

**MAPPING OF TRADITION AND CULTURAL ASPECTS IN AMIT CHAUDHURI'S A
*NEW WORLD***

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ABSTRACT

Culture is an important part of a land. India is racially, culturally, linguistically, ethnically and religiously the most different country in the world. The culture of India has been figured by its long history, exceptional geography and dissimilar demography. Amit Chaudhuri has become highly celebrated across the world at a very young age of forty one. He was born in Calcutta and grew up in Bombay. He went to Britain to study. Living both in India and abroad he ignores the post colonial and post modernist concerns of his contemporaries and explores the Indian sensibility through his works. Mapping in the specific context of cultural spaces stands as a potent modifier. It connotes Chaudhuri's preoccupation with the cultures of the spaces inhabited, observed or experienced by him and his caliber as a writer. The present article focuses on the representation and the significance of tradition and cultural aspects in the select novel 'A *New World*' of Chaudhuri. It seeks to demonstrate, analyse and explore the meaning and value of tradition and cultural aspects which in turn enhance and expand the thematic foci of the novel.

Key Words: Mapping, tradition, culture, perceptiveness, society, customs and codes of manners.

Amit Chaudhuri was born in Calcutta. He works in England. He remains an Indian and has mostly limited himself in writing about his own society and culture. Culture is an important part of a land. The Oxford Advanced Learners' dictionary defines culture as, "a particular form or type of intellectual development in a society generated by its distinctive customs, achievements and outlook" (306). Broadly speaking, culture is taken as constituting the way of life of an entire society and includes codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, social customs and folklore of a nation. Every nation has a distinct culture of its own and every culture has its own curiousness and fondness, which evoke a mixed reaction in one from a different cultural setting. With the immigration of people belonging to different places new cultures are introduced into that nation making it a multicultural.

T.S. Eliot in his *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* observes:

Culture is too vast and baffling a term to be precisely defined. Culture is a quest for good but it is not good if the quest is not free choice. The quest and the choice are, therefore, the two ingredients of Culture and the tradition and is formed by the culmination of centuries of history, or a tradition may be defined as a passage, in which there is both persistence and renewal (21).

India is racially, culturally, linguistically, ethnically and religiously the most different country in the world. The culture of India has been figured by its long history, exceptional geography and dissimilar demography. Sunanda Mongia remarks thus:

India roles as a central metaphor frame work, even when a novelist, for example Bharati Mukherjee, rejects her Indian roots and desires to call her novels examples of "New American Cultures"- Inevitably, whether an Indian or an expatriate, the novelist obsessively return to India, as a concept an actuality, a symbol, a network of Cultures, myths and relationship which ensnares every author. (218)

Amit Chaudhuri has become highly celebrated across the world at a very young age of forty one. He was born in Calcutta and grew up in Bombay. He went to Britain to study at

University College London and then at Balliol college, Oxford. He has seen and was brought up in the influence of different cultures. He himself longed for his society. His worldwide visibility has been augmented by various prestigious international awards and the admiration and appreciation he has got for his sophisticated, suggestive, lyrical and evocative literary writing.

Living both in India and abroad he ignores the post colonial and post modernist concerns of his contemporaries and explores the Indian sensibility through his works in a way peculiar to himself. Chaudhuri himself belongs to the influential upper class but he aligns himself with the middle class of India and this is the quality which makes him unique as a novelist as his focus is on local culture. For him all places are apt for presenting culture and that may be the lanes of Oxford, the streets of Calcutta and the suburbs of Bombay like St. Cyril Road. He makes his practice as a creative writer quite clear in the following statement in an interview by Fernando Galvan Wasafiri in 'On Belonging and not Belonging: A Conversation with Amit Chaudhuri:

Now the kind of India I write about is a lower middle class or middle-class India, because I write about Calcutta in particular and Bengal, a post independence Bengal reality, lyricising the experiences of the middle class and the spaces in which they live, I am not writing about a fantastic India. (48)

The present article focuses on the representation and the significance of tradition and cultural aspects in the select novel of Chaudhuri. It seeks to demonstrate, analyse and explore the meaning and value of tradition and cultural aspects which in turn enhance and expand the thematic foci of the novel. In Chaudhuri's writing, culture figures as a dominate trope informing the entire narrative in terms of both contexts and concerns.

