



**EXPLORING THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES USED IN THE  
SELECT NOVELS OF AMIT CHAUDHURI**

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**Abstract**

Amit Chaudhuri has used different literary techniques in his novels. This article will discuss the style and language used by Chaudhuri in the novels *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, *Freedom Song*, *A New World* and *The Immortals*. He writes simple novels and his style of writing is descriptive. He describes his place and characters in detail. The style and language used by him is realistic. Realists built their plots and characters around people's ordinary and everyday lives.

**Keywords:** Irony, Allusion, Interjections, Native Language.

## **Introduction**

Amit Chaudhuri is one among the Indian writers writing in chaste English. He is conscious in avoiding the hybrid English language. His sporadic use of Bengali words and phrases in his text highly suit to the situation and it never mars the beauty of the English language. From his first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* to his fifth novel, *The Immortals* uses various literary techniques such as shuffling and reshuffling the scenes from present to the past and vice versa.

## **NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES**

In most of the novels the narrative shifts from present to past and sometime into future. Rarely does he shift his narrative from first person to third person to make the readers to view his point clearly. While using the first person narrative he gains the advantage of in-depth study of the characters' mind and heart; whereas the third person narrative technique lends him the distance required to judge the situations and events. Thus, he avails himself of the advantages of both the techniques as and when the situation demands. However, by the end of the novel there is a closure called open-ended close in all his novels. While commenting the narrative strategies of Amit Chaudhuri in *Afternoon Raag*, Devika Bose states thus:

The novel is a self-observed monologue and though the chapters devoted to Calcutta and Bombay retain some of the spirit of *A Strange and Sublime Address*, those connected with Oxford and strikingly different. The novel is in the first- person narrative and Oxford is delineated in the past tense while India is placed in the present. Numerous small events are presented in a comic light when he talks about India.... (Bose 101)

Irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that may end up in quite a different way than what is generally anticipated. In simple words, it is the difference between the appearance and the reality. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, here are the following ironical instances created by Chaudhuri: as Shonamama entered the room and closed his black umbrella due to hot weather outside. He immediately asked for a glass of water from Saraswati and then turning to Sandeep said, "Now we really know that the Tropic of cancer runs through Calcutta" (ASSA 26), this statement was ironical as it defines the weather, it was very hot outside and the author through Shonamama has tried to bring something out of nothing.

In India people usually the middle class has the habit of praying for little things like Mamima did that her husband's car should start in the mornings. It is ironical as instead of praying for new car or bigger things in life she is happy that her old car starts in the morning. On

being asked by Sandeep: “Mamima, what did you pray for today? Mamima replied: “Oh, I prayed the car would start in the mornings” (ASSA 34). Innocence of Mamima is revealed here as it proved that middle-class people enjoy in their little happiness. Abhi being of modern age asked her in disappointment: “Didn’t you pray for a new car?” (ASSA 34).

In an ironical situation when Chhotomama visits the old couple, the son of old couple tries to touch the feet of Chhotomama as mark of respect but Chhotomama said, “Oh no no no,” “There’s no need for all this. This was half a token gesture towards modesty and half towards the new, ‘modern’ India - Nehru’s secular India, free of ritual and religion” (ASSA 55). The young man replied that he had not met Chhotomama for two years and he wanted to touch his feet: “You must not stop me. This was half a token gesture towards modesty and half towards the old, ‘traditional’ India - Gandhi’s India of ceremony and custom” (ASSA 55).

Chhotomama was in hospital due to his bad health and he considered it as: “Being ill was a kind of entertainment, a communal ceremony; it involved such a lot of people. He had never seen so many people gathered in one room-three generations, at times-since his wedding or the time when he had passed his BA with a first class” (ASSA 102). According to the author it is an ironical situation in which the hospital had become a gathering place where anyone would come and meet Chhotomama. People who had not met him since ages had come to meet him in the hospital.

