

Chief Objectives of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's Bangla and English Writings

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Abstract: *Why the same author (Nirad C Chaudhuri) has written on identical and different topics in two different languages is a pertinent question here to be explored through a critical analysis of his writings in both the languages. To talk about the issues in Chaudhuri's writings, it has been found that he covered a wide variety of topics in his Bangla and English writings. But his presentation of the materials is, to a great extent, different i.e. in objectives and issues, in stylistics etc. Basically, he wanted to communicate with both the worlds of readers through his ideas for the greater welfare of the people. In doing so, he always kept in mind the intellectual circumference of his readers. It is also found that he had distinct intentions in his writings in Bangla and English languages. He thinks the Bangla and the English readers have separate choices and socio-cultural identities. That is why, many subtle differences prevail between these two types of writings. Keeping these views in mind, he did not even allow anyone to translate his works, neither did he translate himself as he was addressing two worlds and he transforms himself into two selves. Noticeably, in Bangla he wrote more about national affairs, whereas in English he wrote more about international affairs. In English, he has also written about such topics as are not found elaborately in Bangla because he intended these merely for the English-speaking people. Similarly, there are some topics in Bangla which were intended solely for the Bangla-speaking people. Furthermore, in English we find him writing in two prose styles, one scholarly and the other easy. Contrarily, he writes all the Bangla writings in simple prose getting rid of complications. This is because his Bangla books targeted ordinary Bangla reading people who, as it appears, compelled him to evade an intellectualised style. In fact, his audience always remained in his consideration while writing in a language, be it Bangla or English. So, in this paper the focus has been on the chief differences in objectives in his Bangla and English writings.*

Keywords: Objectives; Readers; Two worlds; Issues; Identical; Differences; Communication

Introduction

Nirad C Chaudhuri wrote untiringly and extensively on different issues with different aims in mind in two different languages- Bangla and English. He is known to the Bengali and Indian readers for both controversial and iconoclastic attitude. Those who did not read his writings also knew him as a 'Brown Sahib', an 'Anglophile', an 'Imperialist' etc. He may not be completely acceptable, but he is now, at least, tolerated by his countrymen. He had the guts to speak the truth, as he understood it, without caring for the

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result. His writings were based on varied situations and perspectives. The impetus for the differences in his writings was the audience. He was one of the most unusual and talented figures thrown up by the long colonial encounter between Britain and India. Born into a traditional Bengali family at Kishoreganj, he learned English as a second language. But his command over it was such that the writer Paul Scott commented: “He can write many an Englishman into the ground in his own language, as well as outthink him in it” (Shatabarshiki Samkalan, 40). His use of Bangla is exceptional and original. Such an excellent account maintained in *Sadhu Bhasa* is now-a-days uncommon. With a rational mind and philosophical understanding, he discussed the fall of Hindu civilization in the pre-British era, historical role of imperialism in spreading British civilization and culture, blind rejection of the British by the nationalists of India, weakness of leadership of Gandhi in the independence movement, practices of Hinduism, Hindu thinking in the ancient classical age, his own belief in God and mysticism etc. In all his writings, his self is parallelly present along with his discussions on Bangladesh, Bengali language, India, the culture of India and the West, contemporary history etc. Common agenda in both his Bangla and English writings were – his autobiography, biographies, love, marriage, sex, conjugal life, personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Nandalal Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohitlal Mojumder, Bibhuti Bhusan Bannerji, Shakespeare, nationalism, Bengali life and culture, English life and culture etc. the East and the West, history, religion, warfare, lost glory, literature, society, politics, gender etc. In his Bangla and English writings, differences on many aspects like perspectives, context, target audience, objectives, issues, attitude, range, sensibility etc. are found. But I have attempted here to scrutinise the subtle differences in objectives in his Bangla and English writings. About writing and its occasion, he says that he did not write to make both ends meet. Through his books and articles he has “tried in the first instance to understand the world in which” he has lived for himself, “and next to warn others about the dangers in it” [Thy Hand, introd. xxviii].

