Chapter III

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India’s association with England has been a long and multifaceted phenomenon. The prolonged trade connection between the two countries, the long-drawn-out freedom struggle, and finally the removal of the Colonial rule from India are the salient features of Indo-English relationship to which the Indian mind is still riveted. The Indian English writers’ attitude towards England bears ample evidence to this mindset. Nirad Chaudhuri too, carried a mental baggage of England, English, and Englishness, which finds frequent and frank expression in his works.

Chaudhuri was, in fact, preoccupied with England in his very early life. The following excerpt shows how dramatically he has introduced England and Europe to his audience.

What I have written about Shillong leads me naturally to speak of another intangible and exotic element in the ecology of our lives. To us it was absent and yet real, as Shillong was, but its power was immensely greater, for while our conception of Shillong soon reached the perimeter which bounded it, our idea of this other thing never struck against barriers from which it had to recoil. In the end this came to be very much like the sky above our head, without, however, the sky’s frightening attribute of vast and eternal silence, for it was always speaking to us in a friendly language in the knowledge of which we were improving from day to day. Perhaps I need not formally
proclaim that this was England as we defined and understood it, that is to say, with Scotland, Ireland, and Wales merged in it, and Europe conceived of as its corona. (1951:115)

Chaudhuri's encounter with England, Europe, and the West has been on two levels. First, he developed an imaginary notion based on reading of books and other second-hand sources and secondly, a real idea based on his coming in close contact with them.

In *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) Chaudhuri has introduced a chapter named 'England' where he gives an idea of his imaginary England and the way he developed this. Though Chaudhuri had not till then been to England, he visualized it to be a beautiful place of "half-land and half-water." In his words: "I could never think of England, as I thought of Bengal and of India, as a stretch of land alone. Combined visions of land and sea were always fleeting through my mind and before my eyes whenever I tried to think of England" (1951:131). He refers to a number of literary, political and historical figures of England and Europe with whom he became familiar. He also mentions the names of a number of historical and political events such as the Boer War, the Graeco-Turkish War, Russo-Turkish War, the Franco-Prussian War, and the American War of Independence along with those of the people connected with these wars such as General Roberts, General Kitchener etc. He, in addition, refers to the English scene, the British Isles and the pictures of the external appearance of the country, most of which are mentioned in the previous chapter. He further gives a reference to his ideas of the Englishmen in the flesh, an interesting story (the monkey analogy) with its antecedents. These ideas were different from his ideas of their civilization. His boyhood ideas about
the Englishmen in the flesh were borrowed from the prevalent hearsay, and they were negative. But his ideas about their civilization are derived from books and they are positive. There has been however, no conflict between these two opposite ideas. Consequently, while trying to understand the one, he understood the other also.

Chaudhuri tells us another story of a more serious misconception, which is entwined with the central problem of the Indians’ relationship with Englishmen or with all Europeans. That is the problem of colour of the skin. In his own words, “Their [Englishmen] fair complexion was a matter of real curiosity and still greater perplexity with us, and we wanted to know why they were fair and we were dark. One theory was that we had been darkened by the sun whereas they had been bleached by the cold, both of us travelling in opposite directions from a golden or rather brownish mean” (1951: 141).

Chaudhuri was fascinated and enchanted by the mere image of England and Europe in his boyhood days and formed a romanticized impression of it. This finds a rather dramatic expression in his Autobiography. It is more an emotional outburst of a powerful lover of England than a realistic one; an account of England of his imagination as a land of beauty and poetry.

Chaudhuri’s A Passage to England (1959) is a model of his works on England. It is an impressionistic account of his first trip to England at the invitation of the British Broadcasting Corporation. At the outset, he gives an explanation for it to show the nature and extent of his experiences of visit to Europe:
“As it happened, on the day I boarded the aeroplane for England, I was exactly 2,992 weeks old, and I spent eight weeks outside my country, thus completing a round three-thousand-week span by the time I returned to Delhi, where I live. The point of giving these figures lies in the range and intensity of the experiences I went through in these eight weeks” (1959:9).

This is remarkable that within this minimum span of time, Chaudhuri sensitively absorbed the maximum possible experience of the “strange country”, its customs, manners, government, and so on. In his own words: “In that short space of time I saw more paintings, statues, and works of art in general, more plays, fine buildings, gardens, and beautiful landscapes; heard more poetry and music; ate and drank better; and altogether had a more exciting and interesting time than in all the rest of my life” (1959:9). Iyengar observes, “In his second book, A Passage to England, Chaudhuri set down with candour and percipience the impressions of his visit to Britain in 1955, an elaborate postscript to the chapter on “England” in the Autobiography” (1962:595). Chaudhuri’s avowed aim here is “to grasp … the reality I would call Timeless England, which I was seeing for the first time…” (1959:11).

This book, however, could not have been nearer to what it aimed to be because, it had not been written down at the time of the visit. Nor had Chaudhuri kept any diary so as to represent intense immediacy of feeling. He did not in fact like that. He considered that to be something which would weaken his experience and convert his visit into an act “like cramming for examinations or writing a doctoral thesis” (1959:10). He was in high spirits, in a state of mind that he thought was better described by Wordsworth as follows:
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (1959:10)

This delicate feeling has served the purpose of immediacy in an unusual way. B.S. Naikar explains:

One of the most striking features of A Passage to England as also of other travelogues is the immediacy of experience which is intensified by the novelty and the contrast that it provides to the traveller’s native experience. This is matched by Chaudhuri’s sensibility, which is sharpened by his encyclopaedic reading of a wide range of subjects from art to ammunition and from poetry to politics etc. It is because of this rare combination of a rich sensibility encountered with a rich atmosphere that Chaudhuri is able to produce a work of art of substantial worth. (1985:26-27)

However, the England Chaudhuri saw and loved was not so much modern England as an “ante-bellum”, nineteenth century England, what he calls “Timeless England” or “Merry England”, which was a historical reality and was not affected by the economic, social, and political problems of England. He remained a devoted admirer of that England throughout his life. The modern England with its failings, the seamy side of English life and culture have not been highlighted in A Passage to England. Chaudhuri admits: “This England of the public prints; of shattering jargon, deadening cliches, and pseudo-smart journalese, will be absent from the book. I saw very little of it” (1959:12). Cristopher Carduff (New Criterion
10/01/99) refers to *The Times of India* to identify Chaudhuri’s England as “one which was dead and buried with ... Jane Austen, and Lord Palmerston ... a map of Victoria’s vanished empire.” Here can be drawn an analogy between Chaudhuri’s attitude to his ‘timeless England’ and V.S. Naipaul’s attitude to England. As Naipaul puts it in *The Enigma of Arrival*: “So much of this [English countryside] I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of a stranger, and yet with the knowledge of the language and history of writing. I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy” (1987:22). Fakrul Alam has well explained this. To quote: “… at one level, Naipaul and Chaudhuri come together in the way that they are able to root themselves in a kind of unchanging England created for them by their reading. There is, after all, much in the English landscape for these writers which appear to be timeless”(Kain, 1997:49).

Chaudhuri’s first real impression of England was not different from his imaginary idea about it. He himself admits in his article “Britain Through an Indian’s Eyes”: “My first visit to England ... provided an exciting discovery—that the England I had read about since my childhood existed in reality”(1998:19). This was mostly subjective. R.K. Kaul says: “Chaudhuri’s *Passage* is also a journey in search of a dream which is located in imagination” (1998: 19). Fakrul Alam puts it: “In his first visit to the country... Chaudhuri... sees England and the English as embodiments of the land and the people created in his mind by his embrace of English culture in his reading” (Kain, 1997:50). His mind
was, in fact, so preoccupied with the beautiful image of England that he saw but its manifestation in the objects he viewed. The imaginary England became one with the real England and left him with an exquisite feeling which he illustrates very sensitively:

What I was seeing corresponded almost preternaturally to what I had read about in books, and yet was infinitely more solid, tangible, and therefore more overpowering to the senses. If an Englishman were to find the world described in *Alice in Wonderland* actually presenting itself to his eyes he would have had a feeling broadly resembling mine. In no case was the idea of England I had gained from books contradicted by anything I saw, it was on the contrary completed, and that is why I can no longer recover the original bookish idea. It has been absorbed by the reality of which it was an abstraction, like thawing ice in water. (1959:20-21)

Chaudhuri’s first days in England were passed in a state of euphoria. There is hardly any sign of disillusionment recorded in *A Passage to England*. He speaks very highly of the English people and culture and of what he saw during this visit. He was so overwhelmed that he found everything fine and flawless. Chetan Karnani rightly remarks: “Chaudhuri’s pronounced Anglicism touched its high water mark in his *A Passage to England*. Here he is ... determined ...to praise everything English including the cats” (1968: 77).

Really, Chaudhuri sometimes becomes flippant for the sake of entertainment and refers to anything he likes. His long description of the courteous behaviour of the British cats is a testimony. He was struck by a cat’s behaviour the very first morning. These are, of course, gimmicks that add pep to the delineations.
Chaudhuri’s preoccupation with the notions about England, acquired from her literature, history, and geography thus enabled him to have a comprehensive and homogeneous picture of the country and its people. His knowledge about the political, social, and economic problems of the people of England did not, however, affect his notion of “Merry England.” But despite all cheerfulness of his mind he was left with the impression of decay as he says: “... I too was not immune to the idea of decay. 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”(1959:12). This could however, be said that below the surface Chaudhuri could recognize old England—the England of his reading and imagining, the England of history, whose shadow he saw in today’s England. He thought of today’s England to be like the England of history and consistent with it.

Chaudhuri, however, does not deny the fact that far-reaching changes had taken place. But he believed that such changes could not affect the historical personality of the English people because the permanent form and spirit of a society remains unchanged for centuries. The changes on the surface could not reduce England’s importance for him. In his words: “Since to exist is to change, nothing can hope to remain always the same, but I cannot believe that such changes destroy the once formed personality of a people or civilization, or alter their basic character”(1959:14). He believed that despite numerous changes England’s monumentality would remain unaffected; and so would India’s too. But there was as he realized,
great difference between the indelible identities of England (the timelessness) and India. As he explains:

But the permanent face of India and the permanent face of England are different, they wear different looks. Time has made the face of my country stark, chastened, and sad, and it remains so in spite of the lipstick that is being put on it by the hand of the spiritual half-castes. The face of England remains smiling. When I was in England I felt this contrast, as well as the timelessness. (1959:14)

A Passage to England is primarily intended to assert this contrast between the two faces along with their common timelessness. Chaudhuri's preoccupation here is with the delineation of the contrast between India and England. C. Paul Verghese points out: “Perhaps it is this aspect of his writing that separates A Passage to England from the general run of travel books” (1973:44). Chetan Karnani too, says: “Here [A Passage to England ] he [Chaudhuri] is ... determined to compare Hindu society to its disadvantage with a Western one” (1968:77).

Given the title, one may naturally pose the question as to what India has got to do with a book on a passage to England? P. Hari Padma Rani answers:

One must not forget the fact that it is an Indian who is making a passage to England. Having made a passage from India to England, Chaudhuri could not but make use of the tool of extensive comparison in his account of the English life. In the hands of Chaudhuri, comparison becomes doubly functional. On the one hand, it helps define England clearly and on the other, it defines India better. Both England and India are pitted against each other. Therefore the readers will find India "walking in freely" in
Chaudhuri’s account of England, which makes it extremely interesting as well as enlightening. (Dhawan, 2000:106)

Chaudhuri could not define his sensations about the new country without placing them against those about the only country he knew until then.

