DIALECTICS OF MODERNITY: A STUDY OF AMIT CHAUDHURI'S SELECT FICTIONS

Ph.D. THESIS

by

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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE
ROORKEE-247 667 (INDIA)
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*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree*

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<u>CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION</u>

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **"DIALECTICS OF MODERNITY: A STUDY OF AMIT CHAUDHURI'S SELECT FICTIONS"** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee is an authentic record of my own work carried out during a period from July, 2013 to December, 2017 under the supervision of Dr. Nagendra Kumar, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee.

The matter presented in the thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institute.

(SOVAN CHAKRABORTY)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

(Nagendra Kumar)

Dated: _____   Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The whole experience of the Western modernity may be seen through the binary of societal modernization and cultural modernity, through 'the dilemmas of Western Modernity' (D. P. Gaonkar). Societal modernization, a set of cognitive and social transformations, forms the basis of understanding of bourgeois modernity associated with the development of capitalism in the West, which is marked with a distinctive mode of production and a new type of subject, free from the constraints of the tradition. Cultural modernity – the cultural response to societal modernization – may be put in opposition to this modernization process itself. The cultural modernists, *avant-garde* writers and artists, starting with the Romantics in the late eighteenth century to the proponents of Modernism, in opposition to the reason based societal modernization process, emphasize on imagination and emotionalism as their primary vehicle to delve deep into the inner realm of the modern self. While the unifying narratives of rational modernity promise a perpetual linear development in terms of the materialistic production processes, they point out to the 'disenchantment' of modernity such as to disintegrating self, fractured social relationships, the alienation of human labor, an emotional vacuum, a limited scope for human imagination and the destruction of whatever 'irrational' and 'idiosyncratic', that cannot be logically explained.

The modern existence, as a cultural and aesthetic experience, seems to sway between the two poles: enthusiasm about the rational progress, and a melancholic human condition as a result of that process. Living in a modern world is wrestling inexhaustibly with its ambiguities and contradictions – the ironies and inner tensions becoming the primary source of the creative power. The primary objective of this thesis is to enquire into this dialectical modern existence – a continual tension and associated circumlocutory anxiety – through the select fictional corpus of the post-liberalization Indian English writer, Amit Chaudhuri. The novels taken for the current study include: *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991), *Afternoon Raag* (1993), *Freedom Song* (1998), *A New World* (2000), and *The Immortals* (2009). Theoretically, the opposing poles of modernity are analyzed to explore how both are intertwined with each-other and create the grey, unknowable in-between space for the phenomenon. In my thesis, the modernity's location is neither here, nor there, but in an elsewhere, which can be intuited but can never ever be adequately expressed. The ambiguities and contradictions of the modernity are not 'essential' features of modernity, but symptoms of its ever ungroundable locale.

Chaudhuri's conception of modernity simply lies beyond any kind of categorization rather it resides in a 'zone', which is more anterior than could be grasped by rational consciousness, which he calls "secular unconscious". ("Travelling between genres") This phrase is Chaudhuri's metaphor for the accidentalism and (un)knowability in whatever 'out there', including his literariness, sense of modernity, persona, fictional acumen, and his critical stances. He is in a relentless critical search for an elsewhere, where 'being in the world' is found in effervescence, in a state of always already becoming, but irrationally, even irresponsibly. His 'secular unconscious' is consciously aware of the 'paradoxes' and the 'reciprocity' at the heart of Indian modernity, which does "not only involve the beginnings of secular 'culture' in a nationalist project, but make the nation, once and for all, a cultural one. It's a reciprocity that's given our democratic and daily lives in India their recognisable texture. . . ." ("The Flute" 21)

This thesis has formed 'frame' theoretical spatio-temporalities, by taking recourse to chiefly, the 'hermeneutic circle' as proposed by Martin Heidegger, and further explored by Hans George Gadamer, as opposed to the vicious circle; to the formulations of the 'negative dialectics' as proposed by Theodor Adorno, as opposed to the kinds of 'reconciliatory', 'synthetic' or 'deterministic' senses of dialectics of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, or classical Marxism, or their 'mainstream' variants; and to finally, a revision of Heideggerian existentialism, or fundamental ontology, proposing the 'double movements' in Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy, like 'singular-plural', or 'spatio-temporal'. This frame also refers to the basic 'fracturedness' in a dialectical process, which declares such a process 'open' as in the sense of an 'enunciation', which should not cover itself up, which will eventually 'close' the dialectical process, but as in sense of such an 'openness', which is *both* an 'enunciation' for the sake of enunciating, and *also* a 'renunciation' in putting no faith in such 'enunciation'.

As far as the 'embedded' theories in each chapter are concerned, they have been explored chiefly on the contextual basis depending on that paradigm of modernity, which the chapter seeks to explore. In the second chapter, "Being at the Edge of Chaos: The Game of (Im)Mortality in *The Immortals* and *Freedom Song*", the ambiguous and split selves have been explored as beings, continually swinging between the theoretical formulations of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' of '*Dasein*' by Martin Heidegger, which have been seconded by such related theorists of modern existentialities like Søren Kierkegaard, and Jean Paul Sartre. The third chapter, "A Theatre Called Spectacle: Phantasmagorical Urban Space and *Flâneur's* Gaze in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A New World*", analyzes, through

the theories and conceptualizations of Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Georg Simmel, Jacques Derrida, Georg Lukács, and Ranajit Guha, how the narratives of these novels militate against all that is 'spectacular' in the urban modernity/modern urbanity, and brings into a play of ghostly with that to resist and impede the former's unquestionable progress. This 'progress' both originates and gets dissolved in such 'spectacular'/'spectral' urban space. This chapter also analyzes how this space is simultaneously addressed and redressed by the *flâneur's*, a casual city stroller's, observations, which are always already informed by a double vision – seeing yet disbelieving. In the fourth chapter, "Image(I-Nation): Representing the Denizenry of the Post/Coloniality in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Afternoon Raag*", the thesis has focused on the historiographies of coloniality and postcoloniality through the continuous and unstoppable dialectical double movements of the post/colonial images/imaginations vis-à-vis the notions of the nation in a more personalized Indian contexts of those people of the nation, who are yet to become full-fledged citizens, expressed in the term 'denizenry', through mainly the theoretical deliberations of the school of subaltern historians like Partha Chatterjee, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, of postcolonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha, of alternative modernity thinker D. P. Gaonkar, and also of the Indian Marxist literary critic and political commentator, Aijaz Ahmed.

The first chapter, "Introduction: Clearing a Space for an 'Open' Dialectics of Modernity', tries to deliberate on the ambiguous and contradictory nature of modernity, both in the West and the rest through a kind of 'open' dialectical structure, in which the supposed 'oppositional' elements of a 'closed' dialectics, like self/other, subject/object, thesis/anti-thesis etc., are inevitably bound to each-other, thus become like, self-other, subject-object, thesis-anti-thesis etc. It also offers justifications for the creation of 'frame' theoretical discourses, as the thesis calls them, vis-à-vis Amit Chaudhuri's literary-critical stands, which have been discussed in brief above. It also states the objectives of and further scopes for this thesis.

The second chapter attempts to formulate a thematic and attitudinal proximity between Amit Chaudhuri and Martin Heidegger, and examines how Chaudhuri's 'self being in the world' is eternally suspended in the in-between space of Heideggerian in/authenticity as proposed in the *Being and Time*, where both of these existential categories not only remain incomplete in themselves, but also create a pattern of what the study calls 'dialectical circularity'.

The third chapter deliberates upon the modern urban space split in the discourses of what Guy Debord calls 'spectacles' or the grand, majestic, decorated expressions of the imperial/capitalist progress that signify a modern metropolis, and their spectral counterparts emerging out of themselves as in Benjaminesque phantasmagoria that finds expression in Parisian Arcades. It also discusses how, in many cases, these fetishes produce a psychopathology, what George Simmel calls a *blasé* attitude, marked by indifference, irritation and superficiality. A *flâneur* is, probably, one of the greatest examples of this urban type, whose 'double gaze' is symptomatic of the spirit of an ascetic roaming within the jungle of concrete spectacularities.

The fourth chapter seeks to re-define a postcoloniality by both 'thinking through' and 'thinking against' (D. P. Gaonkar) the notion of modernity travelling from the West to the rest, which is both 'inevitable' and 'inadequate' (Dipesh Chakrabarty) to the formulations in the making of nationhood in the 'Global South'. It shows how modernity, both at the colonial heartland of Britain and at a postcolonial margin like India, is fractured. It also discusses how through a continuous dialectical tension of post/colonial images/imaginations, alternative spirits of nationhood, primarily based upon the more personalized experiences of the people as against the grand narratives of nationalisms, could be found in piling up 'norm exceptions' as against 'normative expectations' and 'norm deviations' (Partha Chatterjee), also through interrogating into the formulations of *svadeś* and *svadeśī samāj* proposed by Rabindranath Tagore.

The last chapter both summarizes the theoretical stands taken and arguments made in this thesis and reiterates the prime objective of this thesis as foregrounding anti-totalitarianism, anti-authoritarianism and freedom by resisting any interpretive attempts with the purpose of "socializing of arbitrariness" (Achille Mbembe).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Clearing a Space for an

'Open' Dialectics of Modernity

The word 'modern' and associated words like modernization and modernity are derived from the Latin word 'modus', meaning 'just now.' Modernity is a word, which is supposed to explain the condition of being modern. Both the words modern and modernity, when theoretically approached and put in different contexts, disseminate a range of interpretations. So, a discussion of modernity means entering into a highly contested arena of philosophy, historiography, sociology, economics, culture and literature. D. P. Gaonkar writes that modernity

> [H]as arrived not suddenly but slowly, bit by bit, over the *lounge-durée* – awaken by contact; transported through commerce; administered by empires, bearing colonial inscriptions; propelled by nationalism; and now increasingly steered by global media, migration and capital. And it continues to "arrive and emerge", as always in opportunistic fragments accompanied by utopic, but no longer from the West alone, although the West remains the major clearing house of global modernity. (1)

Jürgen Habermas in his essay "Modernity, an Unfinished Project", projects that the philosophical history of the word "modern" may be traced back to the phenomenal debate between the ancients and the moderns: "this transition from the old to new, being quite essential for the concept of modernity." (Qtd. in Mesbahian 135) He clarifies that the term "modern" in its Latin structure "modernus" was employed for the first time in the late 5th century with the view of differentiating the present, which had become predominantly Christian, from the Roman and the Pagan past. The term 'modern' as it was first articulated in the nineteenth century sociology, was meant to distinguish the present epoch from the preceding one – the 'antiquity'. Whenever the researchers talk about the 'modern' and the 'modernity', they appear and reappear over the centuries to designate the historical moments of the 'new' as opposed to the 'old', until following the French Revolution, a different and historically new "form of modernist consciousness was formed" and a "radicalized consciousness of modernity which freed itself from all specific historical ties" came to the surface. (136)

This grand epoch may be connected to the European Enlightenment, which starts approximately in the middle of the eighteenth century, but not limited to it as the seeds of European modernity may be traced back to the beginning of the Western imperialism in the mid-fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century, with scientific revolutions of Galileo, Hobbes, Newton, Leibniz and Descartes, the term 'modernity', in its current sense, in the

context of societal modernization, has been specially attached to the dynamics of Western Rationality. The eighteenth century, otherwise famously called as the Age of Enlightenment, has shown a distinctive tendency toward a mastery of nature and society through reason, since which time 'rationality' has been considered as the key to justice, morality, control, unity, organization, understanding, and above all, happiness. Marshall Berman divides modernity into three historical phases: the 1500-1800, when people struggled to find a vocabulary to describe modern life; the 1800s, from the American and the French Revolutions through the great upheavals across Europe in the nineteenth century; and the 1900s, in which almost the whole world became involved in the process of modernization. At this point, it is worthwhile to remember Baudelaire, who not only for the first time has used the word 'modernity' but has done that in a the sense of a dialectical tension, which has always been modernity's 'fundamental' nature, but which has also been attemptemed to be appropriated by different '*zeitgeists*' that cannot but only inadequately 'characterize' epochal moments in a linear historical manner. On contrary to this tendency of reading modernity in 'de-historicized' (as the linear/normative time scheme) way, the poet has noted modernity in the continuous sway between different, and supposedly, oppositional components of the civilization, especially in the Western world of the mid-nineteenth century. In his essay "The Painter of Modern Life", he describes modernity as a very temporal and floating phenomenon, but also as something that has always been there as a permanent phenomenon. He writes, "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable . . . . You have no right to despise this transitory to dispense with it". Clearly, Baudelaire here tries to grasp a sense of modernity at its very 'presentness', in opposition to the historical (and by 'essentializing' that which ultimately becomes a non-historical fixity) trend of situating it in the schema of the old and the antiquity.

The whole experience of the Western modernity may be seen through the tension of societal modernization and cultural modernity, as D. P. Gaonkar suggests through what he calls 'the dilemmas of Western Modernity'. By societal modernization, he means a set of cognitive and social transformations. The cognitive transformations include the growth of scientific consciousness, the development of a secular outlook, the doctrine of progress, the primacy of instrumental rationality and so on, on one hand. On the other, the social transformations refer to the emergence and institutionalization of market driven industrial economics, bureaucratically administered states, modes of popular government, rule of law,

mass media and increased mobility, literacy and urbanization. They together form the basis of understanding of bourgeois modernity associated with the development of capitalism in the West, which has called for a distinctive mode of production and a new type of subject, free from the constraints imposed by the tradition. Gaonkar suggests that the cultural modernity – the cultural response to societal modernization – may be put in opposition to this modernization process itself. By this he points to an aesthetic realm led by various, sometimes opposing groups of *avant-garde* writers and artists starting with the Romantics in the late-eighteenth century through the proponents of Modernism to the popular media of news, entertainment, commercial arts and advertisements. These cultural modernists, in opposition to the reason-based societal modernization process, emphasize on imagination and emotionalism as their primary vehicle to delve deep into the inner realm of the modern self. On the contrary to the celebration of materialistic development at the superficial level, self exploration and self realization become their primary concern. While the unifying narratives of rational modernity promise a perpetual linear development in terms of the materialistic production processes, they point out to the 'disenchantment' of modernity such as to disintegrating self, fractured social relationships, the alienation of human labor, an emotional vacuum, a limited scope for human imagination and the destruction of whatever 'irrational' and 'idiosyncratic', which cannot be logically explained.

Thus, the modern existence or the experience of modernity can never be taken as a monolith; rather, the cultural aesthetic realm of modernity may be seen as continuously swaying between the two poles: enthusiasm about the rational progress and a melancholic human condition as a result of that process. Living in a modern world is wrestling inexhaustibly with its ambiguities and contradictions – the ironies and inner tensions becoming the primary source of the creative power. The primary objective of this thesis is to enquire into this dialectical modern existence – a continual tension and circumlocutory anxiety – through the select fictional corpus of the post-liberalization Indian English writer, Amit Chaudhuri. The novels taken for the current study include: *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991), *Afternoon Raag* (1993), *Freedom Song* (1998), *A New World* (2000), and *The Immortals* (2009). This has been theoretically done by not taking the opposing poles of such a modernity as stable and unified wholes in themselves, which, for the sake of ease and compulsion of using the binary rationalities of civilization, has been a practice in thinking about modernity. Instead, the chief theoretical approach of this thesis has been formulated by analyzing how, being inevitably intertwined with one other, these apparently warring poles

create the grey, unknowable in-between space for the phenomenon. In my thesis, the modernity's location is neither here, nor there, but in an elsewhere, which can be intuited but can never ever be adequately expressed. The ambiguities and contradictions of the modernity are not 'essential' features of modernity, but only 'symptoms' of its ever ungroundable locale.

Critical writings on Amit Chaudhuri's fictional works are not very widely available probably because a little attention has been paid to analyzing them. In the 'Preface' of *The Novels of Amit Chaudhuri: An Exploration in the Alternative Tradition*, which, in its all possibilities, is the only published book-length study on this writer, itself being an edited volume, the editors, Sheobhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla aptly write, "He has perhaps not got as much attention in India as he should have. Besides a few articles and review articles, so far no book length study on him has been published." (v)

This book, as its title suggests, seeks to explore an alternative tradition of Indian writing in English, especially in the post-Independence India. It aims at looking into the writer's endeavour to synchronize his Western "intellectual make-up" and Indian "emotional make-up", although I have differed from this completely differentiated and split persona of the author later in a chapter. In my analysis, the complexity of the modern authorial persona cannot offer a scope for such watertight binarism; rather, as far as the aesthetic experience is concerned, they remain uncannily embedded in one another. The editors of this book, in their introductory essay bearing the namesake of the book's title opine that so far the Indian writing in English has had two distinct literary traditions, "one being the tradition of social and metaphysical realism of the "big three" and the other of magic realism and national allegory of the children of *Midnight's Children*." (5) Chaudhuri, although is full of praise for the "big three", does not consciously follow them. He is critical of 'Rushdie and his tribe', who are the masters of "air-fairy theory", and picks holes in postmodernism and postcolonialism. He is unhappy with both of these terms as the first repudiates any connection of the 'world-life', with the 'reality' or 'actuality' of human existence, while the second defines everything in connection with the colonization, which he considers as "a pretty narrow, one dimensional meaning", and also with the 'nation-state' and its 'national allegories'. (6) Instead, he focuses on reality and tries to find out a lost 'completeness' in its all-fractured forms taking recourse to a kind of syncraticism combining both the West and the East. He has an affinity towards depicting tangible physicality in strictly localized context. The editors have noticed that it is the intermingling of genres, poetry and fiction, which may

be termed as Chaudhuri's greatest contribution to the Indian novel written in English. What he offers is the poetic rendering of his experiences at home and abroad in nostalgic form, but with a difference. This difference lies in not portraying experiences of the "bizarre, perverse, sensual and sexual, the stock-in-trade of many writers with an eye on foreign book-market", but in communicating them with "the same propriety, decency and delicacy, which we find in Sanskrit and modernist Bengali literature." (16)

Saikat Majumder, in his book *Prose of the World*, has explored the experience of the aesthetics of banality and boredom from the marginal spaces of the coloniality, from the late colonial modernism to the present day, taking one writer each from Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and India ranging from James Joyce's deflated epiphanies to Amit Chaudhuri's disavowal of the grand spectacle of postcolonial national allegories. The researcher explores banal as a prime feature of modern and contemporary fiction – one that is often ignored because of its oppositional relation with the literature's 'natural' function to engage or excite. He never admits that a proper representation of banality, especially from the space of historical marginality, is an aesthetic failure. Rather, aestheticizing banal is a novel modernist literary reaction that suspects the conventional impulses of narration through tremor, velocity and excitement. One of the most distinctive aspects of this book is that it provides a cultural history of the empire, especially its metropolitan centers of power, through structures of feeling and emotion. One of the greatest cultural consequences of the empire is the realization that history is concentrated in the metropolitan heart of the empire, while the colonial periphery is a place where nothing happens, where life is banal, boring, devoid of historical meaning. Modern literature's revolutionary preoccupation with the ordinary and tedious cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the colonial anxiety of being left in the backwater of progress and excitement. This book is a case study of understanding the significance of suffering, oppression and poverty as an everyday, ordinary experience, as an alternative to something that can only be understood as a grand spectacle. It delineates the negative emotions of boredom and frustration as a central concern of modern literature, especially as they are articulated as a psychological condition of colonialism.

Dirk Wiemann in his book *Genres of Modernity: Contemporary Novels in English* has dedicated a chapter on Amit Chaudhuri, wherein he has dealt with the fictions of the writer as a cite of the delineation of "home as a more complicated site – not fully delinked from the larger framework of nation, or even world, but constitutive of a semi-autonomous sphere of belonging." (209) In this book, he has emphatically found Chaudhuri's fictions laden with

such a domesticity, which goes beyond the binaries of the personal and the political competing for primacy, and which also is not a sphere merely subservient to the general, as a singular case symptomatic of the grand structures of culture. Rather, his analysis of Chaudhuri's fictions "pursues such a rhetoric of dwelling as "saving"; one of the preconditions for this is the refusal to 'sacrifice' the contingent in favour of a construed necessity, i.e. a narrative function." (211)

Bruce King has also discussed about Chaudhuri's fictions in a chapter in his book *Rewriting India: Eight Writers*, in which he has concentrated upon more localized charm of them. He writes, "Chaudhuri is concerned with writing that is true to the particularities of time and place in contrast to large generalized notions of India and the postcolonial." (85) he has also given attention to the fragmentary and the ordinary that color Chaudhuri's fictional imagination. In the way of commenting upon the structurality of Chaudhuri's fictions, he writes, His unusual sentences stand out less for their drama than their dawdling and meandering towards completion. His writing is not about ideas of colonial or postcolonoial India, but about discrete areas, about parts rather than the assumed whole." (85)

Sumana Roy has dealt primarily with the semiotic level of Chaudhuri's stylistics in her PhD dissertation *The Optic and the Semiotic in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri*. She has investigated into the rhizome-like structures of Chaudhuri's language: "The absence of a never/ever pair leads to the trajectory of the rhizomatic narrative in Chaudhuri." (17) She has found a paratactic style instead of a syntactic one in Chaudhuri's deployment of language, about which she writes, "Unlike the syntactic style, Chaudhuri's narratology follows, as is apparent, the paratactic style, which thrives by multiplying the valences of every episode and by making every arrangement a palimpsest rather than a statement, rather as poetry does when it draws together a rhythmic unit by means of repeated sound or rhythm." (17) She has also analyzed how a sense of "rhythmic time" has substituted the "historical time" in an effort to construct a new pattern of temporality. (16)

Patrycja Magdalena Austin, in her essay "Local Histories, Global Perspectives in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Afternoon Raag*", argues that the development of novel has traditionally been associated with the emergence of the modern nation state. Referring to Benedict Anderson's book *The Imagined Community*, she opines that the novel has also been instrumental in 'representing' the kind of imagined community that a nation is. She further explains that Berthold Schoene in his book *The Cosmopolitan*

Novel has retained the claim of novel as a genre being a space of "collective imagining" but extended its implications to all spatialities, global or local. Her focus in this essay is on two aforesaid novels of Amit Chaudhuri as they go beyond the framework of national allegory and are sensitive to the interplay of the global and the local. It also draws on Dipesh Chakrabarty's reading of the history of capital that makes room for the politics of human belonging and diversity.

Ian Almond, in the essay "Melancholy, Ghostliness and Economy in the short fiction of Amit Chaudhuri" examines the motifs of sorrow, fantasy and economy in the aforesaid fictional works, and finally links them to a postcolonial India, whose increasing fetishization of the daily life is making life itself as a mere cultural extension of capital. Referring to the sociologist Bourdieu's terminologies of cultural/social/symbolic capitals, he opines that these stories portray an urban India, whose citizens are regularly fighting to convert their cultural/social capital into its desired symbolic equivalent. The melancholy is a result of awareness that these economic systems offer a consciousness of existing in a post-metaphysical world. It is in this world that the characters of these stories try to move beyond, a trial, which costs in losing the comfort of living in faiths of religion and tradition, yet they have to accept the reality and reside within it. Chaudhuri's time in England, narrated in *Afternoon Raag,* has been looked at as a Weberesque moment of disenchantment: his trip to the 'small, cold island' reveals to him the source of his own illusory identity. The ghostliness of the book, the unreality of its landscapes, has been suggested as a metaphysical strategy for dealing with the consequences of this disillusionment.

Dr. Dhananjoy Roy's essay, "The Image of Problematic City in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Freedom Song*", is an exploration of the representation of the dysfunctional city throughout the history up to the modern day. He claims that since its birth not only the Western city but also the Eastern city like Calcutta has been subjected to the problems inherent in its modernization process. This paper proposes to single out and critically examine some of the major problematic aspects of the city of Calcutta that are represented by Amit Chaudhuri's aforesaid novels.

Dr. Arun Kumar Yadav, in his essay, "Music as a Metaphor of Culture: Reading Amit Chaudhuri's *The Immortals*", examines how in this particular novel music has become the conveyer of culture. He tries to find out in the context of modern society, where trans-valuation of values is a common phenomenon as the matter-driven market is its propelling

force, music may become a vehicle for finding out once inner self. In the backwater of an all pervasive postcolonial, late-capitalist monocultural space, the *ragas* of Indian classical music maybe of immense help in understanding what may be called a distinctive Indian soul.

So, what is evident from this literature review section (although some other but not many, as they are, works have been referred to in different parts of this thesis) is that although different aspects of Amit Chaudhuri's fictional works have been explored in different contexts, all of these studies have essentially remained in bits and pieces. No one singularly authored book-length study has been devoted to the whole oeuvre of Chaudhuri's fictional world from a particular viewpoint. (Sumana Roy's dissertation has not been published yet, as far as my knowledge goes.) Amit Chaudhuri has time and again emphasized in his interviews and non-fictional works that he is a writer of modern sensibility but the same has largely remained unaddressed in the critical analyses of his works. The present study proposes to explore the major bulk of the fictional corpus of the writer with its emphasis on the nature of modernity as represented in all its varied possibilities. Especially, this experience of modernity would be explored at three very important paradigms of modern existence: The Self, Urban Space, and Nationhood, with all their dialectical dynamics, in which they are eternally ossified between absorption and disintegration, identification and alienation, unification and fracturedness, bondage and liberation, and so on.

Karl Marx is one of the foremost thinkers who had thrown light on the dialectical nature of modern existence. The first section of *Communist Manifesto,* "Bourgeois and Proletarians", presents an overview that is now called the process of modernization. Here, Marx deals with the emergence of a world market and a bourgeois culture, in which the mass production is increasingly centralized and rationalized in highly automated factories and capital is concentrated in a few hands; he has to acknowledge, "The bourgeoisie has played a most revolutionary role in history". (Qtd. in Berman 92) In this context, he cannot but praise the idea of *vita activa*, an activistic stance towards the world that the bourgeois science and technology has brought about. Marx, a materialist here, is not primarily interested in the things that bourgeoisie creates. Rather, he praises the processes, the powers, the expressions of human life and energy: men working, moving, cultivating, communicating, organizing and re-organizing nature and themselves – the new and endlessly renewed modes of activity. But, the negative aspects of this bourgeois capitalist system do not go unnoticed. Firstly, the alienation of human labor from what it produces turns human beings into mere machines of production rather than a part of it. Secondly, the previous structures of centres of human

civilization like nature, countryside, God etc. are becoming increasingly disintegrated and thus creating profound instability. Thirdly, the tyrannical rule of instrumental reason has left the members of bourgeois activism to pursue their only goal towards making money, accumulating capital and piling up of surplus value; all their enterprises are merely means to this end, in themselves of no more than transient and intermediary interest. Fourthly, science and technology, under the arrest of the capitalist bourgeoisie, has paradoxically become the tool for controlling culture and society with vested interests instead of liberating them. Lastly, the bourgeoisie has resolved all personal honor and dignity into exchange value. So, precisely what Marx shows is at a strange intimacy, a contradiction between the glory of modern energy and dynamism, and the ravages of modern disintegration and nihilism the same time.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, the founders of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research during the Weimar years, have realized the sinister undertone of the Western modernity. While contemplating on the contemporary politics, they have pointed out the totalitarian reach of political control. In his book *Eclipse of Reason*, Horkheimer has severely reprimanded the ongoing shrinkage of critical reason and self reflection into a mere instrument of calculation and managerial control. Further, he, along with Adorno, in their epochal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, has criticized the Renaissance reason for becoming the instrument of unreflective power. They argue that although 'reason' has been meant for critical understanding and self reflection, it has resulted in the progressive congealment or 'reification' of both rational knowledge and the empirical target of knowledge – both the subject and the object. They assert that the cognitive rationality has shown a 'patriarchal' face: by conquering superstition, human reason is meant to "hold sway over the disenchanted nature". What, moreover, the positivist attitude and the 'unified science' movements have done is the reduction of all qualities to quantitative measurements. They write, "Number became the canon of enlightenment: the same equations governed bourgeois [abstract] justice and economic commodity exchange". (Qtd. in Gupta et. al. 25) In distancing itself from all the qualitative differences, cognitive rationality has inadvertently prepared the ground for the 'systematization' or 'homogenization' of social life and thus, for the establishment of increasably effective social control and discipline. The instrumental reason by its focus on the target of study or object of knowledge has actually alienated reason or benevolent understanding of the learning experiences, including the human sensibility, and affectivity – the realm of 'inner' nature. The only way of reviving it is to regress to the 'inner-self' by

using the notion of 'determinate negation', a critical awareness of a reason's tendential complicity with power and remodulate it in a different form.

The reification and totalitarian objectification of human civilization have got a deeper and more sinister expression in Herbert Marcuse's book *One-Dimensional Man*. According to Marcuse, in the highly commodified society, even the conventional paradigms of Marx's and Freud's thoughts are backdated as he claims that not only class and social struggles but also psychological conflicts and contradictions have been erased by the state of 'total administration'. Berman writes, "The masses have no egos, no ids, their souls are devoid of inner tension or dynamism: their ideas, their needs even their dreams, are "not their own"; their inner lives are "totally administered", programmed to produce exactly those desires that the social system can satisfy and no more". (28-29) He quotes from Marcuse, "The people recognize themselves in their commodities: they find their soul in the automobiles, hi-fi sets, split-level homes, kitchen equipments". (29)

Max Weber is one of the harshest and the most pessimistic critics of societal modernization as far as the application of the instrumental reason is concerned for achieving the goal of accumulating more and more profit in a capitalist market society. In his most famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he has traced the origin of modern capitalism back to the seventeenth century, when the Protestant Reformation played a critical role in sowing its seeds. The birth of the "mighty cosmos of the modern economic order" with all kinds of capitalistic, bureaucratic shackles is unconsciously the result of the same protestant activism but is stripped off its principles of the 'spirit' of moralistic self constraints. His account of bureaucracy, which goes hand in hand with capitalism, is pervasive with dark and gloomy realism. Bureaucratization of the modern society was a 'rational' process of getting rid of the irrational and idiosyncratic patrimony inherent in the feudal system. In its turn, against all its promise of societal and economic liberation, it has become a system of stringent hierarchy, incisive rule of modern nation state by handful of democratic officials, or bureaucrats and politicians. Thus, for him the modern "Democracy and individualism would stand little chance today if we were to rely for their 'development' on the 'automatic' effect of material interest". (Allen 142) So, the inexorable modern economic order determines "the lives of all individuals who are born in this mechanism . . . with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt". (Weber 123) This experience of the modern existence ossifying under the inescapable grasp of the capitalist economic order is what he calls 'an iron cage' of modernity.

Unlike Weber, for Jürgen Habermas, modernity is an 'incomplete but redeemable project'. In his essay "Modernity, An Unfinished Project", he pays particular attention to the Weberian argument about the disillusionment with the Enlightenment project of modernity and the resultant loss of faith in reason in directing our lives. When he looks at the argument of Weber that modern society has witnessed a progressive erosion of meaning and freedom due to the all-pervasive effect of socio-cultural rationalization process, he opines that this kind of argument confuses the selective deployment of reason under capitalist modernization with the nature and *telos* of reason itself. He keeps the hope alive for reinvigorating the high ideals of the Enlightenment by deployment of reason in alternative ways. As for example, in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, he advocates a balanced development of different dimensions of rationality by giving priority to 'social actions oriented to understanding' over 'social actions oriented to success'. Conclusively, he is committed to rehabilitating the project of modernity by revivifying reason as an agency with its many forms and voices.

Walter Benjamin, one of the most prolific and dialectically expressive critics of modernity, sees history, especially the cultural history, as 'a document of barbarism', in which the linear, progressive history becomes the record of feats of the political victors against the defeats of the losers in that battle. He writes in "On the Concept of History," "There is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism". (Qtd. in Ferris 73) Dismissing the progressive and linear history of the Hegelian lineage culminating in the third stage of dialectical method – 'the meditational unity' – he proposes that history, on the contrary, is full of breaks. The rational process forcefully justifies the logical progression of events, whereas many fragments that are politically unprivileged are marginalized in this march of historical progress. This is the 'barbaric' act that the rational historians perform while writing history. He alternatively proposes the modern history to be located as a 'caesura', full of breakages, predominantly concerned with the 'presentness' of the situation, in Baudelairian fashion, written in surrealistic montage and with what he calls 'constellation'. This history, instead of being totalitarian, would be dialectical, in the sense that it would at the same time reveal the politics of reification of the capitalist forces, leading to the 'fascinating' nature of a modern city, and at the same time, its irrational, supernatural and ghostly existence as expressed in the terms like 'feerie' or 'phantasmagoria'. So, he is keen to expose the 'uncanny' demystification of the modern technological urban existence generally considered as highly 'progressive', 'developed' and 'rationally illuminating'. He is

actually pointing out to an incomplete nature of modernity and its history of bourgeoisie by demystifying its fascinating projects, which he considers to be devastating to the human kind.

From the above mentioned critical overview of the leading thinkers of modernity in the West, it is discernible that the Western modernity, far from being a totalitarian and complete project of progress, freedom and happiness, is fractured and incomplete, ridden with contradictions between societal modernization and cultural modernity, between scientificism and emotionalism, between the aspirations for external success and internal self-division, between grandeur and mundaneness of the quotidian existence.

Modernity, in the postcolonial context, is often seen as a derivative discourse of this Western modernity and thus doubly removed from its all pervasive Enlightenment project. Amit Chaudhuri, in his essay "In the Waiting-Room of History", writes, "Europe is a universal paradigm for modernity, we are all, European and non-European, to a degree in an inescapably Eurocentric. Europe is at once a means of intellectual dominance, an obfuscatory trope and a constituent of self-knowledge, in different ways for different peoples and histories". (61) Using Dipesh Chakrabarty's splendid term the 'imaginary waiting-room of history', he elaborates the situation further. He writes,

> For modernity has already had its authentic incarnation in Europe: how then can it happen again, elsewhere? The non-West – the waiting-room – is therefore doomed either never to be quite modern, to be, in Naipaul's phrase, 'half-made': or to possess only a semblance of modernity. This is a view of history and modernity that has, according to Chakrabarty, at once liberated, defined, and shackled us in its discriminatory universalism. . . . (62)

Partha Chatterjee, in his groundbreaking study on nationalism, specifically centered on India, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse,* opines that the ideals of nationalism, including its third world counterparts, expressed through the phenomena of industrialization, rationalism and scientificism, travel under the name of modernity. Introducing the politics of colonial location and colonial psyche within a discourse of power, he tries to suggest that the process of 'approximating', through a kind of 'mimicry', of the European model of modernity, the postcolonial nations are always at a loss or on the verge of failure. Firstly, the non-European colonial countries will never be able to achieve the attributes of modernity; secondly, these nations would be doomed to a process of

trying; and finally, the meaning of this attributes would always be 'given' but never be actively 'performed'.

At this juncture of East-West encounter as far as the conceptualization of modernity is concerned, some critics have taken the stance of not only 'thinking through' but also 'thinking against' the model of Western modernity in the context of analyzing postcolonial modernity. One of them is D. P. Gaonkar, who in spite of maintaining the stand that modernity has taken the path from the West to the rest of the world, proposes a reappraisal of the phenomenon in the non-Western context by putting emphasis on pluralizing the concept of modernity itself. He writes, "One can provincialize Western modernity only by thinking through and thinking against its self-understandings, which are frequently cast in the universalized idioms. To think through and to think against mean to think with a difference – a difference that would destabilize the universalist idioms, historicize the contexts, and pluralize the experiences of modernity". (12) For making the claim to 'alternative modernities', he proposes mainly two techniques – the site based study of modernity, and the creative adaptation of the conceptualization of the Western modernity. By site based study, he means that the analysis of any modern text should strictly be locally placed, with those locales possibly remaining indigenously and culturally-historically specified to give a break to the universalist pre-assumptions of the Western modernity. The creative adaptation may possibly point towards the dismantling of the unifying character of the Western modernity more at a personal level. He writes "It points to the manifold ways in which a people question the present. It is the site where a people "make" themselves modern, as opposed to being "made" modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny." (16)

Not only thinking through but also thinking against the Western modernity, especially in the context of postcolonial Indian modernity, has given rise to a dialectical structure to the literature on modernity, which destabilizes the pre-supposed unitary and thus binarily existing agencies in both of them. As a result, both of these versions of modernity remain interdependent, and thus, incomplete in nature, inevitably inter-penetrating into one-another for existentially acting out their respective selves. One of the interesting implications of this dialectically existential structure is that while such a zoomed-in gaze into it gives the impression of two binarily differentiated yet holistically bound segments, a more hyperopic glance will advocate for a single undifferentiated entity, which is practically a resultant effect of a pattern of circularity, in which all different binaries are unknowably embedded. This is

quiet close to the notion of hermeneutic circle instead of that of a vicious circle, through which the uncanny location-less structure of modernity can be traced out.

The terms 'uncanny' and 'vicious circle' are of special importance here because the present discussion attempts to foreground the scopes for an 'open' kind of dialectics as against a 'closed' one, which signifies an 'end', a conclusive 'synthesis' in the process of the ever-ongoing existential possibility a dialectics between 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis'. This kind of synthetic stoppage precludes that a structurally 'wholesome' enough epistemological entity has already been formed 'successfully', which is/can be 'known'. It is this telos-centricism in the 'thought processes' or in the 'ideational' realm that actually creates a circularity, which is 'vicious' or 'forced' in the sense that it forcefully stops the generative possibilities of an existential reality. The Aristotelian 'idea' of the 'other world' thus not only forcefully undermines the paraphernalia of a 'lived life', but also keeps on making the Hegelian 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis' revolve in an unproductive circle, centering on a dead and fixed synthesis, where they reflect banally on each-other, without generating any further signification. But, popularly saying, this is what is perceived as the 'success' and 'progress', and is represented through a linear motion towards 'betterment' and 'advancement'. This kind of 'vicious' dialectics is popular because of the ease in understanding the 'complete' and 'wholesome' nature of it, which is 'rationally' appealing in 'binary' thinking modes. It necessarily invokes a clear beginning, middle, and end, precisely a compact structure of progress as if 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis' are self-made and self-relied entities, and the 'naturally' the 'synthesis' would be the same too.

The hermeneutic circle suggests a different model of dialectics, in which the play between the 'binary' components are so intricately existentially located that they are not either 'completely known' or 'known to be complete'. And, most vitally, this stance raises doubts about the possibility of having knowable 'binary opposites' at all as they are bound in such an interpretive circularity as to deny any positivist existences of them independent of one another. They are although ontologically possible, epistemologically not. Yet, the general logocentric bias forces human rationality to recognize and perpetuate the 'knowledge' system in 'binary' terms. Abrams and Harhpam allude to Dilthey in the way of elaborating on the hermeneutic circle in the following words,

> [I]n order to understand the determinate meanings of the verbal parts of any linguistic whole, we must approach the parts with a prior sense of the meaning of the whole; yet

we can know the meaning of the whole only by knowing the meanings of its constituent parts. This circularity of the interpretive process applies to the interrelations between the single words within any sentence and the sentence as a whole, as well as to interrelations between all the sentences and the work as a whole. Dilthey maintained that the hermeneutic circle is not a vicious circle, in that we can achieve a valid interpretation by a mutually qualifying interplay between our evolving sense of the whole and our retrospective understanding of its component parts. (158)

So, what the hermeneutic circle suggests is a kind of an 'open' dialectics, at least two basic features of which are, every situated proposition is in the middle already, and so, there are always what Heidegger calls 'fore-structures', and every interpretation, if fundamentally and ontologically situated, has a less knowable part, if not completely unknowable, and thus unreliable. At the same time, this openness cannot be rationally calculable in positivist terms, but imaginatively asserted, negatively through 'what is *not* out there'. What these propositions implicate to me, most significantly, is the need of continuous self-appraisal and criticism and the recognition of an 'other' not as an outsider, but always already present within the 'self' (and vice-versa) to foreground an interpretive condition, and not a prescriptive model, of an anti-authoritarian, alternative discourse of analyzing the reality/ies. Wallace Martin refers to Ronald Barthes while trying to correlate the hermeneutic circle with the act of literary interpretation,

> A refusal to recognize or admit that all criticism involves presuppositions, says Ronald Barthes, is the major (if not original) sin in criticism, and can only be seen as "guilty silence; it is self-deception or bad faith." Those who do not discuss their own methods are condemned to seeing them analyzed by someone else. (97)

Allowing the fact that the presuppositions (in case of Heidegger, the bunch of fore-structures – fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception, and in case of Gadamer, fore-meaning, and fore-projection) to enter into the critical consciousness may inspire us to do away with the linearity (originality/authenticity) of critical methodology. It, more significantly, foregrounds the necessity to think about these fore-structures as a pre-condition, which is both a temporal and a temporary situation, but not a 'historical' one in a hierarchically linear way. They do not come 'before' the structures as if something has happened before something else, in a positivist, and deterministically historicist way. But, they entail an ever dynamic pre-existing condition negatively, in an 'originary' sense of lack.

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These fore-structures will always be there as being-in-the-world ('*Dasein*') is 'thrown' into it, but the question is not to let them 'cover' its 'intentionality' towards the world. In other words, one should not take them as the 'telos' or the end, the prime deterministic factor of one's judgment, rather one should treat them as always already a 'middle', and should critically engage in scrutinizing them to 'uncover' the 'originary' nature of *being*, which is uncanny, in-deterministic, and Heidegger thinks about it as 'temporal' as against 'spatial'. But, the open dialectical sense lies in the situation, in which the canny fore-structures, when critically challenged and analyzed, open up the faultlines inherent in them and make passage for the uncanny. A kind of dynamic dialogism goes on between the canny and the uncanny, while the dialectics remain in-deterministic without a chance given to the stable Hegelian 'synthesis'. This is precisely the anxiety of existence, and in Heidegger's words, ""nothingness" of readiness-to-hand is grounded in the most primordial "something" – in the *world*." (Qtd. in Spanos 425)

This leads to an interesting discussion on how Heidegger thinks about the existential reality is fixed by the more rational/telic kind of spatiality whereas the temporal, or ever-non-quantifiability or liquidity, can explain that "most primordial something" in a better way. This can be approached from what the philosopher terms as a "world picture", either "a flattened out, static, and homogeneous Euclidean space", like a "positivistic or realistic" map, or "a self-bounded or sealed off and in-clusive image, like some "idealistic" icon or "symbolistic" myth. (Qtd. in Spanos 427) Through a binarily compartmental kind of human rationality, grown more and more so with the modernist, industrialized, and urbanist feats of the civilization, the open free-flowing temporal but originary nature of the being remains unutterable, and ungraspable too. In contrast, the spatial(ized) dimension of the existence is easily made available in a realistic 'cover' of falsity, with the categorizing impulse: giving something a name, and some attributes, and thus fixing the identity of it, in the same vein that has been dominating the thinking process of human civilization at least ever since Plato and his idealist categories of human ontology, if not so even before him. Any 'discovery' of an existential segment, in a positivist, telic sense, is thus also at least a two-fold "covering up and eventually forgetting" of the 'originary' negativist nothingness of the existence: covering of the general ungraspable nature of existence by several categories, and covering of a particular instance of that generalized reality. I would like to use Spanos's words in the way to summarize the question of existence and the spatializing instinct of human rationality in 'closing off' the ontological truth in a way to 'discover' it,

Thus, according to Heidegger, since the time of the classical Greek philosophers, the Western tradition has increasingly interpreted the word *logos* in the sentence "man is the animal who is endowed with *logos* (ζωον λογον'-εχον)" "as 'reason,' 'judgment,' 'concept,' 'definition,' 'ground,' or 'relationship'" (BT 7, 55; SZ, 32), covering up and eventually forgetting in the hardening process its origin in λεγειν ("to talk": *Rede*). And *Rede*, which in being equiprimordial with *Dasein*'s *Befindlichkeit* (his original and inescapable being-in-the-world as thrown) and his *Verstehen* (his authentic understanding of *Dasein*'s original being-in-the-world as potentiality-for-being), is radically temporal. . . . Since judgment (i.e., correctness or accuracy of correspondence) is the goal of the relationship between the mind and its object, the epistemological impulse behind the traditional notion of truth is to take the object (thing or man) out of its existential/temporal context to render it a pure and shareable presence. In doing so *Dasein* as interpreter must transform his temporality into a series of "now points," must assume, that is, the inauthentic stance of that *"awaiting [Gewairtigen] which forgets and makes present"* (BT, 67, 389; SZ, 339) or, in the terms of this essay, which suspends and thus "spatializes" the temporal process. (428)

The current research is an attempt to go back to that primordiality of the existential condition of *Rede* or dialogism, as a form of freedom (of course, not with the 'finality' of the term, and apparently, accepting the quite unreachable implication of it too). In doing so, it accepts the importance of the hermeneutic circle's insistence on the continuous interdependence of the dyads of human rationality, especially of the language, on one another. As it buys the Heideggerian concepts of 'fore-structures', 'spatialization of the existence', and 'anti-ontotheologicality', it has also to accept an inherent bias of the Heideggerian phenomenological stance towards temporality, uncanny, subjectivity, and inauthenticity over their respective counterparts. But, there is no denial that these concepts have immensely helped the dialectical model of this thesis to come out of its deteriministic and positivist closed structure, in many cases, dominated by some special versions of Hegelian and Marxian dialectical thoughts, and to suggest a fundamentally 'open' dialogic structure of the dialectical process.

