

# 1 Nirad Chaudhuri and the Muslim world

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There is no doubt that the Qutb Minar is a sublime structure, the first truly Islamic monument in India built on the morrow of the conquest. Just below it is the first mosque built in the country, and it was called Qubbat ul-Islam, the Might of Islam. But its hall and cloisters were built with pillars taken from Hindu and Jain temples, and the effect was totally un-Islamic. It was curious to see Hindu and Jain iconography in bas relief on the bases, capitals and architraves of the pillars. Formerly they were plastered over, but they were now clearly visible. A strange feeling came over one when looking at Hindu or Jain religious processions marching with drums and trumpets on these reliefs in a mosque.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, p. 734<sup>1</sup>

However much Chaudhuri's writings may sprawl, Islam presents itself as a useful barium meal to reveal the internal contours and nodulations of one South Asian intellectual's constitution. The ambivalence inherent in Chaudhuri's response to the Qutb Minar – the paradox the Moghuls present to him as extraordinary builders and destroyers of monuments, as erectors and deleters of cultures – should not lead us to the simplistic half-truth that, beneath the secular, Westernized exoskeleton of Chaudhuri's dispassionate admiration for Moghul art, an unconscious, Hindu identity nurtured a not-quite-articulated resentment. The situation is much more complicated than that.

Chaudhuri's work deals with a wide variety of Muslim subjects: not merely the obvious topics of Hindu–Muslim conflict or Pakistan, but also poets such as Saadi and Kazi Nazrul, historians like Ibn Khaldun, and thinkers such as Nizam ul Mulk and Syed Ahmed Khan; in the memoirs, we learn about his Muslim neighbours, rich and poor, the processions at Id, his father's reaction to the latest news concerning the Turkish independence struggle or his discovery of the history of Islamic architecture in the libraries of Delhi. At work behind the enunciation of these topics is no simple Hindu-secular dichotomy but rather a variety of different personas, an array of alternating voices, sometimes jarring, sometimes in harmony, all struggling for the primacy of expression.

### **Non-Muslim Bengali views of Islam: some literary precedents**

A survey of Bengali responses to the Muslim world would require a book in itself. A coarse, provisional overview would see in Bengali Hindu writings the four responses most cultures tend to exhibit towards the 'foreign': nonrecognition, demonization, exoticization and instrumental affinity. As Chaudhuri's treatment of Islam operates in all four of these modes at one time or another, it might be useful to have an historical inkling of the literary/cultural precedents for such gestures, not to mention alternative responses from other Bengali intellectuals contemporaneous with Chaudhuri. The antipathy behind Nirad Chaudhuri's reductive description of the Bengali Muslim poet Kazi Nazrul Islam as 'superficial, indisciplined and frothy' is only really understood when set alongside Buddhadev Bose's sensitive, seven-page praise of his 'jocund spirit' in *Acre of Green Grass* (1949).<sup>2</sup> No thinker, not even one as solipsistically erudite as Chaudhuri, responds to another culture in a vacuum; a long history of images, tropes and gestures lies like a network of roots beneath Chaudhuri's various engagements with Islam.

As the historian Kaviraj points out, in Bangla literature, it is really only with the development of medieval *mangalkavya* poetry that an awareness of the 'subaltern' aspects of the Bengali world – namely, Muslim and lower caste elements – creeps in.<sup>3</sup> Before that, a very Sanskritic exclusion of the Islamic took place, an exclusion ironically replicated in many modern literary histories of Bengal. As far as Bengali literature goes, this mode of nonrecognition finds its most interesting manifestation in the short stories of Tagore, a significant proportion of whose tenants would have been Muslims and yet from whose stories the Muslim as a character is largely absent.<sup>4</sup> The demographic subtext underpinning this literary reluctance to represent the Muslim should not be forgotten – by the end of the nineteenth century (if we are to believe the 1872 census), nearly half of the population of Bengal was Muslim.<sup>5</sup> In later years, Chaudhuri, to his credit, seemed to grow increasingly aware of this deficit in Hindu attention to their non-Hindu cohabitants.

The exoticizing of the Muslim in Bengali Hindu representations usually took the form of an Arabizing/Persifying/Orientalizing approach, one which saw the faith and its believers as having their roots in a distant, Middle Eastern land. Tagore, once again, is an interesting example of this use of the Muslim exotic – a striking passage from one of his letters, written from a house in the middle of the East Bengali countryside, shows how easily an *Arabian Nights* landscape could be summoned by a Bengali writer at the very end of the nineteenth century:

I feel, somehow, that in this golden noon sunshine an Arab tale could be made: a Persian or Arab landscape – Damascus, Samarkand, or Bokhara; bunches of grapes, rose-gardens, nightingales singing, wine from Shiraz, desert paths, lines of camels, horsemen and travelers, clear fountains shaded by date palms.<sup>6</sup>

This landscape of camels and minarets was a commonly invoked one, and it found its way into the Bengali mind through a number of sources – the influence of Persian poets such as Hafiz, Saadi and Omar Khayyam and the circulation of Western translations of the *1001 Nights*, coupled with the exoticization of the Moghul period increasingly seen in the expanding genre of the *bashi* nineteenth-century historical novel.<sup>7</sup> In a sonnet complaining of his poverty, Michael Madhusudan Dutt (born 1824) can lament he has ‘No cushions, carpets that by riches are/ Brought from the Persian land, or Turkish shore’.<sup>8</sup> Two ironies need to be noted here – not simply the way in which the exoticized Muslim effectively eclipsed, even to the point of rendering transparent, his real, Bengali Muslim counterpart, but also the extent to which Bengali Muslim elites were also involved in the same project of de-indigenization with respect to Islam in Bengal. Frustrated with the large degree of cultural overlap between Bengali Muslims and Hindus (Muslims having Hindu names, celebrating *puja*, imitating caste practices, etc.), many late-nineteenth-century mullahs and Muslim intellectuals exhorted the ‘return’ to a ‘purer’ Islamic lifestyle, a world which was, in the words of one historian, ‘essentially one of fantasy . . . mostly adapted from tales of romance and heroism in Arabic, Persian or Turkish’.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the exoticization of Islam was by no means an exclusively Hindu phenomenon.

On the whole question of the demonization of Muslims in Bengali literature, we inevitably stumble upon the name of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, arguably Bengal’s greatest novelist and certainly one of the most significant influences upon Chaudhuri himself. Controversy still surrounds what some perceive to be virulently anti-Muslim sentiments in Chatterjee, from the threatened demolition of a mosque in *Anandamath* and the dog-like image of Aurangzeb in *Rajsingha* to a general historical investment in ‘the time the glory of the Hindu race vanished from Bengal’ thanks to the ‘foreign hordes’ of Islam.<sup>10</sup> History plays a crucial, perhaps even enabling factor in such negative representations – the (to some extent) understandable desire to recognize the injustices of a previous empire became not merely a metaphorical vehicle to orchestrate resistance against the present one, but also anachronistically projected notions of cruelty, intolerance, lust and foreignness from the past onto present-day Muslims. Chaudhuri’s ambiguous role here – both as a critical observer of this phenomenon, but also sometimes as a participator in it – deserves some careful consideration.

Amongst Bengali responses to Islam, the final category of what I have termed ‘instrumental affinity’ includes those writers who, for whatever political/cultural/philosophical reason, felt moved to emphasize common cultural ground and values with the Islamic world. Although many of these later on in the twentieth century would be leftists or secular humanists (the Marxist Ritwik Ghatak’s remarkable 1973 film *A River Named Titras*, for example, where Muslim fishermen help one Hindu fishing village defend itself against another), probably the most striking nineteenth-century example would be the influential Hindu reformer Rammohan Roy (born 1772), another significant precedent for Chaudhuri’s own cultural formation. Sudipta Kaviraj correctly compares Roy to Tagore a century later as an indication of how Bengali high culture lost its Perso-Arabic influence to an increasingly Hindu presence.<sup>11</sup> Writing in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Anglophone Rammohan Roy, fluent not merely in Sanskrit but also in Persian, Arabic and Hebrew, pursued his own Hindu reformist agenda in dialogue with both Christians and orthodox Hindus, whilst displaying in the process an intimate knowledge of Islam and Persian culture. His Persian text *Tuhafutul Muwahhidin* (1804) has the standard format of an Islamic treatise, from its Arabic title page to the impressive use of *kalam* terminology and Mutazilite theology.<sup>12</sup> Roy was certainly no Islamic convert – in his *Second Appeal to the Christian Public* (1820), he provides a number of Koranic quotations in the original Arabic to argue for the relative ‘arrogance’ of Mohammed<sup>13</sup>; nevertheless, both his belief in the superior rationality of Muslim doctrines to the ones Christian missionaries were propagating and, more importantly, his desire (as the founder of the Brahma Samaj) to discern the universal, monotheistic core of all religions produced an empathizing recognition in Islam of ‘the doctrines of monotheism taught by Muhammad’.<sup>14</sup> More than anything else, this idea of the Muslim as neither a Moghul nor an Arab sheikh but simply a reasonable, Bengali-speaking monotheist registers an important gesture for Chaudhuri’s own rotating attitudes towards the faith.

### Chaudhuri the secular enlightenment humanist

Looking that way, I saw a Muslim running for his life before a number of Hindustanis with clubs, who were chasing him ... before I had gone half way the man was overtaken at the crossing of Harrison Road and Amherst Street, and brought down with a blow. Then to my horror, I saw the man who had given the blow kneel down and plunge a dagger into the man’s back. When I reached the wounded man the attackers were gone. The Muslim moaned: ‘Give me water’. A Hindustani stepped down from the pavement and cried: ‘Salako garam pani do’ (‘Give the bastard boiling water’). (Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, p. 178)

The voice of Chaudhuri's secular humanism was, amongst the many voices to be heard within his work, one of the most dominant. A kind of zooming-out device, one which would drain a situation of detail and render it abstract within the space of a semicolon, it was that voice of Chaudhuri's which believed in, and most frequently appealed to, a rational notion of the human. Cynical observations on the superstitions of the Hindu, Kantian lamentations for the loss of moral responsibility, appeals to human dignity, pleas for common decency, expressions of disgust at the inevitability of corruption in Indian public life . . . all belong to Chaudhuri's Enlightenment persona. To call such a vocabulary 'Western' would be both vague and inaccurate, as a mixture of sources fed and influenced Chaudhuri's mistrust of sense-driven, unreflective irrationality: not just Julien Benda's insistence on the freedom of the intellectual, but also Rammohan Roy's belief in the necessity of reason, Tolstoy's preoccupation with moral accountability, and Ibn Khaldun's material eye for the influence of environment. Reading some of his more dismissive critics, one might think Chaudhuri's entire *Aufklaerung* sprang from a combination of Lytton Strachey and Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son.

As far as the faith and believers of Islam were concerned, Chaudhuri's secular humanist observations forked in some interesting ways. One happy consequence of this rejection of the irrational and the religious was a commitment to the humanity of the Muslim in the very midst of sectarian violence. R. K. Narayan (whom Chaudhuri detested) once wrote a story which dealt directly with Hindu-Muslim violence but never mentioned the words 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' – the religionists were simply referred to as 'our community' and 'their community'.<sup>15</sup> Although Chaudhuri never quite reaches this level of radical abstraction, there is a willingness on his part to underline a common moral finitude in both faiths to render themselves monstrous in the service of their communities. After describing a period of Muslim looting of Hindu shops in the East Bengal riots of 1930–2, Chaudhuri ends with the passage:

All this created a chronic and endemic violence which lasted till the partition of India. In Dacca, while the Muslims knifed Hindus whenever they found them helpless, the Hindu boys, even schoolboys of fifteen, suddenly went out of their houses and came back after a little while to enjoy their dinner with the recollection of a Muslim murdered in stealth. All of them behaved as if they were werewolves.<sup>16</sup>

One of the effects of this emphasis on the 'human, all-too-human' essence of the Muslim in periods of strife was to underline his alienation from the Hindu community. Chaudhuri's frequently asserted desire for distance

from his environment – ‘to modern Indian society I am like an aeroplane in relation to the earth’<sup>17</sup> – found its expression in this insistence on the *humanitas* of the Muslim. To say such a gesture, in 1932 or 1947, ‘anglicized’ Chaudhuri would be exaggerated and unfair; however, a more reasonable argument would show how the expression of Chaudhuri’s humanism, being to some degree a consequence of Empire, carried with it a number of pro-imperialist subtexts. Chaudhuri’s regret that the British ever left India, the popular British perception of India’s violence as ‘what happens when the natives are left to themselves’, along with Chaudhuri’s own enthusiastic embrace of his role as a retrospective legitimizer of Empire for a nostalgic postwar British audience, all modify Chaudhuri’s otherwise laudable refusal to demonize his ‘other community’.

