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The Synthesis of Binary Opposition in *a Passage to England* by Nirad C Chaudhuri: A Critical Overview

Mahmoda Khaton Siddika

Abstract- **The popular myth of oppositions-India and England, finds the proper admixture in Nirad C Chaudhuri's travelogue *A Passage to England* through the contrastive sense. Since he completes an eight-week-journey outside India, five weeks in England, two weeks in Paris and one in Rome, he presents what he sees in western world along with the reality of his own country as an Indian in this travelogue. Though in every chapter of this book he upholds very contrastive views of India and England giving a superiority of anyone, he beautifully synthesizes this contrast showing true reality. So, this paper aims at showing how he synthesizes the binary opposition applying Derrida's view on binary opposition and Hegel's dialectic process.**

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I. Introduction

Nirad C. Chaudhuri in *A Passage to England* through his perceived sense of English and western culture from reading books places superiority of English over Indians to remove the oppositions and make a bridge between them, only thinking over Frost's (1993) poem, "The Road not Taken."

"I took the one less traveled by',
And that has made all the difference."

He exposes how Indian can integrate with British in England by comparing and contrasting all things in India and those in England. He with the technique of praising everything in England and of degrading somewhat that in India attempts to create a pathway of proper integration of them. Though his position to his countrymen is in a dilemma for debasing his country, he unfolds the facts in his travelogue what he witnesses in his traveling. The French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida's concept of social binaries is described in 'A Passage to England'. The binary opposition of colonizer-colonized, white-colored and civilized-primitive sense is prevalent. This binary is always opposing each other to establish them in another binary sense, controller-controlled. In *A Passage to England*, Nirad C. Chaudhuri has applied this binary sense as India-England, Indians-British, and idea-reality. Thus, he tries to make a soothing bridge in this binary to create an entity integrating the two.

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II. Binary Opposition

Binary opposition is as Macey (2001) points out, a kind of myth that the world views as day and night, male and female and so on. This twofold idea is called binary opposition as the word 'binary' means twofold. The French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida has a look at this presence of social binaries. Derrida points out that such oppositions in society constitute "a tacit hierarchy" as Abrams and Harpham (1929) say, that is, the first one in this opposition is placed as superior to the other one. The poles of such dualities are not always rigid, but flexible and they interchange their position and between them, they also show that "he goes on to destabilize both hierarchies, leaving them in a condition of undecidability" (79). This opposition reestablishes itself. If we arrange the binaries in a matrix, reading this matrix downwards, its right and left pole to show a collective binary which creates a new dimension. In structural criticism, they again unearth that "their identity as signs is given to them by their relationships of differences from, and binary oppositions to, other elements within the cultural system" (382). Queer reading "undertakes to subvert and confound the established verbal and cultural oppositions" (328). In *A Passage to England,* the binary oppositions are England and India which constitutes a collective binary. Naipaul (1972) says that "may be the one great book to have come out of the Indo-English encounter". So, now we have seen how this triadic movement works on each idea of this book.

III. Hegel's Triadic Movement

To Hegel, the Absolute truth or the essence of reality comes through the logical process which is deduced from the experience of actual matter. Stumpf and Fieser (1996) uphold that "Hegel's dialectic process exhibits a triadic movement … as a movement from thesis to antithesis and finally to synthesis, after which the synthesis becomes a new thesis" (300). This process goes until we reach the Absolute Idea. This philosophical process is apparent in the book *A Passage to England* by Nirad C Chaudhuri. Whenever we have read this book we see the writer places some kinds of views through his journey to England which is a thesis. But in a next way, he exposes very contradiction

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of those views as antithesis. Then he wisely synthesizes these views to attain an idea. This process we see in almost all chapters of this book. The last one is as the synthesis of his whole book.

IV. World's View

The western thinking on Hindus' view of the world as illusion is for the concept of rebirth in the universe. Hindus regard everything in this world as " an Absolute nothing" (11) and " the world as insubstantial" (11). Thus Hindus makes the west realize their indifferent attitude to the world and economical for fear of being poor. This kind of attitude is partly for the climate of the country which makes them easy going. It is like a thesis. As antithesis, he points out that the Christian belief is to enjoy, to exploit and to reduce world's substance. Their thinking on the abstract world and in execution of the material world makes them active in this world.

