CHAPTER – II

SELF-REVELATIONS
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Chaudhuri is an erudite scholar of rare distinction. He rose from poverty to prosperity and from obscurity to recognition with his brilliance. Despite his manifold qualities both as a scholar and a writer he remained an unknown Indian till the publication of his monumental work, *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* in 1951 and the title of which soon became an ironic misnomer. The book shot him into instant fame, recognition and universal acclaim. His maiden work written at the threshold of his fiftieth year made him an instant international literary celebrity.

The *Autobiography* is dedicated to the memory of the British Empire. He glorifies the colonialists saying that, “all that was good and living within us was made, shaped and quickened by the same British rule”. It was highly commended by the editors of the Glasgow Edition as, “this is an extraordinary book written by a Hindu of East Bengal who has never been in Europe, yet with a command of English that is not exceeded by Mr. Nehru himself...No other Indian self-portrait can compare for interest or challenge with this product of a tortured and assertive spirit.” V.S. Naipaul and Anita Desai poured eulogies on the book.

The *Autobiography* has become the primary source of its author’s life and career. Chaudhuri says explicitly that “this book is more of a national than personal history” (p.512) He seems to have interested more in cultural anthropology than in himself and it was his hope that the book would be a contribution to contemporary history which indeed it is. That is the reason why that the fourth section of the book is devoted entirely to the analysis of the politics, culture and history of India. The book runs to more than five fifty pages and its scope is so wide that it is difficult to summarise it. Prof Raghavendhra Rao says: “It is at once history, anthropology, political science, sociology, indology, genetics and other disciplines”.

The *Autobiography* describes the conditions in which an Indian grew to manhood in the early decades of the twentieth century. Though written in the first person, it is more a treatise on history than autobiography. The feelings recorded in the book are those which Chaudhuri harboured immediately after the British had left India and India had come into the hands of the Indians. On reading the book, one finds that Chaudhuri is unhappy with his country’s having acquired an independent identity and expects her to lose it in near future. He attributes himself the identity of an obedient people of the colonial thinkers of Britain. The fact is that, he is unhappy to find his country to have an independent identity. He is very skeptical

* All references in parenthesis are from *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*, Twenty-sixth Jaico Impression: 2008.
about the self-rule and believes that India will not be able to remain independent for long and that she needs the white rulers of the west to shape her destiny. He expects India again to become a colony of the U.S.A and Britain as foreign rule always rejuvenates India. Naik Bhagabat writes: “Chaudhuri as the distant devotee of European Civilization had fallen in love with Europe fifty years in advance before his putting on European clothes”.  

The basic principle of this book is that environment shall have precedence over its product. The first part of the book contains the reminiscences of his childhood days at Kishoreganj. Chaudhuri begins by giving an account of his early rural background which became a part and parcel of his being and the influence of which he felt all his life. His birth place, Kishoreganj, his ancestral village, Banagram and his mother’s village, Kalikutch, exerted the deepest influence and formed “the buried foundations.” (p.1) of his later life. Thus, the Autobiography offers not only the story of Chaudhuri’s individual life but it creates a vivid picture of Bengali culture with all its diverse strains. As he writes in the opening para of his preface:

This book describes the conditions in which an Indian grew to manhood in the early decades of this century. My main intention is thus historical and since I have written the account with the utmost honesty and accuracy of which I am capable, the intention in my mind has become mingled with the aspiration that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history. (p.ix)

The book is arguably one of the finest to come out of India in the last century. On the opening page, Chaudhuri inscribes Oscar Wilde’s quotation defending his argument and greatness. “Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it” exposes his megalomaniac nature. Chaudhuri’s theory of Indian history raised a controversy. The unknown Indian proves to be an extremely unusual Indian. With his love-hate attitude Chaudhuri made a complimentary complaint in his dedicatory note. The epitaph sums up Chaudhuri’s verdict on the British Raj. It contains two points, one which is political and the other, cultural. There is a neat political indictment. “To the memory of the British Empire in India which conferred subject hood on us but withheld citizenship …” The second point is that “all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the same British rule…” Chaudhuri does not explicitly state the deep connection
between the two points but one may wonder whether the injustice suggested by the first is not the price for the benefits suggested by the second part of the statement. Commenting on the epitaph, Harish Trivedi reacts violently: “Nothing that Nirad Chaudhuri has written in his whole career has been as shocking and as quotable as the very first page of his first book, cheekily titled, **Autobiography of An Unknown Indian (1951)**” ³

Apart from giving an account of the socio-cultural condition in undivided Bengal, his **Autobiography** is a document of his personal growth. Further, England as a place of Chaudhuri’s mental make-up gets equal emphasis when his Indian-self grieved into manhood. He was completely Anglo-maniac like Bakim Chandra Chaterjee and Raja Rammohan Roy who had admiration for the English civilization and the English administrative system. As Chaudhuri was brought up in European atmosphere. He had an anglicized temperament from his boyhood and it was strengthened as he grew up. He was fascinated by England in his boyhood. Many English and European thinkers, writers and statesmen fascinated him.

The **Autobiography** is divided into four books and again each book is divided into four parts. The first book entitled, **Early Environment** describes the beautiful landscape of East Bengal which offers a feast to the eyes. Chaudhuri divides the book into four parts:- 1) My Birth Place 2) My Ancestral Village 3) My Mother’s Village and 4) England. The first three chapters give an account of Chaudhuri’s rural background where he actually lived and spent his early boyhood in and the fourth of the intellectual background which made him an anglophile. He takes a dive into and swims not merely in his beloved river, Meghana but in the entire natural surroundings and landscape of his beautiful Bengal.

In the preparatory note, Chaudhuri says that environment shall have precedence over its product. He describes three important places which exerted a profound influence on his boyhood days. He calls them the buried foundations of his later life. Three important places- Kishorganj, Mymensingh and Banagram will make up the first three chapters of this book. The fourth chapter contains a summary of his boyish notions about England which was evoked by imagination and enjoyed emotionally. It has made as great an influence on him as any of the above three places sensibly experienced.

In the first chapter, **My Birth Place** Chaudhuri gives a detailed picture of Kishorganj in the Mymensingh district of East Bengal, the village in which he was born and brought up. It was a collection of tin and mud huts or sheds, courts, offices, schools, shops and residences. The huts were so old and crumbling that they creaked at almost every wind. The town was cyclone prone and they frequently caused extensive damage. Chaudhuri describes the life of the town: “Life at kishoreganj was calm, regular, business like. For the elders, it meant
absorption in profession and earning money; for the young in education and acquisition of knowledge”. (p.37)
Kishoreganj was situated on the banks of a little river, Meghana which they called their ‘Nile’. The river was an important source of traffic. Boat races often took place on this little river. During monsoon the river flowed swiftly but the water became muddy. At night, the kerosene lamps on the boats spread light around and the illumination looked so beautiful as if to set the fringe of the river on fire. Chaudhuri nostalgically recalls the four monsoon months. The rains bring out the boats, and the minute description of these boats brings the entire picture of the rainy season alive before the mind’s eye: “Last of all came the boats which were the sight of the season we loved best. Every year they came like migratory birds, in twos and threes, for the first few days and then in large numbers”. (p.7)
Life in the rainy season was very hard. Chaudhuri says that their clothes were never dry. The bark of the trees became so moist and soft that it seemed that they could tear it up in handfuls like moss. The aesthetic description of rainy season is seen here as they were sitting on the veranda:

As we sat on the veranda, myriads of tiny watery marionettes, each with an expanding circlet of water at its feet, gave us such a dancing display as we had never dreamt of seeing in actual life. It often went on for the best part of an hour but had a trick of stopping suddenly. No magic wand could make elves vanish more quickly. The crystalline throng was brushed off even before the rustle of rain ceased in our ears. (p.10)

Another beautiful pastoral scene that Chaudhuri presents is Kalikuth, the village of his mother. He describes Kalikuth as a world so different from the disturbed city life. It is full of humility, free from artificiality and effacing in bamboo and cane greenery. He brings down the memorable lines which describe the glorious pastoral scene at Kalikuth:

Across the river was a small temporary hamlet such as the peasants in our parts build on the sandbanks of the big rivers. All the huts in it were thatched with bright gold-coloured straw; there was a corn rick of the same happy colour in every homestead; the river between us and the village was
rippling to a light breeze and shining like cut-glass in the afternoon sun. (p.196)

Commenting on Chaudhuri’s love of natural beauty and the surrounding landscape of East Bengal, Karnani Chetan quotes Khuswant Singh who has made a fine observation: “Many people, who would not otherwise read the Autobiography, discovered to their surprise that there was nothing anti-Indian in its pages. On the contrary, it was the most beautiful picture of Eastern Bengal that anyone had ever painted.” ⁴ This view of Khushwanth Singh is true as far as the early part of the book is concerned.

Chaudhuri carefully recalls how the seasons were marked by flowers and how each season brought its own festival. The rustic landscape of the East Bengal is beautifully painted with the changing seasons and the presence of animals and birds. Crows and mynas and other birds were common sights. Occasionally gypsies came and were encamped on the outskirts of the village. Their pigs were dirty, but the children took keen interest in them. Chaudhuri had keen interest in watching sucking pigs: “Despite the severest warning against going anywhere near the unclean animals, we felt the profoundest interest in the sucking-pigs which were carried in bamboo baskets and were perpetually squealing”. (p.16)

Chaudhuri’s description of his ancestral house reveals the anglophile nature of the family. It was quite a large house. His father’s passion to acquire furniture from the west is revealed here:

My father had imported from Dacca two American (or at all events, so we believed them to be) bent-wood chairs, called “bentoo” or “lady” chairs by us, and these were hung from bamboo rails to be brought down only for very important visitors. To sit on chairs as a matter of regular habit would have been regarded at Kishorganji in those days as a conscious parading of wealth bordering on snobbery. (p.28)

“One of the clichés about Chaudhuri that has been aired again and again is that he is the last surviving flag bearer of the semi-anglicized culture and sensibility that flourished in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Bengal” ⁵ comments Pankaj Mishra on the anglophilism of the Chaudhuries. A number of fairs and festivals were held to the great joy of the children. The festivals were celebrated with due solemnity. Among them the most brilliant description was that
of Durga-Puja, the most important festival of Bengal. This annual festival which took place in October at the turn of the seasons was associated with dance and music. Chaudhuri provides a brilliant explanation of the genesis of this festival. Durga Puja was celebrated in four phases lasting for over a month. Nirad Babu has given a detailed account of it in about ten pages. The sacrifice of goats and buffaloes to appease the wrathful goddess, Kali particularly interested them except the author. A gleeful sadism pervades at the sacrifice of the mute animals:

  But its hoarse blare was drowned by the beating of the drums, cymbals and gongs, and the frenzied shouts of the spectators. To the pleasure and victory of Mother Durga!” In a flash the scimitar descended, the animals… (p.72)

Thus, Kishoreganj was Chaudhuri’s Arcadia where parents were loving education for their children and it was full of problems and superstitions. The social milieu was peaceful, people were industrious and social occasions were the excitements. Kishorganj was like modern secular India where there was Hindu-Muslim amity, equality, citizenship and civic responsibility among the people. The lawyers, doctors, teachers and the common people were living happily in Kishorganj during the British rule.

In My Ancestral village Chaudhuri gives an account of Bangaram, the village in which his ancestors lived. In his boyhood days, along with his siblings he visited it every now and then. Many of their close relatives still lived there. They were considered to be the landlords of the village. Their position was a distinctive one. Bangaram influenced them profoundly. They were proud of it and considered it to be their real home. Their uncles were all very proud of their rank and status, and considered themselves to be superior people.

Their house in Bangaram was called the New House. It was very spacious, and had a wide and open landscape; there was nothing but greenery as far as they could see. The family deity was installed in a spacious courtyard. It was a joint deity and was called by them Gopinath and Gopanji. There was also the idol of Lord Vishnu. Mythological plays were frequently staged and the children took keen interest in them. Thus early in life they became familiar with Ramayana and Mahabharata.

My Mother’s Village narrates Kalikutch, the village of Nirad’s mother situated at a distance of five miles from Ajabpur on the river Meghana. It was surrounded on all sides by thick woods. They all liked the green landscape around. The scenes of sunrise and sunset were beautiful. They visited the family six times between 1904
and 1905. The boys of the family were being educated in schools at different places. Then the family fell on evil days. It was in financial difficulties. So his father did not visit his mother-in-law as it meant heavy expenditure to entertain the son-in-law in the traditional way. Even his mother’s visits meant heavy expenditure.

The people of the village loved folk poetry and folk music which was traditionally played on ceremonial occasions. The population consisted both of Hindus and Muslims and so there were frequent quarrels. Their morality was simple. It was on the basis of this simple morality that Brahmonism was founded.

Contrasting the autobiographies of Nehru and Chaudhuri, Karnani Chetan makes an interesting observation:

Nehru knew that he was India’s man of destiny, hence his Autobiography tells about his descent, his forefathers, and his birth in Kashmir. His Autobiography is the narrative of his life’s events in chronological order. But Chaudhuri knows that he is an unknown Indian. Hence, he has given precedence to the description of his early environment. It is significant to note that the entire first section of his book is devoted to the description of the beautiful surroundings of his early days.  

