CHAPTER - VI

DECADENCE

OF

A CIVILIZATION
It is unique in literary history that the writer remains creative at the age of a centenarian. At such an age most people have passed through the inevitable process of physical and mental decline. Chaudhuri may aptly be regarded as an ‘aged prodigy’. Even in the twilight of his life, he has an unaffected love for writing with his unfaded memory. The delight of his creative daylight does not diminish with the decline of his day. The epicurean epigram, ‘older the wine greater the taste’ aptly, applies perhaps to Chaudhuri.

One of the great features of this book, *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*(1997) is, that, it is written and published by the writer in his one-hundredth year 1997 (the date of his birth day being 23rd, November 1897, in the year of the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen Victoria). The writer considers it a fabulous feat that he proudly records in the preface to the book: “I have never read or heard of any author, however, great or productive in his heyday doing that.” (p. 7)* Here, without showing the slightest trace of physical and mental decay, Chaudhuri talks of the decline and decay of human civilization. Though written at the fag end of his life, the book is not detached nor far away from the excellence of his erudition and exquisiteness of his expression. Here he brings to bear the accumulated wisdom of a life spent in a dispassionate pursuit of knowledge. “The book reveals Chaudhuri’s phenomenal erudition, profound historical sense and

* All the references in the parentheses are from *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, Oxford University Press, 1999.
highly individualistic world-view”, says Tapan K. Ghosh in one of his articles. Though started late in his life the longevity of Chaudhuri’s creativity is much greater than the longevity of his life.

Though Chaudhuri settled in Oxford in 1970, India continued to occupy much space in his intellectual psyche. With his accumulated wisdom and earnest passion for writing, he wrote the book at his hundredth year. He views the world’s decadence from the highest pinnacle of his own experience of life. The book is about the decline and fall of the Western civilization and the world wide disintegration of civilized life. Apparently, decay and decadence are the two threads that tie the book together. His tone is far bleaker than in Chaudhuri’s other books which have an unprecedented fascination for decay and decadence which is no way concerned with his physical decay. Chaudhuri says:

Western civilization today is no longer exclusively Western. It has expanded all over the world, but in doing so, it has not remained as a whole one: it has two clearly marked divisions. There is the inner circle, which is fully lighted and is occupied by peoples of European origins; around it is a very much larger circle, which is the penumbra of the central sun and is occupied by diverse non-European peoples. (p. 10)
It is with the decline of the ‘inner circle and its penumbral regions of Asia and Africa that the author is concerned with. For Chaudhuri, decay and decline of the Western civilization does not mean the total disappearance, destruction or devastation of a nation, culture or civilization by unprecedented natural calamities or wars but it is descending in its mountain of glory; judging it by making a contrast between its pinnacles of glory with its present day of misery. His perception of decadence is biological and historical but not moral. He says that individual life-cycle is more or less akin to the life-cycle of nations. Just like a man is born, grows to manhood reaches the peak of his achievement begins to lose strength and vitality to pass to the old age and to death, so does the collective entity of a nation. According to him, “If a nation continues to exist as a human group in a devitalized state instead of disappearing, I regard it as a decadent society.” (p.8)

Chaudhuri first diagnosed the present decadence in India in the 1920s and wrote in *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* (1951).

Everything about us was decaying, literally everything ranging from our spiritual and moral ideals to our material culture and nothing really live or organic arose to take their place. ²
Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse is divided into three parts. It explores the reasons and the historical perspectives of this decline. In part one, Chaudhuri informs the readers, briefly but precisely of:

1. The methods he consciously followed in writing this book.
2. His fundamental assumptions about human life and the universe on which the entire thesis of the book depends.
3. The present state of his mind in which he views the world.

In the second part, he considers the concepts of “Individualism”, “Nationalism” and “Democracy,” and their debased forms and arrives at the conclusion that these three are mainly responsible for the decadence of contemporary civilization. They are ‘the three horsemen of the new apocalypse’. In the third part, he presents a graphic but authentic picture of decadence in England, America, and India.

Chaudhuri sets out his fundamental assumptions about the universe and human life. His belief in reasoned faith and the psychological evolution of the human species frankly draws on European thinkers like Pascal and Alexis de Tocqueville. According to the scientists, who devote themselves to cosmology, the universe is not a material body; it is a process and flow of energy in different directions. It has a beginning and an end. With the help of thermodynamics, they
have mathematically proved their hypothesis that the total energy of universe will one day be dissipated and the universe will cease to exist.

