CHAPTER - IV

PURSUIT

OF

HAPPINESS
To Live or Not to Live is a collection of articles already written and published by Chaudhuri. It is also subtitled: An Essay on Living Happily with Others. In the introduction Chaudhuri states in clear terms his purpose and premises. His aim is to consider how we can have a happy social and family life under the conditions to which we are born in this country. The book is intended to enable other Indians to achieve happiness, since “we Indians as a people possess a remarkable genius for being unhappy ourselves and making others unhappy”. (p.174).

One of the main reasons in writing the book is that in The Continent of Circe, Chaudhuri enumerates many of the evils of the Hindu society. He says that the Hindus are seeped in self-pity, gloating in ignorance and groping in unwavering fatalism. He comes down hard on the all-pervasive unhappiness existing in the Hindu society. He bitterly attacks the Hindu grievances—everlasting suffering, committing suicides, fits of monomaniac, perverse thinking, greed for money and sexual-obsession.

Chaudhuri paints the exact picture of the Hindu misery in Circe:

But the Hindus have by their own behaviour made their tragedy pitiful. Deadened by their slow, dull, and benumbed palsy of suffering they have become numeric, and their absorption in self-pity has made them incapable of perceiving and admitting that any action of theirs might be responsible for it. They will always throw the blame on others. ¹

Chaudhuri wants to transform all this pervasive unhappiness into all-embracing happiness. He sets out to trace the causes of unhappiness and thereby helps others avoid misery in India. The success and wide recognition as a writer has given him a position of authority as an outstanding social and political commentator on India, and he has used his prestige to bring about some valuable changes in Hindu society. Chaudhuri’s inner urge and inherent thirst for happiness is expressed by quoting R. L Stevenson in the last words of the book: “There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy”. (p.174) The duty of getting happiness is more binding on Indians than perhaps on any other people in the present day world.

¹ All references in parentheses are from To Live or Not To Live, Orient Paperbacks, 1998.
Chaudhuri has his own fixed notions regarding a happy life that comes from living soundly, i.e. living to some purpose. In fact, living unsoundly, in his view is not living at all. Chaudhuri quotes Plato’s famous dictum: ‘The un-criticized (un-examined) life is not worth living’. (p. 8) His basic charge against Indians is that they do not have any perception of the value of life or of the kind of the life that is worth living. Because we live uncritically. We have a ‘sordid love of money’ which Chaudhuri sarcastically calls the new ‘Bhakti’. This cult of money has led the leaders morally astray and has made the youth throw disinterested idealism to the winds.

In *A Passage to England* Chaudhuri writes about the Hindu habit of hoarding money because they feel that they continue to use it in their after-life. It means Indians can expect a welfare state like the one enjoyed in England only in their life-after-death. So Chaudhuri ironically quotes the Hindu moral commandment: “Thou shalt not spend more than quarter of thine income”. ²

The book shows Chaudhuri’s attempt to understand and account for the peculiar problems of the Indian society. It is the embodiment of Chaudhuri’s personal vision which is the result of the life-long observation. His generalizations about the Indian society are based upon his personal experience with people, events and situations of the Indian society. And this makes his essay personal. The book turns out to be a treatise on social and family relations in India in which he both probes into the sociological foundations of our social and family life. He advances suggestions as to how they can be moved towards an end which will offer greater happiness and fulfilment. Happiness comes from realizing some great purpose or working for it to the best of one’s ability. After that it comes from performing one’s duties in life without flinching. The following passage is characteristic:

> A man who is not happy with fellowmen and members of his family may find a compensating happiness in his vocation or in his duty, but he will never be fully happy.

(p. 175)

But happiness is more difficult to find in the higher sphere, for it makes greater demands on our capacity to be unselfish. Happiness in the company of others can never come without unselfishness and forgetfulness of self.

Chaudhuri relies in connubial happiness. He says that the person from whose company we expect the greatest happiness in our relations with others is the wife. But if any husband thinks that he can get that happiness by expecting more from the wife than he is ready to give her he will be dreadfully mistaken. “So the first
requisite for getting happiness in the company of others is to learn to love unselfishly… To make others happy is the definite way of getting happiness for ourselves”. (p. 176)

The passage shows that Chaudhuri has outgrown the anger expressed in *The Continent of Circe*. The new mellow tone of his writing shows his desire to make a truce. Paul Verghese comments:

The Chaudhuri of *To Live or Not to Live* is different from the Chaudhuri of *A Passage to England* and *The Continent of Circe* in which he figures as an outsider and embittered critic of everything Hindu and Indian. But here he does not talk to us as an outsider, but as one of us sharing his superior knowledge with us for our benefit. We may not agree with him but we do not react in revulsion either.

