CHAPTER 1
WHAT IS CULTURE?
CHAUDHURI’S PERCEPTION OF CULTURE
CHAPTER 1

What is Culture?  
Chaudhuri’s Perception of Culture

Culture for Chaudhuri is a matter of intellectual heritage that sticks to human authenticity like some inevitable or unavoidable passion. At times man becomes a prisoner of culture and such a ‘prison-house’ nature of culture constantly goes on crushing the human sense of existence, freedoms and choices. Man as a member of (certain) society automatically acquires for himself some ‘capabilities and habits’, which are sympathetically identical and common for almost all the people that constitute the said society. Depending upon the geographical variations, demographic differences and environmental distinctions, a given culture assumes upon itself some unique modifying colours of habitat and lifestyles. It allows man to adapt himself to his natural and social settings that are greatly variable, and is manifest in institutions, thought patterns and material aspirations. E.B. Tylor, describes culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”(1) Sociologist also consider it as a man made part of environment, for it includes all the elements in man’s mature endowment that he has acquired from his group by his conscious learning or by a conditioning process — techniques of various kinds, social and other institutions.

15
beliefs, and patterned modes of conduct. But whether man is happy or otherwise, invariably depends upon the extent and scope that culture leaves for the individual freedom and choices. Usually almost all the cultures are unanimous in demanding a sort of surrender of the individual choices and freedoms.

As a humanist par excellence, Chaudhuri’s mind always went in favour of the ‘primary concerns’ of the humans. But he found that the ‘secondary concerns’, in some extraneous manner always came to the forefront in human affairs and ruthlessly contributed for the total or partial annihilation and devastation of primary concerns. Referring to the relative place and importance of primary and secondary concerns Northhope Frye says as follows:

Literature develops out of mythology, a body of stories with a specific social function and mythology, in turn is an outgrowth of what I call concern, a term that I hope is self-explanatory. There is a primary concern and there is a secondary concern. Primary concern is based on the most primitive of the platitudes, the conviction that life is better than death, happiness is better than misery, and freedom is better than bondage. Secondary concerns includes loyalty to one’s own society to one’s religion or political beliefs, to one’s place in the class structure, and in short to everything that comes under the general hoarding of ideology. All through history secondary concerns have had the greater prestige and power. (2)
On an overall study of Chaudhuri's writings, it perspires that his mind goes very near to the above analysis of primary and secondary concerns of humans. Upholding the importance of 'primary concerns', he becomes a bitter critic and opponent of the exclusive manner in which the 'secondary concerns' completely drive people to a ruthless and dogmatic conservatism. As a result of this their actions and projects of life turn out to be highly injurious to the 'primary concerns'. Chaudhuri is of the confirmed opinion that all cultures in their infancy are concerned only with the 'primary concerns', but with the progress in civilizations, 'secondary concerns' take over.

Chaudhuri finds that almost all the cultures of the world instead of hastening the human values are constantly and consistently contributing for the stunting and regressing of the same human values that are the life and breath of human spirit. He says:

...the very existence which has created the values whose passing I regret has also created the agencies which are destroying them. (AU! 149)

Chaudhuri regrets the passing of these human values for they evolve out of the manifestation of the highest forms of man's thoughts, feelings, customs, beliefs, entertainment, occupation, and artistic impulses. Culture is also a social phenomenon that radically evolves.
itself into a formal agency culminating into systems and institutions. These systems and institutions in their own way contribute for self-preservation of the individual and preservation of the race, particularly in an atmosphere and environment, which is not conducive for human welfare. The traditional institutions and systems contribute for the safety and security of the humans. But at the same time the same systems and institutions which are supposed to contribute for human welfare and safety are most likely to turn in course of time into the most possible restrainers and inhibitors of individual freedoms and choices. Therefore any given culture is stuffed with both positive and negative forces so far as the human survival and human enhancement is concerned. Chaudhuri ponderously gloats upon and distinguishes both the positive and negative aspects of a given culture. All this is done by him with a sincere aim of providing a sensible and sensitive attitude towards nature, fellow men and the self. He calls for a careful coordination between sensibilities and senses what T S Eliot calis `a harmony between senses and sensibilities'.

Chaudhuri's perception of culture is an intellectual's manner of looking at things as they are, from the vantage point of view of reason and logic. His perception of culture is not limited to the thinking, living and behaviour of people of a particular group but is extended to understanding the reasons behind the existence of the peculiarities that lie within that culture. Being a biographer and a historian he perceives culture through his observations and tries to relate them to the past in order to visualize
the future. He does not stick to the anthropological meaning of culture and borrows from Spengler a deeper meaning which concentrates on the 'living and creative phase' of a civilization. He writes:

...and I might add that Spengler in his famous book which predicted the decline of the West regarded 'culture' as the living and creative phase of a civilization, and gave the appellation 'civilization' to its devitalized and stagnating continuation. (THM 93)

At the same time, Chaudhuri also considers race, geography, climate and history to be crucial factors in determining the content and quality of a culture. In his attempt to understand the existing norms of the modern Indian culture, Chaudhuri probes into the history of Indian civilization to trace its roots. While forming his concept of the Indian culture, he never forgot the fact that there was never any single cultural model that prevailed all through the past in India. Every passing invasion right from the Aryans to the modern Europeans through the Moguls completely varied and differentiated the cultural components of the Indian context. The concept of unified India as a cultural milieu is of the latest origin. The geographic and demographic variations in the past contributed for innumerable cultural sprouts through local loyalties and local rituals. Modern commentators like Chaudhuri comprehend and coordinate the cultural variations and variances from the past through their ability of objective historical analysis and insight into the national character. According to them it is important for a man to have historical
sense because it enables him to understand the present better by contrasting and comparing it with the past. For, as T.S. Eliot says:

The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence... (3)

Thus, to Chaudhuri too, the past was important to understand the present. That is why his autobiographies are not merely documents of his personal development but also records of historical facts.

Understanding the Cultural History of India:

Chaudhuri’s perception of the Indian cultural history revolves around two basic concepts; first is, that the Hindus are deracinated Aryans who are of European origin and the second is that there has never been any civilization in India which has not had a foreign origin or a foreign inspiration behind it. Edward Shils sums up Chaudhuri’s concept in these words:

He now thinks that India is incapable of a vital civilization on its own unless it is subjected to foreign influence. Without the Aryan, Muslim and Western influence, India would not have ever developed. (4)

He classifies the successive cultural cycles in India as Indo-Aryan, Indo-Islamic and Indo-European. Each of these cycles springs out of the
Survivals of social and cultural elements from the preceding cycles are to be found in the later cycles, which exist as parallel forms without integrating with the main stream of each cycle. Chaudhuri observes:

"...inspite of the bodily transfer of elements from cycle to cycle, it is the distinctness of the cycles and not the similarity with strikes the eye most in India." (AUI 554)

Chaudhuri finds the Indian history discontinuous because the dominant civilization of each cycle constitutes a separate species of civilization with an independent cultural and social origin and nature.

Thus three different socio-cultural complexes appear in succession and dominate the Indian scene. Regarding the qualitative aspect of these cultures Chaudhuri observes that the dominant social cultural type of each historical cycle in India arose from a human group which was less specialized than the type which it superseded but contained a much higher potentiality for evolving. Hence, it not only became the dominant form of its age but also dominated it on a new level with new attributes. Chaudhuri writes:

"the supplanting civilization ...... displayed in each case higher vitality and higher achievement at the moment of contact. The result is"
unmistakable. Each new dominance led to a fresh outburst of social and cultural activity. (AUI 555)

Regarding the influence of these foreign rules on the Indian culture, Chaudhuri's observation is that there has been a decrease in quality from cycle to cycle, while in the field of politics, there has been an increase. The Indo-Aryan culture was the most original and massive while the Indo-European the most imitative. The cultural worth and individuality has also been seen to be decreasing with each successive cycle. Chaudhuri feels that at the root of this lies the ethnic factor. He explains that the civilization of the first cycle was original and massive because it was the creation of the foreigners who had settled down in the country in large numbers and virtually swamped the older population. The cultural creations of the next cycle were the work of a smaller number of foreigners helped by indigenous converts and reinforced from time to time from the home territory of the Islamic civilization. The civilization of the third age was the handiwork almost wholly of the indigenous elements. He writes

Of the three historical civilizations that have arisen so far in India—the Indo-Aryan, the Indo-Islamic, and the Indo-European—by far the most original and massive was the first. The creations of the second cycle, though magnificent, were on a lower plane, while the culture of the third phase has proved to be the least solid and individual of the three. (AUI 600)
Chaudhuri finds this progressive dilution of the foreign element responsible for the progressive dilution in the quality of culture.

Chaudhuri delves into the past in order to understand the future. By projecting the past into the future, he anticipates that India will become more imitative in the cultural field. He believes that individual Indians will be born who will make notable contribution to the world civilization but we shall never achieve the greatness and individuality of the Hindu civilization. That civilization is dead and we cannot hope for a second civilization of the same order.