Objectives in Bangla writings

He dealt with a wide variety of topics in Bangla writing. Though he wrote less in Bangla, he achieved a remarkable position as a Bangla prose writer. While writing in Bangla he put emphasis on the needs and interests of the Bangla-speaking people. His topics range from his personal life to Rabindranath, Bengali life and culture, love and sex, women in Bengali life, rebirth of Bengalis, results of learning English, biographies of writers and politicians, Hindu-Muslim conflict, Calcutta Corporation, nationalist leaders, warfare, personal life, explanation to Bengalis, results of British rule in India, examples from Bengali life, culture and literature, childhood, some famous Bengali writers, criticism of Bengali people for their correction etc. He writes on all these in Bangla because Bangla readers have lost the habit of reading English. So they do not feel comfortable reading English. That is why the question of getting pleasure from reading English is a far cry. His only intention of writing is to carry on a conversation with the Bengalis. He shows deep concerns for the readers. He knows that it is all useless if the readers do not read his books. So, as long as the readers will read his books, he will be unconcerned.

To most of the Bengali readers, English is unreachable. So he did not feel it would be possible to communicate in English with the Bengalis. Most of the readers misunderstood him. To avoid misconception about him and to prevent them from deriving inappropriate meanings in English, he started to write in Bangla. He wanted to let his readers know about his ideas directly. He desired to share his views with his countrymen. He had also the secret intention of increasing his readership. A large number of readers was a matter of pleasure to him. His Bangla writings are his self-explanations, his defense. He explained the context and background of his writings. It was a sort of apology to the readers. He thinks writing is not for scholarly exhibition but to communicate ideas, to reach other minds- that is why he uses Bangla. He writes describing the objectives of his writing in *Bangali Jibane Ramani*, "As long as they listen to me I do not care if I am recognized as a writer." (15) In his Bangla writings, he is soft in many cases in his attack on Bengalis. This can be compared with the scolding by a father for his son's faults. Since Bangla communicated directly with the readers, he was restrained to some extent in the attack. Whatever attack he made on the Bengalis he did so with the sole intention of the betterment of the people of Bengal, to make them aware of their position, faults and misunderstanding. He himself writes on the objectives of his writing in Bangla, "Bengali is a very difficult language to translate into expression – diction, sound, rhythm- are different. On top of that there is the Bengali sensibility, which in the old days always rubbed an Englishman the wrong way" (Thy Hand 597)

He also thought that whatever he wrote in English for the British publishers was unreachable by most of the Bangla readers. It was also considered that any Bengali writing in English is like showing off in a circus. It is meaningless to him. Readers thought it was something untouchable. They did not have the ability to appreciate it. So it became a necessity to write in Bangla to communicate his ideas. Again, he reveals new information here and thus disillusioned us. He wanted to reveal the facts about the British people and the misconceptions we have about them from our nationalist leaders. The local British people hated the Bengalis. They showed anger towards the adoption of their culture. He says, "They did not like the adoption of their culture by the Indians" (Thy Hand, introd. xx). He wanted to present Bengali life, its various aspects- colourful and colourless to the Bengalis. He laments over the decadence in Bengali life and literature. He celebrates the Bengal Renaissance and its glory in most of his writings. Modhusudhan, Bankim and Rabindranath attracted him for their roles in the Bengali literary movement.

He thought that he was betrayed by the Bengali readers. They misunderstood him completely. They also betrayed him. They failed to catch the spirit of his speech. He made attempts to defend himself. Chaudhuri wanted to maintain a link to the country of his origin through his writing till his death. Furthermore, some instinct in him seemed to drive him to shield himself against accusation of betrayal by Bengali readers. On purpose of writing Bangla Chaudhuri writes "So my books are not for those who are known as pundits in Bangladesh" (*Bangali Jibane Ramani*, 3). This is clear enough to say that he also wrote in lucid prose. Simplicity, brevity, clarity, objectivity typify his Bangla prose.