Chaudhuri has arguably juxtaposed his concepts of “Timeless England” and “Timeless India” in contrast to each other. As he explains:

What my senses were dealing with and striving hard to grasp was the reality I would call Timeless England which...I was inevitably led to set against the Timeless India in which I had been steeped all my life. Any acuity of the senses that I developed when abroad was due, not to any innate perceptivity, but to the impact of one big and unfamiliar reality on another equally big though familiar. That is why in this account of England India will be found to be walking in freely. I could not define my sensations about the new country without placing them against those about the only country known to me. In fact, I do not think I had any conscious theory at all: my senses worked below the conscious level in such a manner that one-half of my perception of England was the perception of something not-India. I saw things there in doubles—there were the things which were positively English, but there were also their shadows cast in a dark mass under the light from India. (1959:11)

This is how, Chaudhuri’s England and India by virtue of his exquisite acuity could have been complementary to each other even through contrasts.

Chaudhuri’s first impression after he landed in England was of British weather, which marked a sharp contrast to that of India in which he was brought up. He could sharply feel the contrast. The
strange combination of light and temperature rendered a sensation of unrealistic strangeness to him. While he was left with this sense of unreality, there appeared to him some sort of difference between things he read about and things he saw with his own eyes, although they were not contradictory to each other. He says:

And as we were coming down on London Airport I caught sight of Windsor Castle and Eton College Chapel, which I could recognize from the air. I thought it was a good omen that the first historic buildings to catch my eyes on my arrival in England should be these renowned symbols of English life. But all this confidence vanished as soon as I landed on the ground, and bewilderment took its place. I had no previous idea that things which were so familiar to me from description and pictures, which I could still identify as objects in outline, could become so strange and different in their three dimensions, atmosphere and personality. As long as I remained in England a persistent trance-like effect never left me, and nothing seemed quite real, not even the human beings I was meeting. The only persons who appeared to be made of flesh and blood were the Englishmen I had known in India. All the rest glided like wraiths. (1959:19)

This sense of the unreality, which Chaudhuri had been haunted by, is better expressed in the letter he wrote to his family after he came back from Shakespeare’s birth place, Stratford-upon-Avon:

As I roam about I still have a sense of the unreality of all that I am seeing, the light is different, the atmosphere is different, the smells, colours, and sounds are different. Even when I met people, for example, when I met old Mr P-- and Mrs P--, or Mr and Mrs H--, I wondered if I was not calling up in a strange and intolerably vivid dream something I had read about in an English novel. In one
sense, England has not become more real to me than it was.
(1959:20)

As to the combination of light and temperature, Chaudhuri
explains that people from the tropics are required to have warmth
and light to awaken their sense of reality while people from the West
require cold and cloudiness for the same. Therefore, the weather that
renders a sense of actuality to the Englishman simultaneously gives
"a curious sense of the reality of the third dimension" (1959:24) to
the Indians and as a result, "everything in England presents itself to
our [Indian] eyes in a manner different from visual phenomena on
the plains of India" (1959:24).

The effect of strangeness is also evident in his observation of
architecture. In his words:

... the effect is most powerfully and cleanly
observed in architecture. I arrived in London one
afternoon, and early next morning I was walking towards
Hyde Park from place near Albion Gate. It was, I believe,
a normal residential locality, and in any case it had no
features of any particular interest. But the whole scene
affected me in a very queer way, and trying to account for
this sensation of strangeness and even oddity, I found that
to my eyes the houses were rising more steeply and
perpendicularly from the pavement, forming a higher
skyline, and altogether standing more four-square than
anything in the way of houses I had seen doing in my own
country, even in a big modern city like Calcutta. (1959:25)

All this strangeness of atmosphere is not only caught by
Chaudhuri's keen sense of observation but also rightly designated
by his profound knowledge enriched by the encyclopaedic reading of
art and architecture. "All this experience of Chaudhuri", says C. Paul
Verghese, “leads him to the meaninglessness of the concept of an objective vision” (1973:46). On weather Chaudhuri puts so much importance that he considers temperature to be the chief determining factor in dividing the East from the West. As he says: “What divides the East from the West is neither Anglo-Saxon pride nor Hindu xenophobia. Both have indeed done their worst, but even they could not have made the division so unbridgeable without a contribution from something infinitely stronger, something which is absolutely basic to man’s existence on earth -- temperature” (1959:31). So, in Chaudhuri’s analysis, all social, cultural, and psychological differences and contrasts between England and India are rooted in the basic difference of temperature. This, of course, sounds rather too subjective and fanciful. Throughout his book Chaudhuri goes on to compare the conditions in India with those in England. “This”, says P. Hari Padma Rani, “gives a piquancy and edge to his writing” (Dhawan, 2000:107).

* A Passage to England * very interestingly opens with an epigram on Indian philosophy: ‘There is a belief in the West that we Hindus regard the world as an illusion’ (1959:17). Chaudhuri tries to refute this notion of the people of West. The Hindus, because of their belief in rebirth and afterlife, tend to be assured of the negation of everything they know and hence are ready to dismiss the world as insubstantial. They are easy-going and indolent partly due to the climate and partly to a subconscious philosophy. By a contrast to the Hindus, he gives a reference to the Christian occidentals who naturally indulge in the propensity to enjoy the world by exploiting it and reducing its substance. Their belief in the life after death and the
transcendental world enables them to exploit this world; on the contrary, the Hindus do not dare exploit the world and let it lie fallow with a view to using it in their next birth. They deny themselves every comfort on earth, contemptuously rejecting the Western notion of improving the standard of living, in order to earn a fortune at death. Chaudhuri doubts whether they [the Hindus] could inherit their own wealth in afterlife and rather ironically comments that although after world inheritance is questionable, by making the saving habit universal the Hindus at least can ensure that ‘everyone will come into some kind of inheritance’ (1959:18) here in this world.

This is Chaudhuri’s explanation for the general Hindu indolence compared to that of the Christian Occidentals. But how far it can have a common ground is a debatable question.

Chaudhuri was so keen an observer that hardly any aspect of English life and culture was left to be dealt with by him. He went on observing different aspects of England and English life such as geography, people, art, architecture, economics, politics, religion etc. in course of his tour. And in order to intensify the effect of his description, he often differentiated between things English or Western and things Indian. What he said as to the colours of the flowers of both the countries is as follows:

In England I ... found that colour in my country and colour there were quite different things. In our country we have many flowers with blazing colours, but these hues always seem to flow and run into the surrounding atmosphere, as dyes which are not fast do in water. In England and France on the other hand I saw floral colours
almost as frozen masses, ... All the flowers in the West had to my eyes a pronounced waxen appearance, and when they were the annuals I was familiar within India... they seemed to be quite different flowers. (1959:26)

Contrast is again evident in his description of the landscapes Indian and English: “In India any landscape tends to resolve into a silhouette, with a side-to-side linking of its components, in the West it becomes a composition in depth, with an into-the-picture movement, a recession, which carries the eye of the onlooker, wherever any opening is left, to the vanishing point on the horizon” (1959:27).

Chaudhuri vividly distinguishes between the rivers of England and those of India as experienced by him. Although he believes that a Bengali is disposed to be scornful of the English rivers looking upon them as no better than canals, he himself develops a lofty idea about the rivers of England and considers them more interesting than those of India. He had learnt to consider the sea as an appanage and projection of England. He regarded the sea front of the country, the seafaring life of her people, and the impact of sea on their spirit as the most important aspect. He was born and brought up in his early life in a country of rivers. He found the rivers of England as a contrast to what he saw in his country. According to him, the rivers of England are not only a scenic complement and contrast to those of East Bengal but also complements and contrasts of mood and emotion. He believed that the Hindus did not try to bring human life and the rivers together but the Englishmen could do it very well. In his words:

... there was a very important difference between my feelings about the rivers of my boyhood and those of

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England. In East Bengal, whenever we went near water or water came near us, we became aquatic in spirit. I could well imagine myself to be a crap or an eel, but in England I was astonished to discover how near to land water could approach. Everywhere it was closely interwoven with the life and landscape on *terra firma*. (1959:38)

Chaudhuri gives a description of English people, their appearance, behaviours, manners, beliefs, and disbeliefs in contrast to those of the Indian people where he deems necessary. One might wonder if it is sensible to make such hasty words and sweeping generalizations on characteristics of a people on the basis of a very short acquaintance. Chaudhuri confesses to his doing this and then justifies:

Though I am going to speak about the English people now, I do not intend to offer even the sketchiest of psychological studies. To try to do so after seeing them for only five weeks would be like attempting to write the biography of a man after meeting him at a cocktail party. My acquaintance with the English people had no chance really of becoming deeper. In fairness to me it should be remembered that my account is concerned with the superficies of English life, though it might be claimed, even without solving a difficult metaphysical question, that appearance does in some measure correspond to reality. But perhaps some of the most basic things are just those commonplaces which are always meeting the eyes, and for that precise reason as frequently evading the mind. (1959:69)

About the nature of his account of the English people, Chaudhuri argues that for the reason of his limited acquaintance with them, his account of them will be an impression of their collective appearance and behaviour. He had been apprised of the fact that
Englishmen of different social classes were very different from one another in respect of almost everything.

Chaudhuri detected the varieties and differences even among the Englishmen, which fell far short of what he was used to in his country. The varieties and differences among the Indians themselves were considered by him as natural and easily perceptible, hence he did not need to detect them through careful observations as he did in England. He thought that this might be because of India’s being more a continent than a country and having many languages and regional cultures. To substantiate this notion he cited an example of clothing. In England, he saw that the politicians, including the ministers, and the officials were clad in the same manner. But in India, there were two standard dresses for the politicians and two for the officials, all derived from separate culture complexes.

As to the different role of the climate and weather in moulding human psychology Chaudhuri says:

It would seem that climate and weather have shaped different modes of exercising individual liberty in the East and the West. Living in the tropics we like to relax, lose control of our appearance and behaviour, and thus create differences through our failure to keep to the track. The people of the West are braced up by the cold to exercise greater will power in casting themselves in a uniform mould. Lush growth in the tropics is not a phrase which applies only to vegetation. (1959:73)

Chaudhuri reportedly failed to see in England the common people or the masses that can be noticed everywhere in India. He says:
In India, wherever we go we notice two kinds of people, the ordinary folks who dress in their own way, speak their own dialects, behave in their own way, without sophistication and without affectation, as against the minority who wear the older Hindu or Muslim aristocratic costumes, speak both English and the standard forms of the Indian languages, and have what in the West would be called a middle-class pattern of behaviour. (1959:74)

Because of this distinction between India and England with regard to the status of the people, Chaudhuri has compared Indian society to a ship with a large black hull and a white superstructure. He did not find that hull in England. The contrast of sound and silence is easily discernible in Indian and English life. For the Indians noise is essential to express cheerfulness, while the English people are of the quiet habits. Chaudhuri has compared the life in London, even in the most crowded streets to a silent film, a film of ‘pre-talkie days’. He was left with an uncanny sensation when he saw unending streams of people going along Oxford Street and heard no sound. After long experiences in the crowded cities of India he seems to have been frightened. He met the same silence when he went into the restaurants. On the contrary, in India such places usually remain filled with the hum of talks. To point out the sound and noise characteristic of Indian life, he very practically refers to the buses and trains, which he considers as the right places to observe public behaviours of a nation. He sees in India buses are full of conversations between people irrespective of acquaintances.

Chaudhuri observes that people of northern India cannot keep steady in moving vehicles. They lean against one another and put their arms round a fellow-passenger.
As to newspaper reading, the fellow passengers never mind taking the pages of anybody's paper and distributing them among themselves. Incidents of quarrels also sometimes occur in the buses. Chaudhuri considers the buses of India as a microcosm of the macrocosmic Indian life. This sort of behaviour is quite absent from English life style. In England, people do not disclose their positions in the society. The authors do not show off their books and the statesmen do not propagandize. While in Indian society, a man is usually known by his designation. An individual is introduced with special emphasis on his official position. In case of casual omission of the designation by the introducer, the persons concerned do not even mind quickly reminding of that. What Chaudhuri has discovered is that superiority complex about one's social status is a common feature of Indian culture, which is totally absent form English life. He did not see in England the distinction between the classes and the masses but this was felt in India in the first instance on account of the bareness of body.

