CHAPTER – 5
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The interaction between India and Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century resulted in a social, cultural and political revolution in India. It was a direct result of the situation created by the foreign rule in the Indian subcontinent. The colonial rule in India was a phenomenon that extended for more than a century and through these years as it developed into a secure worldwide empire at the height of its glory, it brought great many changes in the Indian society, culture, and politics. When India became independent, it inherited all the colonial legacies of the British rule. As its geographical and political boundaries were defined and its constitution formed and adopted, it took on the image of a secular and democratic nation. India’s encounter with the West resulted in a new self-awareness and to some extent a collective image of nationhood.

In The Autobiography Chaudhuri discusses the effect of the eighteenth century European Enlightenment that reached India in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and led to a synthesis of values between the East and the West. As a result there were changes in the society, which were literary, humanistic, religious, and ethical. While the
religious movements were contemporaneous with those of the literary, it was not till the literary movement had attained its fullness that the religious movement came with a force. Chaudhuri observes:

Thus the two movements, broadly speaking recapitulated the connection seen previously in history between the Renaissance and the Reformation in Europe; and the humanistic influences hung as pendants to the literary revival just as the ethical influences were ancillaries of the religious reformation. (AUL 213)

By the beginning of the twentieth century all the waves had merged together and they developed a modern Indian culture where all the elements had equal importance. Because the movement first hit Bengal, the Bengali society underwent changes stage by stage in the order in which the literary humanistic religious and moral values made their appearance till the Bengali culture attained its three dimensional fullness by completely absorbing all the values. Chaudhuri notes that the whole community absorbed this culture by reducing it to its simplest. It was incapable of receiving any idea without diluting it and bringing it down to its own level. But this new culture was neither weak in inspiration nor in creative power for in-spite of the stepping down of the ideas it still retained some of the original values. The Westernisation of the Bengali mind was completed by the establishment of Calcutta University in 1857. The minds of the women, too, got a Western cast through the works of Bengali literature modeled on those in English. As a result of English
education, specially in Bengal, there was a resurgence of Hindu culture

And hence, what the Hindu’s developed in the first place was a new

personality wholly different from their old one. The cultured man and the

educated man became synonymous phrases. A new historical

consciousness grew once the ruins of the Mohejendaro and Harappa

were excavated in 1920 pushing back the Indian history by two thousand

years. It made them aware of their rich heritage and this trait; an

essential to the Western personality was acquired by the Hindu’s too.

Naipaul too observes this in his book An Area of Darkness — “...and it was

Europe that revealed India’s past to India and made its veneration part of

Indian nationalism.” (1) The Western Orientalists revealed to them the

authentic historical character of their ancient civilization. Chaudhuri says:

Thus, the new life of the Hindu’s under British Rule could also be

regarded, besides being Westernized, as also being Hinduised in a

living way by a Hindu renaissance. (EEWW 173)

Chaudhuri feels that this was bound to have an anti-Muslim edge,

both cultural and political, material as well as ideological in its full

unfolding. The Hindu desire to be more truly Hindu than they were at the

end of the Muslim rule first asserted itself in the cultural and more

specially in the literary field. Sanskrit words instead of Urdu were used

and the ancient names Arya for Hindus and Yavana for Muslims were
recovered. This was the contribution of Western comparative philologist to the Hindu resurgence.

The Indian renaissance, according to Mr. Chaudhuri was influenced by two phenomena (i) the alien rule and (ii) the impact of Western ideas and culture. This renaissance gave new awareness to the Indians about their peculiar situation and consequently the Hindu intellectuals were led to undertake four major inquiries. They were "(i) What were the shortcomings of their own institutions and outlooks, and how were they to be removed (ii) How was national self-respect and confidence to be revived? (iii) In what manner were the incoming and irresistible elements of Western culture to be absorbed and combined with the old traditions? (iv) What attitude was to be adopted towards British rule?" (II 15)

Chaudhuri thinks that the Indians were attracted towards the Western schools because the old Hindu thought had become devoid of any creativity. Thus the Indians began to cultivate the European ideologies like Liberalism and Conservatism. But most of the Indians were paradoxical in their behaviour. A liberal Indian could very well turn out to be a conservative at least. Chaudhuri says:

The opposition between the liberals and the conservatives was much more over the range of innovation and the pace at which this was to be
brought about, then over fundamentals. No Hindu conservative opposed the introduction of monotheism or disputed its superiority to image worship, he even advocated the adoption of Western science and some forms of knowledge relating to the external world, and he was for education in institutions of the Western type. (II 17)

In his book *The Intellectual in India* Chaudhuri has observed that at the beginning of the twentieth century intellectual pursuit was totally absent in the country. The Hindu’s concept of intellectual life consisted merely in the personal pursuit of philosophical and vedantic knowledge which had no bearing on the day to day life. Knowledge was connected with morality. The Hindu’s intellectual pursuit was never rationalistic, but more often than not suprarational and at times sub-rational also. The Westernization of the Hindus made them rational but they could not adapt to their scientific outlook.

