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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Thematic Study of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*

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Article History: Submitted-01/03/2019, Revised-26/04/2019, Accepted-29/04/2019, Published-25/05/2019.

Abstract:

Nirad is a prolific writer. *The Times of India* paid tribute to Nirad C. Chaudhuri in the following words, "He was essentially a miniaturist of knowledge, repository of a bewildering range of facts and figures and a practitioner of intellectual narcissism." While knocking at the world, he turned the mirror he held to the world on himself- a yogi exemplifying self possession. He lived a life devoid of compromises the intimate sign of an eccentric and a supreme individualist. This book *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* was published in 1951.' This book is dedicated to the memory of the British Empire in India, because it made shaped and quickened, that was good and living within Indians. Nirad C. Chaudhuri regards this books as a contribution to contemporary History. In the preface of this book Nirad C. Chaudhuri writes. This book narrates the story of the struggle of a civilization with a hostile environment, in which the destiny of British rule in India became necessarily involved. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has written this book with The conscious object of reaching the English-speaking world. In the preface he writes "In the first place, my personal development has in no wise been typical of modern Indian of the 20th century. It is certainly exceptional, and may, even be unique. But I do not believe that on this account the value of my narrative as historical testimony is impaired, rather, the independence of environment which I have always been driven to assert by an irrepressible impulse within me has give me a priter-natural to it. In relation to modern Indian Society, I am not like an aeroplane in relation to earth. It can never rise so high as to be able to sever the terrestrial connexion. But its flight helps it to obtain a better view of the life of the land."

Keywords: dedicated, contemporary, civilization, hostile environment, testimony.

It is a great work of Nirad C. Chaudhuri. It is a thoughtful analysis of contemporary society and politics. The book also takes us deep in to the observation of how British made colonies and how a new renaissance started in the country. Mr. Chaudhuri an Indian writer has tried to mingle the growth and changes of India's politics societies, national feelings with

those of his personality. The book covers a feeling of nationalism and Hinduism. In 1947 Mr. Chaudhuri set out to write '*The Autobiography of an unknown Indian*'. That was the year of India's partition. There is sensitive description of his early childhood and education in the rural heartland of Bengal. Nirad has observed his childhood and his native land as a source of inspiration his treatment of his childhood his enchantment, disillusionment and gratitude to the colonial capital Calcutta is highly factual. The book is very deftly covering the varied geographies of the map as well as human thought.

Britisher paved a path of success for every individual. He was in love with the English speaking world. He believed that British empire in India had shaped and quickened that was good, and living within us encouraged to acquire knowledge by his enlightened upper class Hindu parents he devoured the great works of the Indian and European traditions, gaining familiarity with both cultures history, philosophy, statecraft, military strategy science and literature. In his youth he was tugged between revolutionary and Gandhian views. He was of the opinion that the best of western should synthesize with the best of Indian culture.

The Autobiography has become the primary source of author's life and career Chaudhuri agrees that the book is more covering the national feeling than personal. The book's main aim was to highlight the culture and history of India. The book reveals that how a boy grew up to a man in the early decades of twentieth century. The first book describes three places, his birth native place, Kishorganj, his ancestral village. Banagram, and village of his mother Kalikutch. These three places have left a deep impact on Nirad's Boyhood and formed the buried foundation of his later life. Nirad also describes his boyish notions about England. The Chaudhuri family used to go once to their ancestral village Banagram. This visit usually happened on the occasion of great Bengali Hindu festival of Durga Puja. Knowing the exact lineage of every old man, every middle aged-man, every young man, every boy, every child and every baby around and relationships among human beings. The ancestral village Banagram had great impact on Chaudhuri because it had given him an existence to live with every hardships and could get the best out of it.

