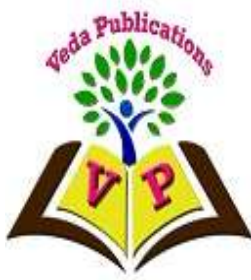


**AN EXPLICIT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL SPACES IN AMIT CHAUDHURI'S NOVELS**R.Padma Priya^{1*}, Dr. M. Premavathy²^{1*}(Research Scholar, Bharathidasan University, Constituent College For Women, Orathanadu.)²(Research Advisor, Bharathidasan University, Constituent College For Women, Orathanadu.)**ABSTRACT**

Amit Chaudhuri is a versatile writer of contemporary Indian English Literature. He is a poet, novelist, essayist and literary critic and also a good singer. He has made a mark in the pantheon of contemporary Indian writers in English. His writings are conspicuous, striking and vibrating. His works reflect the Indian values, Bengali sensibility and simplicity. Chaudhuri's controlled writing, is lyrical, firmly places him in the standard of contemporary Indian writing in English. He locates real India, especially Bengali culture in his novels. His artistic views and creative perception made him to change the conventional concepts of Indian English Fiction. Chaudhuri's novels provide new vision on the ideology of the Western and the Indian domesticity. My aim is to explore how Chaudhuri's novels represent the prominence of the construction of cultural sensibility of class, caste, family and identities. Chaudhuri pictures life's every day activities with perfections of daily existence with depth and compassion of distinctive manner. Amit Chaudhuri is one of them who have portrayed the narration of cultural sensibility in his novels through the representation of the lived experience of home in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, *Freedom Song* and *A New World*.

Keywords: *Culture, Bengali Region, Society, Domesticity, Indian Tradition, Aesthetics.*



Amit Chaudhuri's works explore the influence of a particular space on the characters and events of his novels. He describes the hills, the forests, the roads, the buildings, the architecture, the towns and the countryside of his region and gives maximum exposure to them. It has been used as a background of his works. The region is much more than a mere setting or background of his works. It plays an important role in the development of the story and characterization. The region participates in the works of Chaudhuri with all its aspects: nature, culture, legends, customs, conventions, superstitions, topography, and environment.

He describes farmers, businessmen, laborers, fairs, market places, river-bridges and sea, the backwardness and superstitions of the local people, rustic songs and dances and Bengali dishes etc, with a wide knowledge and acute feeling because he has known them intimately. Amit Chaudhuri entered the literary world of Indian English Literature in 21st century. Right from his birth he always dreams enormous and always wanted to achieve something very different in his life. He is a versatile genius who can write novels, compose music and he also presents it on stage. He has touched day-to-day living and experiences of everyday lives like getting up in the morning, reading newspaper, taking bath, having meals, visiting relations and so on. He presents real India especially Bengali culture in his novels.

Amit Chaudhuri's, debut novel *A STRANGE AND SUBLIME ADDRESS* (1991) has pictures the world of Childhood predicaments. It has a combination of young and the old, the growing up and the grownups. Chaudhuri thematized the socio-cultural identity in his novels. He compromised with the colonial reality and has realized that he cannot excuse from it. However, his aim is recognizing at native culture by projecting it positively. It is known fact that a works of art carry the clue of the social and cultural practices of the community in its evolutionary history and play an obvious social role by servicing as a selective memory of traditions and ideals.

Literature is one avenue of cultural substance and its modern-day significance lies in its ability to assume an anxiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance. A study

of Chaudhuri's novels explores the disconnected fragments of the commonplace and mundane life. His novels are, in fact, a continual reminder of everyday life. Chaudhuri's first novel, *A strange and Sublime Address* captures middle class Kolkata, a city of industrial and economic stagnation but with the unique cultural flavor, seen through the eyes of the twelve-year old protagonist, Sandeep, who comes to the city from Mumbai to spend his summer vacation in the household of his maternal uncle.

Chhotomama, youngest maternal uncle of the novel's young protagonist Sandeep in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, here as in rest of the novel is a good example of a local subject, a concept that is crucial both to the tradition of fiction. Chaudhuri has foregrounds his theoretical criticism in the narration. Chhotomama's subjectivity here organizes itself through its interpretation into regional political ideologies. The comical and strange behavior of Chhotomama, the uncle of Sandeep, we have a very realistic crystallization of this political regionalism.

Chaudhuri's fiction, however, places an almost exclusive emphasis on such spaces marginalized by dominant historiographies. Such spaces in fact constitute the crucial site of the production and cultivation of the quotidian in his fiction, through which the tangible texture of locality are woven Sandeep finds a great delight in this ancient house full of antique objects, old radios and out-of-fashion furniture and here he senses a kind of rootedness, a strong bond between brother and brother and brother and sister. Alone in Bombay, in his father's huge company flat, he feels too much 'foregrounded' lonely. However, amidst the humdrum of life, amidst the not-so-important gossip of his aunt and his mother, he discovers a placid world, the world of a middle class Bengali, as it was lived in the seventies. A passage like this shows the twin themes inextricably linked in Chaudhuri's novel. They are, the celebration of simple of joys of childhood and the evocation of a way of life. This comes out forcibly in the lunch that follows; it is as if he opens our taste buds and the taste lingers long after the lunch is over:

Pieces of boal fish, cooked in turmeric, red chilli paste, onions and garlic, lay in a red, fiery sauce in a flat pan; rice, packed into an

even white cake, had a spade-like spoon embedded in it; slices of fried aubergine were arranged on a white dish; dal was served from another pan with a drooping ladle; long, complex filaments of banana- flower, exotic, botanical, lay in yet another pan in a dark sauce; each plate had a heap of salt on one side, a green chilli, and a slice of sweet-smelling lemon. (P.9)