The Hindu's boast that while all other civilizations have passed away, our civilization still survives. Chaudhuri found this a perverse boast for according to him our survival is only a "mummified continuity" (AU1602). He wrote that earlier we had managed to escape from it by "casting up and casting off" (AU1602) with various cultures and that we might escape the doom of petrifaction if we renew our affiliation with countries, which stand in the mainstream of human evolution. "The choice before us is of revolving round ourselves to die, or revolving round a sun in order to live." (AU1 603)

Standing on the threshold of the twenty-first century, Chaudhuri saw a strong but gradual assimilation of the European ways once again. He had never believed that when the British left India, it was the end of
the Indo-European culture and had prophesized that the time will come when the civilization of India will become a provincial addition of the civilization of Europe. In *The Autobiography* published in 1947 he has written:

I expect either the United States singly or a combination of the United States and the British Commonwealth to re-establish and rejuvenate the foreign domination of India. (AUI 600)

We witness the truth in what Chaudhuri said then, when we look around and study the cultural changes that have taken place in the last twenty-five years.

**Diversity Factor in the Indian culture:**

To understand India with its enormous cultural, economic and social diversity is a profound challenge to any writer. India has always been projected in a superficial way both by the Indian and foreign writers. The Indian writers represent India the way the West would want to enjoy. As Chaudhuri says.

They (the Indo-Anglian writers) 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. The result is an inefficient imitation of the novels about India written by Western novelists (CC14)
For the foreign writers especially the correspondents of Western newspapers and broadcasting organizations the image of India is exotic, consisting of mystery, fantasy, intrigue, superstition, snakes, tigers, yogis, maharajas, elephants and sacred cows. India for them is a mystery and a muddle. The problem faced by these writers arises not only due to their lack of knowledge regarding the life, mind and behaviour of the Indians but also because the Indian culture, though is loosely referred to as a single entity, is actually a strange mixture of diverse ethnic groups. The Indian culture that developed from the mixture of these ethnic groups is bound to be complex and imperceivable by foreigners. The 19th Century European enlightenment which reached India through the British, brought seekers of knowledge about India. They brought in a freshness of perception, freedom from set notions and an insight into the modes of Indian thinking and behaviour whose patterns were different from the West. Influenced by these people, it is only a writer like Chaudhuri who is at once deeply rooted in his own culture and also alienated from it, who has an in-depth knowledge of the ethnic history of India - is able to understand India. Chaudhuri has made a study of the diverse ethnic groups in India in The Continent of Circe. He has tried to find in the past a possible explanation for the conflicts and deep degradation which he witnessed around him during and after independence. In his attempt to search in the past, Chaudhuri made a study of the Indian ethnology and stated that the visual facts that differentiate the various ethnic races help to solve the most acute and baffling problem of the Indian politics i.e the
unending human conflicts that have raged in the country in the past and are continuing till today. They also explain certain traits in the Hindu character like intolerance and incapacity for synthesis.

The Indian ethnic races as Chaudhuri sees them can be differentiated from each other on the basis of their complexion as – the Blacks, the Browns and the Yellows. They are also clearly separated from one another by their geographical distribution. The Mongoloids i.e. the Yellows are confined to the Himalayan regions and the Hills of Assam, the Darks are mostly massed in the hilly and wooded areas of Central India and the Deccan while the Browns live mostly in the plains, or in the river valleys of the hilly regions where they have penetrated the territories of the Darks or Yellows. The Darks and the Yellows are the aboriginal and the Browns are Aryans, the Hindus.

Chaudhuri further believes that the difference in physical traits can be related to ethnic conflict and violence. He gives several examples to prove his point. The oldest conflict in Indian between the civilized 'Browns' of the North and Yellow and Dark primitives of other regions is one such example. According to him the dark aboriginal have always hated their Hindu rulers for invading their territories, economy and life. Outside the tribal areas, the conflict takes the form of revolt in the lower castes who are considered untouchables. Similarly the Mongoloids till date remain rebellious against any foreign rule. The cultural differences
as seen in the appearances of people are also responsible for conflict – for example, the Sikh-Muslim conflicts. In the past an intensity of cultural consciousness and displacement of populations, economic and cultural rivalry, have all led to conflicts and this continues till today.

Chaudhuri was concerned with the living process of the groups now in existence and wanted to understand their conflicts as well as their co-operation. For this he traced the Aryan colonization, settlement and expansion in India till seventh century BC in their three phases, and their conflicts with the aboriginal, and the barbaric invasions from outside. He also explained how the notion of race and racial superiority was born among the Aryans.

By the time Aryans came to India from somewhere between Danube and the Volga, the Darks of the country had become fused into one mass whose culture though primitive was fairly advanced within those limits. The Darks were in complete contrast to the fair skinned Aryans. They were highly skilled hunters and rudimentary agriculturists and were mostly found in the highly and wooded regions of Central India and the Deccan. Here they lived for centuries slowly absorbing the cultural influences from outside. Chaudhuri observed that in the south, the character of the Aryan settlement was substantially different from what it was in the north. In the northern India the Aryans were the largest and
the dominant community and the Gangetic plain was their country. On the contrary, in the Deccan even on the plains there were large aboriginal populations, who could not be suppressed and the Aryans remained just a civilized minority. Here the Darks were reduced to the servitude as untouchable labourers in the large numbers. Only in the hills many survived as free men. Hence, these Aryans developed a sense of being somewhat different from their kinsmen in the north and formed a southern colonial form of Aryavartha. They came be to called as `Dravidah', Dravidians after the original settlers of the south. This incompleteness of the Aryan civilization in south India lead to the abandonment of pure Aryan speech in every day life and popular culture, though not in religion and civilization. According to Chaudhuri, by 7th Century, the Aryanisation of the Indo-Gangetic plain and the establishment of colonies in the south was complete and what he calls the most outstanding feature of the ethnic pattern of India emerged. Chaudhuri wrote:

...the opposition between the civilized community descent and the primitive Darks was firmly established.(CC53)

This awareness kept them a closed society and one in which no outside could enter. The social organisation of a four class social set up also developed and exists till today.
Ethnic conflicts in India, both past and present have arisen from the course of history in India. They are a part of the historical process accompanying it as heat does chemical processes. Except that the ethnic conflict has always resulted in an amalgam – a physical mixture that has remained more or less inflammable. Chaudhuri concludes that the most outstanding feature of ethnic history of India is:

...that whenever there has been an active stage in the formation of the population of India there have also been conflicts.(CC36)

He proves his point by illustrating examples from the Punjab and Bengal partition after independence and the attitude of the Mongoloid Ahoms who have developed a strong sense of an Assamese collective personality towards the Bengalis who brought them into the folds of Hindu civilization.

The Hindu / Indian Character:

Chaudhuri believes that one cannot gain true insight into the Indian mind without a thorough knowledge of the Hindu character. His essay on the peoples of India - The Continent of Circe is a lifetime's effort to understand the Hindu character. While speaking about the inhabitants of Indian sub-continent, he prefers to use the word 'Hindu' rather than Indian because he believes that the word 'Indian' is primarily a geographical
expression and is not comparable to 'Christian' or 'Muslim.' The word Hindu may have a cultural connotation but not a religious one because the word 'Hinduism' is also not a correct word for the complex of religious beliefs and practices of the people of this area. He believes that it was first used by European scholars who found that the Hindus have no name for their religious beliefs and practices other than 'Sanatana Dharma'.

The notion of race and racial superiority amongst the Aryans kept them as a closed society and one in which no outsider could enter. The social organisation of a four class social set up also developed. During the four hundred years after the completion of the Aryans settlement in India, there were Persian and Greek invasions but the impact remained military and political, not ethnic. These invasions brought the Hindus in touch with the higher civilisations of Greece and Persia.

The barbaric invasions, which started from the 1st Century BC, brought into existence an ethnic ferment of a very active sort. The Hindu society came face to face with an external proletariat of barbarous nomads in addition to the internal proletariat of the Darks and for their survival they (the Hindus) were compelled to fight on two fronts. The invasion of the barbarous nomads left a permanent impression on the Hindu's mind and outlook confirming their aggressiveness. When faced with the aboriginals they formed a closed society based on birth. This, Chaudhuri believes led to the development of the caste system. They had
done this as conquerors who were superior to the natives in race and civilization. On the contrary the barbarians from Central Asia came as conquerors and their domination humiliated the proud Hindus. This led to the development of that violent xenophobia which became a fixed trait of the Hindu outlook. Chaudhuri observes:

The compound of fear, hatred, contempt, and humiliation was embodied in the notion of Mlechchha, the unclean and uncivilized foreigner. (CC56)

The xenophobia in the Indians, which simmered within them throughout the Muslim rule burst out violently during the Indian National Movement led by Gandhi.