The most important chapter in Book-I is England which is very dear to Chaudhuri. Long before he went to England he had formed many boyish notions about the place. England formed a part of his early mental environment. Through the literature he visualized it to be a beautiful place and imagined it to be half-land and half-water. He explains in his Autobiography, “….as England evoked by imagination and enjoyed emotionally, has been as great an influence on me as any of the three places, sensibly experienced, I shall add a fourth chapter to complete the description of the early environment of my life.”(p.3)

England had such a hold on his imagination that he compares Kishorganj to an English country town. He goes on to catalogue the names of English and European personalities with whom he was familiar. The first group includes Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, Napoleon, Shakespeare, and Raphael. The next group comprises of Milton, Burke, Warren Hastings, Wellington, King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. According to Chaudhuri, these personalities belonged to the proto-
memorial age and “these ideas and associations constituted what I may describe as the original capital of our intellectual and spiritual traffic with the West” (p.100)

Like most Indians, the things that Chaudhuri liked most about English civilization were cricket and poetry. He was brought up in European atmosphere. He had anglicized temperament from his boyhood. He was fascinated by England since his boyhood. His reading of English poetry opened an enchanted realm before him. In his early days, he liked Tennyson’s “Break, Break, Break” and Wordsworth’s “The earth has not anything to show more fair.” About the latter, he feels that when he read the first six lines, “the heavenly light of dawn with its unity and peace seemed to descend on us.” (p.114). It was the study of English poetry which enabled Chaudhuri to visualize England as half land and half sea. He refers to Shakespear’s sea dirge, “Full fathom five thy father lies” side by side with Webster’s land dirge, “Call for the robin-red-breast and the wren” conjured up visions of a beautiful England before him. Many English and European thinkers, writers and statesmen fascinated him.

Ignorance about Englishmen in the flesh existed side by side with an ambivalent attitude towards them. There was an irrational cringing accompanied by an unconquerable hatred. He claims that he treats English gentlemen as English gentlemen, nothing less, nothing more. Whatever Chaudhuri’s attitude towards Englishmen might be, his attitude towards English women is anything but servile. It seems that he tends to relax (his dignity) in the presence of Englishwomen. Thus, when he saw one Mrs. Nathan for the first time, he remembered “her blue eyes, her flaxen hair, her dress and her hat for the whole day” (p.118). He was so impressed that he makes the following pronouncement:

It was many years before I had a second opportunity of seeing an Englishwoman at the same close range.

But the thorough examination I had made at the very first opportunity carried me well through the barren intervening years (p.119).

Chaudhuri suffers from the same weakness for white skin that most other Indians do. But even in the case of the white skin, the love-hate relationship towards Englishmen persists. The English are admired for their white colour, there are many curious notions about the cause of their white skin. For instance, it has been believed that immediately after their birth English babies were thrown into a tub filled with wine which bleached their skin white; or it was believed that they were white because they suffered from a skin disease like leprosy. Thus, the Hindus took
revenge on English men by calling them mlechcha or unclean foreigners. This fact makes Chaudhuri so angry that he writes about his fellow-Hindu: “He is intolerably humiliated, and in his unforgiving envy and hatred he seeks to obliterate the foreigner’s superiority by casting on it the shame of the most loathsome disease which can afflict a man” (p.126).

In any case, Chaudhuri’s *Autobiography* is a valuable record of Indian attitudes towards Englishmen. It recalls those days of the British Raj when Englishmen were treated with fear and envy in India. As a chronicle of days gone by, it is a useful guide to any future historian.

The second Book describes Chaudhuri’s *First Twelve Years* which is divided into four chapters tell about the formative years of his life - 1) My Birth, Parents and Early Years 2) Torch Race Of The Indian Renaissance. 3) Enter Nationalism and 4) We Leave Kishorganj. His father’s passionate interest in educating his children and his anglophilism are discussed, here, at length. Chaudhuri tells of his parents and their influence in fostering his scholarly ambitions. He had a liberal view of education but he did not want his sons to become mere technicians and specialists but also to acquire some ancillary qualification in the field of art which would lend grace to life. The next two chapters are devoted to an elaborate account of how the current religious, political and moral ideas influenced his mind, and make a searching analysis of the different social, political and religious movements of his time.

In the first chapter, *My Birth, Parents and Early Life* Chaudhuri gives his personal bio-data and the environment in which he was born and brought up. He was born on Tuesday, 23rd November 1897. His parents did not maintain the record of his birth though they belonged to an aristocratic family. They were partly deists, partly Hindu monotheists and partly rationalists and as such they had no faith in horoscopes. Apart from this, his father disapproved horoscopes as they were a nuisance because the worries and complications brought by them into the life of a person are endless. He feels that horoscopes gave free hand to the priests in fleecing the family to avert an impending calamity. In West Bengal a less expensive but more interesting device was resorted to for averting calamities foretold in horoscope. He says humorously, “It was believed that given the widest publicity to the impending calamity was the most effective means of averting it”. (p.146)

Another peculiarity of his birth was that all the eight children except the first two were born in the house of their father contrary to the existing custom of those days. His father, being an individualist didn’t send Chaudhuri’s pregnant mother to her mother’s home for delivery. Chaudhuri gives a pen-portrait of his father and mother. He feels happy that he resembles most his mother: “I was perhaps the one among her children who most resembled her in physical and mental traits, yet the
misunderstanding too was the greatest between us”. (p.182) His mother’s face rippled to the emotions as waters to wind. He says that it is a difficult task for a son to portray his father, with the background of Indian patriarchal society. He talks of the predominance and reverence that a father enjoys in the Hindu family: “Father is Heaven, Father is Morality, Father besides is the highest prayer and if Father is pleased, pleased also are all the Gods”. (p.162)

His father, Narayan Dutt Chaudhuri was born in 1867 and lived for sixty-seven years. He was intellectual who took good care of the education of his children. He felt that to be reconciled to the penury of a son was a bitter ordeal. Chaudhuri learned grammar from his father: ‘I learned English without tears, although not without toil’. (p.165). Chaudhuri was interested in the living use of a language and not in the theory of grammar. He felt that “It is the English vocabulary but the English construction which is the bug bear of Indian boys, and only too many never learn it at all” (p.163). Chaudhuri fell head long in love with education: “I, in particular, fell so head long in love with the idea of being a scholar gypsy after reading Matthew Arnold’s poem that this love marked its trail on all my subsequent worldly career”.(p.160)

His mother, Susheela Sundari was a pious, religious-minded woman, who disliked falsehood, dishonesty and moral cowardice. She tried to inculcate these qualities among her children. She always taught them not to be rude intentionally. Her honesty was certified by her mother-in-law which was quite a rare thing in society. She was a superstitious woman who believed that her mother-in-law had laid a curse upon her and so she never enjoyed spiritual happiness. Chaudhuri used to advise her: “Mother if you don’t find happiness within yourself, don’t look for it elsewhere”. (p.183) This inner frustration made her liable to fits of hysteria. It weakened her from day to day and killed her before her time. Chaudhuri pathetically describes the pre-mature death of his mother which shocked and troubled the entire family: “It enfeebled her from day to day and killed her before her time, and it undeservedly saddened my father’s life and troubled ours”. (p.186)

Chaudhuri describes his earliest recollections which made an indelible impression in his life. At the age of seven years he went on a journey to Mymensingh and Kalikutch with his parents and siblings. He saw trains and steamers for the first time. People were bowing down to locomotives as if they were gods. In that journey they had a bitter experience as they missed their father for few hours and all of them were in total chaos: “When the train got into motion at Bandel without our father being with us the darkness of chaos descended on the face of the earth, and we sat stiff, like creatures turned to stone.” (p.190)

One of the main compliments made by Chaudhuri in his Autobiography is that Indian life was “made, shaped and quickened” by British rule. Thus the Indian Renaissance which was a synthesis of the East and the West started in the early
decades of the nineteenth century and reached its zenith by the turn of the century is discussed with earnestness in **Torch Race of Indian Renaissance**. It took about a hundred years for it to come to full flowering. It had far reaching influence on Indians. It was created in a series of waves of different composition--literary, humanistic, religious and ethical. For Chaudhuri, it was a Renaissance of wonder. All the ideas acquired by him up to the age of twelve – intellectual, moral, religious – were considered very important at that time.

