NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI'S CRITICAL VISION

A STUDY OF HIS MAJOR WORKS

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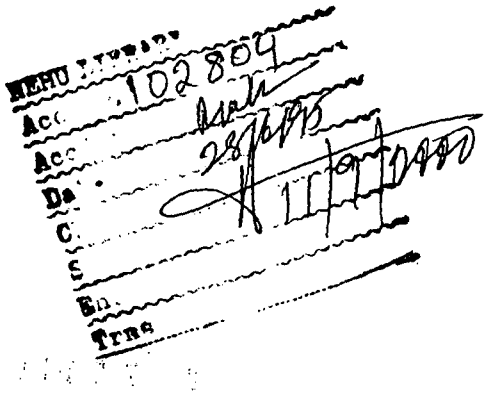

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Certified that the thesis entitled "Nirad C. Chaudhuri's Critical - Vision- A study of his Major Works", submitted by Ms Sutapa Das (Nee Chakravarty) embodies the results of her investigations carried out under my supervision and that no part of this work has ever appeared in any form earlier.

The candidate has been duly registered and has completed all formalities required of her as a Ph.D candidate.

I consider the work worthy of being submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

(S. Homchaudhuri)

C O N T E N T S

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CHAPTER 1

CHAUDHURI'S INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

> 'The individual is not an isolated unit, but is part of a whole, composed of many other individuals. This whole is called Society. The relation between the individual and the Social Whole of which he is a part, is an organic relation. It means that the individual can fulfil himself only in and through Society, even as this Society can fulfil its collective life only in and through the fulfilment of the individual ends of the numerous humans composing it. The individual and the Society to which he belongs are, thus, interdependent upon one another for their self-fulfilment.
>
> And the things that differentiate Man from the rest of the creation, so far as we know it, - his reason, his emotions, his will, his power of knowing himself and his capacity for love and self-sacrifice, — all these are evolved in and through his social life and relations. The individual finds his highest self-expression and self-realisation in and through his Society even as his Society finds its highest expression and realisation in and through the life and activities of the individuals composing it. The individual and his Society are like the wrap and woof of the social fabric. To truly understand the individual , we must see him in and through his social setting: and to correctly appraise social values, we must see Society in and through the life and aspirations, the struggles and achievements, of its individual human units.'[1]

In the light of this observation about the relationship between an individual and his society it can very justifiably be affirmed that N.C. Chaudhuri, born in 1897, is in a vital sense a product of the intellectual awakening of the nineteenth century India or rather Bengal. "The impact of British rule, bourgeois economy and modern Western Culture was felt first in Bengal and produced

an awakening known usually as the Bengal Renaissance. For about a century, Bengal's conscious awareness of the changing modern world was more developed than and ahead of the rest of India. The role played by Bengal in the modern awakening of India is thus comparable to the position occupied by Italy in the story of the European Renaissance."[2]

"Our cultural movement began in the early part of the nineteenth century and reached its apogee in about one hundred years."[3]

In this connection it is to be noted that the new cultural movement, which passes under the name of the Indian Renaissance is mainly based on the formula of a synthesis of the values of the East and the West. Hence, any comparison to the European cultural movement is not sound. For a sampling of Calcutta's litterateurs show that "their inspiration came not from Periclean Athens or Augustan Rome or Medici Florence. It came from England of Shakespeare, Milton and Byron; Bacon, Locke and Bentham; Bruke, Mill and Spencer".[4]

The introduction of English education opened the flood gate and especially Calcutta became the nerve centre of a rapid crystallisation of Western ideas and thoughts. Humanism, liberalism, individualism and democratic tenden-

cies gradually struck their roots and spread out, awakening the spirit of self-criticism."Opening India to the currents of Western thought and science was something the British imposed on Indians for what they took to be, with complete assurance, their own good. But there were also Indians, of whom Ram Mohan Roy was one of the most distinguished, who welcomed this policy from more disinterested motives".[5] Ram Mohan was "no thinker shut up in his own speculations, but a champion of his people, engaged in the daily toil of advancing their conditions with an unfaltering vision of their bright modern destiny".[6] Therefore, his intention was "first to reform Hindu religious thought and practice by introducing into it a stricter Protestant ethic, and second to associate with a profound loyalty to the Hindu spirit — there was no touch of cultural cringe in Ram Mohan Roy's temperament — a more open attitude to Western thought, particularly scientific thought. He argued, therefore, with energy and determination for women's rights, for religious toleration, for the freedom of the Press, for the radical improvement of the conditions of peasants, and for science, education and democracy in the manner of the best of the disinterested and liberal Victorians"[7].

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was not only a religious reformer but also a social reformist. He fought for the cause of humanism and for the first time raised his voice for the Hindu women and saved them from the inhuman practice of Sati. Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar carried it a step further. He raised his powerful voice against child-marriage as early as 1850 and was campaigning against polygamy. But his "most memorable stand was in 1855, when he caused a sensation by his outspoken advocacy of widow-marriage in the teeth of the deepest social prejudices".[8] What moved him most was a deep sympathy for the unfortunate and the exploited and his reverence for humanity.

Alongside these social changes Bengali literature also blossomed. The new literary and humanistic movement in Bengal which began with the founding of the famous Hindu College in the early part of the nineteenth century developed into a consciously directed movement "by a magnificent outburst of creative activity in literature. The flowering of the renaissance began with the poetry of Madhusudan Dutta, the drama of Dinabandhu Mitra, and the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee".[9] Madhusudhan Dutta was a

brilliant student of the Hindu College in the late thirties and early forties when the Derozian tradition had not yet died out. With his adulation of Shakespeare and Romantic poetry he began to write English verses. By seeking inspiration at the Western fountains of literature and after paying cruelly for his choice in poverty and humiliation, he turned to his native Bengali with near fanaticism. Dutta's 'life presents psychological and historical problems of great interest and subtlety. Besides, his personal career can be taken as a symbol of the entire history, not of Bengali humanism alone, but of the whole of Bengali culture'.[10] He died in 1873 and 'at that time the tide of Brahmoism or Hindu monotheistic reform was flowing strongly. Deriving both the strong and weak points of its ethics from English Puritanism combined with the later Non-conformism, the movement approached Dutta's life didactically and treated it as a very valuable demonstration of the evils of improvedence'.[11]

The conflict between the 'new' and the 'old' continued and the 'Bengali response to the Western challenge moved like a pendulum from one extreme to another——from revolutionary romanticism to archaism. The Bengali outlook had, in the process, been quite

confused. While some of the elite turned to the rationalistic, scientific, liberal, individualistic tradition of the West, others mixed it up with a variant of Vedantic or Bhakti tradition and the rest clung to the dogmatic, orthodox, Nyaya Smriti tradition'.[12]

'It is intriguing that, not keeping with Burcharat's secular image of the Renaissance, Indian thought was profoundly disturbed by a religious debate in the nineteenth century'.[13] The religious controversies which began with the coming of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1814, and the interest thus aroused lasted till the end of the century. The Protestant movement within Hinduism which made its appearance in 1860 brought about as its inevitable reaction a Hindu counter-reformation and for the next forty years there was a constant opposition between the Brahmo Samaj and the Hindu revivalists. Two notable Bengalis — Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda true to the established traditions of conservatism, regarded religion as the central fact, the keystone of human activity and achievement, and both uncompromisingly rejected the idea of a purely secular culture. The dislike which Chatterjee felt for the idea of a purely secular

culture made him 'speak disparagingly of the ideal of culture propagated by Matthew Arnold'.[14]

Vivekananda resisted an undignified and philistine submission to Western, pragmatic thought, just as he had little sympathy with an indulgent nostalgia for the past. 'Religion is the note struck insistently by him in his various commentaries on the Vedas and in his accounts of Indian psychology and history. He saw it both in its sublime and homely aspects as the chief creative influence on, and the distinguishing mark of, Indian civilization'.[15] As true conservatives both Chatterjee and Vivekananda looked to their own national religion to furnish the basis of the religious culture they valued so much. On this assumption the two men between them offered a version of Hinduism to modern Indians which became a serious rival of the liberal doctrine offered by the Brahmo Samaj. These two schools wrestled for the soul of modern India, and there was hardly one modern Indian with any capacity for thinking who did not experience this struggle within himself. 'Even Tagore, a Hindu liberal if ever there was a Hindu liberal, felt drawn towards the new Hinduism, and his novel Gora is an exposition of this theme'.[16] Thus, ultimately Hindu conservatism may be said to have won the battle.

Besides the religious controversies another very important element in the humanism of modern India was the revived Sanskrit learning. This revived Sanskrit learning was not the hereditary learning of the priestly and pundit families, but it was essentially the learning of the European Orientalists and their Indian disciples. 'The new Sanskrit learning gave to the modern Indian a view of Hindu antiquity which was historically truer and at the same time more intelligible. On the other hand, it was also more explosive, because it did nothing to soften the contrast between the modes of thought and mental attitudes of ancient Hindu India and those of traditional, pre-British Hindu India of the late eighteenth century'.[17]

It is clear, then, that Bengal was in the throes of a profound ferment—cultural, social and religious. The intellectual, moral and spiritual awakening that resulted from it had its widespread and far-reaching impact on the aristocratic and middle-class sections of the population. The mind could no longer be in a state of torpor and self-complacency but was galvanised into reflection and action. In every walk of life powerful minds could be seen at work, thinking, disputing and writing. The strenuous

intellectual activity extended to every aspect of human life, so that the range of active interests could be truly called encyclopaedic. The overall effect was to emancipate the mind from the thraldom of obscurantism, to rouse its latent resources to make it truly critical.

Even when this burst of creative and critical awakening was on the wane, it could not but leave its legacy in the suspected quarters among the people who came later, among the younger generation of people who had no means of being a part of that great intellectual and spiritual upsurge.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri can truly be called an inheritor of the large, vital and critical ethos that that great national awakening in the realm of thought had helped to create. For his writings are a living testimony to the lasting impact of that age of awakening and at the same time to his intellectual and moral indebtedness to that influence. Bound by an invisible umbilical cord, he can be seen to have imbibed the twin spirit of criticism and daring from that remarkable time which he had made his own by a strong empathic imagination. In this direction, his early environment and training had no inconsiderable role to

play. Born in 1897 into a middle-class family in the small town of Kishorganj, in East Bengal, N.C. Chaudhuri grew up in an environment which was certainly exceptional and can even be called unique. Kishorganj, his birth place where he lived till he was twelve years, his ancestral village — Banagram, Kalikutch his mother's village, Shillong, the Assam hill station, and an England of his imagination exerted a deep influence on Chaudhuri's boyhood and they may be said to form the buried foundation of his later life. 'Each of the places Chaudhuri lived in has a particular meaning in his development — not meaning in the sense of anything emblematic or mystical but, more straightforwardly, meaning as a special and precise twist in the shaping of his character.'[18] The town of Kishorganj was the constant in the family existence. Life there was solidly based, plain and industrious with occasional excitement in the form of feasts and fairs.

Life in Kishorganj made for a rational habit of mind. It offered stability but, largely because of the influence of his level-headed father, it also encouraged moral and intellectual independence. Banagram and Chaudhuri's mother's village Kalikutch — deepened and refined his feelings for blood and family,

the living Bengali tradition of drama and folk-poetry. In his Autobiography he says:

'We always had these plays at the time of religious festivals and weddings, and at times also for their own sake. The repertory, though large, was almost exclusively drawn from either of the great epics, the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, and the stories were thus familiar to the audience. From this followed that the watching of the plays was even for the young people like us not a passive gulping down of a story but an appraisal, in the light of a critical code which was never crude, of points of composition and acting, and, at times even of doctrine.'[19]

At the same time this is not an idyll of lyrical nostalgia. His mother felt imprisoned in it and she was sure that her own health — was ruined by her sojourn in Banagram. His father felt that to live permanently in the way the gentry did in the villages would be to live without work and without purpose. He had the deepest possible conviction of the sanctity of the present and the future, and he hated the spirit of Byzantinism that he saw expressed in this society.

Shillong, the paradisal hill station, with its pure, cool air and pine trees, where Chaudhuri accompanied by his family visited his uncle, makes a natural bridge to another place which exercised a profound influence on his nature — England — for it was here that he first saw the English in flesh and blood, men and women and doll-like babies. England had been a living presence in Chaudhuri's imagination from his early days, partly because of his father's care that he should learn English and partly through the books and pictures in the house. Nor could any educated person escape the influence of England that came through the political administrative system imposed on India by the British, an influence that was recognized and supported (even if it was rejected on patriotic grounds) by great names of Hindu and Bengali thought like Michael Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Tagore, Ram Mohan Roy. Chaudhuri's feeling for England was a more explicitly conscious attraction than any English boy could have had, but it was added to a personality which had the greatest natural affinity for English civilization.

Kishorganj, Banagram, Kalikutch, Shillong and the implied presence of England together with the vast

city of Calcutta complete the pattern of influences which inaugurated Chaudhuri's fundamental sensibility in his formative years.

Chaudhuri was lucky enough to have been born in a family which was a real family in the Western sense and not, as was common in Bengal, a joint family. Chaudhuri's father and mother asserted their parental authority and responsibility against their relatives so that their children were brought up by them and not by a set of surrogates in some vague, impersonal community creche, a system which eliminates the influence of father and mother by abolishing parental exclusiveness. His father was an 'individualist' who instead of maintaining an attitude of detached neutrality appeared to take everything quite actively on himself and built up a Bengali Hindu family in which the father, the mother and the children had their due share of importance and proper status.

Theirs was an enlightened family where Chaudhuri even as a mere boy was exposed to a variety of objects such as paintings of Raphael, English books and magazines, Stories of Demeter and Persephone, Theseus and the Minotaur. As a boy of nine, Chaudhuri with his natural curiosity read through all the nine cantos of

Michael's Meghanadvadha Kavya. This was an introduction not only to Bengali poetry but to a far bigger world lying behind it.

Chaudhuri's father concerned to develop the initiative and the independence of his children, laid an emphasis on education — which is the acquisition of knowledge accompanied by and inseparable from the training and development of all the mental faculties, and more specially the intellect. It was not with intellectual conviction alone that his father spoke of education, there was an emotional fervour in his attitude and thus from his very young days Chaudhuri and his brothers got a sense that by educating themselves they would be "acquiring, not simply the means to do something else, not simply a key to other kinds of success, but some all round and absolute goodness which was not mere skill but something desirable in itself."[20] His father thus tried to give them an education which was the best he could think of. In most well-to-do families however, education then was despised as a last resource of a person who had no independent competence. At a later epoch this attitude was modified but only in favour of education as a means of making money. The appearance of the school of Bengali humanism in the

nineteenth century was thus a revolutionary phenomenon, and as Chaudhuri puts it, his "father's distinction was that without coming into direct contact with this movement or being a highly educated man himself he had almost intutively imbibed the humanistic spirit, and tried to make it the spiritual heritage of his children."[21]

He was extremely careful and critical about the use of the Bengali language but still more curious and painstaking about English. The vocabulary of the English language, its syntax, its idioms possessed a fascination for Chaudhuri's father and thus even after entrusting his childrens' English education to the care of a tutor, he ultimately took over the job himself. He thought that his children under the tutor's care were not making the kind of progress which he wanted them to make. He thus took special care of their English education, taught them for about two years and only when he was satisfied that they had received a thorough grounding in the elements did he hand them over to a tutor. The emphasis laid by his father on the language study left in the long run an immense influence on Chaudhuri who at the age of eleven went through the marked copy of Evening's at Home and

says that "I count that reading among the most profitable of my life, for whatever may be thought of Evening's at Home as literature, it was both in diction and style and in subject-matter a log hewn from the native English woods and for a foreign boy that was a most valuable quality."[22] By adding to Evening's at Home Miss Mitfords Our Village two years later, Chaudhuri claims that he was attuning himself 'very successfully to the spirit of the English language and English life.'[23]

Chaudhuri confesses that the two years in which he learnt English under the guidance of his father were the decisive years in his understanding of the fundamental principles of the English language. His father drilled Chaudhuri and his brothers very thoroughly and would under no circumstances permit them to translate Bengali passages into slipshod English or vice versa. He made them place the sentences side by side and analyse the differences in structure.

What attracted Chaudhuri's father most was 'the living use of a language and not a study of the linguistic forms,'[24] thus, Chaudhuri found his father's method of learning English singularly pleasant, for not only was he spared the trouble and boredom of

learning grammatical definitions but it also as Chaudhuri puts it, enabled him to establish his superiority over the other boys, thus 'showing to advantage in the class.'[25] On this score young Chaudhuri at the age of twelve had a brush with a teacher for he had written a sentence in a certain way and not in another and the more usual way. Asked the reason for doing so Chaudhuri's reply was that it did not 'sound right' to him. His other teachers "were, however content with the results and did not try to improve"[26] his methods.

Thus, from his very young days Chaudhuri was well groomed in the English language. Under the vigilant eye of his father he 'learned English without tears, although not without toil.'[27] But English was not the only thing in his education, for his father gave all his children equal encouragement and facilities in other subjects. He never dictated what subjects his children should take up and hence the choice of subjects rested entirely on Chaudhuri. His father gave them (i.e. Chaudhuri and his other brothers) the means of learning anything from science to drawing and painting. Chaudhuri and the others were thus left to find what suited them best, the only extra effort which his father expected from them was that even though they

became specialists in some subjects they should not however become mere technicians but 'acquire some ancillary qualification in the field of art which would lend grace'[28] to their life. Thus their 'book allowance was not only liberal but lavish.'[29]

When Chaudhuri reached the upper classes in school his father gave up teaching him, 'saying frankly that he did not consider himself equipped to do so'.[30] By that time, Chaudhuri says, he had 'ceased to be helplessly dependent' on tutors, thus he and his brother were always trying to declare their 'indepdence of teachers'[31] and at this stage their father whole-heartedly supported their efforts 'at yet greater independence.'[32] His father concerned to develop the initiative and the independence of his children thus left them free to decide for themselves on the basis of their earlier training. In most Indian families, more often the subject of study for the student is chosen by his parent or guardian. Likewise their family also was different from most other Bengali families. In the 'Chaudhuri household' there were fixed hours of study, of sleep, exercise and play. Everything in the family was very well organised wherein the children received a moral education that was thorough and more systematic than mere religious

instruction. Infact Chaudhuri grew up in an atmosphere of moral awareness. Their family had adopted the 'Brahmo system' and naturally that system became the main influence and ingredient in Chaudhuri's moral life.

'Conduct was a subject of explicit discussion, guidance and correction'[33] with them and Chaudhuri writes in his autobiography that it can never be said that 'they did not receive moral training either at school or at home'[34]. He further adds that even if this direct moral training had not been given to them they should have received an indirect initiation into moral values through the purely linguistic and literary education that they were getting at school. The natural leaning of their 'teachers was towards the didactic.' Over and above, they were 'asked to write any number of essays, both in Bengali and in English, on such extremely un-Indian virtues as moral courage, perseverance industry, self-help and un-Indian conceptions like character, repentance, and conscience.'[35]

Through this exercise the students were initiated into certain moral values about which they were writing and the more intelligent boys made an honest effort to understand the ideas and write something with conviction. This kind of moral training however

is not to be found in most of our modern school education today.

Another indirect means which enlivened Chaudhuri's moral consciousness was what he calls 'social gossip'—the pretty thorough discussion of themselves, their relations, their neighbours and friends.

Even the scoldings they got were a form of moral teaching, because one of the most important elements in it was furnished by comparisons to their disadvantage between themselves and some neighbour's children or the children of their maternal kinsfolk. In this connection Chaudhuri further adds:

> 'We received our share of these derogatory and humiliating comparisons. But neither the scolding we got nor the small talk with which our simple and rustic community was so murmurous was pure peevishness, pure malice, or pure triviality. It was, like the small talk in Jane Austen's novels, founded on a serene and stable system of morality, which knew its bearings very well and was not fuddled, which never trifled with moral issues and which had all its frivolity, mischief, smallness, in sum—all the malicious propensities in the right place.'[36]

Since men and especially women cannot live perpetually above the level of triviality, the prevalence of a moralizing tittle-tattle is certainly preferable to the prevalence of the new gossip which centres

round mere place and position with an undertone of envy running through it.

The two great epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which Chaudhuri began to read very early were another 'inexhaustible source of ethical inspiration' for young Chaudhuri. One cannot read these two seminal works 'without becoming aware of the eternal conflict between good and evil, and without being warned that the price of virtue is eternal vigilance and effort. Although the Epics are insistent that Right alone triumphs, they do not encourage faith in an easy victory for Right.'[37] From them Chaudhuri received the lesson that it was 'Right and not Wrong which was at every turn in dire peril and at every juncture of being engulfed in ruin and defeat.' He further discovered that Right never won without infinite faith, toil and courage. At the same time he received the moral that 'the struggle always availeth'[38] and this has remained the most valuable lesson for Chaudhuri.

From his very young days Chaudhuri was a voracious reader, it was not only books which moulded this young boy. Various political situations also left their mark on his young mind. With the partition

of Bengal in 1905 started the nationalist agitation. Thus, while still in the prime of his youth Chaudhuri had a formal initiation into the nationalist movement. At that time, however he was too young to have an understanding of the intellectual content of the new nationalism but like the other young boys of his generation he too shared the same sentiment and was swept by its emotional fervour. The first element in this emotion 'was an intense, almost religious, hopefulness.' Chaudhuri like all the other Bengalis believed in the second advent of the country and nation 'with a firmness of conviction which nothing could shake.'[39]

'Patriotic lyricism was the second note in the emotion they felt at the coming of the nationalist agitation and its poignancy lay in the continuous evocation of the beauties of nature: the waters, the green grass etc.'[40] The influence of this 'patriotic lyricism' was so immense on young Chaudhuri that even at a much later period he was unable to sing those songs without instantly bringing back to his memory the sights and sounds which embody for him the idea of Bengal.

An eagerness to serve and sacrifice themselves for their motherland was in the mind of every youth and Chaudhuri too, like the others of his age felt that he had no right to live any other life but a dedicated one. The call of the country was so real for them that if seemed 'as if actual calls of distress from some living person were reaching them and they in turn felt guilty if they could not show some activity'. Gradually, however, as the agitation became more intense and heated other feelings began to take possession. That Muslims were 'coming out openly in favour of the partition on the side of the English'[41] sprouted the germs of a new kind of hatred for the muslims. This hatred between the two communities — Hindus and Muslims was an entirely new development. Young Chaudhuri at Kishorganj had always seen these two communities existing in complete harmony. But this new hatred for each other became very intense, so intense that referring to his school days in this context Chaudhuri says that on the protest of his muslim - school-fellows certain scenes of a Bengali drama could not be acted on the school anniversary day. This was indeed a great blow for all the Hindu students who had made all preparations for the function.

Although open clashes were avoided the Hindu-Muslim enmity became so clear that 'it left a permanent legacy of estrangement.'[42] A cold dislike for the Muslims settled in their hearts putting an end to all real intimacy of relationship and in his school it found 'visible expression in the division of the class into two sections.'[43] One comprising Hindus, the other Muslims. Though no one seemed to be sorry about this state of affairs yet this brought about a change of deep significance and left a mark in the sensitive mind of young Chaudhuri.

This however was not all. More changes were in store for young Chaudhuri and one came in the form of a cricket match. This providential match brought about a great change in Chaudhuri and his brothers lives. It so happened that noticing the interest of the school students in cricket, Mr. Sinton, the then Magistrate of Kishorganj suggested a cricket match and offered to present a cup himself. For some days the game was played with great enthusiasm before quite a large gathering of spectators. On the last day, however, a very unexpected thing happened ——some boys of the top-most class refused to play "alleging as their ground the discovery that the cup which had been brought to the field was of English make'.[44] On account of this

exhibition of indiscipline the recalcitrant boys were threatened with expulsion. Chaudhuri's father at this point came out in support of the boys. A meeting of the guardians was called and it was decided that unless the boys were taken back all the guardians would withdraw their wards from the school. The headmaster however, stood firm and as a consequence most of the boys including Chaudhuri and his brothers left the school. A tussle between the guardians and the magistrate followed. Mr. Sinton sent for the guardians in batches and tried both cajolery and threats on them at length most of the guardians yielded pleading the excuse that Mr. Sinton had threatened to bring Gurkhas into the town. Mr. Sinton won but Chaudhuri's father 'smarting from the feeling of being let down by the others, decided not to send his children back to the school'.[45] In the meantime his father sent for the prospectus, handbooks and calendars of the National Council of Education which had been established at Calcutta. The interruption in Chaudhuri's studies at this stage was however not very serious as the summer vacation was ensuing. Perhaps, had it not been for his father's decision not to send them back to the Kishorganj school Chaudhuri would not have had a chance to be at the

National School. The thought of joining the national school after the summer vacation, combined with the district political conference held at Kishorganj made the year 1908 an ever memorable year for Chaudhuri. The political conference was an exciting interlude which showed them 'the true form of the political agitation which was tnen sweeping over Bengal'. Another incident which though very small in itself was very explosive emotionally — a revolver showed by his father left Chaudhuri and his brothers 'romanticising on the revolver, on the investment of it with limitless potencies for political agitation.' It was not only young Chaudhuri was was emotionally moved at his first sight of a revolver infact, the entire revolutionary and terrorist movement in Bengal rested 'on the thought of it as the Alladin's lamp of freedom.'[46]

Further the political conference at Kishorganj comprising of fiery speeches of Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, Suresh Chandra Samajpati and the display of military drill and swordsmanship by the volunteers seized the mind of Chaudhuri with immense power. Its effect was so intense on him that immediately after the conference he started drilling his brothers copying the drill of the volunteer. Observing his intense devotion in performing the task Chaudhuri was made the captain of

a team. Chaudhuri's initiation into military ways early in life resulted in the systematic development of a taste for the study of military history and the art of warfare. Chaudhuri feels from all this, something was absorbed into his moral being so that even at a much later period he could 'never think of any collective action, and more especially political action, except as the calm and resolute action of formed bodies of men'.[47] The summer of the year 1908 was thus very interesting and memorable to Chaudhuri politically. With the end of this summer vacation started a different phase in young Chaudhuri's school life. He and his brothers were admitted in the national school. The atmosphere in the school in which Chaudhuri now found himself was needless to say different from anything which he had known before. In the national school for the first time Chaudhuri felt a "sense of duty to the country and society and greater readiness to serve the community."[48] Further, here Chaudhuri found that the students assumed as a matter of fact that the school would be exactly what their powers and devotion could make of it and hence they never hesitated to give even bodily service to the school. In Kishorganj High School Chaudhuri like the other

students had never felt that they owed anything to the school. Thus this feeling which he found at the national school was a new experience for him. Unlike his previous high school, in this school Chaudhuri found that a great emphasis was laid on the value of physical culture. Here Chaudhuri and the others not only went through the usual physical drill but had to learn military drill and undergo a regular course of gymnastics. In this school a great stress was placed on science and here Chaudhuri for the first time laid his eyes on scientific apparatus used for teaching the elementary principles of physics. The necessity for hand work was recognised and thus there were carpentry and pottery shops attached to the school. The headmaster of the school was a fair orator and he suceeded in bringing into the students "consciousness a clear though rudimentary sense of public life and political agitation."[49]

Thus, in the national school Chaudhuri was exposed to an overall atmosphere which was entirely different from the high school. However, he did not complete his schooling at the national school for on account of his mother's ill health the entire family left Kishorganj in 1910. The prospect of coming away from a small and

rustic place like Kishorganj to live in Calcutta seemed to open out endless vistas of ambition before Chaudhuri and his brothers. From 1910 to 1942 Chaudhuri lived continuously in Calcutta. He learned much from the libraries, museums, gardens and parks of Calcutta. And yet as Chaudhuri puts it 'I remained wholly unaffected by the surge of its daily life; the city as an abstract entity engrossed me, as a reality it was intolerably irksome.'[50] Thus while in Calcutta he was in reality a stranger to Calcutta. His life was the 'hermit-crab's life' — 'the cultivation of important people did not come naturally'[51] to him. Though Chaudhuri was fond of literature and cherished literary ambitions, he shunned the society of writers until he was almost dragged to literary circles by one of his former teachers. In politics also Chaudhuri avoided attending public meetings. Chaudhuri had very little direct personal contact with public men and movements, political or literary, yet he formed ideas of these men and movements from reading and distant contemplation. What is striking is that these ideas formed by him were not wrong and he needed 'only one or two direct contacts, and even then nothing more than a grazing or skimming contact, to acquire a very

vivid sense of their quality.'[52] Perhaps the process of detachment from environment which began with his coming to Calcutta sharpened his perceptive faculties. Chaudhuri puts it thus:

> 'I understood the life around me better, not from love, which everybody acknowledges to be a great teacher, but from estrangement.... The simple truth is that after I had left Kishorganj the relation between me and the environment in which I lived underwent a revolution. Kishorganj, Banagram and Kalikutch are interwoven with my being; so is the England of my imagination, they formed and shaped me; but when once torn up from my natural habitat I became liberated from the habitat altogether, my environment and I began to fall apart; and in the end the environment became wholly external, a thing to feel, observe and measure, and a thing to act and react on, but never to absorb or be absorbed in'.[53]

In conclusion it can be said that, the general cultural atmosphere, the influences of his early years have made Chaudhuri the man that he is — ' a writer austerely conscious of his vocation as an intellectual'.[54] He was a brilliant undergraduate but he collapsed during his post-graduate studies, and the academic life that would surely have been his natural habitat was shut off from him. But this misfortune was unable to bend his spirit. An imperious self-confidence and the belief that he was meant to achieve something enabled him to struggle in life even in the face of poverty

and failure. The courage and the ethical and intellectual values which Chaudhuri imbibed from his father combined with the honesty and the impassioned egocentricity of his mother saw him through his worst days. The places where he lived as a child, his family, the socio-political and cultural milieu are the vital source of everything positive and committed in Chaudhuri's nature. He grew up in a subjective environment in which the vital elements of modern Indian culture fertilised one another and got fused. In his personal development and in his gradual absorption of this culture, he thus, 'recapitulated national history as embryos are supposed to recapitulate the evolution of the species'.[55] Initiated into the values stage by stage in the same order as they made their appearance in Bengali society, Chaudhuri received, first, the literary and humanistic influences, then the religious and moral.

