CHAPTER – III

DIAGNOSIS
The Heart of India by Nirad C. Chaudhuri was originally named as The Continent of Circe, when it was first published in 1966. It is the most controversial social criticism of the Hindus in India. This is a general survey of the history and the culture of the Indian people. The author applies historical method and discovers how history and geography have worked to create endless conflicts and dissimilar communities. The account links all historic events from Aryan migration up to Nehru’s death in a coherent, though shifting perspective. The book deals with the Aboriginals, Hindus with their Anglicized variety, Muslims, Eurasians and Indian Christians. The main feature of the book is the imaginative interpretation of the Hindu personality based on original sources. The author puts forward the revolutionary thesis that the Hindus are really Europeans in India, corrupted and denatured by the tropical environment which is metaphorically described as Circe. The Heart of India may be designated as a descriptive, analytical and satirical work. It is a brilliantly written thesis of an erudite scholar who has distorted history to suit his pre-conceived notions. His main thesis is that the Hindus are aliens in India who are nevertheless living in the sub-continent as victims of climate and surroundings. He contradicts the scientifically established historical and sociological truth that the Aryans ceased to be foreigners with the absorption of several indigenous cultures. Though Chaudhuri treats the Hindu as a European in India, he regards him as emaciated, weak and perverse and as one who has been devoid of his European qualities. The fair European has become the brown Hindu whom the climate of India has enfeebled both in body and mind. Chaudhuri believes that India is a defective kind of Europe.

The views that he expresses are so extraordinary that they constitute Chaudhuri’s original contribution to Hindu cultural anthropology, ethnology, sociology and history. As a historian Chaudhuri digs out the Deposits of Time imaginatively and has unearthed the three layers of Indian history as 1) The Aryan invasion, 2) The Greek and Muslim invasion and 3) The British colonization. History proves that the Hindus during the period of their ethnic history, despite having conflicts and animosities, showed a willingness to absorb non-Hindus into their society.

The book deals mainly with the influence of the Indian environment on the Hindu character. It is full of geographical explanations and climatological philosophy. Chaudhuri’s assertion is that the Hindus are the descendants of a European race – the Aryans – who lost their glorious heritage because of the awful climate of this subcontinent. He says: “The Hindu is the European distorted, corrupted and made
degenerate by the cruel torrid environment and by the hostility, both real and imagined, of the true sons of the soil”. (p.139).

The book is about the denunciation of the Hindu society. If Chaudhuri’s second book *A Passage to England* is written with total fascination for England; *The Heart of India* expresses his complete disillusionment with India. In his *A Passage to England*, he turns a pro-British but in *The Heart of India*, he seems to be an anti-Indian. Chaudhuri has propounded a new theory called environmental fatalism through which he wants to prove that the Hindus are originally Europeans settled in India corrupted and denatured by the tropical environment. Thus the book is a lament on the fate of the Aryan who left his homeland in Europe only to be caught and left squeezed-out and enervated in the steamy-heat of the Indo-Gangetic plain. It is quite ironical to note that Chaudhuri learned about his European origin only when he went to England: “The notion that we Hindus were Europeans enslaved by a tropical country became a conviction when I paid a short visit of eight weeks to the west in 1955 at the age of fifty seven.” (p. 348) Till the age of twenty, Circe cast such a spell on him that he often lived in a state of misery. Chaudhuri slowly recovered his original soul by forming European habits. Now he is happy. “I have rescued my European soul from Circe, to whom it was a kind of happiness to be in thrall”. (p.350) Commenting on the ruthless attitude of Chaudhuri on Indians, Prof. Iyengar who is highly impressed by Chaudhuri’s learning and scholarship, cannot understand and explain his lack of compassion for his countrymen whom he called the swine:

What has happened to Nirad Chaudhuri? He has rescued, he claims, his own European Soul from Circe and recovered his Ariel’s body from Sycorax. Then why not show a little compassion to the other ‘victims of Circe’? Why does he write as though the springs of compassion are wholly dried up within him? ¹

The purpose of this unusual view is to show that Chaudhuri is a Hindu with a European soul. While he has saved himself from the prevailing swinishness, other Hindus have continued to suffer on the Continent of Circe. He makes a conscious effort to absorb the phenomenal world through his senses and looks at the world with an extreme alertness. He also attempts to rationalize and gives a historical

¹ All the references in the parentheses are from *The Heart of India*, Jaico impressions, 2008.
veneer to his prejudices and mercilessly attacks all things Indian. It is clear that Chaudhuri has a European soul in him though he is a Hindu. Chaudhuri expresses his conviction strongly:

Life long observation has convinced me that there is a streak of insanity in the Hindu and that nobody will arrive at a normal personality… In all Hindu activities, especially, in the public sphere, can be detected clear signs of either a feebleness of mental faculties or perversion of them” (p.123).

Chaudhuri, is thus, right in designating his work as *An Essay on Peoples of India*, because his main intention is to endeavour and to understand the mysterious and puzzling country of which he himself is a native. There seems to be no connection between India’s tall talk and the squeamish and ugly existence. Chaudhuri’s anger, bitterness and concern are expressed in his words. “I declare every day that a man who cannot endure dirt, dust, stench, noise, ugliness, disorder, heat and cold has no right to live in India”. (p.21). If in matters of public hygiene and sanitation, India is far behind of the western world, it is due to the dire poverty of Indians which is the important legacy of the British Empire in India.

Chaudhuri’s wisdom enables him to identify three European principles violated by Hindu life – reason, order and measure. The negation takes place through a terrible dichotomy:

- an extreme renunciation with greed; an unnatural insistence of chastity accompanied by a sex-obsession and sensuality in personal life; a morbid respect for animal life go hand in hand with beastly cruelty to living creatures, and in moral sphere contradictions that make them mix up sexual experience with the spiritual (p. 98).

