UNIT 9: NIRAD C CHAUDHURI: "SHAKESPEARE IN TODAY'S ENGLAND"

UNIT STRUCTURE

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- develop an understanding of Nirad C Chaudhuri as an essayist
- form an idea on the works of the author
- appreciate the greatness of Shakespeare and his position in today's England
- discuss the style and technique of Nirad C Chaudhuri as a prose writer
- evaluate the critical reception of Chaudhuri

9.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall discuss the essay "Shakespeare in Today's England" by an eminent author Nirad C Chaudhuri. The essay that you are

going to read is an excerpt from his second book titled *A Passage to England* published in 1959. The book is a collection of twenty- six essays containing the author's impressions of his short visit of five weeks to England, rounding it off with two weeks in Paris and one in Rome. It was his first visit abroad at the age of fifty-seven in the spring of 1955. In that short span of time, he saw more paintings, statues, and works of art in general, more plays, fine buildings, gardens and beautiful landscapes; he heard more poetry and music and altogether had a very exciting and interesting time. The essays that form the contents of the book have been arranged in four parts with the following titles for each part:

Part I : The English Scene

Part II : The English People

Part III : Cultural Life

Part IV : State of the Nation

The essay "Shakespeare in Today's England" is the first essay of Part III of the book.This essay, not unlike the other ones, brings out the author's deep understanding of English culture, Shakespearean theatre and audience and Shakespearean criticism through the ages. He had visited Stradford- upon Avon on a very special day. It was the 391st birthday of Shakespeare as started earlier. Even on his first visit he did not appear to be a stranger. He had carried with him to England a rich assortment of "book derived nations" from literature, history and geography. Accumulated since childhood, these ideas had built up a fairly comprehensive and homogenous picture of the country and its people. It is not surprising therefore that even in his first visit, he had been able to show an unusual awareness of the events that he saw happening around him.

A basic feature of Nirad C Chaudhuri's approach to the English scene, its celebrations, its cultural life and even the town of Stradford upon-Avon is his emphasis on the contrast that he brings out with India. It is this aspect of his writings that runs through the essay that we are going to discuss here. The essay has references to his visit to Paris where he spent two weeks as part of his European tour. He refers to his experience of watching a play by Racine, a French dramatist titled *Athalie* in the essay and tries to relate his

experiences of watching Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at the Old Vic in London and *Twelfth Night* at the Memorial Theatre at Stratford. It is a very interesting essay that you are going to read in this unit.

9.3 NIRAD C CHAUDHURI : THE ESSAYIST

Nirad C Chaudhuri as an essayist has developed a love-hate relationship with his readers, especially his Indian readers. Yet, there are others who find it difficult to make up their minds about the essays of Chaudhuri. Interestingly, in the West he had an excellent rapport. The *New Statesman* had a glowing tribute to his book*A Passage to England* :

> *"He has a poetical mind with a sceptical turn*
> *and the English are lucky to have come under*
> *His shrewd peeled gaze. He isat best direct*
> *observation and writes like an angel..."*
> (Quoted from the Orient Paperback edition of *A Passage to England*)

The above quote makes two interesting points. First, Chaudhuri is a keen observer; he has a shrewd, peeled Gaze. Secondly, with his poetical mind with a sceptical turn, he "writes like an angel". Both these points are crucial in understanding his essays.

A basic character of his essays included in *A Passage to England* is his emphasis on the contrast between India and England. Even when he sat down by the bank of an English river, his thoughts were with the rivers of India he had known. The East-West divide is a defining factor of his essays. The essay taken for this unit can be seen as fairly representative of his writings included in this book.The essay, unlike those written on Shakespeare, reveals the originality of his approach to the subject. The essay shows a marked individuality in his approach. While watching the plays of Shakespeare or experiencing the modern- day Englishmen's attitude to Shakespeare, his main concern has been to find out for himself what is it that is in Shakespeare that makes the playwright so popular even today. In other words, he would like to find out why Shakespeare appeals to a modern

audience. He had the same question in mind when he was watching a play by Racine in Paris. As an essayist, Chaudhuri had developed a distinctive style of his own. He was very conscious of the use of words and held the view that “the substance of a piece of writing cannot be separated from its style”. He believes that “style is the subject itself”. Yet, in India, he remains the most controversial author.

