

## Portrayal Of Traditional Values In Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange And Sublime Address*

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Amit Chaudhuri is a versatile writer. He is a poet, novelist and literary critic and also a good singer. *A Strange and Sublime Address* is a collection of nine stories. Sandeep is the protagonist of this novel. He is a Bengali boy who spends his school holidays at his uncle's home in Calcutta. His journey with his mother is a journey from the silence of his parents' modern flat in Bombay to the traditional household of his Calcutta uncle. He has deep intimacy about this city as he is born in this city. He takes the experience of ecstatic happiness along with his cousins Abhi and Babla. The third person narration makes the author to think of everything indifferently. Quite interestingly the novel gives an account of minute details that take place in everyday life. Heat waves, thunderstorms, mealtimes, prayer-sessions, shopping expeditions, and family visits create a shifting background to the shaping of people's lives. Delicate, nuanced, full of exquisite detail, *A Strange and Sublime Address* is a small masterpiece.

Chaudhuri's novels presented traditional ethics and rituals and he views about the world through the eyes of Sandeep, a child. He beautifully explored the Calcutta city and importance of home. He represents the domestic themes and musical effects through different aspect of the characters. He portrays this novel as a 'musical prose' it compressed many similes and comparison. This paper aims to analyse about the portrayal of traditional values in Amit Chaudhuri's Novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*.

The term 'Traditional Values' refers family Values. It means the values of the tradition and society associated with the traditional principles. Non- Western countries followed some ancestor worship or religion.

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Their main purpose is maintaining the Traditional Culture and standards. It is related to the concept of traditional authority and Folk Culture. It can also refer to an intention to preserve ancient or traditional customs and values against anything deemed 'Innovation'. It is an intentional usage because people must to be believed that a set of values is good because traditional is often perceived in a positive sense. The writings of Amit Chaudhuri concerned the Indian values and Bengali sensibility. He seems to have maintained in his writings Indian values, Bengali culture and tradition.

The main part of India, family is the supreme place for Traditional values. They followed the Joint Family System. In Indian family the father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, son, daughter, son-in-laws, daughter-in-laws, their children and all are living under the same shade of one family with sharing the food and earnings. The men are responsible for the financial security of the household. The women do all the household chores without any hassles as they share their work of cooking, cleaning, washing, etc. The children have the wonderful time as they have lots of children to play with and elders to guide them both spiritually and physically.

In *A Strange and Sublime Address* deals with the joint family system like parents, children, the children's spouses and their offspring live together. Sandeep, the protagonist of the novel differentiate the Bombay life and Bengali life, Sandeep's house in Bombay looks like:

No Sounds, no smells, only a pure, perpetually moving picture; Alone in the big apartment on the twenty-third floor; he was like Adam in charge of paradise . . . but here, in Chhotomama's house, he pulled into life and passed into extinction according to his choice; he had liberty. (ASSA 35)

The impression of the house also in the religious oriented. Chhotomama's house looks like a devotion in the rooms. The room itself was timeless without beginning to end. The furniture and the wall- lizard symbolized another world, another order of calm, inviolable existence. Sandeep observed,

There was a wooden table in the centre of the room . . . carved into the wall, that had a picture of Ramakrishna and a statuette of Shiv next to incense sticks on a stand whose sandalwood fragrance brought a faint, subconscious aura of devotion to the room. (ASSA 78)

The objects in the room are a book of Ramakrishna's anecdotes, wedding photographs, a peacock feather and a jar of spices, money plant, and a mango tree. There was a harmonium and a tanpura in the room. Space gave the little room its strange composure and a cool, accommodating presence.

In the family customs father is the head of the family. They shared their money and household duties. Money was meant to flow from the hands of one member of the family to another. The elder one helped and supported the family in the economical way. It was middle class family that the family is vast and the money is short. They planned and distributed the money wherever they want. That he says, 'Who need money more than we do' (ASSA 58). It was a criticism of life. Chhotomama, the central character of the novel was the elder man of the family and he took all responsibility of the family. Mamima, Chhotomama's wife took the responsibility of the household duties. Father should be the children's Imaginator. They controlled their children and their ambitions.

Woman gave respect to her husband. Sandeep found his uncle sitting with a friend at the dining table and his aunt sat on the floor. Whenever there was a feast or a wedding all the relatives would be invited. Relatives shared the happiness and sad feelings of the family members. When Chhotomama was suffering with heart attack he was admitted in hospital. Mamima worried about his health. Every day, patients were allowed to take gentle walk in the garden. It looked like an Adam walking into Sacred Garden. Relatives arrived in rickshaws, trams, taxis, some walked by bus, some came alone and some families with their friends. A feeling of anxiety passed like a delicate wave over the crowd of relatives. They will share some ideas about his health condition and



asked him to take care of his health condition. Sandeep's father hopefully said to them,

Dying is not a horse- race, they should be no speculation about the ending, no wagers won or lost, no one need know anything but basic information provided from moment to moment. (ASSA 132)

Chaudhuri said about the Death, Death was like a miracle; like the camel passing through the needle's eye. (ASSA 138)

Religion became an important division in culture and places of worship became community centres. The Hindu religion was separated into three parts: They are puja or worship, the cremation of the Dead and the principles of the caste system. Hinduism is the chief religion followed by about eighty percent of the population. These religions have some common rituals and practices and all of them trauma on the importance of God, the Supreme power. Most of the Indians trust in God and the efficacy of prayers. They spend more time in the pursuit of religion, like prayers, rituals, pilgrimages, fasts and discourses than any other people in the world.