Shaped and nurtured by this new culture which was neither weak in inspiration nor in creative power, Chaudhuri's character as revealed in his Autobiography 'is the means by which we are enabled to observe the transformation of Bengal society'.[56]

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL OUTLOOK

A major force among Indian authors in English, N.C. Chaudhuri is an intellectual who has the courage to stand aside and be different from the crowd. A critic of Indian society, Chaudhuri possesses a Swiftian capacity of making surgical probes. Writing on three major prose writers : Radhakrishnan, Raghunathan and N.C. Chaudhuri, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar comments:

> 'Each in his own way has tried to interpret Indian history and thought, and although their approaches are different, there can be no question about their integrity... Scholars and thinkers at once, they are all equally fascinated by Indian-or Hindu-thought, they are equally critical of latter-day obscurations and perversions, and equally sensitive to the glassy undying essence, the true inwardness of Indian culture. They differ only in their sense of measure, the degree of objectivity they bring to their studies, and the extent of inclusiveness in their views.'[1]

Chaudhuri, fascinated by Indian or Hindu thought has tried to interpret Indian history and thought in a highly individualized manner. William Walsh thus writes :

> ' No one has given a more dramatic and impassioned account of the origins and growth of Indian civilization than the cultural historian Nirad C. Chaudhuri... In The Continent of Circe Chaudhuri has evolved, as much from imagination as from history, a theory of Indian development which, he is satisfied, provides him with a causal explanation of the character and failures of his society. We may not agree with what is a

> passionately subjective and intuitive explanation of the origins of Indian society. But Chaudhuri's sharp, unforgiving eye, natural audacity and impatient, intellectual edge — while they may not qualify him as an unfailingly objective analyst of national life — do offer what impresses as a pure intensity of perception. The evidence for, or perhaps I should say the source of Chaudhuri's theory or conviction about, the shaping of Indian society by immigration is, first, the undoubted fact of the diffusion of the Indo-European languages and, secondly, his own interpretation of the early Indian epics, supported thirdly by a method of extrapolating backward into history and pre-history the logic of his observations of contemporary Indian society.'[2]

Now, the basis of Chaudhuri's historical imagination can be traced back to his early days. Endowed with an acutely sensitive mind and a restless spirit of inquiry, Chaudhuri, as a young boy, exhibited a marked difference from the other boys of his age. Books were his best friends and hence, they played a major role in moulding his personality and outlook. From his young days he was familiar not only with Bengali literature but also had a knowledge of English literature and European personalities. Hence he writes:

> 'I cannot remember any time when I did not know, the names of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, Napolean, Shakespeare and Raphael. The next series comprising Milton, Bruke, Warren Hastings, Wellington, King Edward VII, and Queen Alexandra is almost as nebulous in origin. Lord Roberts, Lord Kitchener, General Buller, Lord Methuen, Botha, and Cronje entered early, thanks to the Boer war. Next in order came Mr. Gladstone, ...

> The beginnings of true memory in my case were marked by the names of Fox and Pitt, and Mirabeau, Robespierre, Danton, Marat, Junot, and also perhaps George Washington. On the literary side, in addition to the names of Shakespeare and Milton which we imbibed unconsciously, we came to know of Homer as soon as we began to read the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which was fairly early.[3]

Though these names were imbibed unconsciously by young Chaudhuri, yet, they did not only remain as mere names — 'they possessed some meaning and much more of associations.' As years went by the names acquired ever greater precision and ever greater significance and it can very justifiably be affirmed that, these ideas and associations form the original capital of his 'intellectual and spiritual communication with the West.'

Even as a boy, Chaudhuri was familiar with the name of Shakespeare from the stories which he had heard from his mother. But he records in his autobiography that his 'first notion of Shakespeare was of a man whose writings all grown up persons were expected to discuss and, what was even more important, to recite.'[4] It did not take him long, however, to pass from the ranks of a spectator to that of a participant in the Shakespearean procession. By the time he had learnt a second story of Shakespeare — and that was the Merchant of Venice, Chaudhuri though very young was in a position to recite both the Merchant of Venice and Julius Caesar. His

familiarity with the name of Julius Caesar was only a byproduct of his knowledge of Shakespeare, and the first idea that he 'formed of the great Roman was in the image of the Mr. Rames Roy, a top-form boy of Kishorganj High School, who in a black English suit had taken the part of Caesar in a performance of Act III, Scene I, given by the senior students.'[5] Chaudhuri took to Shakespeare just as a duck takes to water. As a mere boy of twelve years he acted the part of Cassius on the school stage with great spirit and enthusiam. Recalling his role Chaudhuri writes:

> 'But, always reciting the part of Cassius, I got myself a bad reputation. I was small and thin, and some clever people began to remark when they saw me: "Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look; he thinks too much: such men are dangerous... I wish he were fatter." And, as is proverbial, it was the enemy at home, my brother, who took the greatest and the most malicious delight in reminding me of the moral implications of my slight build in Julio-Shakespearean rhetoric.'[6]

In the literary culture of the nineteenth century Bengal, Shakespeare played a very dominating role. He was 'the epitome, test and symbol of the literary culture' of the Bengalis then, and hence, Chaudhuri from his very early days, imbibed a part of this cultural adulation of Shakespeare. When very young he learnt to recite plays like Julius Caesar. This indeed is noteworthy.

Likewise the name of Homer was not unknown to him. Of Homer Chaudhuri writes:

> 'We had a fuller but less correct notion. We were not so narrowly patriotic as to deny his claim to be the father of poetry, but we made him its joint father with Valmiki, the legendary author of the Sanskrit Ramayana. We knew the name and the story of the Iliad and regarded it as the Greek counterpart of our Ramayana. It was the obvious parallelisms which decieved us. In both cases there was an abducted woman, Sita in the Ramayana and Helen in the Iliad. In both cases there were two rescuing brothers, Rama and Lakshmana in the Indian epic and Menelaus and Agamemnon in the Greek. In either case there was a magic car which could pass through the upper air. And, last of all, in both instances there was a long struggle round a fortified city before the women could be recovered and brought back.'[7]

What strikes one is the fact that even as a boy Chaudhuri had the mental capability of finding points of similarities between these two great epics — the Iliad and the Ramayana.

Milton was held in admiration and his claims on young Chaudhuri's mind were manifold. His first impression of Milton was that of being the author of two shining volumes of books which were in the 'glass-fronted cupboard' of his Kishorganj home. Secondly, he was the model of Michael.M. Dutt and thirdly Milton was the writer of the most striking line —"Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven"—a line, which was often repeated by Chaudhuri's father. To these

impressions was added the idea of Milton 'as a stern, unbending and powerful champion of liberty.'[8] The picture of this great poet which Chaudhuri came across in an edition of Macaulay's Essay on Milton, imprinted this idea on his mind, and the fact that the poet was blind added a touch of compassion in young Chaudhuri's mind for this rather solitary and awe-inspiring person. What is noticeable is that, even as a boy, he possessed a rather unique capability of forming a relationship with an author on an almost personal level.

However, in his youth English literature was not the only love of Chaudhuri, for, if he read Milton and Shakespeare, likewise did he admire Napoleon. Infact, this admiration which he felt for Napoleon was not his alone, for, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the whole of Bengal literally adored Napoleon, and, 'not satisfied with mere worship, tried to understand his military campaigns. In one of our historical novels by our great novelist, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, a not very necessary allusion occurs to the Austerlitz campaign and to Wellington's Salamanca campaign.'[9]

From his father Chaudhuri got 'quite a business like summary of the alternative theories of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, including the theory of his mental degeneration.'[10] Amidst all the wealth of Napoleonic literature he was surprised to discover a torn copy of

Sir Neil Campbell's Napoleon at Fontainebleau and Elba. Thus, from early in life his association with various historical events grew. He writes:

> 'Thanks to this prevalance of Bonapartism amongst us we began to hear of Napoleon quite early in life, and the first picture of him that became fixed in my mind was that of a young artilery commander bending over his guns and laying them.'[11]

For Chaudhuri, Napoleon was not a mere name nor was Wellington. He regarded Napoleon almost as a God, a person 'invincible and unconquerable by straightforward methods of warfare.'[12] Thus Chaudhuri's young mind ascribed Napoleon's 'defeat at Waterloo to the bribing of Grouchy.' Wellington was judged by him as the greatest general that ever lived and 'as the best rational and human general'[13]. Though perhaps childish, these judgements bring to light the intensity of Chaudhuri's mind—even as a boy he did not merely look at things as others do, but thought about everything very intensely thereby forming his own conclusion.

Chaudhuri's deep love for military statesmanship is another very important factor which draws our attention. The two panoramic pictures of the Boer War which he had at his Kishorganj house held immense fascination for him. As a small boy, he often asked his elder

brother to read out the names of the regiments of officers provided below the pictures, and the names of commanders like 'General Roberts', 'General Kitchener', left him in awe and admiration. Recalling his feelings for the Boer War he writes:

> 'The Boer War was very frequently in our thoughts and not less frequently on our lips. Its hold was reinforced by a magic lantern show with brightly coloured slides to which we went. We thought of the Boers as a heroic people and of their leaders, particularly of Cronje and Botha, as men of super human valour. Our reaction to the Boer War, as to every war in which England was involved, was curiously mixed. One-half of us automatically shared in the English triumph, while the other and the patriotic half wanted the enemies of England to win. When our patriotic half was in the ascendant, as it usually was after an English victory, we went so far as to believe that the victory had been won by bribing one of the opponents' generals. We were told that General French's successful dash to Kimberley was made possible by the treachery of a Boer commander who had been bribed... Not only is bribing believed to be an infallible remedy for all workaday inconveniences — a belief justified by experience — it is also regarded as an equally effective means of managing high affairs of state, but in this instance without the same warranty. We heard that the English had won the battle of Waterloo by bribing Grouchy...'[14]

What arrests our attention is Chaudhuri's reaction to the Boer War. India then was a subject state and every war in which England was involved created a mixed feeling among the Indians. One-half of the Indians shared the English triumph, while the other patriotic

half wanted the enemies of England to win.Chaudhuri, though young then, was keenly aware of this mixed-feeling of the Indians towards the war, and this again compels our attention to the truth that Chaudhuri, unlike other boys of his age, was perhaps a bit too serious and mature — a boy who had an unusually serious cast of mind.

The Boer War was not the only war with which he was familiar. Though staying in the remote rustic town of Kishorganj, the Chaudhuris' were very much aware of world affairs. This accounts for Chaudhuri's familiarity with 'Graeco-Turkish War, the Russo-Turkish War and the Franco-Prussian War'[15]. All this knowledge was gained by him from a 'systematic enumeration' of the more important European Wars of the previous fifty years. The name of Osman Pasha and of his heroic defence of Plevna was first heard by Chaudhuri in connexion with the Russo-Turkish War. Several other historical figures like Luther, Bruke, Fox, Pitt, Washington,Gladstone and Hastings, to name only a few, were also not unknown to him. However, the familiarity did not end in names alone. Bruke was looked upon with reverence for 'not only had he supported the American colonists but that he had also impeached Warren Hastings

for his oppression of the Indian people.'[16] The names of Fox, Warren Hastings, Washington, and the Pitts were names of actors in a very big, many-sided and slowly unfolding drama, which somehow appeared to have a sense 'of the underlying unity of the whole historical epoch beginning with the Seven Years' War and ending with Waterloo.'[17] Thus, Chaudhuri's conception of it was 'closely knit' and the two Pitts in his words:

> 'Constituted for us the visible symbol of this unity, although apart from this we also recognized their intrinsic greatness. In addition, we saw in them the marvel so rare in the sequence of human generations of a father and a son being equally great.'[18]

Further, Luther was looked upon as a reformer possessing great importance and merit as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshub Chandra Sen. The Hindu Reformation movement based on the theory of Protestant Reformation was then sweeping over Bengal. Chaudhuri's family belonged to the class of 'liberal Hindus' and hence, even without any 'deliberate instruction' he imbibed the notion that European history was a series of struggles for freedom. In this context he writes:

> The more important and epoch making of these struggles, to our thinking, were the Reformation, the Puritan Rebellion in England, the American War

> of Independence, and the French Revolution. The heroes of these movements were also our heroes... Not that we had much moral condemnation for them, for we thought it very exhilarating to be able to chop off heads as easily as Danton and Robespierre , incited by Marat, were reported to us to have done. But pondering over the guillotine's indiscrimination in its personal implication we were somewhat awed by it, Of mob violence too we were afraid... The beginnings of the Revolution appeared to us as a more generous phase, free from excesses, and matinal in its promise.'[19]

Thus, the Reformation Movement, the Puritan Rebellion in England, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution were to Chaudhuri's mind some stirring symbols of man's undying quest and struggle for release and emancipation whether in the world of religion or politics.

In this connection he mentions 'we had been told that English politics were run by two parties, but we hated the Conservatives, because we gave the same appellation to the orthodox Hindus whom we looked upon as the upholders and adherents of superstition by which we understood belief in ghosts, evil spirits, magic, witchcraft, and the like. We could think of no worst insult than to be called a Conservative, and with me this persisted up to the age of adolescence.'[20]

His uncle's remark "You are very conservative", thus, once left Chaudhuri smarting with anger. There was no worse insult than to be called a 'Conservative' and this he feels was the result of a natural bias which most of the Indians had in favour of 'Liberal Statesmen'.

The impression is strong and clear that for Chaudhuri reading the history of the past was not merely reading it for its sake, but it was a process in which the entire personality was involved and which gave him the prespective in which to judge and evaluate contemporary events. Thus, while the study of European and English history left him responding in his own way — finding his models in Napoleon and others, the fast changing political scene of India also coloured the impressionistic mind of young Chaudhuri with different hues — the Partition of Bengal (1905) sowed the first seeds of hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims in his mind. That same mind was again swept by the emotional fervour of the Nationalist Movement. Chaudhuri writes:

> The first element in this emotion was an intense, almost religious hopefulness. We believed in the second advent of our country and nation with a firmness of conviction which nothing could shake... The faith was fixed in our mind by a large number of patriotic songs whose single theme was that our country would be great again... This patriotic lyricism was the second note in the emotion we felt at the coming of the nationalist agitation, and its poignancy lay in the continuous evocation of the beauties of nature: the waters, the green grass, and the golden cornfields of Bengal, the fragrance of the mango blossom in the spring; while on a grander level we had the snows of the Himalayas and the waves of the Indian Ocean... An eagerness to serve and sacrifice ourselves was the third element in our patriotic emotion. Hence forward, we thought, we had no right to live any other life but a dedicated life. Our country was waiting for us to rescue and redeem her.'[21]

The sense of the demand made by the country was so real that for Chaudhuri, 'it seemed as if actual calls of distress from some living person' were reaching him and hence for a time being he was totally engulfed by this all consuming intensity of the nationalist agitation.

Further, being a voracious reader from his early days, Chaudhuri imposed upon himself a rigorous and well regulated programme of studies and hence as a student he was 'awakened to a new understanding of the nature of learning.' Mark Pattison's saying "that the product of study was not the book but the man,"[22]

in one of Lord Moreley's essays, made Chaudhuri conscious of the inter-relatedness of personality and scholarship. Scholarship is a product of personal temperament and Chaudhuri definitely possessed this temperament and hence he felt an immense fascination for 'palaeography, diplomatics and textual criticism.'[23] He read through complete sets of the English Historical Review and Revue Critique even without being a specialist in any of the subjects treated in these periodicals. Young Chaudhuri's mind was captivated by an emotion —the emotion of scholarship and thus, in Anatole France's book Sylvestre Bonnard which is the expression in literary art of the emotion of scholarship, Chaudhuri recognized his 'ideal self mellowed and matured by age'.[24] Hence, it can rightly be said that what attracted Chaudhuri's mind was 'scholarship itself' and he felt an irresistible attraction for the history and methodology of every branch of learning. His scholarly temperament attained gradual growth and forms the basis of his encyclopaedic knowledge and a mind that is always agile and active.

As a young boy in school, Chaudhuri had shown a marked preference for history over the other subjects but he finally fell in love with history during the

two years of his intermediate course. This love for history can it seems, be attributed to two major influences — the books that he read and heard about and two of his teachers who generated passion for the subject and left a lasting impression on young Chaudhuri's mind.

Mr Bipin Gupta, an established writer in Bengali, created an immense influence and hence he says, 'My respect for him made me respect history'[25]. The other outstanding influence was that of Professor T.R. Glover. The impression he made on Chaudhuri was profound and it was he who implanted in him "an ineradicable interest in early Christianity and the Roman Empire."[26]

The love for history initiated by these two men soon turned into an all consuming flame and Chaudhuri started reading the Constitutional History of Stubbs, with Green's Short History of the English People and Mommsen's History of Rome. History became almost an obsession, for, he not only read Green and Mommsen but was influenced and attracted by the literary quality of their histories. He was charmed by the Keats - like delicacy of Green's writing and provided a complete contrast to the erudite massiveness

which he felt while reading Mommsen. However, Mommsen also became a real favourite of Chaudhuri within a short period of time. The emotion of scholarship was so dominant in him that often his imagination was stirred just by the names of books. He puts forth this curious part of the story in his autobiography:

> 'A small number of books, which even yet I have not seen and about which I had not read, stirred my imagination so deeply in my early college days that they may be reckoned as very powerful influences on my intellectual growth. The first two of them were Beloch's Griechische Geschichte and Busolt's with the same title. I had learnt their names from the article on Greek history in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Both the books, and more particularly Busolt's work, seemed to me to be the very model of what every historical work should be. I gathered that Busolt had given the source of every fact stated by him, discussed all the evidence and every view on every point in dispute or doubt, and provided a complete critical apparatus'[27]

That to Chaudhuri's thinking, was the perfection of historical writing and as a student he was allured by books. As he puts it'I liked, and still like, to contemplate the appearance, feel the texture and weigh the mass of the books which I cannot read.'[28] Though he acquired a highly specialized interest very early in life yet he also possessed a more general intellectual taste. What primarily interested him 'was the meaning and purpose of existence, and since

existence has many facets,' Chaudhuri's intellectual interests also became many-sided. Even without being aware of its deep springs, his appetite for information and explanation became as varied as his mental denitation became versatile. Thus, with an enviable agility Chaudhuri was able to move from one subject to another and surprisingly enough he was at home in any subject that he chose to read. He however, was not satisfied with merely reading the subject, he was always simultaneously eager to ascertain the position of the subject he was studying in the whole field of knowledge. He writes:

> 'I was not less interested in the question of its descent, filiation, and affiliations than in itself. Thus I was perpetually probing round a particular subject in order to discover its limits, and most often discoverd that it had none... At all events, my attitude towards knowledge was similar to my attitude towards the animal world. Knowledge no less than animals appeared to me to be divided into varieties, races, species, genera, families, orders and so forth, and all this variety seemed to be cemented together by an unbreakable living chain. On account of this pronounced bias of mind I could not limit myself to the subject set for me for the time being, but would immediately get busy with its bearings... Appropriately enough, the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica... continued to be my mainstay in this absorbing exploration of the interrelatedness of all knowledge, and from it in addition to acquiring the notion of correlation, I also acquired the bibliographical flair. I always read the

> bibliographical notes given at the end of the articles very carefully, and came to realize that before one could begin the study of any subject the essential preliminary was a knowledge of the most important books on it.'[29]

This bibliographical flair which Chaudhuri acquired when young, combined with the sense of the relativity of knowledge gradually drew his mind to specialized scholarship and its methods. Regarding this duality within his intellectual being he writes:

> 'All unknown to me, even during the first two years of my gropings in the field of scholarship, an internal contradiction was crystallizing within me. On the one hand I was irresistibly drawn towards wide views, sweeping generalizations, and comprehension of wholes which were continually expanding into bigger and vaguer wholes; on the other I was beginning to feel the attraction of specialized scholarship and its methods.'[30]

This attraction which Chaudhuri felt for specialized scholarship was further intensified with the passage of time. The year 1917 stands out as the decisive year in his life. It was in this year that Chaudhuri 'really understood the nature and methods of historical scholarship.'[31] He had already had a love for history, but with his introduction to the Imperial Library, began a phase in Chaudhuri's life which accounts for his outlook — which is essentially

historical. The reading room, the shelves, made Chaudhuri tremble with excitement and the first book which he borrowed from the library was an edition of Bury's History of Greece. Initially, however, Chaudhuri visited the library only occasionally but from April, 1917 he began 'a series of uninterrupted regular and almost daily visits'[32] to the library. No force on earth could hold him back. Like a young lover betwitched by his beloved, Chaudhuri too, was captivated by 'history' and in the three months of the summer vacation of 1917 he read very nineteenth century and early twentieth century classic of history and made himself 'perfectly familiar with the history of historical writing.'[33] In this literary mission Chaudhuri's principal guides were Lord Acton and Dr. Gooch. For Lord Acton he says:

> 'I developed a veneration which was almost idolatry, and as a personal loyalty this veneration is equalled in me only by my affection for Charlotte Bronte. I read through all the works of Lord Acton, including his letters. I also read everything published about him, and I do not think the account Lord Acton gave one night at Cannes of his projected history of freedom gave a greater thrill to Lord Bryce who listened to it, than Lord Bryce's account in his Contemporary Biography gave to me. I was shocked by Strachey's sneer about Lord Acton in his Eminent Victorians, and, in spite of my admiration for Strachey's brilliance, considered the remark very ill-natured and shallow.'[34]

All this reading of historical literature together with his incursions into anthropology, which Chaudhuri began to study about the same time, left him, 'confirmed in the habit of thinking historically.'[35] He thus 'discovered that nothing was either complete or intelligible at one particular point of time without a reference to its past, that is to say, its duration or history.'[36]

Besides the historical attitude, he also acquired an unshakable faith in historical integrity. When most of Chaudhuri's fellow - students and teachers appeared to think that history existed only for the sake of exalting Indian nationalism, Chaudhuri inspite of all his love for India 'came to regard a lapse from historical rectitude as even more condemnable than a lapse from moral conduct.'[37] In upholding historical integrity with such unwavering determination Chaudhuri's intellect played the major role. As a young student of historical investigation and writing, what he sought for and respected was thus "Scientific truth" — a truth whose claim on man at the time transcended even that of morality.

A shock to his notion of 'historical integrity' provoked Chaudhuri to write his first original essay on an historical subject. This provocation was given by Dr. Kalidas Nag, a teacher who was much admired and liked by Chaudhuri. Dr. Nag taught ancient Indian history, and one day in course of his lecture when Professor Ramsay Muir walked into the class to listen to Prof. Nag's lecture, the latter 'immediately took to his wings and delivered a tremendous patriotic harangue, in which he compared the blood-thirstiness of Europeans with the tolerance and pacifism of the Hindus.'[38] Professor Nag obviously enjoyed himself greately but this lecture left young Chaudhuri in a 'boiling rage'. In anger and shame Chaudhuri then twenty, wrote an essay on The Objective Method in History. This 'essay' which is reprinted in full in The Autobiography is certainly a remarkable demonstration as impressive in the marshalling of detail as it is forceful in the summing up.

> "...who would think of judging the world by standards either Indian or European? It must take its stand on broader human grounds when all is changing no one attitude would serve as a measure of progress. In this infinitely complex and infinitely vast mass of ever-changing things nothing supplies us with a safe anchorage save the objective method.

