

A Critical Study of Local Characters in Regional Setting through Amit Chaudhuri's Novels

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Abstract— *Local colour is a style of writing which focuses on the presentation of the features and peculiarities of a particular locality and its inhabitants. A character is a person in a narrative work such as a drama, novel, play, television, series or film. Characters may be flat, minor, major, or round according to their deeds in the narrative work. The main character in a story is generally known as the protagonist and the character who opposes him or her, is the antagonist. Characters are extremely significant because they are the means through which a reader interacts with a piece of literature. Characterization is the process by which a writer reveals the personality of the characters. Characterization is the most memorable and important aspect of novels. Characters in regional setting tend to be concerned with the character of the district or region rather than with the individual. Characters may become character types, sometimes old-fashioned or stereotypical and are marked by their lifestyle focused on the old ways of living.*

Keywords— *Character, Characterization, Regional Setting, Stereotypical, etc.*

A character is a person in a narrative work such as a drama, novel, play, television, series or film. Characters may be flat, minor, major, or round according to their deeds in the narrative work. The main character in a story is generally known as the protagonist and the character who opposes him or her, is the antagonist. Characters are extremely significant because they are the means through which a reader interacts with a piece of literature. Every character has his or her own qualities, which a creative author uses to support in forming the plot of a story or creating a mood. Characters are an essential component of the novel as the story centres round human beings and their actions, passions and motives. The novelist has to show his characters functioning within variety of contexts, situations and relationships.

The word “character” is derived from the ancient Greek word *kharaktêr*, the English word dates from the Restoration, although it became widely used after its appearance in *Tom Jones* in 1749. In literature, characters guide readers through their stories, helping them to

understand plots and think over the themes. Since the end of the eighteenth-century, the phrase “in character” has been used to describe an effective impression by an actor. Since nineteenth-century, the art of creating characters, as practiced by actors or writers, has been called characterization. The study of a character requires an analysis of its relations with all of the other characters in the work. Fiction writers make use of a variety of characters while knitting their fiction.

According to Aristotle, character is to be seen from four perspectives. The first and the most important thing is that it should be good. The character will be good if purpose is good. This aspect is applicable to each class. The second thing to aim at is propriety and third thing is that character must be true to life. The fourth point is that the character should be consistent. Chaucer is the first great artist of characters in English Literature. He painted the whole of English nation during the fourteenth century, ranging from knightly class to the order of Clergymen in *Prologue to Canterbury Tales*. The Character sketches are brief, yet lucid and comprehensive. Both the in and out of the characters are depicted in such a superb way that the entire personality seems moving before the reader's eyes. It is Chaucer's unique rich and original art of characterization that has enabled him to explain unforgettable portraits. Henry Fielding a well known writer is famous for his art of characterization. His prime interest was in depicting everyday life of the ordinary man. He was the great creator of master characters because most of the characters represent the complete picture of the art of the English society of Fielding's time.

Characterization is the most memorable and important aspect of novels. Anyone can recall the characters from the novels one has read over a period of time as characters can be recalled easily than the story, title or author of the novel. There is an endless list of the characters with the same name as that of the titles of the novels. Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones, Emma, David Copperfield, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Kim, Mrs Dalloway, Joseph Andrews, etc. An eponymous hero or heroine is the character in a play or book whose name is the title of that play or book. Such novels are called Eponymous novel and the characters are called Eponymous. The importance of the character to novelist

can be judged by the fact that all of these names are the titles of the novels in which they appear. Regarding the significance of the character in the novel Virginia Woolf makes the following remarkable observations:

I believe that all novels ... deal with character, and that it is to express character - not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose and undramatic, so rich, elastic and alive, has been evolved. To express character, I have said, but you will at once reflect that the very widest interpretation can be put upon these words ... besides age and country there is the writer's temperament to be considered. You see one thing in character and I another. You say it means this and that. (qtd in Mirriam 290)

Setting includes the background, atmosphere or environment in which characters live and move, and usually include physical characteristics of the surroundings. Setting enables the reader to better envision how a story unfolds by relating necessary physical details of a piece of literature. It is integral to the story and may sometimes become a character in itself. It may be simple or elaborate, used to create ambiance, lend credibility or realism, emphasize, organize, or even distract the reader. Characters in regional setting tend to be concerned with the character of the district or region rather than with the individual. Characters may become character types, sometimes old-fashioned or stereotypical and are marked by their lifestyle focused on the old ways of living. The characters are marked by their adherence to the old ways, by dialect, and by particular personality traits central to the region. In women's local colour fiction, the heroines are often unmarried women or young girls.

