CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF CHAUDHURI'S PRO-COLONIALISM

"Chaudhuri's Autobiography may be the one great book to have come out of the Indo-English encounter."
— Vidyadhar Surajpershad Naipaul, 'The Overcrowded Barracoon'

3.1 ANTI-NATIONAL SENTIMENTS

In the pre-independence era, most Indians who wrote in English were anti-colonists. They included political leaders like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu. However, not all Indians writing in English had that anti-colonial attitude. Some of them were indifferent or even pro-colonial. A number of such writers in Indian English who showed colonial symptoms are discussed in this section.

The pioneer in Indian English was a pro-colonial man. His name was Sake
Dean Mahomet (1759 – 1851), his book's name being *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, through Several Parts of India, While in the Service of the Honourable The East India Company* (1794). While the title says that Mahomet was in the service of the Company, the book in its entirety gives a feel that his service was not merely professional but emotional too. A pro-British tilt is noticeable throughout, although the book is mainly about Indians — their dresses, occupations and customs at that time. Mahomet's pro-colonial sympathy was reconfirmed when he chose the European way of living and settled there during his last years.  

Dean Mahomet was, admittedly, an insignificant scribe but even some important writers in Indian English had expressed colonial sympathies. The first significant Indian writer in English was Rammohun Roy (22 May 1772 – 27 September 1833). "Rammohan Roy mastered the English language, and wrote and spoke forceful English years before Macaulay wrote his Minute," writes literary historian K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. *(Indian Writing 34)* Roy, who motivated the British rulers to abolish the Indian practice of widow immolation, actually wrote down the advantages of British rule in India. Not satisfied with India being Britain's 'occupier' colony, he argued in favour of a full-fledged 'settler' colony. He lambasted the prevalent Sanskrit-based education for the continuation of ignorance. Pleading for promotion of western education instead, Roy wrote to Governor General Amherst on 11 December 1823:

We now find that the government is establishing a Sanskrit school
under Hindu pundits, to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This seminary (similar in character to those which existed in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon) can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practicable use to the possessors or to society. The pupils will there acquire what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtilties since produced by speculative men, such as is commonly taught in all parts of India. . . . If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. The Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislators. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction; embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, with other useful sciences. (Biswas 190-95)

Like Roy, Dadabhai Naoroji (6 September 1825 – 30 June 1917) wrote in Indian English with pro-colonial leanings. Naoroji's book, Poverty and Un-British Rule in India (1902), proved his flair for English writing while the lectures he
delivered betrayed a soft corner for British colonialism. As he presided over the Indian National Congress for three years, he was a nationalist for sure though not necessarily an anti-colonialist. 2 The ‘Grand Old Man of India’, as Naoroji was popularly known, was a firm believer in Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence and the British sense of fair play. He believed that British colonialism was the progenitor of Indian nationalism, rather than its annihilator. In a speech of 1886, he wondered if the feeling of nationhood existed at all during the pre-British ages of India’s history. Addressing a diverse audience, Naoroji said:

I ask whether in the most glorious days of Hindu rule, in the days of Rajahs like the great Vikram, you could imagine the possibility of a meeting of this kind, whether even Hindus of all different provinces of the kingdom could have collected and spoken as one nation. Coming down to the later empire of our friends, the Mahomedans, who probably ruled over a larger territory at one time than any Hindu monarch, would it have been, even in the days of the great Akbar himself, possible for a meeting like this to assemble, composed of all classes and communities, all speaking one language, and all having uniform and high aspirations of their own. . . . It is under the civilizing rule of the Queen and people of England that we meet here together, hindered by none, and are freely allowed to speak our minds without the least fear and without the least hesitation. (Bakshi 105)

Naoroji was a non-fiction writer, although many fiction writers who appeared
after him had been equally pro-colonial. The first fiction in Indian English was the novel *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864), and the novelist was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (27 June 1838 – 8 April 1894). Bankim, the composer of India’s national song *Vande Mataram* (Hail Mother), was appreciative of Europeans in many of his works. He believed that Indians could never become Englishmen simply because the qualities of the latter were much better than those of the former. In a satire, Bankim allegorized the British and Indians as tigers and monkeys respectively. The tigers go about their business without taking any notice of the monkeys whereas all that the simians get worked up about are the felines. Elsewhere, Bankim created a character named Amarnath who is very well acquainted with the works of European intellectuals. Amarnath’s conversation with another character reflects Bankim’s knowledge of Europe. That passage, from the novel *Rajani* (1877), is translated as follows:

The discussion of ancient literature led in its turn to ancient historiography, out of which there emerged some incomparable exposition of the classical historians, Tacitus, Plutarch, Thucydides, and others. From the philosophy of history of these writers Amarnath came down to Comte and his *lois des trois etats*, which he endorsed. Comte brought in his interpreter Mill and then Huxley; Huxley brought in Owen and Darwin; and Darwin Buchner and Schopenhauer. Amarnath poured the most entrancing scholarship into my ears, and I became too engrossed to remember our business.
Bankim's junior contemporary, Nobel-laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941), was another fiction writer who criticized Indians. "Tagore left behind him an immense mass of prose writing, in Bengali as well as in English," notes K. R. Srinivasa lyengar. (Indian Writing 104) Tagore's novel The Home and the World (1916) shows a nationalist character, Sandip, in poor light. The novel has references to the violence unleashed in the name of India's nationalist movement. Another novel by Tagore, Gora (1910), has a hero who symbolizes the unity of India and Europe. The hero's Irish father had been killed by Indians in the mutiny-turned-rebellion of 1857 and his Irish mother died soon after giving him birth. The orphaned infant, who grew up to be the novel's hero, was brought up by Indian foster-parents. However, Tagore did not confine himself to literature alone and commented on politics too at times. He could not keep silent on the ways of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920 and condemned the burning of British cloth, which was the rage all over India, as senseless. Some of Tagore's English lectures are indirectly critical of Indian chauvinism. He even suggested that the colonization of India was beneficial to us in certain ways. Cautioning against the concept of nationalism, Tagore writes in an essay:

Even though from childhood I had been taught that the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity. (Nationalism 127)
Tagore’s unease with the nationalist movement was shared by one of the most prominent writers in Indian English, Aurobindo Ghose (15 August 1872 — 5 December 1950). C. D. Narasimhaiah calls him the “inaugurator of modern Indian criticism”. (Journal of South Asian Literature 24.87) Aurobindo, the author of The Life Divine (1949) and many other philosophical works, had an Anglicized upbringing and studied in England. Nevertheless, he returned to India to become a firebrand nationalist. In a surprising volte-face, however, he withdrew from the Indian movement in 1909. This withdrawal occurred after his arrest for alleged involvement in the Muzaffarpur bomb case wherein two British women had been killed. Aurobindo was acquitted of the charges but, thereafter, kept India’s anti-colonial struggle at an arm’s length. In fact, he left British India and settled down in the French colony of Pondicherry. During the Second World War, he spoke openly in favour of the Britain-led Allied Forces. He preferred the Allies despite their many wrongdoings since he considered the Germany-led Axis to be a worse evil. On the Allies versus Axis debate, Aurobindo wrote:

The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. (Messages 12)

In Indian English writing, equal to Aurobindo in prominence was Jawaharlal
Nehru (14 November 1889 – 27 May 1964). Like the former, the latter too had an Anglicized upbringing and studied in England. Unlike Aurobindo, however, Nehru remained a nationalist throughout his life and went on to be elected as independent India's first Prime Minister. Despite this consistent nationalism, he had felt out of place in India.  

Nehru was more at home among Englishmen than among his compatriots. Noticing his discomfort in this country, even Gandhi had written, "Indeed, he is more English than Indian in his thought and make-up." (Collected Works 49.499) In a speech at Columbia University, Nehru urged Indians to be cosmopolitan in their outlook. He advised against practicing insularity, saying that Indians suffered whenever they refused to interact with the rest of the world. In Nehru's words:

My own view of Indian history is that we can almost measure the growth and the advance of India and the decline of India by relating them to periods when India had her mind open to the outside world and when she wanted to close it up. The more she closed it up, the more static she became. (Iyengar 312)

Not only major writers like Nehru, but many other Indians who wrote in English expressed pro-colonial sentiments too. In 1883, social reformer Keshub Chunder Sen (1838 – 1884) wrote, "If I am an Asiatic in devotion, I am a European in practical energy." (Am I an Inspired Prophet?) In 1877, Indian National Congress leader Surendranath Banerjea (1848 – 1925) wrote, "I verily believe that the establishment of British power in India was providential." (Bedi 167) In 1909,
educationist Madan Mohan Malviya (1861 – 1946) wrote, "I do believe that British rule is meant for the good of India, meant to help us to raise our country once more to a position of prosperity and power." (Bedi 167) N. C. Kelkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak's biographer, wrote, "I think that we in India as a nation must be eternally grateful to the English language for opening to us endless vistas and beautiful avenues of Western thought." (Bedi 168) K. M. Munshi (1887 – 1971), the Home Minister of Bombay province, wrote, "India joined the brotherhood of the English-speaking world." 6

The foregoing account shows that many Indians, though not all, who wrote in English had sympathies for British colonialism in India. It was with this background that Nirad C. Chaudhuri started writing in Indian English. Moreover, on the global scale, anti-nationalist writing is not entirely unknown. A searching look at world literature throws up a couple of other writers who can be put, to a certain extent, in the same league as him.

