**THE NOVELIST AS TEACHER - Chinua Achebe**

**CHINUA ACHEBE: THE NOVELIST AS TEACHER**

“The Novelist as Teacher” is an exploration of the role of the writer in general and of the African writer in particular.

There is much difference between the European writer and his African counterpart. The European writer with beard and outlandish dress tries to hook the attention of the readers through his strange exterior. He plays only a peripheral role. Achebe’s concern is quite different. He says that it is a writer’s responsibility to fulfil the tasks that the society imposes on him. A writer is not a parasite, living on the society. He should be a teacher, guiding people who are groping in the dark.

Achebe refers to the expectations of some students and teachers. A student by name Baba Yero Mafindi once wrote to him, appreciating his novels. Achebe’s novels teach young generation. Another wrote a funny letter that Achebe’s novels would be useful if he appended answers to the questions in exams. He is a mediocre student who wants a guide for Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart”. A lady teacher wanted Achebe to present in his novels such young men who would resist parental pressure and marry the woman of his own choice. The teacher does not like Achebe’s novel. ‘No longer at Ease’ because, the young men in this novel yields to his father’s wish and turns back on his lover. The teacher cannot attune herself to Achebe’s realism.

Achebe says that a writer should not become an object slave, catering to the whims of the audience. He should have his own vision to promote. A Nigerian journalist attacks what he branded “ the soulless efficiency of industrialisation” But Achebe is a realist. He is free from clichés. He says that efficiency is essential for the development of Africa.

Achebe says that change is the law of life. Flux and reflux are inevitable. In the pat, Maypole dance was the only outlet for an African woman. But now even school girls dance voluptuously western dances during festivals. Women used only earthen pots to carry water in the past. But now it has disappeared. They use metal wares.

Achebe does not welcome all changes. Westernisation has bred contempt in the minds of Africans towards their culture. A black boy avoided writing about African dusty wind harmattan, but he loves western season of winter. For him both palm tree and harmattan have pristine beauty.

Achebe welcomes movements like African democracy and socialism. They are calculated to restore African culture to its pristine glory. Achebe sides with patriots like Ezekiel and Ghanaian philosopher William Abraham. Achebe is hopeful that African culture has a bright future.

**Altercation among Modernity and Tradition: A Study of Nirad C.**

**Chaudhary’s**

**To Live Or Not To Live**

**Abstract**

The present paper is an attempt to find out the confrontation between modernity and traditionNirad C. Chaudhary in his novel reveals the greatest short-coming in our modern society. Hewarns us against cynicism in old age, where he says to be cynical in age is living death. Butthen without self-contradictions of this sort there is no Chaudhuri, for Chaudhuri is an Indianwho is an anti-Indian, an Anglicized Hindu who is critical of other Anglicized Hindus, andIndian writer in English who sees no virtues in Indian novels in English, a historian whobelieves in objectivity but leans heavily on subjective dogmas, a radical non-conformist whosupports the caste system and cow worship; a cynical individualist who cares very much forsocial relations and human happiness.

So Chaudhuri’s criticism of life and social traditions is

 constructive the based on concept of happiness and change, which is positive and healthy andshows a concern for his fellowmen.

**Key words: Modernity, tradition, society.INTRODUCTION**

Nirad Chaudhuri at once became famous with the publication of

The Autobiographyof an Unknown Indian

. They followed in due course,

 A Passage to England

,

The Continent ofCirce

,

The Intellectual in India

 and

To Live or Not to Live

 –

 books that have rightlyestablished him as an autobiographer, historian, sociologist and a social critic. In addition tomany articles, with a highly individualistic approach to different subjects and topics,published every now and then in popular magazines and journals, he has also produced abiography of the German Scholar Max Mullar

 –

Scholar Extraordinary

 which had drawnwide acclaim. Quite recently two more books have come from his pen

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Clive of India

 and

Culture in the Vanity Bag.

 Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s observation of India’s social and historical problems is fairly

authentic as he does not depend on second hand information in his writings. Therefore, hisviews have a magic touch on the reader. Chaudhuri pinpoints a number of short-comings inour family, social and political life which come from his deep concern for his country and thepeople. He was very influential writer in England on the international scene, his ideas and views deserve a detailed study ashe is very well known one for incisive writings on Indian and English traditions. Thoughefforts have been made to study the ideas of this personality but so far, no comprehensivetreatment of his ideas and views about Indian society. The critics have failed to take intoaccount all aspects of Indian society and culture as depicted by Chaudhuri. Hence, an attemptis being made here to restate his views and ideas and consider how far they are valid andsignificant. For this proper perspective is needed a critical understanding of his views aboutIndian society, Indian traditions and its social mores. How he sees society as being ahistorian or as a sociologist, what were the basic traditions which we the Indians werefollowing and are still following or how we analyse our social and family today. Hence,sincere attempts are being made to analyse his views from one aspect but through differentangles.