Chaudhuri made a comparative study between the beauty of the women in India and that of the women in England. His idea of human physical beauty was derived from art. Therefore, he found it difficult to appreciate it unless "it was not presented in the nude or in the historical costumes from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century" (1959:77). He found no beauties in the West comparable to those found in painting or sculpture. The most beautiful impression of human physical beauty that he brought away from the West was of its nudes. The Hindus too, have a large number of nudes in art, and in its treatment, have gone much further in
frankness than the Europeans. The unclad world of art in India is different from that in England. He argues: “Hindu art has made it impossible to look at a nude without a leer, it has resolved flesh to its most fleshly elements, the Europeans have made it the expression of the spiritual in man” (1959:78). To support his arguments Chaudhuri refers to the Venus of Cyrene and the Venus de Milo in the National Museum of Rome.

Chaudhuri also discovered a sociological fact in connection with religion, in which England presented a complete contrast to India. We see how he differentiates: “There [in England] the so-called upper classes were more religious than the common people, while in India the situation is exactly the opposite. Religion belongs to the people, and the upper classes boast of their irreligiosity … The upper classes in India are losing, and have largely lost, their capacity for faith, and they no longer feel its need” (1959:167).

In England Chaudhuri observed a close connection between man and nature, which was not seen in India. He says: “In the East man is either a parasite on Nature or her victim, here [West] man and Nature have got together to create something in common” (1959:33). When Chaudhuri came in touch with English countryside he was struck by the amount of green, which was however, not the green of the trees or shrubs but of the grass. It was quite unthinkable to him that industrial England could look so rustic. As he looked at these hundreds of square miles of typical English scenery, he thought them to be a result of human endeavour. To him it was like landscape gardening on a vast scale. But this was unthinkable in context of tropical East, as he indicates:
For wherever in the East the hungry generations of men have marched on Nature they have come like ruthless colonists, who have sacked the countries they have conquered. ... For these men Nature, so far as it has been subjugated, is like their cattle--starved, twisted in the tail, and goaded; and so far as it is wild is like the wild beasts--for then it means flood, dust, storm, cyclone, creeping weed or sand, and locusts. They live at the mercy of Nature, get very little from it, and take their revenge by making ceaseless war on it. (1959:34)

Chaudhuri marks the contrast between the English and Indian country towns as he experienced in the way of human habitations. In his words:

In India the country towns are very much worse than the big cities. They have all the squalor of their overgrown relatives but none of the amenities. In England on the contrary, the smaller towns seemed to be wholly different from the cities, and a species by themselves. Some of them might be market towns, some cathedral towns, some manufacturing towns, and yet others university towns. Nonetheless, all of them had a family likeness which was not effaced by their differing functions, just as the family likeness of brothers is not by their different professions. (1959:43)

In *A Passage to England*, London has been very passionately presented by Chaudhuri. He has called London 'The Mother City of the Age' and the "Mother Mega polis of our era" who has many children in the West and the East, Calcutta being one. As the title suggests, Chaudhuri has most deliberately dealt with the present and the future London than the past. It takes its place in the Age of Science, though it had acquired a distinctive personality before the advent of Industrial Revolution. For him, London stood out vast,
stark, and powerful, against the rest of England. Although he was familiar with London of history, he saw another London unlike that of his previous knowledge. He was totally unaware of the immensity and mass, gravitation and power of London he saw.

London is always thought of as very special. It is big and complex and most of the visitors both physically and psychologically seem to be steeped in it. Even according to the Londoner himself, London has never been planned or even built, it has rather grown. It does not possess any obvious beauty of appearance, nor does it acquire any form that can easily catch one's attention. One needs to live in London to gauge its personality. Chaudhuri most passionately asserts that a lifetime of daily discoveries would fail to give the full idea of London. He suggests:

London must be regarded as the base of a new mode of human existence, and that is what it has been in the last hundred years or so, and is today. It is a town which has broken out of the old classification of human habitations as rural and urban. It is no longer a historic city, although it has a long history. London is neither Westminster Abbey, nor the Tower, nor Lincoln's Inn Fields, nor St. Bartholomew - the Great, nor St Paul's, nor Chelsea, nor even nineteenth-century Whitehall. Also, it is not of the Roman times, nor of the Middle Ages, nor of the Renaissance, nor of the Augustan Age, although it has monuments from every epoch. In spite of being overwhelmingly Victorian in appearance, it does not belong to the Victorian age ... it has absorbed all its past, near and distant, in its present. (1959:63-64)

Chaudhuri believes that London is an ever-growing modern city, which is yet to take its final shape and whose ultimate reality is unpredictable. London's modernity does not depend on buildings nor
even on its Festival Hall. It rather, depends on its being the first and archetypal city of contemporary age created by modern government. To him, “the greatest wonder about London is that it is historical and young at the same time, illustrating the process of evolution of the modern city besides being one of its most notable products”(1959:65). He concludes confessing to his being a man of the past, unable to accept the wholeness of London, but not being so narrow as to underestimate its enormous role and overlook its colossal presence. In sum, one has to observe that Chaudhuri’s notion about London is biased and nonobjective. It is a romanticized picture which is antithetical to what T. S. Eliot calls the ‘Unreal city’ (The Waste Land).

While London was a city of the present and the future, Paris was of the past, thought Chaudhuri. It gave him the impression that it was always hanging at a point of time and incorporating its presence into a particular period of its history. He compared Paris to a chateau where the French people were placing all the modern devices of comfortable living without destroying the historic character of the place. He felt this as he went to Paris from London and consequently wrote to his people:

The more I see of Paris the more I feel that it belongs entirely to the past. The only modern or ultra-modern thing in Paris is the motor traffic. In every street you feel as if you were in an aeroplane... But the cars move so fast -- you do not see anything but a blur when they pass you -- that they become projectiles and completely impersonal. So Paris looks, though it does not sound, as a thing of the past. Perhaps we shall have to go to Donzère-Mondragon or the Régie National des Usines Renault to see modern France. As for Eiffel Tower, this monstrosity, which throughout the world has become the symbol of
Paris, is completely out of keeping with everything else in the city. It is a blotch left by the industrializing nineteenth century on the sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century landscape of Paris. (1959:64)

Chaudhuri’s knowledge of Paris is lopsided and prejudicial since he was left only with two week’s experience before he gave such opinion. Although somewhat away from reality according to critics, his description is filled with intensity of feeling.

As regards the Englishman’s relations with money, Chaudhuri says that in the West, or to be more precise, in Great Britain and Western Europe, it is very difficult to estimate a man’s exact degree of attitude to money. He thinks it easier to get an idea about Indian people’s attachment to money since Hindu religiosity covers every aspect of moneymaking. In every normal Hindu house, there remains a private shrine for a god or goddess of money, or for an economic form of their own god. But Chaudhuri did not find any sort of shrine in any English home. He thinks that like Hinduism Christianity is not directly involved in financial transactions whereas among the Indians the religious approach to economic affairs is a common thing, which has been prevailing since the olden times. Ever since the Rig Vedic age they have had economic gods.

Regarding two different processes of moneymaking of the two countries, Chaudhuri says:

In our society [India] money-making is an open conspiracy, if it is a conspiracy at all .... In our eyes it is an occupation which can be avowed with pride by every honest and honorable man. Indeed, as long as we remain in the world we are expected to put money above everything else. The notion of sordidness simply does not exist among
us. As a consequence, the process of moneymaking can be observed as easily in our country as love-making... can be in the West. But in English society there is a good deal of prudery over this... The only thing in their behaviour which seemed to throw an indirect light on the subject was the smoothness with which monetary transactions could be put through. England appeared to be a country of easy money, in the moralist’s sense of the term. That is to say, everybody there was not only expected to pay his dues promptly and regularly, but also, generally speaking, did so. In our society the willingness to pay decreases as the capacity to pay increases. What struck me even more forcibly was the readiness of public bodies to part with money, and trust individuals. (1959:102-103)

With regard to their relation to money, Chaudhuri puts emphasis on their style in living, which is much more generous. In the past the English upper classes enjoyed the privilege to live in style and be careless about money. And those who could not afford pretended to be so. Finally with the advent of the Welfare State the opportunity for living in style has come to English people at large. Chaudhuri admits that he has been taught by the English people that “the best use for money is to spend it on the good things of life” (1959:108). His analysis of the Hindu view of money is questionable. The traditional Hindu way of life has four-fold approach: dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. At the foundation is dharma, which is the “right way” that gives conviction. Artha is really the mundane duties and responsibilities, and not only “money”. Unless these duties and responsibilities are fulfilled, one has no right to accept kama, that is, earthly enjoyment. For him the highest stage of moksha (liberation) is also inaccessible. While the fatal attraction of and greed for money is obvious in India, Chaudhuri’s rationale behind it is far-fetched and even distorted.
Chaudhuri has admittedly revealed the English people’s attitude towards love and contrasted it with that of Indian people. He says: “In England, as indeed all over Europe, love seemed to be a primary motivation of human beings, a major occupation of men and women, and as serious a pursuit as moneymaking in our society” (1959:109). In England lovemaking was an easily observable activity. The Western people have made family life dependent on love and as long as their family life remains they cannot break this affiliation. But in Indian society, he found it very difficult to observe the workings of love in human beings. The history of love in Bengali Hindu society, according to Chaudhuri, was introduced from the West. At first it was transferred to Bengali literature from English literature and then taken over to life. He observes with a touch of humor that love-making was imported to India much later than tobacco or potatoes, but was not adapted as successfully as those two plants. The Hindu society as a whole has never needed love for marriage, family, and other social institutions, he adds. But in Western society he saw that love had an independent existence, which was not transference from literature. It is, he believes, inherent in English society. Although Chaudhuri has glorified the romantic and idealized love as the basis of the intimate relationship between men and women, he considers present blatant lovemaking as “trivial… cheapened and vulgarized” (1959:112).

As to the idea of fidelity Chaudhuri believes that Indian and Western outlooks differ from each other. He thinks that in Europe the idealization of relations of the sexes was basically the work of the man; while in India or in Hindu society it was that of the woman.
He does not believe that the Hindu ideal of wifely devotion is an imposition by a patriarchal society. He rather believes that it was the women themselves who set up an ideal of faithfulness for their own interest. The feminist critics will certainly differ from Chaudhuri on this point. He, however, finds faults with both the attitudes. He argues that in making love an end in itself the Western attitude is encouraging love to be a wild thing.

The Hindu concept on the other hand, does not always bring about any idealization of love and allows sex relations to remain at physical level, fostering sensuality in marriage.

Chaudhuri finally makes a balance between the Western and the Indian attitudes towards love although they are for the most part antithetical to each other. The choice made by the Westerners may result in satisfaction and that by the Indians in dissatisfaction, but still there is equilibrium. None is worse than the other. Chaudhuri has devised an equation of that balance: “Life plus love = Life minus love” (1959:115).

As for Chaudhuri’s observations on love-making, it would be pertinent to see that despite so much unabashed display of it, the family system has completely disintegrated in the West. How far it would be true to say that Indian families and couples lead a totally loveless life! So Chaudhuri’s arguments on the existence of love in Indian and English or Western couples can be considered as fallacious. The number of splitting up with one another in terms of love and marriage has always been far more in the West. If love has got little to do with conjugal harmony and personal attachment, then the Western people’s marital relationships cannot be called to be
imbued with true love. Although Chaudhuri has been critical of the present-day English love-making, even then he seems to be prejudiced towards English people’s love-attitude and a little harsh to that of Indian people.

Chaudhuri sets down his impressions of the positive and negative attitudes to the idea of John Bull of the English people and concludes his account of the manners of the English people with some general observations. He points at the most widely advertised conception of the Englishman outside England. That was the conception of John Bull, who stood for different things to different people. In India John Bull was identified with the Anglo-Indian of olden days, who treated the Indians sometimes with authoritarian care and patronization, sometimes with snobbishness, and sometimes with bad temper. Chaudhuri assures that John Bull still exists in England. They live a lonely and unhappy life and grumble over everything from food to social customs. They feel that the English are still a proud, cold, and even snobbish people. Like the old Anglo-Indian, many of them nurse a grievance against the country they live in.