Under the influences of European ideologies, the Hindus rejected the traditional Hindu values, because modernization became synonymous with Westernization and there arose a great gap between the traditional pundits and modern scholars. Accordingly to Chaudhuri, the only three great men who advocated a balanced view of Indo-British rule were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda.
Both the conservatives and the liberals of the Indian Society benefited from the first contact with Western knowledge, beliefs and ideals. Earlier they thought that the entire fabric of Indian society had to be rebuilt for these movements of reform aimed at the transformation of Indian society. Cessation of widow burning, right to remarriage of widows, improvement of the status of untouchables, education especially for girls and young women, promotion of science and technology, diffusion of scientific and technological knowledge, the introduction of literacy genesis previously not used in India, improvement of the intellectual substance of Hindu religious belief and eradication of superstitions, all became a part of the programme. The pursuit of these objectives and public discussion of them gave an elevation to Indian life especially in the urban centers.

The poor conduct of the English towards the Indians in India never made any difference to the historical judgement on British rule in Chaudhuri's mind. He was of the opinion that the finest phase of Indian history was the Indian liberalism which resulted from the assimilation and adaptation of British and Continental ideas.

The noisy crowds which greeted the end of British rule in India on 15th of August 1947, did not recall the old saying 'Le Roi est mort. Vive Roi!' which meant that even if a particular monarch passed away, monarchy remained: that is to say only the person disappears, but not
the institution. These people thought that with the departure of the British, nothing of the British rule would survive in their country. They did not realize that the British were not leaving behind supreme examples of architecture to be cared for by archaeologists, but a system of government for which there was no substitute and a cultural legacy which had become a part of the Indian culture.

Literary & humanistic changes:

The synthesis of the Eastern and Western culture resulted in a new outlook in the literary field in Bengal. The new literary and humanistic movement hit Bengal with the founding of the famous Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817. The students rejecting the traditional taboos took to beef and drinks as readily as they took to Shakespeare. Their iconoclasm did not stop at food and drinks and was extended to religion. This great movement also had serious apostles like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, a great scholar and poet of Bengal. Chaudhuri considered Dutt’s life as a symbol of the entire history, not of Bengali humanism alone, but of the whole Bengali culture. Dutt left his wealthy family to become a Christian. The motive of his conversion was never known though Chaudhuri thinks that it is quite probable that the hope of being able to see the land for whose culture and literature he had such adoration was an important inducement in his conversion. Thus
becoming a poet, was Dutt's mission in life, from an early age and he paid for his choice with poverty and humiliation.

Chaudhuri's real acquaintance with humanism began with Dutt. Dutt wrote his well-known epic poem 'Meghnadvadha Kavya' in blank verse. A Bengali who could not read blank verse properly could not be regarded as an education or cultured person. Chaudhuri's father who initiated him to both English and Bengali literature also taught him how to read blank verse. Dutt was influenced by the great epic poems like Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberated* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The eight canto of 'Meghnadvadha Kavya' where Dutt with his exotic allusions and images has given a description of Rama's descent to hell is modeled partly on The Aenied and partly on the *Inferno*.

Dutt has also glorified Ravana and his tribe of demons and not Rama. This distortion by him of the traditional spirit of the *Ramayana* sprang from his entire poetic outlook and education. Under the influence of Homer, he showed the war between Rama and Ravana not as struggle between opposites and irreconcilables but as a war between rivals and equals. Chaudhuri learnt from Dutt's treatment of the *Ramayana* that whenever an old theme is treated by a modern author he is likely to introduce something of his own or something of his age. He also learnt a more valuable and characteristic lesson of all humanity.
When Dutt who earlier wrote in English returned to his mother tongue to voice his springs of fresh thought. The Western influence also touched writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who wrote his first novel in English but came over to Bengali permanently after that. But his Bengali works showed the Western influence in form of themes and ideas. Tagore who wrote in Bengali initially turned to English in his later age. Shakespeare was the epitome test and symbol of literacy culture in Bengal in the 19th century. In reading him the Bengalis felt as if they were worshipping God. For the Hindus one of the modes of worshipping God is through knowledge. They were also worshipping him in the third mode of Hindu religious culture and that was adoration.

Chaudhuri found that the synthesis also resulted in the revival of Sanskrit learning. It was Sanskrit learning of the European Orientalists and their Indian disciples not the hereditary learning of the priestly and pundit families. This was similar to the difference between the spirit of Medieval Latin learning and the spirit of the classical learning of the Renaissance. The Indians preferred the new Sanskrit learning to the old one for the same reasons which prompted the Renaissance scholar to prefer the New Latin learning to the old one. Chaudhuri says:

The new Sanskrit learning gave to the modern Indian a view of Hindu antiquity which was historically truer and at the same time more intelligible. One the other hand, it was also more explosive because it did nothing to soften the contrast between the modes of thought and
mental attitudes of ancient Hindu Indian and those of the traditional, pre-British Hindu of the late eighteenth century. (AUI 228)

Chaudhuri personally did not imbibe any Sanskrit learning at Kishorganj though he was aware of its revival through the scholarly articles, which were being published in popular magazines.

