity, offers a secular India; and Chaudhuri portrays an iconoclastic India. And the real image of India may be constituted by these three versions of India.

Chapter II: Three Faces of India makes a close analysis of their autobiographies - Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Nehru's *An Autobiography*, and Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* - to build an authentic background for this study. Gandhi's autobiography is "a spiritual manual... an absorbing human document, agonizingly frank and unflinchingly honest in its self-portraiture". Nehru's autobiography "a sketchy, personal and incomplete account of the past" presents a vivid picture of both the man and his milieu. Chaudhuri's autobiography which he
claims is "more of a national than personal history" - describes the conditions in which an "unknown Indian" grew to manhood in the early decades of the twentieth century. In revealing the public and private sides of their personality, they picture the three different faces of India respectively: spiritual, secular and iconoclastic. And in this sense their autobiographies can be considered as condensed versions of their vision of India.

The self-revelation, which is the main element in the art of autobiography writing, remains in the background, but it is their national character which is of importance here. Gandhi deals not only with his constant search for truth but also with contemporary social and political conditions and events. In Nehru's autobiography also we are in contact with a deeply sensitive personality keenly alive to the political and social problems of the country, whereas Chaudhuri's is ponderously erudite, cynical and lacks in personal revelation. Gandhi and Nehru had faith in the past and described the story of their life in the face of defeat and disaster and accepted the past as it was, but Chaudhuri is cynical and betrays a profound sense of frustration. He seems to be guilty of deserting his past and his autobiography is a slavish commemoration of the memories and baneful influences of the pernicious British rule in India. When Gandhi and Nehru look at India from within, Chaudhuri
distances himself from it and looks at it from the vantage point of a foreigner. And yet we can derive an image of India - an iconoclastic India - from this "Unknown Indian's" autobiography. The fact that Gandhi, Nehru and Chaudhuri are temperamentally not alike is a positive factor in this study, because their views on matters like religion, politics, society, family and sex are coloured by their temperament. We are therefore able to realise the different aspects of the same issue while comparing their views, which will be dealt with in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter III: Religion considers in detail the religious views of the three writers. Gandhi, in his interpretation of religion, accepts it; Nehru, in his modest rejection of religion, accepts only its spirit; and Chaudhuri in his subversive attitude to it, negates it.

By religion, Gandhi does not mean a formal religion or customary religion as he believes that all religions are different paths leading to the same goal. According to him, religion and morality are the same. Though he believes that all religions are true, he does not consider them as infallible. In My God, Gandhi reveals his belief only in a formless and attributeless God. Nehru is non-religious and he has a certain distaste for vague speculations on religion. However, Nehru, as a secularist, has not ruled
out religion, which, to a certain extent, has penetrated his world outlook. His religion, therefore, as he says in An Autobiography "consists of the inner development of the individual, the evolution of his consciousness in a certain direction which is considered good". Though any idea of personal God seems odd to him, Nehru understands the value of religion. But Chaudhuri is anti-religious in his attack on the varieties of belief that take shelter under the umbrella of Hinduism. He is exasperated with India for everything in India is ultimately connected with religion—the Indian sociology, politics, economics are all affected by religion. To his iconoclastic eyes, Vedas merely appear as symbols. In The Continent of Circe, he criticizes Hindus who create gods in the image of the earthly kings and worship them as "supernatural kings".

Chapter IV: Politics explores their political ideology and explains how Gandhi spiritualizes Indian politics, how Nehru declutches it from religion and how Chaudhuri ridicules it.

Gandhi combines politics and religion and it is in this context that Gandhi's works become important. He changes the nature of Indian politics by spiritualizing it. His principles of truth and non-violence become the basis of social order and the instruments of socio-political dynamics. In Political and National Life, he stands for the
substitution of power politics by the politics of goodness based on his famous doctrine of the integrity and symmetry of ends and means. The two words Satyagraha and Sarvodaya explain the entire life and political philosophy of Gandhi. As a secularist, Nehru strongly opposes the use of religion in modern Indian politics. He is firm in his efforts to keep politics apart from religion and adhered to this principle to the end of his days. According to him, religion may be all right when applied to ethics and morals, but if it enters the political sphere, it has only a negative effect. Whereas, the iconoclastic Chaudhuri believes that the political power and religious power are almost identical. While the political leaders try to control the private life and property of people, the religious leaders exercise their power over the minds of a whole populace. Both are hypocrites and Chaudhuri condemns them outright. In *A Passage to England*, he compares the politicians and political institutions in England with those in India and as an inveterate anglophile, here too, Chaudhuri finds occasion to extol the British parliamentary democracy and denounce the Indian. However, much of his criticism is palatable because it is true.