Chaudhuri also gives Buddha’s message for happiness: ‘Limitation of desire is an indispensable prerequisite for happiness’. Chaudhuri complains that most Indians do not live, they merely exist. Some aspire for money, while others care only for their survival but no one really lives. As he puts it:

I can get only two versions of living. Those who have done well in the worldly sense say that they have so much money or property; and those who have not, say that they contrived to remain alive. One group mistakes acquisition for living, and the other surviving for living. Beyond that their conception of life does not reach out. Most people sacrifice living for livelihood, a majority which consider themselves lucky for affluence. None live. (p.8)

It is pertinent to note here the comment made by Emerson: ‘We are always getting ready to live, but never living’. Here Chaudhuri is radical and hard hitting. He
wishes to shake Hindu society out of its old lethargy. He is wise enough to understand that real living is living in the light and with a sense of vocation. To live a happy life in our social and family relations is the first stage of living well. He has courage enough to see the problem in the face and try to understand and analyze it, however, ugly and unsolvable though it may be. There is a greater heroism in having the Hamletian knowledge of reality than in being satisfied with the ignorance of the same. As Aristotle says it is always desirable to have the knowledge of reality although it is quite ugly and harsh. Chaudhuri who is known for his objective analysis of the Indian society is compelled to raise an eternal Hamletian problem, i.e. To Be or Not To Be as To live or Not To Live. Karnani Chatan writes:

By his persistent preoccupation with fundamental values and basic attitudes, Chaudhuri provides a brilliant criticism of Hindu society. He is sharply observant, lively and thoughtful and has raised many Indians’ consciousness.

*To Live or Not To Live* presents a wide variety of topics. It is divided mainly into two parts: (A) Social Life and (B) Family Life. Social life is further divided into four important and interesting topics:

1. The Great City
2. Forms and Occasions of Social Life
3. Spirit and Content of Social Life

In the second part of the book Chaudhuri discusses the enlightened topics to the much entertainment of the reader:

1. The Joint Family
2. Working Women
3. Marriage in Hindu Society
4. The Unitary Family.

Chaudhuri begins his informal and discursive book with a discussion of basic question about living a meaningful life in India. Social and family life, both fall within the large framework of human life. He would not deal with social and family life without raising the basic question: “Do we live at all?”(p.7) Chaudhuri thus raises the fundamental and epistemological question about life. Chaudhuri, like many other sensitive men has felt the presence of a great lacuna between Indian ideals and the actual Indian practice. He asks the basic question again and again as he cannot digest the dichotomy. Basavaraj Naikar writes:

Life in India is marked by a general lack of idealism and is, therefore, characterized by negative qualities like eccentricity, stupid vanity, malice, spite and so on. The
conspicuous gap between the tall ideals traditionally professed by the Indians and the stark materialism of their pragmatic life is bitterly noted and attacked by Chaudhuri in the manner in which the seventeenth century England and the nineteenth century England were attacked by Milton and Charles Dickens respectively.⁵

Chaudhuri hates conformity in social life. He strongly believes that genius is essentially abnormal. About himself Chaudhuri says: “I take it as the highest recognition of my efficacy as a writer that the fossils in the bureaucracy and academic life call me eccentric”. (p.9) Chaudhuri values his own eccentricity like Robert Frost who has combined his ‘vocation with his avocation’. Hence he regards himself as an unusual Hindu and bemoans the lack of idealism in his fellow-Hindus. The overall impression of Chaudhuri about Indian life is that money plays an extraordinary role in the life of the major groups of society like the youth, the intellectuals and the politicians. Money, thus becomes the keynote of the Indian society, of human relations, of enjoyment and of achievement. The Indians, according to Chaudhuri can do anything and everything for money and are potential sharks or swindlers. He feels that those who think that money is everything and therefore everything should also be done for money.

Social life and family life have much to do with a happy life as conceived by Chaudhuri. And that is why he tries to see both social life and family life in the light of the highest ideals of life. It is again for the same reason that Chaudhuri in the course of his discussion attempts to probe into the sociological foundations of our social and family life.