A second, related aspect of Chaudhuri’s secular humanist response to the Muslim world saw Islam as a useful, external vantage point from which to better evaluate the Hindu. Of course, in European thought, this attitude towards the Islamic Orient is a familiar device – Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, Kant’s speculations on how a Turkish traveller might see Europe, not to mention Nietzsche’s own desire to live in Tunisia for a couple of years, ‘in order to sharpen my eyes for all things European’.<sup>18</sup> The most explicit example of this function lies in Chaudhuri’s repeated use of the tenth-century Islamic scholar al-Biruni (‘Alberuni’) and his detailed description of the ethnocentric, xenophobic, introspective and cowardly nature of the Hindus:

This great Islamic scholar, *clarum et venerabile nomen*, whose aim was to compile an accurate historical record of the religion . . . and customs of the Hindus for the information of his co-religionists, had necessarily to make his acquaintance with the Hindus and in the process of this intercourse became acutely aware of all the facets of their group consciousness . . . To begin with, I shall reproduce what he says about its internal aspect:

‘*The Hindus*,’ writes Alberuni, ‘believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no king like theirs, no region like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid. They are by nature niggardly in communicating that which they know, and they take the greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste among their own people, still much more, of course, from any foreigner.’<sup>19</sup>

Chaudhuri clearly relished this description of the Hindu – it becomes a set piece in his writings, requoted multiply in his later works (*To Live, Continent of Circe, Hinduism*<sup>20</sup>), acquiring the near-status of a scriptural text, to give his own conviction of Hindu *ressentiment* the façade of an historical basis. In this sense, Chaudhuri used Islam as a provincializer of the Hindu, an outside point of reference which could make a Brahmin’s

insistence on purity or Hindu claims to universal truth and benevolence look ridiculous, if not mendacious. This makes it different from the standard European use of a weird and strange Orient to defamiliarize Europe – for Chaudhuri, thoroughly mundane Muslims were used to show how weird and strange Hinduism was. When Chaudhuri relates, for example, how a Brahmin in a railway carriage is angry with him for eating a piece of fruit in the presence of Muslims (technically a sin),<sup>21</sup> the Muslims themselves are left catalytically undescribed. Although the tacit assumption of a common humanity is necessary in order to find Chaudhuri's critics ridiculous, the main effect of the Muslim's *humanitas* has been to more clearly delineate the petty-mindedness of the Hindu. The operation, in other words, is as anthropological as it is humanitarian.

An emphasis on the humanity of the Muslim and the use of Islam as an epistemologically useful vantage point leads Chaudhuri's secular Enlightenment vocabulary to what is probably his most positive gesture towards the Muslim world: a sustained critique of 'Muslimophobia'.<sup>22</sup> In the *Autobiography*, this produces some of the most lucid moments of self-analysis on Chaudhuri's part with regard to Islam, where the narrator is able to evaluate his own community's attitudes towards Muslims without lapsing into the usual demonizations of the Hindu mind:

When we were very young, that is to say when the Swadeshi movement had not coloured our attitude to the Muslims, we presented four distinct aspects in our attitude towards them as it was shaped by tradition. In the first place, we felt a retrospective hostility towards the Muslims for their one-time domination of us, the Hindus; secondly, on the plane of thought we were utterly indifferent to the Muslims as an element in contemporary society; thirdly, we had friendliness for the Muslims of our own economic and social status with whom we came into personal contact; our fourth feeling was mixed concern and contempt for the Muslim peasant, whom we saw in the same light as we saw our low-caste Hindu tenants, or, in other words, as our livestock. Of these four modes of feeling the first was very positive and well-organized intellectually; the rest were mere habits, not possessing very deep roots.<sup>23</sup>

The passage reveals Chaudhuri's writing at its best: a self-dissecting honesty pervades the lines, an impersonal tone which manages the difficult autobiographical task of communicating intimacy without prejudice. Unburdened by endless references to the reptilian venom of the Hindu, Chaudhuri's constructs a familiar situation whereby, through the use of a *passato remoto*, the details of a previous, prejudiced self, complicit in the unreflective habits of its environment, are related by a present, enlightened narrator. However, this detachment which facilitates such an illusion, the standard trope of all autobiography, is not always present – elsewhere in his work, Chaudhuri devotes significant energy to detailing

all of the various manifestations of Hindu hatred towards the Muslim with an intensity that would make even a Muslim feel uncomfortable. The Hindu image of the Muslim invasion of India as a skin disease; the faintly Nietzschean explanation of Hindu Islamophobia as a *ressentiment* born out of impotence and cowardice; the widespread Hindu allegations that Rammohan Roy had affairs with Muslim women, that Tagore's family was 'impure' because of a dish of Muslim *pillau*<sup>24</sup>; all of these negative attitudes towards Islam are traced back to the Sanskritic notion of *mleccha* (unclean), a prejudice Chaudhuri sees in the Hindu as a festering, cancerous, self-hating sore:

[T]he initial hatred . . . with which the Hindu began his life of political subjection, went on swelling in volume during the whole period of Muslim rule . . . The passivity which the Hindu mode of life and the Hindu outlook generate, makes the Hindu more or less independent of action in his emotional satisfactions. On the other hand, being incapable of action, he considers it all the more his duty to nurse his hatred in secret.<sup>25</sup>

An otherwise astute and articulate chronicling of Indian Islamophobia loses its effectiveness when it requires a parallel Indophobia to underwrite its validity. The repeated observation of how Hindu hatred became an ersatz for real 'action' against the Moghuls, a kind of metaphysical consolation for their military/political inferiority, once again calls into question how far Chaudhuri's Enlightenment voice was interested in the Hindu dehumanizing of the Muslim and how far it wanted to dehumanize the Hindu. There are certainly moments when Chaudhuri (like Narayan) seems to invoke a notion of 'common decency' and 'fellow feeling' when analysing Hindu prejudices towards Muslims; what also emerges, however, are moments when the primary concern is a particular, historically persistent idiosyncrasy of the Hindu – an inwardness, a paralysis, an obsession with Muslim women: a psychological observation, rather than any attempt to recuperate a common humanity, seems to be at stake.

Chaudhuri's secular humanism also draws him to kindred spirits in the Muslim world, parallel elements of modernity – and proto-modernity – which emerge at sometimes curious moments to indicate his admiration. The fact that his first flat as a newlywed in Calcutta had in it both Medici prints and Moghul pictures suggests the way in which Muslim India could stand alongside Renaissance Italy as a model of civilizing influence for Chaudhuri.<sup>26</sup> In his more sympathetic Enlightenment moments, the Islamic world lost any associations with fanaticism or religious zeal, as its rigidity acquired the more positive sense of a cooler rational ruling of mind over appetite (the momentary morphing of Islam's body-hating, life-denying dogma into a praiseworthy appetite-ruling, desire-curbing



discipline being a familiar phenomenon in secular representations of the faith). Muslim historians fared well in this respect: not simply critics of Hinduism such as al-Biruni and the Persian historian Tabatabai, but also medieval Arab historians such as Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), whom Chaudhuri saw somewhat anachronistically as 'the first propounder of a secular philosophy of history'.<sup>27</sup> When Chaudhuri's Enlightenment identity came to the fore, a very Aristotelian understanding of the exercise of intellect as a virtue in itself emerged, to be praised no matter how anti-Western and anti-imperialist the mind was; Chaudhuri's surprisingly positive description of Jamaluddin al-Afghani, the famous nineteenth-century intellectual, illustrates this willingness to recognize mental prowess even when channelled in a political direction different from Chaudhuri's.<sup>28</sup>

In a late article, Chaudhuri called him 'the greatest figure in the Islamic revolt against . . . European domination' and a 'contemporary of Bankim Chandra Chatterji'.<sup>29</sup> It remains unclear how much of al-Afghani's work Chaudhuri had actually read; Afghani's close associations with the Anglo-Saxon world, both his friendship with Wilfred Blunt and his dialogue with Lord Randolph Churchill, may have impressed Chaudhuri.<sup>30</sup> His famous reply to one of Chaudhuri's favourite thinkers, Ernest Renan, may also have struck Chaudhuri with its ability to leave its Islamic viewpoint and interrogate Renan's own logic from within – an intellectual versatility Chaudhuri would have admired.<sup>31</sup> More importantly, for all of al-Afghani's pan-Islamism and anti-imperialism, a number of ideas within al-Afghani's work would have appealed to Chaudhuri: a frustration with the technophobia and scientific backwardness of his co-religionists<sup>32</sup>; an acknowledgement that Islam, as an example of organized religion, constituted a barrier to scientific progress; a basic disbelief in the rational capacity of the masses and a moral rejection of communism as a license for anarchy.<sup>33</sup> The Muslim world was filled with these moments of potential modernity for Chaudhuri, ever-present possibilities of the secular which Chaudhuri turned to and foregrounded whenever he needed a moment of confirmation, comparison or estrangement.

Islam, however, did not always bathe in the glow of Chaudhuri's secular humanist gaze. A darker underside lay beneath Chaudhuri's Enlightenment attitude towards Islam, particularly in those moments when the project of modernity emerged in close alliance with the project of Empire. In such Gibbonesque instants of proximity between culture and colonialism, Muslims were neither victims of xenophobia, co-Enlightenment purveyors of culture nor human beings like the rest of us, but lumped together with Hindus as obstacles to Empire and

civilization. Both Hindus and Muslims were seen as anti-Western creatures capable of fanaticism, possessing the ‘same fatalistic formula: “it is written”<sup>34</sup>, prohibiting the same Western pleasures such as alcohol.<sup>35</sup> In such moments, the Muslim lost all claim to science and Enlightenment and became a fierce, primitive lump of stubborn resistance against an imperialist *Zeitgeist* of change and modernity. Chaudhuri’s few remarks on the British military occupation of the Middle East seem to be largely positive – he is enraged by a Bengali Muslim’s political preference for ‘Dates from Iraq’<sup>36</sup> and impressed by another Indian soldier’s tale of how he had saved the life of his British officer whilst fighting (Arabs) for the 41st Dogra Regiment in Iraq.<sup>37</sup> The tacit kinship Chaudhuri feels in these moments, reporting the British military presence in the Arab world with evident sympathy, is enabled by this Anglophile conviction of the British civilizing mission and finds its most striking example in Chaudhuri’s curious encounter with a British officer who had served in Palestine. Needing a medical certificate from him, Chaudhuri prepares to make the best possible impression on the officer by showing he belongs to the ‘same psychological species’. He brings a book of Orientalist etchings and water-colours of the Middle East by James McBey to show the officer (‘This is somewhat like two dogs sniffing each other’s posteriors before becoming friendly’ writes Chaudhuri).<sup>38</sup> The strategy with the British officer works well:

I gave him his fee, and he came out with me into the waiting-room, where the book of etchings caught his eyes. He took up the volume on McBey, and turning a page found a picture showing a town in Palestine. He was surprised and pleased at the same time, and turning to me said, pointing to the picture: ‘I was here when I was in Palestine in the war, with Allenby’s army’. We had hit it off.<sup>39</sup>

With the book of etchings, Chaudhuri effectively proves he is on the same side: the side of culture against bedouinism, the side of Empire against insurgency, the side of rationality against barbarism. Of course, there is a long history in itself of this elitist Bengali belief in ‘co-ruling’ with the British<sup>40</sup> – what is of significance here is how the same rational identity which can bring Chaudhuri to admire Muslim poets and Arab historians can also restructure itself in a moment to produce their very opposites. Chaudhuri’s disdain for the Kemalist struggle for Turkish independence is particularly striking, given the highly Westernized and Europe-looking direction of Mustafa Kemal’s own reforms. It was as if Chaudhuri could generally only appreciate the Islamic world as a source of science and culture in a vacuum bereft of any Western elements – as soon as a European entered the context, Italian, British or Serb, Chaudhuri’s

Enlightenment sympathies would realign themselves like a needle towards the more magnetic pole.

### **Chaudhuri the East Bengali Hindu**

A cold dislike for the Muslims settled down in our hearts . . . (Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 276)

To speak of something as simplistic as ‘Chaudhuri the Hindu’ means, in this section of our argument, a number of things: the Chaudhuri who was a reader of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and the nationalist Bepin Chandra Pal, who could at times deeply feel the wounds – architectural as well as mortal – inflicted by the Moghuls upon their Hindu subjects, the Chaudhuri who could occasionally see Muslims as a rival community, one which threatened the safety, well-being and sometimes even history of his own. By ‘Chaudhuri the Hindu’ then, we mean the upper-caste writer who grew up in East Bengal, whose earliest memories of Muslims would have been peasants and drummer-boys, a Muslim ‘proletariat’ living in not-so-easy co-existence with his own community. We mean a writer who would have grown up during the tense times of the attempted 1906 partition of Bengal, and who would have subsumed (as Chaudhuri himself records) the various anti-Muslim tensions and prejudices circulating in his own community. In other words, Chaudhuri’s ‘Hinduism’ was a tribal identity which enjoyed a complex interaction with his other personae, sometimes overlapping them to produce an artistic or academic observation, sometimes resisting them to express a more visceral emotion.

