

Aesthetics of Indian Culture in Amit Chaudhuri's Works-III**Dr. Vivek¹**¹Asst Professor, Dept of English, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur.**Abstract**

Indian culture is rich in its customs, traditions and rituals. Indians have traditions of paying respect to elders, teachers, relatives etc. The word 'Culture' is a broad term which implies a variety of meanings but here I have taken culture as a way of life. And an attitude of living the common day today life activities which people do in their lifestyle will be presented in this paper. In our day today life, we do certain things in a certain way. People of a country have traditions of doing things in a certain way likewise, Indians have a certain way of doing things. In their day today activities they do many activities: walking, talking, behaviour, living, dressing, travelling, doing puja etc. They have their own lifestyle of living. This paper presents the beauty of those activities which Indians do in day today life. And the description of these day today life activities gives pleasure to the reader. Causes behind it are a variety of reasons but I won't go in that much of detail. This paper presents the state of lifestyle of Indian common man. Culture is depicted in novels in many forms like music, business, pronunciation etc.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Culture, traditions, quotidian, sound, Indian society, indianness of culture.

A New World is a story of a divorced, Jayojit Chatterjee, an economics professor in an American University. He travels to his native Calcutta with his young son, Bonny, to spend summer holidays with his parents. Jayojit's mother cares and loves her grandson more than the others. Jayojit's parents mourn in their own way for the failed marriage of Jayojit Chatterjee. And as Jayojit walks the bustling streets of Calcutta, he finds himself not only caught between clashing memories of India and America, but also between different versions of his life, revisiting lost opportunities, realized potential, and lingering desire. Amit Chaudhuri lovingly captures life's every detail on the page while infusing the quiet interactions of daily existence with depth and compassion.

In Indian culture we feel pleasure in eating food made at home, whether the food is not made tasteful but we eat it with relish. As Jayojit and his father feel when Jayojit's mother prepares food for them. Jayojit's

father says about food made by his mother, 'it was an honest, even joyful, effort by his mother, though it had not quite worked; but it was not wholly tasteless either' (14). Indians regard the food which is made at home. We have faith in the food which is made at our home by our family members. We regard it as tasty and pious. It is said in the novel, *A New World*, 'home food was safe and insipid' (14). Jayojit praises Pabda fish made by his mother. Her dish was not made so delicious but still he praises it because it is made by his mother with 'honest, even Joyful, effort' (14). He praises his mother to cook that dish. On the other hand Jayojit's father never praises her cooking. He always has an eye on who praises her cooking. Jayojit ate the fish with relish by saying- " 'The Pabda is very fresh,' Said Jayojit appreciatively. He was eating with his fingers." (14) Bengali dishes are eaten not with knife and fork but with fingers. They love eating it with fingers.

Jayojit came to India with his son Vikram. Jayojit is an American based employee in a University. He is using American based things. He brings these things with him to India. When he unzipped his shoulder bag he finds Aquafresh toothpaste, Head and Shoulder's shampoo, bodyline deodorant, a cylinder of old spice shaving foam, a Backwood insect cutter within. (18) These

things look foreign and desirable as well. Chaudhuri called these things as 'fragile, opulent culture' (18). Jayojit finds them so desirable that he brings them with him to India.

In India, we have a beautiful culture of calling children by their pet name, not by their actual name or documented name. We love to call them by their pet name. As in the novel, *A New World*, Jayojit has a only son Vikram. He was not called by his actual name except a few pages in the beginning. In the whole novel Vikram is called by his pet name only that is 'bonny'. This name was given by his mother who is not living with them. His father got divorced with her a few years ago.

The novel, *A New World*, is written in the Indian weather conditions. In India all the time we have summer. In India we have four months winter, four months summer, and four months rain. But in rainy season and in winter season they are shortened and remained only for two months. We have winter only for two months; that is December and January. So the same is the case with rainy season. In the novel, *A New World* we find Jayojit's father, Admiral keeps on complaining about summer season. 'sweat-stained shirt', 'hot and dusty' (28).

Indians show their affection through giving more food to eat by cajoling to eat more food. We cajole the person to eat more whom we love the most. In the novel, *A New World*, when Jayojit complains to her mother about the shape of his body changing, Jayojit said to his mother that now Bonny will take toast and tea only, in breakfast. Jayojit is very cautious about his health and body. When he said to his mother, she replied, 'O ma-what's this!' she said in surprise. 'but you don't even eat much for lunch! You must at least have one proper meal a day' (46).