The synthesis of the Eastern and Western cultures resulted in that new culture which completely ignored the Muslims. Even the great religious reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy did not have any first hand knowledge of Islam, as a whole. According to Chaudhuri after the end of Muslim rule Hindu society had broken completely with Islam. Hence Chaudhuri in-spite of living in East Bengal where he came in daily contact with Muslims did not know anything of their culture. But Chaudhuri knew about the Hellenic civilization at the time when Europe too was making its acquaintance with Greek art. Though he could not still make distinctions between Greek and Roman forms of the gods of classical antiquity, he had rudimentary notions of the Iliad and the Odyssey. At Kishorganj he also learnt the stories of Demetus and Persephone and Theseus and the Minotaur as Greek literature had became popular in Bengal too.
Religious reforms:

The Western influences brought in the great movement of religious reform in India in the nineteenth century. The religious reform and humanism started in Bengal with the founding of Brahma Samaj, the institutional symbol of the reformation movement. It was formally inaugurated in 1828 by Ram Mohan Roy himself. The Hindu Protestantism made its appearance in 1860. In the following two decades, the Protestant movements within Hinduism brought about an inevitable reaction – a Hindu counter-reformation and for forty years (between 1860 & 1900) there was fierce opposition between Brahma Samaj and the Hindu revivalists. The orthodox counter blast was simultaneous with the first groping of the reforming movement. Chaudhuri states that Hinduism has an uncanny sense of what threatens it. No assurance, no eupheumism, no disguise can put its ever alert instinct of self-preservation off its guard. During the British Rule. Hinduism fought tooth and nail, even with the most humanitarian reforms like ‘Suttee’, widow remarriage, inter-caste marriages, raising the age of consent etc. But Chaudhuri saw that towards the end of the century the Hindu counter-reformation swung to the opposite pole of grotesquesness. "Every Hindu custom and every Hindu taboo found its justification in some theory of electricity and magnetism. At times the science of bacteriology, new at the time, was also invoked."

For example, a Hindu’s pigtail was an electromagnetic coil, a bath in Ganges...
killed bacteria, a fast on full and new moon counteracted gravitational forces of the sun and the moon and the Diwali illumination was supposed to burn up the poisonous gases given off by the earth on that evening. Even the intellectuals like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee were not wholly immune from this infection. Hinduism survived the reformation movement. Chaudhuri sees its infinite capacity to endure the attacks of its own followers and attributes it to its' simple and rough-hewn greatness derived from its Aryan creators. However, Chaudhuri is very clear sighted about the corruptible ‘clayey core’ of Hinduism that imbibes foreign goodness and mixes it with indigenous debasement. But under some textual influence at times the latent greatness of Hinduism tries to reassert itself. Though it fails most of the times “its voice is heard like the voice of one crying in the wilderness by those who have ears to hear.”

(AUI 239) Swami Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee both tried to revive Hinduism, for they regarded religion as the keystone of human activity and achievement and rejected the idea of a purely secular culture. Vivekananda called upon the Indians to go England and learn from the Western civilization a lesson on expansion and expression for the Indian civilization that had the power of expression had reduced itself to a dead nation. But , he said that one must go there as teachers of religion and not as beggars.
Chaudhuri quotes Vivekananda to emphasize the fact that even a conservative like Swami Vivekananda was open to the Western thoughts and was ready to imbibe what he felt was good in their culture.

But both Chatterjee and Vivekananda wanted their own national religion to furnish the basis of religious culture of India. Hence between them they offered a version of Hinduism to modern Indians which became a serious rival to the liberal doctrine offered by the Brahmo Samaj. Chaudhuri observes:

These two schools wrestled for the soul of modern India, and there was hardly one modern Indian with any capacity for thinking who did not experience this struggle within himself. (AUI 240)