To Live or Not to Live

 makes no concessions. Nothing is sacred. It lambastes at theinadequacy of our way of living, our system of values, morals, marriage, family and sociallife

 —

 and at everything associated with our age-old wisdom and Indian tradition. Thepungent, hard-hitting criticism compels even the unwilling to pause and ponder andreconsider the values and ideas he may have lived by, what Chaudhuri says about the evilsof our social practices is quite true but he does not take an account of the changes which arethe result of reformative measures introduced by our social reformers to remove these evils.The proposed study is a modest attempt to study the treatment of Indian traditions in Nirad C.

Chaudhuri’s prose works

 with respect to

To Live or Not to Live

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 Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s understanding of Indian psyche is both profound

&comprehensive. His

To Live or Not to Live

is an insightful reflection on this theme, “

To Liveor Not to Live

seems to be an absurd question, for none of us commit suicide, though, to behonest, I would confess that I have come to feel that a large majority of the persons, I knowshould do so . . ., This should suggest that when I speak of living. I have something special in

my mind. That is what this book is about”

 (Chaudhuri,

To Live or Not to Live,

1995). That iswhat the book

To Live or Not to Live

 is going to reveal about living. This book is, in fact, arehash of some articles originally published in some of the well-known dailies and weekliesin India. However, Chaudhuri has taken pains to see that the book on the whole has a definiteaim and continuity of theme. The book consists of two parts; the first part deals with the

social life in India and the second with family life. “Taken as a whole, the book has a unity of

theme and a criticism of Indian life and Indian social tradition in India”

 (Verghese, 1973),writes C. Paul Varghese in his book titled

 Nirad C. Chaudhuri

. “An aspect of the book which

strikes the reader is Chaudhuri's insistence on the pursuit of happiness as a duty by the

Hindus who ‘as a people possess a remarkable genius for being unhappy’ (themselves) andmarking others unhappy”

 (Verghese, 1973).

Chaudhuri’s intention in the book is thus to actagainst this unhappiness and act in certain way to it. So Chaudhuri’s criticism of life and

social traditions is constructive the based on concept of happiness and change, which ispositive and healthy and shows a concern for his fellowmen.According to Chaudhuri, living, the aim of which is only the acquisition of wealth, isdevoid of any meaning. One cannot achieve happiness in life without a purposeful social andfamily life. Chaudhuri sees both social life and family life in the light of highest ideals of life.By social life Chaudhuri does not mean that which is imposed on us by our compulsoryrelations with other human beings, for example with family members, relatives, colleagues orfellow professionals. What Chaudhuri emphasizes in social life is happiness in humanrelations. For this he analyses the nature of social and family life in our big cities like Delhiand Calcutta. He is of the opinion that a normal social life is impossible in our big cities. He

says: “Today Calcutta is really antisocial. It is rent by human hatreds which make normal

social life impossible. The whole of the Bengali society in Calcutta is disintegrating and even

decomposing”

 (Chaudhuri, 1996).What Chaudhuri fails to see in Delhi is a living community. In his opinion big citiessuch as Delhi or Calcutta are unfavourable to kindly human relations. He feels disappointedonly when he sees embarrassing life of the people of the big cities. As he was hopeful to see

that “from the very ancient times pleasant social and polite manner have been connected withthe cities”

But what he gets only is disappointment. The main drawback withour life is that we establish social contacts with the sole purpose of exploiting it for socialclimbing. Securing friendship with foreigners and influential officials are considered as astatus symbol. Since the motive is not purely social the foreigners naturally becomesuspicious when they are invited to social functions. The Indian cities thus fail to create any

form of meaningful social life and friendly atmosphere. Chaudhuri declares: “I must say thatto try to exploit friendship for advancing one’s interests is the wor

st feature of social life

among us, and to see this motive cropping up in every social relationship is distressing to me” Chaudhuri speaks a great truth here. We have to pursue self interest in life, but thisshould be kept separate from social life. This is what Chaudhuri wants. That is why he iscritical of the forms and occasions of Indian social life such as the wedding festival, the