The first thing to say, in speaking of Chaudhuri’s ‘Hindu’ identity, is that within it Muslims were seen primarily as a labouring class. Around the time of Chaudhuri’s birth, well over two-thirds of his district (Mymensingh) would have been of the Muslim faith; the overwhelming majority of these would have been field workers.<sup>41</sup> The association of ‘Muslim’ with ‘proletarian’, and implicitly ‘revolution’, would always be a dormant one in Chaudhuri’s work, manifesting itself in his old age in the various disparaging remarks made about Bangladeshi immigrants to the UK. As an educated upper-caste East Bengali in a province with a largely uneducated Muslim majority population, the young Chaudhuri would have seen the politicized Muslim as a threat not simply to abstracts such as culture and Hinduism, but also to the established social order as well. Although Chaudhuri distances himself from the unreflective anti-Muslim sentiment of his youth (‘we . . . did not want to sit with the Muslim boys because they smelt of onions’<sup>42</sup>), there is a sense in which the smell of the

Muslim lingers on. In Chaudhuri's description of Calcutta, the 'Eurasian and Muhammadan belt was very characteristic in appearance and even more so in smell'.<sup>43</sup> This olfactory aspect of Islam, with all its connotations of the Great Unwashed, comes to the fore again years later in *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, when Chaudhuri describes the Muslim delegates who come to petition Sarat Bose's nationalist party:

One day I saw a procession of Muslim divines trooping into Sarat Babu's house . . . I with my knowledge of Islamic painting could only assume when I saw them that they were crude incarnations of the Muslim divines I had seen portrayed in Persian or Mughal miniatures . . . The eyes were large, black and burning, and in that emaciated face they looked even blacker and larger . . . He looked like an ill-dressed Robespierre, the sea-green Incorruptible. Sarat Babu's house was not only crowded for the occasion with these survivals of Islam, but even reeked of them.<sup>44</sup>

Chaudhuri's Muslims, it would seem, still smell of onions. It is interesting to see how, in naming Robespierre, Chaudhuri evokes the centuries-old European tradition of Islamicizing any kind of social revolt or protest (Hegel, Schlegel and Spengler all associated the French Revolution with some kind of Mohammed or Orient<sup>45</sup>). Unlike most nineteenth-century Europeans, Chaudhuri was more than able to distinguish between Muslims of different classes, regions and fervour. And yet the persistence of the Muslim's smell suggests an abiding sense of Islam as a brooding, faintly threatening underclass, one which inferred for Chaudhuri a triple threat – to a modern nation-state, to a bourgeois socioeconomic order and, most ironically, to a Hindu sense of identity which Chaudhuri elsewhere attacked and defamed with devastating vigour.

To some extent, this understanding of Muslims as 'an external proletariat'<sup>46</sup> accounts for Chaudhuri's ambivalent feelings towards the Moghul invasions, which sometimes are seen as a phase of genuine cultural and political advancement for India and sometimes as a horde of savages à la Gibbon or Spengler, which 'flooded the country in one great rush'.<sup>47</sup> Chaudhuri's Hindu vocabulary tended to stress the plebeian nature of the Islamic invasion more than his other voices – mosques, ghazals and *adab* faded into the background, giving way to a notion of 'the Muslim masses [as] a horde of semi-Islamized converts'.<sup>48</sup> In moments of distaste – the recollection of temple destruction, a threatened loss of sovereignty – Chaudhuri could plebianize his Islam at will, turning Muslim poets, thinkers and architects into the faceless field labourers and sharecroppers of his childhood.

In this, one of the most significant functions of Chaudhuri's Hindu vocabulary emerges: it insisted on the difference between Muslims and

Hindus, stressing a cultural/historical distance which diminished any common humanity, opposition to Empire, mutual acculturation or shared features the two groups otherwise enjoyed. In *The Continent of Circe*, he ridiculed the 'infatuated Hindu belief in the oneness of Hindus and Muslims' (59), a ridicule motivated in part not just by some Ur-Hindu core identity, but also by an opposition to one of the fundamental tenets of the anti-British nationalist movement. In contrast to some of the identities we will examine later in the chapter, Chaudhuri's Hindu persona was reluctant to historicize the Hindu out of existence, reducing them to mere Islamic copies. If the Hindu Chaudhuri used history at all, it was not as a tool of cultural and political deracination, but rather as an occasional instrument to reopen some very old wounds. The most obvious example of this tendency has become somewhat infamous – Chaudhuri's remarks on the Hindutva destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya (1992), where he reproached Muslims for criticizing the destruction when they themselves had 'sacked and ruined . . . every Hindu temple from Kathiwar to Bihar'.<sup>49</sup> The remarks of a ninety-five-year-old man, however intellectually agile, should not be given too much significance in the overall evaluation of his work; their relevance lies rather in the way they indicate, even near the very end of his life, how the anti-Muslim sentiment and strong sense of Hindu identity Chaudhuri chronicled in his early youth did not vanish, but instead underwent some kind of submergence. The powerful feelings of the nine-year-old Chaudhuri who cried because his school wouldn't let him stage the anti-Muslim scenes in their play or who was enraged at the desecration of a Durga statue by Muslims in a nearby town<sup>50</sup> would not simply disappear with the waning of the pan-Islamic movement, as Chaudhuri claimed. They persisted in sometimes explicit, sometimes barely perceptible ways: remarking, in the middle of the description of a trip along the river Ganges, the mosque of Aurangzeb 'built . . . on a temple of Siva, so that the Faithful might trample on the god's head'.<sup>51</sup> Or, in the passage quoted at the opening of this chapter, the 'strange' and 'curious' feelings Chaudhuri has on seeing chunks of Hindu temple masonry in the pillars of a Delhi mosque.<sup>52</sup> To experience not anger or rage but eeriness on seeing Hindu masonry in a mosque testifies in itself to a powerful repressive mechanism at work in Chaudhuri's Hindu identity, one not easily explained through the appeal to some form of high culture/low culture formula (i.e., odorous Muslim peasants, magnificent Moghul mosques). When we consider the smell of Chaudhuri's Islam, his occasional anger at temple destruction, his distaste for Muslim nationalism, it becomes clear that his sense of Hindu identity was somehow interwoven with his socio-economic, political and even sexual identities; that in certain moments,

Islam could signify a combined assault on his body, his sovereignty and his social position – on his sexual, political and monetary independence.

### Chaudhuri the political theorist

Like my father, our press and the majority of our people were pro-Turk. I, on the contrary, though a mere boy, remained consistently anti-Turk . . . Accordingly, I wanted Turkey, the cradle and forge of the pan-Islamist movement, to be crippled, and was very much disappointed when the Turk, instead of being ejected, lock, stock and barrel from Constantinople, succeeded in stabilizing a defence line at Tchataldja [Çatalca]. (Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 358)

The first political order in India . . . was established by the Muslim conquerors . . . (*Autobiography*, p. 583)

When Chaudhuri dealt with Islam as a political entity, two mechanisms came into play. The first was an Orientalist gesture (in the most Saidesque sense of the word), a carefully compartmentalized praise of the classical Islamic past, set off from a ‘backward’ Muslim present. The second was a mechanism we have already hinted at earlier in this chapter in our discussion of how the Enlightenment Chaudhuri’s sympathy for Empire modified his views of Muslims: crudely put, the presence of the Hindu would augment the political sophistication of Islam, whilst the proximity of the West would diminish it. Neither of these mechanisms was straightforward, and when they encountered topics such as Israel, Suez or Pakistan, they fractured Chaudhuri’s political vocabulary in some strange and unexpected ways.

In the final section of the *Autobiography*, Chaudhuri gives some limited but very positive recognition of the political system of the Moghuls. Here, the likes of Aurangzeb, Shahjahan and Akbar are seen as neither temple destroyers nor ghazal composers, but rather as a stabilizing political force which not only brought a concrete administrative structure to the Hindus – whom Chaudhuri describes as a ‘cultural proletariat’<sup>53</sup> – but also connected them to a much wider series of cultures and civilizational influences outside India:

In the next cycle Indian history becomes even more clearly the part of a larger history. India was drawn and absorbed into a bigger society occupying a much more extended habitat. She became part of the Islamic world which occupied the entire Near and Middle East, North Africa, and virtually the whole of southern Asia. There are historians who regard the Islamic period of Indian history as if it were an independent entity and Indian in its essence, with only an Islamic veneer. This view is certainly wrong. Throughout the period of their domination the Muslims of India regarded themselves as part and parcel of the Islamic world and always took particular care to maintain their affiliation with the parent society.<sup>54</sup>

When is an invasion a 'flooding', and when is it an influence? When Chaudhuri wrote as a political theorist, certain aspects of India's Islamic period acquired more emphasis than others: the political organization and discipline of the Moghuls and the 'opening-up' of India to a variety of different influences. Given Chaudhuri's own highly negative view of the Hindus as insular, inward-looking, xenophobic creatures, the Moghuls in these moments are seen as bringing fresh, invigorating ideas to a stagnant period. There is also a greater insistence on the merging of Islam into India when Chaudhuri's historic-political voice comes to the fore, a stronger emphasis on the osmosis inherent in the 'absorption' of India into the Islamic world, which contrasts with Chaudhuri's other voices. Chaudhuri still felt that Islam, as a political theory, had its limitations:

In the Islamic world we see the hold of one great political concept, arising from the creation and sway of the Islamic universal state, the historic Caliphate, and constituting a theoretical embodiment of the idea of such a state. Islamic political thought was never able to put forward an alternative concept.<sup>55</sup>

In this respect, out of the 'three-cycle' history so beloved by Chaudhuri (Aryan, Islamic, British), Islamic India represented a middle stage of development politically, set halfway between the pre-Islamic Hindu states and the advent of the British. Historiographically, there is something faintly German about Chaudhuri's view of the Islamic expansion – his view of the Moghuls as an intermediary stage towards a fully developed political structure seems very Hegelian, his understanding of the 'original political vigour' of Islam smacks of Spengler, whilst his self-Hellenizing pairing of the Hindu with the Byzantine – both victims of Islamic invasions<sup>56</sup> – seems to be an association which only a Prussian classicist would come up with (although, it should be said, Chaudhuri's devotion to Gibbon is also a viable influence).

One important factor in Chaudhuri's treatment of the Moghuls as a political force is that, in certain moments, he almost sees them as fore-runners of the English. If Chaudhuri the Enlightenment thinker could lump Muslims together with Hindus as obstacles to imperialism, then a different Chaudhuri could find the Moghuls redeemed alongside the English through the common quality of empire. The Hindu looked upon both the British and the Muslims as unclean, we are told; both were seen as a 'disease' which blighted the skin of India; both achieved a level of imperial architecture Hindus could never emulate, so that Chaudhuri can mention, in the same breath, a 'Gothic cathedral', a basilica and a great mosque<sup>57</sup>; both imperial landlords looked down upon their Hindu subjects as a 'cultural proletariat'.<sup>58</sup> More than any other

reference, it is probably the description of the Muslim world as an 'Islamic Commonwealth'<sup>59</sup> which most forcefully conveys this sense of the Moghuls as being a kind of premonition of the Anglo-Saxon – a pairing which would cause serious tensions for Chaudhuri's Anglophilic and Islamophobic tendencies. The Arnoldesque idea of civilization as a stabilizer and checker of the body pushed Aurangzeb and Hastings together in Chaudhuri's political moments as parallel entities which brought discipline and stability to the irrational, libido-driven native. In a 1972 magazine article, Chaudhuri expressed his contempt for fake 'modern' culture in India even more explicitly:

This worship of Oxford and Cambridge, which like the Quran was imposed on India by the sword, has become a native religion like Islam among Anglicized Indians. It persists as an exercise of faith in the era of independence.<sup>60</sup>

The point is not to dwell on the irony of an Anglophone Indian intellectual condemning the very historical forces which produced him, but rather to note how classical Islam – its political energy, its explosion of culture, its irresistible military and civilizational force – in certain moments became almost identical to the British Raj. This yoking together of Oxford and Arabia, of Cambridge and the Quran, had the unusual consequence not merely of Anglicizing Islam, but also of Islamicizing the English. Moghuls and Anglo-Saxons were seen as the two invaders who brought a concept of political theory to India.