As a Hindu, the writer realizes the world as phantom as he travels through France and England. All these things in England have been viewed differently in "three dimensions, atmosphere, and personality" (14), having a similarity in flesh and blood of English man and Indians. He cannot at first leave from "the world of books" (14). Like Plato's allegory of the cave, he likes those who are living in world of books, becomes a person of the imaginary level and is not willing or prepared to transform his mental reality to actual reality. The writer is in cobweb to match up the reality and the imaginary world created by reading books. Experiencing the contradiction the bookish idea and the reality, he is no longer eager to revive his bookish knowledge during his journey. He absorbs in the reality as "throwing ice in the water" (15) as the synthesis of the binary oppositions. He thinks himself as in "a class of Englishman" (16) for the lacking of originality. But Englishmen are in resentful of and even sneers this type of Indians. Those Indians face this attitude become anti-literary sentiment. The writer wishes to be manservant of English than to be master of Indians. He can do so by feeling ties with England in mind. England is in the heart of Indians. Those Englishmen who try to break this tie are the loser of the Indian Empire. The Indians who permit the English to do so becomes the "bored or querulous"(16) visitor of England.

V. Atmosphere

The thesis on the atmosphere is that the unreality sense of Indian is for the climate of this country. The light and temperature induce to live in sleeping beauty, so the need of warmth is felt to awaken the sense. The same sleeping beauty sense is in unusual temperature of cold countries. The light and the temperature of India are so sunny and hot that the cold country's person like English Viceroy in India is seen in the morning only. He can see the real beauty of QutdMinar in the morning than in the sunny. After his return, he observes the plasticity of trees except in the moisture atmosphere. The branches of trees are like fans. The effect of light also is in architecture and it is observed the proper beauty of light. In India, there is no such beauty. The light fell on the buildings even Mogul building as a disruptive way to give its physical existence with "modicum of impressiveness" (20). The flowers of India are blooming with eye-catching colors, and the fragrance goes rapidly in the surrounding atmosphere. The landscape of India "tends to resolve into a silhouette" (21). The garden of India is two dimensional. But Mogul's garden is "horticultural extension of the flat and linear Persian art" (22).

The antithesis is that the cold countries always observe dawn except for daylight which creates a kind of wonder. Thus, the tropical people may find themselves happy, as it is "impossible to be gay" (18). But the optical effect or the reality of the third dimension is fully observed when the writer comes back to India. What he has noticed at the park of England and France is seen from his verandah in Delhi. The trees of England areas like as "paper-cut"(18). The branches of trees are like blooming. But the real appearance of trees is felt in France. The architectural beauty covers Cambridge, Oxford and Place Vendome. People have observed the dimension of tree from the building. This forces the people's mind to this consciousness. The flowers seem to arise the sense of the plastic function of color in painting. The landscape of England goes round "an into-the picture movement" (21). It creates a new sensation for the outsider of this country. From each building and rooms of it, the outside beauty looks different. The gardens in England are three-dimensional. He tries to synthesize that this distinction of this two worlds shows the "natural appearance of the visual phenomenon" (22). When we are in the East, it dictates our way of seeing, "a rarefied way" (24) and when we in the west," a concrete way "(24). This practice is because of the distinction in existing reality, although the Europeans call Eastern as a pack of cards, the same as the Eastern calls European as cubes.

VI. An Existing View

The writer wants to synthesize the Kipling's doctrine, "The twain shall never meet"(25). Sharma (2005) escaping the formula- the East and West will never meet, shows that the writer's personal development in the whole book tries to prove, the twain can meet. The writer moves from thesis and antithesis, and finally reaches the synthesis of this idea to get the reality. He at first meets occidentals in India which creates his doubt. Then he meets his contemporaries of Hindu traditionalists who complains of the superficiality of westernization. But his doubt turns into certainty when he visits the west. He does not find any single traits of

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them to resemble. He finds out that the temperature of these two worlds divides them, as to him. After his visiting west, he realizes that "In the East man is either a parasite on Nature or her victim, here man and Nature have got together to create something in common" (28). He understands in France the meaning of "brechen green" (29) and in England "the green of grass" (29) to see the pastoral beauty of England. In England, everything is in man's hand which removes the wildness of nature which we see in India. But in the East, when people use nature as like as "ruthless colonists who have sacked the countries they have conquered" (30). In the west, men treat Nature in a domestic manner. The East lives on the nature by the ceaseless war over it. They gain little from Nature. In France, peasant works on crops as they do on Millet's paintings. In England, the works of peasants are seen, not the persons themselves.

He intermingles that no world is quite natural and artificial either. Only the west does not observe "man's cruel and endless struggle with Nature" (30) which the East observes. That is the reason for India to adopt "the spirit of English life through the literature" (30) without achieving its purpose.

