CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
haudhuri has passion for writing and courage to follow that passion. His latent talent and the tireless attempts at perfection did produce remarkable results which have become the legacies of his life. The blossoms that his writings produced have an everlasting fragrance in the hearts of millions of non-fiction lovers. His works ensure an infinite longevity of his intangible existence. The lines of Philip James Bailey resonate the great creativity of Chaudhuri — “We live in deeds, not in years, in thoughts, not in breathes, in feelings not in figures on a dial”. Like his Circe, he casts an ‘everlasting spell’ on the lovers of English literature and history. But he never enervates and enfeebles like her but always entertains and enlightens, though sometimes enrages us.

Chaudhuri has an astonishing admiration for the vocation of writing and for the writers who took writing as their vocation. Acknowledging his gratitude to his friends and well-wishers in In Gratitude to the third book, The Continent of Circe Chaudhuri cites an interview of an American woman journalist with Kushwant Singh. He was asked who the greatest writer of Indian non-fiction in English was. Mr. Singh unhesitatingly answered: “In non-fiction without a doubt Nirad Chaudhuri… A bitter man, a poor man. He doesn’t even own a typewriter. He Borrows mine a week at a time.”

Chaudhuri started his creativity at the age of fifty when creativity of most of the writers either begins to fade away or dies down. He wrote and published his last book, Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse in 1997, the year of his centenary celebrations. He himself considers it a fabulous feat that he proudly records in the preface to the book: “I have never read or heard of any author, however, great or productive in his heyday doing that”. It is certainly unique in literary history that a writer remains creative as a centenarian. Chaudhuri can be regarded as an ‘aged prodigy’. As Punkaj Mishra commends Chaudhuri is not merely “an unageing intellect” but he is an amazing and unageing intellect. The epicurean epigram, ‘older the wine, greater the taste,’ aptly applies perhaps to Chaudhuri. He wrote till “the spirit of ink would sink” in his pen.

“To be great is to be misunderstood” says Carlyle. Few Indian writers are more widely misunderstood in this country than Mr. Chaudhuri. A prophet is not honoured at home says a Bengali proverb. The greater the genius of an individual the greater would be the difficulty of assessing him. Chaudhuri being a genius is always much ahead of his times. Because of his some unsavory remarks, he is denounced as an iconoclast, an anglophile and an anti-Indian. His individual thought and independent judgement might have prone them to make such adverse remarks on him. With hindsight many of his critics will agree that he was misunderstood, and that he spoke out at a time when India brooked no criticism. Fakrul Alam is of the opinion that with the passage of time even hostile Indians have become neutralized with his ideas which were considered to be controversial
at the time of his writing. A quick survey of magazine and newspaper articles on Chaudhuri reveal to us the immensity of his impact on India, the country that spurned him for his searing honesty. When Chaudhuri died in 1999, almost every major newspaper and magazine carried an obituary; some were deprecatory; others bemoaned the death of “The Last Englishman,” as he increasingly came to be called.

But to deny Chaudhuri is to deny rational thought. To condemn him is to condemn practical wisdom. To outcast him is to outcast knowledge itself. As a cosmopolitan, he is more an English than any other English man and more an Indian than any other Indian. He wants to rejuvenate an inactive society, a lethargic society and a society which is hibernated and fossilized in religious fundamentalism and superstitious dogmas.

Chaudhuri is a pygmy in appearance but a pyramid in intelligence. He has become a celebrity because of his cerebral quality. He enjoyed a predominant position as a writer of rare reputation. All his readers wholeheartedly acknowledge his knowledge for which he made a noble sacrifice by resigning his government job in order to pursue the faculties of his mind. He models himself on great scholars of Europe. He liberally uses many European languages which we do not generally know. This exemplifies Chaudhuri’s capacity for literary appreciation. He promotes himself to narrate the diverse creative dalliances dedicatedly and with a delicious taste. His expressions are like vernal showers falling on the plants of dreary desert of thoughts. They percolate deep down into the layers of the minds of his readers and sprout the rational ideas. They clean the dirt of the cerebral drainage of Indian society.

