Chapter I

Introduction
Nirad C. Chaudhuri was born on November 23, 1897 in Kishorganj, a small town in erstwhile East-Bengal [now Bangladesh] into a middle class Bengali family. The second of eight children of Upendra Narayan Chaudhuri and Susheela Sundari Chaudhurani, Nirad began his education at home in a primary school. In 1910 the family moved to Calcutta to settle. In 1914 he passed his matriculation examination and in 1918 distinguished himself securing a first in his B.A. (Honours) examination in History from Scottish Church College under Calcutta University. He, however, failed in his M.A. examination in 1920 seemingly due to a case of nerves and gave up his formal studies. He was married to Amiya Dhar, also an author, in 1932 and between 1934 and 1939 the couple had three sons.

From 1921 to 1941 he remained in Calcutta, surviving long periods of unemployment, penury, contumely, despondency, and drifting from job to job. But during this period of stress, he engaged himself in literary polemics and began to earn fame as a literary journalist writing both in Bengali and in English. In 1942 he migrated to Delhi and was appointed as a broadcaster for All India Radio. During the Second World War, he served as a military analyst in English on the overseas service of the Radio. He retired from his job in 1952 and continued to make his living by writing. In 1966 he was awarded the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize.
Chaudhuri left India and emigrated to Oxford in 1970 and spent there the rest of his life. He went on to continue his writing. In 1990 the Oxford University conferred an honorary doctorate on him. Again in 1992 the Queen of England accorded an honorary CBE (Commander of the British Empire) to Dr. Chaudhuri. The award recognizes the outstanding services he has rendered to British national life as a writer and journalist focusing on British relationship with India. At last on August 01, 1999 he passed away in Oxford and thereby ended his long, celebrated literary marathon, which spans a whole century and two continents.

Throughout his life, Chaudhuri continued to read widely and intensively, remained determined on a vocation of authorship, and devoted himself to the creative calling. Chetan Karnani agrees: “Nirad C. Chaudhuri is one of those few pure intellectuals who forgo the safety of a regular salary and dedicate themselves entirely to the pursuit of learning. With a rare courage of conviction Mr Chaudhuri has made intellectual writing his full-time vocation” (1968:76). As to the nature and extent of his vocation, Edward Shils says: “His vocation... was to understand the world, to appreciate the great and beautiful things in it, and to write into clear and concise English exactly what he saw with his own eyes and with his mind’s eye and what he thought and appreciated – and, in so doing, to live a life in accordance with his inner necessities” (1988:553).

Chaudhuri, the celebrated centenarian author, is universally hailed as one of the most original thinkers of the twentieth century. He is, at the same time, the most controversial writer of Indian Diaspora. Arguably the most provocative English prose writer of the
post-Independence period in India, his name goes quite equally with that of what we today call Indian Writing in English.

Indian Writing in English began at the end of the 18th century and developed more strongly and characteristically during the 19th century. In M.K. Naik's words:

Indian English literature began as an interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India. As a result of this encounter, as F.W. Bain puts it, 'India, a withered trunk ... suddenly shot out with foreign foliage.' One form this foliage took was that of original writing in English by Indians... (1982: 1)

There has been a remarkable continuity of aims and procedures in Indian writing in English during the 19th and 20th centuries. Since Macaulay’s ‘Minute’ in 1835, English displacing Persian as the official language of the government, has been the essential medium of expression of the educated Indians, journalists, and also the medium of instruction of higher education. As far as the tradition is concerned, H. M. Williams says: “Raja Rammohan Roy is the father of Indian literature in English. As propagandist, reformer, thinker, master of written word, his influence extends through the Dutts [Aru Dutt and Taru Dutt], Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and on to Sri Aurobindo Ghose, Gandhi, Nehru and Nirad Chaudhuri” (1987: 1). Although “V. S. Naipaul pointed out in 1964 that Indian literature in English had ceased to exist.” (Sturrock, 1997:204), Mulk Raj Anand asserts: “I believe that Indian-English writing has come to stay as a literature of India, because it is based on Indian-English language of the most vital character, like Irish
Srinivasa Iyengar says: “Indians writing in English have attempted all the diverse forms or literature” (Santhanam, 1969:681). Chaudhuri has emerged as a writer of the non-fiction genre. A critic like Walsh thinks: “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” (1990:1-2) and hence he is unique in this respect.

In other words, as in England with Carlyle, Mill and Ruskin, so in India with Rammohan Roy, Vivekananda, Tagore, and Aurobindo Ghose, this line continues with Chaudhuri. He is a professional writer of considerable accomplishment. As an autobiographer, he has found his widest public and as a scholar with bold and idiosyncratic theories on race and religion, he has stimulated much controversy. He projects in his life and work, a strange product of the Indo-British cultural encounter, critiquing both the cultures from personal angle and in the historical contexts. He holds provocative views about the British rule over India, Hinduism, English people and culture, and the decline of India and the West. Many of his theories have been shot down in flames. While his fame as a writer rises to a dizzy height of eminence, he remains controversial throughout his life as a pedantic scholar, a self-opinionated critic, a dauntless iconoclast, a veteran polemicist, and an unorthodox cultural historian by all of which qualities, his treatment of England and India has been substantiated. Ian Jack rightly remarks: “Increasingly Chaudhuri found himself isolated
(sometimes mocked) by the role he had created for himself -- a self-confessed ‘controversialist’ who despised the new India and zealously pursued European tastes (wine, porcelain, tweed jackets) which he could hardly afford” (Dasgupta, 1997:50). He is still an enigma to a wider reading public, known for his strong and contentious views on life and lifestyles that can be defied but cannot be denied or ignored. In Chetan Kamani’s words: “However one may disagree with what Chaudhuri says, one cannot but admire the way he says it. He is the most polished craftsman among the Indian writers in English.... He commands admiration even when he causes irritation” (1968:81). After his death, Times of London remarks: “His history is perverse but provokingly entertaining” (Majumdar, 2000:90).