VII. River

The writer goes on saying on rivers placing thesis and antithesis statement. The Bengalis sentiment sees them with the nationalistic sentiment. They are scornful of English rivers considered as canals. But the other ones move with "the peculiar aspect of water in England" (31). Whenever the writer thinks of rivers, his mind is fleeting with a combined sense of land and sea. The English rivers give him the sense of scenic complements what is absent in Bengali rivers. The Ganga is wild and sacred at the same time. In the rainy season, the rivers are destructive, and in winter, they look "like a chain of lagoons in a desolate landscape of sandbanks" (32). The river ceases its offer of our idylls, because Jumuna, idealized in Indian literature more ceases its previous appeal that anybody would suspect the capital city of India is behind him. The people of India remains touched with rivers through Hinduism because "all Hindus flock to these rivers to bathe and purify themselves" (33). But all Hindu do not try to amalgamate the human life and rivers.

But the rivers in England and France turn the writer into his childhood in East Bengal. When he comes near to water at that time, he becomes "aquatic in spirit"(34). But in England, he realizes the interwoven relation "with the life and landscape" (34). The English rivers offer the dual geographical appearance with twofold personality-seaward face and inland face. Sea and land work in a way that the sea does not impact on their life, but they adapt themselves to the earth perfectly. They attach water with "earthy aspect of the landscape" (34). There is also flood attached with their life and civilization. Their water and earth are correlated as like as a mill to make bread. Above all, he poses a synthesis that only smile with happiness brings a soothing heart when he is with water and natural objects.

VIII. Town and country

The writer revolves round thesis and antithesis idea. The writer's anti-town concept turns into a surprise "to see the artificial didacticism of the anti-town pose" (38) when he observes English town. He hears the songs of the blackbird in the town. Indian country town is less bad than cities because "they have all the squalor of their overgrown relatives but none of the amenities" (39). This demarcation becomes a blur after the industrial revolution. The modern megalopolis erases this distinction of the country and the old English town. Through the people of pre-industrial era see the distinction because of its divided parliamentary representation which makes all kinds of difference. The writer draws an explanation of this situation that Aryans, a forefather of English, comes and is used to the city life, but antipathy prevails in their mind. Similarly, they and Brahmanism feel that aversion in ancient India though Indians thinks of their civilization as superior to Europeans during nationalist movement. The English people bear this dislike in their new civilization which is evident in their language and architecture, "This emotional resistance still lurks" (42). But they are successful in handling this inherited elements. They make them capable of combining the old and the new things perfectly.

However, English people do not get any characteristics from the Roman rule or any other. But the imposed things become lifeless which is especially from Roman. Though England is parted with northern and southern souls, the one soul is dominant at any age. But the writer sees the fusion of all elements, no fixed formulas prevails. He sees only mild oscillation. This process of fusion overcomes "the question of congruity and incongruity in style" (45). This intermingling situation is quite natural in English because everything in England equally belongs to English.

IX. Origin

The writer continuously poses the thesis and antithesis ideas and then makes a fusion of these ideas. We do not indentify England with the invaders because of not having similarity with Celt, Roman, Saxon, Dane or Norman. But India is recognized with Aryans, Scythians, Huns, Muslims, and British. English people belong to different social starter in speech and behavior above all in appearance. To the writer, the working people in Hyde Park are like clerk Indian high official. Whenever the writer meets several types of people of different

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profession, it is striking that he has seen the common traits than differences. "They all conformed to what to my unpracticed eye seemed to be the upper-middle-class type, to be distinguished from the lower middle-class, which I could also recognize" (72).

Since everybody says that India, "more a continent than a country" (73), has many languages and regional cultures. The heterogeneity in their appearance, attitude, and the dress do not find any explanation because deeper forces are in work. Anybody finds an explanation that nature-climate and weather create different modes in the East and the West. The cold weather urges the West to exercise a greater will-power. The writer has not found the mass people in England shown uniformity which is a great distinction from India. India has two types of people-the ordinary folk without affectation and minority having middle-class behavior. The most woman in England appears in ordinary clothes without beautifully decoration. But all Indian woman's physical beauty is related to fair complexion. There are two types of women- "who are considered beautiful and consider themselves beautiful" (77) are not equal. But they do not allow anyone to overlook them. The dark complexion woman decorates them with extra ingredients which are different from English woman with a natural appearance. All women in India who have the pretention to fashion appear themselves with overdressing. The writer finds the human physical beauty which comes from art-from the West, what is "its amazing nudes" (78).