It started with the founding of the famous Hindu college in 1817. Raja Rammohun Roy was the first person to express the new moral, religious, literary and humanistic ideals. As a result of his pioneering efforts, many Bengalis embraced Christianity because they thought that religion was the secret of the West’s superiority. The finest fusion of the East and the West took place in Michael Madhusudhan Dutt who based his epic in Bengali on the models of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso and Milton. The beautiful comments made by Legouis about European Renaissance may be apt to Indianise in the context of Indian Renaissance: “The rich soil of the East Bengal was fertilized by a deep layer of English works and Calcutta had become a veritable nest of singing birds.”

So far as religion was concerned, Bakim Chandra Chatterjee and Vivekananda tried to explain Hinduism in the new rationalistic terms of the west. Chaudhuri had a low opinion of his own religion : “and Hinduism, as we have known it during historical times, has always been an admixture of foreign goodness and indigenous debasement”. (p.225) He points out that revitalization of Hinduism couldn’t have been possible if the new western norms had not been applied to it. Further, England as a place of Chaudhuri’s mental make-up gets equal emphasis when his Indian-self grows into manhood. He was completely anglomaniac who had admiration for the English civilization, English education and English administration. Bhagabat Nayak observes:

> It is substantially true that Chaudhuri is almost irrationally, mesmerized by everything English and whatever he thinks and imagines about India should have the approval of English-their philosophy, culture and overall ethos.  

Chaudhuri gives Indians’ affiliation with Shakespeare as an epitome of literary culture: “I do not know if any other country or people in the world has ever made one author the epitome, test and symbol of literary culture as we Bengalis did with Shakespeare in the nineteenth century”.(p. 212) The Hindu religious tradition recognizes three equally legitimate modes of worshipping God: firstly, through
Knowledge, secondly, through action, and lastly, through love. Chaudhuri thought that they were pursuing the first path with Shakespeare. The Renaissance also resulted in the revival of Hinduism. Interest in the great epics of the world led to a study of the great epics of India, and the conflict of good and evil with the victory of good in these epics heightened the moral sense. Chaudhuri was born in a traditional Hindu family of Kishoreganj. It was an orthodox family, and as they grew up they imbibed a number of religious beliefs current in the family and in the surroundings. Though they believed in one God they also believed in many lesser gods and goddesses whose numbers ran into thousands. Thus they were both monotheistic and polytheistic: “they seemed to be equally at home in polytheism and monotheism and passed from one to the other without the slightest perception of any inconsistency”. (p.227) There is no great gulf between monotheism and polytheism. Many gods are manifestations of the one god. He retained faith in both monotheism and polytheism till he lost his faith in both.

Chaudhuri grew up in an atmosphere of moral awareness. His family had adopted the Brahmo system, and naturally that system became the main influence and ingredient in their moral life. Their moral education was thorough and systematic. They were never imparted any systematic religious education, and so Chaudhuri never developed a true spiritual or religious life. Brahmoism and revived Hinduism were both helpful in this connection. These new influences had considerable impact on their character and conduct. Their permanent sources of moral teaching were the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which represent the conflict of good and evil and good being victorious in the end. He also acquired a religious mood through the regular routine of devotional singing. Thus, the Indian Renaissance had a profound influence on the growing boy and intensified his love-hate attitude towards the English people and the English Raj. Basavaraj Naikar makes a beautiful observation: “Chaudhuri’s interest is not in the isolated individual but in the relationships between cultures which are brought together by historical forces and affect the individual life”.

Chaudhuri’s *Autobiography* is a valuable addition to the study of Indian nationalism. It is the record of the feelings of a sensitive man who could not reconcile himself to the idea of foreign domination. The influence of Renaissance soon got mixed up with the influence of Indian nationalism and this further modified his attitude towards the English. There was partition of Bengal in October, 1905. There was intense agitation against the English Raj followed by the Swadeshi Movement or the boycott of English goods. Chaudhuri was swept forward on this rising tide of nationalism. He resented the restrictions put on freedom of expression. He felt subjected and helpless, his frustration with the British Raj increased, and thousands felt like him. A number of patriotic songs
became popular, they helped to keep up their morale, and they also fostered opposition to the British rule.

Chaudhuri’s attitude towards Indian nationalism is pithily summed up in the following sentence: “We knew that our present condition was pitiable: we were poor, subjugated and oppressed, and even degenerate in certain respects, but we knew that we were great once and should be even greater in future”. (p.247) while other ancient civilizations had declined, Indian civilization alone had the capacity rejuvenate itself. Chaudhuri gives a glimpse of the nationalist movement that erupted after the partition of Bengal in 1905: “In 1905 the partition brought with it the nationalist agitation. Our opposition to the division of Bengal was fierce.”(p.259)

Chaudhuri is personally opposed to partition of all kinds either provincial or national and particularly to the partition of Bengal as this marked the beginning of a new phase of nationalist movement. People were full of passion for personal freedom and republican rule, and thought there was an inherent virtue in the removal of an absolute monarchy. He compares the nationalist movement with “the Russian Revolution of 1905”, “The Young Turk Revolution of 1909” and “the Chinese Revolution of 1911” and refers to the great personalities like Burke, Mill, Gladstone, Lincoln, Rousseau, Mazzini and Garibaldi in the world history.

Looking back into the history, he says that evolution of nationalism was not a new thing: rather it had its phenomenal growth long ago. He rejects the idea that nationalism is a gift of the West, and the Indian nationalism in the form of Hindu nationalism as described by Alberuni, a great Islamic scholar, in his book India more than nine hundred years ago. He finds the genesis of Indian nationalism in Alberuni’s well-known statement: “The Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid.” (p.478) Chaudhuri agrees with Alberuni and believes that the Hindus hated all foreigners. Raghavendra Rao says: “In an excellent analysis of Indian nationalism, which is highly original and provocative Chaudhuri declares that the view of nationalism is wholly a western gift to us, is purely a myth which ought to be dismissed”.  

Thus, the Hindus remained separate from the Muslims, who easily conquered a people whose fatalism made them so weak. He rightly says that the prolonged period of subjection made the Hindus hate-addicts. At first, their hatred was fixed upon Muslims; subsequently it was transferred to the British. He is of the view that Hindu nationalism had its consolidation among the members of Hindu society during the Muslim conquest of India.