Chaudhuri thinks that old John Bull survives both in English social life and in the international relations of the English people. The old John Bull had two faces, the conservative and the radical. The conservative one is dead, or can be found only in a very refined people. On the contrary, the radical John Bull had a love for the oppressed and unfairly treated people and never hesitated to go for their aid. This John Bull “could be most easily recognized among the English working people, a manly and shrewd set of men, who were
always friendly but never impertinent, who knew their place and yet were not servile, and who wanted not only to live but also to understand things in their own way” (1959:122).

Chaudhuri thinks of the Englishman’s attitude to physical labour as a manifestation of the Englishman’s basic simplicity. The English people follow the dictum ‘work is worship’ and their sense of physical labour is on the whole utilitarian. He finds the English middle-class to differ from the Indians radically. In selecting a career Englishmen take their main interest in life into account. This interest not only governs the choice but also takes the question of money and worldly position in its stride. Endowed with a weak sense of vocation, the Englishmen are ready to leave a well-paid and secure job when they find it incongruous with what they want to do in life. On the contrary, Indians plan their careers in terms of wealth, position, and power. The Hindu have no indissoluble emotional or ethical ties with anything they do at a particular time of their life. They do not hesitate to leave the post for another one in a different line for a little more money or prestige. Choice of career appears to Englishmen as being something like an adventurer’s outlook on life, while the word ‘adventure’ is not familiar to the Indians, Chaudhuri concludes.

While dealing with the cultural life of the English people, Chaudhuri begins with Shakespeare and shows how treatment of Shakespeare is amusement in England and culture in India. He happened to see Stratford-upon-Avon thriving on Shakespeare on the 391st anniversary of his birthday. The way they celebrated the occasion was tantamount to that of a national hero, which included
“the speeches, the procession, unfurling of the flags, visit to the birth-place, laying of wreaths and posies on the tomb” (1959:131). Chaudhuri heard elsewhere in England that Shakespeare was dreadfully commercialized at Stratford. Despite that he approved of that commercialization of Shakespeare and drew an analogy between the commercialization of Shakespeare and that of religion in India. In a letter written to his family, he refers to Stratford and this commercialization. In his own words: “Stratford flourishes on Shakespeare, and even Englishmen say everything at Stratford is commercialized. But in order to make Shakespeare commercially profitable you must have a sufficiently strong interest in him. In our country religion is still more commercialized but religion is there” (1959:132).

Another aspect of the contemporary cultural life of the English people, which is also a part of their amusement, is the growing habit of visiting the country houses. People visited the country houses almost equally before and after the custom of charging a fee was introduced. Chaudhuri also approves of the commercialization of the country houses kept open for the public. He has thus marked the popularity of two of the highest expressions of English culture as well as civilization, Shakespeare and the country houses.

Chaudhuri considers his visits to Europe as “adventures of a brown man in search of civilization”. He was not interested in “the Europe of politico-economic tripe” but in “the Europe of European civilization, which is entwined with the contemporary existence of the European peoples, influencing and shaping it in every way, and
being accepted as part and parcel of their ordinary life” (1959:145). By civilization he means an interest in antiques, old books and second-hand furniture, the inseparability of the life of the present from the past. According to him, European civilization remains as much of the present as of the past. He found it impossible in the West to separate the life of the present from the heroic past. In the light of this idea of civilization, he discovers in the cultural situation of India a rejection of the contact with the past. As a Hindu and also as a student of history, he has always wanted to meet the civilization of ancient India to understand its nature and to feel it as a living reality but he has admittedly failed to capture its spirit.

Another serious aspect of the cultural life of the English people is their religion Christianity, that has been recognized as a great force behind the rise of Western civilization. In fact, religion and culture have always intermingled in Europe, especially in England. Chaudhuri was deeply impressed by the solemnity of the church-services attended in England by a large number of men and women. He himself attended a number of church-services at Cambridge, Stratford, and Winchester, which gave him the same impression. All Christian worship in England had the same appearance to him. The spirit was common. He makes an analogy between the Christian and the Hindu religious observances, and shows the difference in the spirit as follows:

We go to temples to look on the image of a divine potentate and to watch the ceremonials of his daily life, which are modeled on those of a king. We do indeed prostrate ourselves in awe before him, but that used to be done by the ancient Egyptians before the Pharaoh and by
the Japanese before their Emperor. Modern Indians did that before Mahatma Gandhi, and do it now before Jawaharlal Nehru. Between these secular prostrations and the prostrations before the gods there is only a difference of degree and not of kind, because in India the most powerful political leadership is itself quasi-religious. But certainly the English people did not go to their churches to look on a Divine Ruler and his daily life. (1959:164)

Chaudhuri pinpoints the essential difference between Hinduism and Christianity as far as temple cults are concerned. He shows that the Hindu scriptures do not make collective worship in a temple an essential duty for every Hindu, but Christianity does. All basic aspirations of Hinduism were absent from the collective worship of the English people.

Chaudhuri does not approve of the Hindu way of worship aspiring to spirituality into worldly prosperity and approves of that of Christianity tending to spirituality of unworldly nature. C. P. Verghese comments on this attitude of Chaudhuri:

Chaudhuri here ignores the fact that Hinduism is at best a way of life and not an organized religion such as Christianity and that any collective worship of a disciplined group is possible only in an organized religion. And furthermore, to imply, as Chaudhuri does, that only the Hindus and not the Christians pray for personal favours and material prosperity and happiness is to credit the average believer in God and religion with something more than he ever bargains for. (1973:60-61)

Although Chaudhuri was basically interested in the ‘Timeless England’ but sometimes he awakens to its present state too. He thinks he ought to cover the present situation to give completeness to his account. He has well arrived at a view of the connection between
the Welfare State and other contemporary phenomena on one hand and the traditional features of English civilization on the other.

The present-day English politics gave him the impression that he was watching a swimming pool, which means, it was so lively. The great majority of Englishmen became so placid in their attitude to politics that they seemed to be quite unable to get excited over it. The reason for this is:

...they have solved all their political problems or got rid of them, and so there is nothing left for them to do. At home they have ended social and economic injustice, so far as this can be removed at all in human society and thus deprived their politics of its most powerful motive force. They have also eliminated all competition for political power by distributing it among all, and making it diffuse to the point of ineffectiveness. It is hardly likely that any class or any tyrant will arise among them in the future to monopolize political power and create a new struggle for it.... In the field of international politics, too, English people are clearly conscious of the limits of their power... Taken all in all, then, what they want today in the way of politics is not politics properly so-called, but only administration, with a little politics to keep the bureaucracy in check. In such circumstances why should they be excited over politics? (Chaudhuri, 1959:178-179)

Contrary to his expectation, Chaudhuri found to his surprise and pleasure that the Welfare State in England was a reality. By the Welfare State he understood two things, firstly a government which tries to promote the welfare of the people and secondly, a general state of welfare of the people, which may or may not be due to the government. Chaudhuri saw both kinds of welfare in England. Of the reality of the Welfare State, National Health Service convinced him most.
The building effort also made Chaudhuri admit the existence of the Welfare State. He was deeply impressed by the building activity in England, which meant not only more amenities for the inhabitants, but also a different kind of life. He passed on to the appearance of welfare in the people. He makes a sharp contrast between appearance of welfare in India and that in England. India according to him is a country of disparities of wealth. There can hardly be any comparison even between the middle-class family’s living standard and that of a well-to-do family. The Indian village peasants and artisans live below the standard of livestock in England. Want and distress are obvious in the first instance in the clothing. Besides the presence of diseased, underfed, and deformed persons is seen everywhere. The children are also seen in the same miserable condition. And most ironically the helpers of people in distress are themselves in less distress.


In his analysis, the first condition of ensuring happiness in the Welfare State is that it should not be stagnant. Something new and creative should always be done in it and people should live happily without feeling bored. The one danger of the Welfare State in these days of democracy that he refers to, is the over-enthusiasm of the theorists and practitioners of democracy to supplement political and economic equality with that of mind. He believes that the democratic steps of ameliorating the living conditions of people have already
destroyed the folk-civilization of many countries and thus are contributing to the failure of the Welfare State, which they have once made. He envisaged the failure of the Welfare State and sarcastically comments on the present state of the English people:

I am not surprised, therefore, to find that some English intellectuals are already revolting against the Welfare State, of which generally speaking the English people are so proud and as it seems to me justly proud. It is contributing its share of discontent, supplementing the quota from political frustration and economic anxiety. Perhaps more rebellion is in the offing. But the worst part of this suffering is that it is so drab. Even in writing about the present state of the English people I have caught its contagion. (1959:199)


Chaudhuri, however, does not end here. He suggests that the English people have to look for something on which they can fall back from their present condition. That should be solid and inexhaustible as a source of happiness, and proof against decay and corruption. “But where can they find it?” (1959:200). He asks and himself answers that different people have different ways of finding consolation and compensation for national troubles. To all Western nations including the Englishmen, he thinks that the only thing to fall back upon is their historic civilization. In his own words:

I think their [Western nations] historic civilization has already become the ultimate resources of the existence of these peoples... It is entering actively into their daily life
to keep them steady and cheerful in situations which are full of disappointments and anxieties. Perhaps the power of the historic civilization is best seen in the effect it produces on the creators and preachers of contemporary culture. As soon as they turn their face from the present to the past they are restored to sanity, good sense, and sincerity. They recover humility and love. (1959:203)

It seems to Chaudhuri that Englishmen are showing all the greater affection for the products of their historic civilization. He opines that in England, civilization has most often been identified with the art of living.

Literature, painting, architecture, and the other creations are being looked upon as mere accessories. An English scholar says that the last product of study is, not the book, but the man. The nation as a whole is imbued with the same idea about their civilization. Chaudhuri assures that they still think so, but they have also become aware that their life would be endangered unless they re-orient their attitude, for, they cannot practise the art of living in the old manner any longer. To get rid of this, he emphatically suggests that the Englishmen “must not fix their love on the permanent things, and put less trust in the evanescent style of living” (1959:203).

Despite all the shortcomings besetting the present state of the Englishmen, Chaudhuri finds no reason for losing heart. Much optimistically he concludes his notion about the historic civilization:

In any case, I found no defeatism in the rank and file of the new followers of civilization. Perhaps for the future more is to be expected from this Young Guard than the tired Old Guard. These men and women seemed not only to enjoy the historic civilization with immense zest in
their own lives, they appeared also to be marching to battle to the tune of a brave music:

MARCHE DES DAVIDSBUNDLER CONTRE LES PHILISTINS. (1959: 204)

Finally, Chaudhuri raises the most fundamental question as to what the Englishmen's national destiny is. He saw them going about their business with energy and confidence, looking strong and healthy, having plenty of food and other necessities of life while they had lost their Empire, the greater part of their wealth and their position as the first World Power. He wonders as to where all this would lead them as a nation. He asked if they were going to recover their old position or create a new position or despite all apparent recovery and prosperity, they were going down the path of inevitable decline. He justified his interest in all these questions by way of his avowed love for the English people. He tried to know the answer from them directly.

On being asked whether there was any thinking on the national destiny among the English people, one of Chaudhuri's English friends replied in the negative and added that they were wholly absorbed in the present. Chaudhuri was not satisfied with this answer nor could he leave the question. He however, felt reassured with the answer of his hostess in Rome. In her words: "You see, Mr. Chaudhuri, we have had very bad times and we have come through, though we hardly knew how to. We have also recovered more rapidly than we could have believed to be possible, I think that is why we are enjoying the present for a little while. I am sure we are not really thoughtless about the future" (1959: 206).
Chaudhuri still felt uncertain about the future but he no longer remained critical of the attitude of the English people to their national destiny. He thought them wholly right in going about as they were doing, “making the best of their imperishable resources of happiness and showing a brave thoughtlessness as regards their troubles” (1959:206). Chaudhuri was simultaneously surprised and delighted to see the English people as happy, careless, and gay as they generally are.