The paper will focus on the characters in regional settings in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri. It will focus not only on how the characters develop in that setting and their affection towards it but will also focus on the characters' relation with their region. The characters in regional setting though do not develop still play an important role. Born in Calcutta, brought up in Bombay, having spent time in England and now resettled in Calcutta, Chaudhuri's background is highly cosmopolitan, and so are most of his protagonists, but that has not distracted him from his local society and its importance in his life and his characters life. Like Chaudhuri, William Dean Howells, one of Realism's strongest practitioners in his *Criticism and Fiction* writes about the characters:

Let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measures we

all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working with by springs and wires; let it show the different interests in their true proportions; let it forbear to preach pride and revenge, folly and insanity, egotism and prejudice, but frankly own these for what they are, in whatever figures and occasions they appear; let it not put on fine literary airs; let it speak the dialect, the language, that most Americans know - the language unaffected people everywhere - and there can be no doubt of an unlimited future not only of delightfulness but of usefulness, for it. (51)

Chaudhuri talks about characters and the setting of the novel in a very subtle way. Characters of his novels are drawn from humble walks of life and shown carrying on their daily activities. These regional characters are not characters or comic figures which are introduced for the sake of humour. Chaudhuri treats them with respect, sympathy, and understanding. His characters are true to life as he has tried to present his characters which are real. The characters belong to a particular regional setting, i.e. Calcutta. He has given more importance to the characters than the plot or story of the novel. There is nothing special that happens in his novels, there are eventless episode connected with one another like a series. The setting is important in most of his novels and characters revolve around that setting only. Like Chaudhuri, Hamlin Garland also believes the same and writes in his *Crumbling Idols*:

Veritism is unquestionably acting upon the drama as impressionism has already transformed painting, and changed the current of literature. Veritism discredits plots and formal complications. It deals with life face to face, and swiftly and surely and always from the individual artist's standpoint. Characters and the relation of groups of characters are coming to have more value than plot. (94)

Chaudhuri's first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* captures middle-class Calcutta, a city of industrial and economic stagnation but with a unique cultural flavour, through the eyes of its twelve year old protagonist, Sandeep. He comes to the Calcutta from Bombay to spend his summer holidays at his Chhotomama's house and to whose eyes the city possesses an old-world magic that is seemingly missing in the faster paced Bombay. He has another relation with the city as he was born here and has the curiosity to know it more. He loves being here as he gets into the open space from his close and big flat in Bombay. He works as a camera and tries to capture everything without leaving a

single thing. He is the protagonist of the novel and also can be considered as a developing character.

The novel is quite interesting and appealing as it captures a plethora of characters like Chhotomama, Sandeep, Surjeet (Babla), Abhijeet (Abhi), Chhordimoni, Sarwati, Chhaya, Sandeep's Mother, Mamima and many others who live in Calcutta. Most of them are flat characters and show no drastic change throughout the novel. Abhi and Babla, Sandeep's cousins can be considered as developing characters as they showed physical and intellectual growth in their behaviour. With the main characters there is also focus on the minor characters like the maid servants, the guests at Chhotomama's place or people in the neighbourhood, etc. They can be considered as spear-carriers as they have minimum role to play but provide a real picture through their actions. Nothing much happens in the novel unless things like bathing, dining, gossiping and singing are called happenings. There is nothing unusual either about the place or the characters Chaudhuri writes about. The details of the entry of Sandeep in the opening scene of the novel make the reader curious about the upcoming actions in the novel. The lanes in Calcutta, two boys playing at the rusting gate of their house, the feeling and surprise on their faces when they see a taxi in front of the gate and the warm welcome given to Sandeep and his mother after coming to the house of his Chhotomama and Mamima at Calcutta- all these observations are described in an interesting manner. Very close attachment is revealed in the meeting of Sandeep and his mother with his Chhotomama, Mamima, and cousins in Calcutta. When they entered the house, they all went upstairs, Abhi, Babla, Sandeep and his mother, his uncle, his aunt, one after the another as if they were going up to a shrine on pilgrimage. Emotional intimacy is observed in their talk that follows after they enter the house:

His aunt, by contrast, stood at the head of the stairs, in a place that was half sunlit and half shadowy, with immaculate serenity, seemingly not having moved from where she had said goodbye to him about a year ago; she said: 'How have you been, Mona?' When she saw Sandeep's mother, she went down the stairs and grasped her hand in a relaxed way; all the excitement shone in her eyes. (5)

Chhotomama is the central and static character. He does not show any change as he remains the same throughout the novel. His schedule is busy on working days and the mood of relaxation could be observed on Sundays. He is seen as a man taking interest in everything like film-viewing, going for shopping, taking the children out on holidays, chatting with them with great enthusiasm and so on. He loves his family and would do everything

to keep them happy as any common man would do. He is a simple man who would not leave any chance of spending time with his family. When Sandeep and his mother came to Calcutta, Chhotomama took keen interest and welcomed them properly. He can be considered as a man of the soil as he loved being there. Dr. Arun Kumar Yadav observing Chaudhuri's novels in "Socio-Cultural Aspects of Life: A Study of Amit Chaudhuri's Novels" writes:

Chhotomama, youngest maternal uncle of the novel's young protagonist Sandeep in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, here as in rest of the novel is a good example of a local subject, a concept that is crucial both to the tradition of fiction Chaudhuri for grounds and his theoretical criticism of the national narratives. Chhotomama's subjectivity here organizes itself through its interpellation into regional political ideologies. The comical and strange behaviour of Chhotomama, the uncle of Sandeep, we have a very realistic crystallization of this political regionalism. (Web)