Although Chaudhuri passionately wanted India free he did not think the British delayed the declaration of independence by exploiting Hindu-Muslim enmity. The two-nation theory came to be formulated during the British days. Chaudhuri
himself admits that the compartmentalization of the two communities started first in education, then in politics:

The most serious and tragic aspect of the Hindu-Muslim discord in India today is the creation of a rancorous hatred which one can feel only for an abstract entity, or only for the foe who is of one’s household, to the relations between man and man, neighbour and neighbour, friend and friend, playfellow and playfellow, fellow worker and fellow worker, when they happen to be of rival faiths. (p.256)

Indians attributed their poverty to British rule. Thus, the course of Indian foreign policy was determined by hatred for British rule. The mutual distrust and discomfort of the rulers and the ruled is found a beautiful expression here: “The arrogance and absence of consideration shown by one side was matched only by the indiscipline and lack of self-respect shown by the other”. (p.320) Chaudhuri regards India’s friendship with the Soviet Union as a corollary of anti-British and anti-Western feeling. He considers Indian nationalism in terms of persistent east-west dichotomy.

The Book-III, Education comprises four chapters 1) Calcutta 2) Experiences of Adolescence 3) Citizen Student and 4) Initiation into Scholarship. This book deals with the ‘education’ and ‘adolescent experiences of Nirad Babu’. The process of detachment from environment began with his arrival in Calcutta and it obviously sharpened his powers of perception. If Chaudhuri had confined himself to Kishoreganj, the petals of his intellectual blooming would have faded away without maturing to a graceful and fruitful conclusion.

In 1910, the Chaudhuris left Kishorganj and shifted to Calcutta. His stay in Calcutta extended from 1910 to 1942 and played a decisive role in moulding his scholarly temperament. The city had considerable influence in moulding his personality during the formative years of his life. He makes no secret of the fact, that he learned much from libraries, museums and even the shabby buildings of Calcutta, but remained wholly unaffected by the surge of its daily life. Chaudhuri’s self-criticism with the ways of the city finds a beautiful expression: “In appearance and manners I was a semi-savage when I came to Calcutta; the city polished off the rough edges but could not break the rustic core.” (p.283) He frankly says that in Calcutta he became a nomad of the industrial age, wandering from pasture to pasture, not for grass, but for employment.
In the first chapter of the third Book, *Calcutta* Chaudhuri narrates his three decades of stay at Calcutta. The city grew enormously, swallowing the neighbouring towns and villages and bulged like a python after swallowing a deer. The expansion was so fast that for the nearby people Calcutta itself came to them. It was even then an international city. Victoria Memorial at that time was under construction and it was to be another landmark of the city, though it was considered to be an unsuccessful imitation of Taj Mahal.

Bengalis were poor. They went to work in the morning and returned in the evening. In reality Calcutta belonged to them. The rest were foreigners. The city was full of lanes and shabby houses. The poor people lived in the shaggiest parts of the city. They were slum-dwellers and enjoyed no amenities of life. Their condition was miserable. The winter and rainy seasons made life in Calcutta unbearable. People were afraid of catching pneumonia in these seasons.

Chaudhuri learned for the first time that in Calcutta the seasons could uglify no less than beautify. He gives a detailed account of the dirtiness and shabbiness of Calcutta city, particularly its slums. During the rains the streets would turn muddy which made their lives a hell: “Even after a moderate shower certain streets and crossings were inevitably flooded, and heavy showers converted them literally into canals and ponds”. (p.303)

Sometimes the rains were so heavy that instead of the usual mud they had floods in the streets. The sewers of Calcutta could not cope with the rains. The hidden and forbidden materials in the drains surface changing the face of the streets: “The water was the dirtiest shade of brown, with all the floatable elements in the garbage afloat, and all the soluble elements in solution.”(p.303) Chaudhuri compares Calcutta in rainy season to Venice, the water city. It was Venice with a vengeance. He generalizes the personal and universalizes the particular. When he describes the city of Calcutta, it is not mere Calcutta but any city of the developing countries.

Chaudhuri began to fall apart from his environment and memorable landscapes which were watched earlier by him with bewitching admiration. A true rustic can never separate himself from his surroundings. Though he lives in Calcutta, he often
turns nostalgic: “The winter mornings in the city were never refreshed for me by the dew I was accustomed to in the country, where to walk to the grass at dawn was to crush a mass of diamonds.” (p.301) The worst thing in Calcutta is the combination of smoke and mist in the evenings: “At Kishoreganj the mist hung over the landscape exactly like a veil of fine muslin. In Calcutta both the smoke and the mist spitied each other. The mist would not allow the smoke to go up, and the smoke mix itself up with the mist as it came down.” (p. 301) The immediate outskirts of the city were squalid and congested beyond description.

Chaudhuri gives an account of his amusing adult life which is more typical than personal in Adolescent Experiences. Such experiences are common and general among the students of his age and physical stature. His father kept Nirad and his brothers for four months at Mymensingh, as a stop-gap arrangement before proceeding to Calcutta to settle down there. Mymensingh was the district headquarters situated on the banks of the Brahmaputra and the broad stretches of its water were always a source of great delight for him. It had all the worst features of town life--congestion, open drains full of filth, squalid streets, narrow bazaars, flies and mosquitoes.

Chaudhuri had the unhappiest experiences of his life as he was away from his parents and he was quizzed by his school fellows and was most reluctantly forced to dwell in the most crowded and insanitary conditions of a hostel. Moreover, he was treated by his school fellows as if he were a boor from some backward village. However, he was much pleased when the proprietor and teacher of “The Fonetik Skool” prophesied a great future for him after studying his palm. He was quite ready to believe those forecasts.

The most memorable event during his stay at Mymensingh and Banagram was watching the sight of Halley’s Comet. He was so engrossed with its refulgent beauty that he sat on a mat in inner courtyard of the house gazing at it with bewitched admiration: “But one day it suddenly appeared in the evening in the western sky and continued to do so, remaining in view for quite a long time. It was a glorious sight putting even the Milky Way into the shade”. (p.310)

Chaudhuri had highly heard of scholastic atmosphere of Calcutta boys much before he entered the city. But there was nothing like that. The school atmosphere was totally different from that of Kishoreganj. The majority of students lacked the intellectual brilliance of which he heard so much. He expected the precocious intellectual brilliance among the city students but later he came to know ironically that he himself was the source of it. The students were quite indisciplined and had little regard for their teachers. Chaudhuri makes a contrast between the rural boys who always commend the teachers with the urban boys who condemn them: “At Kishorganj we looked upon them as if they belonged to a sacerdotal order. At
home the Calcutta boy, with aggressive consciousness of his superior social and economic position, treated his tutor as his fag”. (pp.313-314)
The school life in Calcutta was a great disappointment for him. But it was immensely compensated by more lively and generous literary atmosphere to which they were brought by their distant uncle in Calcutta. Chaudhuri pays a glowing tribute to his English teacher, Mr. Mazumdar who exerted a very strong influence on his later life. He was known to be a distinguished contemporary poet and critic and it was his initiative that made a writer of Chaudhuri:

I remember him as something more than one of my teachers, for as Mr. Mohitlal Mazumdar, the distinguished contemporary poet and critic, he exerted a very strong and beneficial influence on my later life. He introduced me to the literary society of Calcutta and made a writer of me almost by main force. (pp-316-317)

Chaudhuri notices another most memorable event in the Delhi Darbar of Calcutta city in 1911. His first acquaintance with the Encyclopedia Britannica in its newly published eleventh edition sent him to wild raptures. A delicious fragrance of the book gave them notice of the unusual greatness of the work. He was very much thrilled and fascinated by the pictures of a variety of lovely dogs and artillery:

So the very first impression the plates in the Encyclopedia made on me was of a very high degree of mechanical complexity. The sight of these pictures was the beginning for me of a study of artillery technique which lasted many years. (p.327)

Nirad’s political interest is described in the chapter, Citizen-Student. In Calcutta, Nirad began to live in a ‘mess’ or lodge and he was a student and citizen with a taste for politics at one and the same time. In the ‘mess’, life was hard, drab and dull devoid of repose. The rooms were uncongenial for studies which in turn made the inmates coarse in their daily habits. Chaudhuri describes in a light vein, the unscheduled activities of mess life which is common everywhere:

Usually three to four students lived, studied, and slept in one room. There were no fixed hours for anybody or any
particular activity. So while one slept the others might be entertaining friends, or the study of one young man might be accompanied by the snoring of a second, the singing of a third, and the gymnastics of a fourth. (p.330)

Chaudhuri gives the brighter side of the dirty messes. He could not underestimate the importance of mess life. In spite of its demerits, it taught him to face the rough and tumble of the world by enhancing his limits of tolerance: “In it I learned endurance and became, if not easy and polished, at all events tough. I take pride in the exposure and seasoning I have undergone in mess life. (p.332)

The underground revolutionary movement had its most vigorous life between 1910 and 1915 in East Bengal. There was undeclared presence of the revolutionaries in Calcutta and the government kept a special eye on them. By the end of 1915, open political agitation was showing signs of revival and a little later it resulted in the Home Rule Movement led by Mrs. Besant. The Defence of India Act was passed by Lord Hardinge and many of Nirad’s friends and relatives were arrested. He and his elder brother could avoid trouble with the police. Lord Hardinge was due to leave India. Chaudhuri and his friends appreciated the kick and also speculated on his successor: “I personally felt that the situation called for a Viceroy of real genius, and I often remarked to my friends, I wish they would send out Winston Churchill.” (p.350) He had an unbounded admiration for Churchill. Because of such anti-patriotic views, Chaudhuri is denounced by his countrymen. D. Anjaneyulu comments: “Some conventionally patriotic readers were so scandalized by his views on Indian history and politics, that they began to describe it as the Autobiography of a known anti-Indian”.  

Despite the political turmoil, Chaudhuri appeared at his B.A examination in 1918 and after that he went back along with his family to Kishoreganj. Politics remained in a state of suspended animation with him during that period. But it reasserted all its old hold with the coming of the Passive Resistance Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and its suppression in the summer of 1919.

Chaudhuri, like a true scholar wanted to experience “the emotion of a scholar” in the chapter, Initiation Into Scholarship. Learning counts for true scholarship, it is the product of personal temperament. Chaudhuri was awakened to a new understanding of the nature of learning after reading the saying of Mark Pattison: “That the product of study was not the book but the man.”(p.362) Chaudhuri possessed such a scholastic temperament that even as a young student he had strong emotions about scholarship. It was these emotions which impelled him to
revere to the great medievalists of England and Germany--Stubbs, Round, Maitland and Waitz. He was fired with the desire to attain encyclopedic knowledge. Among all the subjects, history fascinated him most. He wanted to be “an epitome of universal knowledge.” (p.369) He himself writes about his insatiable intellectual curiosity:

In the first place, what I was primarily interested in even as a boy was the meaning and purpose of existence and since existence had many facets my intellectual interest also became many-sided. Even without my being aware of its deep springs, my appetite for information and explanation became as varied as my mental dentition became versatile. (p.369)

Subhash Chandra Sarker compares the attributes of Shaw’s intellect to Chaudhuri: “Bernard Shaw is credited with having said, ‘I have nothing to declare but my genius.’ Nirad Babu could say that of himself. Not only is his erudition unmatched by any Indian, past or present; his intellect is also paramount and fearless.”

Chaudhuri fixed his goal to become a professor. He knew that his career would depend more on his own efforts and less on chance. After passing his Intermediate, he had finally fallen in love with history for which he had liking even as a school boy.

Chadhuri enumerates the great teachers, famous books and personalities who had profound influence on him. One of his teachers of history was Mr. Bipin Gupta, an established writer in Bengali and a man highly regarded for his learning as well as his style made an indelible impression on him. The adoration on his teacher made him to adore the subject taught by him. He became an unmentioned favourite of him: “My respect for him made me respect history.”(p.365) Prof. T.R.Glover another outstanding teacher left implanted in Chaudhuri an incredible interest in early Christianity and the Roman Empire.

Some of the books played a decisive influence on Chaudhuri. They were *Constitutional History* of Stubbs, Green’s *Short History of the English People* and Mommsen’s *History of Rome*. He was attracted to Green and Mommsen because of the literary quality of their works and read them with immense pleasure. Apart from the highly specialized interests, he also acquired general intellectual tastes. *Encyclopedia Britannica* continued to be a permanent source of inspiration.
He also acquired a profound interest in bibliography-making which gave him a great deal of self-confidence.
The Imperial Library (now National library) of Calcutta also stimulated his interest in history. There he mastered a number of classics of History. He made regular uninterrupted visits to the Imperial Library for which he owed all his higher education:

But from April 1917 began a series of uninterrupted, regular, and almost daily visits which continued for some years. Neither the sun nor the rain could hold me back, and I did not use the public transport. I had my umbrella and my legs.

(p.374)

It is in this library Chaudhuri read every nineteenth century and early twentieth -century classics of history, and he made himself perfectly familiar with the history of historical writing. In this study Lord Action and Dr. Gooch were his principal guides. He had deep veneration for Lord Acton: “For Lord Action I developed a veneration which was almost idolatry, and as a personal loyalty this veneration is equaled in me only by my affection for Charlotte Bronte”. (p.374)

Book fourth ‘Into the World’ consists of four chapters 1) Man and Life in Calcutta 2) New Politics 3) Vanishing Landmarks 4) An essay on the Course of Indian History. In this book Chaudhuri describes in detail the life in Calcutta. Chaudhuri was imbued with the spirit of Anglicism during his stay at Calcutta.

In the chapter, Man and Life in Calcutta Chaudhuri describes in detail the life in Calcutta, the different sections of society, both Bengali and English, the mansions of the rich and the houses of the middle class: “Life in Culcutta was the symbol and epitome of its national history”. (p.400) To live in Calcutta was to be reminded at every turn of the cultural history and achievements of modern India and to be aware of every significant activity of the present.

The natives and the gentry of Calcutta were extremely proud of themselves and their culture. They hated foreigners and all efforts at reform. They were extremely conservative. There was an influx of East Bengalis and the natives of Calcutta hated them also. They loudly denounced Tagore, Rammohun Roy and Brahmo Samaj:

The natives of Calcutta should have been hostile to the reforming movements. The sternest denouncers of Rammohun Roy or Tagore, for instance, were the gentry of
Calcutta. But while opposed to all kinds of reform, they were most opposed to religious reform and the emancipation of women. (p.403)

But they were men of great intellect, erudition and political power. Sunil Dasgupta identifies the positive qualities of the Bengali gentry in Chaudhuri: “There is no doubt that Nirad Babu epitomizes some of what is best in the Bengali bhadralok (gentry) the learned, enlightened and civilized man.”  