The original title of the book, *The Continent of Circe* stands for the vast continent of India. In Greek mythology, *Circe* is a great sorceress known for her black magic and venomous herbs. She has had slain her husband to obtain his
kingdom. Anyone who drinks from her cup turns into a pig. She has detained Ulysses and changed all his companions into filthy swine. Chaudhuri’s metaphorical choice of the title of the book is that ‘India is the sorceress, people who make it their home, in the course of time, become dehumanized and turn into swine.’

Critical opinion is divided with regard to the book. On the one hand critics, like Rama Murthy and S.Venkata Narayana\(^2\), welcome Chaudhuri’s onslaught on Hindu faith, Indian tradition, culture and history as a self-therapy for a nation directly in need for its own bitter truth:

> In *The Continent of Circe* Mr. Chaudhuri expands his earlier views to their logical conclusion. The majesty and solemnity of the *Autobiography* passes here into a tumultuous turbulence of a spirit vexed by the growing stupidity and inhumanity of a nation that is still beloved to his heart.\(^3\)

Taking note of the intensely personal and passionate quality of Chaudhuri’s doctrine some other critics declare that the main thesis of the author in *The Heart of India* “takes the form of a diabolic vision: the Indians are swine”\(^4\) says Nissim Ezekiel. Radhakrishna Murthy dismisses Chaudhuri’s so-called truth as “Soporific distortion of fact”\(^5\) and calls him a lunatic, an eccentric and megalomaniac.

In the introductory chapter, *The World’s Knowledge of India since 1947* Chaudhuri gives the reasons for the absence of world’s knowledge about India since 1947. According to him the world’s knowledge of secretive India since 1947 is vitiated by contemporary requirements of international friendship and the consequent timidity. The Indian novelists distort the image of India for the ready consumption of their novels in the western market. Chaudhuri blames Indo-Anglian novelists for the world’s inaccurate knowledge of India:

> The Novelists, too conscious of the demand, and keen to meet it, go about the country notebook in hand, collect local colour and turns of speech, record snatches of conversation, with special reference to such slips in English as lend themselves to caricature, and then three quarters in ponderous solemnity, and quarter in cold-blooded self-seeking malice,
they turn out works which are no more fiction than blue-books are fables (p.12)

But Chaudhuri is not accurate. He displays a naïve attitude to Indian creative writing in English. India has been depicted more effectively in the Indo-Anglian novels only. Chaudhuri may be right in feeling that a cultural gap creates a translation handicap and poses a problem of adequate and precise verbal device when the Indian writers in English “try to see their country and society in the way Englishmen or Americans do and write about India in the jargon of the same masters.”(p.14) But one may feel that Chaudhuri fails to give an example of artificial themes. Any literary critic impartially admits that the best Indo-Anglian writing does reflect both thematic authenticity and technical excellence. For example, R.K.Narayan’s The English Teacher provides a wonderful microcosm of the Indian culture. Raja Rao, in his expatriate’s idealization of India, provides an interesting counterpoint to Chaudhuri’s heretical portrait of his own country. G.V.Desani, in All About H- Hatterr, presents a much better picture of a confused Eurasian than does Chaudhuri in his Autobiography. So Chaudhuri is not correct in assuming that the Indian Writer in English has to bear the difficult double burden of creating “an adequate Western idiom” (p.15) and writing genuine Indian themes. Chitre aptly observes:

It is not picture-postcard Indianness he objects to: he only wants better picture-postcards. He will perhaps accuse any modern, self-conscious and highly individualistic Indian creative writer of being un-Indian. He seems to expect all Indian novelists in English to write in a naturalistic, realistic or documentary vien. That amounts to forcibly pushing them backward into the nineteenth century.6

In the first two chapters, From the Word to the Eye and The Deposits of Time Chaudhuri discusses the ethnic situation in India. The word ‘Hindu’ does not have a religious connotation but a geographical connotation for him. He prefers to equate the term ‘Hindu’ with the term ‘Indian.’

It needs very little Greek to discover that the words ‘Hindu’ and ‘Indian’ are etymologically the same … The
definition originally meant ‘an inhabitant of the region of the river Indus (in Sanskrit -- Sindhu), but was extended to the people of the whole continent. Thus, in its primary meaning, the word ‘Hindu’ stands for the same thing as Indian… (p.25)

Any kind of religious association with the word ‘Hindu’ is not accepted by Chaudhuri. He also refuses even to think that ‘we are Hindus because we have a religion called ‘Hinduism’ and the word is comparable to ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim.’ According to Chaudhuri the European Orientalists found that “…the Hindus had no other name for the whole complex of their religious beliefs and practices except the phrase ‘Sanatana Dharma’ or the Eternal Way; they did not even have a word of their own for religion in the European sense; and so the Orientalists coined the word ‘Hinduism’ to describe that complex of religion:

Actually we Hindus are not Hindus because we have a religion called or understood as Hindus; our religion has been given the very imprecise label of ‘Hinduism,’ because it is the jumble of the creeds and rituals of a people known as Hindus after their country. On this analogy, the Greek religion might be called Hellenism, and even Graecism.(p.27)

Jawaharlal Nehru, in *The Discovery of India*, interprets the word ‘Hindu’:

The word ‘Hindu’ does not occur at all in our ancient literature. The first reference to it in an Indian book is, I am told, in a Tantrik work of the eighth century A.D, where ‘Hindu’ means a people and not the followers of a particular religion. But it is clear that the word is a very old one, as it occurs in the Avesta and in old Persian. It was used then and for a thousand years or more later by the peoples of Western and Central Asia for India, or
rather for the people living on the either side of the Indus river. The word is clearly derived from Sindhu, the old, as well as the present, Indian name for the Indus. From this Sindhu came the words Hindus and Hindusthan, as well as Indus or India.7

Nehru, discussing the religious connotation of the word ‘Hindu,’ remarks that though Buddhism and Jainism arose in India and remained the integral parts of the Indian life, culture and philosophy certainly did not belong to Hinduism or the Vedic Dharma. Nehru strongly desires that Indian culture should not be referred to as Hindu culture. For Nehru, Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided and it is difficult to say definitely whether it is a religion or not in the usual sense of the word. That is why he considers it incorrect to use the term ‘Hindu’ or ‘Hinduism’ for Indian culture even with reference to the distant past, although the various aspects of thought, as embodied in ancient writings, were the dominant expression of that culture.

According to Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, the Hindu civilization is so called, since its original founders or earliest followers occupied the territory drained by the Sindhu (the Indus) river system corresponding to the North-West Frontier provinces and the Punjab. He also feels that as this civilization extended over the whole of India it suffered many changes, but still kept up its continuity with the old Vedic type developed on the banks of Sindhu. He states:

The term ‘Hindu’ had originally a territorial and not a creedal significance. It implied residence in a well-defined geographical area. Aboriginal tribes, savage and half-civilized people, the cultural Dravidians and the Vedic Aryans were all Hindus as they were the sons of the same mother.8

K.V.Rangaswami Iyengar explains that the word ‘Hindu’ is derived from Pahlavi Hendu, the name given by the Persians to the river, the Sindhu. According to him it is possible that it was also due to a racial distinction from the rest of the people of the Persian Empire the name was applied to the Indians as the word ‘Hindu’ meant
‘dark’ in Pahlavi. In Sanskrit the word ‘Hindu’ stands for ‘Arya.’ So, K.V.Rangaswami Iyengar says the word ‘Hindu’ is thus not an extremely religious term; it denotes also a country (Aryavarta or Bharatavarsa), and to a certain extent also a race. It has geographical, spiritual and ethnic bases. When a man claims to be a Hindu, he should strictly qualify for three tests-- religion, parentage and country.\(^9\)

The physical characteristics of the main ethnic groups and the recurrent conflicts among them are described with the greater interest in The Deposits of Time by Chaudhuri. Prof. Iyengar says “Chaudhuri proposes to describe people of India in their natural groupings, both ethnic and cultural, and analyses their collective personality in the light of the historical evolution which has formed it”.\(^10\) In this book the chief doctrine of Chaudhuri is that the Hindus are of European stock, immigrant Aryans from Mitannaian — Mesopotamia, who colonized the Indo-Gangetic plains and certain area of South India.

He classifies Indians into three groups — the Dark, the Yellow, and the Brown. This classification is derived from Herbert Risley’s The People of India. The Darks, with their sharp and modelled faces, lived in the hilly and wooded areas of Central India and the Deccan; the Yellow Mongoloids confined themselves to the Himalayan regions and the hills of Assam; and the sharp featured Browns lived in the plains. The Darks and the Yellows are the Aboriginals. The Browns are the Aryans, the Hindus. The Muslims of India can be distinguished from the Hindus by their dress, speech, manners, features and expression.

The most outstanding feature of the ethnic history of India is the recurrent conflicts among the ethnic groups-the Darks, the Yellows, the Browns and the Muslims. The Darks and the Yellows are the Aboriginals. The Browns are the Aryans, the Hindus. Chaudhuri believes that it was the confrontation of the Aryans with the dark primitives (aboriginals) that set in motion the ethnic history of India. The primitives were always living in the hilly and wooded regions of India and the Deccan, as the Gangetic-plain which was too wet and marshy for a hunting folk.

In the south the Aryan settlement was different from what it was in the north. The Aryans could not totally suppress them:

Thus, if the Aryanization of the north was like the colonization of North America or Australia by Europeans, the position of the Aryan in the south resembled that of the Europeans in South Africa. They were a civilized minority among a large and barbarous native majority. (P.48)
The Darks were reduced to servitude as untouchable labourers in large numbers, though in the hills many survived as free men.

The aboriginals at the time of Aryan invasion of India were quiet and quite happy at home in their hills and jungles. But the Aryans who were agricultural people hated these hunters and never disguised their hatred for them. From the beginning the Aryans were both frightened and fascinated by the aboriginals. Naturally, until they were established in the country in unchallenged power, they felt the hatred more than the attraction. In later years, the admiration for the aboriginals died out and only the abhorrence remained. The occidentlists soon passed from sentimental admiration to disillusioned abuse.

The later invasions made it necessary for the Hindus to fight for the survival of their society on two fronts – against internal proletariat of the Primitive Darks and an external proletariat of Asian nomads. As a result, the Hindus now formed a close society based on birth, became aggressively self-conscious, violently xenophobic and intensely, colour-conscious- traits that remain till today. But history proves that the Hindus, during this period of their ethnic history, absorb non-Hindus into their society. Chaudhuri asserts, that the Hindus possessed an extraordinary capacity to assimilate foreigners and bring about a racial synthesis. Actually, the historical situation left them with no choice and the barbarians themselves, wanting a rise in the cultural scale, must have been very willing. This was accomplished through an extension of the caste system.