Although we have said that Chaudhuri's Orientalist separation of glorious, classical Islam and a backward, culturally stagnant Muslim present enabled these two different views of Islam to co-exist (Muslims as mosque-builders and mummies, political theorists and puppets), there was a sense in which the contemporary Muslim in Chaudhuri's writings still seemed to be a cannier political creature than his Hindu counterpart. The initial reluctance of Bengali Muslims to join the independence movement Chaudhuri saw as 'perfectly clear-sighted and sensible'<sup>61</sup>, a political canniness he links in several places to the Indian Muslim, and seems to deny to the Hindu, whose solipsistic self-pity and lack of self-control precludes them from the calm decentring of viewpoint so necessary to the politically agile. When Golda Meir remarks on the astute caution of Russian foreign policy – how the Russians always 'put one foot in water to find out how deep it is before they take another step'<sup>62</sup> – Chaudhuri comments on how this is something Indian elephants do, although Hindus have never learned from them: which explains why 'the drivers of elephants were always Muslims'.<sup>63</sup> Canniness, of course, is a standard Orientalist way of attributing intelligence without conceding modernity to the native, and it is as superior gameplayers, rather than



political theorists, that the modern Muslim emerges for Chaudhuri. We see this in his mixed feelings towards Pakistan, which he calls a lagoon, an abortion, a consequence of Muslim fanaticism and Hindu cowardice, but also sees alongside Israel as an experiment in political imagination and an act of successful audacity.

When Chaudhuri writes about 'poor and weak' Pakistan<sup>64</sup>, in one sense his Hindu and Enlightenment identities overlap to find a backward, economically impoverished, lifeless swamp. 'Pakistan can only look toward the past and remain half-dead' (in this association of death and stasis, one can't help thinking of the Dantesque morbidity of Kipling's Lahore in 'On the City Wall').<sup>65</sup> Most remarkable is to find Chaudhuri calling Urdu, the language of poets and composers, 'a linguistic mulatto'.<sup>66</sup> Having plebianized Pakistan, the Enlightenment, pro-imperialist voice, forever ready to endorse the First World over the Third, sees Israel, in contrast to its unfortunate peer, as 'a country and people [that] look towards the future and will always be a living reality.'<sup>67</sup> A futuristic vision of Israel which stemmed partly from the Western assistance in its foundation and Chaudhuri's strange, oscillating relationship to Judaeo-Christianity, but also from a 1967 visit Chaudhuri made there, where he got the chance to glimpse first-hand 'some very fine modernistic building . . . especially in Jerusalem'.<sup>68</sup>

When Chaudhuri the political theorist writes, however, a very different voice comes to the fore. Pakistan emerges, alongside China, as one of the two countries Hindu militarism has mistakenly turned into enemies rather than friends<sup>69</sup>; we find Chaudhuri lamenting its use as a 'bogey' in Indian public discourse,<sup>70</sup> and even the comic spectacle of the head of the History Department at Delhi University telling Chaudhuri not to write anything about India that Pakistan could use as propaganda.<sup>71</sup> In this switch from lagoon and morgue to potential ally and unjustly demonized state, Pakistan becomes a stunningly successful political experiment, an audacious act of political one-upmanship comparable to the founding of the Israeli state:

[T]hey [the Muslims of India] were driven to seek a 'national home' like the Jews of the world-wide diaspora . . . . Thus they were bound to seek firm ground to stand on by creating a country of their own in India. They succeeded in doing this under the leadership, ideological and political, of Iqbal and Jinnah. These two men can be compared to Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann. I would say: *Salut aux ennemis honorable, et fi des Hindous laches!* . . . .

Such was the creation of Pakistan. Sheer audacity of the demand takes the breath away. Yet Jinnah, like Danton, did say: 'De l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace!' But Jinnah in everything – appearance, dress, speech, personality and temperament, was like Robespierre, not Danton. Only,

Robespierre perished on the scaffold but Jinnah became the President of Pakistan as the Incorruptible, even, to employ Carlyle's amplification of the adjective, the Sea-Green Incorruptible.<sup>72</sup>

Chaudhuri is quite happy to designate the move from pan-Islamism to what he calls 'Pakistanism' as the move from emotional politics to Realpolitik – and it is here, in this use of cunning rather than fervour, of *nous* rather than *somos*, that Chaudhuri is able to praise a development he must otherwise see as backward and theocratic. Once again, Islam is plebianized, so that a kind of 'bravo!' is delivered not so much to the culmination of progress in a nation-state as to the crafty leader of a mob. This comparison of Israel to Pakistan also modifies Chaudhuri's otherwise wholly positive endorsement of the Israeli state; it suggests a recognition of artifice in the establishment of both states, perhaps even bordering on mendacity, as both Iqbal and Herzl are congratulated on successfully selling something which did not previously exist. Both Pakistan and Israel, the analogy suggests, are cleverly packaged, politically engineered illusions. Even if one disagrees with the result, one has to admire the Realpolitikal acrobatics employed to obtain it.

What the example shows is that, although a definite First World sympathy dominated Chaudhuri's commentary as a political theorist, an idiosyncratic admiration for political dexterity fractured his pro-Western conservatism with sympathies and understanding for political directions very different from his own – his admiration for Jamaluddin al-Afghani, for example, or the occasionally positive remarks he makes about Maoist China and the Soviet Union. Chaudhuri usually dresses this either as a kind of chivalric gesture ('Salut aux ennemis honorables') or as a display of his objectivity, but what often lies beneath the gesture is an implicit condemnation of India's political elites, whom Chaudhuri generally saw as clumsy, inept and short-sighted.

Apart from such interesting blips, Chaudhuri's geopolitical commentaries on major developments of the twentieth century overlap to a large degree with his pro-Western, Enlightenment vocabulary: he shares none of the Germanophilia/Japanophilia many Indians felt during the Second World War, and even more emphatically laments the postcolonial relationships of solidarity India tried to build with countries in Africa and the Arab world after independence ('with Papuans, Malays ... and Dark Africans'<sup>73</sup>) instead of a more Westward-looking foreign policy; he finds it ridiculous that wealthy countries should show kindness to nations they could occupy militarily in a week, speaks of the Suez Canal as 'lost', and declares his own sentiments to be increasingly 'pro-Israeli' and 'anti-Arab' as time goes on.<sup>74</sup> In terms of political theory, his vocabulary is

reminiscent of present-day commentators such as V. S. Naipaul and Fareed Zakaria, particularly in this division of the world into countries we have to learn from and countries who have to learn. For a critic otherwise so sensitively aware of detail and nuance, there always seems to be a false sense of meritocracy in Chaudhuri's postcolonial analyses, not so much an unawareness but a refusal to consider the various ways 'advanced' countries operate to keep 'backward' countries back – in Chaudhuri's discussion of the instability of the nationalist Mossadegh government in Iran, there is no mention of what Chaudhuri certainly knew – the CIA's involvement in such instability and its ultimate overthrow of the administration in 1953 (the *Autobiography* came out in the very year Iran had nationalized its oil industry – 1951).<sup>75</sup> A complication here arises when we consider a leitmotif in one of Chaudhuri's most central influences, the historian and thinker Ibn Khaldun – namely, the concept of '*asabiyya* or solidarity. In Chaudhuri's anger at British critics of imperialism, an interesting reproach emerges:

Whether it be a white, yellow, brown or black enemy of Great Britain, for everyone of these the British Leftist seems to have a fellow-feeling which he does not have for the parental clan.<sup>76</sup>

A certain double standard is evident here: if the wave of mid-century anti-colonial and independence struggles Chaudhuri was able to witness testify to a strong sense of '*asabiyya* in Arabs, Africans and, most importantly, Indians, they are seen as asinine (literally – Chaudhuri says post-war India chose to race with donkeys rather than horses<sup>77</sup>) because their solidarity was feudal, against the West. When the West is left out of the equation, however, and only India is the point of comparison – when it is a Pakistani or a Chinese or a Moghul solidarity – the sense of tribal belonging and identity acquires a positive light. In the case of the British Left, they are castigated with the curiously unmodern reproach of betraying their clan. Here, in one of his more 'postmodern' moments (I employ the term with heavy irony), Chaudhuri seems to describe modernity as the best tribal system of all tribal systems.

### Chaudhuri the Romantic Orientalist

I live just inside the old wall built originally by the Mogul emperor Shah Jahan, overlooking a fine park and commanding a magnificent view of the famous Ridge, the Jumna, and the Jami Masjid . . . But after independence, for four years, I saw people easing themselves in the park in the morning, sitting in rows. During this time the stench was so foul that after inhaling it for a year I fell ill and came very near death. (Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, p. 22)

The moments of Romantic Orientalism in Chaudhuri's work produced, more than anything else, an unearthly faith, idealistically severed from every kind of actuality – temporal, political, physical. It was a vocabulary which drew on some already extant motifs in Chaudhuri's other identities – a nostalgic sympathy for Moghul empire and discipline, a notion of the Muslim as the antithesis of modernity, an inconsistent conviction of the 'un-Indianness' of the Muslim and an equally inconsistent avowal of their victimhood – and fused them together with a powerful sense of Romantic idealism to produce a Muslim Other who was manly, aggressive, dignified, unreal, capable of fanaticism yet strangely innocent.

The provenances of Chaudhuri's Romantic interactions with Islam would require a book in itself to write because they trickle into the river of his thought from a wide variety of different streams. Chaudhuri's own quasi-catechistic devotion to the English Romantics (in *A Passage to England*, he claims his understanding of England was almost wholly indebted to them) is an obvious influence: a familiar storehouse of Eastern voluptuousness and Oriental glamour to be found in Coleridge, Keats and Byron and, to a lesser extent, in the late Victorian romanticism of Arnold, Tennyson and Pater. Add to this Chaudhuri's regular use of British Orientalists – Breasted's work on Egyptian hieroglyphics, Robert Orme's history of the Moghuls, Cresswell's book on early Muslim architecture<sup>78</sup> – and it might be all too easy to deduce a very predictable origin for Chaudhuri's Romanticized Moors.

A glance through the 1920s–30s editions of *The Modern Review*, Calcutta's most influential English-language magazine and one which Chaudhuri not only read avidly but also contributed to, provides enough Orientalist images of Islam to give an idea of the intellectual climate in which Chaudhuri was writing. Although the list of contributors to the journal was overwhelmingly Hindu (out of eighty-five contributors to the 1936 issues, only four were Muslim), a diversity of responses to Islam could be found within the pages of *The Modern Review*: articles warning of the decrease of Hindus in Bengal ran alongside assertions of Hindu–Muslim cultural unity in Sind; essays praising how previously 'Islamized' Hindus (the Malkana Rajputs) were being 'restored' to Hinduism literally followed editorial notes emphasizing the 'intercommunal friendliness' of Hindus and Muslims in troubled times.<sup>79</sup> As far as Romantic Orientalist images go, the January 1935 issue opened with a painting on the inside cover entitled 'Call to Prayer' of an Egyptian priest, dressed like a pharaoh, standing underneath a magical, starry sky.<sup>80</sup> Highly dramatized treatment of the Hindu struggle against the Moghuls could be found in a long serialization of 'The Mughal-Maratha Struggle for Madras', in which the terms 'Moghul'

and 'imperialist' were interchangeable. Articles on Sufism could juxtapose 'the Arab, who believed in the Sufic virtue of toleration' against 'the Turk, a cruel fanatic', whilst entire lectures by Lord Ronaldshay, one of Chaudhuri's favourite authors, were reprinted, with the usual references to 'the Turkish imbroglio, which has fired the dominant fanaticism of the Turks'.<sup>81</sup>

Other factors in Chaudhuri's romanticizing of Islam also emerge on closer inspection. The formative influence of Spengler's *Decline of the West* (which Chaudhuri considered 'one of the greatest books of our times'<sup>82</sup>) would have played a role in modifying Chaudhuri's Muslims, with its thesis of the essentially mystical fanaticism of Islam and its lurking apocalyptic potential, a feature of Spengler's book which gives Islam a distinctly unworldly hue. Spengler's curious linking together of Jews, Puritans and Sufis as 'Magian' tendencies, in opposition to the 'German-Roman' world, sometimes suggests a re-Semitizing of Islam in his work (Spinoza and the Hasidic founder Baal Shem are described as 'Oriental Sufis'<sup>83</sup>), a factor whose relevance we shall consider in the next section.