> Such a conception of history cannot think of being partial or impartial. It shows a development and lays bare its causes... It has no special liking for things Indian or European. It has grapsed the unity of history in time as well as in subject-matter. The hero of this history is man in all his developments and in every climate. The conclusions of such history are independent of the views of morality, religion, or politics that the writer happened to hold.'[39]

This essay demonstrates Chaudhuri's capacity to formulate for himself an attitude towards life which on the one hand did not grow out of the system of values which he had acquired earlier in life, and on the other hand was in complete opposition to the prevailing super-nationalistic ideas and emotions. Rereading this essay thirty years later Chaudhuri comments that:

> 'In formulating my conception of history, I was moving away, in relation to my past life, from the ethical standpoint to an amoral intellectual creed, and in relation to my countrymen and contemporaries I was eracting a barrier of intellectual isolation which was to become more and more impenetrable with years. The essay was the manifesto of a revolution within me, completed on the sub-conscious plane, a revolution leaping out in full panoply like Athene from the head of Zeus, which made me take an intellectual view of existence in a society which was completely anti-intellectual. Perhaps, if I had had to write the essay even two years after, it would not have been written in the same words. But its content and drift would not have been different. The

> creed adumbrated in the youthful testament remained my single article of faith for more than twenty-five years, and the discovery I have made since has not involved any repudiation of the early faith. It has only added something and that addition is this: the objective pursuit of historical truth which, for me, means the truth regarding the meaning and purpose of existence, not only of individual human beings or even of nations, but of the universe, is inseparable from the pursuit of morality, for it gives men a true understanding of the nature of Good and the nature of Evil, a surer grasp of the principles which should regulate personal and national conduct, and a sorely needed confidence in living and dying, both as individuals and as nations.'[40]

Chaudhuri was then studying for his degree. On being placed first class first in his degree examination he pursued his academic career by joining the post graduate course in history at Calcutta University. Here too, he came under the deep influence of two of his teachers. Dr. R.C. Mazumdar brought to Chaudhuri the sense of the living quality of ancient Indian history. His lectures gave young Chaudhuri 'the sense of watching the process of the writing of ancient Indian history, and not merely the experience of reading it.'[41]

Mr. Y.J. Taraporewallah was the other teacher who influenced him during his post-graduate days. Mr. Taraporewallah taught the newly introduced subject

of the French Revolution. This teacher 'felt a human, and not merely a lecturer's interest in the Revolution.'[42] With him Chaudhuri became personally intimate, and from him he also received a number of French books on the Revolution, among which was a complete set of Chuquet's history of the Revolutionary Wars. Mr. Taraporewallah was very kind to young Chaudhuri and encouraged him in all possible ways.

As a young enthusiastic student of history Chaudhuri cherished a dream:

> 'My insane ambition was to combine Mabillon, Muratori, Tillemont and Gibbon. The idea of a gigantic corpus piling itself up in annual volumes throughout a life-time, a single-handed Monumenta of Indian history rivalling the corporate Monumenta Germaniae Historica, and the idea of a stupendous synthesis written on a grand scale over decades and revised on an equally grand scale over suceeding decades obsessed me at the same time. If the synthesis was not to be absolutely like Eduard Meyer's Geschichte des Altertums, the least that it had to be was Stern's Geschichte Europas seit den Wiener Vertragen von 1815, and I was in too great a hurry to turn out such a work.'[43]

He was so engrossed in this pursuit of historical studies that gradually his health deteriorated and ultimately he was unable to complete his M.A. examination. Thus, from the conventional point of view

Chaudhuri was no doubt a failure, yet what he attained was scholarship, and a mind which with its richness and complexity was at once incisive and encyclopaedic.

Through the well regulated programme of historical studies spanning Eastern and Western traditions of thought and culture Chaudhuri derived a massive scholarship and formed an outlook which is basically historical—based on facts of history and not on mere legends. Chaudhuri's ambition was not merely to take a degree and get a professorship, but to become a historian. Taken in its strict sense he definitely is not a 'historian' yet a proper scanning of his autobiography very clearly establishes the fact that through the autobiographical exercise Chaudhuri actually interprets Indian history and thought. His autobiography is "more of a national than personal history."[44] In the opening paragraph of its Preface Chaudhuri writes:

> 'This Book describes the conditions in which an Indian grew to manhood in the early decades of this century... The story I want to tell is the story of the struggle of a civilization with a hostile environment, in which the destiny of British rule in India, became necessarily involved. My main intention is thus historical, and since I have written the account with the utmost honesty and accuracy of which I am capable, the intention in my mind has become mingled with the aspiration that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history.'[45]

It is clear, then, that his main aim was to write history and the autobiographical exercise was merely a means to realise his cherished end. The Autobiography is organised round a conception of place, which is shown as the great means by which embodied history is brought to bear upon growth. The places that had an influence on Chaudhuri's boyhood, the family antecedents, the rural cultural milieu, the cold war between the ruling and the subject races, the coming of Gandhi — these many environmental layers receive as much attention as the vicissitudes of his childhood, boyhood and youth. This intricate treatment gives the reader a sense of young Chaudhuri's life picking its way through a variety of locations and assuming definition and individuality in the process of growth. What is noticeable is the fact that, Chaudhuri with his double-edge of sensitivity achieves insights denied to most. His self-chosen standards of scholarship and history are indeed unexceptionable and terribly exacting. In The Continent of Circe he writes, "I know who is learned and who is not, I am not. In order to convince the reader that this is not insincerity I shall mention the names of four men whom I regard as truly learned.

They are Mommsen, Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Harnack and Eduard Meyer. When young and immature I cherished the ambition of being the fifth in that series. So I could not have been very modest. But a standard is a standard.'[46]

Chaudhuri's self-chosen standards are indeed high, but even as he fails by them he remains a formidable scholar, a man who inspite of all odds against him has the intellectual and moral resource to turn it into something like profound historical knowledge. By temperament, aspiration and arduous training, he was meant to be a historian, but the fates had decided otherwise. — Instead of being a historian he became a writer — but this was not able to change Chaudhuri's outlook. He is essentially a historian — the two basic coordinates of his study of Indian culture are 'time and space', history and geography. His preoccupation with history in general, and Indian history in particular, is apparent throughout his autobiography and in its last chapter entitled as An Essay on the Course of Indian History, the mask is finally cast off and the historian in Chaudhuri is revealed. He writes:

> 'The thesis of this book has been taking shape in my mind for over twenty years...
> Those who will read the book will, I hope, take into account the toil and the criticism which have gone to its making. The conclusions embodied in it are not the first half-baked ideas that came into my mind. Nor are they to be put to the sole proof of the daily flux of events, which when not correlated over a fairly long period of time is, on account of the refraction it generates, more of a hindrance than a help in grasping large historical perspectives. Therefore, if I have tried to arrive at conclusions which will remain valid for all time, I have also taken a very large field and body of reference from which to draw these conclusions. I have read the history of my country, a history of some three thousand years, and tried to connect it, with what is known of the entire history of mankind. I have also observed the events and phenomena around me in my own life. I have meditated over what I have read and what I have observed, formulated conclusions and rejected them, until those that survived became irresistible. I believe they now stand clear of subjective and passing clouds and embody a more or less sound view of Indian history, which can be left with some confidence to be tested by time.'[47]

As a historian Chaudhuri has an abnormally sensitive nose for the odour of death and decay for a major theme of The Autobiography is the origin and death of the Indian effort to create a modern culture on the basis of East-West cultural synthesis. Yet, he does not leave one with an impression of mere decay and depression. His vision is not bleak, and his love

for the vital and creative is too strong for such a mood to last. His method is objective and hence he speaks of the Hindus as "being an aristocracy living among hostile and inferior aliens, being always in danger of being swamped by them... In this matter, the ancient Hindu", Chaudhuri writes, 'reminds one of the modern white, more especially the Boer, in South Africa.'[48]

Chaudhuri is likewise extremely sensitive to the menaces of Western culture. He expresses strong feelings regarding the relationship of the Indian with the Englishmen and writes, "that the only course of conduct permissible to either side in their political and public relations at the present moment is an honourable taciturnity. The rest must be left to the healing powers of Time."[49]

Chaudhuri's later book, The Continent of Circe likewise elaborates the historical thesis already set forth by him in The Autobiography. The 'Vampire of history' of the earlier book now becomes with a change of metaphor, 'the land of Oriental Circe'. It is described as An Essay on the Peoples of India, and Chaudhuri adds that the word 'essay' is used in the sense of 'a trial in exposition.'[50] The main purpose

which Chaudhuri aims at in this book 'is to describe the peoples of India in their natural groupings, both ethnic and cultural, and analyse their collective personality in the light of the historical evolution which formed it.'[51] The core of the doctrine of The Continent of Circe is that the Hindus are of European stock, immigrant Aryans from Mitannia-Mesopotamia who colonized the Indo-Gangetic plain and parts of South India. The Aryans were a complete society originally with a triple structure comprising the aristocracy, the general body of the community and the workers. The ferocious opposition between the civilized community of Aryans and the indigenous dark population becomes Chaudhuri's prime concern throughout the book. He maintains that 'The aboriginals of India had happiness in their blood and in their free state neither would nor could be cured of it.'[52] The Hindus are what they are because they are the victims of Circe, the 'fair European-Aryan' has become the brown Hindu whom the climate of North India has enfeebled in body as well as in mind.

In all the essays which Chaudhuri writes on Indian life, Hindus necessarily figure as the main

character. This is because Chaudhuri cannot contemplate another cycle of subjection of his own people, how the fatal drift can be arrested is however beyond his comprehension. Even so he writes, 'I shall make a last attempt, in fact the present series of books which I may not live to complete is that . I say to myself that if I am to be a Cassandra let me at least be a positive Cassandra.'[53]

In The Autobiography, Chaudhuri had affirmed that 'the true autochthon of India has the one immutable role of wearing out, outraging and degrading everything great and good that comes into the country from abroad, and Hinduism... has always been an admixture of foreign goodness and indigenous abasement',[54] and the 'Hindu is the European distorted, corrupted and made degenerate by the cruel torrid environment and by the hostility, both real and imagined, of the true sons of the soil.'[55]

Trying to escape their swinish plight, the Hindus cling to certain old memories — the veneration for the Veda, the obsessive feeling for a 'fair' skin, the sentiment for rivers the worship of the cow are basic to their way of life. Chaudhuri further writes

that, "they have no ugliness which is not of their own making."[56] Chaudhuri, himself being a Hindu speaks rather unfavourably of the Hindus but this can be traced to his intense love for the Hindus. He opines:

> "But I would save the fellow-beasts. They do not, however, listen to me. They honk, neigh, bellow, bleat or grunt and scamper away to their scrub, stable byre, pen and sty.
>
> Tears roll down the cheeks of Circe. The great sorceress weeps to see the completeness of her handiwork."[57]

In The Continent of Circe Chaudhuri is definitely launched on a historical undertaking commensurate with his early ambition of becoming a historian. Thus he opines that the psychological experience of the British in India, first as traders, then as rulers, closely repeated, that of the Hindus themselves. A people of temperate climate, with a strong disposition in favour of the fascinating and promising East, became, under the brutalities of a tropical climate and among a potentially hostile population horribly demoralized. Their sense of proportion broke down. They became extreme and strident. Outraged by the

lack among the Hindus of the European virtues of 'reason' and 'measure' everything appeared inconsistent and extravagant, lush and awry. They were continually oppressed by the possibility of submergence in a lower culture. Thus their pride in race intensified and they grew increasingly unwilling to share their culture. 'The British in India lost all sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, charity and malice, and paraded a racial arrogance whose mildest form was a stony silence.'[58]

In repeating the psychological development of the Hindus, the history of the British in India helped to harden the Hindus in their own strong bias as confirmed believers in blood and birth. In Chaudhuri's judgement, the Hindus remain, a people divided against themselves, suffering an exhaustion of vitality and an ever-present maladjustment with the tropical environment. What happened to the Hindus happened to the British. It was the excruciatingly cruel country which had the same effect on both peoples. 'Western Scholars', writes Chaudhuri 'have sometimes made Buddhism or Vedanta responsible for the apparent indifference of the Hindus to the things of the world, especially for their disinclination to

mental and bodily exertion and attributed to us a world negation which we never had. The philosophies did not make our life what it is; it was the life which made the philosophies what they are.'[59]

In Chaudhuri's reading of the origins of Indian culture there are personal and psychological undertones. 'And yet in the end he comes down unambiguously on an impersonal and objective influence as the key item, namely the brutalities of life in a tropical climate. To ignore the geography is to misconceive the history.'[60] For life and climate in a subcontinent of quite hard extremes are, except to a tiny favoured few, incomparably hard.

Chaudhuri is often very bitter in his criticism and thus in Thy Hand Great Anarch, he contends that the worst crime the British committed in India was to desert it and fail in their mission to bring European civilization in thought, art and science to India. With this powerful implicit defence of the nature and purpose of the British Raj he combines the utmost scorn for the British in India. This bitterness of tone arises perhaps from his despairing confrontation

with the almost omnipresent spectacle of sloth and immobility in every sphere of our national life, but soon there comes to light the objective historian in Chaudhuri — a man who perhaps looks from a height at things below and judges them in their true perspective. Thus it can be said, that, Chaudhuri though a writer is essentially a historian — for whenever he deals with a topic his outlook is historical, he looks at it from the point of view of 'Time and Space'. That is to say he looks at a topic from the standpoint of history and geography. This formidable scholar has a keen eye for the present as shaped or distorted by the past and often leaves his readers in a state of gasping admiration for his sensitised scholarship and dynamic vision.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CRITICISM

In an attempt at understanding himself and through himself the present day India, Chaudhuri focuses on India with a critical vision which owes substantially to the English critical tradition. A product of the intellectual awakening of Bengal in the nineteenth century, Chaudhuri derived a massive scholarship through a self-imposed well regulated programme of studies spanning Eastern and Western traditions of thought and culture. Besides this, Chaudhuri, when young, had set up a standard for himself in notable historians like 'Mommsen Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Harnack, and Eduard Meyer.'[1] Even though he has failed by his own standard yet, Chaudhuri's writings clearly bring out the historian in him. Wide awake and fiercely honest he is 'an unsparing critic of men and morals' in contemporary India. He attempts at giving us a comprehensive perspective of our present day Indian society and culture and without the least hesitation he brings to light all that is sham and hypocritical in our culture. The present day degeneration of Indian society thus forms the focal point of Chaudhuri's critical vision.

A man with a highly intellectual core, Chaudhuri takes upon himself the mammoth task of raising his voice against all that is spurious in our society. In the process of speaking against the ills of society Chaudhuri has been the subject of much controversy. Because of his bitter and caustic remarks he has often been branded as anti-India. This however is far from the truth, for, Chaudhuri's prime concern is the degeneration, the horror, boredom and malaise of the 'unaccommodated' present. With his consuming curiosity about men and manners, shored up by a great deal of scholarly knowledge Chaudhuri probes both eastern and western ethos with sharply individual insights. One of the most original thinkers, Chaudhuri writes searchingly about the Hindus — their life, culture and society form the core of his writings. The word 'Hindu' when used by Chaudhuri represents a human type common to the Indian sub-continent and hence does not carry any religious connotation. Chaudhuri further opines that the Hindus — the 'fair European Aryan' enfeebled both in body and mind by the enervating climate of India always exhibited a marked degree of superiority. They did not intermix with the

aboriginals of India. In fact, the hatred of the Hindu was directed against 'all men who were not fellow-Hindus or, theoretically, blood-kins.'[2] Chaudhuri looks searchingly at the Hindu society and the 'degeneration and decadence' which he sees around him provokes him to raise his voice against some of the social evils, the superstitions, the rites and rituals which have become an integral part of the Hindu society. While there is no harm in following certain religious rites and rituals and every society has them, the problem that arrests Chaudhuri's attention is the magnitude of such rites and their extension to the secular aspects of our national life. As an instance he cites the Hindu love for 'the Vedas, fair complexion, the rivers and the cattle' and opines:

> 'In spite of their anti-Hindu chatter, which, incidentally, is vocal only when it is not risky, even the Anglicized Hindus are as respectful of these four as any conservative Hindu could be. They might exude radicalism or even communism through the pores, still, when these call, the great majority fall in, and the rest come to heel...
>
> Vedic rites form part of the official opening ceremonies of the great material projects. Vedic fire-sacrifices have been performed even in the presidential mansion, and wherever they are performed they are well

> and impressively attented, at times by very high dignitaries, in whom one would hardly assume a belief in magic.'[3]

Likewise, the worshipping of rivers has also become a cult in our country, Officials and ministers including those of the highest ranks attend the periodic bathing festivals, especially those at Hardwar and Allahabad. A huge amount of expenditure is incurred on such occasions, and not only that, often terrible disasters happen. In this context Chaudhuri refers to an incident which occurred in the year 1954 when because of the President's and the Prime Minister's presence at the bathing place the police had to be diverted from their proper duty of regulating the crowds to look after their security. As a result, there was a stampede and hundreds lost their lives. Well, one may argue: where lies the harm in such a ritual being performed, for disasters do not happen every day and why does Chaudhuri make an issue out of it? What pains Chaudhuri is perhaps the fact that the majority who go to these 'Melas' do it either from superstitions or from motives of political expediency and have no notion of what the river cult actually is. The Aryans loved the rivers of India because they were

the real-image of the great rivers of their old tradition. Thus, the true reason for the worship of the rivers by the Hindus was not religious in the strict sense but an expression of loyalty to the Aryans. With the lapse of time 'a progressive loss of beauty and grandeur, and a steady gravitation towards crudity'[4] in the cult of the river attracts Chaudhuri's attention. The river cult which is, according to Chaudhuri, extremely 'touching in its intrinsic quality' is less impressive outwardly for what remains today is nothing short of superstition and a blind obedience to it —the Hindus go on a pilgrimage at least once in their life time to the historic bathing places and think 'that with every bathe in these places all the previous sins are washed away.'[5] This belief is so deep-seated that most Hindus, even the very modern and Anglicized ones also cannot resist it. Herein, Chaudhuri feels, lies the problem for it 'seems as if an invisible force, not an octopus but a gigantic cephalopod with thousands of tentacles, was dragging people to the places.'[6]

Like the river cult the worship of cows is another aspect of Hindu society which irks Chaudhuri. He feels:

> 'This is a paradox of the Hindu system of values and behaviour which baffles all Occidentals. Of all the irrational Hindu obsessions, none appears more irrational than the fanatical and ferocious determination not to permit the destruction of superfluous and useless cattle, even when the animals cannot be properly fed or cared for. This is a negation of every principle of economy and efficiency in animal husbandry, and all the more so because in India there never is any regular allocation of land for pasture. From the moral point of view, it appears to be a very repulsive form of hypocrisy to worship cows and yet starve them. As everybody knows, the worshipped cattle are, as a rule, pitifully scraggy.'[7]

Though it is a very repulsive form of hypocrisy to worship cows and at the same time starve them, yet it forms a part of our social ethos even in the present day. Here too the original love of the Aryans for cows — a rare breed of cattle found only in certain parts of India and revered in order to preserve their species underwent a drastic change with time. Thus, 'In cow-worship, too, one sees the operation of the cruel law of evolution of the Hindus: that trees disappear before the weeds... Therefore what we see of cow-worship today is not its living tree-like form, but its fossilized weedy survival.'[8]

Alien domination has also affiliated the Hindu worship of the cow and opposition to cow-killing with the anti-Muslim and anti-British nationalism. Already, even before the coming of the Muslims, the

question of protecting cattle had entered both Hindu ethics and Hindu religion. The foreign conquests made it a part of nationalism, because both sets of hated foreign rulers were given to killing and eating cattle. 'This injection of politics made the old Hindu feeling for the cow a contentless, disembodied fanaticism, more hatred of the Muslim and British cow-killer than love for the animal.'[9] But originally when 'the Hindus had not lost their vitality, and when they had not exchanged true compassion for the degraded and morbid respect for animal life which they now practise and profess, the cult of the cow did have a beauty and strength of its own.'[10] Then, the care of the cow and feeling for it originated in other and better impulses, both religious and secular, free from the xenophobia which characterises it today. In The Continent of Circe, Chaudhuri refers to an incident which took place some months before the general elections of 1962 in India. He noticed posters appearing in Delhi with this extraordinary accusation: 'The renegade Congress Government is assassinating cows. At first Chaudhuri could not even make a distant

guess as to the reason for this absurd charge. But afterwards he writes:

> 'I learned that it referred to the serving of beef in the Ashoka Hotel of Delhi, which is owned by the Indian Government and is meant for foreign tourists. Obviously, the Hindu Rightists were looking for their stick. I thought, however, that at least this stick would be treated with the contempt it deserved. But no, that is not the way of our ruling class.
>
> Very soon I read in the newspapers that the management of the hotel had stopped serving beef in its dining rooms. The poster was an election manoeuvre, so the withdrawal had also to come as a counter-manoeuvre.'[11]

What Chaudhuri perhaps tries to drive home through this instance is the utter callousness, lack of rationalism and even insincerity on the part of the rulers. Thus, the worship of the cow has been reduced to a fetish in present times totally devoid of its original spirit. In respect of the four Hindu loyalties —the reverence for the Vedas, fair complexion, the rivers, and the cattle, Chaudhuri feels:

> '... There is really no difference between the masses and the Anglicized ruling class, except perhaps this — that the masses are always sincere, and the rulers most often the opposite. Though the Hindus have no real understanding of these loyalties of theirs, even in their blind adherence they are more respectable than the rulers who are always

> talking of destroying Hinduism and always retreating before it. And the loyalties, even in their unanalysed state, are impressive... in their original inspiration very touching and beautiful.'[12]

. But unfortunately what remains today and what we see around us in regard to these loyalties is nothing but insincerity and as an example Chaudhuri cites the modern Hindu interest in the Vedas. He says, 'the modern Hindu interest in the Vedas is wholly artificial, and is a creation of western scholarship. It is an academic interest, but not competent academic interest, for most of the Indian scholars and historians who deal with the Vedic age cannot read Vedic Sanskrit, and are wholly dependent on Western translations and exegesis.'[13] Thus, the point which Chaudhuri tries to make is that we in our adherence to the Aryan loyalties only try to brag without knowing or even trying to know what these loyalties actually are or what they stand for. The Hindu belief that the Vedas contain everything has thus been carried to the length of absurdity in the face of the challenge of European Science. Chaudhuri is hence shocked and also amused to hear scholars, 'who are otherwise quite respectable, say that evidence for the existence not only of fire-arms, but even

aeroplanes in ancient India is to be found in the Vedas.'[14] This new aspect of the worship of the Vedas frightens Chaudhuri regarding the future of his people who as it were are becoming increasingly superstitious and irrational in dealing not with the actual contents of the Vedas but in making them a purely ego-boosting myth.

The next point raised by Chaudhuri is the Hindu's infatuation with fair complexion. This too is a legacy from the past which like the other Aryan loyalties has undergone a change to assume its present aspect.

Now, the 'fair Aryan-Hindu' aware of the problem of maintaining his original complexion under the climatic conditions of the Indian sub-continent, 'took to selective breeding, and did not care much about the inhumanity of his eugenics. One of the first results of the application of the eugenics of complexion was a more or less complete insensibility to the physical beauty of a dark person, which the ancient Hindu did not show. But modern Hindus have become incapable of seeing any beauty in a dark women.'[15]

But the modern Hindu aversion to dark persons is not always passively felt, it can be positive and vocally unpleasant. 'Especially, to dark young girls the Hindus can be not only heartless, but assertively cruel, and they do not perceive the cruelty only because all of them, including the insulted ones, are so used to it. The dark girls have to hear uncomplimentary remarks made about them to their face by acquaintances and relatives, and they have also to bear ceaseless reproaches from their mothers. They themselves take up an attitude of guilt, as if they had committed a deliberate offence.'[16]

Till recently they were continually reminded that they were unsaleable goods in the marriage-market, a problem and a burden for their parents.

This definitely is a social evil which plays with the sensibility of a person. But the 'Hindu preference for a fair complexion, and the Hindu prejudice against a dark skin'[17] has become so much a part of our society that we cannot think rationally regarding the colour of one's skin. As such we are all to some extent having a bias regarding the question of colour and our love for the fair complexion is perhaps

innate in us. In explaining why the Hindu is so colour-conscious Chaudhuri writes:

> 'This adoration of colour in the Hindu has a profound historical basis. The Hindu civilization was created by a people who were acutely conscious of their fair complexion in contrast to the dark skin of the autochthons, and their greatest preoccupation was how to maintain the pristine purity of the blood-stream which carried this colour. Varna or colour was the central principle round which Hindu society organized itself, and the orthodox Hindu scriptures know of no greater crime than miscegenation, or as they call it, Varna-samkara, the mixing of colour.
>
> This faith in the sanctity of Varna, colour or caste, endures and abides in Hindu society, and the fact...—that the inevitable intermixture with the indigenous element has made many Hindus dark-skinned, makes no difference to the hold and fascination of the ideal of colour.
>
> That is why the Hindus are so infuriated by the colour bar, and by the colour-prejudice among peoples of European origins. These are a double insult to them. In a general way they feel, of course, that discrimination based on the colour of the skin is an offence against humanity and justice. But what they resent even more is that they are mistaken for coloured persons. There is nothing which makes them so angry as to be taken for a Negro.
>
> What is wrong in the Hindu objection to the Western colour-bar is the self-deception, the suppression of the fact that when he thinks he is standing for humanity he is standing for egoism. On the other hand, I would not admit that any Occidental has the right to criticize us for hypocrisy. Colour-prejudice is the common—and should I also say?—the original sin of all the peoples of European origins. The Hindus only systematized and practised it first, as the

first people of European origins confronted with the threat to a fair complexion from the dark.'[18]

Till the present day the Hindu retains a colour prejudice showing preference for a fair complexion against a dark skin and hence this 'faith in the sanctity of Varna, colour or caste, endures and abides in Hindu society' resulting in evils based on the criteria of colour and caste.

Caste system in its original form was not what it is today — a system which is creating disunity and mutual hatred. Chaudhuri very emphatically maintains 'nowhere and at no time did the caste system have a norm, or any finality. It remained elastic and its expansibility was seen in more than one direction... The assimilation of the foreign barbarian through the caste system had as its counterpart a partial promotion of the Darks to the Hindu status. Such aboriginals as showed any capacity or desire for a superior kind of life were not denied admission into Hindu society.'[19] Thus, the rigidity of the caste system which one sees today is far removed from the original system which as a social organization 'contributes to order, stability, and regulation of competition.' He further opines:

> 'If the system suppressed anything it was only ambition unrelated to ability and watching the mischief from this kind of ambition in India today I would say that we could do with a little more of the caste system in order to put worthless adventurers in their place.'[20]

This, however, is a typical Chaudhurian gesture, a voice likely to disappear in the evils of the caste-system of todays Hindu society, where man is being discriminated against on the basis of his caste. Thus, today the caste-system while losing its original colour is posing as a social evil which results in inhuman treatment between man and man where the basic dignity of being a human being is totally lost. Hence, Chaudhuri's wish that the caste-system be revived in its old day shape is perhaps only a wish which can never be fulfilled and the caste-system as it prevails in Hindu society today needs to be eradicated.