Anglicism is a pronounced feature of Chaudhuri’s writings and it finds its fullest expression in his A Passage to England. It is evident in his adulation of the English way of life, in the sympathy and consideration with which he glosses over the faults of the English people, and in his comparison between the Hindu society and the Western. Verghese says:

The chief weakness of the book arises from this comparison. Apart from the impropriety of comparing two absolutely dissimilar countries and their peoples, Chaudhuri makes the very serious mistake of confusing the England of the past with that of the present and of comparing the England of the past with the India of the present as well as with that of the past. Chaudhuri writes from the point of view of his temperamental alienation from India and her people. But that temperament is not universal, not even widely distributed; Chaudhuri can escape from the community, but most other Indians can only escape into it. To forget this is to be wholly subjective, wholly self-righteous. And it is this self-righteous tone of the book that is more objectionable than his condemnatory judgments and sweeping generalizations. (1973:63-64)

M. K. Naik too, disapprovingly comments on the contrast Chaudhuri shows between the two countries. To quote: “…when he
[Chaudhuri] contrasts England with India ... all his pet prejudices have a field... Chaudhuri looks at England with rose-tinted spectacles...” (1982:266).

Despite his full-throated eulogy of English people and culture, Chaudhuri was also preoccupied with the idea of the decline of the British Empire. He predicted and interpreted this in some articles and speeches later compiled, edited, and published in 1998 under the title *Why I Mourn for England*, which itself is the name of an article. Even before he wrote his much criticized dedication in *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, he wrote and published three articles on British politics, which were also included in the above mentioned book. He observes:

*My earliest premonition of a decline of English greatness was set down in an article which I sent to the Daily Telegraph in August, 1945. It was provoked by the news of the general election of that year. Until then my confidence in a greater future for the English people after their victory in the war had remained unshaken. It was shattered on that day: Britain had voted for Labour’s soft opinion. I felt that the English spirit was broken, and a demolition squad would begin its work on the external greatness of the English People.* (1998:14)

In his article entitled “Why I Mourn For England” Chaudhuri has illustrated the decline with a symbolic example. One day in 1908, When he was aged 10 and living in Kishorganj, he was running up a steep bank from the river in front of their house shouting: “England expects every man to do his duty” (1988:14). A Bengali gentleman passing along the road on an elephant’s back asked him smilingly if he knew the meaning of what he said. When
Chaudhuri gave the correct answer, he left with a broader smile.
Recalling the incident Chaudhuri mourns:

The days when an elderly Bengali on an elephant and a Bengali boy of 10, bare bodied as well as barefooted, could have that kind of exchange and claim their share in English greatness are gone for ever. Today, at the age of 90 I see Bengalis ignorant of English arriving in jumbo jets from that same East Bengal to turn England into a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. (1998:14)

Chaudhuri mourns for today’s England where the public aspects of decline are tacitly admitted, where there is resignation to the loss of power and wealth, and where there is a startling acceptance of brutishness and incivility. He thinks that this external decadence has resulted from an inner decadence of the English mind. This is evident in the careless and penurious use of their language even by the educated Englishmen. He argues that the human mind and human language are compatible. So decline of correctness, precision, adequacy, and elegance in the use of a language suggests a corresponding decline in the power of the mind. He points out that in the modern Englishmen’s writing and speaking, grammatical strictness and precision of phrasing have virtually disappeared as a result of which logical communication has become fully impossible. He has spoken of the most important aspect of linguistic communication, i.e., adequacy which is also on the decline. The inadequacy is found in the shrinkage of vocabulary, in the absence of colour in diction, and in the monotony of rhythm. He considers all these as serious enough to justify the assumption that the English
mind is losing its depth, its intensity, and its capacity for making distinctions.

He has cited a number of linguistic evidences to substantiate his assumption of mental decadence in the English people. Even then he does not consider this contraction of the mind as the worst part of the decadence in England. “What is more ominous” says Chaudhuri, “is that as the mind is contracting, the sense of emptiness within it is increasing. The emptiness is made visible to me by the number of young people I see roaming the city of Oxford, where I now live, with headphones over their ears. These young things, who are not afraid of their parents, of their teachers or even of policemen, are afraid of their own minds” (1998:18).

In “Britain Through an Indian’s Eyes” Chaudhuri has juxtaposed his idea of timeless England with contemporary British life. At the beginning, he informs us of the real existence of his timeless England as he experienced just at the time of his first visit to England. In his words: “This timeless England lives on and nowhere could I feel its presence more strongly than in the village on the edge of a hill where I am writing this. But three more visits, each longer than the preceding one, have also brought me face to face with contemporary British Life” (1998:19).

Chaudhuri in this article also discovers that the British people’s main occupation today is the pursuit of money while a casual observer may consider the sexual behaviour to be the major revolution in the British way of life and its most striking expression.

Chaudhuri regards their sexual behaviour as one of many such distractions in which British people are seeking relief from the
strain imposed on them by their main occupation, i.e. money-making, which is treated here differently than it is treated in *A Passage to England*. His analysis is quite persuasive:

The whole nation has given itself over to money-making. Not only has it become in itself the most engrossing and satisfying occupation. It is also bringing other activities formerly independent of it within its scope. For instance, politics is, now almost wholly the management of the national finances. In the elections the major issue for the voter is whether his vote will make him earn, spend or save more. Education is training to make money as efficiently as possible. Authorship... has converted itself into a cottage industry. Collection of books and works of art is investment. Even young women, though not under duress like the poor house, are coming into the money business as objects of betting. All the other activities are either diversions or distractions. And all this is glorified doctrinally as the modern man's recognition of the overriding claim on him of economics, the new religion. (1998:19-20)

In one sense Chaudhuri justifies this tendency of the British people as natural, i.e., acquisition of wealth is the simplest expression of man's innate urge for self-assertion. So he argues that when a people lose their political ambitions they turn to money-making. He cites examples of the Jews who did that after the Dispersion and of the Germans and the Japanese who are doing it after the defeat in the last war. He goes on to say about the Germans and the Japanese, the two nations, one philosophical, musical, and military, and the other contemplative, aesthetic, and military, both of which have made money the first object of their national and personal endeavour and succeeded remarkably. From this point of view, Chaudhuri does not get it wrong if the British people, who have lost a great empire, do the same thing. The only
question he poses is whether they are succeeding in their new venture.

Chaudhuri is, however, critical of the ferocious pursuit of private interest of the British people and suggests that the only thing which could restrain this pursuit is a sense of national interest based on the consciousness of a national mission, which he does not find existing any longer in the British people. He mourns: “There is no longer any sense of mission; the British people have got immured in private life” (1998:21).

As for Chaudhuri’s observations on the Englishman’s mammon worship, there is nothing much new or original, as Victorian thinkers like Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold vociferously condemned it. Napoleon described England as a nation of shopkeepers. One of the chief motives for the British people’s imperialistic invasion was money-making. So it is not unusual on the part of the present-day English people to have completely immersed in the pursuit of money as a long-born legacy. Again, Chaudhuri seems to be a little self-contradictory while he tries to justify the British people’s tendency for acquisition of wealth on one hand and vehemently blasts their pursuit of private interest on the other.

This is exactly what Chaudhuri thinks about the British people today. But he also knows that the British do not like any observation of them by a foreigner. So his observation may provoke the standard British reply: ‘Oh, you don’t understand!’ (1998:21). Chaudhuri concludes the essay with the typical Englishmen’s belief that their way of life is very esoteric, inaccessible to the outsider.
Chaudhuri delivered a speech at the British House-wives’ League, on April 27, 1988 on decadence in English life and civilization, which was later published as an article under the same title. In his speech, he categorically mentioned that the decadence in English life was in full swing. He termed it “a sort of euthanasia of civilization.” But he also found a malignant side of it because, he knew that “no civilization can disappear unless there are active agents for its destruction” (1998:42).

Chaudhuri quotes Dean Inge: “The ancient civilizations were destroyed by imported barbarians; we manufacture our own” (1998:42). When he read Inges’s lecture first in 1921, he wondered how far that could be said of England, but later on he felt convinced of its import when he saw young savages attacking, robbing, mugging, and even killing old women.

In his speech, Chaudhuri refers to the main crises in decadence in the sphere of human activity such as “bureaucracy, high taxation, and debasement of currency in government; ruin of the middle-class and disappearance of the peasantry in social life; and, in recreation, worship of non-purposive physical prowess carried to the point of irrationality and accompanied by factionalism” (1998:43). He has not discussed all these aspects of decadence in his speech. He has rather confined himself to one aspect of decadence which, he thinks, is of special interest to his audience and to others. This aspect of decadence is related to what is called woman’s liberation movement, which he does not support. He thinks that all the features of the movement reveal its affiliation with decadence. He, however, does not describe all of them. He begins
with one feature, which is the wholly external reorientation of women’s personal adornment. He shows how in English society decadence loosens the marriage tie. He draws his audience’s attention to what decadence is doing where integrity in married life is maintained. It is according to him, seen in the demand for a married woman’s independence and privacy in terms of money. He believes that where there is accounting between husband and wife in respect of money, there should not be a marriage. He does not respect their custom of giving the wife a housekeeping allowance and pocket money. According to him, the Christian women are resolved more than any other to become hirelings, which they consider synonymous with freedom.

In his speech, Chaudhuri has declared the failure of the feminist movement in freeing women from the clutches of man. He has made a humorous interpretation of that failure, marked by a pungent remark about the aim of the movement which he takes for granted as an aspect of decadence. To quote:

... so far as can be observed, the freedom from man for women today is only freedom from half the man: from that part of him only which exists above the belt. Submission to the part below the belt is now more wholehearted that it ever was in the past. In the streets one hardly sees a young man or a young woman walking singly, they were joined together like Siamese twins. The only success in the way of creating a new feminine personality that can be credited to the movement, is the appearance of a composite one: the combination of a male element which is a fanatical Leftist, with a female element which is a snarling harridan. If that transformation of the timeless woman is not decadence, I hardly know what is. (1998:48)
It is evident that in the present context while woman's liberation movement all over the world has more or less attained fulfillment ensuring equal rights of women, and feministic study has occupied a larger portion of human inquiry and critical investigation, Chaudhuri's attitude to feminism may sound like what he himself calls "dogmatic assertion". Given the principles of feminism, Chaudhuri may well be treated as a reactionary. But his attitude to women especially in the context of present British society is no doubt thought provoking.

In his article "Permanent Conservatism" (New English Reviews, December 1946) Chaudhuri makes a proposition that some time in near future the sole choice of political principles and methods left to the English people will be some sort of conservatism. At the present stage of their national evolution and that of their relationship to the rest of the world, conservatism will be for them both a virtue and a necessity.

Chaudhuri has framed his theories on the basis of too many ideas about the English people's recent leftist and supposedly liberal policies, which have leaned towards a permanent conservatism.

He considers English Leftism even at its best, as a past-regarding movement, possessing a short-term and limited usefulness. He cites the example of the then labour Government's programme which, he thinks, was confined by the Tory-Labour quarrels of the period between 1924 and 1939. The general strike, the savings bank-scare, the coal crises, and the unemployment allowance were the memories which haunted the new Whitehall. Although the Labour government was optimistic about their future,
the reality Chaudhuri thinks, was quite opposite of that. He unequivocally says that the Labour administration was going to close an era, not to open a new one.

Chaudhuri discovered a sense of antithesis in the English people. As he says: "... in the present state of the English people certain mental qualities present themselves in pairs, one in the pair being *indicated* and the other *contra-indicated*... Empiricism against Dogmatism; Freedom against Regimentation; Augustanism against Catilinism; Reason against Intuition; Aristocracy against Demagogy" (1998:86).