Another non-Anglo Saxon component in the Romanticization of Chaudhuri's Orient may well have been the Bengali exoticization of Muslims we found in Tagore and Dutt et al. at the beginning of this chapter. The Orientalized images of Muslims we encounter, for example, in a poem such as Madhusudan Dutt's 'The Captive Ladie' (1849), with its talk of 'the Crescent's blood-red wave' and the 'unerring blade of Muslim steel'<sup>84</sup>, certainly provided Chaudhuri with local versions of the kinds of Orientalia found in Southey, Byron and Beckford.<sup>85</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee speaks of the difficulty of discerning the exact origins of certain nineteenth-century techniques in Indian fiction – for example, is authorial intervention a consequence of the Victorian novel or a ritual oral device, such as those in the Bengali storytelling tradition of *kathakata*?<sup>86</sup> Or, to suit the question more to our own purposes: when Bengali writers such as Madhusudan Dutt or Tagore or Chaudhuri employ Orientalist themes of the despotic Mohammedan, lustful Turk or Persian nightingale, to what extent can we monocausally determine their presence? When the possible provenances are plural – a Turkish tale by Byron or Walter Scott, a bona fide original Persian source such as the *Bustan* or *Gulistan*, or even precolonial Sanskritic responses to Muslims as 'Yavanas'<sup>87</sup> – the whole question of what motivated Chaudhuri to speculate on the Muslims' preferred sexual position or emphasize the silent dignity of the Indian Muslim becomes fractured by such polygenesis. The most feasible idea may be that a kind of echo chamber emerges, in which writers such as Chaudhuri and

Bankimchandra Chatterjee would have re-encountered European Romanticizations of the Islamic East in various Bengali adaptations of them, parallel Orients which would have eerily co-existed alongside the Persian and Urdu originals which in part provoked them. Abanindranath Tagore's library, for example, contained several translations of the *Arabian Nights* – not just Burton's ubiquitous translation, but also Ramananda Chattopadhyay's Bengali version, as well as an edition in Urdu.<sup>88</sup> Of course, all literary texts emerge in one way or another from such a cacophony of sources: the most necessary point to be made here is to warn against simply seeing Chaudhuri's Romantic Orientalism as a straightforward internalization and reiteration of European models.

If Chaudhuri's other vocabularies saw Muslims as fellow human beings, obstacles to modernity, cannier political creatures, temple-levelling savages or a brooding underclass, Chaudhuri's Romantic Orientalism brought forth a positive, if somewhat cliché-infested version of the Muslim as the epitome of manliness, dignity and life. His contrasting of Islam with womanish, emasculated Hinduism is uncannily similar to Nietzsche's affirmation of Islam over an effeminate, reality-hating Christianity,<sup>89</sup> even though the manliness of the Moor and all the philosophical consequences such virility had for their worldview was something Chaudhuri could have received from many nineteenth-century sources – not least of all Kipling, who was infamous for putting manly Afghans in his stories alongside feeble, cowardly Bengalis<sup>90</sup>. For Chaudhuri, the manliness of the Muslim is expressed both sexually and militarily, and on both counts the Hindu is trumped. In *The Continent of Circe*, we are told how the Hindu preference for allowing the woman on top was a submissive consequence of his own fear of female desire – in contrast to Muslim male assertiveness in matters sexual, where he 'felt that he had to ride and control the wild lust he attributed to his womenfolk just as he took pride in breaking his wild Arab horses'<sup>91</sup>. Chaudhuri's generally low view of women facilitates this particular device, one which serves two purposes simultaneously by animalizing the Muslim and emasculating the Hindu. The attitude feels Nietzschean insofar as the virtue of affirmation in this sexual assertiveness is extended to war and life. Whether it is the 'strapping Punjabi Mussalmans' a twenty-year-old Chaudhuri noticed stationed as British Army soldiers in his town or his recognition of the Turks as 'a people noted for . . . political ability',<sup>92</sup> Chaudhuri's fascination with military matters (which at least one commentator has uncharitably attributed to his own unconscious sense of physical impotence<sup>93</sup>) foregrounded the Muslim over the Hindu as a triumph of virility over effeminacy, of courage over cowardice, of the lust and desire for life over the fear and resentment of it. The sentiment

becomes so focused it makes even the non-Hindu reader uncomfortable; when Chaudhuri writes 'how amply the Hindus of the twelfth century deserved to go down before the virile and living Muslims',<sup>94</sup> the historical *Schadenfreude* conflicts quite starkly with the semi-articulated anger expressed elsewhere at building mosques on top of temples. The deferred rage the Hindu Chaudhuri could feel at the Moghul history of temple destruction, in certain moments, vanished like steam when recollecting the strength of the temple-destroyers and the impotent, smouldering resentment of the Hindus who fled them. This alternation between indignation and admiration was handled by these two identities – a Bengali Hindu refusal to forget and a Romantic Orientalist admiration for the manly aggression which made the atrocity possible in the first place.

Perhaps this tension between the two optics was lessened by the fact that, for Chaudhuri, the modern (post-Vedic) Hindu was distanced from the original Aryan in the same way the post-Christian 'bad' Jew was sundered from the Old Testament 'good' Jew for many nineteenth-century anti-Semites (including those of the German Jewish variety such as Heine and Weininger). Even Nietzsche, for very different reasons, springs to mind as one who differentiated between a proud, aggressive Old Testament Judaism which was uncontaminated by 'weak' Christian compassion and mercy and the subsequent pathetic figure 'convicted of hatred of all mankind'.<sup>95</sup>

In harmony with the manly assertiveness of Islam, another quality Chaudhuri perceived in the Muslim was 'dignity'. This is partly an observation of the perceived decorum with which, Chaudhuri feels, India's post-Partition Muslims have accepted the destiny of being a minority in a Hindu majority state: 'on the whole [Muslims are] showing a great dignity and have no whining underdog air'.<sup>96</sup> This conviction of Islamic dignity, however, goes further than a merely contingent quality, as Chaudhuri essentializes it in the Muslim himself:

I have lived among the Muslim peasants of East Bengal, whom one would hardly call civilized in any high sense, but at their most primitive they showed a dignity in which even the Muslim aristocracy did not surpass them. I suppose this is to be attributed to the fact that Islam, a political religion, not only brought a new faith, but also a new political status.<sup>97</sup>

Here, Chaudhuri Orientalizes the Bengali Muslim peasant in a space in which, to some extent, three different vocabularies overlap: Chaudhuri's Enlightenment vocabulary, which saw the Muslim as a backward, 'primitive' peasant; the Bengali Hindu register in which Muslims were invariably proletarian; and the terminology of the political theorist,

which ascribes the cause of the Muslim peasant's 'dignity' to the political essence of Islam itself. Chaudhuri's Orientalizing of this convergence produces a Rousseauistic noble savage, Romantically reiterating this confluence of three different ideas to produce an Indian version of the 'proud Arab' – one which contrasted usefully with the servile, two-faced, resentful Hindu Chaudhuri was so fond of portraying. In the formulation of this preference for the 'dignity' of the subjected Muslim over the smouldering resentment of the Hindu under British/Moghul rule, there seems to be a Romantic (even Nietzschean) admiration for honesty in the evaluation of relations of power. And, in the end, if there is anything Nietzschean at all in Chaudhuri's admiration of the dignified Muslim, it is this willingness to embrace as authentically as possible the truthfulness of one's needs and circumstances (political, military or sexual) and not construct self-deceiving narratives of denial and blame-deferral, as Chaudhuri feels the Hindu has done.

The idealization of the Muslim which follows this positive appraisal of their proud, manly assertiveness, however, sometimes had the strange consequence of making them unearthly. Chaudhuri's early childhood impression of Islam as an essentially lunar faith, transcendently separated from any worldly connection, seems to belong to this process of (literally) alienating the Muslim:

Since the Id moves backwards around the year it had no particular association with season and weather as had every Hindu festival, and this was important because in our perception it liberated the Id from all relationship with the earth and its animistic emanations, which is so strongly felt as a feature of Hindu pantheism. It made us feel that this Muslim was half a purely human activity and half the activity of something transcending both man and the earth altogether . . .

[Muslims in Id] had their countenance stamped with the visible marks of the state which Pater has called 'inward tacitness of mind'.<sup>98</sup>

This notion of the unearthliness of Islam and the subsequent detachment of its followers brings with it a number of points. The obvious and all-too-easy gesture would be to underline how Chaudhuri's Orientalism enabled him to 'other' his Muslim neighbours during the Id procession, filling in the epistemological lacunae of his unfamiliarity with an imagined Romantic interiority (in a manner reminiscent of Wordsworth's sacred, silent peasants). To use a Late Romantic phrase such as Pater's to describe a procession of Muslim boys – in the next passage, Chaudhuri goes on to call them 'high Renaissance baby Christs' – simultaneously Romanticizes and detaches the Muslims from their Bengali environment. This operation, although imbuing the Muslim with an unworldly innocence, has a politically conservative function – that of de-Indianizing the



‘Mussalman’ and seeing both him and his faith as ‘an extra-territorial human community’.<sup>99</sup> In a typically European foregrounding of the notion of transcendence in Islam,<sup>100</sup> what seems to be a Romantic/izing recollection of Chaudhuri’s childhood Muslims also feeds into a latent conservatism. The cherub-like, silently profound Muslim peasant faces Chaudhuri glimpsed every Id concealed the ‘extra-territorial’ potential, to hoist a Turkish flag over a Bengali rice field years later and call it the Caliph’s territory.<sup>101</sup> The crucial factor here – that of Islam being an ‘unworldly’ religion, mystically, rhythmically connected to celestial bodies in outer space – seems to have been a point around which Chaudhuri’s Romantic proclivities enjoyed a large degree of overlap with some of his more Hindu moments.

What is also interesting, however, is the ‘peculiar attraction’ the Id procession had for the narrator of the *Autobiography*.<sup>102</sup> When we consider Chaudhuri’s own Joycean relationship to his milieu, the ‘irrepressible impulse’ he insists he has always felt for the ‘independence of environment’,<sup>103</sup> then it becomes clearer how the unworldliness of a Muslim procession might provoke a frustrated desire for distance in someone who, themselves, wanted to see their society from the viewpoint of an aeroplane. The distance the Bengali Muslim acquired at Id from their society may well have been an object of unacknowledged envy for a young Chaudhuri who, using a pair of very different wings, equally wanted to escape the trappings of his terrestriality.

The final aspect worth mentioning of Chaudhuri’s explicit Orientalizing approach is his conviction that ‘Delhi is of the Islamic Middle East’.<sup>104</sup> Chaudhuri’s attitude towards the city where he lived for well over twenty years, once again, offers ambiguities. On the one hand, Delhi serves as an Oriental fleshpot, a city swimming in Eastern sensuality and indulgence, ‘all bazaar and . . . all feminine’ (30). Chaudhuri draws on the Moghul origins of the city to effectively carnalize the metropolis in a 1971 text:

But Delhi is Baghdad with the burqua off, which makes it more piquant, and even more dangerous . . . The houris make it look like a sea of heaving breast and swaying hips which, as everyone knows, is very Islamic. The loafers are transfixed by the spectacle. But I have observed that the front view shatters them, and they look absolutely *bête*. It is only when the women pass by and, turning round, the loafers take their back view that a sigh of ineffable happiness escapes from their breast. How Islamic again!<sup>105</sup>

A frustration with the moral/sexual decadence of an increasingly modernizing/Westernizing social scene in the Indian capital activates a whole *Arabian Nights* vocabulary in Chaudhuri, one which culminates in comparing modern Delhi cocktail parties to ‘the slave markets

of Istanbul' as pools of potential sexual opportunity.<sup>106</sup> In the same text, however, can be found a very different voice – a sublation of Chaudhuri's empire-nostalgia in the form of a lament for the loss of Moghul Delhi and, post-1947, the increasing Hindu/Sikh Punjabization of the city as the result of the diminishing of its Muslim inhabitants in the wake of the violence of Partition. In this voice, the place of Islam in Chaudhuri's discourse changes quite radically:

[The Punjabis] . . . came like driven game or cattle. They invaded Delhi, occupied the houses left by the fleeing Muslims, or lived in camps for the time being. They virtually swamped Delhi and gave it a new ethnic character.<sup>107</sup>

The departure of Muslims – and the animal-like flood of Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs – puts Islam in the place of a former, soon-to-be-dissolved moral, political and social order. Pre-1947 Delhi, the symbol of Islamic/British empire, fades away, to be replaced by the bovine, unreflective flood of 'new' Indian citizens and all the subsequent sexual/political decadence such 'modern' Indian citizens will initiate. In other words, what we see here is a genuine clash of registers: on the one hand, Chaudhuri Romantically Orientalizing the modern urban decadence of what he still perceives to be an 'Islamic' city, but having to contend with a very different, Enlightenment, pro-imperialist voice, one which, on the contrary, would see Moghul Islam as the bastion of that moral/political framework now in decline. This tension between Islam as harem and harmony, the irony of exoticizing /Islamicizing a permissive society whilst lamenting the loss of its Muslim inhabitants, indicate only one of many areas in Chaudhuri's oeuvre where no single, settled position on India's Muslim past can be stated.