One Trinidadian author whom Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri shared significant similarities with was Cyril Lionel Robert James (4 January 1901 - 19 May 1989). Both of them came from middle-class backgrounds and taught themselves most of what they knew in the sense that their learning was more due to their individual efforts than to the schools and colleges they studied in. Both the writers developed keen interests in literature and other fine arts as well as in history and politics. As far as their literary style is concerned, both indulged in thick descriptions of their
respective houses, people and happenings. Regarding their ideological moorings, both Chaudhuri and James were ambivalent towards the British civilisation. On the one hand, they acknowledged the positive contributions of Britain to their parent countries, something which cost them their popularity among their compatriots who were anti-colonial. On the other hand, both Chaudhuri and James decried the degradation of British culture in the second half of the twentieth century, mostly blaming the popular media for the dismal state of affairs. In self-imposed exile during the autumn of their lives, both spent their last years in England with Chaudhuri settling in Oxford and James in Brixton. In fact, it was V.S. Naipaul who first noticed the resemblances between Chaudhuri’s The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian and James’s autobiography, Beyond a Boundary, saying that both were “part of the cultural boomerang from the former colonies, delayed and still imperfectly understood”. (‘Two Brown Sahibs’ The Hindu December 19, 2004)

The quintessential spirit of Nirad Chaudhuri’s autobiography is also in line with that of Alan Paton’s novel Cry, the Beloved Country (1948). Paton’s book throws light on the racial tensions of South Africa in a way that seems to be anti-nationalistic but is patriotic in its essence. Chaudhuri’s autobiography, too, gives insights on the colonial tensions in pre-independence India and while the tone is anti-Indian, it is infused with a subtle affection for the country. In fact, this duality is another mark of his ambivalence.

However, the most famous writer to share significant common ground with
Nirad Chaudhuri was Nobel-laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn (11 December 1918 – 3 August 2008). Just as Chaudhuri regretted his early enthusiasm for the Indian freedom movement, so did Solzhenitsyn repent for his initial participation in the Soviet army. Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) exposed the fissures in India's nationalist movement quite as Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) brought to light the horrors of Russia's communist regime. Consequently, both these writers invited the wrath of their state machineries — Chaudhuri was forced to exit the AIR while Solzhenitsyn was persecuted by the KGB. Both of them, however, continued writing uninhibited as is evident from the former’s *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* (1987) and the latter's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1969). Both Chaudhuri and Solzhenitsyn moved away from the confines of literature to the arena of history in order to 'correct', what was in their opinion, western misconceptions about their respective countries. Neither writer spared the West, though, from their trenchant censure. Perhaps, it is in this ambivalent attitude of criticizing the West and also the non-West that the biggest similarity between Chaudhuri and Solzhenitsyn is to be found.

Nirad Chaudhuri's non-conformist attitude and historical knowledge may also be compared to Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (29 April 1863 – 29 April 1933). Alexander Pope was a particular favourite of Chaudhuri, as is evident from the former's couplets spread in the latter's books. However, the foregoing account brings out the biographical and intellectual commonalities between Chaudhuri and a host of writers. It may be noticed that many of them had difficult relationships
with the parent countries. Cyril James and Alexander Solzhenitsyn criticized the western countries too with equal vigour. Being uncomfortable about their own nations and yet being critical of the West put them on the horns of a peculiar dilemma, a dilemma which reveals itself in the postcolonial ambivalence of N.C. Chaudhuri.

3.2 UNCONVENTIONAL HISTORIES

The previous section gives an idea about the subterranean pro-colonialism in Indian writers. However, to be fair to them, it must be said that they were not the only ones to have second thoughts on the country's nationalism. Even professional historians of certain schools hold similar views. They differ from nationalist historians to a considerable extent and an awareness about them would be of considerable assistance in analyzing Nirad Chaudhuri's pro-colonial stance.  

The neo-imperialist school of historiography, sometimes known as the Cambridge School, professes the greatest difference with conventional history. Not only do they deny that there was a national movement, they also question the existence of India as a nation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their assertion is that, at the time, the Indian sub-continent was little more than an unwieldy assortment of ethnic communities. According to these historians, the absence of concrete nationhood precluded the possibility of any national
movement. The lack of tangible nationhood also made the situation in this sub-continent qualitatively different from that in China, Japan, and the Middle-Eastern and African countries. Moreover, the neo-imperialist school denies that British rule over this sub-continent was any more exploitative than the rule of local kings or chieftains. In fact, imperialist historians like Bruce McCully went to the extent of suggesting that it was actually a "benevolent Raj". (English Education 40)

However, what this school does not deny is that there were many conflicts between the native inhabitants and the foreign rulers in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding those conflicts, the Cambridge School says that the native protestors were too heterogeneous to be uniformly motivated and often worked at cross purposes. The school also alleges that the protests had been hijacked by the elite classes within the indigenous communities. Those elites, who supposedly had their own axe to grind, incited their brethren against the British rulers in the name of anti-colonialism. What helped the local elites in the incitement of their fellowmen was the occurrence of wars, droughts, epidemics and occasional excesses of the government. In other words, we are to believe that the freedom struggle was nothing but a glorified power struggle between indigenous and foreign elites. 8

Denying any lofty idealism on the part of anti-British protestors, neo-imperialist historian Anil Seal argues:

What from a distance appear as their political strivings were often, on close examination, their efforts to conserve or improve the position of their own prescriptive groups. . . . It is misleading to view these native mobilizations as directed chiefly against foreign overlordship. Much
attention has been paid to the apparent conflicts between imperialism and nationalism; it would be at least equally profitable to study their real partnership. (The Emergence 342)

While the neo-imperialist school dismisses the entire national movement as non-existent, the subaltern school of historiography splits it into two. This school finds that there were not one but two streams in the country from 1857 to 1947. The mainstream was, of course, the well-known movement led by the big leaders of the Indian National Congress. The other one, a side stream, was a less-known struggle by the downtrodden millions of Indian society. Subaltern historians say that the first was a sham whereas the second was the real thing. According to them, the main conflict was not so much between nationalists and imperialists as between elites and subalterns. The subaltern school dismisses most of the organized resistance in the pre-independence era as mere shadow-boxing between Indian and British elites. On the other hand, these historians pay a lot of importance to all the incidents of spontaneous protest at that time. The school accuses conventional history of failing to recognize the liberation efforts of the subjugated people and, hence, subaltern historian Ranajit Guha writes:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism — colonialist elitism and bourgeoisie-nationalist elitism. ... In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist
writings — to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas. ([Subaltern Studies 1]

Among the other schools of Indian historiography is the Marxist school. This school examines the national movement not only from a political perspective but also from a socio-economic one. According to Marxist historians like Rajani Palme Dutt, the movement’s political objective was to attain independence from British rule while its socio-economic aim was to provide equitable distribution of wealth. Though the national movement succeeded in obtaining political independence, it failed to ensure socio-economic justice. As the immediate objective of ousting the imperial rulers was achieved but not the long-term objective of revolutionizing the society, many Marxists consider the freedom struggle as only a partial success.