On account of the barbarian invasion the Hindus also lost their readiness and faculty of learning from foreign nations, though earlier they had borrowed ideas from the Persians and Greeks. Because of the compelling historical situation, non-Hindus were absorbed into their society, and it showed their capacity to bring about a racial synthesis. Chaudhuri suggests that the Hinduization of some barbarians must have quietened the Hindus for some time. The caste system became flexible to accommodate the barbarians who wanted to raise their cultural level. It organized an anarchic situation. Chaudhuri explains that:

Hindu society did not attempt to suppress the immense range of racial, social, cultural and economic diversities which history was creating for it.
in unending succession. On the contrary, it accepted them, gave to each its place and niche, and brought into existence a living association of human groups of all sorts, which was a federation of its part, without even trying to be any one thing (CC58)

But the dislike for foreigners and all things foreign became a fixed feature of the Hindus, Chaudhuri observes:

But its basic character had been fixed, and in the new historical situation, which was to arise within a few centuries, it was to be revived in a much more violent and virulent form. (CC58)

Kalki, the tenth incarnation of the great preserving Lord Vishnu was born to suppress the 'Mlechchas'.

Chaudhuri believes that the course which the Indian History has taken in the last thousand years, is due to the Hindu character. It is difficult to interpret the mind and behaviour of the Hindus in the light of a prefabricated psychology for the living Hindu belongs to his own world which is not less bizarre than the Freudian, nor is it less dogmatic and fanatical than the Marxist. (CC 92)

The British in spite of ruling India for two hundred years never succeeded in discovering the Hindu mind and this was pointed out most forcefully by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. To him the Englishmen's
knowledge of India was like a large fine orchard full of fruit, which was neither eaten nor enjoyed by its owner. Chaudhuri accounts for this failure stating that as soon as the English-mind came in contact with the Hindu's that was a very different kind of a mind, it completely lost its temper and so became incapable of dispassionate analysis. They found the Hindus effeminate, degraded, perverse, grotesque and contradictory. “The Hindus were regarded as untruthful, dishonest and shifty, and often described as such to their face.” (CC94).

Chaudhuri says that the peculiarity of the Hindu mind is in its terrible dicotomy. He takes the Roman God Janus as the symbol of the Hindu character. To him the Hindu personality does not only have two faces but a series of them. He mentions the antithetical traits, which shaped the Hindu behaviour and influenced both the domestic and foreign politics as follows:

A sense of Hindu solidarity with an uncontrollable tendency towards disunity within the Hindu order; collective megalomania with self abasement; extreme xenophobia with an abject xenolatry; authoritarianism with anarchic individualism; violence with non-violence; militarism with pacifism; possessiveness with carelessness about property owned; courage with cowardice; cleverness with stupidity (CC106-107).
Chaudhuri rests his thesis on the knowledge acquired from the epics and states forcefully that the whole of Sanskrit literature from the epics down to the latest long poems is full of accounts of battles and exultation over war and conquest. In spite of all the propaganda by Gandhiji that Hindus are peace-loving and non-violent people, Chaudhuri finds not one word of non-violence in the theory and practice of statecraft by the Hindus. But the Hindus practiced war within an idealistic framework. Frightened by the militaristic violence and the proneness to bloodshed of their people, the ancient Hindu moralist tried to restrain and purify it by formulating a moral concept of war as a war of righteousness (Dharma Yuddha). (This was something like the chivalry of the middle ages). The duty of the Kshatriya was to defend and protect the distressed. Further the spirit of the war was to be such that though the evil doer had to be punished, there was to be no gloating on his end.

Chaudhuri finds a streak of insanity in the Hindus especially in the activities in the public sphere. He calls it, using the psychiatrist's terms - partly dementia praecox and partly paranoia. This so-called collective insanity amongst the Hindus is feebler than collective insanity of the Germans and Japanese, but is continuous and permanent. But the survival of the Hindus is due to their inertia. He finds that nine-tenth of the Hindu society consists of "an inert element, which is impervious to the malignancy of the one tenth" (CC 133). Chaudhuri concludes that though
this inertia has helped the Hindu civilization to survive it has failed to raise it to great heights.

Chaudhun finds an explanation for the behaviour of the Hindus in his theory that the Aryans – the first Europeans in India, suffered in the hostile tropical environment because they could neither tolerate their new environment nor adapt themselves to it. This suffering brought about a moral and nervous breakdown and shaped their philosophies and gave to them their specific colour. He says:

Western scholars have sometime 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 emotion, 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. (CC167)

Chaudhuri condemns the Buddhist and Hindu spiritual discipline, which emphasizes on suffering as the way to salvation. Hindus have a tendency to gloat over their sufferings. They suffered as rulers for the first two hundred years and in the next thousand as subjects to new conquerors. As years passed their strength ebbed and behaviour oriented largely towards escape. Humiliation was added to their sorrow and suffering and the new age of Hindus looked back to their old suffering as
a sort of glory. They not only learned to cherish and gloat on their sufferings they also became incapable of living without grievances.

Suffering in `Tamas' (total darkness) was the Hindu hubris, for total escape from physical and mental suffering was impossible. The degeneracy found in the national character of the Hindus is often attributed to the cumulative effect of many centuries of foreign rule, but Chaudhuri says that the degeneracy, instead of being the product of the subjection, was the cause of it.

The Aryan Hindu never wavered in their loyalty and adherence to four things i.e. the Vedas, fair complexion, the rivers and the cattle. These loyalties were basic to their way of life and can be seen both in the anglicized and conservative Hindu. Chaudhuri finds the modern Hindu interest in the Vedas artificial and a creation of Western scholarship for most Indian scholars cannot read vedic Sanskrit and are dependent on Western translations. The Hindu's adoration for fair colour too has a historical basis for the Hindu civilization was created by people who were fair. Though inter-mixture with indigenous element has made many Hindus dark skinned, they feel angry and hurt when they are called coloured or are taken for a Negro. When a Hindu objects to western colour bar he is not standing up for humanity he is standing for egoism.-states Chaudhuri. Having traced the degradation of the intellectual and moral faculties of the Hindu to the climate Chaudhuri comes to the gnawing sense of failure
which the majority of the Hindus in contemporary India experience. He calls this feeling of frustration the 'Acedia' of Hindu life. Chaudhuri points out that the frustration of the Hindus is observable, in the lifelessness of expression on their faces, their massive staticity, their quarrelsome nature in all walks of life, their dwelling on and sorrowing for conditions which cannot be helped and in their insatiable craving for sympathy. Chaudhuri hated Hindu asceticism. He believed that the Hindus deliberately inflict pain on themselves so that they can neutralize the pain of the environment. Through self-torture, the Hindus only want to assert their superiority over others. Explaining the reason as to why Hindu's glorified their sufferings he wrote:

The suffering of the Hindus in every day life was so drab and even sordid...that no man ,if he knew he was condemned to live with it for ever, could hope to save himself from the utter degradation except by raising the suffering to ,a level at which it could be borne without shame...(CC171)

Chaudhuri attributes most of the peculiarities of the Hindu character to the Indian climate and geographical conditions. He also seeks to fit his version of Aryan conquest into his wider philosophy of Indian history. According to him the natives of India have always been in a state of debility owing to the demoralizing climate of India. All vigour has been infused by foreign conquests. Once the new conquerors adapted themselves to the Indian climate they lost their original dynamism and became passive like the people they had conquered. In due course a fresh invasion took place and infused vigour into the Indian society.
The Cultural Innovations:

**Muslim Influence:**

The modern Indian culture is greatly influenced by the Muslims in regards to food, costumes and language. The innovation started with the advent of the Muslim rule, which began in India when the Turks took over the political and military leadership of the Islamic world. Chaudhuri makes his study of the Islamic presence in India as an extension of the Islamic imperium into India, which remained Islamic as long as it lasted instead of becoming an adaptation of Islam to India. The Muslims came to India as a well-developed and mature society, with the fully developed way of life and living culture. They were established in India as a society parallel to that of Hindus. No adjustment between these two societies took place except in minor matters and hence it led to an ethnic cleavage in India's population. This cleavage was more cultural than racial. Its immediate effect was a revivification of an intense form of Hindu xenophobia created by the barbarian invasion. Chaudhuri observes:

This animosity has inflicted irreparable harm on the country, and is as active today as it was in the past, and as toxic (CC63).

The Muslim rule, which extended to our country, remained the rule of colonizing people who never forgot their affiliation with the wider
Islamic world. The Hindu converts in Punjab and Bengal felt close to their foreign co-religionist than to the native Hindus. The Hindus too wrote off the converts and refused to look upon them as members of a common society. Chaudhuri writes:

Here is a case of true ethnic relationship being completely broken by a new cultural and social association. (CC65)

Chaudhuri in The Continent of Circe finds the roots of the Hindu-Muslim conflict in the attitude of both the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslims who settled in India were not barbarians at a low level of culture who would consider admission to the Hindu fold as a promotion. On the contrary, they considered themselves to be the creators and defenders of a new and aggressive culture. They had a fanatical conviction that their culture was superior to all others and that it was their duty to propagate it even by force. Their religion too made it one of the duties of a true Muslim. As Chaudhuri observes:

They were the first people in history to put forward the idea of an irreconcilable conflict between a particular way of life and all others, and to formulate a theory of permanent revolution. There could no place on earth, they declared, until the whole world was converted to their faith. (CC64)
The Hindus on their part had lost all assimilating power and adaptability and had hardened into a close society "with a conviction of its own superiority, which amounted to megalomania". (CC64) They could not absorb any foreigner let alone a Muslim. Hence the routes of antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims can be traced back to the period when the Muslim started to expand their colonial empire in India in AD 1192 with Muhammad of Ghur defeating Prithviraj Chauhan. Unable to deny the foreignness of the Islamic cycle the Hindus tried to discount it with the help of a cultural heritage common to the Indian Muslim and Hindu. The common cultural heritage could be felt in the ethnic relationship between the two,- their common language, the inter-mingling of Islamic and Hindu strands in the culture of Mohammedan India, in the literature and arts which arose as a result, and the mutual influence which Hindu and Muslim religions and philosophies exercised on each other. Chaudhuri states that though this common heritage was hardly deep, the norm of the civilization of India in the Islamic cycle could be seen in this synthesis. The so-called common heritage was weak for it quickly lost its hold over the people of India for it was not homogenous but formed of three superimposed layers corresponding to the three strata or the society – the ruling order, the middle classes and the masses.