9.3.1 His Life and Works

Nirad C Chaudhuri was born on the 23rd November 1897 at Kishorganj in the Mymensingh district in East Bengal, now Bangladesh and died on 1st August 1999 after an eventful life of a hundred and one years. His writing life is equally impressive, extending so far over seventy- one years from 1925 to 1996, perhaps the longest in history. In its course, he had written fourteen books in English as well as Bengali, and poured out hundreds of articles and broadcasts.

He had his early schooling at Kishanganj where his father was a lawyer. He recalls that his father had taught him the use of the English language which he learnt “without tears but with tail”. In 1910 when his family migrated to Calcutta, he stayed back in Mymensingh for his schooling, but a few months later he joined his family in Calcutta where he was admitted to a Bengali school. He passed the Matriculation in 1914. Even at that age, he had acquired a mastery of English syntax and idiom and an adequate vocabulary, so that when he entered college in 1914, he did not have to consult dictionaries for the meaning of words. In 1918 he took his BA degree with Honours in History at Scottish Church College, Calcutta and was placed in the 1st division. But somehow, he could not complete his MA in History from Calcutta University which sadly brought an end to his dream of becoming a Professor in History.

In 1921, he took up the position of a clerk in the Accounts Department of the Indian Army. That was the time when he began his writing career contributing articles for newspapers and magazines

in Bengali and English. He got tired of his job in the Account Department and resigned his position there to start a career in journalism and editing.In 1932, he married AmiyaDhar, a well known writer herself. They had three sons. In 1938, he obtained a job as secretary to Sarat Chandra Bose the brother of Subhash Chandra Bose as a result of which he was able to interact with eminent political leaders of India and from it he also gainedknowledge of their ways, which he could never have otherwise. In an article on "The Gandhian Congress", he relates his experiences of his meeting with Gandhi when the great man stayed as a guest for several weeks in Sarat Chandra Bose's house. However, in 1941, he left Calcutta and moved to Delhi where he stayed on till 1970.

In Delhi, he worked as a commentator for All India Radio. But more than that, it was in Delhi that his writing career flourished with the publication of his first book *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* in 1951. In 1955, he received an invitation from the British Council and the BBC for a five week visit to England, rounding it of with two weeks in Paris and one in Rome. He had presented a series of talks in the BBC of his experiences England and to Europe which came out in book form *A Passage to England* Published in 1959.

A list of his works with brief review notes on a few of them appears in the next section of the unit. Among his books *The Continent of Circe* received the Daft Cooper Award, a very prestigious literary award. He was the only Indian so far to have received the award. Another book *Scholar Extraordinary* received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1975. England too gave him due honours. He was honoured by the University of Oxford with the Degree of D.Litt. in 1990. But the honour that was close to Nirad C Chaudhuri's heart was the honour conferred on him by Queen Elizabeth II in 1992. He was made a CBE, commander of the order of the British Empire. It is an award given in Britain to some people for a special achievement. Moreover, he was awarded a Fellow of the Royal Literary Society. He stayed on in Oxford, living out a dream. Though over the years,

he became more and more disillusioned with England. He died on the 1st of August 1999 barely two months short of his one hundred and second birthday.

Nirad C Chaudhuri was a prolific writer, writing both in English and in Bengali. He began publishing articles, in both these languages as early as the nineteen twenties when he was working in the Accounts Department of the Indian Army. Since then, he had been writing and had established his reputation as an ardent anglophile. His well known and much criticised dedication in *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* was held as a Proof of his love for the British people and British Culture. He had dedicated his *Autobiography*

To the memory of The British Empire.... because
all that was good and living within us was
made, shaped and quickened by the same
British Rule.

