

**NATIVE LAND IN AMIT CHAUDHURI'S *AFTERNOON RAAG*  
- A POST COLONIAL VIEW**

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Indian English fiction has witnessed a remarkable change in the last three decades. A good number of Indian English novelists, hailed from multiple professions, produced a good body of literature with their solid contribution. They have presented the problems of their own professions, keeping their region and culture as background, besides highlighting social problems. They are primarily the victims of nostalgia, who never forget or run away from their roots, region, and culture. Outstanding among the novelists of new generation is Amit Chaudhuri, a young, delightful, and brilliant contemporary writer. This research paper focuses on Chaudhuri's recreation of the state of a young man coming to terms with loneliness, reminiscence, and hostility. It also focuses on how the author puts forth his conflicts at various levels namely remembering the music

teacher, explaining the ragas, the narrator's choice between India and Oxford, his nostalgic desire for India.

Key words: nostalgia, music, domesticity, loneliness,

Chaudhuri's second novel, *Afternoon Raag* (1993) is set in England, Bombay, and Calcutta. It is about the life and emotions of an Indian student and three Asian friends at Oxford University. The story moves back and forth between Oxford, where the student studies and Bombay, where his parents live. *Afternoon Raag* deals with the experiences and impressions of the student who studies English literature at the University of Oxford. Sharma, the student often returns in his thoughts to his domestic life home in Bombay and later to Calcutta. He straddles the two worlds literally – on his trips back and forth – and more importantly imaginatively. The new surroundings of the Oxford Campus, as well as the house in Bombay to which the narrator's parents have moved, prompt a range of sensual reaction. Thus, his sojourn at the university, and his childhood memories of Bombay and Calcutta form the staple of *Afternoon Raag*. 'Raag' in the title, *Afternoon Raag* means a piece of classical Indian music. Chaudhuri calls a "raga", "the melodic progression of the ordered, and systematized notes of a melody."<sup>(4)</sup> Here, afternoon 'raag' is played just before the evening and the whole *Afternoon Raag* gradually unfolds the narrator's love for music and his love for the two girls, Shehnaz and Mandira. Shehnaz, thin, small-breasted, vegetarian postgraduate, is divorced and the student of Oxford University. She meets Sharma when she is at the end of an affair. Mandira, an undergraduate, is depressive, avoids taking her exams, moves off campus, works part-time in the covered market. But eventually takes her exams, and returns home to her family, possibly for an arranged marriage.

Sharma, is not like many Indians who go to Oxford and change their style of living. He has generous openness and is adept at picking English customs and

making English friends. He does not let down that he feels homesick or separated. The narrator is fond of Sharma's company but he does not allow him to disrupt his world of wistful longing, loneliness, and laughter. As Said, a founding figure of postcolonial study suggests, the movements that sought independence from the colonial powers were not wholly representative of the minority ethnic groups in their territories. Here, Said gestures to the movements and migrations of people from their homelands as a central historical fact of colonization which introduced dramatic changes in the composition of 'Third World' societies.

Amit Chaudhuri establishes his conflicts in *Afternoon Raag* by making his protagonist or the author persona to venerate his music teacher Pandit Govind Prasad Jaipurwale. Yet he gives a detailed description of life in Oxford and India. Though the music teacher is remembered, various ragas and the narrator's friends Sharma, Shehnaz and Mandira and his association with them occupy most chapters of the novel. The bulk of the space and time in the novel is occupied by Oxford. Outwardly the form of this novel looks like that of the 'Tanpura' bought by the narrator.... Oxford forms the urn and India – Bombay, Calcutta a bit by Rajasthan and East Bengal now in Bangladesh – forms the long neck. The diasporic experience portrayed by the author forms one of the conflicts of the novel. It is in Oxford that the students from India namely the narrator, Sharma, shehnaz, and Mandira try to adjust themselves in their own ways. Each is conscious about of the strangeness of the 'one' that has been chosen "of having travelled great distances, of arriving... at a place that is not home, a feeling that cannot be recalled or understood later..." (63). The relationship they try to establish with each other is charged with the feeling of suppressed anxiety and loneliness, the sense that after the time of social intercourse, lectures, and studying at libraries, fade at night "in the solitary moment before falling asleep. Oxford seems to be a dream one is about to remember... that one has no existence for oneself, except in their absence" (67).

The realization of being in transit remains so that all the characters and events only help them to feel the tangibility of the situation which otherwise would melt into dream. “It is the city that ultimately remains a kind of meeting place... never becomes one’s own or anyone else’s” (74). Amit Chaudhuri while describing India, especially Kolkata, Mumbai and Rajasthan portrays the life of his music teacher and the nuances of various ragas. These explanations form the basic thematic pattern of the novel. The narrator tries to overcome his experiences of diasporic cross-over through his commemoration of India, his music teacher, various ragas taught by him and so on. When the narrator in *Afternoon Raag* arrives in Kolkata on his university summer break, he notices: “In Calcutta, nothing has happened after Marxism and modernism. In tea-shops and street vendors, Bengali men, as ever, indulge in adda, a word that means both a pointless, pleasurable exchange in which it is conducted” (225).

Likewise in *Afternoon Raag*, while observing the English working classes in Oxford, the narrator muses: For them the supermarkets were built, to work in and to shop at. Not Sainsbury’s but Tesco, with its long aisles of shopping-trolleys, sides of beef, and ham, frozen chips, mango chutney, and spinach at tuppence less. Towards such centres they gravitate .... Not for them history, old buildings, literature, but an England of small comforts and marriages, happy or unhappy. (206) Life is described here as the epitome of highly routinised consumerism as in Dirk Wiemann’s words: “it is life dependent on prominent re-enactments of rituals of shopping, pubbing and soap opera watching” (221). This picture is put side by side with the world of the university campus: “This world is a different world from that of University; they never meet. The state of intoxication here, broken bottles, a beggar’s foul breath, is more basic than the students’ social drunkenness, a state of the soul” (207). While the description of the English families is reminiscent of a capitalist society, the social drunkenness of University as well the social gatherings

in Kolkata could be disruptive to the logic of capital. While establishing the conflict of the novel, Amit Chaudhuri has placed the intangible Oxford against the solid background of India. The time-frame used by Amit Chaudhuri in *Afternoon Raag* in describing India and telling the narrator's relationship with his music teacher is quite interesting. Amit Chaudhuri has used present tense in telling the present tale of Oxford and past tense while describing the life in India and the narrator's relationship with his music teacher. In this regard Devika Bose makes a pertinent remark on Chaudhuri's art:

This is the present indefinite but soon after there is a smooth transit from the present to the past when the narrator describes a time.... Imperceptibly, there is a switch-on to the past where he recollects a few childhood events and then there is be a journey back to the present. Time is fluid here and the past and the present gently unite creating the atmosphere suitable to hold the musical analogy that runs throughout the novel. (103)

To conclude in brief, post colonialism also a literary assessment to texts that carry racist or colonial undertones. Postcolonial literature, finally in its most recent form, also attempts to critique the contemporary postcolonial discourse that has been shaped over recent times. It attempts to assimilate this v2ery emergence of postcolonialism and its literary expression itself.

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