In order to derive happiness Chaudhuri advises us to escape into delusions. He says that “man’s happiness lies in living the strength of his illusions. It is the ‘maya’ of the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta.” (p.12) “With this dejected mood, Chaudhuri describes at great length the decadence in England, India and USA in the last part of the book”, writes Karnani Chetan.³ While Chaudhuri accepts the scientists’ theory of the nature of the universe, he rejects their hypothesis about the duration, because he regards it as an expression of scientific nihilism.

His third assumption is that the life-cycles of individuals and nations are analogous. Just as an individual is born, grows to manhood, arrives at the acme of his achievement, and then begins to lose vitality and gradually passes through old age to death, so does a nation. Sometimes, a nation after passing through the process of decline, totally vanishes from history; but sometimes it continues in a devitalized and uncreative state.

The last fundamental assumption is about the value of public opinion. He believes that public opinion does not shape the course of history. It simply follows historical trends.

Everything written in this book was kept into the author’s mind long before he set it down on paper. He says that it is only like printing a photographic
negative on paper. The print can show nothing which is not in the negative. But the death of his wife in 1994 brought about a sea-change in his attitude to life. The event shed a wholly different light on what he wrote subsequently:

For me the night of time had descended on the lighted universe. That has made a radical change in my life. In my vocation as a writer I had always been an engage, totally immersed and involved in the affairs of the world. But, suddenly, I lost all interest in that world. (p. 17)

He now views the world and its affairs from a distance as one views a familiar landscape from the top of a hill. Like a wise man, mellowed by bereavement and sorrow, he now looks at the world dispassionately, and softly but as a whole.

Chaudhuri says that man’s unity as a species has been achieved zoologically. Since no new animal has appeared on earth after the emergence of man, it can be assumed that in the animal world the zoological evolution has come to an end. He thinks that the next stage of evolution will be psychological through which new psychological species of man will appear. He says that it is not unimaginable, in some five hundred or thousand years a particular psychological species of man will find that he is not quite like other human psychological species, although he will also admit that there are common features.
This theory of psychological evolution is, however, nothing new. Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw, had written about the evolution of man into superman. Chaudhuri presents it as a ‘teleological corollary’ to his ‘cosmological assumption.’

The second part of the book is an exercise in elementary political theory. The three horsemen of the new apocalypse are Individualism, Nationalism, and Democracy. Beginning with the lexical meanings of these three words, he traces their history and shows how these concepts have assumed debased forms in the twentieth century and substantially contributed to the decadence of civilization.

Chaudhuri, at first, gives Toqueville’s definition of ‘Individualism’ in the United States: “A mode of life in which the individual pursues his own ends or follows out his own ideas.” (p.30) Thus, individualism is conceived as the belief in the individual’s supreme worth and importance, as well as his right to act as he pleases.

In fact, the first citation of the word in the Oxford English Dictionary dates from the first half of the nineteenth century. But in course of time the term came to signify an extreme assertion of individual freedom and a revolt against authoritarianism. This kind of individualism came from America where the term is used to mean that “an individual has the right to pursue self-interest in the form of
acquisition of money and fulfillment of all desires, good or bad also amenities of life, without external constraints.” (p. 29)

The principle of individualism is embodied in the American declaration of independence. The domination of authoritarian doctrines and absolutist regimes in Europe, in France, in German and Russia, in particular from the middle of the nineteenth century are responsible for making individualism a driving force of the process of decadence in western civilization. Individualism, as it understood today, is just un-restrained self-indulgence more especially with regard to money and sexual relations. It is only recently, by total perversion of its real nature, that the physical act of sexual intercourse has been represented simply as a means of giving men pleasure without reference to procreation.

Individualism, though primarily an American concept, has spread inexorably to all countries of the world and has proved to be a formidable agent of disintegration. This is an extreme assertion of individualism which has never been successfully put into effect in any country or in any age. On the other hand, in every country and in every age individual’s freedom has been restricted, first by the state or society, and secondly by its own moral scruples.

Chaudhuri quotes Sir Isaiah Berlin in his essays on Herzen who made an irresistible claim for the individual’s liberty of thought and action. He says “to Herzen the goal of life was life itself and to sacrifice the present to some vague
future was a delusion, a sacrifice of the flesh and blood of living human beings on the altar of idealized abstractions.” (p. 32)

Chaudhuri has marked individualism as an agent of the decline and fall of Western civilization. But he ignored its contribution to the development of modernism. There is no gainsaying the role of this concept behind the most distinctive cultural achievement in the modern age. His views about American decadence and technology are as challenging as they are thought-provoking. His judgment on the two dominant passions of British and Indian peoples, namely money-making and promiscuity are undeniable facts.