One obvious reason why Nirad Chaudhuri is a controversial writer especially in his homeland India, seems to be stemming from his attitude to England, which arrests the attention of most of his critics and makes him a curious subject of debate over the years. This is primarily initiated by the publication of his first book *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) which is dedicated “to the memory of the British Empire in India”, where he makes an overt recognition that “all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the same British rule” (Chaudhuri, 1951:V). As to the reaction of the Indians to the dedication, Kushwant Singh says: “the wogs took the bait and having only read the dedication sent up a howl of protest...” (Dasgupta, 1997:28). The book won him wide critical acclaim as well as the disfavour of his countrymen for whom the dedication was enough to brand him as
persona non grata or a 'known un-Indian' or an Anglophile. Subhash Chandra Sarker says: “He was denounced on such a wide scale of being anti-Indian as to make his name anathema to any truly patriotic Indian” (1991:319).

No wonder that Chaudhuri, right after the publication of the *Autobiography*, turned into an outsider in his own society. This process had actually started earlier. His relations with his colleagues had been weakened by his parade of knowledge and his deliberate disclosure of their mistakes. His disapproval of socialism and communism placed him outside the preponderant block of Indian intellectuals in the 1930s. On the contrary, his criticism of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress in the years before Independence separated him from the side of Indian opinion. To quote Shils: “His liberal nationalism and his critical attitude towards Ghandhism, socialism and communism, fascism and nazism would have stirred the resentment of his colleagues against him. He would also have by this time been thrust into the position of a reactionary by the Marxists who were more numerous among intellectuals in Calcutta” (1988:570). The most important factor in his isolation from the Indian intellectuals was his appreciation of the benefits brought to India by the British Raj. He considers that the finest period of modern Indian history is the achievement of Indian liberal and conservative reformers, who wished to improve their social and religious life by imbibing the Western, especially British liberal and humanitarian thoughts and ideas. The intellectuals of India had consistently been remaining hostile to Chaudhuri for his imperialistic attitudes and trenchant and sardonic style. Their anger
culminated in fury after the publication of his *Autobiography*. Though he acquired a reputation in England and America, in India he became an object of raucous hatred and vehement contempt. His attitude to England, English people, and their culture is still a hotly debated issue and one of the most vital aspects of Chaudhuri studies.

As far as the topic of this research is concerned, it attempts a critical inquiry into Chaudhuri’s attitude to and treatment of England in a wider context and broader perspective. In other words, it aims at finding out the true nature of his attitude and approach to England, Europe, and the West as a whole. The intention here is to explore the extent and nature of his knowledge of England as evidenced by his own writings and reflected in the writings of others on him, to find out what he knew about the people, history, culture, and literature of England, and to examine in the light of the facts discovered his total view of England. The question of his attitude towards England and the question of his knowledge of England are two interconnected but different issues on both of which, it may be possible to throw some new light by analyzing what he has said about or written on England.

In this respect, we need to have an overview of his total output along with the major works done on him. A scholarly writer, Chaudhuri earned international fame mostly as an English writer, nevertheless, he has written a handful of autobiographical and critical books in Bengali too. Here is an overview of his *œuvres*.

Chaudhuri took to writing during his Calcutta days. His first literary effort *Defence of India* or *Nationalization of Indian Army* (1935) is a noted study of the military organization in British India.
This brief monograph of 73 pages is carefully argued and deals with issues like the character, spirit, and quality of the colonial Indian army, the unjust recruitment policy and its harmful effects, the need of Indianization and the mode of achieving it. M. K. Naik says: “His argument in “Defence of India” clearly shows Chaudhuri’s mastery of the subject in all its ramifications. He knows as much about the Indian military tradition through the ages as about the theory and practice of modern Western military science…” (1984:104). In May 1947 while he was in Delhi, he began writing his first book, The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian and managed to get it published in England in 1951. He made his entry into the realm of creative literature with the publication of his Autobiography, a memoir of his childhood in colonial India, which includes lively descriptions of Indian lifestyle and culture along with Indo-British encounter. As Chaudhuri himself says about the subject matter of the book: “This book describes the conditions in which an Indian [Chaudhuri himself] grew to manhood in the early decades of the century [20th century]” (1951:IX). It is not only his most characteristic and best book, but also contains all the basic ideas that have shaped his highly individualistic world-view. It is an unabashedly egotistic work and perhaps the greatest single work produced by the clash of British and Indian civilizations. It is a self portrait of the product of a tortured and assertive spirit. The Autobiography in William Walsh’s words: “is one of the finest examples of this genre to appear in English in this century, and the most significant single discursive work to be generated by the love and hate of India-British relationships” (Mukherjee, 1977:133). R.
C. P. Sinha agrees: "...it tells the unique story of a man whose personality has been shaped by the clash between two cultures and civilizations" (1978:71).

He makes an immensely erudite analysis of his own attitudes against the background of the Hindu ethos. Here he not only tells his life story but also projects his inner conflicts as an Indian and correlates them to the conflict of the whole nation. This aspect of the autobiography compares favourably with Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography*. All the three autobiographies deal with the personal and the national in such a way that one merges with the other.