Public life was made interesting by processions and public meetings and demonstrations, but private life was dull. They had their addas where they assembled in the afternoons. This gregarious instinct killed their family life for they had no time left for their wives and children. The natives of Calcutta had virtually killed family life, as they had strong herd instinct. There was no custom among them of a man sitting with his wife and children in the evening.

In New Politics Chaudhuri narrates political movements of pre-independent India and his adoration for Gandhi. Although he did not participate in the nationalist movement, he watched minutely the new trends in Indian politics. The old leaders like Tilak were still living and active but everyone’s eyes were fixed on Gandhi as the coming man. The practical application of the political weapon of Passive Resistance disillusioned Chaudhuri because it degenerated into mob violence. It also caused the severity of repression in India. During the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, Chaudhuri veered round to a passionate approval of Mahatma Gandhi’s methods and became an almost idolatrous worshipper of his personality. Gandhism became an integral part of Indian politics. Chaudhuri writes: “The victory of Gandhism was the victory of a new kind of nationalism.”  

The new politics brought about the death of various forms of Indian nationalism. It also crushed the moral awareness created by Brahmoism and the Neo-Hinduism in the nineteenth century. It destroyed the concept of synthesis aiming at a fusion of the values of the East and the West. Only the imitation of the West emerged as the conspicuous feature of our cultural life. He deplores the degeneration of Hindu society. Karnani Chetan writes: “Chaudhuri’s great achievement in his Autobiography was that he projected his own inner conflict as the conflict of the whole race. By a deep analysis of his own attitude, he saw in his own microcosm the macrocosm of the whole Hindu ethos”.  

Vanishing Landmarks is a wonderful self-therapy in which Chaudhuri bemoans over the vanishing landmarks of morality and religion. Politics was an all-consuming passion that vanished or degraded morality and religion. Describing the unperceived revolution in the contemporary life, Chaudhuri had given priority to
politics over the other things. The new politics presented the best illustration of
transition from positive to negative and from rational to the sub-rational values. All
other Indian activities were completely dominated by politics. In other words,
politics had established its complete hold over everything. The first causality was
the moral awareness created by Brahmonism and New Hinduism. Morality is
pushed out of the lives of people. Corruption in public life increased. People
became dishonest and didn’t hesitate to accept bribes. Chaudhuri hated the loss of
moral values: “I do not mean by this that our society became at one stroke as
dishonest, self-seeking, venal, mercenary, and insensitive to all considerations not
only of probity, but also of appearances, in its pettifogging pursuit of money as it
now is”. (p.487) It was a dangerous trend as people used to lead the uncriticized
life which was not worth living.

Chaudhuri says there are a large number of people in India, who bear a respectable
appearance outwardly but have dishonest adventures at heart, seldom caring for
moral values. The spectacle reminds him of scavenging birds and animals
wandering about in search of offal and filth: “I want to shut my eyes on this lack of
moral values for I am no satirist. Still such lack of moral values is intolerable to
me”. (p.489)

Another important mark which was vanishing is religion. Spiritualism, too, lost its
value and significance. It became purely a theoretical activity of a few with no
impact on public life. The supreme virtue of Hinduism was that it considered life to
be a unitary spiritual experience. He believes that culture is indeed the faculty of
making distinctions. However great is our spirituality, Hinduism appears to be
against the current. The common belief that the gods could be bribed had a
pernicious effect on Hindu morality and taking of bribes thus justified. The ethical
immaturity of Hinduism is apparent in its failure to develop a high sense of moral
responsibility.

The most serious handicap, which the Hindu morality suffers from, is the
assumption that the gods can be won over by bribes. The Hindu believes that he is
capable of gaining any favour of gods by just bribing them; in fact he is capable of
bribing them through priests. The idea of the corruptibility of the gods is very
widespread and firmly rooted in Hinduism. Chaudhuri says that the Hindu
pantheon is as corrupt as the Indian administration:

    The divinities were merciful and compassionate and did
not expect heavy bribes when the means were denied.
They were also socialistic and gave to every man
according to his need and took from him according to his
capacity. A poor peasant could get moral remission for an
offering worth five annas and a quarter (the lowest traditional amount), while Hindu millionaires and profiteers were expected to erect temples and dharamsalas. (pp 495–496)

R.K. Kaul writes on the dichotomy of Indian behaviour:
The detailed analysis of one orientalist demonstrates that there was a complete dichotomy in the attitude to the Indians in the mind of the orientalists. While the ancient Indians and their sacred books were to be eulogized, contemporary Indians were considered to be debased and unworthy of association with the British rulers.  

Chaudhuri feels annoyed for his career also experienced a crash, along with the important landmarks of intellectual and spiritual life. He wanted to become a university professor but professorship went out of his reach with his failure in obtaining the M.A Degree. As he was mentally and physically weak at that time he had to give up idea of reappearing at the next M.A Examination. He was pained greatly with his father’s cold indifferent attitude towards him:
That afternoon I had a long and peaceful walk by the river. A great burden was lifted from my mind. But this respite was short-lived. It was quickly followed by a new kind of mental strain. To begin with, there was my father’s coldly indifferent attitude towards me, an attitude maintained so consistently that it hurt me more than even any angry and continuous abuse would have done. (p.509)

With the help of a friend Chaudhuri managed to get a job in Military Accounts Department. In the beginning, he worked hard and soon earned promotion with increase in salary. But the digital work didn’t suit his scholarly temperament and
soon he began to neglect it. At last he was dismissed and faced poverty, want, humiliation and extreme misery. He suffered from spiritual distress, became pessimistic and longed for death. He suffered a sort of moral and intellectual decay. He admits that the Edwardian Bengal is dead and killed by partition, and the social and political turmoil. He made an escape to the west with a desire to live as permanent resident moving away from East Bengal to Calcutta, from Calcutta to Delhi, and from Delhi to Oxford.

An Essay on the Course of Indian History is the most important concluding part of the book as it makes his Autobiography more a national than a personal history. Chaudhuri could have ended his book here. But he makes a judicious comment by reminding his readers that his Autobiography is “more of a national than personal history.” (p.512) Srinivasa Iyengar observes: “It is clear then that Chaudhuri’s real aim is to write history and the autobiographical exercise is merely a means to get the history started.”

Thus Autobiography of An Unknown Indian is not merely the life-history of an Indian citizen but of the whole nation. It is a record of India’s literary, social, political, religious, educational and cultural history in the present time.