Mamima and Sandeep's mother, the two major women characters in the novel. They can be considered as flat characters and also stock characters as they do not show any development in the novel but have characteristics of typical women. The twin heroines were much engrossed in things like rituals, routine affairs, making themselves up, gossips, etc. They were as important as the furniture in the house which was always there and which would give comfort by its presence. Mamima was also observed as a kind lady who would always be busy with her household routine, her careful attention to the children, her husband, sister-in-law, etc. She never complained about anything, and is described as the most enthusiastic woman in the family. She got worried when Chhotomama was admitted to hospital. Mamima is described as a lady of most caring nature. Her love for the protagonist is a symbol of her concern for maintaining relations in harmony. The family that Chaudhuri has depicted is really a happy one in which everyone has affinity for one another. Sandeep's Mamima was a very simple lady, and almost her daily routine was the same. Her day would start with her family and would end with her family only. The most important thing which she would never forget was her prayers. In the morning, she would never approach the gods until she had bathed and after her bath she would wrap a sari around herself. She would enter the prayer-room:

She entered the prayer-room and lit two incense sticks, then stuck them, like slim pencils, into a perforated brass stand. She

arranged slices of cucumber and oranges and sweet white batashas on three brass plates and placed them in front of the gods.... She muttered something incoherently - not an answer, but a mantra she had begun to repeat to herself as soon as she sat upon the shatranji on the floor. (33)

The other characters in the novel are also given an equal importance. Sandeep being the protagonist of the novel acts as a camera used by the author to portray the characters. It is not that only Sandeep is kept in the limelight but all the characters and his region, Calcutta are shown or represented to the world through Sandeep's eyes. Chaudhuri has tried to portray the life of children who love doing one thing or the other. He has also tried to present the childlike life and important happenings in their life like homework, different games, school, little misbehave, etc. Like in the novel itself Sandeep and Abhi would walk up quietly to a window and open a single shutter, and would call out to passerby by different names:

Sometimes, Sandeep and Abhi would walk up quietly to a window and open a single shutter, slanting it so that as little light entered the room as possible. Then they both peered through it; it was like peering into the narrow slit of a letter-box. They were momentarily blinded; outside, everything dazzled intolerably; a few people walked on the pavement like survivors, vanquished by the heat. (27)

Sandeep's father is another character in the novel, a flat character who is constantly the same in the novel. He was a successful businessman, and had a good position in a company in Bombay. He was basically from Calcutta but for his job had to leave this place. He makes his appearance in the second half of the novel when Sandeep visits his Chhotomama's place second time after a span of about one and half year. They prefer to stay at the Grand Hotel on Chowringhee rather than Sandeep's Chhotomama's old house. He would visit his in-laws house for few hours in the day. He is a kind man and would leave no chance of helping others as he helped Chhotomama and his family when Chhotomama had a heart attack and was admitted to hospital. Sandeep's father stayed at the old house of Chhotomama in order to accompany Chhotomama's family. In a way he was caring though a bit different from others in nature.

Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* is a semi autobiographical novel. It is a first-person narration of a student about his days at his college. He is a viewpoint character as through him one experiences the narration. The narrator can be considered as a sympathetic character

as he arouses sympathy through the memories of his home and parents. It significantly portrays his casual involvement with two female students, nostalgic memories of his parents staying in Calcutta, and his fond recall of the classical music teacher. The novel has many different characters and author's focus is on all the characters. The important character is narrator's mother whom he misses a lot. She is a static character as she shows no development in the novel. In the afternoons she would sleep and maid servants would rub cream on the soles of her feet. She had got an ugly scar when a car ran over her feet and the mark is printed on her skin like a glowing star. The narrator's mother was an insomniac and at three o'clock in the morning she would eat Marie biscuits in the kitchen. In her bedroom she would weigh herself on the weighing machine that too naked as she did not want to leave any chance by which she could weigh less. After weighing herself she would go to the veranda with a cup of tea in her hand and look at the people moving in the lane. After she has finished her tea, she would go to the harmonium and settle on the rug and practise her music especially scales in the raag Todi. The narrator talks about the style by which she made her hair:

Her hair is troublesome and curly; when she was young, it was even thicker than it is now. It falls in long, black strands, but each strand has a gentle, complicated undulation travelling through it, like a mild electric shock or a thrill, that gives it a life of its own; it is visually analogous to a tremolo on a musical note. It is this tremolo that makes her hair curly and unmanageable and has caused her such lifelong displeasure. The easiest way she disposes of it is by gathering it compassionately into a humble, medium sized bun, rendering it graceful with a final plastic hair-clip, or by thoughtfully metamorphosing it into a single serpent-like plait that looks paradoxically innocent. (192-193)

Narrator's mother sometimes used to go to Bombay Gymkhana. "Gymkhana" is an Indian term originally referred to a place of assembly. It is an Anglo-Persian expression, which is derived from the Persian word "Jammat-Khanna." Most gymkhanas have a club allied with them. It is very difficult to get membership into this exclusive club. Narrator's mother used to go to the gymkhana club in order to pass her time. She used to be alone at home and that was the best way for her to relax and pass her time. She would go there in the afternoon and would settle there on one of the sofas and dozed off in the Gymkhana till her husband would come home for tea from the office. His mother has been shown as a lazy

woman who has nothing to do at home. She is married to a rich husband and has a membership for the club and has nothing to do in the club except to doze off:

... my mother would sometimes go to the Bombay Gymkhana in the afternoon and settle upon one of its spacious, boat-like wicker sofas, sinking into its oceanic cushions and dozing off till my father arrived for tea. Coming back from school, which was nearby, I would see her there as a silent composition of loved details; the deliberate, floral creases of her sari, the pale orange-brown glow of her skin, the mild ember-darkening of her lipsticked mouth, the patient, round fruition of her bun of her hair, and the irrelevant red dot on her forehead. (195)

