

# A POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI'S WRITINGS

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BY

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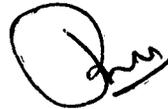
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## CERTIFICATE

As per the Goa University Ordinance, I certify that this thesis titled 'A Postcolonial Critique of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's Writings' is a record of the research work done by the candidate Sri Tamal Guha during the period of study under my guidance and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma in the Goa University or elsewhere.



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As required vide Article 9(ii) of Goa University Ordinance OB-9, it is stated that my thesis titled 'A Postcolonial Critique of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's Writings' is a work based on new relations of facts observed by others and it tends to the general advancement of knowledge. The sources from which my information has been derived have been indicated in the Select Bibliography at the end of the thesis.



(Tamal Guha)

Research Student

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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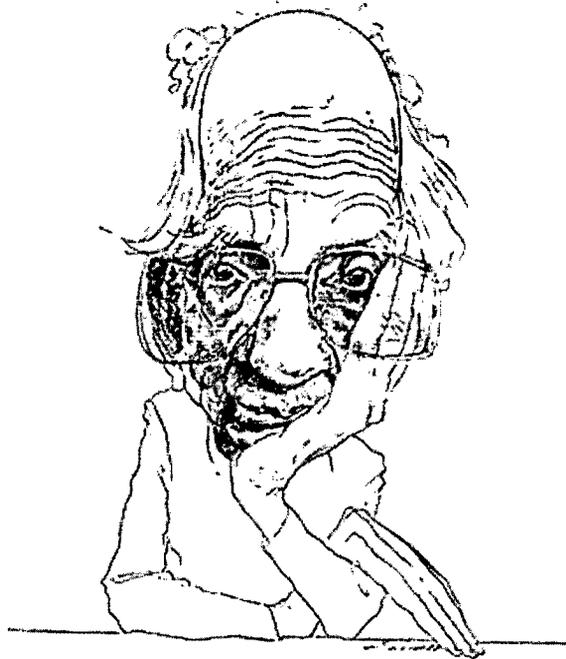
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*"Human experience, which is constantly contradicting theory, is the great test of truth."*

*- Samuel Johnson, Boswell: Life*



Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri (23 November 1897 - 1 August 1999)

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*"The autobiographer Nirad C. Chaudhuri has been, throughout his long life, an erudite, contrary and mischievous presence."*

— *Salman Rushdie, 'India and world literature'*

#### 1.1 A BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHER

All writers write out of their lives' experiences. Hence, in order to analyse their writings, it is helpful to know their lives. Such knowledge helps an analyst to gain a comprehension better than that of a lay reader. It is for the purpose of a comprehensive analysis that this section sketches the life of writer Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri (23 November 1897 – 01 August 1999).<sup>1</sup> The sketch highlights those aspects of his life which appear to have influenced his works.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri was born in a small town of eastern Bengal, now in

Bangladesh. The second son in a family of eight children, he made his father anxious about his worldly prospects. The senior Chaudhuri used to say, "I have no anxiety for my other sons, but Nirad is utterly unfit to go through the world." (Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India: 1921 - 1952 xxi) Most of Nirad's siblings became well placed in society — his elder brother was a High Court advocate, the brother immediately after Nirad was a paediatric doctor, the next brother was a civil engineer and the sisters were wealthy homemakers. In stark contrast to their socially successful lives, Nirad became an accounts clerk, a journal editor, a private secretary and a news writer at different points in time. He was frequently without work or working in part-time jobs.

Nirad Chaudhuri and his siblings had received the best education which their parents could afford. Initially, it was the father who taught them English grammar. "The two years," writes Nirad, "were the decisive years in my understanding of the fundamental principles of the English language." (The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian 140) After their linguistic roots had been planted at home, the Chaudhuri siblings were put in schools for further studies. They were also placed under tutors at home. However, boy Nirad grew dissatisfied with the low standard of his English textbooks and read up those of his elder brother. His learning of English is of particular interest to us because he finally became a writer in this language.<sup>2</sup>

After completing middle-school in his home town, Nirad Chaudhuri was sent

to Calcutta (now Kolkata) for high school. The World War I (1914 – 1918) was raging at the time and he followed the news of the war out of personal curiosity. He was surprised to find, however, that the gravity of the situation was not being conveyed by its official communication. Chaudhuri happened to discover that the communiqués through the media tried to downplay the reverses suffered by the Britain-led Allied Forces. This surprise finding taught him the necessity of forming his own opinions, independent of others. He writes, “So I would not accept an opinion simply because it was a product of the times.” (Thy Hand xxvii) It was the genesis of his self-opinionated persona. <sup>3</sup>

After completing his schooling, Nirad Chaudhuri studied Arts with History Honours in a Calcutta college. Out of personal interest, he also read literature in Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, English, Greek, Latin, French and German. The result of his wide reading was that, in the examination for Bachelor of Arts, he stood first in the First Class. Despite such an excellent result, it turned out to be his last examination ever. As his reading habits kept growing, he could not confine himself to the limited syllabus of an examination any more. Consequently, he dropped out of the course for Master of Arts in History in which he had taken admission. About his lack of a post-graduate degree, Chaudhuri wrote, “It put academic employment out of my reach, because in India no one could become a university teacher without the MA degree.” (Thy Hand 4)

After dropping out of the MA course, Nirad Chaudhuri managed to get a

clerical job. It was in the government's Military Accounts Department and it revived his earlier interest in matters military. He started working well and was recommended for a promotional examination. In the study leave of two months, however, he did not prepare for the test but read up Matthew Arnold's poetry instead. The Scholar Gypsy inspired him to "leave the world, with powers / Fresh, undiverted to the world without, / Firm to their mark, not spent on other things; / Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt, / Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings". The poem's spirit dissuaded Chaudhuri from pursuing careerist goals rather than scholarly ideals. He decided not to take the promotional examination because it would tempt him towards careerism and away from scholasticism.<sup>4</sup>

After declining promotion avenues in the job, Nirad Chaudhuri started to dislike government service itself. Ironically, he disliked anti-government agitations too. While he did not like government service because of its monotony, his dislike for anti-government agitations was because of their coercion. During a strike protesting the visit of the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, Chaudhuri saw that some of the protestors held whips in hand. They were forcing other Indians to join the strike. Chaudhuri resented such bullying so much that he jumped their barricades and narrowly escaped being roughed up. He writes, "All my life I have resented and defied any attempt at coercing me." (Thy Hand 19) The more he got agitated by such incidents, the more he wanted an escape to a scholastic idyll. He penned an article in literary criticism and published it in The

Modern Review, an English magazine with all-India circulation. Soon thereafter, Chaudhuri chucked up his clerical job but continued writing articles.

As a budding scholar, Nirad Chaudhuri was painstakingly meticulous. An example of his painstaking nature was the trip he made from Benares to Sarnath in 1926. He walked the distance of eight miles in the hot sun instead of taking a more comfortable mode of transport in order to vicariously experience a historical journey. He explains, "I recalled that pilgrims had come from far-off China on foot to visit the place of origin of their religion, and I thought it would be sacrilegious softness if I went to Sarnath in a horse-drawn carriage." (Thy Hand 185) Chaudhuri's meticulous scholarship was seen in the originality of his observations too. One of his observations was on the comparative artistry of the sculptures at Sarnath and those at Puri. He noticed that the beauty of the former was puritanical while that of the latter was sexual. Another original observation of his was regarding the anatomy of the sculpted figurines. He found that the figurines, whether at Sarnath or at Puri, were subtle representations of the local populace.<sup>5</sup>

For all the places Nirad Chaudhuri could not visit, he had to rely on books. They became his "mental nourishment" and buying expensive books became a habit. (Thy Hand 193) He was forced to buy them on credit though, because he was jobless. Consequently, he had to escape the creditors, for which he used to lock himself inside his house. Such humiliation ended only when his booksellers and landlord were paid their dues by his father. Nonetheless, Nirad justified taking

credit or borrowing money on the ground that he was too pre-occupied to earn a living. In his pursuit of knowledge, he was like the holy mendicants who get so involved in meditation that they do not mind begging for food.

To take a break from this difficult situation, Nirad Chaudhuri went to his hometown in eastern Bengal for a short trip. It turned out to be his last visit there. After coming back to Calcutta in early 1928, he did not return to East Bengal ever again. It was the first step of his westward march in life, where there was no looking east. In Chaudhuri's words, "My life has always moved West, and once it has done so its direction has never been reversed." (Thy Hand 683)

Back in Calcutta, Nirad Chaudhuri started editing a monthly journal on literary polemics. This job was closer to his heart than his first one, clerkship, was. However, the city police found some article in his journal to be obscene and summoned him to their headquarters. Though he was let off with a warning, it is ironical that a fledgling anti-nationalist like him should have been harassed by the Calcutta Police which was otherwise notorious for harassing nationalists. Subsequently, Chaudhuri quit the journal because of a policy disagreement with one of its founders. He proved his editorial worth, nonetheless, as an editor by helping new writer Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyaya publish the famous novel Pather Panchali [The Song of the Road].<sup>6</sup>

After resigning his editor's job in late 1928, Nirad Chaudhuri got another.

He became an assistant editor of The Modern Review, the magazine which had published his maiden article. At that time, he came under the pan-Indian influence of Gandhi and broke the infamous Salt Act at a marsh of eastern Calcutta. He also supplemented one issue of his magazine with a picture pull-out of sixteen pages on the inspirational Dandi March. In Chaudhuri's words, "For the first and last time I became a Gandhian." (Thy Hand 251) This issue, dated May 1930, was so anti-colonial that it was proscribed by the British government. Around the same time, two of his younger brothers served six months of simple imprisonment for shouting Vande Mataram [Hail Mother] at street corners.

With a modest job in hand, Nirad Chaudhuri decided to get married. Having failed to choose his spouse himself, he wed a girl chosen for him by his father.<sup>7</sup> His eccentricity, though, could have put their conjugal compatibility at stake. On their first night after marriage, he asked his wife, "Have you listened to any European music?" (Thy Hand 351) The college-educated bride replied in the negative but spelt music composer Beethoven's name correctly! It reassured the Anglophile groom that his partner was not totally ignorant about Western culture.

Nirad Chaudhuri's wedded life took off precariously. Chaudhuri left The Modern Review for another publication as its editor. That publication wound up within a few months due to its owner's indifference and, consequently, Chaudhuri lost the job. The resulting crisis was made even more acute by the fact that he already had two children by then. Regarding his pecuniary status, Chaudhuri

writes figuratively, "It was like being on a raft after being shipwrecked, and drifting on the off-chance of being picked up by a ship." (Thy Hand 364)

Nirad Chaudhuri's saviour ship appeared in the form of Calcutta Municipal Corporation. He got a temporary job there. However, it was not only a breather but also an eye opener for him. He was shocked to see the corruption and nepotism in the civic body. It was at this stage that he formed his personal theories about India's past, present and future which he propagated for the rest of his life.<sup>8</sup>

Nirad Chaudhuri lost the temporary job at Calcutta Corporation in 1936. Then, he had to take up three part-time assignments simultaneously for his financial survival. He became a part-time literary assistant to the Sheriff of Calcutta, a part-time private secretary to the President of the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee and a free-lance commentator at All India Radio. The last two jobs were particularly significant for him. As a radio commentator, he wrote on international affairs, thereby widening his intellectual horizons. As a private secretary to the Congress leader, Chaudhuri was privy to the goings on within the Indian National Congress.<sup>9</sup> He had the rare opportunity of seeing from close quarters the leaders of India's freedom struggle, as if he "saw something of the greenroom behind the lighted stage, and the actors without the makeup as well as with its application." (Thy Hand 434) Familiarity with them bred contempt in him. The years were deeply disappointing, his only ray of hope being the birth of his third and youngest child.

Nirad Chaudhuri's temper was as short as his height. The short temper showed itself in bouts of physical aggression. Once he gave his doctor brother a blow for insulting him about his joblessness. He also kicked a young man down a staircase for accusing him of taking bribes as private secretary. In yet another incident, he beat a young writer in the face with a slipper for calling him a "servant" in the house of the Congress leader. (Thy Hand 574) He also declared his intention of fighting fellow Bengalis in case they tried to lynch him for his anti-Bengali utterances!

Nirad Chaudhuri subsequently left Bengal for Delhi, never to return to his home state again. This was the second step in his life's westward journey. In Delhi, he joined All India Radio's News Division as a script-writer and his brief was to write English commentaries on international issues like the raging World War II (1939 – 1945). After moving to Delhi, he did two things for the first time in his life — he wore European clothes and he studied Islamic architecture. Having seen the city's Islamic monuments, Chaudhuri understood "what relationship architecture bears to imperialism, which I had known only in theory from my reading of Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman history." (Thy Hand 736)

As British imperialism withdrew from India and the newly-created Pakistan, ferocious riots broke out in the sub-continent. Nirad Chaudhuri was so unsettled by those massacres of 1947 that he could not appreciate India's independence.

Weeks after Independence Day, he spotted Hindu men breaking shops at Connaught Place and looting articles. The next day he saw an old Sikh, whose stomach had been ripped open by a Muslim tonga driver. A couple of days later, he helped a Muslim man whose whole back had been "cut up and covered with blood which was congealing like jelly". (Thy Hand 847) Another day, he saw murdered corpses on a hospital footpath and at a railway station. A friend told him how a Muslim boy in Calcutta was forcibly drowned in a pond by Hindu men. A man was found tied to an electric pole, with a hole made in his skull so that he would bleed to death. In still another incident, Chaudhuri's brother tried in vain to prevent the murder of a poor old Muslim fruit-seller in his locality. Chaudhuri could never forget these horrors and they made him feel ashamed to be an Indian.<sup>10</sup>

Partition and independence made 1947 a landmark year in the history of the Indian sub-continent. The year was a turning point in the life of Nirad Chaudhuri as well. On a midsummer night, he got the idea of writing an autobiography in order to "write the history you have passed through and seen enacted before your eyes". (Thy Hand 868) It was a bizarre idea because autobiographies are generally written by famous people whereas he was yet to be so. Nevertheless, he started writing it the next morning. When he mailed the half-finished typescript to British publisher Hamish Hamilton for an advance opinion, the response from the latter was encouraging.

After it was completed, however, the manuscript was rejected by Hamilton.

Other well known publishers like Faber and Faber refused it too. Macmillan, another British publisher, finally published The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian in 1951 on the recommendation of literary critic John C. Squire. After that, ironically, the autobiographer did not remain unknown any more. The book was acclaimed and declaimed with equal vigour. For instance, writer Anita Desai appreciated it because of "its almost unique achievement in charting the development of a complex mind made up of its native Bengali and alien European languages". (jacket of Viking Penguin edition of The Autobiography) On the other hand, many readers denounced the book because of its pro-colonial remarks.<sup>11</sup>

Not only literary criticism, Nirad Chaudhuri also faced professional reprobation due to his book. Soon after the book was published, All India Radio (AIR) reprimanded him on a procedural matter. Then, the organisation compelled him to retire from service at the age of fifty-five without gratuity and other termination benefits. Chaudhuri was blacklisted as an external broadcaster too, ignoring his experience of fifteen years in the field. The premature retirement hit Nirad Chaudhuri where it hurts the most — finances. No offer was forthcoming, either from Indians or even from the British. In this situation, the French came to Chaudhuri's rescue. The French Ambassador in India offered him the editorship of the embassy's English bulletin. "What I could see was that he respected my literary ability," writes Chaudhuri, "and also deeply appreciated the love of France and French culture that I displayed in my writings." (Thy Hand 937)

It took another two years for the British establishment to acknowledge Nirad Chaudhuri. In 1955, the British Broadcasting Corporation offered him a sponsored trip to England in exchange for a series of talks on that country. "This, I was told, was an experiment," writes Chaudhuri, "and a very risky one it was, for they were backing a completely dark horse." (A Passage vii) Nevertheless, he took up the offer and visited England for the first time ever at the age of fifty-seven. It was his maiden visit to Europe but he could still give road directions to taxi drivers, so detailed had been his knowledge of the famous cities of the continent. Chaudhuri's radio talks and some related articles were later published as his second book, A Passage to England (1959).

Nirad Chaudhuri's third book, The Continent of Circe – Being an Essay on the Peoples of India (1965), was on India. It won the Alfred Duff-Cooper Memorial Prize, a prize given to the year's best work in English or French in the areas of history, political science or biography. Chaudhuri made his second trip to Britain, this time to receive the coveted prize.

Nirad Chaudhuri wrote a fourth book in English, The Intellectual in India (1967), before publishing his first ever Bengali work. It may be noted that in Bengali, Chaudhuri wrote his name differently from that in English. While in English he initialized his middle name and signed as "Nirad C. Chaudhuri", in Bengali he used his full name and signed as "Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri". This minor difference could, perhaps, have been the symptom of a major dichotomy —

it might have been a sign of Chaudhuri's identity crisis. The issue of his split personality will be dealt with in Chapter IV of this thesis.<sup>12</sup>

Nirad Chaudhuri emigrated permanently to Britain in 1970, initially to research European Indologist Friedrich Max Muller's documents in the University of Oxford. It was the final step of his life's west-bound journey and was made possible by a rich Cambridge sociologist, Professor Edward Albert Shils, who gave him a handsome loan at the time. Regarding the help he received from different people, Chaudhuri wrote, "This outside help came to me unsolicited, given freely to me by some of my countrymen but mostly by individual Englishmen, all of whom perhaps saw something in me which was worth supporting." (Thy Hand xi) Thenceforth, the Chaudhuri couple lived at 20 Lathbury Road of Oxfordshire county.

After Nirad Chaudhuri settled in Britain, he taught at the American universities of Texas and Chicago as a visiting professor. For somebody who could not be a professor in India because of inadequate qualification, it would have been a dream come true. He also became the subject of a documentary film, Adventures of a Brown Man in Search of Civilization (1972), directed by James Ivory of Merchant-Ivory Productions.<sup>13</sup> The film's title was taken from a chapter in Chaudhuri's A Passage to England. Chaudhuri's conceit was that he was in England to show Englishmen "how their fathers dressed, how their fathers ate and drank and how their fathers wrote English." (The Spectator September 1988)

Nirad Chaudhuri's first book from Britain was a biography of a famous Indology scholar, Max Mueller. Titled Scholar Extraordinary – The Life of Professor the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Muller, P.C. (1974), the book won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975 as the year's best work in Indian English. Chaudhuri's second, and last, biography was Clive of India – A Political and Psychological Essay (1975). There would have been one more biography by Chaudhuri had he accepted an offer by Jacqueline Onassis, the widow of former American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Chaudhuri declined to write a biography of her second husband, the Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis. Refusing such a high-society offer was an act of intellectual arrogance by Chaudhuri. He also publicly refuted a remark of British politician Norman Beresford Tebbit. The latter had suggested that love of cricket was the acid test of English patriotism. Chaudhuri, however, wrote back that the love of Kenneth Grahame's novel The Wind in the Willows (1908), Stilton cheese and the opera were the three real tests for authentic Englishhood. <sup>14</sup>

Nirad Chaudhuri wrote four more books in English, apart from a number of essays. One of these books was his autobiography's sequel, Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India: 1921 – 1952 (1987). These two books put together make his autobiography the longest in English. In that sense, his two-volume autobiography holds a record of sorts. Another achievement of Chaudhuri was his last book, Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse (1997). It was written at the age of

ninety-eight. In his words, "I have never read or heard of any author, however great or productive in his heyday, doing that." (Three Horsemen Preface)

An academic achievement of Nirad Chaudhuri was that even without a post-graduate degree, he received two post-doctoral degrees from the universities of Oxford and of Stirling. At the Oxford ceremony for conferring a honorary Doctor of Letters degree, the Public Orator said, "The eminent Bengali whom I now present is thoroughly versed both in English and European poetry and has interpreted Indian society and customs to us with great intellectual ability, illuminating incidentally several aspects of our society." (translated from Latin) In 1992, Queen Elizabeth II made Chaudhuri an Honorary Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. <sup>15</sup>

In a fortunate turn of events, Nirad Chaudhuri was forgiven by India's intelligentsia. The Visva-Bharati university at Santiniketan bestowed on him its highest honour, the Desikottama. President K. R. Narayanan expressed a wish that Chaudhuri's "sharp intellect and scintillating pen continue to enthrall and instruct the world." ('Nirad felicitated' The Indian Express 22 November 1997) Prime Minister I. K. Gujral greeted him on his centennial birthday. Chaudhuri, a widower in the last five years of his life, died at the age of one hundred and one years. He left behind three sons — Dhruva, Kirti and Prithvi — and grandchildren, all of whom are well-settled in their lives.

Nirad Chaudhuri seems to have borrowed his cynical attitude from the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes (412 – 323 B.C.), the one who walked the streets with a lamp in daytime looking for a human being. Both of them were born in small towns of their respective countries but moved on to live in big cities. Diogenes was influenced by the Oracle at Delphi just as Chaudhuri was by The Scholar Gypsy. They were also similar in audacity to the high and mighty of their times — Diogenes refused to entertain Alexander the Great and Chaudhuri refused to oblige Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, as has been mentioned earlier. Neither Diogenes nor Chaudhuri was interested in any national identity, both were cosmopolitan in the true sense of the term.

## 1.2 HIS CONTROVERSIAL CREATIONS

The previous section outlined the life of Nirad Chaudhuri, with a look-out for his pro-colonial leanings. This section outlines his works, again with an eye on his pro-colonialism. His works will be introduced and his colonial sympathies highlighted. Chaudhuri was a writer of non-fiction. In fact, he concentrated so much on non-fiction that he never published the lone piece of fiction which he happened to write once upon a time. Within the gamut of non-fiction, however, Chaudhuri wrote in various genres. His favourite genres were autobiography and socio-political criticism though he has also written biography, travelogue and literary criticism. These works are spread across sixteen books and a number of

articles. All his books and anthologies of selected articles are listed alphabetically in the Select Bibliography at the end of this thesis.

Nirad Chaudhuri's maiden book was The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (1951). The title, with uncharacteristic modesty, admits that the autobiographer was not a known personality. At that time Chaudhuri was one of All India Radio's news writers, practically a non-entity. His gigantic ego, though, had egged him to write an autobiography. The book is strange in many ways. For one, it covers only the first twenty-three years of the autobiographer's life although he was already fifty-three years old. A second oddity of the autobiography is that it is not wholly autobiographical, but partly historical.<sup>16</sup> In this part-autobiographical, part-historical book, he considered the British Empire in India as more a regenerative era than an exploitative one. He felt that Britain had sped up rather than slowed down India's social and material progress. Hence, he took it upon himself to express the 'gratitude' on behalf of all Indians. As an expression of that peculiar gratitude, Chaudhuri dedicated his book to the memory of British imperialism. The only grudge he nursed against imperialism was that it did not give us British citizenship. That highly controversial dedication, which Khushwant Singh later called a "bait" for wogs, reads:-

To the memory of the  
British Empire in India  
Which conferred subjecthood on us  
But withheld citizenship;

To which yet

Every one of us threw out the challenge:

'*Civis Britannicus Sum*' [Citizen of Britannia I am]

Because

All that was good and living

Within us

Was made, shaped, and quickened

By the same British rule. (The Autobiography v)<sup>17</sup>

Even after writing the long Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, Nirad Chaudhuri continued to write about himself. In 1987, he published a massive sequel to it, named Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India: 1921 – 1952. The main title "Thy Hand, Great Anarch!" is extracted from Pope's mock-epic The Dunciad (1728). That eighteenth century satire ends with the couplet: "Thy hand! great Anarch! lets the curtain fall / And universal darkness buries all." Obviously, Chaudhuri's title implies that India fell to anarchy and plunged into darkness during the period 1921 – 1952. Most Indians, on the contrary, believe that the period was the one when India's nationalist movement grew from maturity to fruition. The reason for Chaudhuri's unconventional take in this regard is complex. He had been so shocked by the wrongdoings of average Indian politicians that he refused to understand the righteousness of their professed nationalism. The hypocrisy and corruption of Indians, which he saw aplenty, did not allow him to be an enthusiast of pro-Indian nationalism. For instance, he had seen random malpractices at

Calcutta's municipal corporation.<sup>18</sup> It was the only organisation under Indian control in the first half of the twentieth century, and consequently, without British supervision. The absence of British control emboldened the presence of Indian corruption, according to Chaudhuri. As he saw power corrupting Indians, he feared that absolute power would corrupt us absolutely. Thus, he felt that India would be ruled worse by Indians than by the British. Chaudhuri forebode:

I anticipated that transfer of political power to Indians would make the Indian people victims of an insidious exploitation unparalleled even in the long history of their sufferings. I became opposed to the idea, and said to myself in the words of the cliché that India in that event would become Calcutta Corporation writ large.

I saw that happening in Bengal and in all the other provinces of India in 1937 with the introduction of provincial autonomy by the British Act of 1935, and after 1947 I saw that phenomenon in the Central Government. (Thy Hand 382-83)

Nirad Chaudhuri's censure of Indians was not confined to his two-volume autobiography. It overflowed onto his socio-political criticism, a genre in which he wrote six books.<sup>19</sup> The first of his socio-political books was The Continent of Circe – Being an Essay on the Peoples of India (1965). Its main title, "The Continent of Circe", refers to Homer's Odyssey. In that epic, Circe was the name of a sorceress with a magic drink which transformed Ulysses' men into swine. Chaudhuri's title implies that the sub-continent of India was possessed by Circe and that the British

imperialists had been transformed into porcine creatures. Another noticeable aspect of the book is its sub-title. It refers to the people of India as "Peoples of India". This highlights their plurality instead of singularity, their heterogeneity rather than homogeneity. It seems that Chaudhuri did not find much unity in India's diversity, and hence, the different communities of India are discussed separately in the book. As a strange example of negative secularism, Chaudhuri writes ill of each of them! He thinks of the middle and lower class Hindus as double-faced, upper middle class Hindus as the dominant community, Muslims as a false minority, Christians as a hybrid community, and Parsis and Sikhs as foreign and political communities respectively. Chaudhuri also accuses the ancient Aryans of a superiority complex against their contemporary indigenes. He claims that their mentality was as poor as that of the British against Indians. He equates the Aryans with the British on the ground that both races had virulent anti-native attitudes. In Chaudhuri's words:

They called themselves '*Arya*' (Aryan), which signified 'nobly born', and the pre-existing people '*Anarya*' (not Aryan), and they made the boundary line between the two absolutely impassable in theory, and very difficult to cross in practice. The notion of racial superiority, which was present in this distinction from the outset, was later widened to include that of moral superiority. The Hindu said to a fellow-Hindu, 'You are *Arya*,' in the same tone as that which an English colonial assumed when he said to a fellow-colonial, 'You are *White*.' Any dishonourable act or conduct was described as being

unworthy of an Aryan, or befitting only a non-Aryan. The Sanskrit phrase *Anarya-jushta* (*Na+Aryajushta* or *Anarya+jushta*) might have meant either. (The Continent 41)

After having discussed the ethnic communities of India, Nirad Chaudhuri turned towards India's intellectual community. This time it was in his second socio-political critique, The Intellectual in India (1967) — his first book to be published in India. In the book, he attributes social reformer Rammohun Roy's intellect to western liberalism. Chaudhuri argues that Roy could realize the need for social reform due to his occidental learning.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter, Chaudhuri goes on to detail other influences of western thought. He says that while ancient and mediaeval India had been inspired by Hindu and Muslim scriptures respectively, pre-independence thought was influenced by western literature. He hints that the prose form was largely unknown to Indian languages in the pre-British ages. According to him, prose was a gift from European literature and it spread like water hyacinth in the stagnant pool of Indian expression. As prose swamped the literary scene, Indians outgrew their liking for indigenous forms. Chaudhuri notes:

Prose was created for the first time in all the literary languages, which had so far embodied all their creation in poetry. Genres of European literature — fiction, short-story and novel, essays, literary criticism — were all introduced and acclimatized, and its readers gradually lost all taste for writings of the traditional type. (The Intellectual 11)

Nirad Chaudhuri's third socio-political critique was less formal than his previous ones. It was on the family life of Indians, titled To Live or Not to Live! – An Essay on Living Happily with Others (1970). The main title, "To Live or Not to Live", was adapted from Shakespeare's Hamlet (1600). However, Chaudhuri's intention was more Puckish than Hamletian. Whereas Hamlet had questioned the necessity of his being, Chaudhuri intends to question that of others. He cannot understand why some people continue to exist! This impish query is revealed in the book's introduction where he writes:

I would not deal with social and family life without raising the basic question: Do we live at all?

This would seem to be an absurd question, for none of us commit suicide, though, to be honest, I would confess that I have come to feel that a large majority of the persons I know should do so, because I cannot see any point in their remaining alive. . . . We live uncritically, without paying any heed to Plato's famous dictum: The uncriticized (or un-examined) life is not worth living. That is why when I exercise some self-criticism, both as an individual and as the member of the collective entity called Indian, I am denounced as unpatriotic. (To Live 7)

Nirad Chaudhuri's fourth socio-political critique was the less than serious Culture in the Vanity Bag – Clothing and Adornment in Passing and Abiding India (1976). Incidentally, this is the only book in which he takes the help of artist's

sketches for explaining his point. The book, as its title indicates, is a study of Indian culture in terms of clothing.<sup>21</sup> Divided into three parts, it describes the evolution of clothes in the country. The first part is about the orders and taxonomy of clothing. Here, Chaudhuri suggests that Indian clothing lacks any specificity and is only a motley collection of different traditions. The second segment of the book discusses what, according to the author, are the conflicts in Indian dressing. In this part, he examines the dressing patterns of the Muslim and the British periods. The book's last part is regarding the fashion scenario in the India of the nineteen seventies and Chaudhuri shows its decline and rootlessness. The overall tone of the book is as critical as the other ones, his main idea being to lament the absence of originality in Indian dressing. As is his wont, Chaudhuri cannot forget the West even while writing about Indian clothes. He rubs in the point that Western clothing has been catachretized in the Indian sub-continent:

The influence of the West on clothing in India is seen most obviously, of course, in the presence everywhere of the European suit, the masculine garment *pur sang*. But far more significant is the visible stamp of Westernization on all city clothing of the native types. . . . The European garment which is most widely seen in India and has been most thoroughly acclimatized is the shirt. (Culture 5)

Nirad Chaudhuri was back to his serious self in his fifth socio-political book. It was another critique named Hinduism: A Religion to Live By (1979). The title of this book is deceptive because it appears as if Chaudhuri is writing in favour of

Hinduism after having been against it for long. In fact, the book throws light on the cults of Siva, Durga-Kali and Vishnu-Krishna as found in texts like the Mahabharata, Bhagavata Purana, Brahmavaivarta Purana, Bhagavata Gita, Gita-Govinda, Harivamsa and Vishnu Purana. Nevertheless, Chaudhuri repeats his old charge about Aryan xenophobia. He is of the opinion that this phobia against others had made Aryans insular, that it hindered any cultural exchange between them and the indigenous Indians. He says that ancient Hindus were over-conscious of the alleged inferiority of non-Aryans. In his words:

If the whole of Sanskrit literature, sacred or profane, makes one thing clear it is that there was one line no Hindu would cross, and that was the line which separated the Aryan in India from the non-Aryan. . . . The non-Aryans were beyond the pale of Hindu society, and therefore untouchable. The Aryan Hindus regarded them with fear, hatred, contempt, disgust, but at times these feelings were mixed with some admiration for their physical strength, frankness, and joyousness. (Hinduism 96-7)

Nirad Chaudhuri's sixth and last socio-political critique was Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse (1997).<sup>22</sup> The title is adapted from 'Apocalypse', the last book of the New Testament in the Bible. (King James Bible, 6.2) However, the holy book speaks of four horsemen whereas Chaudhuri's book names only three. For him, the three "horsemen" are individualism, nationalism and democracy. He is scared that they would usher decadence in India, Britain and the United States

of America. In this book, Chaudhuri formulates a narrow definition of colonialism – to him the settler colonies in America, Africa and Australasia were the only examples of modern colonialism. It was because the demographics of those continents, along with their administration, had been altered by the phenomenon. For Chaudhuri, the occupier colonies in Asia and Africa were no colonies at all. His reasoning is that only the administration of these countries, not their demographics, were affected by Europeans. He meant that British India was not a proper case of colonialism because the rulers never wanted to settle here permanently. Since the British merely ruled India without any intention of permanent settlement, this was only a case of imperialism.<sup>23</sup> Chaudhuri differentiates between colonialism and imperialism thus:

The Europeans were colonists in North America and South America, and brought about the same ethnic transformation. They were colonists in North Africa, east Africa and South Africa. They were also colonists in Australia and New Zealand.

But they were *not* colonists in West Africa, India, Burma, Malay, Indonesia and Indo-China. These were regions of European *imperialism*. This fundamental distinction between the two forms of European expansion in the world should never be overlooked.

(Three Horsemen 58)

Apart from autobiography and socio-political criticism, Nirad Chaudhuri wrote biography and travelogue as well. He wrote two biographies, one of which is

said to be the best in Indian English. It was Scholar Extraordinary – The Life of Professor the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Muller, P.C. (1974). The book was on European Indologist Friedrich Max Muller. It describes Muller's contribution to Indology, such as his translations of Hitopadesa and Meghaduta to German and of Rig-Veda, Dhammapada and Upanishad to English. Although Muller was vastly knowledgeable about India's past and warmly affectionate about her present, Chaudhuri points out that he was not very confident about India's future.<sup>24</sup> It seems that the German scholar was uneasy about the anti-British sentiments brewing in India. To prove that unease, Chaudhuri quotes a letter of Muller to social reformer Behramji Merwanji Malabari (1853 – 1912). In the letter, Muller suggests that India's true interests lie with Britain:

'I wish there was more English feeling in India, and that it would show itself in words and deeds. What is the use of haggling over the pay of an Indian regiment in Egypt? It is a mere nothing compared with the true interests, the peace, and prosperity of India. I can understand Indian patriots who wish to get rid of England altogether, but those who see what that would mean should take to their oars manfully, and pull a good English stroke.' (quoted in Scholar Extraordinary 342)

The other biography written by Nirad Chaudhuri was Clive of India – A Political and Psychological Essay (1975). The main title, "Clive of India", is confusing because Clive was not of India but of England. In fact, he was an

Englishman who defeated an Indian nawab in the decisive Battle of Plassey. The book's sub-title, "A Political and Psychological Essay", clears that confusion — it indicates that the book is not strictly historical. One weird feature of the biography is the way it defends Lord Clive against charges of corruption. Clive had been accused of corruption by other Englishmen and taken to court. While the courts acquitted Clive due to lack of evidence, Chaudhuri defends him by a mere technicality. He writes, "The acceptance of gifts was not contrary to the regulations then in force." (Clive 260-61)

Nirad Chaudhuri wrote only one travelogue, A Passage to England (1959). The title was in imitation of A Passage to India (1924), a novel by Edward Morgan Forster. Chaudhuri's book contains his impressions of England during a trip of five weeks. It turned out to be the first book by an Indian author to appear on the bestseller lists of England. One of the travelogue's anecdotes throws fresh light on Indo-British issues. It is about Chaudhuri's reaction to a British boy's words at the Canterbury Cathedral in Kent. The child called him an African but Chaudhuri did not suspect any racism in that remark.<sup>25</sup> He corrected the boy instead, as if the latter had made only an innocent mistake:

When I came near him he began to rise slowly on his knees, and while still half kneeling raised his arm, pointed a finger at me, and cried out in his sharp treble, 'You're from Africa!' This was the moment for me to scream 'Colour prejudice!' and send a bitter letter to one of our newspapers, for there is nothing a Hindu resents more

than being taken for a negro by a white man. But I shouted back, 'No, from India!' The boy dropped on the grass and kept his eyes fixed on it. (A Passage 125)

Not only eleven books in English, Nirad Chaudhuri also wrote a number of articles in this language. Some of them were re-published under the title The East is East and West is West (1996). His major articles in English are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Nirad Chaudhuri's first ever article, 'Bharat Chandra', was in English. Published in The Modern Review in November 1925, it was literary criticism — a reappraisal of an eighteenth century Bengali poem. The article was indicative of Chaudhuri's later works in two ways. Firstly, it flagged off his unconventional attitude by swimming against the tide of contemporary opinion. The concerned poem had been condemned by other critics on grounds of vulgarity. Chaudhuri, however, defended its alleged obscenity on the premise that "The poet or the novelist's idea of love, whether as something ethereal and disembodied or something frankly carnal, is not the outcome of a scientific investigation."<sup>26</sup> Secondly, the article indicated Chaudhuri's internationalist tenor — it referred to the Bengali poet's French contemporaries like Voltaire, Diderot and Laclos and also to Baudelaire, Anatole France and Maurice Barres. He quoted lines from Gautier and adapted an ode by Schiller, while discussing the Bengali poem.<sup>27</sup>

On Indo-European issues, Nirad Chaudhuri wrote a large number of articles. In his maiden article, he argued that the people of India did not have a distinct concept of nationalism before the British ruled them. Indian nationalism was purely a result of British imperialism because the only thing that the people in India had in common was their British rulers. Moreover, Chaudhuri goes on to say that the concept of Indian nationalism was merely a hotchpotch of incongruous notions like Hinduism, Christianity, Fascism and Communism. He feared that those notions could pull in different directions at some point in time. In his words:

The nationalism of Indian thought is a composite product possessing unity from this point of view alone that it is aimed at the system of authority which the British have established in India. Provided a system of thought or an institution is likely to prove an intellectual dissolvent of British power, the nationalist thinkers are eclectic enough not to worry whether it comes from the Gita or the Bible, Fascist Italy or Communistic Moscow. (The Statesman 15 January 1926)

Nirad Chaudhuri published another article on Indo-European issues in January 1926. There he made a hair-splitting distinction between the British civilization and individual Britons. If the former was the whole and the latter were its parts, then he suggested that the whole was infinitely greater than the sum of its parts. He was not ready to condemn an entire civilization for the misdemeanour of its individual citizens. His logic was that just because a few people are bad, it does

not necessarily mean that their country is not good as a whole. Chaudhuri laments that the relationship between Indians and the British was a love story turned sour. According to him, most educated Indians initially felt at home with the British civilization. Subsequently, though, they felt at sea if they faced uncivilized behaviour from any Briton. In Chaudhuri's words:

When after reading Bergson or Benedetto Croce, Mr Hardy or Mr Wells with a sense of intellectual kinship, an Indian comes across some instance of ignorant superciliousness in a European — be it in the shape of a remark in a book or a personal affront at the hands of a police-sergeant or a tactless European merchant on the Maidan — he returns home in bitterness and wrath, and his previous enjoyment of a European writer becomes to him a cankering reminiscence of his humiliation. (quoted in Thy Hand 500)

In still another article on Indo-European issues, Nirad Chaudhuri criticized the British policy regarding the Indian Army. The article was titled 'The Martial Races of India' and published in four parts in The Modern Review.<sup>28</sup> The British policy had been to recruit soldiers mostly from Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province because of their so-called martial aptitude. Chaudhuri's article exposed the question of martial aptitude as a myth. He proved that those states were preferred in recruitment mainly because of their British loyalties. Chaudhuri pointed out that the rulers of Nabha, Patiala, Jind and Kapurthala, among others, had helped the British with men and money during the revolt of 1857-58. Hence,

the Indian Army was deliberately overpopulated from the north-western states after the revolt.

