Treatment of Indian Culture in Nirad C. Chaudhuri's
'To Live or Not Live'

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an effort to study the treatment of Indian traditions in Nirad C. Chaudhuri's 'To Live or Not Live'. Nirad C. Chaudhuri's understanding of Indian psyche is both profound and comprehensive. His 'To Live or Not Live' is an insightful reflection on this theme. 'To Live or Not Live' is highly laudable. Positive observations of the clash of modernity and tradition are included alongside Chaudhuri's scathing critiques of Indian society. Instead of preaching serious, lofty values from the pulpit, Chaudhuri sits in the pews. Because he cares deeply about the well-being of his fellow citizens, he has spent considerable time and energy recommending strategies for improving the quality of life in social and family settings.

Keywords: Tradition, Family, Society, Relationship

INTRODUCTION

Nirad C. Chaudhuri's understanding of Indian psyche is both profound and comprehensive. His 'To Live or Not Live' is an insightful reflection on this theme, "To Live or Not to Live seems to be an absurd question, for none of us commit suicide, though, to be honest, I would confess that I have come to feel that a large majority of the persons, I know should do so . . ., This should suggest that when I speak of living. I have something special in my mind. That is what this book is about" (Nirad C. Chaudhari 1). To Live or Not to Live is going to reveal these truths regarding book.

Some of the essays in this book were initially published in prominent Indian newspapers and magazines. However, Chaudhuri has made every effort to ensure that the book as a whole is focused and cohesive. The first half of the book focuses on Indian society, while the second half is devoted to the social sphere. "Taken as a whole, the book has a unity of theme and a criticism of Indian life and Indian social tradition in India" (Verghese 105). Accordingly, the goal of the book is for Chaudhuri to take measures to combat this dissatisfaction and respond to it in a specific manner.

Therefore, Chaudhuri's criticism of life and social customs is positive and healthy because it is grounded on the concept of happiness and change.

According to Chaudhuri, the key to a happy existence is having a reason for existing. Not having a feeling of calling based on self-criticism, searching, and constant investigation to bring about revalidation is, in fact, not living at all. According to Chaudhuri, a life focused solely on material success or maintenance is not a meaningful one. His perspectives on India's social issues are crystal clear. He investigates each issue in depth before offering his own unique take on how to fix them. Some people might disagree with Chaudhuri's assessment of Hinduism and the Indian people.

But he makes a compelling case for his assessment of India's social issues. He arrives at certain clear conclusions, for example after analysing the evils of the joint family, he declares: "The large joint family is, however, so out of time with the spirit of the age that it cannot survive much longer" (Chaudhuri 397).

According to Chaudhuri, life has no value if one's primary goal is to amass fortune. A fulfilling social and familial life is essential to finding fulfilment in one's own life. Family and community life are both viewed by Chaudhuri through the lens of the highest aspirations of social existence. What Chaudhuri does not mean by "social life" is the part of our lives that is mandated by our obligatory connections to other people like our family, friends, coworkers, and clients.

To Chaudhuri, the key to a happy social existence is finding fulfilment in connections with others. To do this, he examines the dynamics of family and social life in major Indian metropolises like Delhi and Kolkata. He thinks it's hard to lead a regular social life in today's megacities. Although his writing career afforded him more opportunities to interact with people, he never felt like he truly belonged in Delhi. Life in Delhi does not have an environment that supports joy.

Chaudhuri observed that, "Delhi, on the other hand, is growing and expanding still. But it is not growing society" (Chaudhari 20). According to Dr. Radhakrishnan: "A living community is not a loose federation of competing groups

of traders and teachers, bankers and lawyers, farmers and weavers, each competing against all the rest for higher wages and better conditions. If the members of the different groups are to realize their potentialities, they must share a certain community of feeling, a sense of belonging together for good or evil" (82).

Delhi is home to a vibrant community that Chaudhuri seems to have overlooked. His view is that large urban centres like Delhi and Calcutta are not conducive to goodwill between people. Only when he witnesses the pathetic ways that city dwellers live does he feel any sense of disappointment. As he was hopeful to see that "from the very ancient times pleasant social and polite manner have been connected with the cities" (Chaudhari 19). However, all he ends up with is disillusionment. The biggest problem with social society is that we tend to make friends for the sole goal of using them to further our own social standing. It is a sign of social standing to be well-liked by non-natives and high-ranking officials. As a result, social guests often view invitations to social events with suspicion since they suspect the true motivation lies elsewhere. Therefore, the urban centres of India are unable to foster a vibrant social scene and welcoming environment. Chaudhuri declares: "I must say that to try to exploit friendship for advancing one's interests is the worst feature of social life among us, and to see this motive cropping up in every social relationship is distressing to me" (Chaudhari 90).