The first of three layers of common heritage was the culture, which flourished in the Muslim courts of India based mainly on Islamic elements. Though modified by Hindu influences it was most unstable for it depended
too much on "the accident of personality" (AUI567). While it flourished with Akbar, it withered with Aurangazeb. Chaudhuri says:

The cultural trends of Islamic courts therefore oscillated from pole to pole, from wide armed receptivity to non-Islamic influences to an absolute rejection of them. (AUI567)

Thus the common heritage in India never had a chance of evolving uninterruptedly within the Islamic ruling order, nor did it take a deep root. The instability of the eclectic culture of the middle class was due to the motive of expediency on which it was founded. They adopted the Muslim dress learned Persian and wanted to be in good graces of the ruling order, because they wanted positions in the administrative system. The continuance of the Islamic elements in the culture of the Hindu middle class depended on the continued existence of the Muslim rule. As soon as one disappeared, the other disappeared too.

Chaudhuri found the cultural confluence most stable in the culture of the masses. This was because the Hindu and Muslim masses of India were closely related ethnically and were also on a level of culture which was fairly uniform which in its essentials, was a folk civilization almost wholly devoid of self consciousness. When diverse cultures meet, this lack of self-consciousness favours assimilation and absorption. But this lack of sophistication was also its greatest weakness. Once they rose to
a higher plane, the Hindus became more Hinduized and the Muslims more Islamic. With the revival of the Hindu traditions, there came about a progressive de-Islamisation of non-Muslims in India in the 19th Century (in The Autobiography Chaudhuri gives examples on how the Hindus condemned people who even ate Pulau as it was considered a Muslim rice delicacy.) The Muslims on the other hand attempted to complete the Islamisation of Muslims in India both qualitatively and quantitatively. But the common heritage of the Hindus and Muslims did nothing to modify the group consciousness of the member of the two societies or to make them forget that they were anti-thetical in all matters except a few inessentials. Yet culturally the achievement of the Muslims in India were great. In no other country or age, have painting, architecture, and literature been of a higher quality than what was produced in all the three by the Muslims in India. The great Turk poet Amir Khusrau, the Urdu Poet, Sauda Mir and Mir Hasan were among those who created Indo-Islamic literature.

Personally Chaudhuri hardly met or knew any Muslims during his stay in Calcutta. The Muslim peasants he came across in Kishorganj as a child did make him aware of the basic character of the Muslims and the modern Hindu attitude towards them. While in Calcutta, he became aware of the deep-seated hostility amongst the people for the Muslims. This contempt was the result of the complete insulation of the two communities and the absence of personal relations between their members. In East Bengal, such antagonism did not exist due to the fact
that the Muslims were Bengali speaking and the economic and social life of the two communities was inter-woven. Yet from around 1906 the hatred for Muslims penetrated Kishorganj – observes Chaudhuri.

Before the swadeshi movement coloured the attitudes of the Indians towards the Muslims, there were four distinct aspects of it. Firstly, there was a retrospective hostility towards the Muslims for their one time domination of the Hindus. Secondly, on the plain of thought the Indians were utterly indifferent to the Muslims as an element in the contemporary society. Thirdly, friendliness existed for the Muslims who belonged to the same economic and social status and lastly, there was a feeling of mixed concern and contempt for the Muslim peasants who were seen in the same light as the low caste Hindu tenants or as livestock.

As the nationalist movement swept India, the Muslims sided with the British for they looked upon it as Hindu movement. When they saw that the British were going to make political concessions to the Hindu nationalists, they demanded counter balancing rights and privileges for themselves. The realization, that to survive after the British left India, they must rely on their own strength, made them fall back on the very basic principle of Islam, i.e. the brotherhood and solidarity of all the Islamic countries and peoples, and what favoured this trend was the emergence of a new Islamic nationalist movement which was Pan-Islamism. When this movement failed, they once again turned to the British for support and
the idea of partition to give themselves a homeland was the only solution they could see. But the creation of Pakistan did not solve the problem for Muslims who remained in India. Politically, they are now reduced to the category of minorities which made Chaudhuri consider the entire community of Muslims to be “under a black veil.” (CC282)

*The Greek Influence on Indian Culture:*

The invasion of Alexander brought the Greeks to the northwestern regions of India, and exposed the life and culture of the Hindus to Hellenic influences in many things. The Greek presence in Punjab and Afghanistan was a potent cultural influence on the Hindus. The Greeks brought in the temple cult amongst the Indo-European group of people including Indians. Earlier, none of these people made images of the God, nor worshipped them in temples. The religion basically had a pantheistic character, derived from a strong feeling for nature. Their Gods, largely nature Gods were worshipped at scared spots or in groves. The Greeks also influenced the Indo-Aryan culture in material expression. Chaudhuri says that in Sanskrit literature this weakness of the Indo-Aryan culture has been frankly admitted. The erotic art evident in the sculptures of the temples of India were also borrowed from the Greeks. Chaudhuri feels that Indian scholars, from purely nationalistic and sentimental reasons have always discounted the Greek influence on the Hindu culture.
In so far as the European cultural innovations are concerned they are being dealt in chapter 5 in detail. But however, it is important to note here that in a broad spectrum analysis, the European cultural influences contributed for a sort of progressive humanitarianism in the sense of equanimously considering the status and prerogatives of all the citizens more or less equally.

Understanding Hinduism

Development of Hinduism:

Chaudhuri believes that no one can deal with India or understand the social and cultural life of the people of the country without the knowledge of Hinduism which has influenced the behaviour even of the non-Hindus. He finds Hinduism a great religion of a particular kind and in understanding it one may even understand the innate urges of man from which religion emerges. Chaudhuri believes that Hinduism is of European origin and has been adopted even by the modern Hindus under the influence of Western thoughts. It was shaped by Christianity, but partly also by Judaism and Islam, all of which constitute a particular family of religions. Hinduism differs fundamentally from Christianity in this that for its followers it is not an alternative to the world, but primarily the means of supporting and improving their existence in it. It is also a human phenomenon of immense magnitude and is overpowering not only by
reason of that, but also owing to its bewildering diversity. Despite its obvious inconsistencies, Hinduism is one whole. Even those features in it seem to have no connection with religion as understood today, stem from its basic character as natural off-shoots.

Chaudhuri regards Hinduism as a way of living. In his book 'Hinduism' which is extensive thesis on the religion, he has written:

Hinduism in its fundamental aspect is a civilized amplification of the primitive man's way of living in the world by accepting the conditions which he believes are inexorably laid down by the super-natural spirits who really own and govern it. (H 21)

He also finds it an elaboration of the primitive man's corollary to the main proposition that by accepting the conditions it is possible to establish a relationship of mutual dependence that will remain stable. His view is that the geographical environment and historical evolution of the Indo-Aryans has given Hinduism its peculiarities. The other Indo-European ethnic groups namely the Romans, Greeks and Persians who moved out of their original habitat with cultures already crystallized had to face the problem of adjusting their institution and more specially their religion which sustain their worldly life in the new environments. As they did so in four different ways—Italy, Greece, Persia and India brought into existence four distinct cultures. Chaudhuri says that these differed from each other in their obedience to the particular conditions set by each environment
The Greeks came to the Mediterranean region where there already existed highly developed cultures and religions. Though these modified the original features of the religion, it did not change the basic Indo-European character of the religion. The Romans retained more of the original heritage through a very tenacious conservatism, combined with a certain degree of adaptability for they found nothing in Italy which could drastically modify their archaic religion. The Persians did not find any religion in Persia which could change their Indo-European polytheism. But their internal religious revolution changed the polytheism and a new monotheism became the national religion for the Iranians. The Aryans, according to Chaudhuri, who came to India not only became completely cut-off from the polytheism of other Indo-Europeans by immense distances, but also by the intervening monotheism of the Persians which was very assertive. On the other hand, they found nothing in India with which they could strengthen their culture in isolation. They had to face the problem of surviving with their culture in an environment which was hostile in every way. Chaudhuri wrote

For this they had to create a way of life which would serve multiple purposes: resist the enmity of the aboriginal inhabitants whom they looked upon as savages, as well as the temptation to fraternise with them, compensate for the decline of vitality inevitable in a tropical environment; check erosion of morale, and withstand the destructive impact of the environment on their institutions. (H 23)
As this security could not come from their social life which itself had to be saved and also from political activity for they were thoroughly incompetent in politics, they had no alternative secular ideals to fall back on. These handicaps created serious difficulties in the way of social and cultural survival in the hostile environment because Chaudhuri feels that in India, nature in all its aspects is in arms against man. Therefore, to win battle against nature, the Aryans had to seek the help of supernatural in everything. They created a pattern of life in which the supernatural reinforced human strength. Chaudhuri finds the greatest achievement of Hindu religion is that it has enabled Hindu society and culture to survive through vicissitudes which have destroyed other societies and cultures contemporaneous with it. It still sustains life at a level of confidence maintained by few religions in the world. This has happened because the original Indo-European religion has developed in such a way that it became a strong and comprehensive way of life covering every aspect of human existence. A massive norm was also established which by becoming Hinduism at its widest and most general became the framework of worldly life in India.

