



# NIRAD CHAUDHURI'S VIEWS ON INDIA AND HINDUISM

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## Abstract

Nirad C. Chaudhuri is one of the Indian English intellectuals of the twentieth century. As he was discouraged in India by his excessive adherence to British imperialism after the independence he left our country and went to England. He became the citizen of England. He, being scholar and historian wrote many books of which two are important -*The Continent of Circe*(1965) and *Hinduism* (1979) in which he expressed his mocking ideas about the country and its religion. He is a critic of India and Hinduism, pointing out its weakness and demerits. Like V.S. Naipaul, he looks at India with the jaundiced eyes, highlighting the dark side of it.

**Keywords:** Intellectual, discouraged, imperialism, England, Circe, dark side. etc.

Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri (1897-1999) is one of the Indian English intellectuals and writers on the twentieth century. Being a writer of Indian Diaspora, he is known as "outsider-insider" in the opinion of Prof.M.K.Naik. Like V.S.Naipaul, he is the harsh critic of India and Hinduism in his major prose works and a 'self-confessed Angklophile'<sup>1</sup>

He was born on 23 November, 1919 in Kishoregunj, Mymensingh, East Bengal, district in West Bengal. He was the second of eight children to Upendra Narayan Chaudhuri, a country lawyer, and Sushila Sunderani. They were of liberal middle-class Hindus. who belonged to Brahma Samaj. After the passing his FA examination he joined Ripon College, ( now, Surendranath College) in Calcutta where he met the writer Bibuti bhushan Bandopadhyaya. After he got into History Department in Scottish Church College. He graduated in 1918 in History and earned his place in the merit list. He was close to Kalidas Nager, historian-professor. He joined Calcutta University for the Masters degree. His wife's name was Amiya Chaudhuri whom he married in 1932. He wrote an article "Theoretical Methods Objective Methods in History".<sup>2</sup> He became prolific writer writing up to the age of 99. Amiya his wife died in 1994 in Oxford and he died in Oxford three months short of 102nd birthday. A Blue plaque was installed by the

Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board in 2008. Dr Sumantha Miatra named as the 'unforgotten visionary of British in India'.

In his youth, he studied the complete works of William Shakespeare and Sanskrit Classics. He wrote his autobiography "The autobiography of an Unknown Indian" in 1951 and dedicated it to the British empire. For this act, he was hounded by the Indian government, deprived of his pension and blacklisted as a writer in India and forced to live the life of poverty. That was the reason why he had to leave his country and go abroad to England. Being called 'Bengali babu' he fell with English language and England and began to dislike India in working.

In England, Chaudhuri was the resident of the city of Oxford. He lived in Lathbury Road, Oxford, United Kingdom. A Movie is made on him under the title "Adventures of a Brown Man in Search of Civilization". For his literary contribution, he was awarded CBE in 1992 by Queen Elizabeth II.

Chaudhuri was erudite scholar and loved the British rule and imperialism. In 1966 The *Continent of Circe* was published got the award In 1990 he received Honorary Doctorate from the University of Oxford. He has been called "a lunatic. . . eccentric, and megalomaniac"(Murthy, 144). His concept of India arises out of dislike for the country and its people and its strange history of several thousand years. All this is expressed in the book *The Continent of Circe* in which it is explicit; metaphorically it refers to the myth of Circe, a demoness,<sup>3</sup> who converts the human beings into pigs who come to her island. It is compared our country.

*The Continent of Circe* (1974) is a 1965 book of essays written by Indian author that was winner of the Duff Cooper Prize for 1966. book ". . . is to describe the peoples of India in their natural groupings, both ethnic and cultural, and analyze their collective personality in the light of the historical evolution which has formed it" (Chaudhuri, 38). In this book he sets metaphor for India as a land of Circe, which emasculates all immigrants."<sup>4</sup> Circe is the *demoness* of her land. He discusses Indian society from the mental perspective, commenting on Hindu society from Prehistory to modern times. The author's thesis is that warring factionism has been a way of life there from time immemorial. He gives an account of various anthropological subgroups dominating the Indian subcontinent and the struggles between communities from the arrival of the Aryans to later settlements of the Hoons in western India. Chaudhuri is of the opinion that the Hindus have descended from the Europeans. Hence, he warns that "there is no future for us Hindus unless we can recover at least our old European spirit, even if not the European body and pride of flesh" (373). He calls upon the Hindus to affirm their ancient origins and save their essential European spirit. He expresses his anxieties about them and sees himself as their savior by stating "I would save the fellow beast. They do not, however, listen to me. They honk, neigh, bellow, bleat, or grunt, and scamper away to their scrub, stable, byre, pen, and sty"(376). Writing with an essential impulse, he states the purpose of his book, which is to save the Hindus and Hinduism. It may also be noted that his description of India alludes to the idealist-mystical view of India as a mother figure, for example as Mother India in Sri Aurobindo's words.

Similarly Chaudhuri criticized the religion of the country- Hinduism. Being himself as Hindu, he has unique ideas about the religion and its nature. He has expressed his views on the Hinduism in his masterpiece *Hinduism* (1979), "a sketchy and one sided presentation of a subject to which he returned again and again."<sup>4</sup> He writes about the conspicuous gap between the ancient Hindu spirituality and the modern Hindu superficiality and farce. His complaint is not against Hindu religion or its philosophy but against the Hindus of their contradictions, illogicalities and irrationalities, employing the religious principles for the wrong purposes. Being "Unphilosophical"<sup>5</sup> They have always superiority complex. They are as fanatical as other religious people. there is a philosophizing of suffering. he gives the examples of *naga sadhus* and *nagasansyasies*. "the Hindu holiness made indifference to filth as essential attribute of saintliness."<sup>6</sup> so is their attitude towards sex which is perverted from the Hindu myths, legends and imagination. procreation is a religious duty as per the Hindus and romanticized the sex. He quotes Kalidasa's poetical works. They have obsession to wars the sub-rational and supra rational and behavior. They belief in magic and witchcraft supernaturalism. His belief in the law of karma makes him indifferent to dirt, filth and squalor. and suffering. To sum up it is said that Hindu character and culture is full of contradictions, double standard of hypocrisy and compromise with violence, caste system, gender discrimination, chastity and food habits and atonement of sins, and Manu's Doctrine of Law.

Thus Nirad C. Chaudhuri's views on India and Hinduism are unique . Like V.S. Naipaul he looks at India with the jaundiced eye as a outsider. His pointed out the fallacies and myths more than he highlighted the virtues and merits. By his views, he stands as one of the writers of Indian Diaspora and his writings are read more for the beauty of language, sense of gentle hum our, cynicism and wit than the fact finding material. In this sense he is called as an imposter because he betrayed his own country in writing on the international level. He died on 1 August, 1999 at the age of 101.

## REFERENCES:

1. M.K.Naik, *History of Indian English Literature*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982,p.265.
- 2.Ibid.,p. 267.
3. Kumar, "Mapping Nirad C.Chaudhuri's Ideological Position: A Critical Analysis of *The Continent of Circe*," p.7.
4. Op.cit., Naik, p,269.
5. Ibid.,p.p.269.
6. Nirad.C. Chudhuri. *The Continent of Circe*, Bombay: Jaico, 1974, p. 211.