



Nirad Chaudhuri

Nirad Chaudhuri was 54 and a struggling Bengali journalist when he burst upon the English

literary scene with his first published work, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (Macmillan, 1951). An excited Winston Churchill said it was one of the best books he had ever read. Churchill's praise was understandable. *The Autobiography* was dedicated 'To the memory of the British Empire in India which conferred subjecthood on us but withheld citizenship; to which yet everyone of us threw out the challenge: *'Civis Britannicus sum'* [I'm a British citizen] because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped and quickened by the same British rule.' This dedication was dropped when the book was reissued in 1988, but as for the challenge of citizenship, *Civis Britannicus sum*, he need not prove any more that he was a 'British'.

Nirad Chaudhuri died on 1 August at his Oxford home. He was 101.

However, for the very reason, Churchill and his English reviewers were so excited about Nirad Babu, the fellow natives were cross with him. One critic described him as a 'senile Anglophile'. He was sacked by his Delhi newspaper as columnist. But Nirad Babu was no Anglophile, he was 'Anglo' *par excellence*. His education and his intellectual roots had made him a Bengali Englishman. So if he was angry with his intellectual homeland, it was because of the ultimate shame: it had liquidated a great Empire.

'The abandonment of India in 1947', he wrote in his second autobiography, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch - India 1921-52* (Chatto, 1987), 'has to be regarded as the most shameful act in British history.' The last British viceroy to India, Mountbatten, did not 'go forward to India as Alexander did, but ran back from India to Britain. Mountbatten further compounded the shameful exit by surrendering 'unconditionally to the Muslims led by Jinnah by partitioning India and giving to them the territorial base for a Muslim nation which they had wished for'.

Nirad Babu's own objections to

Pakistan appear to have been aggravated by his strong sense of Bengali jingoism, his 'Englishness' notwithstanding. Whenever he used the word Bengali, he meant Hindus of Bengal and not Muslims; then they were simply Muslims. The 'Bengali Muslim' was a recent innovation.

'Ever since the 1920s,' he explained, he 'had been advising the elder sister to leave East Bengal because I did not want them to live under the social and cultural domination of Muslims, and in 1945 I asked the younger sister, whose husband was much more wealthy than my other brother-in-law and who was living at that time at Kishorganj, my birthplace, to come away to Calcutta realising all their assets in time. But my sister wrote to me that there was perfect harmony and friendliness between the Hindus and the Muslims'.

The Bengali jingoist in him believed in dominating Muslims and, therefore, did not want 'to live under the social and cultural domination of Muslims.' So he 'did not, nor have I ever now, accepted the partition of India intellectually, morally or emotionally, and I have been saying since 1947 that, had I been anybody to influence events then, the last Hindu would have died before India was divided'.

Yet opposed to Pakistan, as he always remained, Nirad Babu saluted 'Jinnah as an honest and honourable enemy'. He wrote: 'Jinnah is the only man who came out with success and honour from the ignoble end of the British Empire in India. He never made a secret of what he wanted, never prevaricated, never compromised, and yet succeeded in inflicting an unmitigated defeat on both the British Government and the Indian National Congress. He achieved something which not even he could have believed to be within reach in 1946. For this he can be compared to Weizmann who made a similar impossibility possible.'

Why then Jinnah was 'pursued with mean malice' by both the British and the Hindus alike? 'It is the defeat at the hands of Jinnah which has made both British and Indian writers vent their spleen on him,' said Nirad Chaudhuri. And 'for this very thing he has been pursued with mean malice by British politicians, Hindu politicians, as also by writers of both the sides which had to admit defeat at his hands. It was said by them that all the misfortunes that came on the Indian people with the withdrawal of the British were due to his unreasonable extremism. But what is called his extremism was the

minimum demand of the Muslims, and was known to everybody for years. Why did anyone expect the leader of the Muslims not to stand up for it?'

Nirad Chaudhuri saw an interesting link between the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate and the rise of the Pakistan movement. 'By deposing the Sultan and abolishing the Caliphate Kemal destroyed the Pan-Islamic movement, and cut the ground from under the feet of the Indian champions of that Islamic institution. This was to have an increasingly profound effect on Muslim politics in India ... The Indian Muslim became increasingly convinced that they would not be able to maintain their Muslim identity unless they had some territory of their own.'