### **Chaudhuri the Aryan**

If one of the subtheses of this chapter has been the extent to which Chaudhuri's various tics and twitches over Islam show a German influence, then his curious devotion to the idea of the Aryan – which at least one scholar has called 'fanatic[al] in manner'<sup>108</sup> – probably displays this influence at its peak. Chaudhuri's hero Max Mueller was able to speak about his 'Aryan brother' Rammohan Roy and contemplate 'that ancient brotherhood which unites the Aryan race'<sup>109</sup>; Mueller's famous insistence on this blood relation was only the culmination of a general nineteenth-century German conviction of the ethnolinguistic proximity of Germans to Persians and Indians. The idea of race – and in particular the Aryan race – possesses almost all of the qualities of a fetishism in Chaudhuri's work, and when it emerges into the foreground of his texts as a primary

component, it is interesting to see how Islam and Muslims are reconfigured and restructured around it.

The first and most important point to make here is that, although Chaudhuri generally saw Islam as an un-Indian phenomenon, his view of the relationship between Islam and the Aryan is somewhat conflicted. Are Muslims a different ethnic group from Hindus? To what extent was the Muslim invasion of India an Aryan one, and not Turkic or Asian? Chaudhuri seemed to have different answers to these questions at different times. In *Continent of Circe*, he explicitly lists aboriginals, Hindus and Muslims as separate ethnic groups, an observation which may harmonize with the occasional distance Chaudhuri put between Hindus and Muslims but jars with his strange speculation on a 'slow proto-Aryan expansion all over the Middle East' – a sentence which suggests an Ur-Aryan origin even for Arabs.<sup>110</sup> When one considers a profoundly Hindu writer such as Raja Rao, whose *The Serpent and the Rope* (1963) came out three years before *The Continent of Circe*, we find Islam and Africa as two entities in the novel wholly separated from the precious soil of Mother India<sup>111</sup>; Chaudhuri's description of the Moghul invasion as 'Indo-Turkish',<sup>112</sup> even though it is distinguished from 'Indo-Aryan' and 'Indo-European' phases of conquest, still suggests a greater degree of cultural and ethnic osmosis than Rao's vision of Vedic purity.

The root factor at the heart of this ambiguity was Persia – a country which could be seen as the only Muslim Aryan country, playing a large role alongside central Asian Turks and Uzbeks in the Moghulization of India, but nevertheless a country with (for Chaudhuri) a distinctly Aryan past and an ancient legacy of racial kinship with both Europe and India (in *Hinduism*, Chaudhuri relates quite easily how migrant 'Indo-Europeans' formed new cultures in 'Italy, Greece, Persia and India',<sup>113</sup>). Although Chaudhuri never explicitly stated as much, this Aryan subtext of race ran through most of his positive remarks on the Moghuls. We see this, for example, in the positive status Persian enjoys in his work. When a Persian sentence is uttered near the beginning of the *Autobiography*, Chaudhuri significantly uses Latin to 'translate' the equivalent for the reader.<sup>114</sup> The high cultural status of Farsi in a text such as the *Autobiography*, although conforming to the generally acknowledged high status of Persian as a classical language on the South Asian subcontinent, certainly owes something to an unconscious belief on the narrator's part in the racial continuity pervading Sanskrit, Persian and English. We see this in the easy way Chaudhuri links all three languages together in a movement of cyclical evolution ('English came to ... dethrone Persian as easily as Persian had dethroned Sanskrit'<sup>115</sup>). The emphasis here may seem to be on language rather than race, but what underlies this

repeated emphasis on a higher culture dominating a lower one is the Indo-European provenance of the domination, a pure racial origin radiating eastwards into a lesser cultural space. When Chaudhuri tells us how 'Urdu or Hindustani . . . becomes more Persianized as it becomes more serious',<sup>116</sup> we get a clearer idea of where pure 'seriousness' would come from – the Aryan homelands which produced all three waves of India's colonization: Hindu, Persian and British.

Once we remove Persian from the equation, however, Chaudhuri's racial attitude towards to Islam becomes much more conventionally Hindu. We see this in the way Muslims are sometimes semitized, even Africanized, in his books. Chaudhuri's Indian Muslims acquire an analogous proximity to Jews on two points: through the notion of a 'Promised Land' (Israel/Pakistan) and through the subsequent effect of 'unnaturalness' that the creation of a new homeland has on those who live outside it. In an earlier section, we already saw how the foundation of both political states gave Chaudhuri the opportunity to speak about Jews and Muslims as driven by comparable existential needs to seek a 'natural home'.<sup>117</sup> There is even something unsettling in the way Chaudhuri denaturalizes and renders obsolete the post-Partition Muslim in a language faintly reminiscent of the way nineteenth-century European Christians spoke of the superfluous and irrelevant Jew, even though Chaudhuri extends this to Pakistani Hindus: 'There is something unnatural in the continued presence of the Muslims in India and of the Hindus in Pakistan'.<sup>118</sup> The magical way in which, for Chaudhuri, the creation of Pakistan effectively 'diasporizes' Muslims who have been culturally present in India for more than eight hundred years is never stated in explicitly racial terms. If Chaudhuri sometimes sees Indian Muslims as Jews at all, it is as metaphorical Jews, not Semitic ones.

The effect is that Indian Muslims are portrayed as somewhat 'lost', uprooted, almost in a state of existential pathos. The most striking example of this is Chaudhuri's account of an evening cocktail party at a Delhi embassy, where he claims he saw a melancholy Nawab (Muslim nobleman), with his arms crossed, staring out into space: 'Had it been old times everyone . . . would have gone up to him, made a deep salaam, and inquired if the Nawab's *mizaz* (mind or mood) was *sharif* (pure, untroubled). But that evening no-one was talking to him'.<sup>119</sup> The sense of directionlessness is not quite the Wandering Jew, but a very Semitic sense of homelessness does seem to pervade the depiction of a religious group in a modern state who suddenly find themselves without a country to call their own. A sense of unbelonging which, in this respect, works in harmony with Chaudhuri's rendition of Muslims as 'unearthly' or 'transcendental'.

The associations we find in Chaudhuri's work of Muslims with 'blacks' or 'Negroes', although infrequent and mostly late, further reinforce this notion of the Muslim as racially separate from India, even though Chaudhuri denies this to be his argument. The point here is not to lapse into politically correct castigations of Chaudhuri's terminology (in *Circe*, he controversially used the term 'blacks' to describe even the pre-Aryan tribals of India), but to point out how, despite his protestations, Chaudhuri's Aryan register employed moments in which Indian Muslims were semitized/Africanized out of any Indian context.

Chaudhuri certainly harboured racial notions about Africans that clearly separated them from Europeans and Indians, often in ways which indicated a subcolonial relationship. As a student, Chaudhuri recalled hearing a lecture on the imminent decolonization of African countries in his college and learning that 'India might get Tanganyika', he writes how 'the vision of a large estate . . . a ranch house and a pretty wife' became lodged in his brain.<sup>120</sup> The most explicit linking of this racial designation of the African with India's Muslims, however, occurs in a late essay on the Hindu-Muslim conflict, where Chaudhuri spends the very first page discussing how the French historian Tocqueville considered 'the Negroes to be a menace to the white Americans'.<sup>121</sup> The conflict is presented as both cancerous and irreconcilable and, having endorsed Tocqueville's position, he goes on near the end of the essay to explicitly compare Muslim and African-American politicians:

As there is no historical parallel or precedent to the demand for and the creation of Pakistan, I shall assume a hypothetical case in the United States. Undoubtedly, there is an irreconcilable conflict between the Blacks and the Whites there and fierce assertion of what is called Black Power. But neither the Rev Jesse Jackson nor even the fierce Mfume . . . [African American politician] has demanded that a Negro sovereign state must be created by wresting Texas, Florida and Louisiana in the south and California and Washington in the west from the union.<sup>122</sup>

Once again, the Africanizing of Muslims (as with their 'semitizing') is metaphorical rather than literal. What does that mean here? It means that, for Chaudhuri, Indian Muslims are similar to African Americans insofar as they constitute both a permanent, brooding menace as well as an externally created foreign population on domestic soil, with all the dangerous implications of territorial claims to sovereignty the presence of such significant minority populations entails. The foreignness of India's 'African' population, however, is cultural, not racial. Indeed, having earlier listed India's Muslims as a separate ethnic group, in this late essay, Chaudhuri insists that in Hindu-Muslim differences 'the genetic factor is virtually nil', primarily because the overwhelming majority of 'Indian

Muslims are converted Hindus'.<sup>123</sup> Interestingly enough, in the face of Africa, Chaudhuri's Muslims have the possibility to reacquire their Aryanness genetically, even if they forfeit it metaphorically.

### Chaudhuri the relentless historicizer

Certainly, I regarded my knowledge of Islamic history and civilization as my greatest acquisition in Delhi. (Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, p. 737)

When we speak of 'Chaudhuri the historicizer', a certain tone of voice is intended, a particular vocabulary – one which privileges the origin above all other phenomena and almost seems to turn the knowledge of an origin into a kind of moral responsibility. Although it is true that many of Chaudhuri's corrections and reproofs involve a mistaken understanding of history, Chaudhuri's historicism – his archophilia, if you will – often goes beyond mere historical correction, taking an almost deconstructive attitude to the political effects of deflating a particular myth or belief system by unveiling an unexpected origin. When using this vocabulary, Islam has an interesting, if somewhat Protean place in Chaudhuri's strategies, regardless of whether he is writing as a South Asian historian, a lover of Moghul art or a devotee of Ibn Khaldun.

Chaudhuri delights in the unmasking of false origins, especially if the puncturing of a particular myth or relocation of a certain origin leads to the deflation of a nationalist *hybris* or (less frequently) a Western superiority complex. Most of the signifying chains whose origins he reveals to be misconstrued inevitably belong to Hinduism or modern Indian nationalism: thus, Nehru's costume – the classic example of Indian national dress – turns out to be of Moghul origin (586), much South Indian culture is less Dravidian and more Sanskritic than anyone realized, whilst the greater part of the contemporary Hindu legacy itself (and here Chaudhuri is speaking of rituals, temples and image worship) is allegedly derived from Greek settlers in the Punjab and Afghanistan around the time of Christ.<sup>124</sup> For Chaudhuri, there is something authentic, almost spiritual, about locating the correct source of the river in whose currents you swim, a moment of expansive self-awareness more to do with Arnold's 'The Buried Life' than *Of Grammatology* or the *Muqaddimah*. The original Hindus, who 'regarded themselves as autochthons' (558), certainly do not labour under the kind of Rousseauistic illusion Derrida discerns in Levi-Strauss, and yet the way Chaudhuri sketches the painted political universe of what he considers to be the deluded modern Indian is striking and not merely for its arrogance. Beneath the *hauteur* lies a keen awareness of the power of the origin

and the mischievous hope that its emptying and relocation will somehow disenchant the devotee.

Political purposes to one side, there is something compulsive about Chaudhuri's archophilia, a passion not simply springing from his oft-cited natural resistance to environment, but emerging as a consequence of a much profounder dissatisfaction with the immediacy of phenomena:

I was perpetually probing around a particular subject in order to discover its limits, and most often discovered that it had none, for it appeared to be shading off on all sides into kindred objects and disciplines, so that as a specific subject it had seemed to possess no self-sufficiency.<sup>125</sup>

The desire for the *Ursprung* which would drive Chaudhuri to spend three months reading Breasted's study on Egyptian hieroglyphs or go roaming the heights of Shillong in search of menhirs and dolmens is a Romantically infinite quest, one whose semantic futility Chaudhuri was not unaware of. The quoted passage, with its trails leading on endlessly to other trails, is reminiscent of the famous moment in Levi-Strauss (which Derrida quotes in his admiring deconstruction of him) when the anthropologist freely confesses how there is 'no real end to methodological analysis', since the themes of the subject 'can be split up *ad infinitum*'.<sup>126</sup> Although this sense of the possible endlessness of archaeology is never quite articulated in Chaudhuri, the quoted passage does suggest a very deconstructive dizziness at the infinitely overlapping nature of things.

