Amit Chaudhuri: A Creative Writer of the highest intellectual quality

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ABSTRACT: Amit Chaudhuri is one of the quintessential writers of Contemporary English literary world. He is widely recognized for his achievements in different area of World Literature. He is regarded as one of the few foremost Indian authors of the recent generation to find success outside India. He is a worldwide novelist, poet, essayist, academic and critic. Renowned for his novels, Chaudhuri is also a famous musician and singer in the North Indian Classical Tradition. He is a realistic writer who has the highest intellectual quality with a great record of literary sensibility. He is called ‘Publisher’s Nightmare’ (1). As a writer, his roots are deeply grounded in the best literary traditions of Indian culture. He is truly attached with cultural and familial traditions of his native land and all his stories revolve around it. The strength of his novels arises from the colourful portrayal of life in Calcutta and Bombay through the eyes of the characters. Chaudhuri’s observation of these two cities makes aware him to see the subtle cultural differences between two cities in the same country. His own experiences of everyday life reconstruct the plot of his creations which are rooted in the web of Bengali sensibility to evoke images of life which trend the fictional space of the novel. He captures the metropolitan sensibility of the modern Indian middle class which shows their eternal connection with family and cultural values that become the part of his novels. His works represent the eloquence observation of different aspects of home and domestic life with emotional rhythm. Chaudhuri registers all the sounds of his creative imagination to explore a real world. The present paper is an honest attempt to attract the attention of the readers towards the academic excellence of Amit Chaudhuri who is a realistic writer and who is having the highest intellectual quality with a great record of literary sensibility.

Key Words: English literary, Literature, foremost Indian, generation, highest intellectual, literary sensibility.

Introduction:
Amit Chaudhuri was born on May 15, 1962 in a middle class Bengali family in Calcutta, India. Later his family moved to Bombay with his father’s job. He grew up in Bombay in a small nuclear family with Bengali cultural heritage. Thus Bombay shaped him as a person but his Bengaliness forced him to look at Calcutta. His father, Nagas Chandra Chaudhuri, was the first Indian Chartered Accountant in the company of Britannia Industries Limited and worked in London, Bombay and Calcutta. These cities have great impact on Chaudhuri which reflected in his works. His mother, Bijoya Chaudhuri, was the well-known singer of Tagore songs and devotional songs. Chaudhuri also inherited talent of music and his first music teacher is also his mother. He completed his schooling from Cathedral & John Cannon School in Bombay. In his school time, he was not interested in English language so his class teacher suggested to his mother to give him Ladybird books to read in improving English. But with the help of these stories, he mastered the English language rapidly and he began to write little stories and rhyme in English from childhood. This talent of writing led him leaving India for London. In 1983, at the age of 20, he left Bombay and moved to Britain to take an English degree. He graduated in English from University College, London. His study at this college encouraged him to be a writer. He studied at Wolfson College, Oxford as a Creative Arts Fellow. He was also offered the Harper Wood Studentship for English Literature and Poetry from St. John’s College, Cambridge. He completed his Ph. D in 1993 at Balliol College in Oxford, on D. H. Lawrence’s poetry. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009. In 2009, Chaudhuri was elected in the judging panel of the Man Booker International Prize.

Amit Chaudhuri has written seven novels and won several prizes for his writings. His first novel, A Strange and Sublime Address (1991), won the Betty Trask Award and the Commonwealth Writers prize for the best first book. This book is also shortlisted for the Guardian Fiction Prize. It is included in the list of Colm Toibin and Carmen Callil’s Two Hundred Best Novels of the Last Fifty Years. His second novel, Afternoon Raag (1993), won the Society of Authors’ Encore Award and the Southern Arts Literature Prize for the best second novel of the year. It is also included in Anne Enright’s list of 10 Best Short Novels in the Guardian. His third novel, Freedom Song, published in 1998. All these three novels were published in a single volume of trilogy, Freedom Song: Three Novels by Knopf in America in 1999. This volume was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction in 2000. His fourth novel, A New World (2000), won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2002, India’s highest literary honor for a single book. The fifth novel, The Immortals (2009), shortlisted

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The connection between his wide experiences of life and his love for music is reflected in the theme of his novels in various glimpses. In an interview by Anna Mundow, Chaudhuri said: “I grew up in a culture where one is never completely alone and is always slightly distracted by sound. All of that makes me look at story, plot and characters everything in a different way.”(4)

Chaudhuri’s novels have a different Indian tradition and mostly critics compare him to R. K. Narayan. Like Narayan, his works also have limitation and he also describes certain people in a certain place at a certain time. Everyday domestic life and scene is narrated with ordinariness in his novels. His novels have also shown a better awareness of the predicament of the modern man and have a reflection on the alienation and the sensibility towards cultural values and familial norms. His real experience of family and culture has been figured hugely in his writing.

Objectives:
Following are the objectives of the present research:

- To study various literary facets of Amit Chaudhuri’s personality as a significant novelist and a creative writer of high quality.
- To study the upper-middle class complexity in the existence of modern Indian culture.
- To analyze the cultural and familial traditions in Indian and Western perspectives. To observe the rituals and rhythms of family life in the routine and sensory world.
- To highlight the passion for north Indian classical music in the form of raga in the context of Chaudhuri’s novels.