*The Autobiography* offers not only the life of an individual but also the biography of a culture seen through the individual's point of view. In this book is so vividly pictured the history of a nation by means of the life history of an individual that it rises to the point of becoming 'more a national than a personal history'. Though the book earned Chaudhuri notoriety at home, it made him famous abroad, and he was invited to visit England in 1955 by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

*A Passage to England* (1959), Chaudhuri's second major publication is a vivid account of his delightful voyage of discovery during a five-week trip to England. It is a record of the range and intensity of the experiences, Chaudhuri went through at the age of fifty-seven. It is a paean to what he calls "Timeless England". An informal reading may consider this book as a travelogue like Dom Moraes’s *Gone Away*, Naipaul’s *An Area of Darkness*, and Ved Mehta's *Portrait of India*. But it is something more than a
travelogue, because Chaudhuri during his visit to England was trying to catch the reality of his conception of "Timeless England." Dilip Chitre observes: "A Passage to England has all the qualities of a devout and faithful pilgrim's joy in walking over sacred land: the topography of this land is highlighted by emotional involvement" (1969: 45). It is an unusual response to a country known only till then in literature. It is a graceful universal travel book. Its main attraction lies in its being an Indian version of the sensibility of recognition seen in the autobiographical studies of Henry James, by which something known in literature is perceived in life.

Chaudhuri's third book *The Continent of Circe, Being an Essay on the Peoples of India* (1965) is a highly idiosyncratic view of Indian history and civilization and a characteristically erudite and scornful account of Hindu culture. He explains that the main purpose of this book is to describe the peoples of India in their natural groupings, both ethnic and cultural, and analyze their collective personality in the light of the historical evolution. This book is the result of a lifetime's effort to understand the nature of things Indian. It describes the human situation in India after the Independence. Applying historical methods, the author discovers a continuing, dynamic, and even explosive process in which history and geography have worked to create dissimilar communities and endless conflicts. The human groups discussed here, are the Aboriginals, Hindus with their Anglicized variety, Muslims, Eurasians, and Indian Christians. The main feature of the book is the imaginative interpretation of the Hindu personality based on original sources. The author puts forward the revolutionary thesis that the
Hindus are really Europeans in India, corrupted and denatured by the
tropical environment. The geographical setting of the country exerts,
as Chaudhuri thinks, baleful influences on the incoming peoples.
This is the reason why he has called India the continent of Circe.
Here he appears as a social analyst evolving a theory of Indian
development, which provided him with a casual explanation of the
failures of Indian society.

Chaudhuri's next two books, *The Intellectual in India* (1967)
and *To Live or Not to Live* (1970) are essentially minor works and
were published in India. In *The Intellectual in India*, he is primarily
cconcerned with the contemporary intellectual climate in India.

His approach to the problems of the intellectual in India is
historical. "He therefore presents the antilogy of the disease and its
diagnosis first and then suggests how best the Indian intellectual can
recover from the malady" (1973:97) comments C. Paul Verghese.
There are three intellectual traditions— the Hindu, the Muslim, and
the modern. In his historical survey of the intellectual traditions in
India, Chaudhuri emphasizes the reformist zeal of modern Hindu
intellectuals, the traditionalism of their Muslim counterparts, and the
derivative and imitative element in the thought of the intellectuals of
the Modern Indian Renaissance.

Chaudhuri's exploration of Indian society and culture was
carried out further in *To Live or Not to Live* (1970) and *Culture in
the Vanity Bag* (1976). "The aim of this small informal, and
discursive book" [*To Live or Not to Live*] says Chaudhuri, "is to
consider how we can have a happy social and family life under the
conditions to which we are born in this country" (1970:7). The book
is a scathing criticism of life in modern India. It is divided into two parts. The first part deals with social life and the second with family life. The author here tends to examine social and family norms, man-woman relationship, and maternal fidelity. With a view to making life worth living, he analyses the basic facets of social and family life. Through a pungent and hard-hitting criticism he lambastes the inadequacy of Indian way of living, its system of values, marriage and morals, family and social life, and everything associated with the age-old wisdom and Indian tradition. The book makes a further attempt to prompt the readers to ponder and reconsider the values and ideals they have hitherto lived by. To Live or not to Live aims at offering the Indians advice on how to live happily in their country.

Culture in the Vanity Bag deals with Chaudhuri's sartorial vision resulting from his study on Indian clothing through ages. Here he displays so serious engagement with thoughts about Indian clothing and the philosophy underlying them that he seems to have no equal in this respect. He has proved himself a keen observer of life around him and evolved an interesting sartorial philosophy about the Indians. He has been able to show the connection between Indian clothing and Indian history. He gives a taxonomical picture of the history of evolution of clothing in India.

Although these two books were minor and could not bring him fame, the reputation he had already built through his first three books, that of a man of original views, formidable learning, and many-sided interests, led him to an invitation from the family of the famous Indologist, Max Muller to write a biography of him. Since all of Muller's papers are in the Bodleian Library, Chaudhuri had to
go to Oxford in 1970. He wrote *Scholar Extraordinary* (1974), the biography of Max Muller, the German scholar, who made a remarkable contribution to the study of Sanskrit literature. This is Chaudhuri's finest attempt at biography, which is thoroughly researched, and where his characteristic scholarship is unmistakably present.