He, however, did not find any reason to identify the antithesis with the existing party division because individuals with *indicated* qualities could come almost equally from the ranks of British Labour, Liberals, and Conservatives. In fact, according to him, the party lines in English politics did not take their final shape.

He thinks it necessary for the English people to return to the system of checks and balances on which British politics in its best days operated. He suggested that the intuitive collective will had to be supplemented by reasoning, and the absolute power of the people had to be reconciled with the leadership of an aristocracy possessing disciplined intelligence. He points to the main task of the English People. As he puts it: "The main task is to rescue English politics from a fussiness and sentimental effervescence unbecoming of its maturity and endow it with a mellowness, serenity, and ease consistent with that maturity. There can be no question of any loss of strength or dignity in the pursuit of repose" (1998:85).

In his last book *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* published in the centenary of his birth, Chaudhuri deals, among
other things, once again with one of his central concerns — the decline and decadence of the Western civilization. By the term ‘Decadence’ he means ‘deterioration’ ‘degradation’, ‘devolution’, ‘decline’, and ‘declension’ (1997:72). In his consideration, a nation turns decadent when it loses its political and economic power and cultural creativity. Edward Shils accounts for Chaudhuri’s idea about decadence. To quote: “Decadence for Mr. Chaudhuri is craveness, lack of individual and collective self respect, lack of dignity, a different sense of honour, no appreciation of national greatness” (1988:569).

All these aspects of decadence can be applied to Western civilization. Chaudhuri gives two examples of collective decadence of Western Civilization from history. The first is the late Hellenistic stage of Greek Civilization and the second being the last stage of the Roman Empire after the reign of Diocletian. He considers Mrs. Thatcher as the female incarnation of British Diocletian. He discusses what he calls “The All-embracing Faces of English Decadence.” In his own words: “There is not a single aspect of English life to which decadence is not spreading and deepening its invasion—national personality, politics, social and economic life, education and culture” (1997:76).

Chaudhuri has divided various aspects of English decadence into two forms viz., the general and the malignant. In his words:

the general ... is like an incurable chronic disease, showing no obvious dangerous symptoms, nevertheless debilitating in its effects, and in the final result fatal, but not sensationally. So the danger is insidious. The second... is malignant, violent and alarming, like the sudden out-
break of a plague, smallpox or cholera epidemic. It is like these diseases before the modern methods of checking them were discovered. So it frightens and almost paralyses the mind when it is met with. (1997:79)

Chaudhuri describes the general and malignant aspects of English decadence in its various manifestations, under the following heads respectively.

Falsity of Behaviour:

It has become a common phenomenon in the day to day life of the English people. Far from being natural, men and women appear as actors and actresses. They keep up appearances but at bottom they are insincere and self-conscious. They pose for the sake of posturing and being photographed to impress a wide public by their poses. This attitude is most widely seen among young women. The desire to become a model seems to be the supreme ambition of the young persons. The self-conscious artificiality is seen in their postures and facial expressions. It is really difficult to explain “why they appear to be in a fit of rage, abandonment to sorrow, softened by tenderness, or brightened by amusement, [because]… expressions are seen, but their causes are absent” (1997:80).

The incongruity between appearance and reality can also be seen in other aspects of life. The providers of goods are more interested in the package and name of the goods than their substance. He refers to the change in the name of a wine shop from ‘Peter Dominque’s’ into ‘Bottoms up’. The same tendency is also true to authorship. Chaudhuri was confronted with the question as to what he had called his writing, not what it was about.
Chaudhuri, however, warns against the impingement of this posturing on its subjects, which he thinks, is brought about as ‘stills’ in the statues placed in the shop-windows, and as ‘movies’ through TV and video. He also points to the fact that the English people’s living exhibition is exerting its vicarious impact and “the transformation of experience of life into vicarious experience is one of the most noticeable features of contemporary decadence” (1997: 80).

**Falsity and Incongruity in Adornment**:

Chaudhuri accuses the English women of seemingly having fallen for the Oriental habit of overloading themselves with jewelry in their normal appearance. As he puts: “They [the young English women] appear with strings of pearls as big as sparrow’s eggs round their necks, and heavy gold bangles round their wrists. But on them these are unoriental for the pearls are synthetic and the gold fake” (1997:80-81).

He notices another kind of falsification among the present-day English women in their treatment of hair. Natural hair is differently coloured and dressed in keeping with the tastes of the women. Wigs of varied forms and colours are used especially by the elderly women. He regards this distortion of adornment as a feature of contemporary English decadence.

**Impact of Decadence on English character**:

To show the intensity of the impact of decadence on the English people, Chaudhuri here mentions an opinion poll
conducted by *The Times* aimed at finding out the Englishman’s most favourite poem. Kipling’s “If” was selected which laid down eighteen contingencies and suggested the right responses to them. Chaudhuri argues that the English people’s choice of the poem was suggestive of their thought that the time had arrived to test their power to confront the emergencies. He has categorically stated that the English people today have become almost incapable of meeting the uncertainties with the right responses. The selection of the poem was as such the testimony to their total despair.

**Two Passions Typical of Decadence:**

Under this head, Chaudhuri deals with two serious passions of the contemporary English people, one being dominant and the other complementary and compensatory both of which, to his thinking, are typical of decadence. They are in his words: “... love of money in the extreme form of addiction, and unceasing pursuit of it; [and] licentiousness, indulgence in which is brought about by the necessity to counteract the insensitiveness generated by the pursuit of money. In decadence, the two, which would seem to have no connection with each other, become inseparably associated” (1997:83).

He has elucidated these two strong passions at greater length in his essay “Britain through an Indian’s Eyes” which has already been discussed.

**Decadence and Government:**

Chaudhuri shows how the appearance of decadence is concretely evident in regard to the contemporaneous British rule.
What made him resentful about the parliamentary government was power of catchwords whose credibility was far away from truth. So in his words:

The conversion of the House of Commons to a mere stage for acting before the electorate has pursued its relentless course since then. It has been completed by the introduction of TV into the House of Commons. The MPs no longer discuss public affairs in it, they only declaim and posture before the people. This is real decadence of parliamentary government. (1997:85)

Political Leadership in Decadence:

Chaudhuri shows the decadence of the present political leadership by comparing it with the earlier one in regard to their relation to democracy. He argues that the head of the parliamentary and representative government seems to have acquired a very powerful status. He makes mention of two recent Prime Ministers, Mrs Thatcher and Mr Major and points out that their orders are being directly described as the orders of the Prime Ministers, not as the decision of the English Government as was done before. Even the decisions of Churchill, who was virtually a dictator, had to be confirmed by a council and were regarded as collective decisions. In addition to that, his [Churchill] decision at times was countermanded by his colleagues and he had to abide by it. Whereas, a recent British Prime Minister sends an order like a dictator and seems to have occupied a position like Mussolini, Hitler, or Stalin. Chaudhuri considers this as an apparent confirmation of the Platonic opinion that democracy leads to tyranny in the Greek sense.
Impact of Decadence on Religion and Morality:

In Chaudhuri’s opinion, the impact of decadence on religion and morality among the English people today has been a total reversal of the traditional relationship between a people and their religion. He asserts that it is religion which has been controlling and regulating the life of the people since prehistoric times. But in today’s Britain, he sees the opposite, i.e., religion is being controlled and reshaped by the people in keeping with their wishes and whims. The religion of the English people now is not Christianity in the true sense of the religion, it is rather “what they wish it to be” (1997:86).

While dealing with decadence in religion in Britain, Chaudhuri simultaneously indicates the rise of superstition as a sequel to it which is also another aspect of the total decadence. He feels it necessary to say:

... although faith in Christianity has virtually disappeared among the English, except where it is a lifeless regional loyalty in elderly people, superstition has become more powerful than ever. This has been seen as a natural sequence in the evolution of all religions. Whenever a religion has ceased to be living its heir has been superstition, which is of course older than religion and was its precursor. (1997:87)

While considering the impact of decadence on morality, Chaudhuri argues that since morality was always closely associated with Christianity, with the decline of faith in it, the English people have found scopes to escape their mental inhibitions and free themselves from morality. He calls it a drastic and
comprehensive revolution which finds the most vulgar expression in respect of sexual life although it covers all moral inhibitions. Adultery and homosexuality are being considered natural by people whom he thinks either ignorant or hypocritical. He holds the same views on abortion, which he deems also a revolt both against morality and biology as well. To his thinking, the consequences of revolt against biology are worse and more dangerous than those of the disregard of morality.

What the English people call the rejection of Victorian morality seems to Chaudhuri to be the most strange of all kinds of rejections of traditional morality. He thinks it analogous to “giving a dog a bad name in order to hang it” (1997:88). He complains about the exploitation of the current prejudice against the Victorian age and condemnation of something timeless.

Decadence and Social Life:

To bring all individuals directly under the power and authority of the state has been regarded by Chaudhuri as a destruction, which he thinks the most decisive impact of decadence on the social existence of the English people. This has, to his thinking, made an individual totally helpless against the power of the state. As a result, the society's function has been bestowed on the state and the idea that a government should take care of the people has been established. He, however, holds views opposite of that. He thinks it to be the people's function to care for their government by electing representatives worthy of serving national interests.
Chaudhuri accuses the absolutism of the State of replacing the ‘old monarchical absolutism’, which must destroy the family, the smallest and basic unit of society in his opinion. The family and the society are interrelated to each other as a microcosm to a macrocosm. So, he regards destruction of the family as the elimination of social protection and care. He gives a candid picture of the deplorable condition of marriage by whose institution, was maintained the family and thereby the society. Marriage among the English people has become as such a formal variant of man-woman relationship. Married life has become prone to breaking up at the will of the parties. He gives a ratio of the breakdown of marriages to their total, which is almost one in three. To his great surprise, he saw that a large number of the most distinguished persons included in Who’s Who had got their first marriage divorced. It was more surprising to him to see many cases of these dissolutions of the married couples who remained together for decades. He speaks of another way of association between young men and women by means of living together extramaritally beyond any religious or legal bond.

He in addition, touches on the existence of a new type of family called a one-parent family. The parent is the mother, who is usually a young woman. The tendency to become unmarried mothers is mostly seen among the young women because, they are given special privileges by the government which married women are deprived of. To show where decadence lies in regard to this, Chaudhuri explains:

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This kind of intersexual relationship has brought in two words into the English language—‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’, to mean those who were called a lover and a mistress in the old days. Even elderly men speak of their ‘girlfriends’, which amuses me very much. This is degrading their pretty mistresses verbally. Who does not know that old men wish to have young girls as mistresses? But it is wrong to make them cheap by depriving them of their time-honoured appellation of mistress. Decadence, however, degrades words and phrases as well as living. (1997:90-91)

**Decadence, Family, and Education:**

Chaudhuri here very emphatically expresses that the impact of decadence in England has totally destroyed the relationship between the home and the school. It has deprived the family of its long-borne role in education whereas, the home had almost always been the first centre of education. The school had to supplement the technical knowledge of language, mathematics, and other concomitant subjects with that education, which was essential for a citizen to maintain the civilized state. Thus he believes that the school played the role of an adjunct of the home. This traditional idea about the home-school relationship has recently undergone lots of changes. The teachers nowadays have ceased to admit to an educational role of the family. Anyway, Chaudhuri finds faults with the methods of teaching in the schools ignoring teaching in the homes which are “making the pupils incapable of reading intelligently and calculating mentally” (1997:91).

Chaudhuri imagines that the destruction of the traditional family has also resulted in the loss of parental authority over their
children in terms of controlling their behaviour and activities. The loss of authority leads to the abandonment of responsibility, which sometimes causes casualty especially in cases of very young children. He hints at the most undesirable form of children liberation i.e., juvenile delinquency.

