INTRODUCTION
Nirad Chaudhuri is a humanely concerned critic of the practical, historical and cultural scenarios of the past and the present. Opposition skepticism and criticism, coupled with a Quixotic scholastic temper or temperament, in being the prime movers of his personality, made him one of the most controversial writers of our times. In this connection the following words of Swapan Dasgupta are worth quoting:

Nirad babu is indeed an oddity, but his exceptional status stems from his readiness to us what we would rather not face up to. In the 100 years of being an Indian – despite all temptations to belong to other nations – he has straddled two Indias. One shaped all that was 'good and living with us'; the other provoked Pope's imagery of collapse. We may not agree entirely, but it is difficult to find another Indian who can match his grand sweep, his erudition, his accomplishments and his penchant for having the last laugh. (1)

Being the most thought provoking and conscientious cultural critic of modern times, Chaudhuri's critical temper or temperament very often turned out to be provocative without condescending to ribaldry or becoming vindictive. But however he very often assumed upon himself a typically eccentric posture just to suggest that such a quaint intellectual manner prompted a curiosity towards him from his reader's end. This
doesn’t amount to say that Chaudhuri was not capable of what Matthew Arnold calls ‘high seriousness.’ In spite of the fact that he did not dogmatically adhere himself to any particular cult or ideology, it can be substantiated from his writings that he backed the cause of humanism and the welfare of humanity in a broad sense. In this effort, Chaudhuri took his lead from Goethe, and not only made an extensive study of cultures but also conformed to the humanistic call of the European Enlightenment and conducted his critical probe into ideas and persons that went to make the modern era. Referring to the salient features of the eighteenth century enlightenment and later nationalist upsurges in Europe, Barry S. Strauss says as follows:

The worst, too, has marked its borders with ideas, never more dramatically than in the eighteenth century when a great new idea took hold of Europe and America – the ideal of the Enlightenment. It maintained that all people have an equal right to freedom which, used productively and rationally, can create a world of peace and prosperity: civilizations will move, slowly but surely towards a world without war. a world without border. (2)

This exactly is the mission with which the British expanded their empire in the far East, and they called it ‘The Whiteman’s burden’. But the practical application of ‘freedom’ needed the like minded in the social context. Since the societies are divided into innumerable unlike minded groups, clans and cults, the application of one’s freedom on another turns
out to be exploitation. Therefore, national boundaries with refined distinction turned out to be a historical fact in its demographic context; and the national identities became necessary. On the event of conflict between the national interest and prerogatives, the salient human sense of freedoms must prevail; and the world should progress into new awareness and new understandings through good sense and adjustment thereof. That is the choice attitude of Chaudhuri towards cultures cross-connecting themselves amongst themselves. He hoped that one day India too would achieve that height where both humanity and humanism would hold their right place.

The humanistic impulses that started with Erasmus and later hastened by the Renaissance, were not sufficient for Chaudhuri because they were highly individualistic and egotistical. What he aimed at was the introspective and judicious restraint of the later eighteenth century humanistic impulses. The humanistic impulses of Nirad Chaudhuri are the outcome of the cultural innovations of the British rule in India. Being a product of the European Enlightenment that reached the Indian shores in the nineteenth century, he cherished the idea of seeing the illiterate and ignorant masses of India rising up to be the choice and enlightened citizens of the world — a brave new world that alone could conform the entire universe into a humanistic whole. For that purpose, he believed, that the Western enlightenment should be invariably be coupled with the Eastern wisdom.
Chaudhuri's awareness of human cultures, both of the East and the West, as well as the present and the past is a matter of ingenious perceptual awareness. His cultural standards are informed by his critical insights; his critical insights are supported by choice human standards; and his human standards are a seasoned confluence of par excellent humanistic norms of the East and the West. The ingenious manner in which he makes a categorical intellectual survey of a given culture on instance, envisages his profound awareness and insight into its strongholds and the weaknesses. It is more appropriate to call him a concerned critic of cultures rather than a mere stock-barrel of cultural scenarios. Referring towards his passion for human cultures Edward Shils writes:

The world has never ceased to be interesting to Mr. Chaudhuri. He is still alert to it, even in his very advanced years. He is still at heart a Brahmo liberal, of the Victorian age, although he has disavowed the doctrinal believes of the Brahmos and has elaborated his own views of faith, of man's life in the cosmos, and the responsibility of individuals. He remains a liberal, and it is from that standpoint that he assess the world as it is now (3).