Hans Georg Gadamer has already suggested a dialogical bent in the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle, in treating it as opposite to a vicious circle, and also in self-criticality, which is attached with the foregrounding of a primordial precondition of existence. Generally, the 'scientificity' (calculability) yields results while the analysis goes beyond any

circularity (like the pastness of the present, and vice versa etc.), and accepts a linear fate of the reality, which is finally quantifiable (like, the past precedes the present). But, in Gadamer's view, following Heidegger, the 'scientific theme' might only be secured through a consciousness of this circularly interpretive nature of the 'text' (to him, worldly reality is textual reality). It suggests not an escape from the circularity, but a willful and vigorous entry into such an interpretive condition beyond any (pre)expectation of getting a final answer as there is never such a thing called finality. Georgia Warnke writes about Gadamar's position vis-à-vis Heidegger's,

> The significance of Heidegger's claim that interpretation moves in a circle is not, as it might first appear, to show the impossibility of "bringing scientific results to maturity." Rather, his claim is that it is precisely by moving in a circle that we do so. As Gadamer explains, "The point of Heidegger's is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance." For the hermeneutic tradition, the hermeneutic circle describes a means for testing our interpretation of a given text. (94)

Gadamer calls us to critically investigate our own self-projections and pre-expectations and understandings of the text, the resultant effect might be the readers getting "pulled up short by the text", negating the possibility of any clear-cut understanding of it. (Wranke 100) He traces this condition from the recognition of the presence of an 'other' in the text, "a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity." (Qtd. in Warnke 101) His understanding of Heidegger's concept of *Mitwelt*, or the with-world, which proposes to see the other as an integral part of the world being already amidst it, revivifies the hint of a more 'realistic' presence of other in this structure, and he rephrases *Mitwelt* as *Mit-sein*, which not only points at the 'amidst-ness' of the being in this world, but also one who is 'surrounded' by 'others'. This sense of a more revitalized 'other' gives him a hermeneutic consciousness that there must a fundamental 'opening' to this 'other' while interpreting the text, and in the process "the other has to say." (102) The following comment concludes the discussion in the section well, "For Gadamer, then, an openness to and interest in others involves listening to and taking seriously their "claim to truth" such that we try to find in it a "truth that is valid and intelligible for ourselves." This practice he takes to be a dialogical one." (103)

The following section will, in very short (therefore, sometimes might seem to be either inadequate or under-justified), attempt to trace the kind of 'open' dialectics that the thesis proposes to foreground in Theodor Adorno's concept of negative dialectics vis-à-vis the hermeneutic circle and the existential philosophy. This may seem particularly controversial as there is already an established and widely received antagonism between Heidegger's Fundamental Ontological approach and Adorno's Critical Theory, especially the latter's direct criticism of the former in books like *Negative Dialectics* (2004/1966) and *The Jargon of Authenticity* (2003/1964). This section will try to investigate how these two path-breaking stances of modern Western philosophy might hold each other's hands in resisting any kind of essentialism in philosophical and critical theoretical approaches, although in their different ways and methods. These varied ways of finding the significance of the existential condition (Heidegger) and experiential truth (Adorno) lead to so debated and vital differences between these two thinkers and the respective schools they represent. But, as far as the nature of existence or of experience, that these thinkers respectively try to foreground, sometimes strike astonishing similarities despite their differences in reaching their objectives. The present section will attempt to explore the important understandings of these scholars in criticizing the positivist or essentialist philosophies since Plato or even before. While Heidegger is more interested in denying the conceptual idealism in 'thinking' of philosophy instead of 'doing' it, Adorno is not at ease with the telocentric or deterministic nature of philosophy, which precisely by 'stopping the play' gives up the self-critical reflexivity of the philosophical process. For both of them, this continuous 'processual' nature of philosophy is important instead of what Martin Jay calls the "totalizing philosophies of identity", while comparing Jacques Derrida, with Adorno as a precursor of deconstruction. (Qtd. in O'Connor 149) Eventually and interestingly enough, Derrida is considered by Habermas as "an orthodox Heideggerian". (Qtd. in Moran 470)

The formation of the negative dialectics has a really murky and complex trajectory if we constantly keep an eye on its relationship with the existential analytic. While both of these philosophical stances oppose the long-standing rule of 'subjective'/'idealist' philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, even partly Marx and Husserl, Heidegger goes on to choose the 'existenzial'/'existentiell', the 'lived', 'instantaneously active', paradigm of the existence, instead of the 'existential', or the 'deliberative', 'conceptual', 'idea(tiona)l' approach towards being, Adorno clearly foregrounds the 'priority of the object'. (O'Connor 45) At this turn, it is interesting to note that although Adorno is stringently critical of the

existential hermeneutics because of its strong subjective bias, and also of its abstract metaphysical appeal to form another unitary and universalistic category of 'being', which he thinks has lost its philosophical vigor in the modern age at its present stage of decay and disintegration, nevertheless he considers the prime philosophical task is still to be 'interpretive'. (Buck-Morss, 64) He holds, as reflected in his inaugural lecture at the Institute of Social Research, *The Actuality of Philosophy*, "Plainly stated: the idea of science is research; that of philosophy is interpretation." (Qtd. in Buck-Morss 78)

However, for Adorno, the significance of interpretation is quite different from that of the exponents of the hermeneutics, especially of Wilhelm Dilthey, whose "aim in interpreting was to recapture the original subjective meaning, the original intention behind the written word or other form of cultural expression." (Buck-Morss, 78) While the stress on the role of the interpreter is quite obvious in the hermeneutics, the interpreted cultural artifacts get an upper-edge in Adorno's interpretation, which is independent of the 'intention' of the interpreter. Rather, the whole dynamics of Adornian interpretation is just the opposite of that of Dilthey. Here, the objects, like living entities, respond to the interpreter instead of and against the grain of the 'intentionality' of the interpreter, the subject. If such is the antitheticality between the hermeneutics and critical theoretical school, then how can they be even thought of having some parallelism? Without belittling significant and different individual contributions and complexities of any of the greatest exponents of phenomenological or Marxist theories, the selection of Heidegger over Husserl or Dilthey and that of Adorno (and Benjamin too, as the thesis proposes later) over Lukács, might hold the answer in themselves. The present thesis tries to explore a 'more' 'open' kind of a dialectical process, which will eventually attempt to overcome any idealist or ideological bias.

The 'priority of the object' thesis, offers an insight into 'anti-totalitarian' commitment of Adorno, who although gives an upper-hand to the object in his opposition to the universalistic and subjective assumptions of modern Western philosophy, does not prescribe an ahistorical and absolutist idea of the same. The following propositions about such a thesis might clarify the issue further. Firstly, objects are neither lying 'out there' mutely nor are completely overpowered by the corresponding subjects. They have a life of their own, if not materialistically but figuratively, for sure. He is quite accepting the concept of 'natural history' proposed by Walter Benjamin, with whom he has always had a close association, when he talks about the dynamic and 'blood-and-flesh' character of the objects in "Portrait of

Walter Benjamin", "The totality of his thought is characterized by what may be called "natural history." . . . He is driven not merely to awaken congealed life in petrified objects – as in allegory – but also to scrutinize living things so that they present themselves as being-ancient, "ur-historical" and abruptly release their significance." (Qtd. in Buck-Morss 58) The idea of "natural history", as opposed to the linear, and compartmentalized (i.e. past-present-future, in a row), presents an endless dialectical thinking process in the formulation in history, in which, "the archaic could be made to appear meaningful in the light of the present; or the very newness and modernity of the present could be made to suddenly release its significance when seen as archaic." (Buck-Morss 58) This history, in search of the "ur-hisorical", the "reservoir" for momentous continuum, "a history of the origins of that particular present historical moment", not only liberates moments from the received linear historicity but also makes objects and history more lively and reciprocal, if not completely 'democratic', as against the 'registered' version of the victors. (Szekely section V)

These 'origins of that particular present historical moment' do never point to a 'graded' temporality of an 'original' starting point in historical thinking process; rather, they try to excavate the 'originary' moments of 'actuality', when history 'happens', not when it 'gets registered' by privileged practitioners, backed by the ruling class (the bourgeoisie). These moments are the "absolutely modern", as these are those precious moments, when the intelligentsia performs the crucial philosophical task of critically contradicting the popular, received – the 'reified' – version of the history and the 'life-world' in unfolding the 'truth' that "in very un-Hegelian fashion . . . critically challenged the course of history rather than merged with it". (Buck-Morss 66) This formulation of the 'absolute modern' moments of history reminds me of the 'fundamental' and 'temporal' 'dis-closure' of being in Heidegger, overcoming the 'petrifying spatialization' of temporal dimension of the existence, which I have discussed, to some extent, in the preceding section of this chapter, and will discuss further in the next chapter.

Secondly, the formulation of a 'living' object offers an agency to it, which simultaneously points out its "non-reducible" identity, which Adorno calls "non-identity" of the object both with the concepts, and eventually, with the subject, which, traditionally speaking, employs these concepts as universal 'ideas' and 'categories' only to create "false forms of consciousness". (O'Connor 43) This structure of "non-identity" has a strong Marxist role to perform, which, precisely, may be called "doing "justice to reality" (*Realitätsgerechtigkeit*)", following Adorno's own usage of the terminology for a deeply

historically contextualized reality. (Qtd. in O'Connor 43) Brian O'Connor comments, "Indeed, in this very sense, Adorno's project might be seen as a project of recognition, one in which our potential for rationality brings us to the reality that is otherwise distorted in our false forms of consciousness." (43)

Whereas the fundamental ontological school might take this 'reality' as something that precedes 'rationality', Adorno would still attempt to excavate the lost sense of an 'originary' rationality, as an alternative to the prevailing reified rationality by an eternal 'negation' (as opposed to the Hegelian negation of the negation finally resulting in a positive synthesis), which would always oppose to the 'constructedness' of the reality (in a more Marxist sense, the bourgeois reality) and lay open the internal and inherent 'contradiction' (which the Heideggerians would prefer to term as a structure of 'ambiguity' and 'anxiety') of it. His tremendous achievement lies, I think, in asserting a Marxist intellectualism, as fundamentally libertarian in asserting itself continually as a critique of the 'reified' and 'bourgeois' intelligentsia, but without an activism towards political proletariatianism following the three very principles of the socialist realism, *partinost'* or "commitment to the working class cause of the party"*, narodnost'* or "popularity" and *klassovost'* or "a double emphasis – on the writer's commitment or class interests on the one hand, and the social realism of the writer's work on the other". (Selden et al 85-86) This particular approach to an alternative Marxism has completely differentiated him from other Marxist thinkers of his time and space, like, Lukács, from whom he has taken the concept of 'reification', but has never seen the commitment of or to the working class as the only alternative to the 'reified' bourgeoisie reality. His deep interest in 'critical' theory has, in fact, posited him in contrast to a Marxist thinker, who instead has placed his attention to the superstructure, although always challenging and destabilizing it by close criticisms. Susan Buck-Morss has dealt with this novelty of Adorno's stance as a Marxist thinker in the second chapter of her book *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, emphatically titled as "Marx Minus the Proletariat: Theory as Praxis". In the beginning of this chapter, she beautifully summarizes the contradiction in Adorno's philosophy of the critical (Marxist) theory:

> [L]aden with the language of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* chapter, it was not dialectical materialism in any orthodox sense. And although it was indebted to Marx and might even be termed "Marxist," it was not Marxism. No matter how hard one tries to defend Adorno as the true inheritor of Marx's theoretical legacy – as a result of the controversy surrounding him in the late 1960s, Adorno has had his share of "Marxist"

apologists – throughout his life he differed fundamentally from Marx in that his philosophy never included a theory of political action. (Buck-Morss 24)

This, in fact, is reflected in his practices in life, like his refusal to join the Communist Party, or his criticism of Stalin for his "purges of dissenting individuals no less than Hitler's", (Buck-Morss 83) a list of whom includes David Ryazanov, the director of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow in the late 1920's, and one of the Frankfurt Institute's close associates, (215) and who "was regarded politically as a rather eccentric throwback to the days of pre-Bolshevik social democracy". (Jay 19)

Thirdly, the formulation of 'non-identity' is closely related to the conceptualization of the 'concrete particular', which in Buck-Morss' view, contains the former concept. (76) And, this concept gives an important insight into the conceptualization of the negative dialectics, which professes for a continuing, endless, but non-identical swing between the components of 'social reality'/truth (for Adorno) or existence (for Heidegger). Concrete particular does not only indicate that the 'particular' is not a case of the general, i.e. the universalizing categories, but also asserts that it is not identical with itself being continuously in its 'mediated' relation to the subject or the society. So, if the concrete particular is 'always already' reified, it is also 'always already' untied to the subject. And, the more a critic approaches the object negatively, against the prevailing norms standardized by the subject, the more the concrete particular opens avenues for a 'revolutionary' commitment towards change. If Adorno cherishes any utopian dimension of Marxist revolution, it does not lie in the collective subjective class called proletariat, but it is in the fundamental freedom of the particular individual moments, events, or views, which have potential to challenge the hegemony, and thus to usher change. The significance of the particular does not lie in its synthesis with any universalizing category but in its sheer contingency, fleeting nature, and relentless potential for non-conformity, and thus, for bringing change. (Buck-Morss 76)

Fourthly, another level of the possibility of thematicizing an 'open' dialectics through the formulation of the negative dialectics lies in the significance of 'reciprocity' via mediated relationship between the object and the subject. It is also to be noted that through the libertian schema of thinking freely and thinking through the 'other', Adorno, although has found the 'priority of the object' in his opposition to the subjective idealism in most of his preceding philosophical stances in the history of Western modernity and politics, he has never undermine the role of the subject, which is obviously not the constituent part of the object,

but, more importantly, critical agency behind object's comparatively free standing. O'Connor writes about the importance of the subject in Adorno's philosophy of negative dialectics,

> The priority of the object means that the object is determinative, but its determinations are articulated by the subject. This idea accommodates Adorno's conception of a critical subject. It is interesting to note that Adorno sees significant implications here for a more radical, politically oriented philosophy. The idea that the mind is not just a passive piece of the world is central to the idea of liberation, as it was for the followers of German Idealism. As Adorno writes: "The subject is the object's agent, not its constituent; this fact has consequences for the relation of theory and practice". (73)

One of the important contributions of Adorno is to free the simply idealistic subject, which can be logically determined by its absolute binary opposition to the object that is also graspable and freely standing 'out there'. This is how a critical subject is foregrounded against the naturalistic idea of a stable subjecthood. This critical subject is always mediating its relationship with the prioritized object. The negative dialectics advocates for this vital reciprocity between the prioritized object and the critical subject, both unstably bound in an ever dialogic relationship with each other, but negatively, not essentially identifying even with one's own self, and always retaining critical distance with that, i.e. with self-reflexivity and without reducing the other into an *innate* 'other'. In his way of describing the idealist subject as opposed to the critical subject, Adorno writes, "The mind will then usurp the place of something absolutely independent – which it is not; its claim of independence heralds the claim of dominance. Once radically parted from the object, the subject reduces it to its own measure; the subject swallows the object. . . ." (Qtd. in O'Connor 51) His antidote to a dyadically opposed subject-object relationship is the object, which "is the corrective of the subjective reduction, not the denial of a subjective share", bound in a reciprocal relationship with "the subject," which, "in full experience is essentially critical." (O'Connor 51)

Adorno has decisively posited his formulation of the negative dialectics against the integrative, positivist, idealist, and universalist kind of 'closed' dialectics, which he calls "*prima dialectica*", a telic and static dialectics prior to experience, 'mostly' influenced by the German idealism, and modern scietificity trying to replace the 'human(e)' from the civilization. (Buck-Morss 190) Negative dialectics is an attempt to look beyond the blinded vision of a 'reified' truth in search of a liberated experience for Adorno. While both of the

thinkers, Adorno and Heidegger, attempt to break into the totalizing barriers of idealism and positivism, as reflected, respectively and primarily, in the capitalist social reality and the stultified human existence, and while they respectively attempt to find ways out in the priority of the object and a subjective but not idealist philosophy of fundamental ontological existence, their common point of attack is the scientific and technological rationality. Samir Gandesha refers to this striking parallelism between these two thinkers, which this thesis also tries to capture through its own theoretical rhetoric,

> Adorno allies himself here with Heidegger and against "scientific thought," which we may read in this context as positivism . . . the hegemony of a classifying, calculating gaze. Adorno calls such a conception of truth "identity-thinking," while Heidegger understands it as a metaphysics that has reached its "end" – in the sense of both culmination and exhaustion – in technology. For Adorno, identity-thinking results from the displacement of mimesis, understood as approximation, by a reductive form of pure imitation. For Heidegger, positivism represents the apotheosis of a philosophical tradition constituted in and through the "forgetting of Being" [Seinsvergessenheit]. This tradition precipitously reduces Being to what is enduringly present and in the process reifies and privileges the present over the past and the future. As we shall see, Adorno's and Heidegger's attempts to work free of such a reduction of experience move them down parallel paths toward a consideration of the intrinsic temporal dynamism of art. (107)

If Adorno finds a 'reification' of the object under the eye of an uncritical subject, Heidegger sees a predominance of the 'inauthenticity' in the being of the *Dasein*. Both of them would probably wish to have an ever 'libertarian' philosophy of dynamic, critical, and mutual reflexivity of the self and the other. Heidegger would never oppose if Adorno proposes, "Experience lives by consuming the [detached] stand-point; not until the stand-point is submerged in it would there be philosophy", but would love to replace the term 'stand point' with the term 'standing' in case of *Dasein*. (Qtd. in O'Connor 76) Adorno is keen to put stress on the significance of the transitory, the disappearing and the fleeting of the object through creating the 'constellation of truth' (a parallel formulation of 'dialectical image' has been explored in the third chapter) through the technique of 'immanent criticism' as does Heidegger in case of the evanescence of the passing, and the temporal flux of the 'being-in-the-world' through reclining in the pre-essential, primordial temporality of 'nothingness' as an eternal originary lack. 'Intellectual non-conformity' is probably the buzz-

term for the philosophical theses of both Adorno and Heidegger, which would profess what the former writes in *Negative Dialectics* about the necessity to foreground such an experience that

> [F]orbids the resolution in the unity of consciousness of whatever appears contradictory. . . . Contradiction cannot be brought under any unity without manipulation, without the insertion of some wretched cover concepts that will make the crucial differences vanish. . . . It is up to dialectical cognition to pursue the inadequacy of thought and thing, to experience it in the thing. (Qtd. in O'Connor 77)

This non-conformity needs always to address at least two propositions: a) the fundamental double (at least, if not more) character of the so-called streamlined ideas or concepts through what Adorno terms as "the logic of disintegration"; and b) an awareness and care for the 'concrete particular' object instead of abstract 'ideas', in case of Adorno, and for the 'existentiell' and 'ontological' self instead of 'existential' and 'ontical' one, both of which formulations indicate a basic/fundamental, particular, and "blood-and-flesh", and even passing, surreal, transitory experiences, of which history is dynamically made. Almost all philosophers, out of whose deliberations almost all other modern disciplines have emerged, including Plato, Hegel, have neglected this dimension, and instead have made human history a host of privileged concepts. Instaed, intellectuals must be aware of Adorno's revolutionary vision of the possibility of change, which "succeeds only in the smallest thing. Where the scale is large, death dominates." (Qtd. in Buck-Morss 76) Adorno makes all intellectuals remember forever the 'truth' of the 'absolutely modern' philosophy that lies in the 'foul existence' of human(e) civilization, the dimension of minimalism and, probably, in modern sense of democracy, that of 'minoritarianism': "Philosophy, in view of the present historical situation, has its true interest where Hegel, at one with tradition, registered his disinterest: with the nonconceptual, the singular and the particular; with that which since Plato has been dismissed as transitory and insignificant, and upon which Hegel hung the label of "foul existence."" (Qtd. in Buck-Morss 69)

In the following section, I will try to explore very briefly the 'central' propositions of Jean-Luc Nancy's formulations of 'ungorundablity of the ground', 'absence of the presence', and 'singular-plural' to delineate how this post-Heideggerian has attempted to free the 'closed' interpretation of the existential analytic in its subjective bias on *Dasein* or Hegel's so called 'closed' dialectics with a new interpretation of his philosophy. This serves to

foreground the 'fundamental double character' or even 'multiple' character of the entities, which is termed by Nancy as "an explicit and endless exposition of co-originarity" of being-with or *Dasein* simultaneously with 'itself and the other'. (*Being Singular* 26) A strong statement of both of the propositions, of the liberated character of the entity, existence, experience or truth along with a fundamentally free dialectical structure of the 'assumed' binaries of human rationality, and also of the fundamental and simultaneous double/multiple character of all that are stated above, is the primary objective of the present thesis.

Nancy, unlike Heidegger and Adorno, does not take Hegel essentially as a thinker of a variant of dialectics, which is 'closed' in the sense that it offers one positively "the assurance of a principle." (*Hegel* 8) Nancy's re-reading of Hegel is negativistic in the sense that it cannot assure of commensurable, adequate, and tenable 'synthesis' of the dialectical components, in which each of the dyad is self-sufficient, and thus, is able to create a relationship of contradiction finally leading to synthesis, a desired and tangible end, from which the beginning of a new thesis starts. Burns writes about this: "If one takes Nancy to be providing a philosophically tenable reading of Hegel, then one is forced to rethink the caricature of Hegel as the thinker of absolute totality and closure, the philosopher unable to account for the inevitability of contingency." (20) Burns explores a parallelism between Nancy and Kierkegaard, calling the latter's philosophical stance as 'fractured dialectics', which is primarily fractured without any fundamental hope of synthetic totalization. He writes,

> In particular, I would like to highlight the underlying ontological conditions which create the space for what I would like to call a fractured dialectic, meaning a non-totalizable account of dialectical structure that does not emerge from, or arrive at, a synthetic unity of opposites. . . . I will use the term fractured dialectic to describe Kierkegaard's ontological position as it describes a structure that is dialectical in nature, while holding to the position that fracture, not unity, is ontologically primary. (61)

Nancy observes a similar emphasis on the anti-foundational character of the dialectical structure in the re-analysis of Hegel, which is marked by the absence of a presence (which does not imply an essential absence). This existential phenomenon is termed by Nancy 'the restlessness of the negative', about which in the chapter titled "Becoming" in his book *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, he writes, "Such is the first and fundamental

signification of absolute negativity: the negative is the prefix of the *in*-finite, as the affirmation that all finitude (and every being *is* finite) is, in itself, in excess of its determinacy. It is in infinite relation." (12) The non-essential negativity, as in dialogue with the 'determinable' finitude indicates the fundamental impossibility of such determinability if thought is deemed to be restless. Nancy observes,

> The restlessness of thought first means that everything has already begun: that there will therefore be no foundation, that the course of the world will not be stopped in order to be recommenced. It means that one is no longer in Descartes' element, nor in Kant's, and that, if the thread of history is broken, this happens of itself, because its very continuity is only division and distension. . . . In these two ways – absence of beginning and absence of end, absence of foundation and absence of completion — Hegel is the opposition of a 'totalitarian' thinker. (8)

Nancy appreciates Heidegger's attempt to formulate *Dasein*, or 'being-there' or 'being-in' as *Mitsein* or 'being-with', which eventually implies the co-originarity of existeniell character of existence. But, Nancy claims that too much consideration of the '*Mit*' element of the '*Mit-sein*', that is the 'with' element, has many a times overshadowed the '*Da*' element of '*Dasein*', that is the 'there' element, whereas it is not the case that these two elements can be separated as they are already and inevitably informed by each other continuously. He writes,

> Heidegger clearly states that being-with *(Mitsein, Miteinandersein, and Mitdasein)* is essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself. Given this, it needs to be made absolutely clear that *Dasein*, far from being either "man" or "subject," is not even an isolated and unique "one," but is instead always the one, each one, with one another *[l'un-avec-l autre]*. If this determination is essential, then it needs to attain to the co-originary dimension and expose it without reservation. But as it has often been said, despite this affirmative assertion of co-originarity, he gives up on the step to the consideration of *Dasein* itself. It is appropriate, then, to examine the possibility of an explicit and endless exposition of co-originarity and the possibility of taking account of what is at stake in the togetherness of the ontological enterprise (and, in this way, taking account of what is at stake in its political consequences.) (*Being Singular* 26)

On commenting on this, Christopher Watkin writes, "The major dissonance between Heideggerean Mitsein and Nancy's appropriation of it, according to Nancy, is that for

Heidegger the 'Mit-' supervenes upon the Dasein previously established whereas Nancy thinks the two as coextensive. . . ." (177-178)

But, at the same time, in search of the co-originary roots of the fundamental ontology, Nancy takes forward the Heideggerian formulation of unconcealment or '*altheia*', which implies "the paradoxical logic of a 'Dardichtung'", a combination of *Darstellung*, or presentation, and *Dichtung*, or withdrawal. The paradox in this logic is that the moment of presentation of art, being, or any 'presence' for that matter, is a matter of at least double 'concealment' or at least doubly withdrawn or removed from 'truth': the intention of 'presencing' something or making something present, and a figure of that 'presence', which is non-commensurable with the originarity of that presence, which always already lies in the excesses. 'Theoretical thinking', 'paradoxical moment', and 'non-identity' in the following passage, in which the paradoxical epiphenomenon of 'presence-withdrawal' is elaborated by Cristina Claudia Cojanu, places the same quite close to Adorno's formulation of 'reified truth', which I have already discussed at length in the previous sections of this chapter:

> The subject is infinitely exposed to its own excess and exceeds any possibilities of description or theoretical thinking. The thought of the thinking subject is held 'syncopated' within the repetition of this paradoxical moment. This thought is also radically different from the traditional understanding of thought as the work of concepts, since there is no presence or identity, which the concept aims to comprehend and to re-present. This thought operates in figures, as figures do not coincide with and are not identical to what they speak about. The logic of the figure is of a nonidentity in which the difference to what is figured is part of the figure itself. "The figure figures the unfigurable". Terms, like sense, community, corpus/body, being or art, used by Nancy in his writings never refer or signify an identity, they always "excribe" a certain excess of signification and existence and unction in the paradoxical logic of a 'Dardichtung' of presentation and withdrawal. (64)

Nancy's following account of how the 'inscription' or writing or expression or presentation, is, fundamentally, an 'excription' or 'an excess', and so, is the 'final truth' or ultimate fate of 'inscription' from his short essay entitled "*Le Poids d'une pensee*" ("The Weight of a Thought"), also reverberates Adorno's formulation of the 'concrete particular', in the former thinker's term 'a material point, a point which weighs':

Sense requires a thickness, a density, a mass and therefore an opacity, an obscurity by which it gives purchase, it lets itself be touched as sense precisely there where it absents itself as discourse. This there is a material point, a point which weighs: the flesh of lips, the point of a pen or a style, all writing insofar as it traces the edge and the beyond of language. It is the point at which all writing is exscribed, places itself outside of the sense it inscribes, in the things of which this sense is supposed to form the inscription. And this exscription is the final truth of inscription. (Qtd. in James, 204)

The most important of Nancian articulations of this originary double/plural movement of existence/reality/truth lies in his formulation of the 'singular-plural', the originary pluralistic nature of these entities, which are presented as singular entities, while simultaneously being pluralistic as they are inevitably interdependent on others at the very moment of their conception or formulation. The formulation of the 'singular-plural' can be called as a kind of 'meta-essentialization' or a kind of a commentary on how 'essence' is created, what is so faulty in that process of singling out a 'single' instance of 'essence', which retrospectively creates 'categorical' knowledge, and how, in search of the originarity of 'essence', which lies beyond or in excess of the 'image' of an essence, Nancy is able to foreground a 'co-essence', which is already submerged in the essence of the essences, without the scope of a rational determination. Nancy writes,

> *Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as coessence. In turn, coessence, or *being-with* (being-with-many), designates the essence of the *co-*, or even more so, the co- (the *cum*) itself in the position or guise of an essence. In fact, coessentiality cannot consist in an assemblage of essences, where the essence of this assemblage as such remains to be determined. In relation to such an assemblage, the assembled essences would become [mere] accidents. Coessentiality signifies the essential sharing of essentiality, sharing in the guise of assembling, as it were. This could also be put in the following way: if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the "with" that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition. This operates in the same way as a collective *[collégial]* power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective *[collège]* nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collectivity *[collégialité]* as such. (*Being Singular* 30)

The move taken by Nancy is significant in excavating the character of the existence or the reality in breaking the hierarchies between the subject/object, singular/plural, I/they, temporal/spatial, and so on, indicating a fundamental excess, and tracing out that excess beyond rational schema, and thus, digging irrationality, contingency, accident, aleatory etc. out of (human) existence. He has been able to point out how both existence and reality are fundamentally lying in flux, but both philosophy and politics always, although not successfully, attempt to stop the game, and put a veil over that in favor of a strategic rationality, which eventually creates 'closed' discourses, one of which is the kind of dominant concepts of dialectics, which the thesis tries to resist, and attempts to find out the fissures in its way to exploring an 'open' kind of dialectics, in which the self and the other are inevitably bound in inter-determinacy. If any dialectics it tries to foreground, it is something what Nancy calls the 'hermeneutics of suspicion': to explore a co-essential 'truth' of existence in its attempt to resist any kind of theoretical or practical totalitarianism. It aims to perform what is emphatically commented by Christopher Watkin upon Nancy's philosophical stance:

> Neither unity nor multiplicity is primary, and Nancy is not merely operating a reversal of individuality and collectivity, privileging the latter in the place of the former. He is suspending, not reordering, the hierarchy of the two, a move emphasised in his warning that fragmentation can, if we are not careful, become the reverse (and therefore the twin) of totalisation. (181)

There are two vital cautions to be aired at this moment: a) The thesis can only give an intuitive 'suggestion' on or can only hint at this 'openness' in the dialectical process as 'complete' openness lies in a negative nothingness and originary lack only, and thus, is beyond the scope of at least the kind of comprehensible and critical language that the thesis uses. So, the thesis would like to refer to the binary structures of the existence, as it seems to be inevitable, but, then would go on to show the faultlines in each of them, and would try to explore a dialectical pattern by foregrounding their mutual inseparability, inter-dependability, and intersectionality through a dialogic process. b) Many a time, it is thought that the Hegelian dialectics ('idealist') has a direct opposition to that of its Marxian variant ('materialist'). So is true about the fundamental ontology of Heidegger and the critical theory of Adorno. But, this thesis neither takes them as natural enemies nor counts them as derivatives. Nancy has been introduced in the theoretical framework of this thesis, with the view of achieving a neutralizing force to iron out the tilts in both Heidegger and Adorno,

respectively towards subjectivity and objectivity, the self and the other, and so on. Nancy's philosophical stance may help this thesis in exploring the simultaneous double movements of these components of a dialectical thought. The thesis has attempted to create a dialogic parallelism depending upon the contexts on case-to-case basis in search of a fundamentally open dialectical structure to avoid any totalitarian and absolutist value judgments in favor of any one of these components.

The present section will attempt in short to delineate how Amit Chaudhuri's literary stances and creative points-of-view also wish away all kinds of one-sided totalitarian discourses of writing of English fiction in India, and how Indian modernity, literary and otherwise, can be thought of in a co-essential manner, although avoiding any methodological undertone in doing so. Further extensive discussions can be found in different parts, especially in the opening sections, of each of the chapters that follow the current chapter. The objective of composing this section lies not only in offering Chaudhuri's literary-critical stances in a nutshell, as I have perceived them, but also in scripting how the 'frame' theoretical discourse stated above may possibly hold those stances in its framework, sometimes directly, and sometimes through (met)aphorisms.

This, first of all, will include Chaudhuri's view on the growing reification of the 'postcolonial' Indian Fiction in English, which has been taken up by the grand narratives of a postcolonial nation-centric discourses precisely termed as 'national allegories', and which he is at an unease with particularly because they overshadow the small, the particular, and the quotidian experiences of the individuals (note the reverberations of the 'existentiell' of Heidegger, 'concrete particular' of Adorno), by and through whom any idea of nation is created and disseminated. A similar kind of reification is also seen in the case of the (creative) book publication scenario in the post-liberalization era in India (which also is true for the post-globalization, or more fashionably, the late capitalist, era in the Western world, I guess), which being incessantly driven by a logic of visibility or spectacularity has eventually taken up the culture as a whole. Modernity, not only in the West, but also in the 'Global South' is getting increasingly dominated by market and material productivity, which is continually dictated by scientificity and technlogism, increasing routinization of life, loss of human interaction, and a superficiality of life and world.

Secondly, while Chaudhuri attempts to dig the value of the small, the rugged, the dull, the unimpressive, and the quotidian out of a version of Indian modernity, he, in my reading,

can never wish to essentialize these elements taken together as a totality of a modernity, which is either militating against or is getting left out of the contemporaneity, colored by the former elements. He, instead, is attempting to delineate "an experience of ambivalence" – a sense of simultaneous "curiosity and recognition", implying a double movement of homeliness and exile, of acceptance and rejection. ("A Strange Likeness") This sense of ambivalence has taken his focus to a terrain, which is passing, and contingent, historical, in the sense of deep contextuality and temporality, which is often personal, small, and momentary "in the pursuit of certain objectives: the fragmentary, the concrete, and a certain quality of the aleatory that narrative couldn't accommodate." ("The alien face" 284) This has often compelled Chaudhuri to find his fictional life 'in excess' of what it seems to have offered apparently, at an 'elsewhere', if not at 'nowhere'.

Thirdly, from this recognition of the double movement of the seemingly opposite elements of a 'closed' dialectics of an overreaching theoretical modernity, he clears out a sense of modernity, which is hinted at by as varied (literary) representatives of the global modernity, as Rabindranath Tagore, James Joyce, or Shiva Naipaul, hailing from remote geopolitical corners of the world, far removed from one another, not only spatially, but also temporally, historically. A continuous opposition to the selves by innumerable others are not regarded as clear-cut shifts; but, such 'against the grain' movements are signs of fundamental clearance of the spatial-temporal, or singular-plural to use Nancy's terms in denoting the double movement, which has not been noticed so far because of blinding fetishes. It is the recognition of a fundamental ambiguity (in existential sense), and contradiction (in critical theoretical sense), which has always already been at the heart of the modernity – it is the recognition of a state, which makes an entity 'absolutely modern', to use Adorno's term.

To take up the first issue in a more elaborate manner, I would like to take readers' attention to how Amit Chaudhuri looks at the contemporary or post-liberalization (starting from 1980's, to be precise, as symptoms had started to develop even before the official economic reforms brought free market policy in 1991) 'Indian English Novel'. He sees the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnights' Children* as an epochal moment in the development of the contemporary Indian fictional corpus written in English. He argues that the publication of this novel marks two important phenomenon simultaneously taking place, a) the identity formation of India, or the Indianness through the English language meant for the global audience as a part of the project of 'writing back to the center', which has given birth to grand 'national allegories' in Indian English fictional space led by Rushdie's classic,

and b) the recognition of this identity as unique and along with it the acknowledgement of Indian English fiction writers on the global stage are both getting more and more a matter of the market. The grave consequences that follow only indicate a homogeneity in fixing the Indianness vis-à-vis post-coloniality, a particular way prescribed by the 'national allegories' like Alan Sealy's *Trotternama*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass*, Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* and so on, in which the grand national life takes the center-stage of fictional space.

Amit Chaudhuri writes in the "Introduction" of *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literarure* edited by himself, in which he makes an attempt to show how heterogeneous the vernacular modern Indian literatures might be, selecting literary accounts of *Bhasha* (native Indian language) writers of Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, and of a debatable category, which he calls "the South", along with the writers of Indian English after the independence, which includes Rushdie too, "it is the construction, after *Midnight's Chiledren*, of a particular idea of both the post-colonial novel and Indian writing in English, where the heterogeneity of the genre is glossed over and where these terms are used as a substitute for a more demanding form of engagement, that is intriguing." (xxv) On how, especially following Rushdie, the Indian identity is getting fixed through Indian English fictions, he notices a two-fold petrification process, one part of which is towards creating an essentially, to some extent, archaically, Indian aesthetics as opposed to that of non-Indian, while the other part promoting a postmodernistic flavor in celebrating the quintessentially pluralistic Indianness. He comments on this phenomenon quite interestingly,

> Rushdie's style, robustly extroverted, rejecting nuance, delicacy and inwardness for multiplicity and polyphony, and, moreover, the propensity of his imagination towards magic, fairy tales and fantasy, and the apparent non-linearity of his narratives – all these are seen to emblematic of a non-Western mode of discourse, of apprehension, that is at once contemporaneously post-colonial and anciently, inescapably Indian. Again, although the emphasis on the plural and the multivocal, in this reading, is postmodern, the interpretative aesthetic is surprisingly old-fashioned and mimetic: Indian life is plural, garrulous, rambling, lacking a fixed centre, and the Indian novel must be the same. (xxv)

To second to this idea that "India is a huge baggy monster", Indian fiction has to be proportionate to accommodate that monster, and with the liberalization of the economy,

market comes in to make this space as big as possible. (*Vintage Book* xxiv) Branding and visibility become the touchstones of that space, which becomes covered with the idea of India as a land of plurality, and fairy-tales, no less than that of the old-age colonialist construction of India as a nation of the snake-charmers. At this point, it should be made clear that in my reading I have tried to keep away a stereotype that is increasingly attached to Chaudhuri's narratives that they are 'opposed' to any kind national/istic representation in fiction, to the extent that sometimes it seems to make Chaudhuri so naïve as to altogether 'reject' the long history of colonial past, or the existence of the geopolitical entity called India. What he is trying to bring to the attention of the readership of Indian English fiction is that in the name of 'Indianness', one cannot undermine the heavily pluralistic, and even contradictory, cultures and subcultures, with which the idea of India is traced, but in turn, in the name of a 'pluralistic' Indianness, one cannot promote a kind of postmodernism, which would not only be alien but would also be essentially fragmentary, and thus petrifying. The point is to prevent a kind of orientalism, whose participatory character has gone beyond Europe, and reached the target land of orientalism itself, which is creating it anew by reinvigorating the old myths and the stupefying stereotypes. ("The East" 87) This can be testified from what he comments on his own literary self in an interview with Soumabrata Chatterjee. He says, "Some of that had to do with my choice to write about being in this world rather being a part of the nation in a kind of ethos and atmosphere that has been dictated by postcolonial studies. That is why I felt like doing something different and creating a space of my own." ("Travelling between genres") Exploring the "being in the world" residing in excess of being a part of 'nationally colored' "ethos and atmosphere . . . dictated by postcolonial studies" is his literary goal. He does not altogether deny or defy the existence of a nation, and I believe, he cannot, as he knows "The way India enters history is, evidently, via colonialism," rather, his idea is to explore that being, which is not strictly nationalistic in some theorized ways although could be remotely informing or being informed by a more variegated and imaginative bend of a geopoliticality or a territoriality or a culturality, which otherwise is precisely and inevitably categorized as the nation. ("Modernity and the Vernacular" xix)

Instead, the kind of manifold richness that he wants to witness in the Indian (English) fiction can be summarized by the following account, in which his literary sensibility can be traced out as what I have formulated as "the dynamics of angularity" in the next chapter:

The richness of the various power struggles to define the literary within India in the time of modernity, and the robust, often contradictory creative opportunism that took

place in the interests of that struggle, is, alas, considerably reduced and simplified by the terms 'colonial' or 'postcolonial'. If one were to map the strategic affinities of these writers, those terms would gradually lose their mythic integrity; what would begin to appear (almost accidentally, as not every point of the map would be known to the other) is a sort of trade route of vernacular experimentation, a patois of the concrete, an effervescent cherishing of the idiosyncratic. ("The alien face" 281)

The kind of modernity that Chaudhuri conceives as his version of literary modernity in India or in other corners of the world does not simply lie in the ambiguity or contradiction of the dialectical components of it, but also in which the fundamental nature of it goes beyond that, which cannot be simply categorized, and which always escapes any such officially formulated and strategically rationalized conscious identities or identifications. Rather, his sense of modernity always already resides in a 'zone', which is more anterior than could be grasped by rational consciousness, which he calls "secular unconscious". ("Travelling between genres") The formulation of this particular phrase is also symptomatic of Nancy's formulation of the fundamental double movement of the being, like the "singular-plural" or "temporal-spatial". It plays with both a negativity called 'secular', not religious, not official, not nationalistic, not communal, not constitutional, a kind of 'concealment', an exile to the realm of the excess shutting all posterior doors of the rational formulations, and a positivity called 'unconscious', which being already comprehensively outside of conscious signification attempts to locate such a 'secular'. And, this phrase is thus Chaudhuri's metaphor for the accidental (un)knowability of whatever out there is as un(knowable), including his own literariness, his sense of modernity, his persona, his fictions, and his critical stances. This is how he formulated his notion of a modern self,

> The self has changed obviously in certain ways to allow itself to make those judgements and ascribe values to certain things without adhering to a particular set of ideas or dogmas formulated by religion or by the state. That is a very important part of the history of this secular imagination in our country which almost never gets talked about. And it is this 'self' which experiences modernity and assigns meanings without being driven by existing ideas. ("Travelling between genres")

Almost an Adornian or a Benjaminesque critical consciousness of the mainstream, the official, the dominating, the powerful colors his literary-critical persona, all of whose affiliations "represent an angularity . . . they are all abnegating from these various forms of

seriousness and escaping into forms of randomness. . . .” (“A Conversation”) His creative-critical persona is a relentless critical search for an elsewhere, where ‘being in the world’ is found in effervescence, in a state of always already becoming, but unknowably, irrationally, even irresponsibly. His ‘secular unconscious’ is consciously aware of the ‘paradoxes’ and the ‘reciprocity’ at the heart of Indian modernity, which did “not only involve the beginnings of secular ‘culture’ in a nationalist project, but make the nation, once and for all, a cultural one. It’s a reciprocity that’s given our democratic and daily lives in India their recognisable texture, and probably led to obfuscations, both right-wing and secular, with which we’re now so familiar.” (“The Flute” 21)

He has traced the double dialectical movement in an ever becoming sense of modernity, which is both eternal and transience, in the writings of one of not only Bengal’s but also of India’s greatest modern literary-political-social thinkers of modernity, Rabindranath Tagore. In the essay on Tagore, “The Flute of Modernity”, Chaudhuri has analyzed the poet’s socio-religious-familial biography along with some of his lyrics how he has developed a sense of modernity, which lies in contingency, contextuality and ambiguity, especially, in contrary to both of his divinization and universalization as a nationalist, a romanticist, a spiritualist, and so on, and of the criticisms of him as static figure of the Western colonial elitist, which attempt to categorize the poet. Chaudhuri writes,

> [I]t is crucial to note that few poets in their work – in the output on which both their popular and critical reputations rest – have devoted so much of their gift to describing what is half understood, partially grasped, unclear, or ambiguous, but that is the temperament of Tagore’s songs and his lyricism. . . . his Bengali lyrics have everything to do with uncertainty, with hesitation, with fleeting and the momentary, and the beauty that resides in the moment of incomplete perception. (“The Flute”, 49-50)

In another essay “The Accidental Tagore”, Chaudhuri has noticed Tagore’s tryst with his time, a slice of the colonial history, as both transformative in and transformed by the poet’s literary-critical consciousness. At one place of the essay, citing one of the lyrics by Tagore, “In order to find you anew, I lose you every moment/ O beloved treasure,” the writer has traced the Joycean in celebrating “the modernist’s love of the moment, the here and now”, which eventually “heightens the quotidian”, and not the grand universalist paradigm of history. The writer has interrogated how this sense of moment, its effervescence instability,

and the awareness of its temporality and eventual decay and destruction, which is symptomatic of the elucidation of what to come 'next', not in a linear sense, but in the sense of an 'open' dialectical simultaneity, and in the sense of what has so far not been noticeable yet has always been there, a fathomless possibility. This is how the poet has been able to excavate the potentiality of an Indian modernity both along with and in opposition to its encounter with the coloniality, and Chaudhuri comments,

> Tagore's apotheosis of his historical moment, his here and now, is not a surreptitious celebration of the colonial history into which he was born, but a recognition of the fact that no historical period can be contained within its canonical definition. Accident and chance ensure that its outcomes are unpredictable and life-transforming. ("The Accidental Tagore")

This simultaneous acceptance and rejection creates the critical-creative 'angularity' that Chaudhuri has been talking about has shaped the more and less recognized exponents of modernity around the world. This double movement is significant as it breaks through the spells of veiled visions of historical milieu one is in, and thus also shatters any conviction of the wholesomeness of reality, through the fissures of which the modern keeps on coming at every other moments, and when the so called 'new' takes a giant leap, we call it a 'shift'. But, no shift is actually a 'shift', but a surficial illusion of shift, as it carries consciously or unconsciously the inevitable possibility of transience and change. So, each modern is modern so far as it recognizes the undeletable ambiguity that resides at the heart of its being. For example, in case of Shiva Naipaul, Chaudhuri notes how his masterpieces, *Fireflies* and *The Chip-Chip Gatherers*, contain a paradox, and a recognition of the broken totality at their creative heart, "Unlike V.S. Naipaul, who is at once haunted and tormented by a sense of completeness deriving from his lost Hindu, historical past, Shiva Naipaul has no real conviction in authenticity or wholeness; it's almost out of this state of negation that he creates his variously populated novelistic world." ("There Was Always Another") In the bits and pieces of the small, passing, everyday moments – like misfits in the grand scheme of universality – lie the elements of modernity. Chaudhuri notices the same in case of James Joyce, when he recalls the latter's encounter with an interviewer, who tries to streamline the writer's fiction *Ulysses* with the "stream of consciousness":

> Joyce's self-appointed task was to relocate this spirit in the everyday in Dublin; when asked by an interviewer if Molly Bloom's climactic monologue in *Ulysses* was an

example of 'stream of consciousness', he reportedly said, 'When I hear the word "stream" . . . what I think of is urine and not the contemporary novel. . . Molly Bloom . . . would never have indulged in anything so refined as a stream of consciousness.' In retrospect, I see it's logical, given that the 'holy' could now only be discovered in the commonplace. . . . ("Writing *Calcutta*")

Looking at face of Walter Benjamin, Chaudhuri finds a queer but strong resemblance of this Jewish bourgeois with a colonial Bengali elite, a *bhadralok*, and he tries to grasp the significance of his conception of this particular epiphany in the modernity, which was shaping the world in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries:

What is it that converges in the face of a certain kind of Bengali and Jewish bourgeois, a face that's now, to all purposes, a relic? It's a current of history that shaped the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries everywhere, and brought a particular kind of individual – putatively, the 'modern' – into existence. The face of the 'modern' belongs to someone who's secular, probably deracinated, and whose face, in place of the old patrician certainties of class, caste and standing, possesses a new expression of inwardness; . . . but its inwardness refutes any easy formula – internationalism, miscegenation, hybridity – for how that contact takes place. . . . Many of us know what it means to occupy such a position, or to emerge from a tradition of individualism, of modernity, inflected by minority; and of minority not being a political certitude, but an experience of ambivalence. ("A Strange Likeness")

I wish to conclude this chapter except for the summaries of the upcoming chapters with Sumana Roy's observation of Amit Chaudhuri's *magnum opus*, in my view, *The Strange and Sublime Address*, which she terms as both 'deeply unserious' and 'important'. This juxtaposition is not only emphatically able to catch hold of the ambivalence of modernity that the writer has excavated out of the surficial petrification and stupefaction of the reality, but also points to the double movement I have been trying to 'theorize' for the purpose of containing Chaudhuri's fictions with all their nonsense and evanescence accidentalism, randomness and non-totalitarian contingency. Roy, in her beautiful essay, "The Deeply Unserious, Important Work of Amit Chaudhuri" has described this fiction as "a literature of the "window"", which characterizes, the whole corpus of Chaudhuri's fictional-critical space, including the novels I have taken up for analysis in this thesis, *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991), *Afternoon Raag* (1993), *Freedom Song* (1998), *A New World* (2000), and

The Immortals (2009). I agree when this critic opines, "*A Strange and Sublime Address*, and indeed all of Chaudhuri's fiction, is a literature of the "window."" ("The Deeply Unserious") While she makes a case for the first of Chaudhuri's novels and comments upon it as "a remarkable literature of and for the senses", the 'window', in my reading, provides a valuable tool for the analysis of his fictional oeuvre. A 'window' is such a metaphor, which is both an interior and an exterior; it does not only mark the 'limit' of the house, but at the same time opens the possibility of its infinite openness to the world, the sky, the nature, and so on. It is such a metaphor, which points to an overreaching, and so a never-reachable excess to the rationally constructed boundaries, which by appealing to our senses and imagination inspires us to break its own existence. Windows are only built so that we can go beyond them to explore the fundamentals of the "world of the being" – an out-of-reach flux, an unfathomable existence only partially grasped by an 'open' dialectics of negativity in the always, already broken, incomplete, and deferred abysmal primordiality of the transient and contingent modernity.