And he was aware of the sufferings of the Bengali people. He hoped that in such suffering the hearts of the Bengali people did not wither away. They had the ability to tolerate all kinds of disasters in their life. History has proved it again and again. He wanted to work through his writing for the emancipation of the Bengalis. He was well aware of the objections against his writing. As he writes in understandable Bangla, severe objections start as soon as his writing is published. He also feels sorrow that those who write in ambiguous language do not face the trouble. They become reputed as writers. Finally, the purpose of writing in Bangla was getting a response from the readers. Every writer aims at this. In absence of it they become despondent. Nirad is no exception to this. Sometimes he is also hopeless. He says, "So getting no response it seemed to me that writership in Bangladesh is in vain" (4).

In *Bangali Jibane Ramani* (Role of Woman in Bengali Life), he presented a unique thesis about the role of English literature in the evolution of *Kama* (Physical desire) into *Prem* (romantic love) in nineteenth century Bengali life. In this book he provides an impressive collection of evidences to confirm his thesis not only from literary texts in Sanskrit and Bangla (from Bibhuti, Kalidasa, Jaidev to Bharatchandra, Chandidas, Bankimchandra and Rabindranath) but from less reputable sources as well. Bengalis may understand half of the meaning, but the other half and rhythms do not enter their mental faculty. This incompleteness of understanding breeds misconception about his writing. He opines, "If anybody wants to say something for the prevailing conditions of Bangladesh and Bengalis he should say so in the understandable language of the Bengalis" (*Bangali Jibane Ramani*, 5). He wanted to reach today's educated Bengalis. He says, "I have understood that I cannot reach today's educated Bengali people writing in English language" (ibid.).

Atmaghati Bangali (Suicidal Bengali) is a ceaseless introspection on his own sour-sweet relationship with his origins. Even he calls Bengal a static sea and he wants to abandon it. He feels the urge to carry on a dialogue with the people he has discarded, and provides various justifications for renewal of his late career in Bangla. In *Atmaghati Rabindranath* (Suicidal Rabindranath) he has portrayed the life of Tagore extensively with explanations. He has written a full Bangla book on him. He kept the interest of the people of India in mind while writing on him. He has identified the suicidal faults of Tagore also. He has given a new presentation of Tagore to the Bengali readers. In English he has written only one chapter on Tagore in *Thy Hand*. In other places he has written only a few words. His presentation of Tagore in English is relatively brief with fewer allusions. He wanted to give a brief but overall picture of Tagore in English. He also compares the last part of his life with Tagore. On the Nobel Prize, he thinks that its effect on Tagore was a warning. It did not do any good to his writings, though it increased sales of his books and he became like a hero of the western world. He has found out rarer information on Tagore. As he says, Tagore says in response to the award of the Nobel Prize "This day of mine will not last forever. The ebb tide will set in again. Then all the squalor of the muddy bottom will expose itself bank after bank" (ibid. trans. Nirad C Chaudhuri, 75). He was

misunderstood and it was said that he “had denied the literary greatness of Tagore” (76). But people did not think that it was Chaudhuri who described Tagore saying “Few literary men have been subjected to more unjustified, malicious and indecent abuse than Tagore” (77).

He refers to the comment of Marlaux De Gaulle “that to belong to history is to belong to hatred” (ibid.). In Tagore’s case this reached the lowest depth. He belonged to literature and scholarship and became the worst victim of this. After the Nobel Prize the attacks on his writings stopped, but a new kind of personal and political attack on him as an internationalist started. In a letter Tagore wrote, “There was a question in your letter whether I have engaged paid agents to spread my fame” (78). And he commented that this type of doubt is likely only in Bengal. He also refers to his last prayer of his tired life on rebirth and that is he may not be born in Bengal again. Nirad has criticised the critics of Tagore: “A conviction which they could not resist, that the English of the ‘*Gitanjali*’ might really be Tagore’s own, made them even wild” (80). He calls Tagore as sensitive abnormally and a practical analyst. He also shrinks from everything unsocial and unpleasant. His love for Bengal and simple Bengali made him suffer more and that was why he was incapable of overlooking his treatment by fellow Bengalis. His inspiration was rural Bengal. “It was only in a rural setting that he found not only the real Bengal of geography but also that of the spirit” (84). Tagore wrote in 1980 that after coming to England he came to think of the unfortunate, poor India as his mother.