But the degradation of human values that he witnessed around him both in India and England made him a concerned and bitter critic of both the cultures. His manner of evaluation remained harsh in tone, skeptical in temper and cynical in attitude. Opposition, skepticism and criticism the
tridents with the help of which he lashed at all sundry indiscriminately reminds one of Alexander Pope. His manner of railing at the opponents is similar to that of Pope. But then it is not the personal ego-centric vanity of Pope but his concern for humanity that hastened him to be an aggressive critic of cultures, men and matters. Chaudhuri once said:

I have lost faith in the two countries I call my own —Bengal and England— but I have kept faith in humanity though there has been nothing in my life which has in any way encouraged me to take an optimistic view of human destiny. (4)

As a centenarian, Chaudhuri was perfectly poised, Janus faced to study the Indian culture before and after independence. Unfortunately, the once glorious Hindu civilization which he admired existed no more and the modern Indian society which came up after independence did not appeal to him. He was even skeptical about the makers of the modern era including Nehru and Gandhi. At the same time, the enlightened England he cherished so much in his imagination died with Queen Victoria. The India he despised was the India of recent times and the England that he missed was the England of his dreams, the one he had learned about from books and pictures. A great believer of empires and makers of empire Chaudhuri held the view that it is only in empires one retains human dignity. In the second part of his autobiography Thy Hand, Great Anarch, he wrote
I emphatically rejected the idea that empires were opposed to human dignity, because I held that it really sustained the dignity. I said that, while the fashionable modern democracies - the dictatorships being as democratic as parliamentary governments - got their opponents killed, history records that even autocratic emperors acted ace to the idea of a common wealth based on equity and freedom of speech, which, above all, cherished the freedom of the subject. (THA 778)

Chaudhuri's unabashed admiration for the British Empire and his critical approach towards the various aspects of Indian culture made him unpopular among those Indians who failed to understand him and labeled him as an inveterate anglophile. As Narayana Menon had remarked to Dom Moraes:

... [Chaudhuri is] like a dog trained to wag its tail when its master said "England". (5)

At the outset, Chaudhuri was quite optimistic and hopeful that some great human good would befall as a result of British rule in India. To some extent there emerged some benefits to the Indian subcontinent. India for the first time started experiencing the spacious sentiments of a geographically unified whole. It also brought in changes in the literary, humanistic, moral and religious field in India. This made him favour the British Empire. But at the same time, he saw that the same British rule which consolidated into a single whole could not willfully award the glories of individualism, free democratic enlightenment and the rights of free
citizens to the people of India. The dedicatory note that he gives in
The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian is ironic enough in exposing the
unauthentic manner in which the British dealt with the Indian public. He
wrote:

To the memory of the British Empire in India which conferred
subjecthood on us but withheld citizenship; to which yet every one of us
threw out the challenge: "Civis Britannicus sum" because all that was
good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the
same British Rule. (AUI Dedication)

This dedication caused a wild uproar among the Indians who failed
to understand the irony and sarcasm hidden in its lines. He was asked by
the All India Radio (where he worked) to submit an explanation which he
refused and preferred to lose his job instead. Chaudhuri was in-fact
condemning the British for not treating us as equals in spite of their wild
cry that it was their sacred mission to 'civilize' and uplift the Indian people.
Though he had refused to submit an explanation at that time, he, later, in
his hundredth year, wrote in an article:

It was really a condemnation of British rulers for not treating us as
equals. It was an imitation of what Cicero said about the conduct of
Verres, a Roman proconsul of Sicily who oppressed the Sicilian Roman
citizens, although in their desperation they cned out: 'Civis Romanus
Sum'. (6)
Throughout his long life Chaudhuri never made any compromises either with his views or with his situations. He remained firm in his convictions and even if the facts were bitter he would speak about them without fear. K. Natwar Singh who knew Chaudhuri personally sums up his attitude in the following way:

In his long life there has never been any spiritual backsliding or intellectual intransigence that led him to abandon the values that made him what he is—the possessor of a granite-like integrity, which despises 'saccharine morality.' Not for him the fawning of half-men before authority and power. For this a price had to be paid and Nirad C. Chaudhuri has paid for it. He owes no debts. His life has not been easy. He has chosen a hard bed and is content to lie on it. "Moral discipline was an indispensable preliminary to spiritual achievement", he wrote in his autobiography. He neither bends nor bows. (7)

Chaudhuri's personality was moulded by the best of the Eastern and Western cultures. Unlike Nehru, he never became a 'queer mixture of the East and the West'. He apparently remained a Hindu, a Bengali, and an enlightened Englishman all at the same time out of conscious conviction, while evolving himself as a citizen of the world. Prof. K.R.S. Iyenger says about Chaudhuri:

The truth about him seems to be that he is at once more Indian than most Indians and more English than most Englishmen. (8)
The subtle distinction that Iyengar makes is true to the personality of Nirad Chaudhuri. The Indianess of Chaudhuri was born of his inherent and innate love for the par excellent humane Hindu cultural values and his Englishness was what he acquired painstakingly by whole heartedly involving himself into all that contributed for individual enlightenment through understanding. This double-edged sensitivity gave him a rare intellectual stance in isolation from where he could observe both the Eastern and Western civilizations.

The Indian society and its relation with Western ideas and practices provided the objects for Chaudhuri’s curiosity, observation and reflection. His intimacy with the English and continental culture and his original views about India and the oriental culture were very much the product of his own intellectual broodings. Yet during the first fifty years of life, he lacked the prompting passion to write and to put his thoughts into a major book. Chaudhuri came of age as a writer at the age of fifty to write his book about India and the West framed in his autobiography. The second volume has a similar pattern.