Any criticism, comment or commendation on Chaudhuri would become incomplete without a mention of his grand style in prose which is based again on his unusual scholarship. Of all the Indo-English non-fiction writers Nirad C. Chaudhuri is perhaps the best because of his robust thinking and clarity of style. His popularity both in India and abroad depends as much upon his controversial views as upon his uninhibited and fearless style. In spite of having started his career rather late in his life, he has written extensively and achieved an international reputation. Like all men of originality and strong conviction he has expressed his views boldly and has incurred the wrath of many and earned the admiration of a few.

There are certain prose writers whose writings contain all the virtues of good prose style – clarity, the ability to evoke people, places and things, a sense of continuity, originality, wit, humour and a sense of irony. Writers like Dom Moraes, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao and Nirad Chaudhuri write English “with the language in their bones”. One hardly ever has the feeling that they are using a language not their own.
Chaudhuri wants to enjoy total freedom from fear and inhibition of any sort, which is determined partly by the topic that he selects for discussion and partly by his own temperament which is satirical. He would set out to criticize or admire anything and everything without being afraid of any race, community, institution, region, religion or government. He can criticize the Hindu, the Indian Christians, the Eurasians and the Muslims without any fear of these groups. Chaudhuri frankly explains the mutual hatred and animosity between the Hindu and Muslim communities:

The fact that they (Muslims) were converted Hindus did not make any difference to the sense of solidarity of the Muslims of India among themselves and with the Islamic world at large. The descendents of the Hindu converts never thought that they were nearer to the native Hindus than their foreign co-religionists.

Chaudhuri has the courage to point out the mistakes in the personal as well as official behaviour of Nehru who was in power as the Prime Minister of India. He did not hesitate to show the negative aspects of English culture and English people even while he was residing as the citizen of England. He described the drabness of Indian life as meticulously as Bernard Shaw did of the English life in his plays. He discusses sexual matters like ‘coitus’ and ‘venereal diseases’ with the same ease with which he discusses religion and history. Even gods, the celestial-dwellers are not spared by him:

The Vedic and epic gods are as lecherous as the Olympians, and Indra, the supreme warrior god, is the most reckless of them all. He was always after the beautiful wives of the sages and was given to seducing them by assuming the form of their husbands.

Chaudhuri, undoubtedly, acquired abundant erudition through sweat and tears. In spite of his wide reading, he never ceases to make fresh observations and original comments about the things, persons and situations that come on to his way. He takes life very seriously and thinks about it seriously. That is why, every idea of
Chaudhuri has a definite aim, a clear purpose and has a special relish. Many of them have elegance of epigrams, the power of proverbs and the perception of precepts. Chaudhuri shocks the smug and the complacent, irritates the hypocrites; hurts the idealists and whips the slumberous sentimentalists. Because of his courage to see the problems in the face, he does not shy away from the ugly, the indecent and the discordant. The kind of uninhibited boldness shown by Chaudhuri can never be expected in any other Indian writer. The only writer comparable to Chaudhuri in this regard is his friend, well-wisher and benefactor, Kushwanth Singh.

Chaudhuri remains the best writer of non-fictional prose in Indian English literature, as he chisels every phrase and polishes every clause to perfection. His complete dedication to the craft of writing makes him the Walter Pater of Indian English literature. It is because of his unique style that Chaudhuri commands admiration even when he causes irritation.

Critics have been unanimous in ranking Chaudhuri very high as a writer of English prose. When all caveats have been made, however, Nirad Chaudhuri remains the Grand Solitary, the master of a prose style that has often a fascinating spidery quality, a writer and a thinker and a universal Momus who stands apart from the muddy mainstream. Chaudhuri has his faults. He often lacks in coherence and compactness. He suffers from the sin of prolixity. There are long digressions and anecdotes which have no direct bearing on the theme of the book. However, such faults do not take away anything from the real greatness of Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri as a stylist. Few can write English prose like him with ease and confidence, charm and lucidity, grace and dignity. C.R. Mandy wrote of Chaudhuri: “I had hardly met an Indian writer of such intelligence, his brain dances like fireflies before the monsoon. I would always rate him – cerebrally and stylistically – in the top class of Indo-Anglian writers.”