In the following chapters, I have tried to trace the double movement of 'enunciation' and 'renunciation', through the 'open' dialectical frame theoretical structure, with the help of some other 'embedded' theoretical postulations applied to case-to-case basis while enquiring into different paradigms of 'reality'/'truth'/'existentiality' through the corpus of Amit Chaudhuri's five fictions, *A Strange and Sublime Address (1991)*, *Afternoon Raag (1993)*, *Freedom Song (1998)*, *A New World (2000)*, and *The Immortals (2009)*. The three important paradigms are, namely, but could not be strictly put into the water-tight compartments of paradigms of 'Modern Self', 'Modern Urban Space', and 'Post/colonial Historiography vis-à-vis (non)Nation'. The 'embedded' theoretical sub-structures include, for example, in the second chapter, the theories and concepts, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, Michael Billig; in the third chapter, those of Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Georg Simmel, Jacques Derrida, Georg Lukács, Ranajit Guha; in the fourth chapter, those of Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Aijaz Ahmed; and, in the fifth, those of, primarily, Jürgen Habermas. The vital critical-creative standpoints of Amit Chaudhuri has remained a constant inspiration of and guiding force behind the current thesis, the chapters of which are entitled as below:

1. Introduction: Clearing a Space for an 'Open' Dialectics of Modernity;
2. Being at the Edge of Chaos: The Game of (Im)Mortality in *The Immortals* and *Freedom Song*;

3. A Theatre Called Spectacle: Phantasmagorical Urban Space and *Flâneur's* Gaze in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A New World*;

4. Image(I-Nation): Representing the Denizenry of the Post/Coloniality in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Afternoon Raag*;

5. Conclusion.

It is to be mentioned with caution that this chapter division and the paradigms selected for study in them, is largely ritualistic, and for the sake of the structural 'coherence' a thesis is expected to have. But, such a 'construction' not only contradicts the 'line of argument' of the thesis, but is also symptomatic of the 'fragility' of the thesis making process, in which a kind of 'totality' has to be reached, but that being something transcendental and airy, can never be actually reached. The paradigms taken are for the sake of a getting into starting points, which being inevitably bound to other paradigms through an 'as-with' structuration, are always already middle. So, not in all cases, I have been able to maintain such a compartmentality with regard to the paradigms proposed for the study, because existentially they are not so, and the motto of the thesis is to 'uncover' such a 'truth'. This is true for the chapters too, which have sometimes overlapped with one another as far as the exploration of the 'breaking of the genre' mission of the thesis is concerned. The novels taken for study against the proposed chapters or paradigms, in the same spirit, do not contain *only* those paradigms, but also others, proposed or not proposed. Through this kind of a 'circumspective formulation', the thesis attempts to 'achieve' the following 'objectives', which, if 'really' achieved would fail the 'purpose' of thesis of projecting what I have called in the thesis as the 'dynamics of angularity', which, in turn, is aimed at exposing the fragility of the stereotypes, if not at breaking them. Such objectives are as below:

1. To look for a kind of alternative 'open' dialectics on the theoretical plane.
2. To explore the dilemmas/ambiguities/contradictions of modern existence on the basis of the paradigms of the Self, City, and Nation through select fictional works of Amit Chaudhuri.
3. To critically enquire into the possible effects of this dialectical existence – the probable threats and the chances of redemption.
4. To find out alternative spatio-temporal locales of modernity, specifically in the context of post-colonial India.
5. To examine the narrative style and structure, in which the concept of modernity is represented in connection with the critical-creative framework the author has

proposed in his various non-fictional and academic writings, and in personal interviews.

The second chapter attempts to formulate a thematic and attitudinal proximity between Amit Chaudhuri, and Martin Heidegger on two counts: a) both of these thinkers' intellectually angular positions against the increasing theorization and consequent homogenization of their respective worlds, the postcolonial Indian English literary scene and the post-Cartesian philosophical sphere, and b) their analyses of the ways of being or the human existence, which is random and aleatory for Chaudhuri and an arbitrary game of available possibilities and active choices for Heidegger. Moreover, this chapter analyzes through the novels that appear in its title how Chaudhuri's 'self being in the world' is eternally suspended in the in-between space of Heideggerian in/authenticity as proposed in the *Being and Time*, where both of these existential categories not only remain incomplete in themselves but also create a pattern of what the study calls 'dialectical circularity. The implication of the stands taken by both of these thinkers is that the way of being in the world is never linear or progressive; rather, ontological identity is negativist, holistic and relational and as a result, the homogenization of existence may never be an absolutist possibility.

The third chapter deliberates upon the modern urban space split in the discourses of what Guy Debord calls 'spectacles' or the grand, majestic, decorated expressions of the imperial/capitalist progress that signify a modern metropolis, and their spectral counterparts emerging out of themselves as in Benjaminesque phantasmagoria that finds expression in Parisian Arcades. It also discusses how, in many cases, these fetishes produce a psychopathology, what George Simmel calls a *blasé* attitude, marked by indifference, irritation and superficiality. A *flâneur* is the greatest example of this urban type, whose 'double gaze' is symptomatic of the spirit of an *ascetic* roaming within the jungle of concrete spectacularities. This very often incisively dissects the progressive dicta of an 'advanced' metropolis to lay bare its dark and hidden crevices, hitherto unknown or unnoticed. S/he thus creates a new aesthetics of urban writing by exploring the non-spectacular and banal spatio-temporality of the city and catching the inevitable ambiguities as if in flashes of what Walter Benjamin calls 'the dialectical images'. This chapter is divided into three parts: the first part situates Chaudhuri's fictions within the context of a neo-liberal capitalist epoch of Indian history; the second elaborates the theoretical deliberations about spectacle and phantasmagoria, and the third analyses how the concerned novels militate against all that is

spectacular in the urban modernity, its own mentor, and brings into a play of ghostly to resist and impede the former's unquestionable progress.

The fourth chapter seeks to re-define a postcoloniality by both 'thinking through' and 'thinking against' (D. P. Gaonkar) the notion of modernity travelling from the West to the rest, which is both 'inevitable' and 'inadequate' (Dipesh Chakrabarty) to the formulations in the making of nationhood in 'Global South'. It shows how modernity, both at the colonial heartland of Britain and at a postcolonial margin like India, is fractured, and incomplete through analyzing the narratives of the novels concerned. It also discusses how through a continuous dialectical tension of post/colonial images/imaginations, alternative spirits of nationhood, primarily based upon the more personalized experiences of the people as against the grand narratives of nationalisms, could be found in piling up 'norm exceptions' as against 'normative expectations' and 'norm deviations' (Partha Chatterjee), also through interrogating into the formulations of *svadeś* and *svadeśī samāj* by Rabindranath Tagore.

The last chapter both summarizes the theoretical stands taken and arguments made in this thesis and reiterates the prime objective of this thesis as foregrounding anti-totalitarianism, anti-authoritarianism and freedom by resisting any interpretive attempts with the purpose of what Achille Mbembe calls "socialization of arbitrariness" (Qtd. in "Lineages" 18).

The implications and future scopes of the current research are the following:

1. The study has critically examined reputation of Amit Chaudhuri as a major writer of Indian modernity.
2. The study helps in exploring the alternative traditions of the postcolonial and post-independence Indian English Literature.
3. The study has framed a distinctive critical approach for analyzing Modern Indian Literature, applying which future researches may be conducted in other genres as for example in Indian Poetry written in English by A. K. Ramanujan, A. K. Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar etc.
4. This study has also created scope for the critical analysis of this corpus of fiction from a post-modernist perspective instead of that of the modernity as it is done in the present context.

Chapter 2

Being at the Edge of Chaos: The Game of (Im)Mortality in

The Immortals **and** *Freedom Song*

I

Amit Chaudhuri has been eloquently termed as 'the quiet rebel' by Lakshmi Krishnan while reviewing his fifth novel *The Immortals*. She is impressed by the quiet radicality with which, "Like those of his revered predecessor, D. H. Lawrence, Chaudhuri's polemics embrace the ordinary with courage, allowing moments of life – sometimes comical, but often tragically commonplace – to blossom." ("The Quiet Rebel") The title that this reviewer confers upon the writer immediately reminds me of a memoir with the same title by Peggy Dickenson, which records its authors' personal memories and experiences as a Peace Corps Volunteer to Bolivia during two years, from 1965 to 1967. Barbara E. Joe suggests that this slender volume gets its title from Dickenson's "mother's description of young Peggy's decision to join the Peace Corps." What is interesting to note is the way the applications of a same title may be intended to disseminate two exactly oppositional interpretations. Dickenson is eulogized as a 'rebel' for her decision to break away the timid and barren and, most importantly, feminine life of domesticity for quietly changing the course of humanity, that is futuristically based on the grand "foundation of freedom and a condition of peace", as 'envisioned' by John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the USA and the founder of the Peace Corps, by championing a 'heroic' and 'masculine' life in a war-ridden foreign territory. Chaudhuri, on the contrary, is called the same for embracing the mundane quotidian life of a commoner 'with courage' in his novels! What is so courageous in scripting down an eventless life? How can a fictional account of everyday be so lofty a project to demand from its 'male author' to keep a distance from complacency when compared to a 'memoir' by a 'female activist' concerning her braving a foreign land without a family escort especially during a tumultuous time?

While the 'realist' memoir (at least more real than a fiction) unequivocally contains the spirit of heroism and thus automatically qualifies for the title of 'the quiet rebel', Chaudhuri's meek fictions may arouse not only questions but also wonder in their being termed as rebellious. This, at a time of increasing religious and racial intolerance, hubristic nationalism and kitschy commercialization, foregrounds a politics in the cultural sphere in the production of a knowledge of reality, which is more valid if it is able to disseminate the 'truth' via grand and heroic narratives of nationalism. Michael Billig has found "something misleading about the accepted use of the word 'nationalism'" when he observes that "A book about nationalism is expected to deal with . . . dangerous and powerful passions, outlining a psychology of extraordinary emotions." (5) On the contrary, the humble and commonsensical everyday life of the common subjects, who are actually the targets of these spectacular

nationalistic discourses, is often shoved off to the margins. In spite of all the hullabaloos in the postcolonial and postmodern cultural spheres of the acceptance and proliferation of the hybrid spaces and the breaking down of the Europocentric normativity, we see the age-old grand narratives of male-chauvinism allied with a racially charged nationalism dominate the course of present cultural history. Chaudhuri's courage lies in his intellectual and creative spirit in championing the quotidian narratives of the citizenry, which although often are termed as insignificant and are relegated to the backstage, play crucial roles in the pedagogic production of the national-cultural spheres in their much complex and variegated existential modes. Rather, they reserve the potential to resist the ubiquitous nationalist and cultural discourses to pave ways for alternative narratives that may give rise to healthier cosmopolitanisms. By 'banal nationalism', Billig suggests a similar version of nationalist narrative, that rejects the hyper-statements by the cultural allies of a militant nationalism, especially those that gain more currency and legitimacy during national crises like wars, and that describes national image/imagination being constantly constructed and subverted through the daily-life practices. He emphatically writes,

> In short, the crises do not create nation-states as nation-states. In between times, the United States of America, France, the United Kingdom and so on continue to exist. Daily, they are reproduced as nations and their citizenry as nationals. And these nations are reproduced within a wider world of nations. For such daily reproduction to occur, one might hypothesize that a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced. Moreover, this complex must be reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world, the familiar terrain of contemporary times. . . . there is a distinction between the flag waved by Serbian ethnic cleansers and that hanging unobtrusively outside the US post office. . . . Daily the nation is indicated, or 'flagged', in the lives of its Citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition. (6)

Billig's observation that banality or everydayness is not 'benign' or 'harmless' as compared to the militant nationalism in constructing various identities, which often are not strictly national but ethnic, racial and even religious or communal, immediately appoints it with a political poignancy that offers it strength to fight with the hegemony of the mainstream. Billig here seems to be supporting our arguments why Chaudhuri can

legitimately be called 'a quiet rebel' for his engagement with a project of 'non-complacent un-eventfulness'.

Chaudhuri's radical approach as an Indian English novelist of the post-liberalization era does not merely rest upon the 'fact' that his fictions (and obviously, non-fictions) explores the everyday with greater and more minute detailing than celebrating the grand narratives of his times. Rather, it is the 'dynamics of angularity' of his narratives with the mainstream and the predominant, which relentlessly put them against the hegemony of the grand narratives and offer alternatives to it, that makes him a rebel. The immediate focus of this 'angularity' is to resist the spectacular narratives of nationalism primarily because of Chaudhuri's unease with the over obsession of the writers of Indian Literature in English with the national(ist) allegories, which have almost become synonymous with the image of India in the post-independence period. Apart from/along with the Nehruvian version of Indian nation-state, what dominated especially the post-Rushdie scene of Indian English fiction is the sensational magic realist and fantastic tradition, which globally 'represented' India as a certain sort of Oriental construction, largely similar to the age-old discourse of India as a nation of snake-charmers. Chaudhuri is especially worried about how the Indian writing in English, which supposing itself the representative elite voice always feels the pressure of canvassing the nation in the global market of postcoloniality, is actually fetishizing a particular version of India:

> In the last few decades, there's been a palpable but often unspoken feeling that the production of the Orient has moved beyond Europe, and Europeans, into the realm of the diaspora, and of Indian writing in English. And the spread of globalization and the free market coinciding roughly with the advent of the post-Rushdie Indian novel in English returns us to the epigraph from Disraeli in Said's book: 'The East is a career.' For the production of the Orient involves, implicitly, its consumption; the circle is incomplete without the 'audience'. ("The East" 87)

In the essay "Modernity and the Vernacular", Chaudhuri opines that the Indian writing in English seems to suggest that India has no other historiographical existence other than that of colonialism: "The only way India enters history is, evidently, via colonialism; and as colonialism is seen basically as an encounter between Western colonizer and native colonized, it is perhaps fair to say that colonial India is interesting because, at least in one crucial sense, it is a part of Western history." (xix) Rather, he argues in a conversation with Fernando Galván that it has to be understood that the post-independent India has a rich, variegated, colorful and complex history, which is not inevitably dependent on coliniality:

The fact that we write in English, and we write in Bengali as well, has everything to do with colonialism. But why only call it colonialism? It is the condition of modernity, of industrialization, coming to India, and the middle class being formed. From that comes a certain kind of sensibility that expresses itself in the novel, whether through English or Bengali. I am not altogether happy with the term 'postcolonial', because it defines everything in connection to the experience of colonialisation, which only has a pretty narrow, one-dimensional, meaning. So I don't think that all the writers who wrote in Bengali and continue writing in English are only defined in themselves by the relationship to the rulers, or their understanding of themselves as postcolonial subjects. There are a lot of other things meant, and it meant coming to terms with their own modernity and consciousness. (48)

Chaudhuri's foregrounding of the quotidian reality in his fictions is his desperate effort to resist the homogenization of the post-independent fictional space by a pan-Indian and postcolonial nationalist allegorist public sphere, which, in turn, sublates all the differences at a micro level of lived experience, and undermines the importance of private sphere in the way of making an eclectic national-cultural heritage. Saikat Majumdar observes,

The most significant narratives about postcolonial identity emergent during the post-1981 period often reflect this imagination (triggered by postcolonial bourgeois nationalist consciousness). The fate of the fictionalized child born on the very stroke of India's independence cannot be his own but must instead belong to the nation. Such allegorical conflations implicitly construct a hierarchy of binaries where constructions of the public are more significant than the private, and the latter's reality, notwithstanding its private idiosyncrasies, is made to fit into certain perceptions of the former. (141-142)

Chaudhuri's writings are the assertion of the impossibility of a national-cultural project's both overpowering and streamlining of the everyday private life by ironing out the inner contradictions of a rich and multi-layered Indian modernity. They are the assertion of an Indian modernity defined by its own people in its own terms while the entity 'own' is conflict-ridden and thus multi-faceted always denying a tendency of stabilizing the process of identity formation. So, he writes about a middle-class everyday, which is not the 'outcome' of a postcolonial India having an imperialistic ambition of becoming a superpower and a player in the global market, but is defined by its own forms of idiosyncrasies and faultlines: "In many ways India in itself has a middle class which is very like the Western middle class,

and that middle class has its own forms of oppression and has its own 'others' within India." ("On belonging" 48)

I have already alluded to the 'dynamics of angularity', that determines both Chaudhuri's fictional and critical writings, has a random location outside the Europeanness (like his self-proclaimed affiliations to the writings of D. H. Lawrence or James Joyce), the derivative discourses of Indian writing in English (like that of the Rushdie effect), and any native tradition that presupposes itself as a fixed archival showcase (like a particular version of the 'Tagore' effect in Bengali literature or like that of Kalidasa in Sanskrit).[i] I hereby propose a more radical reading of Chaudhuri's fictional space than the one proposed by Sheobhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla, "Chaudhuri's "intellectual make-up" is Western and "emotional make-up" is Indian but he makes a serious endeavour to put the separating line under erasure and to explore and reinvent the alternative tradition in the Indian novel written in English." (5) I feel that the way these critics at first create essential descriptive categories, and then talk about the erasure imposes a rational hierarchical linearity in the creative universe of Chaudhuri, which rather opposes any such spatio-temporal structuration in its attempt to foreground "the contingent and historical; a cosmopolitanism of the avant-garde that had been located in an India which, since the late nineteenth century, had been making those transverse mappings across territories in the pursuit of certain objectives: the fragmentary, the concrete, and a certain quality of the aleatory that narrative couldn't accommodate." ("The alien face" 284) Rather, the writer wishes to remain an 'outsider' to any rational fixity of traditionalism while clearly knowing and acknowledging but deliberately ignoring the danger of taking up a 'risky project' always already in tension with all of the homogenizing forces of rationalist agencies. ("A Conversation" 154) He is 're-creating' a 'reality' in his fictional space, which is in contrast with the 'realist' tradition of the nineteenth century British novel and the 'fabulist' tradition of the post-Rushdie Indian English novel, both of which disseminate an idea of tradition that is immovable, and thus a-historical and universal, and didactic and prescriptive. His is a 're-creation' of a fictional and even a 'real' space, with all its randomness pitted against the normative, which he never claims to 'invent' but which has always been 'there' both within the lived experience of passing everyday, and in the fictional worlds of his ancestors form both the Western and the Indian literary traditions. He explains to Anita Roy,

> Detail for me is important in its randomness, in its being part of lived life rather than
> providing information about a setting or a character. That very randomness then
> begins to intrigue me . . . Then I make these affiliations; each one of which are with

angular traditions within other traditions. The writing of the American South or Irish writing or the poet Elizabeth Bishop, all represent an angularity: they are all abnegating from these various forms of seriousness and escaping into forms of randomness in their writing. (153)

He moves from the knowable and the totalitarian side of a tradition to enter the eerie uncanny that pastness of a tradition suggests. The past is to him is not dead as we have already known it, but it is alive and vibrant as it can never be totally known. Then all fictions/realities of the past is an allegory of resurrection only to haunt the present power regimes in their imposition of stable meanings upon their ancestors and (mis)using them to dominate over the Others. Chaudhuri calls this tendency "the tyranny, the enforcements, of narrative". ("The alien face" 284) Chaudhuri is rather interested to register the 'moments of dissonance' in the traditions to lay bare the fissures within them that would serve to keep alive the undercurrents of the *avant garde* cosmopolitanism against all attempts of homogenization of the cultural-political sphere. He writes,

> It's important to record those moments of dissonance when one looks at one's ancestors yet cannot recognize them or lay claim to them – it's an important and illuminating part of who we are as modern Indians. Tagore who greatly admires Kalidasa, says, "I cannot access that world – it comes to me only in moments; it comes to me fitfully. I read the long poem, 'Meghdoot', but once it's over, the world recedes and fades away". Tagore writes a whole poem about the sense of entering that world and then not being able to stay in it. I think being able to say 'It's not mine to have' is very important before we lapse into some kind of complacent cultural nationalism, on one side or the other, deciding what our country, our identity and our past are. ("A Homogenous World")

Chaudhuri is a Joycean in his faith in the epiphanic accidents in the 'secular' world that constitute life. He opines, "When one is in a state of dysfunstion, when one is not properly able to access it is when it can lead to illumination and wonder." ("A Homogenous World") This I do not take as Chaudhuri's assertion that life is a sum total of blind accidents. Rather, it is the other way around in the sense any such overwhelmingly sweeping statement with a potential of becoming a theory of life, and thus creating a particular form of knowledge on which a totalitarian regime can be established is what makes him look into 'a state of dysfunction'. He is against all kinds of political agencies that construct a world as a continuation of *logos*, wherein with the shift in power regimes, there occur shifts in knowledge bases and new kinds of cultural spheres replace the older ones, which along with

the Others, end up in margins. This pedagogic economy in the Manichean binarism, especially popularized after the emergence of postcolonial studies is the point of dissention for him. His foregrounding of the random, the superfluous, even the idea of failure and the impulse of irresponsibility, are an attempt to escape the endless cultural-political maneuvers created through the pedagogic production of the margin/center dichotomy to give rise to one after another orthodox power regimes. He says,

> Now what I am saying is this: that old ideas gradually become marginalized in the interests of this margin/centre dichotomy, where what is marginal – let us say, non-Western literature, Indian writing, or Indian writing in English – then it becomes almost a consensus that if we are Indians writing in English, we are doing this margin/centre thing, we are the margin. Of course then, within our own country, that margin becomes an orthodoxy, it becomes a central voice, an orthodoxy. ("A Conversation" 153)

Chaudhuri's modernity is against this incessant proliferation of potentially dangerous orthodox cultural-political regimes when he proposes a modernity as "a powerful engagement, in craft and vision, with classical modernism; Enlightenment values – clarity of perception; rationality; the presupposed relationship between language and reality – in terms given to it by the Enlightenment itself." ("Travels in the Subculture" 148) This modernity is always in tension with these rational linear structures as they lie oppositionally outside of its discourses and the fragile construction of the being of each of its own discourses forms the inner domain of its contested self, of which it is well aware. Precisely, this modernity is self-consciously self-critical while also remaining in continuous contestation with the external rational agencies of cultural enforcement. Thus, his modernity as the random, the aleatory, the contingent, the fragmentary, the irresponsible, the superfluous, and finally an absurd failure, is in continuous dialectics within and without itself, with the rational institutions, including their all possible pedagogic binarism, and the self reflexivity is about its being in the world in a way that is predominantly arbitrary in its functioning. This modernity is all about continuous critical relocation of the spatio-temporal existence of cultural politics. It is a recognition that the location of culture is in a continuous flux, and any attempt to rationally symbolize it is always already deferred. In the reading of the author, "[I]ndian modernity, has created a pluralism that is not just a 'tolerance of a variety of opinions', as Western or even Nehruvian pluralism might be, but a teetering towards, and acceptance of, the 'absurd'". ("Travels in the Subculture" 154) This is a cosmopolitan modernity, which is 'secular' not in the way the Constitution of India or the official Indian state describes it as 'unity among

diversity' in the terms of ir-religious civil public sphere. Rather, this has an angular relation with this official version, and instead, is located in the lived experience of the Indian everyday in its entanglement with a psychological space, which, not consciously and not following the normative rules or customs, assigns values in the transactions of the self with the world, but does that randomly. This space is what Chaudhuri calls 'the idea of secular unconscious or subconscious'. ("Travelling Between Genres")

II

This idea has a close relation with Chaudhuri's attempt of writing the life or the self in his fictional space. The author denies that this self is or can be adequately explored through any singular and/or even mosaic definition of it formulated by any empirical/theoretical approach. Rather, the sudden contingencies of life defy any such chances as forwarded by intellectual enquiries in their efforts to understand the self dealing with the world through stabilized categories. At the same time, the self cannot altogether avoid the 'practical' concerns of living a life, which are very much variegated, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and often have conflicting interests in shaping it. The self exists in the world through innumerable negotiations with the normative forces that try to streamline it at each and every moment of its existence.

The exploration of the quotidian and the banal in the fictional space is thus an attempt to look at the 'self being in the world' with a spirit that neither is ready to assign values to life through any of the normative discourses of the world nor an outright denial of the force generated by those discourses. It is sometimes theoretically hard to explain such a position as this because the irrationality and uncanny that life retains at its heart remains beyond the scope of the functioning of all symbolic orders such as language. The location of this kind of a life is neither here nor there; it is the invisible 'elsewhere' where life resides. This location is never pedagogically stable and determinable as it is not a 'positive' spatio-temporal 'reality' that can be arrested through the language of a theory; rather, it is an anti-rationalist assumption and an intuitive 'impulse' that only symptomatically and 'negatively' (against all normativity) may be able to give an idea of this existence. Chaudhuri, in an interview with Anita Sethi, explains this in the following words:

> It was the pull of the elsewhere and the random ways in which they [the quotidian details] arrived towards me that interested me. I realised that the invisible and the quotidian gave me great joy and allowed me to escape from the oppressiveness of the hero and the heroine and their consciousness through the rules of how time

passes; what Virginia Woolf described as the awful business of what happens between breakfast and dinner. I had to reject all of that to find out what it was that excited me. . . . and what I wanted to do and consider whether the novel could accommodate that impulse. . . . I began to explore this form of moving from one kind of experience to another; the self being in the world. ("Interview")

Both the fictional and the non-fictional writings of Chaudhuri are attempts to locate the aforesaid 'impulse' in the critical-intellectual life of Indian writings (in English), which will seek to explore the random, and often 'unnecessary'. He is well-aware of the fact that this may take his narratives out of the 'serious' historical centrality of more serious kinds of rationalist discourses, and put them into the category of myth or of mere romanticism. So, he places himself in a European literary ethos that 'comes from Flaubert', which he claims, "informs modernity in a much more complex way than you'll find in Hemingway or Carver, where the tendency is just to jettison something you don't see as necessary." ("A Coversation" 159) In the specific case of Indian writings in English, Chaudhuri is a writer, who does elucidate the details of "being in this world rather being a part of the nation in a kind of ethos and atmosphere that has been dictated by postcolonial studies." ("Travelling Between Genres") His angularity is registered in his advocacy for a space in the contemporary cultural history for the outsider, the misfit, the daydreamer and even for failure towards the "the creation of a truly energetic and self-critical social and intellectual space". ("I Wish Indian") He triumphantly expresses his anxiety over post-liberalized India becoming a totalitarian cultural space,

> My anxiety is that in the last 20 years India, typically for a globalizing country, hasn't theorized a position for the outsider or for the misfit or for failure. Its rhetoric is concerned with success in various ways. So Indian writing in English or any other phenomenon is always spoken in terms of success and if it is not successful, it becomes invisible . . . Right now we do not have a space for the irresponsible misfit, which means we do not have a space which is at an angle to power. Even those who speak against power are in some ways in powerful positions of their own. In India, everybody is some way in some kind of nexus of power. We need to regain that space for the irresponsible. ("I Wish Indian")

He historically situates the 'irresponsible' beyond the 'nexus of power' not because he wants an affiliation from the history (Benjamin's 'Universal History', which is a creation of and a narrative by the powerful) for his position, rather it is his attempt to register a protest against the overwhelming tendency of this history to centralize what is responsible and

visible and to put all Others out of the question of consideration while writing history. Moreover, it is an attempt to throw light on the complex nature of life, which is so random and aleatory that any single historical approach will fail to narrate its story. Chaudhuri's 'self being in the world' is a "'self' which experiences modernity and assigns meanings without being driven by the existing ideas." ("Travelling Between Genres") He even hints at his own angularity as a thinker and a writer might generate a theoretical tendency of positing him within some literary-historical brackets, but it is purely fallacious to think that those could adequately hold his own writerly spirit or any single commoner's life, for that matter. It is not a theoretical will that makes Chaudhuri (or, anyone) to take a stand for or against some discourse; rather, it is the pull of the unknown, the elsewhere, the arbitrary that creates an angular tension with the established 'realities'. The author describes,

> When I was starting out, I knew I was rejecting a number of things. One never chooses to be what one is, or with whom to make one's affiliations. If one could choose, I would much rather be an insider, part of the establishment, going with the flow, part of the mainstream and being very happy and benefiting from all kinds of things and leading a perfectly well-adjusted life – a rich and productive life. But somehow, for me at least, it is not rich and productive. So one has to begin making these affiliations and choices – although not programmatically. ("A Conversation" 156)

His argument foregrounds the non-programmatical nature of life's making affiliations and choices, and that is largely propelled not by undertakings in life but rejections of ways of life unlikely to be officially, schematically and consciously taken account of. Soumabrata Chatterjee rightly comments that Chaudhuri's narratives are characterized by a duality, which can only be described in terms of negatives only as the interviewer observes that his fictional 'self' is "against the Cartesian self" and is also "against the postmodern self that can't take a decision, like the act of legitimizing oneself or creating a space". Chaudhuri replies, "For me character is a mystery and this mystery is simply not rebutted by self awareness in the postmodern sense. . . . what I'm expressing is . . . a critique of the humanistic way of looking at the individual and the novel, and what you described as the Cartesian self; it's an embracing of digressions, these acts of looking away, these interruptions but in a way that is closer to modernism and, superficially, post-modernism". ("Travelling Between Genres") His 'self being in the world' remains largely outside of the conscious formalities of the officially recognized lives, but always already in tension with them. This remains as "a

metaphor of a hyphen which joins two things but also separates them". ("Travelling Between Genres")

The 'self being in the world' within its detailed randomness as Amit Chaudhuri has a close affinity with the a-theoretical positioning of *Dasein*, which is often translated as 'being-in-the-world' by Martin Heidegger in his seminal work of ontological phenomenology, *Being and Time*. Before drawing any parallelism between the quotidian aesthetics of modernity and the ontical self of the being in the 'worldhood of the world', I should give a caution that Chaudhuri himself does not wish to affiliate himself with any form of theoreticism, including the existential philosophy, with which Heidegger has a close connection. He, rather, has himself clarified that he had been "trying to escape from other forms – the whole burden of absurdist and existentialist discourse which was such a big thing in the 70's, creating prisms through which one saw everything . . . I wanted to escape all these things . . . I find nothing in common with the existentialist idea of the self, with psychological realism, with nineteenth century naturalism and the accumulation of detail." ("A Conversation" 153) In an interview given to Anita Sethi, Chaudhuri confesses, "When I was 24 the discovery I made was that I didn't want to be a writer who was going to be a kind of quasi-existentialist or quasi-T. S. Eliot or quasi-nineteenth-century novelist." ("Interview") This is the kind of angularity or the rebellious spirit of the writer that I have been discussing so far in this chapter – an anti-theoreticist, liberal, even negativist approach towards the reality of the commoners of this country. And this is where I find the closest affinity of Chaudhuri's approach with that of Heidegger.

"What is Metaphysics?" was the 'inaugural address' of Heidegger at the University of Frieburg after securing a professorial position in Philosophy there consequent upon the retirement of his mentor, Edmund Husserl. In this lecture, he argued for two propositions antithetical to the philosophy of not only his guru Husserl but to the whole history of mainstream Western philosophy: "philosophy must break the "dominion of logic" and that the experience of anxiety is indispensable for carrying out intellectual research". (Qtd. in Blattner 6) The reception of this lecture in the English-speaking academia was so negative that Heidegger was almost accused of being an inconsistent irrationalist. Mark Wrathall comments, "Philosophers with analytical sensibilities often see Hiedeggar as a throwback to the bad old days of the metaphysical (i.e. unscientific) speculation – an appearance only heightened by his seeming inability or refusal to make clear, logical, analytical arguments." (2) This is why Heidegger remains at 'the outskirts of philosophy' along with such others as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. (Blattner 6) But, this propensity towards the irrational and the

aleatory has given him a special position among the thinkers, who in the decades to come, have argued against the massive, almost absolute, domination of rational scientific disciplines in the world of knowledge chiefly on two counts. The first is: these disciplines claim and propagate a totalitarian truth-value for whatever knowledge they produce either by missing the point or by hiding the fact deliberately that all truth-claims are representational. The second argument foregrounds the anxiety of the intellectuals over the crisis of a certain branch of knowledge, which advocates for the irrational and the arbitrary nature of it. Here, the issue is of a structure of hierarchy of power within the knowledge world. They receive his intellectual stand as a repudiation of "the pre-eminence of the empirical sciences" and the reclamation of "the noble standing of philosophy." (Wrathall 3)

Heidegger's thesis on the nature of being-in-the-world, seeks to break with the long tradition of philosophical thinking in the West. In the pre-modern Western philosophy, starting from Plato, or even back to Socrates, through Aristotle, to the High Middle Ages, the question of being has been addressed by simply looking at it as a unified substance having properties inherent to it. In thinking about the being or the existence, thus a subject-predicate model is established, wherein the unified substance (subject, i.e. the table) is logically related to its properties (predicate, i.e. the color, brown). This rational calculation about the existentiality of the world finally leads towards the formulation of a predicate calculus, in which

> [I]f you believe this ontology as if all you need is the right story about all the subjects or substances in the world, and all their properties or predicates, and how these are all related logically by forms or relations, you could describe everything. . . . That is exactly what you get if in your ontology, you think, that the only kind of being is present-at-hand then everything must be understandable with the present-at-hand and if you have got a form or model for understanding everything as substances with properties, you are able to understand everything. (Dreyfus L1)

With the advent of the Cartesian philosophy in the modern world this substance ontology has shifted from what Dreyfus calls *the universe of things* (L1) to the realm of what Husserl terms as *psychologism* (Qtd. in Blattner 31). This is a shift from the enquiry of the ontology of the objects out there in the world to that of the subjects as found in the human consciousness, a shift from the subject as 'substance' or the metaphysical correlate of the subject as what Descartes calls *res cogitans* or the thinking things. Blattner opines, "All one's experiences belong to a single subject, because they all in here in this substance that thinks, and the persistence of this subject-substance through changes in experience explains one's

identity through time." (34) Subjectivity, as the logical requirement of the self-conscious subject to corroborate with its experiential unity, substitutes the metaphysical yet unified substance, and takes the center-stage in the post-Kantian German philosophy. This is how Blattner views Kant's stand on the issue: "To be a subject is not to be a *thing* or *substance*. Rather, subjectivity is a form of experiential unity, unity constituted and exhausted by my ability to become aware of my experiences *as mine.* This is Kant's conception of "transcendental personality."" (35) So, become *aware*, that is a psychological attitude towards the world is at the core of Kant's transcendental philosophy, which limits the 'reality' to such a 'nature' that is a totality of mere appearances as a subject analyses them on the basis of his/her *a priori* knowledge of the world. Categories of knowledge are conceptual categories of understanding this world through sets of rules and theories, which must be applied first while analysing a subject's experiences. Kant's conception of 'moral personality' is structurally quite close to the conception of 'transcendental personality'. Just as a (consciously thinking) subject, a person is to possess a transcendental cognitive awareness of his/her own existence as a thinker, s/he is also aware of his/her being arrested by a transcendental feeling of respect for the moral law. The idea is to take a position responsibly taking into account that there are *a priori* moral codes accountable for the being that a subject possesses.

Heidegger radically attempts to break away from the shackle of all previous philosophical burdens, chiefly the domination of different kinds of *a priori* and transcendental cognitive and moralistic categories in search of valid knowledge with the final result that "human *Dasein* as such is excluded from the possibility of being encountered." (Qtd. in Nenon) He locates the intrusion and encroachment of the same tradition in the phenomenology of Husserl, his own mentor. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann has differentiated Husserlian 'reflective phenomenology' from Heidegger's 'hermeneutical phenomenology' chiefly on the count that while the former is still interested in 'theoretical knowing', the latter shifts its lenses to 'understanding looking', with its emphasis on the practical 'concern' with the 'lived experience' of *Dasein* as opposed to the former's proceeding from a whatever is reified or ob-jectified, including human consciousness as an 'object' of reflection. In a review of von Herrmann's book *Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology*, Thomas Nenon has lucidly summarized the basic distinctions between these two approaches towards phenomenology, as forwarded by von Herrmann:

The contrast is then drawn to Husserlian reflective phenomenology that (a) remains oriented on theory and thereby misses the crucial practical dimensions of lived experience (20, 67), so that it (b) assumes that the primary access to the things around us is perception upon which all of the other ways in which we encounter things are founded (32-33, 36, 50), and (c) is enacted by a "pure ego pole" that "ob-jectifies" instead of living in the acts of lived experience as consciousness (30, 51). (Nenon)

Heidegger as a philosopher has a very close relationship with Chaudhuri as a writer in which both of them maintain a critical distance from the mainstream in their respective fields, what the latter calls 'angularity', being grounded in the historicity of moments with respect to the lived experiences of what the former terms as 'average everydayness'. In doing so, Heidegger like Chaudhuri looks at the *Dasein* or the being-in-the-world or simply being human is a negative state of behavioural existence. It is neither the being in terms of present-at-hand or being object nor being with respect to ready-to-hand or the equipment. It *lives* a life instead of *having* a life in possession of one and this proposition ultimately rejects to offer it any unified positivist subjectivity. The being in *Dasein* is a 'being to be', which is a queer amalgamation of the infinitive and gerundive German forms of 'being': 'Sein' and 'Zu-sein' as per the English translation of *Being and Time* by Macquairre and Robinson, precisely denoting that for *Dasein*'s being is to do with its capacity of its 'to be'. In Blattner's words, ""*Zu-sein*" is a gerundive: Just as *Dasein* may have things to do, it has being to be. Put more colloquially, then, Heidegger is saying that *I am a life to live.* He wants to refocus our understanding of what it is to be a person away from reflection and self consciousness and towards how we live our lives." (36) But, the paradox is, even if it 'responsibly' takes a stand that responsibility is directed towards or is determined with respect to others, a way of being that Heidegger calls 'inauthentic' following Aristotle. And, when the being comports it towards itself, that is, it takes a responsible stand with respect to its own possibility of being, although now its way of being is 'authentic', it finally is stuck in a brutal self-reflexive circularity that finally denies it its existentiality, a situation of 'death', according to Heidegger which is not 'demise', that is, a socio-cultural-legal causality of one's departure from this world.

In his way of commenting upon the standard American model of creative writing based on the fictional practices of Hemingway and Raymond Carver, which focuses upon precision and necessity of details, Chaudhuri has once commented that this kind of model misses the complex richness of modern life. Rather, the Flaubertian tradition, "where the tendency is *just to jettison something you don't see as necessary*", seems to be more fruitful

as a model of creative writing as "it informs modernity in a much more complex way." ("A Conversation" 159, italics mine) To me Chaudhuri's observation of this complexity of the modern life which lies in the unforeseen and unpredictable *jettisoning* of seemingly unnecessary, i.e. culturally unimportant details is especially important as it brings him quite close to what Heidegger calls 'thrownness' that constitutes the facticity of *Dasein* but through an inevitable paradox. Wrathall explains thrwonness in the following way: "'Thrownness' is Heidegger's name for the way that we always find ourselves 'thrown' into or 'delivered over' to circumstances that are beyond our control." (35) This shows how the being-in-the-world, even prior to all cognition and volition, finds itself 'disclosed' or exposed to an existential condition, which s/he neither does/can *will* to construct nor does/can disown at the same time. In a marvellous paragraph, Christopher Macann has brought forward this caustic paradox in the existence of the *Dasein*:

> 'Thrownness' is indicative of the fact that, in the final analysis, I never choose my situation but always already find myself in a situation which furnishes the context for all choosing and deciding. Even if I successfully choose to assume a different situation it is always out of some already given situation that such a choice first becomes possible. And the very first of the entire chain of situations which regressively constitutes the already given contexts for all choosing and deciding can itself never be chosen or decided about — birth. Along with 'thrownness' we find the characteristic of 'facticity'. 'The expression "thrownness" is meant to suggest the *facticity of its (Dasein's) being delivered over*' (p. 174). In his own discussion of this interesting notion, Sartre uses the phrase 'necessary contingency' to bring out the paradoxical character of facticity. I cannot but be who I am (pure necessity) and yet it is a complete accident *that* I am at all, let alone that I am *this particular man* (sheer contingency). (88)

Heidegger's ontological phenomenology is existentially grounded in *Dasein*'s choices of his/her possibilities, to which s/he is already disposed in his/her everyday experiences. These experiences are all never beyond the scope of dialectical circularity of *Dasein*'s average existence that is explored by Heidegger through a negativist approach. This facticity about the *Dasein* as an existential condition of being human is exquisitely explored through the phenomenon of anxiety, and *Dasein*'s taking a step towards an 'authentic' existence is a rarity if not an impossibility.

In the opening section pertained to Heideggerian phenomenology, I have referred to Heidegger stressing the necessity of the phenomenon of anxiety to be played into the realm of

research as an important feature of human existence. *Being and Time* emphatically explores the significance of anxiety as a state-of-mind, which, in turn, is deeply connected with the ontological structure of Falling, which has been described by Heidegger as *Dasein*'s "'fleeing' in the face of itself." Macann further explains "Falling is that ontological-existential structure which explains why *Dasein* is for the most part not concerned with itself but 'absorbed in' . . . 'distracted by' the world in which it finds itself." (93) This structure of falling along with the phenomenon of anxiety, coupled with another phenomenon of individualization brings forth either an unending dialectics or a dialectical circularity of the being-in-the-world. The *Dasein* is not *naturally* 'absorbed in' the 'They' or the dominant socio-cultural-political structures of the world it finds itself in. Rather, on the contrary, it *existentially* makes itself get absorbed in the mainstream so that it may avoid the anxiety of facing itself. '*Das Man*', the German expression that Heidegger uses has an ambiguity as it may mean both 'the One' and 'the They' as '*Man*' is an indefinite pronoun in German, which is used in everyday interaction to mean both anybody and thus understandably, all and sundry, in expressions like 'they say that . . .' (*'man sagtdass . . .'*) or 'one must do it' (*'man muss estun'*) or 'that's just what one does' (*'man macht daseben so'*) etc. (Wrathall 51-52) In turn, this ambiguity creates an understanding of the being-in-the-world or being-with as being-in that the facticity of the existence of both 'the One' and 'the They' is not only interdependent or interchangeable, thus, precisely, 'negative' but also, and most significantly, internally 'unstable' and 'un-unified'. The anxiety in facing one's own self or to individualize it is in the recognition of this unstable identity of one's being, which one wants to forget existentially, through submission to dominant cultural structures of the world.