**Chapter V: Society** deals with the views of the three authors on the Indian society, analysing why Gandhi and Nehru are against, and Chaudhuri is for, the social stratifications in India.
According to Gandhi, all the political, economic and educational problems of man in the society can be solved by "spiritual awakening". The defect with the modern society is its weakness in morality and discipline. Gandhi calls for an agrarian society - Ram Raj - where everyone engages in manual and low caste Indians personal dignity and economic self-sufficiency. In Constructive Programme, he says that the society and the individual have to grow together. He encourages inter-dining, inter-caste marriages, etc., and wants women organizations to solve the social evils such as untouchability, dowry and purdah system. Gandhi wants to create a society that would neither be a jungle nor a straight jacket, but a home that would provide the maximum freedom for the individual's growth, not of a few but of each and everyone in the human family. If Gandhi sounds rural, Nehru is urban in his approach to society. His strategy, dramatically different, calls for industrial development, an active state to promote social and economic reforms, an end to the rigidities of the caste system, and equality of opportunity. He does not reject mechanization as Gandhi had done, but he incorporates some of the latter's thought to evolve an "Indian" variant of the modern, industrial society. Though non-religious, he does not rule out the influence of religion on the society and even appreciates the works of religious reformers who tried to change the society.
Chaudhuri's critical surgery of the social and familial relationships is highly controversial. His book To Live or Not to Live inquires deep into the internal structure and problems of the Indian society. To him, Nehru's zeal for industrialization will only modernize the aboriginals thereby destroying their culture. Surprisingly he advocates caste system. He says that the various charges made against the caste-system are totally baseless. It creates neither diversity nor disunity in society, according to him.

Chapter VI: Family and Sex shows how they are again divided in their diagnosis of the institution of family and sex in modern India.

Gandhi makes no distinction between men and women. Therefore he believes that there is nothing sacrosanct in what is said about women being subordinate to men in Smritis. In this regard, Gandhi is an androfeminist, who advocates for the cause of women's uplift even at the cost of his religious faith. In Women and Social Justice, he wants to eliminate sex altogether except for the primary purpose of procreation. He is against all social and religious barriers to widow re-marriage. He even encourages women to enter the political arena. Nehru, too, advocates equality of men and women and condemns in severe terms the wrongs done to the women in the name of law, tradition and
religion. As a secularist, he however cannot understand Gandhi's attitude to sex that any union is a crime when the desire of progeny is absent. He is against joint-family system as it suppresses the individual and prevents growth. According to Chaudhuri, woman has been the object of special interest and concern in India because of the ambivalent approach of man towards her in the rigid puritanical background of India. Though he feels sorry for the plight of dark marriageable young girls in Bengal due to the "Colour-consciousness" of the Bengalis, he considers the emergence of working woman in India as a great threat to the happiness of family life. He is fully convinced that 'the joint-family' system must be swept aside both in theory and practice. He shows how procreation, the primary goal of ancient marriage, has become secondary in modern matrimonial world.

Chapter VII: Conclusion: Humanism sums up the arguments to see a common ground between them in their characteristic vision of India. Born in a particular milieu, without succumbing to it, they consciously exert their influence on it to change it in the manner they would like it to be. In a way they are revolutionaries with a passion for the change of humanity for the better. It is this concern for humanity which brings these diverse authors together on the same plane - Gandhi being a spiritual humanist, Nehru, a secular
humanist and Chaudhuri, an atheistic humanist. And in revealing the three different faces of India in their writings, they become representative of the contemporary India - Gandhi and Chaudhuri remaining as polar opposites and Nehru marking the continuum between the two extremes. And their versions of India, though different, are not mutually exclusive of each other but contributing to the formation of a composite image of India.