

# The Creative Process and Subjectivities: Probing Consciousness in the Light of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*

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## Abstract

The present paper explores the diasporic consciousness and psychological dilemma of Amit Chaudhuri fictional characters who are all engaged in some kind of struggle. Cultural nostalgia becomes the major cause of suffering and loneliness. Most of Chaudhuri's characters have left their homeland. We, as human, tend to feel disturbed when we are alienated from their homeland. Displacement brings anxiety and the memory of home produces a sense of homelessness. Their mind is always disturbed because they don't know where they belong. At the same time, the paper also discusses that the self reflective nature of Chaudhuri characters creates problems for them. Some ideas from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* will be discussed here and there while discussing the mind of Chaudhuri's Characters.

**Keywords:** Chitta; Consciousness; Diasporic consciousness; Klesas; Mind; Self- reflection.

Consciousness is the most obvious but also most difficult thing to define. The word "consciousness" denotes awareness: the inner processes of experiencing events including perceiving, thinking, feeling and imagining: how does a character's mind undergo subjective, conscious experience? How does he explore his experiences? It is like exploring elements that affect a person's experiences. It is more like a narrative representation of consciousness of Amit Chaudhuri's fictional characters.

Amit Chaudhuri is a 21st century writer working in numerous genres. He has written fiction, poetry, stories, essays, memoir and literary criticism. He is also known as a good music composer and singer. His writings have

appeared in *The Guardian* and the *London Review of Books*. He has written seven novels: *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991), *Afternoon Raag* (1993), *Freedom Song* (1998), *A New World* (2000), *The Immortals* (2009), *Odysseus Abroad* (2014) and *Friend of My Youth* (2017). All these novels have been discussed to explore Chaudhuri's consciousness as well as his characters. Some of the ideas given by Patañjali in *Yoga Sutras* have also been used to analysis the mind of Chauhduri's characters. Patañjali is believed to have compiled *Yoga Sutras*. Yoga Sutras offer a comprehensive study of mind and consciousness. Patañjali has denoted the word consciousness as awareness: the inner processes of experiencing events including perceiving, thinking, feeling and imagining. These ideas are discussed here and there to explore the mental states of Chauhduri's characters: how do they behave, why they experience pain and happiness and why they react in a certain manner.

Patañjali is of the view that real reason of a man's suffering is his mind's attachment to an object, to memory and to a person. For example, mind's attachment to the memory of home in a foreign country becomes the cause of pain for most of Chaudhuri's characters. Home emerges as a cultural memory and belongingness. In *Afternoon Raag* Chaudhuri writes that home is "where one gathers from their talk, happiness or unhappiness is a more unsurprising, everyday affair than here, home, where, one speaks another language, with sister and mother and father" (231). Consciousness develops a desire to be with the object of happiness and becomes unhappy in its absence. When an object becomes the cause of our happiness and mind identifies with the object, it can result in anxiety in the absence of the object.

Desires, emotions and aspirations are part of a man. These disturb his mental peace. Memory is one of the *vrttis* (fluctuations of mind). Patañjali describes memory as the retention or, more literally, the not slipping away of an object of experience (44). An object experienced by a person forms an imprint in the mind. The attachment to the object results in pain upon the loss of the object. Most of Chaudhuri's characters have left their homeland. People tend to feel disturbed when they are alienated from their homeland. They often suffer from identity crisis and alienation. A diasporic person is always torn between conflicting cultural ideologies of homeland and the host land. This feeling of not belonging anywhere and rootlessness results in diasporic consciousness. They are always in search for their roots. Most of Chaudhuri's characters are alienated. All his characters ranging from Sandeep to Anada manifest a sense of exile and are suffering from identity crisis. They are physically and psychologically

affected. A sense of rootlessness, identity crisis, cultural alienation resides in them. They also suffer from socio-linguistic hurdle. Displacement also brings depression. The memory of home results in alienation and loneliness.

Memory of home can influence your present situation. For instance, Chaudhuri's sixth novel, *Odysseus Abroad*, follows a young Indian student, Ananda, who travels from his room in Warren Street to India, but only in his mind. This mental journey comprises eating food with his uncle Radesh, visiting shopping malls, listening to Indian classical music and so on. These external activities of Ananda glorify his flow of consciousness. He tries to overcome his sense of loneliness through such wanderings in the mind. But Ananda's memory of home disturbs his present life in London. It becomes a catalyst for his agitation and alienation. When people are dislocated, they try to locate themselves in their nostalgic past. This attachment leads to pain and agitation. Ananda's pain is the sum total of his past impressions.

One is reminded of Salman Rushdie who writes in book *East West*, "Home has become such a scattered, damaged, various concept in our present travails" (93). People who have left their homes are usually haunted by some sense of loss, rootlessness and alienation. For example, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* opens with Ashima recalling her homeland fondly. It is the story of a Bengali couple. They have moved to Cambridge from their ancestral homeland, Kolkata. Ashima desperately wishes to go home. She misses her family, but finds none to console. She reads and rereads the letters from home, written in Bengali, cherishing them sentimentally.