Jayojit got divorced with his wife. Now Jayojit and his son Bonny live together. They are alone. Jayojit's parents want Jayojit to get married. Jayojit is now thirty-seven years old. Parents think that it would be better for Jayojit and his son to live with another family member. So they want Jayojit to get married soon. Parents have in their mind that 'if he married now, the Admiral believed, it would be like attending to a wound when it was still fresh.' (68)

Jayojit preferred America to Britain. He lives in America with his son, Bonny. The lifestyle, the way of living in America is totally different from that of India when Jayojit saw his parents returning from morning walk he said, 'How quaint of you two!' explaining, he'd continued, 'you

know, in the states, no one walks any more. They drive; and once a week, when they want exercise, they go to the gym.' (79)

Jayojit's mother asked in surprise that if they needed some matches, milk, and other grocery items how they get these from market. Earlier Jayojit himself used to do this kind of chores in his childhood. In India, children bring some household things from the market. Then Jayojit replied to answered his mother's question and said that the Americans call the grocery shop and the person give it at home as home delivery, and they got fat by not doing things in their life style; they 'walk for hours on a treadmill' (79) because in their daily lifestyle, they do not do physical work. So they need to walk on a treadmill. In our lifestyle walking is an essential part of our life style; so we need not walk on a treadmill.

Jayojit and his wife Amla got married eleven years and seven months ago in the novel after that they had divorced in the American court. The Court gave the custody of the child to his wife, Amla. Jayojit was very disappointed by this news but he decided to fight it again, and he fought the case and got the custody of Bonny, his son.

Fiat is an old car which was driven by Admiral, Jayojit's father. He loves going in

this car though it is not a chauffeur driven car. It is driven by Jayojit's father himself, earlier Ambassador and Fiat were the only cars which were available in India. The Fiat was not getting as reputable as the Ambassador but it had much strength than the Ambassador. Admiral bought it before retirement and it was well cared by him.

Jayojit and his son are used to using American things in daily use. When he came to India to live for a longer period of time he needed to have those things. Jayojit went to buy things from market and found it difficult to get those things which he was using in America. In India, we are not so used to those American brands. When he asks a shopkeeper to give him Dove soap or Pond's cream, the shopkeeper was a little hesitant. There are many products in the world which are not so frequently used in India but people are using them in other countries.

Chaudhuri has written on every aspect of human life. He writes on popular culture of clothes. What clothes were there in fashion at that point of time? He writes on Salwaar kameez. It was in vogue. But it was not popular at that point of time. Jayojit remembers when he first bought Salwar Kameez for his wife Amla. Now, it has become a fashion and it has become common in masses. But there is a change in

prints and popularity has increased. He compares this fashion of wearing Salwar Kameez to 'a popular tune' and to 'annual blossoming' (144).

The climatic conditions of Bengal are humid. In Bengal, every time people feel humidity. The Condition of the people aggravated when it had the monsoon. In the monsoon season people want to go for holidays, because in the Monsoon season there is unbearable humidity in Bengal. The geographical conditions of Bengal are also in such a state that most part of its coastal line is attached to the Arab Sagar. So Bengal gets most heavy rain fall during the monsoon. People go for holidays in some dry places so that they may get relieved of the humidity during these days.

When Jayojit was left with a few days to return to his work place, America, he had been to shopping for American friends and for himself as well. He bought beautiful Rajasthani bedcovers, Pichwais and tables etc. He appreciates Rajasthani traditions and criticise Bengali. As he writes, Rajasthan is rich in tradition; they have a lot of things that we can present in front of the world and the world will definitely appreciate those things but Bengalis do not have anything 'except a few first-class university degrees- and a good command of English?' (166). Jayojit bought two mirror work cushion

covers bed sheets and two small brass birds for his neighbour who is a cardiac Surgeon. So in that way there is an exchange of things between India and America.

Chaudhuri writes about Bengali women's style of wearing saris through the observations of Amla, his wife, who is noticing the women. She observes that women of Bengal are not meticulous about their saris especially the common Bengali women. Amla observed that saris that Bengali women wear are old-fashioned and the blouses they wear are clumsy. Bengali women wear sari in a very loose way means just tuck the sari and let it go. It is what Amla observed the ladies on the road while she was on a city ride. Amla is also glancing at their hairstyle and a smile comes to her face by this observation.

