

A PORTRAYAL OF DIFFERENT CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE: A STUDY ON AMIT CHAUDHURI'S *A STRANGE AND SUBLIME ADDRESS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes an attempt to analyse the different cultural lifestyle of Indian people in the modern era. India is known for its richness in culture. It is ethnically and religiously diverse nation. Culture and lifestyle of people differ from place to place. In this novel, author focuses on the lifestyle of metropolitan Mumbai city and conventional Kolkata town. This paper aims to bring out the cultural difference within India.

KEYWORDS:

Culture, Tradition, Lifestyle, Difference.

This paper aims to analyse the difference in the work and lifestyle of Indians in modern period, mainly after the development of technologies. Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* portrays the events experienced by the protagonist Sandeep during his summer holidays. Sandeep, who is living in a busy metropolitan Mumbai city, visits his uncle's house in Kolkata with his mother. He observes both the conventional; lifestyle in Kolkata and apartment life style in Bombay city. He feels strange when he saw his uncle's house and relatives. Chaudhuri describes the scenario as a meeting of two different worlds: one is conventional and other is modern. In an interview to Sumana R. Ghosh, Chaudhuri frankly admitted that,

I'm more interested in that kind of movement between two different worlds, this inner and outer, sometimes two incompatible cultural worlds which can be signified by the use of Shajana tree and Colgate toothpaste in the same sentence. So, that is, what I find, has the movement of narrative. (161)

Throughout the novel it is very clear that author symbolically describes the diverse culture in India, where people live in harmony. He also differentiates busy city life and village life. He describes Sandeep's father as a workaholic who spends less time with his family. On the contrary, Sandeep's uncle Chottamama, toils for his whole family as well as spend free time with his family by making a small round trip around the city in an old

ambassador car. His uncle gives more importance to the family. M. Sivakumar in his article “Tradition and Modernity: A Critical Study of Amit Chaudhuri’s *A Strange and Sublime Address*” states that, “The metropolitans, Kolkata and Mumbai can be regarded as microcosm for the change or growth that the other places of India would experience. It is the time, at which globalization and computerization competed with each other to excel in the Indian socio-political sphere. Indeed India gives way for both the factors and welcomed both for its fast evolving stages” (118-119).

Chaudhuri depicts the image of middle-class life of Kolkata during 1980’s in this novel in a colourful way. Screening a film in a open place, listening to radio-broadcasting, cricket commentary and film songs; old ambassador car which is regarded as a prestigious possession in the family; fireflies flying in the field and children without freedom of choice and trip around Kolkata during weekends are the events that occur in every middle class life of Kolkata. He also describes how they spend their evenings. Family members and neighbours gather in the balcony in the evenings. Even the widows in white saris and housewives in the kitchen, who were never allowed to go outside, join themselves in the balcony. Hence all the neighbourhood gather and gossip in their leisure time.

Chaudhuri describes that the streets of Kolkata are filled with garlands, shawls, dresses and fancy items. The people swarm around the place. Everywhere it is crowded. Some people are idle while others are doing tough jobs along the roadside. He says, “Daily, Calcutta disintegrates, unwhispering, into dust, and daily it rises from dust again” (13). While describing the life style of Mumbai, he says:

Sandeep’s father was working in Bombay city. . . they had moved to the twenty fifth storey of a twenty-five-storey building. Standing in one of the balconies or looking out from the windows in the hall, one could see almost all Bombay, the swarms of lights in the evening, the hoods of tiny cars shining and vanishing and vanishing in the sunlight during the daytime a view marginally more breathtaking and marginally more unreal than the one seen from the balcony of the twenty third floor. No sounds, no smells, only a pure, perpetually moving picture. (115)

He says Mumbai is one of the biggest and busiest cities in India. The Mumbai city is different from other cities, where people are struggling even to cross roads and get a seat in locomotives. He also compares that Mumbai is busy, passionate and bright at night while Kolkata has “lightless lanes, where houses that were silent but gave out smells of fish and boiled rice stood on either side of the road. There was not a single tree in sight; no breeze and no sound but the vaguely musical humming of mosquitoes” (66).

Chaudhuri explains the richness of cuisines in Kolkata and the eating habits of Bengalis. Foods prepared in Bengal are known for its variety of desserts and flavours. The traditional cuisine is made of milk and sugar. “People live to eat; especially Bengalis spend most of their income for food and they have regular habit of going to market every morning” (Balamurugan160). People in the family gathered together to eat food. Sandeep compares his lifestyle in Mumbai and his uncle’s place. He feels that in Mumbai, people are more lonely, mechanical and also in hurry, whereas in Kolkata, he feels the joy and livelihood.

Chaudhuri portrays the traditional activities in Kolkata in his works. In this novel, he expounds the conventional way of singing prayer songs and worshipping various Indian God

and Goddess. Sandeep's aunt, after bathing, performs pooja in a traditional way. Chaudhuri highlights the praying culture of India through this action. Chaudhuri reflects how the people of Calcutta celebrated the festival of the goddess Saraswathi in a grand manner in the follow lines of the novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*:

Towards the end of January, the people of Calcutta celebrated the festival of the goddess Saraswati. In every house and lane, offerings were made punctiliously to the austere beautiful goddess of the arts and of learning. Students would scribble 'Nama Saraswati Nama' a hundred and eight times on a piece of paper so that they might pass their exams. Painters would say a silent prayer for their paintings, and musicians for their music. Writers would ask the goddess to bless the new book they had written: bless this book... bless these words. Saraswati, riding a swan, playing the veena with long, attentive fingers, would listen to everyone and promise nothing. (150)

Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* portrays both the positive and negative qualities of the Cities of Bombay and Calcutta. He explains the life style of the Bengali people mostly and he brings out cultural identity of the people. Though he compares traditional and cultural values of city and conventional life in Mumbai and Kolkata, throughout the novel, he also brings out the consequences of changes that occur in the Indian cultural system which hugely impacts the lifestyle of people in India. Chaudhuri chooses a child's perspective to see the imperious that the culture and lifestyle of a place creates since there imperious are clear and strong in a child than an adult

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