Chaudhuri was charmed by England because it was an intangible and exotic element in the ecology of his life. His study of English poetry had opened an enchanted realm. This book is indeed a contribution to modern History. In this book there is an essay entitled. '*The course of Indian History*' which is highly subjective and based upon interpretation of national History. Nirad writes, "with the help of personal experience I too am able now to analyse and understand better the process of national evolution, the course of our History. It has been made incandescent by the heat of contemporary ruin. I have lived a part of the History of my

country and people in my own life and that has put me in sympathy with the entire process, so that my conception of the Indian History is no longer purely external." This book describes subjectively and eruditely with Chaudhuri's distorted and anglicised version of Indian History and culture, from the Aryan conquest down to his own age. He wrote his Autobiography not for Indian readers but for academic circles in the West under whose influence he grew up and to whom he owed all his intellectual and academic attainments. Nirad writes about his personal matters his early childhood and places where he lived as a child, his student life in Calcutta, his frustration and failures in life. Nirad describes about his birth place Keshorganj, his ancestral village, Banagram and his mother's village Kalikntch. Nirad C. Chaudhuri in his book 'The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian', describes contemporary religious, moral and political conditions. Nirad has followed the examples set by Goethe and Edmund Gosse in the genre of autobiography. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has gained many intellectual, religious and moral ideas upto the age of twelve. He was imbued with the ideas propagated by the new cultural movement mainly based on the formula of a synthesis of the values of the East and the West, which passes under the name of Indian Renaissance. The great Bengali reformers from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore spear headed the Indian cultural Renaissance in the early part of the 19th century. Nirad's introduction to Bengali humanism began very early in life. He was impressed by the picture of Tom Dutt. Once his father enquired him to beam by heart some passages from Michael Madhusudan Dutt's famous epic poem Meghadnaradhya Kalya. He wrote "We received a valuable critical lesson from or perplexities over Dutt's treatment of the Ramayanic theme. Hence forward we never forgot." Besides English and Bengali literature revived Sanskrit learning was another very important element in the humanism of modern India.

Chaudhuri and his brothers did not imbibe anything of this Sanskrit element of humanism at Kishorganj. They did not learn Sanskrit and did not also read the existing English translations of Sanskrit texts. However, at Kishorganj they had assimilated, as much of it had percolated to a childish level through modern Bengali literature. Nirad wrote about the role of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Vivekananda, "As true conservatives, true to the established traditions of conservation both Chatterji and Vivekananda regarded religion as the central fact of human activity and achievement and both uncompromisingly rejected the idea of a purely secular culture." Nirad's religious influence found at work in the formative years of his life at Kishorganj it may be divided into five stands-first, the most elementary and elemental belief in ghost and spirit and animistic duties and the routine of magic and ritual organized round this belief, secondly a polytheism both anthropomorphic and pantheistic and

on the whole sunny and benign, thirdly the Brahma monotheism, fourthly the pseudo scientific. Nirad C. Chaudhuri took special interest in History. He has used History in his two famous books, *'The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian'* and *'The Continent of Circe.'* In his book, *'The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian'* he has included two essays entitled 'A Youthful Testament' and second 'An essay on the course of Indian History.' The former essay was written by Nirad. C. Chaudhuri in January, 1918. The writing of the History is called Historiography. Nirad writes, "But the objective method does not conceive of judging to be the true vocation of History and from grounds moral as well as Historical-Ideas which are truths in religion and politics are forces in History. They must be respected. They must be affirmed. By dint of a supreme reserve, by much self-control, by a timely and discreet indifference by secrecy in the matter of the black cap History might be lifted above contention and made an accepted tribunal and the same for all. This impartiality is then something new. The historian must be content to state facts as they happened or to use a modern phrase, to show a development without intruding his opinions and predilections into the narrative."

Nirad divides Indian History into three cycles(I) The Beginnings of the first of the three historical cycles of Indian history can not be dated. It came to light with the commencement of the third century B.C. when historical records properly so called began to reveal the sequence of events in Indian History. (II) The second cycle begins with the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan by Muhammad Gori in 1192 A.D. and comes to a close in 1757, the year of Plassey. (III) The third cycle began towards the middle of the 18th Century and is still continuing. About foreign influences on Indian History Chaudhuri writes, "The foreign influences in Indian History are exceptional in their character and are also exceptional in their operation and results."