Every modern Indian at that time experienced the struggle between the new Hinduism and Brahmo Samaj within himself. During his formative years at Kishorganj, Chaudhuri, found five strands of religious influences at work. First, the elementary and elemental belief in ghosts and spirits and other rituals around this belief; second, a polytheism both anthropomorphic and pantheistic; third, the Brahmo monotheism; fourth, the pseudo scientific Hinduism; and last, the new revived Hinduism as preached by Swami Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.
Though these did not include all the aspects of Hinduism as it was practiced in East Bengal, these were the influences that Chaudhuri saw, felt and judged. Among these the first and the fourth were totally rejected and despised; and the fifth, he could not understand till he reached adolescence and even then only developed an intellectual appreciation of it. In the beginning Chaudhuri followed the second and third strands, for he felt equally at home in polytheism and monotheism. Though monotheism was more associated with Christianity and Islam, the traditional Hindu nursed contempt for the Brahmo creed. Monotheism and Polytheism both were acceptable and polytheism was explained on the basis that many gods are only particular manifestations of one God. Chaudhuri himself initially took to the Hindu view of the inter-relation between monotheism and polytheism in preference to Brahmo affirmations. Later in his life he lost faith in both. Both Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Vivekananda who proposed a balanced view between the two cultures believed in following a strict regime in daily life in order to achieve ethical and spiritual ideals. Chaudhuri observes:

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was one of the most assiduous preachers of religious culture; his conception of the perfection of faith was that it was the state in which all the human faculties, intellectual, aesthetic and active converged on God; and for the achievement of religious culture and attainment of faith he emphasized the need for strict regime, daily exercise and regulation of the routine of living. (AUI 245)
From Christianity the reformed monotheistic Hinduism copied the Sunday meetings and Sunday schools, congregational prayers, hymn singing and the routine of spiritual exercise. Even the Hindu counter-reformation took over the Western modes of religious discipline. Chaudhuri was also convinced that "the monastic order founded by Swami Vivekananda had little in common with the pre-existing forms of Hindu monasticism and was far more closely approximated to the Christian Missionary society and religious orders.

Moral reform:

The two religious movements, which emerged during the nineteenth century as a result of the Indian Renaissance, were both earnest, even fanatical regarding the question of principle and conduct. Chaudhuri says while the Brahmo morality was based on puritan Christianity the revived Hinduism tried to restore the Hindu form of asceticism, its domestic and monastic aspects. It is also understood that the new Hinduism emerged as a result of the propagation of Brahmoism. But both were sincere and serious about morality and moral conduct, though in later years new Hinduism became stricter and more active.

Chaudhuri observes that the Brahmo Samaj began its moral crusade by attacking the four vices, which were widespread in the society at that time. They were sensuality, drunkenness, dishonesty and
falsehood. These vices like the Hindu virtues were the products of feebleness and passivity in character. The first two vices filled one with nothing but choking disgust. Dishonesty and falsehood inflicted harm only on the weak and unprotected people of society like widows and minors. Both Brahanoism and new Hinduism were determined to cleanse the society of these evils. While Brahmosim placed religion and morality on the same plane, new Hinduism believed that moral discipline was an indispensable preliminary to spiritual achievement. Chaudhuri says that both were ascetical and puritanical in practice, for under the influence of Brahmo teaching Chaudhuri never saw a Bengali play. Inspired by the Christian-European ethics, the Brahmo movement fought not only against the immoral practices of the contemporary Hindu society but also against the moral turpitude exemplified by timid avoidance of personal moral issues.

Chaudhuri says that ethical extremism in Brahmoism and new Hinduism was not due to narrowness or lack of intelligence. It was deliberate and provided an insight into the Indian character and its workings. According to him, the Indian's lack the Greek notion of 'Sophrosyne' i.e. "self control, balance, sanity and reasonableness; avoidance of extremes of action, speech, and thought; a rightness of mind which brings harmony into a personality or life." (AUI 253)
Seeing this imbalance in Hindu character the moral teachers of the nineteenth century decided to favour the extreme which they considered preferable. The Brahma movement fought not only against the sordid immoralities it found practiced by contemporary Hindu society, but also against the methods which were practiced in the name of morality like keeping the widows on a diet of semi-starvation to preserve them from the urges of flesh. Chaudhuri finds Brahmaism an application of Christianity to Hinduism as Sikhism was the application of Islam. As his own family had adopted Brahmaism, Chaudhuri grew up in an atmosphere of moral awareness where even in school he had to write essays both in Bengali and English on the "Un-Indian virtues as moral courage, perseverance, industry, self-help and un-Indian conceptions like character, repentance, and conscience" (AUI 256)

The moral preachings of Brahmaism and new Hinduism were not only justified, but also successful. Chaudhuri considers it the only period in the last two hundred years of the history of the Hindu middle class in which it had shown great fulfillment in cultural aspirations, put forth greater creativeness in every field and attained great happiness in family and personal life.

**Linguistic Changes:**

A foreign influence usually works its way even into the body of native languages. A revolution is seen in the vocabulary of politics
intellectual life, and culture. Chaudhuri finds that the British cycle of
Indian history too has developed a language, which corresponds to Urdu
and constitutes the natural spoken language of all educated modern
Indians. This was adopted even by labourers, hawkers, artisans and the
like. For example; Chaudhuri says that often workmen in the streets of
Delhi asked him, "Saab, time kaya hai?" Like 'time,' words like 'room',
'market', 'garden', 'shoe', 'bed', 'wife' are similar words of work a day
status. For an Indian today, this mixed vocabulary has not only become a
part of his private conversation but also his most proficient form of
expression. Barred from use of this vocabulary, he would be deprived the
power of expression.