It is a curious work, because there is obviously a yawning gap between the biographer's and his subject's attitude to Hindu culture. Even then, Muller's qualities are perfectly matched by his biographer. Chaudhuri's mastery of English style, his profound appreciation of the aspirations, the strivings and sufferings of the scholar's life make this a biography of rare quality and interest. It is a result of over four years of meticulous research at Oxford, England.

Chaudhuri's book entitled *Clive of India*, a biography of Robert Clive, the founder of the British Empire in India, was published in 1975. It is an analysis of the personality and achievement of Robert Clive with special reference to his association with India. Robert Clive was a very significant British figure in the history of British India. Most of his biographies are written in the light of the subsequent history of Empire, but in this book, Chaudhuri has deliberately abandoned the convention. This study of Clive's strange and elusive temperament has a special authority. It derives from his unique insight into the bizarre society, which was shaped and influenced by Clive on one hand and shaped and influenced him on the other. The author maintains that no previous biographer or historian has assembled the facts of Clive's extraordinary achievement in an objective way, free of didactic
assumptions. It is in recognition of this achievement that Chaudhuri has written this thought provoking essay of historical and psychological importance. This book is perhaps the most objective of his works.

Another commissioned work, *Hinduism, A Religion to Live By* (1979) is an attempt to give a description and interpretation of the religion of the Hindus as practised and experienced by them. A careful analysis of the book reveals the testimony to the authenticity of the author's explanation. Rejecting familiar assumptions about early Hinduism, he provides illuminating insights into and makes a brilliant reassessment of its formative influences and examines temple and image worship as well as the three major cults of Siva, Krishna, and the Mother Goddess. Here we see him as a non-conformist who looks at Hinduism as a rationalist, yet sometimes he seems prejudiced and biased. The best part of the book is his observations of Hinduism in Bengal. He is critical of the religious faith of the Hindus. He denounces their religious ideals as stagnant lagoon of orthodox beliefs and practices. Here he becomes highly censorious about the formal ritualistic practices of the Hindus, which seem to him devoid of the sense of salvation.

Chaudhuri began work on the second volume of his autobiography in the spring of 1979 and got it published in 1987 under the title *Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India 1921-1952*, which happens to be one of the lengthiest autobiographies ever written in the world. This mammoth book is a sequel to *The Autobiography* and depicts a picture of the society in which he was born and grew up. It deals with his working life, which began in July 1921 and
ended in November 1952. It becomes quite evident from all this that *Thy Hand, Great Anarch* is a post-script to his *Autobiography* for, it traces the course of his life after he failed to take his M.A. degree in History. It was written at the age of 80 years. It opens in 1921 when the author was looking for a job, facing numerous upheavals in life. It is a candid picture and truthful account of his life during the post-autobiography period in India up to 1952. This book is also a combination of paradoxical opinion, erudition, and an extraordinary creative memory. While *The Autobiography* depicts the first twenty-three years of Chaudhuri’s life, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* appears as an extension and a complementary sequence to it. There is no clear-cut division between the two autobiographical works as far as the time and theme are concerned. Although *Thy Hand Great Anarch!* includes some facts of his early life microscopically pictured in *Unknown Indian*, it basically aims at giving a relatively vaster picture of his later life. “If the *Unknown Indian* offers a close-up picture” says Naikar: “*Thy Hand offers a panoramic picture of Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s life*” (Dhawan, 2000:158). This important autobiography in fact, gives a very honest picture of Chaudhuri’s life of continuous struggle in particular and of the major historical events of Indian life in general. This is why, *Thy Hand* can be said to be an extraordinary fusion of personal experience and national history. Universally praised on publication, this magnificent memoir combines the most vivid and touching account of his private life and precarious career with a sardonic, sweeping survey of the Indian and Bengali politics in the turbulent years leading to independence, and provides memorable portraits of Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore, and other
Indian and British leaders. Chaudhuri exhibits rare talent in character delineation and analysis of events. His wide scholarship, penetrating observation, and consummate mastery over language make his book a timeless creative work.

Chaudhuri’s last book *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* was published by Oxford University Press in the centenary year of his birth (1997). This book was written by a man in his ninety-ninth year. He himself admits in the preface: “I have never read or heard of any author, however great or productive in his heyday, doing that” (1997). The main theme of the book is the decline and fall of Western civilization. The book explores the reasons and the historical perspectives of this decline. The three horsemen of the new apocalypse are individualism, nationalism, and democracy, which Chaudhuri thinks, are mainly responsible for the decadence of contemporary civilization. He also presents a vivid picture of decadence in England, India, and America. In this book, he shares the wisdom of his life as a dispassionate scholar and political moralist on a prevalent issue of our time, the decline of Western civilization. This book is a highly readable and visionary mediation on the 20th century as it draws to a close. It is characterized by the writer’s capacity for prescience, measured prose, and acerbic judgments on a great variety of 20th century issues in the Western world, such as the English royalty, dress codes, nuclear weapons, and American life.

*The East is East and the West is West* (1996) is a collection of essays by Chaudhuri compiled and edited by his son Dhruva. It is a selection of articles on India and England that Chaudhuri wrote in
the Indian Press between 1926 and 1994. It gives a deep insight into the Indian and English societies over the last part of 20th century. The 29 articles printed in this book form only a fraction of what he has written in the last fifty years; they are a selection from those published mostly in *The Statesman*, *The Illustrated Weekly* and *The Times of India*. The central theme of the book, even in two biographical essays ("Life and Work of Rabindranath Tagore" and "Nandalal Bose"), is the decline and fall of Indian and Western civilizations. His criticism of present day Western life and culture is equally caustic as that of India.