By criticizing the Hindu loyalties, Chaudhuri wants one to realise that in adhering to their past loyalties the Hindus have moved far away from the reality of the original Aryan loyalties. They have no idea regarding what these loyalties really were and thus the Hindu society instead of progressing is perhaps regressing backwards with all its adherence to its past which it is incapable of revitalising.

When Chaudhuri talks of Hindu society one cannot help but admire the intense sensitivity of his mind and appreciate his sense of perception. The agile mind of Chaudhuri observes even the minutest details and lifts the veil from the dubious face of a society which is exposed to the critical eye in all its nakedness.

Thus, talking about the general atmosphere of a Hindu home Chaudhuri remarks that it is 'one of heavy and listless dulness, which drives the inmates out into the streets at all times of the day.'[21] This happens because for a large majority of people in India a happy family atmosphere hardly exists. According to Chaudhuri family life 'is the life of a human unit consisting of a man, his wife and minor children.'[22] This kind of family life however seldom exists in India and the lack of family happiness is due to the joint family system which still prevails in most parts of our country. Such a system results in the destruction of individuality, the spirit of self-help and the erosion of good feeling and sympathy among the members. As a result, there is a constant tension among the inmates. Chaudhuri further feels that these tensions often erupt into violent quarrels in

course of which 'all reticence and reserve is thrown to the winds, and the grossest abuse and even blows are exchanged.'[23] The maladjustment in such families range from mere friction to rancorous rivalries and no sensitive person can live in them without feeling either tortured or smothered in spirit. And yet, surprisingly enough except for a few strong determined persons who can break away from its clutches most of the others go on enduring until all individuality is completely lost.

Now, one may think that in our present day society the joint family system is gradually breaking up. So why does Chaudhuri still consider it one of the greatest evils of Hindu society?

Chaudhuri, however, feels otherwise regarding the joint family system. He feels it is still very much a part of Hindu society considering the fact that in most cases the sons who work in the city where their parents live do not set up their own homes after marraige but continue to live with their parents. Even when the sons are forced to stay away from their parents on account of jobs 'the emotional and theoretical attachment to the joint family survives.'[24]

He substantiates this statement by mentioning the fact that often the mothers come and stay by turns with their sons in different cities. The wife and the children are also sent away from time to time for long visits to parents. Thus, even when the joint family is broken up through economic necessity it continues to receive a token of loyalty from all concerned and the norm of the Hindu family is still the joint family. The unitary family which has come into being is not universal nor has it been legitimized. He further feels that the harmful effects on true family life of the fully traditional or modified joint family as it exists today are manifold.

The first evil which Chaudhuri notes is 'parental authority' which completely destroys the individuality of the children — who have no voice in their education, marriage or profession. All are chosen for them by their father and even today the tradition of submission to the wishes of the father or 'Pitri Bhakti' remains as strong as ever. 'The sons never develop a personality as individuals and remain as a type, perpetuated from generation to generation.'[25] Infact any departure from the established pattern and

ideals of life is not possible. Thus no one from a family can acquire new morals, religious or even intellectual ideals as long as one remains in the family. The erosion and undermining of all spirit of adventure and self-help is another injury which has been inflicted on Hindu society by the joint family system. Young men born in joint families are assured of a comfortable life within the framework of the family standard of living without working, and even in these days one can depend on a sort of unemployment dole when one is in a joint family for there are others to provide for them.

Further, in such families the inmates live a rather segregated life and there are hardly any personal relations between the members. Brothers and sisters also after reaching a certain age keep a formal distance. In talking of the relationship between the mothers and sons Chaudhuri makes a rather caustic remark: 'These meetings when the mother retains authority either through her living husband or property of her own, are more like visits to the family deity when disinterested, and like visits to the family solicitor when business is involved, for it is the mother who serves as the

intermediary between the father and the son in all matters on which there has to be consultation between the two. Dependent mothers however hardly see their sons, who keep up only the bare appearance of a relationship called for by decency.'[26]

This remark though unpalatable cannot be denied. For when one looks at the Hindu social set-up one cannot help seeing a true representation of what Chaudhuri says regarding the relationship between mothers and sons in most cases.

Chaudhuri further opines that in most Hindu households any conversation in the family beyond the routine exchange of words necessary for living together 'is normally either an arid discussion of money matters, or a peevish airing of grievances against relatives, or — if the family is exceptionally united — a wailing in chorus about wants which cannot be removed.'[27]

In this connection he writes: 'Dwelling on and sorrowing for conditions which cannot be helped is as common in Hindu society as is the want itself. It never occurs to these people that the best way to deal with financial troubles about which nothing can be done for the time being is not to talk about them.'[28] This is, however, not a feature of the Hindu mode of life

for among them, perpetual dwelling on ones poverty, troubles and disappointments, is more a rule than an exception. Infact, to be gay and cheerful is looked upon as inhumanity towards one's less fortunate fellow creatures.

Chaudhuri very emphatically stresses the fact that in order to lead a happy life the Hindus should first of all do away with the luxury of basking in self-pity and the joint family system as it prevails in contemporary society 'must be swept aside both in theory and practice if any genuine and satisfactory family life is to be built up in our society today.'[29] Often one hears about the disappearance of the joint family under the impact of westernization or modernization. Chaudhuri without acknowledging this fact refers back to the 'Manu Samhita' wherein there is no reference to the joint family but where the stress lies on the smaller family as the proper unit, because only then can the members of a family live together as individuals.

Another striking feature of our social pattern, according to Chaudhuri is the monetary relationship between parents and their children, be it sons or daughters. This relationship, he feels, should be put

on a rational basis and should not be left to drift. In our society one finds an excessive dependence on children for support in old age. This, Chaudhuri says should be avoided as far as practicable by providing for oneself and his wife first and then considering all other financial responsibilities such as education of children, marriages of daughters etc. This sort of a rational and practical outlook, he rightly feels, will definitely lessen the maladjustments between parents and their children which form a very prominent feature of a Hindu household.

Considering this point of monetary relationship, a question naturally arises in ones mind regarding the Hindu attitude towards money. In this respect Chaudhuri comments that 'Our religiosity covers every aspect of money-making, including the dishonest and violent.'[30] This remark when analysed carefully shows that it is not exaggerated for the worshippers of 'Goddess Kali' are not infrequently the thugs and robbers. In discussing the Hindu attitude towards money, Chaudhuri naturally discusses the English attitude towards money and makes a comparative study of these two different attitudes. He notices a difference between the English and the Hindu attitude towards money. In most Hindu homes there is a private shrine for a God or Goddess

of money. Lakshmi and Ganesa are worshipped and 'they preside over all our enterprises, particularly financial ones.'[31] One may repudate it by saying that this was prevalent during the past and does not exist today. Chaudhuri, however, substantiates his criticism by establishing the fact that 'economic Gods' are still very much a part of our society and we shall continue to have them for just as we do not even now leave medical treatment solely to the doctor or the surgeon but requisition the priest and the astrologer, so in all our economic and technological ventures we call upon the Gods to help us. As an instance, Chaudhuri cites the fact that Vedic rites are performed in order to ensure the success of a dam. What irks Chaudhuri is the fact that whenever our own efforts are inadequate, we rely upon occult powers. Unlike us the English do not exhibit any of this exaggerated devotion to money either in their religious observances or in their secular behaviour. In our society 'money making is an occupation' and as long as one remains in the world one is expected to make money and put money above everything else. Chaudhuri feels that the notion of sordidness simply does not exist among us and hence the self-righteous process of money making can be seen as some-

thing pervasive. In English society there exists a great deal of prudery over this and no one discusses money matters openly. Further, in England everyone is expected to pay their dues promptly and regularly and, generally speaking, do so whereas in our society 'the willingness to pay decreases as the capacity to pay increases.'[32] The Hindus exhibit a peculiar characteristic of hoarding. With us 'hoarding is a pleasure as well as a virtue, and spending at best a stern duty, but normally a pain. An associated difference between us and the English people is that we cannot, like them, spend money in a planned and deliberate manner, but stand in need of some external pressure or stimulus. For people of moderate means among us, who are of course the majority, this force is the compulsion of living. But for those who have wealth, it is temptation, passion or panic,'[33] which makes them part with their money. The Hindus cannot think of spending money on anything which do not constitute investment and as such possess 'an insatiable greed for money.' Chaudhuri acutely observes that the Hindu money maker is the worshipper of money and 'believing that money can do everything he is prepared to do everything for money.'[34] The truth of Chaudhuri's statement is symbolized, among

other things, by the adulteration of food and medicine in our country. There is perhaps no other country in the world in which this is practised so universally and openly, with a whole people and Government powerless before it. A noticeable feature of our country is the fact that not only do these adulterators and black marketeers carry on the business of money-making unhampered but even occupy respectable positions in the society. Money has become a standard of social positions and hence bribery, corruption and all manner of financial dishonesty are met with in every sphere of life. These vices have, indeed, become such an integral part of our social ethos that we have become insensitive to them to the extent that we hardly seem to notice them. Those handful of people who say anything against such things often find themselves alienated from the mainstream of Hindu society which unlike English society pays very little regard to such aspects of society. As a result these have become a part and parcel of our society in the same manner as 'dust, squalor and noise.' The people are so accustomed to seeing unclean and unhygienic surroundings that it makes very little difference to them. A sight which would shock anyone but an Indian leaves an Indian totally

unperturbed. When Chaudhuri comments on the Hindu's 'lack of privacy' he is perhaps not wrong for while travelling in public conveyances one can hear discussions of extremely private affairs. Quarrelling in public places is an usual picture, people lose their temper at the slightest provocation and even come to blows with each other. These things which would have scandalized any European have very little effect on the generality of us, including the Anglicized ones. Chaudhuri also notices a marked difference between the Hindu and the English attitude towards 'Love'. Just as money making is a serious pursuit in our society similarly 'love making' is a special feature of western life. It certainly is not a recent fashion, or a result of laxer standards in matters of sex for love-making as a widespread popular, semi-popular, and aristocratic activity has always been present in Western society and any one who has read English literature cannot remain unaware of this fact. In Hindu society love remains purely a literary phenomenon and hence Hindu society 'never needed love for marriage, family and similar social institutions.'[35] The wry humour of this irrefutable observation deserves to be appreciated rather than condemned. In the West, family life is dependent on

love and Chaudhuri in this connection says — 'so long as their family life remains they will not be able to break this affiliation, so that even if love were to go on asserting its independence in the manner it is doing today, half of it will remain under the power of the family.'[36] Love was transformed in such a manner that even what is regarded as the wrong kind of love evoked more pity than repulsion. The Hindus on the other hand took their stand on the 'idea of fidelity' and the Hindu women set up an ideal of faithfulness and 'gave their love irrespective of the merits of the recipient.'[37]

The Western system and the Hindu system of marriage are poles apart, and Chaudhuri recognises that countless millions have found happiness in our system, and it is not to be spoken of lightly. He is open-eyed enough to see the short-comings of both systems. The greatest failure of the Western attitude as he sees it is that in making love an end in itself it is encouraging love to be a wild thing 'which sends men and women out on a selfish chase after the will-o' the wisp' and at times prompts cruelties which far surpass any other kind of pain inflicted on man. Chaudhuri admits that love is something quite precious in the lives of men and women

but there are also other things in life which are needed for human happiness, which is not at our command, and hence we have to go without, perfectly reconciled to going without those things. Therefore if one does not have love, there is no justification for throwing oneself into a tragic pose, and least of all inflicting unhappiness and misery on others. He adds further that the 'Hindu concept on its part does not always bring about any idealization of love and allows sex relations to remain at the bodily level, fostering sensuality in wedlock...

So, considering everything, one might say that, although the Westerners have made their choice and we ours, the resultant satisfaction and dissatisfaction balance each other, and we are no worse off than they are, and they no worse than we.'[38] This attitude of Chaudhuri clearly establishes the fact that inspite of his unorthodox views on certain matters at heart he remains rather orthodox and in his words, he criticizes his people 'for their good.'[39]

Considering the political life of Indians at large, Chaudhuri remarks:

> 'For all his preoccupation with politics, the middle-class Indian never developed any real political aptitude... No other group of human beings has succeeded to the same degree as have the masses of India in eliminating the mind in its all-important function of retaining the consciousness of duration. The common man in India lives in the everpresent and is governed solely by reflexes. But with that perverse duality which I have again and again singled out as a characteristic of our external behaviour, he has combined his unconsciousness of duration with a paralysing bondage to the past, and done this in a manner which could only make his unconsciousness of the past bear the worst possible consequences for him. I do not know of any nation besides my own which is held so relentlessly in the clutches of the past and is yet so incapable of contemplating and understanding it, and, consequently, profiting by its lessons.'[40]

With the non-existence of historical consciousness among the masses of India, political consciousness took a characteristic form of being entirely negative. Thus 'distrust of the state and the ruling order is virtually ineradicable'[41] from the minds of the masses.

Chaudhuri grew up during a time of great political upheaval — India was then a subject state under the British. Nationalism was then the catchword and it was spreading like wild fire. Chaudhuri, however, in his characteristic manner, was not swept

up by the tide of nationalism completely. He informs us that in the whole course of his life there have been three periods during which he 'fully shared the passions of the nationalistic movement: first, during the anti-partition or Swadeshi days; secondly, in the months following the suppression of the passive - resistence movement in 1919; and, thirdly, during the civil-disobedience of 1930-31.'[42]

The reason why Chaudhuri was unable to sympathize with the nationalistic movement whole-heartedly was because of the fact that the nationalism which he saw around him was not true in its spirit. He feels that true nationalism should go beyond mere myths, and seek a larger sense of historical destiny. But in India, there existed three different forms of nationalsim and 'in the competition between the three different forms of modern Indian nationalism the victory in the first round went to new Hinduism, in the second to Gandhism, what triumphed in the end was that far older thing the atavistic nationalism of the Hindu.'[43] This Chaudhuri attributes to the fact that "the people of India, taken in the mass and including the intelligensia, never accepted Gandhism as Mahatma Gandhi understood it: they accepted only their own version of

Gandhism and made it serve their own ends. When it went against their inclinations and interests, which always were retrograde, they rejected it — their own basic morality — as completely as they rejected the civilization of the West and of ancient India. Towards the end of his life Mahatma Gandhi seemed to have become suddenly aware of this fact, of the repudiation by his countrymen of the only one thing for which he cared — his vision of truth and right.'[44] But alas! the realization came too late and Gandhiji succembed to an assasin's bullet.

In what Chaudhuri has called the 'unperceived revolution in our contemporary existence' politics has emerged as a dominant factor so dominant as to eclipse all other aspect of life. In its new dominance politics is bringing two negations into our existence — 'the first, its own, and the second created by the expulsion of all other pursuits and interests.'[45] Thus, 'The death of moral consciousness' though not an overnight phenomenan is insidious in its workings. 'People were getting used to leading the uncriticized life, which Plato has described as a life not worth living. The Nomos of a community, however seemingly well established, cannot be maintained in its health and strength

without unceasing criticism, which in its turn has its springs in moral awareness. Both the criticism and the awareness seemed to have passed out of our existence altogether. So our Nomos decayed inevitably, although imperceptibly, and what has now come about through the ampler opportunities for dishonest money-making provided by the war and the subsequent acquisition of political power is only the collapse of the worn-out facade.'[46] Morals in our society is in a sorry state of decline and Chaudhuri is sickened by the spectacle which he sees around him. The whole country now is helplessly and inexorably drawn into a modernizing process, which, as he acutely perceives, is non-selective, non-discriminative and massive. The nineteenth century Indian attempted to assimilate the West in a selective, rational, conscious and directed manner. But the present century's assimilation of the West because of its extensive nature has become superficial, most profoundly affecting the economic and the technical aspects of our life.

In the march of industrialism into the aboriginal's territory Chaudhuri notices a distinct threat to the aboriginal's distinctive way of life. The aboriginals were always left to themselves. But

after independence large industrial units are growing up in areas which are in the occupation of the aboriginals. This 'is breaking down the isolation of the aboriginal, threatening not only his security, but existence. There is a Hindu push towards the wilds, which never existed before, and very large vested interests are being created for the Hindus in the homeland of the primitives.'[47]

Chaudhuri feels extremely bitter with the present situation and remarks:

> 'The motives, ideas and forces which are ranged behind the modern onslaught on the aboriginals belong to an amoral world, where neither ethnics nor aesthetics has any say. In an industrialized India the destruction of the aboriginal's life is as inevitable as the submergence of the Egyptian temples caused by the dams of the Nile.'[48]

Another baffling problem of Indian politics is the unending human conflicts specially those between the Hindus and the Muslims which raged in the country in the past and are continuing even to this day. Chaudhuri is scandalized by the discrepency between the actual state of Hindu-Muslim relations and their presentation in words. Though 'technically and culturally Hindus and Muslims are one' yet, in

reality, there exists a wide gap between these two communities more often referred to as being the 'majority community', and the 'minority community'. The general Hindu attitude to the Muslims of India is not actively hostile though there is an emotional bias against them. This may be traced back to the mistakes that the Muslims committed during the decades of nationalist agitation by not only siding with the British, but by being provocative and also openly aggressive towards the Hindus. Further, the unnatural partition of the country on the basis of two religious groups is also to a great extent responsible for this rather unusual relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. Outwardly calm, this relationship ignites at the touch of a small spark and mutual hatred is harboured in the minds of the people belonging to these two communities.

The urban westernized middle class who are at the helm of political affairs in India are a butt of Chaudhuri's ridicule. This class, he rightly observes, is completely imitative of the West and 'are totally ignorant of the traditional and rural India.'[49] These people play for small stakes in a small way and remain satisfied with their small gains. The result is that their whole existence is utterly trivial. In writing

about the Anglicized Hindus of today Chaudhuri does not fail to notice a difference with their counterparts 'who in the nineteenth century took the lead in accepting Western ideas and brought about a genuine transformation of their mind as well as a partial transformation of their society.'[50] This was due to the faith they had in their new ideas, and the energy and courage they showed in propogating them. The modern Anglicized Hindus are marked by a 'common lack of faith, energy and courage.'[51] The timidity of the Anglicized upper middle class appears to be extremely deplorable and Chaudhuri truly diagnoses that the present Westernization is only a facade. 'Behind it lies hidden a dangerous void of faith, ideas, courage, and of course, energy.'[52]

To sum up, it can be said that, Chaudhuri as a critic, performs a task similar to that of Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century England. With a burning passion and rigorous honesty he carries out his function as an intellectual. Though conscious of all the odds against him, he does not retrace his steps from the chosen path — that is to reveal the true face of our society and to awaken us from the slumber of self-complacency and self-deception. Often we decieve ourselves with self-praise and swim in the

tide of 'platitudes'. But Chaudhuri in his highly individualistic manner does not refrain from hitting fiercely at established conventions and dragging to the light of day many abuses which have accumulated in our social life. In performing this task as a critic Chaudhuri has often been adversely criticized as being anti-India. This, however, is far from the truth — for Chaudhuri under no circumstances can be called anti-India. What he does is to confront us with our true image — an image we are unwilling to see, for it makes us uncomfortable. He can be bitter and savage but an inspired critic of whatever race or age has perforce to be bitter and savage. Chaudhuri puts one in mind of not only Matthew Arnold but of the great critics of eighteenth century England who grew wrathful and lashed out at the falsities and self-righteousness of their compatriots.

Every civilized society, in order to be cleansed, needs the services of such critics who are 'cruel to be kind.' The excesses of criticism are only part of its inevitable process, but the cracks of the whip-lash go home and we are the healthier for our awakening.

CHAPTER 4

RESPONSE TO ENGLISH LIFE AND SOCIETY

England, was 'an intangible and exotic element in the ecology'[1] of Chaudhuri's life. Though absent in the sense that he did not see England when young, yet it was vital and real, for it was always speaking to him 'in a friendly language in the knowledge of which'[2] he was improving from day to day.

As already discussed in Chapter II Chaudhuri's knowledge of England, and of English personalities did not end in knowing or getting familiar with names only. Each personality 'possessed some meaning and much more of associations'. Thus, these ideas and associations with kings and princes, writers, painters and historical figures such as Napoleon, Wellington and others constitute the original capital of his 'intellectual and spiritual traffic with the West.'[3] The fact that Chaudhuri responded to all that he read or heard about England can be well illustrated by young Chaudhuri's reaction to the story of Queen Alexandra who much distressed over the Prussian invasion of Schleswig and Holslein had expected her mother-in-law to intervene on the side of Denmark. This of course the Queen mother did not do. Combining this detail with the general state of mother

in-law daughter-in-law relationship in Bengal, Chaudhuri's child mind formed the notion that the 'imperious old queen was something of what we in Bengal called a daughter-in-law baiting mother-in-law.'[4] What is arresting about this small incident is the reflexes of Chaudhuri's mind. Even as a mere boy he responded to incidents in his own way, thinking for himself and drawing parallelisms from everyday life which he saw around him. Chaudhuri's ideas of English life and society were initially scrappy and simple but they did not exist without the accompaniment of some visual suggestion. He thus writes:

'Everything we read about British Isles or in English evoked pictures of the external appearance of the country even when not avowedly descriptive. But we had plenty of verbal descriptions, and in addition to these we had pictures to go upon. Taken together, these gave us the impression of a country of great beauty of aspects, a country which possessed not only beautiful spots but also place-names which sounded beautiful. Isle of Wight, Osborne House, Windsor... were some of the names which attracted us.'[5]

Further, when young Chaudhuri could never think of England, as he thought of Bengal and of India, 'as a stretch of land alone. Combined visions of land and sea were always fleeting through'[6] his mind and before his eyes whenever he tried to think of England.

This characteristic vision of the physical aspect of England as half land and half sea was confirmed in him by his reading of English poetry. Ye Mariners of England gave Chaudhuri and his brother a wholly straightforward initiation into the spirit of British maritime enterprise. He writes:

> 'We recited the lines, not with half-perplexed, half-intuitive appreciation we had for the two poems by Shakespeare and Webster, but with great gusto and complete understanding. The climax of my own initiation into English seafaring life was reached when as a boy of eleven I read about the battle of Trafalgar and saw a coloured picture of Nelson standing on the deck of the Victory with Hardy. Nelson's signal kept ringing within me and I shouted out time and again, "England expects every man to do his duty".[7]

Taking these instances into consideration one cannot help wondering at this small boy's love for England. Though staying in a remote village of East-Bengal, Chaudhuri fell in love with England and the

Western civilization at a very early age. He loved England — her sights and sounds were a pleasure, a passion, and an appetite for him and yet the 'Englishman in flesh' was beyond his understanding and he reacted in the face of an Englishman by head long flight. As a boy he had heard that an Englishman could never resist bananas. In this connection, Chaudhuri, in his autobiography refers to a very funny incident when he along with his elder brother, both young boys, jumped into a road-side ditch to save a bunch of bananas which they were carrying and which they 'believed to be in danger from the Englishman'.[8] This little incident though trivial in itself is yet of deep significance for it brings home to one the ignorance and prejudice about Englishmen which the generality of Indians harboured in their minds. This ignorance bred bizarre legends and myths about Englishmen. The prevelant attitude towards the English, Chaudhuri feels, 'was one of irrational and ineradicable cringing and equally irrational and unconquerable hatred.'[9]

One may well remember that Chaudhuri who grew upto manhood under the British and witnessed their departure feels very strongly about the strange and fateful relationship that developed between, 'the rulers and the ruled'. Though he does not hold any 'personal grudge' against the British, yet the racial arrogance which governed the relationship of the resident English in their dealings with the natives does not escape his keen observation. In the early years of his life Chaudhuri 'never came in touch with English social life in Calcutta.'[10] Those were the days of racial privileges in India, and certain parts of Eden Gardens were roped off from the Indians. Certain other amenities were also reserved, and even where there were no express reservations Indians were not treated politely. Chaudhuri's 'invariable rule was never to go near any of these places to invite rebuffs.'[11] In this context Chaudhuri says that in the given situation 'I acted on the instincts and impulses of the healthy aborigine, and in this I was influenced by the example of my parents who never went into any kind of society in which they were not treated as equals.'[12] He thus entertained no ambition whatever of hobnobbing with the English in India.

When young, Chaudhuri 'disliked and despised' the local English. Such stories as he had heard about their arrogance put his back up and angered him no end and he came to share his countrymen's hatred for them. Indeed, this reaction of Chaudhuri towards the English was an authentic image of the general Indian attitude towards their rulers. These two peoples who lived in the same country knew very little of each other. The fact that there always existed a feeling of hatred between them can be well exemplified by Swami Vivekananda's speech —

> "No one ever landed on English soil with more hatred in his heart for a race than I did for the English. On this platform are present English friends who can bear witness to this fact; but the more I lived among them and saw how the machine was working — the English national life — and mixed with them, I found what the heartbeat of the nation was, and the more I loved them... They are a nation of heroes, they are the true Kshatriyas... there is a spring of deep feeling in the English heart. If you once know how to reach it you get there, if you have personal contact and mix with him he will open his heart, he is your friend for ever, he is your servant."[13]

Vivekananda attributed the misunderstanding between Englishmen and Indians to ignorance. He was perfectly right. Chaudhuri thus feels that 'in the

two centuries of British rule Indians never came to know Englishmen properly and Englishmen never knew Indians properly, and today the acquaintance has been broken off without ever being really made.'[14]

While he himself was a victim of this misunderstanding and consequently did not mix with the local English people, having failed to reach the 'spring of deep feeling in the English heart' he nevertheless greatly appreciated their culture and responded to it in a highly individualistic manner. English music was his first love and in the prime of his youth he often visited the concerts conspicuously dressed in a dhoti.

It can be said that Chaudhuri's response to English life and society grew with him as he advanced in years. In the early part of his life Chaudhuri's response to English society and life was more psychological and emotional than real. His first contact with actual England and the English was when he went abroad at the age of fifty-seven for a five weeks' visit to that country. This short visit opened new vistas for him. For the first time in his life here Chaudhuri came in contact with the Englishmen, saw

paintings and statues gardens and beautiful landscapes, things which he had longed to see ever since his boyhood. While in England Chaudhuri felt quite at home in English society and he saw everything with almost a child's unsatiable curiosity. In responding to the life and society he had come to be in live and immediate contact with, Chaudhuri could not help making a comparison between the conditions prevalent in India with those which he saw in England.