The anxiety is also caused by a continual dialectics of the factical self of the *Dasein* as it incessantly swings between what Heidegger calls the 'authentic' and the 'inauthentic' dispositions of one's self, while both of these phenomenal structures, I understand, remain not purely unified as to be positioned as completely oppositional to each other and while both remaining incomplete forever, exist only symptomatically. The greatest paradox in the ontological structure of *living a life* is basically ceasing one's own life from existing on its own terms (as it is absorbed in the They), always remaining that what it is never is or should never 'to be'. This kind of existence, the average everyday living, is termed as inauthentic by Heidegger. On the other hand, to live authentically is to individuate oneself, to face one's own self instead of fleeing from it, taking a stand of one's own. But, this pure individuation although is a result of overcoming the anxiety of living with one's own self and refreshing in the sense that it restore the self-sufficiency of a lost self, it finally is directed towards Death,

the end of living a life. It is so as it demands an apparently impossible existential positioning of *Dasein*, namely 'Being-ahead-of-itself'. Macann emphatically bring out the significance of this phenomena,

> Existentiality is *Being-ahead-of-itself.* With this definition Heidegger not only captures the movement of self surpassing characteristic of existence, he does so in such a way as to offer a new conception of the traditional phenomenological problem of transcendence. As the *ahead-of-itself,* transcendence is no longer to be regarded as a self-surpassing 'towards other entities which it is *not',* but precisely a 'Being towards the potentiality-for-Being which it (*Dasein*) is itself'. (94)

Purely taking a stand towards itself or standing ahead of itself is Death, which is the only other name of pure life. For Heidegger, "Death is *Dasein*'s ownmost possibility" and "The ownmost possibility is non-relational". (Qtd. in Wrathall 58) It is in death that the being-in-the-world could take a stand absolutely on its own without *caring for* 'the They' and thus could live an authentic life, which is almost an impossibility. I would once again like to highlight that both authentic and inauthentic are so interspersed with each other that any absolute purity is beyond the scope of enactment of life. Their pre-ontological nature determines their way of disclosing themselves. And, this pre-ontological apprehension (understanding with anxiety) is the ontological basis of *Dasein*'s existence. In Blattner's words,

> Thus, ontology is interpretive or "hermeneutic." Because our pre-ontological understanding is embedded in our conduct and pre-reflective ways of going about our lives, ontology is an attempt to put our practical understanding of being into words. Ontology does not require any special epistemic capacity, such as innate ideas or the rational intuition of Platonic forms. (20)

This neither life nor death is n/either rejoicing n/or dampening for Heidegger's ontological phenomenology. Rather, the unknowability of life's practical design and the unpredictable positioning of the being-in-the world in its ever uncertain 'in-between' spatio-temporality, is the crux of his hermeneutic phenomenological understanding. Heidegger is interested in seeing a life caught interstitially in the "difference between having a possibility, and having the possibility present to us *as* a possibility." (Wrathall 68) I wish to conclude the discussion on Heidegger's ontologically phenomenological philosophy by citing an excellent summary by Blattner:

> [W]e are disclosed to ourselves more fundamentally than in cognitive self-awareness or moral accountability. We are disclosed to ourselves in so far as it matters to us who

we are. Our being is an issue for us, an issue we are constantly addressing by living forward into a life that matters to us. Even in the exceptional condition of having lost interest in life, of radical alienation from it, of depression – which Heidegger discusses under the rubric of *anxiety* – the question of identity looms as inescapable, which is why alienation is distressing. This disclosure of myself to myself does not reveal me as a distinct and persisting individual, however, but rather as immersed in a social world that engages me as well. That world, its possibilities, its paraphernalia, and the others who live in that world along with me matter to me simply in so far as my own life matters to me. All of this falls under the heading of *existentiality*. (41)

III

That Amit Chaudhuri's fictional (even non-fictional) narratives take a break from the fabulist or national allegorical brandings of postcolonial Indian fiction and his return to the life of commonality or quotidian aspects of Indian middle class have been discussed by some scholars. (Shukla and Shukla 2004, Majumdar 2013) This return is almost reminiscent of the clarion call given by Husserrl while elaborating upon the methodology of phenomenological investigations: "Back to the things themselves." (Qtd. in Moran 228) Majumdar writes, "Chaudhuri's own fiction is less driven by a nationally ambitious political or historical narrative than by the literal evocation of the everyday lives of people in specifically evoked regional settings. More often, in fact, Chaudhuri is less interested in such larger narratives than he is in their odd, local variations, not in the public sphere but within idiosyncratic spaces of the domestic domain." (150-151) In the Introduction of his non-fiction collection entitled *Clearing a Space*, Chaudhuri writes about his critical engagement and a radical reinterpretation of an Indian 'reality' and the mundane based on a particular version of 'humanism', which is not only peripheral "in the face of the epic and fantastic narratives that Indian literature has been made synonymous with" but also ambiguous as it reserves the capacity to go beyond the binaries through which the reality is constructed, albeit crudely and incompletely. This humanism does not carry the burden of the legacies of either the Western or Indian renaissance or enlightenment thoughts. Rather, it places itself amidst the ebb and flow of the common everyday of Indian life, which is more complex and richer than to be simply theoretically explored through the mechanisms of binary thoughts. He constructs the concept of this humanism in a negativist and non-holistic approach. He writes,

> In dwelling on 'Indian' or 'Bengali' humanism, I'm not trying to add to the
> knowledge of variants of humanism in the world, or issuing a corrective; nor am I

interested in *returning* to a lost, utopian paradigm of 'high' modernity. What I am interested in are the elisions that directed the binaries (East, West; high, low; native, foreign; fantasy, reality; elite, democratic) within which, by some subtle and inescapable default mechanism, we generally position ourselves in relation to our cultural formation, binaries that, however, do not corroborate to our experience of the world. ("Introduction: On Clearing" 14)

This humanism brings Chaudhuri's position as a creative thinker of Indian 'reality' on many counts closer to that of Heidegger. First, he emphasizes upon the exploration of the everyday experience as his reality as opposed to the epic and fantastic narratives on Indian postcoloniality. This 'average everyday' is also the starting point of Heidegger's enquiry into the nature of *Dasein*. Secondly, he acknowledges that life is more nuanced and subtler than the cultural binaries, which 'do not corroborate to our experience of the world' yet, supposedly but unsuccessfully, claim to formulate our perceived positions on our behalf. Rather, his interest in the 'elisions that directed the binaries' brings into play a more anxious and ambiguous interpretation of our cultural self. The word 'elisions' connotes both an omission in and a conjoining together the binaries, the gaps within them and the continuous overlapping of them into one another. This is almost in the line of Heidegger's proposition that *Dasein* is both submerged in and independent of the 'They' with a State-of-mind or mood that is always already characterized by a structure of anxiety.[ii] And thirdly, he confesses that a 'subtle and inescapable default mechanism' directs the positioning of our cultural being, which is almost the same as the mechanism that *Dasein* finds in his/her thrownness in the world and which cannot be epistemologically known by it as the primary principle of its being is pre-ontological. Anxiety over and unknowability of the self's 'groundedness' or sense of belonging to any single conceptual category (religion, region, race, class, caste etc.) that, in turn, creates the illusion of actuality, is primary to Chaudhuri actors as to the explorers of ontological-existentialist tradition of the Western Philosophy. Anxiety is unavoidable in Chaudhuri's narratives as they simultaneously talk about freedom as a possibility of life. Burns writes in the context of Kierkegaardian anxiety, how in dealing with 'sin' (a more theologically oriented reading of the term), the self explores a blank space, a groundlessness of its existence, always already but negatively caught between the dialectics of (im)possibility,

> [I]n Kierkegaard's systematic project as a whole, we can consider negation of the absolute, or put differently put differently, sin *is* absolute negation. As John Erlod has phrased it, for Kierkegaard, 'sin is the abandonment of immanent self-reflection in the

consciousness of one's self as an impossibility'. This negation is the individual subject absolutely negating its own grounds in an attempt to assert its autonomy in the face of an absolute that exists absolutely independently of it. This space opened up by absolute negation is thus the space of freedom. (39)

It is the space, which is at the same time a non-space as it does not have a stable ground as its foundation, and which is always fraught with fissures and fillers continuously letting new spaces open up and some others close down. Ian Almond, in case of Chaudhuri's 'characters' in his short stories, has termed this space as 'a basic void', observing its strong affinity with the Heideggerian notion of the 'Worldhood of the World' and Kierkegaardian negative existential structure of self's 'incommensurability'. He has observed,

> A basic void lies beneath the plans and projects of Chaudhuri's characters, the featureless screen Heidegger called "the worldhood of the world" (*die Weltlichkeit der Welt*), the imperceptible, ever-present blankness against which the stories take place. . . . If there is a space for the radically incommensurable in stories as technically polished as "Real Time" and "Portrait of an Artist" – "incommensurable" in the most Kierkegaardian sense of the word, namely that which has no unit by which to measure it – they are spaces which are not present but which have to be intuited. . . . (170)

Chaudhuri's actors are always in a grip of an anxiety of nothingness, which is an alter-ego of a fear coming from a specific and knowable object. In his narratives, "Something akin to fear is at work. The individual feels unease, even dizziness, as if he feared something, and yet the threat is not any identifiable "something." It is fear without an object, Kierkegaard writes, a fear of "nothing." It is an unsettling sense of "the possibility of possibility", or "the possibility of acting freely." (Söderquist 88)

The Immortals, Chaudhuri's fifth novel, with which I started this discussion, is symptomatic of all other novels written by the author: it does not tell a complete story. The characters are not even fully sketched as in cases of the *Bildungsroman* although all of his novels are somehow or the other tells stories of his own life. All of his novels have strong subjective elements, which are limited to his own perception of the world, but any expectation of aesthetic or logical development is consciously dashed at the outset. This may partly because of his belief in the unknowability of the life's intricacies and its incalculable schema. He opines that to him characters are 'mysterious'. They are bound to be incomplete as they are neither the sum total of some physiological traits not that of psychological attributes, which make the transcendental 'substance' called 'character' with 'properties',

outer and inner, respectively. Rather, he loves to see characters as "an embracing of digressions, these acts of looking away. . . I believe we are always making radical journeys." ("Travelling Between Genres") That characters are none of these and that they are mysterious, in the sense of the *how* their 'self' engages itself in the dispersal of culture from different sides, once again makes him attitudinally very close to Heidegger, who analyzes *Dasein* neither in terms of present-at-hand or being object nor with respect to ready-to-hand or the equipment nor as a unified thinking thing. He, once again, like Heidegger himself, believes in self's 'embracing' of its own digressions, its 'making' journeys – to be precise the 'acting' part of the characters but in mysterious and unknown ways, for which no formula is applicable. In his attempt to capture the 'moments' of life, Chaudhuri even gives his characters a touch of evanescent quality as he pays attention to the *flâneur*, the loiterer, as an artist registering impressions staggering among the crowd. He is even interested in sketching the characters, who are known very little or not known at all, people "you come into contact incompletely with many more characters. . . . You come into contact with millions and millions of people in your lifetime in India whom you actually don't know very well."("On belonging 46) *The Immortals* brings forth a loose sum of these characters, henceforth will be called as actors, with the purpose of putting stress on their active existential dealing with their lives, on how they take stands vis-à-vis the culture that makes them what they are and the culture that they create for themselves.

  The Immortals registers apparently the conflict of classical artistic/aesthetic values and the newly emerging capitalist value system, which unabashedly promotes a money-culture. In Chaudhuri's own words,

> By the end of the seventies, India gradually saw the decline of the bourgeoisie in the old sense — that is, of the Nehruvian legacy and the older legacies of liberalism via, say, the Bengal Renaissance. A world emerged in India — as in other places — where it was okay to be rich, which it hadn't been under the Nehruvian dispensation. It became okay to have desires and to be upfront about them.
>
> In *The Immortals*, the traditional guru, oddly enough, seems to be able to cope with these facts better, and to take to the situation much more naturally, than the more romantic, educated, bourgeois boy. The so called "traditional" in India has embraced capitalism, wonderfully, in a way in which *bhadralok* [middle-class] India has not. ("The Quiet Rebel")

The 'oddity' of this strange readjustment that the actors continuously keep on making without, for a moment, succeeding with a sense of completion, is what their immortality is all

about. The logic is a queer self-assuming trajectory, wherein the journey is long but anxiously circular. A life-in-death or death-in-life situation guides yet haunts this journey. This is why a traditional guru like Shyamji seems to be more adjusting to the *nouveau riche* lifestyle at the cost of his traditional aesthetic values, whereas his disciple, an educated and wealthy teenage boy, resents the same and instead, chooses a life of a stoic in his devotion to his music education and a life of an apparent vagabond with stubble and a *khadi* jacket.

Nirmalya Sengupta almost summarizes the existential angst relating to the consciousness of life's inevitable circularity and inescapability for the cultural milieu, in which somebody is thrown helplessly beyond any control. He is the son of a successful corporate official with status and wealth more than any ordinary Indian, and lives in rich flats in the posh locality of Bombay (now Mumbai). He aspires to be an *avant gardist* intellectual and a poet taking a stand against a culture, which is more and more getting commercial and marching towards a kitschy showing off. He, at a very early age, has gone through *The Story of Philosophy* by Will Durant and *Being and Nothingness* by Jean-Paul Sartre. He knows that he does not understand Spinoza at all (only whom he has developed a special fondness for) but has liked the wonderful and magical way logically he has proved his hypothesis that the God and the Universe are all one thing. Specially, what has hypnotised him is the 'irrefutability' of Spinoza's logic, which compels him to offer an awful air of superiority to the philosopher as "Gulp by gulp, in the air-conditioned study, he swallowed civilisation." (*Immortals* 260) As the boy more and more gets aware of the magicality of the logic or rationality in the making of human civilization, at thirteen, he dismisses "God as a fiction," and sees the heavenly beings "through Tulsidas and Kabir and the pseudonymous authors of the classical compositions" as "the anarchic creation of the poets". He understands the inherent dialectics of life as he gets inspired by the logic and rationality and at the same time, the irrational and the imaginary that fascinates him as he thinks of "how profligate and real the universe of the gods actually was", "How messy that world of eternal beings was" and he ponders over the devotional songs on baby yet Lord Krishna, which are full of "workaday calamities and disturbances". (*Immortals* 260) Almost in the spirit of Hamlet, he gets preoccupies with the question of existence; the question 'Why do I exist?' haunts him in relentless nonsensical repetition. He realises the central paradox of being: it is an existence without a satisfactory answer for the basis of its being if approached by "an intellectual query, or rational investigation . . . by reasoning and deliberation". The anxiety of the existence creeps in him as he anticipates the being "might be a cry of pain", in which "the answer is no longer important". The greatest revelation he gets out of existence is what the

study is constantly calling a 'dialectical circularity', the question is not only the question but also the answer itself whereas "The answer lies in the question, which is the result of suffering". The binaries of existence, which are rationally constructed to arrive at a justifiable conclusion constantly defers the conclusion itself and rather pushes it towards the imaginary introduction of the problem itself. This damned but inevitable self-reflexivity and painful uncertainty in the face of existence magically gives him a strength for responsibly taking a stand on his own as "His sympathies lay with the cry of pain . . . in a mood of visionary despondency, he walked, in his incipient philosophy's agony and undecidedness. . . ." (*Immortals* 262)

As Nirmalya feels the 'the cry of pain', he also gathers courage to take a stand towards his own disposition of his practical world – against his parents' position of a corporate elite and the financial ambition of his trainer of the Hindustani Classical Music. He starts rejecting his father's Mercedes 'unobtrusively' but 'firmly': "If the Mercedes came to pick him up, he ignored it; sometimes it followed him, twenty paces behind him, discreet, trying absurdly to merge with the background, while he walked on, apparently nonchalant, in his khadi kurta and churidar, past peanut vendors and hurrying peons, at one with Mahatma Gandhi Road's disorganised street-life." (*Immortals* 104) He, instead, stands at the bus stop before finally boarding a bus reading *The Story of Philosophy*. He develops a liking of Croce's proposition that a work of art precedes actual composition as his newly reared long hair struggles with the winds coming in through the window.

This journey towards *authenticity* in Heideggerian terminology is not linear rather paradoxical on several levels. While he flies high with his philosophical 'thinking' he is apparently leaving the ordinary life, he is strangely spellbound by the chaos at the street, the crowd at public transports, the smell of the dust, the quotidian flavor of the commonalities of the city. On one hand, he does consider Shyamji's anxiety over the immediate future of his and his children and his ruminations of the proper conduct in daily life as not thinking at all while "his daily life involved an agonising – punctuated by blank phases of stupefaction – over the history that, from the beginning of time, had gone into forming the moment that he now, in 1981, found himself uneasily in." (*Immortals* 206) On the other, he is frantically fascinated by an amazing appeal of the stark ordinariness out there amid the street life of the city: "This coughing, whispering life frightened him, but he went out searching for it." While his parents are frequenters to the Taj, a five-star hotel, for parties off and on, he seldom accompanies them. He feels alienated from the everyday flow of his parents' life: "Nirmalya felt jaded; the world – the flat; the view from the balcony; Cuffe Parade – caused him pain.

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He looked unkempt, out of joint, next to his parents." (*Immortals* 111) His actively taking a stand against his parents' corporate status and lifestyle leads to the 'unconcealment' of not only his own self that revolts against the kitschy hubris creeping in the urban middle class bourgeoisie, in which there is a reversal of value practiced through over-emphasizing on the political economy that is now going to be the only marker of a 'rich' culture, but also the pitfalls of this new elite culture. His disposing himself towards the mundane existence of the urban landscape denies any unified and totalitarian agency to the elite urban status-quoist culture: "The cheap hotels behind the Taj, with old doors and ancient lifts; the beggars, in a huddle of amputated limbs and beedis, beneath the Gateway of India – from there he went back past the Eros cinema all the way to the Gothic building where classical music recitals took place, and easy-to-ignore exhibitions; it was not far from his college; pavement here was empty but lit." (*Immortals* 119)

There are moments of revelation that not only gives him the impression of the randomness, incalculability and fragility of cultures that try dominate him through what Sartre calls the 'bad faith': moments both in philosophical interpretation and in the everyday encounters with the unexpected everydayness. The narrator writes about this experience of the little boy:

> For each day was part purgatory for Nirmalya, where he constantly came close to the sinking spirits of damnation; as well as a time for discovering randomly, with impatient, almost dismissive, exhilaration, the cultures of the world and of history. He had lots to do: read philosophy, and novels in which men suddenly discovered in pubs that existence was *contingent* and *absurd*, that it had occurred almost for no discernible reason. . . . (*Immortals* 178)

Among other events that attest to his philosophical observation that life is *contingen*t and thus inevitably *momentous* and the same time *absurd* and so *irrational*, there is one very scathingly surprising when he meets a fisherwoman sitting on the steps of a building as he roams about in the neighbourhood of the Taj while his parents are busy attending a party in the hotel. He discovers strong smell of hard drinks coming out of the mouth of the shabby woman selling bananas. This he has never experienced at any parties where women drink but remain without a foul breath. She smells of wine "like a gust – a soft, sour mist". As the woman asks whether he wants to feel her breasts, he moves into insipid, distant and extremely brief conversation regarding the price of bananas, which ends with her answer "Ten rupees." (*Immortals* 119) The episode concludes without any further elaboration or description at the middle of nowhere. The author never gives us any clue of the significance

of the episode other than a sudden astonishment while the readers keep on staggering what the episode means. It leaves the readers with more questions than a convincible answer: Why does the woman seem different to Nirmalya? Is it a class issue? Why does he not feel interested in the sexual content of the conversation and instead shift the conversation to a nonsensical turn? Is it a gender issue or an issue of class entwined with that? The small yet detached events make us think of a serious issue of existence, in which Nirmalya incomprehensibly keeps on working upon his environment by virtue of some pre-ontological knowledge but without having been successfully pinning down his identity. Rather, his identity remains always in interstitial spaces in a condition of flux and it can only be experienced by summing up negative possibilities. He does not either belong to the elites or to the subalterns, although he comes from a rich corporate family and he reads transcendental issues of philosophy yet, at the same time, he is attracted to the out-of-the-box possibilities of existential encounters. He has a strong feeling of this ever unfinishedness and incompleteness of life; the boring circularity of life makes him anxious but makes him feel the compulsion of going along with it too. In his characteristic mundane way Chaudhuri expresses this inescapable paradox of life: "Despite the urge to go to the Himalayas, he also went with his parents to the Taj, and ate chilli cheese toast with them in the Sea Lounge." (*Immortals* 200) As he allows the goatee to grow, "he feels answerable to nobody." (*Immortals* 63) If this is facing one's own self or placing one's 'Being-ahead-of-oneself', in Heideggerian terminology, this is placing oneself towards the Death, in which all anxiety ends, but which itself is an anxious premeditation, and thus, negatively dialectical. His existence can be summarized by how Heidegger himself has put forward the anxiety of paradoxically being in the world,

> The closest closeness which one may have in being towards death as a possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual. The more unveiledly this possibility gets understood, the more purely does the understanding penetrate into it as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all. . . . It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing. . . (*Being and Time* 306)

This liminality of existence gives him a new vision and a new courage and confidence to take his 'own' steps in his life and his 'bristly superiority' is even noticed by the servants: "He seemed on the verge of discovering some new definition; he didn't know what it was, but it set him apart, a bit cruelly, but also providentially; and it turned his latent lack of self-belief into a bristly superiority he carried about with him always." (*Immortals* 194) But, with

all this superiority, he also knows that he can never put himself in the track of an authentic Heideggerian self-assertion, as his own self is not entirely his own, but it always already belongs to the Others, questionably and negatively. The narrator registers, "It was as if – and his heart sensed this, not his mind – he was now to be caught up, if not as a player than as a bystander, in a story of ambition; he wasn't sure whose – perhaps his own, but if not his entirely, then his parents', or the people's, or could even the city's itself?" (*Immortals* 82) The cruelly endless and incomplete story of his being offers him neither a stand of himself nor that of others, neither towards the 'I' in him nor towards the 'They'; it always puts him in the anxiety and the tension that leads him nowhere but suspends him amid an inscrutable and unknowable nothingness.

Nirmalya's mother, Mallika Sengupta, is a homemaker, who wants to gain fame in the Hindustani classical music circle in Bombay. She is also caught between her ambition to become a singer by virtue of her 'own' signature style, which is not getting recognition and the consumerist political economy, among others, which is coming in her way to releasing musical record. To add to her worry, her circumspective attitude towards the views and values of her family members, for whom she cares too much, at times almost denies her from taking a stand towards her own life. Incompleteness always haunts her existence and her desire remains ever unrealized: "But she wondered whether it was accident or destiny or her own hidden desire that had made her what she was. She'd never wanted to be Asha; yet what was it about her own talent that made it meaningless without the happiness she had, and also always made the happiness incomplete?" (*Immortals* 208) Ambiguity remains the touchstone of this actor since her persona has been introduced in the narrative. Her own preferences – likings, interpretations and choices – have always been hinted at but without even a slightest sense of realization as they get too much overshadowed by the unseen yet invincible force of the socio-cultural milieu surrounding her. The tension between the 'I' in her and the 'They' she has to interact with, never gets resolved as they are existentially inseparable, at times even refer to a single entity, in which they are inscrutably lost and found periodically. It is interesting to note how her ambition of becoming a famous classical singer is ever deferred; she takes a number of steps only to cater to her ambition, but as they are inevitably taken along with others, she can never escape the specter of an inauthentic existence, that denies her both a sense of an 'enownment', and (thus) a sense of fulfilment. Ironically and tragically enough, her ambition of launching her maiden album remains ever unfulfilled in spite of lots of actions undertaken towards that project, but that itself remains ever self reflexive and comes back to its origin even after striving a long way and making a long journey. Take for

example, her decision to marry Nirmalya's father, Apurva Sengupta, a youth and a good job prospect. Initially, she is reluctant as she believes that 'not only to be loved' is enough for a marriage, and the narrator calls it 'impractical' while hinting at her family's cultural pride of its own social status of being landed zaminders, but also pointing out at the decline of its financial abilities though such phrases like "a large family run only partly successfully by a widowed mother". (13-14) But, "the tumult of Partition and Independence" does not allow her to anymore stick to her romantic ambition to "love the person she would marry". If this is a failure of realising one's own standing as an individual, then the other failures are bound to come sequentially as outcomes of a chain reaction following being's incessant alignment with the grand public cultures. The narrator writes, "the landscape changed permanently; she wisely accepted his offer, largely because she respected him, but also because she shrewdly, that life with him would allow her to pursue her singing." (14) But, any amount of theorising rationality is not enough to sufficiently address life, and thus, naturally, any amount of her 'wisdom' and 'shrewdness' cannot satisfy any of her ambitions, as it potentially cannot have such strength in it being always already defined by 'the They'. She takes a decision neither in favor of her 'own' romantic ideology of love and marriage nor towards her ambition of becoming a famous singer on her 'own'. Rather, quite appositionally, she sacrifices her 'own self' to the mercy and service of her husband and thus, her 'rationality' fails her – all her wisdom and shrewdness drags her to a circular road, where the more she strives, the more she comes back to where she started and nothing is achieved although a modest amount of journey has been taken up. Her husband now tries his best to get her record launched by the HMV, but, in doing so, he practically hands her ambition over to 'His Master', the owner of the company, Laxmi Ratan Shukla, who is always already made of by a big 'They', the political economy of the culture industry. The more she tries to appease this businessman the more she is distanced from whatever may be called to be her 'own' – her melodic voice and her signature style, unlike and distinct from Lata Mangeshkar, 'the *Zietgiest*' of the then contemporary music industry and from Asha Bhosle, another musical giant, who "She'd never wanted to be. . . . ." and her ambition to sing Bengali songs and *Bhajan*, the areas in which she feels to have had command and liking. (*Immortals* 208) The list of her 'own' choices getting wiped out gets longer as she feels her chances of getting a record released by the HMV are gradually falling prey to her thousand market 'un-friendly' limitations and inabilities – her little rounded Bengali-sounding pronunciations of Hindustani words, her inclination for the *Bhajan* genre, which no more sells and so on. Om Prakash Vrindavan has been made a phenomenon by Laxmi Ratan himself with his subtle manoeuvres in the market,

which has practically misled the public imagination with the consequence that it has mistaken the show-off of Vrindavan as something closer to Kabir's *Bhajan* and to his spiritual personality. Unlike this sellable but under-quality singer, Mallika can never become fit for a kitschy market. She tells her husband as she understands this, "Do you know, I don't think he's ever going to let me cut a record". (*Immortals* 28) She is permanently caught between her husband – the rationale and the guiding spirit of her life – who tries to lead her towards the public exposition of her talent, although not with much success, and her son – the inspiration for her authencity – who wants her to concentrate more on developing her own signature style and to devote herself towards the practice of classical singing without any outward ambition, roughly representing two major warring cultural forces, the consumerist political economy and the self-defensive individualism, which once has fought and is still fighting against the aggression of any tradition trying to fix the meaning of cultural world. The author writes, "She, in the middle of this, could take neither Apurva Sengupta's comfortable faith nor her son's impatience seriously; compromise was necessary to lead a life even as unreal as this on an even keel – compromise, which engendered but also tempered disappointment." (*Immortals* 117) Her life inevitably journeys but towards some unknown, in the course of which, there will be sudden moments of revelation like this, which will indicate its disappointing but inevitable circularity, an imperfect story of compromise and failure.

Sometimes death comes to haunt even the everyday existence as the anxiety of life's circularity and inescapability of failure looms large on and creeps deep into the experiential reality of the actors. Looking at a photograph of the deceased son, Biswajit, of his parents' oldest friends in Bombay, the Neogis, Nirmalya always can feel the gothic presence of the boy almost of his age – a surreal presence, a transcendental being beyond physical perception existing negatively being replaced by a diminutive yet concrete a photograph: "The boy's absence, and the presence of the photograph, haunted the casual cigarette-smoking skein of the Neogis' lives, and always confronted the visitor." (*Immortals* 75) This sometimes leads to his realization of life as a consistently liminal entity, an "other world, on the hallucinatory plane of repetitive, everyday existence" quiet close to death, which always remains a question, an apprehension without finality, yet is assumed to be the final destiny that authenticizes life. Nirmalya sometimes gets maddened by the impending weight of the question of death: "What was death – a permanent blankness? He often wondered what would happen if he fell asleep and didn't wake up again." (*Immortals* 75) He dreams of dying in a war and the moment when he wakes up 'dying', offers him the epiphanic realization of how life is constantly standing at the edge of an apocalypse on its own projected corpse

critically: "he woke up. But that feeling of draining away, where dying had mingled with the dream's fading into daylight – he found that difficult to shrug off. . . ." (*Immortals* 76) For Neogis, the anxiety of life, which springs up from the drive of preserving its authenticity, the unique standing on its own, from being taken over by death, is manifested much more critically than the Senguptas. The Senguptas, other than the teenage boy, more or less is aware that they have had a life, which is governed by others, and they constitute the notion of life by compromising and selling it to others; for example, Mallika, her musical career to the HMV and Apurva, a corporate official, already sold off to his boss. Life is more undulated, complex, ambiguous and painful for the Neogis precisely because they try to characterize their lives with their 'ownmost' colors without complete success and the sense of failure and the anxiety about a dubious existence never give them up. Nayana Neogi knows that she, along with her husband, has consciously chosen the life of an artisan – "a world of handlooms and recyclable items, of ashtrays made out of inadvertently discarded chunks of wood, of junk fashioned into useful everyday objects or bric-a-brac or even art, a world of small-scale creativity and experiment." (*Immortals* 42) This life has an "air of bohemian sophistication intact" but at the same time its "refusal to be awed by this recent spectacle of luxury" forbids it access to the world of wealth and status that a corporate official may have had owned. (*Immortals* 42) While these two families come together to celebrate the Senguptas' movement to a more spacious flat in a better location, the author narrates,

> Prashanta and Nayana Neogi still lived in the rented ground-floor flat with the dusty driveway in Khar. These, the Senguptas' oldest friends in Bombay. But separated from them not only by distance – between the world of Khar and the sea-facing tall buildings of Malabar Hill – but different social worlds they now moved in. In fact, the Neogis didn't 'move' at all; they stayed put, and people visited them – the same filmmakers and artists, both failed and successful. (*Immortals* 74)

In spite of deciding not to go for a materialist existence and to swim against the tides of consumerism and spectacularity, sudden revelations, at times, about at least their partial failure to get themselves completely freed from the mainstream allurements shock their (false) consciousness with a bizarre self-immolating sense of unfulfillment. When Nayana inspects the big three bed-room flat of the Senguptas, she is full of admiration, exactly not of a kind that people usually show as a mark of social courtesy or to cajole the superior to extract favor out of him/her. But, her admission of Mallika's 'luck' could actually attest to her wonder and awe about something she can never imagine to grab yet which her friend has already achieved with 'unthinking pride'. Her adjective 'beautiful' for the large corporate flat

even surpasses her sense of wonder and awe to lay bare the inevitable calling of a consumerist culture,

> By 'beautiful' she didn't mean what she meant when wandering about an art gallery, or assessing her husband's graphic designs; as an adult sometimes pretends to use a word in a simple, clear, limited way for the benefit of a child, she used the word as the upper reaches of the bourgeoisie thoughtlessly used it, as an uncomplicated acknowledgement of well-being. At the same time, the observation was an afterthought she'd almost come to terms with, without too much ruefulness; about the impossibility of ever possessing anything like this lifestyle. (*Immortals* 42)

The conversation between the couple regarding the ambition of Mallika of becoming a famous singer after they come back home almost epiphanically denudes their own sense of failure in achieving some desired existence. When Mrs. Neogi tells her husband that Mrs. Sengupta fosters some special ambition related to her musical career, Mr. Neogi petulantly, and to some extent reproachfully, asked, "'What's the *point* of having this ambition?" or "'Where will it get her?'" Both of the questions are self-evident and self-referential. But, astonishingly, both of them seem to be less concerned with the futility of Mallika's fostering some ambition. Rather, they scathingly open up the frustration and incompleteness of the Neogi's own existence, for finding out the cause of which or for simply explaining which no reason will be sufficient. They may only superficially but not sufficiently be accounted for the death of their son, the apprehension of Mr. Neogi's failed artistic life (which nowhere is mentioned clearly) or Mrs. Neogi's gradual loss of a musical voice because of developing a crack in her vocal cord, or any of the 'facts' related to their life. Rather, this is once again an assertion of the inevitable circularity of the existence, and also of the random irrationality that paves the way for life, "It wasn't clear what had made him say what he had – some grumbling desire to please his wife; contempt for Mallika Sengupta's presumptuousness; a general acrid conviction about fate; or was he in some way being secretly self-referential – speaking of, and to, himself?" (*Immortals* 44)

I started the discussion of the novel, *The Immortals*, with how towards the end of the seventies of the previous century, the cultural signs of the economic liberalizarion in the Indian 'market', which is to be officially announced only just a little over a decade later, has already started to sprout, and how Amit Chaudhuri notices the decay of the bourgeoisie in an old sense of the Nehruvian legacy and some of the older legacies of cultural liberalism. ("The Quiet Rebel") In this novel, I have shown how the selves of Nirmalya Sengupta and his music teacher, Shymaji are continually falling apart and swinging between an interiority,

75

which can be called the intellectual elitism to the extent of a spiritual devotion towards 'own' passion, and a comparatively newer sense of an exteriority, colored by the open-market economy trying to take control over and govern one's unique eccentricity. In the context of the novel, *Freedom Song*, there are other added factors, which make the actors' selves more complicated. While, in this novel, I can notice that the market factor, both in its grand and domestic forms, remains quite active in affecting the beings of the actors like Bhaskar Biswas and Shib Purakayastha, they remain more estranged because of the entry of the Communism in various shades, like idealistic, ideological, and governmental, and also of communalism, in latent and erupted forms. About this latter factor affecting the actors of this novel, the historical locale of which is India in the early Nineties of the previous century, especially the city of Calcutta, portrayed in the backdrop of the communal tension that follows the demolition of the Babri Mosque by the Hindu fundamentalists along with the political far rights, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party at the town of Ayodhya, Chaudhuri elaborates,

> Calcutta, and India itself, were on the brink of change because of communalism, the difference in the political atmosphere from the politics of Nehruvian India, the India of tolerance, liberalism, and also the imminent economic liberalisation of India, which would change ways of life, but was still being resisted by people. So this is India trembling on the brink of change, and Calcutta is sort of arrested, depleted. ("On belonging" 44)

The novel attempts to delineate how both of these factors are gradually trying to overpower, what Chaudhuri calls the "secular unconscious" of the Indian cultural spatio-temporality, and which I have already discussed in the introductory chapter. But, it also shows yet how some existential power has continually kept alive the constant fight to fill up the fundamental and inevitable emptiness of living and being. This novel is another testimony of the being's unfathomable placing in some 'elsewhere', which doubly means what is seen 'here' as life is not a life in authenticity, and the life lying 'there' cannot be authentically located, being always already in untraceable negation. The anxiety of the lives of these two characters portrays Chaudhuri's claim about his first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, "Something is always happening elsewhere, life is happening elsewhere, something's going on." ("On belonging" 45)

Bhaskar Biswas is precariously quivering in all directions beyond the grasp of rational narrativity, some of which, Heideggerian "the They", can be traced in his deep affiliation with ideological Communism and its political counterpart the Communist Party of India (Marxist), in his commitment to both political and aesthetic paradigms of street theatre, in his

financially and attitudinally tuned middle class family, which is very much worried about his marriage prospects due to his political affiliations, and in a contradiction-ridden 'postcolonial' society, which expects of its young male members to take care of the family both financially and physically, and yet takes pride in their migration to the more 'developed' Western world. The analysis of this novel how these 'the They' are continually intertwined with an endless dialectical game, through which the being of Bhaskar is at once addressed and lost, because the 'autheniticity' of it is both colored by the simultaneous (in)voluntary acceptance of these 'They' and in(complete) rejection of them. For example, it has been time and again portrayed how the persona of this Communist activist is in continuous tension with his political choice and the family and the society that too much anxious to get him married as they conceive marriage as the 'logic of life' of a middle-class Bengali grown-up. While Bhaskar's 'own' life is intimately bound to the political 'party', it, at the same time, diminishes his chances of getting a handsome job, on which paradigm he will be 'owned' or 'disowned' by a family and a society, which expect him to take care of his ageing parents, which can partly be performed by his marriage to a girl for shouldering the household chores apart from giving him a sort of social prestige by acquiring for him the significant 'marriageability': "For the story of a working life is also the story of marriage." (*Freedom Song* 131) The occasional talks among his relatives, like the one between two of his aunts, gives an insight how his self is constructed even at his absence beyond the chance of repairing, as the dynamics of differential topicality will never let Bhaskar to 'own' his self: a shortcoming in the society's eyes, if at all overcome, will be replaced by another with the 'ownmost' Bhaskar remains a deferred, if not completely lost, possibility. Khuku and Puti, two aunts, lightly, even with a tone of jovial sarcasm, talk about the future of Bhaskar in one fine morning when he is "marching down the street . . . brandishing newspapers", the prints of the daily Bengali organ of the CPI(M), the Ganashakti, which can be roughly translated as 'the power of the people'. (28) Khuku said to Puti,

> 'What will he do next?' she said.
>
> 'He should get married before he does anything.'
>
> 'I hear they're trying to find a girl.'
>
> 'It won't be easy.'
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . .

. . . 'And tell me, which father will give away his daughter to a boy who has Party connections?' (28)

In response to Khuku's reference to the physical beauty of Bhaskar as the 'Black Beauty', Puti reproaches, "'Leave your "Black Beauty", said Puti. '"Black Beauty" won't help him when his father-in-law finds he sells *Ganashakti*.'" (28-29)

Proving Puti's apprehension to be true, one of Bhaskar's prospective fathers-in-law, Mr. Lahiri, rejects him saying "'But,' said Mr Lahiri, 'if it's not a serious thing – his commitments, I mean – because we liked the boy very much . . .'." His father, Bhola, tries to defend him as if he is placed in the judge's court, "'my son is concerned about things affecting each one of us today . . .'", but Bhaskar is such a criminal who is indefensible, and can only be put to the mercy of the judge in order to be saved, "'But I can say that his political ideals don't affect his work or his family life.'" Finally the rendezvous with Mr. Lahiri does not work, with him 'understanding' something that is not convincingly 'unstandable', "'I quite understand', said Mr. Lahiri.'" (*Freedom Song* 192) Bhaskar's mother is such a "concrete particular" model of a struggling middle-class Bengali family as through whom the macro-economic structure enters the family, and who cannot quite accept him donating five hundred rupees out of the meager amount of his monthly income of only two thousand rupees to the party fund. And, in almost an intimate conspiratorial scheme "she hoped, no, she believed, rather calculatingly, that the marriage would divide Bhaskar's energies and weaken his attachment to politics; . . ." (194)

The search for Bhaskar's self continues throughout the novel as complex negotiations keep on being made and remade, and a very crucial dimension of this existentiality getting unfolded through either the smallest metaphors of life or their relentless compromises with the life in the most quotidian ways. One of such metaphors remains the *Ganashakti*, which points out how through the minutest and unknowably intersecting alleys, life keeps on swinging among various pulls. Bhaskar's belief in distributing this party organ lies in his ideological faith in a camaraderie, which will be aware of the unity and equality among the people, and will eventually thwart the threats of communalism and capitalism as divisive forces. This newspaper is a symbol of his fight for safeguarding his 'authentic' self, which is under immense pressure of getting compromised by such impediments as communalism or nascent capitalism in India, on a grand scale, and as familial obligations, on a more intimate one. This organ, for him, is a mouthpiece of a party, which sends its message through innumerable graffiti scattered around the walls of Calcutta, "C.P.I.(M.) FOR UNITY AND HARMONY AMONG ALL COMMUNITIES", (*Freedom Song* 15) which, in turn, for a

critic, points out the reified character of such a search of an 'authentic' self, and denies any possibility of finding out a positive conclusion of that. Yet, Bhaskar keeps on throwing (as a mode of distribution) the *Ganashakti* to the verandahs of different houses: "There was a special purpose in these throws, for the readers of *Ganashakti* were fellow-travellers of the Communist Party, they believed in its necessity and its vision, and inexplicable bond was formed between the distributor, whose every aim with the bundle seemed to be a salute, and the silent house." (17)

But, the *Ganashakti* is more than a Communist Party organ, and more than the protagonist's attachment to an ideology and a commitment. It is also a passing reference in the form of wastage, and a utilitarian recycling of something apparently counted as a waste. Bhaskar finally gets married to a girl, called Sandhya, who probably marries him because of her assumed less prospects as a bride being dark, or may be, because of some reason that her husband would never be able to find out being a source of eternal mystery and amazement. And, this is how Chaudhuri, in a very microscopic way of catching a domestic life of a couple, registers the anxiety, ambiguity, tension, negotiation, and compromise of life through the symbol called the '*Ganashakti*':

> Early in the morning, when it was not quite light, she sometimes sensed him going out; it was inexplicable; she sighed; and then once or twice she saw him return with a pile of newspapers, the *Ganashakti*. It was a paper she'd never read; but Bhaskar insisted to her, with what seemed to her an excessive and uncomfortable advocacy, that it contained all the real and important news and all that was really worth reading. She didn't believe him; for *Ganashakti* was a paper that no one she knew read; it was, as far as she knew, used to make cartons and containers in the market; and its pages were swept away in lanes and alleys. These early morning excursions of his became indistinguishable to her sometimes from the intense dreams she had before waking. (*Freedom Song* 223)

If for Bhaskar the newspaper contains the 'real news', for his wife it does not exist in reality at all – its importance in her life is to the extent of its being 'indistinguishable from intense dreams'. For some of his relatives and their friends, the *Ganashakti*, is matter of unserious talks only with reference to Bhaskar's marriageability in their daily course of eating sweet oranges, a bit more expensive than the average standards of Calcutta with its reputation as one of the cheapest metros of the country in popular imagination. Although these relatives cannot bear the communist government's policy of minority 'appeasement', and the anti-capitalist attitude, they have a problem in the oranges being a bit more

expensive. However, they do not mind if those 'sugary' oranges come from Park Circus, a place 'infested' by Muslims. Two of these old ladies, Mini and Khuku, converse the following, in a different place in the novel:

> 'I mean you'll never be able to appease them,' said Mini.
>
> What if one mosque had gone – for hundred of temples had been destroyed before. She could not understand what the fuss was about.
>
> . . . .
> . . . .
> . . . .
>
> Promises, always promises. No sooner had the mosque gone down than the government had promised that it would be built again.
>
> 'Who'll rebuild those temples?' she asked.
>
> 'That's right,' said Khuku. 'No one talks about them.' (*Freedom Song* 104-105)

While they take pledges to vote against the present Communist government to secure a glorious Hindu past, and take vows to vote for the BJP, which, instead of appeasing Muslims, has just vandalized the Babri Mosque, and is gaining popularity among them: "'BJP,' said Khuku, her eyes larger than usual. 'I might even vote for the BJP. Why not?'" (*Freedom Song* 67) Among these currents and cross-currents of varied discourses the Ganashakti keeps on getting circulated, getting recycled as cartons, getting merged with the 'sugary' but a little expensive oranges bought from Park Circus:

> 'Do you know what Puti told me?' Khuku separated the portions of orange, which came off with white threads hanging by their sides like bits of cobweb. Absent-mindedly she picked off some of the threads with the finger and put a piece in her mouth. 'Bhaskar sells *Ganashakti* in the morning. Mmm, it's like sugar.' She picked up another piece and sprinkled sweet white powder upon it. 'The sweeter the better,' she said. (31)

While many of his intimate people are condemning the Communist government, expressing contempt for the party organ, many of whom only mythologize it according to some popular imagination, Bhaskar keeps alive his conviction, and walks on the path of ideology and politics he believes in. It continues even after his marriage, frustrating his mother's 'hope' or almost 'belief' in her assumed distance from the party after he is married. The *Ganashakti* is his death to many of 'the They' he is negotiating with; again it is the symbol of his life, which is however shrouded by an ideology, not far from a 'false consciousness' as every ideology is. He keeps on fighting for his existence, which is now

under immense stress after his marriage, at the time of a communal rife, at a milieu when queer irrationality gathers support for the divisive forces, at a time when "There was contradictory rumour in circulation these days that the 'higher-ups' in the Party had, in secret conferences, been forced to reconsider their attitude to liberalization and that at the source of this change was the highest authority himself; reluctantly they began thinking about China on the one hand and Russia on the other." (*Freedom Song* 182) He is committed to his own self and to the selves of his innumerable comrades, "'who get so involved they don't do anything else for the rest of their lives. Many. Two boys, Anshuman Biswas and Partho Guha – good students at school – have even left their jobs.'" (31) While his relatives keep on hoping for a 'transformation' in Bhaskar,

> They waited. But married life and responsibilities seemed to leave Bhaskar unchanged. He was still selling *Ganashakti*; and, even now, he would, vociferously if necessary, and for as long as he could, marshaling an array of facts and arguments, criticize the new and sinister global order, the present government that was governing shamelessly from the centre, illegal bargains between nations and business houses, and every relative, cousin, or uncle who happened to disagree with him. (226)

If the *Ganashakti* seems to be a 'grander' symbol of existential ambivalence and an excess due to its connection with greater political ideology and activism, Chaudhuri's artistic sensibility has even more minute metaphors, like mosquito. The way, in this novel, the author has used this metaphor-cum-imagery, it reveals how life goes on and gets affected not only by the grander schema of socio-political-national discourses but also by tiny scraps of life; life does not always honks but silently passes by with its piecemeal grudges and hissings. At least two different contexts in which mosquitos have been invoked in this novel show Chaudhuri's success in seeing through and delineating life's unknowable location, beyond the received boundaries or categories of the life-world. The first of them is the instance when a 'meeting' of the Party has just ended, and the author describes how mosquitoes "have left tiny red pustulations; all through the talk there had been the sound of agitating slapping. And, in the poster, Lenin's eyes, above his neat beard and below his bald head, shone humorously." (*Freedom Song* 57) This is not simply, as I conceive of it, the genre-breaking tendency in Chaudhuri, which is almost getting a stereotype about him – the inter-penetration of the serious and the mundane; but, something more, and that is how mosquitoes are disrupting the grandeur of revered political-historical world affairs, and are clearing a space for a chaotic human existence beneath the apparent veils of civilization. How can life forget the mosquito bites even if it is forcefully placed within the humdrum of grand activisms and

theorizations? Mosquitoes make us recall that life is inaccessibly and invisibly escaping all such reifications, and is residing elsewhere like a permanent fugitive. There is another dimension to it, and that is, a decay and a melancholic awareness of 'a writer of the dereliction', who is witnessing the fall of a great ideology, and his achieved distance from that although with some sympathy, has let him enter mosquitoes in a Communist meeting. He is seeing life so closely because he can see life from so far, in an 'open' dialectical tension of myopia and hyperopia.

A second mention of mosquitoes is employed in an even more complex context, in which Khuku, who remains ever in irritation, because of old age, and also because of either an unknown or no reason, takes, after a sudden waking up from sleep, the *azaan* as the humming of a mosquito: "It grew louder, and then faded, and then grew louder again; its notes note swelled faintly and then diminished, just as when a mosquito hovers above one in indecision." (*Freedom Song* 158) First of all, for Chaudhuri life resides in the little insignificant details of it; and, so, if I can take mosquito as a prototype of life, then like mosquito, it is everywhere, across the Communist meeting, and the household of a newly initiated Hindu right supporter, who pledges to cast her vote for the BJP. The significance of life does not lie in the categories we have created to understand it, but across all such categorizations, and also beyond them. Secondly, life has been linearly philosophized like the waves, in accordance of historical ebbs and flows of events, one passing after another, following one another, with determinable births and deaths. But, here the word 'indecision' gives a fundamental turn to the theorizing screw of life, and its histories, economics, philosophies and sciences, most of which are written by the strategic rationality, and by undermining the irrational indecisiveness of such microscopic moments, at which the humming of a mosquito may seem to be irritating *azaan* to an old Hindu lady, whose sleep has been disturbed by such a noise for several times now. This miniscule randomness and ordinariness is beyond rational theorization, and it fills the spatio-temporality with incomprehensible bits and pieces that life is made on.