Decadence and Cultural Life:

Chaudhuri regards the British Welfare State as a decadent one because mere arrangements of welfare of the masses can not ensure the greatness of a people. He argues referring to history that a people’s real greatness had no relation with their economic affluence. It needed a great passion to enliven a people whose absence leads to a 'putrescent psychological gangrene.' British Welfare State, he thinks, fostered decadence particularly in the expression of national life. What Chaudhuri calls religious decadence was caused by popularization of religious diction. The language of Christianity was never popular speech. Both the New Testament and the English Authorized Version were written in unpopular languages of respective times. So the Church of England was making changes in religious diction. He adds that this popularization of diction could not save English Christianity.

It is among other things, in the popularization of religious direction that a new English language appeared which became equally noticeable in "the secular employment of language." Chaudhuri, however, finally could realize that the new English was really a 'vulgar English,' which did not develop a homogeneous style. This English is being used by everybody, most ostentatiously
by contemporary journalists. The banner headlines are made sensational to divert readers' attention from the dullness of the reports. He was so antagonistic to the fashion of the catchword in the headlines that he satirically says: "...those who need such headlines to be induced to read the news are exactly like those who need aphrodisiacs to perform the sexual act naturally" (1997:97). Thus he gives many examples of the distortion of English language in the cultural life of the English people.

**Impact of Decadence on the English Personality:**

Chaudhuri here mentions some important changes in the English people's outlook on life. The English people in the past were race and colour conscious to the point of being contemptuous of all foreigners and coloured people. He refers to Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, who called the English a haughty race. But the contemporary Englishmen have reportedly changed this attitude. Some are hopeful that the immigration of coloured people will help enrich English life by making it multilingual and multicultural. But Chaudhuri did not find any distinction between adulteration and enrichment as far as the immigration was concerned. He was surprised by the invitation of the initiators of the "Saga Prize" for the "Black writer born in Britain or in the Republic of Ireland" because he never judged himself to be belonging to any such group. He held the view that writers should be categorized only by language in which they write, irrespective of country, race or complexion.

Whether the change of attitude among the English people as to race and colour consciousness can be considered as a sign of the
impact of decadence is questionable. Chaudhuri seems to be concerned only with the apparent change which the contemporary Englishmen declare. What he really believes is “the hard core of racial and colour prejudice in England” (1997:98). He points out that despite the change, racial arrogance and colour prejudice have not disappeared among the English people. He says that the Indians holding high positions in administration, industry or even universities could feel this most because they had to possess at least twice the competence of an Englishman to have an equal recognition. Chaudhuri treats this as a clear sign of decadence on the basis of a general rule about the effect of decadence on a people, i.e., “it always weakens their good qualities, but leaves the bad ones as they were. (1997:98).

Chaudhuri rates the tendency for not praising the great men as a concomitant of decadence. He charges this tendency with transforming history into biography in order to induce people to read it. He argues that history-turned biographies give more attention to the weakness of their subjects with a view to arresting the attention of men and women because “nothing has more piquant appeal than scandal-mongering about great men” (1997:99).

He cites a number of examples of this kind of biographical scandal-mongerings from history and shows their effects as decadence in cultural life. He confirms that the ancient precedents are being followed by the contemporary English biographers about whom he makes a pungent remark:

I say rather flippantly that the most serious concern of present-day English biographers seems to be to find out
whether their subject is a bastard or a bugger. They think, if they can find their subject to be one or the other, they would deprive him of his greatness, which they resent. But they overlook how irrelevant is this inquiry to the greatness of a ruler. They seem to have forgotten that the most illustrious ‘bastard’ in history was William the Conqueror, the founder of the English State. A man with the weakness of a decadent would naturally try to show that no great man of the past was better than he is. (1997:99-100)

Thus Chaudhuri tries to prove that the inducements and inspirations of the scandal-mongering English biographers driven by rancour and malice spring from their decadent state of mind. His resentment against the scandal-mongering English biographers may have been rooted in his strong aversion to his Indian critics and detractors, who lampooned him without properly appraising his works.

While dealing with various harmful effects of decadence on the human personality, Chaudhuri treats decline of sensibilities to be the most serious. He tries to clarify the causes and effects of what he calls “the erosion of all delicate sensibilities, normal in civilized men and women” (1997:100).

Chaudhuri opines that it is the audio-visual producers of entertainment, who are mostly responsible for that. Even the BBC could not escape his accusation of playing this obnoxious role.

He further adds that the audio-visual exploitation of literature i.e. making of TV features from the English fiction in an incompatible way, has become “the most effectual means of destroying literary culture among the English people” (1997:101).
Malignant Features of English Decadence:

Chaudhuri recounts the malignant side of the English decadence as he has found it reported in the newspapers. By malignant features, he means the occurrence of crimes. About the nature and extent of crimes occurring around him, he says: “There can be no doubt that in Britain crimes of the most horrifying and degraded character are being committed in ever greater numbers, and with increasing atrocity” (1997:102).

As to the authenticity of his observation and credibility of his attitude to deal with such a theme, he gives an explanation to escape the potential suspicion of bias or preconception regarding the account of criminality in Britain.

Armed robbery on banks and post offices is the most serious although not most atrocious, crime according to him. Despite all precautionary measures “the robberies are still being perpetrated, and the robbers are showing increasing finesse” (1997:105).

Chaudhuri looks upon robberies on private homes socially more serious because they sometimes lead to murder. The most heinous aspect of such robberies is the attack on the unaccompanied elderly women, who are regarded as the easiest targets by the young robbers.

Another dangerous crime is murder on various motives. They include murder by husbands on wives, and vice-versa and murder from irrational homicidal mania. Murders of last category are committed more frequently than those of other.

He gives an account of the most unnatural and barbaric crime among the English people, which is rape. This hideous crime is
committed both on very young girls and on old women. Not only that, in many cases, this unscrupulous performance of sexual act ends in murder of the raped girl or woman.

Very young girls are abducted even from near their homes and their naked bodies are later found in the bushes. Chaudhuri tries to imply the intensity of the crime by saying. “Taking a lift from a stranger has become taking the risk of being raped or raped and murdered” (1997:105).

Another manifestation of malignant decadence is seen in baby-lifting. Young women craving for a child steal a newborn baby even from the maternity hospitals. Babies are also lifted from prams. Killing of babies by unmarried mothers in order to unburden themselves is the most diabolic act seen in the English society.

At the last part of his treatment of the malignant features of English decadence, Chaudhuri takes note of a kind of crime which is unprecedented in the history of all previous ages of decadence, i.e., massacre of young children. He gives examples of this horrific act of massacre.

He argues that there can be many interpretations as to the inscrutable motive behind a maniac’s killing a lot of young children, but they can in no way be justified and the occurrence will always bear the testimony to the existence of the malignant features of English decadence.

Chaudhuri’s criticism of contemporary English people and culture does not emanate from his position as an immigrant. In fact, he never considered himself to be an immigrant. He found his position quite different from that of his countrymen who also settled
in England. He has very subtly made the distinction between their respective status in England and has explained on the pretext of a flippant joke, the ulterior motive of his living in England. As he puts in his diary published in The Spectator in 1988:

I totally reject the status of immigrant. So when those whom I consider to be genuine immigrants ask me why, I say: 'Because in the first instance I did not come here of my own will as you did of yours, but was brought over; next, a true Indian immigrant becomes wealthy in Britain whereas I have become almost a pauper.' Hearing this, they ask me, and quite justifiably: 'Then why do you live in England?' I reply -- and this is the joke: 'In order to show Englishmen how their fathers dressed, how their fathers ate and drank, and how their fathers wrote English.' What I mean is that insofar as I have adopted English ways I have the traditional English manner. The misuse of English would make me feel that I was actually trying to teach Englishmen their language. (1998:110)

In the same diary he has cited a couple of examples to substantiate his ideas about traditional English dressing, eating, and drinking from which the contemporary Englishmen have allegedly deviated much. He is critical of these as an Englishman, not as an immigrant.

The reason why Chaudhuri lived in Oxford despite disliking most of the things in contemporary England, can well be traced in his Bengali book Amar Devottor Sampatti in which he devotes a whole chapter titled "Why I Am Living in England"[Ami Keno Blete Achi]. Among his cogent reasons for his choice, he includes suitable climate, preference for English food, the opportunity for using the libraries of the city for his work, easy access to the publisher, the National Health Scheme, and social welfare conducive
to the life of the elderly, which he was. As Fakrul Alam puts it: "England may be in a state of decline and most things in contemporary England may disgust him, but Oxford can provide him mental and physical comforts which he would not have in India. He could have easily added to his list what we have gleaned from *A Passage to England* : living in Oxford, he is as close to "timeless England" as he can be" (Kain, 1997:56).

At certain point of time in his life, Chaudhuri got into the habit of making remarks on whatever changes he noticed in English life, whether in the shops, streets, buses, or homes. He distinguished between the changes he noticed before he was fifty years of age and those he saw at the last decade of his life. The earlier changes were, according to him, more revolutionary than the later ones about which he was rather impatient. In the earlier changes were included, among others, the disappearance of British rule in India and of the British Empire ‘on which the sun never set’. He looked at the later changes in a spirit of philosophical inquiry, got puzzled both by their nature and by the attitude of the English people to them and hence complained of them. He was also bewildered by the Englishmen’s stoical acceptance of the changes. He has noted in his diary the changes in their behaviour which he came across. Firstly, during his first visit to Stratford-upon-Avon, he could buy some goods and take them with him before his cheque was cashed. But later the same Chaudhuri was asked to show his bank card for even a cheque for five pounds. Not only that when he gave a note, the change was counted penny by penny on his palm. He also did not like the display of the notice in the shops with the caution ‘Thieves will be
prosecuted" because he thought that such notice indirectly proclaimed the shopper’s being a "potential thief" which was a disgrace to a gentleman. Again he mentions the example of the Bodleian Library to prove the change. From 1968-1980, he was never asked to show his admission card, but later he had to show it every time he went there. Even in the library a man was being treated as a "potential thief". Chaudhuri voices his utter disapproval of such changes in the English people’s approach, however trivial they might look. That Chaudhuri was a blind admirer of British life and culture does not stand to reason on this ground.

In the concluding chapter of his book, *Three Horsemen* Chaudhuri adds a short note on the decadence in the United States also. He, however, did not have the same first-hand experience of American decadence as he had of the English although he visited the United States thrice in his life.

He had a notion that the bond of marriage among the American people had become very loose and therefore there was no need to go to the most brutal extreme of lust. That is to say, American decadence did not exhibit the most malignant features of the English like rape accompanied by murder of the victims. He observes that marriages and separations have become a trivial matter in the American life. As if, they marry for sports! He comments:

But it is precisely this disarray of marriage which is the greatest revolution in the mores of the American people, which I regard as a feature of their decadence. I do not understand this, however. Why and how did it come about? Marriage was the most stable human relationship
among the American people. Even down to the third quarter of the nineteenth century, marriage was assumed to be so indissoluble that a young wife who discovered that her husband was intolerable in every way would still live with him, and not seek a divorce. (1997: 126)

To show the marked deviation from the tradition, Chaudhuri gives a candid account of the traditional American marriage as depicted and expounded in two great novels by Henry James, namely *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Europeans*. He quotes from both the novels to prove the fact that since the late nineteenth century in the United States, the old-established concept of man-woman relationship has been abandoned. "It is," he says, "a total abandonment of the American *mos majorum*—the way of the ancestors" (1997:129). He establishes his view on American decadence on the basis of what is happening to the practice of marriage and resents their lax attitude to it. He considers the Americans as "the most degenerate people in the world" (Fallowel, 1991:245).