By social life Chaudhuri does not mean that which is imposed on us by our compulsory relations with other human beings -- family members; relations; neighbours, colleagues or fellow professionals. His idea of good and true social life is to be in the company of people for whom we sincerely care. What Chaudhuri emphasizes in social life is happiness in human relations. He also states that his idea of good and happy social life is built on the European model. He yearns for a sincere and sophisticated social life, because he has read novels, biographies, and memoirs in English and French which have given him an idea of social life at its best.
In the Great City, Chaudhuri deals with the dominant feature of Indian life that could be evidently noticed in the large cities of the country like Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. According to him, these large cities exhibit the main ingredients of Indian character in a major key where as the minor cities or towns or villages do the same in a minor key. Though pleasant social life and polite manners are connected with cities, our big cities are inorganic, ill organized, uneconomical, and unhealthy socially and morally. They do not contain organized societies and are unfavorable to all human relations. The difference between the Indian metropolis and the Indian village is one of degree rather than of kind. The great cities exhibit certain features of Indian character which create an atmosphere of Indianans in all the fields of life. A great city is said to be a great desert where the individuality is lost in the mass life and the generalities of life look more conspicuous than the idiosyncrasies.

Chaudhuri’s Autobiography is remarkable for its portrait of Calcutta. He points out that the Bengalis of Calcutta possess gregariousness without sociability. People everywhere prefer endless idle gossip to work. In Calcutta, Chaudhuri finds utter boredom side by side with an unusual love for money. What is applicable to the Bengali society of Calcutta is also applicable to India in general. His description of life in Calcutta is interesting because it is supported by evidence to which he alone has drawn such pointed attention.

Since Chaudhuri is not very familiar with Bombay and Madras, here, he confines himself to the Delhi society where he has already spent twenty eight years of his life. His portrait of Delhi also shows that his impressions and opinions constitute his own life, the stuff of his daily round at work and in relaxation. While social life is lacking in Calcutta, in Delhi people know only how to eat well and dress well. His own experience in Delhi is that though he has wider human contacts as a result of his being a writer, he has no sense of belonging to Delhi. There is, however, some kind of social life seen in Delhi in the relations between the foreign, and more especially the western residents of Delhi and their Indian friends and acquaintances. This, he says, “goes nearest to my conception of social life.” (p. 36)

Chaudhuri seems to equate social life as a means to happiness with the social life in the western manner. He finds great sincerity and pleasantness in European social life because “European social custom always includes the wife”. (p. 34) It clearly reveals Chaudhuri’s anglicism. Chaudhuri measures the Indian social life with the cultural yardsticks of the western social life. But he warns the Indians against exploiting their contacts with the westerners for social climbing.

Before 1911 when Delhi was made the capital of British India, it was a crude descendant of Damascus, Baghdad or even the new Babylon. The two dominant elements in the population of Delhi are the Muslim traders and artisans and the
Hindus of Bania class. They were segregated in separate mohallas and were equally important. When Chaudhuri first came to Delhi in the year 1942, it was a typical north Indian urban centre of British times made up of a ‘city civil lines’ and ‘cantonment’. After independence and partition, the same Delhi was transformed into a Punjabi city over night. The Punjabi refugees invaded Delhi and occupied the houses left by the fleeing Muslims, or lived in camps for the time being. They virtually swamped Delhi and gave it a new ethnic character. The rich Punjabis invested their money in house property and industries. Thus, industrial Delhi can be said to be a by-product of the partition of the Punjab. However, it should be remembered that Delhi’s immense growth is more demographic than social. The transfer of power resulted in an irresistible migration of people from all parts of India to the capital. “Now Delhi is an immense conglomeration of human beings divided into provincial communities but the visual impression of human life in Delhi is overwhelmingly Punjabi”. (p.27)

Chaudhuri draws a very vivid and authentic picture of the Punjabi society in Delhi. The outward expression of Delhi life is conditioned by the daily routine of Punjabi life which is basically different from the routine of Hindu life in Hindustan. After his morning ablutions, and a very perfunctory breakfast of chapati and bhuja ; a Punjabi goes to his shop or to his work where he remains till late in the afternoon. In the evening he has another ill-prepared meal and then goes to bed. During the working hours of men, the women wander about in the streets and bazaars gossiping with relatives and friends, looking into shops and eating in public places. Chaudhuri disapproves this sort of routine life and makes a very apt comment on the shallowness of Punjabi life:

The Punjabis normally have no home life. They are inveterate agoraphils and that is because their homes are only like lairs or nests. Does a bird ever think of sitting in its nest or on its bough when there is day light ? The bird, of course, remains in the nest for the fledgelings. But the Punjabi woman is not prepared to do even that except for the unavoidable period. So I am enabled to see little Punjabi babies with red and wrinkled skin wrapped in towels and carried in arms even in the midday sun of June. (p.29)
Due to this routine of the Punjabi’s, the external impression of human life in Delhi is all bazaar and all feminine. It is the women who get the tone of urban life. They give it movement, colour and charm. It is they who are invariably iridescent and assertive in comparison to their ill-dressed and inelegant male counterparts who look like servants though they have come from the same home. Apart from the Punjabis, Delhi is made up of a very heterogeneous population – very rich and very poor, provincials and sojourners with wide cultural gaps. Like all other big cities in India, Delhi too is incapable of making a homogeneous society. At its best, it remains only a conglomeration of human beings without a definite psychological, cultural and social unit. What is true of Delhi applies to the whole of India. Social life comprises mostly futile chatter. Chaudhuri’s observation in *Forms and Occasions of Social Life* in India shows his insight into human nature. It reveals his wide reading and his awareness of social psychology of Indians. “Hindu society” according to him “is basically genetic in its outlook, and looks upon social life only as the extension of the family, clan or tribe. It is very difficult for us to get out of this mould of social life, which is really tribalism and to acquire genuinely social behaviour”. (p.37) No one can deny the truth of Chaudhuri’s observation. He illustrates it by pointing out how the Indians in the streets address one another as *bhai*, *bahn* or *baba*. Happiness is undeniably the basis of social life. But Chaudhuri criticizes the forms and occasions of Indian social life such as the wedding festival, illness, death and the ‘sradh’ ceremony. They are far from being the celebrations of the events concerned. These occasions are turned by Indians rather farcically, into those of pomp, show and prestige. So Chaudhuri does not generally attend the wedding of his friends and relatives. To invite people to a wedding is often a social obligation or liability, and equally often a means of mere ostentation. At more normal weddings elaborate cooking preparations are made for the whole day and the feast goes on till midnight. One such marriage he watched the proceedings with keen eyes in 1916 was the marriage of his eldest sister in his village. Chaudhuri uses a martial metaphor to describe an Indian marriage: “The wedding procession appears to be more a military expedition undertaken as a punitive raid on an enemy stronghold than a friendly affair”. (p. 41) The wedding festival with the waste of time, money and energy that accompanies it can sometimes be a product of the desire for social self-ascertain and even intimidation. The long procession of the bridegroom’s party gives the impression that the members are going to conquer the bride literally. The accompaniment of noise at wedding feasts makes any true socializing impossible.
Another occasion of Indian social life is the death ceremony. As at the marriage ceremony, so here, some guests arrive who never know the person who has died. The ‘sradh’ ceremony which follows the death of a person is a means of advertising one’s wealth and position.

The third occasion which makes Indian social life looks so unpleasant is the serious illness of a person. Even when the patient needs rest and isolation, people come and gossip which is always the traditional recreation of women and of old men. In his characteristic way, Chaudhuri says it is the tradition and Indian habit of making illness, “and more especially a serious illness, as frivolous a social gathering as a cocktail party in New Delhi”. (p. 47) The traditional Indian habit of crowding the house of sickness is tiresome doing no good to the sick. It becomes a burden on the hosts, forced as they are to offer usual courtesies like smoke, betel and water to the visitors. This practice is certainly uniform all over India. The occasions as death and illness are turned by Hindus into social gatherings.

As a profound psychologist Chaudhuri says: “To come trooping to a house of death and become vicarious mourners, is a definite social obligation as well as a secret pleasure”. (p. 44) Chaudhuri uses the most poignant image. He views the mourners sitting round a dead body to a ‘flock of vultures sitting around a dead cow’. Most important manifestations of Indian traditional social life are collective but not personal.

Chaudhuri is true about the evils of our social practices. His description of these occasions are based on his first hand childhood observations and he accepts the customs and norms of the Bengali society as those of entire India. He openly admits that it is arid and positively unpleasant but he does not condemn it outright. In this connection Tara Sinha observes:

Here, Chaudhuri, unlike in *The Continent of Circe*, is not embittered with the whole Hindu world around him. Instead, he appears to have a lot of wisdom and practical sense and advocates a rational approach to the problems of life. He feels here in spite of a many formidable obstacles something might still be done to salvage our social life.⁶

In the chapter, *Spirit and Content of Social Life* Chaudhuri switches his attention to the social behaviour of Indians. The first feature of the Indian behaviour is the ridiculous acceptance of his inferiority masquerading as superiority complex. Because of the exaggerated importance attached to the economic status, the Hindus
cannot understand the total behaviour of man. Chaudhuri says that the Hindu society never learned to value man as man, as an individual, as a personality without reference to his worldly status. The economic poverty or wealth of the Indian plays a very significant role in deciding his behaviour. Whereas, poverty makes him cherish the ideas of class-hatred, wealth instigates him to show it off on all the possible occasions such as large parties. According to Chaudhuri, Indians are not properly educated in the social behaviour. They can be very sociable in streets and bazaars but not in close gatherings. They make a pretense of having a high sociability in the presence of others in public places. Indians are generally fond of talking. They are also known for back talk which is bad talk. They condemn in the presence and condemn in the absence. So talking and talking incessantly is the mark of the undignified people. They crave for talking smut which provides a compensation for sex-starvation. With a cool head, Chaudhuri examines and analyses the main hurdles and suggests ways and means by which they can be overcome.

