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**PORTRAYAL OF SELF-DISCOVERY IN NIRAD CHAUDHARI'S 'AN
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN UNKNOWN INDIAN**



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ABSTRACT

The fundamental definition of Autobiography is the account of a writer's life penned by himself, 'autos' is the self-whereas 'bios' is the life of the writer and graphin is the act of writing. The autos in autobiography takes precedence over the 'bios' therefore the autobiography records the life history of the writer and in the process, it leads to discovery or recreation of the self to offer an analysis of an autobiography. It reveals the inner dimensions of his personality and multi-dimensional aspects of his life intertwined with history and the times he lived in. Autobiography exposes the oscillations of the life, thought and times of the author which is often times very intriguing to the readers.

George Gusdorf an authority on autobiography writes, "It's a search of self through annals of history an act which embodies the self where the 'real' or actual self is replaced by a new self-made object, a cultural artifact the autobiographical text."

The odyssey of discovery leads him from the periphery of events to the centre of his essential self, his distinctive personality, his innermost guided secrets and thoughts. An Autobiography exposes the man and the creative artist within the self.

KEYWORDS

Self, autobiography, consciousness

RESEARCH PAPER

Nirad Chaudhari defines self as:

“Thoughts of self are encouraged by a religious view of life because it emphasizes our lone coming into the world and our lone exit from it and induces us to judge values in their relation to the individual Voyager, the individual voyage and the ultimate individual destiny.”

The autobiography belongs to the genre of nonfiction and is a sub genre of Prose. The Autobiography of an unknown Indian has become today gems in Indian English literature. The sheer power of the English language, the lucidity, cascades into widening experience and thoughts. They display a powerful memory for times gone by; a vividness of details that is the outcome of an intelligent mind and emotions regarding persons and places which comprises spiritual compassionate selves.

Nirad is known well into the twenty first century as a ‘grand solitary’ because he unabashedly confesses to being an anglophile who loved all things British and English during the colonial Imperialist rule in India. It is amazing how Nirad puts down minute observations and fleeting emotions. It contains the basic ideas that have shaped his intellect and idiosyncratic point of view; his ideas are highly controversial and lived during the Bengal Renaissance which was opened to intellectuals, to bring India out of the dark ages to the light of modernism, humanism, religion and a new political ideology of freedom.

“To the memory of the British Empire in India which conferred subject hood on us but withheld citizenship to which yet everyone of us threw out the challenge “Civies Britanneous sum” because all that was good and living within us was made shaped and quickened by the same British rule.”

Nirad an intellectual product of the Renaissance in India was captivated by the enlightenment and humanism that brought about a dynamic world view away from narrow religious thinking. He confesses that he wrote his autobiography for the English speaking world but at the very outset he outlines the two worlds and the two different types of the reading audiences. Firstly he explains the type connected intimately within man and his geographical environment.

In the preface to the Autobiography he outlines the grand narrative as follows;

“The book describes the conditions in which an Indian grew to manhood in the early decade of this century---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 rule in India becomes necessarily involved.”

Nirad's memory creates the essence of his past. M.N. Naik the foremost critic and writer in Indian writing in English comments of Nirad's work:

“Chaudhari's self-portraiture is all the more fascinating, because the unknown Indian is so much a usual Indian and the picture of life in a small East Bengal town in the early years of the twentieth century is drawn with many evocative details.”

Nirad begins his Autobiography with his birth place Kishoreganj in Bengal. He prefers to call Kishoreganj a country town. Nirad becomes sentimental about the river, rain, the seasons of Kishoreganj. He gives us details of the flora and fauna of this country town. He remembers this unique place as a blend between the rural and the urban. The self and consciousness of nature in communion form a unique psyche. Nirad's self was moulded by his growing up years in a vast house with natural surroundings. As a child Nirad was conscious of his self as exclusively privileged belonging the higher strata of society. He grew up to be an iconoclastic individual living in the fabled world of his imagination of Kishoreganj and Banagram. The large house at Kishoreganj and Banagram grew in his consciousness and etched its largeness upon his personality.

Talking about real Englishmen there were few occasions where Nirad and his brother came face to face with Englishmen in Kishoreganj. The obsession with fair complexion also took hold of Nirad concerning his own marriage. He married a girl with dark complexion. This indicates Nirad's humanitarian and rational outlook towards human beings on the basis of colour. Nirad remembers his father as the gentlest of men. He was always spic and span in traditional Bengali dress, Nirad's father was a disciplinarian. He distinctly remembers the educational aspect

“The thing my father was interested in was education---education was acquisition of knowledge accompanied by an inseparable from the training and development of all the mental faculties and more especially the intellect.”

Nirad's mother contributed profoundly to the shaping of his self, a fragile woman, simple, good and honest. Nirad Chaudhari reveals Vivekanand's displeasure at the Hindu counter reformation at the end of century. He spoke in chaste English and said

“In India we think --- but unfortunately sometimes we think so deeply that there is no power left for expression. Without expression how can we live? The backbone of western civilization is expansion and expression.”

Nirad's self was enriched by the confluence in his family of three great traditions of India. His mind had been shaped by the best European thoughts and he possessed an analytic frame of mind. Chaudhari's autobiography is an intellectual delight. The language is so lucid that it seems like being written by a Westerner. Nirad for all practical purposes endorsed the best of Western civilization and culture. Morality and honesty were his guiding principles throughout his life. Even when writing this story of his life he varied every event before writing it. Nirad's undeniable belief in civilized man and a moral learning distinguishes him from other writers. To follow up on his life through self and historical consciousness the grand solitary confesses,

“From the personal standpoint this historical thesis has emancipated me from a malaise that has haunted me throughout my life during the years of my education. I was becoming a stranger to my environment and organizing my intellectual and moral life along an independent nexus.”

Nirad Chaudhari closes his autobiography on the note of his affirmation of the self that he did live his life to the of faith, hope and joy and in his intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical existence.

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