Chaudhuri exhibits orthodox views as far as his classification of race is concerned, but he is unorthodox in his views about the Caste System. Chaudhuri champions in favour of this institution, when everyone else speaks against the caste-system. He says that only a strong dose of casteism prevents undeserving people from obtaining the high offices. Chaudhuri asserts:

If the system suppressed anything, it was only ambition unrelated to ability, and watching the mischief from this kind of ambition in India today I would say that we could do with a little more of the caste system in order to put worthless adventures in their place. (pp.57-58)

Most of the people may not be convinced with this typical attitude of Chaudhuri. For him various charges made against the caste-system are unfounded. It neither creates diversity and disunity, nor does it interfere with economic freedom nor bars the way to talent. There was no other way, apart from the caste-system, in which the Aryans could preserve their ethnic, social and cultural personality from being
submerged into a conglomeration with native Darks. The elasticity of this system would have facilitated the assimilation of foreign barbarians and the promotion of the Dark to the Hindu status. But Chaudhuri is not correct in his tracing the origin of the caste-system in India. It was not the desire of the Aryans to preserve their ethnic, social and cultural personality from being submerged in a conglomeration with the native Darks, nor to give a defined status to each individual that gave birth to the caste-system.

Taking the caste-system as a whole Chaudhuri describes it as a social organization which contributes to order, stability and regulation of competition and advises the foreign reformers of the Hindu society and their Hindu imitators: ‘Please keep your tongues and pens off the caste-system…’ Please do not pulverize a society which has no other force of cohesion, into amorphous dust,’ (p.58)

Verghese makes a prudent remark that Chaudhuri’s “view against an egalitarian society is born out of a kind of misplaced prejudice.”

The caste originally meant the division of function and responsibility in the agrarian society of the Hindus. People were divided into different castes according to social needs and individual action. Division of labour is the main inspiration behind the fourfold caste-system. In the Vedic Society this system had a noble beginning, but, in due course of time, many evils crept into it. As the caste system has no utility, one feels that Chaudhuri should not have supported it.

Chaudhuri further points out that the caste system failed to cope with the Islamic invasion and the British expansion which created cultural and genetic cleavages in a society already split apart into Aryan and aboriginal. He feels that the Hindus lost their power to assimilate and adapt themselves to the new cults. The true ethnic relationship has got completely broken by a new cultural and social association.

Chaudhuri wants to prove that the Hindus have become aliens in India without their knowledge, due to Muslim conquests and the British or European expansion. He says that when the foreigners seized the country, the natives became the foreigners. Just to formulate his theory and apply the legend of Circe it would have become essential for him to say that the Hindus have remained aliens in India. But, Chaudhuri fails to realize the fact that the historical evidence, he presents to support his thesis holds no ground as they are the result of a subjective analysis of the historical facts. As such he seems to contradict his own view that a historian must be objective.

The sorceress, Circe makes her appearance in the third chapter, The Children of Circe. Chaudhuri seems to have been inspired by the legend of Circe with whose impact he has written the book. His heart is filled with compassion for her unfortunate and poor children – the aboriginals. Inspite of the age-long Aryan opposition, the aboriginals were able to continue their own way of life. He bemoans the fact that the aboriginals are used as a cultural commodity and no
genuine affection is shown to them. He fears that the industrialization will unnecessarily Europeanize them and makes them run away from their pastoral surroundings. But now the westernized Hindu rulers of modern India threaten to destroy the culture of the aboriginals through industrialization because of their love of money. The unfortunate result is that today the aboriginals “…face the prospect of seeing their distinctive way of life wiped off the ethnic map of India. (pp.73-74) Chaudhuri is a bundle of contradictions is quite evident from his plea for the preservation of the cultural identity of the aboriginals. On the one hand he shows his anxiety for the Hindus’ threat to the cultural and ethnic identity of the children of Circe, and, on the other, he shows his indignation at their being put on display at the annual folk-dance festival in Delhi. One may fail to understand why Chaudhuri wants the children of Circe to remain innocent forever and to be conscious of their environment. Verghese very aptly remarks:

One wonders why Chaudhuri wants them to remain innocent for ever …That the tribal people and the aboriginal should continue to exist in their natural state unsullied by industrialization is a bee in Chaudhuri’s bonnet which of course is enormous enough to accommodate such bees as the caste-system and class-distinctions. Perhaps he prefers an unschooled Caliban to a schooled one. There is no doubt that Chaudhuri’s sympathy for ‘the Children of Circe is quite misplaced.’

This bodes a very dark future for the poor aboriginals. The extension of democracy which will enable them to share political power with the Hindu instead of uplifting them, as the political leaders think, will bring only degradation to them. The increasing dependence of the Hindu ruling class on the Americans, for the industrialization of their country, is still another threat to the existence of aboriginals for then the Americans, “… will repeat their history by having the blood of the dark Indian on their head as they have that of the Red. (pp.84-85) Chaudhuri attributes all the vices of the British character and their evil administration in India to the Indian climate. He says that the environmental fatalism cast spell not only on the Aryans but also on the British in India. He believes the Englishmen did not behave properly in India because they could not adjust to the Indian climate. Chaudhuri could understand the causes of the British
behaviour in India only after his visit to England. He puts forward elaborate arguments to defend and justify the atrocious behaviour of the English Imperialists towards the Indians during the British rule. But, all his criticism of the Indian climate’s influence on the Englishmen is highly imaginary and too far-fetched to convince the reader.

