CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION
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Chaudhuri’s vision of life is essentially earth bound as he is of the conviction ‘that man is nothing but a product of historical and environmental forces’. 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 moments that swept the world: The Indo-Aryan movement; the Indo-Turkish and the Indo-British. Nobody can deny the validity of Chaudhuri’s theory.

Although Chaudhuri is primarily a student of history, he cannot be labelled as a historian. His books are the honest records of his response to the world around him. His childhood in the native village, Kishoreganj; his graduate days at Calcutta; his service in the A.I.R. of Delhi; his trip to England have enabled him to gain rich experience, 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 encyclopaedic knowledge.

Chaudhuri is one of those rare intellectuals who have forgone the safety of a regular salary and dedicated themselves entirely to the pursuit of knowledge. With exceptional courage, he has made
intellectual writing his main vocation. He has occasionally taken jobs but, with all the economic hardships, he has not lost faith in his lofty pursuits. One cannot but agree with Kushwant Singh who declared Chaudhuri "a scholar extraordinary" after the title of Nirad Chaudhuri's own book written in 1974 on the legendary German writer, Max Muller. His encyclopaedic erudition has captivated many.

The dissertation would become incomplete without a mention of Chaudhuri's grand style which is based again on his erudite 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. Inspite 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. Chaudhuri is a solid and comprehensive thinker, and cannot help thinking about large issues of life in an elaborate fashion with his epic mind.

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. And, like all great stylists, each has his or her only individual style. It would, however, be no exaggeration to say that the dictum “style is the man” is never more true than in the case of Nirad Chaudhuri, an artist of great intellectual and stylistic endowments. Even Chaudhuri’s bitter critics admit that, “He has wit and learning and a style that is unique”

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 and 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.3

Chaudhuri has the courage to point out the mistakes in the personal as well as governmental behaviour of Nehru who was in power as the Prime Minister of India. He would not hesitate to show negative aspects of the English culture and people when he is right inside the English country. He can describe the drabness of Indian life as meticulously as Bernard Shaw did of his English life in his plays. He can discuss 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.4

Chaudhuri undoubtedly acquired abundant erudition through sweat and tears. Inspite of his wide reading, he never ceases to make fresh observations and original comments about the things, persons and situations that come to his way. He takes life very seriously and thinks
seriously. That is the reason why many statements that he makes come to
have the stature of epigrams. His books and articles bristle with
innumerable epigrams.

Like many eighteenth century writers Chaudhuri at times
produces beautifully balanced sentences by placing two ideas in
‘antithesis’, one against the other in the body of the same sentence: "The
arrogance of the almsgiver is fitly matched by the impudence of the
beggar".5

My mother was slight and fragile as my father was
robust, while her face was as responsive as my father’s was
impassive.6

Chaudhuri has, in abundance, poetic words as seen in AN
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN UNKNOWN INDIAN “............... where
to walk through the grass at dawn was to crush a mass of diamonds”.7

His writings are packed with innumerable metaphorical utterances
In his Max Muller, Chaudhuri writes:

German scholar is a Volcano which sends up hot,
molten lava from his blazing depths, and that lava solidifies
on the earth’s surface to become the hard basalt of his books.

Chaudhuri proclaims that as a writer he cannot be constrained by the boundaries of nations nor restrained by religion. He says that as a writer he belongs neither to India nor to England. As cosmopolitans the writers belong to the world public: “When I write in English, I am not writing as an Indian or an Englishman. I am just a writer. Writers know no nationality”.

Though one may disagree with what Chaudhuri says, one cannot but admire the way he says it. He is the most polished craftsman among the Indian writers in English. The intensity of vision and the forcefulness of expression with which “AUTOBIOGRAPHY” and the ‘THE CONTINENT OF CIRCE’ are written make them out as first rate books in the history of Indo-Anglian literature.  

Chaudhuri is very much conscious of the fact that his “English was not learnt from Englishmen or in any English speaking country,” and therefore, to avoid being stamped as the writer of Babu English, he must follow a rigorous practice.
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 other Indo-English authors. The only writer comparable to Chaudhuri in this regard is his friend, well-wisher and benefactor, Kushwanth Singh.

Yet Chaudhuri remains the best writer of non-fictional prose in Indo-Anglian literature because he chisels every phrase and polishes to perfection every sentence. The conscious pursuit of style makes him look deceptively like a creative writer. His complete dedication to the craft of writing makes him the Walter Pater of Indo-Anglian literature. It is because of his unique style that Chaudhuri commands admiration even when he causes irritation. But whatever style is used by Chaudhuri, it is the natural style of an Indian who has learnt his English through dictionaries and Indian lecturers and who has not de-Indianised and Anglicised himself to use the snobbish style. Most of the Indian haters of Chaudhuri belong to the Anglicised class whose superficiality and hallowness are ruthlessly exposed by him.

Chaudhuri’s amazing scholarship enriches his prose style. He is very fond of putting his scholarship on display. He tries to show
that he has a good knowledge not only of many disciples but also of some
European languages. His style is flavoured with bookish terms and
French, Latin and Sanskrit tags. Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar has said:
"His amazing scholarship no doubt gives ballast to the craft of his
wayward sensibility, and the Latin tags, French quotations, German titles
and Sanskrit citations sometimes introduce an element of the agreeably
exotic and extraneous".10

For all these reasons critics have almost 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 stylist. Few can write English
prose like him with ease and confidence, charm and lucidity, grace and
dignity.
C.R. Mandy once 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.

Another admirer, Kushwanta Singh wrote in the 'New Statesman': Chaudhuri writes the English language better than any Indian who has done before and is the most erudite writer in the country. His encyclopedic knowledge had made him somewhat of a legend. He is provocative and at times offensively anglophile at the expense of his countrymen. He further observed, India has produced few men of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's erudition or scholarship. He writes with equal fluency in Bengali and English. His prose is full of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and French words.

Nirad Chaudhuri, an unknown Indian till 1951 became 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.
NOTES:


4. Ibid, p.211.