The smiling English countryside 'set off very charmingly by the black and white or brown and white of the cattle, and creamy white of the sheep and lambs, which lay like bundles of fleece on the meadows'[15] filled his mind with gladness. Prior to his being in England, he had no conception that industrial and overpopulated England could look so thoroughly pastoral. In India Chaudhuri had witnessed the burden of overpopulation leading to a deadly feud between tillage on one hand and pasture and woods on the other.'[16] As he looked on the typical English scenery, Chaudhuri felt the presence of mans' hand everywhere and it came to him as a flash that 'here man and Nature have got together to create something

in common.'[17] In the East, on the other hand, men live at the mercy of Nature, get very little from it, and hence take their revenge by making ceaseless war on it. Thus, the profoundly harmonious relationship between Man and Nature which Chaudhuri experienced in England, struck the deepest cords of his heart. Just as English scenery drew his admiration as something unique, he allowed himself the observation that it was impossible for either the East or the West to resemble each other in any significant trait.'[18]

As we have noticed, since his youth England had played a dominant role in Chaudhuri's life — it shaped, moulded and guided his thoughts in powerful, almost compulsive ways. He admired everything English — music, art literature, and yet, peculiarly enough he maintained a rather indifferent and aloof attitude towards the 'flesh and blood Englishmen'. This attitude of Chaudhuri was, as we saw, due to the complex that he belonged to the class of 'ruled' and not the 'rulers'. Further the behaviour of the Englishmen in India made him very sensitive towards them. While in England, therefore,

Chaudhuri was always on the look out for the most widely advertised conception of the Englishman. In India he was identified with the sojourning English type, the Anglo-Indian of older days. These Englishmen as a rule treated the Indians 'with authoritarian solicitude mixed with a certain amount of condescension, but sometimes also with icy snobbishness, and occasionally even with loud and berserker bad temper.'[19]

Though Chaudhuri had very little contact with the English in India, he had heard enough to become curious to see whether the type was to be found in England. Hence he was always watchful. Soon, however, he found out the utter futility of such watchfulness for unless he was told about the antecedents of their having lived in India nothing in their manner or appearance revealed that they had been in India. This difference in the Englishman's behaviour while in India and when at home, set Chaudhuri's mind thinking and he arrived at the conclusion that 'their proper environment seemed to have reclaimed them, and restored their natural self.'[20] In England Chaudhuri did not come across any Englishman who was 'over-

bearing and contemptuous of foreigners' and yet the fact that 'colour prejudice' still dominates the English sensibility is evident from an incident in which a little English boy on seeing Chaudhuri enquired of him —whether he was from Africa? This was an eye-opener for Chaudhuri who, in the little boys question saw a reflection of the entire English people's attitude towards the darker race.

The English society as a whole further drew Chaudhuri's attention. He writes:

> 'The simplicity of the English middle-class appeared to me to be illustrated in their manner of following a profession or career. In our society a man does not mind sacrificing the general business of living for the one or the other. I have seen lawyers devoting themselves to their cases from morning till bedtime, doctors doing the same thing, officials shutting themselves up at home to study files. And most of them would be thoroughly unhappy if they were not allowed to do so. General conversation in company is not only an unlearned art for them, it is a dissipation in their eyes.'[21]

Chaudhuri feels that such people go on earning a livelihood sacrificing everything else to it —and they in truth thus do not 'live' at all. Further, for most of us what one wants to do in life is a pointless question. We are ready to do anything

provided it gives us wealth, security, wordly position, and power. 'Therefore we also plan our careers in terms of wealth, position, and power, and pursue the selected career with an almost Napoleonic deliberation. We have no indissoluble emotional or ethical ties with anything we are doing at a particular time of our life. If a little more money or prestige is going in another post we do not hesitate to leave the one we are holding for one in a completely different line.'The rush of the intellectuals from the universities to the secretariat is one of the most striking career-drifts seen in our country.'[22] In this respect too Chaudhuri found the English middle class presenting a striking contrast. Thus he says:

> 'It seemed to me that in selecting a career they took their main interest in life into account, and this interest not only governed the choice but also took the question of money and worldly position in its stride. Englishmen, if they have a sense of vocation at all, are ready to leave even a well-paid and secure job when they find it coming in the way of what they want to do in life.'[23]

The attitude of the English middle-class to manual work was another feature of the English society which greatly compelled Chaudhuri's attention and

admiration. An official of middle class origin in India not only does not carry his brief case, he does not even take a paper to his colleague, but rings for the peon. The peon on his part will carry files and papers but not packages. So when in England he saw shop assistants sweeping the floor of the shop and even the pavement and his friend carrying his briefcase for him, Chaudhuri naturally noticed the difference between us and the English people. The English attitude in this respect represents a whole national ethos, an entire way of life.

While Chaudhuri was in England he was always on the look out for the people. 'Where are the people'?[24] was a question which engulfed his mind. That was because in England, unlike in India, he was missing 'the populace, the commonalty, the masses.' In India wherever one goes one can easily notice two different kinds of people — the ordinary folks who dress speak and behave in their own way without sophistication and without affectation, as against the minority who wear the older Hindu or Muslim aristocratic costumes, speak both English and the standard forms of Indian languages — and have what in the West

would be called a middle-class pattern of behaviour. Used to seeing these distinct classes of people Chaudhuri naturally expected to see a similar picture in England. But this distinction between the classes and the masses appeared to be totally absent in English society. The entire English society in Chaudhuri's eye was thus 'all superstructure, all saloon, upper-deck and bridge'[25] as opposed to the Indian society which is like a ship with 'a large black hull and a white superstructure.'[26]

Chaudhuri's honest confession about what he thought of the beauty of English women reveals the man with his irrepressible curiosity and refreshing candour. With an Oriental's insensitiveness to the beauty of furs Chaudhuri could see very few beautiful and fashionably dressed women in England. The comparative rareness of beauty puzzled him to such an extent that more than once he asked his English friends about the whereabouts of the beautiful ladies of poets and painters. When told that they were to be seen in the streets of England Chaudhuri's surprise knew no bounds, for, as far as he could judge, the majority of the women appeared to be very plain and

simple. This was essentially because of the fact that the inexperienced eye of Chaudhuri was unable to detect the elegance of woollen garments. In this context he thus writes:

> 'We who live in the tropics are susceptible to the texture and colour of cotton and silk, but cannot easily detect the elegance of woollen garments, and as it happened I was in England too early in the year for the women to have shed their winter coat to go into their summer plumage, which was on display in the windows. Besides, it must be said that there is some difference between the winter coat of animals and that of women. A silver fox or an ermine is much more resplendent in winter than in summer, but with the women it is the opposite.'[27]

Finally, one or two days before he left England Chaudhuri did have a chance to see a whole bevy of fashionable ladies. 'It was as if, with the coming of spring, they had burst into bloom overnight like the azaleas and rhododendrons.'[28] Nevertheless Chaudhuri does not hesitate to confess that these beautiful and smartly dressed women pleased him 'more in the manner of well-designed motor cars than as women.'[29] In this remark of Chaudhuri one can notice the total absence of any uncritical adulation of whatever is English or Western. He retains the integrity of perception intact and one is delighted

to encounter the honesty of the writer who without any iota of blindness or hypocrisy writes what he feels. Chaudhuri admits to having had a fair amount of difficultly in appreciating human physical beauty when 'it was not presented in the nude or in the historical costumes from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century,'[30] because his idea of human physical beauty was derived almost exclusively from art. Thus he felt that in the modern times there were no beauties in the West comparable to those found in paintings or sculpture and the most glorious impression of human physical beauty which he 'brought away from the West was of its amazing nudes.'[31]

Chaudhuri feels that Hindu art has made it impossible to look at a nude without leer, it has resolved flesh to its most fleshly elements whereas the Europeans have made it the expression of the spiritual in man —a thing which burns up all desires and purges the mind, instead of arousing passions. An ardent admirer of painting and sculpture, he arrived at the conclusion that 'the two unclad worlds are as different as the two draped ones.'[32]

If he failed to see beautiful women in the streets, he was equally unable to see today's Europe of our conception -- 'an Europe of politico - economic tripe.'[33] This Europe of politics and economics does exist but at all events it does so in a dimension of reality which is not readily perceptible through the senses. One has to make a special effort to discover it, where the Europe of European civilization, is entwined with the contemporary existence of the European people, influencing and shaping it in every way, and being accepted as a part and parcel of their ordinary life. 'In the West it seemed impossible to separate the life of the present from the historic past, or to overlook the basic elements of Western civilization in the preoccupation with passing matters.'[34] This omnipresence of the Europe of Culture arrested Chaudhuri's attention, for as an ardent student of history he had always wanted to meet the civilization of ancient India -- to understand its nature and to feel it as a living reality. Considering how traditional we still remain, the task should not have been very difficult. But in truth it is,

because, for the great majority of Indians their historic civilization is 'a culture in the anthropologist's sense of the word.'[35] One can only read about the civilization of ancient India, or attempt to reconstruct it by a painful exercise of inference and imagination. Thus, considering our situation, Chaudhuri had expected to see a similar condition in England —the economic situation endangering cultural life. What he saw was however, just the opposite. In England, Chaudhuri noticed that, one could have the 'choice of any music that had musical history, any ballet that had made history in choreography, any painting and sculpture famous in the history of art.'[36] It was readily available to anyone who was interested. The popularity of Shakespeare and the country houses to which people flocked in large numbers spending time and money struck Chaudhuri as 'the highest expressions of English civilization.'[37] He lays bare the enduring and authentic soul of England in this truly sensitive perception.

In England Chaudhuri found a government which was trying to promote the welfare of the people and making contributions towards it. The general state of

welfare of the people captivated his eyes and he was convinced of the reality of the Welfare State made possible by the 'National Health Service' which he saw in operation throughout England making no distinctions what-so-ever between the English and the non English people. Chaudhuri feels that one of the most harrowing problems of Indian society is not so much semi-starvation as illness though they go together. Good treatment is expensive, and free treatment in public hospitals is most often casual and unsympathetic, and not infrequently humiliating at that. The medical facilities available in English society thus drew Chaudhuri's pointed attention and what he felt for the 'National Health Service' was nothing short of admiration.

The appearance of welfare in the people was so decisive that it gave him an impression of 'extravagant luxury' in comparison to what he was used. In the so-called slums of England Chaudhuri noticed 'curtains, prams and gardens'[38] and these slums naturally did not agree with Chaudhuri's conception of slums formed in his mind by the slums of Calcutta and Delhi. The so-called slums of England

appeared more like 'luxury flats' than like the god-forsaken habitations he had known earlier. In India he had been pained by a universal exposure of squalor and distress. 'The most painful impression is created by the presence of diseased, underfed and deformed persons everywhere.'[39] But in England, there was a complete absence of all this. Everyone there looked well-fed and well-clothed. In fact, the state of well-being of the general mass of the English people not only held Chaudhuri's attention, it had already reached the ears of others and thus, there were several hundreds and thousands of Indians trying to go to England to live a better life than the one they were living.

Besides the well-being of Englishmen in general, another feature which arrested his attention was their behaviour. In England, Chaudhuri never came across the 'rudeness and the arrogance' which he had noticed in Englishmen in India. That Chaudhuri saw none of the 'notorious stand-offishness' of Englishmen is perhaps due to the fact that unlike most other Indians who go to England for education, business and such other purposes, he went there with the object of seeing England at first hand and hence he

was very receptive to the English social life. He felt quite at home in the English society, mixed with the English people without any reservations and thus, he too was received by his English friends as 'one of themselves.' Chaudhuri, while in England, realised that most of the Indians residing there 'live a lonely and at times very unhappy life, grumbling about everything from food to social customs.'[40] They have very few English friends and because of their isolation feel that the English are 'proud, cold and even snobbish people'. This, he feels, is due to the fact that most of the Indians who go to England do not go there 'out of love for things English, but only for vocational advantages.'[41] Therefore, their enforced stay irks them, and in them, Chaudhuri found a reflection of the one time behaviour of the English in India — living in a country and yet nursing a grievance against it.

The poor impression of English mens' sociability is another factor which limits social intercourse, for, English social life has to pass through 'proper channels' and this applies not only in the case of foreigners in England but to the natives as well.

While in England Chaudhuri found out that in order to have intimate personal relations with Englishmen one has to live with them and get to know their various and subtle ways. The English will relax only in the privacy of their homes. They are too polite and considerate to think of imposing their habits on foreigners, and yet, they get upset if people do not conform to English ways in England.'[42] The English habit of not disclosing their position in the world often perplexes a non-Englishman. The traditions of our society are such that a man is not credited with anything unless he can display it with effect. Chaudhuri says that while in England he met distinguished people, but unless he knew who they were, he should never have been able to guess that they had achieved anything at all. In India, 'we usually pronounce a eulogium, and in any case emphasize the official position. In our society a man is always what his designation makes him, therefore we are very punctilious in giving it.'[43] In England Chaudhuri noticed a conspicuous absence of this particular phenomenon.

The English 'habit of tacitness, which they call understatement' often confuses and troubles a foreigner in England. Chaudhuri, too, was initially confused by their habit of understatement but later on he realised that when an Englishman is friendly he 'considers all explanations as rudeness.'[44]

Though the English people present a face which is not very friendly to strangers, yet Chaudhuri feels that at heart they are a warm and friendly people — only one has to know how to get through to their heart. But unfortunately, the 'inaccessibility of knowing the true Englishmen poses as a major problem in their dealings with others. Though Chaudhuri himself did not come across the traditional 'John Bull', yet he concedes that John Bull does survive both in English social life and also in the international relations of the English people.

The inaccessability of English people combined with their national habit of 'Grumbling' over everything make them rather different from others. Further, the negative aspect of their behaviour also draws the attention of a non-Englishman. In this context Chaudhuri refers to an incident:

> 'On one occasion, talking with a distinguished English politician, I said that I was seeing England for the first time. 'Do you like it? he asked, and when I replied, 'Yes, it is very lovely,' he observed, 'You are seeing it at a very favourable time? Another Englishman, a writer, told me that I had been exceptionally fortunate in regard to weather, and that had a great deal to do with my enthusiasm over the English scene.'[45]

This behaviour of the Englishmen is very puzzling and Chaudhuri says that had he not known how proud the English were of the appearance of their country, he should have thought that they were interested in only finding fault with it. Further, the Englishman's 'infinite silence' and reserve makes him all the more distant from us — Indians, who are always accustomed to a rather noisy and open life. In our society there is no room for silence and privacy. Now, every nation has its peculiar manner of self-projection and Chaudhuri is of the opinion that -

> 'We ought to be more willing to recognize an alternative way of self-expression and give the Englishman his due. In this he is now behaving more handsomely by us than we are doing by him. The gift of the gab, which the English people have always distrusted, seems now to exercise a spell on them when they meet it in us. They are fascinated by it and show themselves ready to credit us with as much genius as our talk seems to indicate in us. We show no appreciation of their negative traits.

> We also fail to see how these — all their Isn't Dones — add up to a positive type of character, which in its physiognomy is like a subdued drawing in silver point, quite attractive to those who have a taste for such things.'[46]

Chaudhuri says that 'our forte being talking, we do not readily perceive that the silence of the English people reserves their energies for work, and that to judge their real power of self expression'[47] one has to see what they do and not simply hear what they say. Their negative traits are also worthy of appreciation in the sense that they add up to a positive type of English character, where a person just cannot do certain things even if he wants to do them, and thus, 'even the most rebellious young men acquire a formidable range of inhibitions from their elders.'[48]

In the universality of the parental habit of saying 'Don't do this or that,' Chaudhuri noticed a resemblence between India and England. Indian parents with the exception of a minority who spoil their children, are more addicted to saying 'No' to anything proposed by the young people. But as regards the effect of the negative discipline no two societies

could be more dissimilar. For as soon as our young people are out of sight of their parents they snap their fingers at them, and the guardians are too shy to notice their disobedience. In England, on the contrary, the latter have succeeded in making the negation stick.

The unpredictability of English weather was also an eye-opener for Chaudhuri and its changefulness as opposed to the uniformity of our weather made him enjoy its 'mischief making'. He experienced the pinching cold, the driving rain, the whistling wind — typical features of English weather, and it made him aware of the fact that English weather was very provoking and that 'the distrust of the weather was instilled into the English breast for all time'[49]. The realization that weather has very largely entered into the formation of the Englishman's mind, and the training of his sensibilities dawned on Chaudhuri after experiencing the English weather. He felt that the weather has made an Englishman 'responsive to the changes in the environment, capable of meeting surprises of all kinds, both pleasant and unpleasant, and of taking contretemps with good humour; and above all, it

has made him observant of and susceptible to concrete details.'[50]

Chaudhuri was very much intrigued by the Englishman's absorption in small things — 'a boss, a knocker, a hinge'. The interiors of the English houses, especially the great ones, also gave him evidence of the Englishman's love of concrete details. He realised that these houses were made by and meant for people who had to spend long evenings indoors, sometimes day after day. The lavishly decorated interiors with furniture, China glass, plate, pictures, ornaments etc. is a necessity to provide the mind with a long chain of interest, which otherwise would be benumbed by its own emptiness, spending days together in the captivity of the four walls of a house. Such lavishly decorated rooms, Chaudhuri feels, would be 'unendurable in the tropics, where the light and the wind have unhampered access to the interiors, and give to the mind an ineradicable outdoor or even nomadic cast.'[51]

The English weather has made both men and things more mellow. It lays a sort of patina on them. After experiencing the English weather Chaudhuri had no

difficulty in understanding 'why Englishmen became so offensive in India, losing their usual kindliness and equability in human relations.'[52]

Chaudhuri who was much puzzled by the Englishman's behaviour in England and his behaviour in India, ultimately comes to the conclusion that, the weather of India is to a great extent responsible for changing the Englishman's personality. The unpleasantness, the illnatured peevishness and the uncharitable arrogance which had marked English behaviour in India 'were inconceivable in anyone brought up in the English tradition.'[53] He emphatically, states that one should 'never demand more from the spirit than the flesh has the power to give, and never, never in any circumstance seek to put asunder those whom God or Nature has joined together, for instance, the Englishman and his weather.'[54]

Chaudhuri's keen and agile mind responsive to the various aspects of English life and society noticed that there was no pretence of secularism in any aspect of the civilization of the English people which appeared to be infused with the spirit that Christianity has created. It is felt instantaneously

in the reverence which accompanies their religious rituals. Chaudhuri noticed this in the behaviour of the choir boys in Kings College Chapel — 'As they went about placing the music and books on the stands they looked like young priests.'[55]

In England, he felt a happiness which he confides he had experienced only in the intimacy of his family life. The gay, careless and happy English people were a joy for Chaudhuri during his brief sojourn to England. And yet, inspite of all his happiness certain doubts, misgivings and questions which baffled him were always lurking in his mind regarding the soundness of things beneath the appearances. The religious observances raised two basic questions. How much of their religious belief went deeper than the continuation of a respected tradition and how much faith was still left among them? —were the questions which occupied Chaudhuri's thoughts and he came to the conclusion that the English people would pass beyond the pale of civilization to a de-civilized state created by industrialism and democracy as soon as it would lose touch with religion. An incident at Canterbury where a party of English visitors had to be told about who Thomas Becket was, shocked

Chaudhuri's historical consciousness. Afterwards he realized that it was not only a question of ignorance of elementary facts of history but also an ignorance of religion. They were 'falling from the civilized state for having acquired, not forbidden knowledge, but forbidden ignorance.'[56] Further, the English people seemed to be 'thoughtless about the future.' Since Chaudhuri loved and admired the English he felt himself rather worried about their 'national destiny' and only after he was told that they were 'enjoying the present for a little while... not really thoughtless about the future'[57] Chaudhuri's mind was set at rest and he felt that he had no criticism to make of the present attitude of the English people.

To conclude, it can be said that, swept off the platform of cool sense all that Chaudhuri saw in England made him extremely happy and he felt as if he was wearing his joy on his sleeve. But that is not all, for, in Chaudhuri's response one can see an Indian's keen and awakened response to English society and its people. When Chaudhuri went to England late in his life his mind was not a clean slate. It was overlaid with an enormous load of book-derived notions. As we have seen, all ideas about England were acquired by

Chaudhuri in his early days from literature, history and geography. Accumulated since childhood, these ideas had built up a fairly comprehensive and homogeneous picture of the country and its people. On this was superimposed all the news of their later political, social, and economic troubles. So when Chaudhuri first went to England he did have the apprehension of seeing 'a faded and mouldy existence, and a distracted and weary people, leading a courageous but rather drab life.'[58] But surveying things on the spot, Chaudhuri found this England not far different from the England of history and literature, the land he had dreamt about and longed to see. There was not much disharmony between the two. He found the face of England still smiling inspite of all the changes that had taken place. Between the faces of England and India Chaudhuri saw the difference of age and youth. He thus writes:

> 'Time has made the face of my country stark, chastened, and sad, and it remains so inspite of the lipstick that is being put on it by the hand of the spiritual half-castes. The face of England remains smiling. When I was in England I felt this contrast, as well as the timelessness.'[59]

The fate of his country pained Chaudhuri when he compared it with England's.

In Chaudhuri's response to English life and society one sees that sensibility of recognition 'by which something known in literature is now known in life; by which, in fact, life verifies literature and corroborates imagination.'[60] Chaudhuri has been accused of having looked at England through coloured glasses. When one undertakes an unbiased examination of his response to English life and society, such an accusation can be seen to wear thin. His appreciation of the English people is not wholly without informed criticism. His pained response to and disapproval of the cheapening of the man-woman relationship, a relationship that has been stripped of its noble purity in grossly ubiquitous physical demonstrations, his shocked sensibility on the detection of colour--prejudice, his frank confession about his failure to recognise in flesh-and-blood English women the kind of beauty he had expected to see in them —well, these, among other things, do add up to a substantial refutation of the commonly held belief that Chaudhuri is an uncritical admirer of the English. On the other hand, he adds to our understanding of English life and character by his admirable insights into the English

weather as a profundly shaping influence on character, habit and architecture, his perceptive observations are the harmonious coalescence, or rather the organic unity of the urban life and the country side, on their racial habit of 'understatement' or reticence, on their richly stored energy channelled more into deeds than words, and, not the least, on the high excellence of their political and cultural life.

It must be remembered that India is never absent from Chaudhuri's thoughts, that looking at England with a wide-eyed curiosity he has India constantly at the back of his mind. Besides the many details, which we have noted, of his perpetual consciousness of India during his brief English stay, one would recall the affecting nostalgia with which he recalled the rivers of East Bengal while on the banks of some English rivers.

The immemorial England he thought he had discovered put him in mind almost compulsively of the immemorial India on whose dear ancient face he is pained to see an avoidable outgrowth of distortion.

CHAPTER 5

RESPONSE TO THE WESTERN CULTURAL INTERACTIONS WITH INDIA

In The Autobiography Chaudhuri records the fact that he began his 'acquaintance with Hellenism at the point where modern Europe too began its acquaintance with Greek art, namely, with the Laocoon and Apollo Belvedere.'[1] This piece of information is indeed noteworthy, and as evident from his writings it can be said that, since his early days, Chaudhuri has developed a rather unusual familiarity with the Western ethos. His sharply individual insights into the literary and cultural traditions of the West enabled him to interpret it in relation to Indian society and culture. Thus, A Passage to England and Scholar Extraordinary are landmarks as explorations by an Indian mind of the cultures of England and Germany in the process of their encounters with Indian civilization and culture. Chaudhuri is of the opinion that the rapidly growing interest in Indian thought and way of life among the countries of the West is in a large measure due to the life and work of Friedrich Max Muller, a notable German scholar of the nineteenth century, who as a boy adopted India — 'as a boy's dream and pursued through life as an object of live.'[2]

Generally speaking, India then attracted Continental Europeans, especially the Germans, and repelled the British. In England 'a study of Sanskrit, and of the ancient poetry, the philosophy, the laws and the art of India was looked upon as best as curious, but was considered by most people as useless and tedious, if not absurd.'[3] But a contrast to this behaviour in France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Sweden and Russia drew Max Muller's attention where he found 'a vague charm connected with the name of India.'[4] This difference in attitude Chaudhuri feels —

> 'was in every way natural, for the German and British involvements in India were of wholly different kinds. The German interest was spontaneous, the product of a combined emotional and intellectual urge created by the Romantic Movement, whereas the British was forced, a by-product of the establishment of British political power. In other words, the German interest was ideological and imaginative, the British practical and objective. For the Germans the knowledge of India was an ingredient in a process of <u>becoming</u>, by the acquisition of which they wanted to make their European personality deeper and fuller. They felt that India had thoughts and feelings which were different as well as complementary to theirs. The Englishman would not even consider the possibility that anything from India could enrich his personality.'[5]

The apathy of the British towards India was perhaps due to the fact that they came to India with optimistic expectations of a highly civilized and

immensely rich 'wonderland'. The reality however, fell far short of their expectations — an appalling climate, the apparently incomprehensible irrationality and 'pervérse' culture of the Hindus, the complete antithesis of European Renaissance ideals drove them into a walled castle of complete alienation. Thus, the educated British public, at their most understanding and sympathetic 'recognized ancient Indian culture as a civilization in being at one time, but which was also for them a thing apart. The majority were indifferent, except when they looked at things Indian as curiosities.'[6]

Now, Chaudhuri grew up under the impact of the British rule and his sensitive mind was well aware of the Indo-British personal relations. He feels that anyone who has gone into the history of this relationship even during the most stable days of British rule in India cannot but be aware of 'what the British contempt and hatred of Indians was like.'[7] Further, the British assumed that Indians were 'all liars and all dishonest,' and these assumptions were communicated in advance, to any Englishman who was going to India as an administrator or in any other capacity. Generally

speaking, Chaudhuri feels, these were accepted even before the Englishman saw the country and its people. Thus, they came to India with a prefabricated hostility. From this sprang the mutual hostility and contempt of the British and their Indian subjects — a point which has been commented upon by one of the greatest of modern Indians, the famous Bengali writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterji. He wrote in 1873:

> 'If we take up any English newspaper [ie., a newspaper edited by Englishmen in India], we are sure to find somewhere in it some abuse of the Natives, some unfair vilification. Again, looking into any Bengali newspaper, we find as a matter of equal certainty anger against the English and denunciation of them. In every Indian newspaper there is unjust criticism of the English, in every English newspaper the same injustice to Indians. This has been going on for a long time, there is nothing novel about it. Conversation in society runs along the same lines.'[8]

These words of Chatterji express very aptly the rather peculiar predicament of the British and the Indian people — who never tried to understand each other's mind. At this juncture of the Indo-British relationship Max Muller intervened and Chaudhuri maintains that this German Scholar whose adopted country was England 'set himself to fight and if possible to eliminate this misunderstanding.'[9] He tried to grapple with this

'prejudice' which was more mischievous than 'ignorance', because it formed a kind of icy barrier between the Hindus and the British, and made anything like a feeling of true fellowship between the two utterly impossible. That prejudice, Max Muller felt, consisted in looking upon the English peoples' 'stay in India as a kind of moral exile, and in regarding the Hindus as an inferior race, totally different from the English in their moral character, and, more particularly in what forms the very foundation of the English character, respect for truth.'[10] What he found most unnatural and vehemently denounced in the relationship between India and Britain was the habitual denigration of the Indian character by those Englishmen who lived in India or had first hand experience of the country. Chaudhuri says that Max Muller not only defended Indians, but also set himself to show in what way the Indian character and outlook could be a complement to those of the European and in one of his lectures boldly titled, India : What can it teach us, he said:

> 'If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant — I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of

> Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life — again I should point to India.'[11]

This lecture clearly emphasises Max Muller's deep respect for India and as is evident from his life and works he continued to defend Indian character and to give exposition of Hindu life and culture even in the midst of almost universal denigration. However, Chaudhuri is emphatic about one fact that Muller 'was not an indiscriminate admirer of everything Indian.'[12] He had/had some unpleasant experiences with a small number of young Indians who came to Oxford and thus in his reminiscences Max Muller wrote, 'These men have a very curious way of blushing. If you convict them of a downright falsehood, their bright brown colour turns suddenly greyish, but their eloquence in defending themselves never fades or flags.'[13] Chaudhuri was attracted by the fact that though the spirit of this remark was not very far from those made by the hard-boiled Anglo-Indians of his times, Max Muller also offered 'the vindication of Hindu truthfulness'[14]. What Max Muller objected to was any sweeping generalization from a small number of personal observations.