Nirad Chaudhuri resumed his criticism of Army-related policies in an article published in the October 1931 issue of The Modern Review. The Indian Military College Committee, chaired by Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode, had submitted a report to the British Government about setting up a military college for Indians.<sup>29</sup> Chaudhuri picked holes in that report, notwithstanding the fact that the Field Marshal was then the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. Chaudhuri accused the committee of defeating its purpose. He said that its report tried to slow down, rather than speed up, Indianization of the Army's officer cadre. In his words, "The military authorities in India have secured through it what they wanted: the restriction of the number of Indians to be admitted to their co-fraternity to a negligible fraction of the total number of commissioned officers in the army and the careful sterilization of the men to be taken in."

Nirad Chaudhuri was so critical of the military policies of the British that even the Indian National Congress harnessed his service for writing a booklet on Indianization of the Army. In the booklet, Chaudhuri expressed concern firstly over the denaturing of Indian cadets who were forced to adapt themselves to a British style of living during their training courses. Secondly, Chaudhuri warned against limiting cadet selection to the elite class only. He was of the opinion that the clout of this class in the corridors of power had made it too selfish and lazy for

meaningful service. Thirdly, Chaudhuri was worried that candidates from poor socio-economic backgrounds were being left out by the selection procedure. He was anxious that there were countless young men who would never get selected only because of their weak family positions. The essential qualifications for military leadership, that is psychological and physical fitness, were being eclipsed by non-essential considerations like the knowledge of English language and of English lifestyle. The non-essential factors inevitably shrunk the number of eligible candidates. Chaudhuri wrote:

Though it might be possible to find in India a fair number of young men who approximate the British type in character and outlook, the number of those who satisfy this test and have in addition the requisite economic status, familiarity with spoken English and the English mode of living, and contacts in Government circles, must necessarily be very few. <sup>30</sup> (Defence of India or Nationalization of Indian Army 1935)

When not writing against British policies, Nirad Chaudhuri wrote against Indian attitudes. In an article published in The Statesman of 18 March 1940, he said that Indians were selective about believing the news during World War II — that reports of British reverses sounded truer to them than those of German setbacks did. He complained that Indians were more willing to believe that German airplanes flew in the Mersey sky than that British aircraft snooped over Berlin. Such biased beliefs betrayed that the real sympathies of Indians lay with

the German-led Axis Forces. The Indian vision seemed to be so jaundiced by anti-British sentiments that they refused to read the writing on the wall, hinted Chaudhuri. His faith in the eventual victory of Britain-led Allied Forces turned out to be correct, of course, at the end of the war.

Another article showing Nirad Chaudhuri's lack of faith in Indians appeared in The Statesman. This was on independent India. Chaudhuri argued that the more things change, the more they remain the same. He implied that the joke was on Indians who thought that British rule would disappear with the British rulers. His point being that the British system had become permanent in India, Chaudhuri wrote:

The immense noisy crowds that greeted the end of British rule in India with deafening shouts of joy on August 15, 1947, did not recall the old saying; they thought nothing of British rule would survive in their country after the departure of the white men who had carried it on. They never perceived that British rule in India had created . . . a system of government for which there was no substitute.<sup>31</sup> ('British Rule is Dead, Long Live British Rule' The Statesman 15 August 1994)

Nirad Chaudhuri wrote two articles on Gandhi and Nehru's influences on independent India. In an article on the Father of the Nation, he said that the Mahatma was not forgotten. However, Gandhi was being remembered not so

much as a national leader of India but as if he were a new god of the Hindu pantheon. In other words, Gandhi was being more worshipped than followed. Chaudhuri also felt that the Mahatma's memory was cynically exploited by the ruling class of independent India. Both his life and death happened to be very conveniently timed for them. In Chaudhuri's words:

So, during the minutes of silence on 30 January, they must be thinking what a providential thing it was that Mahatma Gandhi lived only so long as it was necessary for them to be put in power and died exactly when he would have become embarrassing and inconvenient. Even now they cannot do without him as the moral sanction behind their power and prosperity, and they go on speaking about him. ('Have we forgotten the Mahatma?' The Illustrated Weekly of India 1 June 1959)

Nirad Chaudhuri's article on Nehru was published by fellow writer and editor Khushwant Singh. Chaudhuri predicted that after Nehru, India would suffer a splintering of statesmanship because no other politician had his comprehensive qualities.<sup>32</sup> Chaudhuri opined that western democracies counted Nehru among their own due to his global outlook. The article commended the then Prime Minister for becoming "India's representative to the great Western democracies, and, I must add, their representative to India. The Western nations certainly look upon him as such and expect him to guarantee India's support for them, which is why they are so upset when Nehru takes an anti-Western or neutral line. They feel

they are being let down by one of themselves.” (The Illustrated Weekly of India 30 May 1953) It is obvious that Chaudhuri’s regard for Nehru was mainly due to the latter’s internationalist approach.

Nirad Chaudhuri, knowledgeable in international relations, wrote a couple of articles on Indo-Pak issues. In an article in The Statesman in 1954, he sought to dispel fears that the fledgling alliance between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the United States of America would eventually work against India. His premise was that a purposive nation like the U. S. of A. would not tolerate any frittering away of her provisions to Pakistan as long as the threat from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics existed. Chaudhuri implied that the prevalent situation favoured India instead of Pakistan. It is noteworthy that his reassurance was based not on any confidence in Indian strength but on the estimation of American strength and Pakistani weakness. Moreover, Chaudhuri underestimated the deviousness of the Pakistani leadership who managed to hoodwink their American benefactors. It is well known that Pakistan diverted against India a substantial portion of the military aid that was received from the West.

Another article by Nirad Chaudhuri on the Indo-Pak question was published in the same year in The Times of London. It tried to explain India’s discomfiture at USA-Pak proximity. Chaudhuri wrote that India was displeased because she wanted Pakistan to be isolated from the rest of the world. He alleged that India had a vested interest in enfeebling the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. He also

suspected that India's original plan might have been to invade her western neighbour but it could not be executed because of a pre-emptive intervention by western powers. However, Chaudhuri failed to substantiate his suspicion with verifiable facts and thus his allegation remained in the realms of conjecture.

Many of Nirad Chaudhuri's other articles have provocative titles like 'A Sterile Intelligentsia', 'The Hindu-Muslim Confrontation in India', 'Sex on the Mind Fear in the Heart', 'Communism is the Opium of Failure', 'Why Ape the Lechery of the West?', 'My Way of Being Pro-British' and 'Why I Mourn for England'.<sup>33</sup> They appeared in various Indian and western periodicals including The Times of India, Atlantic Monthly and Encounter. All his books and articles, as introduced in the preceding paragraphs, will be referred to in the subsequent chapters of this thesis for the purpose of post-colonial analysis.

In Bengali, Nirad Chaudhuri wrote only four books as against the eleven in English. His first book in Bengali was published after four in English. That he wrote his name in full while writing in Bengali, unlike in English, has already been pointed out in Section 1.1. Nevertheless, one thing remained constant in both the languages — Chaudhuri's clear preference of non-fiction over fiction. The non-fictional genres that he wrote in Bengali were socio-political commentaries, literary criticism and autobiography. He wrote many articles, too, in the language.

Nirad Chaudhuri's maiden Bengali book, written at the age of seventy one,

was Bangali Jibone Ramani [Ladies in Bengali Life]. The book is about the relationship between the two sexes in contemporary Bengal. Its ambit is so wide that it includes Platonic love on the one hand and masturbation on the other. Chaudhuri's treatment of the topic is uninhibited, as is his wont. Chaudhuri's second Bengali book was published twenty years after the first. It was again a socio-political critique, Atmaghati Bangali [Suicidal Bengali]. In the book, he says that the decline of the Bengali community was hastened by the Government of India Act 1935. However, Chaudhuri holds the Bengali nature to be primarily responsible for the state's downfall.

Nirad Chaudhuri's third Bengali book was his only on literary criticism. Titled Atmaghati Rabindranath [Suicidal Rabindranath], it was published in two volumes in 1992. The book is about poet Rabindranath Tagore and his travails in life. Chaudhuri calls Tagore 'suicidal' in the sense that the latter was unduly perturbed by the negative reactions of Indians to his work. Chaudhuri's fourth book in Bengali was his vernacular autobiography, Aji Hote Shatabarsha Aage [Hundred Years Ago].<sup>34</sup> Although not a translation of his English autobiography, it is substantially the same. It happened to be his last book ever. Some of his Bengali essays, though, were later anthologized under the title Aamaar Desh, Aamaar Shatak [My Country, My Century].

As far as literary art is concerned, prose writer Nirad Chaudhuri had certain artistic similitudes with poet William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850).

Wordsworth's magnum opus is a semi-autobiographical poem, The Prelude, while Chaudhuri's masterpiece was The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian. Both wrote long prefaces to their works, prefaces which explained their respective theories. Most importantly, the lyrical quality of Chaudhuri's prose is reminiscent of that in Wordsworth's poetry. The former's description of Bengal's village boats at night is a case in point:

They [the boats] themselves could be seen only as blurred masses, for their little kerosene lamps could never break the nearly solid darkness around them, but the reflections of these lamps seemed to set the fringes of the river on fire. When the water was still, there appeared to be an illumination going on two or three feet below the surface of the water, and with breezes and ripples swaying ladders, spirals and festoons of amber-coloured light made their appearance.

(The Autobiography 7)

### 1.3 THE DIVIDED JURY

While the last section offered an introduction to Nirad Chaudhuri's works, the present section will summarize the works by other writers on him. Some of these works are in the form of books and the others, as articles. There is, however, no unanimity on Chaudhuri's merits or demerits. It seems that the jury is still out about him.

The earliest book written on Nirad Chaudhuri was C. Paul Verghese's Nirad C Chaudhuri (1973). It was published after Chaudhuri had settled in Britain. Verghese calls The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian Chaudhuri's *magnum opus* and The Continent of Circe his *crux criticorum*.<sup>35</sup> However, the critic feels let down by the sociology and history in the latter book. He accuses Chaudhuri of factual distortion, of forcing the square peg of acknowledged facts into a round hole of personal theory. Verghese writes,

His is a case of an erudite scholar who in his anxiety to defend his own ideas builds a superstructure of theories and in the process becomes a pseudo-historian and pseudo-sociologist and throws away huge bricks of solid history. The main weakness of *The Continent of Circe* consists in the fact that the sociologist in Chaudhuri conceived a theory about the Hindus and the aboriginals of India and the historian in him started looking for facts and when he did not find them, he depended on pseudo-history. (115)

The second book written on Nirad Chaudhuri was Goa and the Continent of Circe (1973) by Robert de Souza. de Souza thinks of Chaudhuri as one who has identified the problems of Indian society accurately but is unable to provide any viable solution. Disappointed with Chaudhuri for failing to prescribe medicine for the social ills even after diagnosing them correctly, de Souza says, "His criticism of the peoples of India may be welcome to certain extent and in due proportion, but it will not serve a healthy purpose. He satirically criticizes the peoples of India but

does not suggest adequate means to remedy the situation.” (194) de Souza is particularly unhappy with Chaudhuri’s unfavourable description of Goan Christians as a half-caste minority.<sup>36</sup>

The nineteen eighties saw three books on Nirad Chaudhuri. They were Chetan Karnani’s Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1980), Tara Sinha’s Nirad C. Chaudhuri: A Sociological and Stylistic Study of His Writings during the Period 1951 – 72 (1981) and Basavaraj S. Naicar’s Critical Articles on Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1985). Of these, the first was a biographical critique, the second was a published thesis with a foreword by renowned academician Bhabhatosh Chatterjee and the third, a compilation of essays.

Basavaraj S. Naicar introduces his book, Critical Articles on Nirad C. Chaudhuri, as “an attempt to understand Mr. Chaudhuri’s works from a sympathetic point of view and to counterbalance the unsympathetic approach of anti-Chaudhuri readers and critics.” (viii)<sup>37</sup> He deals with Chaudhuri’s works, one by one. Naicar is impressed by the unanticipated success of Chaudhuri’s The Autobiography as the book was the latter’s maiden venture. He justifies the pitiless tone of The Continent of Circe on the ground that it was constructive rather than destructive. In Naicar’s words, “The bitterness and anger are the obverse side of Chaudhuri’s love and concern for his countrymen.” (71) He also finds The Intellectual in India to be as original in attitude as the writer’s other books. About The Intellectual, Naicar writes:

As usual Mr. Chaudhuri expresses his own distinct view about this issue which are not mere imitation of other's ones. His views on this problem are strongly supported by his own knowledge of history of India in particular and of the world in general. Again his views are marked by the extraordinary freedom from inhibition and chauvinism that is typical of his personality. . . . Tracing the intellectual traditions in India at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mr Chaudhuri points out the absence of purely intellectual pursuits in the country. He shows how the Hindus' concept of intellectual life consisted merely in the personal pursuit of philosophical or Vedantic knowledge which had no direct bearing on the day to day life. (93)

Another book on Nirad Chaudhuri was Raj Kumar Kaul's Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The Renaissance Man (1998). It highlights the nuances of Chaudhuri's descriptive passages, even as it points out the occasional lapses of his diction. The chapter titled 'Of imagination all compact' is appreciative of Chaudhuri's style, of his "accurate and minute observation, with the eye of a painter." Nevertheless, Kaul is skeptical about the historical validity of the author's viewpoints, "in spite of monumental scholarship, Chaudhuri's formulations about Indian history and culture are essentially unsound." Although the book laments the "acute Anglophilia" of Chaudhuri, it gives him an overall thumbs up. (54) Kaul steers clear of the overawed adulation heaped on Chaudhuri and also of the thoughtless condemnation hurled at him, thus separating the grain from the chaff and giving

credit where it is due.

The last book exclusively on Nirad Chaudhuri was published to mark his birth centenary. It was Nirad C. Chaudhuri, The First Hundred Years: A Celebration (1997) edited by Swapan Dasgupta. Dasgupta introduces Chaudhuri as a supporter of the Hindu revivalist movement, ignoring Chaudhuri's trenchant criticism of Hindus.<sup>38</sup> In the book, Ian Jack's essay 'The World's Last Englishman' gives snippets of Chaudhuri's obsession with English correctitude. Harish Trivedi's article 'The Last Bengali Babu' compares Chaudhuri's "delightful" English with his sadhu bhasha (classical Bengali). Khushwant Singh, in his essay 'A Scholar Extraordinary', recounts his interactions with Chaudhuri and also the ways by which the latter's anti-nationalist expressions had been sought to be gagged by the Indian establishment. Amita Malik gives Amiya Chaudhurani her due by saying, "Nirad Chaudhuri would not have been what he is without the patience and unflinching support of his wife." (58) While Keki N. Daruwalla compares Chaudhuri with Naipaul, Shrabani Basu tells us of Chaudhuri's views on Austen.<sup>39</sup> Other contributors like Nabaneeta Dev Sen and Meenakshi Mukherjee give accounts mostly of Chaudhuri's oddities. Krishna Bose's 'Mejokaka' is about Chaudhuri's deep pain at his anachronistic existence:

He lives mentally in Jane Austen's age. Hence his eccentricities, such as dressing up in period costume, which embarrasses his relatives and is considered bizarre by the contemporary British. He would doubtless have been happier to celebrate his hundredth

birthday in the year of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign than on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence. (12)

Other than the books discussed above, a host of articles have been written on Nirad Chaudhuri. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar wrote an article titled 'Three Prose Writers' (1972). In it, he comments that Chaudhuri's strength and weakness both sprang out of the same source — the latter's self-imposed intellectual exile. According to Iyengar, the Chaudhuri of The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian was an instrument for detecting social hypocrisy.<sup>40</sup> A Passage to England, feels Iyengar, is a link between the countries of Britain and India. Though Iyengar is appreciative of Chaudhuri's erudition, his final verdict is based on the latter's flair of writing and his courage of conviction:

When all caveats have been made, however, Nirad Chaudhuri remains the Grand Solitary, the master of a prose style that has often a fascinating spidery quality, a writer and a thinker and a universal Momus who stands apart from the muddy mainstream. His great merit as an intellectual is that he isn't ever too lazy to avoid doing his own thinking or too timid or hesitant to give outspoken expression to his own views. Above all, he has the supreme faith of the moral man in an amoral (if not immoral) society . . . (Indian Writing in English 593)

In 1984, an article titled 'Growing to Manhood' by C. V. Venugopal was published.<sup>41</sup> What the commentator misses in Chaudhuri's works are word pictures of his wife and children, the way they have been drawn for his parents. In fact, Venugopal asserts that The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian is more appropriately read as literature than as history, although Chaudhuri himself intended otherwise. To prove the literary merits of the book, Venugopal ferrets out a number of passages in it and says:

Nowhere is this delightful element more obvious than where Chaudhuri is telling us about his early days, at Kishorganj or Banagram or wherever it is. The pictures we get of Chaudhuri and his playmates after they bathe in the river and paddle in it: ". . . when we got dry after our bath we looked fairer than we really were with a coat of fine white sand" (p. 2); or their general predicament during the rainy season: "Neither we nor our clothes were ever properly dry. When we were not slushy we were damp" (p. 6) give us but an inkling of how Chaudhuri must have enjoyed his childhood days. The ecstatic moments he must have enjoyed as the rain came down in "what looked like closely packed formations of enormously long pencils of glass and hit the bare ground" would be the envy of any toddler . . . (Perspectives 214-15)

Sudesh Mishra's article 'The Two Chaudhuris: Historical Witness and Pseudo-Historian' (1988) bisects Chaudhuri as an author. It says that the

Chaudhuri of The Autobiography was history's witness who "operates largely as a chronicler recording incidents and events to which he has borne personal witness." (Journal 23: 8) Nonetheless, Mishra writes that the Chaudhuri of The Continent of Circe was a historian who "evaluates history biologically, psycho-culturally, racially, philosophically and idiosyncratically by postulating his personal dilemmas as representative of the Indian people's collective predicament, and in particular of the Hindus." (Journal loc. cit.) From the article's tenor it becomes clear that Mishra is no admirer of Chaudhuri.

David Lelyveld of Columbia University published an article titled 'The Notorious Unknown Indian' in The New York Times on 13 November 1988. He valued the personal testimony of Chaudhuri. He writes, "As a historian Mr. Chaudhuri is useful insofar as he recounts personal experience — for example, his accounts of the Bose brothers or of Hindu-Muslim riots at the time of partition."<sup>42</sup> Regarding Chaudhuri's personal theories, however, Lelyveld considered them more literary than historical. According to him, "Great cascades of flowery erudition, allusions to the histories of ancient Greece and endless quotations of French poetry are of interest mostly as evidence of Mr. Chaudhuri's artfully constructed persona."

Poet Nissim Ezekiel reviewed Nirad Chaudhuri's Scholar Extraordinary in 1992. Incidentally, the review had the same name as Chaudhuri's biography. Of Chaudhuri's weaknesses, he writes that the book contained a "number of

statements about Victorian love and sex which are very unsatisfactory, besides contradicting one another". (Selected Prose 156) About the book's strengths, Ezekiel mentions its unbiased defence of its subject:

I cannot imagine any criticism, however valid, of special insights or even of the treatment in general undermining the worth of this biography as a whole. Chaudhuri's admiration for Muller, which he declares without reservations, leads him to defend Muller against all detractors. But he defends persuasively, and always with a fair statement of their position. This means that at times one may disagree with Chaudhuri and still not feel that he is unduly partisan.

(Selected Prose 154)

Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah compared the autobiographies of Nirad Chaudhuri and Jawaharlal Nehru. Though he declares Chaudhuri's biography of Muller to be "an excellent work of scholarship", Narasimhaiah is thoroughly dissatisfied with Chaudhuri's autobiography. According to him, it was too autobiographical to be meaningful — he complained against Chaudhuri's tendency to "magnify things that have any relation to him whether it is the house he lived in, his mode of living, the fairs he visited, the festivals he celebrated, the books and paintings he owned and admired and the tastes he cultivated." (Essays in Commonwealth Literature 67) Narasimhaiah is, thus, a virulent critic of Chaudhuri.

Author Pankaj Mishra wrote Nirad Chaudhuri's obituary titled 'The Art of Inquisition'.<sup>43</sup> Mishra regrets that Chaudhuri had become too distant from the modern world to be relevant. Hence, according to Mishra, Chaudhuri's last English book is "a sad record of his alienation." (Outlook 16 August 1999) However, the obit ends with a generous tribute to Chaudhuri:

After several national trysts with defeat and disillusionment, Chaudhuri now appears right about many things. . . . But ultimately, it is as a connoisseur — of cultures and civilizations — that Chaudhuri will be remembered: someone who brought the purest energy and dedication to the almost forgotten art of self-cultivation. The last Indian of his kind, Chaudhuri was also the last of the great public intellectuals of this century. Attached to no cause or institution, he lived and ennobled the free life of the mind till the very end, and died, fittingly, in exile from both his home and adopted country.

Interestingly, V. S. Naipaul has professed two diametrically opposite opinions about N. C. Chaudhuri at different points of time. About The Autobiography, Naipaul wrote in superlative terms: "No better account of the penetration of the Indian mind by the West — and, by extension, of the penetration of one culture by another — will be or now can be written." (The Overcrowded Barracoon 59)<sup>44</sup> Naipaul was also a member of the jury that awarded the Duff-Cooper Prize to Chaudhuri's The Continent of Circe. However, this approach of Naipaul in the middle of the twentieth century was totally reversed towards the end

of that century. In Chaudhuri's epitaph for the Royal Society of Literature, Naipaul ran him down as merely a flash in the pan. He wrote, "He wrote one good and unexpected book, The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, and then took to clowning."

Prema Nandakumar reviewed Nirad Chaudhuri's Hinduism – A Religion to Live By. In an article titled 'Reinterpreting Hinduism', she acknowledged Chaudhuri's depth, "what Nirad has read, he has read well with a scholar's grip on facts." However, she was unsure about Chaudhuri's width because "he ignores completely the Sangam segment of Indian religious world, has no clue to the Siddha cult and is a stranger to the Mother Goddess icon of Kotravai." Clearly, Prema Nandakumar is not as impressed with Chaudhuri as was her father, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar.

Articles on Nirad Chaudhuri have also been written by others including academician M. L. Raina and columnist Kunwar Natwar Singh. However, it is obvious from the works by other writers on Nirad Chaudhuri that none of them have explored his writings from a post-colonial perspective. This lacuna in academia is surprising since he wore his pro-colonialism on his sleeve. There is a critical need to plug that loophole in order to take a meaningful re-look at him. Hence, the colonial expressions of this Anglophile Indian need to be subjected to critical scrutiny.

#### 1.4 PLAN OF THE THESIS

This thesis proposes that, from a postcolonial perspective, Nirad Chaudhuri's writings are ambivalent rather than merely pro-colonial. In other words, the thesis seeks to prove that his writings have an undiscovered duality beneath their well-known colonial exterior. By establishing Chaudhuri's colonial ambivalence, the thesis intends to make a modest contribution to the world of literary knowledge. It is pertinent to mention that, in the world of academics, the general impression about his works is of abject pro-colonialism. While that impression is not false, it is not the whole truth either. This work highlights another aspect of Chaudhuri — his duality on the colonial situation in British India — for the purpose of offering the academia a fuller picture of him than what is ordinarily available.

Three caveats are called for at the outset. Firstly, it is clarified that this thesis is based substantially on his English writings while the Bengali works have been introduced only cursorily. Nonetheless, it is submitted that whatever assertions have been made here in connection with the English writings are equally valid for the Bengali ones as well. That is because Chaudhuri never changed his tone and tenor, irrespective of the language he wrote in, as one can vouch for after having read him in both the languages. The second caveat is that this thesis, although a project in English literary criticism, makes considerable use

of modern Indian history. The combination of literature and history was necessitated by the fact that this critique is based on postcolonial theory, an interdisciplinary exercise to a large extent. Finally, it is submitted that this thesis treats Chaudhuri's life and his writings in conjunction simply because they cannot be separated like chalk and cheese. As he was primarily an autobiographer, his life is the foremost part of his writings.

The first chapter of the thesis is introductory in nature. The chapter begins with a detailed account of Nirad Chaudhuri's life. However, it is not a general biography but one with an emphasis on those aspects of his life which turned him pro-colonial and cynical. The second section provides a genre-wise synopsis of Chaudhuri's English writings i.e. two volumes of autobiography, six socio-political critiques, two biographies, one travelogue and a large number of articles. Chaudhuri's Bengali writings are referred to briefly as also his Wordsworthian descriptions of rural Bengal. The third section is about the works on Chaudhuri by other writers. It indicates the areas of Chaudhuri's works which have already been covered by his critics; it also reveals some of the fields which have not been adequately researched into yet. The introductory chapter ends with a plan of the thesis.

The second chapter of the thesis introduces the postcolonial theory. It offers a preview of the theory and also the relationship between the theory and Nirad Chaudhuri. The first section of this chapter summarizes the contribution of

African and Caribbean writers towards the theory. It recapitulates the relevant works of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Chinua Achebe. The next section sketches the European background of the postcolonial theory. Here the focus is on the works of Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. The third section deals with three Asian postcolonial theorists — Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Their concepts of orientalism, mimicry and subalternism are introduced in brief. The last section brings together a number of other postcolonial issues like the spelling, meaning and application of the term itself.

The third chapter analyzes Nirad Chaudhuri's pro-colonial outpourings. It tries to understand his unconventional relationship with India's anti-colonial movement. The chapter begins with a section on writers, other than Chaudhuri, who have expressed similar anti-national sentiments. It excavates a forgotten truth — that some writers, including nationalist leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji and Jawaharlal Nehru, had loyalist tendencies during the pre-independence era. The writings of Cyril James, Alan Paton and Alexander Solzhenitsyn have also been referred to. The next section of the chapter sketches the unconventional histories, including the neo-imperialist school and the subaltern school, of the pre-Independence period. How they differed from the nationalist school of historiographers, just as Oswald Spengler differed from other European historians, has been explained. The third section highlights something which is least known — that Chaudhuri had once been associated with the Indian movement and had supported even extremist nationalism. The subsequent section throws light upon

an aspect of the nationalist struggle, its incidents of violence, which alienated Chaudhuri gradually. He drew a fine line between extremism and violence, and felt repelled by the latter. The fifth section is on communalism during the national movement. How the communal problem made Chaudhuri question the very basis of India's nationalism has been analyzed therein. Apart from communalism, there were other reasons for Chaudhuri to feel disenchanted with the movement. He accused the movement of hypocrisy, corruption, arrogance and negativism. These accusations have been scrutinized in the last section of the chapter.

The fourth chapter offers a contrapuntal reading of Nirad Chaudhuri's major English works. It analyzes his writings from a strictly postcolonial perspective. The first section of the chapter provides an insight into Nirad Chaudhuri's take on certain postcolonial issues. This section is important because Chaudhuri has never written on the theory as a whole. The second section of this chapter proves that Chaudhuri was a victim of colonial discourses. It identifies the allegories that influenced him and also his own appropriation of the colonial culture. The third section is on ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry. This section answers the question which puzzled Chaudhuri — why the British were none too happy about Indians appropriating the colonial culture. The fourth section examines Chaudhuri from the viewpoint of other perspectives like Marxism. It examines the matters of decolonization and neo-colonialism too. The next section demonstrates the way Chaudhuri became different from a stereotypical comprador. It shows why his writings remain interesting despite his compromised intellect. The last section of

this penultimate chapter seeks to retrace his path from being an unknown Indian to a known un-Indian.

The fifth, and final, chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the major issues analyzed in the work and highlighting the significant findings. The first portion of this chapter takes a last look at the controversial author including some of his unheeded prophecies regarding colonialism. That his many contradictions are indicative of a certain duality is emphasized here. The next two portions include recapitulations of the arguments for and against Nirad Chaudhuri's writings. This is done in the interest of fairness prior to expressing the final opinion of this thesis. At the very end, is placed a postcolonial report on his works. It proves the point that Chaudhuri's writings suffer from a hitherto undetected postcolonial ambivalence. For a writer who is generally thought to be pro-colonial, both by his own admission and by the charges of his critics, this detection of ambivalence is a significant revelation.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Regarding his date of birth, Chaudhuri says, "It was quite impossible to come across precision in stating the age." (The Autobiography 123)
- <sup>2</sup> About Chaudhuri's learning of English, Chetan Karnani writes, "He inherited his verbal and lexicographic interest from his father, who had only an elementary education, but who drilled him in sentence patterns from his early days, and taught him, for example, the unique construction of the English verb 'to have'." (Nirad C. Chaudhuri 15)
- <sup>3</sup> Andrew Robinson notes that Chaudhuri was "fiercely independent of received opinion." ('Obituary' The Independent 3 August 1999)
- <sup>4</sup> In Chaudhuri's words, "The life I had in mind was one dedicated to pure scholarship." (Thy Hand 76)
- <sup>5</sup> Chaudhuri writes perceptively, "The figures in every case were idealized representations of the local human types." (Thy Hand 185)
- <sup>6</sup> Pather Panchali was picturised by film director Satyajit Ray in 1955.
- <sup>7</sup> Chaudhuri's wife, Amiya Chaudhurani nee Dhar, was a Bengali writer in her own right.
- <sup>8</sup> Chaudhuri began fearing that "power in Indian hands would be a calamity for the Indian people." (Thy Hand 395)
- <sup>9</sup> The Congress leader was Sarat Chandra Bose (1889 – 1950), brother of Subhas Chandra Bose.

- <sup>10</sup> Chaudhuri calls the 1947 Hindu-Muslim bloodbath, “The Red Carpet for Indian Independence”. (Thy Hand 804)
- <sup>11</sup> About the Indian reaction to Chaudhuri’s autobiography, fellow-writer Khushwant Singh said, “The wogs took the bait and having read only the dedication sent up a howl of protest.” (quoted by Andrew Robinson in ‘Obituary’ The Independent 3 August 1999)
- <sup>12</sup> In some of his Bengali writings, Chaudhuri used the pen-name of ‘Valahak(a) Nandi’.
- <sup>13</sup> In the film, Chaudhuri talks about lack of governance in India, the lack of substance of yoga and the lack of proteins in Indian food.
- <sup>14</sup> Obviously, Chaudhuri’s tridimensional yardstick for real Anglicism – literature, food and culture – was more comprehensive than Tebbit’s unidimensional one.
- <sup>15</sup> In direct contrast to pro-colonial Chaudhuri’s acceptance of the C. B. E., anti-colonial poet Benjamin Zephaniah refused an O. B. E. because of his anger “when I hear that word ‘empire’; it reminds me of slavery, it reminds of thousands of years of brutality — it reminds me of how my foremothers were raped and my forefathers brutalised.” (‘Me? I thought, OBE me? Up yours, I thought’ The Guardian 27 November 2003)
- <sup>16</sup> Regarding the part-autobiographical and part-historical writings of Chaudhuri, journalist Sukumar Muralidharan says, “Chaudhuri’s memoirs were more than a series of reminiscences — in its detailed characterization of the ethos of a whole age and in its dissection of the process of formation of a nation’s identity, it transcended the genre of the autobiography.” (‘Evaluating a Century’ Frontline 29

Novemeber 1997)

- <sup>17</sup> Novelist Amit Chaudhuri calls the controversial dedication a “twelve-line signpost of Indian literary history, announcing its striking act of disowning while proclaiming its embarrassing allegiance . . .” (‘The Moor’s Legacy’ The Telegraph 16 November 2003)
- <sup>18</sup> Chaudhuri called his experience at the Calcutta Corporation, “my horrible enlightenment.” (Thy Hand 381)
- <sup>19</sup> In Bengali, Chaudhuri wrote two more socio-political commentaries — Bangali Jibone Ramani [Ladies in Bengali Life] and Atmaghati Bangali [Suicidal Bengali].
- <sup>20</sup> Chaudhuri held Roy in such high regard that he wrote about the latter in almost every book of his.
- <sup>21</sup> Betraying his hidden tenderness for things Indian, Chaudhuri writes, “My love of the vanished Indian world, unlike Schiller’s love of the gods of Greece, is not nostalgic.” (Culture 185)
- <sup>22</sup> This book, written at the age of ninety-eight, made Chaudhuri the oldest writer in English.
- <sup>23</sup> Critic John McLeod distinguishes colonialism from imperialism as “only *one form of practice* which results from the ideology of imperialism, and specifically concerns the *settlement* of one group of people in a new location.” (Beginning Postcolonialism 7)
- <sup>24</sup> Muller once said, “You know that I am generally on the Indian side.” (quoted in Scholar Extraordinary 342)
- <sup>25</sup> It is ironical that pro-colonial Chaudhuri had been unperturbed on being mistaken

for an African whereas anti-colonial Frantz Fanon was shocked on being called a Negro.