In the chapter entitled **The Victims of Circe** he slowly unfolds the significance of the title. How India, the continent of Circe with its tropical climate affected the brave and the kindly people. Even the best type of the English-man could not escape being denatured to a greater or a lesser degree by his stay in the country. He lost his sense of proportion, usual kindliness and equability, became a sexual pervert, deteriorated in collective behaviour, and, became extremely offensive. Chaudhuri’s aim in putting forward elaborate arguments is to defend, and in a way justify the atrocious behaviour of the English imperialists towards the weak Indians during the British rule. He admits that:

“The British in India lost all sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, charity and malice, and paraded a racial arrogance, whose mildest form was a stony silence”. (p.129) At the same time he defends their race-pride and sense of superiority. The impatience, the arrogance, the bad tempered, the degeneration, in fact, all the unpleasantness was inherent in the situation.

Thus, Chaudhuri attributes all the vices of English character, and the British administration to the Indian climate. His intention becomes apparent when he says that a key to the Hindu character to be found in the conduct of the British in India. India was an excruciatingly cruel country and had the same effect on the both the people- The English and Aryans who afterwards became Hindus. The difference was that the British had to endure the Indian climate for just two hundred years, for the Hindus the period of suffering had been prolonged to three thousand years. The chapter ends with Chaudhuri’s propounding and startling thesis as the Hindu is the European distorted, corrupted and made degenerate by the cruel torrid environment.

In **Nostalgia for the Forgotten Home**, Chaudhuri opines that the philosophy of the Aryans and the negation of life have developed due to the scorching heat of the tropical country. The Aryans came to India in high hopes of finding ‘a promised land’. At first, they were elated to find themselves in a country which could offer them virgin land and rivers in such great abundance. But, as time advanced, they discovered that “the sweetheart whom they had wedded was going to be a termagant of a wife, and there was no escaping from her for the rest of their existence.” (p.145) They could neither adapt themselves to the new environment nor could they tolerate it. Even after living in the country for thousands of years, they could neither get used to the excruciating heat nor to the excessive rains. Dust repelled them. Their suffering was intense and “it was the moral and nervous
breakdown brought about by this suffering which finally shaped their philosophies and gave them their specific colour.” (p.155) His is an enquiry into the origins of Indian philosophy, a philosophy of sorrow prompted by the motive to rescue India from sorrow. Chaudhuri correlates Hindu philosophical systems with his ‘theory of the intense suffering of the Aryans in the hostile climate,’ he makes far sweeping comments: Western scholars have sometimes made Buddhism or Vedanta responsible for the apparent indifference of the Hindus to the things of the world, especially for their disinclination to mental and bodily exertion, and attributed to us a world-negation which we never had. The philosophies did not make our life what it is; it was the life which made the philosophies what they are. (p.155)

He cites Buddhism as an example of the bodily suffering leading the Hindu mind to pessimistic philosophies. Samkhya, for example, (which to Chaudhuri’s thinking is the most typical system of Hindu philosophy) says that Philosophical inquiry arises from the impact of three-fold sorrow which prompts the effort to discover the means of getting rid of it. The means itself as suggested by Samkhya, which lies in the total severance of the bond between ‘Purusha’ and ‘Prakriti’, is awful according to Chaudhuri. The salvation suggested by Hindu philosophical system is ‘Nirvana’-explained by Chaudhuri as extinction. According to Chaudhuri sorrow and suffering are the starting point of Indian philosophy. It is true that ‘the concept of sorrow’ occupies a prominent place in almost all branches of Indian philosophy. But Buddha’s renunciation was not a failure of courage and vitality as Chaudhuri explains. It was realization of the impermanence of all earthly things, and a determination to forsake his home and to try to discover some means to immortality to remove the sufferings of man. But it is surely not justified in drawing an inference from this that all the systems of Indian philosophy preach negation. Indian philosophers recognized and took note of sorrow because sorrow is very much a part of our worldly lives. They rightly sought a means to get rid of this sorrow. All our experiences are essentially sorrowful and ultimately sorrow begetting. Sorrow is the ultimate truth of this process of the world. That which to an ordinary person seems pleasurable appears to a wise person or to a ‘Yogin’, who has a clearer vision, as painful. The greater the knowledge, the higher is the sensitiveness to sorrow and dissatisfaction with worldly experiences.
This sorrow of worldly experiences cannot be removed by bringing in remedies, for each sorrow as it comes, for the moment it is remedied another sorrow comes in. The only way to get rid of it is by the culmination of moral greatness and true knowledge which will uproot sorrow once for all. Through the highest moral elevation a man may attain absolute dispassion towards worldly-experiences and retire in body, mind, and speech from all worldly concerns. When the mind is so purified, the ‘self’ shines in its true light, and its true nature is rightly conceived. The ‘self’ can never again be associated with passion or ignorance. Thus emancipated the ‘self’ forever conquers all sorrow. As Vivekananda describes this state of mukti:

> When the Vedantist has realized his own nature, the whole world has vanished for him. It will come back again, but no more the same world of misery. The prison of misery has become changed into Sat, Chit, Ananda – Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute…

Attainment of this kind of supreme bliss is the ultimate goal of Indian philosophy. It is certainly not a negative approach or a negation of life as interpreted by Chaudhuri. His conclusion on the subject is partially correct:

> The idea that the Hindus had great love and reverence for philosophy and respect for philosophers is a figment of the European mind. What we respect are the Sadhus, possessors of occult power, not philosophers to possess only knowledge, and that is useless in our eyes. (p.162)

It is true that as time advanced great many evils crept into the Indian religions so that Hinduism no longer remained a fountain-head of different schools of philosophy it had given birth to, but instead, became a jumble of dogmas and creeds sheltering fake Sadhus and fraud ‘fakirs’. This, however, does not mean that there was a total loss of love and respect for philosophy and philosophers. How else can one explain the emergence of such great spiritualists and philosophers on the Indian scene as Shri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Dr. Radhakrishnan and many others? In this context the views of Nehru are worth to mention:
It must be remembered that the business of philosophy in India was not confined to a few philosophers or high borns. Philosophy was an essential part of the religion of the masses...In India our trial has been more drawn out, and poverty and uttermost misery have long been the inseparable companions of our people. And yet they still laugh and sing and dance and do not lose hope.  