Thus, he found no reason why all Indians could be called 'liars', or all Frenchmen 'monkeys'. Chaudhuri is of the opinion that, 'Hindu truthfulness' even when considered on the doctrinal or historical plane is extremely complex. For example, 'If a man speaks an untruth at the time of marriage, in sexual intercourse, when his life is in danger, or when he is likely to lose all his property, and when a Brahmana is in danger, it has been declared that these five untruths are not sins.'[15] Max Muller was well aware of this kind of complexity and as such, according to Chaudhuri, his greatness rested in the fact that, he made out 'a strong case for the Hindu's love of truth in ancient times from Hindu scriptures and from the testimony of foreign observers such as the Greeks.'[16] Since no direct evidence was then available for what the Hindus actually did, the didactic inistence on truth created a justifiable presumption that they were truthful in their conduct.

As a champion of 'Hindu truthfulness' in respect of the contemporary situation Max Muller faced a lot of difficulty, not due to lack of evidence but to the

contradiction in it. The most vocal opinion of the Anglo-Indians, or the British who were living or had lived in India was that 'Indians were habitually and universally given to lying.'[17] Though Max Muller himself had never been in India, he claimed for himself 'the right and duty of every historian, namely, the right of collecting as much information as possible and the duty to sift it according to the recognized rules of historical criticism.'[18]

Max Muller felt that it was the privilege and duty of the scholar and the historian, to stand aloof, to choose his own point of view and to look at both sides of the question. Chaudhuri opines that Muller assumed this role, and thus, he based his views on the experience of a large number of eminent Englishmen such as Colonel Sleeman who had intimate knowledge of Indians. Max Muller felt that in order to judge them properly the Indian people had to be observed when they were 'left to themselves'. He further stressed the fact that historically they could be regarded as 'left to themselves' only before the Muslim conquest. 'So the truthfulness of the Hindus could be seen best in ancient India, when they were politically independent.'[19]

Further, he also expounded the view that the Indians could be considered to be 'left to themselves' only when they were in their village communities. In this connection Max Muller noted the observation of a notable Englishman, Colonel Sleeman, who having discovered the village communities of India stated that 'lying between the members of the same village was almost unknown.'[20] Muller also felt that the English opinion about Indians was shaped largely by experiences in big cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and that the native elements in such towns contained the most unfavourable specimens of the Indian population. Besides, he pointed out that any insight into the domestic life of the more respectable classes, even in towns, was extremely difficult to obtain.

Now, Muller's concept of 'the Hindus left to themselves' politically should, according to Chaudhuri, also include 'their loyalty to their own notion of Dharma.'[21] Chaudhuri feels that Max Muller had left this aspect of the question open, without stating it explicitly. Chaudhuri says that this loyalty to their own notion of Dharma could be found working among all

sections of the Indian people. The Hindu peasant, despite his worldly propensities, was also the carrier of a tradition of religious faith and morality which was the ancient Hindu spirituality reduced to its lowest and simplest denomination but this was also the heritage of the upper classes before British rule. With the introduction of European moral consciousness among the Hindus, their simple indigenous morality was undermined. 'The Indian Penal Code and the Evidence Act, introduced by the British in India, with all their complexities created more falsehood in India than existed before'[22] and as such, he emphatically decries the westernized ruling class in India which, in the name of its secularism, is dealing the last blows to Hindu morality. In India today 'religion belongs to the people, and the upper classes boast of their irreligiosity. It is not simply that they have lost a particular faith... but that they have largely lost their capacity for faith, and they no longer feel its need.'[23] This peculiar predicament of the Indians makes Chaudhuri afraid of the fact that being prosperous in the worldly sense, they do not see the unhappiness of their state. This he feels is a feature of the Hindu society which has come into existence with the advent of the British

in India. Another point stressed by Chaudhuri is the fact that among the Indians 'the notion of verbal truthfulness was never very highly developed and therefore nobody minded a false statement, and often called an incorrect statement a lie.'[24] The feeling of moral baseness in lying was roused only in the early days of the British rule in India when the English word 'liar' was used. The whole idea of 'verbal falsehood' Chaudhuri says, was entirely foreign to the Indians. 'The European influence also created the white lie in India, prevarication and casuistry, for which before there was hardly any need.'[25] Thus, Chaudhuri feels the modern and Westernized Hindus of the late nineteenth century failed to understand the basic difference between the Western conception of truth on the one hand and Hindu truthfulness on the other. Hence they accepted Max Muller's defence of 'Hindu truthfulness, with all its Western implications.' Thus, the whole of educated India was scandalized when Lord Curzon in one of his convocation speeches admonished the students of Calcutta University to 'respect truth in all circumstances.'[26]

Chaudhuri is aware of the fact that Max Muller always kept himself in touch with all the important religious and social movements in India even when they

were not directly connected with his scholarly work, and he tried to promote those which he considered progressive. But the deepest and most enduring practical effect of his scholarly effort was produced by his work on Comparative Philology — a part which for him was the most theoretical, gave a specific direction and character to modern Indian nationalism. On being appointed to the new chair of Comparative Philology Max Muller said that 'a Comparative Philologist without a knowledge of Sanskrit was like an astronomer without a knowledge of mathematics... We may date the origin of Comparative Philology, as distinct from the Science of Language, from the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta in 1784. From that time dates the study of Sanskrit, and it was the study of Sanskrit which formed the foundation of Comparative Philology.'[27]

The connection between modern Hindu nationalism and Comparative Philology was implicit in this purely scholarly affiliation, but according to Chaudhuri it owed its full development very largely to the manner in which Max Muller presented it to his readers. Thus, his work on Comparative Philology can be said to have had its political effect, for it 'gave a specific

direction and character to modern Indian nationalism.'[28] That the Hindus had created their own brand of nationalism, long before the coming of European influences to their country is evident from the writings of the great Muslim scholar, Alberuni, recorded at the beginning of the eleventh century. Alberuni who made a special effort to know the Hindus and their religion recorded that, 'the Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, follishly vain, self-conceited.'[29] This remained a living passion under the British rule also, but unfortunately it had no historical basis and therefore, was not accepted 'in its traditional form' by the Indians of the nineteenth century under the infleunce of Western education. These enlightened Indians wanted a nationalism which would be tenable historically and here Chaudhuri felt, came in the contribution of the European Orientalists. They supplied the historical basis by revealing to modern Indians their past history and achievements and Max Muller as a champion of the Indians fully supported all 'legitimate' use of history by them. He was of the opinion that 'A people that can feel no pride

in the past, in its history and literature, loses the mainstay of its national character.'[30] For him Comparative Philology thus did not mean 'solely an inquiry into the origin and nature of language, but also a means of exploring the mind of the earliest civilized man, and even more especially the mind of the Aryan man.'[31] Chaudhuri in this respect draws our attention to Muller's pet expression the 'Aryan Race' and holds that it was not marked with any kind of vagueness. For when Max Muller spoke of 'Aryan Race' he referred to the fact that 'Aryan' in scientific language, is utterly inapplicable to race. It means language and nothing but language; and if we speak of Aryan race at all, we should know it means no more than Aryan speech.'[32]

Chaudhuri is of the opinion that in respect of the relationship between language and 'race' zoologically defined, Max Muller held very sound and sane views. But unfortunately, the educated Indians of his time who were becoming familiar with these philological discoveries did not accept or apply them with Max Muller's scientific spirit.

Now, Hindu nationalism retrospectively was based on the belief that the Hindus were 'Aryas', and as such

not only different from the other communities, but also superior. This 'Aryan pride' Chaudhuri says, 'ran in the blood of all Hindus and, transformed into a dogmatic megalomania and xenophobia, it enabled them not only to survive under foreign rule, but also to despise their foreign rulers, whether Muslim or British.'[33] None the less, so long without a historical basis this 'Hindu nationalism' hung in the air. Comparative Philology supplied that basis, and brought into existence a more rational and also a more self-conscious Aryanism among the modern Hindus. Chaudhuri is of the view that the British who ruled India for two-hundred years 'never succeeded in discovering the Hindu mind, not to speak of getting to grips with it.'[34] Mutual misunderstandings marked the behaviour of both the communities in their interaction with each other. But with the new ideas of Comparative Philology pouring in, the Hindus tried to maintain their national honour against the very vocal British arrogance in India. The Hindus had always resented and felt deeply insulted by their treatment as inferiors by the British and as such, 'Comparative Philology came to their rescue by showing that not only in their languages, but even ethnically, they were related to Europeans.'[35] This naturally created an immense

enthusiam and confidence among the Hindus, a feature which attracted the notice of their English rulers. The then Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, Sir Henry Maine, conscious that there lay a risk for the future in this new found enthusiasm of the Hindus explained:

> 'Depend upon it, very little is practically gained by the native when it is proved beyond contradiction, that he is of the same race with the Englishman. Depend upon it, the true equality of mankind lies, not in the past, but in the future. It may come — probably will come — but it has not come already.
>
> In the meantime [he continued] the equality which results from intellectual cultivation is always and at once possible. Be sure that it is a real equality. No man ever yet genuinely despised, however, he might hate, his intellectual equal.'[36]

Chaudhuri remarks that the Indians with their new found enthusiasm and confidence, by themselves tried to reach that intellectual equality, but at the same time found that instead of being despised by the Englishman he was being hated.' The fact that they went on advertising 'the equality from the presumed common descent' is evident from an article published in the Indian Mirror in 1874, where a Bengali writer brought out the difference that Sanskritic studies in Europe and Comparative Philology had made to the

British attitude towards Indians. He said that at the beginning of their rule the British regarded the people of India as little better than niggers, having a civilization perhaps a shade better than that of the barbarian. The discovery of Sanskrit 'had entirely revolutionized the course of thought and speculation.' He further said:

> 'The advent of the English found us a nation low sunk in the mire of superstition, ignorance and political servitude. The advent of scholars like Sir William Jones found us fully established in a rank above that of every nation as that from which modern civilization could be distinctly traced. It would be interesting to contemplate what would have been our position if the science of philology had not been discovered...'[37]

This reawakening of self-respect among the modern Hindus was welcomed and admired by Max Muller, because it showed a line of development which he himself was urging on the Indians. Chaudhuri thinks that the human urge of Max Muller's scholarly work was that, 'becoming aware of their great past and drawing on their legacy, they would revitalize their contemporary life, and shed the dead wood which had accumulated through the centuries.'[38] The result of the impact made on Indians by the work of European Orientalists and other scholars

was marked by a general drift and thus, the religion, the literature, the whole character of the people of India were becoming more and more 'Indo-European.'

This movement however had another side which, Chaudhuri feels, Max Muller was unable to see, as he did not visit India. The other side of the movement was the presence of a strange dichotomy in the ideology of the educated class. The educated Indians themselves with their new education 'did not conceal the fact that by their new education they had broken for ever with their past and abandoned much of the customs and creeds. Yet, he said, he was constantly reading and sometimes hearing elaborate attempts on their part to persuade themselves and others, that there was a sense in which these rejected portions of their history, usage and belief were perfectly in harmony with the modern knowledge which they had acquired, and with the modern civilization to which they aspired.'[39] The tendency on the part of the educated class 'to defend practices on the ground that they served some practical end , or more often, because something superficially like them could be found in Europe'[40] was also a point noticed by Sir Henry Maine. He felt that, there is no greater

delusion than to suppose that an error can be weakened by giving it a colour of truth. On the contrary, it is given 'pertinacity and vitality, and greater power for evil.'[41]

This warning, however was not heeded, the tendency grew, and Chaudhuri says:

> By the end of the century a very plausible Hindu apologia was built up, largely on the strength of the very ideas and information supplied by men like Max Muller. This can be seen in the record of a conversation that the French literary critic, Andre Chevrillon, had with a learned Bengali, the principal of a college at Jaipur. Chevrillon found in him a fund of enthusiam for the old metaphysics of the country, and he told the Frenchman: "Within the last five or six years there has been a reaction in its favour. Under English influence writers in Calcutta (the school of Brahmos) have denounced the immoralities and follies of the Hindu religion. We now begin to recognize that under its extravagance is hidden a profound idea, and you will see that it is defended by our scholars and thinkers. We aspire to be ourselves."[42]

This naturally set Chevrilon's mind thinking — Is it possible that India, becoming once more conscious of herself is throwing off the intellectual yoke of England? This question rose in other minds also. Lord Curzon as Viceroy of India was also observing the movement of the Hindu mind. The ancient philosophies were being reexploited and a strong current of Hindu

conservatism with a fairly elaborate ideology of its own, intellectually competent in its higher expression, had already come into existence, and it had put the liberal Hindu movement on the defensive. Chaudhuri in this connection expresses the thought that the transformation which Max Muller wanted in Hindu life was turned into a channel of which he could not approve, but which he and his fellow-Orientalists, had provided. Chaudhuri further stresses the fact, that though in this movement Max Muller's role was 'passive and involuntary,' yet he deliberately took up the role of advisor and guide to the movement of religious reform in India.'[43] This, Chaudhuri feels, was 'natural on account not only of his scholarly interest in Hinduism but also of his deeply religious nature.'[44] He wanted the Hindus to recast their religious life in the light of what he was placing before them as its highest expression and 'subsequently he rested his hopes for a religious reform in India on the Vedic studies in the West.'[45]

In 1826, Rammohan Roy inaugurated the 'Brahmo Samaj', the institutional symbol of this reforming movement. He was preaching a new form of Hinduism based on the latest products of the Vedic canon, the

Upanishads. After his death some of his followers thought that, in order to strengthen the movement among the less educated people they could not depend solely on the Upanishads, whose doctrines were too pure and sublime to suit the gross ideas of common people. They began to uphold the Vedas as revelation but soon found that 'the Vedic corpus was so heterogenous that as revelation they had either to be adopted as a whole or rejected as a whole.'[46]

Chaudhuri expresses the opinion that Max Muller's hopes for a religious reform in India based on the Vedic studies in the West was not fully realised because 'the Vedic Samhitas, or the Vedas strictly so called, did not form the basis of the Brahmo monotheistic movement, which took its stand on the Upanishads... The Upanishads continued to be the theoretical basis of the Brahmo doctrine. But spirit and liturgy as well as devotions were soon taken over from Christianity, and Brahmoism in its spirit though not in its form became an adaptation to Hinduism of Christianity.'[47] Chaudhuri says this was mainly due to the influence of Keshub Chunder Sen, a friend of Max Muller, who led the Brahmo movement after Debendranath Tagore.

This Protestant Movement within Hindusim brought about as its inevitable reaction a Hindu counter-reformation and the forty years between 1860 and 1900 were vivified by the opposition between the Brahmo Samaj and the Hindu revivalists.'[48]

The Western challenge was seen to be the most fundamental in this area. Hence, Chaudhuri opines that during the British period, 'Hinduism has fought tooth and nail even those measures of reform which a non-Hindu would consider as purely humanitarian, such as the abolition of infanticide and the burning of widows, the raising of the age of consent, the marriage of widows, and inter caste marriages.'[49] In an acute analysis of the Hindu counter-reformation Chaudhuri brings out how even the Western material science was used or abused — 'every Hindu custom and every Hindu taboo found its justification in some theory of electricity and magnetism. At times even the science of bacteriology, new at the time, was invoked. It was proclaimed that if a Hindu kept a pigtail it was only as a electromagnetic coil; if he bathed in the Ganges it was because an unspecified European scientist had demonstrated that Ganges water killed bacteria instantaneously.'[50] The most astounding

fact in this instance, was not that these antics should have made their appearance but that they should have been taken so literally and seriously. Chaudhuri opines that though towards the end of the century the Hindu counter-reformation had swung to the opposite pole of grotesqueness, its simple and rough hewn greatness derived from its Aryan creators remained uncontaminated rising above the abominations which those who profess the Hindu religion have always been perpetrating on it. 'Most often it is the debasement which remains ascendent, but at times, under the stimulus of some external influence, the latent greatness of Hinduism tries to reassert itself.'[51] Chaudhuri brings to our notice that this voice of Hinduism trying to assert itself was heard in the preaching and writings of two eminent Bengalis at the end of the nineteenth century under the impact on India of European culture. The first and the older of these men was Bankim Chandra Chatterji, a student of Comte and Mill, and the second Swami Vivekananda, who was equally familiar with Western thought. The main preoccupation of Chatterji was the 'problem of culture,' for he believed that the proper cultivation of all faculties resulting in action and knowledge was the natural function of man. His lifelong search was

after the means of expanding and deepening culture. Vivekananda, on the other hand, was more a proselytizer than a theoretician. He revealed the inner urge of his being involuntarily in one of his minor speeches in 1898 where he remarked:

> "Let us remember that the civilization of the West has been drawn from the fountain of the Greeks, and that the great idea of Greek civilization is that of expression. In India we think — but unfortunately sometimes we think so deeply that there is no power left for expression. Gradually, therefore, it came to pass that our force of expression did not manifest itself before the world; and what is the result of that? The result is this — we worked to hide everything we had. It began first with individuals as a faculty of hiding, and it ended by becoming a national habit of hiding — there is such a lack of power of expression with us that we are now considered a dead nation. Without expression how can we live? The backbone of Western civilization is expansion and expression."[52]

Vivekananda thus, called upon his hearers to go out to England and America, not 'as beggars but as teachers of religion.'

Both Chatterji and Vivekananda regarded religion as the central fact, the keystone of human activity and achievement, and both uncompromisingly rejected the idea of a purely secular culture. As true conservatives, they looked to their national religion to furnish the basis of the religious culture they valued so much and on this assumption Chatterji and Vivekananda offered a

version of Hinduism to modern Indians which became a serious rival of the liberal doctrine offered by the Brahmo Samaj. Chaudhuri feels that these two schools wrestled for the soul of modern India and by the time the nationalist agitation was over, the partition of Bengal had reached its climax (1907). Hindu conservatism with a contribution from politics may be said to have definitely won the battle.

With the partition of Bengal set in the nationalist agitation and though Chaudhuri was then too young to have an understanding of the intellectual content of the new nationalism he was nevertheless drawn by its current. In this context he writes:

> 'Greek and Roman republicanism had cast its spell as decisively on us as on the makers of the French Revolution, and under its influence we seemed always to feel on our shoulders the weight of an unseen toga. In the actual unfolding of contemporary history it made us read with delight and high hopes the news of the political revolutions of our youthful days...
>
> Certain modern personalities and movements contributed powerfully to our political consciousness, of which there were two clearly discernible facets. The first and rational facet was indoctrinated by Bruke and Mill, but shaped in its practical expression by the liberalism of Gladstone and Lincoln. The second facet was purely emotional, and its inspiration was furnished by Rousseau and Mazzini besides the Ancients. The methods of political action were suggested by the leaders of the Revolution — the Italian Risorgimento—

> particularly Garibaldi — and the Irish Nationalists. The entire course of English constitutional history, and more especially, the turmoils of the seventeenth century, together with the American, French, Italian and Irish movements were freely drawn upon for precedents and also for operational hints... But electic as they and we were, the German nationalism of the nineteenth century, curiously enough did not influence us. This appears surprising in view of the close resemblance to Nazism that Indian nationalism came to bear later, but it is also — perfectly intelligible, because the German nationalist movement of the nineteenth century was not like the nationalism of Italy or of Ireland, the nationalism of a subject people.'[53]

He further adds that without comprehending the intellectual content of the nationalist movement, 'we were swept by its emotional fervour... We knew that our present condition was pitiable: we were poor, subjugated and oppressed, and even degenerate in certain respects; but we were great once and should be even greater in future. This amazing faith, running counter to all the known facts of history which go to prove that a nation overtaken by decline after once creating a great civilization never rises again, was to us justified by itself and needed no evidence of validity external to itself.'[54]

With the agitation becoming more intense and heated he writes, 'our messianic faith in the future of our country was filled out with a definitely Hindu content; to our lyrical love of our country was added a fierce hatred of the English.'[55]

Chaudhuri with his characteristic honesty also throws a collateral beam on the character of Indian nationalism by describing what he felt about the Muslims. 'When I see the gigantic catastrophe of Hindu-Muslim discord of these days I am not surprised, because we as children held the tiny mustard seed in our hands and sowed it very diligently. In fact, this conflict was implicit in the very unfolding of our history,'[56] and cannot be attributed to the British rule, however much the foreign rulers might have profited by it. He feels that his attitude and the general Hindu attitude towards the Muslims was influenced, 'if not by positive utterances,' at all events by the silences, of our nineteenth-century writers. In them the hatred of the Muslim was the hatred of the Muslim in history. It operated retrospectively. Of Muslims as contemporaries they were almost totally oblivious; and when they were not forgetful they were indifferent.'[57] Chaudhuri opines 'British rule in itself was a factor which discouraged the cultivation of Islamic culture and sympathies by the Hindus, and to British rule was added the far stronger influence of the discovery of the ancient Indian civilization. The very first result of this renaissance

was a progressive de-Islamization of the Hindus of India and a corresponding revival of Hindu traditions.'[58] He further maintains that throughout the nineteenth century the culture of the Hindus of India was taken back to its ancient Sanskritic foundations. The only non-Hindu influence which it recognized and tried to assimilate were European. Thus, all the thinkers and reformers of modern India from Rammohun Roy to Rabindra Nath Tagore based their life-work on the formula of a synthesis of Hindu and European currents keeping Muslim influences and aspirations beyond the pale of their vision. Matters however did not end in making the Muslims stand as external proletariat outside the perimeter of the new nineteenth century Indian culture. With the Swadeshi movement 'this hostility was now brought down from the historical to the contemporary plane, and converted from a retrospective hatred to a current hatred,'[59] which is continuing to this day.

Having lived through contemporary events in a manner which has developed his understanding of the history of India by sharpening his sensibility towards it, Chaudhuri says:

'I used to be specially drawn towards those periods of history in which some great empire or nation, or at all events the power and glory of a great state, was passing away. I was induced to anguished fascination by these periods, and the earliest experience I had of this feeling was when I read about the final defeat of Athens at the hands of Sparta. I seemed to hear within me the clang of the pickaxes with which the long walls to the Peiraeus were being demolished, and was overwhelmed by a sense of desolation which men have when they see familiar landmarks suddenly disappearing...

This surprisingly strong emotional reaction to the defeat of Athens had its source in the mood to which we had been brought by the reading of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In reading them we found from the very beginning Good being assailed and Righteousness defied in the most perplexing and what seemed to us the most unnecessary manner; we saw them struggling against cruel odds and in dire peril at every turn; we went through intolerable suspense; yet we were sustained by the faith that Good and Right would inevitably triumph, indeed we saw them triumph; but at that very moment victory turned to mockery and its results to Dead Sea fruit. In the Ramayana Rama after fighting a dreary war to rescue Sita banishes her himself.. The reading of these episodes created within me the palpitating apprehension of a great disaster lurking within a great victory, of fulfilment being sardonically challenged by emptiness. The defeat of Athens dismayed me all the more because in it I saw for the first time the descent from the plane of myth to that of history, of that perverse fate which I had seen working in our epics. Even the last comfort that it might only be the device of a moral allegory was denied me. All human achievements began to stand before my eyes with unpredictable and undeserved doom hanging over them.' [60]

Chaudhuri was extremely susceptible to the odour of decay in a civilization or political order and

sniffing the atmosphere of contemporary India with an air of uneasy exploration he gradually and slowly woke up to the fact that he was 'witnessing the decay of a social order.' His argument is that the Indian civilization has been declining for a good many years. It has been, and it can be, occasionally rejuvenated by artificial stimulants in the form of foreign conquests. He maintains that today while the British have left, their influence in the broader sense of being Western has not left the land. Thus, 'The linguistic basis of modern Indian culture, which is made up of a combination of English, a denatured written vernacular, and a mixed colloquial language, is the first proof of the essentially foreign character of modern Indian culture. The second proof is to be found in the almost exclusively exotic forms of modern Indian literature, art, thought and moral and spiritual activity. Literary expression in prose is itself a creation of British rule in India... Within prose all literary forms — the novel, essay, short-story, history, biography, were taken over from English. Poetry, though pre-existing, became almost unrecognizable in its new forms. An Indian who was familiar only with the older kind of poetry could not

understand the new poetry, while the exponents of the new poetry became totally dead to the older poetical appeal. This alienation between the old and the new was to be observed not only in literature but in every field of intellectual and artistic activity, and even in the moral and religious. Sunday meetings and Sunday schools, congregational prayers, the liturgy, the hymn singing, and the routine of spiritual exercise which the reformed monotheistic Hinduism popularized were, of course, wholly copied from the ritual of Christianity. What is even more striking is that even the Hindu counter-reformation took over Western modes of religious discipline and propogation. The monastic order founded by Swami Vivekananda had little in common with the pre-existing forms of Hindu monasticism and far more closely approximated to the Christian missionary societies and religious orders.'[61]

Chaudhuri is of the opinion that in India we always have an unchanging indigenous culture and then a more vital foreign culture, injected by the conquerors. In all this the most disturbing point is that, all that is vital and creative in our life must emanate from the sources outside our own life. Only when this occurs do

we have brief interludes of 'cultural activity.' But this too is a 'discontinuous evolution.' 'The sucessive phases of literature, art, philosophy and political thought of modern India do not develop out of one another and show no organic connexion. As soon as certain art or thought forms have been acclimatized in India after being adopted through the sheer impulse of imitation, and when they may be expected to lead to the creation of forms which could go on developing from their internal motive force, they are seen to be utterly disrupted and then replaced by quite new forms. In Bengali poetry, for instance, the first modern forms were based on Shakespeare and Milton. But Tagore's showed clear signs of breaking away from both the original foreign form and the derived Bengali model, and shaping itself after Shelley, Tennyson, and Swinburne. The latest phase of Bengali poetry has seen a disintegration even of the Tagorean tradition by poets who swear by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Auden and the like.'[62] In art too one can see imitations of the European academic styles. In political thought Rosseau, Mill and Mazzini have suffered a complete eclipse from the shadow of Marx. In fact in the cultural creations of modern India, Chaudhuri feels

that 'there is only too much which cannot be described as anything better than European cultural forms crudely simplified in order to be brought within the comprehension and artistic capacity of insufficiently educated Indians.'[63]

In responding to the Western cultural interactions with India Chaudhuri maintains that the concept of East-West cultural synthesis on which the new culture of modern India is based, stands wholly discredited today. What Indians en masse want is nationalism, which does not however preclude a wholesale and uncritical acceptance of Western habits of living and economic technique. He says that even while the absorption of Western trends was taking place on the unconscious and the subconscious, the concept of nationalism was working against the concept of synthesis on the conscious plane. Thus, 'nothing that was achieved or created by means of the highest kind of intellectual, ethical or spiritual effort of which Indians were capable in the nineteenth century retains any appeal today.'[64] He further maintains that this very nationalism had led to the 'blind, crude chauvinism displayed by the Indian ruling class today — a chauvinism which includes the inability to read an Indian language properly.'[65]

Chaudhuri is also bitterly critical of modern Indians and feels that we are still slaves of the English, otherwise, why should we still retain the English language despite proclaiming that we are a great independent country with a great civilization of our own? He maintains that 'nothing of the new Indian civilization and new Indian personality, created by the Bengali people as an important product of the cultural interaction which was an accompaniment of British rule, has stayed.'[66] Further, his scornful rejection of abject flattery by amateur 'Indologists,' and his stoical even cynical preference for the older British attitude towards the Hindus—exasperation and isolation—are provokingly honest, healthy contributions to the continuing debate of the relationship between the Hindus and the Anglo-Saxons. He maintains that the 'Hindu is the European distorted, corrupted and made degenerate by the cruel torrid environment and by the hostility, both real and imagined, of the true sons of the soil.'[67] He thus argues, with considerable logic for a new commonwealth solidarity based not on 'pious platitudes' but on a shared awareness of common 'Aryan' sins. He very emphatically puts forth the idea that there is no future for us Hindus, unless we can

'recover at least our old European spirit, even if not the European body and pride of flesh.'[68] Having been a witness to the suffering which foreign rule can create even when it confers good on the subject people, Chaudhuri feels that he cannot 'contemplate another cycle of subjection' for his people, and the solution which comes to his mind is that we should cease to think of ourselves as Orientals and say that 'we are Europeans in our own right, and we want no patronage.'[69] He aspires to a vision in which our destiny would be in our hands, we would create our life and renovate our economy through our own strength mental and physical.