- <sup>26</sup> Critic Radha Nag has accused Chaudhuri of writing vulgar himself. (Atmaghati Nirad Chaudhuri 70)
- <sup>27</sup> Chaudhuri's knowledge of French culture came in handy later in life — he was hired by the French Embassy after the abrupt termination of his job at the All India Radio.
- <sup>28</sup> The four-part article was published in the July 1930, September 1930, January 1931 and February 1931 issues of The Modern Review.
- <sup>29</sup> The Royal Indian Military College, now renamed Rashtriya Indian Military College, is in Dehradun.
- <sup>30</sup> It is surprising that Chaudhuri felt pro-nationalist when it came to military training. He wrote, "The first condition of success of any system of military education is that it should be suited to the national character and not try to uproot the cadets from their social environment."
- <sup>31</sup> Chaudhuri meant that even after independence India continues to be ruled by sahibs, the brown ones.
- <sup>32</sup> As Chaudhuri had forecast, the Indian National Congress split three years after Nehru's death.
- <sup>33</sup> Chaudhuri's books, on the other hand, had non-provocative titles.
- <sup>34</sup> In this book, Chaudhuri suggests that there are more Sanskrit books in Oxford than in Delhi, Benares, Calcutta and Pune put together.
- <sup>35</sup> About Chaudhuri's laborious scholarship, Verghese writes, "Chaudhuri is a

painstaking writer.” (13)

- <sup>36</sup> However, de Souza admits, “Mr Chaudhuri has a reputation for his enormous reading and erudition in classics and for being a successful writer.” (3)
- <sup>37</sup> Naicar calls Chaudhuri’s outpourings “Swiftian anger”. (vii)
- <sup>38</sup> Elsewhere too, Dasgupta calls Chaudhuri “a proud Hindu”. (‘Ever the Gadfly’ India Today 16 August 1999)
- <sup>39</sup> Chaudhuri claimed to have read Austen’s Pride and Prejudice two hundred times!
- <sup>40</sup> In Iyengar’s words, Chaudhuri was “the Geiger counter looking for hidden obliquities of self-deception.” (591)
- <sup>41</sup> Dr. Venugopal teaches English at the Karnatak University, Dharwad.
- <sup>42</sup> The Bose brothers were the nationalist leaders Sarat Chandra Bose, whose private secretary Chaudhuri was, and Subhas Chandra Bose.
- <sup>43</sup> Pankaj Mishra writes, “Chaudhuri perhaps overstated the case in his dedication, and other writings, but he did not wish to leave unacknowledged the British role in creating — if only inadvertently — a whole new range of human possibilities in India.”
- <sup>44</sup> Elsewhere, Naipaul compared N. C. Chaudhuri’s The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian with C. L. R. James’s Beyond a Boundary, since both were “part of the cultural boomerang from the former colonies, delayed and still imperfectly understood”. (quoted by Ramachandra Guha in ‘Two Brown Sahibs’ The Hindu 19 December 2004)

## CHAPTER II

### THE POST(-)COLONIAL THEORY

*"The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination."*

— *Che Guevara, 'Colonialism is Doomed'*

#### 2.1 AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN CONTRIBUTION

The beginning of the end of European colonialism was in the mid-twentieth century. It ended in the Indian sub-continent, for instance, in 1947. Around the same time, the concept of post(-)colonialism started growing in different parts of the world. The concept grew mostly in Africa and Asia though similar concepts were developed in the settler colonies of America and Australasia too. The contributions to postcolonial theory from the African continent and the Caribbean

Islands are highlighted in this section.

A French essay titled 'Discours sur le Colonialisme' [Discourse on Colonialism] contributed to the genesis of African postcolonialism. Published in 1950 and later translated into English, the article was written by Marxist author-cum-activist Aimé Fernand David Césaire (26 June 1913 – 17 April 2008). Césaire points out that colonialism had not put different continents side by side, as was suggested by its apologists, but one under another. Thus, the relationship between different continents was not horizontal but vertical as in a poststructuralist binary. Césaire says that the colonizer was mostly in the roles of a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard or a slave driver. Hence, the colonizer enjoyed an authority of power over the colonized.<sup>1</sup> Césaire rejects the charge that pre-colonial Africa was uncivilized. His argument is that Africa was already civilized in the sense that her communities were basically democratic, courteous and rational. He accuses Europe, on the other hand, of creating problems in the African continent. Holding Europe to be unable or unwilling to solve its self-created problems, he writes:

A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization.

A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization.

A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization. (Discourse on Colonialism 1)

Aimé Césaire taught at a Martiniquan school where one of his students was Frantz Fanon (20 July 1925 – 6 December 1961). Their acquaintance flourished even as Fanon grew up to be a soldier and, eventually, a psychiatrist. In 1952, Fanon wrote a book titled Peau Noire, Masques Blancs [Skin Black, Masks White]. Translated into English as Black Skin, White Masks (1967), the book describes itself as “The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World”. This self-description indicates that a man’s experiences depend on colour — his and his world’s. If the man’s colour is different from his world’s then, sadly, there could be maladjustments. In fact, the maladjustments were so acute in the case of black people that Fanon wonders if blacks could be considered people at all. Being black was, as if, being abnormal. They were either patronised or hated by their white counterparts, never treated equally. The black people suffered such an inferiority complex that they felt they did not even exist. Fanon quotes Jean-Paul Sartre’s essay Orphée Noir [Orpheus Black] to suggest that if blacks would speak up then their speech would not be pleasant for the whites.<sup>2</sup> Fanon regrets that black people are considered outsiders to European culture even if they master European languages. Having mastered a European language, such people would no longer remain fully black yet they could not be white either. The whites were the Superior Other while the blacks symbolised immorality or, worse still, sin. Hence, no black person could be comfortable with his or her self-image. What Fanon resents most is that whites assume all blacks to be a homogenous community. On seeing a black, one white would call out to another, “Look, a

Negro!" When he overheard such racist remarks, Fanon felt dehumanised into objecthood. His deep anguish is apparent in the chapter 'The Fact of Blackness' where he says:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination. I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'."

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematisation. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together. (Black Skin 112-13)

Black Skin, White Masks is, obviously, a work of non-fiction. However, fiction too contributed to the birth of postcolonial theory. For instance, Things Fall Apart (1958) by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe (16 November 1930 - ) is a novel about how things fall apart in a west African village on the arrival of British

colonialists. It tells the poignant story of a tribal faith being swamped by Christianity and an old village headman losing to a newly-arrived District Commissioner. After the village headman commits suicide being unable to adapt to the change, the novel ends on an ironic note with the District Commissioner thinking of writing a book by the title of 'The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger'. The story seemed to be typical of many colonies around the world.<sup>3</sup>

The next year, Frantz Fanon's second book was published by the name 'L'An Cinq. de la Révolution Algérienne [Year Five of the Algerian Revolution]. It was about the Algerian revolt started in 1954 which eventually led to her independence from French colonialism. The book was later translated into English as A Dying Colonialism (1965) but remains obscure till date. It points out, though, that anti-colonial struggles have never been accepted by the colonial powers as reasonable and secular. The struggles were invariably "attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behaviour" instead. (A Dying Colonialism 41)

The growth of African postcolonialism got a big boost in 1961 with the publication of Les Damnés de la Terre [The Damned of the Earth], Fanon's third book. Its title being extracted from the well-known French song L'Internationale [The Internationale], the book describes itself as "A Negro Psychoanalyst's Study of the Problems of Racism and Colonialism in the World Today". This description's forepart, 'a negro psychoanalyst', suggests that a person's race could matter even

in the scientific profession of psychoanalysis. The book, which was translated into English as The Wretched of the Earth (1963), has a foreword by Sartre. He presents the book as an advocacy of violent anti-colonialism. In fact, Fanon justifies the violence of Algerian nationalists as an inescapable consequence of French colonialism.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the controversial justification of violent struggles, he explains how colonial powers changed colonized societies. The introduction of new laws, for example, was a tactic to perpetuate colonial rule. Law was only one of the many colonial instruments which changed native societies beyond recognition. Thereafter, even if colonialism were to disappear, the pre-colonial culture could not reappear in its original form. Fanon also reiterates certain points made in his first book. He reiterates his complaint that whites assume all blacks to be a homogenous community. However, the fact is that the blacks are as different from one another as the whites. Another point which Fanon regrets is that, in the colonial world, complexion had become destiny. Race had unfortunately assumed an inordinate power over life. Pained at racial discrimination, he says:

When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.

(The Wretched 32)

A few years after Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth was published, Chinua Achebe wrote an essay titled 'The Novelist as Teacher' (1965). It was about expanding the novelist's role from a story-teller to a pedagogue. What Achebe wants to teach, through his novels, is the unknown history of pre-colonial Africa. He wants to teach Africans not to be unduly ashamed of their ancestors. Also, the colonial version need not be believed as the gospel truth. In Achebe's words:

For the moment it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what Jean-Paul Sartre has called an anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are much better. . . . The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. I for one would not wish to be excused. I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past — with all its imperfections — was not one long night of savagery from which the first European acting on God's behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. <sup>5</sup>

Almost a decade later, Achebe wrote an essay titled 'Colonialist Criticism' (1974). In it, he questions the practice of literary criticism to search for so-called

universal qualities in literature. He suspects that their search was really for European qualities instead. Hence, he rejects the so-called universality and writes, "I should like to see the word universal banned altogether from discussions of African literature, until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe". (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin The Post-Colonial Studies 13) The article rung an alarm bell for the prevalent modes of literary criticism.

In the following year, 1975, a lecture titled 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*' was delivered by Achebe at the University of Massachusetts. He alleged that the treatment of Africa by Conrad was thoroughly racist.<sup>6</sup> He said that, in the novel, Africa was portrayed as an antithesis to Europe. Africa as a place of peril was shown as a foil to Europe as a place of grace, thereby justifying colonialism. Due to so demeaning a portrayal, Achebe commented, "The question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot." The lecture, with its unambiguous denunciation of a famous novel, has become a milestone in postcolonial criticism of literary works.

Apart from the works highlighted above, there were many others which helped in the development of African and Caribbean postcolonialism. They include works by well-known figures like Leopold Sedar Senghor (Senegal), Wole Soyinka

(Nigeria), Edward Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados) and Wilson Harris (Guyana). Comparatively less-known writers like Denis Williams (Guyana), Emmanuel Ngara (Zimbabwe) and Sam Selvon (Trinidad) have also contributed to the origin of the theory. How their efforts received unexpected support from European philosophers is explored in the next section.

## **2.2 THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND**

The previous section highlighted the development of postcolonialism in Africa. Many a postcolonialist there had been influenced by Karl Heinrich Marx (5 May 1818 – 14 March 1883), a European philosopher. It is, indeed, ironical that colonial Europe contributed to the postcolonial world. In fact, Marx was only one of the many Europeans who influenced postcolonial theory. This section focusses on some of them and their impact on African and Asian postcolonialism.

Among the European thinkers who influenced postcolonial theory, one was Italian communist Antonio Gramsci (22 January 1891 – 27 April 1937). He wrote about a number of communist concepts, one of them being 'hegemony'. The word 'hegemony' means the domination of a person or a group by another. Previously, it was assumed that such domination could be only through top-down coercion. However, Gramsci points out that hegemony could be through mutual consent as well. He suggested, with an insight from Machiavelli's works, that one could

consent to be dominated by another due to the superior position of the latter.<sup>7</sup> In other words, people could willingly submit to hegemony. Hence, Gramsci expands the meaning of the word to include:

The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

The apparatus of state coercive power 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed. (Selections 277)

Gramsci refers to those groups which undergo hegemonic domination as 'subalterns'. The word subaltern means a person or a group of low status. Gramsci says that the history of subaltern groups is not the same as that of their nation state because national history represents only the hegemonic groups. Subaltern history, on the other hand, has been mostly obliterated. Gramsci also notes that wherever subaltern history has survived, it is not continuous in flow. This is so because subaltern groups could not counter the hegemonic ones continuously but could do so only intermittently. Gramsci's concepts, of the subaltern and of the hegemon, have been used extensively in postcolonial theory.

Apart from Marxists like Gramsci, post-structuralists Ferdinand de Saussure (26 November 1857 – 22 February 1913) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (28 November 1908 - ) influenced the generation of post-colonial theory. Post-structuralism, as practised by them, was a revisionist version of structuralism since the late 1960s. While structuralism used to analyse texts through their subterranean structures like linguistics and anthropology, post-structuralism began ignoring those structures as culturally conditioned and, consequently, unreliable references. Structuralism had viewed every text through the eyes of its particular author whereas post-structuralism started seeing each text from the angles of its different readers. Incidentally, some theorists graduated from structuralism to post-structuralism once they realised that no text yielded a singular comprehension but as many interpretations as it had readers.

A student of French structuralist Louis Althusser was post-structuralist Michel Foucault (15 October 1926 – 25 June 1984), known for developing the concept of 'discourse'.<sup>8</sup> Discourse, as he meant it, is an institution of thought. Thought is like any material institution in the sense that it has certain limits or boundaries. If those boundaries are transgressed, then that thought itself is considered meaningless or irrational by other people. Transgression of discursive limits is not acceptable to society. Moreover, these discourses are omnipresent because they circumscribe almost everything that we think. In other words, thinking is not as limitless as it is assumed to be. Foucault goes on to suggest that

discourses involve not only speech but also art and, perhaps, science. Thereby, discourses determine human society in a comprehensive way. They are created by the powerful and accepted, unknowingly, by the rest. People are not aware that they are discourse transmitters themselves. The surprising aspect of discourses, though, is that the boundaries or limits are never made explicit. The 'don'ts' are never clarified. Hence, Foucault says,

All manifest discourse is secretly based on an 'already-said'; and that this 'already said' is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a 'never-said', an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark. It is supposed therefore that everything that is formulated in discourse was already articulated in that semi-silence that precedes it, which continues to run obstinately beneath it, but which it covers and silences. The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said. The first theme sees the historical analysis of discourse as the quest for and the repetition of an origin that eludes all historical determination; the second sees it as the interpretation of 'hearing' of an 'already-said' that is at the same time a 'not-said'.  
(Archaeology 28)

According to Foucault, discourse is inextricably connected to power and

knowledge. Their mutual relationship may be represented schematically as the following: power → discourse → knowledge. It means that power creates discourses which, in turn, create knowledge. To put it in another way, knowledge is limited within the confines of discourse which has been generated by power. Since discourses are the immediate products of power, and knowledge is a product of discourse, it proves that knowledge is the end-product of power. In fact, it is that power which gives knowledge its credibility. Foucault debunks the belief that knowledge is created by reality or any other absolute. Conventional wisdom, however, was that knowledge gives power. By contrast, Foucault provides a new dimension to the relationship between power and knowledge. Hence, he talks of “a certain code of knowledge” implying that knowledge is not really fetterless.

A not unrelated concept is that of identity. Issues regarding identity were explored in detail by French psychiatrist Jacques-Marie-Émile Lacan (13 April 1901 – 9 September 1981). In the light of Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacan has pointed out that one’s identity is based on similarities with and differences from others.<sup>9</sup> We cannot think of ourselves on our own. Actually, what we think of ourselves is somehow based on what others think of us. However, Lacan says that others are not homogenous themselves. He divides them into an “Other”, with a capital ‘O’, and an “other”, with a small ‘o’.<sup>10</sup> The former represents society’s dominant group while the latter represents the dominated one. In terms of child psychology, a baby sees his parents as the ‘Other’ and his mirror image as the ‘other’. Lacan’s

interpretation of identity has had significant repercussions on postcolonial studies.

Another European to have influenced post-colonialism was the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (15 July 1930 – 8 October 2004).<sup>11</sup> One of the issues he paid attention to was the presence of social binaries. The word 'binary' means 'twofold'. In post-colonialist criticism, the word stands for a pair of opposites with one of its terms dominating the other and also suppressing the ambiguous and in-between spaces. Binaries have been used both by the colonizers and the colonized, but mostly by the former. On the one hand, colonizers used binaries like white/coloured and modern/primitive; on the other hand, the colonized utilised binaries like indigenous/foreign and traditional/new. Interestingly, moral binaries like good/bad and right/wrong were common to both these discourses. Derrida argued that the poles of such dualities were not always rigid but flexible at times, which in turn altered the difference between them. For instance, a binary such as European/Asian is well-known but it gets disturbed on questions about Russia or Turkey because these two countries do not fit in neatly within that pair. Due to this indeterminacy of binaries, an entire text could have its meaning unstable or fluid. Also, the interstitial space within a binary is more often than not a region of taboo and that leads binaries to encourage extreme positions. Moreover, the poles of a binary are not equal in power — the first term dominates the second. Accordingly, most of the binaries are biased in favour of the powerful at any point in time. The predominance of one term over its counterpart in binaries worried Derrida to the extent that he commented,

In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with a peaceful coexistence of a *vis-a-vis*, but rather a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a *neutralization* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively. . . . The hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself. (Positions 38-9)

The relation between two or more binaries can be even more complex than that between the poles. The examples below can prove the point:

Colonizer	–	colonized,
White	–	coloured,
Civilized	–	primitive.

Such binaries are easily read across but, when arranged in a matrix like the one above, may be read downwards as well. If this binary matrix is read downwards, then the items on the left would form a single pole while those on the right would form the other pole. Reading the matrix downwards, its left and the right poles would show a 'collective' binary i.e. the colonizer who is white and civilized as

opposed to the colonized who is coloured and primitive. That adds a totally new dimension to the apparently simple binaries.

Apart from the writers discussed above, there were other Europeans like Roland Barthes (12 November 1915 – 25 March 1980) who contributed in different ways to postcolonial theory. Americans like linguist Avram Noam Chomsky (7 December 1928 - ) have contributed to the theory too. Nonetheless, the role of Asian writers in developing this theory is immense and justifiably merits detailed discussion.

### **2.3 ASIAN THEORETICIANS**

European communists and poststructuralists, as discussed in the last section, created the background of postcolonial theory. However, the main theoreticians of postcolonialism are from Asia. Noteworthy among them, are Edward W. Said (1935 – 2003), Homi K. Bhabha (1949 - ) and Gayatri C. Spivak (1942 - ). These three theoreticians, coincidentally, had or have extensive connections with the West. Their major concepts are discussed below.

The first and the foremost among Asian postcolonialists was Palestinian activist Edward Wadie Said. He contributed to the theory by analyzing the orientalism of the Western world. The word 'orientalism' means scholarship in

Eastern cultures, whether in fiction or in non-fiction. In the light of Foucaultian discourse and Gramscian hegemony, Said analyzed the existing orientalist scholarship.<sup>12</sup> He argues that the orientalist 'knowledge' was constructed on the basis of a Western discourse about Eastern societies. In other words, orientalism was less a fact-finding mission and more a prejudice-confirming exercise. Said points out that even those orientalists who tried to be factual could not withstand Eurocentric pressures. Said suggests that biased orientalism was accepted by the East because of consensual hegemony. The East had consented to such 'knowledge' because of the dominating position of the West, the former had become subliminally convinced about the projected superiority of the latter. In that way orientalism helped the social, economic and political subordination of the Orient by the Occident. However, it is not only the East which was influenced by orientalism. Said reminds us that even the West was affected, although differently. The West looked upon itself as the opposite of the East in the symbolic sense. It saw itself as what the other was supposedly not — modern. This kind of oppositionality, which thrives on stereotypes, was necessary to strengthen and perpetuate Europe's self-image. So orientalism resulted in increasing the psychological distance between the two hemispheres of the world rather than bring them together. Orientalist knowledge, thus, became a handmaiden for colonial rule. Hence, Said concludes,

My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence — in which I do not for a moment believe — but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose,

according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting. (Orientalism 273)

The relationship between oriental and occidental countries was, generally speaking, the relationship between the colonized and colonizing ones. As such, it was the focus of Indian critic Homi Bhabha. Influenced largely by Lacan, Bhabha introduced the concept of 'mimicry'. He argues that the colonizer is often mimicked by the colonized. These mimicries, although sincere, become embarrassing for the colonizers just as distorted reflections in curved mirrors are.<sup>13</sup> The distortions in the image are uncomfortable for the object, the person whose image it is. After all, the line between mimicry and mockery is thin. The line could be breached inadvertently and prove colonial domination to be a fluctuating authority. Hence, Bhabha says:

If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce. For the epic intention of the civilizing mission, 'human and not wholly human' in the famous words of Lord Rosebery, 'writ by the finger of the Divine' often produces a text rich in the traditions of *trompe-l'oeil*, irony, mimicry and repetition. In this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects Mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. (The Location 85)

Bhabha is also associated with the postcolonial concept of 'hybridity'. Hybridity is a fusion of certain elements of the colonizing and colonized peoples. Like a double-edged sword, the colonial hybrid reaffirms the domination of the colonizer while encouraging the insurgency of the colonized. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and hybridity have helped in the unravelling of complex colonial problems.

Homi Bhabha seems to assume that the colonial situation was homogenous to a great extent. However, the validity of such a generalizing assumption is doubted by his compatriot Gayatri Spivak. She takes particular note of the differences within the colonized peoples. Influenced by Gramsci, she says that there existed many 'sub-altern' peoples among the colonized. These sub-alterns, whether by class or by gender, had very little representation in the forums of power. Although they were numerically strong, they are practically absent in history because their voices were drowned and their viewpoints ignored by the colonizers and also the colonized who had been co-opted into colonialism. In fact, the absence of the subaltern groups is so noticeable that Spivak wonders if they can speak at all. Hence, she concludes, "In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak." ('Can the Subaltern Speak?') Spivak's main contribution to postcolonial theory is, thus, the awareness of heterogeneity among the colonized.<sup>14</sup> She has little patience for postcolonial fundamentalism and essentialism.

Said, Bhabha and Spivak are three of the most important postcolonial

theoreticians. Despite their major contributions to the field, they have encountered fierce criticism. For instance, critic Robert J.C. Young has sarcastically called them the “Holy Trinity”. (Colonial Desire 163) Bhabha and Spivak, in particular, have been repeatedly criticized for the incomprehensibility of their language. Those are not the only issues in this context, however. Some related issues of postcolonial theory are discussed in the following section.

## 2.4 RELATED ISSUES

The roles of Africa, Europe and Asia in the development of post(-)colonial theory has been outlined earlier in this chapter. The theory, while training its guns on colonialism, continues to weather a number of internal storms. However, controversies could not prevent the theory from being given clear definitions by various postcolonialists. Some of the controversial issues and suggested definitions are brought to the fore in the following paragraphs.

One of the controversies regarding ‘post(-)colonial’ is the word’s spelling. To hyphenate, or not to hyphenate, that is the question. In other words, ‘post-colonial’ or ‘postcolonial’ — which is the correct form of the word? It is spelt differently by different people according to their ideological predispositions. Those critics who are not heavily influenced by post-structuralism, generally use the hyphenated form ‘post-colonial’. These writers, like Aijaz Ahmad and Benita Parry,

focus on the material effects of the colonial era. Other critics, who are deeply influenced by poststructuralism, prefer the unhyphenated form 'postcolonial'. They include the likes of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak who concentrate on the discursive power of the colonial period. Nonetheless, the difference between the two forms of the word is narrow since their meanings are practically the same. Hence, Bill Ashcroft *et al* write, "While this distinction in spelling exists, the interweaving of the two approaches is considerable." (Key Concepts 187)

Another controversy of postcolonialism is regarding its historical and geographical range. It is not certain when and where postcolonialism started because imperialism, if not colonialism, existed right from the dawn of civilization. For instance, the Mauryan Empire in India, the Roman Empire in Europe, the Aztec Empire in North America and the Inca Empire in South America existed during the Ancient Age. The Mughal Empire, the Chinese Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire flourished during the Mediaeval Age. British, French and other west European empires thrived during the Modern Age. American imperialism, or neo-colonialism, seems to exist even in the twenty first century. The continuity of imperialism over the ages makes identification of any specific postcolonial era difficult. Hence, critic Ella Shohat asks pointedly, "When exactly, then, does the 'postcolonial' begin?" (103) <sup>15</sup>

Still another postcolonial controversy is regarding the two types of colonies — 'settler' colonies in Australasia and America, as distinct from 'occupier' colonies

in Asia and Africa. Many Europeans settled permanently in the former colonies, displacing large sections of the indigenous population, but not in the latter ones. Consequently, racism was more prevalent in 'settler' colonies than in the 'occupier' ones. Given these differences, and many others, it is doubtful whether discussing all colonies together would yield fruitful results. It has been feared that indiscriminate application of the term 'postcolonial' could create problems, rather than solve them.

One more unresolved issue for postcolonial writers is regarding their linguistic choices. There is no unanimity as to whether they should write in their vernaculars or in the colonial languages. While Ngugi wa Thiong'o (earlier known as James Ngugi) has renounced English in favour of his native Gikuyu so as to reach his national readers, Chinua Achebe continues to write in English in order to reach a global audience. Justifying his choice, Achebe said, "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience." (Morning Yet on Creation Day 103)<sup>16</sup>

Postcolonialism has some difficulty with feminism about the role of women in colonial times. While postcolonialism accuses white women of complicity in colonialism because they were white, feminism points to their helplessness because they were women. Feminist postcolonialists like Jenny Sharpe sidestep this controversy by arguing that white women were used by white men as psychological weapons in colonial battles. White men sometimes alleged that

white women were raped by colonized men — such allegations, whether true or not, frightened both white women and colonized men into submission. Citing the allegations of rape in A Passage to India and The Jewel in the Crown, Sharpe says that “fear-provoking stories have the same effect as an actual rape . . .” (Allegories 67) Incidentally, Shakespeare’s Prospero had accused Caliban of threatening to violate Miranda. Whatever be the role of white women in colonialism, the role of their coloured sisters has been less controversial though. Both postcolonialism and feminism agree that coloured women were victimized on two counts, their colonized status as well as their gender.

Another unresolved issue is regarding the etymology of the term ‘postcolonial’. In the literal sense, the prefix ‘post’ means ‘after’. Accordingly, the word ‘postcolonial’ implies ‘after the colonial era’. However, postcolonial studies are not limited to those events which happened only after the colonial era. Postcolonial studies encompass many events which occurred during the colonial era too. In other words, ‘postcolonialism’ as a word is slightly different from ‘postcolonialism’ as a study. The difference is narrow but significant — what is not postcolonial in one sense, may be so in another.<sup>17</sup> For example, anti-colonial movements were not postcolonial occurrences in the chronological sense. However, anti-colonial movements are closely studied in postcolonial theory. Aware of this semantic confusion, critic John McLeod warns, “The term postcolonialism is *not* the same as ‘after colonialism’, as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with.” (Beginning Postcolonialism 33)

A further problem with postcolonialism is its multi-disciplinary usage. Since the late 1940s, the term has been used in economics and other social sciences. From the late 1970s, it is being used in literature and other cultural arts. At times, the term has been used in physical sciences too, notably in medicine. Conceding the confusion, critic Ania Loomba writes, "This difficulty is partly due to the interdisciplinary nature of postcolonial studies which may range from literary analysis to research in the archives of colonial government, from the critique of medical texts to economic theory, and usually combine these and other areas." (Colonialism xii)

The multi-disciplinary nature of the term 'postcolonial' has led to its unthinking application. Such indiscriminate use, or misuse, of the term incensed Stephen Slemon so much that he wrote in his essay 'The Scramble for Postcolonialism':

It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalizing forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonial power; as an oppositional form

of 'reading practice'; and — and this was my first encounter with the term — as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies.

The most befuddling issue of postcolonial theory is its love-hate relationship with the West. On the one hand, it criticizes the Westernization of colonial times; on the other, the theory depends on Western roots itself. As has been pointed out in earlier sections of this chapter, postcolonialism has been greatly inspired by Western philosophies like Marxism, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. In fact, Aijaz Ahmad has alleged that many Asian and African postcolonialists "live and do their theories" in First World countries. Despite such Western colours, postcolonialism is substantially an anti-Western philosophy.

The theory of post-colonialism, like all other theories, has been criticized on many grounds. It has been accused of failure to reflect the entire spectrum of colonialism – the colonized natives at its one end, the colonizing foreigners at the other with mestizos and creoles in the middle. The difficulty of post-colonialism lies in the fact that though all these groups were created by the same process, colonialism, their experiences of it were not the same. What compounds the difficulty for post-colonialist theory is that even for any one group, the experiences differed from colony to colony because of a host of variable factors. The experiences of all colonies could not have been the same because there were too

many colonies for that to happen, with almost 85% of the land surface being colonized in the 1930s.

Whatever be the unresolved issues of postcolonialism, there have been a number of definitions for the theory. The definitions highlight different aspects of the theory and may be read in conjunction. For instance, Homi Bhabha's description of the theory emphasizes its political aspect. He said, "Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south."

However, one needs to remember that postcolonialism is not a wholly political phenomenon. It also includes social, economic and cultural aspects of the countries affected by colonialism. Many critics have kept in mind the large canvas of postcolonialism and defined the theory in a wholesome manner. For instance, Hans Bertens describes the theory thus: "Postcolonial theory and criticism radically questions the aggressively expansionist imperialism of the colonizing powers and in particular the system of values that supported imperialism and that it sees as still dominant within the Western world." (Literary Theory 200) Similar accounts of postcolonialism have been offered by other critics too.

The foregoing paragraphs enumerate some of the issues and definitions of postcolonial theory while the previous sections of this chapter give an idea about

the inter-continental development of postcolonialism. Together, they form the base on which a postcolonial critique may be made for a particular writer. It is on this basis that the present thesis critiques Nirad C. Chaudhuri's writings.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Césaire coined the word “thingification” to describe the acute objectification of the colonized by the colonizers. (Discourse on Colonialism 21)
- <sup>2</sup> This reminds us of Caliban’s speech: “You gave me language, and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse.” (The Tempest 1.2)
- <sup>3</sup> Things Fall Apart got a sequel titled No Longer at Ease (1960).
- <sup>4</sup> Fanon justifies Algerian violence as follows: “The Algerian’s criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequences of his nervous system or of the characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation.” (The Wretched of the Earth 250)
- <sup>5</sup> In another essay, ‘Africa and her Writers’ (1963), Achebe said that African writers need to concentrate on their social responsibility whereas European writers may focus on their individual expressions.
- <sup>6</sup> According to Achebe, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness was “a story in which the very humanity of black people is called into question.”
- <sup>7</sup> Gramsci also busts the myth of “common sense” as something manufactured by the dominant group and internalized by the dominated.
- <sup>8</sup> The word ‘discourse’ is derived from the Latin cursus which means ‘running to and fro’.
- <sup>9</sup> Lacan was influenced not only by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud but also by structuralist philosophers Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure.
- <sup>10</sup> Lacan’s term for the “Other” is grande autre (grand other).

- <sup>11</sup> Derrida has been an influence on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who translated his Of Grammatology (1976) into English.
- <sup>12</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook criticize Said for mixing post-structuralism of Foucault with Marxism of Gramsci, two apparently incompatible theories. (Comparative Studies 141-67)
- <sup>13</sup> Bhabha says that mimicry showed the colonized to be "almost the same, but not quite". (The Location of Culture 86)
- <sup>14</sup> Emphasizing the fact that the subaltern is not a monolithic entity, Spivak says, "One must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous." ('Can the Subaltern Speak?' 26)
- <sup>15</sup> 'Notes on the "Postcolonial"' Social Text 31/32 (1993).
- <sup>16</sup> As far as the language of English is concerned, Achebe said that for him "there is no other choice." (Morning Yet on Creation Day 103)
- <sup>17</sup> Neo-colonialism, which is also a form of colonialism, too is studied by postcolonial theory.

## CHAPTER III

# ANALYSIS OF CHAUDHURI'S PRO-COLONIALISM

*"Chaudhuri's Autobiography may be the one great book to have come out of the Indo-English encounter."*

— Vidyadhar Surajpershad Naipaul, 'The Overcrowded Barracoon'

### 3.1 ANTI-NATIONAL SENTIMENTS

In the pre-independence era, most Indians who wrote in English were anti-colonists. They included political leaders like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu. However, not all Indians writing in English had that anti-colonial attitude. Some of them were indifferent or even pro-colonial. A number of such writers in Indian English who showed colonial symptoms are discussed in this section.

The pioneer in Indian English was a pro-colonial man. His name was Sake

Dean Mahomet (1759 – 1851), his book's name being The Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, through Several Parts of India, While in the Service of the Honourable The East India Company (1794). While the title says that Mahomet was in the service of the Company, the book in its entirety gives a feel that his service was not merely professional but emotional too. A pro-British tilt is noticeable throughout, although the book is mainly about Indians — their dresses, occupations and customs at that time. Mahomet's pro-colonial sympathy was reconfirmed when he chose the European way of living and settled there during his last years.<sup>1</sup>

Dean Mahomet was, admittedly, an insignificant scribe but even some important writers in Indian English had expressed colonial sympathies. The first significant Indian writer in English was Rammohun Roy (22 May 1772 – 27 September 1833). "Rammohan Roy mastered the English language, and wrote and spoke forceful English years before Macaulay wrote his Minute," writes literary historian K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. (Indian Writing 34) Roy, who motivated the British rulers to abolish the Indian practice of widow immolation, actually wrote down the advantages of British rule in India. Not satisfied with India being Britain's 'occupier' colony, he argued in favour of a full-fledged 'settler' colony. He lambasted the prevalent Sanskrit-based education for the continuation of ignorance. Pleading for promotion of western education instead, Roy wrote to Governor General Amherst on 11 December 1823:

We now find that the government is establishing a Sanskrit school

under Hindu pundits, to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This seminary (similar in character to those which existed in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon) can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practicable use to the possessors or to society. The pupils will there acquire what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtilties since produced by speculative men, such as is commonly taught in all parts of India. . . . If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. The Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislators. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction; embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, with other useful sciences. (Biswas 190-95)

Like Roy, Dadabhai Naoroji (6 September 1825 – 30 June 1917) wrote in Indian English with pro-colonial leanings. Naoroji's book, Poverty and Un-British Rule in India (1902), proved his flair for English writing while the lectures he

delivered betrayed a soft corner for British colonialism. As he presided over the Indian National Congress for three years, he was a nationalist for sure though not necessarily an anti-colonialist.<sup>2</sup> The 'Grand Old Man of India', as Naoroji was popularly known, was a firm believer in Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence and the British sense of fair play. He believed that British colonialism was the progenitor of Indian nationalism, rather than its annihilator. In a speech of 1886, he wondered if the feeling of nationhood existed at all during the pre-British ages of India's history. Addressing a diverse audience, Naoroji said:

I ask whether in the most glorious days of Hindu rule, in the days of Rajahs like the great Vikram, you could imagine the possibility of a meeting of this kind, whether even Hindus of all different provinces of the kingdom could have collected and spoken as one nation. Coming down to the later empire of our friends, the Mahomedans, who probably ruled over a larger territory at one time than any Hindu monarch, would it have been, even in the days of the great Akbar himself, possible for a meeting like this to assemble, composed of all classes and communities, all speaking one language, and all having uniform and high aspirations of their own. . . . It is under the civilizing rule of the Queen and people of England that we meet here together, hindered by none, and are freely allowed to speak our minds without the least fear and without the least hesitation. (Bakshi 105)

Naoroji was a non-fiction writer, although many fiction writers who appeared

after him had been equally pro-colonial. The first fiction in Indian English was the novel Rajmohan's Wife (1864), and the novelist was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (27 June 1838 – 8 April 1894). Bankim, the composer of India's national song Vande Mataram (Hail Mother), was appreciative of Europeans in many of his works. He believed that Indians could never become Englishmen simply because the qualities of the latter were much better than those of the former. In a satire, Bankim allegorized the British and Indians as tigers and monkeys respectively. The tigers go about their business without taking any notice of the monkeys whereas all that the simians get worked up about are the felines.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Bankim created a character named Amarnath who is very well acquainted with the works of European intellectuals. Amarnath's conversation with another character reflects Bankim's knowledge of Europe. That passage, from the novel Rajani (1877), is translated as follows:

The discussion of ancient literature led in its turn to ancient historiography, out of which there emerged some incomparable exposition of the classical historians, Tacitus, Plutarch, Thucydides, and others. From the philosophy of history of these writers Amarnath came down to Comte and his *lois des trois etats*, which he endorsed. Comte brought in his interpreter Mill and then Huxley; Huxley brought in Owen and Darwin; and Darwin Buchner and Schopenhauer. Amarnath poured the most entrancing scholarship into my ears, and I became too engrossed to remember our business.

