

poems

Song-Lyrics of Spring

by Rabindranath Tagore
Translated by Fakrul Alam

Ektuki Choua Laage

A slight caress, a few overheard words —
With these I weave in my mind my spring songs.
Intoxicated by blooming *palash*, by *champak* flowers too,
I spin my webs of tunes, colors, and desires.
Aroused by what comes my way in fleeting moments,
I paint dream images in a corner of my mind.
With whatever drifts away, I wander about in tunes,
Thus I let time fly, counting the beat of ankle bells.

Boshonto ki

Is Spring solely a festival of flowers in full bloom?
Isn't Spring a play of dried leaves and fallen flowers too?
Waves leaping up to its tunes sound across oceans!
Waves lapsing to its tunes break up all day long!
See how Spring this day is a play of fallen flowers too!
Who says only jewels keep glowing at my Lord's feet?
At his feet lie scattered thousands of stones too!
How many of the men by his side are meek and mild?
He became my guru when He took me in knowing I was wild!
The King of Festivals beholds the play of fallen flowers too!

Aaji Boshonto Jagroto Dare

This day spring stirs at doorsteps.
Don't keep it away from your cloistered life.
This day open the petals of your heart;
Distinguish no more between near or far ones.
In skies resounding with music
Let your essence surge like waves.
Spread what is sweet in you everywhere
And let yourself mingle with space.
This day what deep pain spreads across forests
And sounds through leaves?
This day all dressed up and expectant,
Who does earth look for in far off skies?
The south wind has grazed my soul,
Who is it seeking by knocking at doors?
On this fragrance-filled night
Whose footfalls can be heard?
O beautiful, beloved, and radiant one,
Whom do you call so profoundly?

Bashonti, He Bhubonmohini

Spring, you enchant earth.
Your boundless beauty
Pervades everything.
In forest outskirts, green fields,
Shaded mango groves,
Lakesides and riverbanks,
Blue skies and the south breeze.
You are immanent.
In cities, villages, and gardens,
Daylong or at nighttime,
Cuckoo calls, dances, and songs
Enthrall the world.
Houses and palaces hum with music.
Hearts fill with delight,
Life upsurges today.
The mind stirs, becomes restless,
Rings out like bells on dancing feet.

Jhora Pata

Fallen leaves, I belong to your lot.
With many a smile, many a teardrop,
Falcon sends my soul on its way.
Fallen leaves, have you put on spring's light orange colors
For your last show?
Have you been rolling over grass and dust
Ritually, to herald spring's ultimate outburst?
Let me be like you in my final passage,
With the color of fire set me ablaze.
Let the setting sun stir my soul
And prop it up as it moves towards its goal.

Fakrul Alam is Professor of English at Dhaka University.

Cathy Is Thy Name

by Akhtar Ahmad

Cathy is thy name
Thou art my Nancy Spain.
All said "no"
And you said "proceed"
And so did I
Without a thought.

I now stop to linger for a while
On thy warm lap,
To forget all, only to rest.
And to imagine with my frozen brain
To dare to pass away rigidly
On the same lap
Without a thought.

Little Bit Of Narcissism

I smell my armpit
And I seem to like it.

Mirror

My son,
I see myself through you.

book review

Civilisational Angst

by Ashok Patnaik

From the Archives of a Centenarian
by Nirad C Chaudhuri
Mitra & Ghosh, Rs 100

Why I Mourn For England
by Nirad C Chaudhuri
Mitra & Ghosh, Rs 100

HE answers to restoring a disintegrating individualism and finding a new and natural morality for Athens were the cardinal causes for the death of Socrates. Similarly in India, Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri found himself pilloried for his unflattering and unostentatious opinions. His books were seen as anti-Indian and his sparkling erudition was trashed by critics.

Besides his magnum opus *The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* (1951), and other magisterial works like *The Continent of Circe* (1965), *Max Mueller: Scholar Extraordinary* (1974), *The Hand Great Anarch* (1987) and *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997), Chaudhuri wrote thought provoking essays and gave lectures in some of the world's premier institutions. These have largely remained unnoticed and unknown by many, especially the lectures he delivered. Now that treasure has been compiled and edited in two volumes under review, by

Nirad Chaudhuri's analysis of the pathology which has crept into various rungs of our society was of course critical, which it ought to be. At a time when most of his contemporaries were assessing the time, the scholar extraordinary foresaw the dreadful events plunging the nation into chaos. *From the Archives of the Centenarian* contains twenty-one essays. They throw light on essential subjects such as "Nationalism in India", "Chasm between Indian Opinions and Actions", "Envy as Part of Our National Character", "Tagore and the Nobel Prize", "The Discovery of Women in Bengal", etc.

his eldest son Prof D N Chaudhuri.