Shenaz is one of the girl friends of the narrator and he has an affair with her but is unable to keep his relationship with her as he is mostly engrossed in his memories of home at Calcutta. He starts a relationship with her because she is a kind of person he could relate to. She has been married once and then divorced later. She is ready for the commitment but the narrator is not ready as he is unable to come out of his longing for his home, i.e. Calcutta. She can be considered as a flat character without any development in the novel. He has very beautifully portrayed her beauty in the very few starting pages of the novel. He has talked about her personality as he likes her and according to him:

She was, essentially, a wise girl in a woman's body, dressed in black trousers, a blue top and a coat, and black sneakers. Her hair was long and striking and untidy; solemnly, she carried a file full of papers under her arm, and clumsy, oversized bag whose significance was that there was a tiny packet of Marlboro Lights in it. (184)

Another character in the novel is narrator's only male friend in the college, Sharma. He can be considered as a developing character because of his changing behaviour and style of living. He is an Indian and is writing a thesis on Indian philosophy, but he longs to be a stylist. He tries to adapt the new culture of Oxford. He lives in another room in the same building in which the narrator lives. Sharma is a lively person and can come to narrator's room at anytime of the day. Sometimes he would come down to have coffee with the narrator and sometimes he would disturb him in midway when he is practising. Sharma would move around the room doing one thing or the other like tapping keys of narrator's typewriter or reading aloud all the titles of books on the shelf in order to improve his English language. Sharma is

always welcomed in the narrator's room. They watch black and white British films from the fifties era and Sharma was an admirer of the *Collins*' and a baleful critic of the OED (Oxford English Dictionary) and has an eye on their limitations.

Mandira, another character in the novel is narrator's second girlfriend. She is also a flat character in the novel as she shows no growth in the novel. She joined the college two years after the narrator joined the college. The narrator saw her for the first time in a hall of the college. She has a strong American accent. She is very different from others and has an attractive personality. Whenever the narrator gets bored he can go to her room and can have a cup of coffee with her. He knows that he would not be unwelcomed at her door. The narrator says, "She was small and roundish, and a favourite with the porters and stewards, who would wink at her, or put an arm around her, and call her 'love' or 'dear', as the English do, and not take her very seriously" (188).

Narrator's father is from Calcutta and has shifted to Bombay for his job. He is a flat character as he shows no development in the novel. His presence is just made through narrator's memories. He works in a reputed company and they live in a well furnished flat in Malabar Hill overlooking the Arabian Sea. After his retirement they have to move to the lane in the suburbs where only they have an apartment building and rest have bungalows in the lane. His father had an Ambassador car which was theirs after his retirement. They live here for three years and then moved to Calcutta, their actual home. The narrator's parents decided to move back to Calcutta, their region as they had come to the conclusion that they could no longer live in Bombay, the adopted region. They moved to Calcutta from Sylhet, Bangladesh due to partition and became a part of Calcutta. Narrator's father loved Calcutta and he was a typical Bengali. Bengalis love rice and fish curry, his father also liked Bengali food and narrator writes about his father, "He ate great quantities of rice in the canteen, and never left a fish-head uneaten. He was an only child, parentless, in this city where people spoke Bengali differently and more coldly than he did" (243).

Chaudhuri's third novel, *Freedom Song*, traces the friendship of Khuku and Mini. Chaudhuri has developed and portrayed the friendship of Khuku and Mini, the childhood friends and their emotional support towards each other. As family responsibilities and professional pressures become less, friendships become more important. Among the elderly, friendships can provide links to the larger society who cannot go out as often. Dwelling longer on characterization, Chaudhuri examines the intricacies and contradictions of middle-class life in Calcutta through the relationships of one

extended family. The central characters of the narrative are Khuku and Mini who usually spend their time talking about family, friends, health, and occasionally, Muslims and the Babri Masjid. The novel chronicles the lives of Bhola and his sister Khuku and their respective families, portraying the banalities of daily life: eating, sleeping, and going to work. According to Geeta Doctor in a review of *Freedom Song*:

... that seems to describe the life of most of his characters. Their lives are to be extent inconsequential, made up of routine acts that may or may not have significance. Chaudhuri's skill is in making us aware of these lives. It's part of his delicacy and tact that having brought them to light, he is content to set them free so that they can linger on either as phantoms singing a 'freedom song' or as portraits of the ordinary person, the reader, you and me. (7)

Khuku was the second youngest of seven undisciplined children of the family. She is a flat character with no development in the novel. She had been an irresponsible, childish, and the naughtiest one since her childhood days. Khuku used to sing when she was young. Her voice was a miracle and her voice was known to everyone but she could not get fame. The people of Shillong remembered Khuku by her voice and singing. If anyone would enquire about her whereabouts or if someone took her name, they would say:

You mean Khuku Biswas, the one who used to sing? and they recalled a thin girl in a sari, her hair tied in a plait, standing on a stage before a mike, and outside the narrow steep hills of shilling winding and winding, and Khasia children with red cheeks and high cheek-bones sitting by the roadside. She got married and went to England, didn't she? (316)