All the books that Chaudhuri has written are about India and the West. In fact, the two volumes of his autobiography represent certain fundamental aspects of Indian life and culture and their relations with the West. *Clive of India* is about the life of the Englishman who by his courage and strength of character achieved more than anyone else to set
a pattern of British Empire in India. **Scholar Extraordinary**, his book about **Max Muller** is about the life of an Anglo-German scholar, who impelled by his sense of vocation, brought India and Europe closer by helping to disclose India to the West and by helping to restore to modern India, knowledge of its own intellectual traditions. Chaudhuri’s **The Continent of Circe** is about contemporary India as observed immediately and by reading, but reaches far into the past of India and into the demographic dimensions and variations to explain certain important features both of the contemporary and of the historical past of the Indian polity. **Hinduism** is about the most fundamental beliefs of the Indian society in the midst of which Chaudhuri lived as a boy and which has never been out of his field of vision even though, as he informs us in the second volume of his autobiography, he lost his faith in God’s and the tenets of Hinduism by the time he was eighteen. **A Passage to England** is Chaudhuri’s celebration of the socio-cultural values of timeless England set against the socio-cultural values of contemporary India written in the form of a travelogue. **To Live or Not to Live** is a collection of essays on Indian family and social life as observed by him. Chaudhuri’s last book **Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse** is about the fall of Eastern and Western civilizations. The three horsemen that have once guided and then misguided the modern world are (i) Individualism, (ii) Nationalism and (iii) Democracy. Chaudhuri cast himself in the image of the twentieth century iconoclast and with the foresight of a prophet and the vision of a
seer saw it as a sacred burden not only to warn but also to try and save the world from the impending, inevitable doom.

Whatever Chaudhuri has written has borne the stamp of his deep intelligence, his unceasing intellectual curiosity, his independence of spirit, and his unimpeachable moral integrity. In arriving at this destination, after detours and delays and long period of humiliation and insult Chaudhuri could look back without feeling embittered and with certain pride in the achievement of survival. In *Thy Hand* he wrote:

Besides, whatever might be my qualifications to pose as a judge of contemporary events, in my personal life I may be an example to others, because my life is a striking instance of the survival of the unfittest. (THA xxii)

**In-spite of being the ‘unfittest’ man to survive, Chaudhuri as a true enlightened man hoped to evolve himself into a ‘citizen of the world to whom borders of nations wouldn’t erect barriers. His experiences during the second World War eventually made him a complete ‘human being’**

He wrote:

I have never regretted what I did during the war because I can say that it has made me a fuller homo sapiens than I was before, although all my life I have tried to remain one. In making me that, it has not taken away from me any particularity I may have had. I remain a Bengali, an Indian.
an Englishman, while being a citizen of the world. I have not had to give up anything to become cosmopolitan. My cosmopolitanism is deeply rooted in all the particular soils - material or mental - on which I have grown. (THA 534)

Yet after having become a citizen of the world, Chaudhuri was in a painful situation of seeing the world into which he had grown, as being far poorer than he had apprehended it would be. For a human being of a poorer substance, it might have been an embittering experience, but that did not happen to Chaudhuri. It only pained him more to see that he had been right all along.

Chaudhuri did not fall into the intellectual mob by repeating what was fashionable and acceptable. His theories were based on his convictions specially regarding the development of cultures and civilizations. His beliefs were not the momentary products of enthusiasm. They tell us about the world as disclosed to him by his painstaking intellectual probing. In this context, Edward Shils says:

Whatever careers men like Mr. Chaudhuri follow, their minds shine forth ...... They always speak the truth as they see it, and, being what they are, the truth they speak are true about serious matters. (B)

Chaudhuri's passion for truth as he 'sees it' and his fearless manner of stating the same squarely made him dear to this generation of
readers. The truths that he speaks about are 'serious matters' which, if unattended to, are likely to become neglected from the intellectual's understanding of the world.

'The truth' that concerns Chaudhuri is the one that evades the world, particularly in its ideological tangents of war, prompted by dogmatic nationalistic credentials that are still held dear in the minds of the people. In his own way Chaudhuri performed as a lone intellectual, pleading for a unified world vision where all humans and nations can effectively appropriate for themselves the fundamental lesson for freedom in existence. In this context, Chaudhuri was a strong crusader against the forces that segregate humanity into warring factions with an intention to establish the relative national superiority dependant upon mere emotional presumptions. Chaudhuri ultimately pleaded for emotional restraint in the individual instead of reckless intellectual advances of thought and action. This plea for intellectual restraint is categorically a heritage that he gained from the ancestral Hindu scriptural declarations. Chaudhuri precisely wanted a marriage between the choice Eastern ideological dimensions with the forwarding Western ideological tenets. This kind of intellectual approach, he strongly felt, would be able to remove the defects of thought and action in the human affairs in the world.
Notes and References