The religious view of life is anti-biological. In fact they are a revolt against biology. The individual’s life-cycle is predetermined by biology. It is at first growth, from birth to about middle-age, and then a gradual but unchecked decline, ending in death since a human being is basically an animal like all other animals, his existence is bound to be confined within the limits of animal life. Nothing else is established by observation. “The last act is tragic however fine the comedy may be in all the rest; at last then throw earth on the head and there we are forever.” (p.49) Chaudhuri quotes from Thomas Gray’s An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard, ‘The paths of glory lead but to the grave.’ (p. 49)

All this dismissal of fame only reiterates the oldest lament of disillusionment-vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Throughout the ages wise men
have moralized on the vanity of fame, which they proclaim, is reduced to a hollow mockery by death. Chaudhuri compares man’s life on the earth beautifully with a deciduous tree:

That also puts the individuals neatly in his place. He is not rendered a superfluity in the universe on the account of his mortality. He is a necessity like the leaves in a tree which maintain photosynthesis. The cosmos is the everlasting deciduous tree which is kept alive by its leaves, growing anew and falling seasonally in turns. These seasons in the existence of man come in successive generations. (p. 50)

Next comes ‘Nationalism’ which is defined by Webster Dictionary as “A people connected by supposed ties of blood generally manifested by community of language, religion, and customs and a sense of common interest and interrelation.” (p.52) Most nations are formed of agglomerations of tribes or peoples either of a common ethnic stock or of different stocks fused by long intercourse.

Nationalism, as it is understood now, is totally different from historic nationalism. In the past the main inspiration of nationalism came from the desire to free a subject nation from a foreign domination. Thus, it is only from the end of the eighteenth century that wars have become connected with nationalism as it has been seen since the American wars of Independence (1775-1783).
At present, there is no direct foreign rule in any country of the world. Moreover, imperialism as an assertive and expansive form of nationalism has also disappeared. No country today, however, powerful and aggressive it may be, can think of occupying another country and imposing its rule on it. Even if any such attempt is made it will be foiled by other free nations. The recent gulf war in 1991 over the Iraq aggression against Kuwait is an example.

An altogether different form of nationalism has appeared in the place of historic nationalism. It has acquired a degenerate form in the present century. Chaudhuri calls it ‘new nationalism’. “His analysis of nationalism is based on some presuppositions and some propositions,”⁴ says Shyam S. Agarwalla. Chaudhuri writes:

The new nationalism has created a strong sense of national identity for each nation which is different from other national identities. Conscious of being ‘We’ not ‘they’ is strong and ineradicable in the present day nationalists. This makes them xenophobic… But in contemporary nationalism, xenophobia has become aggressive and active. It has created a feeling that all foreigners are potential enemies. (pp. 59-60)

The new nationalism receives its strongest urge of national identity for each nation which results in xenophobia. The neo-nationalism at its typical is now found
among those peoples who have been emancipated from European imperialism. People who have been oppressed in due course of time go for oppression. When nationalism is weaker it opposes the stronger, when it becomes stronger and is transformed into imperialism, it suppresses the weaker countries.

Chaudhuri writes about nationalism, in newly freed nations, which has created a type of human personality like the free man ‘in Roman society who although free could never forget that he had once been a slave…’ The feelings of Asians and Africans are not without foundation. Nationalism as an ideology is irrational, narrow, hateful and destructive. It is wholly a European export to the rest of the world. Nationalism and imperialism are result of the same political urge, the first being its defensive aspect and the second its assertive. Nationalism becomes imperialism when a nation becomes so powerful that it seeks to bring other nations under its domination. Nationalism after achieving its desired goals may be transformed into imperialism as seen in American nationalism but not vice versa.