*From the Archives of a Centenarian* is another collection of articles by Chaudhuri published in his centenary year (1997) compiled and edited again by son Dhruva. It consists of twenty-one articles published over a period of more than five decades in newspapers and magazines (like *The Statesman*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *The Times of India* and others) at home and abroad. The articles are on various quintessential topics of social, cultural, and political significance. They reveal the testimony to Chaudhuri's belonging to the category of writers who have been closely involved with the world around them and have frequently expressed their views that are strongly controversial. That Chaudhuri was involved with and conscious of what was happening around him socially, politically, and culturally is substantiated by this collection of articles.

*Why I Mourn for England* is the latest collection of essays by Chaudhuri published in 1998. This is also compiled and edited by Dhruva. It contains nine essays, three unabridged lectures he
delivered at the London School of Economics (1988), the British Housewives League (1988), and presumably Literature Festival (1986), and a diary. They speak of Chaudhuri’s love and affection for England and his grief over the lost glory of England especially in the social and cultural fields. In the title-article, he has delineated with profound dismay, the sordidness on contemporary British life, regretted the passing away of the old English glory, and denounced England’s moral and spiritual deterioration rampant in the stagnant literacy around him.

Chaudhuri is basically an English writer. But he has written a number of Bengali books quite late in his career for obvious reasons. He confesses: “I write English for the Western mind, not for the Bengali or even Indian mind. Bengali mind and Western mind are so different that writing in English, I have made the scope to misunderstand me in my country. To dispel this…” (1994:16, translation added). In fact, he feels the need to carry on a dialogue with the people of his country and therefore provides various justifications for renewing his career in Bengali so late in life. He realizes that he “cannot reach the educated Bengalis of today through [his] English writing” for, “firstly they have lost the habit of reading English, secondly, most of them have lost the ability to understand that kind of English which the British publishers would find acceptable” (1968:12, translation added). So to touch the heart of the Bengali people, he starts writing in Bengali as to how he really treats the British and Bengali life and culture, which has been the subject of numerous contentions among his countrymen. He felt the urge to disseminate his special thoughts and ideas to the people
of India since his subject of writing is “our history, our life, society, and civilization” (1968:12, translation added).

_Bangalee Jibaner Ramani_ (woman in Bengali life) is his first Bengali essay book published in 1968 while he was seventy years old. The book presents “a unique thesis about the role of English literature in the evolution of _kama_ (physical desire) into _prem_ (romantic love) in nineteenth-century Bengali life” (Dasgupta, 1997:86). Here he marshals an impressive array of evidences to prove his thesis not only from literary texts in Sanskrit and Bengali but from less respectable sources as well. In this book, he tries to establish the fact that through the Western influence on Bengali society there was a distinguished change in the relationship between men and women in the second half of the 19th century. Before Bengali society came in contact with British culture, it was lagging much behind in terms of man-woman relationship. The light of European Renaissance entered Bengali life in the 19th century and exercised a tremendous influence on it within a span of fifty years. Chaudhuri has been critical of man-woman relation prevalent in Bengali society, which was devoid of true love. With special reference to a number of quotations from Bankim Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore, he makes an appeal to Bengali people to know true love in order to live a happy and worthy life.

_Atmaghati Bangalee_ (suicidal Bengali) is Chaudhuri’s second book in Bengali published in 1988 on his ninety-first year. It bears evidence to the writer’s nostalgia for the place where he was born and lived for fifty-five years. Like the first book, it is also about Bengali life and culture, and “a ceaseless introspection on his own
love-hate relationship with his origins, and by varying the tropes in
describing the tension he brings to bear new perspectives on the
topic” (Dasgupta, 1997:87). Chuadhuri here tries to say that in 19th
century, with the advent of Renaissance, various aspects of Bengali
life have been enriched under the impact of English language and
literature. But after the turn of the century, especially after 1935,
Bengal has been a declining trend and symptoms of decadence are
rampant everywhere. The writer feels shocked at this. So, to remind
the Bengali of their lost glory he writes this book with the hope that
this remembrance may bring them back from their present ‘suicidal’
(atmaghati) position and turn towards another Renaissance. He
heralds the message of hope that since the Bengali nation was twice
reborn in the past, so it may be reborn again. With this hope, he
describes the identity of the national youth of the Bengali. He does
not impose here on us any philosophical theory. What lies in this
book is “the description of the actual facts, real thoughts and actions,
and true wishes” (Chaudhuri, 1988:11, translation added).

Atmaghati Rabindranath (suicidal Rabindranath) constitutes
the second volume of Atmaghati Bangalee and was published in
1992. The main theme of this book revolves round Rabindranath
Tagore, the renowned luminary of Bengali literature. Chaudhuri here
argues that in spite of his worldwide recognition following his
winning the Nobel Prize in 1913, Tagore was offended in various
ways at the conduct of his fellow countrymen. Even then, he
continued to hanker after the admiration of his countrymen,
particularly the Bengali community. But he did not get it and
therefore felt miserable till his death. He could have ignored this by
virtue of his self-complacency derived from international recognition. But he did not do that. He was rather eager for the love and admiration of his countrymen and hence, his being, ideology, creativity sometimes pushed him to various compromises. Compromise on the part of a man like Tagore is suicidal. Chaudhuri has thus tried to discover this split personality of Tagore.