Chaudhuri also considers the *Vedas* as non-devotional books. It is an extremely negative attitude of him to say that the Hindus are unable to cultivate any critical spirit because of their treatment of the *Vedas* as the repository of all learning. But, if the influence of the *Vedas* is limited even in the case of the six schools of Indian philosophy, it is much less so in Indian thought in general. Chaudhuri ignores the scholarly tradition that has prevailed through the ages in India. The terrible dichotomy in the Hindu is found not only in their religion but also in their social spectrum. It makes Chaudhuri take the Roman God, Janus, as the symbol of the Hindu character in the fifth chapter, *Janus and His Two Faces*. The only difference is that Janus is attributed with just two faces but the Hindu mind has many. So the Hindu personality is not even ‘Janus Quadrifrons’, but ‘Janus Multifrons’. (p.99) Every Hindu is divided against himself and it is seen throughout his historical existence as he has been. Among the large number of antithetical, though connected traits which shape Hindu behaviour, are:

- A sense of Hindu solidarity with an uncontrollable tendency towards disunity within the Hindu order; collective megalomania with self-abasement; extreme xenophobia with an object xenolotry, authoritarianism with anarchic individualism; violence with non-violence; militarism with pacifism, possessiveness with carelessness about property owned; courage with cowardice; cleverness with stupidity. (p.99-100).
The geographical setting pervades the book influencing all the incoming people, for which reason, the author has called India the continent of Circe. It has enervated and enfeebled the natives as well as the foreigners with her cruel and inimical environment by casting her everlasting spell. With its tropical climate it affected the brave and kindly people—the English. As an ardent anglophile, Chaudhuri puts forward his elaborate argument to defend the atrocious behaviour of the English Imperialists towards the weak Indians during the British rule. It is a device made use of to justify British arrogance and to absolve the Europeans from all their lapses. It is too partial and prejudiced a view to digest. Finally, the Indian climate that made the English men lose their sense of fairness. This is how Chaudhuri thinks he can very convincingly put all the blame on the Hindu world and prove the Europeans to be the angels, the superior creatures he thinks they are. Actually, these two chapters are the key to the understanding of Chaudhuri’s mind. Right in the beginning of the chapter On Understanding Hindus he remarks: “There is such a thing as a national character, and once it has been formed it does control all the subsequent evolution of a people” (p.86) It is thus, obvious that the dichotomy and contradictions Chaudhuri talks about in the Hindu character exists in his own mind. Radhakrishna Murthy enumerates the contradictions of Chaudhuri:

There is a curious dichotomy in Mr. Chaudhuri’s personality. He is composed of opposites. He is lyrically sensitive and mercilessly rude. His scholarship is vast and so is his ignorance. His love is great, therefore, he hates. He longs to create and his energy expends itself in destruction. He longs for peace and is violent. He is after the finest and best in life and he digs himself in prussic acid. It is ironical that such discerning vision as his is not always straight. It can and does look straight at things when he chooses, and it can be oblique when he wills it to be so. His eye takes the colour of his mind and it too often creates the image of his conception and does not transmit the objective picture without optical interference.
Chaudhuri calls the Hindus a war-mongering people. He asserts that on one hand the Hindus preach non-violence, which is only a rationalization of their cowardice, and on the other hand, they are vehemently militaristic in their outlook. According to him the Hindus are a peace-loving and non-violent people is a fallacy. Examples are cited from the pages of Indian history, Sanskrit literature, Hindu epics and Hindu mythology. References are also made to the Indian National Movement, the Gandhian doctrine of non-violence and the Chinese invasion. He believes that Ashoka’s inscriptions have misled us about the Hindu non-violence and that Ashoka took a non-violence only when there was nothing left to conquer. Actually Ashoka could have proceeded to conquer Burma or China or Afghanistan or Iran. The thirteenth rock edict clearly shows that he desisted from further warfare because of the misery and carnage caused by the Kalinga battle. Chaudhuri conveniently ignores these facts. He says that Bhima’s kicking the dying Duryodhana in the Mahabharata demonstrates the callous act of the Hindus, but deliberately avoids mentioning the fact that Bhima’s undignified, callous act is condemned in that epic. References to the Jats’ killing a number of Muslim women and the Marathas’ war-cry ‘Har Har Mahadeo’ are made by him only to show the Hindus’ aggressiveness and their love of war. In quoting these instances Chaudhuri fails to see that similar conditions prevail all over the world, including Greece, Rome, Europe and the U.S.A. He minimizes the macro things and maximizes the micro things to suit his purpose. R.K. Kaul rightly says:

“... One does not have to go to the remote past to find Hindu militarism … The history of Europe and America is stained with violence, and ironically the worst exhibitions of violence from the Spanish inquisition to Belsen and Auschwitz took place either in the name of Christ or by exploiting the un-Christian sentiments against the Jews.”