The main scope of Nirad Chaudhuri’s work was like that of British historian Edward Gibbon (27 April 1737 – 16 January 1794). As children, both had been sickly but turned out to be voracious readers. Gibbon is known for his six-volume *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* while Chaudhuri’s masterwork, his two-volume autobiography, might well have been named ‘The History of the Decline and Fall of the British Empire’. Both of them based their works on primary sources and avoided second-hand accounts like the plague. They were equally severe on their religions — Gibbon, on Christianity and Chaudhuri, on Hinduism. Gibbon said that the fall of the Roman Empire meant the “triumph of barbarism” while Chaudhuri would say much the same thing on the fall
of the British Empire. In his words,

This degradation of Bengal is, of course, part of the larger process of the rebarbarization of the whole of India in the last twenty years, a story which is as sensational and as ominous for human civilization, but not as well known, as the story of the barbarization of Germany by the Nazis. (The Autobiography 174)

Another Western historian with whom Nirad Chaudhuri shared a surprising number of similarities was Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler (29 May 1880 – 8 May 1936) of Germany. Like Chaudhuri, Spengler was emotionally reserved as a child and suffered indifferent health lifelong. Both had turned to books early in life and wrote for various magazines in order to supplement their meagre incomes. Apart from such biographical similarities, there were certain intellectual convergences between Spengler and Chaudhuri. Sociologist Max Weber described Spengler as a "very ingenious and learned dilettante", a description which suits Chaudhuri too. Both the writers were pessimistic about their respective nations, as expressed in the former's The Decline of the West (originally published in 1918 as Der Untergang des Abenlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte) and the latter's The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (1951). The books put forth a theory of the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations and both the writers were hounded for being anti-national. Conventional historians took umbrage at their unapologetically non-scientific approach while general readers gave them a mixed reception. In fact, Chaudhuri was aware of these similarities
and thought of his autobiography in conjunction with Spengler's book. Hence, he says:

When I was passing through the events I have described, I had no perception of their universal affiliations. But writing about them after intervals ranging from thirty to sixty years, I could not remain unaware of these affiliations. . . . what the book contains is only the first chapter of the long but still unfinished history of the Decline of the West, of which Spengler spoke. (Thy Hand xxvi)

The historical schools discussed above are unconventional in the sense that they do not easily subscribe to the nationalist schools of thought. Their positions on the events prior to India's independence (for Gibbon and Spengler, though, it was Europe) are qualitatively different from the commonly held views on the topic. It is with this background that one can analyze the pro-colonial attitude of Nirad Chaudhuri.

3.3 CHAUDHURI'S EARLY NATIONALISM

Earlier in this thesis, in Section 1.2 to be precise, Nirad Chaudhuri's life has been sketched in detail. As he lived through the twentieth century, he could not have been untouched by the massive anti-colonial movement which swept India in the first half of that century. In fact, as it happened, he was attracted to the
movement in his childhood and he supported it in his early adulthood. Therefore, his association with the nationalist movement needs to be examined closely. In Chaudhuri’s words,

In the whole course of my life there have been three periods during which I fully shared the passions of the nationalist movement: first, during the anti-partition or Swadeshi days; secondly, in the months following the passive resistance movement in 1919; and, thirdly, during the civil disobedience of 1930-1. (The Autobiography 375)

As a child, Chaudhuri’s environment was like that of any other child’s in the early twentieth century. Like the children of his age group, he was told about the glorious events which happened forty years earlier in the Revolt of 1857-58. The Revolt had started off as a small-scale mutiny but had soon grown into a full-fledged rebellion. Forty years later, the little Chaudhuri was made aware of its heroic stories and how the mutiny-turned-rebellion became India’s first major anti-colonial struggle. Historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar wrote, “Whatever might have been its original character, it soon became a symbol of challenge to the mighty British power in India.” (The Sepoy Mutiny iii) Kids like Nirad Chaudhuri knew stories of the indomitable Nana Saheb Dondu Pant, the valiant Tantia Tope, the courageous Laxmi Bai, the elusive Kunwar Singh and other brave rebels like them. Chaudhuri says,

When I was a boy I first heard and then read many stories about the Mutiny which had taken shape in the previous forty years . . . The
heroes and heroines of these tales were Nana Sahib (believed in my childhood to be still living and in hiding somewhere), Tantia Topi (the invincible Indian general), the Rani of Jhansi (with her famous cry 'I shall never give up my Jhansi'), and Kunwar Singh of Bihar, to mention only a few. (The Autobiography 400)

Inspired by the legendary tales of the 1857 rebellion, the young Chaudhuri enthusiastically witnessed the Swadeshi Movement of 1905-07. He was only seven years old when Swadeshi, the country's first major anti-colonial struggle in the twentieth century, was launched. The movement protested the British government's act of partitioning Bengal, an act which came into effect on 16 October 1905. The government justified the partition on the ground that the population of Bengal had become too large to be administered within a single province. However, Swadeshi protestors opposed the partition because it would weaken the unity of the province. As a mark of protest, "Moderate leaders like Surendranath Banerjea toured the country urging the boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt," writes historian Aditya Mukherjee. (India's Struggle for Independence 127) The boycott plea had its intended effect on Nirad Chaudhuri too. He rejected foreign goods and adopted indigenous ones even though the latter were comparatively less comfortable. In his description of the movement, Chaudhuri's usage of the first person plural number indicates how much he was in tune with his countrymen. He writes,

It was in October 1905 that we had our formal initiation into the
nationalist movement. . . . A gentleman called at our house with a bundle of silk threads and my father asked us to have a bath in the river first and then in a state of cleanliness tie the thread round our wrists as a token of the brotherhood of all Bengalis. We were to observe that day as a day of national mourning and fasting. We also put away all our clothes manufactured in England and put on dhotis made in the Indian mills, which at first were as coarse, heavy, and thick as sackcloth. (The Autobiography 207-08)

The Swadeshi Movement spurred Chaudhuri's nationalistic feeling to such an extent that he started sympathizing with Extremist ideologies. In 1908, he worked as a child volunteer at a public meeting addressed by Extremist leader Aurobindo Ghose. Ghose was later accused of conspiracy in a bomb case which killed two British women at Muzaffarpur. Another leader who influenced Chaudhuri at that stage was Bipin Chandra Pal. Pal was one among the famous Extremist trio Lal-Bal-Pal, the other two being Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The Extremists claimed to be more nationalistic than their Moderate counterparts within the Indian National Congress. The Moderate camp, on the other hand, included eminent leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta. 12 Congress historian Bhogaraju Pattabhi Sitaramayya brought out the difference between the two camps succinctly when he said, "Gokhale's method sought to win the foreigner, Tilak's to replace him." (History of Indian National Congress) Nirad Chaudhuri, as if on extremist Tilak's cue, wanted to replace the
foreigner rather than win him over. He hoped for an effective antidote to British colonialism and thought that the militancy of Extremists would fulfill his nationalistic desire. Convinced that the pacifist ideology of the Moderates was not a viable method for achieving swaraj [self-rule] in India, Chaudhuri wrote,

The liberal form of nationalism began to lose not only support but also reputation. We always turned up our noses at the mere mention of the Moderates, and even before we had begun to air our contempt for them a complete transformation had come over our spirit. We found the older patriotic songs very tame and uninspiring. (The Autobiography 211)

Chaudhuri remained sympathetic towards Extremist ideology even when the British colonizers sought to suppress it. The British government became suppressive of the Extremists immediately after the end of the First World War in 1918 because, during the war, Indian revolutionaries had needled the government. Soon afterwards, the colonial government set up a committee headed by one Justice Rowlatt to enquire into alleged terrorist and subversive activities of Indians. The Rowlatt Commission recommended that the government be legally empowered to arrest any Indian without warrant, imprison any Indian without trial, deport Indian seditionists and muzzle the Indian press. The proposals were clearly violative of human rights. Nevertheless, Rowlatt's recommendations were tabled in the Indian legislature in the form of two government bills. 13 "One of them was actually pushed through in indecent haste in the face of opposition from all the
elected Indian members," notes historian Mridula Mukherjee. (India's Struggle for Independence 181) The improper passage of that repressive bill into law did not escape Nirad Chaudhuri's notice. As an adult in his early twenties, he understood that the British government was making the bill's passage a prestige issue. Hence, Chaudhuri was one with other Indians in lambasting the government. Without mincing words against the British, he writes,

I cannot explain the unstatesmanly obduracy of these men except on the supposition that they not only looked upon the Rowlatt Bill as their revenge for the nervous worry the Indian revolutionaries had caused them during the war, . . . but were also determined to make the passage of the bill the test of their position and prestige in post-war India. (The Autobiography 373)

Chaudhuri's disapproval of the Rowlatt-inspired despotic law turned into utter shock when its repercussions were seen across the country. No Indian, including him, could anticipate the scale of colonial brutality which followed the enactment of the law. The first reaction of most Indians to that shameful law was one of protests. The protests at Amritsar were violent, and hence, the provincial government of Punjab deployed the army and prohibited public gatherings in the city. However, a few thousand unarmed people assembled at the city's Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April 1919. The army commander was so offended by this violation of prohibitory orders that he ordered his troop of fifty men to open fire without warning. Seventeen hundred rounds were fired at the defenceless crowd which
was unable to escape due to the high walls of the compound. The massacre left about four hundred people dead, twelve hundred wounded and the rest of India stunned. Gandhi, who had co-operated with the British government during the War, decided not to continue the co-operation with them and said, “Co-operation in any shape or form with this satanic government is sinful.” Nirad Chaudhuri, too, could not be indifferent to the barbaric act and was as enraged as his compatriots. With deep anguish at the display of colonial inhumanity, he says,