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Shradh

’ ceremony and occasions of death and illness. According to him the old sociability

has disappeared to a very large extent. In earlier days it was done in a healthy spirit andfriends and relatives were given invitation to attend the wedding feast to get together andbless the newly wed couple for their happy life. The invited people were treated with fullhospitality irrespective of their social positions. But now the things have changed. Marriagesare solemnised to exhibit wealth as much as possible. High officials and ministers are invitedto weddings to show one's influence and to get due recognition of their importance. It isagainst the spirit of the Indian tradition of the Hindu marriage service.What has happened is that we have extended the slave mentality, arrogance andhypocrisy of our political and business life to our social life. What Chaudhuri says in thiscontext about the evils of our social traditions and ceremonies may well be true, because all

the festival have become a waste of time, money and energy. Even at the ‘Sradh’ ceremony

people do not forget about the habit of self advertisement. To

quote Chaudhuri: “The

traditional social occasion which in the past was next only to

the wedding was ‘Shradh’

ceremony of

father or mother. It was also a means of

advertising one’s wealth and positionlike the wedding”

 (

TLONTL

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90).Even such occasions as death and illness are turned by Hindus into social gatherings:

“To come trooping to a house of death and become vicarious mourners, is a definite socialobligation as well as secret pleasure”

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TLONTL,

47).

The mourners “pull along faces over

the

death of persons about whom they have not cared tuppence”

 (

TLONTL,

47-48). Thetraditional Indian habit of crowding the house of sickness is as tiresome and as equal anuisance, doing no good to the sick and becoming a burden on the hosts, forced as they are tooffer usual courtesies like smoke, betel and water to the visitors.Chaudhuri values personal social happiness more than collective social happinesswhich along traditional social life in Indian can offer. He is for this reason critical of thosewho cold-shoulder, close relatives and friends and do not ask them to a meal. Chaudhuri findsa void in the social life in India with the slow passing away of collective social life. He says:

“While the old social life is perishing, the void created by its

 disappearance is not being filled

up by an alternative form human intercourse based on the friendliness of unrelated persons”

In Hindu society, in earlier days, a friend or a relative was given a warm welcome andhospitality, as it was a tradition to consider a guest or a visiting friend equivalent to God. Butgradually, the scenario has changed. Today, the unrelated person is hardly ever entertainedunless he has the power to promote the worldly interest of the entertainer. Entertaining fromsimple friendliness is sometimes objected to by

the wife on the score of trouble, and by thehusband on the score of expense. It has been the tradition of Hindu Society to give food to ahungry person or to share food or to eat together, is the sign of good friendship. Even thebook, Panchatantra endorses the friendship point and describes the characterization of

friendship in the following manners: “Dadati, Prati

-grihnati, guhyam, akhyati, prichchhati;

Bhunkte, bhojanyate ch’aiva; Shadividham Priti –

 lakshanam - or in English, Gives andreceives in return; tells and asks about intimate matters; eats and feeds - are the six signs of

friendship”

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TLONTL,

57).

But now all these have vanished from the society.The greatest short-coming in our society, accord

ing to Chaudhuri is “the virtualsegregation of men and women in it”

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TLONTL,

62). How can we make our women play ameaningful role in our society. A healthy meeting between the sexes is absent in our society.The historian in him is aware of the fact that the situation was not always so. It was theMuslim conquest that subsequently put on end to the freedom, chivalry and sophistication ofthe man-woman relationship so prevalent among the conscient Hindu societies. Here it wouldbe pertinent to quote a

few lines from a reputed historian: “There are no traces of the

seclusion freely even in the company of their husband hymn that the bride would shine as adebater in public assemblies proves their participation, they usually occupied a prominentplace in s

ocial gatherings, lending charm to them by their graceful dress”

 (Altekar, 1970).

These lines very effectively corroborate Chaudhuri’s views. He very rightly regrets

that we have not been able to recover these qualities that existed in the ancient Hindu society.In the present day society, there is no healthy meeting between the sexes even in our most up-to-

date circles. Chaudhuri thinks that our man’s obsession with sex is mainly responsible for

this segregation.Chaudhuri fastens the blame on men for continuance of this segregation. He says thatthey are the sex-

obsessed and have “an unnatural inhibition which prevents them frommixing with woman freely”

 (Verghese, 1973). The ancient Hindus were far better than us inthis respect, as they were neither so crude nor so narrow minded. But he has great hopes in

the coming generations of educated girls who show an intellectual alertness that makescivilized intercourse between men and women possible in India, their intellectual alertness,he thinks can go a long way into making for a free, gracious urbane social intercoursebetween men and women that is the very essence of a cultural existence.Indian women in the distant past had a higher status than in most recent times.Women enjoyed considerable freedom and in the spheres of family, religion and public life.