Khuku was married to Shib and had a child, Bablu. Bablu was in America pursuing his research in Economics. Khuku used to get up early in the morning. She was serious about her singing career and used to practise it in the morning. Khuku were seven brothers and sisters but she was the favourite of her mother amongst all. Her elder sister lived in the hills of Assam and was a headmistress in a girls' school and lost her husband when she was only thirty four. Khuku was:

Khuku, whose father had died early, and who was the second youngest of seven undisciplined children, used to spend afternoons sucking pickles and chattering on the porch of Mini's house: they were both given to bouts of frivolous laughter. Khuku

hated boys; Mini went to sewing class without a needle. And Khuku - Khuku had gone to become a mother, and Mini had become a schoolteacher - both facts were equally difficult to believe. (315)

Khuku and Mini had grown old with time but they tried to enjoy every moment of their life. Khuku's face had a few noticeable wrinkles and her hair had turned grey. She used to apply mehndi or dye on her hair which smelled like mud or manure till she washed it off. Mini had a smaller body, was dark skinned and her forehead glowed as she used to tie her hair in a small bun. Khuku and Mini had not changed much except that Khuku had caesarean marks and Mini was untouched and had no caesarean marks. This was the only difference they both shared but it had not brought any effect on their friendship.

Shib Purakayastha, Khuku's husband is a static character with no involvement in the novel. He was a retired man and was working in an old company, "Little's." The company was in good condition when it was owned by Britishers. It produced sweets and chocolates which were very famous. After Britishers left, the government owned the company and was running in loss. Shib had worked in a successful private company before his retirement and now he was only an advisor in the company but was treated as if he was running the company. Everybody in the company hoped that he was the one who could improve the condition of the company. He was seventy years old and was still working and was earning five thousand rupees per month. The company was not in a good condition but still he was getting his salary every month. He was a kind and dedicated man and knew that the company, "Little's" was not going to work but he kept trying and going to the office. He would help his colleagues in every matter. He was a sensitive and intelligent man and he knew the condition of the company:

I don't know why they've taken me. He'd shaken his head. The government isn't interested in putting money into the company. I don't know if they expect me to perform some miracle and put it on the right course again. He was unlikely to make any miracles happen, presiding over in his active old age this company he'd known since childhood. I've heard that there are some people who resent that money's being diverted from a loss-making firm to pay my salary - so it's best not have any expectations. (337)

Mini, Khuku's best friend is a flat character with just a slight change in her style of living. She was the daughter of a Judge in Sylhet. She was more mature than

Khuku. She was a school teacher and lived in North Calcutta, in the New Municipal Corporation. She lived with her sister Shantidi as they both were unmarried. She was suffering from arthritis which was troubling her time and again. She was brought by Khuku to her place as she used to limp and was unable to walk due to her pain. She once told Khuku, "It cut as if someone were putting salt upon it, Khuku re. 'There is no solution but complete rest,' declared Khuku, saying 'complete rest' in English. 'And had Mini's recuperation and long holiday begun in Khuku's house'" (316). When Mini was at Khuku's place, she had nothing to do except reading books. Both Mini and her sister were teaching in a school and Mini used to teach Geography and Bengali at the school. Khuku and Mini were different in their behaviours but they were best friends. Khuku was child like in nature and Mini was:

But Mini had her own shy, repressed side, which rarely came to light. For instance, after the luxury of bathing in Khuku's house, she, in her unsmiling unostentatious way, splashed eau-de-cologne on herself; and she had her preferences in brassieres, liking those that had small coloured flowers on their cups. But all this was her own secret, for then she covered herself in a large maternal white blouse and a neutral cotton sari. (315)

Bhaskar can be called the protagonist of the novel and a developing character. He was the son of Bholu and was dark twenty eight year old man. He was a day dreamer and particularly a rebellious boy. He had the problem of back pain and it had been troubling him. He had been recommended some exercises by the doctor. He was a short tempered and would get angry easily on small things. He was a worker of the party C.P.I. (M.) and also worked in his father's factory but his interest was more in politics. He used to distribute the paper *Ganashakti* every morning which was the party's paper. Bhaskar was lazy but was an intelligent and hard working young activist who aspired to develop an independent identity. His role models were Swami Vivekananda and his guru, Shri Ramakrishna. He had read the book about Swami Vivekananda's life and "The story he liked best was the one about Swami Vivekananda, who once was an ordinary man called Narendranath Dutta. ... Ramakrishna, seeing Narendranath was a great disciple, gave him the name Vivekananda" (299-300). Bhaskar was much influenced by Vivekananda's changed identity and his speech before the Parliament of World Religions. While discussing about Bhaskar's identity, Indu Kulkarni in "Native Melody in Amit Chaudhuri's Freedom Song" further remarks:

Intelligent, lazy Bhaskar is a representative of the Bengali middle class as he wishes to

cultivate a separate identity, his role models are Swami Vivekananda and Shri Ramakrishna. His pride in Vivekananda's pioneering speech in Chicago at the Parliament of Religions shapes Bhaskar's religious, cultural and spiritual leanings. He is an idealist who has to constantly modify his ideals as the circumstances of life buffet him and force him to make compromises with his career and even in the choice of his partner. (162)

Chaudhuri's fourth novel, *A New World* (2000), deals with the life of an America based Indian professor, Jayojit who visits Calcutta with his son, Vikram after his divorce with his wife, Amala. In the novel, Chaudhuri has described the experience of the protagonist, Jayojit Chatterjee. He is a sympathetic and round character. He has different shades of personality, positive as well as negative. He arouses sympathy because of his divorce and custody of his son gone into the hands of his wife. Chaudhuri portrays the events of dramatic significance in the life of his protagonist as his wife had eloped with her gynaecologist and Jayojit had to take the case of the custody of his son as an NRI to the Indian legal system, when the American law fails him. Sheobhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla in commenting upon the protagonists of Chaudhuri, observes, ". . . *A New World* where the protagonist is a mature, disillusioned sort of person and is capable of a more realistic perception of things" (10).