Chaudhuri’s Contributions:
Chaudhuri has contributed fiction, poetry, criticism and reviewed in the most of the major journals and publications in the world as The Guardian, The London Reviews of Books, The Times Literary Supplement, The New York and Granta Magazine. He is the editor of an anthology of Indian writing, the Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature, published in 2001, including translation from Hindi, Bengali, Urdu into English, works of 38 authors covering a hundred and fifty years. His collection of short-stories, Real Time, published in 2002, set in Bombay and Calcutta. Some stories have been published in the London Review of Books, the Time literary Supplement and the New Yorker. His academic work D. H. Lawrence and 'Difference'; Postcoloniality and the Poetry of the Present, his study of D. H. Lawrence’s poetry and critical theory, is published by The Clarendon Press, Oxford in 2003. It is called a ‘Classic’ by Tom Paulin and a ‘Path breaking work’ by Terry Eagleton in the London Reviews of Books. He has also edited Memory’s Gold: Writing on Calcutta, published in 2008. It is a unique collection of stories, essays, poems and memoirs of people in which he shows different stages of their relationship with the captivating city, Calcutta. Chaudhuri awarded the West Bengal government’s Rabindra Puraskar for his book On Tagore: Reading the Poet Today in 2012. This book is a collection of essays on Rabindranath Tagore in which Chaudhuri deals with the eternal moments of Tagore’s life as a poet. In 2012, he won the Infosys Prize for his extraordinary contribution in the humanities of Literary Studies. Chaudhuri proved his imaginative and theoretical mastery in writing of literary criticism as a critic with the publication of Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Calcutta. This book is called ‘the best work of criticism by an Indian’ by Caravan Magazine, India’s leading journal of ideas. His non-fiction book, Calcutta: Two Years in the City, published in 2013, is a personal account of two years (2009-2011) in the city after moving from England to India. His latest book, Telling Tales, is a collection of essays, published in different publications from Telegraph (Calcutta), Granta and London Reviews of Books. His books are published in more than 12 countries and translated into several languages.

At the first stage of writing, Chaudhuri was writing only poetry and imitating the writers as Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Baudlaire. He wrote a great deal of poetry and his collection of poems, St. Cyril Road and Other Poems, published in 2005. But suddenly he changed his mind and decided to move from poetry to prose. Amit Chaudhuri said in an interview, “When I was 23 I wrote a poem about a street ... my parents had moved to in Calcutta. It was the first time I had actually written about a real locality, a real street, a real neighborhood. Before that, I thought writing and poetry was about grand themes and I felt that surely nothing I had experienced first-hand was important enough to put in a poem led gradually to wanting to put another neighborhood. I had known in Calcutta in a novel. I realized I was a person who actually
wanted to write about everyday things and I thought a novel had the architecture, the space for me to write about them in a certain way. So I saw the novel as a space rather than a plot, a space which I could inhabit in a larger way than I could in a poem.” (5)

Research Methodology
A number of theories would assist in exploring and analyzing the elements of culture and family traditions in all its complexities and contradictions by the life of city’s inhabitants as presented in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri. The approach to the research will be intertextual. I will use sociological and anthropological research method.

In a State of Indifference: A Conversation with Amit Chaudhuri:

“As I was growing up in Bombay, my creative life, like my musical life, had been very fitful, and I arrived at places without expecting to arrive or wanting to arrive. I never knew I would be a prose writer when I wanted to write poetry. But that’s what happened. Similarly I never knew that I would become a Hindustani classical singer. Once I became a Hindustani classical singer, I completely rejected other kinds of music, like my earlier background in western popular music. So for years, I never listened to western music, especially after I started practicing Hindustani music when I was in England. Only after 16 years did I go back to listening to western music again. That eventually led to the experiment I mentioned earlier. One morning, I thought I heard the riff to ‘Layla’ (by Derek and the Dominos) as I was practicing raag todi. So I decided to do something with the notes I was singing in compositional terms. But if you told me in 1985, when I was in the midst of training myself as an Indian classical singer, that one day I would be listening to Derek and the Dominos again, or that I would be incorporating something that they had written into a composition involving raag todi, I wouldn’t have believed that person. If somebody had told me at the age of 14 when I was listening to The Who and playing the guitar that one day I would be a classical singer, I wouldn’t have believed them either. At each place, I’ve arrived by chance”.

“My writing has always been trying to unshackle itself from the pretence of fictionality. I’ve been trying to free myself of this dichotomy between fictionality and fact, between fictionality and life, creative writing and non-fiction. I’m only interested in creativity. All the Malreddy & Chaudhuri Creative Lives South Asian Diaspora International Researchers’ Network rest of the terms are not relevant to me. And I’ve been writing from the beginning in a way that ignores those kind of set parameters according to which you represent reality within a novel. I tried to do that in A Strange and the Sublime Address—to throw those dichotomies out of the window. In Friend of My Youth, I address head-on the question as to whether there is a difference between living and writing, or whether writing is also in some ways continuous with living. I don’t want to say it is continuous with life, because that’s a noun, but writngis both a noun and a gerund; something in the process of happening”.  


Summing Up:
To sum up; the research scholar comes to the point that Amit Chaudhuri has been engaged in two forms of activism. The first has to do with Calcutta’s architectural inheritance, and the importance of buildings outside the ‘heritage’ list. Chaudhuri’s writings and work on this matter challenge, in fact, the notion of heritage. From 2014, Chaudhuri has organised a series of annual symposiums in India on behalf of the University of East Anglia to explore the literary in the present-day world, and create a space for discussion that is distinct from either the literary festival or the academic conference, a space that the cultural studies and literary commentator Simon During called a necessary ‘quasi-academic space’, and the philosopher Simon Glendinning named ‘a space for misfits’. Amit Chaudhuri’s primary aim is to explore the meaning of human relations, nay interpersonal relations, which determine the structure of human bonds and bondages. His novels do not discard the relevance of the institution of marriage and his female protagonists do not lose their morality in search of self identity. Thus his five novels present his attitude and ideology of cultural and familial traditions in his own way. The research scholar has tried to explain the main aspects and abilities of Amit Chaudhuri’s creative writing which has placed him in a different category of young writers.

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