The colonial experience and the extensive transformation of the societies of nationalistic peoples have added a new complexion to national pride. These peoples constantly suffer from a feeling of being confronted by inimical forces and nurture unending grievances. This, in turn, breeds an impotent hatred in them. This deprived form of nationalism is the main source of wars and conflicts, expansive
military preparations and terrorism in the present day world. “The mental life of the mankind of our times,” remarks Chaudhuri, “has one over-riding emotion: hatred generated by conflicts of every kind, personal and social.” (p.61) And this ubiquitous hatred has accelerated the decline of human civilization. Horace B. Davis gives a similar argument:

Nationalism is an implement, when used for murder the hammer is no doubt a weapon, when for building a house, it is a constructive tool. Nationalism considered as the vindication of a particular culture is morally neutral; considered as a movement against national oppression it has a positive moral content. Considered as the vehicle of aggression it is morally indefensible.⁵

There are four outstanding features of contemporary nationalism and they are seen in four ethnic conflicts in the present day world – (a) in India between the Hindus and the Muslims,(2) in the Middle East the conflict between the Arabs and the Jews,(3) in the British Isles between the Roman Catholics of Ireland and the Protestants; and (4) between the Whites and the Blacks in South Africa. Chaudhuri says “It is one of the indisputable facts of history that friendship between nations is fragile, while hatred is ineradicable. In respect of strength, love can never be equal to hatred.” (p.61)
The third horseman of the new apocalypse is **Democracy** which literally means the rule of the people. In the opinion of Chaudhuri, it is the domination of the majority over the whole society. Modern democracy, as it is practised all over the world, is in fact, the American form of democracy and its fundamental doctrine (government of the people, by the people and for the people) was asserted by Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Lincoln’s famous words may be reiteration of the old saying: ‘The voice of people is the voice of God’.

The belief in democracy was further strengthened by World War–I, both in America and Britain. The allied powers were assumed to be champions of freedom as against authoritarianism. Parliamentary and representative government (democracy) defeated plebiscitary dictatorship in Italy and Germany in World War–II. This is the democratic establishment all over the world today as far as politics is concerned.

Political democracy, with its parliamentary and representative government came to be accepted universally as the only form of democracy after the end of World War–II. A new democratic ideology, which is at once assertive and aggressive, has appeared in recent times. Chaudhuri calls it ‘total democracy.’ It seeks to assent its power not only over the political realm but over all aspects of life – economic, social, cultural, and educational. The supporters of total democracy want to give all these aspects of life and the form desired by the
majority of the people. They totally disregard ‘quality’ and prize only quantity. Democracy has, thus, become the same as egalitarianism.

The opponents of ‘total democracy’ are stigmatized as ‘elitist’. This elite group is accepted as socially and mentally superior. So they are entitled to regulate all activities and aims of the society. Chaudhuri’s views on democracy are Leavisian. He says:

‘Elite’ is a term which recognizes ‘quality’ as the supreme criterion in determining the importance of any group of persons in the nation or common unity. This standard is rejected by ‘total democracy’ which preaches and has popularized the notion that an elite is really an ideological canaille, a residual scum. The fanaticism shown by the holders of this view of ‘eliticism’ is terrifying to those who prize quality. The total democracy of today is, in contrast the champion of quantity. (p. 65)

F. R. Leavis, in his very early publication, Mass Civilization and Minority Culture, (1930), explains the role of the educated minority and their composition:

Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age.⁶
From the very beginning, Leavis and Chaudhuri place a tremendous burden on the minority, the elites. They alone are responsible for change of the health of a modern democratic society. Chaudhuri commends ‘the elite’ in his *Autobiography*:

They lived in (Calcutta) aristocratic segregation; brought about in the first instance by the orthodoxy of the ordinary Bengali...Most of them had a highly literary culture, well-developed political science, and awareness of social and political duties. In family life, despite the fact that some affected the ways of the fast and more fell a prey to drink, the general tone was of Victorian respectability, strict discharge of family obligations, steadiness. I use the adjective Victorian in a commendatory sense, as I feel it should be. ⁷
Chaudhuri mourns the loss of Victorian qualities in the post-Victorians and calls them decidedly poorer lot than the Victorians. The England of today is not the England of the great empire. Today’s England Chaudhuri sees as the enemy and destroyer of the England he has admired and loved. As he sees it, there are two Englands today, one is of the civilized men and women and another of unspeakable savages. He mentions a number of cases of murder and violence that he has read about and claims that such cases do not rouse public fury, nor touch the conscience of the humanitarians of the media.

After fifty years there is a sea of change in the opinion of Chaudhuri about the elite. He says that neither the elite nor the masses have contributed anything good for the success of democracy. He feels that the elite of a society are more responsible for the debasement of democracy than the general mass of people. The steady erosion of political values, the degeneration of democratic institutions, and the prevalence of financial and political scandals in India of today are largely the contribution of the ruling elite.