In the spring of 1955, Nirad Babu was invited to Britain by the BBC Overseas Service and British Council. He was 57 and this was his first visit abroad. He spent five weeks in Britain, and on the way back, two weeks in Paris and one in Rome. His earlier 'ideas of England were all acquired from literature, history and geography' on which 'was superimposed all the news of their political, social and economic troubles'. Nirad Chaudhuri set down 'a small number of [his] impressions with some whimsical *obiter dicta*' in *A Passage to England* (Macmillan, 1959).

Passage was a mixed judgement, where it was out of sympathy or concern. The welfare state and the 'material well-being of the people,' put him 'in a very happy state of mind'. He was pleased about modern democracy too, but to his upper caste Hindu mind it amounted to tampering with 'the natural caste system of the mind'.

He believed 'modern democracy is making it impossible for the good Sudra to remain a good Sudra by giving him its characteristic training and education. It has already destroyed his folk civilisation in many countries and has made half-caste of him. In revenge the new Sudra is bringing down everybody else to his level, and he has the power to do so, for the same democracy has made him the ruler of the other castes'.

Sudra is the lowliest of the four Hindu castes. Nirad Chaudhuri said in 1977 that he had long ago 'lost faith in the tenets of Hinduism', yet, it seems, he was never able to give up the myths and prejudices of his original faith. He came to England in 1970 to write his book, *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (Chatto, 1979). He did not return to India.

Hinduism, he pointed out, was 'a

phenomenon of immense magnitude' and 'bewildering diversity', and, therefore, he said, it is important to realise 'that Hinduism is a special kind of religion which has to be met on its own terms'. Hinduism is for its followers 'not an alternative to the world, but primarily the means of supporting and improving their existence in it'... There is belief in life after death, there is the notion of salvation, but 'the main object is worldly prosperity, and this absorption in the world has made the doctrine of rebirth in it the most appealing and strongly held belief among all the notions put forward by them'. The Hindus 'so loved the world that they made the possibility of leaving it for good even after many cycles of birth as remote and as difficult as possible'.

Nirad Chaudhuri drew a parallel between the notion of 'impurity' in Hinduism and 'the innate sinfulness of man' in Christianity. 'A Hindu's concept of life was dominated by the notion of impurity. All material things, including the human body could become horribly impure, and some were intrinsically and irredeemably impure.' To the Hindu, 'all things were naturally unclean and had to be purified.

The purification was the Hindu counterpart of Christian regeneration. But while the Christian could become regenerate only through the grace of God, a Hindu could always employ a rational and material means of purification, for example, water or cow dung.' Nirad Chaudhuri rightly cautioned his readers that his account of Hinduism 'must be regarded as tentative'. Still the book went a long way towards making the mysteries of Hinduism intelligible to those not so familiar with its notions and practices.

Having settled down in England, he did not cease to be Anglophile, but he did feel sorry that the English were giving up their values. He said: 'I regret almost everything I can see with my eyes hear with my ears, but that will never make me give up any English value that I have prized,' he told *The Independent*, London (10 December 1987) almost 17 years after he had settled at Oxford. The England he loved was in decline and what he called 'the new country, America,' he found to be 'even more decadent, more rotten - from the human point of view, not technologically - than the old.'

So when the late Cardinal Basil Hume said his country can no longer claim to be 'a truly Christian society', Nirad

Chaudhuri asked him (*The Independent on Sunday*, 29 April 1990): 'Why has it taken him so long to discover this? Why has he waited to see abortion sanctioned by his Government before speaking out? Why does he say that sanctity of human life is a Christian value? And, lastly why does he blame society's failings only on the Government and not also on the Anglican Church, the chief custodian in this country of the Christian faith?' And coming to the Anglican Church, he took it to task for 'condoning adultery in the name of Christian compassion', showing compassion to homosexuality as well and for its 'notorious subservience' to the monarch or the State since the Reformation. In condoning abortion, he said, 'the British were adopting the very Hindu practices which they condemned in their days of power.'

Nirad Babu made no apologies for being an 'Empire addict', but he wouldn't stand any Empire nonsense either. When the Conservative politician (now) Lord Tebbit tried to lay a 'cricket test' for British Asians (Which side they cheered, English, Indian or Pakistani?), he put forward a surer test of Englishness: appreciation of *The Wind in the Willows*, enjoyment of Stilton cheese in crocks and going to the opera. Nirad Chaudhuri's test would have failed all Indians except himself and, he believed, 'virtually all the English.'