Jayojit and Amala's marriage was an arranged one and were very happy till Bonny was born, whose real name was Vikram. Things changed and Amala decided to leave Jayojit. She started living with her gynaecologist who himself was married. Jayojit was an economist who lived in America and had come to India with his son Vikram to spend his summer vacation. Jayojit and Amala had married eleven years ago and Bonny was born in the fourth year and after four years of marriage they got divorced and custody of the child went to Amala. Jayojit had come to Calcutta to spend his vacations with his parents. He was little upset because of his divorce so he came to Calcutta. S. Shyamala in her paper on "Old Snapshots in New World: Realism in Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World*" has described about Jayojit:

Jayojit Chatterjee, an Indian economist teaching at a University in the United States is the central character. A year after his divorce, he flies from the States to Calcutta with his seven year old son, Vikram nick named as bonny, to visit his parents. He spends a slow holiday of meals, showers, and rare trips outside. (152)

Jayojit was single again after his divorce and had begun to eat whatever he liked or whatever he could get in America. When he was in Calcutta his mother served him *luchis* (*pooris*) and he told his mother that he should not eat much as he was putting on weight. But his mother protested and said, "Where - I don't think you have put on weight" (24). Jayojit was living a life of an orphan in a country away from his parents, his home and his mother was not aware of this thing. He had to do everything on his own from shopping to every household chore in America after his divorce. Amala and Jayojit were living happily with each other till the birth of Bonny. Both Jayojit and Amala were from the same place, i.e. Calcutta and:

Both Jayojit and Amala had grown up with same background, listened to the same music, liked the Beatles; she, predictably, shied away from the Rolling Stones as so many girls he used to know in school had. He had clung to the loyalties he thought he was shaped by; she had seamlessly allowed herself to shed her early enthusiasms, which probably hadn't been very intense in the first place, and, listening to the incomprehensible music of the eighties, would say, 'What's wrong with?' At first, he found it touching. (32)

Jayojit was a simple man and sometimes he would think that he should not have married Amala. Amala is a complex character as it is difficult to understand her nature. She was the daughter of a lawyer of Supreme Court. After marriage she would call her parents twice a week. She was more close to her mother. She would discuss each and every detail with her mother. She would mostly call her parents when Jayojit would not be around. After few misunderstandings they got divorced. Jayojit's parents wanted him to marry again. He was ready to give a second chance to his life because of Bonny. Arundhati was the girl who was also a divorcee and after two or three meetings they got ready for marriage. They respected each other but still things did not go well and could not marry:

In spite of an 'arranged marriage' having failed once, they were both prepared to give it a second go; he still didn't have confidence in 'love'; it was other things - understanding, mutual needs - that held a marriage together. 'But not a Hindu wedding, God, no; I couldn't take another one of those,' she'd said. 'Just a registry.' Everything had been going smoothly and then, almost without warning, he'd realized, after a little more than a month, that something was holding her

back, she'd changed her mind and wouldn't go through with it. (149)

Vikram is a flat character with not much growth. He was seven years old and was the only child of Jayojit and Amala. He was living with his mother as his mother had got the custody of the boy. Bonny was studying in a school in San Diego. He was a bright student and even his teachers praised him. On being asked for permission to go to Calcutta by Jayojit Bonny's teacher said, "I don't think it should be a problem, Dr Chatterjee" (33). He accompanied his father to his grandparents' home in Calcutta. He was excited to be in Calcutta and watched everything with curiosity. He was a little boy and was enjoying every moment in the house at Calcutta. Vikram got his name from his maternal grandfather and his pet name was Bonny, which was given by his grandmother. He was close to his grandmother. She would often bathe him:

Wooo! Said the boy as it rained on him, and he burst out laughing, a long series of delighted giggles. His grandmother, standing just outside the shower area, looked at him and smiled. His eyes and face were shut tightly. His arm reached out for the crevice in the wall where the soap was placed, and his hand closed around a new, waxy bar of Lux. (12)

Bonny would spend his whole day playing and eating. In the evening he would fall asleep without having dinner and his grandmother would get disappointed on his not having dinner. During the day he would play with his toys. He would play with Jurassic Park rakkhosh, which his grandmother used to call the toy. Sometimes his toys would be lying on the floor whole day and while playing he would ask his grandmother:

You scared of them, tamma? asked the boy.

Naturally I am! They are two rakkhosh!