   But as information trickled out from the Punjab I, like the rest of my countrymen, was horrified and infuriated by the disproportionate severity of the punishment and, which was more, by the gratuitous display of vindictiveness and racial arrogance that accompanied the restoration of order in the Punjab. (The Autobiography 375)

Even a decade after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Chaudhuri’s revulsion at colonial cruelty remained constant. He was greatly disturbed by the strong-arm tactics with which the colonial government tried to crush the nationalist movement in 1931-32. In fact, inspired by Gandhi, Chaudhuri had defied the Salt Act at a marsh of eastern Calcutta in 1930. After Gandhi began the Civil Disobedience Movement, the British government became more repressive than ever before. “The non-violent movement was met by relentless repression,” writes historian Bipan Chandra. (India’s Struggle 288) The police opened fire at twenty-nine places and killed 103 Indians besides injuring 426. The Indian National Congress was banned and its offices seized. Even Press freedom was curtailed to the extent
that printing photographs of nationalist leaders was censored. One issue of the Chaudhuri-edited *The Modern Review*, which carried a picture supplement on the famous Dandi March, was proscribed. ¹⁵ India had become such a police state that an Englishman, Fenner Brockway, wrote a book titled *India Under the Lathi* [stick]. The anti-Indian barbarity distressed Nirad Chaudhuri so deeply that he chose the same title for a chapter in his autobiography. In the course of his duties as an editor, he had read about the arrests of approximately eighty thousand Indian protestors. Like thousands of his readers, he too became lachrymose on reading how those arrests tried to cripple the Indian agitation. In Chaudhuri's words,

> As I read the proofs, although I was no participant, tears came into my eyes. By that time all the others were also in jail. But neither Gandhi's arrest nor theirs made any difference to the intensity of the agitation. The people themselves took it over. If anything, it became more widespread and intense, with the passion supplied by the rank and file, not the leaders. Even when one could not see the countrywide agitation one could feel it, and hear its rumble . . . *(Thy Hand* 279)

A number of points emerge from the foregoing analysis. Firstly, it is found that Nirad Chaudhuri did have sympathy for India's nationalist movement at some point in his life. The discovery of his early sympathy for Indian nationalism is startling because he is well known for his virulent antipathy towards the movement. Given his prominent dissociation from the movement, his one-time association with
it seems to be incredible. Another aspect to be noted is that, in those early years, Chaudhuri's association with the anti-colonial struggle was so intense that he favoured its extremist ideology rather than the moderate one. It marks one end of the pendulum swing which he underwent regarding his love-turned-hate relationship with the freedom struggle. From Extremist nationalism to extreme anti-nationalism, Chaudhuri traversed a long distance.

The third feature to be noted in the present context is that Nirad Chaudhuri was critical of the repressive methods of the British government. Although he turned pro-colonial eventually, he rarely kept silent or tried to justify acts of colonial repression. The fourth point to be underlined is that the last time Chaudhuri sympathized with freedom fighters was in the early 1930s. At that time, he was only slightly older than the century. Why he lost his soft corner for the freedom movement, despite being initially inclined, needs to be analyzed. The reasons for Chaudhuri's spectacular metamorphosis are excavated in the following sections.

3.3 HIS DISAPPROVAL OF VIOLENCE

The previous section brought to the fore Nirad Chaudhuri's early association with Indian anti-colonialism. However, by the time he was in the mid-thirties, he had dissociated himself from the movement. It was an astonishing transformation, of course, the causes of which are many. One of the reasons for Chaudhuri
turning away from the freedom struggle has to do with the violence which was occasionally resorted to by Indian nationalists. What influence the spectre of their violence had on his outlook is analyzed below.

It has been noted earlier that Chaudhuri had served as a child volunteer at a public meeting of the Extremist leader Aurobindo Ghose in 1908. Subsequently Ghose left the nationalist struggle and, interestingly, Chaudhuri too started doubting the movement. The latter became uncomfortable with the many acts of violence in it. For instance, militant nationalists had made an attempt to blow up the train of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. In April 1908, they tried to assassinate a British judge of Muzaffarpur though their bomb killed two British women instead.  

There was also a dacoity at Barha in Bengal to raise nationalist funds. A number of secret societies like Anushilan Samiti had sprung up. About such militant activities, historian Hirendranath Mukherjee said, “They gave us back the pride of our manhood.” (India Struggles 96) Nirad Chaudhuri, however, could not feel proud of the militancy. He looked at assassination as nothing else but murder and felt that the end did not justify the means. He felt uneasy with nationalist ideology because it appeared to condone, if not encourage, violent activities. In Chaudhuri’s words,

I discovered later that from the outset many of the organizers of the secret conspiratorial societies had contemplated a quite different method of political action — assassination, in imitation of the Russian revolutionists. But for a long time I did not realize this, and when at
last I perceived in what direction the revolutionary movement was going I lost much of my sympathy for it. . . . As the revolutionary movement tended more and more towards the method of murder and robbery I began to feel an emotional revulsion from it. In this my mother's attitude influenced me very strongly. From the very beginning she came out very decidedly against murder and dacoity. She refused to concede that the end justified the means. Her mind never succumbed to the casuistry which became all too prevalent amongst us. (The Autobiography 231)

As far as violence was concerned, Chaudhuri's discomfort was not only with the activities of Extremist nationalism. He was dismayed to find that even avowedly pacifist protests in the country could degenerate into violence. Perhaps, the first instance of this kind was seen in Delhi on 30 March 1919 where the call to protest the Rowlatt-recommended law suddenly turned violent. "This seemed to set the pattern in most other areas that responded to the call; protest was generally accompanied by violence and disorder," writes Mridula Mukherjee. (India's Struggle 182) Gandhi launched an all-India satyagraha on 6 April to protest various acts of colonial repression but, once again, the protests did not remain peaceful. 18 Satyagraha turned violent, paradoxically. Gandhi, not happy with such a turn of events, tried his best to calm the agitators in Bombay. However, the most unfortunate incidents occurred in the province of Punjab. Three Englishmen were killed, European women attacked and telegraph wires cut by anti-Rowlatt
protestors at Amritsar in April 1919. Nirad Chaudhuri could not approve of the violence and was repulsed at the deterioration of a non-violent movement into a rowdy free-for-all. Even in the city of Calcutta, which is far removed from the north-west parts of the country, he saw public transport being targetted by Indian mobs. Expressing his indignation at the breakdown of law and order in the country, Chaudhuri says:

I read the news from the Punjab and Gujarat with distress and anxiety. No outbursts of violence occurred in Calcutta but there were scenes of unruliness and disorder. To my great disgust I saw bands of street urchins throwing mud and dust at the tram-cars. This was my first experience of a form of rebellion against British rule which was to become typical of the city. (The Autobiography 374)

Chaudhuri not only witnessed the violence which took place in the name of Indian anti-colonialism, but actually got a taste of it on 17 November 1921. On that day the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, had come to India. To protest against the royal visit, the Indian National Congress and the Khilafat Conference called a general strike. However, the response to the call was community-specific, with Hindus and Muslims supporting it but not Parsis and Christians. Such polarization resulted in fierce clashes in Bombay where at least thirty six men were killed and some women molested. "The whole sequence of events left Gandhiji profoundly disturbed and worried about the likelihood of recurrence of violence once mass civil disobedience was sanctioned," writes Mridula Mukherjee. (India's
Struggle 189) In Calcutta, Nirad Chaudhuri experienced the undemocratic nature of the anti-imperial protests. Congress volunteers obstructed other Indians who wanted to go about their daily duties. Khilafat supporters moved around with whips in hand, evidently for the purpose of browbeating common commuters. When Chaudhuri was spotted cycling to work, they abused him and forced him to dismount. He narrowly escaped being roughed up by them. Giving a graphic description of the incident, he writes:

> When the crowd saw me they shouted: ‘Beat the sala (bastard or son of a bitch)’ . . . But the sprint had made me breathless, and I was compelled to go slowly. So, when I had gone only about half-a-mile further, a tall Hindustani darted from the pavement, pulled me down from the cycle, dragged me to the pavement, and said: ‘Now, go on foot!’ (Thy Hand 19)