This promiscuousness of existence has nothing to do with disciplinary '(im)morality', rather it exceeds it to the point of being 'amoral' (in contrast to both 'moral' and 'immoral'), free of judgments, and thus experientially freer. About these ladies, Chaudhuri comments,

> I'm dealing with old age and vivid characters who are now old and who are now at a
> certain point in their lives, and yet are nonetheless alive, with their slightly outrageous
> views about Muslims. It's a part of their condition of being alive, their liveliness. And
> because I think there's something slightly amoral about elderly women, and that's

why at this time of great political upheaval in the background, it's these two women who say the most provocative and outrageous things to each other. ("On Belonging" 50)

If such 'amorality' is the part of their lives, the fiction that portrays them are also bound to be amoral, which actually would point to such an opening, a neutrality, wherefrom new forms of literatures and aesthetics would emerge. Saikat Majumdar thus justifiably writes about such characters,

Let such characters have a play, Chaudhuri seems to be saying, within the amoral space of art, and narratorial sympathy or proximity to such characters need not translate into moral approval of such opinions or attitudes. The inclusion of such characters on a plane of narratorial sympathy thus on one hand, becomes a plea of the essential amorality of art, and on the other, creates the possibility that in the long run, such free play of real but irresponsible attitudes may actually serve the moral and political function of creating an awareness of their wide prevalence, and to what extent we can all be guilty, in varying degrees, of the complacent possession of the privileges of the empowered – far more than may be possible by what Chaudhuri calls the "liberal humanist verities" of the national allegories. ("Of that Time" 29-30)

The following section will explore in details the existential ambiguity of Shib Purakayastha, the husband of Khuku, who is in charge of reviving a now "sick company", called 'Little's', "an old company, once reputable and British owned", which produces sweets, chocolates, toffees and lozenges, which were once "available in every shop in Calcutta." (*Freedom Song* 23) His 'authentic' self, as he supposes, lies in his success in making the company a profit-making one once again, whereas the Communist politics, which is giving so much meaning to Bhaskar's life, in the contrary, is bringing anxiety in Shib's commitment to his project. But, that is one part of the story; the other part lies in the managers' unstable presences, because of their ambitions to move up to better positions and jobs, colored by the same capitalist ventures, of which the factory itself is a product. The company is also an example of the alienation of its different parts from the 'whole' that has once been conceived as a complete company – the distribution unit is now decentralized and has now got independence from the production unit – to such an extent that whereas "Its loyal machines still produced, poignantly, myriads of perfectly shaped toffees, but that organ of the company that was responsible for distribution had for long been lying numb and dysfunctional, so that the toffees never quite reached the retailer's shelves." (23)

Whereas Shib's self is supposed to lie in the project of revival of this company, one can never miss the point that, like Bhaskar's obsession with the Communist politics, it is also a reified existence that gives this official his sense of belonging in the professional world. If I think of the Heideggerian "paradoxical logic of a '*Dardichtung*'", a combination of *Darstellung*, or presentation, and *Dichtung*, or withdrawal, his sense of 'authenticity' in his professional duty is only the first level of such paradox. (Cojanu 64) In a more 'palpable' reality, what Adorno calls the "second nature" in a more Marxist framework of thinking, this paradox is heightened by 'the They', in forms of the department of the West Bengal Government, a government led by the C.P.I.(M.), which at once tries to revive it, and of the dysfunctionality, inefficiency, and disinterestedness of the department that do not really allow it to get revived; in the forms of 'trade unions', which have been too active to 'protect' their 'interests' to the extent of laziness, and negligence of duties; and, also in the form of an effervescent bureaucratic and administrative structures of a government, which take birth in the imperial project of governmentality, which the postcolonial space has inherited. (Qtd. in Buck-Morss 45) Even before the Communist government is formed, there have been labor problems in the factory,

> [B]ut ever since the Communist Party came to power, the atmosphere had changed to a benign, co-operative inactivity, with a cheerful trade unionism replacing the tensions of the past . . . the whole thing becoming a relaxed, ungrudging family affair. Now it was like a hostel; cups of tea travelled from room to room, and bearers ran back and forth in the verandas. There was a perpetual air of murmuring intrigue, the only sign of life, until the doors and windows were shut in the evening. (*Freedom Song* 24-25)

The turmoil of Shib with his professional assignment of reviving the company gets deeply existential character, as it seems that there is no external threat, against which he has to fight for success, or whom he has to be fearful about. Because, the employees in the company are simple and good-hearted, they treat him with "a bit of extra respect"; although he is a mere adviser, they want him to put the company back on the rails, and even the Managing Director, Mr Sengupta openly confesses as he meets him for the first time, "'I've heard so much about you – we are very fortunate, very fortunate. We need your skills, sir." (*Freedom Song* 26) Mr. Seal, in the "Industrial Reconstruction Department", who is instrumental in placing him as an adviser for the company, has had a deep faith in him: "'If anyone can, you can.'" (109) His professional ambition of reviving the now state-owned company is initially Mr. Seal's, but somehow which gradually covers up his own professional

self – he owns the ambition as his own. He realizes that even Mr. Seal, who wants to dispel the ""negative attitude" at the outset'" of letting the company die in its own course, "could not back up his words." (110) He knows that like the ambition, once fostered by 'the They', for example, the official like Mr. Seal in the government department, the battle for this 'revival' game cannot be won on his own. But, both the ambition and the fight have somehow now become his own. And, the deep anxiety creeps in him as it gradually reveals the truth that he is actually going to lose a battle, which has never been his own, but which he has ever thought to be so. This anxiety keeps on lingering for two reasons, apparently. The first one lies in the interiority of his professional self, which cannot allow him to do what all Managing Directors have done to this company: they all "used this company as a kind of airport lounge, from where they went on to somewhere else, never to be seen again." (27) His fight is against his own search for a professional self, the location of which he does not know, unlike all Managing Directors. The exterior reason is that even when he wants to go away sensing an evitable loss, Mr. Seal will not let him go, "Mr. Purakayastha, be patient with us", he would rather request, which he always feels like an endless "waiting for an invitation to set things right." (110)

With all these incomplete life-stories at its heart, the novel also marches towards some limitless deferral of human ambitions and actions, as if in search of a divinity, which it will never find out; because, the earliest possibilities to find such a divinity is death, which Heidegger calls the self's "ownmost possibility." (Qtd. in Wrathall, 58) It is true what one of Bhaskar's cousins sadly pronounces about the paradox of existence, "'But those who see a god invariably die.'" (*Freedom Song* 74) As, now, the winter is going away as the novel approaches the hot, humid, sultry summer days, all stories are coming to an end, only to start 'anew', with the inevitable enigma of life, and its limitless circularity. But, for the time being, the revolution of Bhaskar, the dream of golden Hindu past of Khuku and Mini, and the ambition of Shib put to rest as Chaudhuri draws an unmatchable imagery out of a very mundane routine activity of life, "And the large damp white quilt that had been taken out from a cupboard in the second storey in Vidyasagar Road every November was now, as it grew warmer, folded and laid to rest on the shelf it stayed on in darkness for the rest of the year." (182) And, the novel, along with all its shadowy actors, remains placed in the unknowable excess spatio-temprality that lies between the 'home' and 'not home', like what the writer comments about Mini and the buildings of the school, in which she teaches, and an unknown baby she meets suddenly in the lap of its half-acquainted mother, "This, these buildings, was home and not home; the country she'd left behind in her youth was home and

not home; where you went later was not home either; the baby, though it did not know it, must end up making a journey, must end up somewhere else." (150)

As we follow the fictional accounts of Chaudhuri, we increasingly become aware of the self-referential nature of his actors. Almost all of them remain split and bound in an inescapable dialectical circularity residing in some unknown interstitial space between normative expectations and contingent angularity, with which they incessantly deal with. The normative expectations, which want these actors to be(come) somebody in a prescribed way or in a desired manner, attempt to overshadow, by a complicated power game, the practical considerations of being's being there in the world based on the principle of action. Although these expectations do not wish to consider the unexpected contingencies of life, which is purely contextual, they, at the same time, cannot fully wish them away as well. In fact, normativity itself is the outcome of these contingencies, somehow rationally yet falsely and crudely, theorized and standardized, in a *longue durée*. Thus, normativity is always already made by the spectrality of the contingency. The angularity of the contingent, the contextual, the random and the momentous are attested by the normativity's denial of these agencies of the being. The normative is always dependent on the contingent for its own existence and the vice-versa. The impossible possibility of ever incompleteness of these binaries, which themselves are not unified and thus fragile being always dependent upon one another, the 'situatedness' of the being of these actors remains more nuanced, more complex and more intraceable than it apparently seems to be. It is not the 'presence' that can adequately define the existence as the being is always engaged actively with binaries, which may be taken for granted to be unified units for the ease of rational investigations, but, which are not existentially dyadic in practical considerations. Rather, it is the 'absences' in both the normative and the contingent, and the actors' inscrutable relationships with both of these grand structures, can give a hint of how these relationships work, and how out of inadequacies, identities are formed. Chaudhuri's actors are always already hung up amid nothingness, which both connects and disjoins Heidegger's *Dasein*. Chaudhuri's being-in-the-world in-utter-ably resides in the world of hyphens between Heidegger's authenticity and inauthenticity, both of which remain indispensably placed within each other, and thus remain singularly non-existent. It is the elsewhere's (neither here nor there) pull that can only inadequately define the actors bound in the game of dialectical circularity, which is a thesis of their absence. What Chaudhuri writes about with reference to the Yeats' 'image' in the poem 'Byzantium' in *The Immortals*, which is a meta-narrative of modern urban world in the guise of the space called Byzantium, is dimly true about his own creations:

It didn't matter that you couldn't put a signature to that 'image'. Elsewhere, Yeats had called those images 'Presences . . . self-born mockers of man's enterprise' . . . . it referred to those immemorial residues of culture that couldn't be explained or circumscribed by authorship. It was as if they'd come from nowhere, as life and the planets had; yet they were separate from Nature . . . it was, paradoxically, 'self-born'. (*Immortals* 196-197)

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i.   It is to be understood that although I use 'dynamics to angularity' time and again for commenting upon Chaudhuri's narratival positioning, it does not necessarily mean that the term essentializes this location with a sense of fixity. Rather, the term, like all criticisms, has its own limitations because of being a part of the symbolic order called language, which is largely governed by a rational binarism, which is precisely what Chaudhuri wishes to escape in taking a stand as a writer of Indian fiction (but not necessarily and significantly, "a writer of Indian fiction in English").

ii.   Wrathall (2006) warns the readers about the potential threat that the translation of *Bifindlichkeit* as 'state-of-mind' bears. The ambiguity in German verb *bifinden* is such as that it may both point towards something to be found, and also towards finding someone's self into something. Whereas the term 'state-of-mind' has once again a tendency to fall back to the Cartesian 'psychologism', Wrathall suggests an alternative translation of that in the form of 'disposedness', which can, to a great extent, avoid such a danger and also can retain the rich ambiguity in the original German word. (121-122)

Chapter 3

A Theatre Called Spectacle:

Phantasmagorical Urban Space and *Flâneur's* Gaze in

A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A New World

I

Amit Chaudhuri's fictional narratives can be historically located at a major juncture of the Indian historiography, when gradually the Nehruvian socialist statism was giving way to a regime of neo-liberal capitalism. This was probably the single-most significant development in the Indian history after the Emergency, which is often cited as an epitome of the failure of India to materialize and protect its officially sovereign and democratic nature as a state: the dream of the generation now famously called the 'Midnight's Children', the first Indian generation of full-fledged citizens. Ranajit Guha has called the disillusionment of this generation as 'a disillusionment of hope' that was inscribed on "their nationhood with its promise already constituted for them . . . a promise that relied on the nation-state for its fulfillment". (xii) He has sagaciously summed up the disillusionment of two subsequent generations in the following paragraph,

> The young born, like Saleem Sinai, "handcuffed to history," were eager to break away from what that "history" meant for them as the legacy of a past made up of what they regarded as the utopian dreams, hollow promises, and unprincipled behavior of their elders. Since the latter had defined their identity as Indians precisely in terms of such utopias, promises, and politics and had imbibed the concomitant values for moral and spiritual sustenance during the long night of the British rule, they found themselves, the morning after, on the wrong side of an ontological divide. The doubt voiced so raucously by the youth echoed the ensuing debate as the self-doubt of those under interrogation. (xiii)

No sooner these generations failed neither to realize nor to break away from the paramount 'promise' of the nationhood, while they were still calling the 'age to account' for its failure in a self-reflexive criticality, than another utopia in the name of 'liberalization' was introduced primarily in the Indian economy to add to the already existing heap of heartbreaks in the historical, political and cultural spheres. Chaudhuri's novels, including *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A New World*, are temporally placed at this juncture, when the gradual domination of capital at the market has been resulting in disarray, especially among the upper and lower middle classes of the country, who are *aporiacally* entangled with the contradictory lines of conventional cultural value systems and the newly emerging commodity culture challenging the aesthetics of a socialist-conservative regime. Rather, new forms of political and cultural practices, like regionalism and communalism, for example, are emerging that are chiefly principled on the policy of immediate political profitability almost in a similar spirit of the capital although not strictly related to it by a sense of causality;

rather, in many cases, contradictorily by the demand of contingency. Amit Chaudhuri feels that both of these segments, one more 'progressive', like the capital and the other a bit more ambivalent in its faith in progress, which however publicly resist but does not dare to reject the capitalist globalization altogether, like the communitarian political consolidations, are attempting to make the urban space and the middle classes homogeneous entities, but without complete success. This is what makes an Indian city like Calcutta finding itself amidst a flux of change with a sense of 'depletion'. Chaudhuri notes,

> Calcutta, and India itself, were on the brink of change because of communalism, the difference in the political atmosphere from the politics of Nehruvian India, the India of tolerance, liberalism, and also the imminent economic liberalisation of India, which would change ways of life, but was still being resisted by people. So this is India trembling on the brink of change, and Calcutta is sort of arrested, depleted. ("On belonging" 44)

This sense of depletion is expressed by the author elsewhere also, where his view disseminates altogether a different connotation of the loss incurred by the liberalization of Indian economy. Calcutta, which is taking time to 'liberate' itself from the clutches of a socialist and populist welfare economy, which is often seen as a symptom of stagnation in the path of progress, is started to be abandoned since the nineties of the preceding century by comparatively more accomplished achievers of success. He says,

> I was aware of the sort of moribund air to the city, and an air of being abandoned. The culture had kind of been hollowed out by a lack of job opportunities, a negative environment and by people leaving for other parts of India and other parts of the world. And by the 90s you could sense that something was missing in the city." ("An Interview")

Here, the writer seems to have been saddened by the city's failure in tuning itself to the neo-liberal capitalist activism. But, he could neither be happy if the city had totally been overpowered by the same capital and the concomitant forces like kitschy elitism of the riches and bureaucratic machineries. This is why he is not very inclined to have likings for either Bombay, where one has to "deal with the affectations and the stupidity of the rich" or Delhi, which "has its arid landscape of networkers and schmoozers." Yet, Calcutta, which was far from welcoming the capitalist neo-liberalism, let alone being completely homogenized by it, could not but fall into an all-pervasive cultural degeneration, which has been variously manifested by the author through expressions like "political vibrancy in a city which has lost its way", a city that "seemed half aware of its great history", "the loss of the cultural core"

and so on. ("An Interview") In an interview with Colin Renton on writing his non-fiction *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* in the September of 2013, Chaudhuri says that he apprehended that he could not be able to write a "celebratory book about the new India" because he always thinks that he has always been an outsider in accepting the Indian capitalist boom that would be vociferous in sublating the little cultural differences into a homogeneous economic order to be called a great Indian metropolis and yet it would not be able to bridge the gap between the 'have's' and the 'have not's'. He opines,

> Right now, India is not in such a good place. The Indian boom was too complacent and self serving and things which needed to have been done to decrease the gap between people who were directly benefiting from the boom and people who weren't, in terms of healthcare and education, weren't done. People thought that they would happen automatically, that the more opportunities increased for wealth, somehow opportunities would be created for the less wealthy. And at a certain point in time, people just thought that any kind of spending among the rich was a form of social service and that it would reach the poor in the end. But that's not the way it happened. ("An Interview")

The global capital has a little difference with the ideas of the Reason or the abstract Human or the Universalist History as offshoots of the Renaissance Enlightenment philosophical thinking, which prescribes these imaginary tonics to overcome the diseases of unjust differences sprawled out at a given period of human history to hinder the progress of it. But, it being philosophically so totalitarian and thus fragile, that, in the long run, it could not hold itself from proliferating differences within itself. Dipesh Chakrabarty puts the inherent contradictory character of global capital, which seems utopian in its promise in delivering justness and equality, but actually turns out to be the reason of creating other sets of injustice and inequality, in the following words:

> There are various ways of thinking about the fact that global capitalism exhibits some common characteristics, even though every instance of capitalist development has a unique history. One can, for one, see these differences among histories as invariably overcome by capital in the long run. The thesis of uneven development, on the other hand, sees these differences as negotiated and contained — though not always overcome — *within* the structure of capital. And third, one can visualize capital itself

as producing and proliferating differences. Historicism is present in all of these different modes of thought. (47)

Chaudhuri's narratives seem to be the active agents of resistance to the sublation of differences, which he calls paradoxes, into any single force of modernity. He is vehemently opposed to the idea of any single systemic order of modern life-craft overtaking it in its entirety. Rather, he is on the side of the paradoxes inherent in the notion of modernity. As the writer opines, in an interview given to Thomas Storey, that to him "encountering the modern and to encountering modernity itself as a paradoxical thing – which never seems to have been young". Storey while commenting upon this interaction writes,

> Chaudhuri described the paradox of the modern city, that it accumulates history yet is prototypically modern, as he stated, 'the paradoxical confluence of the new and the aged (in Calcutta), offers a peculiar definition of the contemporary. Calcutta defines newness for me'. However this particular perception of the city shifts with time and Chaudhuri found that 'the conflation of Calcutta with life and life with urban experience – that moment has passed. What does exist of that sense of estrangement of a city? Globalisation has eroded that.' In Ted Hodgkinson's words, this 'sedimentary quality of the city', which layers history like a palimpsest, is found in . . . Chaudhuri's rumination on Calcutta. . . ("Modernity's Paradox")

As an academician as well as a littérateur Chaudhuri is acutely aware of the effect of a ubiquitous spectacularization of the capitalist market economy in the production of postcolonial Indian English literature, which has been fetishized in the forms of national allegories, in the line of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which has made the national historiography of post-independence India the National Literature of India, which, in turn, is marked by the mythical and fantabulous, reinstating the older oriental stereotypes about Indian culture. This may be emphatically summed up by Saikat Majumdar's term "Fetishizing the Fantastic" (*Prose* 135). In an attempt to resist this tendency, Chaudhuri has foregrounded an Indian life, which is of the middle and lower middle classes and of their quotidian history at a microscopic level of domesticity, which Majumdar calls "the Materiality of the Mundane" (135) or "Dallying with Dailiness" (147). Although whether these terms are on the way of making another fetishized category of the aesthetics of the quotidian in the postcolonial Indian English fiction is debatable, Majumdar's argument regarding Chaudhuri's pre-occupation with the everyday life of Indian commoners throws light on how it acts as a resistance to a one-sided domination of the national allegory: "The construction of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the familiar and the grand, is thus to an

extent a matter of cultural valorization. Familiarity, especially when bred in domestic and daily spaces, is seen as a detractor of grandeur as bestowed by cultural canons." ("Dallying" 457)

Coincidentally, the inaugural version of *A Strange and Sublime Address*, the first novel of Chaudhuri, was published in the year 1991, the year the economic liberalization was introduced in the Indian market, and the capital was seen dominating all strata of Indian cultural life. By the late nineties, Chaudhuri opines, 'the Thatcherite legacy' has already permeated the English culture, which is "becoming increasingly homogenised" and the author returned to India in search of making 'discoveries' about the urban life, which he felt declining in terms of aestheticism and cultural elitism but still was not completely overtaken by a capitalist bourgeoisie; he hoped to see the paradoxes at work in the urban modern cultural scenario in India, particular in Calcutta. ("Amit Chaudhuri") By the time his fourth novel *The Immortals* was published in 2009, he has noticed a certain kind of ubiquity practiced by the publishing houses, which is less inclined in promoting a text that is "different and not driven by the same ideas that the mainstream publishers have." Chaudhuri's following comment on the contemporary scene of publication business characterizes not only his own position as a writer but also hints at his fictional narratives being in a love-hate relationship with the 'politics of visibility': "I realise I have to make a certain degree of peace with the mainstream not only to make a living but to exist. But also that I can do it on my own terms because there are enough people who will value you for what you do and therefore to you give you some visibility, and in the free market world visibility is all." ("Amit Chaudhuri") His narratives gasp under an immense burden of 'existential gloominess' due to their encounter with "the featureless screen Heidegger called "the worldhood of the world" (*die Weltlichkeit der Welt*), the imperceptible, ever-present blankness against which the stories take place", which is, in this particular context, the capitalist market and a text's compulsion for finding out forms of endless spectacles, in which it often fails and yet searches for newer variations for its sustenance. (Almond 170) Almond while analyzing the stories of *Real Time* and *A Strange and Sublime Address* notes that Chaudhuri's narratives want to escape from a particular kind of absolutist discourse by scattering their ontological self but a sense of frustration and despondence is generated when they seek to take refuge to another kind of an alternative absolutism, which is theoretically impossible and structurally unknown in a postcolonial universe. He traces 'a sadness' that haunts these narratives: "a sadness not merely at the commodification or reification of culture (and the possibility that our incommensurability may have no recognition outside it) but also a peculiarly postcolonial

sense of the forlorn because of the unavailability of a single, solid identity or tradition to counteract its effect." (170) They are broken under the pressure of a contemporaneity, which is increasingly getting homogenized by the capitalist forces, and yet mourn this fragmentariness under the illusion of some forlorn and unknowable metanarrative. Although we assume in a 'novel' by Chaudhuri a structurally unified entity, each of his novels is an imaginary summation of innumerable broken narratives that cannot hold this structure, rather denies it its existence. *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A New World* are thus not novels, they are meta-novels, telling stories of a story, a negation of its own narratival agency: "the story would never be a satisfying one, because the writer, like Sandeep, would be too caught up in jotting down the irrelevances and digressions that make up lives, and the life of a city, rather than a good story – till the reader would shout 'Come to the point!' – and there would be no point, . . . paradoxically, with many memories and possibilities. The 'real' story, with its beginning, middle and conclusion, would never be told, because it did not exist." (67-68) This (non)story would be as fragile as any grand and spectacular narrative would have a thousands of other specters of it, forlorn yet revolting against it demanding for a space for accommodation.

II

The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation. (12)

Guy Debord

Since the inception of high capitalist modernity in the West, the urban space has been turned into a theatre of spectacles, a space of representations, in which the citizens are allured by and dazzled with the radiance of a range of systematically arranged and decorated commodities, which, in turn, convert them into the denizens of a dream-like reality. The more the city gets 'represented' the more it marches towards an aesthetic of 'super-reality' or 'surreality' where the truth-value is lost to the extent that it becomes an accumulation of the sellable objects, which have only exchange value, and which form the core of an urban space displacing its inhabitants. They are reduced to the role of intrigued passive onlookers. It's the commodity, the radiant spectacle, which dominates the functions and thought-processes of a city dweller, and thus deploys him to an objective position. Guy Debord situates the tendency to spectacularize the urban space within the historiography of the Western philosophical thought. He opines that conventionally the Western philosophy prioritized 'seeing' as the

basis of believing because of its inherent 'weakness' towards 'technical rationality', which Derrida terms as 'logocentricism' (as he pointed out the weakness of this same philosophical tradition's faith in 'scripture' over 'orality' among others). Debord writes,

> The spectacle is heir to all the weakness of the project of Western philosophy, which was an attempt to understand activity by means of the categories of vision. Indeed the spectacle reposes on an incessant deployment of the very technical rationality to which that philosophical tradition gave rise. So far from realizing philosophy, the spectacle philosophizes reality, and turns the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation. (17)

By the turn of the 19th century, the Western cities, in their ambition to become world-cities, started competing for achieving more 'spectacularity' by means of capital gathering, commodity production and reorientation of the old cityscapes. From London to Paris, Berlin to Vienna, skyscrapers were built to accommodate corporate houses and government offices. Old and small business houses were broken down to give space to the city-center, the centre for capital accumulation and circulation. The poor, the idle, the immigrant, the prostitute, the rag-picker – everybody with a potential to dampen the spirit of speed, progress, governance, richness and dignity of a high capitalist world-order — was eradicated from the core of the cityscape and shoved out to the marginal localities of a city. The modernization process resulted chiefly in the 'reification' or 'thingification' of the entire urban existence and this all-pervasive mechanical objectification of the centers of the modern civilization arrived at the cost of all that is 'old-fashioned' and thus has lost its vigor to appeal to the capitalist market economy, which Benjamin calls the "trash of history".

This objective domination of the cityscape inevitably goes through a dialectical process that turns the subjects of the city into inanimate things – the producers become salaried workers and the dwellers become mere consumers, and paradoxically, the objects of the urban space secure the central space as the subjects of the city, by virtue of their power to dictate thoughts and actions of the consumers acquired through a highly technical and technological process of maneuvering (like advertisements in media). Thus, a dialectical condition is inevitable and unavoidable in a spectacular society or a space so dominated by commodity fetishism. Marx, in his *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1867), had already pointed out this dialectical structure of industrial commodity in the mould of a theological allegory. The commodity fetishism, too, like religion "alienates actual human beings from their own nature as free producers, the commodity at the same time assumes human qualities. . . . In this sense, commodities are both nature and culture, both economic

and symbolic forms, or better, are the concrete appearances of the intersection of these dialectical poles." (Pensky 183) Although Marx had grasped the theological complexity of the stature of the commodity both inherited and acquired through a historical process of production, for Benjamin, the process of consumption becomes more fascinating in his way of exploring a more delusional aspect, the phantasmagorical nature, of it as expressed through the dialectics of a theological existence and an afterlife, which may both be blessed or condemned. Pensky observes with his characteristic critical sagacity,

> In their concentration, and reversal, of the dialectical poles of subjectivity and objectivity, commodities express *both* the hellish *and* the utopian sides of human consciousness: the transmutation of humans into objects can also be figured as the dream of a reunion with an alienated nature; the transmutation of objects into subjects recalls the religious vision of a nature endowed once again with the ability to signify. As ciphers of equivalence, "meaningful" only in the language of exchange value, commodities are expressions of the theological vision of meaningless nature, or Hell. But as markers for a continuum of unfulfilled utopian expectation, commodities also point simultaneously back toward a paradisiacal pre-history and forward toward a revolutionary interruption of the continuum that perpetuates them. (184)

Guy Debord observing this delusional aspect of the commodity fetishism puts forward his messianic aphorism, "It [the spectacle] is not something *added* to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality." (13) He points out the ambiguous nature inherent in the phenomenon of spectacle that it is at the same time the "omnipresent celebration of a choice *already made* in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice." (13) If the spectacle serves both as the sign of the cumulative wish of a consumerist society intrigued by the process of repetitive production and the end-product or the outcome of that wish, it at the same time can neither embody the wish nor its fulfillment in its totality. Inevitably the relationship between the spectacle and its consumer is essentially that of a 'reciprocal alienation' in which both of the parties obliterate yet sustain each other. This interplay between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' elements of the society may put a stop to all altruistic assumptions regarding the value of 'reality' and 'truth': "In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood."(14) Spectacle is a means by which a thoroughgoing industrialized society tries to affirm its dreams, but they are shattered with the inevitability and immediacy of the fact that the affirmation is essentially the negation of dreams. Debord writes,

Understood on its own terms, the spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance. But any critique capable of apprehending the spectacle's essential character must expose it as a visible negation of life and as a negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself. (14)

Thus, although a spectacle triumphantly announces the arrival of a marketplace full of countless commodities at the service of the 'material' life of the citizens, it can actually never satisfy the deep-rooted metaphysical or existential desire, a modern's search for 'truth/actuality/reality', which remains inexpressible and inaccessible. Debord observes, "The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear." (15) The spectacle by its rationale of all-pervasive alienation has perfected the temporality called 'capitalist modernity', which has been degraded into what Benjamin calls "homogeneous empty time" ("Concept of History" 395), in the context of linear historiography. The 'now' is full of nothingness, devoid of any underlying significance because "the spectacle, as the perfect image of the ruling economic order, ends are nothing and development is all – although the only thing into which the spectacle plans to develop is itself." (Debord 15-16)

Debord further argues that although the consciousness of the consumer joyfully accepts the domination of objects at the surface level, the sense of exile remains deep-rooted in the subconscious of the consumerist society. He writes, "The spectacle is the material reconstruction of religious illusion. . . The spectacle is hence a technological version of the exiling of human powers in a "world beyond" – and the perfection of separation *within* human beings." (18) The spectacle thus functions as the guardian of the fetish-induced sleep of the modern civilization – an eternal reverie – which, like a safety-valve, protects it from death through explosions: "So long as the realm of necessity remains a social dream, dreaming will remain a social necessity." (18)

What Marx has identified as 'commodity fetishism' is modified slightly as 'reification' by Georg Lukács to stress upon the all-pervasive effect of commodification of the society to a deep psychological realm, which prevents a citizen from realizing his class consciousness. In his celebrated essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", Lukács has expanded the Marxian dictum of this deep-rooted sense of objectification and subsequent alienation of the human kind in the following words, "Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the

structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man." (93) Cohen writes about this (ph/f)antastic and nightmarish possibility of the uncanny that the fetish apparently unnoticeably produces,

> Central to Lukács's account were Marx's observations concerning how capitalism transformed the relation between humans and things. Commodities alienated people from their labor when they separated producers from their products in the circuits of capitalist production and consumption. This labor, however, retained an uncanny power of its own which was displaced onto the commodity, and which then returned, via the commodity, to haunt humans, once the commodity's links to the producer had been forgotten. (201)

Walter Benjamin in his ever-unfinished yet monumental work of the critique of spectacularity, the *Arcades Project*, traces the possibility of a narrative that may achieve the highest degree of graphic character in the expressive forms, both economic and cultural, of the historical moment called 'modern'. The prime point of departure in Benjamin from Marx and Lukács is his concept of phantasmagoria, as an appropriated form of fetishism and reification, which talks less about the sleeping and more about awaking with a revolutionary zeal to break through the 'iron cage of modernity'. He holds a more optimistic vision about the capacity of the phantasmagorical reality to bring social change while analyzing the this 'new dream-filled sleep' as a methodological vantage point for recovering whatever is lost in the process of making society spectacular. The phantasmagoria induced by the commodities needs a complete disenchantment with the old religious-metaphysical forms of consciousness to bring about a new consciousness of meta-reality, which fulfills every dream of the subjects living within its compass to their utmost satisfaction and thus itself remains an eternal reverie. This self-reflexivity inherent in the being of the modern phantasmagoria thus presents an eternal dialectics of the 'hellish' and the 'utopian' poles of modern human consciousness.

So, if on the one hand, the modern epoch is informed by the incessant rationalization, mechanization and dehumanization, on the other it reaffirms its faith in different forms of the metanarratives, which seem to be but could not have been vanished by the dazzling aura of a spectacular culture. The urban spectacle is a site, thus, always haunted by the uncanny forces of commodity fetishism. This sheer irrationality and supernaturalism at the heart of a highly rationalized system called urbanity made Derrida curious about it. In *Spectres of Marx*, he reads Marx with a special sensitivity for ghosts. He has found them at every nook and corner of the city. They are the symbol of urban modernity, which is delusional yet real, fragmented

yet totalitarian. They catch the essence of a 'disjointed now': "Maintaining now the specters of Marx. (But maintaining now [maintenant] without conjuncture. A disjointed or disadjusted now, "out of joint," a disjointed now that always risks maintaining nothing together in the assured conjunction of some context whose border would still be determinable.)" (1) 'Spectre' for Derrida is what Benjamin calls a 'dialectical image' of modern urban existence in which the reality has been turned on its head and yet the traces of a previous body-image could not be wiped away. So, the 'modern' is always informed by a sense of liminality:

> As soon as one no longer distinguishes spirit from specter, the former assumes a body, it incarnates itself, as spirit, in the specter. Or rather, as Marx himself spells out, and we will get to this, the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the specter. (4-5)

While Lukács is more interested in the concretization of the society by the cunning of the capital, Benjamin is more inclined to the irrational aspect of a fetishized society in his mission to recover which he calls the 'trash of history'. Benjamin argues the history is full of violence, ruptures and oppression. And, this is a 'sadness' that is attached with the universal history that it foregrounds only what the 'victors' affiliate and this history keeps on registering thus the unending array of stories of victory of the political winners at the cost of the extermination of the losers and their life-narratives.

So, the culture that this historiography precisely constructs is degraded to documenting only such narratives of the civilization that have been sanctioned by the rulers throughout the ages to affirm and reaffirm the 'truth' that progress has been made. And triumphantly Benjamin observes, "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another." ("Concept of History" 392) He, as a cultural materialist historian, is thus akin to change the course of history writing to redeem and relive the utopian possibilities of human civilization alongwith its 'hellish' present(iment) of unreality, alienation and suppression. He is in need of such a materialist historian who is, "capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious." (391) He clearly indicates a

departure from the universalist historiography in the sense that the continuity of the narratives should be broken to catch the essential fragmentary and even fortuitous nature of temporality, to subscribe to which a historian needs to forget the tradition of either sublating the 'trash of history' into the grandist assumptions of the universalist history or discarding that altogether and at the same time be cautious enough not to make even that 'trash' ('the dead') victorious. To escape the progressive procession of an array of continuous, grand and representative images, which we precisely know as history, he suggests a 'method', in opposition a 'theory', to recognize and arrest the constellation of 'dialectical images' in a flash of lightening. The alternative historiography that he suggests denies to subscribe to the terms 'past' and 'present', because of the hierarchical structure inherent in those concepts; rather, a modernist and materialist approach of registering history would be to register specific and disjointed moments of temporality in which 'what-has-been' and the 'now' is inevitably interlocked in an endless struggle for recognition, in which either both are recognized or both are annihilated. These moments of irritable unreliability to conventional progress, frozen doldrums of temporality, are simply the moments of historical truths:

> Benjamin was convinced that the historical truth of the nineteenth century was *objectively* present in his assembled fragments, and that this truth would be lost, not recovered, by the imposition of a theoretical superstructure upon them. Historical truth, Benjamin came to believe, is not simply available to any theorizing subject at any given historical moment; rather historical truth becomes "legible" or "recognizable" only at specific points . . . (Pensky 180)

The term 'dialectical image' itself is a site of paradox. While 'dialectical' normally refers to the relationship between opposing concepts or arguments; 'image' is the indicator of momentous singularity. The coinage of this term imminently refers to Benjamin's intension to break away with the *logicality* of Hegelian phenomenology and to replace it with an immediate and contingent phenomenon of everlasting struggle without any 'satisfactory outcome' so that the Spirit of Hegel leaves its spirituality to remain ever suspended in an interstitial profaneness as frozen spectre without progress or regress. But, how would it be possible to arrest these fragmentary, frozen moments of historical truth? Benjamin, not very clearly, prescribes a method of "carrying over the principal of montage into history" in a spirit with which the surrealist painter paints his canvas. (Qtd. in Cohen 202) He further explains, "That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event (*Arcades*, 461; N2, 6)." (Qtd. in Cohen 202-203)

'Spectacle' as elaborated by Debord has a remarkable affinity with the 'dialectical image' of Benjamin. Debord says

> At the root of the spectacle lies that oldest of all social divisions of labor, the specialization of power. The specialized role played by the spectacle is that of spokesman for all other activities, a sort of diplomatic representative of hierarchical society at its own court, and the source o f the only discourse which that society allows itself to hear. Thus the most modern aspect of the spectacle is also at bottom the most archaic. (18-19)

It is interesting, at this juncture, to note how the modern citizen reacts to this dialectical nature of spectacular urban space, which is replete with the 'shocks of the new' — the "swift and continuous shift in external stimuli." (Simmel 11) The metropolis breaks away with "the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm" of the pastoral life, which has had a deep impression in the collective longing of the modern city-dwellers, who in most of the cases immigrate to the metros from comparatively more serene small towns and cities, and this rupture, along with the alienation and separation of individual labor from the produce, creates attendant disillusionment and disorientation within the 'inner life' of those who are forced to live in this condition. (12) The spectacles, ever changing yet repetitive, result in the "total bombardment of the sense impressions" and this dramatic increase in nervous life goes beyond the limit the nerve could hold. (Frisby 250) Georg Simmel, the master analyst of the psychological condition of a modern citizen, has identified "a strange contradiction in mental life (*Geistesleben*)" of the metropolis, which exactly corresponds with the dialectical nature of the spectacle. (253) On the one hand the modern citizen is in need of greater and greater excitement and on the other, s/he is not only scared of but also scornful to stronger stimuli that these spectacles offer. The objective mental life (*Geist*) of the spectacle thus at once induces and repels the subjective inner world of the consumer. Simmel alludes to this problem at the beginning of his celebrated essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life":

> The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life. This antagonism represents the most modern form of the conflict which primitive man must carry on with nature for his own bodily existence. (11)

Simmel traces the hint of this deep-rooted psychological alienation of the modern individual in the long historiography of the Enlightenment rationalism. He also diagnoses the

effect of capitalist money-economy, which has reduced everything present in the urban space to a commodity by replacing its use-value with its mere exchange-value. This all-pervasive socio-psychological alienation has always already been informed by an extreme sense of rationality, which starts measuring the urban space and time with different kinds of numerical calculability, punctuality and exactness and thus tries to exclude "those irrational, instinctive, sovereign human traits and impulses which originally seek to determine the form of life from within instead of receiving it from the outside in a general, schematically precise form," (13). So, the society fails to hold any trace of its organic totality, which has informed it since primitive temporality and instead gives way to a body of multitude of humans and non-humans bound only by some (meta)physical mathematical formulae:

> The calculating exactness of practical life which has resulted from a money economy corresponds to the ideal of natural science, namely that of transforming world into an arithmetical problem and of fixing every one of its parts in a mathematical formula. It has been money economy which has thus filled the daily life of so many people with weighing, calculating, enumerating and the reduction of qualitative values to quantitative terms. (13)

This is the most tragic consequence of the capitalist epoch, which marks a historical catastrophe by announcing the demise of the institution called 'society'.

The contradictions inherent in the structure of the capitalist society, which calls for sheer objectivity and rationalism at every level of the society also produces a highly subjective psychopathology that Simmel describes as the *blasé* attitude, an extreme indifference to the external stimuli. This happens because of the continuous and loud bombardments of the spectacular commodities upon the sensations of the citizens to such an extent as "to their utmost reactivity that they can no longer produce any reaction at all. . . ." (14) This makes the city-dwellers a herd of enervated and disenchanted onlookers, who gaze at the nothingness of whatever the capitalist society has to present before them. They actually hollow "out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair." (14) They certainly make a crowd but not a commune; they walk together, shove together, shop and watch together, but they do not communicate with one another. So, the modern citizen is locked in an indispensible aporia – s/he takes birth within city, its crowd, its allurements and tantrums and without these his/her life fails to sustain, but, at the same time, s/he is condemned to death at his/her birthplace by its compulsive repetition, boredom, alienation and subsequent emptiness.

A *flâneur* or a casual city-stroller is the representative figure of this kind of modern citizen. The casual city-stroller or the *flâneur* is an urban type, here, in our context, better fitted as a narrator of the urban landscape, and thus, almost a mouthpiece of the author. Indeed, Chaudhuri is one modern author, who dodges or shies away from the question of autobiographical in his fictional writings. Although he admits, "So much of my work is, in that sense, autobiographical", he has, rather, redefined the autobiographical in the context of literary. ("Interview") To him what in the 'most crude sense' constitutes the autobiographical – the element of personal referencing – does not sufficiently justify the continuing popularity of the writings of V. S. Naipaul, Katharine Mansfield, James Joyce or Marcel Proust. He says, "autobiography does not interest me. I'm not interested in telling people the story of my life. . . ." ("Interview") Rather, he is more interested in autobiography as a mode of writing life as perceived and experienced by the writer and the 'transformation of the imagination expressed through language'. ("Interview") One of the tropes of Chaudhuri's literary autobiographical in which transformation takes place paradoxically without the call of finality is that the autobiographical depicts "a life that is important only ironically. . . an impulse towards the anti-epic, or anti-great work." ("Interview") His writings are the vehicle for gravitating the everyday and the mundane towards a space of liberation, which has exhausted every possibility of reaching a brief goal remaining ever caught between its internal dilemmas. That space never guarantees any actual sense of liberation, yet it is interstitially placed among the networks of the grand narratives that weave the allusion of greatness. This aporiacal littleness informs his writings as, both as a person and as an author, Chaudhuri watches and registers the inherent contradictions of the cityscapes while remaining ever caught between the spectacular objectivity and a resistant intellectual subjectivity; the insistent (im)mobility of the present and the (in)visible weight of the past. This sense of 'contrariness without finality' is something of a philosophy that makes the writer deny even the separate existences of the 'concrete terminologies', through which all rational minds perceive the world. The *flâneur* is an element in the whirlwind of the modern urban society, which continues to loiter the city taking the discontinuities of its grand discourses at its heart, and incessantly blurs the distinctions between its existential agencies. Chaudhuri says,

> I don't know about subjectivity or objectivity, but the *flaneur* and the loiterer have been of great interest to me definitely. I think it has sort of metamorphosed for me as well, this figure of the loiterer. . . . There is no clear demarcation . . . then that's one of the features of the arcades which Walter Benjamin talks of the relation to the *flaneur*;

the arcade is neither inside or outside, it's a public space but it feels like an interior. . . . It is possible to a certain extent but now my loitering leads me to understand that the globalised world has discontinuities in between. ("Travelling Between Genres")

A *flâneur* is a representative socio-psychic phenomenon of an 'exclusive' capitalist society, a singled-out outcast, who offers "paradoxical, privilege of moving about the city without losing one's individuality," swaying "At once on the street and above the fray, immersed in yet not absorbed by the city." (Ferguson 80) S/he[i] is on the mission of creating a new episteme of neuroesthetics, in his "curiosity to investigate the city whose continual metamorphoses challenged the very possibility of knowledge." (80-81) The *flâneur* is an epitomized embodiment of what Ferguson calls the 'discourse of disruption'. (111-112) With all kind of contradictions coupled with speed and agility at its center, the city does not allow a gazer formulate a meditated and theorized appraisal of what is knowable about the city, about its myriad enchantments and volitions. Yet the gazer, with all his/her unreliabilities and idiosyncrasies, keeps on searching for an episteme that will fit the city's predicament because s/he knows that "The more uncanny a big city becomes, the more knowledge of human nature – so it was thought it takes to operate in it." ("The *Flâneur*" 40) The stroller-cum-gazer's search for the knowledge of a modern metropolis is fragmented and frustrated from the beginning, and would finally lead to a mere circumlocutory conclusion regarding the unknowability of the city. This is primarily a methodological crisis for a *flâneur*, who finds it impossible to completely rely on the logicality of the events and their unpredictable consequences continuously hammered by the shocks of the new; any sense of historicist analysis becomes an impossibility given the ever incomplete and fragmentary nature of the city and its crowd. S/he then consciously gives up an intense subjective and critical enquiry of the metropolis, purely on the basis of reason and thus, detaches him/herself so that s/he may be at liberty to watch, but not to build and create a specific knowledge of it. Ferguson observes this tension as inherent in every urban dweller: "The problem of knowledge becomes an insuperable one, and yet every urban dweller must create a city that can be known and with which it is possible to cope." (Ferguson 111) Benjamin sees this contradiction in a *flâneur* as in the incognito of 'an unwilling detective', who "only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant." ("The *Flâneur*" 40-41) Rather this detective is both dependent upon rationality in his/her compulsion to watch, but, at the same time, dependent upon the sensuality to relish his/her unwillingness, and to keep him/herself detached from the construction of knowledge, which s/he knows to be an impossibility. Benjamin writes, "Thus

the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem. He develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city. He catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist. Everyone praises the swift crayon of the graphic artist." (41) Ferguson finds in the figure of a *flâneur* a proponent of a new aesthetics about the metropolis, which she calls the '"science" of the sensual'. (90) She writes,

> The artist-flâneur, on the contrary, tempers desire with knowledge. . . . In this fusion of science and sensuality lies the key to urban control. . . . The conception of Paris as female is hardly new, but Balzac pushes the connection to its extreme by associating flânerie with carnal knowledge. . . . A manuscript of 1830 makes still more of the sexual resonance of the artist-flâneur's relationship to Paris. The city is "a daughter, a woman friend, a spouse" whose face always delights because it is always new. (92)

This sensory aestheticism makes city an entity which not only is unknowable but also unreal. This aesthetics both retains and discards reason as a tool to knowledge production, and rather, drags sensuality as an important paradigm in knowing the metropolis. It relies on both 'seeing' and 'disbelieving', which, at times, registers "the concrete manufacture of alienation," and at others, laments for "an abundance of dispossession." (Debord 23)

Flâneur is historically a resident of Paris, which not only gave birth to him rather nourished and ripened him throughout ages. As Ferguson suggests the first and foremost mention of *flâneur* is found in the anonymous thirty-two-page pamphlet of 1806 in the name of "*Le Flâneur au salon of Mr Bon-Homme: Examen joyeux des tableaux, mélé de Vaudevilles*", which presents Mr. Bonhomme, who is "in all Paris" synonymous with "*Flâneur*". (83) Balzac develops this figure to a considerable extent into a literary-critical urban persona in his *Physiologie du manage* (1826) under the Restoration which, as Ferguson claims, is often misunderstood, as the first public appearance of *flâneur*. (83) The Paris streets were abruptly flooded with "the modest-looking, paperbound, pocket-size volumes called 'physiologies'" in the early nineteenth century with advent of printing technology and the expansion of knowledge market using the availability of cheap paper. ("The *Flâneur*" 35) These volumes entered into a dialogue with the then prevalent modernity by not only watching and registering the panoramic and dioramic urban space, but also, in the process, themselves becoming the sites of those panorama and diorama. Benjamin writes,

> They investigated types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the marketplace. From the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards to the dandy in the foyer of the opera-house, there was not a figure of Paris life that was not sketched by a *physiologue*. . . . In 1841 there were seventy-six new physiologies. After that year

the genre declined, and it disappeared together with the reign of the citizen-king Louis-Philippe. (35-36)

As Ferguson hints at the matter-of-fact, we realize that the reception of this figure is torn with contradictions. While the inactivity – only strolling around and gazing at the urban space often in the pace of a tortoise – has been associated by the July Monarchy with a "superior relationship to society" as a mark of bourgeois propensity towards leisure and comfort, the same inaction could not be accommodated into the growth of an advanced capitalist society characterized by greater agility with necessarily a bourgeois connotation. The sense of contradiction is more enhanced as the figure becomes the subject of criticism by the lower-class that could not afford to be as lazy as a *flâneur* because its socio-economic compulsion does not allow any of its members to become idly sit and yet carry on living. "A dictionary of "popular" (i.e., lower class) usage in 1808 defines "un grand flâneur" as "a lazybones, a loafer, man of insufferable idleness, who doesn't know where to take his trouble and his boredom." (82) Gradually this figure has climbed the social ladder as 'capital' starts coloring the consciousness of the society, and bourgeois sensibility starts gravitating towards the present day corporatism. Ferguson writes,

What is so remarkable about this figure is its progressive reevaluation . . . Instead of prompting a negative moral judgment, the flâneur's conspicuous inaction comes to be taken as positive evidence of both social status and superior thought. The flâneur grows into the rentier, in whose familiar, comfortable, and unthreatening contours the bourgeoisie can recognize one of its own. Thus solidly ensconced in the bourgeois world, and identified with the city, the flâneur is ready to be taken up and redefined yet again, this time by the writer for whom the flâneur's apparent inoccupation belies his intense intellectual activity. (83)