In looking at the role Islam had to play in Chaudhuri's historicizing moments, probably the most obvious point to begin with would be the influence of a Muslim historian itself, the fourteenth-century Ibn Khaldun, whom we have already seen Chaudhuri laud as the first historian to author 'a secular philosophy of history'.<sup>127</sup> In reading Ibn Khaldun's classic *Muqaddimah*, four ideas emerge which would have had some effect on the author of the *Autobiography*: a belief that 'the historian should . . . trace back all narratives to their origin'<sup>128</sup>; an insistence upon the influence of climate upon society (one of the more controversial themes of *Circe*)<sup>129</sup>; the observation that 'the vanquished always seek to imitate their victors in . . . dress' (53), clearly visible in Chaudhuri's own identification of the Indian *kurta* as an essentially Islamic costume and, finally, a highly critical appraisal of the Arabs themselves (who are, says Ibn Khaldun, 'of all peoples the least fit for exercising political domination'; 59), a willingness to criticize one's *ethnos* which became one of Chaudhuri's most notorious traits.

Chaudhuri's historical passion for the origin – and the role Islam played in this – leads us to begin with an interesting passage from Tagore's essay on history, written a good forty years before the *Autobiography*:

Countries that are fortunate find the essence of their land in the history of their country; the reading of history introduces their people to their country from infancy. With us the opposite is the case. It is the history of our country that hides the essence of this land from us. Whatever historical records exist from Mahmud's invasion to the arrogant imperial pronouncements of Lord Curzon, these constitute a strange mirage for India; . . . the trumpeting of elephants, . . . the golden glow of silk curtains, the stone bubbles of mosques, the mysterious silence of the palaces guarded by eunuchs—all these produce a huge magical illusion with their amazing sounds and colors. But why should we call this [Islamic history] India's history? It has covered the *punthi* of India's holy mantras by a fascinating Arabian Nights tale.<sup>130</sup>

In this passage, Tagore associates the felicity of a nation with the visible immediacy of its 'essence'. A version of Tolstoy's 'All happy families resemble one another', India is seen as an unhappy case, an example of where historical forces have worked unfortunately to the host country's disadvantage, covering its 'essence' with a pastiche of Muslim and later British fictions, masking its true being with an Islamic landscape of elephants, turbans and minarets. Within such an ontology of history, the present-day Hindu walked around as in a trance, in a world he deemed to be his but which in reality was of wholly foreign origin.

To some extent, Chaudhuri the historicist shared this idea. In such moments, Islam was almost the dark, dirty secret of Indian nationalism, the hidden, shameful origin whose discovery would dissolve the modern Indian postcolonial identity Nehru and Congress tried to forge for the nation after Independence. Chaudhuri practically delighted in the unexamined manner with which most patriotic Indians celebrated their Hindu/Sikh national identities, wholly unaware that their cultural trappings were Islamic in origin:

Even the maniacal hatred of the Muslim which is sweeping over Hindu India today has not emancipated the Hindu from his Islamic ways. The fierce maenads from the divided Punjab who even in buses mutter imprecations against Muslims have no idea of the true character of their shalwar and kurta.<sup>131</sup>

How did Chaudhuri's other voices overlap or jar with this derisive, Cassandra-like unveiling of a truth only a blessed few could glimpse? We certainly see an elevation of the secular over the Hindu here in Chaudhuri's decision to merely delineate ironies without moving into spectacles of rage at the submergence of a real Hindu identity beneath a false Islamic one. It requires a certain degree of cynicism to perceive a situation of historical error and, instead of arguing for the return of a 'truer' sense of identity, merely stage it as another observation of human (Indian) folly. Within each case of mistaken 'Indianness' (from articles of clothing such as shalwahas and kurtahs up to entire cities such as Delhi),



Chaudhuri saw the premise for a critique of unreflectivity, as opposed to any lamentation of a lost essence, as with Tagore.

Another voice which, to some extent, found congruence with Chaudhuri's relentless historicizing was that of the Romantic Orientalist. In a previous section, we discussed how eagerly Chaudhuri 'Orientalized' Delhi into a Middle Eastern city: the exaggerated Islamicization of the Indian capital worked hand in hand with the way the author of *To Live or Not to Live* mocked the 'superficial . . . Westernization' and 'Punjabization' of urban Indian modernity.<sup>132</sup> Both these vocabularies encouraged one another almost quantitatively: the more 'Islamic' Delhi was, the greater the degree of ridiculousness in it being the capital of a modern Hindu-majority nation. The unreflective modern Hindu, whom Chaudhuri saw as incapable of examining his life in response to Plato's famous exhortation, moved ignorantly amidst a forest of Indian signs – monuments, clothes, names, drinks – content to remain with their 'Indian' surfaces without every trying to go beyond them to more problematic dimensions. In all of this, Islam worked for Chaudhuri as the secret joke of Indian nationalism, the unspoken *bon mot* of Indian historiography, the clandestine formula which, once grasped, would dissolve the *maya* of Indian nationhood and render it absurd to its very foundations.

This mistaking of surface for substance that Chaudhuri, invoking an almost Gnostic cosmology of self-ignorance, attributes to the unwitting modern Hindu, seems to spring from an unwillingness or inability to grasp how we are formed, in part, by the things which control us. Modern Hindus are unable to understand that part of their 'Indianness' is precisely that which was formed during centuries of Muslim rule; 'Indophile Westerners', one of Chaudhuri's most hated subgroups, also fail to grasp that the 'Westernization' they lament (mixing English with Hindi, etc.) is just another phase in the process of becoming Indian. In his subtlest moments, Chaudhuri saw such processes as an inevitable part of being: 'The pastiche which is the very stuff of our being gains all the greater significance because it is unaccompanied by the possession of any positive selfhood'.<sup>133</sup> Unlike Tagore and his vision of an *Arabian Nights* illusion, Chaudhuri can only see lost ironies, not lost essences. Hence, his slightly Saussurean description of the modern Hindu: 'The true definition of a Hindu in contemporary India is that he is a non-Muslim, and that of a Muslim that he is non-Hindu'.<sup>134</sup> When Chaudhuri's historicism moved into gear, modern India became one such world of illusions, ignorance and self-denial, where deluded factions struggled with one another over identities they had no real knowledge of.

However, Chaudhuri's devotion to historical context, although an ironic comment on the nationalism he despised, also had two other effects on his relationship to Islam, both of them somewhat different in nature. The first of these pushed him away from the Muslim world, the second one towards it. The first effect was a heightened awareness of some of the destruction and massacres Muslim armies had inflicted upon the Hindu regions they invaded over the centuries. We have already discussed the half-repressed nature of this awareness – the 'eeriness' Chaudhuri could feel at seeing pieces of temples built into the stonework of mosques, for example, or the abrupt and compact manner in which he sometimes referred to the Moghul destruction of Hindu temples. Even if the central motivation for such recollection lay in the desire to show how the vicious, resentful Hindu could never forget, such recollecting appeared to have a performative aspect to it, whereby Chaudhuri would ambivalently report the atrocities which allegedly fed the sectarian loathing and self-pity of the Hindu whilst simultaneously appearing to draw some understated measure of anger and resentment from it himself. A moment in the middle of *Circe* affords a good example: Chaudhuri spends a paragraph describing in some detail how, in 1757, an Afghan king ordered the destruction of the holy Hindu city of Mathura ('there was wholesale massacre and rape for hours together').<sup>135</sup> What immediately follows is one of his sons' anecdotes, who were shown around the region by a Hindu guide many years later after a 1947 massacre had effectively removed the Muslim population. 'The [Hindu] guide explained with a smile, "We finished them off, all of them"'.<sup>136</sup> The example is intended to show how the Hindu is able to wait two or three hundred years to exact his revenge. It is difficult, however, to avoid in the passage a tacit sense of satisfaction on the narrator's part, a contentment at things finally balancing themselves out – all the more disturbing because it is barely articulated. For all of Chaudhuri's observations on the smouldering resentment of the Hindu, the inconsistent and half-articulated nature of his own relationship to Moghul history sometimes seemed to have a similar quality.

Moving to Delhi, the former sultanate and seat of Islamic power during the Moghul period, had a very different effect on Chaudhuri: it effectively de-plebianized his view of Muslims and gave them unexpected historical depth. Seeing the imperial architecture of Delhi and Allahbad, Chaudhuri was reminded of the former imperialist prestige of Islam, a fact which worked together with his latent Anglo-/kratophilia to provoke fresh new sympathies and re-evaluations. If the Muslim peasants from his childhood Bengal had been an 'external proletariat', the Moghul tombs at Khusra Bagh visibly exemplified how the Hindus themselves had been a 'cultural proletariat'.<sup>137</sup> The realization finds its place towards the end of

*Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, in one of the most significant passages Chaudhuri ever wrote about Islam:

I completed my examination of Islamic architecture in Delhi by a study of Islamic architecture all over the Islamic world from Tunisia to Bengal . . . My study of Islamic architecture had as its natural complement a study of Islamic history and civilization. This study I regarded as my recreation while I was continuing my commentaries on the war. I then realized what a mistake it had been for me not to have tried to know more about Islam . . . when I was in Bengal. It was certainly unnatural, because in East Bengal the majority of the population was Muslim, and we of the Hindu gentry there had to deal with them every day. Yet the Muslims knew more about Hinduism than we knew about Muhammedanism. In Calcutta I had, of course, studied Islamic painting. I had also realized that the Muslims had a perfect right to their way of life, but that opinion was based on my observation of the actual social and political situation, and not on a proper appreciation of the greatness and significance of Islamic culture. This I acquired in Delhi, and I began to regret the ignorance of all Bengali Hindus. If they had known more about Islam and Islamic civilization . . . [t]here would have been some approach to each other based on respect.<sup>138</sup>

History redeems Islam in this passage, in contrast to the records of massacres and destruction in the previous paragraph. The reflective eye of Chaudhuri's historian, which desired to know how a city like Mathura could be leveled, also desired to learn how a city like Fatehpur could be built. The paragraph is interesting for a number of reasons: first of all, Chaudhuri refuses the option of 'regionalizing' Islam, which would have conveniently explained his failure to appreciate the 'lower' Muslim culture of Bengal in contrast to the 'higher' Muslim culture of Uttar Pradesh. On the contrary, he homogenizes the Muslims of both regions (Dacca and Delhi are as far from one another as Rome and Copenhagen) and retrospectively concludes that it was a failure of epistemology (how little 'we Hindus know about Muhammedanism') which had caused him to view the Muslims of his native East Bengal so monodimensionally.

The decision Chaudhuri makes here is of some significance. The Muslim culture of central northern India was much more visibly 'Moghul' and characteristic than the much better assimilated Muslims of Bengal. Although by no means bereft of Islamic monuments, no Taj Mahals or Fatehpurs mark the landscape of Bengal in quite the same way as they do in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Chaudhuri could have employed his Orientalist vocabulary – as he had done fifteen years earlier with his Middle Eastern version of Delhi – to stress the obvious differences between the Islam of Delhi and the Islam of Kishorganj. Instead, Chaudhuri takes the opposite route: retrospectively re-projecting a Moghul historicity and greatness onto the ordinary Muslims of his

youth and castigating himself and his fellow Hindus for not appreciating the wider dimension of the Muslims they lived with.

The role of the library here should not be overlooked. Chaudhuri had moved to Delhi during the Second World War, and it is curious to hear how a steady reading of Islamic literature and culture would run parallel to his own commentaries on contemporary wartime events. Chaudhuri had, through a contact, acquired access to the library of the Archaeological Survey of India, and he describes in some detail the intense bouts of reading he did in Islamic history and civilization ('In the same library I first came to know about Ibn Khaldun'<sup>139</sup>). In other words, after having spent the formative years of his life with Muslims, Chaudhuri rediscovered them textually in a library twenty years later, nine hundred miles away. It was as if Chaudhuri could only truly appreciate Muslims once he had encountered them intellectually, once they had acquired for him a textual depth.

The point provokes a comparison of Chaudhuri's archival re-evaluation of Islam with two German thinkers' responses to the Muslim world, Leibniz and Goethe. Chaudhuri discusses both of them briefly in the *Autobiography*, raising the possibility that they 'were the most encyclopaedic minds at the end of ... the seventeenth [and] eighteenth centuries'.<sup>140</sup> Both figures spent a considerable amount of energy trying to learn more about Muslim culture – Goethe's love of Persian poetry is probably better known than Leibniz's late interest (after 1691) in 'Mohammedanism' and 'Mohammedan' languages such as Persian and Arabic.<sup>141</sup> And yet what distinguished them was the extent to which each thinker allowed his research to affect his contemporary, political view of the Turk. In Goethe's case, although he became (through the work of Turcophile Orientalists such as Diez) increasingly familiar with the complexity of Ottoman thought and culture, the Turks in Goethe's poetry and essays continued to be bloodthirsty beasts and malicious despots.