Chaudhuri felt vindicated about his apprehensions after anti-colonial violence prompted Gandhi to ensure withdrawal of the Non Co-operation Movement. Chaudhuri had a lurking fear that there existed a violent streak, which erupted unpredictably, in the generally peaceful Indians. His fear proved to be right on 5 February 1922 when a group of peasants, Congress volunteers and Khilafat supporters burnt alive twenty two Indian policemen at the village of Chauri Chaura near Gorakhpur. Historian Shimit Amin reads that incident as “a figure of speech, a trope for all manner of untrammelled peasant violence, specifically in opposition to disciplined non-violent mass satyagrahas”. (Event, Metaphor 3)
Gandhi accepted moral responsibility for the violence and fasted for five days as expiation. Then he prevailed upon the Indian National Congress to withdraw the Non Co-operation Movement within a week. Nirad Chaudhuri, however, was not impressed with Gandhi’s response to the deplorable happenings at Chauri Chaura. He felt that Gandhi had been naive in the first place to assume that Indians were an essentially peaceful people. \(^2^0\) Chaudhuri’s logic was that Gandhi should never have expected the Non Co-operation Movement to remain non-violent. Questioning Gandhi’s knowledge of Indian masses, Chaudhuri says:

> Mahatma Gandhi’s efforts to make the masses join his movement, I feared, would rouse the aggressive side of the common people of India. Their individual behaviour and collective behaviour were quite different. Mahatma Gandhi thought that his admonitions about non-violence would be listened to. Of course, they were not and could not be. Eventually, he had to admit that he had committed a Himalayan blunder. (Thy Hand 35)

The foregoing paragraphs indicate Nirad Chaudhuri’s position vis-a-vis acts of violence committed by Indian anti-colonialists. His reactions to the violence unleashed by British colonialists have already been discussed in Section 3.3. With both these aspects in mind, what comes out clearly is Chaudhuri’s unequivocal condemnation of violent acts irrespective of the perpetrators. In this regard, he is like Gandhi who denounced such activities whether committed by colonialists or anti-colonialists. In fact, it is a bit strange that Chaudhuri does not talk much about
the Quit India Movement which saw more instances of Indian violence than the other phases of the anti-colonial struggle.

However, it may be noted that Nirad Chaudhuri's views regarding violence are diametrically opposite those of the postcolonial writer Frantz Fanon. Fanon has justified the violence by Algerian nationalists, instead of condemning it, against French colonialism. He says, "The Algerian's criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequences of his nervous system or of the characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation." (The Wretched 250)

3.4 REVULSION AGAINST COMMUNALISM

Nirad Chaudhuri's strong abhorrence of violence, as brought out in the previous section, was not the only reason for his distance from Indian anti-colonialism. There were other reasons too, the most important of them being his equally strong repulsion against the outbreak of communalism. An analysis of how Hindu-Muslim communalism shaped his reaction to Indian nationalism is provided below.

It has been illustrated in Section 3.3 how the seven-year old Chaudhuri participated in the Swadeshi Movement in whatever small way he could. He, like
others in the year 1905, boycotted foreign goods and adopted Indian ones instead. However, he realized years later that the movement suffered a communal handicap. According to historian Aditya Mukherjee, “The main drawback of the Swadeshi Movement was that it was not able to garner the support of the mass of Muslims and especially of the Muslim peasantry.” (India’s Struggle 132) In this connection, Nirad Chaudhuri remembers how Swadeshi songs invoked religious deities like Kali and Durga. 22 Such Hindu-tinged activities were, naturally, not to the liking of Muslims. Having understood why the movement alienated them, Chaudhuri writes,

When in later life I read Sir Valentine Chirol’s Indian Unrest — we had been taught to hate him and his book equally well — and compared what he had written with my own recollections, I found that he had been wholly correct in his estimate of the Swadeshi Movement, in representing it as being essentially a movement of Hindu revival. (The Autobiography 211)

Chaudhuri’s dislike for communalism was not confined only to its Hindu version. He had an equal distaste for communalism of the minorities, particularly that of Muslims. For instance, he considered the Khilafat Conference to be wholly an Islamic organization with little concern for Indian nationalism. As a party, the Khilafat drummed up support for the Khalifa [Caliph]. The religious post of Khalifa was held by the Sultan of Turkey and, as such, he was the global head of all Muslims. During the First World War, he put his weight behind the Germany-led
Axis Forces but the latter lost in the war. As a textbook example of victor's justice, the Britain-led Allies dethroned the Sultan and dismembered his Turkish Empire. The deposition of the Khalifa angered many Muslims and the Khilafat Conference in India demanded his restoration. Around the same time, the Indian National Congress was demanding the redress of Punjab’s grievances. As both the Khilafat and the Congress were cut up with Britain, for entirely different reasons though, the two organizations struck up an alliance. “But in the long run it proved harmful as it inculcated and encouraged the habit of looking at political questions from a religious point of view,” says historian Bipan Chandra. (India’s Struggle 420) Nirad Chaudhuri, too, felt that Congresspeople and Khilafatis were as disparate as chalk and cheese. To him, the alliance was little more than an unnatural coalition between a political party and a religious formation which would end up politicizing religiosity. 23 Chaudhuri was convinced that the coalition would facilitate the growth of Indian communalism and, thereby, endanger Indian anti-colonialism. Regarding the Congress-Khilafat alliance which was finally dissolved in 1923, Chaudhuri writes:

With all these indications of the extra-Indian loyalties of the Indian Muslims I could not but have anything but disapproval for the alliance which the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi had stuck up with the Khilafat Movement. I regarded it as thoroughly opportunist, and in the light of what happened afterwards it is impossible to hold any other view of it historically. It was impossible to assume that they felt very strongly about the unfair treatment of Turkey, and in any case
Gandhi knew that the Muslims were no practitioners of non-violence. I also knew that all Hindu political leaders were profoundly suspicious of Pan-Islamism and its influence on Indian Muslims. What made them support the Khilafat movement was their knowledge that at that moment the most active and virulent opposition to the British Government in India came from the Muslims. . . . The cynicism of the temporary alliance between the Hindus and the Muslims was thoroughly and disastrously exposed by the entire history of Hindu-Muslim relations between 1923, when the opportunistic alliance was dissolved, and 1947 when India was divided. By allying with the Khilafat movement the Congress had encouraged the most retrograde form of Islamic group-consciousness. (Thy Hand 38-9)

Chaudhuri had seen how Hindu and Muslim communalism undermined Indian nationalism. When he was only eight years old, communal riots had broken out during the Swadeshi Movement. The riots spread to different parts of Bengal including his district of Mymensingh. Minority communalism was led by the All India Muslim League which was founded in end-1907. One of its leaders, Viqar-ul-Mulk, had said, "The only way for the Muslims . . . is to help in the continuance of the British rule." (quoted in Gopal Indian Muslims 101) On the other hand, majority communalism was fanned by the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, formed in early-1915. The formation's leader, Lal Chand, said, "A Hindu should not only believe but make it a part and parcel of his organism, of his life and of his conduct, that he
is a Hindu first and an Indian after." (Self-Abnegation 1) Such statements, obviously, undercut the concept of Indian nationalism and anti-colonialism. Their immediate fallout was the occurrence of 112 major communal riots between 1922 and 1927, as reported by an Indian Statutory Commission in 1928. When Hindu-Muslim riots had broken out in Calcutta in 1926, Nirad Chaudhuri was living in the city. He discovered that the flashpoints of the clashes were ludicrous, although their effect was absolutely tragic. 24 In Chaudhuri's words,

At the time I left the Military accounts serious Hindu-Muslim rioting had begun in Calcutta and it went on for some time. . . . Hindu religious processions were always accompanied by musicians, and if these passed before mosques when the Muslims were praying there always was trouble. Nearly all Hindu-Muslim clashes began with such an incident. (Thy Hand 176)

Chaudhuri became skeptical about Indian nationhood when he found that communal riots were making a mockery of it. The ferocity of riots was going up over the years, increasing the emotional distance between the two largest communities of the country. On 16 August 1946, the Muslim League called for a 'Direct Action Day' to force its separatist demand on the British government. However, the so-called action was actually directed against Hindus who retaliated in equal measure. The cycle of action and reaction resulted in the slaughter of thousands of people in the city of Calcutta within a matter of days. Many more thousands lost their lives and limbs as riots spread to East Bengal, Bihar, western
United Province, Delhi, Gurgaon, Bharatpur, Alwar and Punjab. Historian Sucheta Mahajan writes, "Rivers of blood were to flow before Indian independence, tacitly accepted in early 1946, became a reality in mid 1947." (India's Struggle for Independence 492) Nirad Chaudhuri, on his part, got the feeling that Indians were really more interested in fighting among themselves than in fighting against the colonialists. Hence, he dismissed the anti-colonial movement as a big joke and accused it of overlooking the all too real fissures of Indian society. Chaudhuri's comment on the pre-independence bloodshed is merciless. He says caustically:

Political independence arrived for the Indian people on 15 August 1947. For a whole year before that they were engaged in making a red carpet for it to step on. It was dyed in the blood of hundreds of thousands of Indians who perished in the mass murders committed by the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs on one another in 1946 and 1947.