But as this mixed language is not permitted as a written language,
modern Indians have been using vernaculars, which have been, modified
both syntactically and semantically by English. Current words have
assumed meanings, which they never bore formerly. New words have
also been coined which are Indian only in appearance. In reality, they are
only the etymological Indian equivalents of English words and become
intelligible in the Indian languages only when referred back to the foreign
originals. Sometimes, collocations are used which are mere literal
translations of English phrases, and have no idiomatic associations in
themselves. Chaudhuri observes:

The syntax of all modern Indian languages has also been profoundly
affected by English, so that with their changed construction and new
vocabulary the Indian languages of today are hardly intelligible to those who are familiar only with the older and purer forms. (AUI 572)

Chaudhuri finds the modern Indian language made up of a combination of English, a denatured written vernacular, and a mixed colloquial language. The influence of the West is also to be found in the most exclusively exotic forms of modern literature, art, thought, moral and spiritual activity. According to Chaudhuri there was no prose literature before the end of the eighteenth century in any Indian languages. Literary expression in prose is a creation of British rule in India. Within prose all literary forms – the novel, essay, short story, history, biography were taken over from English. Poetry too took a new form. An Indian who was familiar with the older kind of poetry could not understand the new poetry while the exponents of the new form were dead to the older poetical appeal, Chaudhuri found this alienation between the old and new not only in literature but in every field of intellectual and artistic activity, even in the moral and religious.

Failure of the European innovation:

The synthesis between the East and the West formed the basis of the culture of the modern India. Chaudhuri being a product of this period witnessed all the interesting changes that were taking place in the society around him. While he himself was greatly influenced by the Western
thoughts and philosophies, he remained critical of the manner in which his
countrymen imbibed the Western culture. During the British rule, Bengal
had become not only the political centre but the cultural centre as well.
The Bengalis first came under the impact of that movement which we call
the Indian Renaissance. Chaudhuri points out that under the impact of
the European culture, the peculiar character of the Bengali mind made a
significant difference in its reaction to the different things from European
culture. While his response to English literature made him most sensitive,
human, and creative, the European thought whether political or social
desiccated him and led him to a sterile dogmatism. In course of time, the
Bengali culture that broadened into the modern Indian culture, created the
nationalist movement and also reshaped the Indian personality. Yet this
culture declined. Chaudhuri found the cause in the lack of understanding
between the interacting agencies and also in the nature of the interaction.
The most popular view was that the nineteenth century India was a
meeting ground of an old civilization with a new one and the crucible of a
new culture in which the best of both mingled. The basis of this view was
the concept of synthesis. But to Chaudhuri this was a myth. He said:

All of us in Bengal were brought up on this historical interpretation, at
the bottom of which was a concept of synthesis: an impressive
illustration of the 'law' of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. This, it was
proclaimed, was the essence of the cultural history of India during the
British Rule. But it was and is a pure myth. (THA 857).
Chaudhuri explains the reason of the failure by bringing up the eighteenth century social scenario, which according to him was 'childish' for it lacked sophistication, self-consciousness and historical memory. Before this civilization could evolve the revolutionary impact of the European civilization was upon it. Close in its wake came the discovery of ancient India and the 'childish' 'primitive' Indian society turned eagerly to it as the reaction to European ideas. As a solution to these challenges, thinkers like Ravindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy popularised the idea of a synthesis between the East and the West. But in India the two civilizations were not meeting on equal terms. The Indians whom Chaudhuri calls 'primitive people' were not able to adjust to the triple contact with – "i) European classical civilization, ii) Western scientific technique of living, and, iii) Ancient Indian culture". (THA 659) All of these were too advanced, though varying in degrees, to be assimilated easily by people belonging to a "different species of human society." (THA 659) In their confusion they were unable to perceive their exact situation. Chaudhuri says:

In their anxiety to feel at one with this heritage from motives of self respect they have forgotten the intervening phase of their existence and are now no more able to tear away their immediate past from the classical Hindu background than, looking at the sky at night, we were able to perceive any spatial separation between the solar system and the stellar world. (THA 657)
Chaudhuri holds the view that the premature cultural decline of the nineteenth century was due to the very conditions in which that culture was born. He pointed out that the people were not sufficiently advanced socially and economically to create a solid culture that would last. He says:

"We wanted the end product before we had build the factory. The simple fact was that both psychologically and socially we were a very simple people and therefore, what we were trying to do was force a growth."

(THA 660)

He explains that the pioneer of our new culture was so overwhelmed by the splendor of the modern European and the ancient Indian civilizations that they set themselves to create a culture of that order before the ground was prepared for its development. Chaudhuri uses the simile "we wanted the flowers before we had grown the plant."(THA660) The new culture thus had weakness, immaturities and limitations. These could have been left behind if the development had continued but due to the weaknesses in the Indian intellect, character and personality no such thing happened.