The term 'mapping' occupies the foremost position; hence it needs a neat clarification. Mapping in the specific context of cultural spaces stands as a potent modifier whose meaning extends beyond the simplistic meaning of the term. It connotes Chaudhuri's preoccupation with the cultures of the spaces inhabited, observed or experienced by him and his caliber as a writer with regard to his ability in the synthesis, evolution and final creative representation of these spaces. The term cultural aspects connotes by extension the cities like Kolkata, Mumbai (Bombay) and Oxford where the author has lived either for a long or relatively shorter period during his life. These spaces include both the domestic sites and spaces of cities such as streets, transport, shopping places, parking spaces, eateries, cinema halls, and malls and so on. In fact,

the term cultural spaces scarcely exclude any substantial aspect of middle class life so dexterously represented by Chaudhuri in his novel.

The study of cultural spaces in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri subsumes both spaces inhabited by the characters and the ways in which they think, feel, respond and articulate. The social and personal interactions link the characters to the specific locale or region in which they lead their lives. This locale or region can be defined by its physical, human and functional characteristics such as customs, values, traditions, taboos and festivals. Chaudhuri's novels have their locale mostly in Calcutta (Kolkata), Mumbai and occasionally Oxford or London. His Calcutta, Mumbai and Oxford hardly focus on grey areas of these particular regions. He is mainly occupied with the lives of middle class Bengalis, famously known as 'bhadra lok' whose tradition and culture he has attempted to map in his novels and prose writings. He may be called a regional novelist. M.H. Abrams has succinctly defined a regional novel:

The regional novel emphasizes the setting, speeches and customs of particular locality as local colour but an important condition affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking, feeling and acting. (117-118)

Like all true Indians, Chaudhuri, too, is deeply attached to India. However, he is especially inclined towards the culture of Bengal, its language and literature. The biographical facts of his life reveal that though he was born in Calcutta, he could not learn Bangla language as he spent most of his school-going period staying in Bombay. However, he craved to learn his mother-tongue and when he came to his maternal uncle's house in Calcutta during vacations, he learnt reading Bangla. When he grew up, he cultivated an ever-growing interest in Indian classical music, a passion which did not relent even during his stay in England where he went for higher studies. He studied Bengali literature and other Indian literatures available in English translation even as he pursued his studies in English literature at London and Oxford.

The act of mapping the cultural spaces of select or specific region encompasses the author's perceptiveness in showing the influence of particular spaces on the characters and events in the novel. 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* one could 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. 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 from 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 got 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 phone 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.

-they'd never thought of the value
of money before. ... they gave you
everything as long as you were working,
but in old age you had to manage
your life and your Finances yourself. (21)

When Jayojit 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 frequently.

Chaudhuri has written on every aspect of human life. He writes on popular culture of clothes. 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 during monsoon days. 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 about Bengali does 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 an editorial, in a newspaper, once Prof. Sen has pointed out,

The problem we face with
liberalization is not, after all,
the loss of our culture and
native traditions. No the
problem is whether India can
provide the basic infra-structure
not only industrial infrastructure,
but the infrastructure of human
resources - that can not only

benefit from but contribute to
liberalization. (112)

Thus it is concluded that culture is the unique possession of man, who is born and brought up in a cultural environment that constructs his consciousness. Man is not only a social animal but also a cultural being and he cannot survive as a man without culture. Culture fulfils our wants and represents our tradition, the entire accomplishments of mankind. Culture cares for Amit's identity, habits and mindset but, when uprooted from his native culture, his tradition, he finds it complex to fit into the milieu of new culture. He feels out of place and separated. In course of time, a person so displaced may learn the art of surviving in a strange place, get used to it, and even do well there, but his memory often takes him back to what he has been distanced from. Even though it is famed to play tricks, memory can and does have its moments of strength and power, which stimulate people to visit and revisit their past, their place, their home, and country, to create narratives of dislocation.

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