These massacres were the real prelude to the coming of independence to India, and not the bouts of futile palaver indulged in by all the parties concerned for two years before it became fact. And these massacres were bound to take place, although those who liquidated the British Empire in India failed both to anticipate them and to prevent them. (Thy Hand 804)

Chaudhuri felt that his skepticism about undivided India's nationhood was vindicated, in a sense, when the country split into two separate nations on 14
August 1947. However, the communal riots did not stop even after the sad partition of the country. The British monarch's paramountcy lapsed on 15 August but fratricidal strife continued unabated in post-colonial India and Pakistan. Lakhs of men, women and children were butchered and many more maimed for life in the Hindu-Muslim riots. Property worth thousands of crores of rupees was looted or destroyed on either side of the newly carved out India-Pakistan border. Gandhi, who was then trying to drive sense into the murderous mobs of Bengal, said, "I invoke the aid of the Almighty to take me away from this 'vale of tears' rather than make me a helpless witness of the butchery by which man becomes a savage, whether he dares to call himself a Muslim or Hindu or what not." The savagery left Nirad Chaudhuri, who was in Delhi then, dumbfounded. He saw murdered corpses on public thoroughfares. He saw people with bleeding gashes after being stabbed. He saw men breaking and looting shops. He also saw mobs trying to break into locked houses in order to occupy them. He heard from Calcutta stories of forcible drowning and other such unimaginable incidents. Searching for an appropriate word to describe the horrors, Chaudhuri writes:

These savageries pass as much in the outside world as in India under the name of communal trouble or Hindu-Muslim rioting. But these expressions have become clichés of a stale journalese, which convey no real sensation of the phenomenon they purport to describe. Nor am I able to suggest a better alternative. I have weighed nearly all the words and phrases which the murderous ferocity of man, as distinct from his warlike ferocity, has contributed to
the vocabulary of European peoples: massacre, pogrom, lynching, fusillade, noyade, St Bartholomew, Sicilian Vespers, Bloodbath of Stockholm, Bulgarian atrocities, Armenian massacres, Belsen, genocide, etc., etc., but find all of them inadequate. Their vividness has worn off. Instead of evoking horror, they would rather throw a veil of historical respectability on spectacles of mass murder, rotting corpses, gutters choked with human bodies emitting stomach-turning stench. (Thy Hand 837)

Chaudhuri was so disturbed by the barbaric pre-Partition and post-Partition riots of 1946 and 1947, respectively, that he thought any option other than Partition would have been far better for India. However, Bipan Chandra says, "There was, it can be argued, no other solution to the communal problem left, unless the national leadership was willing to see the nation plunged in a civil war when the armed forces and the police were under the control of the foreign rulers and were themselves ready to join the civil war." (India's Struggle 441) Nirad Chaudhuri, though, would differ on this point. He preferred a civil war to Partition, in case they were the only options available. Chaudhuri had two reasons, one ideological and the other numerical, for his apparently war-mongering preference. Firstly, a civil war would have been a wholesome phenomenon whereas the Partition was merely a political one. A civil war could have ushered in a meaningful revolution which Indian society needed badly. On the other hand, the Partition merely brought in a meaningless separation which India can do without. There was another reason,
perhaps a more important one than the first, for Chaudhuri preferring a civil war to Partition. It was in consonance with his abhorrence of violence. He suggested that a civil war would probably have taken a smaller toll than what the Partition actually did. His knowledge of world history told him that no civil war had been numerically as bloody as the Partition of India was. Hence, he stuck out his neck in favour of civil war and wrote:

I have always been told that there would have been a civil war in India if the partition had not been agreed to. I have replied by asking two questions: first, has any country in the world been able to establish a revolutionary regime without a civil war? Next, has any civil war known in history resulted in the death of nearly a million persons and the ruin of many millions? (Thy Hand 829)

The foregoing paragraphs demonstrate how Nirad Chaudhuri’s view of Indian nationalism was influenced by the prevalent communalism. A few significant insights into his attitude emerge from the above analysis. One of them is the fact that Chaudhuri was staunchly secular without being politically correct. He never spared, in his writings, communalists of any religion whatsoever. The way he criticized Hindus and Muslims alike for their communal words and deeds, testifies to his firm secular credentials.

However, the more important point in this context is regarding Nirad Chaudhuri’s unwavering focus on communalism. It seems that he over-
emphasized the effect of communal riots in India's nationalist movement. While nationalist leaders did not think that riots could ever derail the movement, Chaudhuri thought that internecine clashes and anti-colonial nationalism were fundamentally incompatible. They were two contradictory pulls which could not run on parallel tracks. He felt that the sickening recurrence of large-scale riots rendered the premise of nationalism hollow. Indeed, it is a tragedy that the independence struggle saw staunch nationalists like Mohammed Ali Jinnah turning into hardcore communalists. Regarding this controversy, Bipan Chandra says, "The contradictory nature of the reality of 15 August 1947 continues to intrigue historians and torment people on both sides of the border to this day." (India's Struggle 487)

It seems that Nirad Chaudhuri's real problem lay in his hyper-sensitivity to the communal savagery in India at the time of Independence. He was too numbed by the inhumanity he saw all around to enjoy the new found freedom. For him, celebrating Independence was tantamount to forgetting Partition. That would be an act of utter selfishness on the part of an Indian who just happened to survive the uncountable murders, rapes and abductions taking place then. As the toll in communal riots was way higher than that in government repression, Chaudhuri argued that Indians suffered more because of their compatriots than because of colonialists. That is why he kept himself away from the revelry on 15 August 1947. Incidentally, even Gandhi did not join those celebrations.
3.6 HYPOCRISY, CORRUPTION AND ARROGANCE

Apart from the nationalist movement's violence and communalism, which have been analyzed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 above, there were other factors which Nirad Chaudhuri disliked. For instance, he frequently found the movement to be hypocritical and its leaders to be venal. This section investigates his allegations against Indian nationalism and how they emboldened his anti-nationalist stance.

In recognition of his unsparing criticism of whatever he found hypocritical in the country, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar has called Nirad Chaudhuri "the Geiger counter looking for hidden obliquities of self-deception." (Indian Writing 591) In fact, it is ironical that Chaudhuri's loathing of hypocrisy in such an intense way contributed towards his derision of nationalism. One of the occasions which Chaudhuri found hypocritical was Indians joining the colonial army in millions while India's anti-colonial struggle was on. Not only did it happen during World War I when the Indian National Congress supported the colonialists, it also happened during World War II when the Congress opposed Britain. Despite the political opposition, there was so huge a popular participation that the strength of the Royal Indian Army grew from 1.75 lakh during peace time to 20 lakhs during the Second World War. Nirad Chaudhuri felt that this dichotomy between the political and the popular perspectives was hypocritical. While the Congress eschewed co-operation
with the colonial forces on ideological grounds, the common people embraced the Indian Army for monetary considerations. Alleging that Indians were trying to eat the cake and have it too, Chaudhuri writes:

The Indian people gained on all counts, because they did not hesitate for a single moment to give all the practical co-operation they could to the British war efforts in India for the sake of gaining money. In addition, they had the emotional satisfaction of seeing their British rulers put in the wrong and being provided with more reason to hate them. . . . In concrete terms, the co-operation was spectacular and far exceeded what Britain had got in the First World War. (Thy Hand
559)

Another aspect of India's national movement which Chaudhuri found hypocritical was the famous Indian National Army or I.N.A. It had been formed by one General Mohan Singh who had quit the defeated Indian Army contingent in Malaya and sought the help of the victorious Imperial Japanese Army instead. In response, Japan gave him thousands of Indian prisoners of war who had fought for the British earlier but were captured by the Japanese. The I.N.A., comprised mainly of such men, was set up as an anti-British force. When the Japanese Army attacked Imphal on the Indo-Burma front, probably to pre-empt any British effort to recapture Burma, one battalion of the I.N.A. accompanied them. However, the Japanese attack was foiled by the British and the I.N.A. men surrendered to the latter. 28 “Interestingly, the question of the right or wrong of the INA men's action
was never debated," writes historian Sucheta Mahajan. (India’s Struggle 478) Nirad Chaudhuri is of the opinion that the debate about the INA was hushed up by India’s anti-colonial movement because it was an inconvenient one. He thought of the INA as merely an opportunistic formation which switched sides in favour of whoever had the upper hand at a particular point of time. He also noted that the specific role of the INA in the Japanese offensive was insignificant. Launching a scathing criticism of the organization, Chaudhuri writes:

It should be kept in mind that the Indian Army was an army of volunteers and not conscripted. The men had joined that army out of free will, either for money or position, and often both, and could not take the plea of nationalism in justification of their later conduct. During the agitation in favour of the INA there was a delivery of clamorous and drenching rhetoric about their patriotism by Indians of the highest positions, including Gandhi and Nehru. But the undeniable facts about this patriotism were that it did not prevent these Indians from joining the British Indian army whose primary purpose was to perpetuate British rule in India; it did not withstand the temptation of worldly advantages offered by the British; . . . it only came into play when the Japanese were top dogs and when it was convenient to join them. I would add that people who could call these men patriotic were either hypocrites or wholly devoid of moral consciousness, having been robbed of their judgement by a rancorous hatred of the British. (Thy Hand 784)
Chaudhuri felt that not only were the Indian masses hypocritical, even the leaders were so at times. He was strongly critical of Congress leader Vallabhbhai Patel during a naval mutiny in 1946. On 18 February that year, a large number of Indian sailors of a Royal Indian Navy ship struck work at Bombay. Their immediate demands had more to do with their service issues than with national ones. Nevertheless, it gained popular sympathy as an anti-colonial effort and the Indian National Congress lent it moral support. In the resulting upsurge, people attacked symbols of colonial rule like police and railway stations in Bombay and Calcutta. Some Europeans were also attacked at random. Thereafter, the British government arranged for armed forces to re-occupy that striking ship and Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that Royal Navy ships would encircle it. These threats, surprisingly, induced the Congress to climb down from its earlier supportive stand. Vallabhbhai Patel, who had initially encouraged the rebellious Indian sailors, wrote to Nehru, “The overpowering force of both naval and military personnel gathered here is so strong that they can be exterminated altogether and they have been also threatened with such a contingency.” (Jawaharlal Nehru Correspondence Part I) Patel’s sudden developing of cold feet is seen by Nirad Chaudhuri as an instance of the Congress party’s opportunism. Accusing Patel of trying to be all things to all people, Chaudhuri writes:

The Congress was loud in its support of the mutiny, and its strong man Patel himself went to Bombay to direct it. He was very strident at first, but when one day the crew were seen to be raising steam and
manning the action stations and Admiral Godfrey, who commanded the Indian Navy, sent Mosquito bombers with orders to sink it if the sailors tried to put out to sea, he at once advised them to surrender. He was one of the Congressmen who had specialized in playing the nationalist firebrand or the wise statesman, a combination of Garibaldi and Cavour, according to circumstances. (Thy Hand 829)

Apart from hypocrisy, the electoral malpractices which many Congressmen indulged in were a reason for Nirad Chaudhuri’s disaffection with the movement. He was aghast to find that the nationalist ideologues who had a strong opposition to colonial rule did not have an equally strong opposition to self-serving manipulation. However, this was one of his personal discoveries while working as a part-time private secretary to the President of the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, Sarat Chandra Bose. Although Bose was an honest man, his followers were actively involved in doctoring electoral rolls so as to include bogus names. Such inflated lists were prepared in order to overwhelm eligible voters and, thereby, grab a verdict in one’s favour. As Chaudhuri says:

At that time Mahatma Gandhi was denouncing bogus electoral rolls. The Congress Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation only felt amused by this naiveté, and one day I heard a characteristic comment on it. Sarat Babu was sitting at his desk, with some Councillors before him. I was by his side. A young and very smart Councillor exclaimed: ‘What is this virtuous rampage over false
electoral rolls? All of us have them. I have them. We would not be elected without them.' There was no display of virtuous indignation at this speech. Even Frederick the Great denounced Machiavellism. Sarat Babu, who was never qualified to be any kind of a Machiavellian, took the Machiavellism of his followers without any surprise, far less protest. (Thy Hand 487-88)

Still another reason for Nirad Chaudhuri being put off by India's nationalist movement was the hauteur of its middle-rung leaders, having come in close proximity with them at his job with Sarat Bose. When the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress met in Calcutta, Chaudhuri noticed how many Congressmen and women suffered from a sense of acute self-importance. The only honourable exception was, to Chaudhuri's mind, Babu Rajendra Prasad who later became the first President of India. In stark contrast to Prasad, were Gandhi's principal private secretary Mahadev Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel's daughter Mani Ben. Chaudhuri found these middle-level managers to be particularly arrogant. They were unfailingly polite to those Indians who were either rich or famous, like industrialists and film stars. The big shots were allowed access to Gandhi, even without prior appointments. However, the common man had restricted entry and, generally, had to do with seeing him from a distance. Although Gandhi was visibly benign, his closest companions like Desai and Mani Ben were evidently snobbish. Their supercilious behaviour led Chaudhuri to doubt the concern of the average nationalist leader for the common man. In his words:
These men made up more than fully for what Gandhi lacked in the way of arrogance in looks and behaviour. I had never before seen such impassive hardness of countenance, nor such cold hauteur on the faces of men. They did not speak spontaneously to anyone who did not belong to the order of worldly power and position. If they were compelled to listen to ordinary persons, they did not look them in the face, but kept their eyes either turned away or lowered, and then answered in grave and slow speech. I never saw them smile or look relaxed. (Thy Hand 439)

Chaudhuri felt that India's anti-colonial movement was just that — a movement against colonialists and nothing else. His allegation is that even if the leaders had some idea of what would replace colonialism, that idea was hardly known to common Indians. In other words, the national movement was basically a negative one with little clarity about the intended alternative to British rule. Most Indians seemed to assume that all their problems would simply vanish into thin air once the British disappeared. According to Nirad Chaudhuri, such immature expectations ensured that the movement remained only a 'freedom struggle', not a comprehensive revolution. In his words:  

Before him [Gandhi] no Indian political leader had seen the aim of ending British rule apart from the greater task of rebuilding the entire fabric of Indian life, which they considered as the main duty before them. The triumph of negation made it inevitable that if the political
change the new leaders were trying to bring about ever took place, it would be radically different from all the great revolutions of the past. I have read about three of them, viz. the American, the French, and the Meiji in Japan. I have also passed through and read about all the revolutions of our age, viz. the young Turk, the Chinese, the Russian, and the new Turkish led by Kemal. In every case, those who carried out these revolutions knew what they were going to put in place of the regimes they were going to destroy. There were full-fledged ideologies as well as partly worked-out programmes. In the Indian nationalist movement there was not only a total absence of positive and constructive ideas, but even of thinking. (Thy Hand 31)

Chaudhuri was also rattled by the inconsistencies, as he saw them, of the anti-colonial movement. When the movement’s top-rung leaders were arrested and sentenced, Chaudhuri expected Indians to explode in protest. However, that did not happen always. At times, there was not even a murmur when some of the front-ranking leaders were imprisoned by the colonial government. Gandhi, for instance, had been arrested on 13 March 1922 on charges of sedition and subsequently sentenced to six years of imprisonment. Nevertheless, no protest was seen in any part of the country against his incarceration. 34 Noting this lack of an appropriate reaction, historian Bipan Chandra writes, “There arose the danger of the movement lapsing into passivity”. (India’s Struggle 235) The general indifference to the imprisonment of the leaders surprised Nirad Chaudhuri. It made
him wonder whether the anti-colonial struggle really represented the country's people. He felt that the masses would not have been so unconcerned about those developments, had they been really interested in anti-colonialism. In Chaudhuri's words:

The sentence of imprisonment, too, produced no excitement. It was received with complete apathy. However strange all this might seem to outsiders, those who knew the psychology of the Indian masses and their pattern of behaviour, would not have been surprised, although they might not have been able to predict any particular reaction, because one of the constants of the behaviour was its unpredictability. (Thy Hand 26)

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to take stock of the major and minor reasons for Nirad Chaudhuri's anti-nationalistic outlook. For one, he was unhappy with the violence in the nationalist movement. He certainly did not think that the movement was a peaceful one, as was widely believed. He found that not only did Extremist activities resort to random violence, even the Pacifist tactics became violent at times. The second reason for Chaudhuri's disenchantment was communalism, both majoritarian and minoritarian. He thought that it questioned the very basis of Indian nationalism. As many more thousands died in communal riots than in colonial repression, he could not think of the latter as the worse evil of the two. Chaudhuri refused to forget the barbarism of the pre- and post-Independence riots which were directly caused by Indian masses.
A third reason for Nirad Chaudhuri to distrust the country's anti-colonial movement was the corruption of its footsoldiers. Having seen from close quarters the corrupt practices of pre-Independence politicians, he understood that the same people would continue in the post-Independence scenario as well. Therefore, he could not realistically hope that India would have a better future in post-colonial times. Chaudhuri was also disappointed by the air of arrogance which many Congresspeople wore about themselves. They were none too keen to be humble and polite with ordinary Indians, whom they claimed to represent.