In India, we don't believe in market prepared food or other people's food. We rely on self made or homemade food only. That's why Jayojit's mother put much homemade food, cuisines with her son when he and his grandson were returning to America after holidays. Jayojit's mother puts 'Sandesh', a sweet dish, which his son, Jayojit and Bonny like very much but Jayojit's father and Jayojit objected because of customs related problems. Instead of knowing this problem, Jayojit's mother put these with them. She puts 'gur' (jiggery)

with them which is a very common sweet dish in India. This shows love and affection of an Indian grandmother towards their grandchildren.

In the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Sandeep and his mother come to Calcutta in summer vacations. Sandeep and his mother live in Bombay and Sandeep's mother belongs to Calcutta. They used to come here during summer vacations because they got time to live here in Kolkata. In India, students remain busy in their schools during the year. They have enough time in summer to go out and relax themselves. So in India, children go to their maternal uncle's (mama's) home only in summer vacations with their mother. Mother also remains free from their school related works. In India, children go to their maternal uncle's home to spend summer vacations. They go with gifts for everyone. The gifts like Sari, Sweets, fruits etc. Sandeep's mother is showing saris to her bhabhis. This is what is happening in the opening chapters of the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*.

Bengalis are good at English. Their English is a standard in India. They are recognised as good at the language. In Bengali, the words from English are acceptable. These words have become as Bengali words. Certain words like 'Future' and 'career' etc.

have become a common parlance of Bengali language. They use these words as they are the words from Bengali language itself. They may not know Hindi but they must know English language. (20)

In the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address* when it was asked by Didimoni to stop taking birth to the new child to the sweeper. Didmoni said about concentrating on the future of those children and not to have another child. The sweeper assures Didimoni that he would heed to the development of his children. And he will depend upon English medium school. Why he said to English medium school and not a Bengali school he definitely did not earn like English medium parents. But we have a mentality that in English medium school, we have a standard education. We have a thinking that in English medium schools, there is a standard of education there; whereas in Bengali school or other regional language based schools, we cannot get good education. Even a sweeper wants to send his children to an English medium school because of English medium mentality in India.

In the depiction of small incidents of real world, Amit Chaudhuri, has described the way of life we live in India. In the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address* Chhotomama, Sandeep's maternal uncle, enters the toilet

with a newspaper and a pair of reading glasses. For him, toilet is a study room. He ponders over the different issues of the world and home affairs while having loo. He assesses things from a Marxist angle. In this we also do such kind of pondering upon the different issues of the nation or world. Chaudhuri called such thinker as 'water closet thinker' (45).

Cricket is a very common and loving game in India. People watch cricket matches and enjoy it very much. Cricket is so popular in India that it has become a part of every Indians' life. In the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Chaudhuri describes cricket match, which is being played between India and Australia. It is a test match which is being played in Sidney so they can watch it in the morning at 5 Chhotomama woke up at 5 am in the morning to watch these matches. It is a time when nobody gets up, Chhotomama especially got up to watch these matches between Indian and Australia.

In India people enjoy singing while bathing. People sing songs of his /her choice and they enjoy it a lot. In the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address* as well there are many times when they are singing while bathing. Chaudhuri has quoted the songs even which they were singing while taking a bath. People generally sing old songs of some

famous singers likely Lata Mangeskar, Mohamad Rafiq, Mukesh etc. May be they don't sing outside but they enjoy singing in the bathroom while bathing. Even in Indian culture, it's a common parlance people say, a 'bathroom singer'.

There are some songs which are being sung while taking a bath by the character in the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*,

'Godhulir chhaya pathe

Te gelo chini go tare'. (83)

'whether you'll remember me or not, I have forgotten.

(splash of water)...

Moment after tiny moment, I come to your door, sing

without cause.

Days pass; I remain; if ever, on the road, I find myself near

you,

(two splashes of water)...

I long to see a smile of startled peace upon your face.

That is why I sing without cause. (89)

Spring-flowers drift to the earth; springtime comes to a close.

It has filled an instant's fist; it need know nothing more.

The day will end, the light draw to a fineness, the song

cease, the instrument be silent.

As long as I'm here, won't you load with riches this

mock-raft of mine?

That is why if sing without cause. (89)

In the novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, there are some incidents described by Chaudhuri with different titles in the book. In the incident of 'A Road in late March' Chaudhuri describes a discourse between a lady and the tantric. A tantric stops a lady and asks her to show her palm. The Tantric tells her that she would have three daughters. The Tantric also says that 'You have a kind heart', he said 'You think too much'. It is found common saying by a Sadhu or a tantric to a person who meets him. It is common in India. Saints ask the same questions or some common things to the person who is coming to them. On the basis of personality they judge a person and tell something common about him. Things like you are a very calm person; you are very hard working, so on and so forth.