Chaudhuri feels that what we had accomplished in the nineteenth century was not the creation of a new culture through the fusion of two independent elements. It was simply the assimilation of two influences, complimentary and contrasted, both coming from the West, but one the
native product of Europe and the other its cultured harvest. The process of imitating the West is still going on, but its character has changed. Previously it was a positive, selective and assimilative process but now it has become a process of passive and unconscious absorption. Chaudhuri feels that this change in the quality of the processes was due to the decline of vitality, intelligence and education among the Indians, and also due to the novel character of the influences that were now coming from the West. The European influences of the bygone age were influences emanating from the highest centers of European culture, the intellect and the spirit. The new influences were more elemental and affected our economic life and basic technique of living. This impact, which could be felt after the First World War was gradually altering the superficial aspect and the inward nature of human life in India. India, he felt, has become more Westernized after independence than it had been in hundred years of British Rule. But the manner of Westernisation was incomprehensible both to an Indian of the nineteenth century and a contemporary cultured European, because it was inert, indiscriminate and debased. Chaudhuri had realized early in his life that the European influences, which were coming in later, were different from the ones he had seen earlier in his life. So long as the process of imitating the West remained rationale, deliberate and controlled, it resembled a fusion. But once it became involuntary and compulsive it also became too comprehensive and rapid for our selective assimilative capacities. Hence, it ceased to be a synthesis of cultures.
The failure of the innovative process did not surprise Chaudhuri. According to him, the very ambition of creating a 'synthesis' was impossible, for the ancient traditions of India that were to be synthesized with Western habits of thought were themselves the products of Western scholarship. The traditions of India were made available to Indians by West, and thus were already subtly transformed by being past through the filter of European thought and scholarship. It was a movement that could have remade some individuals but could have never remade India because there was nothing Indian about it. In fact, according to Chaudhuri there was no synthesis at all "but only an imitation of a vigorous and re creative order". (AUI 539)

Speaking of the attitude of the general body of Indians towards the creators and exponents of modern Indian culture, Chaudhuri in The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian says that the majority of the Indians had rejected the idea of synthesis of the Eastern and Western civilization even when the synthesis was a living historical force. At that time what the Indians in mass wanted was nationalism which did not include the acceptance of Western habits of living and economic technique. He writes:

....the concept of nationalism has been working against the concept of synthesis on the conscious plane while the absorption of the western trends has been taking place on the unconscious and sub-conscious

(AUI 575)
Thus all that was achieved or created by means of the highest kind of intellectual, ethical, or spiritual effort of which Indians were capable in the nineteenth century retains no appeal today. New Hinduism became alien to the modern Indians as Brahmoism.

Even in the best days of the new culture of modern India, its unpopularity was transferred to its preachers. Ram Mohan Roy and Tagore both were underrated, ridiculed and slandered by their own countrymen. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee resented at not being understood properly by his own people, while Swami Vivekananda was conscious of the gulf between himself and the mass of Indians. Chaudhuri felt as if they were a group of alienated Dantean figures, in death sleeping far away from their ungrateful country and said:

The greatest paradox in this hostility of the general mass of Indians towards the things of the West is that nearly all our great men of the nineteenth century were not able to gain any recognition from their countrymen nor exert any influence over them until they were recognized by the West. (AUI 503)

Chaudhuri’s life is also considered to be an example of the failure of the Renaissance. Till he received recognition from the West, he was severely rejected by the Indian readers. Due to this William Walsh considers his life in India a proof of the failed innovative process. He writes:
Chaudhuri, his parent’s son, the offspring of that 19th Century movement of which he is the elgist. The failure of his adult life, its poverty and meagerness, is the most poignant proof he offers of the failure of the whole movement. In modern India, there is no place for him. He is as obsolete as the historical forces that produced him. (2)

As far as absorption of the cultures is concerned Chaudhuri saw that none of the Indians had adopted the pure Western culture. He believed that there was a lot of sentimentalizing and cant on the subject of the ‘synthesis’ in India. He thinks that, however, enthusiastically and whole-heartedly foreign ideas are adopted by an indigenous population, some original ideas do survive, as a result of which admixture results. The same happened in India. He says:

Even the most westernized of Indians is likely to have traits of thought, habits of emotion, and modes of expression which will unmistakably mark him as a man of India. This aspect of the synthesis hardly needs stressing, it is something which is inherent in the nature of things, but at the same time it is also a thing in which the indigenous element is inert and negative. (CC 118)

Chaudhuri also points out that this ‘synthesis’ developed two artificial aspects—patriotic and aesthetic. The patriotic Indians showed off their Indianess without having any knowledge of worthwhile Indian tradition. He gives the examples of Hindus who spoke of the greatness of Hindu culture and religion without having knowledge of Sanskrit.
Hindu culture and religion without having knowledge of Sanskrit. Referring to the aesthetic aspect, Chaudhuri says that it was even more absurd and unpleasant than the patriotic one. Tagore was one of the greatest exponents of this aesthetically aspired synthesis. It seemed to comfort Tagore to indulge in archaic Hindu rites and incantations before a purely utilitarian activity was started. For example, before tree plantation the bullocks would be felicitated and Vedic hymns chanted. These meaningless but characteristic airs and graces overwhelmed the Indophil westerners and the Indians in turn were induced to think better and better of these affectations and fall more and more in love with them.

