

## Psychosocial Mixed Mindsets in Amit Chaudhuri's Novel Freedom Song

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### ABSTRACT

Amit Chaudhuri is one of the most acclaimed writers of contemporary India. The writer was born in Calcutta and having been brought up in Mumbai, the literary figure is conscious about the Indian cultural heritage and it would not be wrong to state that he is quite cautious of the Indian native culture. India is a multicultural country, which is new in approach but old at heart. Chaudhuri tries to blend these two. In some instances, they both overlap one another. The traditional part of the novel deals with its characters with the changes in society. They think the more modern the world becomes the more lazy people will become. All the luxuries are making the world too comfortable, which leads to confusion and chaos. Like a true novelist, Chaudhuri tries to combine the various aspects of life in one novel. Be it the social values, individuality or the psychological workings of the minds of the people, Chaudhuri has united all of these together in this novel. A lot of people believed that if they could get the majority to follow them, then they could get rid of liberalization. The present article focuses on the socio-psychology, and cultural ethos of mixed mindsets in the select novel 'Freedom Song' of Amit Chaudhuri. Chaudhuri's keen sense of consciousness of the Indian culture is vehemently clear here in his work that takes the readers on a close journey through the real India and its people.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Change, Influence, Society, Life, Tradition, Modernism

The most realistic representations of life by the writer does not Amit Chaudhuri is highly applauded worldwide for his writings and love for the Indian classical music. He has created a mark in the pantheon of the modern English Indian writers. The works replicate the Indian values followed by simplicity, Bengali sensibility, and distinctiveness of language. Indian values and Bengali ethos were the primary concern of the writer. The writer refrains from using any special story or plot to fill his novels instead he would be using the things and the

experiences from his day-to-day life such as waking up early, taking a bath, newspaper, taking breakfast, visiting friends and relations, etc. fail in rightfully capturing the essence of the Indian life and its people, especially with the advent of westernisation into the aspect.

The present article is organized around the objective of studying the literary representations of socio-psychology, and cultural ethos of mixed mindsets in India in the *Freedom Songs* of Amit Chaudhuri.

*Freedom Song* by Amit Chaudhuri is his third novel, published in 1998. The novel revolves around an old married couple Khuku and her husband Shiv, who is retired and lives in Calcutta. Chaudhuri tries to represent the Bengali culture and norms through his work, but as we go deeper into the novel, we can see a lot of other underlying issues that he tries to tackle through his work.

The novel tries to represent the difference, in point of view, of the old and new generations. Even though the novel contains almost all aged characters, still we can see the contrast between the mindset of the past and young. A lot of clashes can be seen between the ideas of both generations.

In contrast, the young generation has gone on to big cities for further studies and jobs. Chaudhuri works on little details to bring us the authentic feel of Bengal. The plot revolving around Bhaskar's marriage, this plays between the servants; Jochna, Namdo and Uma and even the patterns created by the clothes outside, set to dry, Amit tries to incorporate all the little details to make the novel come closer to the real Bengali culture. According to critic Bruce King "*Freedom Song* can be read as about Calcutta and Bengali culture since independence." (King, "Rev. of Freedom Song", World Literature Today, 1999, 392)

Another aspect of the Bengali culture can be seen through the regular Rabindra Sangeet practice of Khuku, which she undertakes every morning. Her voice is harmonious and sweet.

Bhaskar's dream to become an activist is shattered, and he is left with an unfulfilled dream and identity crisis. His parents believe that a man should be married at a reasonable age

and which will help make them more mature and responsible. During the search for a bride, the narrator delves into the culture of arranged marriages in India. This is part of the Indian culture, where parents search for a suitable partner for their children. The novel is set in Calcutta during a time when there was a deep-rooted tension and hatred prevailed between Hindus and Muslims.

In Abha's character, we can find a blend of spiritual beliefs along with the femininity of a married woman. Abha is like any other Indian wife who worries about her children and husband but never thinks about herself. This selflessness and keeping their family ahead of them is the prevalent trait in all Indian wives and mothers. India, as a country, is displayed as having diversity along with unity. Even though India has several different religions, cultures, languages, still some beliefs are common in everyone. Abha wants her son Bhaskar to get married. They say that "which father gives away his daughter to a boy who has Party connections"(Chaudhuri, *Freedom Song*, Penguin UK, 2012, 22). Bhaskar depicts the modern middle-class youth who wants to form an individual identity away from the influence of anyone else. He then agrees to marry any girl of his parents choice, which turns out to be Sandhaya. Abha believes that marriage will be good for Bhaskar as it will keep him away from the party. She says that "it'll do him good; she thought to have some responsibility on his shoulders at last; for I think he still depends too much on his father"(Chaudhuri, *Freedom Song*, Penguin UK, 2012, 164).