A number of habits and mental attitudes, such as the absence of kindliness for fellow human beings, an exhibition of self-importance or class hauteur, the lading out of smut, personal gossip of the most sordid or arid kind, malice against the absent and disloyalty of those whom he calls friends make social intercourse unsatisfactory in India. They prove that Indian social behaviour is marked by gregariousness rather than by genuine sociability. Chaudhuri hopes that our women can be brought into our general social life so as to remove its shortcoming. The greatest shortcoming in our social life, says Chaudhuri, in *Women in Social Life* is the virtual segregation of men and women. It is called “a purdah in public view”. (p. 62) The historian in him is aware of the fact that the situation was not always so. It was the Muslim conquest that subsequently put an end to the freedom, chivalry and sophistication of the man-woman relationship so prevalent among the ancient Hindu societies.

In spite of introduction of democracy and modern education into Indian society, there is hardly any intercommunication between the sexes. It is because Indians suffer from an acute sex-consciousness which is easily attributable to their puritanical upbringing and atmosphere. There is bound to be a perpetual tension between their natural instincts and their puritanical code of behaviour. Any kind of natural and friendly intercourse between men and women has been made very difficult. “The accepted code of conduct is to keep mum about women in public and talk smut in private”. (p.63) Talking smut in privacy is the natural result of the public restriction and disapproval of the exchange of views and feelings between men and women. Thus in a gathering, one is not allowed to look at the faces of women so that one can only guess their personalities. In his *Autobiography*, Chaudhuri narrates how villagers used to react naively to women. They used to
guess the identity of women by saying “Look that slim one in the red sari is the wife of so and so and again pointing to another, “that plump one in the green is the wife of so and so”. It is because of the unusual social restriction about sex, that the Indians become sex-obsessed and, therefore, begin to read Kama Sutra repeatedly. But the modern Anglicized Hindus seem to have recourse to the Kama Sutra to convert their wives into some sort of prostitutes and offer them to the western tourists. Chaudhuri criticizes such people:

They make western tourists, who come to India with the intention of making part of their tour a sexual pilgrimage,
sigh that contemporary India is not ancient India, so that without having to take the trouble to go all the way to khajuraho to see such scenes only in stone, they could see them in flesh and blood in Delhi. (pp.65-66)

In spite of the sexual taboos in India, sexual promiscuity could be seen on a large scale. Chaudhuri offers one of his own experiences in Delhi office where a pretty-girl-steno-typist was the object of rivalry among his, male colleagues. The popularity of the concepts; like ‘boy friend’, ‘girl friend’ ‘call-girl’ and ‘dating’ etc. is the sign of the promiscuity concealed. The puritanical restriction which is responsible for the secret solutions sought for by men and women should be relaxed a little so that social mingling might be made possible.

Chaudhuri has great hopes in the coming generation of educated girls who show an intellectual alertness that makes civilized intercourse between men and women possible in India. If any opportunity is given, our women show their power of speech: “Elderly women are as noisy as parrots; the young women as mynahs; and the girls as sparrows.” (p.78)

Chaudhuri brilliantly sums up the Indian attitude to sex as the refuse heap of the sexual obsessions and inhibitions. He points out that the Hindus cannot think that men and women can meet for purposes other than sex. But in the interests of social life, Chaudhuri is willing to permit some adultery so that the Hindus can have a full life.

Another important feature of Indian society is the secretiveness of lust. The only difference is that where as some people begin with it, some others end with it. The sex-starved young men and women and the sexually dissatisfied married couple will always be trying to have underground means of satisfaction without tarnishing their image in society. Chaudhuri rightly remarks that “In Hindu society so long as appearances are saved, nothing is wrong”. (p.152) In some aristocratic or snobbish
families the couple will be practicing prostitution with mutual connivance or understanding.

