

# MAPPING CULTURAL SENSIBILITY IN THE NOVELS OF AMIT CHAUDHURI

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Culture can be described as the behavior and beliefs characteristics of a particular social age group while sensibility is defined as aware of one's moral, emotions, existence, sensations, aesthetic notions and standards. So cultural sensibility suggests awareness towards one's culture while still being able to understand other cultures and differences that exists between them. The ability to recognize ourselves and others is stepping stone in cultural sensibility. Every culture captures some elements of a deeper truth, but each represents only one of many possible ways of interpreting the data generated by the human senses.

Interest in culture has always been a part of writer's curiosity about the background and environment of the nation. The powerful influence of culture can be noticed since the very birth of human being in this cosmos. Culture is considered powerful than life and death but it triumphs over death. Indo-English novels have presented a world of colourful and graceful shades of customs of our country. Literature coming from bilingual culture demonstrates how tensions existing in different cultures, languages and systems can be utilize for narrative purpose. The fiction itself is a platform of a cross culture phenomenon. Culture includes language, views, perceptions, traditions, codes, systems, values, art, ritual ceremonies and so on. It is a complex whole that includes knowledge, law, capabilities and habits implemented by man as a social being. The Indian English novels interpret some sensible concepts of culture and creates a theoretical axis upon which it charts insightful and engaging aspects of selfhood and identity. Culture is an essential part of human life that has a great influence on one's personality and gives a proper shape to it. So it has been tempting the native and non-native writer's to innovate their writings with its varied theories and delineation. Like many other Indian-English writers Amit Chaudhuri has also explored the vitality of Indian Culture through his novels and embellished the tradition of Indian English novels with his creative innovations.

Amit Chaudhuri entered the literary world of Indian English Literature in 21<sup>st</sup> 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 perform 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. His artistic perception and innovative vision assist him to change the conventional concepts of Indian English Fiction. Chaudhuri's novels provide new perspectives on the theoretical models of the Western and the Indian domesticity. My aim is to explore that how Chaudhuri's novels represent the importance of the construction of cultural sensibility about class, caste, family and identities. Chaudhuri captures life's every detail with all his perfections of daily existence with depth and compassion in an outstanding manner. Amit Chaudhuri is one of them who also have been narrated in his novels the cultural sensibility through the representation of the lived experience of home in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, *Freedom Song* and *A New World*.

Bengali ethos and Indian values are primary concern in the writings of AmitChaudhuri who has a great concern for Indian values and Bengali sensibility. He initiated his literary career with poems and wrote five novels. He seems to have maintained in his writings Indian values, Bengali culture and tradition. AmitChaudhuri's works show 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, labourers, fairs, market places, river-bridges and sea, the backwardness and superstitions of the local people, rustic songs and dances and Bengali dishes etc. all with a wide knowledge and acute feeling because he has known them intimately.

AmitChaudhuri's the first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Sandeep, the main character of novel seems to be a representative of Chaudhuri's own childhood who celebrates not only the simple joys of childhood as bathing, eating, sleeping, playing and enjoying with cousin and exploring the city but also how the business of living, working, coming to terms with the world of senses imposes an increasing burden on the soul. This shows the twin themes inextricably linked in Chaudhuri's novel: the celebration of simple joys of childhood and the evocation of a way of life. The relations between various members of an extended family, the flavour and fragrance of Bengali food, prayer times and visit to relatives, all are portrayed with a touch of humour that amused the readers from the beginning to end. We can see Chaudhuri's scultural sensibility in the following lines:

*"...Later, they went down to have lunch in the dining-room; they dangled their feet ferociously from chairs round a large, shabby table with pots thronging in the centre.*

*Pieces of boal fish, cooked in turmeric, red chilli paste, onions and garlic, lay in a red, fiery sauce in a red 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 dropping 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. The grown-ups snapped the chillies (each made a sounds terse as a satirical retort), and scattered the tiny, deadly seeds in their food. If any of the boys were ever brave or foolish enough to bite a chilli, their eyes filled tragically with tears, and they longed to drown in a cool, clear lake. Though Chhotomama was far from affluent, they ate well, especially on Sundays, caressing the rice and sauces on their plates with attentive, sensuous fingers, fingers which performed a practised and graceful ballet on the plate till it was quite empty"*  
(Page, 9: 11-29)

Being a Bengali the writer's knowledge of Calcutta city appears to be very sound. He suggests various ways of spending a Sunday evening in Calcutta, for instance, "one should drive to OutramGhat, take a stroll at river Hooghly, could stay home, and listen to plays on radio or watch a cinema" (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 11).

In *Afternoon Raag*, the narrator delights with a tidal wave of little insights, and with the delicate curlicues of his 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 'I' 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 is physically situated in Oxford, often returns in his thoughts to his family home in Bombay and, later, to Calcutta. He straddles 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 "now" of globalization has little to do with—is, 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 understand minutely.

His fourth novel, *A New World* (2000), won Sahitya Akademi Award in 2003. It is the story 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 commonplace things like hurry to catch the train, noise in the railway, canteen and announcement in the departure

It is thus clear that Chaudhuri considers the poetry of the common place to be the importance and the importance he attaches to is well reflected in his writings. He finds magic in the ordinary, and so he depicts just the small, ordinary details of everyday life of an individual in his novels. We have already seen that almost nothing spectacular happens in his novels unless small happenings and events can be called spectacular. He writes about familiar, ordinary things of daily lives in such a way that it gets defamiliarised. His novels amply illustrate how he defamiliarizes the familiar; poeticises the ordinary and makes humdrum things exciting.

*The Immortals* is a fascinating look at the Bombay of 30 years ago — a Bombay that existed in pre-boom India. Most of all, it's a meditation on how – or if – art and commerce interconnect through insightful observations that are both precise and graceful. It is a tale of two families: one luxuriating in a new world of corporate affluence and the other 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 this book together, and AmitChaudhuri knows his stuff. He is, himself, a composer and musician and the meticulous detail and grand amount of exposition is clearly written by a man who has inhabited the world he creates.

Hence chaudhuri's minutedescriptions of the living style of Bengali people and their culture is very outstanding. In the postmodern era individual has become the most important phenomenon. Postmodern authors are trying to highlight theirparticular region and culture even though they are cosmopolitan wanderers. But they never forget their ownculture and region. They are victims of nostalgia. AmitChaudhuri is also one of them. He is an expert in creating images. Chaudhuri possesses a unique gift for sounds and sound patterns. His novels abound in soundimages. .He is a novelist who depicts the ordinary, mundane, daily activities of people specially the middle class and bythe magic of his words and language, defamiliarizes the familiar happenings of daily life. It is not surprising then that much of AmitChaudhuri's novels are a celebration of local cultures andsubjectivities

AmitChaudhuri belongs to the category of writers and depicts Bengali Culture and its people in his novels. AmitChaudhuri represents both a synthesis of and a tension between his Bengali and postmodern sensibility. His writings serve as a wonderful key to understanding the vitality and specificity of Indian modernity and of modern transformation of Indian civilization. His works reflect the Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility.

## **WORKS CITED**

1. *AmitChaudhuri: Three Novels.*
2. *AmitChaudhuri: A New World.*
3. *AmitChaudhuri: The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature.*