Chaudhuri points out a glaring inconsistency in the present form of egalitarianism which reveals its true character and which is immensely harmful for the civilization. The egalitarians accept inequality in the physical powers and skills of men. But they are also the champions of equal rights and they fiercely assert that
all men are equal in mental powers. Their idea is that men are equal comprehensively and there can be no superiority or inferiority of any kind among them. Chaudhuri contradicts: “The creative function of man is exercised by the mind and all creation is creation of inequality.” (p.67)

The social extension of democracy through the doctrine of equality has led to the creation of a classless society. Even the Conservative government of Britain has adopted and proclaimed that as its policy. This has the reversal effect on both a society and a government. The result is that a government which is expected to create a society, is created by a society. Any government, if it wants to remain in power, must adopt an egalitarian policy of appeasing the mass majority.

In the name of equality, the supporters of total democracy, with their animus against mental capacity, have reduced the human mind to its lowest common denominator and made all kinds of cultural development and excogitation impossible. Chaudhuri describes egalitarianism as the assertion of the rancour of the futureless. It is a major agent of decadence. Western civilization, which is now in decline, lacks the strength to resist its own malevolence.

In the third part of the book, *Decline and Fall of Western Civilization with its Worldwide Offshoots* Chaudhuri describes the following four important topics:

A. Decadence of Western Civilization

B. Decadence of the English people
C. Decadence in India

D. Decadence in the United States

This part of the book is authentic because Chaudhari lived in these three countries and has got first hand experience there in. The decline and fall of civilizations is a historical phenomenon and it has occurred repeatedly in human history. Civilizations of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran, Greece and Rome disappeared. Similarly, the civilizations of Chinese and ancient India decayed. Decadence as *Webster International Dictionary* defines the term, “presupposes previous maturing and usually a high degree of excellence; it implies that the falling takes place after a thing (such as a people a literature or other form of art, a branch of knowledge) has reached the peak of its development.” (p.72)
He also presented the same idea in *A Passage to England*. He gives his perception of decline and fall of western civilization with its worldwide offshoots: “Musing on the ruins behind St Paul’s in London in April 1955, while a chanted service was going on inside it, I felt the apprehension of a possible decline and fall of Western civilization”.⁸

Chaudhuri lived in England for twenty-six years. He saw decadence in behaviour, incongruity in adornment. The decadence was in full swing and made him feel that England too had been struck by it. It haunted him like a spectre:

Since then (1945) the spectre has been treading at my heels wherever I have gone to the shores of the Pacific in Canada and to Texas in the United States. I found that the New World was more decadent as a human community than the Old World, not only in Europe but even in Asia.⁹

Chaudhuri thinks that the decadence of a nation is as natural as the physical and mental decline of a man. It is a decline from a higher state to a lower one. A nation becomes decadent when it has lost its political and economic power as well as its cultural creativeness. It is in this sense that the geographical space called Europe and its penumbra, i.e. the countries which were once under European colonialism are decadent.

He also describes decadence in government, religion and morality, “adultery and homo-sexuality, which are now considered natural”. (p.88) He expresses the
same attitude towards abortion which is considered to be a revolt against not merely morality but also biology. He feels that revolt against biology is far worse and dangerous than morality because biology can do what morality cannot do.

In the chapter, Decadence of the English People Chaudhuri unremittingly writes about the degeneration of the English people and their culture, since his permanent settlement in England in 1970. He regretted the passing away of the old English spirit and denounced the country’s moral and mental decay illustrated most strikingly by the dwindling literacy he found around him. Man’s ‘golden age’ is always relegated to the past. Chaudhuri quotes Horace: “Our fathers’ age was worse than our grandfathers’. We their more worthless sons will procreate in our turn a progeny more corrupt.” (p.73)

Chaudhuri refers to various personal experiences and newspaper reports in his detailed account of British decadence. He informs his readers why his despair about the present day English society is so deep-rooted. The decadence of the English people is all-embracing. There is not a single aspect of English life to which decadence is not spreading and deepening its invasion– national personality, politics, social and economic life, education and culture. Love of money in the extreme form of addiction, and licentiousness – the two passions which are typical are manifested in the British character.
The most decisive impact of decadence on the social existence of the British people is seen in the disintegration of the basic unit of the society i.e. family. The destruction of the family has dispensed with the protective barrier which absorbs the shocks of political changes or revolutions among the people. It results in individual’s helplessness and growing sense of alienation on the one hand, and increasing interference of the state in every aspect of society on the other. The expression ‘unmarried mother’, which is totally alien to Indian culture, is the epitome of European social decadence. The son of an unmarried mother even became the Prime Minister of England says Chaudhuri. Of late, another expression as ‘surrogate mother’ is another manifestation of malignant decadence.