With Leibniz, on the other hand, we have a reaction much closer to that of Chaudhuri's. In his early writings, Leibniz's view of Islam and its followers fed generally into the antagonistic climate afforded by the Ottoman campaign against the Habsburgs, culminating in the famous Siege of Vienna (1683). Leibniz's writings about Turks and Arabs, correspondingly, are for the most part negative – he even writes a youthful tract for Louis XIV advising him to stop attacking Germany and invade Egypt instead. Once the Ottoman threat recedes, however, Leibniz's attitude towards the Muslim world becomes archival: in an attempt to find the Adamic original language, Leibniz starts to learn Persian, Arabic and Turkish. He requests – and receives – a whole shelf-full of Arabic

manuscripts from a Dutch Orientalist in Leiden, including the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun. The result is a significant change in Leibniz's attitude towards Islam – no volte-face, to be sure, but very definitely a more positive view. In 1671, Leibniz's talk was of the Turkish pestilence, the nest of Saracens, the plague of Islam; by 1710, we have a Leibniz who is willing to acknowledge the usefulness of Turkish/Arab historians, the positive, anti-idolatrous elements within Islam and the ethno-linguistic proximity of Arabic and Turkish not merely to German, but also to the hypothetical primordial tongue.

Chaudhuri's consideration of Leibniz and Goethe as exemplary encyclopaedists, in this sense, is not without irony. To some extent, the author of the *Autobiography* resembles both of them: Chaudhuri's research in the Islamic archives of the libraries of Delhi modified his views of Islam in some significant ways, even if we see a complicated and multifaceted attitude towards Muslims much the same as Goethe's. A heartfelt appreciation for the 'greatness and significance of Islamic culture' didn't stop the same writer, five years later, from effectively endorsing the Hindu destruction of a seventeenth-century mosque. The immediate and impromptu circumstances which provoke such changes in register lie largely outside the scope of this book, in the same way weather patterns, eating habits and relationship issues lie impossibly outside the analysis of a medieval painting or an ancient vase. The most we can do is chart the modality of Chaudhuri's differing responses to Islam and, by linking them to certain identities, try to have an idea of where they came from.

### Notes

1. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India: 1921–1952* (Chatto and Windus, 1988) p. 734.
2. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 148; Buddhadeva Bose, *An Acre of Green Grass: A Review of Modern Bengali Literature* (Orient Longmans Ltd., 1949) pp. 36–42.
3. See Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal', in Sheldon Pollack (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History* (University of California Press, 2003) pp. 504, 516–7.
4. William Radice comments on how Islam, the faith of most of Tagore's tenants, is 'almost completely absent' from the stories; Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Short Stories*, trans. William Radice (Penguin, 1991) p. 15.
5. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims 1871–1906* (Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 1.
6. Tagore, *Selected Short Stories*, pp. 283–4.
7. See Meenakshi Mukherjee, 'Epic and Novel in India', in F. Moretti (ed.), *The Novel: History, Geography and Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2006) I: pp. 596–631.

8. *The Bengali Book of English Verse*, ed. T. D. Dunn (Longmans, Green and Co., 1918) p. 20.
9. Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims*, p. 108.
10. See Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, 'A Song', in K. M. George (ed.), *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology* (Sahitya Akademi, 1994) III: pp. 96, 98.
11. Kaviraj, 'The Two Histories', p. 531.
12. See Rammohan Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (The Panini Office, 1906) pp. 941–58. For more on this, see Abidullah al Ghazi, *Encounter with Islam and Christianity and the Articulation of Hindu Self-Consciousness* (Xlibris, 2011) pp. 78–80.
13. Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, p. 599.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 881, 600.
15. R. K. Narayan, 'Another Community', in S. Alter and W. Dissanayake (eds.), *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories* (Penguin India, 2001) pp. 93–9.
16. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Continent of Circe: An Essay on the Peoples of India* (Jaico, 2001) p. 282.
17. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (Jaico, 2005) p. x.
18. Kant's remark can be found in *Werkausgabe* (Suhrkamp, 1968) XII: p. 661; Nietzsche's reference to Tunisia can be found in his letter to Köselitz, 13 March 1881, in G. Colli and M. Montinari (eds.), *Briefe* (Berlin, 1975) III:1, p. S.68.
19. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 478.
20. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *To Live or Not to Live* (Orient, 1995) p. 10; *Continent of Circe*, pp. 8, 89, 95; Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (Oxford University Press, 1979) pp. 52, 113; Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *From the Archives of a Centenarian* (Mitra and Ghosh, 1999) pp. 11, 47.
21. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, p. 187.
22. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 859.
23. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 268.
24. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, pp. 143, 233, 484.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 485.
26. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 353.
27. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Clive of India: A Political and Psychological Essay* (Barrie and Jenkins, 1975) p. 20. For an argument contesting this widely held belief in Ibn Khaldun as a 'secular' thinker, see Allen Frommherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and also Mohammad R. Salama, *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History* (I. B. Tauris, 2011).
28. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The East Is East and the West Is West* (Mitra and Ghosh, 1999) p. 180.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
30. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1962) p. 11.
31. Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (University of California Press, 1968) p. 186.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–6, 107.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 187.

34. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 255.
35. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, p. 194.
36. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 38.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Kaviraj, 'The Two Histories', p. 537.
41. Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims*, pp. xviii, 2.
42. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 277.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
44. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 469.
45. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Dover Publishers, 1957) p. 358; F. Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler et al. (Schoeningh, 1958) 22, p. 213; Spengler famously links Mohammed with a modern spirit of revolution beginning with Cromwell; see Spengler's *Decline of the West*, trans. C. F. Atkinson (Knopf, 1950) II: p. 303.
46. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 269.
47. Chaudhuri, *The East Is East*, p. 164; *Autobiography*, p. 482.
48. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 568.
49. Interview with Dilip Padgaonkar, *Times of India* (8 August 1993).
50. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, pp. 272–4.
51. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 180.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 734.
53. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, p. 127.
54. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 559.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 582.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 581, 561.
57. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, p. 192; *Autobiography*, p. 143; *Thy Hand*, p. 170.
58. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, p. 127.
59. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 560.
60. Chaudhuri, *The East Is East*, p. 64.
61. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 270.
62. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 782.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 783.
64. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, p. 273.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
68. Chaudhuri, *From the Archives of a Centenarian*, p. 69.
69. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 880.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Chaudhuri, *The East Is East*, p. 161.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 206–8.
73. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Why I Mourn for England* (Mitra and Ghosh, 1999) p. 28.
74. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, pp. 764, 889.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 893.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 764.
77. Chaudhuri, *Why I Mourn*, pp. 27–8.
78. Robert Orme, *A history of the military transactions of the British nation in Indostan, from the year MDCCXLV: To which is prefixed, a dissertation on the establishments made by Mahomedan conquerors in Indostan* (London, 1803); K. A. C. Cresswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (London, 1932–1959).
79. ‘Decrease of Hindus in Bengal’, *The Modern Review* 33:1 (January 1923) pp. 129–30; ‘Sufi Samagam’, *The Modern Review* (June 1923) p. 738; ‘The Malkanas and Shuddhi’, *The Modern Review* (June 1923) pp. 763–6; ‘Intercommunal Friendliness’, *The Modern Review* (June 1923) p. 753.
80. The painting is by Gogonendranath Tagore.
81. Jadunath Sarkar, ‘The Mughal Maratha Struggle for Madras’, *The Modern Review* 33:1 (January 1923) p. 23ff; T. L. Manghermalani, ‘Sufism in Sind’, *The Modern Review* (February 1936) pp. 163–4; Earl of Ronaldshay, ‘The Clash of Ideals as a Source of Indian Unrest’, *The Modern Review* 33:1 (April 1923) p. 449.
82. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 473.
83. Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, II: p. 321.
84. Dunn, *Bengali Book of English Verse*, p. 15.
85. See Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism* (I. B. Tauris, 1994).
86. ‘The boundary between what was absorbed from local practice by a process of osmosis and what was learned from Western models consciously is thus not an easy line to draw’. Mukherjee, ‘Epic and Novel in India’, p. 599. This problem of origin tracing, in a history of ideas so multiply interlaced as that of nineteenth-century Bengal, can also be found in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s reflections on the multiple origins of Bengali reformists’ notions of compassion as being derived from a European theory of sentiments (Locke, Hume, Smith), but also from Indian aesthetics and the idea of *shahridayata* (the Sanskritic-Bengali word indicating someone with an inborn capacity for sympathy); see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2008) pp. 126–8.
87. Cynthia Talbot, ‘Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37:4 (1995) pp. 696–8.
88. Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta* (Routledge, 2005) p. 171.
89. ‘Mohammedanism, as a religion for men, is deeply contemptuous of the sentimentality and mendaciousness of Christianity – which it feels to be a woman’s religion’, Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Weidenfeld, 1967) section 145, p. 93.
90. See Kipling’s story ‘The Head of the District’, in *Life’s Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People* (Doubleday, 1932).
91. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, p. 225.
92. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, pp. 355, 583.
93. See R. K. Kaul’s aggressive monograph *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The Renaissance Man* (Rawat Publications, 1998).



94. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 482.
95. F. Nietzsche, *A Genealogy of Morals* (Macmillan, 1897) p. 55.
96. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, p. 277.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
98. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, pp. 38–9.
99. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 37.
100. Kant and Hegel, for example, both saw the essential quality of Islam to be transcendence; see Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, III: pp. 242–3; Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. J. T. Goldthwait (University of California Press, 1991).
101. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 37.
102. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 103.
103. *Ibid.*, p. x.
104. Chaudhuri, *To Live or Not to Live*, p. 31.
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
108. William Walsh, *A Manifold Voice* (Chatto and Windus, 1970) p. 25; cited in Tara Sinha, *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: A Sociological and Stylistic Study of His Writings during the Period 1951–72* (Janaki Prakashan, 1981) p. 120.
109. Max Mueller, *Biographical Essays* (London, 1884) p. 13. Many Indians, naturally, reciprocated this belief: in 1887, Keshab Chandar Sen could declare at a public lecture how ‘the advent of the English nation in India’ actually meant the ‘reunion of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race’ (cited in Rajesh Kochar, *The Vedic People* [Orient Longman Ltd., 2000] p. 11). See also Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Yoda Press, 2001). In the beginning of the nineteenth century, spurred by the discovery of Sanskrit and Avestan’s proximity to German and Latin (through figures such as Jones and Schlegel), a number of thinkers were looking to Persia as the original homeland (*Urheimat*) of the German people. The philologist Adelung argued as early as 1806 that Persians and Goths enjoyed a ‘common derivation’ (*ursprüngliche Abstammung*); see Tuska Benes, ‘Comparative Linguistics as Ethnology: In Search of Indo-Germans in Central Asia, 1770–1830’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24:2 (2004) p. 16. Josef von Hammer’s *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens* (1818) called Persia ‘a high intellectual-culture’ and a ‘near relative of the West’. Hammer had even described the Persian epic the *Shahname* and the German *Nibelungenlied* as the sagas of two blood-related peoples (*stammverwandte Völker*); see B. Stemmerich-Köhler, *Zur Funktion der orientalischen Poesie bei Goethe, Herder, Hegel* (Lang, 1992) p. 195.
110. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, pp. 36, 46.
111. It would be unfair to Raja Rao to see this as his only position on Islam; see his delightful short story ‘Companions’, which tells of a snake that helps a Muslim to ultimately find God. S. Alter and W. Dissanayake (eds.), *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories* (Penguin India, 2001) pp. 100–8.

112. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 557.
113. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, p. 22.
114. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 64.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 570.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 571.
117. Chaudhuri, *The East Is East*, p. 206.
118. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, p. 278. For more on the German perception of the unnaturalness and obstinacy of the post-Christian Jew, see Amy Newman, 'The Death of Judaism in German Protestant Thought from Luther to Hegel', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61:3 (1993).
119. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, p. 264.
120. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 467.
121. Chaudhuri, *The East Is East*, p. 154.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
124. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, pp. 64, 95.
125. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 394.
126. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Routledge & Kegan, 1978) p. 287.
127. Chaudhuri, *Clive of India*, p. 20.
128. C. Issawi (ed.), *An Arab Philosophy of History: Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis* (John Murray, 1950) p. 34.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
130. Rabindranath Tagore, *Bharatvarser Itihas* (Visvabharati, 1968) pp. 3–4; cited in Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Two Histories', p. 541.
131. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 586.
132. Chaudhuri, *To Live or Not to Live*, p. 31.
133. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 588.
134. *Ibid.*
135. Chaudhuri, *Continent of Circe*, p. 104.
136. *Ibid.*
137. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, p. 127.
138. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 736.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 737.
140. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, p. 392.
141. For more on both, see chapters 1 and 4 of my *History of Islam in German Thought* (Routledge, 2010).