



The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (New York Review Books Classics)

By Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Ian Jack



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The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian is an astonishing work of self-discovery and the revelation of a peerless and provocative sensibility. Describing his childhood in the Bengali countryside and his youth in Calcutta—and telling the story of modern India from his own fiercely independent viewpoint—Chaudhuri fashions a book of deep conviction, charm, and intimacy that is also a masterpiece of the writer's art.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Intensely rational, Chaudhuri, a Bengali and author of *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, describes his native country with the intent that "one part of this world may still retain some curiosity about the combination of man and geography which has worn out the British Empire." The autobiography yields a dense, absorbing account of Hindu boyhood (he was born in 1897) in a small village in what is now Bangladesh. Careful observations illuminate a waning culture: "A Hindu . . . accepts the first wail of birth as the leitmotiv of existence and manages . . . to lead a mock-turtle's life during the whole of it." Chaudhuri concludes with intricate analyses of the intellectual history of India before independence, seen in the context of its political and social history (from the Dravidians through the Raj); its religion--the "reformed" Hinduism of Swami Vivekananda; and Bengali literature. Chaudhuri's judgments, often surprising, are those of a world citizen; his scholarliness is humbling.

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About the Author

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI (1897–1999) was born in the town of Kishorganj in East Bengal in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. His first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, was published in 1951 and was followed by many others, including *The Continent of Circe*, for which he won the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize, and *Thy Hand Great Anarch!*, a second volume of memoirs. Chaudhuri moved to England in 1970. In 1992 Queen Elizabeth II conferred upon him the title of Honorary Commander of the British Empire.

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