It is beyond the scope of this unit on a single essay of the author to discuss all his works in detail here. Instead, attempt has been made to introduce you to the first six books through brief reviews of each of these books. The other books are merely mentioned in passing. This does not intend to state that these books are of less value than the earlier ones. It is merely to minimise the load of this unit. Discussions on the books written in Bengali are not given either. He had written altogether seven books in Bengali:

1. *Bangla Jeabone Ramoni* (1968)
2. *Atmaghati Bangali* (1988)
3. *Atmaghati Rabindranath-I* (1992)
4. *Amar Devotwar Sampati* (1994)
5. *Atmaghati Rabindranath-II* (1996)
6. *Amar Desh Amar Shatak* (1996)

Nirad C Chaudhuri received international fame as a thinker and scholar mainly because of his books in English. Below an attempt is made to briefly present a review of the first six books:

1. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951): The first monumentalbook *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* brought Nirad C Chaudhuri to instant fame. The book is dedicated to 'the memory of the British Empire which conferred subjecthood on us but without citizenship to which yet every one of us threw out the challenge…" The book describes the conditions in which India grew to manhood in the early decades of the 20th century. Though it is supposed to be an autobiography, the book turns out to be less of a personal story and more of a national history. Divided into four books, the first book "Early Environment" deals with the impressions formed in Chaudhuri's boyhood days of his birthplace Kishorganj, his ancestral village, his mother's village and England as gleaned from books and pictures that he come across. The second book covers the "First twelve years" of his life till his family left Kishorganj. Book III covers his education in Calcutta, his experiences of adolescence till his initiation into scholarship. On the other hand, Book IV brings him "into the world" Indeed *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* is an extraordinary and penetrating study of the complex of social, political, racial and religious stresses of 20th Century India as seen through the eyes of Mr Chaudhuri.

2. *A Passage to England* (1959): The second book written by Chaudhuri is a collection of a series of impressions about his visit to Britain in 1955. This book divides into four parts beginning with "The English scene", followed by 'The English People', "Cultural Life" and lastly "State of the Nation". A keen observer, Chaudhuri contrasts various perspectives of India ranging from its colours, culture and sensibility with those of the West. Naturally, a lover of everything that is British, Chaudhuri thinks highly of the different aspects of social behaviour of the English people. He is full of praise for the culture consciousness of the English people and equally sore at his countrymen's lack of sit. Similarly, he is full of praise for the English welfare state and laments that modern democracy in India has

overlooked these vital issues. On the whole, the look is a perspective of the author's impression of the west vis-a-vis the East.

3. *The Continent of Circe* (1965): Chaudhuri's third book *The Continent of Circe* is sub-titled "an essay on the people of India". The book which the author calls on essay consists of 376 pages (Jaico). Besides an Introduction and an epilogue, the book is made up of fourteen chapters and two Appendices. The book is about the author's reflections on various issues related to India notably ethnicity and Hinduism. He presents his understanding of Indian life in which the Hindus figure as the singular character. In different chapters he deals with different aspects of Hindu life which he traces from the arrival of the Aryans to the sub-continent thousands of year ago from the West. He quotes extensively from the Vedas and the great Indian epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* to support his thesis on the different aspects of Hindu way of life- the man-woman relationships through the centuries with the rise and fall of civilisation. Controversy apart, this is a very interesting book making enjoyable reading. This is the only book by an Indian author to receive the Duff Cooper Award.

4. *The Intellectual in India* (1967): This is Nirad C Chaudhuri's fourth book in which the author deals with the contemporary situation in India. As is obvious from the title of the book, the author first examines and describes the current conditions of intellectual activities and the situation facing the intellectuals in India. He observes that authoritarianism which runs deeps in politics and social life, hostility to intellectual activities, the precarious economic situation makes the intellectual feel frustrated if not wholly paralysed. He traces the history of three intellectual traditions– The Hindu, the Islamic and the Westernised traditions which formed part of a larger movement- the Indian Renaissance. Chaudhuri feels that the intellectual efforts of modern India had contributed towards the expansion in academic life, popularising of professions like medicine, law and teaching. He suggests the need for financial security of the intellectual and should

produce at least half a dozen books during his active professional life so that he can settle down to live by his proper work. He suggests the importance of publishing in English. Besides one must write on such things on which the author feels deeply and sincerely. These suggestions make the book enjoyable.