Amar Debottar Sampatti (My Bequeathed Property) is a final explanation to the Bengalis about all his writings. Causes of misconception about him, nature of publishers, pretension of Bengali professors, pre-British and post-British rule in India, causes and effects of malice towards the English, causes of his stay in England, influence of English literature on Bangla etc. have been discussed in this book. Here he remembers the quotes of Rammohun, “Conquest is very rarely an evil when the conquering people are more civilized than the conquered, because the former bring to the latter the benefits of civilization” (Amar Debottar Sampatti, 72). *Aamar Desh Aamar Shatak* (My Country My Century) is the only Bengali book which deals with major issues discussed in English as well. It deals with Hindu-Muslim conflicts, Second World War and role of India, personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Bose etc. He has described international war affairs like a professional war historian. About writing the book *Aji Hote Satabarsha Age* (Before a Hundred Years) he says that many people have asked him to write a complete autobiography. He has often written about his life in various English and Bangla books on different contexts. But this is not like the English books. He has written here as per the need on the topic. This book is the summation of his personal biography as described in two English books- *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* and *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* Here he has described his formative years and working life very briefly.

Objectives in English writings

He wrote English mostly for the English-knowing international world. In English he has presented and introduced Bengali people, their position, mistakes etc. to inform the English world about Bengal, their rule in India and their mistakes as rulers. He wrote out of an inner urge to reveal facts. He shared his unconventional ideas with the whole world. He came to be known as a famous writer after his publication of *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. He also described English scenes and life through the eyes of an Indian. It is little exaggeration to say that he wanted to show his superior command over English in the scholarly type of prose style which is self-conscious, argumentative and allusive. It consists of compound or complex sentences, difficult words and quotations from famous writers of different languages. The scholarly type of prose style has been developed in the books addressed to the English-speaking world, such as *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, *A Passage to England*, *The Continent of Circe*, *Hinduism* while the easy type is used in books meant for the consumption of Indian English readers, such as *The Intellectual in India*, *To Live or Not to Live*, *Culture in the Vanity Bag* etc. The easy type of prose style is spontaneous, conversational and simple. It comprises common words, simple sentences and familiar statements. He wanted to address the choice, needs, priorities, problems, culture and life of the British people. The volume of his English writings is much more than that of his Bengali writings. In his English writings, he has used allusions from diversified sources. Personal life, England- its scenes and life, victims of Circe, Indo-British relations, Calcutta, Hinduism, Max Muller, Robert Clive, decline and fall of civilization, Indian clothes and culture, European music, Indian renaissance, childhood, mourning for the British, biographies etc. are his widely discussed English topics.

In *The Autobiography*, Chaudhuri wanted to make some fundamental contribution to history. That is why history predominates in all his writings. His objective of writing the book was “that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history” (*Autobiography*, pref. ix). He wanted to rescue himself from being called a failure. After the age of fifty he felt compelled “to write off all the years” (ibid.) he had lived. Chaudhuri has “written the book with the conscious object of reaching the English speaking world” (x). Therefore, “he seeks... .. to placate his western readers not merely by a pompous display of the very English possessions in his house but by the pervasive European frame of reference in idiom (of a dead age, that is), allusion, analogy and standard of valuation” (Narasimhaiah 24). Many misunderstood it as a colonial cringe. But in reality it was not. It was admiration for the supremacy of the British people. In *The Autobiography* he says that he wants to tell “the story of the struggle of a civilization with a hostile environment” (ix). He wanted to write the true history of this part of India. He describes in this book the conditions in which an Indian grew to manhood in the early decades of this century. His main intention is historical here. Out of utmost failure of the Indian leaders, Chaudhuri wants India to remain a colony of Great Britain and her allies forever. He says, “I expect either the United States singly or a combination of the United States and the British Commonwealth to re-establish and rejuvenate the foreign domination of India” (600).