Chaudhuri's fourth Bengali book was published in 1994 under the name *Amar Devottor Sampatti* (My property endowed for defraying the cost of worshipping a deity). This book is a form of autobiography in Bengali "by a Bangalee for the Bangalee" (1994:16, translation added) as he himself comments. Apart from his famous *Autobiography*, here he narrates the long story of his chequered life once again in a new and fresh way. This new life-story of Chaudhuri is not only bigger in size but also different in taste. If his English *Autobiography* is self-search, this life-story written in Bengali is self-examination. He himself has explained in this book why he has written it anew in Bengali, where lies its difference from the English *Autobiography*, and what he means by self-examination. The book contains various interesting stories of each stage of the varied and eventful life of the writer. His genealogy, boyhood, education, romance, conjugal life, service life, authorship, life in England etc. have been discussed in detail. Alongside is evident the expression of his realization that life is a 'devottor sampatti' and own country is its deity. He has not got absolute right to his life. It is bestowed upon him for a great purpose. Life should be led for the greater interest of the country and should be sacrificed, if needed. He lived his long life with this conviction.
This book will help us take a closer look at Chaudhuri and discover the man inside him. This life story, no doubt, will introduce him afresh and help dispel many misunderstandings about him.

*Amar Desh Amar Satak* (my country my century) is another book in Bengali by him published in 1996. This is a study of social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of India and Bengal in various articles by the author published during 1963 to 1996. Enriched in deeper analysis of matters relating to society, politics, literature, culture, administration, military system, communal rift, etc., this book reveals the writer’s versatile genius and creative ability. For the range of time-span and multiplicity of themes, this book is an outstanding contribution to Bengali literature.

*Aji Hotey Shatabarsha Agey* (hundred years ago) is another autobiographical account in Bengali, which is perhaps Chaudhuri’s last literary effort published in January 1999, six months before he passed away. Although since long he had been feeling compelled to write a complete autobiography in Bengali on request of his Bengali admirers, he could not start that. Though many experiences of his life had been sporadically expressed in his different books, no detailed account of his life since childhood to life in Oxford had till then been written. This book is important especially for two reasons. Firstly, it tells us the sensational story of how being born in an unknown sub-divisional town of the then East Bengal, a man can, by virtue of his love of wisdom and relentless effort, present his country and nation to the world. Secondly, this might contribute to help dismiss the misapprehension as to Chaudhuri’s characteristic
attitudes. The book is indeed an invaluable addition to Bengali literature.

Judging from the viewpoint of the style of the books and articles discussed so far, it can be said that Chaudhuri is really an outstanding prose writer.

Chaudhuri’s learning is almost encyclopaedic. He avowedly takes ‘all knowledge’ for his province and the breadth of his interests has few parallels in an age of specialization. His writing is marked by allusions and references from different languages. His use of irony and satire lends trenchancy to his style. Sometimes however, the reader is irritated by his exaggeration, intolerance, obstinacy, and self-opinionatedness. His thinking is at times jeopardized by prejudices, half-truths, and sophistry. Rajiva Deva says:

Nirad is pedantic. His writings are heavy with references. Simple ideas are marked by complex sentences, which are almost bilious due to innumerable Latin and French quotations. All the more objectionable is the fact that an Indian who is writing for his countrymen takes it for granted that they understand Latin and French, whereas he provides for their benefit long translations of his Sanskrit references! It cannot be denied that Nirad is rather an irritating personality. (1968:69)

M. K. Naik says: “At his worst, he appears to have an axe to grind, not an implement to open up new paths of thought; at his best even when he may not enlighten the reader, Chaudhuri can certainly provoke, tease and dazzle him”(1982:270). His matchless craftsmanship and superb style however, assign him a rare place in contemporary Indian English prose. He has mastered an unusual command of English language hardly seen among the Indian English
writers. Sir John Squire, an acclaimed literary figure says: “His English is so good that one is tempted to think that he must have had a translator, but a translator as good as that could have never bothered about translations but have written books on his own” (bharatnet.com). Chetan Karnani says:

Chaudhuri writes an unusually terse style. The wide range of vocabulary which he commands and the precision with which he uses it would flatter any writer of English.... He chisels every phrase and polishes to perfection every sentence-- and this quality is not to be found in any other Indo-Anglican writer.... For Nirad Chaudhuri what matters is not what he says but the way he says it... (1968: 81)

Chaudhuri is a painstaking artist. He writes, re-writes, and examines the diction and vocabulary. Although he is pre-eminently an English writer, he has also a very good flair in writing Bengali. He can write Bengali with equal ease and mastery. He is the perfect emblem of the dictum ‘Style is the man’. Dilip Chitre rightly compares:

The most impressive aspect of Mr Chaudhuri’s writing is his style, his use of literary devices and the effects produced by them. In places, it almost attains the quality of creative writing. Mr Chaudhuri’s impassioned rhetoric, whether he is writing eloquent praise or launching a bitter invective against something, reminds one of writers like Nietzsche .... Nietzsche used literary and stylistic devices as heuristic tools; Mr Chaudhuri uses them primarily for their aesthetic effect. Is Mr Chaudhuri, then, closer to romantic historians and religious prophets? I think so. And Nietzsche did have the same kind of prophetism, a sense of self-styled charisma. (1969: 44)
Harish Trivedi, however, calls Chaudhuri’s English “crusty, musty, fusty” (Kaul, 1998:29). Anyway, in 1990 the much esteemed “Weekend Telegraph” of London chose ten top autobiographies under the appellation “Horrors and marvels of a shelffull of egos”. The authors ranged from Rousseau to Yeats and Nirad Chaudhuri. The comment on Chauduri’s two volumes of autobiography goes like this: “[The autobiography]… will go on being read as long as books will be read” (Majumdar, 2000:77).