5. *To Live or Not to Live* (1970): This is Nirad C Chaudhuri's fifth book. It is a relatively slim book consisting of 2015 pages (Orient paperback), informal and discursive in approach. It deals with how we can have a happy social and family life under the conditions in which we are born in this country. This central theme of the book is presented in two parts: Part I dealing with Social life and Part II with Family life. The author recalls that when he first came to Delhi in 1942, the city consisted of two dominant elements: the Muslim traders and artisans and the Hindus of the trader "Bania' class who were segregated in separate mohollas and were equally important socially. But after independence and partition, the name Delhi was transformed into a Punjabi city overnight as the Punjabi refugees virtually swamped Delhi and gave it a new ethnic character. The author analyses the problems of a social life to thrive in such a heterogeneous society. He suggests that social life survives through communication between life minds.

Chaudhuri then moves on the role of the family in a happy life which constitutes part II of his book. He suggests that the joint family system must be swept aside both in theory and practice if any genuine satisfactory family life is to be built up in our society. He is prejudiced against the working women in the context of happy family life. What inspires the author here is a genuine concern for his countrymen, how they can be happy with others in their social and family life.

6. *Scholar Extraordinary* (1974): *Scholar Extraordinary* is a biography on Fredrich Max Muller who was a German Scholar and a thinker who made remarkable contribution to the study of Sanskrit and Sanskrit literature in Germany. The book had been the author's pain-staking labour stretching four years; but indeed, it was to him a

labour of love. The author himself records in the book that it had been a memorable experience for him and not merely a task.

While introducing Max Muller, the author throws light on different aspects of the life of this celebrated Indologist who was a scholar and thinker. His prestige and profound scholarship has been acknowledged throughout the length and breadth of the globe. When he died on the 28th October 1900 messages of condolence began to power in from all over the world while writing the biography of such a celebrity, Mr Chaudhuri feels that a life of Max Muller is justified if it can show what the scholarly life and the scholar's personally really are. C.D. Narasimhaiah had considered this work of Chaudhuri an excellent work of scholarship.

Chaudhuri's other scholarly works include Hinduism (1979) in which he projects a number of his original ideas on Hinduism from a rationalistic parent of view. In 1987 he brought a post- script to his *Autobiography* is his *The Hand, Great Anarch!,* tracing the course of his life from 1921 when he was in search of a job and ends with an account of the writing and reception of his *Autobiography*. His *Clive of India* (1975), *Culture in a Vanity Bag* (1976), *The East is East and the West is West* (1996), *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997) and *From the Archives of a Centenarian* (1997) are other contributions to scholarship.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the basic feature of Chaudhuri's approach to the English scene and its people?

Q 2: What do you mean by "love- hate relationship?

Q 3: What was the thought that came to Chaudhuri's mind when he was watching the two plays of Shakespeare?

Q 4: What was Nirad C Chaudhuri's aim in life? State whether he could achieve this aim.

Q 5: Briefly relate Nirad C Chaudhuri's work since his leaving college till his departure to Delhi.

Q 6: Name the honours conferred upon Nirad C Chaudhuri by

(a) The Queen of England

(b) The University of Oxford

Q 7: Why do you think that Chaudhuri's has been severely criticised?

Q 8: What is the book *A Passage to England* about? Answer within 100 words.

Q 9: What prize was awarded to the book a continent of Circe?

Q 10: Who is the Scholar Extraordinary?

Q 11: Name the second part of Chaudhuri's *Autobiography*.

9.4 READING "SHAKESPEARE IN TODAY'S ENGLAND"

We shall deal with the text in a detailed way in the following subsection.

9.4.1 Explanation of the Text

1. In the opening line of the essay, "this section of my account "refers to Part III of *A Passage to England*. The author gives the title "Cultural life" to this part of the book though he doesn't feel very happy about it. He is actually not happy with the word "Culture" because he has the apprehension that what he or for that matter an average Indian would consider to be "Culture", would turn out to the average Englishmen merely "amusement". He drew a sharp distinction between the terms amusement and culture.

2. The author visited Stradford upon- Avon, the birthplace of William Shakespeare on the day of the 391st birthday of the poet. Shakespeare was born on the 29th April 1564. So you can easily calculate the date of Mr Chaudhuri's visit to Stradford. Being the birthday of the poet and dramatist, Mr Chaudhuri expected that there

would be some celebrations in honour of the birthday of the bard. He enjoyed the celebrations: there were speeches, procession, unfurling of flags, laying wreaths on the taint.