These exceptional and significant features may be summarized under the following heads, first three of the greatest historical movements have forced their way into India in successive ages and created three different types of civilization, secondly, the civilizations have remained essentially foreign even at the highest point of their development within India and have ceased to be living as soon as they have been cut off from the source and been assimilated by the previously existing population. Thirdly, civilizations have always been in conflict with the greater portion of the local population, and lastly neither political order nor civilization has come into being in India when a powerful external force has not been in possession of the country."

Nirad believed that Indian cannot grow and develop without foreign influences. According to him. "I expect either the United States singly or a combination of the United States and British common wealth to re-establish and rejuvenate the foreign domination of India". Although the detailed discussion on the course of Indian history contribute little to Chaudhuri's autobiographical revelation, it expresses his scholarly temperament.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri came under the influence of Indian Renaissance. Though he was unemployed and most dependent for his livelihood he never lost hope of coming forward to fight for his existence. He was sensitive to the contempt in which other held him. From the middle of the 1930's his attitude towards Britain and India became different. It became difficult for Indians to understand him. He was very much devoted towards his intellectual standards and people admired. About 30 years after his first reversal of fortune on the foundation of *The Autobiography* which was published in 1951 he acquired a small reputation in Europe but Indians looked at him with strong aversion.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri was known as 'Indo Anglian writers – the Indian writer of English who made their names after India's independence. Nirad's mind was more bent towards the discipline followed by the Britishers, he considered them more civilized and has given many examples of his admiration towards Britishers. He found out many drawbacks on the part of Indians which suppressed them for getting respect in the society. He has not mentioned much about the advancement of Britisher in his 'Unknown citizen' many times he has criticised it. He has compared the teaching attitude of Indians and Britishers and found that Britishers produce only machines and mechanically talented scholars where as Indians produce human brain with their own identity. Chaudhuri was not mentally very close to Britishers there was always a racial discrimination found among the people. Hindus were devoid of many privileges but in many cases Nirad had blamed the superstitious belief of hindus for an instance, once a contractor's cow was strangled to death accidentally and all the brahmins gathered and punished contractor for committing the sin, he was treated worst then then an animal. All these drawbacks of the Hindu culture persuaded Britishers for the evil deeds towards Indians, whenever Chaudhuri raised his voice he was chided by his colleagues. *The Autobiography of an unknown Indian* is a very touching story of a man who made his existence even after many downfalls. Many hostile webs were made by his own people which made Chaudhuri's existence difficult but he was never let down. He faced every obstacles and hurdles to make his passage of life easy and he knew that those who are against his views would surely appreciate him in the coming future. Nirad was against a dogmatic belief. His main intention was historical and the account he made in his writing is truly honest. He

wanted that his book should be looked as a contemporary history. Nirad's view was towards the development of the society. He was concerned primarily with the contemporary situation of the country. Indians who were superior and worked to make their existence were pulled down by the society. Nirad believed that the main motto of the citizen should be to think of the global development and for that every individual should make efforts because it is not a one man work but every one should be united together. The *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* is an astonishing work of self discovery and the revelation of peerless and provocative sensibility. Though Chaudhuri was eccentric man but he could be admired for his eccentricity. In his autobiography he wrote in great detail about socio cultural practice prevalent at the time. It could be Punjabi and Bengali culture etc, every individual who come forward with his views are many times admired and many times looked down in the same way Chaudhuri had many critics who found faults in his writing. One was V. S. Naipaul who considered Chaudhuri never to be good with any of his writings but still Chaudhuri made his existence in the society and in the field of writing and every one appreciates him for his honesty and his daring nature of facing every odds keeping in mind that one day people would certainly accept him with what he is.

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