Tamma knows about Jurassic Park, but she hasn't seen it, explained Bonny to his father. It came to Calcutta two months ago, baba. Isn't that neat? (25)

Ananda Chatterjee, father of Jayojit was a complex character as it was difficult to understand him. He lived in Calcutta and had two sons, Jayojit and Ranajit, both were married. Ranajit was living in Delhi with his wife. He used to call Jayojit as Joy with love. He was a strict man and was one of those men who had inherited the Britishers authority and position. He had particular club cuisine and table manners. He never liked his wife as she could not come up to his expectations. He wanted her to be a 'memsahib' as he was a 'sahib'. She was afraid of him. He was also afraid of two things on which he would become strangely Bengali and native:

The first was his in-laws; in those days when his wife and he still quarrelled and his in-laws were alive, his wife, crying softly, would pack her things and go away for a week to her parents' house; and he would be left dumbstruck, unable to say anything. The second was his grandson - Vikram; Bonny. He could not reconcile himself to the fact the boy had to tag along part of the year with Jayojit, and then to his mother, who was living elsewhere on the vast American map, with someone else. (7-8)

Ruby, Jayojit's mother is a stock character having all the qualities of a typical woman whose life is restricted to the boundaries of her house. She was the kitchen queen, though not a good cook but still was busy in cooking one thing or the other for her son and grandson. She was a perfect homemaker and would almost perform every activity in the house herself. There was a maid servant, Maya who used to come at her own will and would make excuses all the time. She had become more a mother and a nurse to his husband who did not like her much. Her main job was to serve food to the family and ensure that they all ate well. She would continuously try to tempt both his son and grandson to luchi. She was more concerned about his grandson and then Jayojit said with an indulgent sternness, "Don't force him, ma." "Don't spoil him - he's not used to oily meals of this kind in the mornings" (45). She listened to her son as if he was the mother and she the son. Jayojit's another reason to stop her was that he wanted to save her from working in the kitchen. She had become a household machine and there was a time when her most of the time was spent in shopping with her friends besides being ignored by the Admiral. Her daily routine was:

In the bedroom, Mrs Chatterjee, very softly, as she often did these days, or ever since she had grown used to this negligible but returning loneliness, turned on the transistor radio to listen to devotionals. Something about these bhajans was apposite to her semi-wakefulness of the first half-hour of getting out of bed. (66)

His fifth novel *The Immortals* is set up in the 1970s and 80s, the years leading up to the radical economic liberalization of the 1990s. It tells the story of three Indian musicians: a mother, her son, and their guru, who is a classical music teacher. The focus is primarily on Mallika, married to Apurva Sengupta, chief executive of a large corporation, and their sensitive son Nirmalaya. Nirmalaya is the protagonist of the novel, lives with his parents and is a devotee of Indian classical music, the boy is intent on defending this tradition against the threat of

commercialism. Others who wing their way in and out of the text include the Neogis, old friends of the Senguptas, domestic followers of cooks and cleaners, and others from Shyamji's extended family, who also dabble in music.

Shyamlal is a complex and developing character in the novel. He is son of late Ram Lal, Panditji. He was different from his father and would tell his father's story as if he was a saint. He was not at all like his father. He used to accompany Moti Lal at Mallika's house to teach her music. Motilal was shyam's brother-in-law, his sister's husband. Motilal introduced him at Mallika's home: "My dewar's name is Shyam - Shyam Lal, said Motilal. 'The late', and he glanced at the heavens, 'Pandit Ram Lal's son. He's quite a good singer, and a teacher too" (11). After the lesson Motilalji would discuss with Shyamji about Mallika. Motilalji was turned out from his job due to his habit of drinking and Shyamji took the opportunity of teaching music to Mallika Sengupta. He was a man who used to take music as job and wanted to earn money out of it. All his students were from rich families and he taught them only Hindi film songs. Nirmalya wanted him to have name and fame as a classical singer but he wanted to earn money so he was more drawn to teach Hindi film songs:

Shyamji fitted neither the model of the Eastern artist, nor that of the Western musician. The Eastern artist was part religious figure, the Western part rebel; and Shyamji seemed to be neither. Shyamji wanted to embrace Bombay. He wanted to partake, it seemed to Nirmalya, of the good things of life; what he wanted was not very unlike what his friends' fathers wanted, Nirmalya couldn't fit this in with the kind of person he thought Shyamji should be. (99)

Shyamji was least interested in teaching Nirmalya the classical music but just for money he was teaching him classical music. The guru became an ideal figure and a sort of imaginary being for Nirmalya, "his real teacher, Shyamji, was an itinerant with his own compulsions, who sometimes found it difficult, in the interests of adhering to deadlines, to give Nirmalya the time of day" (179). Shyamji was a helpful man and bestowed a favour on his brother-in-law, Pyarelal by allowing him to accompany Shyamji to Mrs Sengupta's house. Pyarelal was a self styled teacher of kathak dance and from kathak he picked up various skills in arts. He is a flat character with not much development in the novel. He had learnt singing and playing almost all the instruments related to music. Nirmalya liked him and would wait for his visit as Pyarelal had sensed something special in Nirmalya. He always encourage and appreciate him. According to Pyarelal:

And he sensed that Nirmalya, though belonged to this world, was not in harmony with it, and that his own appeal to the boy lay in his anomalousness; he'd quickly discovered in Nirmalya a powerful nostalgia, a thirst for another time and place almost, that made the boy restless and ill-at-ease. Only Pyarelal noticed this nostalgia; and he'd never seen it in any other young person, certainly not in his three sons or any of the students he played with. (185)