Bankim's junior contemporary, Nobel-laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941), was another fiction writer who criticized Indians. "Tagore left behind him an immense mass of prose writing, in Bengali as well as in English," notes K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. (Indian Writing 104) Tagore's novel The Home and the World (1916) shows a nationalist character, Sandip, in poor light. The novel has references to the violence unleashed in the name of India's nationalist movement. Another novel by Tagore, Gora (1910), has a hero who symbolizes the unity of India and Europe. The hero's Irish father had been killed by Indians in the mutiny-turned-rebellion of 1857 and his Irish mother died soon after giving him birth. The orphaned infant, who grew up to be the novel's hero, was brought up by Indian foster-parents. <sup>4</sup> However, Tagore did not confine himself to literature alone and commented on politics too at times. He could not keep silent on the ways of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920 and condemned the burning of British cloth, which was the rage all over India, as senseless. Some of Tagore's English lectures are indirectly critical of Indian chauvinism. He even suggested that the colonization of India was beneficial to us in certain ways. Cautioning against the concept of nationalism, Tagore writes in an essay:

Even though from childhood I had been taught that the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity. (Nationalism 127)

Tagore's unease with the nationalist movement was shared by one of the most prominent writers in Indian English, Aurobindo Ghose (15 August 1872 – 5 December 1950). C. D. Narasimhaiah calls him the "inaugurator of modern Indian criticism". (Journal of South Asian Literature 24.87) Aurobindo, the author of The Life Divine (1949) and many other philosophical works, had an Anglicized upbringing and studied in England. Nevertheless, he returned to India to become a firebrand nationalist. In a surprising volte-face, however, he withdrew from the Indian movement in 1909. This withdrawal occurred after his arrest for alleged involvement in the Muzaffarpur bomb case wherein two British women had been killed. Aurobindo was acquitted of the charges but, thereafter, kept India's anti-colonial struggle at an arm's length. In fact, he left British India and settled down in the French colony of Pondicherry. During the Second World War, he spoke openly in favour of the Britain-led Allied Forces. He preferred the Allies despite their many wrongdoings since he considered the Germany-led Axis to be a worse evil. On the Allies versus Axis debate, Aurobindo wrote:

The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. (Messages 12)

In Indian English writing, equal to Aurobindo in prominence was Jawaharlal

Nehru (14 November 1889 – 27 May 1964). Like the former, the latter too had an Anglicized upbringing and studied in England. Unlike Aurobindo, however, Nehru remained a nationalist throughout his life and went on to be elected as independent India's first Prime Minister. Despite this consistent nationalism, he had felt out of place in India.<sup>5</sup> Nehru was more at home among Englishmen than among his compatriots. Noticing his discomfort in this country, even Gandhi had written, "Indeed, he is more English than Indian in his thought and make-up." (Collected Works 49.499) In a speech at Columbia University, Nehru urged Indians to be cosmopolitan in their outlook. He advised against practicing insularity, saying that Indians suffered whenever they refused to interact with the rest of the world. In Nehru's words:

My own view of Indian history is that we can almost measure the growth and the advance of India and the decline of India by relating them to periods when India had her mind open to the outside world and when she wanted to close it up. The more she closed it up, the more static she became. (Iyengar 312)

Not only major writers like Nehru, but many other Indians who wrote in English expressed pro-colonial sentiments too. In 1883, social reformer Keshub Chunder Sen (1838 – 1884) wrote, "If I am an Asiatic in devotion, I am a European in practical energy." (Am I an Inspired Prophet?) In 1877, Indian National Congress leader Surendranath Banerjea (1848 – 1925) wrote, "I verily believe that the establishment of British power in India was providential." (Bedi 167) In 1909,

educationist Madan Mohan Malviya (1861 – 1946) wrote, "I do believe that British rule is meant for the good of India, meant to help us to raise our country once more to a position of prosperity and power." (Bedi 167) N. C. Kelkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak's biographer, wrote, "I think that we in India as a nation must be eternally grateful to the English language for opening to us endless vistas and beautiful avenues of Western thought." (Bedi 168) K. M. Munshi (1887 – 1971), the Home Minister of Bombay province, wrote, "India joined the brotherhood of the English-speaking world." <sup>6</sup>

The foregoing account shows that many Indians, though not all, who wrote in English had sympathies for British colonialism in India. It was with this background that Nirad C. Chaudhuri started writing in Indian English. Moreover, on the global scale, anti-nationalist writing is not entirely unknown. A searching look at world literature throws up a couple of other writers who can be put, to a certain extent, in the same league as him.

One Trinidadian author whom Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri shared significant similarities with was Cyril Lionel Robert James (4 January 1901 - 19 May 1989). Both of them came from middle-class backgrounds and taught themselves most of what they knew in the sense that their learning was more due to their individual efforts than to the schools and colleges they studied in. Both the writers developed keen interests in literature and other fine arts as well as in history and politics. As far as their literary style is concerned, both indulged in thick descriptions of their

respective houses, people and happenings. Regarding their ideological moorings, both Chaudhuri and James were ambivalent towards the British civilisation. On the one hand, they acknowledged the positive contributions of Britain to their parent countries, something which cost them their popularity among their compatriots who were anti-colonial. On the other hand, both Chaudhuri and James decried the degradation of British culture in the second half of the twentieth century, mostly blaming the popular media for the dismal state of affairs. In self-imposed exile during the autumn of their lives, both spent their last years in England with Chaudhuri settling in Oxford and James in Brixton. In fact, it was V.S. Naipaul who first noticed the resemblances between Chaudhuri's The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian and James's autobiography, Beyond a Boundary, saying that both were "part of the cultural boomerang from the former colonies, delayed and still imperfectly understood". ('Two Brown Sahibs' The Hindu December 19, 2004)

The quintessential spirit of Nirad Chaudhuri's autobiography is also in line with that of Alan Paton's novel Cry, the Beloved Country (1948). Paton's book throws light on the racial tensions of South Africa in a way that seems to be anti-nationalistic but is patriotic in its essence. Chaudhuri's autobiography, too, gives insights on the colonial tensions in pre-independence India and while the tone is anti-Indian, it is infused with a subtle affection for the country. In fact, this duality is another mark of his ambivalence.

However, the most famous writer to share significant common ground with

Nirad Chaudhuri was Nobel-laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn (11 December 1918 – 3 August 2008). Just as Chaudhuri regretted his early enthusiasm for the Indian freedom movement, so did Solzhenitsyn repent for his initial participation in the Soviet army. Chaudhuri's The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (1951) exposed the fissures in India's nationalist movement quite as Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962) brought to light the horrors of Russia's communist regime. Consequently, both these writers invited the wrath of their state machineries — Chaudhuri was forced to exit the AIR while Solzhenitsyn was persecuted by the KGB. Both of them, however, continued writing uninhibited as is evident from the former's Thy Hand, Great Anarch! (1987) and the latter's The Gulag Archipelago (1969). Both Chaudhuri and Solzhenitsyn moved away from the confines of literature to the arena of history in order to 'correct', what was in their opinion, western misconceptions about their respective countries. Neither writer spared the West, though, from their trenchant censure. Perhaps, it is in this ambivalent attitude of criticizing the West and also the non-West that the biggest similarity between Chaudhuri and Solzhenitsyn is to be found.

Nirad Chaudhuri's non-conformist attitude and historical knowledge may also be compared to Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (29 April 1863 – 29 April 1933). Alexander Pope was a particular favourite of Chaudhuri, as is evident from the former's couplets spread in the latter's books. However, the foregoing account brings out the biographical and intellectual commonalities between Chaudhuri and a host of writers. It may be noticed that many of them had difficult relationships

with the parent countries. Cyril James and Alexander Solzhenitsyn criticized the western countries too with equal vigour. Being uncomfortable about their own nations and yet being critical of the West put them on the horns of a peculiar dilemma, a dilemma which reveals itself in the postcolonial ambivalence of N.C. Chaudhuri.

### 3.2 UNCONVENTIONAL HISTORIES

The previous section gives an idea about the subterranean pro-colonialism in Indian writers. However, to be fair to them, it must be said that they were not the only ones to have second thoughts on the country's nationalism. Even professional historians of certain schools hold similar views. They differ from nationalist historians to a considerable extent and an awareness about them would be of considerable assistance in analyzing Nirad Chaudhuri's pro-colonial stance.<sup>7</sup>

The neo-imperialist school of historiography, sometimes known as the Cambridge School, professes the greatest difference with conventional history. Not only do they deny that there was a national movement, they also question the existence of India as a nation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their assertion is that, at the time, the Indian sub-continent was little more than an unwieldy assortment of ethnic communities. According to these historians, the absence of concrete nationhood precluded the possibility of any national

movement. The lack of tangible nationhood also made the situation in this sub-continent qualitatively different from that in China, Japan, and the Middle-Eastern and African countries. Moreover, the neo-imperialist school denies that British rule over this sub-continent was any more exploitative than the rule of local kings or chieftains. In fact, imperialist historians like Bruce McCully went to the extent of suggesting that it was actually a "benevolent Raj". (English Education 40)

However, what this school does not deny is that there were many conflicts between the native inhabitants and the foreign rulers in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding those conflicts, the Cambridge School says that the native protestors were too heterogeneous to be uniformly motivated and often worked at cross purposes. The school also alleges that the protests had been hijacked by the elite classes within the indigenous communities. Those elites, who supposedly had their own axe to grind, incited their brethren against the British rulers in the name of anti-colonialism. What helped the local elites in the incitement of their fellowmen was the occurrence of wars, droughts, epidemics and occasional excesses of the government. In other words, we are to believe that the freedom struggle was nothing but a glorified power struggle between indigenous and foreign elites.<sup>8</sup>

Denying any lofty idealism on the part of anti-British protestors, neo-imperialist historian Anil Seal argues:

What from a distance appear as their political strivings were often, on close examination, their efforts to conserve or improve the position of their own prescriptive groups. . . . It is misleading to view these native mobilizations as directed chiefly against foreign overlordship. Much

attention has been paid to the apparent conflicts between imperialism and nationalism; it would be at least equally profitable to study their real partnership. (The Emergence 342)

While the neo-imperialist school dismisses the entire national movement as non-existent, the subaltern school of historiography splits it into two. This school finds that there were not one but two streams in the country from 1857 to 1947. The mainstream was, of course, the well-known movement led by the big leaders of the Indian National Congress. The other one, a side stream, was a less-known struggle by the downtrodden millions of Indian society. Subaltern historians say that the first was a sham whereas the second was the real thing. According to them, the main conflict was not so much between nationalists and imperialists as between elites and subalterns. The subaltern school dismisses most of the organized resistance in the pre-independence era as mere shadow-boxing between Indian and British elites.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, these historians pay a lot of importance to all the incidents of spontaneous protest at that time. The school accuses conventional history of failing to recognize the liberation efforts of the subjugated people and, hence, subaltern historian Ranajit Guha writes:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism — colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. . . . In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist

writings — to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas. (Subaltern Studies 1)

Among the other schools of Indian historiography is the Marxist school. This school examines the national movement not only from a political perspective but also from a socio-economic one. According to Marxist historians like Rajani Palme Dutt, the movement's political objective was to attain independence from British rule while its socio-economic aim was to provide equitable distribution of wealth. Though the national movement succeeded in obtaining political independence, it failed to ensure socio-economic justice. As the immediate objective of ousting the imperial rulers was achieved but not the long-term objective of revolutionizing the society, many Marxists consider the freedom struggle as only a partial success.

The main scope of Nirad Chaudhuri's work was like that of British historian Edward Gibbon (27 April 1737 – 16 January 1794). As children, both had been sickly but turned out to be voracious readers. Gibbon is known for his six-volume The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire while Chaudhuri's masterwork, his two-volume autobiography, might well have been named 'The History of the Decline and Fall of the *British* Empire'. Both of them based their works on primary sources and avoided second-hand accounts like the plague. They were equally severe on their religions — Gibbon, on Christianity and Chaudhuri, on Hinduism. Gibbon said that the fall of the Roman Empire meant the "triumph of barbarism" while Chaudhuri would say much the same thing on the fall

of the British Empire. In his words,

This degradation of Bengal is, of course, part of the larger process of the rebarbarization of the whole of India in the last twenty years, a story which is as sensational and as ominous for human civilization, but not as well known, as the story of the barbarization of Germany by the Nazis. (The Autobiography 174)

Another Western historian with whom Nirad Chaudhuri shared a surprising number of similarities was Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler (29 May 1880 – 8 May 1936) of Germany. Like Chaudhuri, Spengler was emotionally reserved as a child and suffered indifferent health lifelong. Both had turned to books early in life and wrote for various magazines in order to supplement their meagre incomes. Apart from such biographical similarities, there were certain intellectual convergences between Spengler and Chaudhuri. Sociologist Max Weber described Spengler as a “very ingenious and learned dilettante”, a description which suits Chaudhuri too. Both the writers were pessimistic about their respective nations, as expressed in the former’s The Decline of the West (originally published in 1918 as Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte) and the latter’s The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (1951). The books put forth a theory of the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations and both the writers were hounded for being anti-national. Conventional historians took umbrage at their unapologetically non-scientific approach while general readers gave them a mixed reception. In fact, Chaudhuri was aware of these similarities

and thought of his autobiography in conjunction with Spengler's book. Hence, he says:

When I was passing through the events I have described, I had no perception of their universal affiliations. But writing about them after intervals ranging from thirty to sixty years, I could not remain unaware of these affiliations. . . . what the book contains is only the first chapter of the long but still unfinished history of the Decline of the West, of which Spengler spoke. (Thy Hand xxvi)

The historical schools discussed above are unconventional in the sense that they do not easily subscribe to the nationalist schools of thought. Their positions on the events prior to India's independence (for Gibbon and Spengler, though, it was Europe) are qualitatively different from the commonly held views on the topic. It is with this background that one can analyze the pro-colonial attitude of Nirad Chaudhuri.

### **3.3 CHAUDHURI'S EARLY NATIONALISM**

Earlier in this thesis, in Section 1.2 to be precise, Nirad Chaudhuri's life has been sketched in detail. As he lived through the twentieth century, he could not have been untouched by the massive anti-colonial movement which swept India in the first half of that century. In fact, as it happened, he was attracted to the

movement in his childhood and he supported it in his early adulthood. Therefore, his association with the nationalist movement needs to be examined closely. In Chaudhuri's words,

In the whole course of my life there have been three periods during which I fully shared the passions of the nationalist movement: first, during the anti-partition or Swadeshi days; secondly, in the months following the passive resistance movement in 1919; and, thirdly, during the civil disobedience of 1930-1. (The Autobiography 375)

As a child, Chaudhuri's environment was like that of any other child's in the early twentieth century. Like the children of his age group, he was told about the glorious events which happened forty years earlier in the Revolt of 1857-58.<sup>10</sup> The Revolt had started off as a small-scale mutiny but had soon grown into a full-fledged rebellion. Forty years later, the little Chaudhuri was made aware of its heroic stories and how the mutiny-turned-rebellion became India's first major anti-colonial struggle. Historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar wrote, "Whatever might have been its original character, it soon became a symbol of challenge to the mighty British power in India." (The Sepoy Mutiny iii) Kids like Nirad Chaudhuri knew stories of the indomitable Nana Saheb Dondu Pant, the valiant Tantia Tope, the courageous Laxmi Bai, the elusive Kunwar Singh and other brave rebels like them. Chaudhuri says,

When I was a boy I first heard and then read many stories about the Mutiny which had taken shape in the previous forty years . . . The

heroes and heroines of these tales were Nana Sahib (believed in my childhood to be still living and in hiding somewhere), Tantia Topi (the invincible Indian general), the Rani of Jhansi (with her famous cry 'I shall never give up my Jhansi'), and Kunwar Singh of Bihar, to mention only a few. (The Autobiography 400)

Inspired by the legendary tales of the 1857 rebellion, the young Chaudhuri enthusiastically witnessed the Swadeshi Movement of 1905-07. He was only seven years old when Swadeshi, the country's first major anti-colonial struggle in the twentieth century, was launched. The movement protested the British government's act of partitioning Bengal, an act which came into effect on 16 October 1905. The government justified the partition on the ground that the population of Bengal had become too large to be administered within a single province.<sup>11</sup> However, Swadeshi protestors opposed the partition because it would weaken the unity of the province. As a mark of protest, "Moderate leaders like Surendranath Banerjea toured the country urging the boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt," writes historian Aditya Mukherjee. (India's Struggle for Independence 127) The boycott plea had its intended effect on Nirad Chaudhuri too. He rejected foreign goods and adopted indigenous ones even though the latter were comparatively less comfortable. In his description of the movement, Chaudhuri's usage of the first person plural number indicates how much he was in tune with his countrymen. He writes,

It was in October 1905 that we had our formal initiation into the

nationalist movement. . . . A gentleman called at our house with a bundle of silk threads and my father asked us to have a bath in the river first and then in a state of cleanliness tie the thread round our wrists as a token of the brotherhood of all Bengalis. We were to observe that day as a day of national mourning and fasting. We also put away all our clothes manufactured in England and put on dhotis made in the Indian mills, which at first were as coarse, heavy, and thick as sackcloth. (The Autobiography 207-08)

The Swadeshi Movement spurred Chaudhuri's nationalistic feeling to such an extent that he started sympathizing with Extremist ideologies. In 1908, he worked as a child volunteer at a public meeting addressed by Extremist leader Aurobindo Ghose. Ghose was later accused of conspiracy in a bomb case which killed two British women at Muzaffarpur. Another leader who influenced Chaudhuri at that stage was Bipin Chandra Pal. Pal was one among the famous Extremist trio Lal-Bal-Pal, the other two being Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The Extremists claimed to be more nationalistic than their Moderate counterparts within the Indian National Congress. The Moderate camp, on the other hand, included eminent leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta.<sup>12</sup> Congress historian Bhogaraju Pattabhi Sitaramayya brought out the difference between the two camps succinctly when he said, "Gokhale's method sought to win the foreigner, Tilak's to replace him." (History of Indian National Congress) Nirad Chaudhuri, as if on extremist Tilak's cue, wanted to replace the

foreigner rather than win him over. He hoped for an effective antidote to British colonialism and thought that the militancy of Extremists would fulfill his nationalistic desire. Convinced that the pacifist ideology of the Moderates was not a viable method for achieving swaraj [self-rule] in India, Chaudhuri wrote,

The liberal form of nationalism began to lose not only support but also reputation. We always turned up our noses at the mere mention of the Moderates, and even before we had begun to air our contempt for them a complete transformation had come over our spirit. We found the older patriotic songs very tame and uninspiring. (The Autobiography 211)

Chaudhuri remained sympathetic towards Extremist ideology even when the British colonizers sought to suppress it. The British government became suppressive of the Extremists immediately after the end of the First World War in 1918 because, during the war, Indian revolutionaries had needed the government. Soon afterwards, the colonial government set up a committee headed by one Justice Rowlatt to enquire into alleged terrorist and subversive activities of Indians. The Rowlatt Commission recommended that the government be legally empowered to arrest any Indian without warrant, imprison any Indian without trial, deport Indian seditionists and muzzle the Indian press. The proposals were clearly violative of human rights. Nevertheless, Rowlatt's recommendations were tabled in the Indian legislature in the form of two government bills.<sup>13</sup> "One of them was actually pushed through in indecent haste in the face of opposition from all the

elected Indian members,” notes historian Mridula Mukherjee. (India's Struggle for Independence 181) The improper passage of that repressive bill into law did not escape Nirad Chaudhuri's notice. As an adult in his early twenties, he understood that the British government was making the bill's passage a prestige issue. Hence, Chaudhuri was one with other Indians in lambasting the government. Without mincing words against the British, he writes,

I cannot explain the unstatesmanly obduracy of these men except on the supposition that they not only looked upon the Rowlatt Bill as their revenge for the nervous worry the Indian revolutionaries had caused them during the war, . . . but were also determined to make the passage of the bill the test of their position and prestige in post-war India. (The Autobiography 373)

Chaudhuri's disapproval of the Rowlatt-inspired despotic law turned into utter shock when its repercussions were seen across the country. No Indian, including him, could anticipate the scale of colonial brutality which followed the enactment of the law. The first reaction of most Indians to that shameful law was one of protests. The protests at Amritsar were violent, and hence, the provincial government of Punjab deployed the army and prohibited public gatherings in the city. However, a few thousand unarmed people assembled at the city's Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April 1919. The army commander was so offended by this violation of prohibitory orders that he ordered his troop of fifty men to open fire without warning.<sup>14</sup> Seventeen hundred rounds were fired at the defenceless crowd which

was unable to escape due to the high walls of the compound. The massacre left about four hundred people dead, twelve hundred wounded and the rest of India stunned. Gandhi, who had co-operated with the British government during the War, decided not to continue the co-operation with them and said, "Co-operation in any shape or form with this satanic government is sinful." Nirad Chaudhuri, too, could not be indifferent to the barbaric act and was as enraged as his compatriots. With deep anguish at the display of colonial inhumanity, he says,

But as information trickled out from the Punjab I, like the rest of my countrymen, was horrified and infuriated by the disproportionate severity of the punishment and, which was more, by the gratuitous display of vindictiveness and racial arrogance that accompanied the restoration of order in the Punjab. (The Autobiography 375)

Even a decade after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Chaudhuri's revulsion at colonial cruelty remained constant. He was greatly disturbed by the strong-arm tactics with which the colonial government tried to crush the nationalist movement in 1931-32. In fact, inspired by Gandhi, Chaudhuri had defied the Salt Act at a marsh of eastern Calcutta in 1930. After Gandhi began the Civil Disobedience Movement, the British government became more repressive than ever before. "The non-violent movement was met by relentless repression," writes historian Bipan Chandra. (India's Struggle 288) The police opened fire at twenty-nine places and killed 103 Indians besides injuring 426. The Indian National Congress was banned and its offices seized. Even Press freedom was curtailed to the extent

that printing photographs of nationalist leaders was censored. One issue of the Chaudhuri-edited The Modern Review, which carried a picture supplement on the famous Dandi March, was proscribed.<sup>15</sup> India had become such a police state that an Englishman, Fenner Brockway, wrote a book titled India Under the Lathi [stick]. The anti-Indian barbarity distressed Nirad Chaudhuri so deeply that he chose the same title for a chapter in his autobiography. In the course of his duties as an editor, he had read about the arrests of approximately eighty thousand Indian protestors. Like thousands of his readers, he too became lachrymose on reading how those arrests tried to cripple the Indian agitation. In Chaudhuri's words,

As I read the proofs, although I was no participant, tears came into my eyes. By that time all the others were also in jail. But neither Gandhi's arrest nor theirs made any difference to the intensity of the agitation. The people themselves took it over. If anything, it became more widespread and intense, with the passion supplied by the rank and file, not the leaders. Even when one could not see the country-wide agitation one could feel it, and hear its rumble . . . (Thy Hand 279)

A number of points emerge from the foregoing analysis. Firstly, it is found that Nirad Chaudhuri did have sympathy for India's nationalist movement at some point in his life. The discovery of his early sympathy for Indian nationalism is startling because he is well known for his virulent antipathy towards the movement. Given his prominent dissociation from the movement, his one-time association with

it seems to be incredible. Another aspect to be noted is that, in those early years, Chaudhuri's association with the anti-colonial struggle was so intense that he favoured its extremist ideology rather than the moderate one. It marks one end of the pendulum swing which he underwent regarding his love-turned-hate relationship with the freedom struggle. From Extremist nationalism to extreme anti-nationalism, Chaudhuri traversed a long distance.

The third feature to be noted in the present context is that Nirad Chaudhuri was critical of the repressive methods of the British government. Although he turned pro-colonial eventually, he rarely kept silent or tried to justify acts of colonial repression.<sup>16</sup> The fourth point to be underlined is that the last time Chaudhuri sympathized with freedom fighters was in the early 1930s. At that time, he was only slightly older than the century. Why he lost his soft corner for the freedom movement, despite being initially inclined, needs to be analyzed. The reasons for Chaudhuri's spectacular metamorphosis are excavated in the following sections.

### **3.3 HIS DISAPPROVAL OF VIOLENCE**

The previous section brought to the fore Nirad Chaudhuri's early association with Indian anti-colonialism. However, by the time he was in the mid-thirties, he had dissociated himself from the movement. It was an astonishing transformation, of course, the causes of which are many. One of the reasons for Chaudhuri

turning away from the freedom struggle has to do with the violence which was occasionally resorted to by Indian nationalists. What influence the spectre of their violence had on his outlook is analyzed below.

It has been noted earlier that Chaudhuri had served as a child volunteer at a public meeting of the Extremist leader Aurobindo Ghose in 1908. Subsequently Ghose left the nationalist struggle and, interestingly, Chaudhuri too started doubting the movement. The latter became uncomfortable with the many acts of violence in it. For instance, militant nationalists had made an attempt to blow up the train of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. In April 1908, they tried to assassinate a British judge of Muzaffarpur though their bomb killed two British women instead.<sup>17</sup> There was also a dacoity at Barha in Bengal to raise nationalist funds. A number of secret societies like Anushilan Samiti had sprung up. About such militant activities, historian Hirendranath Mukherjee said, "They gave us back the pride of our manhood." (India Struggles 96) Nirad Chaudhuri, however, could not feel proud of the militancy. He looked at assassination as nothing else but murder and felt that the end did not justify the means. He felt uneasy with nationalist ideology because it appeared to condone, if not encourage, violent activities. In Chaudhuri's words,

I discovered later that from the outset many of the organizers of the secret conspiratorial societies had contemplated a quite different method of political action — assassination, in imitation of the Russian revolutionists. But for a long time I did not realize this, and when at

last I perceived in what direction the revolutionary movement was going I lost much of my sympathy for it. . . . As the revolutionary movement tended more and more towards the method of murder and robbery I began to feel an emotional revulsion from it. In this my mother's attitude influenced me very strongly. From the very beginning she came out very decidedly against murder and dacoity. She refused to concede that the end justified the means. Her mind never succumbed to the casuistry which became all too prevalent amongst us. (The Autobiography 231)

As far as violence was concerned, Chaudhuri's discomfort was not only with the activities of Extremist nationalism. He was dismayed to find that even avowedly pacifist protests in the country could degenerate into violence. Perhaps, the first instance of this kind was seen in Delhi on 30 March 1919 where the call to protest the Rowlatt-recommended law suddenly turned violent. "This seemed to set the pattern in most other areas that responded to the call; protest was generally accompanied by violence and disorder," writes Mridula Mukherjee. (India's Struggle 182) Gandhi launched an all-India satyagraha on 6 April to protest various acts of colonial repression but, once again, the protests did not remain peaceful.<sup>18</sup> Satyagraha turned violent, paradoxically. Gandhi, not happy with such a turn of events, tried his best to calm the agitators in Bombay. However, the most unfortunate incidents occurred in the province of Punjab. Three Englishmen were killed, European women attacked and telegraph wires cut by anti-Rowlatt

protestors at Amritsar in April 1919. Nirad Chaudhuri could not approve of the violence and was repulsed at the deterioration of a non-violent movement into a rowdy free-for-all. Even in the city of Calcutta, which is far removed from the north-west parts of the country, he saw public transport being targetted by Indian mobs. Expressing his indignation at the breakdown of law and order in the country, Chaudhuri says:

I read the news from the Punjab and Gujarat with distress and anxiety. No outbursts of violence occurred in Calcutta but there were scenes of unruliness and disorder. To my great disgust I saw bands of street urchins throwing mud and dust at the tram-cars. This was my first experience of a form of rebellion against British rule which was to become typical of the city. (The Autobiography 374)

Chaudhuri not only witnessed the violence which took place in the name of Indian anti-colonialism, but actually got a taste of it on 17 November 1921. On that day the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, had come to India. To protest against the royal visit, the Indian National Congress and the Khilafat Conference called a general strike. However, the response to the call was community-specific, with Hindus and Muslims supporting it but not Parsis and Christians. Such polarization resulted in fierce clashes in Bombay where at least thirty six men were killed and some women molested.<sup>19</sup> "The whole sequence of events left Gandhiji profoundly disturbed and worried about the likelihood of recurrence of violence once mass civil disobedience was sanctioned," writes Mridula Mukherjee. (India's

Struggle 189) In Calcutta, Nirad Chaudhuri experienced the undemocratic nature of the anti-imperial protests. Congress volunteers obstructed other Indians who wanted to go about their daily duties. Khilafat supporters moved around with whips in hand, evidently for the purpose of browbeating common commuters. When Chaudhuri was spotted cycling to work, they abused him and forced him to dismount. He narrowly escaped being roughed up by them. Giving a graphic description of the incident, he writes:

When the crowd saw me they shouted: 'Beat the *sala* (bastard or son of a bitch)!' . . . But the sprint had made me breathless, and I was compelled to go slowly. So, when I had gone only about half-a-mile further, a tall Hindustani darted from the pavement, pulled me down from the cycle, dragged me to the pavement, and said: 'Now, go on foot!' (Thy Hand 19)

Chaudhuri felt vindicated about his apprehensions after anti-colonial violence prompted Gandhi to ensure withdrawal of the Non Co-operation Movement. Chaudhuri had a lurking fear that there existed a violent streak, which erupted unpredictably, in the generally peaceful Indians. His fear proved to be right on 5 February 1922 when a group of peasants, Congress volunteers and Khilafat supporters burnt alive twenty two Indian policemen at the village of Chauri Chaura near Gorakhpur. Historian Shimit Amin reads that incident as "a figure of speech, a trope for all manner of untrammelled peasant violence, specifically in opposition to disciplined non-violent mass satyagrahas". (Event, Metaphor 3)

Gandhi accepted moral responsibility for the violence and fasted for five days as expiation. Then he prevailed upon the Indian National Congress to withdraw the Non Co-operation Movement within a week. Nirad Chaudhuri, however, was not impressed with Gandhi's response to the deplorable happenings at Chauri Chaura. He felt that Gandhi had been naive in the first place to assume that Indians were an essentially peaceful people.<sup>20</sup> Chaudhuri's logic was that Gandhi should never have expected the Non Co-operation Movement to remain non-violent. Questioning Gandhi's knowledge of Indian masses, Chaudhuri says:

Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to make the masses join his movement, I feared, would rouse the aggressive side of the common people of India. Their individual behaviour and collective behaviour were quite different. Mahatma Gandhi thought that his admonitions about non-violence would be listened to. Of course, they were not and could not be. Eventually, he had to admit that he had committed a Himalayan blunder. (Thy Hand 35)

The foregoing paragraphs indicate Nirad Chaudhuri's position vis-a-vis acts of violence committed by Indian anti-colonialists. His reactions to the violence unleashed by British colonialists have already been discussed in Section 3.3. With both these aspects in mind, what comes out clearly is Chaudhuri's unequivocal condemnation of violent acts irrespective of the perpetrators. In this regard, he is like Gandhi who denounced such activities whether committed by colonialists or anti-colonialists. In fact, it is a bit strange that Chaudhuri does not talk much about

the Quit India Movement which saw more instances of Indian violence than the other phases of the anti-colonial struggle.

However, it may be noted that Nirad Chaudhuri's views regarding violence are diametrically opposite those of the postcolonial writer Frantz Fanon. Fanon has justified the violence by Algerian nationalists, instead of condemning it, against French colonialism.<sup>21</sup> He says, "The Algerian's criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequences of his nervous system or of the characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation." (The Wretched 250)

#### **3.4 REVULSION AGAINST COMMUNALISM**

Nirad Chaudhuri's strong abhorrence of violence, as brought out in the previous section, was not the only reason for his distance from Indian anti-colonialism. There were other reasons too, the most important of them being his equally strong repulsion against the outbreak of communalism. An analysis of how Hindu-Muslim communalism shaped his reaction to Indian nationalism is provided below.

It has been illustrated in Section 3.3 how the seven-year old Chaudhuri participated in the Swadeshi Movement in whatever small way he could. He, like

others in the year 1905, boycotted foreign goods and adopted Indian ones instead. However, he realized years later that the movement suffered a communal handicap. According to historian Aditya Mukherjee, "The main drawback of the Swadeshi Movement was that it was not able to garner the support of the mass of Muslims and especially of the Muslim peasantry." (India's Struggle 132) In this connection, Nirad Chaudhuri remembers how Swadeshi songs invoked religious deities like Kali and Durga.<sup>22</sup> Such Hindu-tinged activities were, naturally, not to the liking of Muslims. Having understood why the movement alienated them, Chaudhuri writes,

When in later life I read Sir Valentine Chirol's *Indian Unrest* — we had been taught to hate him and his book equally well — and compared what he had written with my own recollections, I found that he had been wholly correct in his estimate of the Swadeshi Movement, in representing it as being essentially a movement of Hindu revival. (The Autobiography 211)

Chaudhuri's dislike for communalism was not confined only to its Hindu version. He had an equal distaste for communalism of the minorities, particularly that of Muslims. For instance, he considered the Khilafat Conference to be wholly an Islamic organization with little concern for Indian nationalism. As a party, the Khilafat drummed up support for the Khalifa [Caliph]. The religious post of Khalifa was held by the Sultan of Turkey and, as such, he was the global head of all Muslims. During the First World War, he put his weight behind the Germany-led

Axis Forces but the latter lost in the war. As a textbook example of victor's justice, the Britain-led Allies dethroned the Sultan and dismembered his Turkish Empire. The deposition of the Khalifa angered many Muslims and the Khilafat Conference in India demanded his restoration. Around the same time, the Indian National Congress was demanding the redress of Punjab's grievances. As both the Khilafat and the Congress were cut up with Britain, for entirely different reasons though, the two organizations struck up an alliance. "But in the long run it proved harmful as it inculcated and encouraged the habit of looking at political questions from a religious point of view," says historian Bipan Chandra. (India's Struggle 420) Nirad Chaudhuri, too, felt that Congresspeople and Khilafatis were as disparate as chalk and cheese. To him, the alliance was little more than an unnatural coalition between a political party and a religious formation which would end up politicizing religiosity.<sup>23</sup> Chaudhuri was convinced that the coalition would facilitate the growth of Indian communalism and, thereby, endanger Indian anti-colonialism. Regarding the Congress-Khilafat alliance which was finally dissolved in 1923, Chaudhuri writes:

With all these indications of the extra-Indian loyalties of the Indian Muslims I could not but have anything but disapproval for the alliance which the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi had stuck up with the Khilafat Movement. I regarded it as thoroughly opportunistic, and in the light of what happened afterwards it is impossible to hold any other view of it historically. It was impossible to assume that they felt very strongly about the unfair treatment of Turkey, and in any case

Gandhi knew that the Muslims were no practitioners of non-violence. I also knew that all Hindu political leaders were profoundly suspicious of Pan-Islamism and its influence on Indian Muslims. What made them support the Khilafat movement was their knowledge that at that moment the most active and virulent opposition to the British Government in India came from the Muslims. . . . The cynicism of the temporary alliance between the Hindus and the Muslims was thoroughly and disastrously exposed by the entire history of Hindu-Muslim relations between 1923, when the opportunistic alliance was dissolved, and 1947 when India was divided. By allying with the Khilafat movement the Congress had encouraged the most retrograde form of Islamic group-consciousness. (Thy Hand 38-9)

Chaudhuri had seen how Hindu and Muslim communalism undermined Indian nationalism. When he was only eight years old, communal riots had broken out during the Swadeshi Movement. The riots spread to different parts of Bengal including his district of Mymensingh. Minority communalism was led by the All India Muslim League which was founded in end-1907. One of its leaders, Viqar-ul-Mulk, had said, "The only way for the Muslims . . . is to help in the continuance of the British rule." (quoted in Gopal Indian Muslims 101) On the other hand, majority communalism was fanned by the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, formed in early-1915. The formation's leader, Lal Chand, said, "A Hindu should not only believe but make it a part and parcel of his organism, of his life and of his conduct, that he

is a Hindu first and an Indian after.” (Self-Abnegation 1) Such statements, obviously, undercut the concept of Indian nationalism and anti-colonialism. Their immediate fallout was the occurrence of 112 major communal riots between 1922 and 1927, as reported by an Indian Statutory Commission in 1928. When Hindu-Muslim riots had broken out in Calcutta in 1926, Nirad Chaudhuri was living in the city. He discovered that the flashpoints of the clashes were ludicrous, although their effect was absolutely tragic.<sup>24</sup> In Chaudhuri’s words,

At the time I left the Military accounts serious Hindu-Muslim rioting had begun in Calcutta and it went on for some time. . . . Hindu religious processions were always accompanied by musicians, and if these passed before mosques when the Muslims were praying there always was trouble. Nearly all Hindu-Muslim clashes began with such an incident. (Thy Hand 176)

Chaudhuri became skeptical about Indian nationhood when he found that communal riots were making a mockery of it. The ferocity of riots was going up over the years, increasing the emotional distance between the two largest communities of the country. On 16 August 1946, the Muslim League called for a ‘Direct Action Day’ to force its separatist demand on the British government. However, the so-called action was actually directed against Hindus who retaliated in equal measure. The cycle of action and reaction resulted in the slaughter of thousands of people in the city of Calcutta within a matter of days. Many more thousands lost their lives and limbs as riots spread to East Bengal, Bihar, western

United Province, Delhi, Gurgaon, Bharatpur, Alwar and Punjab. Historian Sucheta Mahajan writes, "Rivers of blood were to flow before Indian independence, tacitly accepted in early 1946, became a reality in mid 1947." (India's Struggle for Independence 492) Nirad Chaudhuri, on his part, got the feeling that Indians were really more interested in fighting among themselves than in fighting against the colonialists. Hence, he dismissed the anti-colonial movement as a big joke and accused it of overlooking the all too real fissures of Indian society.<sup>25</sup> Chaudhuri's comment on the pre-independence bloodshed is merciless. He says caustically:

Political independence arrived for the Indian people on 15 August 1947. For a whole year before that they were engaged in making a red carpet for it to step on. It was dyed in the blood of hundreds of thousands of Indians who perished in the mass murders committed by the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs on one another in 1946 and 1947.