Chaudhuri’s version of India’s war with China is strange for an Indian as he distorts the facts. He attributes that the war with China was a windfall for the government and that a deep-seated and genuine militarism produced a readiness in the Hindus to part with money. He accuses Nehru and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan also of militarism. But, Every Patriot in India would remember the great deceit of China to India’s proposition of ‘Panch Sheela’ and her attack of India. Unfortunately Chaudhuri blames India for the Indo-China War.
Chaudhuri rightly says that the British understood the Hindu mind only in so far as it served their interest. The Hindu spirituality of which the West spoke was the creation of a Western spiritual necessity. The European idealists lost all faith in Indian spirituality when they came into contact with the reality. Chaudhuri feels that the westerners applied the Renaissance norms of reason, order and measure to Hindu behaviour which they found missing. In the Hindu life he finds only paradoxes. Hindus fast and then overeat; they suffer from washing mania and still remain unclean, they seem indifferent to money but try to earn and hoard more. Though Chaudhuri is right to some extent in pointing out the contradictions among the Hindus, he is partial and biased in his portrayal of the collective Hindu personality.

Chaudhuri believes that the Hindus love fair complexion. Of course, the love of white skin is a universal phenomenon. Chaudhuri fails to see that the Negroes also have fascination for the white girls. Melanasians’ concept of beauty is not very different from that of the Europeans:

The adoration of colour in the Hindus has a profound historical basis. The Hindu civilization was created by a people who were acutely conscious of their fair complexion in contrast to the dark skin of the autochthons, and their greatest preoccupation was how to maintain the pristine purity of the blood-stream which carried this colour. Varna or colour was the central principle round which Hindu society organized itself, and the orthodox Hindu scriptures know of no greater crime than miscegenation, or as they call it, Varna-samkara, the mixing of colour. (p.174)

Especially, to dark young girls the Hindus can be not only heartless, but assertively cruel. They are constantly blamed for no reason. They are continually reminded that they are unsalable goods in the marriage-market, a problem and a burden for their parents:

The dark girls have to hear uncomplimentary remarks made about them to their face by acquaintances and relatives, and they have also to bear ceaseless reproaches from their
mothers. They themselves take up an attitude of guilt, as if they had committed a deliberate offence. (pp.173-174)

In the outstanding chapter, The Anodyne Chaudhuri discusses at length the Hindu attitude to sex. He quotes Sanskrit epigram which had no touch of euphemism. But covering the veil it can be expressed as—“verily, man is a creature devoted to the belly” (P.206) and the predominant organ that lies in its vicinity. He maintains that the physical suffering imposed on the Aryan by the Indian climate made them turn to sexual enjoyment with vehement. Chaudhuri finds that the Hindus regarded sex as one of the supreme joys of life. They further hoped that the sexual gratification opens new horizons in the intellectual faculty of man. Since they had been defeated by the Indian environment on fleshly plane they wanted to rehabilitate themselves in the flesh, and therefore turned their minds to sexual relations in terms of the flesh:

The Hindu would have his victory in sensual enjoymnts, and above all in that which was the most precious to his thinking, namely, sexual relations in terms of the flesh. Even if he could not win, he would use his pleasure as an anodyne to carry on the fight, as the Rajput Warrior took opium to maintain his callousness to wounds. (p.208).

Chaudhuri reconstructs a history of Hindu sex life purely on the basis of literary evidence-Hindu myths, legends and imaginative literature. He builds the theory that the procreation for the Hindu was so exalted that it became an imaginative religious duty and since the sex act was not self-sufficient. The Hindu began to add other sensations to it and romanticized the sex act. Instances from Hindu myths such as the lechery of Hindu gods, the sexual life of the sages, and quotations from Kalidasa are produced in support of his thesis. Nissim Ezekiel says that “Chaudhuri’s views are “regarded as subjective dogmas and not as objective truths”. 17

His interpretation of the ‘Hindu erotic manuals’ and the western interest in Hindu eroticism is also questionable. He condemns the Hindu erotic manuals as “one of the diseases of civilization”. (p.148) and the western interest in it “ a secret lecherous interest, sheepish in one case and puppyish in another”(p.149). It is true that Hindus have always put a lot of emphasis over the moral, sensual and
Chaudhuri maintains that the physical suffering of the Aryans by the Indian climate made them turn to sexual enjoyment a lot. But, nowhere in any Indian writing of considerable standard is to be found evidence of a general onrush of the Aryans towards sex as a release from physical suffering. Chaudhuri finds fault with the erotic figures on the Indian temples and says that the Westerners go to Khajuraho and Konark longing to see Indian art and religion. Chaudhuri’s advice to all such foreigners is not to “throw a veil of art on the iconography of Hindu lust.” (p.138).

The application of religious formula to the erotic temple art is irrelevant. The Indians do not look up to the gods in the Christian or the Roman or the Greek sense. The whole liturgy of worship in temples is a ministration of the daily needs and life of a divine kind. Gods to Hindus are supernatural kings in the image of the earthly kings. From the Vedic period onwards the fundamental aspect of the Hindu faith has been that this universe is the outcome of the cosmic union between the male and the female. They know pretty well that “man’s lust is woman’s burden. (p.224)

Chaudhuri reconstructs a history of Hindu sex life purely on the basis of literary evidence – Hindu myths, legends and imaginative literature. Instances from Hindu myths such as the lechery of Hindu gods, the sexual life of the sages, and quotations from Kalidasa are produced in support of his thesis. It is true that the Hindus have always put a lot of emphasis over the moral, sensual and economic aspects of sex. That however does not explain that they had declared sexual pleasure to be the best of all pleasures: “The Hindu erotic manuals, as any dispassionate writer on Hinduism can see for himself do not glorify sensuality or obscenity, but express an artistic or aesthetic concern with sex.” (p.150)
sexual pleasure to be the best of all pleasures. Restraint of passions is advocated even by Vatsyayana. Verghese speaks in this connection:

The truth about Hindu interests in sex is that its classical phase the Hindu traditions did not suffer from any sexual inhibition. But this does not mean a special preoccupation with sex, in fact, theory are value among the Hindus... The Hindu erotic manuals, as any dispassionate writer on Hinduism can see for himself do not glorify sensuality or obscenity, but express an artistic or aesthetic concern with sex.¹⁸