Kidnaps and killing, rapes and murders are rampant in English social family. Particularly Juvenile crimes--murder, rape, or theft- are done out of sheer curiosity to see what they are like. They are all signs of the English decadence. Chaudhuri says the legal doctrine of absence of moral responsibility under a certain age protects the young criminals.

The other area of the British decadence is seen in their political and racial superiority. Racial arrogance and colour prejudice have not disappeared among the English people. Both of them remain in the marrow of their bones. This is the main reason why the Britishers have been democrats at home and tyrants abroad, particularly, in their colonies while expanding their colonial and imperialistic rule.
Chaudhuri says that an Indian has to possess, at least, twice the competence of an English man in order to have equality of recognition with his or her English colleagues. The general rule about the effect of decadence is that it always weakens their good qualities but leaves the bad ones as they are.

Love for jewellery by English women and passion for money by the English peoples are the other areas of decadence in England. Chaudhuri criticizes English women, specially the young, who seem these days to have fallen for the oriental habit of overloading themselves with jewellery in their workaday appearance:

They appear with strings of pearls as big as sparrow’s eggs round their necks, and heavy gold bangles round their wrists. Both of these are un-oriental, for the pearls are synthetic and gold fake. To speak of the gold only, a respectable oriental women would have only 22 carat.

(p.81)

One more interesting thing that Chaudhuri wants to draw to our attention is that wearing of jewellery with jeans both by the English and the oriental women is not only incongruous but also repulsive. Chaudhuri likens the lower part of the woman in jeans with a mermaid which is not attractive but only alluring. Shayam S. Agarwal writes:

At the thought of his ‘dear’ English women imitating the oriental habit of adornment, Chaudhuri has been
away from India for more than two decades. When he had written his last book, Indian workaday women no longer wear 22 carat jewellery. The violent England is as much unsafe for the real gold jewellery in the neck of a workaday women as violent India is for her women folk.¹⁰

Chaudhuri gives an instance of high insecurity felt in modern England. He makes a contrast between the secured olden days with the insecure modern days which is again a sign of decadence. He asserts:

I shall give only one example of the present conditions. English families when they went abroad on a holiday always left the key of the house under the mat before the front door for the woman caretaker to come and clean the house. I saw that even in 1955, when I came to England for the first time.

Now I cannot leave my front door unlocked even when I am in the living room, very near the door, and my neighbour who lives in the maisonette above mine, never opens his front door without looking through the chained panels to see who has come and that too with a loaded baton in his hand. (pp. 82-83)

Chaudhuri regards the welfare state as a decadent state because he believes that mere welfare of the mass of people of a state can never restore the greatness of a people. It only fosters decadence, especially in the expression of national life in
its culture. People are reduced to the level of beggars standing in long queues, in front of financial institutions, itself is the best testimony of the decadence of welfare state. In every aspect of national life in Britain – language, education, culture, morality, religion, national character, political leadership, dress and food habit, individual and familial relationship, Chaudhuri finds a steady degeneration and he is convinced that civilization in Britain is a glorious monument in ruins.

Syam S. Agarwalla observes:

Chaudhuri is incapable of seeing a comic silver lining in this age of apocalypse. He, like early T. S. Eliot, finds Britain going into the cycle of decadence and waste. If I apply his conclusion on greed for money on all “free market” states, all states, in this world, including the Communist states, become sites for decadence which is not wholly true.¹¹

In *Decadence in India* Chaudhuri says that the decadence in India is no different and it has not escaped the contagion of western decadence. According to Chaudhuri, there had been two previous periods of decadence in India: “The first for about two hundred years before the Muslim conquest, at the end of the twelfth century; the second in the eighteenth century, after the death of the last great Mogul emperor, Aurangzeb. The first decadence brought about the extinction of the ancient Hindu civilization, the second of the Indo-Islamic.”(p.109)
Chaudhuri thinks that the emancipation of the country from the British rule could not release sufficient energy and idealism to bring about a rejuvenation of our national life. In an article published in *The Statesman*, 1994, under the title, British Rule is Dead, Long Live British Rule which was an adaptation of the French cry on the death of one autocratic king and the succession of another autocratic ruler. “It simply meant that even if a particular monarch passed away, the monarchy remained: that is to say only the person disappears but not the institution.” (p.116)