It is interesting that Nirad Babu was not considered worthy of any of the prized literary awards. Presumably, because he wrote to endear to no one except himself. He was not like an advertising agency copy writer, writing to order. When the publisher of *Thy Hand, Great Anarch - India 1921-52* asked him to cut down the book from 1,000 to about 350 pages, he told them he would not reduce it by one page and they could return the manuscript to him. He was quite unlike, for example, V S Naipaul or Salman Rushdie: didn't seem to have the malice of the former or the opportunism of the latter. He did not criticise Rushdie in public, but said (Obituary in *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 August 1999) in private, that he was 'a low scribbling adventurer'.

Nirad Chaudhuri enjoyed being provocative. He could be infuriating and, at the same time, amusing. Talking about his second autobiography, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch - India 1921-52*, he told Andrew Robinson, 'I have thrown atom bomb, you can throw a brick.' Very much like

his former country's military ideology that wanted to reserve the atom bomb for itself and didn't mind if others replied with a brick.

Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri died at Oxford, 1 August 1999. He is survived by three sons.

M H Faruqi



Shafiq al-Wazzan

Shafiq al-Wazzan, 74, prime minister of Lebanon (1980-82), died on 8 July 1999. A 1947 law graduate from the

Christian Saint Joseph University, al-Wazzan had entered parliament in 1968 and become minister of justice the following year. Appointed prime minister in 1980, it was his lot to bear all the brunt and indignity of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

It was also his job to persuade **Yasir Arafat** to quit Lebanon along with his men but within a couple of weeks of their departure, hundreds of Palestinian refugees, men, women and children at the Sabra and Shatila camps were slaughtered by the Phalangist militia. The picture of what had happened, wrote the then US secretary of state, **George Shultz**, 'was this: the Israeli Defence Forces had left Phalange militiamen into the Sabra refugee camp Thursday [16 September 1982] evening and had fired illumination rounds through the night to enable the Phalangists to conduct what amounted to a massacre. The Israeli forces on the scene were well aware of what was taking place. At some point on Friday [17 September 1982], a similar scourge of the Shatila refugee camp took place.' President Reagan 'was more than ready to send the marines back', but Shultz had already told himself that the defence secretary, **Casper Weinberger**, and Pentagon would oppose it.

Emboldened by US indifference, the Israelis broke into Shafiq al-Wazzan's home, violated the Soviet embassy and entered banks in Beirut's financial districts. Standing on the steps of the presidential palace, Shafiq al-Wazzan cried out: 'If the Israelis want to kill us all, let them do it and let us get it over and done with.' He said, 'the US is responsible for all our miseries.'

He told Shultz: 'We have never waged war against Israel. We are the only

country that has been destroyed. Now we are asked to accept conditions. We cannot accept conditions which will prevent us from carrying out the agreement.' But in the end, he caved in to American arm twisting. His own foreign minister, **Elie Salem**, was believed to be collaborating with the Americans. Israel agreed to withdraw from the southern and coastal regions of Lebanon provided the Syrians too withdrew their forces and the Lebanese curbed anti-Israeli terrorists. Shafiq al-Wazzan, however, remarked that 'peace in Lebanon will not last unless the greater problem of the Palestinians is resolved'.



Muhammad Hadid

Mosul-born Iraqi industrialist and politician, **Muhammad Hadid**, 92, who served as minister of supplies in the government of

Nuri al-Sai'd, then as minister of finance in **Brigadier Abd al-Karim al-Qasim's** republican regime (1958-60), died in Maidenhead, England, 3 August 1999. Hadid quit politics in July 1960 but continued to support Qasim, saying that the alternatives to his regime were more extremist: either the Ba'athists or Communists. The Ba'athists took power in February 1963 and put Hadid on trial and confiscated his assets. After rehabilitation, he confined himself to his vegetable oil business.

Hadid came to Britain in 1995 for medical treatment because the health facilities in Iraq have completely run down due to UN sanctions. He is survived by two sons and one daughter, the well known architect, **Zaha Hadid**.