As such Chaudhuri ruled out the possibility of the formation of a cultural bond with the British in the future. He failed to see any hope towards the formation of Indo-British friendship. He feared that such friendliness would only "foster a repulsive growth of opportunism and hypocrisy." (AUI 605). With a firm belief that "bad blood is let out only when one brave man meets another brave man in a clean fight," he wrote that, "As between Indian's and Englishmen, this purification by fire has not taken place..." (AUI 605) The Indians cannot forget the humiliation of the past so soon. But he was equally critical of the behaviour of those Indians who after "crediting the Englishmen with every form of falsehood, deceit, and treachery till yesterday and regarding him literally as Satan, have today suddenly become aware of his virtues." (AUI 605) The only course of conduct which Chaudhuri finds is permissible to either side in their
political and public relations is an honourable taciturnity. The rest, he says, must be left to the healing powers time.

Chaudhuri's personality as formed by the East-West encounter:

Hundreds of Indians imbibed the Western culture that came to India along with the British rule, but Chaudhuri believed that his Westernisation was different from that of his fellow countrymen. He did not want to be considered merely as one of the many Westernized Indians because he had absorbed the influences of the West at a much deeper level and his interaction with the West was mainly concerned with the realm of a higher order of images. While he proudly claimed to have imbibed the best of both the cultures, he made it a point to inform his readers that his distinctiveness from his countrymen is significant.

As I see the matter, the generalization of my countrymen are unconscious or subconscious, while I flatter myself that I have arrived at mine after labourious and deliberate enquiry. In any case they are consciously held and I am fully aware of their implications. (AUI 475)

In The Autobiography, Chaudhuri has described the process of gradual assimilation of the Western culture. It started from early childhood with the impressions produced by English objects of superior material culture. The steam-powered boat of Mr. Stapleton the Inspector of Schools, made him gape in wonder and the locomotives appeared
unbelievably fantastic. His family took pride in their possession of English steel trunks and pursued catalogues of British departmental stores to look for items of comfort and luxury. This eager acceptance of material goods signified the beginning of total anglicization. He once wrote:

What is denounced as my pro-British treachery to India is really my loyalty to English life and civilization by which I was formed. It had as its penumbra my adherence to the values created by European civilization. European cultural influences began to beat upon me from my childhood, when I was living in a small town of East Bengal in a house with mud floors, mat walls, and tin roofs. I cannot remember, even though the material setting of my life was such, any time in which I did not know the names of Shakespeare or Raphael, not to speak of others. (Archives 138)

Real acculturation followed with the Chaudhuri children imbibing literary classics of the West, learning Homer along with Indian epics, reciting Shakespeare by the age of ten and taking immense pride in being able to speak correct English. Chaudhuri began to idealize England as he read about the country in English classics. Its flawless image captivated him and by comparison his own country India seemed ordinary and uninteresting. It also made him apply the most rigorous and uncompromising standards to test his own culture and society. That India failed to meet his standards is evident from his books. Richard Cronin comments:
Chaudhuri's self-assertiveness is abrasive, sometimes brutal, and just occasionally, a little vulgar as if he feels it necessary to bolster his sense of his own dignity by demeaning his country, and their leaders.

(4)

This has often led to Chaudhuri being criticized as an Anglophile. His initial rejection of everything Indian and conscious and complete assimilation of the customs and mannerisms of the West are not seen by critics as mere pretence and sycophancy. DS Philip writes:

He is a valuable specimen, a writer whose autobiography provides an inestimable resource for the study of the transformation of consciousness wrought by the early ingestion of the cultural products of a modern society. (5)

The British might have intended through their education system to create a breed of native clerks for the purposes of their administration but as the writings of Chaudhuri testify, it created many other things as well that they could not have foreseen. It is true that the Western education, like the railways opened up unsuspected springs of experience even in the remotest area of colonial India. As Amit Choudhary says:

It has to be said that it is very doubtful whether an Indian small town like Kishorganj could produce a Chaudhuri today; there might be satellite television in the villages, but relatively little education and intellectual influence penetrates them now. (6)
In fact, Chaudhuri’s role as an autobiographer is also of great importance. Naipaul calls it “one great book to have come out of the Indo-English encounter.”(7) Chaudhuri followed the distinctive Western tradition of writing an autobiography with the dual purpose of writing the history of India and describing his extraordinary life. This form of literary endeavour was one of the most significant results of contact with the West, as it incorporated self-analysis and descriptive study. It also signifies to the society that the writer is an entity and an individual in himself, which is again a Western concept.