Chaudhuri writes that although the British had left India in 1947, the system of government created by them remained in all its features and in its spirit. The government of India after independence pursued the political concepts of the foreign rulers and shamelessly aped their arrogance and airs. The most striking aspect of the government was its absolute falsity. Nothing was authentic, nothing sincere, nothing disinterested in it. The political feebleness of the national leaders to face any challenge, the lack of the spirit of political enterprise, the dynastic rule initiated by Nehru and the statistics of the bureaucratic system, all contributed to the political decadence in post - Independence India. The recent governments are in no way better than the earlier ones.

Chaudhuri describes decadence in India by portraying Nehru in the following words:
As soon as with independence he (Nehru) abandoned his former role of demagogue, he became an ineffable ideologue, flapping his wings against the bars of the cage in which he was put by the bureaucracy. The political programmers which he himself wished to put into effect was to make India, a Soviet Union in technology, and parliamentary democracy in governance. He alone did not realize that he was really a dictator without the will to exercise his dictatorial power. (p. 113)

Nehru found it difficult to face the massive stativity of Indian masses and the cunning self-seeking of the professional politicians of his party. Yet, “the dictatorship of the Nehru dynasty continued with short interruptions, which were like the accidentals in a musical compositions. The normal key was quickly restored”. (pp. 114-115)
After Lal Bahadur Shastri, came Indira Gandhi once again. She was a shrewd politician, yet she could not anticipate her murder by the agents of the fanatical Akali Sikhs. The dynastic rule continued with Rajiv Gandhi “but his imprudent policy with regard to Sri Lanka made him a victim to a woman suicide bomber”. (p.115) Thus the assassination of three Gandhis is the greatest sign of political decadence in India. This political decadence runs parallel to social decadence which can be seen in money-making, licentiousness and lack of vitality in speech, dress and eating.

The decadence in political life has its counterpart in social and cultural life. The most obvious manifestation of socio-cultural decadence is the popular and lowest expression of Americanism. A sociologist has commented that Indians always think of two countries in the world; the first one America with great commendation, the next one Pakistan with deep condemnation. The three important aspects of this decadence are (a) single minded, sordid and dishonest, pursuit of money, (b) licentiousness, and (c) falsity of mores.

The decadence in India is as pervasive as it is in Europe. But there is a difference between its manifestations in the two continents. Chaudhuri remarks, “As a cultural satellite of the West, India was found to share its decadence. But there is a difference between the two manifestations. The western rouses a civilized man to anger, the Indian benumbs into despair.”(p.124)
The author finds no ray of hope in America either. In the last chapter, *Decadence in the United States* Chaudhuri thinks that the latest decadence in human history has its centre of diffusion in the United States. One of the signs of decadence in America is the ease with which marriage is dissolved. This absence of conjugal felicity surprises Chaudhuri. The bond of marriage among the American people has become so loose and transient that no young people are willing to spend more money on their marriages. Chaudhuri gives a newspaper report about American marriage:

A firm of jewellers has discovered that young people who are going to marry are unwilling to spend the large sum of money which is needed to buy a 22-carat engagement and wedding ring, so, they have offered to supply the ring on a weekly rent. (p. 125)

The same persons who are husband and wife today become friends the next day. The reasons for the fragile bond of marriage are many. In America paternal discipline is very lenient and the married relationship very strict. As a result, a young woman contracts marriage with circumspection as well as fear. In American society one sees very few precious marriages. American women do not marry until their reason is trained and matured. In other parts of the globe the great majority of women begin to exercise their reason and make it mature only after marriage.
Tocqueville says that this is not imposed on the young women. They impose on themselves, with the sole effort of their own will. Further he says:

When the time comes to choose a husband, this cool and austere reasoning which a liberal view of life has made clear and firm, teaches young American women that a light and independent spirit within the marriage bond is the source of eternal trouble, not of pleasure; that the amusements of a young girl cannot continue as the dalliances of a wife; and that for a woman the source of happiness is in the conjugal abode. (p. 128)