There have been a very few major critical works in print on Chaudhuri. C.P. Verghese has done the first full-length study on him. Verghese’s book Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1973) discusses Chaudhuri’s historical consciousness and the background of writing his famous The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, his treatment of English and Indian society and culture, and the basic aspects of his philosophy of life. The author has admittedly used only five books by Chaudhuri published till then. Karnani’s book Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1980) deals with the first six books of Chaudhuri. This monograph points out different aspects of the subject’s personality and attitudes to life. Karnani, of course, has reviewed Chaudhuri’s last five books in the third section (Indian Intellectuals) of his recent book Eminent Indian English Writers (2001). Tara Sinha in Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1981) tries to gauge Chaudhuri’s mindset. Another full-length book entitled Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The Renaissance Man (1998) by R. K. Kaul tries to analyse the complexity of Chaudhuri’s split personality, the roots of his socio-cultural and historical ideas. Basavaraj S. Naikar has written Critical Articles on Nirad C.
Chaudhuri (1985). He also discusses Chaudhuri’s first five books and devotes a chapter on his prose style.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, The First Hundred Years, A Celebration published in 1997 is a collection of eleven articles on the subject, edited by Swapan Dasgupta. It is a compilation of articles and tributes to Chaudhuri by critics and friends on his hundred years. Another book entitled Nirad C. Chaudhuri, The Scholar Extraordinary (2000) edited by R.K. Dhawan is a collection of twenty-one articles on the works of Chaudhuri. Mansij Majumdar has written a book on Chaudhuri in Bengali, which is published in 2000. Apart from being a Chaudhuri-critic, Majumdar has had the opportunity to come in close contact with him personally. So he tries in his book to discover the true being of his subject not only on the basis of his works, but also of his letters, conversations, and other means of personal life. A doctoral dissertation has been done at Hyderabad University English Department entitled “Indian National Movement of Hindu Xenophobia: A Critique of Nirad Chaudhuri’s Objectivity”.

Apart from these books, eminent critics among others, Edward Shils, Duncan Fallowel, William Walsh, David Pryce-Jones, Cynthia Abrioux, Margery Sabin, Sudesh Mishra, Tapan Roy Choudhuri, M. K. Naik, Dilip Chitre, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Harish Trivedi, Rajiva Deva, C.V. Venugopal, R.S. Pathak, Ashok Patnaik, Fakrul Alam have contributed their articles to Chaudhuri criticism. But there is no independent fullfledged study on Chaudhuri and England and hence, the present student embarks on
this. But because of inadequacy of secondary sources, the study depends largely on primary sources.

Although G. A. Reddy complains that “[a]uthors like Nirad C. Chaudhuri...are yet to be estimated properly...” (1979:215), many of Chaudhuri’s contemporary and succeeding Indian English writers and critics have rated him as a writer of quality highlighting his bent for controversy. To quote Salman Rushdie: “The autobiographer Nirad Chaudhuri has been, throughout his long life, an erudite, contrary and mischievous presence....That he has swum so strongly against the current has not however prevented [his Autobiography] from being recognized as the masterpiece that it is”(nybooks.com). The Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul considers Chaudhuri’s Autobiography as “a great book to have come out of into-English encounter” (Dasgupta, 1997:42). Anita Desai has looked upon his Autobiography as a “unique achievement in charting the development of a complex mind made up of its native Bengali and alien European heritage”(stat.stanford.edu).

Mulk Raj Anand calls Chaudhuri an “odd genius” and affirms: “one cannot refrain from offering praise to [Chaudhuri] for his enormous knowledge and brilliant style of Indian English writing”(Dhawan, 2000:251). Ruth Prawar Jhabvala speaks very high of Chaudhuri’s Autobiography: “What makes it a truly great autobiography is that the author is himself the illustration of his subject, demonstrating in every line how the high achievements of European culture can be effortlessly absorbed by the Hindu personality without making it any less convoluted, deep, wildly humorous, devious and sublime”(Stat.Stanford.edu). Nissim Ezekiel
describes Chaudhuri as "India’s most formidable and throughgoing dissenter" (Rao, 2000:193).

Khuswant Singh finds that Niradababu was able to “talk on any subject under the sun... discuss stars with astronomers, recite lines from an obscure fifteenth-century French poet to a professor of French literature, advise a wine dealer on the best vintages from Burgundy”. Singh adds: “As a matter of fact there are few English writers who have the same mastery over their mother tongue shown by this Bengali bhadralok in the books he has written” (Dasgupta, 1997:29-30). Zulfikar Ghose calls him the “complete writer [and] his Autobiography a glorious book...a perfectly realized product of its time and yet in its scope as timeless as a masterpiece”(stat.stanford.edu).

Amit Chaudhuri in his piece appeared in The Hindu (July 29, 2001) highly appreciates Chaudhuri and his work. To quote:

... his small, unlikely figure ... embraced an extraordinary century almost in its entirety, and ... embodied too, its strange contradictions and journeys.... Chaudhuri’s great autobiography, written obviously with a Western audience in mind, makes nonsense of the claim that writing for a Western audience is necessarily incompatible with exploring the most subtle and recondite features of one’s culture....