In conclusion of the first part of the book, Chaudhuri reiterates the points he has made in his discussion of social life as a means to happiness. They are (a) the realization that social life is communication between like minds (b) a readiness to make allowance for unpleasant behaviour on the parts of others, (c), a determination never to wallow in self-pity, (d) an attitude of give and take, and (e) the imposition of a limit on one’s social circle for the sake of better enjoyment.

The second part of the book, *To Live or Not to Live* is about **Family Life** in which Chaudhuri discusses the pros and cons of the joint family, the unitary family, working women and marriage in Hindu society. He gives greater importance to family life than to social life for attainment of happiness. His discussion of the joint family is full of subtle observation and incisive remarks. He defines family life as the life of a human unit consisting a man, his wife, and his minor sons. Verghese feels: “Chaudhuri’s views about family life are as much derived from the European example as his ideas about social life”. Obviously Chaudhuri disapproves of the joint family for which he has no liking. He says that the joint family system must be swept aside, both in theory and practice, if any genuine and satisfactory family life is to be built up in our society. He sets out to prove that there is no historical justification for its continuance.

Historically, the extended family in India has been associated with early marriage and economic security. Chaudhuri finds its origin to the tribal cooperative society based on the blood-tie: “At its best the joint family is cooperative society based on the blood-tie and a smaller and more closely knit replica of the village community.” (p.89) He ascribes its continuance to the love of power of the patriarchs and the desire in the members of the family for economic security. The joint family system produces a particular type of behaviour, in fact, it is a mini-world in itself. Chaudhuri strikes at the very root of the joint family in his lengthy analysis of the evils of the system. He sees two major evils in the joint family as it exists in India today. They are the destruction of individuality and the spirit of self-help, and the erosion of good feeling among the members of a large family. Chaudhuri dilates upon a few more evils like the lack of opportunities for intimacy between husband and wife, the proprietary quality of the grandmother’s hold on the children and the degrading status of each member of the joint family in regard to pecuniary benefits. Two more serious evils are the father’s claim on the son’s earnings and the harassment of the daughter-in-law by the mother-in-law.

One of the aberrations of the Hindu society is the peculiar relation between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. In fact, a wild kind of a law of vindictiveness is always operative in the Indian family where the daughter-in-law is ill-treated by the mother-in-law in the first half of their life and the mother-in-
law is ill-treated by the daughter-in-law in the later part of their life. Thus both of them have to undergo the two stages of serving and reigning in the reverse order. Here, Chaudhuri gives his personal experience at his home, how his mother was ill-treated and tortured by his own grandmother who always haunted and cursed her: “Have every happiness but the happiness of the spirit.” (p.113) This had come true all her life. Chaudhuri’s mother was unhappy from this conviction.

The fast changing economic life of India and the attitude of the middle-class to salaried employment and its social respectability have made considerable inroads into the joint family; yet the unitary family has not been wholly legitimatized in India. Yet under the economic conditions obtaining in India today the joint family in one form or the other may continue to exist. It may be an economic necessity, at least, till the time India becomes a full-fledged welfare state that can look after the old and the unemployed. So that they will not have to depend on sons or brothers for their daily needs. However, Chaudhuri comes to the conclusion that “the joint family has outlived whatever usefulness it had, and the sooner it comes to an end the better will it be for everybody concerned”. (p. 119) Verghese comments:

Chaudhuri’s is a perspective analysis of the evils of the joint-family both from the historical and sociological angles. But he does not lay his finger on the real reason for the continuance of the system in one form or the other, not merely among the Hindus but also among other communities in India.⁹

Many of the charges made against the system are based on solid grounds and have been pointed out by many other sociologists and historians. In the view of Chaudhuri, unitary family is the only genuine family. Though Plato dismisses any sort of family life for ‘the elite’: “He (Plato) thought that the creators and defenders of an ideal state could not afford to commit themselves to wives and children”. (p.154) But the family has been the formative cell for continuing and perpetuating the way of life of a civilized society. It is the smallest and the most efficient natural social unit for maintaining a civilized existence.

Chaudhuri is convinced that though the unitary family in India cannot fully replace the joint family, yet to the limited extent it is in existence, it can exercise a civilizing influence on Hindu society. But a good family, exercising this wholesome influence must have ‘life’ which means vital energy and animation.
This is highly necessary in view of the fact that most Indian homes are stagnant, stuffy, and stifling. It discourages all kinds of liveliness.

The absence of interests and boredom are the two important features of the Indian family. Sometimes, the interests of the young men and women are curbed by the parents. “I have always been dismayed by the indifference to hobbies shown by my countrymen. Actually, many parents consider them to be moral delinquency in their children, and never allow them to have them when the children are obedient”.