Mallika Sengupta, a flat character, the Bengali wife of a successful businessman, Apurva Sengupta. She was a caring and loving wife and mother. She was a singer also and was learning music from Moti Lal for last seven or eight months and was trying to get her pronunciation right. She was a Bengali and her accent was typical Bengali. She was trying her hands on bhajans and ghazals in order to have command on them. She had heard Hindi film songs of Saigal and Kananbala, and knew them properly. Then she left singing and now more than thirty years, she found herself faced with these languages, in the daytime loneliness of her flat, to get her tongue round Hindi and Urdu vowels and consonants. According to the author:

Her metier was the Bengali song, the Tagore-song- naturally. Everything she said in Hindi, thus, sounded a bit like Bengali. But the Bengaliness of her voice - its rounded full-throatedness - is also what made her sound charming to her music teachers; they would prick up their ears and search for analogies: 'You sing like Kanandevi,' they'd say; or, 'You sing like Geeta Dutt!' Kanandevi had long turned to religion; Geeta Dutt had gone out of circulation prematurely; in the age of Lata, Mrs Sengupta's voice was certainly different. (12-13)

Apurva Sengupta, a flat character, a successful businessman was from Bengal. He was Mallika's brother's friend in the college. Apurva belonged to a wealthy zamindari family. Mallika's family looked up to him as he was a nice boy and also from a wealthy family. Mallika thought that he was just a friend of her brother. Apurva Sengupta's marriage proposal was accepted by Mallika later as she thought that it was only with him she could pursue her singing. Apurva proved to be a good husband as he tried to fulfil her every desire. He got promotion and he had to take the place of Mr Deb who died of a heart attack. Prashanta Neogi and Nayana Neogi were the first to know about the promotion. They were their family friends as Senguptas had very few friends in the city:

This friendship was a result of an encounter in the fifties, in a foreign land, in England, where Prashanta Neogi had travelled to study art; Apurva Sengupta to pursue Company Law. The story was that they'd met, in fact, on the ship. Two lonely Indians on deck, they'd begun to talk; and Prashanta Neogi still spoke about it with a wifely shrug of the shoulders that went oddly with his large frame. (31)

Nirmalya, the protagonist of the novel, was the only son of his parents Apurva Sengupta and Mallika Sengupta. His parents had given him this name which meant: "an offering to God" (51). She was a very caring mother. As soon as he would come from school, lunch was served to him. He was fond of daal, rice and fried fish. His mother would switch on air conditioner before the arrival of his son. She always thought that he was a special child and was exceptional. His mother would ask him out of concern: "Do you like the fish? How was your day?" (15). He was really different and even the teachers of his school were unable to understand him. Nirmalya used to go to pick his father from the office. He was scared of the ocean and also by the maddened waves. He was growing in age so was his father in business but he started maintaining distance from his parents. According to the author:

The older he got, and the higher his father rose in the company, the greater the friction that came to exist between him and the life to which he'd been raised. With an adolescent puritanism, he'd almost made it a point to boycott his parents' parties, or to appear in them with a premeditated nonchalance, in a dishevelled state. (50)

Nirmalya had some minor heart problem. His parents were worried about him. When he was a child he had been with his mother to Calcutta where he was bitten by mosquitoes and suffered from dengue. His mother always thought that it was due to her neglect that he suffered from dengue. She had read somewhere that both dengue and rheumatic fever could damage the heart and she often wondered if she was responsible for her son's condition. He liked to wear a faded kurta with jeans and got a goatee under his chin. His father was growing in business and he was going farther from his parents. He did not like the new flat and was missing the previous flat because his father got prompted and had to shift to a new flat. He even asked his parents: "Why did we have to come here" (79)? He never shaved his goatee, had grown his hair which would come to his shoulders and hardly appeared to smile. His father wanted him to meet his new colleagues and friends but

he would avoid them as Nirmalya did not like meeting people. He had started going away from every one and started living alone. He loved to remain out of home for no reason and would be seen in a khadi kurta and jeans. He had seen Shyamji many a times at his home. He used to observe Shyamji from a distance trying to make out what kind of man he was. To Nirmalya, Shyamji was:

... Shyamji was a great artist, he was trying to reconcile him to what his own idea of an artist was. Here was a man in a loose white kurta and pyjamas; a man who put oil in his hair. And, although his music sometimes sounded inspired to Nirmalya, a man who seemed to have no idea of, or time for, inspiration. A man who undertook his teaching, his singing, almost as - a job. (99)

Nirmalya could not fit into his milieu so wanted to study abroad. He wanted to run away from the society which had been corrupted by the means it adopted. His father liked his idea of studying Philosophy. Nirmalya's intention to study Philosophy was to know the philosophy of life and the questions raised by it. Things were being done for Nirmalya's departure as he applied for passport. He did some shopping with his mother which he would need in abroad. He even recorded some songs of his guru which he would carry with him. He left for London and Shyamji visited Senguptas to enquire about Nirmalya.

In this paper it is illustrated how Chaudhuri has employed characterization in his realistic fiction. Chaudhuri's characters give a good reflection of the region, Calcutta. He has talked about almost every type of character in literature like flat, round, complex, stock, etc. By doing so he has brought forth the features of characters as well portrayed his region through them

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