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In his formidably encyclopaedic accounts, Chaudhuri engages with the whole range of issues connected with our civilisation. In the first named essay, he goes on to explain why he titled it "Nationalism in India" instead of "Indian nationalism". He prefers to characterise Indian nationalism as "an assemblage of separate and different na-

tionalisms within the geographical unit that is India... operative entirely on the internal evolution of the Indian people or more correctly, peoples... the politics of nationalism was itself wholly negative. If it did not create a mental void, it only filled the mind with aversions and hatred." As the country sails through one of its most turbulent and xenophobic periods, be it in Gujarat, Mumbai, Karnataka or the backwaters of Orissa where the recent barbaric assault on foreign nationals took place, they only mirror Nirad Chaudhuri's prophecy coming true.

His first visit to England, Rome and Paris is recorded in "Eight Weeks in Three Thousand". He acquaints the reader with these places as a guide does, and brings out the *summum bonum* of the museums and art galleries.

In an evocative piece "My Way of Being Pro-British", Chaudhuri engages with an important topic for which he has been branded pro-British. Few of his critics are aware that he was equally

critical of modern Britain. He dealt with profound dismay on the sordidness in their contemporary life in an article in *The Daily Telegraph*. Interestingly, it was not only given a prominent place on the editorial page, but was accompanied by a remarkable editorial observation: "Nirad C Chaudhuri sees us engaged in a ferocious pursuit of private interest, with no regard for public welfare." Chaudhuri concluded that "there is no longer any sense of mission: the British people have got immersed in private life". In the first instance no Indian newspaper would have given place to such an article, and there would have been a torrent of abusive letters to the editor even if it had been published. No such thing occurred in Britain. They welcomed him as they did Karl Marx, Max Muelle, Isaiah Berlin among others. We Indians do not realise that criticism is a necessary function of patriotism.

Why I Mourn for England contains nine essays and three complete lectures

he delivered at the Ilkley Literature Festival (1986), London School of Economics (1988), and the British Housewives League (1988). In the first essay of the book Chaudhuri answers the common question — why do writers write? Then he evokes the traumas he underwent in India and says he does not understand why there was an unprecedentedly hostile reaction to his debut work. This was, however, explained in a detailed letter to the intellectual stalwart Sir C R Reddin by Sir John Square, who read and approved the manuscript for Macmillan & Co. (London): "he is a sage; he is familiar with all the arts of the world as he is with the religions and philosophies. His English is so good that one is tempted to think that he must have had a translator, but a translator as good as that could have never bothered about translation but have written English books on his own. This unknown Indian hovers above our globe and sadly scrutinises the fluctuating fortunes not merely of India, with her

succession of invaders, but of all mankind... if this book comes out as I hope it will, it may put India into an uproar. But it will certainly enlighten all historically minded; and he might possibly, if necessary, find a refuge in England where in spite of all we have lost, we are still allowed to think." This important letter was written on December 5, 1950. Twenty years later, Nirad Babu went into self-chosen exile in England. But then, his admiration for England has turned into mourning, out of which emerged an article published in *The Daily Telegraph* from which the name of one of the books under review has been borrowed: "Why I Mourn for England."

In his lectures at the London School of Economics in 1988, he spoke at length on the East-West conflict. Chaudhuri prefers to characterise it as an "intra-European" conflict and extends his scholarly discussion of the very definition of the term of conflict. His sense of resignation grew deeper and wider as he witnessed the decadence of English life and civilisation.

All these beautifully written essays reflect Chaudhuri's approach of analysing India and Britain on a grand scale. Prof D N Chaudhuri has done a great service to the nation by publishing such valuable work. To all those who wanted to acquaint themselves with India's past as well as present these two books are indispensable.

fiction

A Sensitive Issue in Twilight Years

by A S M Nurunnabi

AS one nears old age in life, some peculiar problems arise which don't prove easy to solve. One of such problems arises when a woman, in the normal course of life, gets married, raises a family, bring up the sons and daughters with proper education, and make them fit for meeting the challenges of life when grown up. The real problems arises when some of her own daughters and sons get married and set up their own families outside the protective care of their parents. At such a stage, the parents become more alone when one or two of their offsprings go abroad for better job opportunities and living.