(p.160) This kind of suppression of the interests of the young men and women is responsible for the cumulative frustration. The revolt of the youth in India begins with the suppression of their interest in early childhood. The things of the mind like literature, art, music, drama are not generally encouraged by the parents who think that everything except an earning of livelihood is redundant and even a waste. Many times Indian family life involves soulless living together, without a renewal of love and faith in the members. Thus, a sensitive man is likely to be terribly, lonely, in spite of being surrounded by his kith and kin.

Chaudhuri discusses the problems and conditions of the Working Women in India with keen interest. His enthusiasm for the total disappearance of the joint family is modern and keeping with the times. But his opposition and disapproval of women working for money can be regarded as an expression of a personal dislike and more fanatical. He says:

I regard the emergence of the working women, unmarried as well as married, as the greatest threat to the family in every country and society, and as even a greater threat in India and Indian society. (p.120)

He regards the working women as a symbol of decadence and cheap imitation of the West. Chaudhuri quotes Bengali critic Pramta Chaudhuri, “It seems to be our destiny to wear the cast-off clothes of Europe”. (p.135) In his search for further reasons, he mentions the well-to-do aristocratic women as examples of those who do not work and sees in them great refinement. Verghese writes: “But I feel that we should take a charitable view of Chaudhuri’s stand when we realize that it is his anxiety to preserve the happiness of the family that makes him oppose women going to work in modern India.”

Chaudhuri is very orthodox, as far as, his attitude to working women is concerned. He argues that even when a working woman is able to marry, she harms the children. He is of the opinion that the married working women harm the children, unmarried working girls themselves. He presents the Victorian prudery that woman should be confined to the four walls of home. The emergence of the working
women in India is in part a product of economic circumstances. But it is not related to any trend inherent in our social and cultural evolution. Another reason for the girls’ attraction for jobs is the economic independence. Sometimes, their salary helps them to save some amount cumulatively until it grows big enough to be an attractive dowry for the highly-stationed grooms. Thus employment of women seems to be a stop-gap arrangement. Thus, the feminine resort to a job is ultimately connected with the problem of marriage. India is undergoing a transition from traditional to modern way of life. The educated woman who is neither purely traditional nor purely emancipated will have to lead a life of forced spinsterhood or to seek surreptitious satisfaction without losing her dignity in the society. Thus they sacrifice living to livelihood. Most of the time, she will be waiting for something great to happen in her path of husband-hunting.

Chaudhuri claims that, in this age of economics, he is contemptuous of the whole subject. Most married women have to work out of sheer necessity, because the husbands income is not enough to meet the desires of a family. Chaudhuri views it differently from a sociological point of view. He thinks that the remedy adopted is worse than the disease: “I strongly maintain that if family life is to be saved as something of irreplaceable value, the income of one member of a family should be adequate to maintain the whole family on a civilized standard of living”. (p. 133)

His contention against the working women is that jobs are limited in India, hence, men should work, while the women should look after the home. The social aspect of double or triple employment for one family is highly undesirable when jobs are limited. Chaudhuri says: “unless employment in a society is virtually unlimited, extra-employment for one family is bound to deprive another family of employment”. (p.133) It is difficult to understand why Chaudhuri does not want the westernization of Hindu society as far as working women are concerned. He believes that the happiness of the family can be increased if women look after the home. Chetan Karnani observes:

Chaudhuri does not want living equated with livelihood, yet for most middle-class families in India, livelihood itself is a problem. While he expects men to do more work and earn more money, one wonders why he expects women to be sexual drudges at home? His own example does not help because neither are all men as gifted as he is nor are all women as devoted as his wife is. ¹¹
In *Marriage in Hindu Society*, Chaudhuri regards fruitful married life as an essential requirement of a good society. But Hindu society has not given love its due. In western society one loves and then marries; in Hindu society one marries and then loves. Chaudhuri is right in pointing out that for all this a sound and sensible marriage is indispensable. And for married life which offers the in tensest personal satisfaction, love is indispensable. In present-day India people marry neither in Indian nor in western style. This has led to a great confusion of values. Chaudhuri, who himself married at the age of thirty-four in the orthodox Hindu style, saw his bride only when he was about to enter the marital bed.

Marriage in Hindu society is attended by certain peculiar characteristics. It has typical antecedents and consequences in Hindu society. Whereas, in ancient India marriage was basically meant for the procreation of children, in the modern India it has come to mean a “means of enjoying the pleasure of sexual intercourse without the attendant risk of conception”. (p.136) Chaudhuri has obviously shown how procreation, the primary goal of ancient marriage, has become the secondary one in modern matrimonial world.