In the description environment has been given more importance. The places that had an influence on Nirad's boyhood, the family antecedents, the rural cultural milieu, the national fervour in the wake of the Partition of Bengal, the cold war between the ruling and the subject races, the city and the university of Calcutta, the coming of Gandhi and the eruption of the new politics of the twenties have been brought into the discussion here. His childhood received much environmental consciousness like the "the quirks and quiddities of his childhood, boyhood and youth" (Iyengar 29). So vast a description on his birth and parentage in English is rarely found in his Bangla books. And even in doing so he engages first 195 pages in its description. This indicates that he wants to inform the English-speaking world of the Bengali rural life and culture.

In *A Passage To England*, he makes a comparative study between England and India. He also indicates that India, too, has remained unchanged "but the permanent face of India and the permanent face of England are different, they wear different looks" (*A Passage to England*, 7). It is time, he thinks, which has made the face of this country sad and stark. But the face of England is always smiling. Chaudhuri appears as an ingrained Anglophile in *A Passage to England*. Critics have criticized some aspects of the book. It is a kind of escapism from society. Here the tone is haughty. This haughtiness has been criticized severely. As Paul C. Varghese says in his book on Nirad C Chaudhuri, "It is this self-righteous tone of the book that is more objectionable than his commendatory judgements and sweeping generalizations" (63-64). *The Continent of Circe* is a book aimed at describing the people of India in their natural groupings, both ethnic and cultural, and analysing their cultural collective personality in the light of the historical evolution which formed it. But he generates controversy by expressing the view that India exercises a baleful influence on all the incoming peoples after the manner of the mythical enchantress Circe who turned Odysseus' sailors into swine. Those who did not believe in single God "migrated to India with their gods and the hymns in which they praised these gods, to be free to keep the religion of their fathers and have unlimited land to till and graze their cattle on" (*The Continent of Circe*, 47-48) Here he not only propagates his anti-Indian outlook on life but also gives it a historical colour. He wants to prove that the Hindus living in India are really descendants of European races corrupted and denatured by a hostile environment, but he does so by writing off the Indus Valley civilization and the Dravidian civilization that had flourished in India long before the arrival of the Aryans. So many think that his analysis of Indian history and Hinduism has become thoroughly distorted.

The book *Hinduism*, a controversial book, tries to prove that the religion of the Hindus is derived from the religious beliefs and practices of the Indo-European peoples of ancient ages but has become corrupt in the course of its evolution through time. Here he criticizes Hinduism bitterly and judges it like a rationalist. He attacks Hindu religious thought as a static sea of religious faith and practices. He has presented the Indo-European character of Hinduism. The words used in the Hindu religious vocabulary either go back to proto-Indo-European languages or have analogues in them. Certain notions and concepts in Hinduism could not have originated in the geographical environment which India

provides but could have come only from some cold region. He also thinks that certain rituals and beliefs in Hinduism show a clear similarity with those of the Greeks, Romans, Celts, Germans and Scandinavians. He shows that the whole process of change from the non-anthropomorphic mode of worship to the anthropomorphic was similar in Hinduism, Roman religion and Greek religion. He points out that the earliest religion of the Aryans underwent drastic changes from their first settlement in India down to the Muslim conquest. He opines that Hinduism had attained its full development before the Muslim invasion of India at the end of the twelfth century. He thinks that Hinduism is a pursuit, not of beatitude, but of power. He considers Hinduism inferior to Christianity on account of its worldliness and its lack of charity. It is a corrupt offshoot of Indo-European religions.