**Hinduism as a way of life:**

According to Chaudhuri, Hindu’s preferred synthesis and hence the secular and religious are merged into one unlike the Europeans. For them life is to be treated as an indivisible whole and not divided into
spiritual un-secular. He quotes from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee to support his view:

With other peoples (he wrote), religion is only a part of life; there are things religious, and there are things lay and secular. To the Hindu, his whole life was religion. To other peoples, their relations to God and to the spiritual world are things sharply distinguished from their relations to man and to the temporal world. To the Hindu, his relations to God and his relations to man, his spiritual life and his temporal life are incapable of being so distinguished. They form one compact and harmonious whole, to separate which into component parts is to break the entire fabric. (H 11-12)

Thus any culture independent of religion was no culture. Hindu worldliness is religious. Though generally the Hindus blame themselves if they do not get what they wanted assuming that it is due to some fault of their own, at times they feel resentment against the Gods too if the Gods fail to perform. Help from religion is sought for all purposes, moral or immoral. Religion and morality run along parallel courses.

Culture is the essence of Hinduism. Unlike the European doctrine of culture, which is Godless, the Hindus have placed culture at the feet of God. Hindu worldliness is religious and hence culture is latent in the devotion of wife to her husband, life of chastity and abstinence of the widow in the rule of Tantras, yoga etc. The intermingling of religion and
worldliness in Hinduism may seem sordid due to the motives behind the
religious observances. But there is more to it because all kinds of worldly
prosperity have been given an aura of sanctification in Hinduism.
Chaudhuri observes:

It was not for monetary and other gains alone that the Hindus turned to
religion. It supported their life in the world in every way, and conferred
tangible as well as intangible benefits. (H17)

Chaudhuri finds the relationship between the divine and the human
order in Hinduism based on a contract which explains the worldliness of
the religion. But in this contract the two contracting parties are not on the
same footing. The relationship between the God and the Hindus is like
the one that exists between a modern democratic state and its citizens.
By submitting to the power of the state, the citizens in return receive
pension in old age, maintenance of conditions in which he can live
securely as well as medical benefits. "The Hindu also gets such things
from his religion and obeys it." (H18)

The Hindu Gods in the forms in which they were worshipped for
centuries had not tyrannical, malevolent or fearful character for their
worshippers, and, hence the Hindus did not feel any pressure to please
God and did it voluntarily. In fact, acceptance of their gifts by the Gods
was a favour - prasada, a pleasure of God. Chaudhuri writes
What characterizes the god-man relationship in Hinduism is benignity on one side and devotion on the other. (H 18)

Chaudhuri tries to prove the worldliness of Hinduism by stating that for all Hindus their religion is a supernatural overlay on the natural world, and the two cannot be separated. Its ultimate derivation is from primitive life, in which the two mingle in every conceivable way. Chaudhuri believes, that the Hindu version of the primitive belief has come via Indo-European outlook which also never distinguished religion from rest of life. “That is why neither the Greeks nor the Romans had any specific word for the whole complex of their religious beliefs, practices and experiences,” (H18) says Chaudhuri. Thus, the supernatural permeates the lives of the Hindus and influences all their activities. This supernatural comprises not only the impersonal pantheism, the peculiar monotheism and the anthropomorphic polytheism, but also magic, auguries and the like. Thus, the feeling of awe in the presence of invisible powers which is one of the elements of religiosity among the Hindus, comes from their awareness of powers immanent in the world in which they live. Hinduism thus becomes a very highly evolved form of animism, which makes no distinction between material and a spiritual world.

The sanctification of the worldliness is best seen in the cult of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. To prove his point, Chaudhuri draws from moral grading which the Hindus used to evaluate
all phenomena. The Hindus traditionally recognise three moral attributes; sattvā (purity, goodness and repose), rajas (majesty, power, splendor) and tamas (darkness, uncleanness, baseness). He writes:

The worldly life which is commendable by reasons of its affiliation with religion can have either the first quality or the second. The second quality of the splendor is as legitimate in religion as the first, which implies abnegation. (H 21)

Thus, Chaudhuri explodes the popular myths, cherished as self-evident truths or historical facts. The most important of them being the antithesis between the spiritual East and the material West. He does not accept the spiritual quality of the Hindu mind. The mistaken impression, according to him, goes back to the Greeks, who had come to India with Alexander.

**Western perspective:**

Sensational stories about India and her wisemen are to be found in the collection of legendary writing, known as the Alexander Romances, which is a folk epic about Alexander the Great. There were other writings too, but none gave full information about the religion of the Hindus, only related stories about Gymnosophists and the Brahmins as there was no direct communication between India and Europe till the end of fifteenth century. Realistic accounts of Hinduism were given only by the Christian
Missionaries who came to India. According to Chaudhuri, the legend of Hindu wisdom and esoteric knowledge, which filled the vacuum created by ignorance was created by the Greeks who had gone to India with Alexander and left account of the gymnosophists with a strange behaviour.

...an overbearing sense of superiority, a gravity which was not consistent with the appearance, total absence of humour or malice in their exhibition of unconventionality, and a self confidence which would not even condescend to air any concept for worldliness.(H 4)

These ascetics were assertive with a desire to dominate over their fellowmen yet wholly egocentric and indifferent to everybody. Employing both speech and silence as effective instruments of self assertion, they managed to influence even the most powerful and practical European mind. Chaudhuri feels that the more rational set of men are the more ready are they to succumb to an assertive irrationality. Thus the Greeks were impressed by the Hindu ascetics whose behaviour created an impression of greatness by virtue of its abnormality.

The eighteenth century European Enlightenment in its passion to extend the limits of human mind by wandering as far as possible in time and space turned to India in search of knowledge which fostered dreaming. They felt that it is in the East that they must look for the supreme Romanticism. But Chaudhuri thinks that this fervour worked up
due to the scanty information they had regarding the civilization and religion of the Hindus. It was only the researcher of the Orientalist over the next hundred years, which were to make them properly informed about Hinduism. It was the early enthusiasm rather than the facts made available by the scholars that created the western legend of Hindu spirituality.

But the influence of the legend has a different implication today than what it had in the last century. Earlier it did good only by stimulating the European spiritual consciousness by its catalytic action. In the present enfeebled state of Western life and culture, the so-called Hindu spirituality has become a mirage to lure those Europeans who have become so devitalised that they feel the Western heritage of religion, ethics and intellection has become an unbearable burden.

Chaudhuri comments that if the esoteric wisdom attributed to the Hindus could do good to anybody they themselves would not have been in a state of mental inertness from which they were aroused only by the Western ideas that came to India with the establishment of the British rule. They had survived in that state as a community due to the real Hindu religion — not what these Occidentals imagine it to be. Apart from the interest at the highest mental level, the Europeans thought they could get from Hinduism what could not be had from Christianity. Chaudhuri found this more dangerous for the attraction towards Hindu charlatanry
and mumbo-jumbo of superstitions operated only on the weak, unsettled and debased. These people tried to find a substitute for their mental stability and spiritual confidence. Worst of all the contemporary sensuality in the whole of West is seeking satisfaction in the erotic aspect of Hinduism. This, he says, led to a good deal of deliberate misinterpretation of Hinduism.

*Decay in Hinduism:*

In the social context, Chaudhuri also finds religion to be one of the instruments responsible for the degradation that has been creeping into the Indian society. Back in 1920 Chaudhuri saw a change from the positive and rationale values to the negative and sub-rationale. As a result of which new Hinduism and the new moral awareness created by Brahmoism began to lose ground. It was not as if people were suddenly becoming dishonest and mercenary. What Chaudhuri found was that people were becoming used to living an uncritised life. As there was no criticism, there was no moral awareness. It was an imperceptible decay but an inevitable one.

Remembering the days when people would not take up a profession like law or business because sometimes these pursuits required men to silence their conscience or when people would not accept a job with the British government because of patriotic reasons.
Chaudhuri lamented the loss of such fine upstanding people in India today. He saw that gradually depravity and corruption were becoming common. The sickening spectacle of “bands of men, respectable in outward appearance but low adventurous at heart going about sniffing on the trial of jobs which are sinecures, contracts which are mere assignments on public revenues, orders which never insists on value for money, and similar openings for profit without effort”(AUI 453) reminded him of scavenging birds and animals wandering about in search of offal and filth. The moral decay, according to Chaudhuri, had been so degrading that he often wished he could shut his eyes to it. However, he tried to find out why it happened and to do this he first examined the true nature of Hinduism.