What Chaudhuri says is really true. Self-interest is an inevitable part of existence, yet it has no place in our social interactions. Chaudhuri desires this very thing. It's for this reason that he has such a low opinion of social Indian celebrations like the wedding festival, the 'Sradh,' and rituals around death and disease. He claims that a lot of the previous sociability has faded away. In the old days, the wedding feast was a time for family and friends to get together and wish the happy couple well as they began their married life. All of the invited guests were given the same warm reception, regardless of their social standing. Things used to be different, but now they're not. Wedding ceremonies are a prominent way for wealthy people to show off their status. Inviting influential government leaders and ministers to one's wedding is a great way to showcase one's power and gain public praise for one's achievements. It goes against the spirit of the Hindu wedding ceremony that is performed in India. Chaudhuri observes: "Now, by reason of this transformation from social cooperation to social competition, the wedding party is offending in the first instance against the spirit of the Hindu marriage service, which is unsurpassed for depth, beauty and tenderness and is truly the verbal embodiment of sacrament" (Chaudhari 42). Again he observes: "Secondly, the discrimination among guests of different social positions is an offence against the Hindu concept that all guests, irrespective of their social status and wealth are Narayan they and we cannot treat them differently" (Chaudhari 43).

What has happened is that our political and commercial elites have transferred their slave mentality, arrogance, and hypocrisy into everyday social interactions. All the festivals have become a waste of time, money, and energy, thus what Chaudhuri argues in this context about the faults of our social rituals and rites may well be accurate. Self-promotion is so ingrained in society that it persists even at the 'Sradh' ritual. To quote Chaudhuri: "The traditional social occasion which in the past was next only to the wedding was 'Shradh' ceremony of father or mother. It was also a means of advertising one's wealth and position like the wedding" (43).

Even such occasions as death and illness are turned by Hindus into social gatherings: "To come trooping to a house of death and become vicarious mourners, is a definite social obligation as well as secret pleasure" (Chaudhari 47).

Crowding a sick person's home is a traditional Indian practise, but it's a hardship on the host because they have to provide the standard courtesies like tobacco, betel, and water to the visitors even though they don't help the sick person.

As a result, Chaudhuri places a higher importance on social fulfilment in social relationships than on the social fulfilment that Indian culture and customs traditionally foster. This is why he has such a low opinion of those who ignore their closest family and friends and never invite them out to dinner. The gradual decline of social life in India has left an empty space in Chaudhuri's social life. He says: "While the old social life is perishing, the void created by its disappearance is not being filled up by an alternative form human intercourse based on the friendliness of unrelated persons" (Chaudhari 51).

It was once common practise in Hindu culture to treat a visiting friend or relative with the same reverence as God. However, things have begun to shift. A stranger's entertainment these days is extremely rare unless the stranger can further the entertainer's monetary or political goals.

The woman may object to informal entertaining because of the hassle involved, while the husband may raise concerns about the cost. In Hindu culture, a sign of friendship is feeding a hungry person or eating with them. The ancient Indian book Panchatantra agrees with this assessment of friendship and provides the following descriptions of its various manners: "Dadati, Prati-grihnati, guhyam, akhyati, prichchhati; Bhunkte, bhojanyate ch'aiva; Shadividham Priti – lakshanam - or in English, Gives and receives in return; tells and asks about intimate matters; eats and feeds - are the six signs of friendship."[16] Yet in modern times, all of these have disappeared.

The greatest short-coming in our society, according to Chaudhuri is "the virtual segregation of men and women in it" (Chaudhari 62). How do we ensure that women in our society have important roles? Nowhere in our culture is there evidence of a healthy sex encounter. Being a historian, he is cognizant of the fact that things were different in the past.

The Muslim conquest eventually put a stop to the liberties, chivalry, and sophistication of the man-woman interaction that had been so common in conscious Hindu communities. Here it would be pertinent to quote a few lines from a reputed historian: "There are no traces of the seclusion freely even in the company of their husband hymn that the bride would shine as a debater in public assemblies proves their participation, they usually occupied a prominent place in social gatherings, lending charm to them by their graceful dress" (Altekar 223).

Historically speaking, Indian women enjoyed greater social standing than they do today. Women had a lot of independence in the home, the church, and the community. Artists in ancient India had a deep appreciation for women's beauty. The appreciation for women's attractiveness in Vedic poetry ran deep. Kalyani, the joyous one, and Subhaga, the graceful one are just a couple of the names that have been bestowed upon her. However, our society has degraded to the point where the same women worshipped as deities in the past are treated with contempt. They are subjected to unfathomable cruelty, and are ultimately driven to suicide. Chaudhuri argues that we need to stop minimising the significance of the male-female interaction. According to him, the first step toward a successful friendship is to admit honestly that one is attracted to someone of the other sex.

In the final section of the book, Chaudhuri summarises his arguments for the value of social interactions in achieving personal fulfilment. Although they are all very obvious, they are highly helpful for those who are looking to get the most out of their social life and haven't gotten at them through any sort of academic or psychological analysis of pleasure. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, on the other hand, values his family time more highly than his social life. He thinks that a happy existence is impossible to achieve without a solid and fulfilling family foundation. It's clear that Chaudhuri really believes this; but, just as his vision of social life is European, so is his ideal of family life. It's clear that he's not in the mood for the fairy tale of a loving, close-knit family. Family life for Chaudhuri is "the life of human unit consisting of a man, his wife and his minor sons" (Chaudhari 85). After defining a 'true family', Chaudhuri goes on to analyse the joint family in India.

