

PORTRAYAL OF RELIGIOUS ETHOS IN CHAUDHURI'S WRITINGS

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Abstract:

*The present research paper is modest attempt to study religious ethos in the select writings of Nirad C. Chaudhuri. He is especially known for his famous autobiography entitled *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* published in 1951. His love – hate relationship with India and her culture is debatable topic. He was familiar not only with English literature but also with Sanskrit literature. His attitude towards Indian culture and religion is fraught with controversy. He strongly believed that “all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the same British rule.” His portrayal of religious ethos is most important aspect of his writing.*

Key Words: Religion, ethos, controversy, colonial, british.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri was one of the most important Indian English writers. His contribution to Indian English literature is noteworthy. He wrote on almost every aspect of India. His portrayal of Indian politics, religion, culture, joint family system, economy, Indian English language and many others are most important aspects of his writings. His major works include *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), *Thy Hand, Great Anarch* (1987), *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997), *The Continent of Circe: An Essay on the Peoples of Indian* (1966), *The Intellectual in India* (1967) and *To Live or Not to Live* (1970). His biography of Clive, Robert Clive of India, is overwhelmingly favourable to this Nabob, who enriched himself through loot. Chaudhuri attempts to justify Clive's rapacity on the grounds that “The acceptance of gift was not contrary to the regulations then in force” (Clive, pp.260-61). *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor, the Rt. Hon Friedrich Max Muller* (1974) is generally considered Chaudhuri's best book, and won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 20th Century prize writer talks about the maladies of the country. He has also Very critically looked at the way: in which the religion and religious sentiments have been responsible for such a situation. In his book, 'The Hinduism Omnibus' published in the year 2003, Nirad C. Chaudhuri makes a few observations on Hinduism. He gives emphasis to the religious psychology and behaviour of the Hindus. According to Chaudhuri, Hinduism is a great religion of a particular kind. An account of it might lead to better, understanding of the religious urge in man, which is innate. He feels that no one can deal with India or understand the social and cultural life of the people of the country, without the knowledge of Hinduism, which has influenced the behaviour of even non-Hindus.

Chaudhuri says that, ritualistic worship is the practical discharge on the part of the Hindus, for a mutual help. He quotes, for examples;

Goats, sheep and buffaloes are sacrificed to the goddess Durga et her annual; worship, and the goat is told: The Goddess will be pleased to receive your flesh mixed with blood.

When the head has been cut off, it is taken to the image of the Goddess with blood, and "the Goddess "is apostrophized: "Thou who art fond off sacrificial meat, O great Goddess accept the blood of this beast with its flesh." The same procedure -is followed with the buffalo and it is told before the head is cut off:

"Om! O hero, forgive the pain which you will feel from the stroke of the scimitar, for you will attain heaven."

Since the Goddess has been given the due, the priest on behalf of the worshipper feels entitled to utter this prayer:

"Om! Give me long life; give me fame,

O Goddess! Give me good fortune. Give me sons, give me wealth give me all things desirable."

After discharging all his obligations to the Gods in order to get what he wants, the Hindu will offer renewed offerings when he has got it. For instance, if a child is ill the mother will take this vow:

"O! Mother! Save my child and I will sacrifice a pair of goats to you."

And she will most conscientiously fulfil it if the child recovers. Gratitude is expressed to a god or goddess even if any kind of property is acquired by a man solely by his own efforts. The Hindus are also capable of feeling resentment against their gods if they failed to perform their part of the contract. Hindus generally blame themselves instead of the gods and assume that if they have not got what they wanted, that was due to some fault of their own, not perceived by them. Hindu Gods could give their worshippers what the world contained, but had no part to play in maintaining the existence of the world, nor were they responsible for the moral behaviour of men. In fact, help from religion was sought for all purposes, moral or immoral. Religion and morality ran along parallel courses. He even quotes that in India even thieves and robbers worshipped their special deity for success in their ventures.

According to Chaudhuri, in Hinduism, the relationship with their cattle contains an element of coercion, which is very much like that which exists between a modern democratic state and its citizens. But Hindus never felt this coercion any human sense. They not only spent money for religious purposes voluntarily, but regarded the acceptance of their gifts by the gods as a favour-'Prasada' of the god as they called it.

While commenting on the god-man relationship in Hinduism, Chaudhuri says that in Hinduism, there is benignity on one side and devotion on the other. He writes:

No Hindu god or goddess, except a minor and local goddess of third rank, has been represented as pursuing any human being with the vindictiveness of Hera, Athena or Aphrodite. Indira, the only god who is known in Hindu mythology as a lecher seducing the wives of the sages, lost the status of a son, give me wealth give me all the things desirable. Hinduism appeared. Siva Is the god of destruction /in mythology, but in worship he is the god who guarantees Welfare and safety and is easily pleased. Kali, so terrifying in her image as a killer of demons is a mother full of love and mercy.

In *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, Chaudhuri says about his first book that, "In spite of its title, the book was not truly an autobiography. It was a picture of the society in which I was born and grew up." Chaudhuri is quite clear about his purpose in writing *Unknown Indian*:

The story I want to tell is the story of the struggle of a civilization with a hostile environment, in which the destiny of the British Empire in India became necessarily involved. My main intention is thus historical, and since I have written the account with the utmost honesty and accuracy of which I am capable, the intention in my mind has become mingled with the hope that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history. He states his target audience: I have written this book with the conscious object of reaching the English-speaking world.

Perhaps this intended readership is responsible for Chaudhuri always using similes from European art, literature and history. Both the preface and the prefatory note to the first section are in the style typical of the book: there are long, involved sentences, and a liberal sprinkling of words from European languages. There are many situations where only the French or Latin quotation would do. But Chaudhuri seems to use foreign phrases even if English equivalents exist. The common reader may not be fully conversant with these phrases, and pausing to find out the meaning provides a needless break in the reading experience. Here are two sentences from the second paragraph of *Unknown Indian*:

These recollections of mine are in no sense des memoires d'outre-tomhe. If anyone so chooses he may call them memoires d'outre-Manche in a figurative sense, in the sense that, retreating before the panzers of the enemy who has seized my past life, I have decided to put between him and me, between apparent defeat and acceptance of defeat, a narrow but uncrossable strip of salt water.

In short, Nirad C. Chaudhuri succeeds to capture Indian religious ethos in his writings. His attitude towards Indian religion is controversial and debatable. He is one of the few Indian English writers who have used the language for non-fictional purposes alone--earlier writers like Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru have been orators, who made speeches because they were social reformers and statesmen; later writers like Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh have written fiction and poetry. Almost all of his ten books have received critical attention and sometimes substantial praise. His biography of Max Muller won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and has become the standard work. *The Continent of Circe* won the Duff Cooper literary award. His *Life of Robert Clive* is quite provocative. We may not agree with his basic philosophy of preferring a dead empire to the lively chaos of modern India, but his books cannot be ignored by any serious student of Indian culture and literature.

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