The development of the figure follows a convoluted path with the logic that the more it has distanced from the dominant form of bourgeois market the more its physical inaction has been taken as intellectual superiority, and thus, has been made fit to be reified with its possible profitability in a consumer society. Ferguson's argument shows the figure's gradual takeover by the intellectuals and the creative writers: "Thus solidly ensconced in the bourgeois world, and identified with the city, the flâneur is ready to be taken up and redefined yet again, this time by the writer for whom the flâneur's apparent inoccupation belies his intense intellectual activity." (83) The historical development of both of the facts – a writer's becoming a *flâneur* in search of an alternative space to the impending modernization, and the *flâneur's* becoming a subject of research and of creative writing to canvass the fissures in the

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capitalist project of advancement – registers the presence of this figure amidst the economies of the intellectual market as a marker of an *avant-gardism*. Various researches on this figure and their publications in the form of books or journal papers, and a keen interest of the celebrated present-day writers, like Chaudhuri, in this figure situate him/her at the heart of the contemporaneity, in which s/he manages to hold the capacity of being packaged and sold by virtue of his/her being a detached, non-aligned subject on the face of a market economy. This changed image of *flâneur* in the hands of Flaubert and Baudelaire since the middle of the nineteenth century as both a part of and mostly not a part of the capitalist market economy, has become colored with a deep-rooted empathy towards the poor, downtrodden, uprooted, marginalized, the "lower class", who was scornful to it for its essentiality and inevitability as a petit-bourgeoisie only thirty years back. This inherent dialectics has never escaped the essential existence of "*flâneur*, who goes botanizing on the asphalt," through the convoluted path of his/her career. ("The *Flâneur*" 36)

The *flâneur* is also one of the precursors of the modern obfuscation of the boundaries in between the home and the world – the dissolving of the person into the crowd. For the first time in history that a *flâneur* chooses the Paris Boulevards as the interior:

> The street becomes a dwelling for the *flaneur*; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. ("The *Flâneur*" 37)

Hannah Arendt in her celebrated commentary on Benjamin has also situated *flâneur* amidst the 'four walls' of the city of Paris, which, according to her, "is the only one among the large cities which can be comfortably covered on foot, and more than any other city it is dependent for its liveliness on people who pass by in the streets, so that the modern automobile traffic endangers its very existence not only for technical reasons." (21) She has found a close connection among the hospitable and comfortably liberated spirit of the city, and its arcades, and the strollers loitering upon them. She observes how arcades have provided the loiterer a sense of ease at home,

> [T]hese passageways are indeed like a symbol of Paris, because they clearly are inside and outside at the same time and thus represent its true nature in quintessential form. In Paris a stranger feels at home because he can inhabit the city the way he lives in his own four walls. And just as one inhabits an apartment, and makes it comfortable, by

living in it instead of just using it for sleeping, eating, and working, so one inhabits a city by strolling through it without aim or purpose. . . . (21)

Her analysis points to the incessant and increasing disintegration of the demarcations called the personal and the public, the home and the world through the agency of a *flâneur*, and the rise of a new frontier on the modern cityscape that cannot be definitely defined on terms of inside/outside. Chaudhuri, while writing about this commentary on Benjamin, has recognised this frontier as a space in which, "the line that divides interior from exterior, domestic from public space, even the 'natural' from the urban and manufactured, is dimmed and blurred constantly for the *flâneur*; he loiters about on the street, inspecting its everyday marvels (or what to *him* is marvellous), as if it were an extension of his drawing room." ("Arun Kolatkar" 231)

Walter Benjamin has found a trace of the *flânerie* within the modern historiography of the metaphysics of 'seeing', which locates the desire of a modern citizen in spectacles. So, a modern person mostly unconsciously prefers seeing to hearing (or smelling, for that matter). Benjamin alludes to a quote of Simmel[ii] that a person who sees but does not hear is less uneasy than a person who hears without seeing. This precisely is the effect of the dominance of spectacles over any other sensory form, which, in turn, results in increased desire for commodities or the other way round. So, one who only sees is more replete with insatiable desire for more, than the one who only hears, and thus, is kept away from commodity fetishism, the center of modern desire. Benjamin argues this metaphysics of sight is also responsible for complicating the inter-personal relationships among the moderns, in the sense, that they keep on observing one another without talking, and thus keep on carrying the loads of suspicion, which instead of opening up the windows of communication shuts them to prevent the horror as an outcome of secrecy. He ascribes the development of public transport, the automobile industry and the railroads, to the modern consciousness towards seeing. In modern times, a citizen as a seeing animal is forced to 'play a detective' as everybody around him is 'a conspirator': modernity is a spatio-temporality constantly falling prey to the terror of uncertainty, and anxiety. The demise of gas-light, and the dazzling electric lights that illuminate the city instead marks an epoch in modernity. They tear up the serenity that the memory of connection with the pristine nature tries to preserve so badly and dearly, but with utter failure. The progressive notion of the public safety in the streets and the business places open for the whole night gets ruptured in such narratives of shock as Stevenson puts forward indicating the end of rhythmical effect of the gas lanterns: "'Such a light as this should shine

only on murders and public crime, or along the corridors of lunatic asylums, a horror to heighten horror . . . All was dark yet splendid. . . .'" (Qtd. in "The *Flâneur*" 51)

This is origin of detective story and simultaneously of a writer-*flâneur*. The watchfulness of a detective coupled with an indolent attitude to the happenings of the life around places the writer-*flâneur* or the artist-*flâneur* within a profitable interstitial space, where this 'unwilling detective' sees ever new creative vistas opening up keeping pace with the march of the modern progress: "He catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist. Everyone praises the swift crayon of the graphic artist. Balzac claims that artistry as such is tied to a quick grasp." ("The *Flâneur*" 41) The artist-*flâneur* keeps registering the 'things in flight' as he strolls the market for no reason. He sees the illuminated shops as the site of a decayed interior yet "he roamed through the labyrinth of merchandise" only because "The bazaar is the last hangout of the *flâneur*." (54) He is totally disillusioned with the horrific progress of the capitalist city, which has taken its birth at the cost of 'what-has-been', the broken and lost consciousness of 'the trash of history': "The *flâneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace. But this attitude did not prevail. . . ." (54) The *flâneur* being a product of a temporality of innumerable crosscurrents himself thus becomes the embodiment of the greatest struggle in the entire dialectical history of modernity, the subjective versus objective, the crowd versus the individual:

> The crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned. The *flâneur* is someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity. He is not aware of this special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him and it permeates him blissfully like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which the *flâneur* surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers. ("The *Flâneur*" 55)

A *flâneur* is the representational embodiment of the modern citizen "as someone condemned to live in the capital day after day" yet as induced forever by the spectacle of the capital, from which he seeks the inspiration to live; he is the embodiment of the enchantment of the horror of urban modernity. ("The *Flâneur*" 55)

III

Almost all of Amit Chaudhuri's novels are narrated by the (non)omniscient narrators, who watch these works of language both intimately and from distance. He follows the characters very closely, their speeches and activities, to the extent that the reader is almost certain to believe that they control the course of events in their own whims. But, this 'truth' about the omniscience of the narrator is shrouded with mystery as it raises question about who this 'truth' represents. In these narratives, the narrator seems to be playing a hide-and-seek game with the reader in the sense that in some way or the other the narration often foregrounds 'his choice of events' and thus hiding the choices of the characters. In some cases, he narrates who he wants to be narrated, and thus, in turn, chooses to foreground a psychological condition or a desire to 'get narrated'. It is not always the case that the narrator is narrating the characters or the events or the thoughts of 'Others' present in the novel; rather, contradictorily and always already simultaneously, he is narrating himself, his own choices and whims. This queer relationship of the text with its narrator evokes a politics of representation as the narrator's self invariably intervenes and colors the course of the events and the thoughts of the characters. The superficiality of an activity of 'presenting others' gives rise to a consciousness about the deep metaphysical impossibility of that activity as all action of 'presenting' is dislocated into a phenomenon of 're/de-presenting' and thus dwindling the possibility of any essentially inherent 'truth-value' to whatever the narrator 'presents'. If we take this narrator as an embodiment of narrator-*flâneur*, we must be aware that he is also in the danger of fetishizing his own account as he tries to find an alternative to the limitless commodity fetish these narratives (en)counter. By his trial in escaping from the all-pervasive domain of rational spectacles of a (com)modified society, his taking resort to all that is 'transient', 'fleeting' and 'contingent' in modernity may fetch him the accusation of objectifying all that are 'flotsome and jetsome' at the cost of 'the eternal' and 'the immovable'.

The ambivalence between the narrator's gaze and its translation into reality, which is metaphysically untraceable, confers a sense of disbelief upon the narratives of Chaudhuri. This unreliability plays in unison with the narrator-*flâneur* an incessant game of dissipation and dissemination through blurring the distinctions among the fictional agencies of modernity.

Saikat Majumdar has located the *flâneur* in Chaudhuri's fiction in the long and rich tradition of the modernist writing on the city. He observes while primarily inquiring into the

quotidian/banal element in Chaudhuri's fiction, "There is another quotidian lifestyle practice that is a striking link between the cultural traditions of high modernism and Chaudhuri's fiction-walking in the city or as readers of Baudelaire, Joyce, Woolf, and Eliot have called it, urban flânerie. Very much in the tradition of Joyce's Bloom and Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway, flânerie plays a significant role in Chaudhuri's work. . . ." ("Dallying" 458) His study also explores how the figure of *flâneur* has been fraught with contradictions and frequent involutions. As for example, he notes that the protagonist of the novel *A New World* finds the cityscapes simultaneously 'alien' and 'familiar' while walking 'aimlessly', which is in turn a continuous recognition with and a distancing from his urban *flâneur*'s self. He also comments that the element of *flânerie* "sets into motion the semiotic play of differences that not only define deconstructive textualities . . . but also mark the hybridity of postcolonial and diasporic subjectivities." (459) He aptly observes that the aimless walking of Jayojit reveals an indefinite play of differences that "stakes out both the startlingly unique color of the urban neighborhood and his own dislocation within it." (459)

The dialectics of the narrator's gaze and the metaphysical impossibility of representation wraps the narratives of Chaudhuri with a mist of unreliability. The most wonderful effect of this uncertainty about the narrative-truth is that they are marching in the same queue with the narrator-*flâneur* of his novels, who wants to dissolve and dissipate and blur the distinctions of the entities placed within the scope of his (fictional) modernity. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, the reader is presented with an event of ailment of Chhotomama, who happens to be very 'serious' and is admitted to a hospital. The narrative of 'seriousness' is narrated with such critically unrelated linguistic interruptions as "Dying is not a horse-race" (in connection with whether Chhotomama has any 'chance' of survival) or "A feeling of anxiety passed like a wave over the crowd of relatives" (in connection with the tension of the relative-visitors) or "The mind was soothed by the great fantasy world of politics and government the radio spoke of" (in connection to how the visitors passed their time in the waiting hall of the hospital) that it almost diminishes the 'seriousness' of a patient in a hospital. But, the same liberates the narrator-*flâneur* from the core of rational spectacularity of the event: this fleeting, transitory milieu is etched into the narratives at the cost of alienating the 'rational' seriousness of Chhotomama. Although a note of caution may be given and a theoretically speculative assertion is buzzed about an imminent danger of a second-level of fetishization of the *avant-garde* modernity and prescriptions may be written to stop the proliferation of a structure of spectacularity, which Chaudhuri's narratives

criticize and hence take birth from, there is an eventual impossibility of anything other than accepting the 'alternatives' that the narrator-*flâneur* so emphatically springs forth. Surprisingly, the narrator is cunning enough to be aware of the inherent contradictions in his narration, and thus he detaches himself for the core of narration as he keeps on narrating something that neither he nor his characters know,

> If you overheard them from a distance – Sandeep's uncle, his mother, his aunt, Chhordimoni and Shonamama, all managing to speak at the top of their voices without ever making a moment of sense – you would think they were having a violent brawl, or quarrelling vehemently about the inheritance of some tract of land which they were not prepared to share. And, indeed, they were engaged in an endless argument (about what, they did not know) beneath which ran a glowing undercurrent of agreement in which they silently said 'Yes' to each other. (*A Strange 58*)

In Chaudhuri's narratives, 'alternative' aesthetic possibilities of the urban modernity haunt the societal modernization project by the capitalist enterprises as the concreteness of the modern structures get diluted and dissolved into some otherwise unassailable spaces infested by the Marx's specters. The 'wide, well-kept lawns' on the grounds of the hospital, to which Chhotomama gets admitted, the shrubs and trees associated with it, the parking-lot, the cars-after-cars-after-cars incessantly coming in and out of that, the patient-after-patient, the anxious family-after-anxious family – everything abound the concreteness called hospital gets dissipated in a space "meditative and pensive and silent in the darkening twilight" while "the children wandering between them, Sandeep and Abhi crouched in the shadows, and Babla searching for them, calling out their names hesitantly". (*A Strange 134*) The whirlwind with which the hospital as a symbol of modern spectacular progress revolves around itself does not allow it anymore to retain its 'self', and the only option left to it is to disintegrate and dissolve itself in the 'darkening twilight' that the narrator discards as scraps at the time of its birth. He metaphysically present in the hospital can no longer bear the monotonous compulsion of repetition that it offers, his eyes are dazzled with the predominance of the lustre at every important and even unimportant turn of its structure, which is inflated by a gathering of capital at the cost of those who still remain in darkness. He, along with his narration, escapes to the land of dreams, of ghosts, of feelings.

When the narrator-*flâneur* is on the street, he assiduously consumes the panorama with the spirit of the consumed spectacles, which have adorned themselves and have brought themselves down to the street for sell. He wants to enjoy the sensuality and the warmth that

the panorama offers. But, at the same time, he has to shield himself against the bombardments of these multifarious sensations because he knows if he does not do so, he will be torn apart and dissipated among the crowd. So, in order to save his subjective and intellectual consciousness (that he is still the Other to the crowd) of '*the* man of the crowd', he employs a defence mechanism. He starts onslaughts on the totalitarian consciousness promoted by the commodity fetish together with the spectacles, a duo responsible for turning the urban space into a 'metropolis' representing the world's absolute saleability. He chops the linear narrativity of the street and the spectacles onlooking it and stabs its fissures with his critically non-serious observations. Look at the following paragraph:

> They went past the bridge in Dhakuria, past Gol Park, where a statue of Swami Vivekananda, with arms folded in fierce serenity, stood staring unflinchingly at an advertisement for biscuits; past Gariahat Market; past Rashbehari Avenue, which would be lit with rows and rows of shops on a weekday, and which was distinguished by having the largest number of underwear shops in the world; then into Chowringhee with its colonial buildings, vacant and proud, looking on Sunday evening like a black and white photograph of another era. (*A Strange* 18-19)

The urban locales of Calcutta, otherwise apparently put side by side like the arranged commodities of the coordinated market, take the shape of an indiscriminate mosaic, by the intrusion of an isolated *flâneur*'s detached and random observations. Vivekananda Statue as an onlooker to the advertisement board with 'fierce serenity' not only ruptures the spatial connections among Dhakuria, Gol Park and Gariahat Market but also a linear temporality between the two sets of images. Vivekananda as a symbol of the high moral and religious structurality of India's nationalist struggle also symbolises 'the trash of history', which is detached from the conventional national historiography, so 'serene' but cannot digest its lost centrality in that historiography, so 'fierce'. Rashbehari Avenue is also separated from the Gariahat Market not only by distance but also by the banality of its sheer (un)importance at the world's largest market of lingerie. The interplay of the waning self-respect of an urban space with its increasing importance as a business place has a particular interest to the *flâneur*, who himself is the embodiment of the same dialectical structure. Chowringhee in the same spirit stands in isolation and shocks the observer with its vacancy, which was unimaginable during the colonial days. The 'shock' of 'what-has-been' coupled with the 'new' 'dialectical image' of Chowringhee, whose honor and glory could not be retained by the universalist history and thus has been forced into oblivion, has compelled the Benjaminisque writer-*flâneur* of Chaudhuri to restore and register it an alternative tradition of

materialist historiography. Chowringhee although has thus lost any 'essential' connection with either its colonial 'past' or a spatial relation with Rashbehari Avenue, it has been reconnected with several other 'bits' and 'pieces' of urban Calcutta, which are similarly relegated into sheer oblivion and unobtrusiveness, and so have gained a special significance for the materialist historiographer, who picks the 'truth' of modernity in them with a scavenger's spirit: 'an empty field that lay beyond the professor's house' (*A Strange* 16), 'the girl behind the brown hill of potatoes' (55), 'sudden exchange of glances of a girl and a young man on two separate terraces' (112-113), 'kokil, the singing bird' (154) and many more.

The 'surprising piece of empty land' that lays beyond the professor's house is a place 'somehow overlooked' by the 'contractors', the modern builders of spectacles. The word 'contract' has a sheer sense of the fleeting nature of the capitalist market economy, in which the sustenance and permanence of any 'project' is a matter of 'contract', of temporary give-and-take. Once the spectacles are built and profit is made, nobody bothers about the relationship between the contractor and the spectacle, leave alone who reside in them. The permanent losers are those, who once inhabited the place – the displaced. By virtue of exemption by the contractors, the land is still capable of supplying to the Utopian dream-elements of the narrator-*flâneur*, who notes the meeting of fire-flies at night with their "miniature green hurricane lamps" (symbolizing the collective modern wish for returning to the alienated Nature ever since the birth of civilization, especially its modern industrial incarnation) and the gathering of servants and their children, rickshawallas, people from basti (slums), who are there for watching a black and white 'seenema' on the "great piece of cloth . . . between two poles" (symbolizing the desire for a class-less society). (*A Strange* 16) It is interesting to note how this piece of empty land is supplying a double-fold liberation of imagination: at the first level, that is of the narrator-*flâneur*, who looks onto the basti people and their panoramic act of watching 'seenema' for a sense of freedom and refreshment; the basti people, at the second level, find their temporary liberation from the struggle and monotony of life by looking at the 'black and white' phantoms of a film. But, the tragic dialectics of modernity never allows any of them to be liberated as the media-induced phantoms look back to the basti people to adjust their gaze according to the desire of the market economy and the poor basti people as representatives of those displaced and toiling mass, in their turn, look back in anger and hatred to the narrator-*flâneur*, a representative of the upper or upper-middle class of the Bengali society. 'The girl behind the brown hill of potatoes' is another dialectical image empahatically crafted by Chaudhuri's narrator-*flâneur*,

who watches multifarious spectacles standing at the same place. At Gariahat vegetable market he encounters the girl while watching children of the sellers playing 'hide-and-seek' and 'lost-and-found' repetitively centering the altered raised platform of the market. The 'cross-eyed' girl is squint and thus probably capable of looking in different directions at the same time seems to be a little 'deranged' to Sandeep, the little boy, an embedded narrator. The girl is not selling potatoes yet is overshadowed by them; rather, she is nibbling at the bits of raw stalks of cauliflower and the unsellable leftovers of the vegetable market. She is 'deranged' and 'squint' and so the successor of all the 'madmen' of the world, who could see more than the straight, normal and well-(in)formed majority, like her, and precisely, for this, have been excommunicated and confined in the asylum. The modern world does not allow one to be as untidy and dirty as her, as deformed and odd-looking as her, and simply as cheap and thus almost unsellable as her. The modern has made her presence as her demise – a bit of trash of modern history. In the following Foucauldian language we can hear the separation of 'madman' and creation of psychiatry:

> In the midst of the serene world of mental illness, modern man no longer communicates with the madman: on the one hand is the man of reason, who delegates madness to the doctor, thereby authorising no relation other than through the abstract universality of illness; and on the other is the man of madness, who only communicates with the other through the intermediary of a reason that is no less abstract, which is order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the demand for conformity. There is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists; the constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue, gives the separation as already enacted, and expels from the memory all those imperfect words, of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly, in which the exchange between madness and reason was carried out. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue by reason *about* madness, could only have come into existence in such a silence. (xxviii)

The girl's 'deformity' just like the resistant intellectuality of a modern *flâneur* has given her a strange power of 'seeing double', which appears to a spectacle-driven market as an avatar of 'seeing nothing' or a form of blindness. Actually, it never allows the consumer to see beyond what it shows fearing the deads, who it has buried under its dazzles might come out. 'Sudden exchange of glances of a girl and a young man on two separate terraces' and 'kokil, the singing bird' – both of these images catch the passing present in the technique of photographic flashes. They not only make a standstill but blurring the contours of the figures

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they refer to their swift passing nature; they are symbols of both standstillness and dynamism. They run parallel to the flashes, which all at once enlighten the civilization and then turn it into a bundle of darkness: they are condensed particular moments, the ever presents, and at the same time fragments of the absent pasts, the forgotten origins. They possess no momentary meaning beyond their inherent sensuality to the extent of eroticism, which constitutes what Chaudhuri's narrator observes as the 'rhythm of the moment': "They glanced at each other, then fumbled, then glanced – such shy, piercing glances exchanged in the heat of the afternoon! How straight and undeflected the man's glance travelled, how swift and disguised the woman's answering glance! What a rhythm the moment possessed!" (*A Strange* 113) Simultaneously, at a second level of signification, they carry with them the Utopian reverie of liberation from the iron cage of modern civilization. While the *Kokil*'s song is made more condensed using futuristic technique of giving form to the sensations like the following

<div align="center">

Ku-wu

Ku-wu

Ku-wu (155)

</div>

the surrealist intervenes to dissolve it to a mere sensation: "It did not seem to exist at all, except the cry, which rose questioningly and affirmatively again and again from the leaves . . . but melted, disappeared from the material world. As they watched, a delicate shyness seemed to envelop it, and draw a veil over their eyes." (155-156) These images are quintessential of surrealism, which deploys such techniques as to treat time both as consequential and simultaneous. In the context of the 'dialectical image' of Benjamin, Marit Grøtta has termed it as 'temporal synchronity':

> Time is conceived both as a distance (consecutive time) and as simultaneity. Before historical truth can be accessed, a temporal distance must be established, however, at the point when historical truth becomes accessible, a temporal synchronicity is established (dialectically). Temporal distance is thus a precondition for truth, but this very distance is itself abolished at the moment of truth. (161)

Taking resort, thus, to the surrealist technique has given the writer an advantage to paint time both as a distance and a simultaneity, which is 'the truth' to a writer of modernity. The image of the urban space, viewed from and projected by such an elegant materialist historiographer and a litterateur as Amit Chaudhuri lays bare the inevitable and invincible aporia of sensuality and detachment, progress and barrenness, all those ambiguities that define a city as 'an iron cage of modernity'.

The narrator of *A New World* is detached from his volition to narrate the urban landscape as he has been separated from his own self. His desire for a family through a marriage, a sense of completeness, has been shattered by a modern social psychopathology called divorce. His is placed into such a delirium as to try to 'escape' into the superficialities of urban life means to be 'engulfed' more and more by some uncertain crater waiting to explode his consciousness. He now lives alone for six months and is accompanied by his only son for another six of a year. It has, like the scientific division of the earth in hemispheres, bifurcated the child, spatially, temporally and consciousness-wise. The father feels 'happier' when he is with his son while the sheer loneliness gives him the sense of an unusual 'liberty' when all familial ties are physically cut-off for six months. This is as if almost to conclude that either 'there is no happiness in liberty' or 'we cannot find any liberty when we are happy'. Both these paradoxical aphorisms are logical impossibilities but both reflect queer and cruel realities of the modern existence, which has been turned on its head. To revive the memories of pre-marriage individualism he takes resort to the restoration of the then 'glamour' of pizzas; but broken relationships are like frozen foods, which can only be consumed if supplied with heat, but warmth is not as easily available, like fires at the time of winter. So, both relationships and foods remain frozen forever, and Jayojit keeps on putting on weight upon them. His father asked over the telephone, "'Joy, are you sure I shouldn't call her parents? Mr Chakraborty could talk some sense in her. . . .'" But imparting sense is a senseless job in a world, where the structure of 'faith' upon the reliability of 'truth' has collapsed: "'Baba, there's nothing to salvage, he'd said, patiently waiting for the line to clear. 'It's finished.' *He had to say this to remind himself it was so*.'" (*A New World* 52, italics mine) He rather utilizes the individual space and unfettered time, which he has acquired as gifts in his divorce:

> Ever since he had become single again he had begun to eat what he could in America, indiscriminately plundering the shelves in the supermarket for frozen food and pizzas. He first read about TV dinners in *Mad* magazine when he was growing up: what glamour pizzas had, then! These days, in America, he looked at food, as he did many other things, emotionlessly, as something that could be put to use and cooked quickly. (24)

To such an enervated citizen, the city seems to be venomous: he is condemned forever to live in the capital when he madly wants to escape its boundaries:

> This city irritated him; it was like an obstacle; yet he'd decided that it would give him the space for recoupment that he thought was necessary now. Nothing has changed

from a year ago; . . . He felt not so much a sense of déjà vu as one as one of ironic, qualified continuity. (51)

This is a queer situation full of contradictions: on the one hand, the city 'irritated' him like an 'obstacle', on the other, it is a source of his recuperation from deep emotional angst; he, like the detached *flâneur,* keeps on roaming around the streets of Calcutta in search of newness, which shatters the monotonous narratives of 'ironic' but 'qualified continuity' yet he cannot forget that this activity of 'gazing around' is absolutely meaningless and purposeless and thus repetitively compulsive:

> He felt somewhat conspicuous as he turned back; he didn't know why. . . . Everyone else, whatever they look like, had somewhere to go, or seemed to; and if they were doing nothing or postponing doing something, as some of these people squatting by the pavement, who seemed to be in part-time employment, were doing, *it was for a reason*. (*A New World* 52-53, italics mine)

The more he 'conspicuously' sees 'reason' in 'everyone else's' activity, the more he gets torn out from the fabric of the urban social life. The more his persona is condensed (and condemned) with sheer individuality, the more his seclusion demands for newness and he imagines the same repetitive journeys to and fro Bullygunge as "still new to him. . . 'everything' – seemed louder and more real to him than normal." (*A New World* 53)

As he keeps on roaming for new sensations he finds the changing cityscapes over the years: through the turbulent time of independence to the post-independent era of socialist Nehruvism to the neo-liberal economic reforms, in which the novel is historically placed. The present cityscape seems to be a queer intermingling of the proud contemporaneity of the large houses with their tall imposing gates "tremendously expensive to maintain" and are yet maintained on the logic that "Money creates money" (*A New World* 54) with their predecessors in the incarnation of "bungalows of the rich Marwari entrepreneurs," which seem to hail from the 'old-world', "the fifties and the sixties, where everything seemed to be more sacrosanct than any other point in India's history, except perhaps its Golden Age" (148) and again with the relics of a past in an avatar of an abandoned house, which at a point of time in history must have been "equally impressive if not more" bearing the name of an East Bengali landowner, signifying the loss of inheritance in the hand of proud historical winners and a subsequent relegation into a dream-world: "East Bengal had long ago been transformed into fantasy; the driveway was covered with leaves that no one had bothered to clear away; space and an impartially surviving light co-existed in equilibrium before the awning. No one had even bothered to sell the house." (55)

Steve Pile has observed the waves of building up and breaking down of the mansions according to the changing economic trends of the world as metaphor of delusive phantasmagoric modernity. He writes, "The modern world becomes a never-ending cycle of dream-like figures – a phantasmagoria – none of which ever fulfils its promise. Fashions come and go: ever more rapidly, in ever more absurd forms. Buildings are put up and torn down, its façades become make-up in a clown's parade of architectural forms." (55)

The city is like a canvas of a surrealist artist, whose forms are indiscriminately scattered around it, to resist and counter the 'discreteness' of the progressive moderns' claims toward a dazzling future. The narrator-*flâneur* paints that canvas in the spirit of an amused tourist, to whom the spectacles are especially and unconsciously enchanting for the 'glare' emanating from the sense of 'importance', and 'tradition' superimposed on and constructed around them by the mechanism of the tourism industry and not for any personal choice. So, for him detachment is more relaxing than any subjective intellectual exercise; bits and pieces are more accepted as they easily come to him than the lost totalitarian metanarratives of big traditionalism and of sacrosanct historical religiosity that he has to 'explore' in wherever he tours. The narrator through Jayojit is thus casually having a look at the Hindu ceremony of marriage:

> [H]e was one of those who had no time for tradition, but liked, even in a sentimental way, colour and noise; so he'd reacted to the smoke and fuss of ritual with the irritation of a visitor in a traffic-jam, but had said, with genuine delight, 'Absolutely wonderful: Bismillah Khan!' when he'd heard the sound of the shehnai. (*A New World* 157)

He is like a sensual miniaturist, to whom (unknowingly) the logic is irrational sensationalism, and thus who is strangely endowed with the capacity to feel the dialectics of his modern existence. This eerie sensationalism inherent in a modern narrator-*flâneur*'s self gives him the strength to feel as opposed to a rational thinker; he thinks but through feeling. This is how he is able to sketch the strange temporality of a passing and contingent modern time filled with dreams for a Utopian past. The encounter of Jayojit with the banking lady makes me recall the classicality of the phenomenal epiphanic illumination of a female passer-by in Baudelaire's poem "*A une passante*" ("To a Passer-by") from *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), one of the greatest depictions of a *flâneur* caught in an inevitable dialectics of modernity as he at the flash of a moment encounters in the "deafening traffic of the town":

> Tall, slender, in deep mourning, with majesty,
>
> A woman passed, raising, with dignity

In her poised hand, the flounces of her gown;

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

A flash . . . then night! – O lovely fugitive,

I am suddenly reborn from your swift glance;

Shall I never see you till eternity?

Somewhere, far off! too late! *never,* perchance!

Neither knows where the other goes or lives;

We might have loved, and you knew this might be!

(Qtd. in "The *Flâneur*" 46)

Let me now consider the episode of the "girl in a cotton sari" as Jayojit encounters her in a private bank equipped with the facilities of "foreign exchange". At first, the episode introduces the appearance and description of the girl, who had "an outline of kohl around her eyes". This introductory fragment then glides into the 'gazing' part – "She was not aware that he was looking at her again; until he let his attention drift and shifted his gaze towards the other people in the bank." (*A New World* 118) The moment at which "At last! She was looking straight at him" is enmeshed with the culminating moment when "He had begun to daydream . . . He shifted out of the sofa; he felt conscious of his largeness, but he used his imposingness unobtrusively on these occasions." (118) This fantasy-ridden space is crafted with all modern comforts, "There was an air-conditioner behind her", which makes the ambience much nicer than home for a divorced person living separated from his wife. There is very meager amount of words exchanged like soft unknown murmuring of words like 'Savings' and 'Fixed', with which "He was probably not as conversant with . . . as he should be . . . He noticed that there was no vermilion in the middle parting. The pleasure this artificial breeze gave him never lessened. . . ." (119) This is followed by a guess about the marital status of the girl, whose not applying vermilion does not necessarily mean that she is unmarried, at least in these days. A fragmented picture of her sheer professional expertise coupled with work pressure of handling "ten different things" (120) is then presented side by side different 'speculations' on both side of the desk, felt by murmurings and queer glances of surprise, such one on Jayojit's part as "She needed the money to buy her saris and sticks-on-bindis. Maybe she had a boyfriend." She feels a strong male gaze on her as "She adjusted her sari, as if she knew she was being watched." (121) The episode is concluded as Jayojit

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resolves to put all his money in that bank. The narrative is presented in such a manner with such an adjustment and deployment of words so as to offer a feel of modern media-induced eroticism. This flash of a moment – a sudden meeting, an exchange of glances, very few words and more murmurs, a sudden arousal of strong psycho-sexual desire, and an abrupt and 'otherwise' totally arbitrary conclusion – is symptomatic of modern condition. It is this 'shock of the moments' that keeps a human being alive amidst the deadly monotony, repetition, separation, fragmentation and compulsion of the 'iron cage of modernity'. What Benjamin comments upon the condition of the male gazer in "*A une passante*" is equally applicable to Jayojit in *A New World*:

> What makes his body twitch spasmodically is not the excitement of a man in whom an image has taken possession of every fibre of his being; it partakes more of the shock with which an imperious desire suddenly overcomes a lonely man. . . The inner form of these verses is revealed in the fact that in them love itself is recognized as being stigmatized by the big city. ("The *Flâneur*" 46)

These bits and pieces of narrativity, as qualifiers of modern urban images, present by their dialectical nature a strange simultaneity of historically distant locales. On one hand, they flash the fleeting and contingent nature of the 'now', and on the other, they retain in themselves the un-wipeable traces of history, like those in a palimpsest. The episodic narratives of Chaudhuri are laden with the Baudelairean tension and contradiction within the texture of the presentness of the urban existence and the continuous semiotic interplay both within and without the signifiers of urbanity that does not allow the readers reach a conclusion informed with stability and definiteness. This semiotic insecurity has been explored through the figure of *flâneur*, the narrator of the novel *A New World*, in its bits and pieces that deny Chaudhuri's fiction the conventional status of the novel. The little and disjointed events that it describes are the modern counterparts of the mythical Phoenix; they are an ever 'passing present' with the reverie of a 'Utopian' past that never dies.

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i   Conventionally, the image of *flâneur* is attached to that of male gazer with his all heroics in resisting the aggression of the spectacles, while females remain the happily enmeshed shopper. For more discussion on this aspect, see P. P. Ferguson: "The *Flâneur*: The City and Its Discontents", 84. For exploration of a critique of *flâneur* as predominantly male and the possibility of a *flâneuse* or

a female *flâneur*, see Deborah L. Parsons: *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, 2-8. For exploration of a lesbian *flâneur*, see Sally R. Munt: *Heroic Desire*, 30-53.

[ii] "Someone who sees without hearing is much more uneasy than someone who hears without seeing. In this there is something characteristic of the sociology of the big city. Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another." See Walter Benjamin: "The *Flâneur*", 37-38.

Chapter 4

Image(I-Nation): Representing the Denizenry of the Post/Coloniality

in

A Strange and Sublime Address **and** *Afternoon Raag*

I

Urban modernity has always dominated the fictional writings of Amit Chaudhuri. He is predominantly a writer of the city with a romantic spirit, in the sense that he captures the cityscape with all its vigor and energy, with all beauty which is full of inversions and contradictions, with the excitement of an observer from within and outside of it. All of his fictional works lie amidst the modern cities – both of the 'West', the 'developed', the 'colonial', the 'first world' and the 'East', the 'developing', the 'postcolonial', the 'third world', all inverted commas are meant for the kind of dialectics this thesis is trying to explore, an inevitability of taking into account of these categories only to think in opposition or 'in-stead' of, or along with these categories as the thinking necessitates invocation of them for delineating what they cannot adequately hold in their conceptualizations. The modern city is something that Chaudhuri is 'addicted to', and he confesses this fact in the way of experiencing modernity, "Although I was growing up in Bombay, Calcutta is the first place I encountered modernity and became addicted to it . . . [There] I felt I encountered the thrill of the modern." ("Interview") He continues as he defines the spirit of the urban modernity, "There are many ways of defining the modern but one is to say that an urban space, a man-made space, has some of the energy, wildness, unpredictability and randomness that we usually associate with nature. In another age, somebody might speak with the same kind of excitement about nature as the modernist does about the city." ("Interview") It is noteworthy when he talks of the 'strange inversion' of the urban space in a modernist context, he places 'deprivation', 'dereliction' of the city in the line of a Wordsworthian romanticism to express a tendency in which, "the urban, the man-made, the industrial, becomes organic." ("Interview") It is the 'inversion' – the reversal of the idea of the urban, the man-made as never being non-organic – that enthralls Chaudhuri, and calls him for a reformulation of the modern urban space that is ugly in a beautiful way, where even deprivation is compelling and enchanting. He notes, "There is beauty for modernists in the dereliction of the industrial city. . . ." ("Interview")

What is this 'strange inversion' that he is talking about? What is so 'sublime' in a modern city? He answers, "It's a periodic use of the word ('sublime'). The inversion is parody". ("Interview") Then what is this 'parody' all about? It is the parody of the classically Romantic notion of the beauty and the grandeur, and a re-questioning and reversal of a "more straight-faced lyrical way by the Romantics" in a modern urban context as one re-lives the experience of the sublime in the contradictions of the cityscapes – in the cohabitation of the

grand and the quotidian, the big flats and homelessness in the footpaths, the familiarity and the foreignness. ("Interview") This is probably something that he tries to explain when he exclaims about "the paralysis of the city and yet the fact that so many currents move through a small space." ("Interview") The simultaneous movements of innumerable currents within the comparably smaller space of the city life make it a riddle-like strange organism and Chaudhuri's fictions capture this 'deadening liveliness' of an urban space, where liminality, and uncertainty remain the buzzwords. On one hand, the urban space offers the spectacles of grandeur through big buildings, wide streets enhanced with glowing lights, giant government and corporate establishments, forms of modern entertainments, the speed generated by machines and technology; on the other, there are the sites of 'darkness' – rampant poverty, homelessness, beggary, social deformation, humanitarian crisis, psychological estrangement, deformation of traditional values and so on. On one hand, there is the march of 'progress', and on the other, the betrayal of the Utopian promise. Amidst these ambiguities that a modern writer like Chaudhuri finds his excitement for conversing and reversing, praising and parodying the cityscapes.

'Rationalization' of every sphere of existence has been the key word since the beginning of the attempt of modernization. Calculation, scientificism, technologicalism, governance are all different terms for defining what is precisely called as 'modern'. The notion of urban utopia could not escape this march of rationalization becoming the centre of all modern discourses. The story of urban migration in search of 'better standard of living' almost stands synonymous with the concept of becoming modern. This is why the twentieth century had witnessed a boom in urban conglomeration and the trend is still retained in the current century. The division of the city and the countryside is often viewed as a major and wider ideological confrontation between modernity and tradition, nature and culture. The rise of global capitalism in the turn of the twentieth century, in a way, has promoted the idea of a modernity almost coterminous with urbanism, the site of utopian progress based on Western rationalism. The interrelation between the modern capitalism and modern metropolis has not only defined the nature of being modern but also has acted as the governing principle of all spheres of modern existence. A series of discourses that has focused upon the nature of modern metropolis, and the directions of the city building have been created with a common emphasis on 'rationalization' that pervades not only the material spheres of the urban space but its non-material spheres of spiritual, mental or cultural existences. The interconnected discourses about the modern metropolis and the capitalism have been explored in the Western

contexts, in greater or lesser details, by Weber, Sombart, and Simmel, a few leading social scientists, among others, in turn of the twentieth century. It is worthwhile to note that social sciences as a discipline have been developed in the Western academia as a result of the spirit of modern 'enquiry' into the socio-cultural process of the leading urban centers. The contribution of these disciplines is inevitable in shifting the academic attention to the life of the cities from that of the villages. Coupled with the scientific tendency of that period, social 'sciences' has turned the urban space into something to be compulsorily 'rational' and 'calculable'— the epitome of 'modern progress'. Frisby has conceived the observations of these three social scientists in a nutshell,

> To give some indication of the then current modes of conceptualizing the metropolis and capitalism in this period, we should note that Sombart places emphasis upon the development of an 'asphalt culture' in the modern metropolis; Simmel announces the most significant feature of mental life (Geistesleben) to be a dramatic increase in nervous life; the debates on the direction for city planning in the 1890s associate the spatial forms of modern metropolis with the generation of new pathologies (for Sitte, agrophobia; for others, amnesia); the new discussion of our mental and motivational orientation to economic (and urban) life into one dominated by a restricted form of (for Weber, 'formal') rationality. (266).

The ambiguity in or the dialectical nature of the modern urban life lies in the continuous swing between the non-material aspects of capitalized modern urban space and its materialist counterparts – an equivalent to the Gaonkar's term "the dilemmas of Western modernity" – between 'societal modernization' and 'cultural modernity'. (2) Capitalism projects a vision of urban Utopia, where there is an abundance of material and tangible rewards. Moreover, the projection speaks for itself that the achievement of the materiality of life assures one of the spiritual and mental happiness. So, at the end of the day, the urban capitalism creates a discourse of the internal life governed by its exteriority that is achieved, polished, conserved and advanced by the constant hooks of rational planning and execution. As a result, the old cities are replaced by the new ones. Narrow streets are widened; personal dwellings are demolished and new tall flats take positions; there are facades and arcades built to enhance the new cities: science and technological exhibitions are held to project a city's potential to become 'the World capital'; city-centers are built to monumentalize the achieved glory; the multiple lanes and over-bridges assure greater mobility; malls and super markets project an economic boom. But, at the same time, the old settlements are torn apart: the rich

city centers create poor marginal settlements, like slums; the rich and the poor previously dwelling side by side are now divided by barricades; the community af-fairs are on the verge on death: the spirit of protest against mal-governance is halted by the march of greater state machineries on the wide streets. Frisby encapsulates this situation in the following words:

> But what were the Utopian visions of the metropolis in the pre-war period and what are they now? In the pre-war context, 'Utopia was that metropolitan illusion for which the concept of development, above all technical development, had become an end in itself, and in which capitalism itself appeared to have become full of fantasy and poetry'. For the present period, after the war, revolution, strikes and yet greater housing scarcity combined with the transformation of cities into 'formulates giant settlement': the result is another kind of Utopia which one may characterize as a Utopia of pessimism and despair of the metropolis. To many, metropolis seems merely hopeless, it appears like a synonym for the decline of the West (268).

As a case study of this, we can take the modernization of Berlin by Martin Wagner, who, in his capacity as the Chief Architect of the city, was focused on the introduction of rationalization in the city planning and on developing a realizable Utopia conceived as "the flight from the prison of poverty to the paradise of life" (Frisby 271). Instead, Frisby notes that Wagner's planning had brought about great humanitarian tension in the urban sphere. He writes, "The equation of progress with rationalization and favouring technical solutions to social problems, both of which recur in Wagner's Weimer writings, give to his conception of the modern and abstract objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) that generates a void in his materialist modernity, a neglect of subjectivity." (273-74) Thus with a subordination of the individual will to the totality of governmental wills, there develops the possibility of all non-material (spiritual, cultural, artistic, creative, social, ritualistic) wills to be dominated, ranked, disciplined, and formally ordered. So, against the concept of modern urban Utopia, there stands a Dystopia in both material and non-material spheres of the urban existence. The artistic response of this Dystopic urban situation has been an evident outcome since the turn of the twentieth century. The apocalyptic or dampening representations of the modern city in literary, cinematic or sociological realms have been a prominent feature of modern culture since then. In this portrayal the city is often represented as dark, bleak, insurgent or totally dominated, dysfunctional or totally mechanized, disturbed by socio-cultural crises, seduced by capitalist consumption, paralyzed by crimes and conflicts and subject to excessive technocratic control. Gyan Prakash notes,

But a shadow always hung over the modernist halo. Inequity and oppression punctuated the drama of freedom on street. The experience of immersion in the crowd produced feelings of estrangement and atomization, and the gathering of the multitude could easily become part of the spectacle of mass society that capitalism staged. The rhythm of daily urban life might suggest a symphony, but it also spelled the boredom of routinization. The awesome promise of technology and planned futures was also terrifying. One way in which modernism expressed this terror was through the image of urban dystopia. Its dark visions of mass society forged by capitalism and technology, however, did not necessarily mean a forthright rejection of the modern metropolis but a critique of the betrayal of its utopian promise. The dystopic form functioned as a critical discourse that embraced urban modernity than reject it." (3)

Thus, the modern metropolis is always swinging between these two extremes of Utopia and Dystopia.

To Amit Chaudhuri, the modern cityscape has a tremendous potentiality coming out of this dialectical movement once thought in the 'non-organic' or 'fractured' way, in which the poles of dialectical (anti)structures of urban modernity, will be 'opened', and also will be thought through the inevitable interdependability of these poles upon one another. This thinking pattern would clear a spatio-temporality that would eventually pave ways for excavating newer paradigms of life, as it is lived, through a bottom-up approach both 'thinking along' and 'thinking through' the binaries of an assumed 'closed' dialectics, which might be able to shove away, to a great extent, if not completely, the streamlining process of (predominantly, Western) rationality, and would be able to disseminate the "wildness, unpredictability and randomness", that Chaudhuri is probably referring to in context of a romanticism that the modern cityscape might offer.

The important thing is to bring into consideration, what Chaudhuri calls the 'dereliction' and 'deprivation' in context of an industrial city. The possibility of 'opening' a passage of subversion, and, in turn, of transformation and change – a possibility of tracing the dynamics of existentiality – lies in the 'derelict' and 'deprived', both of them disseminating a sense of 'discarded' by the official narratives of the power, but not being ceased to exist altogether, which offers other senses of life, and also a conviction about the impossibility of totalizing any discourse, for that matter. Amit Chaudhuri's 'romanticism' remains instrumental in imagining images through the derelict and the deprived, which denies any

official, singular, received 'agency' in them only to excavate different semiotic possibilities. He tells to Nicholas Wroe in an interview, in quite poetically Baudelairean and critically Benjaminesque fashion,

> The things I use are the things that real memoirists, especially today, would throw out of the window. The moment I realised I could talk about not only myself, but something totally unimportant such as the experience of looking at the sunshine on a street, and bring these completely inconsequential things into this hallowed domain, that energised me and took me out of literature and its legitimate subjects into something new. ("Amit Chaudhuri")

Throwing 'out' of window cannot announce the demise of anything, as Chaudhuri, like Joyce, is always bringing them back through the same window, which has remained a critical tool for looking at the reality in this thesis. In this context of 'throwing out of the window', that the current chapter refers to term 'denizenry', as inhabitants of the greyish in-between space between the political and the personal, the official and the unofficial, the included and the excluded, and so on. This chapter tries to capture (eventually, un-capturable) a location of modernity continuously vacillating between the superficial constructs of fictitious but unstable binaries through the images and imaginations created, mostly through the personalized lives of the 'denizery' of both the coloniality and the postcoloniality, as are represented in Amit Chaudhuri's novels *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Afternoon Raag*. Alternative visions of the notion of a nation comes out through the intimacy of this 'denizenry' in these novels, who although might be the part of nation *on papers* but could not participate in the 'grand' theorizations of the nation-state with their idiosyncratic images and imaginations. Guy Standing defines this term 'denizenry' in his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* in the following words:

> One way of depicting the precariat [precarious for themselves and the state, and proletariats too] is as 'denizens'. A denizen is someone who, for one reason or another, has a more limited range of rights than citizens do. The idea of the denizen, which can be traced back to Roman times, has usually been applied to foreigners given residency rights and rights to ply their trade, but not full citizenship rights.
>
> The idea can be extended by thinking of the range of rights to which people are entitled– civil (equality before the law and right to protection against crime and physical harm), cultural (equal access to enjoyment of culture and entitlement to

participate in the cultural life of the community), social (equal access to forms of social protection, including pensions and health care), economic (equal entitlement to undertake income-earning activity) and political (equal right to vote, stand for elections and participate in the political life of the community). A growing number of people around the world lack at least one of these rights, and as such belong to the 'denizenry' rather than the citizenry, wherever they are living. (14)

II

The dialectics of modern Utopia and its Dystopic counterpart may, in other words, be expressed as an oscillation between urban 'imagination' and 'image', especially in the context of such a modernity, which is getting more and more media-controlled, so imagist and representational. Production of images through different amateur and professional or artistic media is one of the prime indicators of urban modernity. Rather, sometimes it is seen as a creation or production of the media, which both govern and are governed by the state machineries. Gyan Prakash observes,

> [M]odernity is inseparable from image production and circulation. Photography, cinema, print and advertising have trained our senses to experience modern life through images. Even if we do not always realize it, visually it is integral to our knowledge and practice. It is thus that the image of the city imperceptibly becomes the imagined space in which we live. Visuality saturates the symbols, values and desires that make up urban society as an imaginary institution. (2)

Here the hint is clear that the 'construction of image' and the 'incitement of imagination' are two mutually interdependent, even interchangeable, terms. Even while the image comes closer to the 'realistic' idea of the world, it is the product of the imagination, and the image, in its turn, constructs, our imaginative world. The feel of Utopian victory is the result of the happy reconciliation of the imagination with the image. On the contrary, the more there is discord between the two, the greater is the Dystopic sense of loss and dissatisfaction. On the basis of this 'open' dialectical play of image versus imagination, we may move to the discussion of coloniality and postcoloniality, which have remained very much urban-centric, and also fraught with the Western normative narratives and their practices.