Chaudhuri wants to show his concern for the decline of the cultural values and Bengali sensibilities. Changes are a part of life. The house represents the symbol of stability and togetherness in the family. The house was given to Bhola when he got married. The house remains the same, with the same red stone floors and green coloured window, but the little changes in the house represent the different elements of families who have lived there. The painted kitchen, the new shelves, central heating and the ovens have all been changed. These changes also represent the modern change from a jointed to a nucleus family. These representations of different households show the changes in the cultural values of the contemporary times and how the people are still trying to keep their culture alive no matter where they are. For instance, Khuku and Mini always talk in the East Bengali dialects. Even though the old middle-class culture is getting demolished, and new norms are taking its place; still, there are some elements which will be ever-present in all the Bengali households. Home is

also used as a secure anchor to keep people sane during the time of cultural upheaval outside. The cultural disputes and riots are a part of everyday occurrence in Calcutta, but the house works as a sanctuary where people can feel safe from everything happening outside, home is a world of their own with no cultural disputes and no parties. The novel shows the gradual change in the values and norms of middle-class households.

The fight for freedom, long after being an independent country is the undertone of the novel. This is portrayed through the character of Bhaskar. He is fighting to free the people from the shackles of oppression. People wanted to be free, but no one was ready to get their hands dirty by fighting for it.

In their usual conversations, Khuku usually brings up her love for music and how her childhood dream was to learn professional music. She used to secretly practice her sister's harmonium when she was a little girl. She gave up on the dream of music due to her marriage, but she still practised it every day.

The novel follows the path of a postmodern narrative; it represents the day to day happenings of an average Indian family. It has no over the top mythical story or elements. It just shows the day to day life of families, of how are the relations among the people and what is going on in their life. The novel has no climax or a proper beginning and end. The novel tries to portray incidents which are relatable to a lot of people.

Like a typical arranged married couple, Sandhya and Bhaskar have to follow all the traditions of a newly married couple. Chaudhuri, as a traditionalist, believes in the concept of arranged marriage and he has beautifully expressed the kind of security and support it brings. In India, arranged marriages are a part of the culture, and married couples get time to get comfortable with each other, till then they get help from their families in understanding the workings of a marriage. The tradition and culture of India are unique. Through Bhaskar's marriage, Chaudhuri tries to pinpoint the everyday happenings of a couple.

Amit has a deeply-rooted love for his country. He does not want the negativity to destroy the country. Staying true to postmodernist novels, he shows the day to day lives of an

ordinary middle-class Bengali family. He tries to blend the issues of the country into the lives of ordinary people. Through dialogues between people, he explains different problems going on in Calcutta. He does not state anything directly; instead, he very beautifully plays with the words and hides them behind the everyday conversation of people.

Postmodern novels keep tradition as the main focus of their writing. They try to showcase how all the cultures are different from one another. Khuku and Mini identify themselves as Hindu Bengali; which make them different from all the Muslims. They have a strong resentment towards Muslims, especially Suleimans. Even though the tabla player during Khuku's singing sessions is a Suleiman himself, they also dislike their tailor Abdullah just because he is a Muslim. Through these characters, Chaudhuri is not trying to discriminate amongst cultures; he is only showcasing the feelings of a middle-class Bengali Hindu towards other religions.

The loss of the family home is a metaphor for the loss of middle-class values. With changing times, the definition of the middle-class is getting developed into a 'new' middle-class. Even though Chaudhuri never comes out and says that he opposes the new values, as he is a traditionalist himself, he has a kind of connection and nostalgia regarding the old values and norms. His concern is regarding the changes in the culture because he wants to preserve the authenticity of the Bengali culture. Changes in tradition are inevitable. The new generations bring new ideas and beliefs with them.

The changes in the house represent the change in the generation. When Bhola moves into the house given to him by his in-laws; he makes a lot of changes in the house. Each generation brings on new changes in the house. This is a symbol of how each generation has a different mindset and ideas. They never demolish the house; they make some internal changes.

India's contact with the West was a contact between a pre-present day and a modernizing social system. At the point when the Postmodern culture shows applied impact on various pieces of traditional open action, social and political system, its own one, of a kind internal structure that had experienced a movement of changes in India. Its standard dynamic and far reaching

character had isolated; its value structure was rendered progressively open, liberal, equalitarian, and humanistic and this show was saturated with a newfound sentiment of trust in the consistent and mechanical world seem reliant on rationale, equalization, and opportunity.

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