Left alone in their own homes, life then became a painful existence in the twilight years. There may be no financial constraints in their living but the

emotional vacuum created by the absence of their independent sons and daughters was felt to be galling. If in such a situation, the husband later died from old age in illness, the ordeal for the old wife got all the more heat-rendering. In all her life, the woman, though sufficiently educated, didn't think of go-

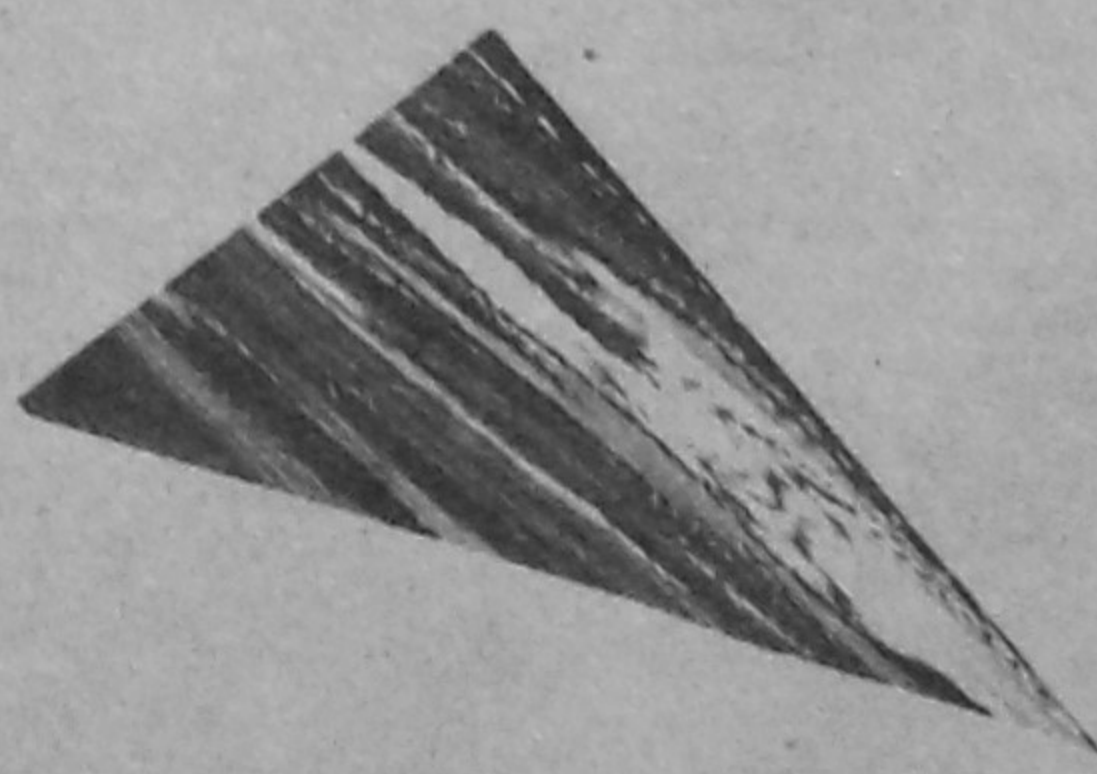
ing into a career; rather she preferred to devote herself to the task of bringing up her children properly. Now, at her advanced age, she couldn't think of any meaningful ways of passing her days to cope with the loneliness that had emerged.

In this state of loneliness, she looked back to her younger days before marriage, when a strange innocent relationship developed with an adolescent boy of her own age. There was no hint of romance in this relationship; rather the relationship was one between an elder sister and a younger brother.

However, the relationship acted as a sort of emotional mooring for the boy who lost his parents at an early age and in his growing years suffered from emotional insecurity. As the years passed, the boy turned into an adult

with sober attitudes and an ambition to stand up in an educational career.

However, the emotional security that his association with the young woman provided, stood him in good stead. He couldn't forget her sympathy and understanding in his younger days of educational life. In this contest, he remembered an incident. Once, in course of his final college examination, he had done miserably and he was so crestfallen that he thought of dropping further examination. The young girl, who used to visit the examination centre everyday during the examination, stood by him at his difficult time and encouraged him not to give up. Her support for him, as it turned out later, paid him dividends, because, though he couldn't do well in one subject, made it up by better performance in other subjects.



These stray thoughts dominated him as he grew up and finished his education. He later became a college teacher.

But throughout his all his past years, he maintained links with the woman who played an important role in stabilising his emotional life. In this behalf,

a telephone call from her some years ago suddenly came when the caller said, "Happy New Year" on the occasion of the beginning of a Bangali new year. There was no mistaking who the caller was. This was a very pleasant surprise for him, as he felt the empathy and understanding in their relationship still continued unabated.

But for the woman who is now old and lonely after having fulfilled all her family obligations, a delicate and uneasy situation loomed. While she would always cherish the sad memories of her dead husband who had always been loving and kindly all through her life, she could hardly be oblivious of the living existence of the person who was considerate and keen for her welfare. In a way, this was her consolation in her prolonged loneliness.