These massacres were the real prelude to the coming of independence to India, and not the bouts of futile palaver indulged in by all the parties concerned for two years before it became fact. And these massacres were bound to take place, although those who liquidated the British Empire in India failed both to anticipate them and to prevent them. (Thy Hand 804)

Chaudhuri felt that his skepticism about undivided India's nationhood was vindicated, in a sense, when the country split into two separate nations on 14

August 1947. However, the communal riots did not stop even after the sad partition of the country. The British monarch's paramountcy lapsed on 15 August but fratricidal strife continued unabated in post-colonial India and Pakistan. Lakhs of men, women and children were butchered and many more maimed for life in the Hindu-Muslim riots. Property worth thousands of crores of rupees was looted or destroyed on either side of the newly carved out India-Pakistan border. Gandhi, who was then trying to drive sense into the murderous mobs of Bengal, said, "I invoke the aid of the Almighty to take me away from this 'vale of tears' rather than make me a helpless witness of the butchery by which man becomes a savage, whether he dares to call himself a Muslim or Hindu or what not." The savagery left Nirad Chaudhuri, who was in Delhi then, dumbfounded. He saw murdered corpses on public thoroughfares. He saw people with bleeding gashes after being stabbed. He saw men breaking and looting shops. He also saw mobs trying to break into locked houses in order to occupy them. He heard from Calcutta stories of forcible drowning and other such unimaginable incidents.<sup>26</sup> Searching for an appropriate word to describe the horrors, Chaudhuri writes:

These savageries pass as much in the outside world as in India under the name of communal trouble or Hindu-Muslim rioting. But these expressions have become clichés of a stale journalese, which convey no real sensation of the phenomenon they purport to describe. Nor am I able to suggest a better alternative. I have weighed nearly all the words and phrases which the murderous ferocity of man, as distinct from his warlike ferocity, has contributed to

the vocabulary of European peoples: massacre, pogrom, lynching, fusillade, noyade, St Bartholomew, Sicilian Vespers, Bloodbath of Stockholm, Bulgarian atrocities, Armenian massacres, Belsen, genocide, etc., etc., but find all of them inadequate. Their vividness has worn off. Instead of evoking horror, they would rather throw a veil of historical respectability on spectacles of mass murder, rotting corpses, gutters choked with human bodies emitting stomach-turning stench. (Thy Hand 837)

Chaudhuri was so disturbed by the barbaric pre-Partition and post-Partition riots of 1946 and 1947, respectively, that he thought any option other than Partition would have been far better for India. However, Bipan Chandra says, "There was, it can be argued, no other solution to the communal problem left, unless the national leadership was willing to see the nation plunged in a civil war when the armed forces and the police were under the control of the foreign rulers and were themselves ready to join the civil war." (India's Struggle 441) Nirad Chaudhuri, though, would differ on this point. He preferred a civil war to Partition, in case they were the only options available. Chaudhuri had two reasons, one ideological and the other numerical, for his apparently war-mongering preference. Firstly, a civil war would have been a wholesome phenomenon whereas the Partition was merely a political one. A civil war could have ushered in a meaningful revolution which Indian society needed badly. On the other hand, the Partition merely brought in a meaningless separation which India can do without. There was another reason,

perhaps a more important one than the first, for Chaudhuri preferring a civil war to Partition. It was in consonance with his abhorrence of violence. He suggested that a civil war would probably have taken a smaller toll than what the Partition actually did. His knowledge of world history told him that no civil war had been numerically as bloody as the Partition of India was. Hence, he stuck out his neck in favour of civil war and wrote:

I have always been told that there would have been a civil war in India if the partition had not been agreed to. I have replied by asking two questions: first, has any country in the world been able to establish a revolutionary regime without a civil war? Next, has any civil war known in history resulted in the death of nearly a million persons and the ruin of many millions? (Thy Hand 829)

The foregoing paragraphs demonstrate how Nirad Chaudhuri's view of Indian nationalism was influenced by the prevalent communalism. A few significant insights into his attitude emerge from the above analysis. One of them is the fact that Chaudhuri was staunchly secular without being politically correct.<sup>27</sup> He never spared, in his writings, communalists of any religion whatsoever. The way he criticized Hindus and Muslims alike for their communal words and deeds, testifies to his firm secular credentials.

However, the more important point in this context is regarding Nirad Chaudhuri's unwavering focus on communalism. It seems that he over-

emphasized the effect of communal riots in India's nationalist movement. While nationalist leaders did not think that riots could ever derail the movement, Chaudhuri thought that internecine clashes and anti-colonial nationalism were fundamentally incompatible. They were two contradictory pulls which could not run on parallel tracks. He felt that the sickening recurrence of large-scale riots rendered the premise of nationalism hollow. Indeed, it is a tragedy that the independence struggle saw staunch nationalists like Mohammed Ali Jinnah turning into hardcore communalists. Regarding this controversy, Bipan Chandra says, "The contradictory nature of the reality of 15 August 1947 continues to intrigue historians and torment people on both sides of the border to this day." (India's Struggle 487)

It seems that Nirad Chaudhuri's real problem lay in his hyper-sensitivity to the communal savagery in India at the time of Independence. He was too numbed by the inhumanity he saw all around to enjoy the new found freedom. For him, celebrating Independence was tantamount to forgetting Partition. That would be an act of utter selfishness on the part of an Indian who just happened to survive the uncountable murders, rapes and abductions taking place then. As the toll in communal riots was way higher than that in government repression, Chaudhuri argued that Indians suffered more because of their compatriots than because of colonialists. That is why he kept himself away from the revelry on 15 August 1947. Incidentally, even Gandhi did not join those celebrations. <sup>28</sup>

### 3.6 HYPOCRISY, CORRUPTION AND ARROGANCE

Apart from the nationalist movement's violence and communalism, which have been analyzed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 above, there were other factors which Nirad Chaudhuri disliked. For instance, he frequently found the movement to be hypocritical and its leaders to be venal. This section investigates his allegations against Indian nationalism and how they emboldened his anti-nationalist stance.

In recognition of his unsparing criticism of whatever he found hypocritical in the country, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar has called Nirad Chaudhuri "the Geiger counter looking for hidden obliquities of self-deception." (Indian Writing 591) In fact, it is ironical that Chaudhuri's loathing of hypocrisy in such an intense way contributed towards his derision of nationalism. One of the occasions which Chaudhuri found hypocritical was Indians joining the colonial army in millions while India's anti-colonial struggle was on. Not only did it happen during World War I when the Indian National Congress supported the colonialists, it also happened during World War II when the Congress opposed Britain. Despite the political opposition, there was so huge a popular participation that the strength of the Royal Indian Army grew from 1.75 lakh during peace time to 20 lakhs during the Second World War. Nirad Chaudhuri felt that this dichotomy between the political and the popular perspectives was hypocritical. While the Congress eschewed co-operation

with the colonial forces on ideological grounds, the common people embraced the Indian Army for monetary considerations. Alleging that Indians were trying to eat the cake and have it too, Chaudhuri writes:

The Indian people gained on all counts, because they did not hesitate for a single moment to give all the practical co-operation they could to the British war efforts in India for the sake of gaining money. In addition, they had the emotional satisfaction of seeing their British rulers put in the wrong and being provided with more reason to hate them. . . . In concrete terms, the co-operation was spectacular and far exceeded what Britain had got in the First World War. (Thy Hand 559)

Another aspect of India's national movement which Chaudhuri found hypocritical was the famous Indian National Army or I.N.A. It had been formed by one General Mohan Singh who had quit the defeated Indian Army contingent in Malaya and sought the help of the victorious Imperial Japanese Army instead. In response, Japan gave him thousands of Indian prisoners of war who had fought for the British earlier but were captured by the Japanese. The I.N.A., comprised mainly of such men, was set up as an anti-British force. When the Japanese Army attacked Imphal on the Indo-Burma front, probably to pre-empt any British effort to recapture Burma, one battalion of the I.N.A. accompanied them. However, the Japanese attack was foiled by the British and the I.N.A. men surrendered to the latter. <sup>29</sup> "Interestingly, the question of the right or wrong of the INA men's action

was never debated,” writes historian Sucheta Mahajan. (India's Struggle 478) Nirad Chaudhuri is of the opinion that the debate about the INA was hushed up by India's anti-colonial movement because it was an inconvenient one. He thought of the INA as merely an opportunistic formation which switched sides in favour of whoever had the upper hand at a particular point of time. He also noted that the specific role of the INA in the Japanese offensive was insignificant. Launching a scathing criticism of the organization, Chaudhuri writes:

It should be kept in mind that the Indian Army was an army of volunteers and not conscripted. The men had joined that army out of free will, either for money or position, and often both, and could not take the plea of nationalism in justification of their later conduct. During the agitation in favour of the INA there was a delivery of clamorous and drenching rhetoric about their patriotism by Indians of the highest positions, including Gandhi and Nehru. But the undeniable facts about this patriotism were that it did not prevent these Indians from joining the British Indian army whose primary purpose was to perpetuate British rule in India; it did not withstand the temptation of worldly advantages offered by the British; . . . it only came into play when the Japanese were top dogs and when it was convenient to join them. I would add that people who could call these men patriotic were either hypocrites or wholly devoid of moral consciousness, having been robbed of their judgement by a rancorous hatred of the British. (Thy Hand 784)

Chaudhuri felt that not only were the Indian masses hypocritical, even the leaders were so at times. He was strongly critical of Congress leader Vallabhbhai Patel during a naval mutiny in 1946. On 18 February that year, a large number of Indian sailors of a Royal Indian Navy ship struck work at Bombay.<sup>30</sup> Their immediate demands had more to do with their service issues than with national ones. Nevertheless, it gained popular sympathy as an anti-colonial effort and the Indian National Congress lent it moral support. In the resulting upsurge, people attacked symbols of colonial rule like police and railway stations in Bombay and Calcutta. Some Europeans were also attacked at random. Thereafter, the British government arranged for armed forces to re-occupy that striking ship and Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that Royal Navy ships would encircle it. These threats, surprisingly, induced the Congress to climb down from its earlier supportive stand. Vallabhbhai Patel, who had initially encouraged the rebellious Indian sailors, wrote to Nehru, "The overpowering force of both naval and military personnel gathered here is so strong that they can be exterminated altogether and they have been also threatened with such a contingency." (Jawaharlal Nehru Correspondence Part I) Patel's sudden developing of cold feet is seen by Nirad Chaudhuri as an instance of the Congress party's opportunism. Accusing Patel of trying to be all things to all people, Chaudhuri writes:

The Congress was loud in its support of the mutiny, and its strong man Patel himself went to Bombay to direct it. He was very strident at first, but when one day the crew were seen to be raising steam and

manning the action stations and Admiral Godfrey, who commanded the Indian Navy, sent Mosquito bombers with orders to sink it if the sailors tried to put out to sea, he at once advised them to surrender. He was one of the Congressmen who had specialized in playing the nationalist firebrand or the wise statesman, a combination of Garibaldi and Cavour, according to circumstances. (Thy Hand 829)

Apart from hypocrisy, the electoral malpractices which many Congressmen indulged in were a reason for Nirad Chaudhuri's disaffection with the movement.<sup>31</sup> He was aghast to find that the nationalist ideologues who had a strong opposition to colonial rule did not have an equally strong opposition to self-serving manipulation. However, this was one of his personal discoveries while working as a part-time private secretary to the President of the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, Sarat Chandra Bose. Although Bose was an honest man, his followers were actively involved in doctoring electoral rolls so as to include bogus names. Such inflated lists were prepared in order to overwhelm eligible voters and, thereby, grab a verdict in one's favour. As Chaudhuri says:

At that time Mahatma Gandhi was denouncing bogus electoral rolls. The Congress Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation only felt amused by this naiveté, and one day I heard a characteristic comment on it. Sarat Babu was sitting at his desk, with some Councillors before him. I was by his side. A young and very smart Councillor exclaimed: 'What is this virtuous rampage over false

electoral rolls? All of us have them. I have them. We would not be elected without them.' There was no display of virtuous indignation at this speech. Even Frederick the Great denounced Machiavellism. Sarat Babu, who was never qualified to be any kind of a Machiavellian, took the Machiavellism of his followers without any surprise, far less protest. (Thy Hand 487-88)

Still another reason for Nirad Chaudhuri being put off by India's nationalist movement was the hauteur of its middle-rung leaders, having come in close proximity with them at his job with Sarat Bose. When the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress met in Calcutta, Chaudhuri noticed how many Congressmen and women suffered from a sense of acute self-importance. The only honourable exception was, to Chaudhuri's mind, Babu Rajendra Prasad who later became the first President of India. In stark contrast to Prasad, were Gandhi's principal private secretary Mahadev Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel's daughter Mani Ben. Chaudhuri found these middle-level managers to be particularly arrogant.<sup>32</sup> They were unfailingly polite to those Indians who were either rich or famous, like industrialists and film stars. The big shots were allowed access to Gandhi, even without prior appointments. However, the common man had restricted entry and, generally, had to do with seeing him from a distance. Although Gandhi was visibly benign, his closest companions like Desai and Mani Ben were evidently snobbish. Their supercilious behaviour led Chaudhuri to doubt the concern of the average nationalist leader for the common man. In his words:

These men made up more than fully for what Gandhi lacked in the way of arrogance in looks and behaviour. I had never before seen such impassive hardness of countenance, nor such cold hauteur on the faces of men. They did not speak spontaneously to anyone who did not belong to the order of worldly power and position. If they were compelled to listen to ordinary persons, they did not look them in the face, but kept their eyes either turned away or lowered, and then answered in grave and slow speech. I never saw them smile or look relaxed. (Thy Hand 439)

Chaudhuri felt that India's anti-colonial movement was just that — a movement against colonialists and nothing else. His allegation is that even if the leaders had some idea of what would replace colonialism, that idea was hardly known to common Indians. In other words, the national movement was basically a negative one with little clarity about the intended alternative to British rule. Most Indians seemed to assume that all their problems would simply vanish into thin air once the British disappeared.<sup>33</sup> According to Nirad Chaudhuri, such immature expectations ensured that the movement remained only a 'freedom struggle', not a comprehensive revolution. In his words:

Before him [Gandhi] no Indian political leader had seen the aim of ending British rule apart from the greater task of rebuilding the entire fabric of Indian life, which they considered as the main duty before them. The triumph of negation made it inevitable that if the political

change the new leaders were trying to bring about ever took place, it would be radically different from all the great revolutions of the past. I have read about three of them, viz. the American, the French, and the Meiji in Japan. I have also passed through and read about all the revolutions of our age, viz. the young Turk, the Chinese, the Russian, and the new Turkish led by Kemal. In every case, those who carried out these revolutions knew what they were going to put in place of the regimes they were going to destroy. There were full-fledged ideologies as well as partly worked-out programmes. In the Indian nationalist movement there was not only a total absence of positive and constructive ideas, but even of thinking. (Thy Hand 31)

Chaudhuri was also rattled by the inconsistencies, as he saw them, of the anti-colonial movement. When the movement's top-rung leaders were arrested and sentenced, Chaudhuri expected Indians to explode in protest. However, that did not happen always. At times, there was not even a murmur when some of the front-ranking leaders were imprisoned by the colonial government. Gandhi, for instance, had been arrested on 13 March 1922 on charges of sedition and subsequently sentenced to six years of imprisonment. Nevertheless, no protest was seen in any part of the country against his incarceration.<sup>34</sup> Noting this lack of an appropriate reaction, historian Bipan Chandra writes, "There arose the danger of the movement lapsing into passivity". (India's Struggle 235) The general indifference to the imprisonment of the leaders surprised Nirad Chaudhuri. It made

him wonder whether the anti-colonial struggle really represented the country's people. He felt that the masses would not have been so unconcerned about those developments, had they been really interested in anti-colonialism. In Chaudhuri's words:

The sentence of imprisonment, too, produced no excitement. It was received with complete apathy. However strange all this might seem to outsiders, those who knew the psychology of the Indian masses and their pattern of behaviour, would not have been surprised, although they might not have been able to predict any particular reaction, because one of the constants of the behaviour was its unpredictability. (Thy Hand 26)

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to take stock of the major and minor reasons for Nirad Chaudhuri's anti-nationalistic outlook. For one, he was unhappy with the violence in the nationalist movement. He certainly did not think that the movement was a peaceful one, as was widely believed. He found that not only did Extremist activities resort to random violence, even the Pacifist tactics became violent at times. The second reason for Chaudhuri's disenchantment was communalism, both majoritarian and minoritarian. He thought that it questioned the very basis of Indian nationalism. As many more thousands died in communal riots than in colonial repression, he could not think of the latter as the worse evil of the two. Chaudhuri refused to forget the barbarism of the pre- and post-Independence riots which were directly caused by Indian masses.

A third reason for Nirad Chaudhuri to distrust the country's anti-colonial movement was the corruption of its footsoldiers. Having seen from close quarters the corrupt practices of pre-Independence politicians, he understood that the same people would continue in the post-Independence scenario as well. Therefore, he could not realistically hope that India would have a better future in post-colonial times. Chaudhuri was also disappointed by the air of arrogance which many Congresspeople wore about themselves. They were none too keen to be humble and polite with ordinary Indians, whom they claimed to represent.

What disturbed Nirad Chaudhuri no end was the nihilism that he perceived in the Indian movement. He understood that it would not result in a full-fledged revolution because the people were not clear about their post-colonial strategy. In fact, the people were often indifferent to the arrest and prosecution of the national leaders. The movement rarely appeared to Chaudhuri as a cohesive one. As the personal secretary to the President of the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, he was privy to the communication between some of the top-level leaders of the Indian National Congress. He found many of them, including Gandhi and Bose, to be involved in infighting and conspiring against one another. All these factors put together, convinced Chaudhuri that the nationalist movement was not worth participating in.

With pro-colonialism gradually gaining sway over him, Nirad Chaudhuri

formed a number of theories about Indian civilization. He felt that a mere transfer of power would not cure India's sickness because he had seen how power had corrupted Indian politicians. Power, he argued, in the hands of Indians would mean political independence but not social and economic liberty. Chaudhuri's prescription for attaining socio-economic freedom was a wholesome revolution, if required through a civil war. He believed that till the time India went through a social revolution, her citizens would not be truly free. Hence, he dismissed the anti-colonial movement as an insignificant half-step. It is curious that in his wish for a revolution, Chaudhuri was echoing the contemporary refrain of the Communist Part of India which had called India's independence a false achievement.<sup>35</sup> In Chaudhuri's words:

I had come to the conclusion that India stood in need of a revolution, covering all the aspects of human life — political, economic, social — which had to be more far-reaching and radical than the French Revolution, the Meiji Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the two Turkish Revolutions. Without that no new life was to arise in India. Yet I saw that it was not likely to come from an application of the policy of transfer of power to Indian hands. That was why I rejected all the ideas and policies which were on the tapis. . . . Behind this was a deeper disbelief — distrust of my own class, i.e. the anglicized upper middle class. I had found its members weak in character, mediocre in intellectual ability, and totally lacking in idealism and public spirit. Their sole preoccupation was promotion of

their individual and class interest, and I saw that in the event of British rule coming to an end in India these men would be the real heirs of the British. (Thy Hand 395)

Despite Nirad Chaudhuri's dissociation from the nationalist movement, it needs to be remembered that he was once associated with it in the emotional sense. Thereafter, his attitude towards the movement underwent a definite and irreversible change. However, such change of heart was not unheard of in those turbulent times. Aurobindo Ghose, as has been mentioned in Section 3.3 above, had switched over from militant nationalism to philosophical spiritualism. Even Gandhi was far from euphoric after the transfer of power from the British colonialists to Indian and Pakistani leadership at Independence.

**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> There are surprising similarities between Sake Dean Mahomet and Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri. Both were born in the province of Bengal, both went to Delhi in the course of their jobs, both published pro-colonial autobiographies in Britain and eventually both settled in western Europe.
- <sup>2</sup> In his pro-colonial spirit, Naoroji said, "Let us speak out like men and proclaim that we are loyal to the backbone; that we understand the benefits English rule has conferred upon us; that we thoroughly appreciate the education that has been given to us, the new light which has been poured upon us, turning us from darkness into light and teaching us the new lesson that kings are made for the people, not people for their kings; and this new lesson we have learned amidst the darkness of Asiatic despotism only by the light of free English civilisation."
- <sup>3</sup> This satire is found in Bankim's Muchiram Guder Jibon Charit [The Life Story of Muchiram Gud].
- <sup>4</sup> The novel's hero, Gora, did not know of his Irish parentage until his adulthood.
- <sup>5</sup> In January 1940, Nehru wrote, "I always feel that I can be of more use to India outside India. The feeling that I do not quite fit in here, pursues and depresses me."
- <sup>6</sup> Munshi, although a member of the Indian National Congress, was so pro-colonial in the government that Nehru called him "a police officer." (Gopal 230)
- <sup>7</sup> Nationalist historians like Bisheshwar Prasad and Amales Tripathi believe that the Indian movement was attributable mainly to the spirit of nationalism in the

country.

- <sup>8</sup> Anil Seal called the Indian struggle against British imperialism “a Dassehra duel between two hollow statues, locked in motiveless and simulated combat.” (The Emergence of Indian Nationalism 351)
- <sup>9</sup> About subaltern history, Bill Ashcroft *et al* write, “Such historiography suggested that the development of a nationalist consciousness was an exclusively elite achievement either of colonial administrators, policy or culture, or of elite Indian personalities, institutions or ideas.” (Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies 217)
- <sup>10</sup> Regarding the aura surrounding the events of 1857, Chaudhuri writes, “The Swadeshi movement also began a fantastic glorification of the Mutiny, which finally created the legend that it was the precursor of the nationalist movement of this century and the first war of Indian independence.” (The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian 400)
- <sup>11</sup> The undivided province of Bengal alone had approximately a quarter of British India’s population.
- <sup>12</sup> The Indian National Congress had been split by the two factions in 1907.
- <sup>13</sup> The so-called Rowlatt Act was legislated in 1919.
- <sup>14</sup> The army commander, Brigadier-General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer, ceased firing only when his troops ran out of ammunition.
- <sup>15</sup> Gandhi’s march began at Sabarmati village on the banks of River Narmada on 11 March 1930 and ended at the village of Dandi on the banks of the Arabian Sea on 6 April the same year.
- <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Chaudhuri was of the opinion that acts of colonial repression paled

into insignificance when compared to the acts of communal brutality.

- <sup>17</sup> Aurobindo Ghose was charged as one of the conspirators in this case but was later acquitted.
- <sup>18</sup> The word satyagraha is a synthesis of the Sanskrit words satya (truth) and agraha (insistence)..
- <sup>19</sup> Gandhi had to fast for three days before the communal disturbances abated.
- <sup>20</sup> Chaudhuri had a premonition that the Non Co-operation Movement would not be peaceful, "I always had a profound distrust of indisciplined mass movements."  
(Thy Hand 34)
- <sup>21</sup> Sartre introduced Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth as a justification of violence.
- <sup>22</sup> Alleging a pro-Hindu bias in the nationalist movement, Chaudhuri says, "Our messianic faith in the future of our country was filled out with a definite Hindu content." (The Autobiography 211)
- <sup>23</sup> Chaudhuri was so skeptical about the Congress-Khilafat alliance that he says, "The only thing which was sincere in this Hindu-Muslim entente was the hatred of British rule". (Thy Hand 38)
- <sup>24</sup> Chaudhuri calls it the "*music-before-mosque*" problem. (Thy Hand 176)
- <sup>25</sup> Chaudhuri was so disturbed by the barbarity of human beings upon one another that he wished he had been an animal instead. (Thy Hand 855)
- <sup>26</sup> Historian Bipan Chandra writes, "Despite their commitment to secularism, despite Gandhiji's constant emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity and his willingness to stake his life for its promotion, and despite Nehru's brilliant analysis of the

socio-economic roots of communalism, the Indian nationalists failed to wage a mass ideological-political struggle against all forms of communalism on the basis of patient and scientific exposure of its ideological content, socio-economic roots, and political consequences.” (India’s Struggle 442)

<sup>27</sup> Secularists, unlike Chaudhuri, sometimes fall victim to political correctness.

<sup>28</sup> On 15 August 1947, Gandhi was in Calcutta’s Beliaghata area praying for an end to the communal carnage.

<sup>29</sup> The INA dream was over in 1945 when the British routed the Japanese in north-eastern India.

<sup>30</sup> The warship’s name was His Majesty’s Indian Ship Talwar.

<sup>31</sup> Chaudhuri exposes the myth that electoral manipulation and financial corruption are post-Independence phenomena in India.

<sup>32</sup> On the hauteur of Gandhi’s secretariat, Chaudhuri says, “Proximity to power engenders that sort of attitude and behavior, and in any case those who graft themselves on personalities with primary power and wish to acquire derivative, secondary power, are bound to give this kind of exhibition.” (Thy Hand 439)

<sup>33</sup> Present-day intellectuals like Dr. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, President of the Center for Policy Research (New Delhi) have also rued the lack of a substantial revolution in India.

<sup>34</sup> The then Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, Lord Rawlinson, had written, “Now we have arrested Gandhi and looked for no end of trouble, and, lo! the arrest has caused no trouble at all.”

<sup>35</sup> Chaudhuri had even contemplated writing a full-length book titled The Real

Indian Revolution in which he would say: "The needed Indian revolution could come only from a collaboration between those Indians who had still some idealism left in them and elements in Britain who would be enlightened enough to see the need for a revolution in India and offer their experience and ability in the political field to us." (Thy Hand 396)

## CHAPTER IV

### CONTRAPUNTAL READING OF CHAUDHURI'S WRITINGS

*"It is not Chaudhuri the scholar who wrote these reckless sentences but the other Chaudhuri, the man of tall prejudices, whose self-pitying moralism taints so much of his intellectual output."*

— Nissim Ezekiel, Scholar Extraordinary

"As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to read it not univocally but contrapuntally," wrote postcolonial critic Edward Said. (Culture and Imperialism 59) His usage of the adverb 'contrapuntally' is borrowed from musicology. In music, the word means 'combining of melodies' and Said used the term to mean 'combining of readings'. By 'contrapuntal reading', what he meant was a reading that would dig out a literary text's socio-political issues rather than its artistic ones. Such a reading illuminates the subterranean thought processes of a text which might not be apparent otherwise. In the process, it brings to light the many assumptions which every author invariably makes while composing the text.

Contrapuntal readings have been helpful in post-colonial criticism of literary texts. They have helped in raising serious post-colonial issues in apparently innocuous contexts. For example, a contrapuntal reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's short story The Speckled Band raises an issue of ecological imperialism — the export of Indian animals to Britain — in what is otherwise a murder mystery of the Sherlock Holmes series.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a contrapuntal reading of Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri's The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian can raise grave post-colonial issues in an autobiography, which is generally assumed to be a 'personal' genre. In order to examine such issues, this chapter presents a contrapuntal reading of all English writings by Chaudhuri.

#### **4.1 CHAUDHURI'S TAKE ON POSTCOLONIAL ISSUES**

It is surprising that Nirad Chaudhuri, whose writing "ranged from Plato and Pascal to apples and acoustics" ('Indian Express' 2 August 1999), did not write even one complete article on the postcolonial theory. Had he written one, surely it would have been denunciatory and not appreciative. That he would have taken a dim view of postcolonialism may be assumed from his opinion on related issues which are scattered all over his works. Hence, despite the absence of a formal critique, it is required to analyze his objections to the theory. The analysis of Chaudhuri's views on postcolonial issues is provided below.

Many students of postcolonial theory mistake the term 'colonialism' for 'imperialism' and vice versa. Between the two words, there is a fine difference which is often overlooked. The fact is that 'colonialism' was the process of settling down in the concerned colony whereas 'imperialism' was only the process of ruling it. <sup>2</sup> The former involved displacing or even slaughtering large sections of the indigenous population. The latter, however, did not involve those inhuman methods. Colonialism gave rise to 'settler' colonies like those in Australasia and America. Imperialism, on the other hand, gave birth to 'occupier' colonies mostly in Asia and Africa. Consequently, one more difference sprung up between the two. Racism was more prevalent in colonialism than in imperialism. Nirad Chaudhuri, being a meticulous scholar, was careful enough to avoid mixing up the terms. He was clear that what existed in India was not colonialism but imperialism. Trying to distinguish between the two, he argues that the latter was an administrative project of Europe unlike the former which was a demographic one. In his words:

I never forget the distinction between European imperialism and European colonialism. Imperialism, far from being the enemy of subject peoples, has always protected them. This was first shown by the creators of true imperialism, the Achaemenid Persians, and the British in India only continued in the same tradition. . . . No empire seen in the entire history of mankind has exterminated the original inhabitants of a country in the manner of the Americans. (Thy Hand 778-79)

As far as postcolonialism is concerned, Martiniquan psychiatrist-turned-activist Frantz Fanon is a fountain of inspiration. He has set in writing the discrimination which black persons like him encountered in French society. When white people on the streets of Paris pointed out at him saying 'Look, a Negro!', Fanon felt "completely dislocated". (Black Skin 112) Similar remarks were thrown at Nirad Chaudhuri, too, when he visited West Europe in 1955 but his reactions were very different from that of Fanon. A British boy in a public place had cried out to Chaudhuri 'You're from Africa!' but the latter simply shouted back, "No, from India!" (A Passage to England 125) In fact, Chaudhuri says that he did not want to feel victimized by the boy's comment and that is why his reaction was so matter-of-fact.<sup>3</sup> He dismissed such incidents as cases of mistaken identity, not instances of racial humiliation. To prove the innocuous nature of these statements, he narrates an incident which happened to him in Paris. While sitting on a flight of steps beside River Seine, a French worker mistook him not for an African but for an Englishman! It convinced Chaudhuri that European comments about identity are not necessarily racist. Often they are incidental mistakes and not intentionally mischievous. Hence, not wanting to attach any socio-political importance to those remarks, Chaudhuri just corrected the Frenchman the way he had corrected the British boy earlier. One notices that neither did Chaudhuri feel elated when called a Briton, which is what one would expect him to feel because of his unabashed Anglophilia, nor had he felt dejected when called an African. Clearly, in this regard, Chaudhuri's poise is in stark contrast to Fanon's grief. In the words of Chaudhuri:

I looked up and saw a French workman perched half-way up the steps. . . Then he asked, '*Monsieur est anglais?*' I was taken aback by his idea of the size and looks of an Englishman, and replied, '*Mais non, indien.*' '*Ah oui, indien!*' he replied and showed such readiness to open a conversation that I, having fears for my spoken French, ran away, still wondering how he could have said what he had said. (A Passage 126)

Just as Nirad Chaudhuri's point of view was unlike that of Frantz Fanon's, it was also unlike Edward Said's. Said describes Orientalism as "a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient". (Orientalism 3) In this sense, Orientalism served to strengthen the West's control of the East. However, Chaudhuri's opinion of the subject is quite different. He thinks that, as far as India is concerned, Orientalism reinvigorated the country's nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Chaudhuri argues that India's memory of her pre-Mughal civilization was hazy till the time Orientalists excavated her past. British numismatist James Prinsep, who worked himself almost to death, deciphered the Brahmi script of Emperor Ashoka's rock and pillar inscriptions. British archaeologist Alexander Cunningham was the first to publish a report on the unicorn seal found at Harappa village in Punjab's Montgomery district. Thereafter, the British Viceroy set up the Archaeological Survey of India (A.S.I.) in 1905. Fifteen years later, the A.S.I. director John Marshall led his staff in excavating some ruins at Harappa and a mound at Mohenjo-daro, measures which finally unearthed the proto-historic Indus Valley

Civilization. These and many other steps by western scholars helped in the modern reconstruction of India's national history. Hence, Nirad Chaudhuri asserts that Orientalists fostered Indian nationalism. Trying to criticize them appeared to him as an attempt to bite the hand that feeds. Chaudhuri writes:

The contribution made by the European Orientalists to Indian nationalism is now recognized by all. The Hindus had created their own brand of nationalism, a basic chauvinism so to speak, long before the coming of European influences to their country. . . . But it had no historical basis, and could not be accepted in its traditional form by the Indians who were receiving a western education. They wanted a nationalism which would be tenable historically. The Orientalists of Europe supplied the historical basis by revealing to modern Indians their past history and achievements. (Scholar Extraordinary 311-12)

Postcolonialism is, of course, closely associated with nationalism but the precise origin of the idea of nationhood has been a matter of controversy among critics. Benedict Anderson says that anti-colonial nationalism used "the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century". (Imagined Communities 116) Historian Partha Chatterjee, however, counters this suggestion that the concept of nationalism was originally imported from western Europe. He asks, "If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already

made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" (The Nation 5) As one would expect, Nirad Chaudhuri would not be convinced that modern Indian nationalism was essentially indigenous. He was sure that it was of European origin. The inspirations behind India's nationalist movement, as identified by him, were exclusively western:

Certain modern personalities and movements contributed powerfully to our political consciousness, of which there were two clearly discernible facets. The first and rational facet was indoctrinated by Burke and Mill, but shaped in its practical expression by the liberalism of Gladstone and Lincoln. The second facet was purely emotional, and its inspiration was furnished by Rousseau and Mazzini besides the Ancients. The methods of political action were suggested by the leaders of the American Revolution, the Italian Risorgimento — particularly Garibaldi — and the Irish nationalists. The entire course, of English constitutional history and, more especially, the turmoils of the seventeenth century, together with the American, French, Italian, and Irish movements were freely drawn upon for precedents and also for operational hints. (The Autobiography 209)

Edward Said rues the fact that, knowingly or unknowingly, European writers "promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')". (Orientalism 45) He says that such differentiation resulted in the geographical West being considered more 'western'

than it really was and also the geographical East being assumed to be more 'eastern' than it was in reality.<sup>5</sup> However, Chaudhuri's opinion on the culpability of the West in this regard is poles apart. He did not think that western writers always hyped the so-called differences between the people of the East and those of the West. Chaudhuri argued that, many a time, they harped on the similarities instead. To prove his argument, he takes the example of Rudyard Kipling.<sup>6</sup> Although accused of harbouring a colonial mentality, Kipling had written, "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!" ('The Ballad of East and West') Evidently, in this final couplet of the ballad, the poet highlights the similarity rather than differences between the eastern and the western hemispheres of the world. Chaudhuri quotes another poem of Kipling to show that the latter did *not* emphasize the divergence between the two parts of the globe. In this poem, Kipling questions the artificial differentiation between 'us' and 'them':

All good people agree,  
And all good people say,  
All nice people, like Us, are We  
And every one else is They:

But if you cross over the sea,  
Instead of over the way  
You may end by (think of it!) looking on We  
As only a sort of They! [quoted in Thy Hand 604]

Said wrote that while orientalism helped *scholars* in understanding the Orient, it also helped *colonialists* in controlling the Orient. In his words, "It is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly different world." Nirad Chaudhuri, too, admitted that orientalism had become a colonial tool. He knew that the famous orientalist Freidrich Max Muller intended not only academic development but administrative development as well:

He derived from the English Orientalists his conviction of the practical importance of Sanskrit for British administrators as well as for contemporary Hindus. He thought and said that British rule would be more understanding and sympathetic, and therefore more productive of good for the Indian people if the ruling order became familiar with their culture. (Scholar Extraordinary 134)

According to Said, scholars in orientalism had created "a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe". The orientalism of western scholars, which became the subject for Said's orientalism, was remarked upon by Nirad Chaudhuri in great detail. He named some of the major orientalists on Indology, many of whom were professional British administrators:

It was actually sustained and developed by the objective and

painstaking work in India of a number of English Orientalists who, in whatever leisure they could secure from their administrative work, tried to recollect as much reliable information about the history and civilization of their Hindu subjects as they could; men like Sir William Jones, Wilkins, Colebrooke, Halhed, to mention only the important figures. They were aided and encouraged in this work by the policy of Warren Hastings, who believed in and patronized Oriental learning . . . . These scholars founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, began to publish their work in its journal, Asiatic Researches, and within ten years a number of important Sanskrit works in translation made it possible for men of letters in Europe to form some adequate idea of what Sanskrit literature was like. (Scholar Extraordinary 126)

However, despite the many dissimilarities between Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri and postcolonial critics, there are a few surprising similarities between him and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak. Some of the similarities between Chaudhuri and Spivak are biographical. Both of them were upper caste Hindus from middle class Bengali families. Both graduated with Honours in the First Class from the University of Calcutta. Both settled in England subsequently and taught in western universities. What is really astonishing, though, is that Chaudhuri and Spivak seem to have some intellectual similarities as well. For instance, both recognized the existence of subaltern sections within the colonized people.<sup>7</sup> Both wondered whether such subalterns got a fair deal from the elite sections within the colonized

community. In fact, Spivak famously concluded that the subaltern voice has been so subdued that it cannot be heard at all. She wrote, "The subaltern has no history and cannot speak." ('Can the Subaltern Speak?') Chaudhuri, on his part, felt much the same. He argues that India's lower class understood that the country's middle class were no friends of theirs, but potential enemies. He says that many people of the lower class wished the continuance of British rule because of the maltreatment by other Indian classes. He narrates an incident he saw which demonstrates the class conflict between the Indian proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie. It was a sharp exchange of words between two co-passengers, in early 1948, who evidently belonged to different classes:

I heard a declaration of faith in the English from a man of the people a few days ago in a bus. He was standing between the benches and had apparently been ill-treated by a well-dressed passenger, a fellow Indian, of course. I had not paid much attention to the preliminaries of the incident, but suddenly I heard the man raising his voice and saying with quivering passion: "The English have not yet left. When they will have left and your *Raj* come I know what you will do to the poor. But not till then shall I tolerate your doing this." (Thy Hand 858)

The population of no country, whether colonizer or colonized, is homogenous. There are the haves and the have-nots, the elites and the subalterns. Historian Ranajit Guha suggests that "the biggest feudal magnates, the most important representatives of the industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie and

the native recruits to the uppermost levels of the bureaucracy” form the elite classes within Indian society. (Subaltern Studies 8) Nirad Chaudhuri’s description of the Indian elite, whom he called ‘Anglicized Hindus’, was almost the same as Guha’s. Chaudhuri felt that this westernized class was a dominant minority because it acts like a power group in the country’s structure:

The Anglicized Hindus can be divided into four groups: I – The Officers of the Armed Forces; II – The Bureaucratic, Managerial, and Professional Elite; III – The Technicians; and IV – The Youth in Schools and Colleges. I shall describe the dominant minority in these categories, which are also the most convenient and apposite for praising their role in Westernization. (The Continent 341)

If Chaudhuri is in agreement with Spivak’s concern for subaltern groups within the colonized people, he is also not in disagreement with Aijaz Ahmad’s description of colonialism. Ahmad calls colonialism “a transhistorical thing, always present and always in process of dissolution in one part of the world or another”. (The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality) Ahmad points out that either colonialism or imperialism has existed always and everywhere. Imperialism has been there in the Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Ages. It has also been seen in all continents except the uninhabited Antarctica. Superpowers, like the United States of America, are accused of neo-imperialism even today. Regarding the historical and geographical range of colonialism, Nirad Chaudhuri had put forward a similar argument. He was so conscious of ancient and mediaeval colonies, that their

modern version did not strike him as anything new.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he insists that the Aryans were the first colonizers in India whereas the British were merely imperialists. Chaudhuri writes:

Colonization is the settlement of foreign people in a country which had a truly national population, at times resulting in the total disappearance of the native population, at others in reducing it to a servile status.