Chaudhuri discovered that ethical value was perceived element in Hindu life before Brahmaism and new Hinduism made society aware of it. Tradition governed moral conduct in a larger part of Hindu society. Breaking social taboos could be as serious a crime as dishonesty, homicide or physical assault. In his student days, Chaudhuri was often irritated by some of his orthodox college fellows’ defence of Hinduism as a religion that mixed morality, religion and social customs. Chaudhun could never agree that this intermingling was a good trait and that it was a mark of the glory of Hinduism. Others believed that Hinduism considered life to be a unitary spiritual experience but Chaudhun was not convinced. He had then began to read anthropology and Frazer's Golden Bough and
his reading had made him aware that differentiation and complexity as opposed to a undifferentiated promiscuity of values, were desirable. He says:

I implicitly believe that culture is indeed the faculty of making distinctions. (AUI 458)

He believed the ancient and pure form of Hinduism had this characteristic. Chaudhuri also believed that before primitiveness buried its purity, Hinduism impelled man to move from the simpler to the more complex. All that has been distorted and Chaudhuri found Hinduism swimming against the current as a retrograde religion, out of touch with reality. Hinduism sees the world as illusion but Chaudhuri who has always had a realistic and scientific thinking does not find the world an illusion. For him Hinduism is, therefore, nothing but a religion, primitive and conservative in its conscious or unconscious refusal to distinguish morality from religion. It could not encourage ethical development on the basis of its philosophy. Chaudhuri argues that if one dismisses the material world as illusion one could also not make the moral and spiritual world more real. He concludes Hindu ethics has remained immature.

Another glaring fault that Chaudhuri sees in Hinduism and its ethical immaturity is its inability to develop a high sense of personal moral responsibility. He sees this in the code of conduct followed by Hindus
even intellectual and religious ones. He says no Hindu would search his conscience on his own initiative and form a sense of individual duty. He finds that the concept of *karma* has killed the Hindu conscience -- moral sensibility and moral life cannot develop on the basis of retribution. Chaudhuri finds it inexplicable that Hinduism has never given moral sphere the importance it has given to spiritual life.

Chaudhuri is even more appalled by what he considers the greatest handicap from which Hindu ethics suffers. He finds the universal ineradicable belief of Hindus in the corruptibility of gods, absolutely despicable. He says:

>The Hindu Pantheon is as corrupt as the Indian administration (AUI 459)

Hindus believe they can buy all indulgence from the gods with the help of priestly intervention. Chaudhuri ridicules the variations in the amount of bribe expected according to the degree of the sin committed or the nature of the favour sought. He satirises the whole system of socialistic gods who give according to a man’s needs and take from him according to his capacity -- so a poor peasant could get forgiveness for a few *annas* while a millionaire had to build temples and dharamshalas. What Chaudhuri considers worse is that a man who speaks out against the venality of gods and the possibility of bribing divine justice...
considered an impious and wicked man. As a consequence of such beliefs:

The atmosphere in the temple naturally approached that obtaining in an Indian police station or the black market and morality received its worst blow from what is popularly believed to be its patron and protector. (AU1 460)

The chapters 'On Understanding the Hindus' and 'Janus and his Two Faces' in The Continent of Circe deal with Chaudhuri's severe indictment of a whole community, race and religion. He makes no attempt to hide his contempt, scorn and hatred for Hindus and what he thinks, are their despicable qualities. He has also taken great pains to show that he himself shares none of these faults and that he has developed and matured as an individual to be able to reject all the tenets of Hinduism.

Modern Indian Culture:

In the beginning of the twentieth century, educated Indians although humiliated by political subjection, still recognized that apart from peace and protection from blatant oppression that it had brought, it had also emancipated their minds, so that they could turn to social and religious reform and cultural creation. Chaudhuri wrote:
No Indian with any education and some regard for historical truth, ever denied that, with all its short comings, British rule had in the balance, promoted both the welfare and the happiness of the Indian people. (5)

Chaudhuri believed that Great Britain brought to India an outlook, which made for a tremendous improvement in the Indian society. It improved the Indian intellectual and spiritual life and resulted in the creation of a modern Indian life which upheld the ideas of personal uprightness, a dignified sense of Indian nationality, an appreciation for scientific knowledge and rationality and an ordered public life in which individual freedom was combined with the sense of responsibility for the common good. But the English left their mission of civilizing the Indians incomplete. Chaudhuri never forgave the British for leaving India. 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. But he was not happy with the way the present Indian society adopted the Western culture. Edward Shils writes:

His regret about the present Westernization of India rests on his conviction that the particular Western ideas and practices which Indians have in fact adopted are departures from those which had elevated Indian life in the one period when India seemed to have taken a turn towards a better future. (6)
When the British left Chaudhuri was apprehensive about the way the Indians would deal with their newly found independence. He considered none of the leaders capable enough, not even Nehru. In the Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse, he wrote:

The most striking aspect of Government in India after the gift of independence by the British people was its total falsity. Nothing was authentic, nothing sincere, nothing disinterested in it. Instead of showing fear of this gift from white men, all Indians exalted over it. (THM113)

The newly acquired political independence eluded self-determination on economic and cultural issues, the education of illiterate and ignorant masses scattered in areas with awful demographic variations. These variations inculcated in Chaudhuri a typical violence and hatred towards the present day managers of social engineering and strategies. He felt that the Indians lack an overall authentic experience of living in the world as concerned agents. He found the cultural creations of modern India to be mostly European cultural forms crudely simplified in order to be understood by uneducated Indians. This dilution is still observable in every sphere of cultural activity and the result has been that we have neither been able to leave that stronghold which our own culture has over us nor ignore the impact of the Western culture.
Chaudhuri's book *The Continent of Circe* – is a bitter criticism of India and the Indians. He has attributed the drawbacks to the physical conditions of India which in turn has affected the character of the Indians. Chetan Karnani writes:

*In this book, Chaudhuri has been influenced by Toynbee's historical philosophy. In light of this philosophy he maintains that the Hindus had failed to surmount the challenge of their hostile physical and human environment. Hence they lapsed into a mixture of religious asceticism and a fatalistic acceptance of dirt, squalor and disorder.*

Today Chaudhuri finds that there is no creative power left in India. The Hindus are “a combination of putrified flesh and fossil bones”. The industrial working class in the big cities of India do not form a stable or coherent social class, but constitute an amorphously piled up and featureless detritus of the stratified of the human rocks of rural India. Thankfully, a large majority of the people in India live in villages. He writes:

*Brushing aside minor adaptations the peasant-artisan of India remains the Bronze Age man in all his outlooks and aptitudes. An attempt is now being made to modernize him through industrialization. But the effect so far as there has been any effect at all, can be observed in all its ghastliness in the big cities. To go through the areas of these cities in which the industrial population lives is to have the feeling of a nightmare, for in them masses of human beings are seen to live in a*
state of squalor and economic enslavement, and from the sociologist's point in a state of social pulverization. (CC133-134)

The Indian ruling class believed that their country will have no international status unless it has an adverse trade balance. But Chaudhuri found that the process of industrialisation, which started as a boon from the European Enlightenment, later became a means of satisfying the Indian's insatiable greed for money.

As a young boy, Chaudhuri believed that the degeneracy of Indian society was due to subjugation by foreigners. But he later realised that the degeneracy of the Indian character was the cause of the subjugation by foreign rulers rather than the other way round. He also realised that the European culture could no longer elevate the Indian culture as he had hoped earlier. In the Three Horsemen, he tells his readers that he believes that just as the Bengalis deserved to lose their supremacy in India, Indians did not deserve independence. He even dismisses India's scientific and technological achievements as "an effort to become a second United States" for that will only create "a Caribbean Island on a continental scale". (THM16) Not that he is any more respectful of the United States. "Not even in Hindu society the superstition present itself in so disgusting and yet overpowering form as it does in the materialistic United States" he wrote in Thy Hand. Great Anarch!(940) Admiration he reserves only for the vanished England of his imagination.
Because India had provided a perfect ground for the fusion of cultures earlier with the Aryans and the Muslims, it was assumed that the same would happen with the Europeans but on coming to India neither the British behaved in a rational way nor did the Indians imbibe the right values from them. Chaudhuri excuses the British saying that the European mind was outraged as soon as they came in contact with the Hindu mind on the three principles of life they believed in – that of "reason, order and measure." (CC102) The contradictions in the Hindu life were formidable. The extremes of renunciation and sordid avarice for material things, and unnatural insistence on chastity and the obsession with sex and sensuality in personal life, a morbid respect for animal life and a beastly cruelty to animals subject to human use were unacceptable to them.