Joshua Nkomo

Zimbabwean Vice-president Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, 83, died on 2 July in a Harare hospital at the age of 83. Before his death, Dr Nkomo sought medical treatment for prostate cancer in South Africa and Egypt.

Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo was born on 7 June 1917 in the Semukwe area in Matabeleland. He was the third child in a family of seven. He was the first African to be employed by the Rhodesia railways as a social worker. In 1957 he was elected president of the reformed African National Congress, which united the Salisbury-based Youth League and

the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress. When the ANC was banned, Nkomo was elected president of the National Democratic Party, which was banned in 1961. In the same year, the Zimbabwe African People's Union, ZAPU, was formed with Nkomo as its first president. In 1963 ZAPU split, giving rise to a new party, ZANU, both of which were banned later. Nkomo formed the People's Caretaker Council to fill the void created after ZAPU was banned. He was arrested and restricted for one year after leading a protest against the introduction of school fees for all African pupils in urban areas. During the next 10 years he was under restriction.

Nkomo was signatory to the Lusaka Declaration of Unity of 1974 which united four Zimbabwe nationalist parties under the auspices of the African National Council. Nkomo attended the abortive Victoria Falls Conference in August 1975 and in January 1977 he went to Lusaka where he directed ZAPU activities. Earlier in 1976, ZANU and ZAPU formed the Patriotic Front with Comrades Mugabe and Nkomo as co-leaders.

Though hardly involved in any political activity during the past few years, Nkomo remained a key figure in Zimbabwe's fragile unity. Waging a parallel war against white domination, Nkomo - at the head of his Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) - had been a bitter rival of Robert Mugabe, whose Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) finally triumphed with independence in 1980. During the struggle for independence, ZAPU enjoyed the support of the Soviet bloc while ZANU was assisted by Communist China. Nkomo lost the first free elections, but refused to accept defeat. At the head of his influential Matabele tribe, concentrated in the province of Netebele, he challenged Mugabe's ascendancy.

The five-year civil turmoil at last ended in 1989 when Nkomo joined the central government, first as a 'senior minister' and then, in 1990, as vice-president and ZAPU and ZANU merged. Though the more militant of the Matabele reproached Nkomo for joining the 'enemy' - in the process amassing a huge fortune - Nkomo's presence in Harare secured a modicum of national unity and peace between the Matabele and the dominant tribe of the Shona. His death puts a question mark over this situation.

Rightly, **President Mugabe** said that 'a giant has fallen with Nkomo's death'.

The minister of interior, **Dabengwa**, now becomes the most prominent figure in the Matabele camp and the chief spokesman of the tribe in Harare. But lacking Nkomo's legendary status, his collaboration with Mugabe may disqualify him in this role in the eyes of his tribe. The conflict with Shona has been placed on a back burner, but has not been erased from the collective memory of the Matabele.

Hakeem Abdul-Hameed

Most eminent physician of Islamic medicine, educationist, philanthropist and founder of Hamdard University, Tughlaqnagar, Delhi, **Hakeem Abdul-Hameed**, 91, died in Delhi, 23 July 1999. (A full obituary will appear later. *Insha-Allah!*)

Georgios Papadopoulos

The Greek army colonel and head of the Greek military junta (1967-1973), **Georgios Papadopoulos**, 80, died in Athens on 27 June 1999. Claiming to have uncovered a Communist conspiracy, Papadopoulos and fellow colonels had seized power to return the glory of 'Hellenic-Christian civilisation' and to restore the 'Greece of the Christian Greeks' though most observers believed it was just another of military 'revolutions', inspired by the CIA as part of America's continuing scheme to redesign the 'Free world' to its cold war plans. In any case, 'the Greek revolution' prevented **George Papandreou** from coming to power in the elections that were scheduled to be held only after a few weeks in May 1967 and the Americans did not want this Socialist politician to become prime minister of a Nato country.

Catholicos Garegin, the First

Catholicos Garegin the First, 65, the Supreme Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, died on 29 June in Etchmiadzin. Born **Nishan Sarkissian** in the north Syrian village of Kessab, ordained in 1952, consecrated bishop in 1964, served (1971-74) in the Iranian diocese of New Julfa-Isfahan, he was elected head of the Armenian Apostolic Church in 1995. Garegin was also active in both the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, **Cardinal Basil Hume**, 76, died in London, 17 June 1999.