One may agree or disagree with his views but surely one cannot but be struck by the power and acuity of his pronouncements, for what he says is indeed marked by an irreducible honesty—an honesty which results in his alienation from his own people. But Chaudhuri remains untouched. His withers are unwrung. He writes as he thinks. He sees and reflects 'on the sterile, ambiguous and confusing heritage of the eroded past, as well as the horror and boredom and malaise of the unaccomodated present.'[70]

CHAPTER 6

TEMPER AND STYLE

An admirer of Chaudhuri, Khushwant Singh, wrote in the New Statesman, 'Chaudhuri writes the English language better than any Indian has done before and is much the most erudite writer in the country.'[1]

There is perhaps a great deal of truth in this statement. As one reads through Chaudhuri's books, what strikes one most is his language — rounded, pointed and agile. This Bengali master indeed writes the English language as well as any Englishman. This itself is even more striking when one traces back the record of Chaudhuri's early boyhood days. As a young boy, Chaudhuri, living in Kishorganj had not learnt the English language from any English teacher but had imposed it on himself through a rigorous training. That Chaudhuri is a remarkable literary stylist is an undeniable fact and his impact as a writer has been increasingly felt all over the English speaking world. His learning, a mark of his insatiable intellectual curiosity, is almost encyclopaedic. He seems to take 'all knowledge' for his province, and the breadth of his interests, reminiscent of Renaissance Humanists, has few parallels in an age of specialization. The largeness of his interests naturally makes for a largeness of utterance and his periodic

style is punctuated with quotations from several languages and has an amazingly wide range of references. Chaudhuri, a born rebel endowed with a 'spirit of fierce intellectual defiance' challenges all accepted opinions. Because of his rather unconventional views on men and affairs, Chaudhuri, has often been the victim of uninformed attack. Whether one agrees with what Chaudhuri writes is no doubt one's own but what is note-worthy is that no one can read his books without experiencing the impingement of a powerful personality, without being roused by a vigorous and trenchant style which makes one reconsider one's position. His method is slow, deliberate, and accumulative, carried forward by an underlying surge of movement to culminate in a telling critical assertion having a combative decisiveness all its own. Consequently, while reading Chaudhuri's books the reader cannot maintain an attitude of aloofness—but is moved emotionally, either protesting vehemently against all that he says, condeming him, or coming to terms with him by accepting the truth of his statements. To rouse the readers both intellectually and emotionally is the test of a writer and Chaudhuri very sucessfully manages to do this.

Thus, with the publication of his autobiography there arose a controversy between the admirers and critics of Chaudhuri. The question naturally arises as to why his writings lead to such controversy — Is he really anti-India? An answer to this all-consuming question can be obtained from Chaudhuri's writings only if one reads them without any prejudice or pre-conceived notions about the author. Chaudhuri attempts at giving us a comprehensive perspective and calling our attention to much that is sterile, immobile and hypocritical in our prevailing culture. In carrying out his mission Chaudhuri has no doubt let himself go with a fling giving out opinions fearlessly, not refraining from hitting fiercely at established conventions also. The Autobiography, thus, expresses his disdain for 'patriotic adulation and complacency dragging into the light of day many abuses accumulated in our social life.'[2] The basic honesty of Chaudhuri, perhaps, does not allow him to be like most of us who shut our eyes to all that we do not want to see. Too often, we deceive ourselves with false-praise and swim in the tide of 'platitudes,' but Chaudhuri's honesty and integrity does not allow him to overlook all that is unpleasant. Thus, he raises his

voice and lashes out mercilessly. As a wide-awake and pugnacious critic of men and manners, Chaudhuri, in turn, has been branded as a 'Hindu hater and a Hindu baiter.'[3] This however, is far removed from the truth and as discussed in the earlier chapters it can be emphatically stated that Chaudhuri is definitely not anti-India. He only directs his critical attention to our fetish-worshipping attitude and shakes the age-old easy complacency of our mind. Hence his writings perform a cleansing task purging our mind.

Matching his individual cast of mind he has an individuality of style which is so peculiarly expressive of his personality. He writes an English with an altogether individual flavour. Some critics have labelled his English as being almost 'Victorian,' and not the English of today. This is an inappropriate criticism. There is no doubt that Chaudhuri's style has an essence of Victorian English, but this definitely cannot be taken as a point of criticism against him, for however much his style differs from the current mode, if a writer is able to reach out to his readers in his own powerfully distinguished way, his style is justified. Chaudhuri has succeeded in achieving this objective and with his distinctive style

in a sharp and clear manner he has been able to touch his readers effectively, at times even overwhelming them.

As a mark of the distinctiveness of his style, the pleasant readability and the 'glow' of his language is a feature which cannot but draw our attention. His style is essentially stamped by robustness and masculinity. What-ever he says, he says with conviction — a conviction which perhaps lies at the core of the author's personality. His style of expression leaves one with a sense of a vibrant sculpturesque solidity. Chaudhuri is essentially a man distinct from others, 'an institution by himself.' Thus his style too has a distinction which is his very own.

Chaudhuri's first great literary virtue is his all consuming curiosity and to this is added his scholarly knowledge. Hence, the impress of original thinking which marks his works — be it The Autobiography or The Continent of Circe, is a feature which cannot be overlooked. Chaudhuri is not only a master in mere analysis but in description as well. As one reads The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, the reader carried along by the development of the narrative has an experience of the revelation of the author's striking personality — its substance being

the treatment of his childhood and youth. The autobiography which begins in the early 1900s takes Chaudhuri to the end of his university career and the story of his development as told here is that of a middle-class Bengali boy—a boy who as we have noted earlier, fell in love with England and Western civilization very early in life. In this story of his growth what arrests the reader's attention is Chaudhuri's conception of place, 'which is shown as the great means by which embodied history is brought to bear upon growth.'[4] Hence the book gradually developes through the sequence of places, Kishorganj his country birthplace, Banagram his ancestral village, Kalikutch his mother's village, Shillong the Assam hill station, an imagined England and a more than real Calcutta plays a significant role in Chaudhuri's life. Chaudhuri in turn, has handled it all with a great deal of imaginative tact. This makes the book a genuine composition, an out-come of an inward initiative and the reader has the invigorating experience of an unique personality which cannot be easily forgotten.

The beauty of his autobiography also lies in the way the author has revived with a kind of creative thoroughness the life of the places in which he had lived.

There is, to begin with the fully pictured actuality of Kishorganj, the villages, the hill station of Shillong, the city of Calcutta — everything in their physical presence from the quality of dust to the design of the houses, the shape of the trees, the layout of the neighbourhood, the character of the rivers, the material of the roof, and the configuration of the land. Another literary virtue of Chaudhuri is his masterly portraits of people. One of the finest is his pious but astonishingly frank recollection of his mother —

> 'Even when she was young there were two deep vertical wrinkles between her eyebrows, which in normal cases would have signified a bent for thought. But my mother was not intellectual, although when she chose to be argumentative she could be devastatingly logical. Her natural propensity was intuitive, and those wrinkles were produced by the frequent fits of introspective brooding to which she fell.
>
> She was not handsome, but no more was she plain. Her fore-head was very well-shaped without being high, and the oval of her face was broad in its upper half but very quickly receding and tapering in the lower. Her eyes were large and liquid, her nose very regular and prominent, her lips well-cut but tending towards fullness in the lower one. The real weakness of ace was the chin, which though neatly shaped was not weighty enough for the upper part. Taken in their entirety, her features gave an impression of unsleeping alertness and inexhaustible animation. By nobody would that face have been called a face of simple and honest goodness alone. The openness, goodness, and generosity which were so obvious in that countenance were of an extremely, restless, positive and winged type.'[5]

In this connection Chaudhuri adds that appearances are deceptive for his mother's face 'did not show, hardly indicated even, the immense strength of her moral convictions. No one could have inferred from her face that she was capable of such fanaticism as she showed over questions of right and wrong.'[6]

Frankness and honesty in thought and expression is a feature which marks Chaudhuri's prose style. 'Displayed with lucidity and warmth there is the intense, enfolding family life with its routine, stresses and rituals.'[7] Thus in his autobiography the reader has a sense of young Chaudhuri's life picking its way through a variety of densely detailed locations 'assuming definition and individuality as it goes; and he catches, too, glimpses that steady into a vision of an extra-ordinary society, which combines something from the Victorian past of our own history, a high-minded ethically serious, self-improving middle class with another ancient and mysterious universe'[8] as old and strong as Lear in which priests with scimitars sacrifice goats to the music of drums while worshippers smear themselves with the animals' blood and pelt each other with the dough made of blood and dust. His autobiography,

however, does not merely end in the revelation of self, for in telling the story of his life Chaudhuri writes a powerful and disturbing essay upon British-India and upon 'the strange and fateful relationship that developed between the rulers and the ruled. The book is essentially an exploration of his own personality divided between two great cultures and is not a statement of any political struggle or personal grudge against 'former masters.' The behaviour of the British in India which was markedly different from their behaviour in Britain and indeed in other foreign countries where they established themselves, such as Canada or Australia, was a bee in Chaudhuri's bonnet. Thus, considering his autobiography, travalogue and The Continent of Circe, it may be said that, perhaps unconsciously, Chaudhuri was writing about this single theme — how to explain the behaviour of the British in India. Having rejected the simplistic explanation of a 'ruling caste complex' peculiar to the British, Chaudhuri argues that the British behaved very much as the Aryan Indians themselves had done after their migration to the terribly enervating plains of India. Chaudhuri desires a new Commonwealth solidarity based not on pious platitudes but on a shared

awareness of common 'Aryan sins.' Much of our pleasure in the book depends on our willingness to welcome the vivid personality of N.C. Chaudhuri himself who is the hero of this 'remarkable amalgam of scholarship, informed opinion and inspired guess work,'[9] having a fling at such phenomena as Indian militarism and expansionism in conflict with China, the absurd flattery, by misled Westerners, of a 'Hindu culture' they can never understand, and 'mass insanity' to which the Hindus are prone. It may be said that though The Continent of Circe deliberately raises as many tangled problems as it claims to solve, yet it cannot but be regarded as the most original and imaginative examination of Hindu life and character.

It has been said of the author that 'there is in India today, no writer, perhaps who is more austerely conscious of his vocation as an intellectual, or who takes more pains with his writing.'[10] There is indeed a lot of truth in this statement. Conscious of being an intellectual, Chaudhuri takes immense pains with his writings, is meticulous about details and writes clearly avoiding 'woolliness and loudness alike.' He seldom attempts humour and when he does it is heavy. Thus,

writing about the Hindu family Chaudhuri remarks : 'All men as well as women, show a perverse genius in discovering words which will wound most.'[11] Such unrestrained outbursts could certainly lead to a total disruption of family and social life but somehow 'an alkali is always present with the acid of Hindu life'[12] neutralizing the effect — thus 'in the families the Sun hardly ever rises on anger. After a brawl lasting till midnight not only peace but even harmony seems to be restored the next morning.'[13] But such alterations of conflict and co-existence cannot go on without leaving some permanent effects on the personality and mind. The first effect is the creation of a double consciousness, each complete and coherent, but capable of shutting out the other when one is dominant. The parallel mental states are seen particularly in married life, and naturally the wife exhibits the split personality most typically. In one of her personalities she does not seem to remember any grievance, and goes about quitely doing her work, and even shows affection to the husband. But once a quarrel has begun, it does not remain limited to the occasion, every quarrel since the day of wedding is recalled; all grievances become connected in retrospect

Ph.D. Thesis of Sutapa Das ~~Dee~~ Chankraborty;

NIRAD C CHAUDARI'S CRITICAL VISION ,

EXAMINER'S EVALUATION REPORT (EXAMINER: DR.A.JANAKIRAM)

This is a neatly argued thesis, spread over 7 chapters, on Nirad C.Chaudari's Critical Vision. The first chapter is concerne with the intellectual background, particularly the nineteenth century social and cultural mileau of Bengal that shaped ~~Chaudra~~ Chaudari's early formative years. Chapter II, "Historical Outlook brings out the objective historian in Chaudari's make-up and seek to explain his criticism of the Hindus in terms of the novel thesis of The Continuent of Circe that the Hindus were originally immigrant Aryans of Mesapotamda, of European stock, enfeebled by the harsh tropical climate of North India.

Chapters 3 and 4, dealing with "social and political criticism" and the writer's response to English culture, may be regerded as the core chapters of this study. In chapter 6, Suta Das does well to point out that the present day decline of Indian society forms the focal point of Chaudhuri's critical visi Chaudhuri is very critical of the contemporary Hindu worship of the cows, bathing in the rivers and the revived interest in the V ha does not spare even the fossilised caste system or the uncritical fervent admiration for the hoary Indian tradition, Chaudhuri's critical diatribes stem from a sound historical and perceptive admiration for some of the best values in our tradition It is a mistake to label him as anti-Indian. Sutapa Das reminds us that Chaudhuri is in the tradition of Mathew Arnold and the Eighteenth Century English satirists who unhesitatingly lashed ou at the falsities and self righteousness of their compatriots. "An inspired critic of whatever race or age has perforce to be bitter and savage", says the candidate, Sutapa Das.

It may be stated that the thesis succeeds in bringing out the salient and sober basis of Chaudhri's critique of Indian culture and establishes him as a great humanist and "cultural historian. "It is with a great humanist's passion that be assails whatever is counterfeit and decadent in whatever culture or community he encounters."

The candidate's understanding of the primary and secondary source material relating to her field of interest is admirable and it is amply borne out by her discussion of Chaudhuri's important books and citations from the texts and critical sources. The bibliography too is quite adequate and includes all the essential items.

One glaring omission in the bibliography is that of Chris Koch's essay "Crossing the Gap: Asia and the Australian Imagination" (published in Quadrant Jan-Feb.1981). The Australian author Koch is an admirer of Chaudhuri and quotes at length in the essay referred to Perhaps the candidate could not list it because Quadrant is not easily available in India.

I have immense pleasure in recommending that Sutapa Das Nee Chakraborty's thesis under examination ~~could~~ be accepted for the award of the Ph.D. degree of ~~the~~ I have also no hesitation in recommending that the thesis is good enough to be published after some minor modifications have been carried out.

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18.4.1992

and sorrows gain a cumulative fury, and anger is poured out in red-hot streams of lava. Listening to the words, one would naturally imagine that a resumption of married life could not take place and as such as long as the fit lasts both the husband and the wife also think so. But, in actual fact no such calamity comes about, because the 'Nature of Things' in India sees to it that this does not happen. Chaudhuri in this connection thus says that 'for most Hindu husbands the wife is a beautiful bath of gleaming porcelain, with both cold and hot water taps, with this difference, however, that the taps are not under control but flow as they list, and by turns the husband is bathed in a cool spray of love or scalded in a geyser of anger.'[14]

This is no doubt a fair example of Chaudhuri's heavy and laboured humour, but such instances are rare. Further, the fact that Chaudhuri sees things with almost a child's insatiable curiosity but records his findings with a picturesque vividness with judicious balance as well, is another trait of Chaudhuri's prose sytle. Thus, in his travalogue A Passage to England one notices the constant comparison between conditions prevailing in England with those in India. This comparative study of

English and Indian society brings a touch of piquancy to his style and gives an edge to his writing. Chaudhuri's visit abroad at the age of fifty-seven for a period of five weeks opened new vistas for him and in England he found an English people entirely different from his conception of them in India. In A Passage to England Chaudhuri appears to be much taken up with the English people and their society. The book is very nearly a 'confession of admiration' but that however, is not all. His love of knowledge and infinite pleasure in the scholarly pursuit of all kinds of information, his understanding, insight, and a sense of history are just as marked as ever and the book seeks to build a bridge of understanding between Britain and India. He maintains that inspite of the two centuries of British rule, the British and the Indians had never known each other. What has existed between them is nothing but mutual misunderstanding and hatred. Chaudhuri takes it upon himself to try to put an end to this unnatural relationship which exists between these two sections of people. He, thus, argues with considerable logic in The Continent of Circe for a new common wealth solidarity based on a 'shared awareness of common Aryan sin.' He feels that the

British in India behaved very much as the Aryans had behaved after their migration to the terribly enervating plains of India from their original homeland in Central Asia. They reacted to the Indian climate and the aboriginal inhabitants with a revulsion bordering on despair, asserting their superiority over the darker inferior indigenous peoples through a caste-system and developed world-denying and life-renouncing philosophies like the Vedanta. The British too had come to India with optimistic expectations of a highly civilized and immensely rich land. But unfortunately their 'optimistic expectations' were completely shattered when encountered by the reality of the situation. An appalling climate and the incomprehensible culture of the Hindus drove them to a walled castle of alienation. Chaudhuri is of the opinion that the climate of India was to a great extent responsible for changing the Englishman's personality in India. The 'unpleasantness, the ill-natured peevishness and the uncharitable arrogance'[15] which had marked English behaviour in India 'were inconceivable in anyone brought up in the English tradition.'[16] Chaudhuri thus comes to a conclusion that one should never demand more from the spirit than the flesh has the power to give and never should one 'seek to put asunder those whom God or Nature has joined together, for instance the English man and his weather.'[17]

As one reads through Chaudhuri's books, one notices the author's pre-occupation with the British and an exploration of his own personality divided between two cultures, 'the division made dangerously deep by its origins in imperial conquests.'[18] His forays in sociology and national psychology in The Continent of Circe is indeed noteworthy. Likewise, Scholar Extraordinary The Life of Friedrich Max Muller strikes the reader as a rather extraordinary book wherein the biographer and the biographee can be said to merge into one — in the sense that both these 'extraordinary scholars' are seen as 'pursuing their respective missions' inspite of all odds against them. Max Muller, the renowned German scholar, having chosen the vocation of a scholar, felt that he would be unable to 'give up Sanskrit,' though it held out no prospect for him. Thus he devoted his entire life to his first love — 'Sanskrit.'

Chaudhuri's first love was 'history' and in his early days he had desired to be a historian. Though the fates had decided otherwise and he drifted till he attained fame as a writer — the essential historian in Chaudhuri however did not die. This explains Chaudhuri's unconventional progress to history through his auto-

biography and in The Continent of Circe. It has been pointed out by critics that his autobiography is not a string of events of his life and that he is discussing 'not the experience of an individual but the history of his people.'[19] With infinite labour and effort, Chaudhuri tries to emancipate us from the pall of ignorance. He says :

> 'My notion of what is proper and honest between Englishmen and Indians today is clear-cut and decisive. I feel that the only course of conduct permissible to either side in their political and public relations at the present moment is an honourable taciturnity. The rest must be left to the healing powers of Time.'[20]

The 'honourable taciturnity' took the shape of The Continent of Circe which is an essay on the peoples of India. In the days of British rule, the Western attitude 'did not go forward from anger to understanding,'[21] while the Hindu revisionists merely got 'angry without understanding the Western reaction.'[22] Today there is a show of new friendliness, which is merely repulsive, 'its visual complement', says Chaudhuri, 'is a collection of faces so greasily made up that as the lips open to utter the inane yet leering civilities, thick drops of greenish

oil seem to roll out of them.'[23] In the Englishman's eyes, the yahoos of yesterdays have changed all of a sudden into the houyhnhnms of today, and in the Indians' eyes, the lepers of yesterday have now been transformed into angels and ministers of grace.[24]

The bitter cynicism expressed by Chaudhuri in these lines draws the reader's attention. The opinionated style of Chaudhuri is another noteworthy feature. Perhaps, this can be explained off as a personal trait of the man himself, a characteristic which finds an expression in his prose style. What ever one may say, Chaudhuri has a way of thrusting down his opinions through the reader's throat. Often Chaudhuri lays down the claim that his opinions are firm conclusions, free from all error.

But one cannot ignore the fact that truth is measured not by an apparently dazzling display but by a conformity to the reality of things. Thus, though well written, original and distinctive, Chaudhuri's opinions do not necessarily turn out to be firm truths. Often he leaves his readers with the impression that he has said the last word. This particular feature of his prose style is perhaps the trait which results in irritating the

sensibility of certain readers and hence often people develop a dislike for him, looking upon him as an author, an intellectual who is constantly belittling his people and laying down that his opinions are without any error. This style of Chaudhuri no doubt makes him rather unpopular with a certain section of readers. It is no doubt true that at times he carries his imagination too far — for example in The Continent of Circe, while talking of the fellow Hindus he writes 'They do not, however, listen to me. They honk, neigh, bellow bleat or grunt and scamper away to their scrub, stable, byre pen and sty.'[25]

This criticism is without doubt carried too far. One sees Chaudhuri, himself a Hindu, exploring, exposing and interpreting and judging the Hindu in his homeland. In the nature of things it is impossible. Sometimes Chaudhuri takes himself to be the prototypical Hindu but more often as the exceptional Hindu, wholly out of tune with his environment. He has developed a sort of 'love-hate' relationship with India and the people of India. Thus, in The Continent of Circe Chaudhuri draws up an indictment against a whole nation and it appears that the springs of sympathy are completely dried up in him. Yet,

one can notice the love, the feeling that Chaudhuri has for his own people. He writes :

> 'I cannot contemplate another cycle of subjection for my people, though watching the doings of all those concerned, including our Government which is the blindest of all, I cannot see how the fatal drift can be arrested. Even so I shall make a last attempt, in fact the present series of books which I may not live to complete is that. I say to myself that if I am to be a Cassandra let me at least be a positive Cassandra.'[26]

Even a bitter critic of Chaudhuri cannot but be moved by the novelty of the author's feelings expressed herein.

Now, Chaudhuri is a man who exhibits the characteristic of calling a spade a spade. His basic honesty and orthodox outlook results in his scornful rejection of abject flattery by amateur 'Indologists,' and his stoical and even cynical preference for the older British attitude towards the Hindu's instead of the 'new friendliness.' Likewise in A Passage to England, Chaudhuri shows his preference for some of the so-called Victorian virtues of the British which are now out of fashion in certain circles.

In discussing the English people Chaudhuri emphasises their habit of 'understatement' and relates his own experiences, while in England. On one occasion when he had gone down to Chislehurst to spend a day with an English couple, the gentleman in the course of showing Chaudhuri some birds on a lake remarked that, 'the mallard is very naughty and it is teasing the swan.'[27] What struck Chaudhuri was the fact that the English gentleman did not explain what a 'mallard' was. He had similar experiences and ultimately arrived at the conclusion that the English 'are not unaware of their habit of tacitness, which they call understatement. They are even proud of it.'[28] Chaudhuri further opines that 'our forte being talking we do not readily perceive that the silence of the English people reserves their energies for work and that we ought to be more willing to recognize an alternative way of self-expression and give the Englishman his due.'[29] What strikes the attention of the reader is the fact that though Chaudhuri appreciates the English habit of 'understatement' and wants his people to learn a lesson from them he himself forgets the lesson which he wants others to learn. Thus, his style instead of being marked by 'understatement' is more given to

overstatement — a feature typically un-English. Understatement does not seem to be Chaudhuri's triumph card and as such he is often given to parading his knowledge, which, again is un-English in temper and appearance.

The self-opinionated style of Chaudhuri is no doubt a prose style which draws a great amount of personal criticism against the author — that his views are partial, one-sided and largely fanciful. This particular feature of his prose style is without doubt a negative trait which however, can be excused, if not overlooked. And the fact that Chaudhuri's autobiography, according to him, 'is the history of his people,'[30] can perhaps be explained by the author's unconventional progress to history through autobiography. As discussed earlier, by aspiration and arduous training Chaudhuri was meant to be a historian, but the fates had decided otherwise. This set back was like a deep wound to his sensibility and it soured his temperament. Thus, in 'An Essay on the Course of Indian history' — the mask of Chaudhuri as a writer is all but cast off and the historian in him is revealed in all his panoply of massed knowledge and defiant self-assurance.