Chaudhuri felt that the modern Indian culture that took shape in the hands of the elite Anglophile Indians fell short in many ways when compared to the once glorious Hindu culture. He heartily loathed the anglicized upper middle class of India. He found them more English than Indian, who are fond of proclaiming their patriotism at the expense of the British. Khushwant Singh calls them "a bastard breed with pretensions of intellectualism that seldom went beyond reading blurbs and reviews of books" (8) Chaudhuri found lack of moral conviction in their Westernization. He deplored the superficial vulgarity with which the Westernized Indian behaved and talked. He called them a "self-hybridized
breed"(CC292) who were arrogant, self-confident with pretensions of having a superior culture. Chaudhuri found no ideological or cultural foundation to this snobbery. Instead he found them marked by a common lack of faith, energy and courage. Regarding their incomplete Westernization he writes:

The Westernization supported by these caryatids is only a façade. Behind it lies hidden a dangerous void of faith, ideas, courage, and of course, energy. (CC355)

Later, Chaudhuri found the effect of the European enlightenment wearing off and the influence of United States of America predominant in all spheres. This, he believed, led to further cultural decadence. For Chaudhuri, the lone campaigner for empires and empire builders, America with all its technological progress could never be a culturally great nation. He wrote:

The most conspicuous outward manifestation of social and cultural decadence in India is the popular and lowest expression of Americanism. (THM 119)

In his two autobiographies, Chaudhuri devoted considerable attention to the political and socio-cultural developments in India during the period covered and set down his thoughts and feelings about public events to which he was an extraordinary witness for half a century. The
books also sum up Chaudhuri's concern for the future. In The Autobiography, Chaudhuri very clearly summed up his feelings towards the changes that were taking place in the following words:

What I am speaking about is true decadence, for during those years everything about us was decaying, literally everything ranging from our spiritual and moral ideals to our material culture and nothing really live or organic arouse to take their place. I have never even read about such a process as I have passed through: it was unadulterated decadence. (AUI 425)

The title of the second volume, borrowed from Pope's Dunciad itself was an indication of his view of the inexorable march of history toward the inevitable decay and putrefaction of human civilization. The modern Indian culture that was to take its shape would certainly not be what Chaudhuri wanted it to be. Chaudhuri chose to see the end of the British and the advent of Independence in India as a restoration of the "dread Empire of chaos", when "light dies" when "Thy hand, great Anarch! let the curtain fall, and Universal Darkness buries All." The situation in Indian in the year 1952 [at which point Chaudhuri ends his narrative] was one of "universal darkness" unrelieved by any "sweetness and light." He witnessed a pervasive decline effecting his own ancient Indian civilization and 19\textsuperscript{th} century Bengali culture but above all, England and her art, her culture, political ideals and achievements.
To Chaudhuri, Bengal was a cradle of modern Indian culture. It was here that the new impulse came into Indian life. The Indian culture enlivened and deepened by Western ideas has extinguished, and Bengal, which was the leader in that movement, has now passed out to Indian history. In *Three Horsemen* he confessed that being a Bengali, he felt the emergence of degradation in its culture very keenly but that was not the only reason why he became so aware of it. It has a bearing on the pan-Indian decadence and that is why he dealt with Bengali decadence in his book.

Chaudhuri regrets the passing away of the *bhadralok* class for it was not only the highest class in the Bengali society, it was also the creator of the modern Indian culture. He observes:

> In the nineteenth century its sense of solidarity was reinforced by pride, for it was this class which created the culture now recognized as the modern Indian culture. Thus the passing away of the Bengali *bhadralok* order is the extinction of the creators of that culture. Sadly, even the culture is keeping the company of its creators. (THM122)

Chaudhuri found the Bengali *bhadralok* class and the English gentry very much alike for "both regarded the general mass of their people as lower classes, and considered themselves as the real, if not the only Englishmen/ Bengalis." (THM122) Rich or poor, the *bhadralok* was a *bhadralok*, by birth. The only thing, which could deprive him, the
*bhadralok* of his status, was going into trade. Then the *bhadralok* was transformed into a *babu*. The special characteristic of the Bengali *bhadralok* order was that within it money did not create any social division. This massive solidarity of the class, which wholly ignored money has now disappeared and the *bhadralok* is now reduced to a *babu*. This, Chaudhuri observes, was brought about in three stages by political events which created opportunities for acquiring wealth, which never existed before. The first of these was the inauguration of the provincial self-government introduced in 1937, the second was the war and lastly the achievement of independence. Chaudhuri who held strong Victorian moral values, found the lust for money among the Indians extremely repulsive and when the *bhadralok* took up trade or politics to earn money, to him it was the disintegration of the old *bhadralok* class which had sunk and become decadent. This decadence, which Chaudhuri being a Bengali felt so strongly about, is today observable throughout India. Thus "he has witnessed Bengal's fall from grace, its effortless jettisoning of its Raj inheritance and the consequent degeneration of its culture into triviality and envy."(9)

The only difference Chaudhuri finds between the cultural decadence of India and England is that the Indian decadence "does not exhibit the malignity which is seen in Europe."(THM 111) It is only a "comatose senility" (THM 111) "and is to be found in all the basic principles of life. It has affected even the speech, dressing and eating habits of all
Indians. Yet after observing both the cultures, Chaudhuri is forced to admit that while "the Western rouses a civilized man to anger; the Indian benumbs him into despair." (THM 124)

Chaudhuri's Perception of the European Culture:

Indian by descent, Bengali by birth and breeding, Chaudhuri opened his eyes on England through literature and thus formed an emotional bond with England long before he actually visited the place. As William Walsh points out:

England was a living presence in Chaudhuri's imagination from his early days, partly because of his father's care that he should learn English and the good sense of the teaching methods he adopted to this end, partly through the poems he read and the history he studied. (10)

By teaching English literature, British rule made available to the Indians an image of British character that was courageous, honest had immense capacity to work and was extremely gentlemanly. It did this by directing the Indian attention to those qualities as they existed in England and as they were represented in English literary and historical works. Edward Shils points out:

The knowledge and appreciation of British virtues which he got from his reading of British history, of English literature, and by inference from
some of the things which the British did in India, made British rule in India worthwhile to him. (11)

Chaudhuri felt that the only time the degenerate Indian society arose from its torpor was under the influence of the Western ideas brought to India by the British rulers. But yet Chaudhuri’s relationship with the European culture remained as complex as it was with India. Just as with India, deep love and respect for the British culture ran alongside bitter criticism. He made it very clear that the hatred he felt for the British was on the score of our political subjection and the behaviour of the local British. It had nothing personal and thus passed away with the passing away of the British rule. Chaudhuri remained great admirer of empires and builders of empires for he felt that the height of humanistic glory could be achieved only by empires. When pointed out by Ian Jack that this was paradoxical, he had retorted:

No, there is no paradox. In 1940 I hated Nazism, yet every day I was sustaining myself by listening to Beethoven, and Hayden. I can separate cultures from personalities, and I grieve for the Empire as an institution. (12)

After visiting the country in 1955 for the first time just for five weeks, Chaudhuri recorded in his book ‘A Passage to England’ that what he saw there was not only England but also what was not India. His perception of English culture was based on a comparative evaluation of
values as perceived by him during his visit. He found England completely in contrast to India both in climate and culture. But the idea of England he had gained from books was never contradicted by anything he saw during his first visit; it was on the contrary completed. The beauty of the English country sides, historical buildings, castles and landscapes fascinated him. They were exactly as he had expected them to be. But Chaudhuri himself admitted that he did not know much about the English culture and social life before coming to England. Though he was greatly impressed by all that he saw and felt, he was not immune to the idea of decay within the English cultural milieu even during his first visit. He wrote:

So I did have some apprehension of seeing a faded and mouldy existence, and a distracted and weary people, leading a courageous but rather drab life. (PE12)

But Chaudhuri chose to ignore it and concentrated on finding the ‘Merry England’ of his imagination. Hence, A Passage to England has often been criticised as a celebration of England and English way of life. The book, which sums up as a travelogue is in fact an attempt by Chaudhuri to grasp during his visit the reality which he prefers to call “Timeless England”. Chaudhuri set his “Timeless England” against “Timeless India” and thus compared the social and cultural aspects of the two countries. He visited England with his mind burdened with book derived notions acquired from literature, history and geography. On this
was super imposed all the news of their political, social and economic troubles which had been broadcast to the world. This created an impression of the English culture steeped in decadence. But as it was his first visit to his land of dreams, Chaudhuri was not prepared mentally to see any part of it. Though his intellectual hosts who had 'Old England in their blood and the Welfare State on their brain' wanted him to take a balanced view of things, Chaudhuri's heart was not in it. He criticised the newspapers and public discussions for unduly magnifying the changes and under-estimating the permanent form and spirit of the society.

But after living there for twenty-eight years, Chaudhuri recalled his fears about the future of English people which he had felt during his first visit.