The author noted that the speeches were in the form of toasts meaning that the speeches were short mainly aiming at wishing happiness (or success to somebody) while raising a glass of wine usually in course of a dinner.

The Menu for the luncheon was given in French since many of these dishes originated in France. This particular menu would read in English as follows:

Iced Melon

or

Meat Jelly

*

Cold Salman with asparagus and

mayonaise sauce

or

Cold Turkey and ham with salad

and new pototoes

*

Iced cake Shakespeare

*

Cheese

*

Coffee

The menu also included a choice of wines from a two-page wine list which for the honour of Stradford was qualified as the “Abridged wine list”.

3. Chaudhuri found everything except the celebration of the birthday, in Shakespeare’s relations with contemporary England quite novel to him. He found that the small town of Stradford was doing quite well on Shakespeare though he had the feeling that Shakespeare was dreadfully commercialised in that town. He was of course

pleased to see that and even wrote about it to his family comparing Stradford with Kishorganj of his boyhood.

4-5. Here Chaudhuri draws a comparison between India and England. In India people and towns flourish on religion because religion is a living thing in India. An Indian town cannot flourish on a dramatist even Kalidas, unlike Stradford where Shakespeare has become popular entertainment.

6-8. The author recalls a visit to the Old Vic, a theatre in Waterloo Road London. Built in 1818, the theatre was famous for its notable productions of Shakespeare's plays. It was what is called a repertory theatre because every day the theatre offered several productions, a repertory of plays. In 1940, the theatre was bombed; but if was restored in 1950. In 1963, the National Theatre took over Old Vic and the Old Vic Company was dissolved.

The play that Chaudhuri saw at the Old Vic, *As you like It* is a light-hearted comedy. While watching the play, Chaudhuri had his eyes and ears on the audience too. He was amazed that the modern day film- viewing English audience could appreciate Shakespeare including the Elizabethan jokes.

9-10. At Stradford he saw *Twelfth Night* a comedy, and found it a delight to feast his eyes on the lovely spectacles and to hear English spoken. Besides, Chaudhuri found Shakespeare had been able to please a modern audience as well.

11. The basic question that was uppermost in Chaudhuri was what Shakespeare appealed to a modern audience. He was not satisfied with the explanation given by the English. They usually told him that at Old Vic and at Stradford one had the best representation of Shakespeare by the best actors and producers. Chaudhuri liked to answer the question by stating that he English people have remained basically Elizabethan and had always been so.

12-15 The author recalls his experience of watching a French play in Paris. He was walking along Quai Malaquais, a street in Paris on the bank of the river Seine. At that moment his eyes were suddenly

arrested by a placard in a newspaper stand which stowed that Racine's play *Athalie* was on at the Salle Richalieu. He rushed back to the hotel and got a seat booked. When he entered the theatre in the evening, he found the attendance to be even greater than at the Old Vic and at Stradford. Racine was a French playwright and *Athalie* is one of his later plays based on the Bible. The play was produced by Mme Vena Korene who also acted the part of *Athalie*. Chaudhuri found the play beautifully presented; the acting and elocution superb.

Here too Chaudhuri tried to find an answer to the question: the relation between a modern civilized people and their classics. He discovered that Frenchmen too could not give him a convincing answer. But Chaudhuri states he could find the answer by himself.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: Briefly describe how Stratford paid homage to Shakespeare on the391st birthday of the poet as perceived by Nirad C Chaudhuri.

Q 13: Where did Nirad Chaudhuri see *As you Like it*? Briefly describe hisexperience.

Q 14: Where did Nirad C Chaudhuri see *Twelfth Night*?

Q 15: Where did Nirad C Chaudhuri see *Athalie*? Briefly describe hisexperience.

9.5 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

In an essay titled "Apologio Pro ScriptaSua", Nirad C Chaudhuri talks about his style and technique of writing in vivid details. He states that he sets down in writing whatever comes to his mind. He tries to convert his mind into a camera to take the impression of whatever to which it is exposed, and thus create an exact equivalent of a photographic negative. His personal work is to develop the negative and then make a print. He does not allow anything of what was not present in the untouched negative to be in the print for pictorial effect.