Chaudhuri portrayed the prayer sessions in this novel through the character of Mamima. He described the 'prayer room' as a world within the world. Different God and Goddesses stand in various postures within. Krishna was there with his flute, his peacock- plume and his mildly flirtations smile; Saraswati sat thoughtfully upon her swan, playing her veena endlessly and attentively; Lakshmi was accompanied by her mascot, the white owl; Ganesh, with his humorous elephant- head, Durga, the Mother Goddess, had been given a slightly more prominent place than the rest. Sandeep personally liked Ganesh the best, because he seemed so content with his own appearance.

The end of the January, the people of Calcutta celebrated the festival of the Goddess Saraswati. Students would scribble "Nama Saraswati Nama" a hundred and eight times on a piece of paper because, they will pass their Exams. Saraswati, the Goddess of art and learning riding a swan, playing the veena with long, attentive fingers, would listen to everyone and promise nothing. Mamima pray for Chhotomama's health,

she sat at the end of the room, like a shy bride. In Indian ethnicity, every evening they performed a little Hindu ceremonial, dusting the ledge with a hanky (thus the ledge was the only clean place in the room) and placing 'Prasad' or sacred offerings, before the deities. The Prasad made of khoi, milk, bananas and sago seeds, was distributed to everyone in the house. They had different Hindu gods and goddess and an old lamp with an Elephant shaped stand; he called this Ganesh, as an Elephant-headed Hindu God of success. Mamima blew the conch and there was a smell of sandalwood incense. He remarks:

All that was important to the gods and the mortals was the creation of that rich and endlessly diverting moment in the small chamber, that moment of secret, almost illicit, communion, when both the one who prayed and the one who was prayed to were released from the irksome responsibility of the world; Oranges, white batashas, cucumbers. (ASSA 45)

Mamima feels secure in the world of mythology and the exterior symbols of Indian values. Chhotomama did not believe in God and Goddess, but loved the rituals and the taste of the offerings.

He said, Lakshmi resembled a marriageable middle class Bengali girl. He searched the Lakshmi idol as a maternal smile, a cool, spiritual smile like the Buddha's, even a Monalisa smile. His mother painted a pattern on the floor with white rice paste, in front of the idol. It looks like a religious symbol, feet of the Goddess. It indicates that the Lakshmi enters the house. That night called as "Poornima Moon". India gives its woman the image of "Mother" or "Devi" liable to great astonishment and worship.

Women as Gods are part of the Indian Tradition. Indian women are renowned for their pious nature and they are mostly occupied by religious pujas of all sorts, fasts and prayers. Rehman, a maid servant entered to that festival. He looks spiritual, a round Islamic dome covering a mosque. He said, "All gods are one, he said, "Allah, Jesu, Ram . . ." After Ramzaan I eat Biriyani, on the Big day I bow Jesu, and on Durga Puja I eat Khichadi"(ASSA 179). Chaudhuri observed the common things

connected with the religious thoughts. Philosophy and religion are very important sectors of our spiritual life. The title of the novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* connects his home with the world. The house represents an emblem for the fixity and stability of the family and also emblematic of the traditions of the old middle class.

Chaudhuri divided the traditional values as moral and rituals in two divisions. Moral values certainly lead the way of human being chooses the right path of their life. This part also analysed the one's educational responsibility in the hand of their father. Joint family system concentrated children's education and another important one is their hospitality. Sandeep observed the human life linked with these kinds of moral values in the city of Calcutta. The rituals of the Bengal gave the imaginary world. The gods are real but the rituals are imaginary. Whenever Chaudhuri portrayed the prayer session in the novel he gave his personal opinion about god through Sandeep.

Culture is the sum of all the forms of fine art. In the novel, Devotion – that was the word; the immemorial tradition of applying Kaajal and Kumkum, and other ancient cosmetics like sandalwood paste and mehandi, belonged more to the world of intricate, systematic ritual than to the world of Fashion. It looks like a Craftsman's work; women made up themselves means 'making oneself up' or 'as creating oneself'. Mamima and Sandeep's mother making oneself up with the help of Kaajal to their eyes, a faint gloss of lipstick to their lips, a line of Kumkum powder in the parting of their hair and pressed a red Kumkum dot in the centre of their foreheads and they wore firmly pressed, flickering saris around their bodies like bright wrapping paper around a lozenge. Widows wore the white saris which was the one of the religious custom in India.

To conclude, In *A Strange and Sublime Address* suggested as a religious oriented. Throughout the Novel, Chaudhuri explained the things connected with religious themes. His works shows the influence of a particular space on the characters and events of his novels. Chaudhuri's novels represent different aspects of home and domestic life. The domestic settings of his novels demonstrate the material history of the Indian home and associated with religious, social and cultural practices,



and show how these are adopted and reworked by the protagonists. Similarly, in the delineation of domestic life, gender roles and social relations in the household, Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* provides a new perspective on the speculative models of the Western and the Indian domesticity.

### Reference

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