Chaudhari claims that the dissolution of the nuclear family is due to the influence of western ideologies. In Chaudhuri's view, the joint family was not the only form of family in ancient India. He says: "It would surprise many modern Hindus to learn that the joint family is not treated as the standard form of family in the most authoritarian Dharmasastras, the Manu Samhita" (Chaudhari 88). Nonetheless, they were quick to point to the smaller family as the true Grihastasharama. Conversely, the Indian joint family was a highly valued social institution. But how does living in a blended family affect a person in India? If we want to grasp Nirad C. Chaudhuri's perspective on the Indian family, we need to resolve these issues.

Chaudhuri calls the mother-in-law—daughter-in-law relationship "as a fundamental aberration of Hindi life" (Chaudhari 90). Something more than a struggle for leadership roles in the family is at the heart of the feud between the daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. To an Indian mother, her daughter is like a guest in the home; she is cared for with the warmth and attention usually reserved for foreign visitors, but she will soon be leaving with her husband.

Because her 'real family' is her husband's, an Indian girl is taught that the 'virtues' of womanhood that will carry her through life are obedience and docility, as well as skill and grace in the many domestic responsibilities. Nonetheless, the bride is typically positioned lower than the groom in the 'real family' social structure. As a matter of course, she is expected to listen to and follow the instructions of the more senior women in the family, notably her mother-in-law.

According to Chaudhuri, the joint family has served its purpose and should be disbanded as soon as possible for the sake of everyone involved. Working women, in Chaudhuri's view, are more detrimental to the success of families than any other factor. He says that "I regard the emergence of the working women, unmarried as well as married, as the greatest threat to the family in every country and society, and as even a greater threat to family in India and Indian Society" (Chaudhari 133).

There is a significant gap between the idealised picture of women and the actual position that women find themselves in around the world, including India. Despite the fact that women in India share many of the same disadvantages as those in the developed world, they face much greater prejudice as a result of the country's sex divided social structure, the country's poverty, and traditional cultural norms. Many authors have pointed out that in India, a woman's feeling of self-worth is tied to her fertility performance and the social status she attains as a mother of males. Motherhood, not marriage, is a woman's ultimate calling. C. Paul Verghese, however, has criticised Chaudhuri's views on the subject of women in the workplace. This, in his mind, is a matter of equal rights for women. Paul Verghese writes: "However, one fails to understand why the Indian women should be denied their freedom to work to supplement the family income

or to meet their personal needs and to keep themselves busy and active. Both these—freedom to follow a profession and freedom to lead a busy life-certainly make for happiness in family life" (Verghese 113). Paul Verghese argues that working women are better able to achieve work-life balance because they do so. The mindset of Chaudhuri is totally different. Women are expected to work full-time, but not outside the home.

One of the fundamental reasons for our failures, as Chaudhuri has often demonstrated, is our dedication to money.

Every choice we make is prompted by the potential for financial gain. Many people aim to better their financial situation by fostering stronger social connections. As far as Chaudhuri is concerned, women should not have to worry about making a living. Women's employment contributes to the mechanisation and materialism that undermines domestic satisfaction. A successful family life is one that nurtures a happy home life and guarantees pleasant and loving interactions among its members, despite Chaudhuri's criticisms of the joint family in Hindu society and the working women in India. It should help advance and showcase cultural practises in a given civilization. He is absolutely correct in pointing out that "for all this a sound and sensible marriage is indispensable" (Chaudhari 30).

According to Chaudhuri, a couple who only marries for financial reasons doesn't care about the important things in life. As cliché as it may sound, love really does make the world go 'round. But he is not in favour of a middle ground that combines the worst aspects of both planned and love weddings. If you're an Indian considering such a union, he says, "Either marry in the true Hindu way or the genuine western way, do not mix together approaches which are not compatible" (Chaudhari 154-55). The ancient system of marriages was effective in its own way, notwithstanding the cruel ritual of scrutinising females before they were wed. Unhappily, the old practise of arranged marriages persists today, but in a degraded and corrupted form, so that the old guarantees for a successful marriage are not operational any longer. Contrarily, your people would not have the chance to meet and get to know each other in an open setting in our social life. According to Chaudhuri, a healthy marriage is built on mutual respect and affection rather than love. He argues that love marriages are doomed to failure since they are the product of illicit encounters tinged with guilt. We cannot but agree with his sound advice that "without love in the more restricted sense there can be very happy marriages, but without respect and affection there can be none" (Verghese 114).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the work that the author put into To Live or Not Live is highly laudable. Positive observations of the clash of modernity and tradition are included alongside Chaudhuri's scathing critiques of Indian society. Instead of preaching serious, lofty values from the pulpit, Chaudhuri sits in the pews. Because he cares deeply about the well-being of his fellow citizens, he has spent considerable time and energy recommending strategies for improving the quality of life in social and family settings.

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