Thy Hand, Great Anarch! is a postscript to his Autobiography. "The story I want to tell" he wrote "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" (*Thy Hand*, introd. xiv). The intention in his mind is that the book might be regarded as a gift to contemporary history. This book contains three elements. Firstly, his personal life which he had made the framework of whatever history he wished to offer; secondly, his thoughts and feelings about the public and historical events through which he had passed; and thirdly, an account of what happened in India in the political and cultural spheres in the period from 1921 to 1952, free from the current myths. He writes his story here as he thinks that "no true history of the disappearance of the British Empire in India will ever be written" (xvi). He manifests his supremacy over other writers of history saying that none of the new writers has any personal experience to be able to appreciate the events accurately, let alone to reproduce the spirit and atmosphere as "Indians are not in the habit of keeping diaries, or even of writing frank letters" (xvii). British rule brought European cultural influences on Indian life. Bengal was the cradle and centre of diffusion of this new culture. This book contains three elements in it. His personal life in which he has made the framework of whatever history he wishes to offer; his thoughts and feelings about the public and historical events through which he has passed; and a description of what happened in India in the political and cultural fields in the period from 1921 to 1952. He says 'in relation to modern Indian society' he is like an aero plane in relation to the earth. It cannot sever "terrestrial connexion" but the "flight helps it to obtain a better view of the life of the land" (x).

Scholar Extraordinary is a book of biographical research. He has not included his own life and experience here directly. There is a gulf of difference between the writer and Max Muller. Through a fundamental research on invaluable papers, rare information, manuscript, personal diary and relevant books and subjects he explains and evaluates the life and personality of Muller. But his comments remind the readers of his own personality and ideals, realizations of a writer. In writing this book he has discovered those ideals of a writer he sought for his whole life- lifestyle and personality of an intellectual and knowledge-loving writer in Max Muller. In Max Muller he found the

example of the equation of culture, of knowledge, of scholarship and of personality. He has seen the reflections of his favourite saying of Plato that uncriticized life is not worth living in the understanding of life by Max Muller. Nirad C Chaudhuri was inspired to write the biography of Max Muller because of the strength of his position and fame in his own age and "he played so important and significant a role in history so that no outstanding individual of the type ever loses his relevance to all ages" (Scholar Extraordinary, introd. 8). In *Robert Clive of India*, he hits the established belief. 'Clive' is a war criminal, according to traditional belief, and mostly hated by the Bengalis. But Chaudhuri tried to make neutral evaluation of a "so called villain" in traditional history. He intended to analyze the cause of defeat of Bengal in the battle of Plassey. Clive was even misunderstood in his own country. These revolutionary findings have been brought to light by him. He did not want to please the British people. He wanted to teach them how misguided they were in their evaluation of Clive.

Conclusion

It is obvious from this discussion that Chaudhuri held separate objectives in his Bangla and English writings. In the later years his Bangla writings became regular though he gained much fame in English. This resulted in the achievement of a remarkable position as both Bangla and English prose writer. Though his Bangla books are much controversial or much blamed they are very readable. His Bangla writing aimed at carrying on a conversation with the Bengalis. It is also a clear representation of the Bengalis to the Bengalis. From the examples mentioned in many places of his books his sympathy for the Bengalis is crystal clear. He had a common objective in all his writings to remind the nations of their lost glory and greatness. He tried to succeed in his mission of explaining his self. But it is also true that all his writings were not object-oriented. In addition, his Bangla writing, as he thinks, was meant for the people giving up their mother tongue in the attempt to acquire English learning. He opines that they should receive a lesson from him. He himself writes, "Nirad Chandra has set examples that one can be a sahib even wearing dhuti, one can gain world citizenship being involved in Bengali literature, enjoying Tagore's songs" (*Desh*, Editorial). His irreverent attitude to the nationalist leaders and public figures of that time, as is found in his writings, is a clear indication of the evaluation of the deeds of the nationalist leaders. His English books are an overall representation of India to the English. Traditional beliefs about the English by the Bengalis, he considers, were deeply mistaken. He tried to break the conventional beliefs speaking the truth boldly both in Bangla and English, though it gave him indescribable sufferings. Last but not the least, the objectives of his English and Bangla writings can be clearly alienated if the issues and stylistics of his writings are studied tenaciously. All these delineate his outstanding capability to communicate with the two different audiences in two separate languages through significantly different aims.

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