X. Behavior

This idea also follows the triadic movement. The speechless condition or silence is prevailing in English people's behavior. But noise is a sign of cheerfulness in Indian people's behavior. Heartiness is in public interconnection than in internal relation in India. English people shows the eternal silence even in a crowded place which is frightening. The writer has seen the reverse condition in India. Everywhere especially public buses booms with talk and echoes with a buzzing sound. The never-meet-before people also is with talking. But it makes "a microcosm of our national life" (84). The writer recalls the incidents on a bus with a gentleman, and his family shows the large-heartedness. The pleasure of anybody's company and conversation in India which "make us recoil from the dreariness of the public behavior of the English people" (86).

XI. Love for Money

Thesis and antithesis works for making synthesis to attain absolute truth on this idea. The English people's fascination for money is "reasonable and decent"(105) which is a kind of revelation to the writer. The writer gives an analogy to say about the extent of their love for money- they are anxious for it as the wild animals for their young. The English people do not have a private shrine of money in their house like Indian people who in their house they make a shrine of Lakshmi, a goddess of prosperity, for their devotion. The English people make a shrine for "normal Christian worship" (106).

Indians "religiosity covers every aspect of money-making, including the dishonest and violent" (106). But Christianity is not directly related to financial interactions. The religious attitude in India to economic affairs is a common phenomenon in the past and present time although the people call themselves as ultra-modern.

So India is regarded by all economist as El Dorado. Indian people's relationship with money is like as lovemaking. But English people deal with it smoothly, and they are always ready to be part of the money, and they become trusted persons. They follow high virtue in business. They think "love of money in order to be enjoyed must be restricted (109). They have two types of people- the miser and the spendthrift. The second one is in power. Spending is highly regarded as thrift and as ideal but frugality as the practical correlative of it. They hoard for pleasure and as a sign of virtue. They spend as duty and with pain. But Indian people spend money deliberately as English people do. The moderate people feel pressure to spend for their living. But for the wealthy people, it is a "temptation, passion or panic" (110).

Their government and economist have warned them to refrain from this habit. They do so not to upgrade their standard of living, but for being "style in living"(114) and be careless which is their way of living. Those who are not able to be careless are forced to pretend to be so. Whenever they prevent themselves from doing so, they feel sore. They compromise with this moral deterioration. At last, their attitude teaches the writer "the best use for money is to spend it on the good things of life" (114).

XII. Love

By following the thesis and antithesis, he combines these two to get reality on this idea. Love is the sole motivation of English people as the money making in Indian life. In England, love exposes the fundamental unity. But this sense is too much awakened to Indian society because "love-making at first hand is virtually impossible" (115). Though the history of love in India is recognized, it comes from England. Indian people "deals with love from the literary end" (116). Love turns from English literature to Bengali Literature and then to life. For this process of transplantation, it remains delicate. Indians have two types of marriage-love-marriage, a scornful for son's mother, and legitimate marriage. Love comes after marriage, but it is transient. They are happy without love. Conversely, in

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western society love, an independent body "an easily observable activity (117) is present everywhere. They express this in a freeway and want to exalt the physical and mental organs showing love-making even after their exhausted time spending. In this situation of love-making, Englishmen do not feel a lack in exposing "their dignity and French-men their intelligence" (117) because the country is willing to safeguard their freedom. Their democratic attitude towards love-making makes a great revolution in the sensibility forming a romantic and idealized love for the two sexes' closed relationship.

However, "it is Europe's special contribution to the life of passion of mankind." (118). In western society, love is a biological term as it is in society, that means, their family life continues as long as love continues. Love without family life does not exist in this society. Hindu society without love becomes tired and boredom. In Europe, love even wrong love transforms into "pity than repulsion" (119). But Hindu connects love without fidelity. In Europe, man idealizes the relation, but the woman does so in India. In India, a woman sets up the sense of faithfulness in which man is to be obliged, though many westerns do not understand the Indian marriage system. But many countless people find happiness in this system.

The realistic thing is that everything is not out of limitations. The failure of the western side is that making love tends to be wild at the end "which sends men and women out on a selfish chase after a will-o'-the-wisp" (120).To the writer, love is precious in human life which makes the life blessed. A loveless life is like a tragic death inflicting misery on others. The western male and female live with each other with satisfaction and love, but by this love, they depart each other easily. Love in western and love in Eastern are not comparable, because of satisfaction and dissatisfaction balance each other by following the formula- life plus love=life minus love. The writer has criticized his people for this goodness.

XIII. Civilization

Through the process of thesis and antithesis, he finally comes to synthesize to get the real idea on civilization. The western one is ever present with the past. This civilization introduces the European people being an integral part of their day to day life. It reshapes their existence. They deal with reality. But, India is a location of multiple civilizations having no connection with the past. The people do not feel "a living reality"(157)in their civilization. People only feel this civilization applying influence and imagination. They are present without its real spirit. They feel for their civilization in the eyes of foreigners "as a burden"(157). Western education teaches them of their civilization. They deal the abstract of civilization "their cultural consciousness is a part of their nationalism" (157). The writer points out the two crowds of European people-one is in the exhibition of ancient painters, another is at the political conference. People feel too much fascination towards the exhibition. They teach their children the difference between the things of God and those of Caesar. India without politics is as like as "petty worldliness" (158), but Europe is lucrative ever. Even they do not neglect their culture for an economic excuse.