What disturbed Nirad Chaudhuri no end was the nihilism that he perceived in the Indian movement. He understood that it would not result in a full-fledged revolution because the people were not clear about their post-colonial strategy. In fact, the people were often indifferent to the arrest and prosecution of the national leaders. The movement rarely appeared to Chaudhuri as a cohesive one. As the personal secretary to the President of the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, he was privy to the communication between some of the top-level leaders of the Indian National Congress. He found many of them, including Gandhi and Bose, to be involved in infighting and conspiring against one another. All these factors put together, convinced Chaudhuri that the nationalist movement was not worth participating in.

With pro-colonialism gradually gaining sway over him, Nirad Chaudhuri
formed a number of theories about Indian civilization. He felt that a mere transfer of power would not cure India's sickness because he had seen how power had corrupted Indian politicians. Power, he argued, in the hands of Indians would mean political independence but not social and economic liberty. Chaudhuri's prescription for attaining socio-economic freedom was a wholesome revolution, if required through a civil war. He believed that till the time India went through a social revolution, her citizens would not be truly free. Hence, he dismissed the anti-colonial movement as an insignificant half-step. It is curious that in his wish for a revolution, Chaudhuri was echoing the contemporary refrain of the Communist Part of India which had called India's independence a false achievement. In Chaudhuri's words:

I had come to the conclusion that India stood in need of a revolution, covering all the aspects of human life — political, economic, social — which had to be more far-reaching and radical than the French Revolution, the Meiji Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the two Turkish Revolutions. Without that no new life was to arise in India. Yet I saw that it was not likely to come from an application of the policy of transfer of power to Indian hands. That was why I rejected all the ideas and policies which were on the tapis.

... Behind this was a deeper disbelief — distrust of my own class, i.e. the anglicized upper middle class. I had found its members weak in character, mediocre in intellectual ability, and totally lacking in idealism and public spirit. Their sole preoccupation was promotion of
their individual and class interest, and I saw that in the event of British rule coming to an end in India these men would be the real heirs of the British. (Thy Hand 395)

Despite Nirad Chaudhuri’s dissociation from the nationalist movement, it needs to be remembered that he was once associated with it in the emotional sense. Thereafter, his attitude towards the movement underwent a definite and irreversible change. However, such change of heart was not unheard of in those turbulent times. Aurobindo Ghose, as has been mentioned in Section 3.3 above, had switched over from militant nationalism to philosophical spiritualism. Even Gandhi was far from euphoric after the transfer of power from the British colonialists to Indian and Pakistani leadership at Independence.
NOTES

1 There are surprising similarities between Sake Dean Mahomet and Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri. Both were born in the province of Bengal, both went to Delhi in the course of their jobs, both published pro-colonial autobiographies in Britain and eventually both settled in western Europe.

2 In his pro-colonial spirit, Naoroji said, "Let us speak out like men and proclaim that we are loyal to the backbone; that we understand the benefits English rule has conferred upon us; that we thoroughly appreciate the education that has been given to us, the new light which has been poured upon us, turning us from darkness into light and teaching us the new lesson that kings are made for the people, not people for their kings; and this new lesson we have learned amidst the darkness of Asiatic despotism only by the light of free English civilisation."

3 This satire is found in Bankim's Muchiram Guder Jibon Charit [The Life Story of Muchiram Gud].

4 The novel's hero, Gora, did not know of his Irish parentage until his adulthood.

5 In January 1940, Nehru wrote, "I always feel that I can be of more use to India outside India. The feeling that I do not quite fit in here, pursues and depresses me."

6 Munshi, although a member of the Indian National Congress, was so pro-colonial in the government that Nehru called him "a police officer." (Gopal 230)

7 Nationalist historians like Bisheshwar Prasad and Amales Tripathi believe that the Indian movement was attributable mainly to the spirit of nationalism in the
country.

8 Anil Seal called the Indian struggle against British imperialism "a Dassehra duel between two hollow statues, locked in motiveless and simulated combat." (The Emergence of Indian Nationalism 351)

9 About subaltern history, Bill Ashcroft et al write, "Such historiography suggested that the development of a nationalist consciousness was an exclusively elite achievement either of colonial administrators, policy or culture, or of elite Indian personalities, institutions or ideas." (Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies 217)

10 Regarding the aura surrounding the events of 1857, Chaudhuri writes, "The Swadeshi movement also began a fantastic glorification of the Mutiny, which finally created the legend that it was the precursor of the nationalist movement of this century and the first war of Indian independence." (The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian 400)

11 The undivided province of Bengal alone had approximately a quarter of British India's population.

12 The Indian National Congress had been split by the two factions in 1907.

13 The so-called Rowlatt Act was legislated in 1919.

14 The army commander, Brigadier-General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer, ceased firing only when his troops ran out of ammunition.

15 Gandhi's march began at Sabarmati village on the banks of River Narmada on 11 March 1930 and ended at the village of Dandi on the banks of the Arabian Sea on 6 April the same year.

16 Nevertheless, Chaudhuri was of the opinion that acts of colonial repression paled
into insignificance when compared to the acts of communal brutality.

17 Aurobindo Ghose was charged as one of the conspirators in this case but was later acquitted.

18 The word satyagraha is a synthesis of the Sanskrit words satya (truth) and agraha (insistence).

19 Gandhi had to fast for three days before the communal disturbances abated.

20 Chaudhuri had a premonition that the Non Co-operation Movement would not be peaceful, "I always had a profound distrust of indisciplined mass movements." (Thy Hand 34)

21 Sartre introduced Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as a justification of violence.

22 Alleging a pro-Hindu bias in the nationalist movement, Chaudhuri says, "Our messianic faith in the future of our country was filled out with a definite Hindu content." (The Autobiography 211)

23 Chaudhuri was so skeptical about the Congress-Khilafat alliance that he says, "The only thing which was sincere in this Hindu-Muslim entente was the hatred of British rule". (Thy Hand 38)

24 Chaudhuri calls it the "music-before-mosque" problem. (Thy Hand 176)

25 Chaudhuri was so disturbed by the barbarity of human beings upon one another that he wished he had been an animal instead. (Thy Hand 855)

26 Historian Bipan Chandra writes, "Despite their commitment to secularism, despite Gandhiji's constant emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity and his willingness to stake his life for its promotion, and despite Nehru's brilliant analysis of the
socio-economic roots of communalism, the Indian nationalists failed to wage a
mass ideological-political struggle against all forms of communalism on the basis
of patient and scientific exposure of its ideological content, socio-economic roots,
and political consequences." (India's Struggle 442)

27 Secularists, unlike Chaudhuri, sometimes fall victim to political correctness.

28 On 15 August 1947, Gandhi was in Calcutta's Beliaghata area praying for an end
to the communal carnage.

29 The INA dream was over in 1945 when the British routed the Japanese in north-
eastern India.

30 The warship's name was His Majesty's Indian Ship Talwar.

31 Chaudhuri exposes the myth that electoral manipulation and financial corruption
are post-Independence phenomena in India.

32 On the hauteur of Gandhi's secretariat, Chaudhuri says, "Proximity to power
genenders that sort of attitude and behavior, and in any case those who graft
themselves on personalities with primary power and wish to acquire derivative,
secondary power, are bound to give this kind of exhibition." (Thy Hand 439)

33 Present-day intellectuals like Dr. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, President of the Center
for Policy Research (New Delhi) have also rued the lack of a substantial
revolution in India.

34 The then Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, Lord Rawlinson, had written,
"Now we have arrested Gandhi and looked for no end of trouble, and, lo! the
arrest has caused no trouble at all."

35 Chaudhuri had even contemplated writing a full-length book titled The Real
Indian Revolution in which he would say: "The needed Indian revolution could come only from a collaboration between those Indians who had still some idealism left in them and elements in Britain who would be enlightened enough to see the need for a revolution in India and offer their experience and ability in the political field to us." (Thy Hand 396)