Strangely enough, fear about the future of the English people insinuated itself in my mind at the very time when I got a first hand impression of the greatness of English life and civilization; in 1955 when for the first time I came to England at the age of fifty seven. (THM75)

A Passage to England, which records his unqualified expression of happiness during his first visit also records his misgivings regarding the future of the English people in the last few chapters. His fear regarding the national destiny of the English led him to ask questions like whether they were going to recover their old position or create new position of which they could be proud of or whether they would slide down the path of inevitable decline. Not receiving any positive response from the
people, Chaudhuri during his subsequent visits gradually confirmed his worst fears. He wrote:

... my premonitions of decadence in England finally became a conviction gaining with the years and accelerated force. (THM 46)

The English not only failed to create that new position which they could be proud of, but also eventually lost the historical sense which Chaudhuri feels, so importantly distinguishes man from animals. Regarding their total lack of historical sense he wrote:

... I cannot understand how the European man, after having attained the high degree of historical consciousness which he did in the nineteenth century, can have stepped back from it to the uncultured man's bondage to the present, and the still more uncultured man's bondage to the eschatology of political dogma. Yet what the European man is displaying more often than not today is an utter lack of historical sense (AUI 399)

It often made Chaudhuri feel that he was witnessing the senile decay of memory of a whole society.

Chaudhuri recalled his growing disillusionment with the country of his imagination after it became the country of his domicile, in one of his articles saying:
After thirty years I find that it is my fears and not my hopes which have come true, and in a manner which even my fears could not anticipate. Yet the evils do not lie in the objective conditions... What is wrong is the psychological situation which has no necessary connection with the objective state of affairs. There is in it defeatism, passivity and class hatred on immense background of drabness, relieved only by sordidness, sensuality, indiscipline, and trifling. (Archives141)

What pained Chaudhuri most was to see that there is not a single aspect of English life into which decadence is not spreading and deepening its invasion – national personality, politics, social and economic life, education and culture. All have succumbed to the pressures of decadence. Chaudhuri made no attempt to hide his regard for the empires and the builders of empires for he considered them to be great protectors of civilizations. As Shrabani Basu points out:

The man who firmly believed that there could be no civilization without empires and was an open admirer of the Roman and the British empire is now saddened at the complete decline of culture all around him. He clings to his lost world of chivalry, etiquette and Victorian values as the world outside nose-dives into the twenty-first century. (13)

It is because of his great expectations from the empires that Chaudhuri was so particular about who ruled the empire. His obsession could be felt when he voiced his opinion that the choice of Diana as the Princess of Wales was an example of English cultural decadence. In spite
of having regards for the Spencer Family he felt that Diana had neither the looks nor the air which her grandmother had and hence both in looks and behaviour she was not of the class to which a Princess of Wales should belong. The family in their present position also did not match up to the Royal family. She, according to Chaudhuri, did not have the class that the royal family, the makers of the empire had.

Chaudhuri had little respect for the present generation British. England is no longer the country that he had fallen in love with after a visit in 1955 – which he recorded in his book *A Passage to England*. It now has become an uncultured place characterised by high taxes and cheap Japanese and Taiwanese imports. Very few of the younger generation speak real English. Chaudhuri was shocked to find that even the BBC’s standards were falling. Shrabani Basu observes:

*Nirad Babu could not live down the BBC’s serialisation of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice which had received such acclaim. The Beeb, he said, did not have the faintest idea of Victorian norms and etiquette and were just playing to popular culture. “Britain is now a corrupt civilization now”, he said with sadness.* (14)

During his first visit to England, Chaudhuri had neither seen nor felt any of the class distinctions of which he had heard so much. Even if they existed, he found that they were much less obvious than in India where the caste system still prevails. The traditional standoffishness seemed
like a virtue to him when compared to the gregariousness of the Indians. But he assailed the Londoners for their utter lack of social and cultural consciousness as neighbours. As the sophisticated, elite Londoners were highly conservative they did not open their minds to strangers. He later found that their standoffishness has deteriorated to complete disregard for other people. Their way of dressing by overloading themselves with jewelry and even colouring their hair all are seen as proof of their decadent state by Chaudhuri. It is obvious that he still preferred the Victorian dressing code.

The English character which was once considered most honest, most disciplined, most industrious and trustworthy in the world has now lost all its qualities. Even in their attitude towards great men, Chaudhuri finds that there is a decline for the biographers in their attempt to transform histories into biographies have started to run down their great men. They sensationalise the stories by giving more attention to the weakness of their subjects and thus try to deprive them of their greatness. A serious aspect of the cultural life of the people of England is their religion, Christianity, which, has been a great force behind the rise of Western civilization. Chaudhuri was profoundly impressed by the solemnity of the church services he attended in England. The solemnity had reminded him of the difference between the Hindu going to a temple and the Englishman going to a church for worship. But lately he found that faith in Christianity had virtually disappeared amongst the English except
in some elderly people and that superstition had become more powerful than ever. Morality, which has always been closely associated with religion, was also failing. He wrote:

Therefore, with the decline and disappearance of faith in Christianity, it has been easy for the English people to shed all their moral inhibitions and liberate themselves from morality. (THM 87)

Chaudhuri who had been brought up under strict Brahmo moral values found the lack of morality a drastic and comprehensive revolution. Though most observable in the open display of their sexual life it is extended to other vices like stealing and homicide. This lack of restraint and morality is evident in every aspect of Western culture. In this context, Ian Jack observes:

Sometimes, said Chaudhuri, he imagined he had been put on this earth simply to demonstrate to Britons how their grandfathers wrote, how they behaved, and how they drank. He has Quixotic notions of a departed chivalrous age. (15)

An ardent fan of Jane Austin, he was pained to see the form of English language used today not only by the journalist and common people but also by the educated Englishmen and even the Church of England. The language has become a mixture of colloquialism slang
figurative diction, recondite allusions and figures of speech among which the most common flourishes are bad puns. According to Chaudhuri:

The human mind and human language are commensurate. So, whenever there is any decline of correctness, precision, adequacy and elegance in the use of a language, there is bound to be a matching decline in the power of the mind. (THM 95)

He found the modern English language vulgar for it lacks grammatical strictness and precision of phrasing both in writing and speaking. The loss of depth, intensity and capacity for making distinctions which is observable in the language is a reflection of the decay which has penetrated the English mind, for “no external decay can come about without inner decadence having set in” (THM 94)

This ‘inner decadence’ has taken a malignant form in the very nature of the English people who have become passive and thoughtless. To Chaudhuri, their passivity is like the so-called ‘cold blood of the reptiles’ for there has been erosion of all delicate sensibilities normal in civilized men and women. Pained to see such decadence in the land, for which he once had such high regards, he pleaded of the revival of moral awareness so that the passive masses could be roused. He was dismayed to find that the passivity makes them sympathetic even towards the criminals who commit heinous crimes like massacre of innocent children. In his book Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse, Chaudhuri
recalls the incident when fifteen primary school children, all five year olds, where gunned down by a man named Hamilton. Chaudhuri was surprised by the explanations given for this act by the educated Englishmen in light of the Christian belief in Absolute Evil. "Our school was visited by Evil," they said. More surprisingly even the Archbishop of Canterbury wanted the people to sympathize with Hamilton and understand the pressure that drove him to the act. With deep disgust, Chaudhuri wanted to remind the Archbishop about the 'Wrath of God' as quoted in the New Testament.

This kind of malignity is not so evident in the Indian society. Ironically, his idealised England, like the empire has let him down by its relentless march away from civilised values and towards vulgarity. Chaudhuri adapts Acton's maxim – loss of power corrupts and loss of absolute power corrupts absolutely – to describe or account for British decadence. It was in the unwillingness to live up to the responsibilities imposed by the national greatness that the decadence of Great Britain can be best seen.

Chaudhuri's concern for Western culture arises from the fact that the Western civilization today is no longer exclusively Western. It has expanded and has taken even the non-European peoples into its ambit. Hence what happens to the Western culture is bound to effect the entire humanity.
Chaudhuri is one of the greatest representatives of the cultural intermingling that created the modern Bengali culture, the secular Indian middle class, the modern Indian nation-state, and ironically the demise of colonialism itself in India. The physical and material world of Chaudhuri’s youth and middle age may have decayed or changed but the intellectual and cultural world he preferred to inhabit has certainly vanished. His three horsemen – individualism, nationalism and democracy have acquired debased meanings in the contemporary world. A reverent glorifier of the values of a previous time and world, Chaudhuri laments their loss.

Analysing the Indian image through his Western exposure and evaluating the European norms against Indian values, Chaudhuri assumes a rare stance of an involved insider and concerned outsider at the same time with both the cultures. The analysis of Indian culture is relatively less complex in the case of ‘foreign’ observers, whose position at best can only be that of an ‘involved outsider’. But complexity increases when we consider Chaudhuri’s texts. He seems on occasion to articulate with an uncanny semblance the conclusions of Western observers on India-putting himself in a position whereby the land of his birth is as much of an other to him as to Western writers. But at the same time we can trace a different process taking place in which Europe (England, for
a backdrop for a protracted and mainly negative transference and enumeration of unsavory details, while England stands as the desired other, the site of positive emotional projection. This dual process sees to it that the author is not a complete ‘outsider’ on either terrain, but then, neither does he approximate to a definite concept of ‘insider’. His position seems to be that of an involved ‘insider-outsider’-a complex formulation rendered more complex as he occupies this position in relation to both East and the West. When he criticizes India it is more as an outsider as he looks at everything very objectively. Yet it is a fact that his vision comes from his being an insider, an Indian in the first place.
Notes and References


14. Ibid, p.25