This phenomenon shows the extra-importance given to the sexual aspect of marriage. Chaudhuri says that the very origin of matrimonial attraction is sexual in nature. He uses his typical aesthetic vocabulary to describe this process. He believes in the geometry of love which is primarily visual. Chaudhuri says that without seeing there is no loving. And no man can love a woman if the geometrical properties of her body do not tally with his geometrical predispositions, which control his aesthetic and amorous inclinations. Each person is born with inborn likes and dislikes. Chaudhuri wants everyone to satisfy the inclinations of his mind. Love begins on the visual level; the sight of the feminine body plays a very important role in the amorous process. In this process of external attractions, the inward beauty or grace or subtleties are totally neglected in India. Thus love is rooted in the visualness of beauty and physicalness of attraction.

Physical or sexual attraction plays a very important role from the boy’s or girl’s point of view. But when the same has to be referred to the family for sanction, the economic consideration also creeps in. Chaudhuri rightly remarks, that the marriages are sordid scrambles for money. As a result human relations are determined by monetary considerations. A surprisingly large number of young men are ready to sacrifice even lust to avarice. In the matrimonial bargain the bride’s father pays an undue attention to the economic status of the groom’s family and never cares for the groom’s mental or moral achievements.

After discussing the antecedents of marriage, Chaudhuri analyses the consequences of marriage as seen in the routine life of couple. Since most of the marriages are made possible only on account of mutual physical attraction, they are sure to crumble as the foundation of physical attraction wears into nothingness. The
husband and the wife cease to be so and begin to take a neighbourly interest in
each other. Chaudhuri’s presentation of this phenomenon is so clear that it needs
no addition: “After the physical attraction has worn off most husbands and wives
feel only a neighbourly interest in each other and sometimes also neighbourly
animosity and hatred”. (p.148) Chaudhuri, therefore, advocates respect and
affection rather than love as the basis of a happy married life. We cannot but agree
with his sound advice that “without love in the more restricted sense there can be
very happy marriage, but without respect and affection there can be none”.(p.151)
The Hindu system of marriage, at present, is not as successful as Chaudhuri makes
it out to be. Hindu culture offers no alternative to unsuccessful marriage. A poor
husband has to put up with a nagging wife, or a devoted wife has to put up with a
vicious husband. Since Hindu society makes marriage a life-long permanent
contract, there are so many unhappy marriages which just continue because of
sacramental sanctity. Young men and women stand at the cross roads of confusion.
They are torn between happiness and unhappiness in marriage.
Chaudhuri feels that unnatural segregation is the most cruel and frustrating thing in
contemporary Hindu society. He sees young people in the parks enjoy each other’s
society secretly and with a consciousness of guilt. He thinks:
This starvation of natural cravings results either in a
deadening of sensibility, or in continuous suffering, or in a
wild and perverted breaking out for a time those who never
get any opportunity to meet a person of the opposite sex
remain in a state of continuous sensual excitement. (p.153)

The only way to cure this is to reform our social life with an eye to marriage.
To Live or Not To Live makes some valuable suggestions for some fundamental
changes in Indian society. If young men and women are allowed to meet before a
formal proposal for marriage is made, many unhappy marriages could be avoided
in India. Chaudhuri makes a sound proposal that young men and women in India
should know about one another before they can decide the issue that will affect the
whole of their life. Basavaraj Naiker says:
The essay helps the reader to understand the man-woman
relationship from a liberal point of view. The clarity of
views expressed in this essay is remarkable and speaks of
Chaudhuri’s sharp intelligence as stunning scholarship behind it. ¹²

The book is truly a commendable effort on the part of its author. There is no pretense to teach any high and serious morals. What inspires Chaudhuri here is a genuine concern for his countrymen, how they can be happy with others in their social and family life. Because he understands that this is great happiness, and a kind of happiness which helps to gain other kinds of happiness. Verghese very aptly puts: *To Live or Not To Live* is a guide to happiness” ¹³. It is not only Chaudhuri’s criticism of life in India but a positive analysis of the configuration between tradition and modernity.

The style of the book is simple, transparent and elegant as it is absolutely written for Indians. Some of the comments and remarks made by Chaudhuri may not be acceptable to the reader. But he cannot remain untouched and uninspired by the sincerity of his purpose to teach his people the art of living a happy life. Unlike in his earlier famous books, here, Chaudhuri acts as a benevolent guardian who wants to share with us his mature wisdom and knowledge of life.
REFERENCES


9. *ibid* p. 112

10. *ibid* p.113