Afternoon Raag is a story of a young Bengali who is studying at the Oxford University and caught in a complicated love triangle. The Narrator's loneliness and melancholy sharpen his memories at home which come back to haunt him in vivid, sensory detail. It is a novel superbly written, intensely moving, it is a perfect miniature of a novel about homes. It is also called a prose poem.

The Narrator of the novel, *Afternoon Raag* is likely Amit Chaudhuri himself. In the novel the narrator is telling his experiences when he was in Oxford. He describes the buildings of Oxford, buses etc through his writings. He describes his experiences in which a person was trying to adopt the British accent in his conversations, in the double-dekker bus. He was imitating the word and sentences said by the other person. He was not pronouncing correctly because he was following the British accent. In this adoption, he was not able to pronounce the words or sentences correctly. In this regard, Chaudhuri infused a statement that is 'but the way he was more English than the English was very Indian, and there was something surprising about his utterances' (207). We try to follow the British accent in that adoption of accent we commit mistakes. I think it is better to follow the Indian accent in pronouncing the words or sentences.

Chaudhuri in his novels depicts the life of man. In our culture what are the things involved, it is depicted by Chaudhuri in a very clear and lucid way. It depicts our culture at a very minute level. By reading his novels we can go in deep of our Indian culture, whether it is a matter of married life in the form of Khuku-shib or Bhola-Abha in the novel, *Freedom Song*. How we live in our married life. The Writer has given a glimpse into indian married life. The Second couple is Bhola-Abha. This couple is trying to see a suitable match for their son Bhaskar. It shows how marriages are fixed in Indian culture. Bhaskar has seen many girls but the match was not fixed. He knows very well that because of his political connection he would not get the match of his choice.

Chaudhuri's concerns in his novels are the impact of foreign made products. These products have become the part of our life. As a result of it, the life has become a commodity. And this impact of foreign products is changing the Indian culture. As Ian Almond says, "he concerns in his novels with India whose increasing commodification of daily life is increasingly transforming culture into an appendage of capital. His stories depict an urban India whose individuals are constantly struggling

to convert their cultural/symbolic equivalent” (164).

Amit Chaudhuri had lived the life of Indian culture and the life of western culture. Bengali culture he is born in and in Bombay and English culture he was educated in. He is very much familiar with both the cultures. He accepted that he ‘was always interested in modernism’¹⁹, the modern image of the word. But he is not interested in ‘disintegration of European culture’, which T S Eliot is doing in his writings. He was very much inspired by Eliot and Larkin. Earlier he wanted to write poetry like them. But later on he realised that it was not the area of his interest. Writing on shattering of culture is not his interest area on which he can write on. He realised that he was interested in ‘the sort of drift and flow of street life...I am not interest in the disintegration of self...but I’m interested in the dispersal of culture from the self, and that for me is a joyful thing, in contrast to the dispersal of some unified self through terror or pressure’.

In a talk with Fernando Galvan in *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*, he accepted that English was not a foreign language. It is used as an Indian language, but not as other Indian languages are like Sanskrit or Bengali as he said, ‘It’s an Indian language to me for all kinds of

purposes...’ in fact we are using English and other regional languages like Bengali or Hindi at equal weightage. He is also accepting it with colonialism. But he has the opinion why we only call it colonialism. He accepts this as a condition of modernity and industrialization.

In western culture, English is the medium of depicting their culture. They use this language to express themselves about their culture. In the novel, *Samskara* by U R Anantmurthy, has used English language to depict Indian culture. At regional level writers are using English language to show their culture and society. They are using English language as a means of communication between India and the world. Ananthamurthy writes on rituals, sanskara, untouchability, rites, sex, and community feeling in the Indian society. Ananthamurthy depicted Indian way of thinking in the life, behaviour, customs, and works. It depicts Indian culture to the world. In Anantmurthy’s novels there is a depiction of social change which we find in society, though the novel, *Samskara* is a depiction of 1960s society of India but we find it relevant in today’s Indian society. The problem of casteism, untouchability, immoral acts especially in relation to sex etc. is still relevant in Indian society.

Parents always want their children to retain their culture as Robert Cohen says, ‘a member’s adherence to Diaspora community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history’

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