Chaudhuri's second novel *Afternoon Raag* is a series of sketches about the life of an Indian graduate student in England, moving back and forth between Oxford, where he studies, and Mumbai, where his parents live. The novel deals with the experiences and impressions of a young Indian student of English Literature at the University of Oxford. Chaudhuri recreates the state of mind of a young man coming to terms with loneliness, nostalgia and alienation. A raag is a piece of classical Indian music which plays around a set of specific intervals to create a particular mood. Here the mood recreated is one of being adrift in a unique situation, enjoying a very special phase of life between childhood and adult life, devoted to ephemeral, yet significant relationships and aesthetic pursuits.

In *Afternoon Raag*, the narrator delights the reader with little insights, and with the delicate classically crafted prose. This piece of work by Chaudhuri is loosely structured like a Hindustani _raag' the classical music. The raag' (a piece of classical Indian music) of the title is not just allusion to the musical taste of the narrator it seems to refer to the very substance of novel and its poetic, musical prose. The novel adopts the metaphor of Indian Classical Music, the raag, to evoke the complex emotions displayed by the narrator, in a young Indian student at Oxford. When he physically situated in Oxford, often returns in his thoughts to his family home in Bombay and, later, to Calcutta. He drifts into the two worlds literally—on his trips back and forth—and more importantly, imaginatively. They learn to perceive the present moment as it was perceived by modernists. In his notes on the Novel after Globalization, Chaudhuri stresses that the novel of globalization has little to do with it, in fact, inimical to the epiphanic, with its disruptive, metaphysical potential.

In *Freedom Song* Chaudhuri depicts the decline and eventual destruction of the family business and the loss of the extended family's houses, moving from a privileged cocoon life in the family's private compound to ordinary apartments in a municipal block. This loss of house and the decline of the family business, in this novel, is a metaphor for the decline of old' middle class values in modern India, which shows that Chaudhuri has great concern for Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility. *Freedom Song* is about the life of three generations of an extended family. Set in Calcutta in the 1990s, the novel chronicles the lives of Bhola and his sister Khuku and their respective families, portraying the banalities of daily life: eating, sleeping, and going to work. Its Chaudhuri's style to somehow focus on culture and tradition in his writing that connects his readers with native and regional aspects of different culture and helps them to comprehend minutely.

Chaudhuri would talk of India, Bengal and Calcutta in the same breath as if they meant the same thing. Similarly, while he is averse to any pan-Indian culture, he would talk of the culture of Calcutta and by implication; suggest the culture of Calcutta and India. For example, he says about *Freedom Song*, "I really think of it as an extended poem about the end of certain phase in Calcutta, in Bengali culture, and in Indian culture." (On Belonging 50) The entire action of *Freedom Song*, which deals with the middle class life in Calcutta, has perhaps been neatly summed up in these words of narrator, "They woke, slept, and talked. They eked out the days with inconsequential chatter." (56)

His fourth novel, *A New World*, won Sahitya Akademi Award in 2003. It is the narrative of Jayojit Chatterjee, a divorced writer living in America, who returns to his parents' home in Calcutta with his son Vikram (Bonny) for summer break. His elderly parents are first unable to comprehend the collapse of his marriage. What hurts Jayojit is the shrinking space that Bengali culture carries with itself and the changing face of the metropolis. Bengali and common place things like hurry to catch the train, noise in the railway, canteen and announcement in the departure. This story is however not just about Jayojit, but is also about the marriage, loneliness of his parents, and about Bengali life in hot, busy Calcutta.



Chaudhuri sets within the four walls of a small flat a contrasting image of marriage: a failed modern day marriage, and an apparently successful, if extremely traditional marriage where the positions of roles are unquestioned and accepted by both husband and wife. Chaudhuri writes with great ease about Calcutta, his city of birth. His description of daily life is vivid and his treatment of the story is filled with a subtle tenderness. Amit Chaudhuri's last novel is *The Immortals* utilizes music, foods, and clothes as a metaphor to show how trans-valuation of values is taking place in the matter-driven modern society. He builds the narrative around the ragas of music to show the difficulty of those artists who are struggling to find their right place in the fashion of popular art culture. While lesser writers obsess over the heat and dust, Chaudhuri charts the by-ways of the Indian soul, and thus marks in the pantheon of contemporary writers. His works reflect the Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility.

Music is also a form of communication using abstract symbols to transfer Music is an important constituent of the culture or family I grew up in.... However, I discovered classical music for myself.... I've become interested in Indian Classical music as a subject.... I've become interested in music and the world of capital, music, art and the marketplace. But I have to say that I'm not conscious of the analogies between my narrative technique and Indian classical music. (176-77)

The Immortals is a narrative of two families: one luxuriating in a new world of corporate affluence and the other is getting by on the old world of musical tradition. Together, they are joined by a common, day-to-day pursuit of music. Music is the thread that ties the novel. The setting of the novel is in Bombay during the 1970s and early 1980s. Mallika Sengupta, the central character of the novel, married to a high-profile executive, has never pursued a career in music but her musical interests are more than the casual hobby of a rich woman. Music is generally accepted for constructing realities about life and culture. It plays a vital role in constructing realities. As a metaphor for communicating, music provides a link between the values and intentional activities for understating culture. Cultural construct is never far removed from Chaudhuri's fiction.

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