In ancient India women’s beauty was greatly appreciated by artists. Vedic poetry was

profoundly sensitive to the beauty of women. She is addressed in such words which suggestbeauty, purity and auspiciousness, like Kalyani, the blissful one or Subhaga, the graceful one.But what has happened today in our society, the same women, which were goddesses inancient times, are no longer treated with grace. They are forced to commit suicide and thetreatment meted out to them is beyond imagination. Chaudhuri wants us to start accepting theman-woman relationship in proper light. According to him, by openly accepting the existenceof mutual attraction between the two sexes, one can progress towards a healthy friendship.Social scientists define joint family as an extended family or a family organization inwhich bothers remain together after marriage and bring their wives into their parentalhousehold. Brothers are expected not only to continue to live together after their marriage,but more important, to remain steadfast to their parents in devotion and obedience. The idealof filial loyalty and paternal solidarity is the rationale for the joint family which thenstipulates common, economic, social and ritual activities. The brothers, their parents and theirown wives and children share a single house or compound, eat meals prepared in singlekitchen and pool their income for distribution by the head of the family. In addition to thiscore group, there may be others who are either permanent or temporary residents in thehousehold, widowed or abandoned sisters and aunts or distant male relatives somewhat

euphemistically known as ‘uncles’ who have no other family to turn to. According to ChetanKarnani: “In I

ndian joint families, the lazy and the clever members survive on those who are

sincere and hardworking”

 (1995: 120). The joint family, thus, is a large group. Its membersare engaged in the manifold activities necessary to maintain the group as a cohesive, co-

operative unit. In the words of Chaudhuri “At its best the joint family is a co

-operativesociety based on blood-tie, and smaller and more closely knit replica of the village

community”

Chaudhuri believes that the joint family today does not retain its function of

IJELLH ISSN-2321-7065Volume V, Issue VIII August 20171105providing security

 –

 emotional or financial. Today, attitudes, ideas, environment are changing

so fast, that the joint family is breaking up. Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s analysis of the evils of the

 joint family is in no way helpful to the growth of one's personality. As in bureaucraticorganizations, the problems in a joint family are resolved on the basis of hierarchicalprinciple. Elders have more formal authority than younger persons

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even a year’s difference

in age is sufficient to establish the fact of formal superiority

 –

 and men have greater authoritythan women. Parents become strict disciplinarians. Children are being guided all the time andhave to accept whatever the parents say. They have no voice in their education, marriage andprofession. The parents want total submission on the part of the children. Parents think of thechildren as their property and they are never allowed to take independent decisions.

Chaudhuri: “But this parental authority completely destroyed the

individuality of the sons,

except for sowing his wild oats secretly”

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TLONTL,

98).Chaudhuri calls the mother-in-law

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daughter-in-

law relationship “as a fundamentalaberration of Hindi life”

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TLONTL,

90).

The conflict between the mother-in-law and thedaughter-in-law is something more than a mere rivalry for more power in the family. In

Indian society, a daughter is considered a ‘guest’ in her natal family, treated with solicitous

concern often accorded to a welcome outsider, who, all too soon, will marry and leave her

mother for good. An Indian girl learns that the ‘virtues’ of womanhood which will take her

through life are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in the various household

tasks because her ‘real family’ is her husband’s family

. But in the social hierarchy of the

‘real family’, the bride usually occupies one of the lowest ranks. Obedience and compliance

with the wishes of the elder women of the family, especially those of her mother-in-law areexpected as a matter of course.The conclusion that Chaudhuri comes to is that the joint family has outlived whatusefulness it had, and the sooner it comes to an end the better it will be for every bodyconcerned. According to Chaudhuri more disastrous to be happiness of family life is the

emergence of working woman. He says that “I regard the emergence of the working women,

unmarried as well as married, as the greatest threat to the family in every country and society,and as even a greater threat to family in India and Indian Societ

y”

 (

TLONTL,

133).In India, as in other countries of the world, there is a great discrepancy between theidealized concept of women and the real life situation in which women find themselves.While women in India share many of their disabilities with discrimination in the developed

IJELLH ISSN-2321-7065Volume V, Issue VIII August 20171106countries, their experience of discrimination is more extensive because of the sex segregatedcharacter of society, the condition of poverty and the traditional value system. It has beenpointed out by many writers that in India, a woman's sense of personal worth is related to herfertility performance and the social standing she achieves as a mother of sons. It is not

marriage that fulfils a woman’s purpose, but motherhood. A marriage which is based on

financial considerations, according the Chaudhuri, does not attach any importance to thehigher values of life. Love is essential for married life. He does not, however, approve of anartificial and unsatisfactory compromise between arranged marriages and marriages whichresult from falling in love, because, he thinks it makes the worst of both worlds.To sum up,

To Live or Not Live

 is truly commendable effort on the part of its author.

It is not only Chaudhuri’s criticism of life in Indian but positive analyses of confrontation

 between modernity and tradition. Chaudhuri does not stand on the pulpit and teach anyserious and high morals. Inspired by his genuine concern for his country men, he hasendeavoured to suggest how they can live happily with others in their social and family lifebecause he thinks that it is great happiness and a kind of happiness which helps to gain otherkinds of happiness