When we talk about modernity travelling from the West to the Rest, we try to imply that for the metropolitan space at the colonial margins, modernity is a derivative discourse. Imagination plays a vital role in this kind of a discourse where the postcolonial image construction is highly dependent upon the discursive imagination that the Western centers of colonial powers provide it with. Thus, as long as the Western images color the non-Western imagination, the question of attainment or disenchantment of modern metropolitan idealism remains contextually deferred. However, it is idealistic to think of completely bridging the gap between the image of the imperial center and the imagination of the colonial margin, the former being a transcendental signified, that seems to be inside the formal structure of the psyche of the colonized, but actually, always already remaining outside of it. In his study of banality in the colonial margins, Saikat Majumdar observes a similar situation in the dialectical play of the metropolitan versus provincial/local. He notes,

> The provincial . . . is on the periphery of the British Empire. . . . intensely aware of its status as peripheral; the provincial shows a longing for the center, which is implicitly identified with the realm of wider possibilities, of the exciting and the extraordinary. But just the way the extraordinary fails to transform fully the banal in the epiphany, the provincial, even in its longing for the metropolitan, does not abandon its paradoxical centrality. . . . The banal materiality of the provincial, in a state of perpetually unfulfilled longing for the metropolitan, energizes the regionalist aesthetics . . .” (*Prose* 153-154)

This analysis inevitably leads to an unending array of unfulfilled desires of the colonial margins in its ambition to 'mimic' the center. In an interview taken on the occasion of the unveiling ceremony of his book, *Calcutta: Two Years in the City*, Chaudhuri says,

> I was reflecting on what it was that had drawn me to Calcutta, given the fact that 'that' Calcutta had changed. What had drawn me to Calcutta was the city in its phase of modernity, and I tried to describe in the book what I mean by modern, as a particular kind of convergence of the urban process, history, but in a way that is not finished and polished . . . but . . . in process and [that] sometimes seems to be in a state of disrepair or dereliction, because it is in process. . . These are cities which are falling apart and getting regenerated before your eyes. (“Exploring a Sense”)

This incompleteness on the part of the colonized cities (settlements, in general) may be seen as the imaginary subject that is essentially needed to complete the superior discourse

of the colonizing metropolitan centers. It had been impossible for the colonial West since the inception of the idea of colonizing the 'Rest' to ignore its 'Other' to formulate what it has spread as the dicta of rational modernity. Formulation of an emphatic Western modernity inevitably demanded a model that would work as a binary opposite to its own discourses. So, Dirk Wiemann rightly observes,

> The non-European 'Rest', in other words, was functional both as the necessary imaginary Other *and* as the concrete interlocutor of the modern West ever since the *conquista*. Hence, this Other was not only relationally inserted into but literally constitutive of modernity as its *te-ixtli* (Dussel's recuperation of an Amerindian term for 'the other face') – the historical subjects and relationalities that the hegemony discursive regime of Eurocentrism excludes or reconstructs as knowable objects. No utterance from the erstwhile colonies of Europe, then, was even actually non-modern but, rather to the opposite, part and parcel of modernity. Not only does "Amerindia form part of 'modernity' since the moment of the conquest and the colonization . . . for it contained the first 'barbarian' that modernity needed in its definition." (19)

The 'exclusion' or 'reconstruction' of the Other – the colonial Rest – through the ages of colonial domination, on the physical terms and beyond, has resulted in a 'faded' past for the former colonies. But, once the imagination of the 'pre-modern'/'non-modern' past of the colonial other is brought into play with the grand imperial/colonial images, not only historically but also as a simultaneity, it opens up a space for such fractured images of both the coloniality and the postcoloniality; no Western standardization process can actually defend the 'self-sufficient' images of the West as a totalizing discourse of modern spatio-temporality making whatever 'non-standardized' as 'non-modern'. And, this is crucially true for the holistic and eclectic patterns of postcolonialist discourses depended upon various kinds of nationalism.

When Dipesh Chakrabarty sees this colonial Indian past "in terms of a lack, an absence, or an incompleteness that translates into 'inadequacy'", he, I think, sensitizes the scholar about the possibility of a negative dialectics at play in the game of postcoloniality, in which by imagining the apparently 'absent' Other not outside of the image, but constitutively inside it, so as to make both colonialisms and postcolonialisms as incomplete discourses. ("Postcoloniality" 227) Given the circumstances, in context of a movement to the present with the burden of a faded past, theorists like Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty have

confessed the "difficulty of going beyond the mere "tracing of the itinerary of the . . . silencing"", by which they do not mean an impossibility, but an immense potentiality in thinking otherwise about these discourses with some struggles. (Weimann 35) What they might mean quite significantly that there are points of departure in relation to the analyses of a postcolonial present, which clear the way of thinking modernity as never ever totally derived from a unitary puritan Western 'origin', but as always an inevitable play among various components of modernity vis-à-vis post/coloniality.

The thesis proposes to look at the postcolonial present both differentially and simultaneously with what the Western modernity has tried to disseminate. As for example, Partha Chatterjee, although not denying the partially derivative character of Indian modernity in the context of the nationalistic history, has suggested that the elite Indian nationalist discourse does not always articulate a model as totally an obedient reproduction of the given European structure. Instead, this model has a dialogic relationship with its British counterpart that it partially rejects, yet remains influenced by it. It has selectively appropriated the Western thought on modern nationalism, and thus has registered a difference from the 'modular' form institutionalized by the Western nationalism. He writes, "The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a difference with the 'modular' forms of their national society propagated by the modern West." (*The Nation and Its Fragments* 5) In the words of Dirk Weimann, "Even if it was forced to adopt "the modes of thought characteristic of rational knowledge in the post-Enlightenment age," Indian nationalisms can therefore not be grasped as a discursive event "wholly derived from another framework of knowledge – that of modern Western rational thought." (28) Ashish Nandy articulates a similar spirit in the context of what he calls 'The Uncolonized Mind'. He, in his attempt to retrace the 'genuine' Indian civilization that is neither pre-modern nor anti-modern but simply 'non-modern', in the sense of not being aloof but being not 'essentially attached', notes that in the process of decolonizing a colonizing psyche, there is the interplay of qualified acceptance and rejection of the dominant traditions. He writes, "the absolute rejection of the West is also the rejection of the basic configuration of the Indian traditions; though, paradoxically, the acceptance of the configuration may involved a qualified rejection of the West." (75) In this interplay, he observes that the ethnic universalism of India "sees the Westernized India as a sub tradition which, in spite of its pathology and its tragic-comic core, is a 'digested' form of another civilization that had once gate crashed." (75)

At this point, a brief discussion on the structures of 'norm expectations', 'norm deviations', and 'norm exceptions', in contexts of post/coloniality, as discussed by Partha Chatterjee in his essay "Lineages of Political Society", should be of some help. By a comparative method of judging the colonial power and the colonized margins, both through qualitative deliberations at the theoretical level, and quantitative proof making processes at the empirical level, the colonial elites have constructed what this subaltern historian calls a mythical "abstract time-space" against the "incursions of the real world of politics . . . only around the turn of the nineteenth century." (4) This, as per the analysis of Chatterjee of Jeremy Bentham's book *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, and a latter tract "The Influence of Time and Place in Matters of Legislation", has a tactic of self-proclaimed standardization by the elite colonial 'masters', who have developed the concept of "backward" colonies, by pitting them against "normative expectations", "alike applicable to the laws of all nations." (6) Therefrom is initiated a political strategy and a formula of "norm-deviation", which would mean that neither morally nor empirically the "backward" colonies could fulfill the expectations of becoming advanced and thus 'modern' in proper sense of the terms. But, as this strategy is never grounded in the 'real' historical situations of the colonized societies, which are so heterogeneous, and is being only contained in 'mythical' spatio-temporality of an elite governmentality, it could never adequately account for the undesirable 'anomalies' in the results. This, instead of, thinking them differently on the diverse nature of the colonies, has actually compelled them to count these anomalies as "norm-exceptions", only eventually to determine the 'incorrigibility' of that formula. He writes,

> From the nineteenth century, therefore, the two senses of the norm encoded the basic political strategy of relating the normative to the empirical. The norm-deviation structure would establish the empirical location of any particular social formation at any given time in relation to the empirically prevailing average or normal. The corresponding normative framework could then provide, by means of a norm-exception structure of justification, the ground for the application of "policy" to intervene and bring the empirical average closer to the desired norm. Normalization was the theoretical key to this political strategy. (10-11)

This formulation of the "norm expectations", "norm deviations", and "norm exceptions" is especially important in the context of postcolonial situations, as similar formulae are adopted during and after the independence of the former colonies, now nations,

with the concept of popular sovereignty, which, in turn, has legitimized the nation-state as the norm of postcolonial history and existence. Chatterjee writes, "The period of decolonization following the end of the Second World War made the nation-state the universally normal form of the modern state. Popular sovereignty became the universal norm of legitimacy: even military dictators and one-party regimes began to claim to rule on behalf of the people." ("Lineages" 11) He refers to Sudipta Kaviraj's formulations of the assumptions of "the symmetrical development", by some sociologists to show how the idea that if "all of the functionally interrelated processes" of modernization are not achieved at the same time, the modernity in/of a postcolonial society is either "imperfect" or "failed". (12) In counter to this, the arguments of alternative or multiple modernities advance the ideas of "the sequential theory of development", which proposes "the particular sequence in which the different processes of modernity occurred in Western history need not to be repeated elsewhere." (12) And, through this idea of sequential 'break' or 'alteration' that alternative modernities are conceptualized, including the formulations of the postcoloniality: "It is from a consideration of these alternative sequences of modernity rather than from that of multiple or post-modernity that postcolonial political theory was born." (13)

To a great extent, Chatterjee's formulation of the idea of "the political society" is an example of such sequential alterity. In contrary to the official dominance of "the civil society", a small section of the neo-colonial elite, itself bound and governed, which also tries to govern on the basis of the "legally enforceable rights", he has theorized the idea of this agency in the functioning and the lived situationalities of the postcolonial nations and their popular sovereignties. In context of India, this society also includes a large section of "the people," who are left behind in the official recognition of their rights by the state, although all of them are 'citizens' in the independent country. In opposition to only the official upliftment of their status as 'fuller' citizens, they negotiate, in various ways and in various contexts, with the representatives of the governments at various levels, which are largely theorized only in terms of 'norm exceptions', the postcolonial state being, to a great extent, modeled on the colonial structure of the nationhood. He describes the political situation of the postcoloniality as split

> [B]etween a narrow domain of civil society where citizens related to the state through the mutual recognition of legally enforceable rights and a wider domain of political society where governmental agencies dealt not only with citizens but with populations to deliver specific benefits or services through a process of political negotiations. (14)

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He sensitizes the policy makers and the intellectuals of the postcoloniality about the need of taking into account this large population while making their formulations for making the modern postcolonial democracy run in a smoother manner: "It is important to emphasize that, unlike the symmetrical theory of modernity which would regard such populism as a perversion of modern democratic politics, the sequential theory would consider it with utter seriousness as a new and potentially richer development of democracy." ("Lineages" 15) He significantly notes that, in contrary to a postcolonial nation based on privileging "the civil society", Indian political life, shows, in reality, as far as the lived practices of the people is concerned, "the piling up of exceptions". The task of the theorists and policy makers of the postcoloniality is to recognize this truth. To quote him exactly,

> The actual practices of modern political life have resulted, however, not in the abandonment of those norms but in the piling up of exceptions in course of the administration of the law as mediated by the processes of political society. The relation between norms and practices has resulted in a series of improvisations. It is the theorization of these improvisations that has become the task of postcolonial political theory. (19)

To deliberate on Chatterjee's essay with so much importance lies in formulating comprehensively what Chaudhuri notices in the sphere of postcolonial Indian English literatures as dominated by the "national allegories". The novelist also, against this homogenization of the Indian cultural-literary sphere by different narratives of 'official' Indian nationhood, wants the writers and critics to recognize the idiosyncrasies, digressions, even irresponsibilities of common lives as they are lived, not as they are recognized by the political mainstream of this country. This can be thought in terms of the breaking or altering the 'sequential' structure of the modernity. And, this can be done by inserting the accounting the 'personal', and the individual as not only an important but also the foremost component of postcoloniality, nationhood, and sovereignty. For example, Chatterjee, after Kaviraj, has given a sample of sequence for conceptualizing the 'ideal' Western modern state, which is the following ""commercial society – civic associations – rational bureaucracy – industrialization – universal suffrage – welfare state."" (12) He has noted that in case of Indian postcolonial modernity, this sequence has been altered by 'rational bureaucracy' and 'universal suffrage' as preceding others. In the case of Chaudhuri's literary-cultural sensibility, this can further be characterized by putting 'the personal experiences' at the first place of the sequence. This will account for a decrease in his sense of alienation from the

literary mainstream of the Indian English writing at a time when the global capital is playing big in the Indian cultural scene (especially, publication scene), and India, in its wish for becoming a superpower, is also playing big in the international politics and trade. He says, "And Indian writing in English reflects that and traverses that thin line between postcolonial pride and imperialist ambition. I would be happy with a writing that is more ambiguous about its own position and wish it would be less triumphant. I feel alienated from that personally as a writer." ("I Wish Indian") Amit Chaudhuri's creative-critical persona is a response to finding out an alternative space for thinking about the complex relationships of the nationhood vis-à-vis globalization, on one hand, and the people of the nation, on the other. The space that Chaudhuri is trying to create can be, to some extent, found in what Debarshi Prasad Nath writes about how ethnic groups negotiating their identities through different strategies of ethnic mobilization, but not in a sense of the theorization of such mobilization with a sense of fixity: "In the process of nationalities being reshaped and altered by globalisation, there has thus been a strengthening of ethnic belligerence. Globalisation has forced ethnic groups into a situation where they have to seek ways to safeguard their identity through different strategies of ethnic mobilisation." (55)

In Chaudhuri's writings, we can see how the personal eccentricities, aleatoriness of the smallest situations of life, and ambivalent and anxious quotidian existence of the common people have taken a central position. This shows a further development in the idea of the political society, which is never quite detached from the socio-political-cultural images and imageries of the postcolonial Indian nationhood, but also not always colored by them. The 'nation' as they conceive it in their little digressions from its different versions of it, is not treated as 'perversions' in imagining and imaging the same on the basis of some prescriptive norms, which is of and for the governments and the elites to do; rather, the notions about a nation are charged by the esemplasticity of the imaginations and even by the idiosyncratically created images, which the theorists of the grand nationalisms might take with either reservation or might reject altogether.

Interestingly, what today's postcolonial thinkers forget about this conception of nationhood can be found in great thinkers of Indian nationalisms, like Rabindranath Tagore. Partha Chatterjee quotes his idea on nationhood, which Tagore calls as "*svadeś*", as the word could not adequately contain the significance of the term and sometimes, too rigidly points out to the "machinery", that runs the modern nation-state – "the organization of the modern

state – political associations, representative bodies, campaigns for membership, elections, etc." ("Tagore's Non-Nation" 105) Tagore writes,

> We must install the machinery. And regardless of which country its operating procedures come from, we must accept them as well, for otherwise all will be in vain. Yet, fully accepting that requirement, we must also say that India cannot run by machinery alone: unless we can directly experience the individual feelings of our hearts, our true selves will not be drawn to such a thing. You may call this good or bad; you may curse it or praise it; but that is the truth. (Qtd. in "Tagore's Non-Nation" 105)

I think, the phrase 'experience of the individual feeling of our heart' of Tagore, whom Chaudhuri has alluded and quoted in several places in his fictional, non-fictional and critical writings, is something that can very well characterize them, which are often thought as nothing to do with the national/isms. On the contrary, I would like to look at his writings as something which cannot totally overlook the grand structures of Indian postcolonial modernity, but do not make this grandiose their point of concentration. In an inevitable open dialectics of postcoloniality, Chaudhuri's narratives continually oscillate between the grand images of colonialisms and nationalisms and the little digressions that make 'nations of their own'. Knowledge about the people, who live together to make a sociable space of community, which is at the root of any nationhood, for that matter, and an imagination, which has immense potentiality for altering the fixed images of the 'grand', plays important roles in shaping a bit 'bizarre' and complex, but well-developed notion of Chaudhuri's *'svadeś'*. And, I agree, when Saikat Majumder writes, "The modernist tradition within which Chaudhuri works is consistent in its mode and sensibility but never closed or indifferent to historical, political or economic transitions." ("Of that Time" 30) And, what Saikat Majumder has observed in case of the novel *Freedom Song*, is very true in this context, in which the double movement of "personal is political, and vice versa ", continuously characterizes Chaudhuri's thought of postcoloniality and nationhood. (26)

I would like to draw attention to a parallelism between Tagore's idea of the *'svadeś*, which is continually at tension with the official notions of the 'nation', and Nancy's idea of 'community', being-with-the-other', which remains always already in an angularity with the 'sovereignty'. Tagore says,

The certain knowledge that I have a *deś* comes out of a quest. Those who think that the country is theirs simply because they have been born in are creatures besotted by the external things of the world. But, since the true character of the human being lies in his or her inner nature imbued with the force of self-making (*ātmaśakti*), only that country can be one's *svadeś* that is created by one's own knowledge, intelligence, love and effort. (Qtd. in "Tagore's Non-Nation" 104)

In his commentary on this, what Partha Chatterjee writes can be useful for the purpose of converging Tagore, Nancy and Chaudhuri. He writes,

My *svadeś* is something that I, along with others, create by virtue of our knowledge, intelligence, love, and effort. My *svadeś* is the product of our imagination, the object of our quest – it is something we must earn. . . . Instead of looking for the nation, we must revive and reconstruct the *svadeśī samāj*, establish the collective power of self-making or *ātmaśakti*. The relation of every inhabitant of the country with the *svadeś* must be personal and quotidian. ("Tagore's Non-Nation" 104)

Jason Smith, in the "Introduction" of Nancy's book *Hegel: The Restless of the Negative*, which has been translated by him and Steven Miller, discusses the philosopher's idea of the "community" and the "political", in contrary to that of state or the sovereignty, while commenting upon the book *The Inoperative Community*. Likewise Tagore's formulation of the notion of *svadeś*, these parallel concepts almost plead for an originary spatio-temporality in thinking of 'spacing' we generally term as 'nation'. This originarity exceeds any received sense of nation or sovereignty, as being only a "covering over and forgetting" about that 'spacing', which is always already disseminated by an idea of the "common" as "being-with-the-other". Smith writes,

Whatever the specific results of these analyses and interventions on the theory and essence of the "political," what is most insistent in Nancy's work is precisely its desire to describe a form of originary sociality that cannot be characterized in terms of sovereignty and the law, but as the merest "opening of a space." Such an opening, voided as it is of any essential relationship to the forms associated either with a public sphere or with an agora, does not seem immediately political: in truth, it seems rather bare. It is precisely this barrenness – what will also be described as a nudity, a laying bare, a place of exposure and exposition, a desert(ed) or abandoned space – that

Nancy seeks. This nudity is the mark of essentiality: its isolation appears to offer a purified image of the political. (x)

The "originary sociality" is such a spacing of the "We" in the world, which is an infinity, because the more any instrumentality tries to capture this "We" by such constructions as 'sovereignty', 'legislation', or 'nationality', it always lacks in holding the immense potential that lies within this formulation, in which the being is inevitably bound with and colored by the other. This instrumental rationality of state-making 'achieves' above constructions by detaching, even sometimes by the brutality of the state machineries, the other from the self of such commonality and community, but not always successfully. This is why such constructions are always directly or indirectly threatened by all that could not be accommodated by these constructions – the 'dangerous' indentured workers, the minorities of various kinds, the dissenting intellectuals, transnational capital, cultural extremists, and so on. This is why the 'originary sociality' is such a space, which, like an infinity, a void, creates possibilities of change, of transformations, of disruptions, which are, however traced out by the superficially constructed categories of the world. The political of Nancy is not that bounded place, in which the community can be confidently defined, but the "place where community as such is brought into play". This place always remains outside for appropriation, but as "expropriation", continual exposition of the denial and further possibility of appropriation. (Smith xvii) That 'spacing', Nancy writes,

> [I]s *not*, in any case, *just* the *locus of power relations*. . . . I do not wish to neglect the sphere of power relations. . . . On the contrary, I seek only to insist on the importance and gravity of the relations of force and the class and/or party struggles of the world. . . . But there would be no power relations, nor would there be such a specific unleashing of power (there would merely be a mechanics of force), if the political were not the *place of* community. (Qtd. in Smith xvi)

This discussion might be concluded with Smith's summarization of the "community" of Nancy, and his "most disturbing" formulation of the "political" without the *realpolitik*:

> Nancy, these two options [correlation and antinomy of the juridical, in context of the state and power, in context of the disciplinary techniques] appear to form a specular pair that is neutralized by a third term, what he has variously called "community" or the "ontology" of the common. This neutralization opens onto an absolute sociality: a pure being-with not yet encumbered by any properly political or even ethical

determination. It is precisely this characterization of the common as *not yet* "properly" political that has ensured these texts' [Nancy's] relative illegibility. Even if Nancy has insisted on the fact that this pure opening is simply the *condition* of the political without itself being political, and therefore that its theorization in no way substitutes for either the analysis of political institutions or the denunciation of exploitation, it is the implied syntax of this formulation – politics without politics – that has proved most disturbing. (xvi)

III

What I have tried to formulate for analyzing the non/nation in Chaudhuri's fictional corpus, specifically in cases of the two novels, *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Afternoon Raag*, through all these rather convoluted deliberations on some theories from different disciplines, can be summarized as below:

a) Chaudhuri's nation might not seem directly political from the points-of-view of the established theories of postcolonial nationalisms, as sometimes the analysis is based on miniscule, or quotidian, and sometimes, remotely *related* spaces and times and people, the 'denizenry' of the alternative nationhoods, like in a child's imagination, or a simple familial occasion or a memory of that, an object otherwise going to be missed, and so on. Although they are remotely related to the established discourses on nations and nationalisms, they, however are intricately knitted with the imagination of one's own *svadeś*.

b) This imagination plays a crucial role in analyzing the texts as the sites of such spatio-temporality as to be capable of destabilizing the 'fixed' and 'petrified' stereotypes of the colonial and the postcolonial in the popular imaginations and/or formulations.

c) The texts are able to disseminate the idea of an ever-expanding stretch of the nationhood, which by virtue of the little quotidian details, is able to express itself both through and against the grand and hubristic schemes of post/coloniality and the incessant swing of the components of these discourses without any certainty. This is through this oscillation the eccentric spaces and times of such alternative nationhood are traced. This oscillation is also a marker of the double movement that Nancy calls "expropriation", both an exposition and an excess of appropriation.

d) Finally, all these deliberations on the nature of postcolonial Indian modernity essentially point out to a process, which is never complete, never completely realized but always already in the making. In the context of postcolonial Indian metropolitan modernity, it applies in the similar vein making it severely 'unreal', stripped off any determinant or determinable finality and any scope of satisfactory conclusion.

In the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Chaudhuri depicts a postcolonial cityscape of Calcutta that is 'underdeveloped' in the sense that it has yet to materialize the imaginary idealism of the Western metropolis. The city streets full of dust, traffic jams, frequent power cuts, the sorry plight of the telephone system – all add to the vision of a 'dysfunctional' city, a city that has not yet become modern through the penetration of the machineries of advancement that are required to brand one so. He writes, "Calcutta is a city of dust" (*A Strange* 13). The dusty streets of Calcutta gives the impression of a city planning that is always incomplete probably hinting towards the relative impossibility of a third-world city's reaching the peak of the global North. At the metaphysical level, it might indicate the failure of achieving the 'desired West', the normative expectations that it has prescribed for the rest. It can never be fulfilled because the rest, because the gap between a borrowed modern rationality and the socio-economic exigencies, priorities and contingencies of a different land. Above all, for the postcoloniality, a rational totality is a mere illusion not less than it is for the colonial images. So, a feeling of unfulfillment always haunts Calcutta streets as Chaudhuri describes,

> If one walks down the street, one sees mounts of dust like sand-dunes on the pavements, on which children and dogs sit doing nothing, while sweating labourers dig into the macdam with spades and drills. The roads are always being dug up, partly to construct the new underground railway system, or perhaps for some other obscure reason, such as replacing a pipe that doesn't work with another pipe that doesn't work. (*A Strange* 13)

The macabre description has a queer liminal realization, wherein the continuous interplay of different forces destabilizes any conformity. The streets and pavements of the city are haunted by a memory of sand-dunes of a desert; the movement and dynamism of the laborers' activities are mocked by the 'inactive' and 'unimportant' children and dogs alike; the 'development' of the city by building underground railways is challenged not only by its own incompleteness but by a sense of void in that no such system is actually 'developed'. Is

it a 'city' that Chaudhuri is talking about or it is a 'desert'? What development is taking place and for whom, where children are left to stroll on the streets with dogs? The writer observes, "At such times, Calcutta is like a work of modern art that neither makes sense nor has utility, but exists for some esoteric aesthetic reason."(13) The words 'sense' and 'utility', all of a sudden, evoke the importance of calculability of the modern civilization, that has excluded all that is aesthetic but of no practical use. The totally chaotic art is yet called 'modern' to incite the modernist artist's whole hearted rejection of whatever that is planned, hierarchical, linear and ordered. The well-planned modern city seems to be a reason enough for fleeing away from it. The whole modern project of city-building seems to be destroying itself amidst a war as the writer probably purposefully evokes the imageries of a battlefield: "Trenches and mounts of dust everywhere give the city a strange bombed-out look. The old houses, with their reposeful walls, are crumbling to slow dust, their once-gleaming gates are rusting. Dust flakes off the ceilings in offices; the buildings are becoming dust . . . Daily, Calcutta disintegrates, unwhispering, into dust and daily it rises from dust again." (13) Chaudhuri in an Orwellian fashion ("War is Peace") parodies the march of the modern development as Calcutta's destiny calmly settles down in dust.

References to frequent power-cuts also add to the dysfunctionality of a postcolonial city yet to meet the standards of a first-world metropolis. During the unbearable heat of the summer, Calcutta is brimming with intolerable power-cuts. Chaudhuri describes the condition of the family of Chhotomama in the following words:

> They had shut all the windows and closed the shutters so that the room was a large box covered by a lid, cool and dark and spacious inside. And they were like tiny insects living in the darkness of the box, breathing in the air of the world through invisible perforations. Whenever there was a power-cut, they fanned themselves meditatively with newspapers or bamboo fans, and the children deserted the bed and lay down or sat down on the floor, because the floor was stone slab of coolness, an expanse of warm eyes that would not melt. Sandeep's aunt and mother lay on the bed, murmuring to each other, and each time they turned, there was a sigh and subtle clink of bangles. And whenever the power returned, the fan whirred at full speed and the silent room filled with its gentle, understated hum. (*A Strange* 34)

Electricity has remained one of the major stepping stones for the Western urban modernity. So, the power-cuts make a postcolonial city relegate into almost a 'primitive' state

of being, which has always served as the Other to the Western conceptualization and execution of the 'development' through a modernity, that is a fulfilling wealth to the West but has always haunted the Rest with a strong sense of incompleteness. Dhananjoy Roy writes in this context, "The author, in the novel, gives as much as five references to the *intolerable* frequent power-cuts of Calcutta which *no doubt exemplify unwanted and tedious disruption* in the flow of the *common* urban life in the city." (*A Strange* 4) (Italics mine) The sentence almost unequivocally points to a 'naturalized' psyche of the 'universal' yet Western urbanity, which does not tolerate without doubts the exemplification of "*unwanted and tedious disruption* in the flow of the *common* urban life in the city". It is an instance where the universalizing tendency of the Western modernity that has colonized the psychological orientation of its Other forever.

Similarly, there are references to the traffic jams in Calcutta. The author meticulously notes the sonorous ebb and flow of the Calcutta traffic while at halt and when the 'golden stillness has ended'. He writes, "He (Sandeep) heard car-horns blowing in the distance. He heard shouts – a taxi-driver must be insulting a bus-driver. It was the first traffic jam of the evening, punctual, ceremonial and glorious. The two hours of golden stillness has ended. The cars and crowded buses were on roads again. . . ." (*A Strange* 114) A two-hour traffic jam is as threatening and unwanted as the dusty streets or acute power shortage to the march of 'developmental' modernity for any city. The tone of the author here gets ironical and satiric, but not only to explore the 'underdevelopment' of a postcolonial city, but only to parody the fractured rationality of the Western modernity, which is caught in its own discourses as even the traffic-jams has been appropriated to the extreme 'precision' in the mantra of 'punctuality', 'ceremonialism' and 'glory'. The picture at the colonial margin of the world-wide urbanism gets grimmer and more complicated when the characteristic incompleteness in one component of modernity affects others like an epidemic. The current novel cites an instance where the dysfunctionality in the road transport system affects the healthcare and the final result is deterioration in patient's health condition or even loss of life. This is an example of how modernity with all its ideological and practical deliberations control the life of citizens, especially the urban mass, in the entirety. The author describes the helpless conditions of the urban citizen in front of a severe traffic jam in the way of depicting the event of Chhotomama's consecutive heart attacks. He writes, "On the way to the hospital, Chhotomama had another attack. He vomited on the floor of the company car. The driver, caught in a traffic-jam, shook his head from side to side. He had seen these things happen to

his elder brother, who had died in half an hour." (131) The next statements are more indicative towards the complicated scenario of modernity, the enlightenment ideals are often questioned and the discourses of development are repeatedly challenged by the critics. The author subtly observes the tension of a helpless patient, threatened by the haunting memories of the deaths of near and dear ones. He writes of the disturbed thoughts of Chhotomama (in continuation of the excerpt quoted above), "His father had died in his village from cholera, which was a different kind of a disease. He began to think of his father, and those last moments when nothing could help him." (131)

The developmental march of modern urbanity has assured a 'difference' in the life, a movement from helplessness before the all-encompassing Nature to the strength of commanding over it propagating Enlightenment as the basic ideology, and science and technology as the basic tools for achieving that myth. It has emerged as an alternative omnipotent power that 'could help' the civilization in every way. This is why the modern era had witnessed massive migration of rural population to the urban centers. But, the current observation shows that it has failed to keep its promise as it has been practically impossible to attain that since its inception, sometimes indicating towards the Nature/Culture binary as only a myth. Chhotomama has migrated to the great city of Calcutta in search of a better life; but, the outcome has been the 'difference' only in the nature of disease, from cholera to heart attack, and not in the trauma of death or the fear of mortality – the Nature has sustained its existence at the end exhausting the extraordinary promise of 'immortality' that modernity had disseminated.

Like the dysfunctional traffic, there is one instance of the partially failed sewage system of the city of Calcutta. While describing the aftermath of a *kal-baisakhi*, the evening storm and rain during the summer in Bengal, the writer writes,

> The gutters in the lane overflowed with an odd, languid grace. Water filled the lane; rose from the ankle-deep to knee-deep. Insects swam in circles. Urchins splashed about haphazardly, while Saraswati returned from market with a shopping-bag in her hands; insects swam away to avoid this clumsy giant. Her wet footprints printing the floor of the house were as rich with possibility as the first footprint Crusoe found on his island. (*A Strange* 88)

The vivid picture of a post-rainfall episode in the city of Calcutta not only points to the unfulfilled network of smooth sewage but also a very different perception of a postcolonial

city about the modern 'hygiene', which is also a modern concept that has travelled from the West to the Rest. Calcutta's sewage system like many other components of urban infrastructure is still largely dependent on the colonial planning and very little development has taken place in this regard in the post-Independence period. The overflowing gutters point out to the city's lack in upgrading the system along with the time and space. But, this statistical incompleteness is not all that a postcolonial urban space has materialized in. Probably, there is an appropriation of this incomplete resultant condition on the aesthetic level that the author is keen to explore. The description sounds to be celebrating the triumph of an ongoing life flow, setting aside the modern analyses on incomplete city-planning or a forgetting of the overcautious hygiene norms. The life at the colonial margins as if does not care of the elite standards of the Western modernity as 'urchins' keep on splashing haphazardly or the maid servants like Saraswati do not stop their marketing adventures. The comic portrayals of the insects' swimming away to avoid the 'clumsy giant', Saraswati, or of her robust wet and dirty footprints seem to be mocking the Western obsession with hygiene. Moreover, the reference to the discovery of the first footprint by Robinson on some Trinidadian island points to the fact that these 'disgraceful' accounts of the postcolonial urban condition may be as pregnant with the 'rich possibilities' of both becoming highly 'exotic' to the Western readership and so 'close to the heart' for that of postcoloniality as it was in the case of Crusoe's unprecedented accounts of the Trinidadian island.

The problematic Ambassador of Chhotomama is another of the prominent and most comically presented motifs of the incomplete and fractured urban modernity at the colonial margin. This car almost itself stands for the model of the Western capitalist modernity with all its developmental and enlightenment paradigms, and the lack of an assurance of an eternity that such paradigms disseminate, especially to the purveyors of the postcolonial imagination. The journey of this car in the novel *A strange and Sublime Address* almost resembles the journey of modernity from the West to the Rest – its ill-conceived birth at the colonial metropolitan centers, its enthusiastic reception at the colonial peripheries, with its simultaneous foreignness and familiarity to both those who have and have been ruled once it has been 'domesticated' at the colonial margin, and the in/appropriability by any of them, and finally, its sad disappearance but not complete demise. The whole story forms a strange heterotopia in which the Ambassador resides within a native culture and yet always remains outside of it, creating for itself a space that is neither native nor foreign, neither pervaded by the colonizers nor adequately owned by the colonized. Contextually, this is the truth about

Chhotomama's private car only but the whole brand of Ambassador in India, a product of the Hindustan Motors, basically modeled after the Morris Oxford III model, owned by the Morris Motors Ltd. at Cowley, Oxford. The Wikipedia information provides how this first mimic Indian car became the status symbol of the colonial elites as well as the State and then lost its popularity and prestige with the growth second-order colonialism by the American late-Capitalist market. The Wiki article informs,

> Modelled after the British Morris Oxford, the Ambassador was the first car to be made in India and was once a status symbol, but began losing its dominance in the mid-1980s when Maruti Suzuki introduced its low-priced 800 hatchback. It lost further cachet and market share when global automakers began setting up shop in India in the mid-1990s, offering models with contemporary designs and technology. The Ambassador has remained the choice of a dwindling share of bureaucrats and politicians, usually in white with a red beacon on top and a chauffeur at the wheel. ("Hindustan Ambassador")

Chhotomama's Ambassador is neither the symbol of colonial elitism nor the derivative native bureaucracy to their fullest extent. Rather, it points to a transition when the postcolonial urban centers are giving birth to the *nouveau riche* middleclass in India, who are eternally caught between the colonial elitism and postcolonial mediocrity with their limited reaches and resources. Thus this class represents most appropriately the liminality of the modern urban centers of the global South. The novel describes,

> Chhotomama backed the car out of the small garage that was attached to the house. It was an old, grey Ambassador; its faded, mottled colour did not seem to be its natural colour, but a complexion attained with age and unrewarded industry. It was battered like an old cardboard box, and the needles on the dials on its dashboard never changed direction, like futile compasses always pointing north. When it ran, the engine and the ramshackle body of the car combined make a grating, earthy noise, like a drunk man cracking an obscene joke in a guttural dialect and laughing at it at the same time. (*A Strange* 17-18)

Chhotomama's Ambassador is thus first found out to be coming out of a middle class family's small garage in Calcutta. In opposition to the brand-new industrial products coming out of the Western industries or their simulated counterparts in the postcolonial spaces, it is 'old', 'grey' and 'mottled', devoid of its 'original' British flavor in every way just like the

firstly derivative and then domesticated modernity in the postcolonial margins. The simultaneous 'utility' and 'uselessness' of this car is hinted at by the phrases like 'an old cardboard box' and the light-hearted comparison of its dashboard-dials with 'futile compasses', almost invoking a sense of an modernity caught between the half-known grand foreignness and the half-remembered nativity. The final analogy with the 'drunk man' creates a critical space for re-interrogating the Ambassador as a symbol of postcolonial urban modernity, which is injected with an essential foreignness that can no more be undone and is perpetually cursed with insanity, obscenity and self-reproach but one that can reserve the potentiality of creating alternative discourses. In the second reference to this car in the novel, it is found to be not moving on its own and needs external 'push' by the 'small battalion' of children at home and the neighborhood. It has become a local site of applause, frustration and wonder with the whole vicinity gathering to watch event 'with sympathetic curiosity'. The author gives a very amusing description of the onlookers,

> Their eyes followed the car's reluctant progress; their lips parted to pass a few well-considered comments; husbands and wives who had quarrelled the previous night were reunited in their avid appreciation of the spectacle; brothers who could never agree about a single point reached a brief consensus about the condition of the vehicle; astonished children who had never spoken anything but thickly meditative nonsense uttered, to the delight of their mothers, their first word as the car belched twice into motion and then stopped again. (*A Strange* 38)

With the dysfunctional modernity at the doorstep of the colonial people and their quotidian lives, the author, as their intellectual representative, has not missed the simultaneous paradigm of acceptance and rejection of the normative standards in thinking about the postcoloniality. This is confirmed in the next two pages when the wife of Chhotomama in her desperate prayer to get rid of this ambivalent existence wishes to go back to the pre-modern 'primitivism' and questions "Why don't we stick to horse-carriages?" (*A Strange* 39) She feels happy and smiles when the car finally starts and takes off. And this further complicates the issue of the modern urban existence, which is sought and not accepted at the same time. The narrator, being a part of the similar postcolonial modern ambivalent milieu, emphatically notes,

> It was one of those beasts that the people of Calcutta had been unable to domesticate – better, perhaps, to go back to the horse and the horse-carriage. On bad days like this,

when the fans stopped turning because of power-cut, when the telephone went dead because of a cable-fault, when the taps became dry because there was no power to pump the water, and finally, when the car engine curtly refused to start, it seemed a better idea to return to the primitive, unpretentious means of subsistence – to buy a horse and a plough, to dig a well in one's backyard, to plant one's own trees and grow one's own fruit and vegetables. Calcutta, in spite of its fetid industrialization, was really part of the primitive, terracotta landscape of Bengal, Tagore's and the wandering Vishnav poet's Bengal – the Bengal of bullock-cart and the earthen lamp. It had pretended to be otherwise, but now it had grown old and was returning to that original darkness: in time, people would forget that electricity had ever existed, and earthen lamps would burn again in the houses. (*A Strange* 40)

The scientifico-technological markers of the modernity – the electricity, the wide and the beautified streets, the telephonic systems, the underground railway, the private cars, the traffic on the roads etc. – are found in a situation of disarray on the colonial margin indicating a plight of ever-incompleteness, where chaos rules. On the other hand, the power-cuts, the dusty roads, the paralytic telephonic systems, the never-realized underground railways, the dysfunctional car of Chhotomama, the traffic-jams – all act as symbols of the strong internal contradictions and fracturedness in the discourses of modernity themselves, which almost always relegate into a realm of unreliability and non-realization, the gap between the imagination and image being ever widening and never bridgeable. Among all this sense of ambivalences, through the aid of imagination, the intelligentsia, is also seen not only opening a spacing of a discourse of its archaic nativity but also giving an alternative to the one, which has so far attempted to "cover over" such nativity and made the world "forget about" the same. Only through the so called 'dysfunctionality' of the grand markers growth, which have failed to sustain the postcolonial life adequately, we can notice a 'return' of a sense of one's ownness in a postcolonial intellectual, who recalls endearingly that "Calcutta, in spite of its fetid industrialization", which "was really part of the primitive, terracotta landscape of Bengal, Tagore's and the wandering Vishnav poet's Bengal – the Bengal of bullock-cart and the earthen lamp." Calcutta's return to the 'original darkness' marks a renewal of the quest for the nation of one's own as against the hubris of nationalisms imported with the colonial modernity, and also a postcolonial consciousness of one's lived life in *svadeś,* in one's own country, experienced through the senses and sensibilities of what has been there all through, but has been noticed so keenly as one's own.

One can seek to take such symbols as Tagore, terracotta, Vaishnav poet and poetry etc. as not an imaginative reformulation of colonial images, which can adequately create a sense of liberation in and thus offer an agency to the thinking about the conditions of the postcoloniality, but as some overworked and clichéd stereotypes employed for the sake of making of a neo-colonial elitism in context of construction of nationalisms. For them, Chaudhuri's novel has offered such miniscule details, which are although far removed for the official stereotypes of a imagining a postcolonial space called Bengal, can be placed so close to the existentiality of such a space colored by the small, quotidian lives of the people, who reside and imagine it with all their little deviations, irrelevancies, and idiosyncrasies, of course alternatively but not being completely cut from the grand structures of the political, which are personal too. For example, the writer recalls how popular Bengali imagination has held in its imagination of togetherness, the Nancian "community" through such tiny everyday activities like oiling both babies and tamarind. He writes,

> In Bengal, both tamarind and babies are soaked in mustard-oil, and then left upon a mat on the terrace to absorb the morning sun. The tamarind is left out till it dries up and shrivels into an inimitable flavor and a ripe old age; but the babies are brought in before it gets too hot, and then bathed in cool water. With their frantic miniature limbs and their brown, shining bodies, they look like little koi fish caught from Hooghly river, struggling into life. (*A Strange* 8)

It is wonderful to note how the esemplastic imagination of Chaudhuri has been able to recreate a collective space both categorically and metaphorically called Bengal through simultaneous invocation of little known everyday rituals of 'soaking' of both babies and tamarind, and the well-known ethnic symbol of fish, which almost with its relentless essentiality colors the Bengalihood. One cannot escape how through his dynamic sense of quotidian but lively aesthetics of Bengaliness, Chaudhuri bypasses all established and elite discourses related to such an identity, yet comes so close to that identity. Not a Bengali nationalism of the colonial order, like the much theorized *bhadralok* sensibility colors his artistic sensibility as a postcolonial writer, but a deep sense of belongingness to and being together with both an evaporating and universal spacing called Bengal, ever expanding with the varied imaginations of the people with their digressions and eccentricities. The same sensibility is at work when he describes across two pages the ritual gathering of 'jaams', fruits "dark and shiny as grapes or berries" (not in the theorized sense as disseminated by the Western scholarships on Anthropology and Folkloristics), and mixing mustard-oil and sugar

with them. The grand themes of civilizations have been diluted into these small moments of lived life, to trace the intractable course of existence, and also to invoke the double movements of tragic-comicality, unimportant-seriousness of this course:

> One by one, they took turns – his aunt, Sandeep, Abhi, even Babla – abandoning their civilized facades and letting themselves go the moment they held the pan, like prophets on the verge of a vision or epileptics surrendering to a seizure. In the end, the 'jaam' became soft and moist and pulpy, purplish in colour, both sweet and tangy, delicious. (*A Strange* 30)

Along with these ethnic-cultural markers, the novel also pays its heed to the surreptitious entry of the capital in the imagination of the popular middle-class drawing in yet other images of Bengal through such little but native counterparts of the grand Ambassador car, the antiseptic cream called 'Boroline' and biscuits called 'Thin Arrowroot', probably produced by the company named 'Britannia'. Both of these brands and companies are Indian, and are creeping in the native national imagination through the new media, like radio. Chaudhuri invokes the once popular advertisements of these products aired from the local radio station at Calcutta, the *Akashvani* (literally, an oracle or the "Voice from the Sky").

The slow entry of the capital, holding the changing policies of the governments moving from the 'conservative' Nehruvian welfarism at the center and water closet Communism at the state to the 'liberalization' of economy, has started coloring the popular imagination in India in the 80's and 90's of the previous century. Along with this movements, the role of media, like television, newspaper and radio, although till then largely owned by the public sector only, is becoming increasingly important. This is not the place to discuss at length the relation between the electronic and print media, and the national imagination, which a lot of researches have been carried out on, probably the most celebrated among them, is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Rather, I will focus on how Chaudhuri has depicted in this novel not only a subversive movement of popular imagination altering and reinterpreting the sense of a nation as a unified community as disseminated by the media by their personal and creative idiosyncrasies, but also an inevitable interdependablility of these two agencies in shaping and reshaping the images of nationhood.