The so-called Aryans or Indo-European-speaking people were foreign and certainly European colonists in India. Wherever they settled they reduced the original population to a servile and untouchable status. The 'pre-Aryan' natives of India were left free only in those areas in which the Aryans did not settle, mostly the hilly regions of southern and central India. (Three Horsemen 57)

Another controversial issue for postcolonial writers concerns each one's choice of language. There is a running debate on whether they ought to write in their vernaculars or in the European languages. Nirad Chaudhuri, as an Indian writer, had to encounter this linguistic conundrum. To wriggle out of it, he chose the route of bilinguality which had been tried previously by many writers. Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, for instance, wrote initially in English before giving up the language like Ngugi wa Thiong'o has done in the late twentieth century. Chaudhuri's first article and book were also written in English but he never gave it up, just like Chinua Achebe. Moreover, Chaudhuri

wrote in Bengali too although his first book in the language was published after four in English.<sup>9</sup> However, postcolonial critic Albert Memmi says “colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to just any linguistic dualism . . . but actually means participation in two psychological and cultural realms”. (The Colonizer 173) In this regard, Chaudhuri is quick to remind us that such dilemma is not faced only in colonized countries. Even West European writers like John Milton had difficulty in choosing between their national languages and Latin. In Chaudhuri’s words:

As in the case of Ronsard, Du Bellay, and Milton, so in Dutt’s also, a consummate philological culture had brought back an assiduous student of foreign languages to his mother tongue. . . . It was not a very easy decision to take, for our political status was always imposing bilinguality on us. (The Autobiography 179-80)

One postcolonial issue yet to be satisfactorily resolved is the theory’s relationship with feminism. The bone of contention between the two theories is the role of women in colonial times. While postcolonial critics think that white women were complicit in colonialism because they belonged to the First World, feminist critics think that white women were helpless because they belonged to the Second Sex. Postcolonial feminist Jenny Sharpe gave the controversy a new twist. She said that whenever white men alleged that white women had been raped by colonized men — the allegations, whether correct or otherwise, created a fear psychosis in colonized men as well as white women. Both were too scared to contradict the charges, even if they were untrue. As a result, colonized men and

white women ended up toeing the colonial line. Sharpe meant that white women were used by white men as psychological weapons in colonial battles. Nirad Chaudhuri, on the other hand, implies that British women were used by Indian men as psychological targets in the colonial tussles. What he means is that abuses were heaped on British women by Indian men for the purpose of vicarious satisfaction. Chaudhuri gives a number of examples to show how abusive language targetted white women behind their backs.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps such expressions warmed the cockles of Indian hearts, felt a disgusted Chaudhuri. One of his examples, of unparliamentary words being used against Englishwomen, runs as follows:

When I was a student of the higher school classes a university student whom I knew told me that another university student he knew had written in his examination paper of the 'leprous white Englishwomen' and had been punished with rustication for that offence. The way the student narrated the story left no room for doubt that he considered the writing an act of great moral courage and the student who wrote it as a martyr to patriotism. (The Autobiography 114)

The situation of coloured women in colonized societies has been less controversial than that of the white sorority. It has been generally accepted that coloured women suffered on both counts of colonialism and gender. They were stereotyped by European colonizers, says Helen Carr: "Either they are ripe for

government, passive, child-like, unsophisticated, needing leadership and guidance, described always in terms of lack — no initiative, no intellectual powers, no perseverance; or on the other hand, they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotional, inconstant, wild, threatening, fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational, near anima, lascivious, disruptive, evil, unpredictable.” (‘Woman/Indian, the “American” and his Others’) Nirad Chaudhuri tells his readers that even the Aryan civilization, and not only European colonialism, stereotyped native women in this way. He summarized the story of ‘Chandalika’ to prove his point:

In a Sanskrit story, written probably in the seventh century of the Christian era, the daughter of a king of hunters comes to seek audience of an Aryan king . . . The princess of low birth overwhelms the king and his court by her beauty. All the imagery of admiration which occurs to them is drawn from the highest levels of the Hindu aesthetic and religious feelings.

She is like a moving statue of sapphire; like the night lit up by the moon; like the river Yamuna, dark and still; like the spouse of Siva in the robe of a huntress; like the Lakshmi with a blue sheen reflected from the body of Vishnu; and with her hands and feet dyed red with lac, she is like the great goddess Durga after she had slain the demon Mahisha. The similes roll out in florid Sanskrit to describe the dangerous attractions of a hunter maiden for the Aryan, who could not even touch her without insulting and sullyng his Aryan birth and honour. (The Continent 70)

Women constitute more or less one half of the human population. Despite that huge strength, their role in the nationalist movements has been underrated because of critical oversight. Frantz Fanon had admitted his ignorance about the colonized woman: "I know nothing about her". (Black Skin 180) Nirad Chaudhuri, however, knew well about the nationalist woman. For instance, he wrote appreciatively about the martyrdom of a female militant who had participated in a raid on a government armoury at Chittagong in early 1930. Chaudhuri contrasted her brave death, after she was challenged by the police, to the meek surrender of many male militants:

There was . . . one incident which redeemed the miserable Chittagong raid, so far as such a fiasco could be redeemed. One young girl being pursued had taken shelter in a house near Chittagong with a young man. They were surprised there and surrounded by the police. In normal circumstances Bengali terrorists surrendered even with revolvers in their hand [sic]. But the girl tried to fight her way out and was shot dead with her companion. Her name was Priti Ohdedar. (Thy Hand 298-99)

Colonialists, at times, hit below the metaphorical belt of the colonized by attacking their sexual life. The former libelled the latter on grounds of 'hypersexuality' and 'homosexuality'. Anne McClintock calls such sexual writing "a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden

sexual desires and fears". (Imperial Leather 22) Nirad Chaudhuri would agree to this denouncement of European writing, at least in the respect of Katherine Mayo's Mother India (1927). He was clearly disgusted with the book:

Katherine Mayo showed India as an aged whore keeping a brothel. The reviewer of the London *Times* got that impression and wrote: 'From reading the earlier chapters of the book one gets the impression — probably not intended, for Miss Mayo is only driving home her point — that all India must be peopled by over-sexed, degenerate folk which only the survival of the least unfit has prevented from disappearing.' . . . At every turn it was suggested that on account of their low morals, especially in sexual life, Indians were not fit for self-government. (Thy Hand 256)

Colonialists used derogatory terms, like 'barbarian', 'savage' or 'cannibal', to describe the colonized. Hayden White says that such sub-human images drew "a distinction between presumed types of humanity on manifestly qualitative grounds, rather than such superficial bases as skin color, physiognomy, or social status". (Tropics of Discourse 17) Nirad Chaudhuri, on the other hand, reminds us that derogatory terms were used also by the colonized to describe the colonizers. He offers a basket of such insinuations as were used against the English by Indians:

Uncomplimentary comparisons of Englishmen to monkeys and other despised or malevolent animals, an example of which I have already given and the stories about and reflection on their fair complexion, of

which too I have given an example and some indication, were two very common forms. To give only a few additional examples, the others were: defacing the pictures of the Mogul emperors and English Governors-General in our text-books and pummelling them; writing abusive epithets like 'forger' or 'thief' below the portraits of Clive and Warren Hastings; declaring that the English language was only a borrowing from Bengali; believing and telling others, as our teachers also did, that all that the history books taught were lies; writing of the Black Hole as a tragedy and the battle of Chillianwallah as a draw in examination papers, convinced all the while that the first was a myth and the second a defeat for the English; telling one another that there was not one chaste woman in the whole of the British Isles; slyly suggesting that the alleged ground of the resignation of Lord Curzon was only eyewash and the real ground was, not disagreement over the position of the Supply Member, but (repeated in a voice stiller and smaller than that of conscience) an affair between the bachelor Lord Kitchener and Lady Curzon. (The Autobiography 388)

Since colonialism affected almost every aspect of the native peoples, none of them could be indifferent to the anti-colonial movement. Whether they supported it or not, nationalism was an inescapable concern for the colonized. In his well-known essay 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital' (1986), Frederic Jameson said that "the telling of the individual story, the individual

experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself". (Social Text 15: 85-6) Nirad Chaudhuri's writings are examples of Jameson's thesis that even individual stories of the colonial era tell of a collective experience. Chaudhuri, himself, explains why his two-volume autobiography could not have been a purely personal work. He says that public issues were so intertwined in the private lives of pre-independence Indians that the two became inseparable:

The very conception of the work was bound to make it a kind of political and cultural history. But even if I had intended to write only an autobiography I could not have excluded the public and collective themes because they were part and parcel of the personal lives of all Indians of that age. Above all, politics was the main preoccupation of the mental life of all of us, the vortex of all our thoughts and emotions. . . . It impinged even on our workaday life. (Thy Hand xvi)

Pro-colonial writer Octavio Mannoni had justified colonialism when he wrote, "To my mind there is no doubting that colonisation has always required the existence of the need for dependence." (Prospero 85) While he tried to argue that the "dependence complex" of non-European nations was the *cause* of European colonialism, postcolonial critic Frantz Fanon countered him by arguing that the "inferiority complex" of the colonized was actually the *effect* of colonialism. (Black Skin 18) What Mannoni called the cause of colonialism was debunked by Fanon as the consequence.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Fanon was so confident that it was the colonizers to

be blamed for the problem, that he justified even the violence of the colonized against them. With regard to the Algerian protests against French colonialism, he wrote, "The Algerian's criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequences of the organization of his nervous system or of the characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation." (The Wretched 250) Nirad Chaudhuri argued, apparently as Fanon did for Algerians, that the corrupt tendencies of Indians are the effect of colonialism. Nevertheless, there is a major difference between Fanon's and Chaudhuri's arguments. The former saw Algerian crime as a "conscious sabotage of the colonial machine" but Chaudhuri saw Indian corruption as a way of making up for lost time. (The Wretched 239) Chaudhuri says that one reason for Indians taking to misusing power as soon as they became autonomous was that they had not enjoyed it for long:

The immediate reason why political power was seen by all Indians as a means of personal aggrandisement lay in the fact that for two centuries they had had no political responsibilities. When these were laid on them, they naturally acted along the pattern of their private behavior, which was to get on in the world. . . . Even after only a few months of the working of the provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act of 1935, I was convinced of the truth of La Rochefoucauld's maxim: 'It needs far greater virtues to bear good fortune than ill fortune.' (Thy Hand 457)

The authenticity of orientalist research has been questioned by Edward Said. He was skeptical about the reliability of works like Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, supposed to be a westerner's guide to Egyptology. Said felt that its writer, Edward William Lane, did not live in Egypt long enough to produce an authoritative book on her.<sup>12</sup> However, Nirad Chaudhuri did not subscribe to this logic. He regarded Max Muller's Indology highly despite the fact that the German scholar had never visited India:

'Residence in India,' he pointed out, 'had its dangers as well as its advantages.' Firstly, India is a large country and not even twenty-five years in Calcutta, Bombay or Madras would justify an experienced civil servant in beginning a single sentence with 'the people of India' . . . An observer might be too near as well as too far, and nothing was more difficult than for a soldier to see the battle in which he is fighting as a whole, or for Bismarck to write the history of his time.

It was the privilege and duty of the scholar and the historian, Muller declared, to stand aloof, to choose his own point of view, and to look at both sides of a question. If historians could write about the Peloponnesian or the Crimean War without being in Greece or Russia, surely a man who had studied the evidence carefully could pronounce an opinion on Lord Lawrence's or Lord Lytton's government in India? (Scholar Extraordinary 308)

The artistic quality of English literature had long protected it from any

suspicion of favouring the colonizers against the colonized. That protective bubble of English literature has now been pricked by a majority of post-colonialist critics. Gauri Viswanathan writes that “certain humanistic functions traditionally associated with literature — for example, the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking — were considered essential to the processes of sociopolitical control by the guardians of the same tradition.” (Masks of Conquest 3) That English literature shaped the character of its colonized readers, is quite true in the case of Nirad Chaudhuri. He was so moved by the natural beauty projected in Webster’s poem ‘Call for the robin-redbreast and the wren’ that he wished to die in England:

What a magic country it was where the drowned were transformed into pearl and coral and where the robin and the wren covered the friendless bodies of unburied men with leaves and flowers, and the ant, the fieldmouse and the mole reared hillocks over them. Reading these lines of Webster, our hearts warmed up with a faith that could be described as the inverse of Rupert Brooke’s. He was happy in the conviction that if he died in a distant land some part of that foreign soil would become for ever England. We had a feeling that if we died in England what would become for ever England would be a little foreign flesh, and with that faith there was happiness in perishing in an English glade, with the robin and the wren twittering overhead. (The Autobiography 108)

One would expect that travelogues would be factual accounts of travels undertaken by their writers. Unfortunately, they are not so matter-of-fact but are soaked in their respective writer's prejudices. In fact, European travelogues confirmed "Europe's differentiated conception of itself in relation to something it became possible to call 'the rest of the world,'" says Mary Louise Pratt. (Imperial Eyes 5) Be that as it were, it was not expected that non-European travelogues would reinforce the 'differentiated conception' of Europe. Nevertheless, such reinforcement of European concepts was done by Nirad Chaudhuri's A Passage to England. He described the European continent, during his first trip of two months, as aesthetically and gastronomically finer than the Indian sub-continent:

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. Hardly less important is the fact that among all these things were a great many that I had longed to see since my boyhood.

(A Passage 1)

Though readers often complain that they are forced to read whatever writers write, writers grumble that they are forced to write whatever readers want to read. Gananath Obeyesekere, in a brilliant essay "British Cannibals", 'Contemplation of an Event in the Death and Resurrection of James Cook, Explorer' (1992), has argued that English colonialists wrote "what the English reading public wanted to hear."

(Critical Inquiry 18: 635) Nirad Chaudhuri, of course, never wrote what the Indian reading public wanted to hear. However, he held the Indian media guilty of this deceptive practice — it wrote what the Indian readers wanted. In August 1940, he had seen a nationalist newspaper repeat the news of London bombings while sidelining fresh news items:

Towards the end of August, on the day that the news of the agreement about destroyers between Britain and the USA appeared in the Indian newspapers I found that Suresh Majumdar's English daily had put it on a page inconspicuously, while the banner headline on the front page was about the bombing of London. . . . I said to him: 'Today the most important news is of the destroyer deal, but your paper has relegated it to a corner while the bombings, which are now stale news, are splashed.' Suresh Babu replied: 'Your criticism is perfectly right from the journalistic point of view. But I know my readers would be mortified if they did not read every day that London was burning.' (Thy Hand 574)

Regarding the shortcomings of British rule Chaudhuri did not overlook the foul language, human rights abuses and too-clever-by-half attitude of the rulers. An incident which Chaudhuri condemns roundly is the death of eighty two prisoners in unventilated rail wagons in November 1921 and police manhandling of a venerated academic in December 1921. Another instance of the British getting Chaudhuri's goat is Viceroy Lord Reading's dinner speech in Chelmsford Club, Shimla on 30

May 1921 when he said that his postal address was not altogether unknown and that if Gandhi applied to him for an interview he would readily grant it. Chaudhuri lambasts the Viceroy thus:

I thought that this was an arrogant assertion of his own position by Lord Reading, as if he was wanting to inflict his Canossa on Gandhi by making him come to the Viceregal Lodge at Simla as a supplicant. And the airing of his wit in doing that seemed to me in very bad taste . . . I think he might have spared his listeners and the readers of his speech the pleasantry. (Thy Hand 16-17)

Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman admit that some writings of post-colonial theory are “depressingly difficult”. (Colonial Discourse ix) Post-colonial critics like Homi K. Bhabha stand accused of this difficulty, mostly because of their complex conceptualization. Nirad C. Chaudhuri too is difficult to read, but for a different reason. His involved style, rather than his conceptualization, created the problem. His writings were made difficult by obscure allusions to non-Indian mythologies, like Egyptian, Greek and Roman, and verbatim quotations from non-English languages, like Sanskrit, Latin and French. At times, even his biblical allusions written in English read laboriously. His comments on the pre-independence Congress rule in Indian provinces are a case in point:

It [the pre-independence Congress rule] was a disaster for the Indian people as well as for the Congress. For the latter, it signalled ‘Paradise Lost’. It was as if the Congress organization as Adam had

been coaxed by the practical leaders as a Congress eve formed out of the ribs of Gandhi, to eat the forbidden fruit. Considering that aspect of the matter, one could conclude that the British Satan indeed had gained a victory. (Thy Hand 455)

In conclusion, it is seen Nirad Chaudhuri did write about many postcolonial issues although he never wrote about the theory as a whole. He refers to its concepts in the course of his general writings. More often than not, his opinions differ from those of analysts like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. Chaudhuri differs from them on questions of racial discrimination, Orientalist purposes and western women in colonialism. However, Chaudhuri has some unexpected common ground with critics Gayatri Spivak and Aijaz Ahmad. The commonality lies in the concern for subalterns and the awareness about the omnipresence of colonialism. As far as the matter of choosing a language is concerned, Nirad Chaudhuri is with Chinua Achebe rather than Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

## **4.2 COLONIAL DISCOURSES IN CHAUDHURI**

In Section 2 of Chapter II above, Michel Foucault's usage of the term 'discourse' has been discussed. The phrase that he used was "the order of discourse" and, ever since, the term has become a catchword in post-colonial criticism. Critic Hayden White describes 'discourse' as "the ground whereon to

decide what shall count as a fact in the matters under consideration and to determine what modes of comprehension is best suited to the understanding of the facts thus constituted.” (Tropics of Discourse 3) Simply put, a colonial discourse means a system of ideas or thoughts whose ulterior motive was to dominate the colonized. A number of such discourses were spread in British India in order to propagate colonialism. The very fact that Nirad Chaudhuri became pro-colonial indicates that he had fallen prey to at least some of those discourses. This section of the thesis analyzes how Chaudhuri was taken in by the discourses and turned into a colonial stooge.

One of the major tools of colonial discourse was allegory. The noun ‘allegory’ essentially means ‘symbol’. An allegory, like all symbols, represents something bigger than what it itself is. For example, a moral allegory represents morality. In much the same way, colonial allegories represented colonialism. Just as the purpose of moral allegories was to strengthen the morals of people, so the purpose of colonial allegories was to confirm the stranglehold of colonialism over colonies. Rulers marked their territories with allegories quite as animals do with their odour.<sup>13</sup> The allegories, on their part, constantly reminded the colonized people of their foreign rulers. These colonial allegories assumed various forms like literature, sculpture and architecture. English books, for instance, smacked of being colonial allegories. “It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England. . . .”

says Gayatri Spivak. ('Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism') Truly, British literature represented England's culture in an impressive way to non-Englishmen. In fact, the so-called superiority of English literature implied a supposed superiority of the English colonizers as well. The ace in the pack of English literature was, of course, Shakespeare. His works were made so popular in the colonies that India became fertile ground for Shakespeare cultivation. How this literary allegory flooded the country is described by Nirad Chaudhuri. His mother had read about Lear in a vernacular translation and told him the story while he was still a child. Other adults of village, particularly the men, used to quote the Bard of Avon at various occasions. Some of Shakespeare's plays were performed at the village school and other places. In Chaudhuri's words:

Although we had heard the story of King Lear from our mother and knew who it was by, our first notion of Shakespeare was of a man whose writings all grown-up persons were expected to discuss and, what was even more important, to recite. It did not take us long, however, to pass from the ranks of spectators to that of participants in the Shakespearean procession. By the time we had learnt a second story by Shakespeare — and that was *The Merchant of Venice* — we were almost ready ourselves to recite both *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar*. Our familiarity with the name of Julius Caesar was only a byproduct of our knowledge of Shakespeare . . . (The Autobiography 95)

However, English literature was not the only form of colonial allegory to be encouraged by the British. As has been noted above, there were other vehicles too employed for the same purpose. The role of art, particularly sculpture and architecture, in spreading allegories has been noticed by many postcolonial critics. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write, "Allegory has an important function in imperial discourse, in which paintings and statues have often been created as allegories of imperial power." (Key Concepts 9) It was for the purpose of conveying imperial supremacy, rather than any artistic quality, that British statues littered the cityscape of Indian metropolises. Hence, the sculptures were nothing else except colonial allegories. They succeeded in inspiring wonder, if not fear, in people like Nirad Chaudhuri. As a young boy, Chaudhuri saw the imposing statues in central Calcutta and was awestruck by the invisible presence of imperialism. He reminisces:

On the ground Calcutta presented a very impressive facade. . . . Through the funnel-like opening of the road called Government Place West could a glimpse of the Treasury Buildings be caught. At this entrance a formidable group of statuary stood on guard. Queen Victoria, Lawrence, Hardinge, Canning in greenish bronze reminded everybody in 1910, even if the unobtrusive Government House modelled on Kedleston Hall did not, that he was very near the heart of the British Empire in India. To the south of the Maidan there was a similar line of trees along Lower Circular Road, and although there was not in that quarter the same reminder of British power in India as

there was to the north, there was at least a reminder of British sickness, both civil and military. For one set of buildings which could be seen through the trees constituted the British Military Hospital and the other the Presidency General Hospital. The first was reserved for British soldiers and the second for British civilians. (The Autobiography 248-49)

The impression of such colonial allegories was so strong on Chaudhuri that they seeped into his sub-conscience. Once there, the impressions probably lay dormant as long as he was still a child. With passage of time, however, the impressions did not get blurred. In fact, they must have re-surfaced decades later at the time when he was making up his mind on the colonial question. Subconscious memories of colonial allegories seem to have been one reason for Nirad Chaudhuri turning into a tireless transmitter of colonial discourses. While advocating colonialism, however, he did not realize that he was being gently goaded by those allegories.

While colonial allegories were spread by the colonizers, there was also the occurrence of colonial appropriation by the colonized. The word 'appropriation' ordinarily means taking to oneself as one's own. In postcolonial criticism, though, 'appropriation' means the adoption of the colonizers' culture by the colonized. The features of the colonizing culture to have been most commonly appropriated were its language and its literary genres. The adoption of the English language is a

case in point as far as colonial India was concerned. "Eminent Indian thinkers of yesterday and today — from Rammohan Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen to Vivekananda, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, and Radhakrishnan — have made themselves heard in the West; a cultural offensive (if so it may be called) rendered easier by their mastery of the English language," said literary historian K. R. S. Iyengar. (Indian Writing 15) Nirad Chaudhuri, too, used European languages with consummate ease. He knew not only English but Greek, Latin, French and German as well. It is significant that, in one incident, the extent of his linguistic appropriation confounded even the editor of Macmillan, London. The editor, though a thorough-bred Englishman, was not aware of an English word which Chaudhuri had used in his A Passage to England. While the episode indicates that Chaudhuri was able to teach Englishmen a thing or two about their own language, it also reveals how much he had appropriated the English culture.<sup>14</sup> In the words of Chaudhuri:

I never learned the language in any English-speaking country or from Englishmen in India. It was learnt in Bengali from Bengali teachers, and till my fifty-third year I did not have, with the exception of relatively long conversations for a period of about one year off and on, enough exchanges of speech with the natural speakers of English which could have added up to five hours in their total duration. . . . I had written of swans (cobs) *busking*. He [the Macmillan editor] queried, 'What is this word?' I sent him with the proofs a photograph of an illustration of a swan in that state from an English ornithological

book, which bore the caption – ‘Male Swan Busking’. He wrote back: though he had lived at Twickenham close to the Thames, and had been seeing swans all his life, it was curious that he had neither heard nor come upon the word. (The Continent 6)

The adoption of European languages was often accompanied by the adoption of European thought as a measure of colonial appropriation. Bill Ashcroft *et al* write that “modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis” from the colonizer’s culture were frequently appropriated by the colonized. (Key Concepts 19) Such appropriation of Western thought, and not only Western languages, was noticeable in the case of many leaders of the Indian renaissance. In Nirad Chaudhuri’s writings, of course, nothing is more obvious than appropriated Western thought. How much he had adopted European thinking is best seen in his self-made list of thinkers, a list that comprises of Europeans only.<sup>15</sup> In Chaudhuri’s words:

Having tried to acquire learning and failing to do so, I know who is learned and who is not. I am not. In order to convince the reader that this is not insincerity I shall mention the names of four men whom I regard as truly learned. They are Mommsen, Wiliamowitz-Moellendorf, Harnack, and Eduard Meyer. When young and immature I cherished the ambition of being the fifth in that series. (The Continent 7)

The cumulative effect of the allegorization by the colonizers and appropriation by the colonized, as shown above, was the generation of a number of discourses. Not surprisingly, all these discourses went in favour of the colonial powers. Britain's colonial discourses encouraged the thinking that Europe and the West were modern while India and the East were primitive. One of the beliefs that this system perpetuated was that British rule was essentially benevolent and only occasionally repressive. Historian Bipan Chandra says that "the British did not rule primarily by force but by a carefully organized belief system or ideology". (India's Struggle 507) Actually though, the impression of the rulers' benevolence was little else but a colonial discourse. Its real intention was to dilute the anti-colonial agitation of Indians and it succeeded in doing so at least in the case of people like Nirad Chaudhuri. Chaudhuri had fallen victim to the insidious propaganda of the colonial machine. He gave short shrift to his famously skeptical mindset and, instead, got sucked into the discourses of colonial rule. For instance, he was led into believing that the British had established the rule of law in generally lawless India. Chaudhuri says:

Overhead there appeared to be, coinciding with the sky, an immutable sphere of justice and order, brooding sleeplessly over what was happening below, and swooping down on it when certain limits were passed. Its arm seemed to be long and all-powerful, and it passed by different names among us. The common people still called it the Company, others Queen Victoria, and the educated the Government. The feeling, thus ever present, of there being a

watching and protecting Government above us vanished at one stroke with the coming of the nationalist agitation in 1905. After that we thought of the Government, in so far as we thought of it in the abstract, as an agency of oppression and usurpation. None the less, although deprived of its subjective halo, the protective power survived for many more decades. (The Autobiography 43-4)

The foregoing account demonstrates how colonial discourses engulfed Nirad Chaudhuri's outlook. The allegories which influenced his mind in its formative years and his appropriation of various aspects of the colonial culture were responsible for this. They convinced Chaudhuri about not only the benevolence of the colonizers, but also about their supposed modernity and development programmes. In this regard, what is surprising is that his monumental erudition could not save him from being compromised by these colonial discourses. It seems to be almost a 'willing suspension of skepticism', if one were to adapt Coleridge's famous description of the poetic process. Chaudhuri's denouement is tragic, like that of Dr Faustus whose wide learning could not save his soul from being damned. That knowledge and wisdom are different are, perhaps, best exhibited in their cases.

### 4.3 AMBIVALENCE, HYBRIDITY AND MIMICRY

The previous section analyzed the various types of colonial discourses in Nirad Chaudhuri's writings. The present section examines, from a postcolonial angle, many of the contradictions which his writings suffer from. The term 'ambivalence' is described by Bill Ashcroft *et al* as "the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized." (Key Concepts 12) <sup>16</sup> The noun 'ambivalence' etymologically means 'two powers'. In psychology, the word means a simultaneous desire for opposites and in post-colonialist criticism, 'ambivalence' means a co-existent attraction and repulsion. It is like a lure-cum-threat between the colonizer and the colonized. Consequently, colonial ambivalence worked both for and against the colonizer, and also for and against the colonized. Many colonizers betrayed this ambivalence regarding colonialism. For instance, British politician Alfred Duff-Cooper wrote, "The idea of an island in Europe governing against their will an Asiatic population ten times more numerous than themselves is not acceptable to the modern mind." Not only the people of colonizing countries, even those of colonized countries suffered from colonial ambivalence. When asked how far he would cut India off from Britain, nationalist leader M. K. Gandhi was ambivalent. He said, "From the Empire, entirely; from the British nation not at all, if I want India to gain and not to grieve." (quoted in Overseas Indian) However, the fact that both colonizers and the colonized were ambivalent towards each other does not mean that they stood on equal platforms. In reality, the former were 'more equal than' the latter.

As ambivalence was an inescapable feature of the colonial situation, Nirad Chaudhuri was no exception to it. In this, he was not unlike his contemporaries during the colonial period. The most visible sign of Nirad Chaudhuri's ambivalent attitude was his attire — he wore Western dresses in the East and vice versa. Taking note of this curious duality, the British Broadcasting Corporation wrote, "When he lived in New Delhi's old city, he walked to work in a western suit and bowler hat. After moving to England in the 1970s, he preferred the traditional dhoti of his native Bengal to receive guests at his home." <sup>17</sup> Due to this, one might be tempted to think of Chaudhuri as exhibiting the Dr-Jekyll-and-Mr-Hyde symptoms. However, unlike the fictional character, Chaudhuri never tried to blend with the background. If anything, he tried to stand out always and everywhere. Even though a split personality, he was different from the stereotype.

However, Chaudhuri's colonial ambivalence was not confined to his incongruous dressing. His response to the British, for instance, was ambivalent and exposed the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that marks the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. During the wars fought by Britain, Nirad Chaudhuri remained undecided as to which side he was on and could make up his mind only after the wars ended. If Britain won a war, he became anti-British and attributed the win to bribery. On the other hand, if she lost a war, he became pro-British and attributed the loss to misfortune. Explaining his dilemma, he writes:

The Boer War was very frequently in our thoughts and not less frequently on our lips. . . . Our reaction to the Boer War, as to every war in which England was involved, was curiously mixed. One-half of us automatically shared in the English triumph, while the other and the patriotic half wanted the enemies of England to win. When our patriotic half was in the ascendant, as it usually was after an English victory, we went so far as to believe that the victory had been one by bribing one of the opponent's generals. (The Autobiography 99)

Not only was his relationship with the colonizers ambivalent, Chaudhuri's reactions to the colonized were equally so. He supported their anti-colonial movement occasionally but opposed it at other times. In fact, Chaudhuri admits to being inconsistent in the matter during his green years. However, he is not able to understand why he became such a bundle of contradictions with respect to the nationalist movement. Nirad Chaudhuri's problem, though, is easily solved by two concepts of postcolonial theory. The self-contradictions which puzzled Chaudhuri were actually the manifestation of the conflict between colonial discourses and counter-discourses. The fact that counter-discourses had been generated by colonized nations was first noticed by critic Richard Terdiman in 1985. The inevitable opposition between these counter-discourses and the colonial discourses resulted in the creation of ambivalence. In this sense, ambivalence was an inescapable part of colonialism. Chaudhuri, of course, fails to see it for what it is. He thinks that his early flip-flops regarding the colonial question were

nothing but his immature fickle-mindedness. He attributes his own ambivalence to the impulsiveness of his youth, thereby committing a grievous error in judgment:

The story of my relations with Gandhian politics was not to end with my disapproval of non-co-operation. During the civil disobedience movement of 1930 I veered round to a passionate approval of Mahatma Gandhi's methods and became an almost idolatrous worshipper of his personality. In all these changes of mood and affiliations between 1921 and 1930 I was governed wholly by blind impulses. I did not understand the reasons for my moods. . . (The Autobiography 378)

The problem of ambivalence is closely associated with the occurrence of 'hybridity'. 'Hybridity' is a term borrowed from botany wherein it means cross-breeding of two species by processes such as grafting, in order to form a third species. Postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha uses the same idea to explain the formation of a "Third Space" between the colonizer and the colonized. (The Location 37) Hybridization entails the fusion of certain elements on both sides of the colonial divide although the fusion is neither equitable nor stable.<sup>18</sup> A colonial hybrid reasserts the supremacy of the colonizer while encouraging, on the other hand, the insurgency of the colonized. It is best exemplified by a personality like Nirad Chaudhuri who supported British colonialism but also lent occasional support to the Indian resistance. Hybridized personalities like Chaudhuri were both supplants and threats rolled into one.

