

## DOMESTIC PERCEPTION IN AMITCHAUDHURI'S *A STRANGE AND SUBLIME ADDRESS*

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### **Abstract:**

*Indian Writing English is matured from a sapling to deep rooted tree where it shelters over millions of people by exploring the writers in various branches. Among explored writers, Amit Chaudhuri is a writer in versatile. He is a poet, novelist, critic, essayist, singer and also a good musician. Amit Chaudhuri belongs to Calcutta, his works excessively explicit the impact of a particular perspective of own domain, Calcutta. Chaudhuri's first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* explores the domestic values of middle class family in the city of Calcutta where the family gives more importance to traditional and cultural values of ancestral home. Chaudhuri has described the city of Calcutta in parallel fashions as *City of Joy* and *City of Chaos*. The protagonist of the novel is twelve years old boy, Sandeep and Chaudhuri has portrayed the distinct instances of domestic obsession of the characters can be observed in the novel. Hence, the present paper focuses on domestic perception of Calcutta city conceived by Amit Chaudhuri in his *A Strange and Sublime Address*.*

**Keywords:** *Domain, Chaos, Family, Calcutta and Perspective.*

Amit Chaudhuri's novels depict the fictional representation of home and share the common focus on domestic themes and issues. The domestic settings of his novels illustrate the material history of the Indian home and it is associated with religious, social and cultural practices. His first novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address* which was published in 1991. This novel is about the events of ordinary life and expresses the importance of ancestral home and relatives especially when it lay on home town. It also revolves around own childhood days through the portrayal of protagonist Sandeep who deliberately enjoys his childhood days as well as the difficulties of loneliness he has faced in Mumbai where he has studied. Chaudhuri would travel to his uncle's home in Calcutta to spend his holidays.

In *A Strange and Sublime Address* Calcutta is figured as a city of sound, site of outer space and also a middle class city, industrial and economic stagnation with its culture. People of Calcutta enjoy their life in number of ways. Chottomama's family enjoys every Sunday evening by visiting various places of Calcutta. The whole novel captures the city of Calcutta. In the opening scene, the city is beautifully portrayed with the description of the setting and also discusses typical middle class society and Bengali households.

The novel opens with a boy's perception of his uncle's house in Calcutta lane where he dwells in small house, unlovely and unremarkable place. Calcutta and Bombay give him two kinds of lives with imaginatively like two worlds. The domestic space, traditionally explores the complete impact of Calcutta culture in Chottomama house's pooja rooms, cleanliness of the home.

Amit Chaudhuri points out the life of Bengali especially through their food and eating habits. Different varieties of foods they prepare like Bengali cuisine is known for its flavours and have variety of desserts. A significant feature of the cuisine is variety of sweets made up of milk and sugar as part of the

tradition. People live to eat; especially Bengalis spend most of their income for food and they have regular habit of going to market in every morning. Traditionally, people used to sit on the floor to eat, with their right hand. Here, the little boy, Sandeep observes everything about the food of Calcutta in the Chhotomama's house. Sandeep feels that his life in the city of Bombay is more mechanical and lonely, but in Calcutta, he observes livelihood, sensible of culture and the joyous in human life.

As a born Bengali, Chaudhuri writes about the various places of Calcutta, where people used to visit and spend their weekend time. Chhotomama's family visits Howrah Bridge with their family and it is a bridge with a suspended span over the Hooghly River in West Bengal, India. It is located by linking the two cities, Howrah and Calcutta. Originally named as New Howrah bridge and it is known as Howrah Bridge. It is a symbol of both Calcutta and West Bengal.

The picture of Chhotomama's household is 'unbearably hot' in the afternoon. All the family members put great effort to beat the heat when the sudden power cut. It is an unbearable one to the people and it is the major problem in the city. The afternoons of Calcutta become the mixture of cool and heat, light and shade to the environment. Mamima and Sandeep's mother used to sleep and talk together and shared their cooking recipes. The boys, Sandeep and Abhi watch the pigeons through window, and it becomes a rare and unenergetic moment to the boys.

On one evening, Chhotomama brings Sandeep, Abhi, and Babla to a near maidan, when power cut. The big maidan is fully engulfed in darkness but also filled with all sorts of people, college boys, school boys, couples, unemployed men, families, hawkers and group of girls. The power cut is an irritating one to the people, but the city of Calcutta makes something beautiful in the environment.

Jams are very famous in Calcutta, especially in the month of May. It is one of the remarkable things which the Bengali people keep at their houses, particularly in the season. Amit Chaudhuri depicts even about the delicious Jams, the people serve in various ways. The strong perception of domestic and domain values can be observed through the Chaudhuri's depiction of Jams in Calcutta. In Chhotomama's house, Sandeep's aunt comes with a tray full of black Jams. She puts them into a pan with mustard oil and sugar, and shakes it well. It turns into pulp, soft, purplish in colour and both sweet and tangy. They used to eat after lunch. Like the other fruits from other cities, different types of Jams are famous in Calcutta.