The last chapter, An Essay on the Course of Indian History is written to justify the views or opinions he has expressed during the course of the book. He speaks with all the humility towards his favourite subject, history by quoting the French historian Fostel de Colunjes: “No applause for me, please; it is not I whom you hear speaking to you, it is history which is speaking through my mouth”. (p. 513)

His view of Indian history is cyclic, when one cycle decayed and thus there was social disorder, it was followed by a second cycle and order was restored, and so is the case with the third cycle also. Order-Disorder-Order has always been the rhythm of Indian history. Great empires and civilizations had risen and fallen in the world, and the Hindu civilization followed a similar course. The epics of the world make this fact clear. They all reflect the conflict of the good and the evil, with the good triumphant in the end. Chudhuri expresses his apprehension of the rise and fall of civilizations: “The reading of these episodes created within me the palpitating apprehension of a great disaster lurking within a great victory. (p.515 )

This is also a fact of the civilization of modern India. Social order has always given way to social disorder and the order has been established once again. The fall of the Mughal Empire was followed by the establishment of British Empire which has fallen as a result of the Indian struggle for independence. The decay of the existing order and the emergence of a new one is the law of Nature.

Chaudhuri’s account of India’s history is not external. It is based on his personal study and experience. As a serious student of Indian history he differs from the conventional categorizer of it on different standpoints. Indian history has followed a cyclic course. There have been three cycles. In his view the first cycle begins
with the third century B.C. and extends up to the end of the twelfth century A.D.;
the second cycle begins with the defeat of Prithvi Raj Chauhan by Muhammad of
Ghaur in 1192 A.D. and the third extends from the beginning of the Battle of
Plassey in 1757 A.D. to its end on 15th August 1947, with the termination of the
British rule in India.
From the cultural standpoint he calls the first cycle as Hindu, the second Islamic,
and the third European. From ethnic standpoint the first is Indo-Aryan, the second
Indo-Islamic, and the third is Indo-British. From the linguistic point of view the
first made use of Sanskrit, the second Persian, and the third English.
In each cycle India was dominated by the culture which was most developed and
influential. In the first phase it was Aryan, in the second phase it was Islamic and
in the third phase it was a synthesis of the cultures of the East and the West which
was dominant. He gives the evolution of these cycles:

> In this sequence the course of Indian history is seen as an expanding spiral. The ambit within which Indian history unfolds itself in each cycle is broader than that of preceding cycle. This process covers the entire historical period in India. (p.526)

Political order in India was always established and maintained by foreigners. It was first established by the Turks. Turks- Mughals and Persians first established political order in India. Then it was taken over by the Anglo-Saxons. Now the Anglo-Saxon power in India seems to be passing away. Europe itself seems to be disintegrating. But in reality it is organizing itself under the leadership of America. Chaudhuri proves India’s dependence on the West by showing that all great men in India initially got their recognition in the West. Neither Rammohan Roy nor Rabindra Nath Tagore was accepted by his countrymen until they were first honoured in the West. Swami Vivekananda travelled for twelve years all over India, finding no way to work for his countrymen; so he went to America. He was received in India as an eminent thinker only when the parliament of religions at Chicago gave him an unusually warm welcome. S. Chandrasekhar, an eminent astrophysicist, settled in the U.S.A. so that he could pursue his research. Har Gobind Khorana got his Nobel Prize as an Indian, but all his work was done in America. Ironically, even Chaudhuri got recognition in India only when his *Autobiography* was published in London. Overnight, he became a well-known Indian. Old Hindu culture is dead and it cannot be rejuvenated. Some foreign
influence is needed to bring India once again into the main stream of human evolution. Only then can India move forward to greater heights. Though Chaudhuri started and made his maiden work late in his life, the Autobiography is a vibrant ejection of his ardently accumulated ideas for more than four decades, gushed out with the volcanic eruption forming into an awesome Autobiography with a marvelous mountainous beauty as he himself compares his book with the Himalayan mountain.

Thus, the Autobiography is one of the great books of Indo-Anglian literature in the twentieth century. It contains, for the first time in English, the most complete picture drawn yet of the psyche and religion of the secular, middle class, colonial Indian possessing and possessed by. It is haunted by the names and presences of the rivers and the flora and fauna of his landscape. His first book is a splendid description of the socio-cultural life of India in general and East Bengal in particular; it is Chaudhuri’s thesis on Indian history. K. Raghavendra Rao has rightly said:

One of the greatest achievements of the Autobiography is to study Imperialism as a cultural problem. It shows how complex, confusing and even ridiculous can be the human drama involved in Empire-building, Empire-running and Empire-dismantling!” It is significant that Chaudhuri started writing his book only after India attained freedom. It remains a brilliant epitaph on British rule in India.¹⁶

The book is full of reminiscences of his native charms and flavours. In his student days Chaudhuri being a voracious reader began to collect knowledge as clouds collect vapours from oceans during summer only to make his first cloud-burst in Autobiography and then in Circe. Thus, the Autobiography is not just the self-revelations of a person and his nation. It is more than that. It has laid a foundation for a much wider scope of varied ideas which have been transplanted in the later works of his creativity.

In this book Chaudhuri has made a foundation for further magnification of his marvelous ideas into voluminous books which have become as popular as his Autobiography. In other words, his later works of creativity are an elaborate expansion of his exquisite expressions that he has made in brief in his
Autobiography. Thus A Passage to England is an expansion of the fourth chapter, England in the Book-I of his Autobiography. To Live or Not to Live is the magnified social views scattered in the Book-III of Autobiography. The environmental fatalism which is the main theme of The Heart of India (The Continent of Circe) has its first expression in the last chapter of Autobiography. He says no foreigner has escaped the scorching heat of Indo-Gangetic plain: “Aryan, Turk or Anglo-Saxon— has been able to escape the consequences of living in the Indo-Gangetic plain. His energy has been drained, his vitality sapped and his will and idealism enfeebled” (p. 555) The gods, goddesses and godmen who have paraded in Hinduism: A Religion to Live By have their inaugural appearance in The Vanishing Landmarks of Book-IV of the Autobiography. The Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse, written and published in his hundredth year is a collection of the pre-conceived notions made on apocalypse in the book written at his fiftieth year. He talks of decadence of civilizations: “All that we have learnt, all that we have acquired, and all that we have prized is threatened with extinction. We do not know how the end will come. (p.141) Thy Hand Great Monarch, which runs to nearly one thousand pages is a sequel to his first Autobiography. So, Autobiography of An Unknown Indian is the main trunk of his creativity from which different branches have stemmed up and grown up in different directions shooting down their prop roots; making them separate trunks and the ideas of which are interspersed in all his works.

That may be the reason why Bhagabat Naik commends Chaudhuri’s Autobiography as it presents socio-economic and cultural condition of Bengal in particular and political condition of India in general. The most characteristic feature of the Autobiography is that “It also contains all the basic ideas that have shaped his highly individualistic world view”. Farkrul Alam describes the Autobiography as “having achieved the status of a minor classic and as one of the canonical texts of Indian English literature”. Chaudhuri’s Autobiography is not free from faults. C.D. Narasimhaiah is right when he writes, there is in the present book, “a looseness of thinking matched by the clumsiness of expression”. When the Autobiography is studied from the background of the definition given by Shipley: “The Autobiography proper is a connected narrative of the author’s life with stress laid on introspection or on the significance of his life against a wider background. “The writer must be truthful. There should be no concealment or shying away from one’s faults and weaknesses, and there should be no attempt at self-glorification. The truth should neither be concealed nor exaggerated”. The major shortcoming of Chaudhuri’s Autobiography is that he glorified his external life by concealing his internal emotional life.
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