Colonial ambivalence and hybridity, as analyzed above, led to the problem of colonial mimicry. The concept of mimicry was introduced by Homi Bhabha and has been discussed in Chapter II of this thesis. Bhabha says that the colonizer was often 'mimicked' by the colonized. These mimicries, although sincere on the part of the latter, became embarrassing for the former. The mimicries were like the distorted reflections seen in curved mirrors — just as such reflections are not faithful to their object, colonial mimicries were hardly loyal to the colonizers. In other words, the imitation by the colonized subjects was not always flattering. After all, the line between mimicry and mockery is thin and could be breached inadvertently, thereby discomforting the ones being imitated. In fact, mimicry is never far from mockery because it resembles and ridicules at the same time. Hence, the "class of interpreters" which Thomas Babbington Macaulay had planned to manufacture in India turned out to be Frankenstein's monsters. (Minute on Indian Education)<sup>19</sup>

Mimicry, as a postcolonial theory, can answer the one question which troubled Nirad Chaudhuri no end. He was always very disturbed to find that Englishmen did not encourage the appropriation of English customs by the Indians. Chaudhuri never knew why the colonizers should be bothered if the colonized people wished to adopt their ways of life. The fact is that the local British resisted all Indian reconstruction of European culture because they were uncomfortable with their mimics. Had Chaudhuri believed in postcolonial theory, he would have

been able to fathom this with the help of Bhabha's concept of mimicry. Instead of doing that, a puzzled Chaudhuri writes:

An Englishman of this type resented our devotion to English literature as a sort of illicit attention to his wife, whom he himself was neglecting for his mistress, sport. Therefore he cast the Tenth Commandment in our teeth, tried to cure us of our literary-mindedness, and at the same time sneered at it. . . . The only ties felt in the heart that we can have with England are those created by things of the mind. The Englishmen who did their best to break those ties have lost the Indian Empire. (A Passage 16)

It is obvious that what Chaudhuri thought of as the Indians' "devotion to English literature" was actually looked upon by the Englishmen as exercises in imitation. It was a case of colonial mimicry for them and, therefore, they were wary of it. Sometimes, they went to the extent of resisting the imitative practices of the colonized people. The result was that the British behaved rudely towards those Indians who were trying to copy their civilization. In this regard, Homi Bhabha has stated that a colonized subject was "almost the same, but not quite". He went on to suggest, tongue in cheek, that colonized subjects were "almost the same, but not white"! Ignorant of Bhabha's analysis, Nirad Chaudhuri found the British behaviour to be inexplicable and held it responsible for souring the mutual relationship between the two countries.<sup>20</sup> He was thoroughly puzzled by the British hostility against those Indians who tried to assimilate British culture. Betraying his

bewilderment, Chaudhuri writes:

From his land and nation the Englishman brought many fine qualities for his work and business in this country, but his residence among us seemed to engender in him certain very offensive attribute which were as pronounced as the overpowering smell of our wild red dog (*cyon cyon duchunensis*), and which did untold harm to Britain's relations with India. These are matters of history. I refer to them only because my personal testimony would go a long way towards supporting the consensus of opinion among my countrymen regarding the Englishmen who have remained In India in the days of his power. . . . Their conduct today fills me with vicarious shame, for they are showing themselves as the same men now by their self-interested and ingratiating niceness towards us as they showed themselves in the past by their arrogant and power-intoxicated snobbery. (The Autobiography 343)

Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry can also throw significant light on Nirad Chaudhuri's controversial dedication of The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian. In Chapter I of this thesis, that dedication has been quoted in full. Chaudhuri had dedicated the book to the memory of the British Empire in India on the plea that "All that was good and living / Within us / Was made, shaped, and quickened / By the same British rule." (The Autobiography v) To most readers, it appeared to be an act of belated subservience, coming as it was from a former

subject to his former ruler. For independent Indians, the memory of the British was certainly not worth dedicating a book to, and the net result was that Chaudhuri got strongly condemned by his compatriots. Later, he clarified his position by drawing attention to the lines which said that the British Empire in India “conferred subjecthood on us / But withheld citizenship; / To which yet / Every one of us threw out the challenge: / ‘*Civis Britannicus Sum*’” [Citizen of Britannia I am]. The “challenge” that Chaudhuri spoke about was supposedly thrown by Indians at the British and it was to acquire full-fledged British citizenship in spite of the British reluctance to accede it. As the British had been unwilling to grant Indians equal citizenship, Chaudhuri’s dedication disapproved of them, although in an oblique manner. Hence, the dedication is not as uncritical of the British as it appears to be on the first reading. Chaudhuri claimed to be misunderstood by his countrymen and explained:

The dedication was really a condemnation of the British rulers for not treating us as equals . . . an imitation of what Cicero said about the conduct of Verres, a Roman proconsul of Sicily who oppressed Sicilian Roman citizens, although in their desperation they cried out: “*Civis Romanus Sum*”. (“My Hundredth Year”)

The “great resistance” of the British that Chaudhuri talks of was, obviously, due to colonial mimicry. He is unable to understand that it could not have been any other way as far as imbibing occidental culture was concerned.<sup>21</sup> The British had to resist Indian attempts at adopting European traditions because the former

could not trust those attempts to be wholly sincere, the colonizers could never be sure that they were only being mimicked and not mocked. Despite the resemblance that the Indian imitations had with their European original, there was always a hidden possibility of ridicule. The distorted image in a curved mirror is the best example of this potential derision. As Bill Ashcroft *et al* explains, "Colonial culture is always potentially and strategically insurgent procedure". (Key Concepts 141) This lurking fear on the part of the rulers caused the distance between them and the ruled to widen. Thus, colonial mimicry made it difficult for Anglophiles like Nirad Chaudhuri to cozy up to the British colonizers.

#### 4.4 OTHER POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

The applicability of Bhabha's postcolonial theorization to Chaudhuri's writings has been demonstrated in the previous section. However, it is pertinent to mention that there are many other related issues which throw a great deal of analytical light on the latter's works. Chaudhuri's works are analyzed from such perspectives in the following paragraphs.

The influence of Marxism on postcolonial theory has been referred to in Chapter II of this thesis. However, a status-quoist writer like Nirad Chaudhuri could not have been enthused by Karl Marx. Predictably, Chaudhuri says, "The man who described religion as the opium of the people never tried to define what kind of

dope political and economic dogmas were, because he was interested in the popularization of a particular drug of his own." (A Passage 199) What is strange is that, despite such anti-Marxist utterances, there were certain similarities between Chaudhuri and India's communists. For instance, when communists decried the independence that India received in 1947 as "false", Chaudhuri did not differ drastically. He asserted repeatedly that India's independence was merely political in nature and that it would make little difference to the teeming millions of the country. The communists believed that only a drastic socio-economic revolution could make a real difference. This conviction, too, is shared by Chaudhuri. He was well-versed with the courses of the various revolutions across the world and wished for one in India as well. <sup>22</sup> Given such convergence of opinions, Chaudhuri's criticism of communist ideology is logically conflicting. One cannot advocate revolutions and dismiss communism in the same breath. The positions are mutually incompatible.

As far as the project of decolonization is concerned, it is universally recognized to be a complex process. In this regard, Kenyan critic Simon Gikandi writes, "There is an urgent need to question the ideological foundations on which the narratives of decolonization were constructed." (From Commonwealth 378) The fact that he raised questions about decolonization, shows that it is not as simple as it sounds. One of the problems with decolonization is that certain forms of colonization could not be easily identified, to begin with. For example, social and economic forms of colonization were not easily identifiable although the

political form of colonization was. Hence, social and economic processes remain colonized even where political decolonization has been achieved. Social colonialism survives because of Euro-centrist preferences and economic colonialism because of globalization practices. Another problem with decolonization is that even the pre-colonized situation, having been heterogeneous, evades accurate identification. In fact, the pre-colonized condition had been so multifarious that some of its strands were irreconcilable. Consequently, decolonization has had to choose one or the other of those incompatible strands. These procedural problems made Nirad Chaudhuri dismissive of decolonization itself.<sup>23</sup> However, his outright dismissal is like throwing the baby with the bathwater. One need not be skeptical of the entire decolonization process just because there are some unresolved issues in it. Chaudhuri, on the other hand, takes an absolutist position on the matter. He is unable to realize that even if certain colonial vestiges remain in a postcolonial nation, it cannot call into question decolonization as such. No wonder that he arrives at the laughable conclusion that decolonization is an impossibility:

No such political phenomenon as 'decolonization' has been seen in history. Colonization of any country by a foreign people has always become permanent. The United States was created by the colonization of people of British origins in North America. It has not been nor will ever be 'decolonized'. (Three Horsemen 57)

Not only did Nirad Chaudhuri reject the concept of decolonization, he has

also tried to prove that he was right in doing so. He saw, while serving in the All India Radio in the year 1947, that there was hardly any meaningful change in the ruling dispensation even after the transfer of power. Instead of the British elite there was then an Indian elite, implying little or no difference in the day to day governance of the country. Government servants suddenly switched their loyalties from the colonial rulers to the national leaders and the departure of British officers vastly improved the promotion prospects of their Indian subordinates. In the rejection of such cosmetic changes, Chaudhuri sounds like the Indian Communists who doubted the significance of Independence. This convinced Chaudhuri that real decolonization was a utopian notion. On the matter of continuity between pre-independence and post-independence India, Chaudhuri comments:

The new Indian regime did not make victims even of those Indians in high places in the civil service who had made themselves notorious by their attitude as well as actions in regard to the nationalist movement. Actually, those who had served the British most efficiently were kept, so that they might put their efficiency at the disposal of the new regime. An Indian civil servant who had dealt with the Bengali revolutionary movement with great severity became India's first ambassador in Washington and the first representative in the U.N. The loyal servants of the British at once became loyal servants of the Congress. (Thy Hand 865)

Although Chaudhuri refuses to concede the occurrence of decolonization,

he grudgingly accepts that colonialism itself is no longer on the ascendant but reached a plateau. However, he does not think that anti-colonial struggles should be credited for that. Chaudhuri, disingenuously, gives the credit to history instead, ignoring the fact that history is little else but the record of such struggles. What he thinks to be the inscrutable forces of history are actually the anti-imperial, pro-democratic movements of the human civilization.<sup>24</sup> To Chaudhuri, though, history is an impersonal abstract which is not affected by the attempts of the colonized to overthrow the colonial yoke. Holding this view is a ridiculous way of robbing the credit from those to whom it is due. The only saving grace for Chaudhuri in this regard is that he admits the irreversibility of the decline of colonization. In his words:

The pride and power of Europe which had inflicted such injury and humiliation and which yet appeared so triumphant and irresistible was going to be fought by something infinitely more potent than our will and capacity; it was to be crushed by history in its inexorable sweep.

There was to be no healing of that bruise. (The Autobiography 376)

The foregoing paragraphs show how Nirad Chaudhuri falls foul of major postcolonial perspectives. Actually, he ties himself up in knots because of his contradictions. Almost everything he asserts is refuted by him at some other place. The reader has only to be careful to notice those inconsistencies, all examples of Chaudhuri's colonial ambivalence.

#### 4.5 AN ATYPICAL COMPRADOR

The previous sections in this chapter have analyzed Nirad Chaudhuri's writings from various postcolonial perspectives. The postcolonial term which describes him best though is 'comprador'. The word 'comprador' is of Portuguese origin, referring to local middlemen who operate in markets between foreign sellers and domestic buyers.<sup>25</sup> The word was appropriated in Marxist theory to mean those members of the bourgeoisie who get undue privileges from capitalists and, thus, have a vested interest against the proletariat. In postcolonial theory, 'comprador' points to that section of the colonized intelligentsia whose independence may have been compromised by a dependence on the colonialists.

Regarding 'comprador', Bill Ashcroft *et al* say, "The word continues to be used to describe a relatively privileged, wealthy and educated elite who maintain a more highly developed capacity to engage in the international communicative practices introduced by colonial domination, and who may therefore be less inclined to struggle for local cultural and political independence." (Key Concepts 55) This description, except for its 'wealthy' part, seems to suit Nirad Chaudhuri to a tee. He was certainly one of the educated elite who had a 'highly developed capacity to engage in the international communicative practices introduced by colonial domination'. He was also disinclined 'to struggle for local cultural and political independence'. Let alone struggling for local independence, given a

choice Chaudhuri would prefer perpetuation of British rule in India.

However, Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri would not have been half as interesting a writer as he is had he been a typical comprador. His uniqueness lay in the fact that he could defy being stereotyped. In other words, his pro-colonial expressions were not uni-dimensional. While his colonial bias was never in doubt, Chaudhuri could, at times, surpass the colonizer versus colonized debate. He realized that there was more to the world than colonialism. The instances when Chaudhuri surpassed the colonial conundrum and displayed a rare wisdom in this regard are highlighted below.

One of Chaudhuri's atypical viewpoints was regarding indigenous and foreign goods. On this issue, the Indian nationalists and the British colonialists had taken predictable positions. While the former preferred country-made goods, the latter pushed the imported ones. Clearly, the stands were taken according to their respective ideological predilections. In such a controversy, Nirad Chaudhuri would be expected to side with the colonialists because of his comprador's attitude. However, the view that he held was one of clear sightedness. Instead of taking an ideological pose, he took a utilitarian view of the whole matter. He judged the goods not by their origin, steering clear of the debate, but by their utility. In Chaudhuri's words:

We made no distinction, till the nationalist movement came, between the goods made in the factories of Great Britain and those made by

our handicraftsmen. We still judged goods, neither by their provenance nor by their method of production, but by their usefulness or appeal to us — the buyers. We paid equal attention to hand-made and machine-made goods . . . (The Autobiography 31)

Not only with regard to goods, Chaudhuri professed an atypical viewpoint regarding the issue of universalism too. On this score, as in the earlier one, the opinions of Indians and the British were widely different from one another. Each group looked at the rest of the world through the coloured glass of its own nationality. Both the rulers and the ruled had, as always, become prisoners of their respective ideologies. However, if one were to expect Nirad Chaudhuri to align with the British view of the world, there was a surprise in store. Chaudhuri understood that neither the British yardstick nor the Indian one were long enough to measure the world as such. Rather than take a partisan call, he held a neutral opinion on the matter. The fact that great works of the intellect were produced in the East as well as in the West, proved to him that no one civilization was better than the other. Distancing himself from the typical comprador who would echo the worldview of the rulers, Chaudhuri writes:

Who would think of judging the world by standards either Indian or European? It must take its stands on broader human grounds. When all is changing no one attitude would serve as a measure of progress. In this infinitely complex and infinitely vast mass of ever-changing things nothing supplies us with a safe anchorage save the

objective method. Such a conception of history cannot think of being partial or impartial. . . . To it the epic of the *Cid* and *Ramayana* are primitive examples of poetry, the philosophy of Vedanta and of Henri Bergson efforts of the human mind to find a solution of [sic] life, the Reformation a transition from one stage of development to another through economic, political and religious causes. It has no special liking for things Indian or European. The hero of this history is man in all his developments and in every climate. The conclusions of such history are independent of the views of morality, religion, or politics that the writer happened to hold. (The Autobiography 329)

Another aspect of Chaudhuri which set him apart from other comrades is his relationship with the continent of Africa. Had he been nothing more than a colonial propagandist, he would not have had any love lost for the so-called Dark Continent. After all, European colonialists had dubbed it the white man's grave. However, Nirad Chaudhuri had a palpably soft corner for Africa although he never visited the place. Africa appears quite unexpectedly in his writings, a bit like the way she appears in the writings of Ernest Hemingway. For instance, while describing his village river, Chaudhuri compares it with the Nile. Given his undying love for the West, one would expect him to make the comparison with the Thames or the Hudson. However, Chaudhuri says, "We loved the stream. To compare small things with great, it was our Nile. Our town was the gift of the river." (The Autobiography 4) While describing the vessels on the village river, Chaudhuri

remembers Africa again. He writes, "They were all country boats, having the outlines and general shape of the model boats found in the tombs of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt." (The Autobiography 6) Evidently, the waterways of India brought to his mind their counterparts in Africa and not those in Europe.

Given Chaudhuri's pro-colonial leanings, it would have been entirely understandable had he wished to be born in Europe. However, it was not so. Nirad Chaudhuri actually expressed a wish to be born in Africa. When India was being ravaged by the uncontrollable post-partition riots in 1947-48, he wished he were an African instead. At that time, Chaudhuri's sole connection with Africa was a lioness which roared in an animal shelter near his house but was later euthanised.<sup>26</sup> Preferring the innocent beasts of that continent to the riotous mobs of India, he writes poignantly:

The lioness had wafted the peace of the wilderness into a murder-ridden city. Her voice had lured our thoughts away from the obscene events which we were witnessing to travel across the African veldt, the Masai country, and the Serengeti Plain, and clothed our nights with the mystery of the gigantic crater of Ngorongoro. O dead lioness! For what you gave us for a fortnight a son of a man who would rather be your cub than a man in contemporary India thanks you from the depth of his heart. (Thy Hand 855)

The above paragraphs do not disprove the fact that Nirad Chaudhuri was a

comprador. What they prove is that he was one with a difference. At times, he would rise above the colonizer-colonized divide and write about the universal. At other times, he would be thinking about Africa rather than Europe. Hence, the conclusion that Chaudhuri was an atypical comprador!

#### 4.6 FROM UNKNOWN INDIAN TO KNOWN UN-INDIAN

The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (1951) is often mistaken to be Nirad Chaudhuri's first publication. However, the fact is that his first publication was 'Bharat Chandra' (1925). It was not a book though, but an article of literary criticism which appeared in The Modern Review, a magazine with a country-wide circulation. Thereafter, Chaudhuri wrote numerous articles on national and international politics in various journals and for All India Radio. By the time India became independent, he was not really unknown in the area of writing and publishing.

The Autobiography was, nevertheless, Nirad Chaudhuri's first book. It was also his first work to have caught the attention of the readers. The most eye-catching part of the book was its dedication; it was to the memory of the British Empire in India on the ground that "All that was good and living / Within us / Was made, shaped, and quickened / By the same British rule." The dedication stated something which was, till then, not accepted by people at large. It declared what

most Indians and many Britons refused to recognise — the positive features of British imperialism in India. In metaphorical language, the dedication seemed to acknowledge a non-existing debt.

This unfavourable reaction of Indians to the book's dedication is partly justifiable. The dedication was unbalanced, to say the least, in its statement on British India. It had failed to identify the negative features of the Raj, as if they never existed. However, the fact of the matter is that there were many and some of them quite serious. Not only was the dedication lopsided in this way, it also appeared to question the rationale of the freedom struggle. Questioning the *raison d'être* of a mass movement is raising doubts about the reasonableness of the millions who had participated in it voluntarily. Surely, nothing could be more undemocratic or elitist.

On the other hand, a few things need to be said in defence of the controversial dedication. The strongest part of it is that it spoke well about the dead. In highlighting the plus points of the Late British Raj, it spoke an unspeakable truth in newly independent India. It is well to remember that one of the slogans of the independence movement was 'self governance is better than good governance' which implied that the Raj did provide good governance. What the freedom fighters actually questioned was not the administrative efficiency of the British but their moral right to rule over Indians. Hence, Nirad Chaudhuri's dedication foregrounds those qualities of imperialist rule which had been relegated

to the background by neo-nationalist enthusiasm.

A tsunami of severe criticism hit Chaudhuri immediately after the publication of his maiden book. He never apologized for it but claimed that he was misunderstood. That he did care for the Indian opinion of him is borne out by the fact that, forty five years later, he wrote an elaborate explanation for the controversial dedication. His article, published on the occasion of India's Independence Day in 1996, is translated from Bengali as follows:

If anybody has an authority on the English language, then he would understand without delay that in such dedication, I have criticised British authorities in India, not praised them. I praised, even boasted about, our attitude because of which we could reconstruct European culture despite being under British rule who were against it. The proof of my logic is the Latin sentence in the dedication: *Civis Britannicus Sum*. A little knowledge of Roman history would explain its significance without difficulty. One would realise that I have written these words in imitation of a quotation by Cicero.

At that time, an aristocratic Roman named Verres was the ruler of Sicily. He was money-minded and depraved and used to torture Sicily's inhabitants. Cicero invoked the Roman senate to judge him. Just as Burke had Warren Hastings impeached on matters of administration, Cicero did exactly the same for Sicily. He said Verres used to imprison people who would scream - *Civis Romans Sum* (I

am a Roman citizen) . . . This was the dedication's crime. Firstly, I indicted the British for not considering us their equals, and secondly, we imbibed occidental culture despite great resistance of the local British. (Desh 15 Aug. 1996)

If we grant the benefit of doubt to Chaudhuri, there does seem to be an iota of criticism against the British in his 1951 dedication. However, this cautious 'criticism' needs to be carefully examined for what it really is. In actuality, it is merely a complaint that the British did not give us their citizenship. What had saddened him was the fact that we were British subjects only, not British citizens. Probably, Nirad Chaudhuri's sadness was the sadness of Frantz Fanon who had realised that because of his complexion, the French would invariably identify him as a negro and never as Tarzan, with whom he wanted to identify himself. This was Fanon's experience at a movie show in Paris, as recorded in Black Skin, White Masks.

From his childhood, Chaudhuri embarked upon an active process of westernization, exemplifying affiliation in its extreme. The colonised replaced his filiative connections to indigenous traditions. Chaudhuri typifies the colonised who, in the words of Fanon, wants to be white, "who will be proportionately whiter . . . in direct ratio to his mastery of the language." (Black Skin 18) Chaudhuri desperately sought to compensate for the absence of blood ties. He reinforces Macaulay's paradigm that knowledge of language and literature is a privileged means of

affiliation. Chaudhuri has said in the absence of blood ties only cerebral interest in English culture and fluency in language can validate a non-English person's claim to a share in English greatness. He identifies English as the culture through which he and others were transformed and he justifies imperialism as a form of social Darwinism.

Nirad Chaudhuri's is actually asking why only subjecthood, why not citizenship? An answer to his query is available with Homi Bhabha. The latter suggests that a colonised subject is merely a blurred copy of the colonizer and calls this condition 'ambivalence'. Apparently the coloniser and the colonised are on equal platforms, but actually the former is more equal than the latter. It is in the colonial penumbra, that the writings of Chaudhuri appear. Bhabha's theory of mimicry can also explain the "great resistance of the local British" that Chaudhuri notes at the end of his 1996 explanation. The local British resisted any Indian reconstruction of European culture because they were uncomfortable with their mimics. Mimicry is never far from mockery; it is like a reflection that resembles and ridicules at the same time. So Macaulay's Indian-blood-English-taste "interpreters" could turn out to be Frankenstein's monsters.

One of the problematic features of The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian is its mixture of autobiography with history. Such a mixture is problematic because it becomes a cocktail of the personal and the impersonal. After all, it is generally assumed that autobiography is a personal genre while history is an impersonal

subject. Nevertheless, a blend of autobiography and history is understandable in the case of national leaders like Gandhi or Nehru because their lives change the course of history. An autobiographical history is not expected out of somebody who is self-admittedly unknown, one whose life did not influence anybody except his family members.

It is here that Nirad Chaudhuri's ego came into play. He thought about himself as if he were India's Sphinx, the silent observer in the sands of time. He thought of his contemporaries as idiots full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. His self-imposed detachment convinced him that an autobiography was the appropriate genre for writing history even though he had no part in creating the latter. In fact, he would be greatly disappointed if his book was read only as an autobiography and not as history. Obviously, nobody but a super-egoist would think on these lines.

Nirad Chaudhuri's forte was autobiographical writing. Not only is his two-volume autobiography the longest in the English language, autobiographical elements are strewn over his other writings as well except for his biographies of Max Mueller and Robert Clive. Now, an autobiography is a literary form with great psychological significance. It is a mode of expression where the author can explore the self quite as another or as the Other in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The autobiography, as a form, has historical relevance too. According to Laura Marcus, it is a genre shaped by history. (Autobiographical

Discourses 167)

In considering the autobiography as a work of literature, one finds that it is a metaphor of the self. It builds a metaphoric bridge from the subjective self-consciousness to an objective reality. Once that reality is reached, the writer becomes accessible to the reader. In other words, an autobiography is a mode of expression for the writer who has to locate a unique objective correlative for his or her self with the purpose of reaching the reader. Separate selfhood is the very motive of autobiographical creation because the genre is of the individualistic self. Autobiographies make mirrors in which the writers reflect their own images. But if an autobiographer falls in love with that image, like the mythical Narcissus, he or she will end up magnifying it. Needless to say, the entire process would get distorted thereby.

In an essay titled "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", Dipesh Chakrabarty says, "Many of the private and public rituals of modern individualism became visible in India in the nineteenth century. One sees this, for instance, in the sudden flourishing in this period of the four basic genres that help express the modern self: the novel, the biography, the autobiography, and history." Unfortunately though, the general standard of autobiographies in Indian English is not as high as that of novels or poetry in this language. It is comparatively neglected, quite like Indian English drama.

Nevertheless, some Indian English autobiographies do deserve critical attention. Among them, are the works of Gandhi and Nehru in the pre-independence era and those of N. C. Chaudhuri and C. D. Narasimhaiah in the post-independence times. Literary personalities like R. K. Narayan and Dom Moraes also have penned valuable autobiographies. If one were to cast a searching eye across such works, certain common features would stand out. For instance, Sunil Khilnani describes the autobiography as “a genre that in Indian hands . . . conveniently fused picaresque personal adventures with the odyssey of the nation”. (The Idea 7) The self and the communal are intertwined, individuality and collectivity are merged in the attempt of telling a story larger than itself. Invariably, it becomes not merely the life story of an individual but also the story of the times.

Despite his attempt to mix history in it, it is the autobiographical aspect of Nirad Chaudhuri's books which is the best in literary terms. Chaudhuri's forte is his picturesque descriptions, be it of nature or of people. For instance, his description of the monsoon showers in what is present-day Bangladesh is as follows:

One of the most attractive and engaging sights of the season was to be seen in the inner courtyard of our house, when there was a heavy downpour. The rain came down in what looked like pencils of glass and hit the bare ground. At first the pencils only pitted the sandy soil, but as soon as some water had collected all around they began to bounce off the surface of water and pop up and down in the form of

minuscule puppets. Every square inch of the ground seemed to receive one of the little things, and our waterlogged yard was broken up into a pattern which was not only mobile but dizzy in motion. As we sat on the veranda, myriads of tiny watery marionettes, each with an expanding circlet of water at its feet, gave us such a dancing display as we had never dreamt of seeing in actual life. It often went on for the best part of an hour but had a trick of stopping suddenly. No magic wand could make elves vanish more quickly. The crystalline throng was brushed off even before the rustle of rain ceased in our ears. (The Autobiography 8-9)

Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India 1921-1952 is the second volume of Chaudhuri's autobiography. It takes off from where The Autobiography had ended, after his dropping out of the M.A. course. The book is introduced by the author as the story of "my life and thoughts" and also as that of "the struggle of a civilization with its environment." (Thy Hand xiv) Perhaps, it is more of the latter than the former, thereby making it more socio-political than personal.

The biggest surprise of this book is Chaudhuri's statement that he would have actually preferred to see India becoming independent decades before 1947. Apparently, this is not in consonance with his strong pro-colonial leanings. However, Chaudhuri justifies this unexpected stance because he thinks that the partition of the country could have been avoided had the transfer of power

happened years earlier. It gives us an inkling to his complex mindset — that his real disappointment with India's independence was due to the bloody balkanization of the country. He discloses:

I have firmly held the view that the best date for transferring power to Indians, as was done in 1947, was 1921. If that could be done outright, even the fixing of a final date then and adoption of a plan of concessions in stages would have spared India the calamities which followed the inevitable transfer in 1947. I would add that a good opportunity came in 1935. If in that year a decisive step had been taken, instead of passing the Government of India Act of 1935, which demoralized the British administration in India without satisfying the nationalists, that would have been a second best. That opportunity was missed. (Thy Hand 68)

Ambivalence, which is one of the definitive characteristics of post-colonialism, has been candidly admitted to by Chaudhuri as he writes, "I remained ambivalent between a nationalist (Indian) and an imperialistic (British) view of Indian history. However, this has not made me overlook the shortcomings of British rule or of the Indian nationalist movement either." (Thy Hand 27) This conclusively proves the main thrust of this thesis about his colonial duality.

Metamorphosis is yet another characteristic effect of post-colonialism. Nirad Chaudhuri could not be outside its pale as a colonial subject. The following

passage is illustrative of his kind of metamorphosis:

Anyone who had any knowledge of the modern Indian mind knew that it had been formed by English education, in India more so than abroad. Westernization of the Indian educated in England had an appearance of being an artificial veneer, but Indians, educated in India in the English language, became mentally transformed quite naturally, so that they could hardly say what exactly their mind and personality might have been without that education. (Thy Hand 918)

Nonetheless, Chaudhuri's accusation of nihilism against the Indian movement is difficult to subscribe to. Had his charge of ideological vacuity been valid it would not have been possible to draw up a comprehensive Constitution of India within three years of independence. The Constitution is the veritable proof, if any were needed, that the nationalist movement was not as negativist as Chaudhuri thought it to be. He also felt that the vacuum created by the decline of positive idealism in India was filled up there by the love of money in its most sordid form. This is the unkindest cut of all. To accuse India's freedom fighters of being money-minded is nothing short of untruth.

Nirad Chaudhuri is of the view that little had changed in India after independence. However, he suffers from a logical incongruity on this point. If nothing has really changed in independent India it must mean that the Indian rulers were as bad as their British predecessors. That is not something Chaudhuri is

willing to concede though. He postulates that no one could serve the foreign rulers of his country and the national rulers with equal loyalty. He refused to script a glorifying account of the Quit India Movement for the All India Radio because in 1942 he was in the service of the British administration. His contention is that, if he had thought that the movement was right, he would have resigned. In the same vein, Chaudhuri goes to the extent of saying, "All the Indians in the ICS should have been hanged from the nearest lamp-post on 15 August 1947." (Thy Hand 922) Chaudhuri insinuates that government servants who were Indian celebrated Independence wholeheartedly since it served not only the nationalist but also their careerist purposes.

Chaudhuri laments that even to the last days of British rule the local British aired an insolent contempt for our reading and literary culture. Their fear of colonial mimicry, he is unable to reconcile even throughout his writings. In the absence of a valid justification of the British attitude, he writes:

One of the most curious aspects of the reception to the book [The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian] in India was that of the attitude of the local British. . . . There was a very discreet aloofness on the part of the British High commission, who must have seen what trouble I had brought on myself by paying a tribute to the British rule in India. But they were probably afraid to cultivate a man who was *persona non grata* with the new Indian regime. (Thy Hand 921)

Chaudhuri relates an incident soon after the publication of The Autobiography which gave an indication of the British 'official' attitude to him. An English General warned Chaudhuri half seriously that he would report the latter to the Director of Military Intelligence, who was an Indian. Chaudhuri was taken aback to find that, in their new respect for Indians, one of the English Generals was now ready to tell on a man for his lack of respect for them. He laments:

Any exhibition of European life, civilization or history drove the British community in India to make the gesture which peasant boys in India make at a passing train. They expose themselves and wave their hips. But as the train goes forward in spite of these gestures, our figurative train to Europe also did, in spite of the figurative obscene gestures of the local British. (Thy Hand 924)

The point worth noting is Chaudhuri's reiteration of his conviction in pro-imperialism. He had built up an elaborate theory based on social Darwinism to defend the concept of empires. The irrationality of his theory is dumbfounding. For a man of his erudition, it is nothing but a deliberate misuse of the intellect to propagate such an unjustifiable theory. He wrote:

I had better confess that all Hindus are traditionally imperialists, and they condemned imperialism only in so far as British imperialism made them subjects to an empire instead of its masters. This is due to that fact that the strongest political passion of the ancient Hindus was directed towards conquest and domination. All Sanskrit literature

and all the historical inscriptions are full of glorification of both. This aspiration to conquer and dominate was suppressed during Muslim and British rule . . . (Thy Hand 773)

The author justifies his imperialism by misinterpreting the social reformers of the nineteenth century like Rammohun Roy. He is not able to comprehend that the conditions had changed since the times of Roy. It is inconceivable that Roy would support British rule in the twentieth century because there are sufficient instances of his life to prove his independent mindedness. Disregarding those facts, Chaudhuri writes:

I was perfectly familiar with the views of the greatest Indians of the nineteenth century on British rule in India. . . . These great men were all conscious of an antithesis between the natural desire of all Indians to become free from foreign rule and the welfare and progress of the Indian people. Not only they, but no Indian with any education and some regard for historical truth, ever denied that, with all its shortcomings, British rule had, in the balance, promoted both the welfare and the happiness of the Indian people. The general assumption then was that an Indian regime succeeding the British would also promote these as assiduously. I, however, began to doubt this from the Thirties onwards, and therefore I became more of an imperialist than a nationalist. (Thy Hand 774)

Chaudhuri was an idiosyncratic writer. The idiosyncrasies pertained to the substance of his writings, not to his style — the substance was generally non-conformist whereas the style was often classical. The substance is idiosyncratic because, through it, he tried to telescope the history of his life with the histories of India and of Britain. It was a mark both of egoism as well as audacity that a writer, who was a non-entity otherwise, could attempt such a work. As far as his non-conformism was concerned, Nirad Chaudhuri was so both in his decisions of life and in his interpretations of India and Britain. One of his life's earliest non-conformist decisions was in 1919 when he dropped out of a post-graduation course even after standing First in the First Class at graduation. His non-conformism regarding matters of India and Britain was first seen in 1951 with his iconoclastic dedication.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Asians and Africans visited or settled in Britain but they were considered exotic outsiders and curiosity objects. Perceived as native informants who could tell secrets of their little-known culture, their burden was to embody foreignness, provide alien perspectives of British culture for the consumption of the majority population. They were considered informed mediators between two widely divergent and incompatible cultures. They were supposed to put to good use their first hand knowledge of the Orient, create some sort of fantasy which would be firmly tied to reality. A sharp light was thrown on the wide gulf between the East and the West. Stereotyped versions of India were bandied about, it was an occasion for savouring of otherness and simultaneous relishing of

the writers' assimilation. Different writers negotiated this role of cultural ambassadorship and self-translation differently. Notions of oriental morality gave incredulous fascination. Privileging of native informants allows dominant culture to restrain from criticising the other because the authentic insider is there. The initial success of Chaudhuri's books was boosted because Britain was losing its confidence and its empire.

Nirad Chaudhuri's immersion in the colonial process was assimilative. His colonial experiences are defined through the processes of hybridization and they testify to the colonialist interpellation of the indigenous elite. However, it must be remembered that some of the education and values concerned were imposed while others were chosen. Chaudhuri's finest achievement is his invocation of the conditions of his growing up in loving, intense details.

Chaudhuri's language is the language of the British elite of a lost generation. The usage of words and phrases like 'larceny', 'mendacity', 'besmirched' and 'not a whit', show an intimacy with old English but it is anachronistic in the present times. Chaudhuri's ornate English is distinctly formal, late Victorian. It is neo-classical in style with long sentences and a masculine tone. He uses archaic terms which were earlier used by the upper-class elite. In fact, Macmillan wondered at his language. (Thy Hand 903) Ironically, this perfect polish shows him to be a non-English author rather than an English one. It is because those born in the language are oftentimes less particular about linguistic niceties. In this context, one remembers

what Sara Suleri says regarding V. S. Naipaul. She thinks that the “anguish of affiliation dictates the grimly perfect grammar” of the hybridised author. (The Rhetoric 149) For writers like Chaudhuri and Naipaul, ‘Indian English’ was a term of disapprobation, implying an insecure grip on English idiom, or infelicitous use of vocabulary. They avoided it like the plague.

Nirad Chaudhuri makes no attempt to challenge the competence of metropolitan readers. The coloniser’s tongue is not used for confrontation or resistance but for abject submission. It is replete with untranslated quotations from French and Latin but not from any Indian language. Chaudhuri does not inscribe any difference into the English language or formalise the cross-cultural character of the linguistic medium. In fact, he insists on the complete absence of any cultural nexus between English and Indian languages though he is himself an embodiment of that very nexus and a mark of that synthesis. He forgets other languages while writing in one as if every language stands in utterly different worlds not only as languages but also as minds. It is worthwhile to remember that, in this strict compartmentalisation of languages, he had his father’s training to fall back on. The senior Chaudhuri never allowed slipshod translations of English into Bengali and vice versa (173). For the same reason, Nirad C. never allowed translations of his works. He was very particular that there should not be any linguistic contamination in bilingual writers.

However, the Anglicised English of Chaudhuri was also a response to

demands of publishing. He thought it imperative to conform to the norms of British speakers in order to ensure that his books get the Western publishers he was looking for so earnestly. Chaudhuri wrote, "An acute anxiety troubled me when I was writing my first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, in 1947 and 1948. I asked myself whether what I was writing would sound like English to those who were born to the language. I knew, unless it did, no English publisher would accept my book." ("My Hundredth Year" in Ian Jack ed. Granta 57 India! p.208)

Nirad Chaudhuri has promoted assimilation into the host culture. Interestingly, theorists have said that untranslatability is a positive feature of marginal languages. Other postcolonial writers have shown a linguistic variance which is a privileged metonymic figure of cultural difference. For instance, Salman Rushdie emphasises cultural hybridity. Chaudhuri, on the other hand, is a writer of undeniable elitism, anti-national cosmopolitanism, and European universalism. His self-Westernization was static and fossilized throughout life. It helped in his initial acclimatisation in Britain. His Anglicisation made him non-threatening, he fell in with their habits and customs as if living with them for years. Clinging to obsolete notions of Englishness, subscribing to discredited imperial ideas, he continued to reproduce outdated ideologies, with the intention of countering what he perceived to be an unsatisfactory, decadent present. Chaudhuri's dislocation was extreme and unique. Nevertheless, he was never actually assimilated in Britain.