Though Chaudhuri is a bitter critic of men and manners', yet, the beauty of Nature does not fail to draw his admiration and thus, his prose style is marked by beautiful evocative paragraphs. In describing the East Bengal sky he writes:

> 'Our sky was a soft infinity rising from the earth to the unknown and the unknowable in equally soft steps. Nearest to us were the clouds, never resting, never in one place, never of one colour, never of one tone. At sunrise or sunset our minds could soar up through their pile on pile, and layer on layer, of yellow, gold, orange, red pink, and grey to the blue spaces beyond, and our child-mind did go up. The blue, too, was of the softest —not even K'ang-Hsi blue was softer — and it seemed to be the colour of space condensed into mist. At night we could see stereoscopic distances and depths within it, regions after regions of the planets, of the galactic stars of the star-clouds of extra-galactic systems, without end from galaxy to galaxy, and never offering any friction to the mind in its ascent to the stellar universe.'[31]

In The Autobiography too there are passages of splendid evocation —

> 'The rain came down in what looked like closely packed formations of enormously long pencils of glass and hit the bare ground. At first the pencils only pitted the sandy soil, but as soon as some water had collected all round they began to bounce off the surface of water and pop up and down in the form of minuscule puppets...
>
> As we sat on the veranda, myriads of tiny water marionettes, each with an expanding circlet of water at its feet, gave us such a dancing display as we had never dreamt of seeing in actual life.'[32]

Such descriptive passages cannot but move the reader emotionally. What draws ones attention is Chaudhuri's choice of words which in turn makes the description so apt and beautiful.

Not only is Chaudhuri a master of descriptions. He has been endowed with the special capacity for presenting a very commonly observed phenomenon in a striking perspective. To cite an example, in relating to the behaviour of the Hindus in public places Chaudhuri writes that their behaviour 'tends to be extraordinary, unnaturally and very often illegally quarrelsome. Tempers are lost at the most trifling provocation.'[33] 'Street brawls' where violence gets the better of non-violence are such common sights in all Indian cities that everybody takes them as natural. There are fights between conductors and passengers as well as passengers and passengers in buses, between customers and shop-keepers in shops, between creditors and debtors either at the front door or in the streets. 'Children of neighbours quarrel and almost invariably involve the parents.'[34]

Shouting and quarrelling have become an integral part of the Indian society, so much so that one hardly ever notices it. In this context Chaudhuri refers to Tagore, who after getting used to such sights in India was struck by the quiet behaviour of the Japanese people. The absence of shouting and quarrelling made Tagore write :-

> 'There is one thing here which strikes the eye in all public places. It is that there are crowds in the streets but no noise whatever. It was as if the Japanese had not learnt to shout. It is said that in Japan even the babies do not cry.'[35]

This technique of Chaudhuri — presenting a commonly observed feature in a particular perspective is an unique characteristic of his prose style. He is constantly doing this, thereby bringing 'that which we see every day but do not notice' to our attention: pin-pointing the various ills of our society, piercing the veil from many a truth as he perceives it. Corresponding to his thoughts his style is thus never light and nimble. It is marked with heaviness both in thought and words and hence, Chaudhuri's books cannot be read in a light mood.

Further, Chaudhuri can be seen as an iconoclast much like G.B. Shaw and Russell, in the sense that he too has attacked popular or accepted beliefs thereby alienating himself from the main stream of his society. He calls himself an 'exceptional Hindu'. But no matter how Chaudhuri looks at himself a sensitive reader is aware of the basic truth that no matter how 'un-Indian' Chaudhuri professes himself to be, basically he is an Indian, a Hindu. This truth is deep-seated in his psyche and can be well exemplified by the pictures that Chaudhuri draws of immemorial India.

> 'As dusk gathers, the mistress of the house hears the ducks quacking, sees the cowboy, naked but for his wispy clout, at first walking in, then caracoling and capering about in the wide courtyard, trying to beat up the darkness with his goad, and she calls out. Bau-ma, ma bru, daughter-in-law! Put the lamp in the cow-shed... Going mother! comes the reply in a soft whisper from the tulsi platform. The young daughter-in-law takes up another lamp and walks towards the cowshed, her face dimly lit up by the flickering flame.'[36]

In another instance Chaudhuri opines that 'when our cattle is properly fed and looked after there are few combinations of form and colour which are more beautiful.'[37] The static beauty of our humped cattle has been embodied for all time in our sculpture.

But the beauty of movement which it shows, according to Chaudhuri, is not less enchanting. 'Dusk is called Go-dhuli, Kinedust, in Sanskrit, and it is a sight of extraordinary beauty to see the herds coming home. It is only then and in this condition that the dust of India is transformed into something loveable. It rises in whirling clouds of grey to form a background for the wavy lines of moving cattle, in their colour schemes of dun, tauny, chocolate, white, black, and many pastel shades.'[38]

These pictures without doubt are pictures of an immemorial India — an India which has no beginning and end, and the fact that Chaudhuri paints such pictures clearly establishes the fact that he is an Indian deeply in love with the attitudes, the sights and sounds that have gone into and built up the timeless image of India.

In conclusion, it may be said that Chaudhuri, a scholar and thinker, is fascinated by Hindu or Indian thought, but is critical of latter-day perversions and obscurations. What Chaudhuri rebels against is the distortion of value systems and is equally sensitive to the glassy undying essence, the true inwardness of Indian

culture. The basic honesty of the author, who is always watchful of the hidden obliquities of self-deception in contemporary India cannot escape the eyes of the reader. As an unsparing critic of men and manners, conscious of his vocation as an intellectual, Chaudhuri thus takes immense pains about his writings. He is essentially a historian 'with an abnormally sensitive nose for the odour of death and decay.'[39] And yet, it would be wrong to say that he leaves one with an impression of mere depression. His vision is not totally bleak, and his love of the vital and creative is too strong for such a mood to last. The two basic co-ordinates of his study of Indian culture are history and geography. He is so sensitive to the menaces of the Western culture and has such genuine sympathy for some of its achievements that he is provoked to anger and even pity by the spurious Westernization he is forced to see around him. He feels so European himself that he is led to a feeling of contempt for the pseudo-European goods and values he encounters. The old values of Indian life such as caste, family, indigenous religions and our way of life had been disrupted by the social anarchy of the period of alien rule, without ushering in anything but the superficial impulses of modernity. The result has been

that while what was important among the values of old Indian life went by the board, the genuine intellectual values of Western civilization could not be acquired or assimilated by the intelligensia thus, producing a hotchpotch world in which no sense of direction can be found. What Chaudhuri aspires for his people is 'that sense of direction.' He desires like a visionary that we should 'cease to think of ourselves as Orientals... Say that we are Europeans in our own right, and we want no patronage. We shall take our destiny in our hands, create our life, and renovate our economy through our own strength, mental and physical.'[40] He desires that we should be proud of what we are. Hence, though an exile, Chaudhuri is still basically an Indian — a Hindu and at the same time an Englishman also. It has been said about him that 'he is at once more Indian than most Indians and more English than many Englishmen.'[41] With this double edge of sensitivity Chaudhuri achieves insights denied to most, but he also isolates himself from others, and remains as a formidable figure of an angry old man thundering out in wrath at his own people and enjoying himself in his self-chosen task. At times

Chaudhuri veers between the past and the present, the subjective and the objective approaches, between fact and opinion. Yet, his amazing scholarship gives ballast to his sensibility, and the Latin tags, French quotations, Sanskrit citations and German titles introduce 'an element of the agreeably exotic and extraneous'[42] to his style.

N.C. Chaudhuri is one of the most maligned authors we can think of. Ever since the publication of his first book, The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian on September 8th 1951, Chaudhuri has created angry waves of controversy among his readers. Some reviewers were critical, and administered very lofty rebukes on him 'for lacking in charity towards the new regime in India, although they, too, did not deny the quality of the book. As a rule, these reviews were by those Englishmen who had worked in India, and who, after the withdrawal, had suddenly become wholehearted admirers of the Indian nationalist leaders.'[1]

The public reaction of the book in India was totally different and except for one review, 'uniformly not only hostile, but even abusive.'[2]

Its publication and reception in Britain however made a very different story. The English reviews had created considerable advance interest in the book. 'No other book by an Indian had received so much attention in England before. Nehru's autobiography, published in 1935, had been favourably reviewed. Even so, the reception had not been of this order. Thus, when at last

The Statesman of Calcutta and Delhi received the book and was ready with the review, it announced beforehand that its Sunday edition would be publishing a review of the autobiography, 'one of the most acclaimed books of the year. The review was very enthusiastic and had been written by the anthropologist, Verrier Elwin.'[3]

The Statesman was run with British capital and edited by Englishmen, and its review was the only favourable one in India. All the rest were not only severe and condemnatory, but in many cases even scurrilous. 'The book was denounced as a second Katherine Mayo attack on India.'[4] Chaudhuri was placed in the category of anti-Indian writers, and that labelling has stuck.'[5]

Although he was very angry at these violent attacks, he could understand them. He thus writes:

> 'No nationalist reader of my book needed to go further than its dedication to acquire a strong and unconquerable prejudice against me, for it was dedicated to the memory of the British Empire in India, and I made matters worse by going on to say at the end of the dedication that all that was living within us was made, shaped, and quickened, by British rule. This was not simply heresy, but treason, and it was the high-placed Indians, educated at Oxford and Cambridge, who resented the statement most violently.'[6]

Chaudhuri remains one of the most controversial writers — loving and hating his people at the same time. In studying his major works I have sought to draw attention to his critical vision which forms the core of his writings. From a very early age Chaudhuri had a very strong sense of vocation. He says — 'I wanted to be a writer, and one who was to be involved with public affairs. I always thought that a writer was a man of action in his way, and since I could not take part in real action I conceived of my role as an observer with a practical purpose, that of being a Cassandra giving warnings of calamities to come.'[7]

His sense of vocation as a writer went hand in hand with a strong instinctual desire for change. But at the same time he says:

> 'I was a traditonalist in this sense that I believed that novelty could only grow as a new shoot out of a tradition. I had already realized that change by itself meant nothing unless we could diagnose its character, for it led both to progress and to decay, and could be good as well as bad...
>
> ... I tried to base our criticism on standards which were less parochial than those adopted in current Bengali criticism. My aim was to make our criticism and condemnation of the new trends as broadly and firmly based as possible by adopting a standard of reference which would place these against the highest excellence achieved in literature in all ages and among all peoples. I had

> already come to disbelieve in progress in art and literature, and on the contrary held that great literature and art of all ages and all peoples had the same level of excellence, although not the same kind of excellence. However, I was ready to admit, and indeed formulated for myself the historical view of literature, that within its expression in a certain language and among a particular people literature evolved like anything organic; that is to say, any particular national literature had birth as well as death, with childhood, youth, maturity, age, and senility in between. The corollary to this theory was that new trends in both literature and art could stand for decay and disease as well as for growth.
>
> Thus I was never afraid of referring to distant precedents, whether they were to be found in Indian or European literature, in a bygone age or in our times. Among Bengali writers this kind of critical writing was not common... Actually in my discussion of Bengali literature I was trying to be something like a European, and more specially a French critic. Circumstances so shaped my career that I became and have remained a controversialist.'[8]

Thus it can be affirmed with justification that from his very early days Chaudhuri assumed the role of a critic. His prime concern as a writer is not to provide entertainment to readers, but to unveil the truth by calling attention to all that is hypocritical, jejune and falsely imitative in our prevailing society and culture. This task he performs by interpreting whatever is happening with reference to the centrality of his cultural awareness. It is no doubt true that there is sometimes a negative slant in Chaudhuri's writings. But

this negative slant must be seen as a necessary aspect of an inclusively vital critical intellect at work, the intensity of which makes 'all disagreeables evaporate.' Through his astonishingly informed criticism of man and manners he tries to clarify our vision of things. William Walsh thus calls Chaudhuri a 'cultural historian' who has given a dramatic and impassioned account of the origins and growth of Indian civilization. Dwelling on The Continent of Circe Walsh writes:

> 'Chaudhuri has evolved as much from imagination as from history, a theory of Indian development which, he is satisfied, provides him with a casual explanation of the character and failures of his society. We may not agree with what is a passionately subjective and intuitive explanation of the origins of Indian society. But Chaudhuri's sharp, unforgiving eye natural audacity and impatient intellectual edge — ... do offer what impresses as a pure intensity of perception. The evidence for, or perhaps, I should say the source of Chaudhuri's theory or conviction about, the shaping of Indian society by immigration is, first, the undoubted fact of the diffusion of the Indo-European languages and, secondly, his own interpretation of the early Indian epics, supported thirdly by a method of extrapolating backward into history and pre-history the logic of his observations of contemporary Indian society. And when I say 'logic' I do not mean to omit feeling. Chaudhuri is a man lacerated by the present and by scorn for the poverty and degradation he sees in every corner of contemporary society and powerfully impelled to find in the past a coherent explanation for the chaos and despair that surround him.'[9]

It cannot be denied that there are personal and psychological undertones in Chaudhuri's readings of the origins of Indian culture in The Continent of Circe. But in the end he comes down unambiguously on an impersonal and objective influence as the key item, namely the brutalities of life in a tropical climate. To ignore the geography is to misconceive the history. Life and climate in a sub-continent of quite harsh extremes are ,except to a tiny favoured few incomparably hard.'[10]

Chaudhuri himself led the life of an average Indian. Faced by failure, poverty and humiliation he experienced life in the raw. And yet in spirit he remained undaunted and finally made his debut as a writer with his autobiography.

'Perhaps it needed a near lifetime of failure and poverty to prepare him for writing this book, because behind it burn not simply events but a life and a character. He shows himself bitterly forging a will capable of risisting an overwhelming environment... Sometimes he suggests — not altogether mischievously — that the troubles of India are caused by an exclusive

diet of carbohydrate sprinkled with chilli, or by a belief, as he puts it, in a pantheon of Gods as corrupt as the Indian administration. But at the centre of his work is an attempt to account for the destruction of a spirit originally strong by an appalling external climate. He fiercely cherishes what most people would find intolerable, the identity of the alien, but that again he makes coherent — at least for himself — by a theory which involves making half the population of India foreigners in their own country.'[11]

With this double edge of sensitivity Chaudhuri achieves insights denied to most. Thus The Autobiography claims for itself 'a different existence and significance —literary rather than philosophical or sociological. Its achievement rests less on the correspondence of its theory with actuality and much more on an inward life and coherence. It is not the doctrine propounded but the presence evoked which justifies and supports the book.'[12] In this context it can be said that the force and relevance of Chaudhuri's criticism of Indian society cannot be rejected outright. For there is much in our society which needs to be rectified. As a critic Chaudhuri isolates himself from the mass by his highly

individualized critique on men and affairs in contemporary India. His lashing pen, it may be noted has not even spared a Nobel Laureate — Tagore. On Tagore Chaudhuri writes :

> 'His activities as a Nobel Laureate ran as a dissonant contrapuntal line to his creative activities in verse and prose. Not even the Nobel Prize could stop that flow, and thus during the last twenty-eight years of his life there was an artifical emanation of his, enveloping and obscuring the real man. Of Victor Hugo it was said that he was a genius who had most of the charlatan in him. There was no natural streak of the charlatan in Tagore. But the Nobel Prize inflicted an incurable falsity on him by making a mime of him.'[13]

For putting forward this view there arose a hue and cry from the Bengali fetish worshippers who alleged that Chaudhuri had denied the literary greatness of Tagore. This was however far from the truth. For Chaudhuri did not deny Tagore his greatness. What he wanted to stress was —

> 'It is one thing to admire Tagore for his literary greatness and quite another to extol all his doings after the award of the Nobel Prize. I shall never make him the holy mascot of Bengali provincial vanity in an age when Bengali achievement is not sustained. But before I consider the second and adventitious role of his, I would explain why he was driven to it.

> Few literary men have been subjected to more unjustified, malicious, and indecent abuse than Tagore... Before he got the Nobel Prize he was uniformly underrated and often dismissed as a writer, except by a small and scattered body of admirers, who in derision were called Rabindra-bhaktas...
>
> After the Nobel Prize the attacks on his writings ceased, but a new line of personal and political attack on him as an internationalist opened up. For the rest of his life he was denounced by the Bengali chauvinists almost as a traitor to his country. In the late twenties a nationalist daily of Calcutta reproduced the story from some foreign magazine that he was not even a pure Bengali but had Portuguese Blood.'[14]

Throughout his life Tagore remained acutely sensitive to these attacks and to the continuous disparagement of him by fellow Bengalis, which never came to an end until he died. Infact Chaudhuri maintains that Tagore died without being reconciled to fellow Bengalis. In this context he opines —

> 'I know that every attempt will be made to prove that what he said all through his life was not meant by him. This does not seem so perverse to me as does the other fact that the Bengalis should make out of him a fetish to protect their own provincial vanity without having the rightness of mind to atone for their treatment of him while living.'[15]

What Chaudhuri is up in arms against is the Bengali or even the Indian habit of making a fetish of a man. Thus, 'the more the Bengalis are worshipping

Tagore as an idol, the more false are they becoming themselves and, at the same time, less capable of seeing what is really great in Tagore. Both the worshipped man and the worshippers are suffering.'[16]

What Chaudhuri intends through this bit of criticism is to open our eyes to the reality of the situation. In his attempt at showing us the unveiled face of our society Chaudhuri has been branded as an iconoclast. He is fully aware of this fact, and today he has finally 'institutionalized himself as an arch iconoclast.' Extreme old age has scarely blunted the intemperate edge of an obsessive contrariness. And yet, the urgings of an insistent nostalgia for a renounced yet beloved country provokes him to write in the preface to Thy Hand Great Anarch —

> 'This has led me to a ceaseless conflict with the world in which I have had to live. For this reason at one time I thought of giving the title One Man Against his People to this book. But that would have given quite a false idea of my life. I was against historical trends, not any people. I have had no personal maladjustments, far less quarrels of my own seeking, with the society in which I have lived, due either to injustice or frustration. I was born and brought up in a class of Bengali society which had been dominant during British rule. Again, the class which dominates India today is some sort of an extension of the

> Bengali class to which I belonged. Thus, if I speak of alienation from a world, that does not mean social or personal alienation....Although I have rejected the whole ideology of the dominant order in India, I am socially at home only among them. I could have shared their position and prosperity if I had wanted that, and if I have not, that has been my free choice. Therefore, I have never been under the compulsion to go on that wild goose chase which in these days is called discovering one's identity. I never lost mine, and never had any doubts about it.'[17]

Chaudhuri has the knowledge that he will never perhaps see India and more particularly Bengal again. Two decades of self-imposed exile have served, above all, to heighten the engagement with an earlier life. And much of the force of his writings thus springs from the intensity of this confrontation with the vicissitudes of a remarkable life which has ended by bringing a man who travelled on elephants in his boyhood to England in a jumbo jet to spend his last days there. But what is striking is that, the essential Indianness in Chaudhuri often comes to the forefront. Thus in every picture that he draws one can see his intense love for India. Recalling the rushing waters of East Bengal rivers he writes:

'But it was in two far distant countries outside India that the rivers of East Bengal came back to me with the revived force of a direct meeting. The first occasion was in 1967 in Israel by the Sea of Galilee, and the second in 1976 at Kingston in Canada by the waters of St. Lawrence where it issues out of Lake Ontario.

... The Sea of Galilee looked like the Meghna... I was awakened by the roar of waters, and looking out of the window I saw below it foaming waves rushing through the reeds growing in a small inlet... The Sea of Galilee was looking ink-black then, with the waves crested with white foam. I had seen exactly such a scene on the Meghna in 1907, near Bhairav Bazar.

At the end of 1976 I went to Canada to be reminded again of the waters of Bengal. I saw the St. Lawrence both at Montreal and Ogdensburg...But at Kingston, when I went out of the Faculty Club of Queen's University and stood by the extreme end of Lake Ontario, I could fancy that I was on the banks of the Meghna again... it looked exactly like the Meghna. Somehow, if there is wooded country on the other side of a very big river, the trees look like grey-green curtains hanging on the water, and the faint blue of the sky can be seen through the shadowy trees, or at all events a mirage-like illusion is created. I had seen this sort of scene on the Meghna and saw them again at the lower end of Lake Ontario. It was almost seventy years since I had seen the Meghna but standing by the waters of the St. Lawrence I could murmur — Super flumina Babylonis ...'[18]

The emotion and passion with which Chaudhuri recalls the lost rivers of East Bengal is intensely touching and one is emotionally moved by the nostalgic pangs that Chaudhuri experiences for a much-loved country. In the Continent of Circe also Chaudhuri paints a much loved picture and says:

> ...The static beauty of our humped cattle has been embodied for all time in our sculpture. But the beauty of movement which it shows is not less enchanting. Dust is called Go-dhuli, Kinedust in Sanskrit, and it is a sight of extraordinary beauty to see the herds coming home. It is only then and in this condition that the dust of India is transformed into something lovable. It rises in whirling clouds of grey to form a background for the wavy lines of moving cattle, in their colour schemes of dun, tawny, chocolate, white, black, and many pastel shades.'[19]

Chaudhuri invokes the immemorial India with emotion and passion. What drives him to wrath is the corrupting process of our obfuscating political and national life. Chaudhuri's Gibbonian eye, which rests most bleakly on the 'decomposing' of Bengal, is fired by a sense of tragic loss. As a Bengali, he feels he has to record a decline which has a poignant relevance to him. Thus he writes:

> 'During the same period of political and cultural decline in India I had also to observe the eclipse of Bengal as a force in Indian politics and culture. From the beginning of British rule down to 1920 the Bengali people dominated the political and cultural life of India... But from 1921 onwards the influence of Bengal in Indian politics began to decline. With independence, the eclipse of Bengal was completed.'[20]

The spectacle of an all-embracing decline pressed so heavily on Chaudhuri's mind that he set down his

forebodings in a passge of The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian. He wrote:

> 'If there is to be any vanished or vanishing Atlantis to speak of in this book, it should be and would be all our life lived till yesterday. All that we have learnt, all that we have acquired, and all that we have prized is threatened with extinction. We do not know how this end will come, whether through a cataclysmic holocaust or slow purid decay. But regarding the eventual extinction there does not seem to be any uncertainty.'[21]

Written in 1947 this passage is almost prophetic. With the powers of a visionary Chaudhuri sees a vision of the future and at the end of his life he writes:

> 'I have come to the conclusion that civilized human existence all over the world is completing the latest cycle of its history by descending into its natural Avernus. I think our times are comparable to the fifth century of the Christian era when St. Augustine saw the Graeco-Roman world crumbling all around him. The present situation of humanity is different from that only in this, that the scale is larger and the decadence universal.'[22]

Chaudhuri feels very strongly —

> 'that the decline of Bengal is part and parcel of Indian decline as well as world decline. And I do not stop at a delineation of the literary paralysis. I extend the notion of decay to religion and politics. For instance young people today have hardly any political interests. In my time, apart from our cultural interests, political interest was burning over the whole question of Indian independence... That sort of passionate involvement has disappeared. People have sunk into private life.

> And a people that withdraws entirely into private life can never maintain or evolve a high order of civilization.'[23]

The decadence and degeneration that Chaudhuri sees around him forms the focal point of his critical vision. He very strongly feels that 'Civilized human existence will perish through internal decay as the Graceo-Roman world did.'[24] The human situation special to our age is, 'on the one hand, a wholesale decadence of civilized life with its face towards the past, on the other, almost unlimited technological power looking towards the future, which must be regarded as progress.'[25]

The presence of universal human decadence, physical as well as moral poses as a very major problem of our age. Considering this world situation rationally and realistically, no observer can see a spot of light on the dark scene. And yet, the visionary in Chaudhuri feels that 'there is a great mercy immanent in the Universe which takes care precisely of those who are least fit to take care of themselves. ...Belief in the mercy is part of that faith.'[26] Chaudhuri very emphatically opines that, the present human situation can be sustained only through faith. This 'problem of sustaining faith would not have been so difficult had there been

a frank recognition by thinkers of our age of the reality of the decadence in social life and mores. If there were, faith could have come to terms with decadence, and taking its stand on a cyclical view of the rise and the fall of civilization, would have faced the inescapable decadence saying:

> 'The world's great age begins anew,
> The golden years return,
> The earth doth like a snake renew
> The winter weeds outworn...'[27]

It is clearly evident that as a writer Chaudhuri imparts a message to his readers. With all his adverse criticisms against men and manners Chaudhuri intends to open our eyes to all that lies under the veiled face of society. With the powers of a visionary like Blake, Chaudhuri too forsees a dismal future for us. And he makes a fervent appeal to rouse ourselves from this stupor of inertia.

Chaudhuri himself a man with a relish for the specific loved the 'quality of concreteness' in English civilization. He was fascinated by the vitality and pragmatism of the English character, by the genius for the concrete shown in English art and by the English capacity to give form and solidity to its insight. The

absence of this concreteness in Indian civilization led him to give a measured philosophic expression. He thus writes:

> 'I think there is even in the highest and most characteristic teaching of Hinduism ... something impelling a Hindu towards the unmerged in preference to the emergent, and towards the general in preference to the particular. According to some of the noblest teaching of Hinduism, the manifested universe is an illusion, the ultimate reality attributeless, and man's supreme happiness lies in putting an end to the cycle of birth and deaths... For I believe in change and hold all reality to be a process, a process which is justifying itself, as well as making itself more significant, by becoming more particular and differentiated, and by endowing itself with ever more new values.'[28]

This acute reading of a fundamental strain of Hindu thought and this affirmation of a personal point of view are without any malice. At times Chaudhuri does bristle with indignation and carries his criticism a bit too far. It is on account of this perhaps that he has often been criticized in India for an excessive Anglophilia. This criticism however is far removed from the truth about character for he is as critical of the English as he is of the Indians. In The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian and in Thy Hand, Great Anarch Chaudhuri has very strongly condemned the British Community

in India. On the one hand he contends that the worst crime the British committed in India was to desert it and to fail in their mission to bring European civilization in thought, art and science to the sub-continent. On the other, he combines this powerful implicit defence of the nature and purpose of the British Raj with the utmost scorn for the British in India, who were incapable of forming human or even humane relationships with Indians, and severe contempt for the ones he has lived among for the last eighteen years as an exile in Britain. 'The former he detests for their inhumanity, the latter for their illiteracy.'[29]

It is with a great humanist's passion that he assails whatever is counterfeit and decadent in whatever culture or community he encounters. Sometimes he does lay it on but basically his writings act as a kind of purgation cleansing our minds of all that is anti-human and anti-culture. It can be seen that Chaudhuri's mind is free from inhibitions, and so ideas enter and flow out in free abundance allowing full inner interaction and leading to quick development of thoughts and words. Searching and constant exploration of new ideas, sharing

thoughts with others is his endeavour. What follows thus, is a natural flow of a mighty river of thoughts and ideas that nourishes those on its path with the fertility of his mind. He is a natural thinker who opines 'I would not accept an opinion simply because it was a product of the times. Fashion, the tyrant of humanity taken in the mass, had no hold on me. Moreover, it has never been in my character to form opinions or formulate even historical conclusions with no apparent practical application, without seeing their relevance to my personal life and acting on them.'[30]

This 'cultural historian' has a keen eye for the present as shaped or distorted by the past and an avid zest for interpreting whatever is happening with reference to the centrality of his cultural awareness. The vigour of his humanist thoughts informs his writings and their acuity lends a measure of sharpness and astringence to them.

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