Allusion is a figure of speech, in which one refers covertly or indirectly to an object or circumstance from an external context. It is left to the audience to make the connection, where the connection is directly and explicitly stated by the author, an allusion is instead usually termed a reference. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Chaudhuri has used following allusions:

Indians mostly believe in the producing many children but how to bring them up is not their problem. Sweeper Nimai had four children and when Sandeep’s mother asked him whether he would be able to take care of them. He replied that he would definitely try to take care of his children. Everyone wanted to hold Nimai’s new born baby in their arms, even Sandeep and his cousins wanted to hold the child. The author here has very skilfully compared the holding of child with an episode in the Ramayana. Here allusion has been drawn from Hindu mythology, Ramayana where King Janak’s bow had to be held by various princes in order to marry Sita but only Ram could hold the bow in his hands and was the one who married Sita. The three boys discovered that there was no Ram among them and they do not have the proper knowledge of holding the child. In India there is belief that when left hand itches one spends money and if right hand itches one gets money. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Mamima’s palm of left hand itches and she says,

Today the palm of my left hand's itching,' Mamima said. 'God, God, I wonder - it means I'll have to spend more money - on what, I wonder.' If the right hand itched, it meant one was going to get money - but it seldom itched, and when it did, money seldom followed. (ASSA 42-43)

Once Chhotomama had the backache and Babla was asked to climb on his back. It was like the picture of Edmund Hillary on Mount Everest and he needed just a flag. He climbed on his father's back and that was compared to the Shiv Tandav. In this incident allusion has been taken from Hindu mythology: The Shiv Tandav:

In the last phase of the universe, when the world is old and corrupt, Shiv wakes from his trance, and sets about destroying everything. With giant strides, he stamps out life. This is the Tandav, the terrifying, cosmological dance of destruction. The sculptors traditionally represent this with Shiv dancing, arms gracefully apart, one leg raised, the other foot on a helpless child lying on his stomach: the latter probably symbolizes the innocent life which is crushed as a part of the dance. (ASSA 64)

Children were playing and Chhotomama asked them about their game. They told him that they were playing freedom-fighters: "We're killing the British. We're cutting the British to pieces" (ASSA 65). Chhotomama asked them, "Who are you?" (ASSA 65). Babla said, "I'm Subhas Chandra Bose," (ASSA 65) and then there was a fight between Babla and Abhi as both wanted to become Subhas Chandra Bose. Sandeep explained, "I'm Mahatma Gandhi," (ASSA 66). Then Chhotomama told him that Gandhi was no freedom fighter. Here allusion has been drawn from freedom struggle.

Chaudhuri has used interjections in his novels as his novels revolve around the minute details of everyday life. His novels are realistic with not much fantasy. His main focus is on the minute details of his culture and speech of a common man. A common middle class man is very expressive in nature and that may be in nervousness or excitement. Chaudhuri has tried to bring out those elements of excitement and nervousness in his novels.

The title, *A Strange and Sublime Address* itself, sets the tone of the whole novel for the way in which Abhi elaborates his home address to include India, Asia, Earth and finally the Solar System and the Universe is downright absurd and comic. It is a child's way of having fun with the world incidents that border on the comic and ironic. Chhotomama's instructions to the local boys to push his decrepit car harder while he himself sat ironically at the steering, staring at some vacant (but important) point in the horizon, Sandeep sees this as a strange and sublime address. Readers and critics see that the novel and its title suggest it is strange and sublime, as Amit Chaudhuri gives each member of the Sandeep family, their

daily life and their refrain from the point of view of a child. The details are strange and peculiar to the reader because they give the best subliminal result. Amit Chaudhuri mocks painfully the superstition of the Indian middle class, who firmly believes that if they study in an English medium school, their children will have a bright future:

He had been transferred from a Bengali-medium school to a famous English-medium one. This would increase his prospects at the age of twenty-one, when he would graduate from college and start looking for a job. He would be what the world wanted him to be – smart, English-speaking and brittle, like one of those ideal men in cigarette advertisements.(ASSA 118)

Chaudhuri describes both the optimistic and pessimistic aspects of the impact of English on the socio-political structure of India. In fact, English has become one of the languages of post-colonial India. Here, Amit Chaudhuri embodies the family heritage of India. He believes that strong ties between families can even eliminate death. In fact, he can see three generations in Chhotomama's house and at the end of the story; the writer brings a sublime sense of strangeness in this way. As a little boy, Sandeep sensed all the strange things, but he liked it. “There was so much laughter. Yet there was grief also. There was comedy. Yet there was seriousness. It was strange how these people managed to hold both in fine balance at the same time” (ASSA 147).