This metaphor of the camera is central to Chaudhuri's writings. When the author books at a scene, he considers his situation to be similar to that of Wordsworth. What he was seeing was to him "an appetite; a feeling and a love". So when his English friends asked him about his impressions of his visit to a particular place, his reply was a camera metaphor: "I am carrying back exposed films. They will have to be developed before I say anything". (*Passage to England*, page 10)

The camera metaphor has affected the style of his essays in general and "Shakespeare in Today's England" in particular. A major portion of the essay is written in a descriptive prose that requires what the *New Statesman* review calls" a poetical mind", a "shrewd peeled gaze" and "direct observation". The description of the celebrations of Shakespeare's 391st birth day which he had the privilege to see, is a striking example of his keen observation. He doesn't miss out "the speeches, the procession, unfurling of the flags, visit to the birthplace, laying of wreaths and posies on the tomb". Even the menu is a photographic replica of the one that might have been displayed for the benefit of the guests.

Chaudhuri's keen observation becomes evident in this description. The description is full of the imagery of sight (visual imagery), imagery of touch (tactile imagery), and imagery of small (olfactory imagery) among others. The description of the celebration of Shakespeare's birthday appeal birth to the eyes and the ears. The French words in the menu create the atmosphere of the festival often lightened up by playful humour.

Chaudhuri is at his wittiest when he observes the speakers in the celebration programme. He notes that the speeches were made by people who could be expected to know something about the poet. The speeches were convincing; they were Chaudhuri slyly remarks, not made by "politician or civil servants who thought they were conferring an honour on Shakespeare or of the most recommending his name for the Honours List". One can appreciate Chaudhuri's wit and human and his sly dig at politicians and civil servants.

Chaudhuri's critical bent of mind is never lost sight of even when he seems to "room delighted through the motley spectacle" of Stratford. He

makes a very interesting observation on the bawdry jokes in Shakespeare's plays which traditionally Shakespeare critics were made to believe that Shakespeare had incorporated them with the aim of pleasing the groundlings. Chaudhuri points out that even a middle class audience that could easily pass as a film-watching audience thoroughly enjoyed the jokes.

His technique of presentation leaves a powerful impact on the reader's mind. His knowledge of the French language becomes obvious in the essay. He quotes French extracts giving the idea that he had read these works in their original and not in the English translation. He could appreciate Racine's play in French and even quotes a few lines from the play towards the end, whose English rendering would run as follows:

O promise! O Threat! O dark mystery!
What evils, what blessings are by turn predicated?
How can so much anger
Agree with so much love?

In fact Chaudhuri's scholarship gives shape to the style of his essay.



LET US KNOW

Metaphor: It is a figurative device used in spoken or written language where a comparison is not made very obvious, but is implied. The "metaphor of the camera" refers to Chaudhuri's attempt to take in the scenes around him in the way a camera takes in the scenes or images that are within the range of the lens. Words like "negative", "exposed films" etc. belong to the area of photography.

Imagery: Language that produces pictures in our minds of people reading or listening. For example when one reads the description of the celebrations and the luncheon menu, the images of the food items are produced in the mind. We get the sight, small, touch and taste of the items on display.

9.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The critical reception that Nirad C Chaudhuri had received has been a mixed one. At one side there are eminent literary critics. William Walsh and Jan Jack, Harish Trivedi and Khuswant Singh and on the other side, very few of course is C.D. Narasimhiah and V.S. Naipaul and a few others, each making an individual assessment of the author and his works and trying to arrive at a standpoint about him.

Professor Bhabatosh Chatterjee of Calcutta University while introducing a research work on Nirad C Chaudhuri by Dr. Tara Sinha very rightly makes this point at the beginning when he says, “It is indeed difficult to make up one’s mind about the work and the personality of Nirad C Chaudhuri...” Professor Chatterjee is rather unhappy with a lot of what Chaudhuri had written and doesn’t hesitate to think of them as bearing “Traces of Juvenile irresponsibility”. At the same time he feels that “the fact remains that we can’t ignore him or dismiss him outright” Professor Chatterjee further states: “Whether Mr Chaudhuri has an original mind is a question not easy to answer but that his writings show a marked individuality, none will dispute. Again, his essays are extremely well written, and to say that he is an accomplished Journalist is not a disparagement”.

