

METICULOUS PORTRAYAL OF CALCUTTA IN AMIT CHAUDHURI'S *A STRANGE AND SUBLIME ADDRESS*

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ABSTRACT:

Amit Chaudhuri is a multitalented writer of Contemporary Indian writings in English. He is one among the diasporic writers, carries the fresh Indian sensibility abroad and represent through the fiction in a realistic manner. He writes his novel in an extraordinary way, that makes music stating and restating his themes, trying them out in different keys and to various effect developing and dropping them only to pick them again and turn them completely around. Chaudhuri's novels provide new vision on the ideology of the Western and Indian domesticity. He pictures life's everyday activities with perfections of daily existence with depth and compassion of distinctive manner. He is the one who portrayed the natural cultural sensibility in his novels through the representation of experiences in the home. *A Strange and Sublime Address* is the best example for the representation of Cultural Sensibility, family and identities in the two different cities in India, especially Bengal. This paper portrays Calcutta in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*

KEYWORDS: Portrayal, Burgeoning, Restating, Ideology, Distinctive, Cultural Sensibility and Identities.

Amit Chaudhuri is a versatile writer of contemporary Indian English literature. He is born at Calcutta in 1962 and grows in Bombay. He is educated at University College, London and completed a doctorate on the verse of D. H. Lawrence at Balliol College, Oxford in 1993. He is a poet, novelist, essayist, literary critic and also a good singer. He is one among the diasporic writers, who carries the fresh Indian sensibility abroad and represent through the fiction in a realistic manner. Culture is considered as a central concept in encompassing the range of phenomena that are transmitted through social learning in human societies. He gives importance to Indian culture, as an Indian writer he shows the light of native Bengali culture. The culture of West Bengal is an Indian Culture which has its roots in the Bengali literature, music, fine arts, drama. West Bengal's capital Calcutta is the former capital of India, which is the birth place of modern literary artistic thought and is referred to as the "cultural capital of India." Bengal has a long tradition of popular literature, music and drama largely based on Bengali folklore and Hindu epics and Puranas. Hinduism plays a vital role in West Bengal. Its culture has been an amalgamation of predominant Hindu culture with the secular Bengali culture. The culture of West Bengal is considered to be one of the richest cultures in India. Apart from boasting of its immense contribution in reformation

movements, the state also takes the credit for being the pioneer of cosmopolitan culture in the country. The culture of West Bengal has emerged as the perfect blend of modernity and traditions. He explores the ideas of cultural and personal isolations and realities in life of an Indian culture. He emphasis the socio-cultural identities in most of his works.

Amit Chaudhuri expressed his family relationship and attachment with the relatives in the home country. *A Strange and Sublime Address* is about the summer vacation enjoyed by a young boy named Sandeep from Bombay to his uncle's house in Calcutta. Chhotomama's house is a very special connotation, it means all play, no work and no thrashing either. He spends a month in Calcutta, staying in his uncle's house playing with his cousin Abhi and Babla, exposing himself to the things and places that he has not seen in his life at Mumbai, enjoying the companies of relatives and visiting many parks, markets and restaurant in Calcutta. Sandeep's own life in Bombay is a direct contrast, he immerses himself in the chaotic life of the city, which corresponds to the informal atmosphere in his uncle's house. He pictures the atmosphere of the Calcutta in the evening. Sandeep finds himself in a locality where the feeling of belonging to a particular place is quite strong, which shows the avid interest in the happenings of the other houses. Chaudhuri makes the most of the setting:

People came out on the balconies in the lane: In white saris, housewives with children in their arms. The men returned home, slowly. Sandeep and his cousins sat on cane stools on the verandah, watching the balconies on the opposite side, each with its own characters, its own episode. (25)

In this novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Calcutta represents as the city of dust and smoke. In the street of Calcutta, the granular particles of dust present in the air. The street appears as a gloomy atmosphere and in that the children and dogs spent their mornings and evenings. The sweating labourers dig the roads with spades and drilling machine. The roads are always dig for the purpose of underground railway construction and for the purpose of replacing pipes which doesn't work. The old houses with the small crakes on the walls, rusting of old gleaming gates and crumbling dust particles which flew in the air shows the dusty atmosphere in the city of Calcutta. Dust particles flakes in the office ceilings, in the buildings, offices and become dust. At the same time, the dust is constantly raised in to new shapes and unexpected forms by arbitrary workings of the wind. Calcutta disintegrates in to dust everywhere daily but again it rises the next day. Calcutta is a city of dust. If one walks down the street one sees mounds of dust like sand-dunes on the pavements, on which children and dogs sit doing nothing, while sweating labourers dig in to macadam with spades and drills Calcutta disintegrates, unwhispering, in to dust and daily it rises from dust again (13).

Calcutta is a city of frequent power-cut, is the problematic aspect described in this novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*. Chaudhuri in the novel give five references to the intolerable frequent power cuts in the city which no doubt exemplifies unwanted and tedious disturbance in the urban life of Calcutta. All the members of the family are striving hard to tolerate the extreme heat which is doubled by frequent power cuts. Shonamama visit Chhotomama's house walking through the lanes of Calcutta with a black umbrella in his hand. He climbs the staircase slowly by

enjoying the shadows. The staircase seems to exhale coolness as the road outside trembles the gasps of heat. The people of Calcutta are suffering due to power-cut and the difficulties of the people are shown in the novel. The people of Calcutta have been to lead a domesticated life to go back to the horse carriage. The fan stops because of power cut, the telephone was dead because of cable fault, the taps dry because there was no power to pump the water and finally the car engine refuse to start suddenly. Finally, they forget the electricity and have burn the earthen lamps in their houses.

At about six o'clock in the evening, the light goes off. The power cuts have gone more frequent with the heat, the two servant girls and the little brother who came to the downstairs to watch the Sunday movie on television But the power cut disappointed them. I'm sure they'll show us a better film next Sunday; assured Sandeep's mother. (65)

The reality of power-cuts in the city of Calcutta is extremely beautiful. The benefit is that the evening power-cut in Calcutta unite the people from their houses to a moonlit maiden for a evening walk, general gossip, casual interaction. The maiden here is almost an epitome of the whole city of Calcutta completely transforms the spell of an evening power-cut. He also observes the poor Telecommunication Department of Calcutta in the novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*. Telecommunication plays a vital in the development of the human civilization especially in the metropolis like Calcutta. He also blames the ridiculous Government which never cares for the sufferings and rectifies the problems of the people in the city of Calcutta. The condition of Calcutta telephones has gradually become much better in the later centuries. Thus Chaudhuri pictures the situation of Calcutta in a praiseworthy manner. Calcutta is city of traffic-jam is also a prominent image recurrently appears in novel. It is due to the traffic-jam the flow of vehicles in the streets of the city often turns to a state of complete standstill, it speaks about the traffic jams in Calcutta and mentions the number of causes for the tedious traffic jams in Calcutta. The reason for the causes is that limited road space and shortages in the number of bridges over the Hooghly River bridge and the crowd occupied by the city of Calcutta. The shortage of parking vehicles in the city which compels people to park the vehicles on the streets or roads, shortage of one-way roads, excess of street vendors who sells their vegetables in the footpath whose 'stalls tend to cluster at road junction.' The traffic jam in the evening is punctual, ceremonial and glorious. Chaudhuri seems to smile along with the inconveniences caused by the traffic jams in the city. The pleasant atmosphere of the environment, metro railways to predict rash traffic jams, free of dirt and smoke leads the peaceful life in the city of Calcutta. Thus, the novel portrays the vivid picture of Calcutta in a realistic way.

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