He accuses postcolonial literature of becoming less a critical or imaginative exploration and more a political programme for ignoring writers like Chaudhuri. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar has singled out Chaudhuri from his contemporaries for his consciousness of vocation as an intellectual and his painstaking writing. About his
psychological identity Iyengar says: “The truth about him seems to be that he is at once more Indian than most Indians and more English than many Englishmen” (1962:591). C. Paul Verghese calls Chaudhuri “all of one honest piece” (1973:116). C.D. Narasimhaiah considers Chaudhuri’s *Autobiography* as “better known than Nehru’s, or Gandhi’s or many subsequent ones… in academic circles in the West (and among metropolitan groups in India, too)” (Dhawan, 2000:60).

According to K. Natwar-Singh, “Chaudhuri is not only an intellectual inferno, he is also a scholarly tsar” (Dasgupta, 1997:103).

M. K. Naik tries to gauge Chaudhuri’s real personality. In his words: “Gadfly in a three-piece suit or Everest of erudition? Intrepid iconoclast or purblind polemicist? Heterodox historian or egregious egoist? Master of His Majesty’s English or hysterical Hindu-hater? Which of these exactly was Nirad C. Chaudhuri…? Perhaps he was all these and something more too” (2000:179). Naik regards Chaudhuri as a latter-day representative of the ancient Indian intellectual tradition.

Dilip Chitre agrees on Chaudhuri’s turning into an Englishman. To quote: “Nirad C. Chaudhuri began as an unknown Indian, and after years of striving, has virtually become perhaps one of the most authentic Englishmen of all times” (1969:43). Michal T. Kaufman in his piece published in *The New York Times* (Aug. 3, 1999) refers to David lelyveld, a historian of modern India who calls Chaudhuri “a fiction created by the Indian writer of the same name -
- a bizarre, outrageous and magical transformation of that stock character of imperialist literature, the Bengali Babu.”

Writers and critics from outside of India have also high opinion about Chaudhuri as a writer. E.M. Forster applauds: “Besides having integrity and courage, he possesses enthusiasm, cheerfulness and a good English style…” (Dasgupta, 1997:94). Doris Lessing has regarded him as an “acute, stubbornly honest, capiciously minded writer…” (nybooks.com). Winston Churchill considers Chaudhuri’s *Autobiography* as “one of the best books” (Majumdar, 2000:32) he has read. Lucy Fisher approves of Chaudhuri’s love for “England, opera, nature, literature, the poetry of fellow Bengali Rabindranath Tagore and, most of all life” (time.com/time/asia). Sir John Squire says: “…he is a sage; he is familiar with all arts of the world as he is with religions and philosophies” (bharatnet.com). Harold Nicolson, Raymond Mortimer have also appreciated him.

Duncan Fallowell considers him as “…a cultural enthusiast, an intellectual, principled, combative, dogmatic, with a streak of fastidious eccentricity, but always immensely interesting” (1992:242). Edward Shils designates him as the “citizen of the world” (1988:568). Dr. Alastair Niven calls him “the master of English language” and considers his existence as an Indian English writer inevitable. In an imitation of a famous quotation from Voltaire he says: “If Nirad Chaudhuri did not exist, India had to invent him” (Majumdar, 2000: 143-144).

What prompts the present student to choose this topic calls for an explanation. The attitude of the British or the European or the Western writers towards India or the East has been a recurrent
subject of various disciplines, discourses, researches, and studies. But the attitude of the Indian or the Eastern writers towards England or Europe or the West is hardly seen in any cogent and consistent form of reflective writing in English. Chaudhuri possessed the mental strength and creative ability to write a book on his passage to England, maybe, as a response of his subconscious mind to E.M. Forster's celebrated *A Passage to India*. Chaudhuri can be treated as one of the representative figures from India or East to have grown an independent outlook on and a characteristic attitude towards England and the West. Viewed from this standpoint, the attitude of the self-proclaimed 'unknown Indian' towards England and thereby Europe and the West could be an apt subject of study especially in the post-colonial era while attitudes, outlooks, and tendencies of critical appreciation are almost diametrically and radically changing. On this ground, an analysis of Chaudhuri's impressions of England would be worthwhile and revealing. In addition to that, his notions and ideas about Indo-British cultural identity have given rise to numerous debates, controversies, and contentions particularly in his homeland. He has been charged with notorious Anglomania for his allegedly deep devotion to British life and culture. Simultaneously, he has been condemned as a hysterical Hindu-baiter or an India-hater for his contemptuous attitude towards the life and culture of India. Again, he has often been dubbed as an Anglophile, which is due to his tremendous love for England and simultaneously extreme hatred for India.

It needs to be carefully analysed whether Chaudhuri's 'likes' for the British life and culture are an expression of his Anglomania,
and conversely his ‘dislikes’ for the Indian life and culture are that of hatred. One can fruitfully scrutinize whether his alleged Anglophilism is a summation of his love-hate attitude towards both England and India. This is, in fact, to examine if he is really an Anglophile and therefore an anti-Indian or none or something else. A host of questions like these may crop up when we focus on Chaudhuri’s treatment of England and India and a careful analysis of this may help gauge the nature and extent of his total view of England at which the present thesis aims. Substantial evidence in favour of this is available in the primary (and secondary) sources of the thesis.

The present study is of significance, for, it aims to be an inquiry into the subject from different angles and approaches of critical investigation. This could be a fresh assessment of Chaudhuri that might help open up newer angles of vision and make a significant contribution to the body of Chaudhuri criticism. The effort also speaks of the need to approach a serious writer time and again as interesting areas may still be lying hidden and unexplored. Such a repeated exploration is also the test of a good writer’s reputation and worth.