The Minority of the Indian population, according to Chaudhuri, is made up of three main genetic and cultural groups — (a) the Muslims, the least of the Minorities; (b) the Eurasians or Anglo-Indians and the Indian Christians, Half-Caste Minorities and (c) the Anglicized Hindus, labelled the Dominant Minority. Chaudhuri traces the whole history of Muslims’ nationalism sympathises with them. He believes that, with the creation of Pakistan, Indian Muslims are lost between two words — one dead and the other powerless to be born. The Indian Muslims still feel a loyalty to Pakistan. Their earlier role in siding with the British and their pan-Islamic sympathy are the reasons for the Hindu disfavour to them. The Genetic and the Cultural Half-Caste Minorities are the ‘underdogs of Indian Society.’ Chaudhuri maintains that the half-castes of India are neither the possessors of a composite culture nor natural and healthy hybrids racially or culturally. His dislike for the Indian Christians is caused by the fact that they were close to the British when they were ruling India. He would have been happy if the Goan Christians had remained from the mainstream of Indian life. He is unhappy at the merger of Goa with India because he thinks that the Continent of Circe has its degrading influence on the gay life symbolized by the Calungute and Colva beaches.

Chaudhuri sneers more at the Anglicised upper middle-class Indians whom he labels as ‘the Dominant Minority.’ The Anglicised Hindus are (i) the officers of the Armed Forces, (ii) the bureaucratic, managerial and professional elite, (iii) the technicians and (iv) the youth in schools and colleges. Chaudhuri exposes their hypocrisy. His bitterness about this class is mainly due to some personal grievances. He feels that this upper middle-class people do not accord to him the
respect which he is entitled to. He makes a bitter comment on the Anglicized Hindus: “All these men combine the Hindu pride of caste with the English pride of class and they can be very unpleasant”. (p.329) He calls Nehru the leader of the Anglicized upper middle class Hindus. He states very emphatically that the dominant position of this rude and snobbish group is due to the presence of Nehru and hopes that they will disappear after the death of this supreme national leader, the object of the Hindu personality-cult which has made a divinity of him to be worshipped in a temple like the Roman emperors.

What Chaudhuri says about the Anglicized Hindus is true and quite revealing. In fact, one of the chief merits of this book is its effective exposure of the hypocrisy of the Anglicized Indians. Yet, one cannot help feeling that Chaudhuri’s bitterness about this class is mainly due to some personal grievances. In this connection, Chitre, Dilip, writes:

> It appears that an acute sense of insecurity in his own society, craving for status and acceptance, and a desire to identify himself with the ruling elite culturally and emotionally, have all been decisive factors in Mr. Chaudhuri’s formulation of his views.\(^{19}\)

In the Epilogue Chaudhuri claims that he has rescued himself from the prevailing swinishness of the Hindus who were long ago turned into beasts by Circe. He abandons his countrymen to their degradation. But he calls upon them to realize their ancient Aryan racial origins and recover their original European spirit:

> Say that we are Europeans in our own right, and we want no patronage. We shall take our destiny in our hands, create our life, and renovate our economy through our own strength, mental and physical. (p.350)

Now, here, he asks them to recognize their human potential and individual identity but like a feudalist, Chaudhuri glorifies the imagined roots of his European origin. So, his thoughts and ideas in *The Heart of India* seem to be the aggressive gestures of a deeply insecure man. Though the intention of this book appears to be a study of the Hindu character and its disintegration, it cannot be considered an authentic history of the Hindus or the Indians. Chaudhuri’s hatred and abuse do not
seem to have any noble purpose behind them. Violent and destructive criticism against any system is unethical. Chaudhuri’s view on D.H.Lawrence does not sound sensible though it may apply to Lady Chatterley’s Lover to some extent. But, he praises Lawrence for his intuition and denigrates Vatsyanana for his cerebration and this shows Chaudhuri’s dual nature.

His hatred and criticism of Hindu philosophy, Hindu asceticism and other systems of Hindus are perhaps the result of an acute sense of insecurity in himself, in his society and also of his craving for a status and acceptance among the elite. Chaudhuri could have conquered the environment even with a position and soft attitude to it instead of defying his native country and her people.

However, Chaudhuri’s The Heart of India serves as a work of propaganda for the Hindu middle class. Thus, the continent purports to be a study of the Hindu character and its degeneration. However, as Verghese says:

The book cannot be considered authentic history or sociology.

It is a book conceived and written in utter contempt of what Chaudhuri sees around him in India, and consequently, it gives shape and form to his own prejudices.  

Indeed, The Heart of India is such a highly controversial and explosive book that it has won Chaudhuri not only Duff Cooper Memorial Award but the reputation of being the most hotly debated author of Indo-Anglian literature.

We may not agree with his idiosyncratic theories on race and religion, his present, hard-hitting criticism and his irritating opinions on India and her people, but the originality, brilliance, straightforwardness, rationality and intellectuality which characterize all his writings compel our admiration. The book mirrors the Indian character and reflects the Hindu society which needs to be repaired of the ravages made by the time.

The book is, in fact, a mysterious time machine which takes us into the past by digging the deposits of the time; by unearthing the historical facts; exposing nakedly much to the awe, surprise and the bewilderment of the reader. On the other hand, the book is truthful in providing a faithful reflection of India’s past. Every Indian can watch his controversial cultural image of the past and the present in the book since the creation of history till the cremation of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India in 1964.

REFERENCES


10. Ibid, p.38.

12. Ibid, p.84.