Chaudhuri further points out that technology in America with all its achievements and prospects of a new way of living, is not also immune to decadence. The probable failure of the scientific inventions to infuse a new life into human existence is the most baffling paradox in human life according to him. In his analysis, it is the people of the United States who would display decadence in its most dogmatic form, and the latest global decadence in history has its centre of dissemination in the United States, because America is the youngest nation in Western history and what it has created is a local version of European civilization. Chaudhuri distinguishes
American decadence from the previous ones and considers it to be of a completely new form, which spreads unchecked in the age of machines. With the spread of things from the West to the rest of the world, the entire humanity is menaced by the contagion! Chaudhuri rightly worries: “...among Americans and, following their example, among some Europeans, including the English, decadence has come to be regarded as the normal condition of human life, though not the most desirable. There is fanaticism behind decadence, a form of hubris never seen before. This makes decadence capable of subjugating the human mind” (1997:136-137).

In such a state of affairs, a man with an objective historical outlook like Chaudhuri himself, cannot but envisage that the future of human existence has turned ‘uncertain’ and ‘unpredictable’. He sees the present world as ‘vide et neant’, empty with nothingness. Although he is optimistic of the advent of a new great age, he does not know how it would come.

*Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* is a major work on the themes of decadence in England, Europe, and the West. Chaudhuri also devotes one chapter to the analysis of decadence in India. He shows that there had been two periods of decadence in India. The first one was at the end of the twelfth century about two hundred years before the Muslim conquest and the second in the eighteenth century, after the death of the Mogul emperor Aurangzeb. The first decadence caused the abolition of the ancient Hindu civilization and the second, of the Indo-Islamic. With this knowledge of history, he felt that some essential features of Indian cultural life were disappearing. He sums up his examination of Indian decadence set down in 1947. To quote: “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 arose to take their place. I have never even read about such a process as I have passed through: It was unadulterated decadence” (1997:110). Chaudhuri gives an account of different aspects and stages of political, social, and cultural decadence in India. He thinks that the most striking feature of the post-independence Indian government was its falsity. At the present regime, he considers government by an ‘uncreative’ and ‘unproductive’ bureaucracy, as a definite sign of decadence of Indian political life. Again he regards Indian people’s expression of Americanism as the most apparent sign of social and cultural decadence. He concludes the chapter by showing a difference between decadence in India and decadence in the West: “As a cultural satellite of the West, India was bound to share its decadence. But there is a difference between the two manifestations. The Western rouses a civilized man to anger; the Indian benumbs him into despair” (1997:124).

This last literary effort of Chaudhuri captures much critical attention both positive and negative. In his piece “Extremism” Rabbi Charles H. Middleburgh says:

In his last book... the centenarian Indian academic professor Nirad Chaudhuri analyzed the changes that he saw in the world around him, particularly focusing on individualism, nationalism and democracy, which he believed acquired debased meanings in the contemporary world. His prognosis was not encouraging, he believed that we live in a vulgar age, and that the hallmark of such times is that they not only create vulgarity but seek to prosecute everything that is not vulgar.
Dr. Middleburgh agrees to Chaudhuri's notion of decadence to certain extent as he puts it in the same essay: "...whether you accept Chaudhuri's opinion or not, it is hard not to conclude, with the plethora of evidence and incident that we might accrue, that the tectonic plates of British society are on the move, and that the resultant changes to our way of life may well be negative, albeit not as dark as the good professor painted them" (ulps.org/sermontext3.html). On account of Chaudhuri's recurrent treatment of the theme of decadence K. Natwar-Singh calls him the Indian Spengler. Singh treats the book as "not a rehash of Spengler but a sequel to him" (Dasgupta, 1997:103).

Shyamala A. Narayan in her piece "India" (Journal of Commonwealth Literature Vol. 33. no. 3) however, observes that Chaudhuri's treatment of the decadence of modern civilization owes a lot to Pascal and de Tocqueville. Chetan Karnani gives a moderate evaluation of the book. To quote: "This book is generally written in a mood of bleak despair and such optimism is an occasional episode in the general drama of acute pessimism. The best part of the book is the third one which describes decadance in England, India and America. This is authentic because Chaudhuri lived in these three countries and had first hand experience therein" (2001:158). R.K. Kaul comments that the book is:

a hotch-potch. It cannot be classified as a travelogue or a Jeremiad, or polemical journalism or a book of popular philosophy. It has something of all these.... Only Chaudhuri makes a show of having recast his material in the manner of the Revelation of St. John. But the polemical journalist and the popularizer is only thinly disguised.... The only addition is the note on the decadence of American society and culture. (1998:147-148)
Harish Trivedi remarks: "...Three Horsemen... is, at a mere 137 pages, no more than a splutter. The three horses of the title, which are individualism, nationalism and democracy, have been his betes noire or at least hobby horses for some time now, and the third and last part of the book... will be no news even to casual Chaudhuri-watchers. For Chaudhuri, not ripeness but rottenness is all" (Dasgupta, 1997:131-132).

*Three Horsemen* is, of course, not free from faults in regard to its observations and style. There is a lot of repetition from the same book and also from many of his earlier essays published at different times. One may give Chaudhuri a benefit of doubt and say that the effort is a reinforcement of his earlier observations rather than a discovery of new truths. There also appear a number of unsubstantiated arguments, digressions, trifling details and sweeping generalizations noticeable in his treatment of various aspects of decadence in the life of the British and the Americans.

Despite all its shortcomings, *Three Horsemen* is not devoid of the salient features of Chaudhuri’s writing. This book is a landmark in apocalyptic literature and proves Chaudhuri a dispassionate critic of the West. It is characterized by Chaudhuri’s deep sense of precognition, calculated prose, and acerbic judgements on a great variety of issues in the 20th century Western world. His forthright and vitriolic critique of the Western morals and lifestyles also helps to absolve him of the charge of being an Anglophile and an Indophobe.
The true nature of Chaudhuri’s attitude towards England should be sought in his works on England, Europe, and the West in their totality, and not in any particular reference singled out of its context. It is immature to evaluate it simply by the dedication of his Autobiography which reads: “To the memory of the British empire in India which conferred subjecthood on us but withheld citizenship; to which yet everyone of us threw out the challenge: “civis britannicus sum” because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the same British rule”.

The apparent eulogy of the British rule popularly makes Chaudhuri out as a staunch Anglophile. Harish Trivedi says: “…Indian writers in English have always been relatively soft on the Raj but, for the most blatant expression of what has come to be called the colonial cringe, this dedication takes the cake”(Dagupta, 1997:123). Edward Shils comments: “That [the dedication] gave much offence to Indian intellectuals, who are capable of becoming zealous patriots, even chauvinists, when their country is severely censured by one who does not share their political views”(1988:66).

Chaudhuri, however, does not agree with his detractors as to the meaning of the dedication. He questions their authority who mistook it for a eulogy and claims that they have failed to delve deep into it. Chaudhuri argues that this can be seen as an indirect condemnation of the British rule. What he applauded and took pride in was the receptive mentality of Indian people by virtue of which they, despite being subjugated by the British, could build up European culture in India contrary to the rulers’ willingness.
Chaudhuri lays the onus of proof of this logic on the Latin sentence in the dedication: \textit{Civis Britannicus Sum} [I am a British citizen]. He explains that this is in imitation of Cicero [\textit{Civis Romanas Sum}: I am a Roman citizen].

Michael T. Kaufman in his piece appeared in \textit{The New York Times} (August 3, 1999) explains: “... those lines infuriated many of Mr. Chaudhuri’s countrymen, who never read much beyond the dedication and who came to regard the author not so much as the Bengali supremacist that he was but as a sycophant for the departed British.”

Chaudhuri’s attitude towards England did not always remain the same. There was a gradual development in his treatment of English people and their culture in keeping with the flux of time and situation. It may be marked by the difference in his pre and post settlement in England. Edward Shils says: “... since he has settled in England, he has become convinced that the British people ... have lost their sense of national greatness, and that British society and culture have fallen into decadence” (1988: 67). Amit Chaudhuri agrees: “... he was never happy with a Britain that had lost its Empire and become a satellite of America” (hinduonnet.com). But Chaudhuri never changed his mind as to what he called “Timeless England”.

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1. The citizens of Sicily while imprisoned by their tyrannical ruler Verres, an aristocratic Roman, cried out this slogan.
Chaudhuri’s treatment of the West is not a theoretical approach, nor is it a shrewd analysis of the political, military, and cultural hegemony of the West over the East as has been discovered by Edward Said. In his famous book *Orientalism* (1978) Said shows how on pretext of unearthing the secrets of another culture the Orientalists were exerting their authority on the East and effectively providing Europe with images of the “Other”. He identifies the ulterior motive of the West in the Orientalist project. To quote:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient... without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage-- and even produce--the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. (1978:3)

To Said’s thinking, Orientalism serves as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin say in the general introduction to *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*: “European imperialism took various forms in different times and places and proceeded both through conscious planning and contingent occurrence” (1995:1).

Chaudhuri’s analysis of the West is not in line with what Said calls examining Orientalism as a discourse. Chaudhuri, in fact, does
not theorize about the European hegemony over the East. He simply tries to expose the good and ugly aspects of English, European, and Western life in the light of his perception. Even his concept of the West is a traditional one. He means by the West only Europe and America. But nowadays, with the advent of post-colonial and other related theories and criticisms, the concept of the West has utterly changed. The term is no longer being used just to define a specific geographical area, it is rather used to imply an inclusion of a strange mixture of countries and areas. The West is being seen as a binary opposition to the East that pretends to universality but in reality embodies the interests of certain forces. It represents a characteristic example of Eurocentrism, which refers to the perspective of a set of beliefs or attitudes that form an ideological force. Christopher Gog-Wilt considers the change from a European to a Western identity at the end of nineteenth century as a “transformation in the nature of cultural hegemony” (1995:1). Most interestingly, he points out a link between the fall of the British Empire and the rise of the West. Given all these developments of critical investigations, Chaudhuri’s treatment of the West is obviously a traditional and conventional one. But whatever the critical or theoretical value of Chaudhuri’s delineation of the West may be, its literary merit cannot be denied.

Chaudhuri was not the only Indian writer to be imbued with the spirit of Anglophilism. He was, in fact, a successor of a trend in India initiated by the canonical figures of Bengal renaissance like Rammohan Roy, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore etc., who were more or less admirers of the British. Rammohan’s attitudes towards British
rule can be learnt from the French scientist Victor Tacquemont’s story of travelling India. To quote: “Formerly when he [Rammohan Roy] was a young man, ... Europe was odious to him; in the blind patriotism of youth he detested the English and all that came from them. Since that time he had learnt about the benefits which have followed upon the establishment of the British powers, and has come to regard it as beneficial to India” (Chaudhuri, 1996:132). Michael Madhusudan Dutt turned an apostate for becoming an English poet. About England and Englishmen Vivekananda says: “No one ever landed on English soil with more hatred in his heart for a race than I did for the English... but the more I lived among them and saw how the machine was working – the English national life – and mixed with them, I found what the heartbeat of the nation was, the more I loved them.... They are a nation of heroes ...” (Chaudhuri, 1996:135). To Bankim Chatterjee’s thinking, the Bengali do not bear comparison with the English. He says: “The Bengali can never be the English, the English are far more virtuous than the Bengali” (Majumdar, 2000:132, translation added). Tagore also welcomed English spirit to Indian life, culture, and literature with equal fervour.

So like many of his preceding and contemporary members of what is called “Enlightenment Project” Chaudhuri believed that among all the governments and rules India has thus far experienced, the British regime was the best despite all its shortcomings. In fact, he was an imperialist so far as his attitude towards the British is concerned. He held that imperialism could be a civilizing force. The British were the transmitters to India of the impact of modernization.
Chaudhuri’s two *bete noirs*, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, two great nationalist leaders, were also admirers of the British to some extent. Gandhi glorified the Western civilization and Nehru called himself the last Englishman to rule in India. We are told that in Maharashtra, a great reformist like Mahatma Phule believed (and declared) that the British rule over India was god’s own dispensation! Chaudhuri is, therefore, not the lone admirer of the British and hence does not deserve all the blasphemy and blame poured on him at home.