Yet Chaudhuri remained a Bengali and a Hindu who had not aped the West uncritically. Remaining true to the bhadralok tradition he personified the Bengali high culture - "...a happy marriage between the traditionalism of England and the traditionalism of Bengal."(8) The conflict between the two was only in the eyes of those who were “either deracinated or avant garde.”(9)

Chaudhuri’s Grievances against the British Empire:

In the whole of The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, Chaudhuri makes a judicious and balanced study of the Indian and British counterparts, particularly for their failure to bring forth a forward looking and progressive innovation on the main land of India. While he duly acknowledged the developments that took place within our society as a
result of the European innovation he made no attempt to hide his
grievances against the British for their behaviour with the Indians. In The
Autobiography, he wrote:

When I remember how until even ten years ago all those Englishmen
who had anything to do with us or our country, as a rule, denied every
capability and every quality in us, and when I set the interested
superciliousness of yesterday against the interested complaisance of
today, I blush for the English character, and my shame is not lessened
by the manner of the flattery. (AU 605)

At the outset, Chaudhuri had a bitter grievance in his heart against
the Englishness of the Englishman that frantically claimed the "White
man's burden" as the honest and sincere task of the British mission in
India. In-fact the so called the 'White man's burden' was a bad metaphor
in itself. It smelt of self indulgent and self-sanctioned superiority of the
white races as against the local population in India. But, however, the
phrase itself had a generic umbilical relation to the eighteenth century
European Enlightenment which upheld the spirit of humanism. The
original innovators of British education in India maintained in their hearts
the laudable spirit of humanism. Macaulay while introducing the English
academic education had cherished in himself a great humanistic desire
that the Indian masses after having been introduced to the Western
academic educational systems would in course of time demand for the
implementation of the salient European institutions in the mainland. It is
this vision of Macaulay that prompted the stigmatic phrase of the 'White man's burden'. Many writers like George Orwell exposed the dishonesty of the intentions of the white man in implementing the true spirit of the 'White man's burden'. The imperial myth of the British Raj created a false ego of superior race in the hearts of the implementers of the English cultural innovations in India. Chaudhuri could never tolerate this racial high-handed unsympathetic attitude of the propagators of the Raj regime in India. The rulers and the ruled divide gradually got widened and turned into the most unsavoured master slave syndrome of the middle ages. He writes:

The most outstanding feature of Indo-British personal relations during British rule was the combination of ill-treatment and contempt, both carried to a blatant exhibition devoid of any qualms of conscience. ...Englishmen assaulted not only ordinary Indians, but even the most eminent. (Archives 144)

It is this high handedness that delayed and ultimately destroyed the implementation of the English man's imperial myth. If this imperial myth had been properly and rationally implemented, the cultural dimensions of India would have acquired for themselves a greater unified humanistic attitude. The British left their mission half-way and huddled the poor ignorant masses of India in an irretrievable state of chaos when they awarded the so called independence to the Indians in 1947. As a matter of fact the very forces of the eighteenth century enlightenment
which held freedom as all important for the furtherance of culture gave rise to a counter ideological theoretical framework which emphasised the need of rigid national boundaries for the implementation of so called freedoms. Referring to this counter ideology Barry S. Strauss says as follows:

At the same time, however, their arouse a counter ideal that freedom can only be exercised amongst one's own kind. This is the idea of (new) nationalism. Taken to extremes, it requires not merely borders but tighter borders than ever, borders within which everyone would belong to a single nation.(10)

During the last two hundred years, the world has passed back and forth between the enlightenment ideal and its ugly twin. The essential fall out of the ugly twin on the part of the rigid British nationalist prerogatives of the English people contributed for difference and diffusion in the Indian subcontinent. Chaudhuri condemns the English people for not being sincere and for not rising to human heights as the benevolent rulers of India. He condemns them for 'conferring subjecthood and withholding citizenship' for us. At the same time he also blames the so-called Indian intellectuals who propagated the Independence movement in the name of national freedom for the cultural backwardness of India. He believes that they have done a great harm to the par excellent human freedom which could have dawned on the Indian mainland if only the Anglo-Indian
encounter had been allowed to successfully conduct itself into a progressive cultural innovation.

Chaudhuri's rapport with the realities of the things as they were made him come to an intellectual conclusion. After due meditation and introspection, he realised that there was something grossly amiss in the coordination and balance of senses and sensibilities among the Indians. As a true humanist thinker he hoped to achieve for himself and his nation the heights of humanistic prerogatives and the failure of which perhaps made him address himself as the unknown Indian.


4. Ibid, p.141