Chaudhuri depicts how Chhotomama enters the toilet "armed with an ashtray, a newspaper and a pair of reading-glasses," wherein he would read the "*significant* news of the day" – the "world affairs" and the "home affairs" – and would the current situation from a

"Marxist angle." (*A Strange* 61) (Italics mine) But, this apparent weight and seriousness of these "daily ceremonies" along with the heavy terminologies quoted above, on which the elite intellectuality constructs its narratives of 'imagined nations', are suddenly altered with such irrelevancies entering a queer personal yet communal/national space as singing of lines from Tagore songs and the interruption of that by Sandeep's, a child's inquisitiveness from outside of the toilet. When the word '*godhuli*' or the dusk appears in one of the Tagore songs, which are keenly followed by Sandeep from outside, the child asks the meaning of the word. And, as Chhotomama explains the meaning of the word, the child's imagination goes on to catch an altogether different sense of being-together-with-others like in

> [A] film being shown from a projector – the slow-moving, indolent cows, their nostrils and their shining eyes, the faint white outline of the cowherd, the sense of the expectant village (a group of scattered huts), and the dust, yes the dust, rising unwillingly from the cows' hooves and blurring everything. The mental picture was set in the greyish-red colour of twilight. It was strange how one word could contain a world within it. (63)

Such minute detailing of the daily life points to a subversive imagination of the nationhood, which would never be treated with enough seriousness in such grand schemes of the media-induced national imagination, but are, anyways, the part and parcel of the image of the *svadeśī samāj*. By referring to a couplet from a Tagore song just following this episode, Chaudhuri might attempt to this entity, which is formed by love and joy of the commoners of a country, "Endless and unbroken flows the stream of joy./ Its timeless sound resonates beneath the sky." (63) The untraceable penetration of the adult and the juvenile imagination, along with the worlds of films and newspapers, with romantic lyricism in Tagore's songs, creates such spacing of a community, which is joyous and 'unbroken', in the sense that the infinity of the always already being-with-the-other cannot be appropriable, the superficial appropriations for the sake of enunciation of the being are temporary and passing. The subsequent episodes of a weekly ritual of Sunday film on the provincial television, the cricket match commentaries on the national radio are all symptomatic of a similar spacing of communitarian and imaginative living in the world.

The reference to the now famous game of "playing the freedom-fighters" from this novel is a very significant indicator of a similar, rather a more direct, event of the imagination of this nationhood, which does not only take into account the digressions in the imagination

of its people, which include citizens or not alike, and also lets that alter, subvert, revert, and reconstruct its histories. This episode depicts two children, Babla and Sandeep, are playing Subhas Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi respectively in their imaginary struggle of "cutting the British to pieces," and Chhotomama enters as a commentator on the game lecturing these children on "pre-Independence Indian history, quoting several historians of several nationalities," while behaving "like a scholar at a seminar addressing a group of inimical scholars who had views hostile to his own." (*A Strange* 93) The comment of Chhotomama on Gandhi and Sandeep's reply to that is worth quoting:

> 'Gandhi! Gandhi was no freedom-fighter! He was a sham yogi who knew no economics!
>
> Sandeep did not know what 'economics' meant; he knew that girls in his school had a class called Home Economics. 'He's the Father of the Nation,' he replied naively, repeating what he had learnt at school; he saw that, once more, he had committed an error. (93)

This episode is such a strange, vivid, non-serious yet utterly grave one, probably one of greatest one in the entire fictional gamut of Amit Chaudhuri that it is difficult to analyze rationally. One would instead feel like sitting calmly but joyously and enjoy the light hearted 'tragicality' and the aesthetics at the center of the whole episode, which is primarily a game of boundary-breaking. Saikat Majumdar writes about this event in his book *Prose of the World* at length,

> A moment such as this has symbolic importance in Chaudhuri's fiction. It is not so much a trivial moment itself (indeed, its political implications mark it as anything but trivial) as it is a metaphor for the power of the trivial in the face of the grander political narratives of anticolonial struggle. It is, as such, a metafictional moment, in which something as idiosyncratic and private as a children's game reveals the place of a significant motif in the national anticolonial narrative, namely, the reception of its key figure, Mahatma Gandhi. The incident of the role-playing game, moreover, illustrates the interdependent relationship between everyday life and the configuration of locality. In his passionate articulation of a "local teleology and ethos" — to borrow Arjun Appadurai's phrase in his essay "The Production of Locality" — Chhotomama (literally, "youngest maternal uncle") exemplifies a local subject, a crucial concept in the tradition of fiction embodied in Chaudhuri's work. Local knowledge, Appadurai

argues, is inextricably linked to the production of local subjectivities and local neighborhoods, wherein they are recognized and organized, as Chhotomama's subjectivity here organizes itself through its interpellation into regional political ideologies. (151)

While I do not have to agree with Majumdar for giving validity to his magnificent analysis of this event, I just wish to modify the hierarchy created by such comment that precedes this analysis as "More often, in fact, Chaudhuri is less interested in such larger narratives than he is in their odd, local variations, not in the public sphere but within idiosyncratic spaces of the domestic domain." (*Prose* 151) While I completely agree on the importance of the 'local', the 'provincial' and the role of 'subjectivity' in organizing the image of 'the political', I wish to look at them as continually at play with the 'larger narratives' as a part of this entity, which is in/advertently connected to the narratives of the 'local' in a relation of hermeneutic circularity. The 'idiosyncrasies' of such narratives are not *only* caused by the "odd, local variations" of these larger narratives in "spaces of the domestic domain", but the "idiosyncrasy" itself remains a central metaphor for conceptualizing the spheres of the 'official' and the 'personal', both of which remain fractured and incomplete in the continuous double movements of the 'self-other' (not, self/other), the 'subjective-objective' (not, subjective/objective), 'provincial-national' (not, provincial/national), and so on. This, in my analysis, is a primary symptom of the 'deferred' modernity that Dipesh Chakrabarty speaks about in *Provincializing Europe* and Amit Chaudhuri alludes to that in his essay "In the Waiting-Room of History".

In opposition to the colonial metropolitan margins like Calcutta, there is Oxford, almost at the center of the Empire, more so in the intellectual history of the 'world', acquiring a major place in the narrative vigor of the novel, *Afternoon Raag*. Oxford here provides the required 'tangibility' wherefrom the postcolonial imagination springs up while itself remaining ever 'intangible' as we can see as the narrative unfolds. The depiction of Oxford in this novel is a testimony to the fracturedness of the images of Western modernity, as it could never fulfill the 'rationalistic' schema of normative expectations that it has set not only for the 'others' but also for itself since the time of renaissance. Oxford is almost symptomatic of the 'incomplete' *raag* of life, tangibly lying out there, yet always already remaining outside of a satisfactory sense of tangiblity. Rama Kundu has observed how any expectation of listening to a *raag* in a 'proper' sense of it is infinitely deferred in this novel,

Even if the stage was expected to have been set for some raag, no raag – neither morning, nor afternoon – really takes shape. Apart from the fragments of visual and auditory details the disappointed reader gets nothing more neither the fabulous 'series of gig lamps' nor the celebrated 'luminous halo', nor the Forsterian 'expansion'. Nothing emerges from the disconnected details casually placed one after another over the length of just 133 pages; at best one gets a glimpse of a very casual way of looking back and around, idly, uncritically, lovingly though, from the non-committal perch of upper middle class elitist life supported by a retinue of servants, sweepers, cook, tutors, et a1. (75)

But, the sharp individuation of the Western self as detached although unsuccessfully from the others to produce a sense of imperial hubris, for example, makes it a space where its existence seems to be only in dreams. Oxford, as a world-city – the center of the metropolitan discourses of the world and as a central seat for world-wide quality knowledge production – creates a space where the postcolonial desire to become 'modern' is manufactured and propagated fails to provide such 'tangibility' for itself. The author, with his critical gaze of postcolonial alterity, writes,

In Oxford, the modes of social existence are few but tangible. But the tangibleness of this existence – conversing at parties, studying at libraries, going to lectures – is at the same time dreamlike. . . . Night brings darkness, the emptying of the images that made up the day, so that, in the solitary moment before falling asleep, the day, and Oxford, seem to be a dream one is about to remember. At this moment, one knows that one has no existence for others in Oxford, just as others have no existence for oneself, except in their absence." (*Afternoon Raag* 91)

The description takes us to the realm of a Benjaminesque phantasmagoria, where the tangibility of concrete reality is not only challenged but is also found in the dark, intangible abstractness of dreams. Here, the dream informs the desire to be and of the modern, that ought to be realized through the rationalization of the sphere of knowledge, the grandification of the civilizational components and the sharp individuation of the inner core of urban humanity. Oxford by both providing all of these and none essentially enough to form a "community" in Nancian sense, becomes the dreamy place, a seat of desire for an 'advanced' modern, which is never going to get fulfilled. But is it capable of retaining this dreamy trance? Is it always a dream or sometimes it does seem to be a nightmare? A solitary

meditation on the nature of this dream of 'advanced modernity' brings about illusion, suspicion and psychological disturbance at the hours of calmness, where one is far from the maddening chase for rational progress such as before sleeping or at waking. The author illuminates these internal contradictions in the discourses of the Western modernity at its center,

> To be someone's lover, to share someone's bed, does not help, but only disturbs that fragile configuration of events and meetings, that neutral and desirable intersection of public places and private ambition, that creates the surface of the dream; instead, the moments of solitariness and self-consciousness, such as before sleeping and at waking, begin to recur unexpectedly, interrupting the flow and allocation of time, of schedules, deadlines, and appointments. One begins to get distanced from Oxford; more and more, one sees it as one's own dream, an illusion or vision composed relentlessly of others, but not shared by anyone else. This is in part an effect of knowing that one's relationship with one's lover could have only taken place in Oxford, and has no meaning outside it, and that Oxford itself is a temporal and enchanted territory that has no permanence in one's life. (*Afternoon Raag* 92)

This points out to a dialectics of 'contingent' and 'temporal' urban modernity, which is oscillating between the tangible and intangible existence of being, between the historically 'materialised' or 'built' modernity and its 'unrealised' or 'abstract form' (Wiemann 22). The queer superficially created mechanical existence always trying to calculate the 'uncalculable', and the 'gap' between the normative and the performative build the central argument of this thesis; in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words "shadows fall between the abstract values of modernity and the historical process through which the institutions of modernization come to be built." (*Habitations* 80) The colonial metropolitan centers like London and here Oxford, to be precise, basically remain the axis of the development of modernity at the historical materialist level as they disseminate the progressive dicta (and logic) of early colonial discourses and undertakings, which later on form the core of late capitalist ideologies. An attempt of hegemonic control of the West upon the Rest ultimately aims to create a discourse of 'abundance' by gathering (even looting) the material components of civilization. The creation of a modern lifestyle by 'corporatizing' life by prescribing "the flow and allocation of time, of schedules, deadlines, and appointments" is a part of the almost pervasive fetishization of the sphere of modernity by the capitalist market economy.

A sex-shop in this novel is an example of such fetish, which tries to take life away in favor a capital, but cannot address at all the humanistic feelings like 'surprise', 'laughter' and 'embarrassment', which do not stem out from such simulacra called fetish, but from the unknown sphere of being-with-the-others that remains always already excluded from the possibility of being completely dismissed. The narrator describes such a 'private' shop interpelling the people only to realize that they have still remained human, they do not necessarily produce and consume, but they still have had feelings,

> When I told Mandira that 'Private Shop' on Cowley Road was a sex-shop, she was curious to see it; she had never been in one before. . . . Anyway, it was difficult to get in without being noticed; and when one opened the door, a bill tinkled as in drugstore in old American films. A man, pale, cheaply well-dressed, one of life's jetsam, stood behind the counter, appearing to fidget busily with something, nodding and saying 'Can I Help?' as you entered, as if you were just another customer and this just another shop . . . Magazines, three for the price of one, phone numbers, giggly dildos, pink perpendicular rubber organs arranged like confectionery, brought feelings, inside one, of surprise, laughter and embarrassment. (*Afternoon Raag* 130-131)

This commodity fetish at the colonial metropolises at an early stage of colonization inspires the people from the colonial margins, migrated or not, to transform themselves into 'mimic men', with their colored skin and emphatically imitated behaviors of their masters. The narrator describes his most intimate friend in England, Sharma's gradual but steady transformation after arriving at Oxford:

> Sharma, adapt as he was at picking up new lifestyles and languages, embraced with generous openness, and without delay, both Wordstar and Wordperfect. . . . he became friendly: computer-friendly, party-friendly, library-friendly, supermarket-friendly. He was kitchen-friendly as well, and spent a good amount of time making food that emitted an aroma of spices that magnified the sense of what it meant to live in England. Demerara sugar, orange juice, nuts, a spiced lentil mixture he had brought at an Indian shop, and long-life milk were all assigned their places on the bookshelves and the window-still in his room. . . . The matter-of-fact but buoyant way he began to cook the evening meal, the confidence with which he expressed himself in English, dropping articles and subverting grammar, made me think that my own sense of foreignness, of loneliness, was a luxury and an invention. (*Afternoon Raag* 169)

I would like to cite here the temporal and effervescent encounter of the narrator with an Indian bus driver in blue uniform, who was not recognized to be so at the first sight. Probably later on through his accent the narrator recognizes him to be an Indian. He recalls this incident:

> Only a little away from me sat the Indian bus driver in his blue uniform, but for some reason I thought of him as 'Asian', and he became for me mysterious and unclassifiable. At each stop, he greeted kindly old ladies in a hearty English manner, 'Hullo, dear! It's lovely day, innit?' and later bid them inimitable farewells, 'Have a nice day, dear!, but the way he was more English than the English was very Indian, there was something surprising about his utterances. (*Afternoon Raag* 51)

The mystery and unclassifiability of the urban population especially modeled after Western notion of 'postmodern' and 'hybrid' metropolitan or cosmopolitan spaces have often been emphasized in the discourses of postcoloniality, and its connection with postmodernity. Very often the interest in the postmodern as a hybrid space is thought to be a space created out of *only* the 'fragmentation' of the 'humanist grand narratives' of postenlightenment thought processes, and it often attempts to transcend all socio-cultural differences by engulfing the everyday/historical negotiations of the minoritarian perspectives and activities within the scheme of a homogeneous hybrid spatio-temporality. Homi Bhabha writes in his celebrated book *The Location of Culture*,

> If the jargon of our times – postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism – has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the 'post' to indicate sequentiality – afterfeminism; or polarity – anti-modernism. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment. For instance, if the interest in postmodernism is limited to a celebration of the fragmentation of the 'grand narratives' of postenlightenment rationalism then, for all its intellectual excitement, it remains a profoundly parochial enterprise. (6)

This kind of 'parochial' postmodern discourses have created a 'hybrid' yet 'homogenized' space probably by addressing its internal contradictions, its 'volatile' nature yet which tries to 'control' that nature. T Ravichandran writes about this symptom, "A volatile postmodern milieu necessitates "control" in order to establish a firm sense of identity

where human beings have been reduced already to the status of conditioned robots."
(Abstract)

The mystery about the bus driver, to the narrator, does not lie only in the 'unclassifiability' of the racial-ethnic identity of him, but also in the way "he was more English than the English was very Indian" and the element of surprise in his utterances. The phrase "more English than English was very Indian" reminds me of Sharma's "curious" sentence constructions. Sharma, traditionally a bit weak in English, is trying hard to become properly British by improving this foreign tongue. But, any more than the 'proper' sentences, he is picking up the gestures of language, pronouncements of which are thought to be culturally more 'proper', like the usages of "Thank you" and "Sorry", which are anyways "gratuitous" in Indian languages but "of great and triumphant cultural importance to him." In an attempt to be 'properly' British, Sharma pronounces them more than the requirement is and thus tries to compensate "missing articles and mixed-up pronouns." (*Afternoon Raag* 15) Surya Nath Pandey in his essay "Angularities of a Prodigal Son: Colonial Approach to Dom Moraes's Poetry", has found a similar curious case in the poetry of the Indian poet Dom Moraes. He writes,

> The careful analysis of Moraes's writings and poetry undertaken in the preceding pages testifies to his desire to become 'more English than the English'. Eunice de Souza identifies him with the 'mimic men' (after V.S. Naipaul's novel) "whose attitudes to their own people are in conformity with those of the empire builders and the Western elites, British and American." (72)

The invocation of these curious cases are of special importance to me as they present a significant three-fold impediment for a postcolonial writer, especially located at the heart of the empire, sailing in quest of an alternative and non-reified version of postcoloniality, which is covered up by the advanced capital, the allurement of the supposed superiority of a 'colonial' culture, and the theoretical perspectives of a "parochial" postmodernism and postcolonialism – all of which ignore the material historicity of the phenomenon called 'human', by which I do not mean a universalist category but the variegated senses, sensibilities, feelings, and intelligences that make 'beings' with all the vital socio-cultural differences and discontinuities. Amit Chaudhuri has depicted through his much celebrated quotidian sensibility, how this alternative and humanistic spatio-temporality of the

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postcoloniality can be traced through everyday activities and interactions of various actors of this novel under scrutiny.

The narrator at Oxford describes his feelings during the weekday ritual of collecting mails from "home" from the mailboxes or the pigeon-holes in the following words:

> The pigeon-holes, after the poverty of Sunday, its spiritual calm, seemed to overflow humanely with letters on Monday, and even if I had not any, the small walk did not lose its freshness and buoyancy, and a tiny and acute feelings of hope did not desert me in all my mornings. From about half past nine to ten, there was a hubbub as students stooped or stood on tip-toe to peep into pigeon-holes, and sorted and sifted letters, and the mail-room had an air of optimism, of being in touch with the universe, found anywhere else in Oxford. When there *were* letters for me – the cheap, blue Indian aerogrammes from my mother – they lay there innocently like gifts from a Santa Claus, they did not seem material at all, but magical, like signs. Then I would miss the feeling of morning at home, I would think benignly of my mother's good health, and how she suffers from nothing but constipation, how for three days she will go without having been to the toilet, with an abstract look on her face, as if she were hatching an egg. (*Afternoon Raag* 19-20)

The purpose of quoting this event at length is to give an impression how the double movements of feelings of postcoloniality, both tragic and comic, permanent and temporal, hope and despair, camaraderie and loneliness, material and spiritual, mundane and magical are taking place together in Chaudhuri's narratives, through invocation of the average everydayness of commoners. This cannot be adequately accommodated any theories of the postcoloniality and postmodernity, neither through hybridity nor through diaspora. The human senses and feelings as they go with us as we live will always "expropriate", both will appropriate and escape such appropriations. They will allow to make an image of human(e) on the concrete particular ground of historical materiality, but also let it pass, like sudden encounters, with the mixed bag of ambiguities and contradictions. This is how modernity in Chaudhuri reveals itself as both "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" and "the eternal and the immovable." (Baudelaire)

The tension of these two apparently contradicting sets of spatio-temporality, which are inevitably bound to each-other for this 'binding' is the source of life to them, has expressed once again in this novel as the narrator describes Mandira's room. The narrator

ponders over how through an incessant play of absence and presence, and of proximity and distance colors this room that stands for a person away from in another country constructs a vision of his/her identity through constant negotiations of foreignness and familiarity, a key to think about postcolonial on the experiences of banal existentiality:

> As I got to know Mandira better, as we became intimate and then grew increasingly unhappy, the room became her refuge, her dwelling, and when she said, 'I want to go back to my room', the words 'my room' suggested the small but familiar vacuums that kept close around her, that attended to her and guided her in this faraway country. Because, for a foreigner and a student, the room one wakes and sleeps in becomes one's first friend, the only thing with which one establishes a relationship that is natural and unthinking, its air and light what one shares with one's thoughts, its deep, unambiguious space, whether in daytime, or in darkness when the light has been switched off, what gives one back to oneself. (*Afternoon Raag* 21)

The room of a foreign student in a faraway land is symptomatic of a space that is thesis is trying to clear since the beginning, a space of 'natural and unthinking', a "deep, unambiguous" space wherein the being might be placed with-itself, in its authenticity, but which cannot 'actually' expresses itself 'adequately' as it is always already with-others. Mandira's room is 'unambiguous' in the sense that it gives Mandira a temporary sense of she-being-herself; but, at the same it is mediated by the imagination of the narrator, which will never ever eventually offer such an 'unambiguous' image its fixed location – the room is Mandira's but also the narrator's the moment he creates an image out of it, and is also of the foreign country, which precisely gives such magnified significance to it by distancing her from her own soil.

The narrator's ever complicated and unfulfilled relations with the two girls, named Mandira and Shehnaz, are also symptomatic of the postcoloniality Chaudhuri is thinking about, the tensions between the West and the Rest subtly creeping in the personal sphere to be surfaced through double movements of the split and fragmented 'subject-object' space that remains ever incomplete and deferred in the realization of any normative expectations or schemata. On one hand, the sense of foreignness and loneliness of three persons from the colonial margins bring them together in Oxford; on the other, the individuation of the self and boredom even at the imperial center do not offer any stable platform to them for fuller realization of their relationships. This formulation does not intend that mean, this kind of

instability can only occur in a postcolonial situations and with persons in foreign lands. On the contrary, it is intended that the postcoloniality itself is a fragmented phenomenon, and always fails to inform the complex and nuanced quotidian lives at the colonial margins, and also that is because (and, not *only* because) the construction of any grand postcolonial theory and identity is inevitably bound to the colonial images or notions of life-world, not in the sense of against or for 'it', but in the unknown greyish uncertainty in-between. The narrator writes about his relationship with Mandira,

> She would have had me possess her, to commit to extinction both our selves, while I always held back, selfishly, on the brink, refusing to take refuge inside her. So I was that we lived for a time in that space in which bodies exist on the borders of each other, separated by flesh, by the life of each, which, unadmitted by both, is actually moving in its own direction, towards its own future. In this way, we teetered on the brink of each other, and her desire remained superfluous and unfulfilled. (*Afternoon Raag* 131-132)

The following excerpt establishes the relation of the personal and the political more vividly, but only when one is ready to take 'oxford' more than a place, but as a metaphor for both tangibility and intangibility that at once affects human lives and the sense of their communitarian existence. The narrator describes the strangeness of Oxford in the following manner:

> Strange place, Oxford, and strange discoveries one makes within it! Strange students' rooms, with their own, always slightly unfamiliar, dimensions. During that time when I was undecided between Shehnaz and Mandira, hurting them both, being hurt by both, confused as I had never been, I lived on the ground floor of the graduate building, and Sharma lived in the room just above mine; we had a floor and a ceiling in common. From the beginning, Shehnaz and I tried in various ways, in kind and unkind, in rational and irrational ways, to shake off each other; but Oxford is such a lonely place, so few its streets and its landmarks, that those who have felt some affection for each other come together again and again. (*Afternoon Raag* 136-137)

The three youths from the colonial margins at the heart of Oxford, like the anti/heroes of Samuel Beckett's play, almost bid to one another "Adieu," and the stage directions reads, "Silence. No one moves." (*Waiting for Godot*)

So far I have discussed Oxford as creating a background for complex and unfulfilled relations informing the people residing within it. Now, I will move to show how London bears within its peripheries the disenchanted denizenry, both in the forms of migrants from the South Asia and also of some Britishers, who could not become 'properly' so as opposed to some Indians, who have become more English than the English themselves. The narrator explores a place in East Oxford, where he along with his friend Sharma goes to watch an erotic Japanese film. He describes how the South Asian population of Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origins has transformed that part of England, where like 'East London', the 'East Oxford' has become a metaphor of the provincial, where the energetic little Muslim boys do not look foreign, the Pakistani gentlemen in overcoats meet and converse in idiomatic Punjabi about politics – "the Bhuttos; Kashmir; cowardly India; bullying India and the Indian cricket team". (*Afternoon Raag* 51-52) In this place the 'Asian' couples shop "imported vegetables – roots and tubers – with the flecked soil of Bangladesh still upon them" (52) and the 'honest Englishmen' are served foods and attended upon by Muslim waiters in a row of Indian restaurants having "furniture, selected with some tender and innocent idea of opulence in mind" (52) as they surrender helplessly "to an inexhaustible trickle of eastern courtesy" (53). This small part of the Occident seems to be re-appropriated by the discourses of 'Orientalism' themselves, with the oriental styles and flavors empowered by the Western capitalism disintegrating the Centre of all such discourses.

The narrator depicts the deplorable condition of the marginalized poor population of England living side by side the migrants, the Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, who do not hail from any other parts of the globe, but the legal citizens of one of the centers of the early imperialism, now induced by both discourses of the postmodernism and the multinational capitalism. The narrator portrays the plight of the "small, mean, jaunty families" living at Cowley Road, Iffley Road and St. Clement's. He describes, "This is the tribe that belonged to Dickensian alleys, the aboriginal community that led its island-life, its daily routines and struggles, and scarcely heard of Empire or took part in governance." (*Afternoon Raag* 123) This people, also living in an age of a-structural postcoloniality, could not totally cut themselves off from their structural origins, like religion and family. Although they endlessly gobble up the television soaps like "East Enders and Coronation Street, showing them their lives and those of their children" but their values have not totally been washed away by the endless streams of the simulacra represented in the media. (124) They remain stuck to the values of "devout Christians, drinking Protestants, religious not in a theological but in a

family way" and thus old-age tradition still informs their postcolonial lives. (124) In spite of all the subversive deliberations of poststructural feminisms their males and females are still happily allocated with traditional gender roles – "the men believing, and supporting their football team, the women praying, and going out shopping, all of them seeming to know the words of the Sunday hymns by heart, but blaspheming and cursing God when they feel like it." (124) This blasphemy and curse is neither theoretical nor methodical but simply mundane and irrational in any commoner's way sometimes adoring the almighty at the time of prosperity and cursing the same in utter helplessness and despair. They are the working class of city – the turners of nuts and bolts, sweepers of a clean country; they consume the cheap cans of German beer; their feet are adorned with either high heels or sandals even in the cold, the legs unstockinged; their old men are seldom unshaven and are untouched by the latest fashion statements like the pony-tails or the corduroys; they are the "white men leading black lives". (125) The narrator goes on narrating them with historically specific details:

> White niggers, they fought the war, sang drinking songs, married, died. Not for them cars, but the great public transport system, joining and holding communities and families together, the buses coming every twenty minutes. They are the ones who lived in a world of horrible and immediate predujices, coined the terms 'Paki' and 'wog', and then lived side by side with the Patels and Muslim Bangladeshi families, and worked for their sons who look like Latin Americans and chatter in Cockney amongst themselves. For them a diet of Brain's faggots and frozen peas, the middle-aged skinheads, in the nineties, become fathers with children perched on their shoulders, the punks, with their phosphorescent hair, vanished like seasonal insects. . . . The state of intoxication here, broken bottles, a beggar's foul breath, is more basic than the students' social drunkenness, a state of the soul." (125-126)

The narrator feels like entering into an extinct civilization, "a lost world, remade and fixed." (*Afternoon Raag* 127) They are beggars in their own country, where they even have to beg to the dark-skinned foreigner-students, who get scholarships from the governments elected by these citizens of England, and yet this poor population have to be content with the cigarettes-ends left for them.

The severe temporality along with all its deceptive enchantment intersects the confident landing of the progressive dicta of Western modernity. It gets brutally butchered at its birthplace. The Empire not only creates its modern centre at the heart of it but at the same

point it is a derelict, marginal island. And it is the plight of all modern metropolitan centers, for which the count begins in England. Chaudhuri notes, "Not for them history, old buildings, literature, but an England of small comforts and marriages, happy or unhappy." (*Afternoon Raag* 123-24) The saga may be concluded by quoting an English beggar, "'There's no difference between you and me, mate, we're both dossing around on other people's money.'" (128) Suddenly, the empire and the colonies are brought to the same platform, all hierarchies vanished as the narrative concentrates on the margins of various luminous elitist discourses and the uncovers the poor, marginal from the spectacular edifices of the colonial centers. If one asks for whom those histories, buildings, literatures, the unending sources of immense colonial pride and normativity, stand for, the answer would not be a satisfying one. The novel tries and fails to answer this unanswerability in context of a grand, and "ancient" college at Oxford:

> This is the abbreviated, painting-like view that passers-by have of the interiors of the colleges, and the rest is hidden behind an edifice of stone that is part history and part fantasy, and has little to do with the domestic or working lives of students, and particular slang or vernacular. . . . In this world, glimpsed briefly by the passer-by through the open doorway, a certain light and space and greyness of stone, and at night, a certain balance of lamplight, stone, and darkness, co-exist almost eternally, and it is the students, with their nationalities and individual features, their different voices and accents, their different habits and attempts at adjustment, their sense of bathos and possession of reality, who, in truth, vanish, are strangely negated, so that, when the passer-by later remembers what he saw, the students seem blurred, colourful, accidental, even touching, but constantly striking at the edge of his vision, while it is possible to clearly and unequivocally recall the dignity and silence of the doorway and the world beyond it. (100-101)

The debate between the airy-fairy discourses of philosophical postmodern-postcoloniality and a postcoloniality ridden with the impoverished humanity at the margin of transnational capitalist economy forms the core of the dialectics of postcolonial modernity, at a different level of political economy. While the migrant-elite postcolonial intellectuals theorize a condition of decentred universe with marginal identities blurring all kinds of 'purist' notion and thus are making their voices heard on a preferred philosophical plain, the materialists, especially the Marxist critics, apart from condemning the atrocities of the transnational capital, challenge these theorizations by exposing the rampant poverty of the

majority of the world's population vis-à-vis ever-increasing accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few corporate 'entrepreneurs' and their political counterparts, the growing racial and communal violence, the development of worldwide terrorism, and the ongoing suppression, even extinction, of the minorities in the different parts of the world, of which the West is not only not spared but in many cases, is the worst hit. Aijaz Ahmad looks at this situation from the materialist point-of-view of class and criticizes the postcolonial intellectuals as an extended self of the continuing imperialist and bourgeois ideologue. He expresses the discourses of the postcoloniality argue for a 'truism' that is full of internal contradictions:

> At two ends of this same argument, this condition of cultural hybridity is said to be a) specific to the migrants, more pointedly the migrant *intellectual*, living and working in the western metropolis; and, at the same time b) a generalised condition of postmodernity into which all contemporary cultures are now irretrievably ushered – so that the figure of the migrant (postcolonial) intellectual residing in the metropolis, comes to signify a universal condition of hybridity and said to be the Subject of a Truth that individuals living within their national cultures do not possess . . . the postcolonial who has access to such monumental and global pleasures is remarkably free of gender, class identifiable political location. In other words, this figure of the postcolonial intellectual has a taken-for-grantedness of a male, bourgeois onlooker, not only the lord of all he surveys but also enraptured by his own lordliness. (13)

He strongly condemns the tyranny of the kind of discourses that these elite intellectuals disseminate with a similar spirit of a phantasmagoric existence created by the late capitalism and of the regime of hyper-reality induced by cultural postmodernity embodied in the global media, all of which have voluntarily cut off their connections with the material realities of life. He writes,

> [T]his regime of electronic pleasures is being imposed at a time when the African continent is mired in a secular decline of its economic systems and infrastructural facilities, to the extent that some two-thirds of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is said to live below the living standards of the colonial period, with the increasing decay of roadworks, transport facilities, electrical grids, schools, textbook production and the social fabric in general, not to speak of nationwide epidemics and ethnic genocides. (12)

He argues that this postcoloniality is not applicable to the majority of the toiling masses and is strictly 'a matter of class' that it seeks to dismiss:

> Most individuals are really not free to fashion themselves anew with each passing day, nor do communities arise out of and fade into the thin air of the infinitely contingent. Among the migrants themselves, only the privileged can live a life of constant mobility and surplus pleasure, between Whitman and Warhol as it were. Most migrants tend to be poor and experience displacement not as cultural plentitude but as torment; what they seek is not displacement but, precisely, a *place* from where they may begin anew, with some sense of a stable future. Postcoloniality is also, like most things, a matter of class. (16)

At this crossroads of a disenchanted colonial center and the perception of it by an expatriated student, the narrator, with his re-vivified imagination of *svadeś*, searches for a space of "community" through "a Bengal that missed changes taking place elsewhere, the middle class reforms of Brahmoism, the intellectual movements in Hinduism." (*Afternoon Raag* 120) What seems to be "More important, there, than the secular nationalist figures, Rammohun Roy and Tagore, initiators of modern Bengali culture, was a native strain of Viashnavism, the worship of Krishna, Ganesh, Parvati, an ecstatic love of their images, sung out in unwritten songs and poems." (120) The narrator comments, "For the first time I could see where my own private joy came from – the love of songs, of music, of pride and delight in creation. That delight is my family's gift." (122) Return to the archaic nativity has always remained a strategy for the creative writers and critics and intellectuals hailing from the colonial margins in re-imagining the postcolonial conditions. By such re-imagination they are able to construct 'alternative epistemologies' by challenging the process through the dominant epistemologies construct their domination. This challenge is a prime marker that by even the supposed 'dominance' of some epistemologies have never been standing stadily on themselves, rather has always been depending on the others they create for such a myth of domination, and through these fissures that lie between their superstructural, but not existential 'gap' the so called 'subjugated' episetemes challenge them and announce their own resistances and presences. Alma Billingslea Brown discusses about the formation of 'alternative epistemologies' in her book *Crossing Borders through Folklore* in contexts of the African-American women writers and artists,

In their creative and critical appropriation of black folklore, contemporary African American women writers and visual artists not only create art, but also construct alternative epistemologies. These alternative epistemologies, Patricia Hill Collins asserts, create independent self-definitions and self-valuations as well as articulate core themes. More important, as forms of subjugated knowledge, they challenge the very process by which certain other epistemologies, those of dominant groups, are constructed and legitimated. As an alternative, dynamic, and open-ended process for constructing knowledge and truth, the African American folk idiom, along with the literature and art expropriated from it, historically has offered ways to question the content of what was claimed to be truth and to challenge, at the same time, the process of arriving at that truth. (2)

But, this 'gift' of an archaic nativity is there not in the sense of a finality in any of Chaudhuri's narratives, as they strive endlessly for unknown locales of human existence, like the narratives of the modernity itself. Subir Dhar has identified a three-fold aspect in creative inputs or constitutive elements in Chaudhuri's discourses, especially in context of *A Strange and Sublime Address*. He writes in his essay, "*A Strange and Sublime Address*: Amit Chaudhuri and the Fiction of Sensibility,"

The creative inputs or constitutive elements lying behind or beneath this unique order of Chaudhuri's discourse, his strange and sublime 'address' to his readers, is threefold in aspect: first a sensibility that regards and absorbs the minutiae of ordinary life; second, a technique informed by this sensibility always attempting to combine imagination with a desire for truth; and third, the finished verbal artifact itself, an accomplished linguistic structure – what I have elsewhere called a 'wall of text' – that gifts to us the sense of satisfaction which comes from knowing that what we read is fiction and yet something very dose to the experiential fabric of the lives we live and are all comfortable and familiar with. And if such a telling or creative embodiment of sensibility, such an evocation, does not conform to expectations of what a 'story' should be like, that is no great matter either. (49-50)

Both modernity and the novels of Amit Chaudhuri believe faintly in what forms the core of narrative of the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, wherein a story is told for the sake of avoiding an aesthetic death with a consciousness that the life resides 'elsewhere':

And yet the story would never be a satisfying one, because the writer, like Sandeep, would be too caught up in jotting down the irrelevancies and digressions that make up lives, and the life of a city, rather than a good story- till the reader would 'come to the point'- and there would be no point. . . . The 'real' story, with its beginning, middle and conclusion, would never be told, because it did not exist. (67-68)

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The 'conclusion' seems to me is not only a contradictory idea to the 'line of argument' of this thesis but also a force that pressurizes me to write such a chapter, which should never ever have been attempted to be written. Structurally, the 'Conclusion' announces the 'end' of an argument, reaching a consensus, and taking a decision about the synthetic 'outcome' of the contradictory elements of thoughts in the thesis. On the contrary, since the beginning, the current thesis has traversed upon the undulated terrains of 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis' without giving a definitive verdict about the 'reconciliatory' potential of these 'binary' components of a traditional dialectics, which the thesis itself tries to revise. In the way of doing so, it has created a 'frame' theoretical spatio-temporality, by taking recourse to chiefly, the hermeneutic circle as proposed by Martin Heidegger chiefly and revised a little by Hans George Gadamer, as opposed to the vicious circle; to the formulation of the negative dialectics as proposed by Theodor Adorno, as opposed to the kinds of 'reconciliatory', 'synthetic' or 'deterministic' senses of dialectics of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, or classical Marxism, or their 'mainstream' variants; and to finally, existentially, or fundamental ontologically, proposing the 'double movements' in Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy, like singular-plural, or spatio-temporal, and also the referring to the basic 'fracturedness' in a dialectical process, which declares such a process 'open' as in the sense of an 'enunciation', which should not cover itself up with such an 'openness', which will then eventually become 'closed', but as in sense of such an 'openness', which is *both* an 'enunciation' for the sake of enunciating, and *also* a 'renunciation' in putting no faith in such 'enunciation'.

As far as the 'embedded' theories in each chapter are concerned, they have been explored chiefly on the contextual basis depending on that paradigm of modernity, which the chapter seeks to explore. In the second chapter, "Being at the Edge of Chaos: The Game of (Im)Mortality in *The Immortals* and *Freedom Song*", the ambiguous and split selves have been explored as beings continually swinging between the theoretical formulations of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' of '*Dasein*' by Martin Heidegger, and have been seconded by such related theorists of modern existentialities like Søren Kierkegaard, and Jean Paul Sartre. The third chapter, "A Theatre Called Spectacle: Phantasmagorical Urban Space and *Flâneur's* Gaze in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *A New World*", analyzes, through the theories and conceptualizations of Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Georg Simmel, Jacques Derrida, Georg Lukács, Ranajit Guha, how the narratives of these novels militate against all that is 'spectacular' in the urban modernity/modern urbanity, and brings into a play of ghostly with that to resist and impede the former's unquestionable progress, which

both originates and gets dissolved in such 'spectacular'/'spectral' urban space, and also how this space is simultaneously addressed and redressed by the *flâneur's*, a casual city stroller's, observations, which are always already informed by a double vision – seeing yet disbelieving. In the fourth chapter, "Image(I-Nation): Representing the Denizenry of the Post/Coloniality in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Afternoon Raag*", the thesis has focused on the historirgraphies of coloniality and postcoloniality through the continuous and unstoppable dialectical double movements of the post/colonial images/imaginations vis-à-vis the notions of the nation in a more personalized Indian contexts of those people of the nation, who are yet to become full-fledged citizens, expressed in the term 'denizenry', through mainly the theoretical deliberations of the school of subaltern historians like Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyan Prakash, and also of the Indian Marxist literary critic and political commentator, Aijaz Ahmed.

The 'openness' in the dialectical processes, in which the processual nature of such a movement has been emphasized, in contrary to its subjectively or objectively determined final destination or movement – the question of 'how' of such a formulation instead of that of 'what for/to/from' – is indicated symptomatically without any certain and determinatory finality, through the select fictional works of Amit Chaudhuri. On the whole, the 'central' (a structural obligation of writing a PhD thesis) argument of the thesis is to resist any singular judgmental stance in favor of either subject or object, if I take them as representatives of the poles of a dialectical process, which 'traditionally' retains the stability of existence of such binaries. But, the kind of a dialectics this thesis has proposed takes such 'poles' as *both* real and mythical – 'real' because in the quotidian 'everydayness', they are often popularly perceived as either 'white' or 'black', and also 'mythical' because they are either 'covered over and forgotten' in the existential philosophical terminology, or are 'reified' in a register influenced more by Marxism. While this thesis attempts a critique of a 'naturalized' reality, but it could have never done it bypassing the quotidian, the 'concrete' that lies 'out there'; rather, it has tried to excavate such 'contradictions', in a more critical theoretical terminology, and 'ambiguities', in a term more frequented in the discourses of fundamental ontology, as found in the representations of the quotidian paradigm itself in the select novels. This thesis has referred to both Marxism, as in Adorno, and existentialism, as in Heidegger, to point-out how a 'totality' in thinking about these schools has dominated in their receptions in the 'mainstream', which have posed them as 'opponents', which has partially to do with how Adorno has expressed his 'antagonisms' to Heidegger. On the 'contrary', this thesis

explores the moments and spaces, when/wherein they have forwarded their formulations against the 'totalitarian' nature of, say, instrumentalization of the rationality, the domination of 'subjective' tendencies in Western philosophical thoughts, which they have tried to overcome in various ways through creating counter-discourses, although with partial success. The 'dynamic angularity to the mainstream thinking process' is thus, following Chaudhuri's own creative-critical stands, remains at the heart of this thesis.

This is why, this thesis, so far, has continuously vacillated between the uncertain and unstable poles of an 'open' dialectics as it analyzes the narratival movements in the fictions of Amit Chaudhuri, about whom Sumana Roy, in her thesis, *The Optic and the Semiotic in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri*, writes, "Chaudhuri plays hopscotch with events in historical time and, in the process, the structure of his novels , which become an embodiment of his subjectivity, replaces the Cartesian cogito ergo sum with a different of his subjectivity whose manifesto might be Cortazar's "I swing, therefore I am." (16) For addressing this "I swing, therefore I swing" movement in my thesis, I would like to deviate from Roy's observation a little by foregrounding a double movement of the 'subject-object' in place of 'a different subjectivity', by which she replaces '*cogito ergo sum*'. So far, in the thesis, this has been achieved by implying not only a strategic breaking into the norms but also into the categories, and by playing out with their 'transcendental' discourses of 'stability'. This is in unison with how Chaudhuri describes his edited anthology of some of the writings of some exponents of Indian modernity written in English and also in the *bhashas*, the vernaculars. The writer of the novels taken for analysis in the current thesis, describes the aforesaid edited book at one occasion at the Columbia University, and as Saikat Majumdar recalls him speaking, as his "best work of fiction". On this event, Majumdar comments,

> Chaudhuri described his anthology as his best work of fiction so far. Clearly, such a claim has an oxymoronic appeal but also a hint towards the conflicted history of disciplinary paradigms of world Anglophone literary studies, and of English studies as a whole, especially within its institutionalized spaces. Ours is a domain increasingly rent apart by the warring ideologies of literary theory and creative writing-notably in the North American academy, which ironically houses the two more closely together than anywhere else. ("Dallying" 448)

And, then he goes on characterizing Chaudhuri as a poet and a critic: "Strangely, it is a mixture of poststructuralist skepticism and a mistrust of this very skepticism that shapes the

coming together of these roles of poet and critic in the career of Amit Chaudhuri. . . ." (448) Both of these comments on the event of Chaudhuri speaking in an American university and on his literary-critical persona can also be applied to this thesis, a like metaphysical commentary on the post/metaphysicality of it.

At a moment when the thesis has already tarversed through such undulated terrains to a great extent, 'Conclusion' comes in and demands a 'finality', which can be assured to the extent of the structural obligatory nature of any thesis, for that matter, but obviously not to that of announcing a metaphysical 'closure' of the kind of dialectical movement explored so far. And, if attempted, doing so will be an intellectual *harakiri* both by the thesis and its writer. So, precisely, there are two important things that are to be understood in context of this conclusion: a) this is a structural conclusion, which is done for the sake of giving a 'shape' to this thesis, which itself talks about an 'impossibility' of giving shapes to entities, who are not there completely on their own merits, but also stand in connection to others; b) this conclusion is an attempt to showcase the continuity the debate on the nature of modernity and the dialectics, both of which, as the thesis proposes, are 'unfinished', in which any 'finality' is infinitely deferred. The continuity or the 'indefinitely processual nature' of the dialectics is not an 'end' product of thesis, but another 'in-betweenness' that the thesis has been exploring since the beginning.

In very brief, towards this 'end', the thesis once and for all, tries to 'open' the debate by accepting the claim of Jürgen Habermas that modernity is an 'unfinished project' as it has not fully realized its own 'rational' potential as the 'instrumental rationality' through various scientific-technological-philosophical-cultural-aesthetic discourses that has tried to reify its 'original' promise. But, at the same time, it will reject his attempt to replace that 'category'/those 'categories' of rationality by another 'instrumental category' of 'communicative reason'. So far as this reason tries to create a communication within the now 'divided' modern lifeworld, and thus to connect the 'polarities' among the segregated and highly specialized knowledge worlds, it is acceptable. But, the moment, it prescribes its own standards for achieving that 'communication', it is not accepted as it makes itself a prey to the same 'instrumantality', which seeks a non-achievable finality and creates binary opponents, in the forms of whom he broadly calls 'conservatives', and their stands as "in the antimodernism of the Young Conservatives from the premodernism of the Old Conservatives, on the one hand, and the postmodernism of the New Conservatives, on the other". (53)

This thesis is an earnest attempt, as far the Indian modernity is concerned, to agree with what Sunil Khilnani writes about modern Indian democracy:

In entering the world as a state, India has had to cut its own modern garb. For Indians, this self-fashioning has brought discomforts, pain and risks. But it has also brought them new liberties. India's experience reveals the ordinariness of democracy – untidy, massively complex, unsatisfying, but vital to the sense of human life today. It establishes that historical and cultural innocence do not exclude Asian cultures from the idea of democracy. But it does not mean that these cultures – or any other, for that matter – are tailor-made for democracy. It will always be a wary struggle. For opponents of democracy in Asia, the history of this experience is a warning of what can be done. For its advocates, it is a basis of hope. . . . It was the laugh of freedom – that dissolves fear and says, however quietly, there is no longer a divine right to rule. (207-208)

This thesis, in its theoretical and attitudinal perspective, has believed in the need for addressing the "simultaneous indispensability and inadequacy" in thinking about the West, when it comes to deliberate upon Indian modernity. (Chakrabarty, 6) The need for thinking with contradictions also arises from an awareness of not only looking at various shades of modernity of/in this country, but also that of excavating these various simultaneities, even controversially, out of different discourses that try to homogenize such varieties by ironing out internal ambiguities. For the sake of any single discourse, we cannot afford to lose the myriad passions in palimpsest-like discourses, which are inevitably interdependent on one another for expressing and sustaining themselves. This thesis is written from the heartfelt need of gathering the courage for resisting any attempt of ironing out the differences, the indeterminacies, and even the 'deviant' irresponsibilities within the spheres of debates on the notion of Indian to become 'modern', but to embrace such 'deviations' within the scopes of an intellectual inquiry. The passions for anti-totalitarianism, anti-authoritarianism, and freedom – all possible kinds of resistance against what Achille Mbembe says 'the socialization of arbitrariness' – remain at the heart of this thesis. (Qtd. in "Lineages" 18) I would like to structurally 'conclude' it with airing the need of a courage that Partha Chatterjee calls for in his essay, "Our Modernity":

Ours is the modernity once-colonized. The same historical process that has taught us the value of modernity has also made us the victims of modernity. Our attitude to

modernity, therefore, cannot but be deeply ambiguous. . . . But this ambiguity does not stem from any uncertainty about whether to be for or against modernity. Rather, the uncertainty is because we know that to fashion the forms of our modernity we need to have the courage at times to reject the modernities established by others. In the age of nationalism, there were many such efforts which reflected both courage and inventiveness. Today, in the age of globalization, perhaps the time has come once more to mobilize that courage. (152)

Chapter-Wise Works Cited

Chapter 1

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