Nirad Chaudhuri, a prolific writer, has devoted his whole life to the pursuit of knowledge as he has developed unaffected love for it all his life. His knowledge is encyclopedic. He has become a literary celebrity because of his cerebral quality. He enjoyed a predominant position as a writer of rare reputation. He is an illustrious individual who has infinite instinct for intellect. He has an inexhaustible thirst to knowledge. He obtained intellect through industry. All his readers whole heartedly acknowledge his knowledge for which he made a noble sacrifice by resigning his government job in order to pursue the faculties of his mind. Like Bacon, he has taken up knowledge as his province. His main interests are history, literature, philosophy, religion, ethics and sociology. Chaudhuri is a writer in Bengali and English and a cultural commentator. The first striking quality that fascinates in Chaudhuri is that he is a man of keen perception, with an exquisite insight into men and matters. With his extraordinary erudition, he drives and commands the words with great dexterity.

The present study throws light on his intellectual endeavour. His is a life of a pilgrimage in search of knowledge. His perseverance and sustained courting of difficulties to pursue the avocation of his choice are exemplary. Chaudhuri has risen in the oriental horizon and has begun to illuminate it with his intellectual ideas from the Western horizon. He is
lulled in the cradle of creativity from the East to the West and the West to
the East by hanging to the radiant rainbow of knowledge. He exhibits
love-hate relationship towards the British in his Autobiography and turns
as an anti-Indian in his Circe and in To Live or Not To Live he heals the
wounds made in Circe by asking his countrymen to follow the path in
pursuit of happiness. His Vanity Bag is full of ornaments and garments
and erotics of modern Indian culture. Three Horsemen of the New
Apocalypse presents the decadence of civilization all over the world.

The introductory chapter deals with the writer’s autobiography.
His childhood in his native village, Kishoreganj; his graduate days at
Calcutta; his pursuit of scholarship; his service in the A.I.R. (All India
Radio) Delhi, as a commentator on World-War-II, his trip to England
have enabled him to gain rich experience. It made all the more
meaningful by his sharp perception and wide reading. These personal
experiences of Chaudhuri naturally enabled him to see them in the light
of his encyclopedic knowledge. His books are honest records of his
response to the world around him. Apart from these, Chaudhuri’s distinct
place as a towering literary personality in non-fictional English prose is
also brought into limelight. His popularity as a writer after the publication
of his first book, Autobiography of An Unknown Indian (1951) is also
discussed.
The second chapter deals with *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* published in 1951. The title of the book has become an ironic misnomer as it shot him into an unexpected fame and established him as a writer of rare distinction. The book put him on the short list of great Indian English writers. Chaudhuri courted controversy in the newly independent India in the dedication of the book itself which ran thus: “To the memory of the British Empire which conferred subject hood on us but withheld citizenship. Still the empire was good for us because, all that was good and living within us was made, shaped and quickened by the same British rule”. His historical knowledge prevents him from mythifying and glorifying the persons or events under discussion. He endeavours to connect the present Indian life with the three great movements that swept the world: The Indo-Aryan Movement; The Indo-Turkish and the Indo-British.

The third chapter is a discussion on *The Continent of Circe (The Heart of India)*. It highlights the author’s imaginative interpretation of the Hindu personality based on original sources. It is one of the most controversial and authoritative work done by Chaudhuri. He won the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize for this book. One of the main reasons in writing the book is that in *The Heart of India*, he enumerates many of the evils of the Hindu society. He says that the Hindus are seeped in self-pity, gloating in ignorance and groping in unwavering fatalism. He comes
down hard on the all-pervasive unhappiness existing in the Hindu society. He bitterly attacks the Hindu grievances — everlasting suffering, committing suicides, fits of monomaniac, perverse thinking, greed for money and sexual obsession.

Chaudhuri wants to transform all this pervasive unhappiness into all-embracing happiness in the fourth chapter, *To Live or Not to Live*, the title of which is an echo of Hamlet’s *To Be or Not To Be*. The aim of this book is to consider how we can have a happy social and family life under the conditions to which we are born in this country. It is intended to enable other Indians to achieve happiness, since, “We Indians as a people possess a remarkable genius for being unhappy ourselves and making others unhappy”.

The fifth chapter of the thesis, discusses Chaudhuri’s *Culture in the Vanity Bag*. It shows that Chaudhuri is a keen observer of life around him. His analysis is tinged with satire and intellectual humour. Chaudhuri wants to show the connection between the Indian clothing and the Indian history. Clothes are the external manifestations of the innermost cultural habits of men. He views India as a “museum or warehouse of cultures’ exhibiting a motley of clothing. He offers a taxonomical break-up of the evolutionary history of clothing in Indian in four categories. He rightly points out the close connection between
jewellery and clothing. He equates the Hindu woman’s attachment for gold to her madness for saris.

The sixth chapter deals with *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997) which was written and published in the year of his centenary celebrations. It is an excellent running commentary on the decadence of human civilization. The writer 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 the writer remains creative at the age of a centenarian. With the publication of this book, in the twilight of his hundredth year, Chaudhuri holds a unique record for being the world’s oldest author. In this book he brings to bear the accumulated wisdom of a life spent in dispassionate pursuit of knowledge. Chaudhuri says that the Western civilization today is no longer exclusively western. It has expanded all over the world. It has two clearly marked divisions. There is the inner circle which is fully lighted and is occupied by peoples of European origins; around it is a very much larger circle, which is the penumbra of the central sun and is occupied by diverse non-European peoples i.e. Asians and Africans. Like all Chaudhuri’s previous writings, this book also has a spark of controversy. However, it will remain a remarkable landmark in apocalyptic literature of this dispassionate critic of the East and the West.
In the concluding seventh chapter, Chaudhuri’s vision of life and his bold and sacrificing nature to the pursuit of knowledge at the cost of government jobs are discussed. Any comment on Chaudhuri, without a mention of his grand style becomes inconclusive. So, his unique style, admiration and adverse comments of the critics and his place in Indo-Anglian literature as a product of the Indian Renaissance are also discussed by quoting precepts and epigrams from his books.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, an unknown Indian till 1951 has become a known Indian with the publication of his Autobiography. He is a master of prose style, an intellectual who has the courage to stand aside and be different from the crowd, a critic of Indian society with an almost Swiftian capacity for making surgical probes. Even Chaudhuri’s bitter critic C.R. Mandy wrote of Chaudhuri: “I had hardly met an Indian writer of such intelligence, his brain dances like fire-flies before the monsoon. I would always rate him- cerebrally and stylistically-in the top class of Indo-Anglian writers”.

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