Thus, Chaudhuri seems to take delight in the delineation of opposites, famously called juxtaposition. In the novel, he discusses the construction of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the familiar and the unfamiliar comes up, at least partially, as a matter of cultural portrayal. Familiarity which especially breeds in domestic and daily spaces is seen to be a detractor of grandeur as bestowed by cultural canons. The irony acquires a sharper edge when this crucial character, the breadwinner of the family is presented as bereft of this grandeur. This is not mainly due to his peripheral position, but on account of Chaudhuri's economic status. However Sandeep's imagination reverses such over determinations. There is something disoriented the way he imagines the people, things and situations. He looks at his uncle's business from an altogether different perspective, investing it with a mythical grandeur.

Sandeep likes to listen his uncle's business. He watches while his uncle is talking with his friend in dining table. He likes it because his uncle's account of the small business world always seemed like a suspense story, myth or fairy tale, full of evocative characters work themselves slowly in his imagination; cheats, sophisticated two-timers, astringent moralists, clever strategists, new military onslaught, each new product like a never-before weapon capable of conquering the world added to a nameless arsenal.

Chaudhuri engages with the trivial details of local life in a way that reminds one of Joyce's uses of epiphany. In Calcutta, the routine acts of the houses and the terrace where the clothes hanging is a common feature of the local middle-class households. It denotes the focus on the environmental spaces in *A Strange and Sublime Address*.

A year and half passed, Sandeep is in Mumbai, where he lives in a twenty-third stored building. His father gets promoted and they have shifted to twenty-fifth stored building. He stands in balcony and thinks

about the life of Calcutta and the environment which differs from Mumbai. Chaudhuri firms the theme of domestic perception by standing in balcony where the boy can see all the surroundings of the city and remembers the peaceful life with joy and companion of two cousins. Sandeep watches the swarms of light in the evening, cars, vanishing and shining sunlight. But it is a quite unreal than what he has experienced in Calcutta.

For the second time, Sandeep and his parents visit Calcutta during the winter. They visit museum and there little cold. People wear heavy clothes like shawls, mufflers, sweaters and coats. Chaudhuri thus feels delight on December. As usual, people's life is changed for the season. The environment gives changes to human life. The ordinary people of Calcutta do everything to excess and the streets are available with all types of woolen garments. People sell them as for the season and they earn money from it. In night, people who stays in roadside, lit fire to rubber tires to take warm.

In chapter seven, Chaudhuri describes about the Sundays of Calcutta. The weekend, the city becomes vacant and the shops, offices, are closed. And there are some shops with the large sign board in which mentioned as DATTA BROS., K. SINGH AND SONS, reflects the sunlight. In Sundays, the houses are filled with familiar voices, the people stay in Chhotomama's house and they argue about several things. Chaudhuri has stated:

Much of the talk concerned relatives scattered all over India and all over the world. Much of it was about money and the cost of living. Chhotomama's business ran in fits and starts like his car. It had to be pushed before it worked; it was unreliable. (ASA58)

Saturday surprises them in the morning with cool breeze in the ninth chapter. The earth becomes wet and it is rained in some villages. The breeze travels through the lane, bridges as rain. Breeze gives an erotic to the monsoons. Sandeep's mother and Mamima feel the smell of earth and they feel it deeply. Chhotomama breaths in deeply and he never feels the same before. It becomes the most natural and unpretentious fragrance. Few days later, Calcutta is affected by Kal-Baisakhi storm for the first time and it has affected the city little by the force of air. The wind blows silent and straight. Kal-Baisakhi showers in Bengal during the April and May and sometimes in March too. It is a powerful and dangerous phenomenon. It is a strange atmosphere to the city. There, lightning and thunder, the moment heavy silence speaks that Chaudhuri says:

In obedience, the leaves began to tremble, and the branches moved uniformly, disciplined as a battalion doing exercises- Bend! Rise! Bend! Rise! And, slam! a door or a window banged shut without warnings; ghosts and spirits were abroad, making mischief, distracting the servants, knocking at the windows. (ASA, 84-85)

At end of January the people are celebrating the festival for goddess Saraswati. A natural image in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, there is a garden in the hospital where the patients are taken by wheelchairs. Sandeep watched everything. In the hospital garden, there is a tree called Sajanatree is broken into white blossoms. The gulmohur trees explode into fierce of orange flowers. Sandeep experiences them in every evening that he has in the hospital while Chhotomama is admitted. There are small green and unripe mangoes hang from the trees and the bees were flying. Kokil begins to sing, the sound like, ku-wu, ku-wu. Sandeep listens the voice of two Kokils, busy with their mating cries. He enjoys the moment by seeing them.

Sandeep is ready to go back to his home, before he watches the lanes and alleys. He watches around Calcutta which makes him to forget own life and gives pleasurable environment. By contrasting the world of children with that of adults, Chaudhuri seeks to assert the routine life of the local culture. When Chhotomama suffers with heart-attack, the humdrum details of life reassert themselves, pointing to a new beginning:

At night, after they said goodbye to Chhotomama, they returned homeward through the lit lanes and alleys of Calcutta. Watching the lanes, they temporarily forgot their own lives,

and, temporarily their minds flowed outward into the images of the city, and become indistinguishable from them and become indistinguishable from them. (ASA,149)

This new beginning is related to rebirth in nature. The novel ends with final affirmation of life passes by the fleeting glimpse of the Kokil which gives an overall impression of shapeliness and stateliness of life. As it disappears from the material world, it seems to draw a veil over the children's eyes. Chaudhuri's lyrical prose is particularly well suited to evoking this enigmatic city itself.

### References

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