

## **Dilemma of Cultural Identity in Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World***

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### **Abstract**

Due to globalization and development in technology people migrate to foreign countries to enrich their knowledge and for better job opportunities. The immigrants always want to connect them with the new land, but at the same time their attachment to their homelands' culture, food, language, etc., arises an emotional and psychological bonding, which results in dilemma of identity and clash of culture. Chaudhuri's novel *A New World* (2000) examines Jayojit's inner psyche, belongingness, cultural conflict, displacement, etc., This novel deals with the cultural dilemma in the host land as well as in his homeland. Indian immigrants always show the ability to stick to their own cultural belief and customs, at the same time they gradually pave way to the host culture too.

**Key Words:** Immigrants, dilemma, identity, culture, displacement, inner psyche

Amit Chaudhuri's Sahitya Academy award winning novel *A New World* is concerned with diasporic issues of rootlessness, identity crisis, cultural nostalgia, cultural amnesia, etc., Chaudhuri in this novel makes an attempt to trace out the nation and its cultural changes through the story of Jayojit and his Bengali middle class family in Calcutta.

*A New World* describes the home coming and departure of Jayojit Chatterjee, thirty seven years old an Indian expatriate, university professor, and writer. He comes from United States to his motherland with his son Vikram, nick named as Bonny. Jayojit married a Bengali girl, Amala who bore a child after three years of their marriage. But after the birth of Bonny, Amala elopes with the gynecologist and began to live with him in San Diego in Southern America. After divorce and winning the custody of Bonny only for three months of summer holidays he comes to Calcutta. His visit to Calcutta aims to search for his roots and balm his wounds caused by divorce, the narrator says, “It would give him for recoupment” (51). But unfortunately all his hopes get shattered when he finds himself unable to assimilate with the city, its people and surroundings. The Calcutta he left was the Calcutta of fifties and sixties but the Calcutta he returns is that of eighties and nineties. The city Calcutta of 90s appears quite new to him when he compares it with the Calcutta of 60s. The newness Chaudhuri refers is not the newness of the metropolitan city, but by the advancement of science and technology. But on contrary he refers to the encroachment of the western modes in Bengali traditional familial and societal relationship which disturbs the protagonist as well as Chaudhuri.

The locality in which Jayojit parents live was dominated by Marwari’s and other Hindi speaking people, so, Chaudhuri states, “Most of the residents of these flats..... weren’t Bengalis”(80). These people brought with them another culture which is different from Bengali culture, food, language; traditions are rendered in the context of clashing of culture. For example the change in the dress code of women with salwar kameez, craze for foreign things and travel, etc., and all the changes were new to the protagonist.

Jayojit’s strangeness to the city Calcutta increases more and more when he finds his parents are not socially compatible with their Bengali relatives. Jayojit’s parents hardly meet

their relatives and they always preferred to live in a seclude shell, because of the divorce of Jayojit, which led them into their own world of mourning. Not only Chatterjee's family, but even their relatives have separated themselves thinking that they don't belong to class and status to which admiral belong. Chadhuri remarks:

In all kinds of ways, these people were, million miles away from Jayojit's parents and their world, their ambitions were different, their friends and referents were different, even the Bengali they spoke were different; they might have belonged to different countries"(44).

As a school boy, Jayojit spent only short period in Calcutta, this also made him stage to the city. He was sent to the boarding school in Ooty. He doesn't know the meaning of daily home coming; He spends only the summer holidays with his parents, wherever the Admiral gets posted. In Calcutta, Jayojit shares no sweet memories and no bitter experience, he no longer feel emotionally attached and cannot fully identify himself with his native culture.

The excessive heat and dust of Calcutta is unbearable for him, he often murmours, "It is humidity I hate" (59). His plan of completing his book is also not achieved due to the heat and noise of neighbours. He is unable to sleep at night due to the sound of music coming from marriage hall. He wants to depart the city as soon as possible.

He observes that the city is developing slowly while comparing to Claremont. He feels the city is same "Nothing has changed from the year ago: only the pavement here seemed more dusty than he had remembered and was like a path that ran parallel to the road" (51). These observations made him to decide that not to settle in the city after the death of his parents. And this decision is also endorsed by his father who says: "Look happening to this city you can't

walk on the pavement, can't post a letter.... I would not advise you to come back to it". To this Jayojit replies to his father "I am afraid there is not much chance of that in the near future" (63).

Another reason for hatred of the city is the memory of his past days spent with his ex-wife Amala constantly haunts him. He is unable to understand the cause of his divorce when both of them belong to the same culture and "had grown up with the same background, listened to the same music, liked the Beatles" (32). Sitting in plane he realizes that globalization is one of the reason for his break down, because to him marriage works well for the people in India but "Look at what happened to the Hindus who left" (9).

Jayojit father, Admiral Chatterjee constantly criticizes the post independence scenario of India. He is retired Rear Admiral from Indian Navy and still possesses the same respect which he used to have earlier. He prefers western culture and manners to the native. He strangely behaves like Bengali only before two things; one in front of his in-laws and second is his grandson Bonny. Chaudhuri comments: "The Old India had changed, and himself had grown somewhat decrepit, the official air still hung around him, like presentiment" (8). After his retirement he lost his authority and status and he has to struggle a lot to survive without any source of income. He sometimes in aggressive manner tells his wife to save for future but she finds it quite difficult due to medical expenses.

Admiral becomes nostalgic while recollecting his good old days when he was in service. For him those days were just " Like a dream had a huge bungalow wherever they went, a car, coloured the navy's deep blue with two stars painted on the back identifying his rank – and they had never thought the value of money would deprecate so rapidly after retirement – they never thought the value of money before"(21). According to Admiral it is better not to be in India after

retirement because the country and institution you served is not going to give you anything after retirement.

Jayojit's Bengali middle class family has caught between tradition and modernity – when Jayojit convince his father to buy a washing machine and his father insists him to hire a servant to wash clothes instead to buy a machine. Jayojit even though fragmented in life with a divorce, he does not embrace the warmth of the Indian home. His departure with his son to another different world of possibilities is portrayed with the same detachment.

Thus Chaudhuri, through the character Jayojit portrays that the total rejection or adoption of either culture is not the way for adjustment rather to mesh the both culture and gain the best from the both the both cultures.

**Works Cited:**

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