Nirad Chaudhuri's immersion in late Victorian culture suggests a distinction

between metaphorical and physical exile. Although he claimed to be living in exile, the fact is that he was only an expatriate who chose to live abroad. It was purely voluntary. His affiliation with the English culture began before the physical crossing of borders. When one studies his childhood, it is revealed that his liberal parents initiated the severance from traditional rituals and from an extended family. Consequently, he distanced himself from ritualistic Hinduism and went over to Christianised monotheistic Brahmoism. Chaudhuri greatly admired Raja Rammohun Roy as a critic of Hindu culture. In a similar context, sociologist Ashish Nandy notes "the widespread internalization of western values by many Indians". (The Intimate 24) A generous view of Nirad Chaudhuri can be in terms of this modernisation and not only as an eccentric Anglophile. Chaudhuri mourns the passing away of India's distinguished past and he is inextricably entwined with notions of present decay thereby inviting colonial intervention. Despite all evidence to the contrary, he claims to have never lost his identity. (Thy Hand preface)

Octavio Mannoni's theory of 'dependence complex' anticipates Nirad Chaudhuri's stance as a passionate apologist for the Raj. Mannoni claimed that colonisation was "desired by the future subject peoples" (Propsero 86) What Chaudhuri claims is that colonisation was required by the past subject peoples and, perhaps, it is required by them even now. He asserts that India can be saved only by Britain and that the latter abrogated her imperial responsibility by abandoning this country and leaving it to anarchy. (Thy Hand 70) He dramatises the predicament of the culturally colonised native in his lament at the elimination of

imperialism. In his autobiography, the powerful retelling of Durga Puja shows a conflictual attraction and repulsion regarding Hindu festivities. He was both aghast and awestruck by the bloody sacrifice of animals; the orgiastic and the devotional nature of the bloody sacrifice fascinated him. (The Autobiography 77-8) The immense detailing and the loving particularisation betray his fascination.

Chaudhuri's intense, cerebral relationship with England led to his internal exile from India. A British reviewer of A Passage to England remarked, "Mr Chaudhuri does not appear to be seeing for the first time, but returning after years of exile." (cited in The Intellectual 77) The absent-yet-present England shaped Chaudhuri's childhood. His imagined realities became as significant as the immediate, referential ones.

Critic K. Chelappan says that Chaudhuri's "obsession with what India is not made him seek an aggressive Western identity". ("The Discovery of India and the Self in Three Autobiographies") For instance, the town of Kishorganj is described in terms of what it is not, i.e. an English country town. It is an attempt to define India in relation to England. Hence, C. D. Narasimhaiah described N. C. Chaudhuri in terms of Macaulay's progeny. (Essays 61)

Chaudhuri's governing metaphor of India is stagnant. He foregrounds the difference between him and others, and is antagonistic and even hostile. (The Autobiography 607-8) He says "this historical thesis has emancipated me from a

malaise that had haunted me throughout my life.” But M. K. Naik has very rightly said, “It is the other way round . . . it is the ‘malaise’ that explains the historical thesis.” (A History 265) The extremity of his estrangement from India is seen when Chaudhuri thinks of his writing as cathartic and alienation as liberating. His sense of liberty or autonomy was achieved without uprooting himself from India.

Ashsis Nandy calls Chaudhuri “the last great Edwardian modernist of India” (The Savage Freud Dedication) He is, after all, a part of India’s modernising traditions. He shows not fusion with the nation but separation. Whatever Chaudhuri writes, be they memoirs or travelogue except biographies, he refracts the reality through himself. The autobiographical form asserts individuality, autonomous self: a fully constituted male subject who pre-exists the language in which he casts his story. It is associated with potency of self-identity and separate selfhood. (Anne McClintock 313)

Chaudhuri lived on his own terms and was anxious to emphasise his self-determination, that he never got carried away by prevalent modes of thinking. Hence, far from expressing angst against his alienation, he relishes and embraces it. He wrote, “I saw nothing wrong in Darcy’s pride, because I came from a landowning family, which would not even dine in any house connected with trade.” (“Woman of the World” Times Literary Supplement 16 January 1976)

Partha Chatterjee calls Nirad Chaudhuri the most extreme proponent of the

theory of Bengal's decline because the story "easily lends itself to a social conservatism that justifies class privilege by dressing it up as a 'meritocracy' and a celebration of the nineteenth century 'synthesis' of West and East." (The Present vii) However, Chaudhuri was never a part of Bengal's elite which was entrenched in the city of Calcutta. He was more of a country bumpkin than anything else when he went to the city. In his defiance, Chaudhuri insists that his position as an intellectual outside the dominant group enabled him to be free from ideological constraints or allegiance to any national constituency. His self-construction as an objective outsider is in order to privilege his perspectives. He dared to transcend provincial limits and put criticism before solidarity; he dismisses patriotism as xenophobia and is against the concept of unquestioning allegiance to one's country. He says that detachment from the multitude is the precondition of all original thought.

Nirad Chaudhuri calls himself as one among "a small number of historians whose integrity would not succumb to nationalism, however patriotic they might be." (The Intellectual in India 52) His works, like V. S. Naipaul's, raise many questions about subjectivity and consciousness. Can we preserve self-respect and autonomy even as subjects of colonial power? Can we stand apart from ideological and cultural circumstances that frame our world view and make impartial judgments about other cultures and our own? Chaudhuri seems to imply that nationalism should be robust enough to profit by a scolding. His correspondence suggests that his criticism stems from a desperate concern rather

than the professed detachment. Naipaul's travelogues are in the tradition of British travel writing but they too establish the tradition of a detached objective observer of the Third World who comments on other cultures.

Chaudhuri's subsequent texts are increasingly uneven. They are characterised by dense prose, repetitive arguments, sweeping generalisations, unnecessary denunciations and a hectoring tone of self-justification. The Intellectual in India was not only his first book to be published in India, but it is also pitched to Indian readers. Since then, there is a double voice – he tries to address both his readers in Britain and his critics in India. Thereafter, we get mostly passionate outbursts, subjective distortions and exaggerations largely unrelieved by lyrical descriptions or his acute, particularised observations of the natural world. However, the book does not walk on stylistic stilts like The Continent of Circe.

In the autobiography, Chaudhuri confesses to an emotional relationship with England. The autobiographical form is only a matter of convenience to tell the life-story of a man generally in conflict with his countrymen. In many a chapter, the interaction between personal and national is artistically unobtrusive. The book is a history ideas even if they are not acceptable or sustainable. What impresses the reader is the writer's originality, brilliance or forthrightness. It is the ideational process, the ways of creating ideas, that is controversial.

A Passage to England is Chaudhuri's canvas to emphasize the contrast

between India and England. This separates it from other travel books which are not burdened with any hidden agenda. His comments on Hindus are dogmatic and doctrinaire, though they cannot be called absolute denigration. Anglicism is a pronounced feature of his writings and it touches the high watermark in A Passage. In his adulation for the English way of life, he exaggerates all good things of English life and glosses over its faults. Chaudhuri compares them with Hindus to the disadvantage of the latter. The chief awareness of the book arises from this comparison. Apart from the impropriety of comparing two dissimilar countries, he also compares the past with the present. Actually, Chaudhuri uses his impressions of England as pegs to hang his criticism of India. His point of view is the temperamental alienation from India and her people. He takes himself outside the Hindu fold and bitterly criticizes the latter. It would have been a fruitful exercise had he not shut his eyes firmly to all virtues of Hindu society due to his wide-eyed love of English.

His urge for radical non-conformism leads Chaudhuri to refute established historical facts. The Continent of Circe is not history or even satire, as there is no fine raillery, only bitterness. It is demonstrative of a peculiar kind of atavism. Hence, the excellence of the book is in the imaginative concept of history, a subjective personal interpretation of history. It is essentially literary not historical. The Continent is a formidable attack on things Indian. Chaudhuri claims to have a full-fledged epistemology, a theory of knowledge, about India. The gist of that knowledge is that one has to be acclimatized or reconciled to the all-pervasive

squalor in order to live in India. Although Nirad Chaudhuri subscribes to the theory of historical objectivity propounded by Lord Acton, he ends up exemplifying the theory of Robin Collingwood that complete objectivity is an impossibility. Hence, The Continent has been described as a brilliantly written thesis of an erudite student who has distorted history to suit his preconceived notions. Chaudhuri says that Hindus have a streak of insanity but that this collective insanity is feebler but more permanent than that of the Japanese and the Germans. His condemnation of Hindus, which involves distortion or suppression of facts and enunciation of half-truths, is like that by V. S. Naipaul or Ved Mehta.

Nirad Chaudhuri was particularly critical of British foreign policy. One of his unpublished commentaries on the British withdrawal of Palestine and the emergence of Israel reads, "British rule in Palestine, disguised under the name of Mandate, came to an end last night after thirty years of unsuccessful and troubled administration. . . . The greatest sufferers from their [USA and UK] policies and from the war in Palestine will be the people of Palestine. Nobody seems to be thinking of them this moment." (15 May 1948) Chaudhuri's exactitude for facts was borne out by his script on the American military action in Korea in 1950 where he had noticed that the action had preceded, not followed, a United Nations Security Council resolution to the same effect by a few hours.

British reviewer Raymond Mortimer said, "If Mr Chaudhuri sees nothing good in his country do not imagine that he is indulgent to the English. He speaks

with loathing of our superciliousness, cruelty and despotism in the days of the Raj . . .” (“The Square Peg” Sunday Times 9 September 1951) Macmillan reader John Squire wrote, “Chaudhuri, a realist, is certainly no indiscriminate belauder of British rule; he has some damning things to say about the attitude of the British communities . . . towards the native inhabitants of India.” (“A Bridge Between England and India” Illustrated London News 3 November 1951)

Chaudhuri’s importance as a writer is due to his erudition, originality, defiance of conventional history and bulk of facts he places before readers. He takes a painstaking intellectual approach, endeavours to be forthright and downright in his expression of ideas while maintaining the highest standards of dignity and decorum in English prose. His books on Max Muller and Robert Clive are examples of painstaking research and bear the stamp of intellectual approach. About Clive, he could not discover any new information but re-interprets old facts. Thus, he said, “To my thinking, the inadequacy of the existing biographies of Clive is to be found not in the incomplete utilization of the sources, but in the unsatisfactory interpretation of well-known facts.” The discussion of moral issues too was in the interest of historical truth.

Nirad Chaudhuri provides important clues to the understanding of social mores and behaviours. His personality is projected most forcefully in all his books - they have a distinct flavour, the like of which seldom comes across in a language not one’s own. He has rightly been described as “gourmet, epicure and stylist”.

Chaudhuri is convinced about own intellectual superiority. Despite his Anglomania, his moorings in India and Hinduism remain very strong. His 'hate India' themes are grossly misunderstood. He knew that the Anglicized class was hypocritical and seldom went beyond reading blurbs and reviews of books. Therefore, his dedication was a trick to attract attention. Chaudhuri is provocative, intemperate and even fussy but never insipid or boring. He maintains a majesty and solemnity of style. His mood is bitter as he grows impatient with the conditions in independent India. He utters some plain but unpalatable truths about Hinduism and castigates Hindus for duplicity, intellectual degeneration. He takes recourse to climatology in the absence of cogent arguments or logic. Clearly, he cares more for the literary purpose than for sociology or anthropology. Over all, Chaudhuri offers some remarkable insights though they are vitriolic and trenchant.

Some of the criticism against Nirad Chaudhuri is symptomatic of the resentment against his admiration for Britain and his hostility to India. Just as metropolitan critics make the thoughtless equation between exile and objectivity, subcontinental critics perceive his criticism of India as evidence of dislocation. The reactionary nature of some of his views overshadows certain points like his acute analysis of role of class and wealth in contemporary Indian society. While his patrician contempt for Gandhi's mass movement is classed, his fears of Hindu jingoism are borne out by the excesses of contemporary Hindu nationalism. However, like Naipaul, he too has been accused of colluding with Hindu communalists. Chaudhuri had an impish urge to be seen as enfant terrible and

delighted in accusations of chronic Anglomania.

C. V. Venugopal asserts that The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian is more appropriately read as literature than as history, although Chaudhuri himself intended otherwise. To prove the literary merits of the book, Venugopal ferrets out a number of passages in it and says:

The book does reflect, as any well written autobiography does, the many facets of a colourful personality as it develops from childhood through youth to maturity. . . . The generally objective expression is almost unconsciously given up, and before Chaudhuri becomes aware of it and switches over to his avowed 'objective method', he exposes the purely personal side. Such 'lucid intervals', taken together, I feel, are capable of providing the reader with a delight no less rewarding than the treat he has at being enlightened by a unique and original look into India of the past, present and future from the historical viewpoint, which is what Chaudhuri explicitly states as his intention in writing this book. And a look into the book in search of the purely personal element is warranted, for Nirad Chaudhuri does only say that his 'main intention' is historical but not his 'sole intention'. (Perspectives 213-14)

In 2007, Ruvani Ranasinha published an article on Nirad Chaudhuri. Titled 'Self-translation as Self-promotion', the monograph suggests that Chaudhuri's self-

translation needs to be seen in relation to his hopes for a European-inspired renaissance in India. Ranasinha also gives an episodic account of Chaudhuri's comfortable duality:

The almost schizophrenic duality of Chaudhuri's personality that observers immediately perceived did not seem to present any personal conflict about the complexity of his intellectual inheritances. When a British friend asked him in 1974 'Which is the *real* Nirad Chaudhuri? Is it the person dressed in Indian style, talking of the old Delhi that he loved, or the person dressed impeccably in Savile Row suits talking knowledgeably about English literature?', Chaudhuri immediately and confidently replied 'both'. (South Asian Writers 81)

After more than sixty years of independence, post-nationalist India seems willing to rediscover Chaudhuri. Hence, in some quarters, there are attempts to re-evaluate some of his anti-national criticism. Chaudhuri's paradoxical essence is that his overt prejudices should not blind us to his perspicacious observations. He considered the British Empire as the greatest phenomenon ever known to history and interpreted criticism of the empire as a disavowal of that greatness. However, his outdated ideas of Englishness remained at odds with the host culture of real Britain.

Nirad Chaudhuri's emotional journey was over when he realised that Britain's empire had to disappear, if not because of the resistance by colonized

nations then by the inevitable logic of historical cycles. That was the sad culmination of his pro-imperial exuberance. Hence, he concluded that “the greatness of the British people has passed away for ever, and the only question now is whether their last days would be serene and honourable . . .” (Thy Hand 762)

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The story was about a common Indian krait, which looked like a speckled band because of its white stripes on black skin, taken to Britain and then used as a murder weapon.
- <sup>2</sup> John McLeod differentiates between the two terms thus: "Colonialism is one historically specific experience of how imperialism can work through the act of settlement, but it is not the only way of pursuing imperialist ideals." (Beginning Postcolonialism 8)
- <sup>3</sup> Chaudhuri writes sarcastically, "This was the moment for me to scream 'Colour prejudice!' and send a bitter letter to one of our newspapers, for there is nothing a Hindu resents more than being taken for a negro by a white man." (A Passage 125)
- <sup>4</sup> It needs to be emphasized that Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri's defence of British imperialism is India-specific; he thought that the condition of India, not necessarily other of colonies, had become so diseased that it required a large dose of British rule.
- <sup>5</sup> According to Said, the polarization between the East and the West resulted in restricting "the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies." (Orientalism 46)
- <sup>6</sup> Chaudhuri writes, "As I read Kipling more and more I find that it is he who has said some of the truest, if also the bluntest, things about relations of the East and the West." (A Passage 25)

- <sup>7</sup> Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* has been called a subaltern view of Indian history.
- <sup>8</sup> Viewing the history of civilization as the history of imperialism, Chaudhuri wrote, "If history reveals anything, it reveals that the emergence of every new civilization and of every new value in human life is accompanied by and is inseparable from the domination of a particular human group." (Thy Hand 776)
- <sup>9</sup> When a British friend asked him in 1974 'Which is the *real* Nirad Chaudhuri? Is it the person dressed in Indian style, talking of the old Delhi that he loved, or the person dressed impeccably in Savile Row suits talking knowledgeably about English literature?', Chaudhuri immediately and confidently replied 'both'. (quoted by Ruvani Ranasinha in South Asian Writers 81)
- <sup>10</sup> Chaudhuri says that, in the pre-independence era, common people circulated rumours like "there was not one chaste woman in the whole of the British Isles..." (The Autobiography 388)
- <sup>11</sup> "The cause is the consequence," wrote Fanon. (The Wretched 32)
- <sup>12</sup> A couple of years, to be precise, from 1825 to 1828.
- <sup>13</sup> Mammals, particularly felines like lions and tigers, urinate around the boundaries of their territory.
- <sup>14</sup> Chaudhuri's appropriation of English culture came to the forefront when he said that he had settled in England to show Englishmen "how their fathers dressed, how their fathers ate and drank and how their fathers wrote English." (The Spectator Sep. 1988)
- <sup>15</sup> Incidentally, all the scholars in the list are German.

- <sup>16</sup> Ashcroft and others explain, "The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. (Key Concepts 12)
- <sup>17</sup> About Chaudhuri's attire, The Indian Express wrote, "If he took pride in his bowler hat and tweed jacket, he was equally at ease in his starched *dhota-kurta*." (August 2, 1999)
- <sup>18</sup> Colonial hybridization can be in various forms like cultural, linguistic, political or racial.
- <sup>19</sup> Macaulay desired "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern — a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals, and in intellect."
- <sup>20</sup> Puzzled by the British attitude, Chaudhuri writes, "The malice was mean, but it was typical of the British community in India, which always tried to hold up our use of English to contempt and ridicule." (Thy Hand 23)
- <sup>21</sup> Chaudhuri writes sarcastically, "An Englishman of this type resented our devotion to English literature as a sort of illicit attention to his wife, whom he himself was neglecting for his mistress, sport." (A Passage 16)
- <sup>22</sup> Chaudhuri flaunted his knowledge about world revolutions, "I have also passed through and read about all the revolutions of our age, viz. the young Turk, the Chinese, the Russian, and the new Turkish led by Kemal." (Thy Hand 31)
- <sup>23</sup> Chaudhuri thinks of decolonization as "rebarbarization". (The Autobiography 174)
- <sup>24</sup> Unlike Chaudhuri, Bill Ashcroft and others acknowledge the role of the

commoner: "The local is perceived to be fully corrigible and involved in an inevitable *process* of historical change." (Key Concepts 16)

<sup>25</sup> The literal meaning of the word, in Portuguese, is 'purchaser'.

<sup>26</sup> About the African lioness, Chaudhuri writes, "When she was living and roaring near our house, the lioness had wafted the peace of the wilderness into a murder-ridden city." (Thy Hand 855)

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

*"I like to think that his [Nirad C. Chaudhuri's] bitter criticism of India is rooted in a deep patriotism, and that nothing would cause him greater pain than to find that he has been right all these years."*

— Sunanda K. Datta Ray, *'The Last Englishman'*

In Greek mythology, Cassandra was the name of a Trojan princess whose unrequited Apollo had given her a blessing and a curse. She was blessed with the power to prophesy but cursed with the inability to convince. Accordingly, the noun 'Cassandra' is described by the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary as "any one who expresses gloomy views of the political or social future and is not listened to." This role appealed so much to Nirad Chaudhuri that he grabbed it with both hands early in life. Not minding the possibility that his words of caution would be thrown to the wind, he went on to issue prophecies most of which were pessimistic in content. About his self-imposed prophet act, Chaudhuri writes solemnly:

I wanted to be a writer, and one who was to be involved in public affairs. I always thought that a writer was a man of action in his way, and since I could not take part in real action I conceived of my role as an observer with a practical purpose, that of being a Cassandra giving warnings of calamities to come. I began to utter them from the very beginning of my career as a writer . . . (Thy Hand xvi)

One prophecy of Nirad Chaudhuri which is verifiable, in the present context, is on neo-imperialism. He believed that the second half of the twentieth century would witness the ascent of a new imperial power because the first half had seen the descent of the old one, Europe. This followed his personal theory of rise and fall of dominant civilizations. Moreover, it was not difficult to foresee the rising power — Uncle Sam. Hence, Chaudhuri writes:

The United States will never export any of its products to the East except those of which every decent American is ashamed. . . . But American national projection on the rest of the world is too deep, large, and important subject to be commented on incidentally. In its irresistible amoral power accompanied by both goodness and vileness on the moral plane, it is bound to continue and grow. (The Continent 2-3)

Nirad Chaudhuri was not deterred by the fact that his dire prophecies went mostly unheeded. Indeed, that was the curse on the mythological Cassandra and

Chaudhuri was more than aware of it. Knowing that he had no power to enforce his thoughts on others, but only to warn them, all that he could do was to 'save' himself and his immediate family. Otherwise, he took the people's indifferent response with equanimity, saying:

Those who do not like me or my views do indeed tell me that people listen to me with the object of laughing at me, instead of with me. I do not think that is wholly correct. But even if it were, I am not one of those high-placed and therefore extra-solemn countrymen of mine who cannot bear to be laughed at. I agree with the dictum of one of the greatest wits in English literature: "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?" I am always ready to make sport *for* somebody without even the countervailing right to laugh at somebody. (Culture vii)

It is significant that Nirad Chaudhuri was exclusively a writer of non-fiction. The genres he wrote in are autobiography, biography, travelogue and socio-political critique. Another noteworthy aspect of his was bilingualism — eleven of his books are in English and five in Bengali. Apart from those sixteen books, he also penned a number of articles in both the languages. As far as the languages are concerned, his English works are full of quotations from Sanskrit, Hindi, English, Greek, Latin, French and German sources. He provided English translations for the Indian, i.e. Sanskrit and Hindi, quotations but not for the European ones. Chaudhuri's Bengali works contain quotations from Sanskrit and

they, too, are left untranslated. Perhaps Chaudhuri expected his readers to be as polyglottal as he was. Whatever the reason, multi-lingual references are a feature of Chaudhuri's writings. It is surprising that despite these difficulties, some of his books became best-sellers. Perhaps they were bought but not read!

It is pretty difficult to build a case for Nirad Chaudhuri simply because his colonial sympathies are too apparent to be overlooked. Nevertheless, if one were to take the pain of scratching beneath the surface, a number of alibis would come up in his favour. One would then be able to take a holistic view of Chaudhuri's writings. Hence, the concerned issues have been investigated thoroughly in Chapter III earlier and are summarized in this section for the purpose of emphasis.

At the outset, we may like to remember that Chaudhuri is not alone in his historical iconoclasm. His incessant efforts at demolishing the grand edifice of India's national movement have found resonance, in varying degrees, with a few Indian historians. For instance, the so-called Cambridge school of historiographers denies that there was a national movement at all because the school doubts the existence of India as a cohesive nation in the second half of the nineteenth century. The subaltern school of historians dismisses the movement led by the Indian National Congress as elitist and harps on parallel movements supposedly carried on by marginalized sections of Indian society. Marxist historians are none too enthusiastic about the Indian movement because of its failure to revolutionize our feudal society. These schools are iconoclastic in the sense that they do not

easily subscribe to the nationalist school of thought. Their positions on the events prior to India's independence are qualitatively different from the commonly held views on the topic.

One issue regarding Nirad Chaudhuri, which is quite unknown, is that he was attracted to the freedom struggle in his childhood and supported it till his early adulthood. More specifically, he was supportive of the anti-partition movement of 1906-7, the passive resistance movement of 1919 and the civil disobedience of 1930-1. Given Chaudhuri's ultimate dissociation from the national movement, his one-time association with it appears incredible. It may also be noted that, in the early years, he was so involved with the anti-colonial struggle that he rooted for Indian Extremists instead of their Moderate counterparts. This marked one end of the pendulum swing which he went through in respect of his relationship with the freedom struggle, much like the transformation of Aurobindo Ghose who went from being an Extremist leader to a spiritual philosopher. Even after turning pro-colonial, Chaudhuri remained critical of the repression unleashed by the colonial rulers as he was not one to fall silent on matters of concern.

The first, if not the foremost, reason for Nirad Chaudhuri turning away from the freedom struggle has to do with the violence which was occasionally resorted to by Indian nationalists. In this, Chaudhuri was influenced by his semi-literate mother who did not think that the end justified its means. She would not justify murder and arson merely because the victims were British. Due to such a rigid

morality, Nirad disapproved of the violence in Indian protests against the passage of the Rowlatt Act or against the visit of the Prince of Wales. He certainly did not think that the movement was a peaceful one, although that is how it has been portrayed. Chaudhuri's stand on violence was obviously closer to that of Gandhi's than of Fanon's – the former precluded all sorts of violence, as is seen from his withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement in the wake of the Chauri Chaura massacre, whereas the latter defended the violence of Algerian nationals targeted at their French colonizers.

Another reason for Nirad Chaudhuri to question the nationalist movement was the bitter communalism of pre-Independence India. He was staunchly secular without being politically correct — he criticized Hindus and Muslims alike, for their communal words and deeds. Chaudhuri refused to forget the barbarism of the pre- and post-Independence riots which were directly caused by Indian masses. Hence, he thought that championing nationalism in a riot-ravaged country was as meaningless as fixing a square peg in a round hole. In fact, for him, the communal riots put a serious question mark on the nationalist project. As staunch nationalists like Mohammed Ali Jinnah metamorphosed into hardcore communalists, Chaudhuri's doubt grew even stronger. Unfortunately, the toll in communal riots was way higher than that in government brutalities, prompting Chaudhuri to argue that Indians suffered more because of their compatriots than because of colonialists. On 15 August 1947, he felt too saddened by India's bloody partition to enjoy the country's new freedom. Incidentally, even Gandhi did not join those

celebrations due to similar reasons.

Moreover, Nirad Chaudhuri's disenchantment with the anti-colonial movement was due to its, what he called, hypocrisy. What he found most hypocritical is that on the one hand Indians were protesting against the British but, on the other, they were joining in millions the British-led army. It confirmed in him the belief that our people are a duplicitous lot. Chaudhuri also considered the Japanese-backed Indian National Army to be a gang of turncoats because they had originally joined the Indian Army and subsequently changed sides after being captured by the Japanese. He wanted to know why their patriotism had not surfaced at the time of joining colonial forces. Thus, it becomes clear that if he hated one thing, that was hypocrisy.

Nirad Chaudhuri distrusted India's anti-colonial struggle also due to the rampant corruption of its middle-rung leaders. He had seen at close range the corrupt practices of pre-Independence politicians, and had sensed that the same people would continue in the post-Independence phase too. The nepotism and manipulation he saw at the Calcutta Municipal Corporation made him turn away in disgust. Therefore, he refused to believe that the country would get a brighter future in post-colonial times. Chaudhuri was also let down by the arrogant behaviour of many Congresspeople like Mahadev Desai and Mani Ben Patel. They were cold, just short of being curt, to commoners. As the personal secretary to the President of the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, Chaudhuri happened

to witness the infighting and conspiracies between some of the top-level leaders of the Indian National Congress including Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas. He quotes letters to prove that Gandhi was frequently evasive while the latter was mostly over-sensitive. These experiences convinced him that this nation's freedom was not worth fighting for.

Surely the most serious aspect to disturb Nirad Chaudhuri was the negativism that he saw in the freedom movement. He knew that it would not result in a comprehensive revolution because Indians had not thought out their post-independence strategy. Chaudhuri felt that India was in need of a revolution which would be more drastic than the French, Russian, Chinese or the Turkish ones. Due to the absence of such a social overhaul, he pooh-poohed the Indian movement as an insignificant half-measure. Chaudhuri was sure that a transfer of power would not cure India's real sickness because he had seen how power had corrupted those Indians who had already attained it. He believed that till the time the country was truly revolutionized, her citizens would not be socio-economically free. It is curious that in his insistence on a revolution, Chaudhuri was echoing the contemporary refrain of the Communist Part of India which had called India's independence a false achievement.

The case against Nirad Chaudhuri is, quite obviously, strong. He unfailingly wore his pro-colonialism like a badge of honour, almost as if nationalism were a matter of disgrace. At times, his writings were so needlessly provocative that they

generated more heat than light. The weird mindset of Chaudhuri has been analyzed closely in Chapter IV of this thesis with the sole aim of identifying the method in his madness. The salient points of that analysis are recapitulated herein.

Nirad Chaudhuri was a pitiable victim of colonial discourses. These discourses, in the sense that Michel Foucault used the term, were certain thought systems propagated by colonizers with the ulterior motive of subjugating the colonized. Various discourses of such self-serving nature were spread in British India, some of them through allegorical means. Chaudhuri had started enjoying the fine arts at a tender age in the town of Kishorganj and in the city of Calcutta, not realizing that arts like English literature and British sculpture were actually colonial allegories. All the European paintings that he saw and the Western music that he heard reinforced in him the idea of occidental superiority. Moreover, his mastery of the English language was indicative of his appropriation of the British ethos. In fact, he felt proud to be able to teach contemporary Englishmen how their ancestors conducted themselves. As a result of being trapped by these various forms of colonial discourses, Chaudhuri was led into believing that colonial rule was a benevolent presence. Surprisingly, his vast knowledge did not give him the required wisdom of seeing through that insidious propaganda.

The most serious problem with Nirad Chaudhuri was his ambivalence, which is an inexorable feature of the colonial conundrum. The most readily recognisable

indication of his ambivalent attitude was his outlandish dressing sense – he went to work in western suits when he lived in Delhi but he wore Indian dhotis to receive guests while he lived in Oxford. It was a colonial variant of the Dr-Jekyll-and-Mr-Hyde syndrome, the literary embodiment of a split personality. His ambivalence came to the fore also during the wars fought by Britain, because he could not decide as to which side he was on. If Britain won a war, he became anti-British and attributed the win to bribery; on the other hand, if she lost a war, he became pro-British and attributed the loss to misfortune. Moreover, the numerous flip-flops of Chaudhuri in which he says something at one place but contradicts himself elsewhere, are actually examples of his colonial ambivalence.

Irrespective of Nirad Chaudhuri's disdain for postcolonialism, this theory can justifiably claim to solve one problem which flummoxed him throughout his long life. Chaudhuri was never quite able to understand why the British were particularly uncooperative towards those Indians who tried to emulate them. He had expected the colonizers to be very welcoming to such natives. However, the unexpected behaviour of Englishmen is easily explained by Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry. Bhabha has clarified why the ones who are imitated, the colonizers, can never be comfortable with those who imitate them, the colonized. The British had to resist Indian attempts at adopting European traditions because the former did not have the confidence that those attempts were wholly sincere, the colonizers could never be sure that they were only being mimicked and not mocked. Despite the likeness that Indian imitations had with their European originals, there was

always a hidden possibility of ridicule like the distorted image in a curved mirror. This secret fear in the hearts of the rulers made them distance themselves from the ruled. Thus, colonial mimicry made it difficult for Anglophiles like Chaudhuri to mix intimately with the British colonizers.

In postcolonial terms, Nirad Chaudhuri is best described as a comprador. Initially borrowed from the Portuguese language by Marxist theoreticians, the term now stands for that section of the colonized intelligentsia whose independence might have been compromised by a psycho-social dependence on the colonialists. Nevertheless, the saving grace for Chaudhuri is that he was not stereotypical as a comprador. In fact, his uniqueness lies in the fact that he defied being stereotyped. In other words, his pro-colonial expressions were rarely uni-dimensional. While his colonial bias was never in doubt, he could surpass the colonizer versus colonized debate at times by writing about the universal. While a typical comprador would think only about Europe, Chaudhuri would bring in references to Africa. In his tender moments for the great African continent, Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri reminds one of Ernest Miller Hemingway.

The arguments for and against the colonial culpability of Nirad Chaudhuri's writings have been analyzed in Chapters III and IV respectively. However, a peculiar difficulty in judging Chaudhuri is the complicity between him and his critics. They accuse him of being pro-British, something which he never denies. In legal parlance, he pleaded guilty to the charge against him. This kind of plea might

d appear to simplify the matter whereas, in actuality, it does quite the opposite. Chaudhuri's acceptance of the accusation complicates the issue by making the judge wary. The latter has to be extra cautious in dispensing justice because prosecutors and the defendant not differing from one another is a strange occurrence.

The detailed evidence placed in the previous chapters, when read in conjunction, leads us to a number of significant discoveries. Firstly, it is found that Nirad Chaudhuri was not the only Indian writer to harbour colonial sympathies. Contrary to popular belief, many Indians who wrote in English had been pro-colonial. They included not only the non-descript Dean Mahomet of the early nineteenth century but also social reformer Rammohan Roy, novelist Bankim Chatterjee and poet Rabindranath Tagore. In fact, indulgence towards colonialism was not confined to writers alone – even nationalist leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Aurobindo Ghose and Jawaharlal Nehru occasionally betrayed a soft corner for the British. Not to be left behind in the display of colonial sympathies were comparatively less known personalities like Keshub Chunder Sen, Surendranath Bannerjea and Madan Mohan Malviya. However, it seems that the soft-colonial environment of pre-Independence literature, in which Chaudhuri started writing, is rarely remembered nowadays.

Another issue highlighted by this thesis is that Nirad Chaudhuri was more careful than most in maintaining the difference between the terms 'imperialism' and

'colonialism'. It is only when we realize how strictly he maintained that difference, do we notice that he supported one and not the other. For him, as for other practitioners of terminological exactitude, 'imperialism' implied rule by a foreign country while 'colonialism' meant settlement by foreigners. That imperialism affected the administration of a native country whereas colonialism changed its demographics, was a very important distinction for Chaudhuri. It followed that imperialism was not as drastic or inhuman a process as colonialism and that is why he favoured the former instead of the latter. Chaudhuri was convinced that the 'occupier colonies' in Africa and Asia, including India, had witnessed imperialism but the 'settler colonies' in Africa, America and Australasia were experiencing colonialism. Accordingly, there never was any British 'colonialism' in India, and hence, the question of him supporting it does not arise.

In addition to the aforementioned, this project finds that Nirad Chaudhuri's support to imperialism was not a general one but specific to British rule in India. He rarely justified European imperialism except for its British variant. That too, he did not volubly defend British imperialism except its Indian project. In other words, Chaudhuri's affiliation with foreign rule is not universal but contextual i.e. Raj-specific. This particularized justification means that he held either or both of two beliefs. One of them could be that Britain was better than other European countries as far as imperial practices went, a conviction corroborated by many professional historians. The other belief was probably that India's pre-British decades were worse than those of other occupied countries, a proposition which is

debatable at best. It was due to any one or both of these beliefs that he considered British rule in India to be a blessing in disguise. His broad feeling was that the best of imperialists, the British, happened to come to the country which needed them the most, India. Therefore, one needs to take a special note of the case-specific nature of Chaudhuri's imperialist advocacy.

What has come to the surface on the application of Homi K. Bhabha's concepts to Nirad C. Chaudhuri's writings would be of considerable interest to any discerning critic. It is a revelation that the idea of colonial mimicry put forward by the former can answer the one question which troubled the latter no end. Chaudhuri was always very disturbed to find that Englishmen did not encourage the appropriation of English customs by Indians. However, he never understood why the colonizers should be bothered if the colonized people wished to adopt their ways of life. The fact is that the local British resisted all Indian reconstruction of European culture because they were uncomfortable with their 'mimics'. It is obvious that what Chaudhuri thought of as the Indians' devotion to English literature was actually looked upon by Englishmen as exercises in imitation. Ignorant of Bhabha's brilliant analysis of this conundrum, Chaudhuri found the British behaviour to be inexplicable and held it responsible for souring the mutual relationship between the two countries.

Finally, the most important, contribution of this research pertains to the extent of Nirad Chaudhuri's collusion with British imperialism. While his writings

were certainly not anti-British, they were not entirely pro-British either. It would be grossly erroneous to label them as anti-Indian because that is not the whole truth, and we must not forget the danger of half-truths. The fact is that ensconced deep within his strong anti-national shell was a subtly patriotic kernel. Such a contradictory inside and outside inevitably led to a duality in expression. Those self-contradictions betray the complex mix of attraction and repulsion which marks the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. They were the external manifestations of the inescapable conflict between colonial discourses and counter-discourses. Hence, one concludes that Chaudhuri's writings were ambivalent in terms of postcolonial criticism, rather than being merely pro-colonial as they are often accused.

The discovery of colonial ambivalence in Nirad Chaudhuri prompts one towards a related issue. Chaudhuri, who generally supported British colonialism but also lent occasional support to the Indian resistance, is surely among the best embodiments of hybridization, a phenomenon which entailed the fusion of certain elements on both sides of the colonial divide. Hybridized personalities like him were both suplicants and threats, rolled into one, for the project of colonialism.

Nirad Chaudhuri, like Jawaharlal Nehru, drew a similarity between discovery of modern India and discovery of the self. They made use of the autobiographical stage to unveil history. Through western knowledge, Nehru does a positive discovery while Chaudhuri does a negative one. While both were idealistic in their

own ways, the latter missed the bus due to his undying cynicism. He was radically out of sympathy with the century in which he had to live. Ironically, that was both his strength and his weakness, the source of his uniqueness and contradictions. From the point of view of Victorian culture that he had developed for himself, Chaudhuri refused to see the efforts made to formulate an integrated India. It was an effort in which Nehru's secular and socialist mindset played a major role, as did Gandhi's tolerance. When the fervour of Nehruvian modernity and secularism was at its peak, in the 1950s, Chaudhuri's writings sounded peevish and shallow. But with the Nehruvian vision now looking exhausted, perhaps Nirad Chaudhuri has won the right to a second hearing.

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