The other sign of decadence is over dependence on technology. Machines have become substitute for men. The impressive and revolutionary achievements of the Americans in the field of technology which have immensely improved the standard of living have failed to make them immune to decadence and infuse a vitality into their national life. The new style of living created by technology is co-existence with decadence. This is the most baffling paradox in human life ever seen in history. All scientific inventions have failed to inject a new vitality into human existence. In a paradoxical statement Chaudhuri says:

Thus, the nuclear bomb became a deterrent for war. As such, it has ensured peace between the great powers for over fifty years, a state of international relations never before seen in history over nearly five thousand years.
For this; humanity should be grateful to the nuclear bomb, instead of staging foolish demonstrations against it (p.136)

In this connection Chetan Karnani writes “Chaudhuri seems to suffer from amnesia for he seems to have forgotten Hiroshima and Nagasaki too soon”. ¹²

Decline and decadence have been major themes in the works of Chaudhuri since the publication of his famous book, *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* in 1951. The decline of the Indian national moment into ‘atavism’, the decline of Bengal as a centre of political and cultural importance, the decline of the Aryans once they came to India, the decadence of contemporary British and Indian life are discussed with the profound knowledge and life-long observation.

In the preface to *Why I Mourn for England*, Dhruva N. Chaudhuri gives a letter written to Sir C. R. Reddy by Sir John Square, the well known critic who made a wonderful comment on Chaudhuri’s decadence of civilizations, after going through the manuscript of *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*:

This Unknown Indian hovers above our globe and sadly scrutinizes the fluctuating fortunes not merely of India, but of all mankind. He comes up to the present day and faces all the contemporary facts in India and elsewhere. He sees and regrets a decaying civilization in Europe. Seldom reading the manuscript do I feel that I am in contact with a mind. He could meet any great thinkers of the past on an equal footing. ¹³
This is the greatest commendation given to Chaudhuri just by going through manuscript of his *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*, three years before its publication.

Decadence is a world-wide phenomenon although it is now manifested in absolutely new form. The novelty of decadence lies in the fact that it is appearing in an age when the economic basis of civilization has changed from agriculture to industry. With the industrial and technological revolutions the peoples of Asian and African countries continue to have inevitably caught the virus of western decadence. “The absolutely new power of making things established in the West and spreading rapidly and irresistibly all over the world,” says Chaudhuri, “is not making any difference to the expansion of western decadence everywhere”. (p.135). Decadence is all-pervasive. Like the mythical Greek goddess Circe, it has succeeded in captivating human mind.

Chaudhuri sees no hope of regeneration in near future and the book ends on a note of despair. “Everything beyond is uncertain and the foreground is vide et neant, empty with nothingness in it. I wish I could see man’s great age coming anew—it may; but I cannot see how it will” (p.137) Karanai Chetan writes:

This book is generally written in a mood of bleak despair and such optimism is an occasional episode in the general drama of acute pessimism.  

However, Chaudhuri’s recent canonization as the great Indian writer has managed to obscure unpleasantness of his views on women (single mothers in particular), abortion, contraception, homosexuals, unemployed youth, and indeed everything else one can imagine a reactionary writer to be hostile to. Pankaj Mishra writes:

These views, and the vehemence with which Chaudhuri expresses them, have the unexpected and unfortunate effect of marking Chaudhuri’s work with the stigmata of a very common place sort of right-wing bigotry. It must be said, harsh though it sounds in Chaudhuri’s centenary years, that his latest and most disappointed book looks like the work of a ranter like Paul Johnson; the author of so refined and nuanced a book as the Autobiography is largely absent from its pages. No bigger disservice than this could have been done to his own reputation by Chaudhuri, who suddenly, in his 100th year, appears to have tilted far too much to the right of radical conservatism- the not undistinguished tradition to which he, in his best work, seemed to belong.¹

In many ways Chaudhuri’s Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse is a valuable contribution to contemporary history. Here Chaudhuri records his mature wisdom on a subject of universal concern in closely-knit arguments and in measured prose. His age has left no mark on his writing. He has tried to remain
objective throughout the book. In the preface, Chaudhuri admits that he has taken Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and Alexis de Tocqueville as his models in choosing the form of the book. The ideas that he has expressed, are as challenging as they are thought-provoking. Like all his previous writings, this book will also spark off controversy. But it is the sign of a live and creative mind in an author that it can provoke readers and stimulate their thoughts even at the age of hundred. At once absorbing and disturbing, *Three Horseman of the New Apocalypse* will remain a remarkable land mark in apocalyptic literature.
REFERENCES


11. Ibid, 230