Actually, in the 19th century, the advanced thinkers of England see the "civilization with soap, as the symbol of cleanliness" (165). But this makes them less confident which creates "crushing forms of vulgarity" (165). To observe the English people applying one technique that how many shops and people have that deal with antiques, old books, and second-hand furniture it is seen that the shops are busy with satisfying all kinds of people for material gain.

XIV. The Cultural Life

Moving from thesis to antithesis on the cultural life of the binary oppositions- India and England, the writer reaches a synthesis. English cultural life intermingles with religion. The English people have the belief that Christianity has a great contribution to the development of their civilization. People love to spend in the old university town than in the seaside resort. The visitors to the chapel are actual devotional. Their sensational divine spirit is the same to all.

Hindu religion is devoid of this spirit to enlighten the people, because they are equally devoted to divine god and their political leaders considering them as "quasi-religious" (177). The people go to the temple to see the image of divine potentate as that of their king, but the English people do not do so. Temple cult is not a part of their true Hinduism because it comes from western Asia. But true Hinduism makes the devotee create a welfare universe. But the present practice of Hinduism turns to the desire of everyday life. They try to infuse spirituality and worldly prosperity and happiness. English spirituality is devoid of the worldly affairs. In reality, "religion and civilization were still interwoven with each other in England" (180). But their lives are decivilized by the influence of democracy and industrialization. After all, it happens for "forbidden ignorance" (180). The religion is for the upper class than the general people in England, but vice-versa in India. In India, the religion only gives importance to the rich section, but not the "unhappiness of their people" (181).

XV. Political Life

The political life of the binary oppositions-India and England runs through the thesis and antithesis and then to synthesis. England is the symbol of Mecca and House of Commons as Kaaba for Indian political

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people. Within the House of Commons, everybody follows "some pre-established pattern of behavior" (188). Its main function is to reign not to govern. The party is chosen by the general people to reign them for the time being. There is no conspiracy between the party and nation. House of Common is a main basis of power in this country. The motto of a party is "the rule of reason and justice" (190). It works with peace in wartime but works against the party during peace time which is "reflected greatness" (191).

The English people feel less interested in political ambition along with the zest in politics. The politician interlinks personal and political life with politics. English politics compared as watching a swimming pool, but Indian politics as the flow of a river. The regular administrative work of the contemporary world is absent in English politics like tear-gas, bombs, buses on fire ,etc because they have solved all kinds of political problems and established the economic and social peace, "nothing left for them to do" (194). They will be monopolizing political power. They are happy to lose their empire. Their politics is "only administration" (195) to control the bureaucracy. They are developing day by day by the peculiar yearning

> "To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost
> Which blamed the living man" (196).

The English nation tries to abandon the politics, but ironically, the politics do not do so. The preparation for military forces in England during peacetime creates a contradiction between practical political life. It is irony of fate that the farewell to politics turns into a life without it.

Above all, the English people are absorbed with the present, "here and now" (226). They become thoughtless people about the future. They are fully thoughtless even in their adverse condition. Their heroism lies in involving in their own work and amusement without any feelings for them. To them, "an irritation and moodiness" (226) are important. The writer's experience is Wordsworth's theory; emotion overflows in recollection. He is overwhelmed with the experience of happiness during his stay in England. His behavior also turns into English way with true affection. His happiness is "flowing out of very much deeper springs" (229). Guha (2009) sees the travelogue which gives a fresh light on Indo-British issues. This conflict turns to conciliation on Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England*. He also (2009) explores that Chaudhuri is the best embodiments of hybridization for the fusion of certain elements on both sides of the colonial divide. He again says that "Hybridized personalities like him were both suppliants and threats, rolled into one, for the project of colonialism". Niven (n.d.) admits that 'A Passage to England' testifies not only the enduring inheritance of empire but also his grandness of heart.

XVI. Conclusion

In the whole book, Chaudhuri upholds the superiority of England over India in every set of the idea; the first one governs the second as in binary opposition. As Derrida says, the center is not static, the writer himself says about the superiority of family life in India over England. Adopting good things from England, India can be in the position of center as Derrida exposes or can be equally superior to synthesize the Indian way of life which can be absolute truth as Hegel points out.

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