Life contains both its beauty and its ugliness. Although bad things often stare at the faces of life, in order to understand the philosophy of existence, beauty must be stripped from life. Amit Chaudhuri explores this quoted reality without heroism, history and hysteria, in order to gain its song, sensation and enchantment. No matter in ordinary life or grand life, novelists makes them alive by discovering their own morals instead of magic and song. His literary work clearly states that he is playing with language for his own purposes, not writing for moral or practical purposes.

Amit Chaudhuri, one of the children of Indian literature, merges local metaphors and images of Bengali with English to give a glimpse into the ordinary life of Bangladeshi middle-class families in the 1980.

Amit Chaudhuri in his work depicts small, ordinary details in a person's daily life, which are neither really nor metaphorically important. They have not added any theme to the main story of the novel but the details have their own descriptions. Nevertheless, Chaudhuri creates an amazing romance in a rather miraculous way, from his songs, swaying and disagreement. He depicts common things like Wordsworth but gives them a magic charm like Coleridge. The nature and customs of his fictional world is all but a vault, where one

displays a fictitious alienation and grandeur, thereby rendering not the majesty of Longinus, but of a beautiful poem. It is therefore *A Strange and Sublime Address*, although obviously the daily activities and religions of a Bengali middle class family life in Calcutta. Nowadays, it really is the story of a foreign world but fascinating of wonders and fantasies for modern readers.

While reading novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* one can find experience like real life, sound and situations. It does not have any ambiguity, anticipation, heroism and phenomenon, so it's very fascinating. The novel is about Calcutta and people like Sandeep, Babla, Chhotomama, Mamima, Chhaya, Saraswati, Abhi, Sandeep's mother and some other people who live in Calcutta and do not happen much in novels except bathing, singing, dining and gossiping. There is nothing familiar about that place or its people. In this novel Calcutta is not the elite metropolis Calcutta, but the middle-class Calcutta. Their heroism lies in the trivialities of life, ordinary dust and frequent power outages lead to their daily lives.

## **Conclusion**

Through English language in this novel, Amit Chaudhuri uses a global perspective to explain local life and style. He alienates things in many places in the novella with the word strange. He uses words such as surprise, shock, magic, unexpected and strange in several places in the novel; Sandeep is a little boy from Mumbai, another part of India, who lives alone and without any experience of ordinary life. So everything is unfamiliar, surprising and strange to the narrator. When Amit Chaudhuri sees things from a subconscious perspective, he clearly echoes this in the metaphorical use of words. The writer describes how the key ringing evaporates after the key man disappears during the hot summer heat. Man's metaphysics - a solid thing that evaporates in the heat is usually his radical imagination: "The strange metallic whisper of the keys could be heard, immaterial and ghostly, even when the man had disappeared seemingly evaporated by the heat" (ASSA 28). Similarly, when describing the culture of Bengalis they leave their homes during the Power Cut and walk in the streets. Choudhuri tries to capture the uniqueness of the experience in an alert artistic expression: "But the darkness had brought a strange lethargy and even peace to these otherwise highly strung men and women, as there was a perceptible sense of release, as if time was oozing day, and the world happening elsewhere" (ASSA 49).

Even for Indian readers, regular events and incidents are unfamiliar to Chaudhuri's novel. While reading his bizarre and fascinating title, readers can understand how Chaudhuri distorted from ordinary to extraordinary. He is an idealistic and postmodern formalist. He is fascinated in the ecstasy and distress of everyday life. He is also fascinated in the perceived aesthetic pleasure. In the works of other novelists, close association with these aspects of life

in Calcutta or somewhere is often unrecognized. However, Amit Chaudhuri writes about innovations and creates some strange structural and literary methods.

### Conclusion

Amit Chaudhuri has used various techniques like Bengali words, imagery, allusions, irony, etc. which make his novels more interesting. His style is realistic and language is simple. By doing so, the style he creates is unique and different from other writers.

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