This is indeed a high tribute by Professor Chatterjee to Nirad C Chaudhuri as an essayist. Dr Tara Sinha, whose book Professor Chatterjee is introducing had done a fairly objective assessment of Nirad C Chaudhuri and his works, though her critical study is comprised only to the first five English books. She finds Chaudhuri a man of letters comparable with some of the great literary figures and social thinkers and she has presented her finding with an academic conviction. She argues her views intelligently in her sociological study of his works. The stylistic study which constitutes Part III of the book is perhaps the best part of her work in which she forcefully places Chaudhuri’s style of writing on a very high pedestal. Her study of the imagery and the Lexis in the narrative style of Chaudhuri makes enjoyable reading.

Professor William Walsh, a former Professor of commonwealth Literature at the University of Leeds, makes a comprehensive study of some of the works of Nirad C Chaudhuri. In *A Passage to England* Professor Walsh sees Chaudhuri as a writer with a gift for registering fresh impressions of what he observes about him and also as one capable of some highly subjective analysis of the British Welfare State.

In this context it would be interesting to refer to a critical response of Professor Walsh to Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. Professor Walsh's observation on Chaudhuri's style deserves special mention: "It is written in a masculine confident English of long balanced sentences, which combine a degree of formality with considerable ease and lissomness, and its oddity is a curiously Celtic use of continuous tenses. It is an idiom which is distinctly late Victorian in flavour..." (P 45-46) Chaudhuri believes that "the substance of a piece of writing can't be separated from its style". (Apologia) Thus, his style in The Autobiography is "wholly consistent with the period and sensibility of the writer".

However Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah does not seem to share the views of Professor Walsh. He finds Chaudhuri's style defective and is not at all happy with the book though he has the fullest praise for Nehru's Autobiography. This essay is referred to here because the views belong the contrary 'pole' and students can find a rope to debate on the issues raised. Interestingly, noted British author Ian Jack has called Nirad C Chaudhuri "the world's last Englishman" and considers him as "one of the world's finest writers of English. To support his claim, Jack refers to Chaudhuri's two volumes of autobiography without of course discounting his other writings, by stating that his works "have given the twentieth century a brave, unconventional and necessary witness" (P 41). It is indeed a significant appreciation by a British author on Chaudhuri's work.

However, in order to understand Nirad C Chaudhuri the man and the writer, one is constantly reminded of another critical response to his works by Professor Harish Trivedi. The title of Professor Trivedi's essay provides a paradox to Ian Jack's essay. Professor Trivedi calls Chaudhuri "The last Bengali Babu" not because "after a Life-time of perfecting an English style",

he had chosen to write in Bangla “while keeping presumably to the same non-Bengali diet” but because he finds that his flair for collective flagellation and self excoriation seems to work even better in his own language then in English. Professor Trivedi seems to jokingly remind his readers of the Bengali meaning of babu which correlates with the very British apparel that he dons when he is out of home.

Finally, one would like to refer to the critical response to Chaudhuri’s work by his life- long friend, the noted author Khuswant Singh who had the highest regard for his scholarship “No Indian, living or dead, had written the English language as NiradC Chaudhuri”, states Singh in open admiration of his works. Referring to *A Passage to England*, Singh observes that the book received the most glorious reviews in the English Press. Three editions were rapidly sold out and it had the distinction of becoming the first book by an Indian author to have become a best-setter in England. Singh considers Nirad C Chaudhuri as “a scholar extraordinary.



9.7 LET US SUM UP

The primary focus of the unit is on the essay “Shakespeare is Today’s England”. But before taking up the essay, attempt was made to introduce the author by looking at his merits as an essayist followed by an account of his life.We also discussed briefly a few of his books written in English before taking up the essay whose full text is given in the unit. The text of the essay is followed by a discussion on the main issues of the essay covering every paragraph and glassing the difficult words. The French extracts have been rendered into English for the comprehension of the readers.In a separate section the style and technique of the author is discussed in the context essay. This discussion is followed by a selection of some critical reception to the author and his works. It is expected that these responses would sharpen your sensitivity towards the author and his works.