In the novel *Afternoon Raag* the mental condition of narrator during his stay at Oxford has been portrayed. He often indulges in memories of his parents of Bombay and Calcutta. For instance, he narrator often remembers her mother which shows his deep attachment with her. Such recollections serve deep insight into his character, her habit of eating at three o'clock in morning, and his insomnia. His dream is shattered after having visited Oxford because earlier it used to be dream like for him. He feels empty in Oxford. The present seems strange to him. The narrator's view of present may be compared to Rushdie's, "it is my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (9). The narrator's memories about past make him melancholic.

The narrator also feels distorted. A sense of rootlessness resides in him. He has no company. The only source for his mental comfort is his friend,

Sharma. But “the narrator did not have, like Sharma, the courage to emerge” (104). Sharma emerges as a symbolic representation of his home. The narrator needs Sharma to give him comfort psychologically. Sharma is a student at Oxford who also loves English language. Their common interest brings them together, “what brought us together, among other things, was a common love for English language. Each night, he would recount new idioms and words, he had picked up during the day (32).

Both Sharma and narrator have same goals in life. They prepare food together and buy eatables from Indian shops. The narrator begins to feel at home with him because he shows motherly care and attention. Sharma picks up new style and languages. People who have migrated try to drive away the sense of loneliness and alienation by creating a space in which they could be mentally happy. Sharma, on the other hand, is in a happy space. He likes to read literary works of Wordsworth and Shakespeare in Hindi translation.

The narrator is trying to escape his reality through contemporary commitments. Similarly, the narrator finds solace with his girlfriends Mandira and Shehnaz. But he is vacillating between the relationships he has with these two women. His mind is agitated. At a time he is thinking about his first girl Mandira, and then his mind shifts to Shehnaz. He is trying to escape from loneliness. He spends the day with one woman and sleeps with the other at night. He is too frustrated to take any decision:

I was still vacillating between Mandira and Shehnaz, falling asleep by one woman at night and spending the day with the other, but I had, for a forced, lucid period of time, come here to attend a seminar on Lawrence.(2)

Chaudhuri beautifully captures the psychology of young people, who come in terms with loneliness, alienation and nostalgia in their unique way. They are in mental unrest because they are not able to find their place and identity. All of Chaudhuri’s characters are deeply attached to the culture of their native country. Devika Bose in “The Novels of Amit Chaudhuri: Stories without Beginnings, Middle or Ends”, rightly observes the psychological connection of the writing with the characters as “past memories, and present impressions, are all mixed together like a mingling of different musical notes” (103). The narrator’s mental unrest is brought out beautifully in his own words. He is not able to find his place in society and his family:

Sometimes I try to keep myself busy for the entire day. I am really innocent and I have so many other things to do. I feel nostalgic of home among the background of speeches, books and friends. He compares himself generously and routinely like rain-showers which stop and start again (23)

Shehnaz also lives abroad and is also tormented by her lover's memories and her mind keeps wandering. She is exiled from herself. She had been married once, very briefly, and then divorced. Shehnaz is a lonely girl who is searching for a right company:

She was in search for a right person because she was very lonely. She was actually like a girl having a woman's body. She was dressed in black clothes, a red top and a coat, and white sneakers. (2)

Whenever she feels alienated, the narrator gives her company and vice-versa. But later he begins to avoid her and she is not able to forget the memory of his warmth and love, "I would hear that Shehnaz had been looking for me; going to her college, I would not find her there" (103). The narrator had a liking for her but he is fickle minded. Shehnaz is not able to get rid of the narrator's memory that is the main cause of her pain. Memory changes the state of mind. Memory, according to Patañjali, is the recollection of 'unforgotten' experiences, both conscious and unconscious. It is another *vritti* (mental fluctuation) wherein one remembers his past experiences. While doing so one is distracted from present and enters into his own world of imagination. It can be both good and painful events. *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras* puts light on the thought pattern and underlines how the past memories influence present state of mind.

Similarly, Mandira had an affair with the narrator. She is a very popular girl among students as well as tutors. After having an affair with the narrator, she is totally broken and disturbed. In her *mudha* (no enthusiasm for work and life) state of mind, she was not capable to distinguish between right and wrong. Her mind was overpowered by emotions devoid of any rational judgment. She has started leading a secluded life away from the clutches of the narrator. She discontinues her studies:

After a spell of depression, she decides to postpone her final by a year; in Trinity term, she moved out of the college, packed her things in two suitcases and left while her friends prepared for exams. She moved to a house in a blind lane off Cowley Road . . .

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Mandira then begins to live more or less alone, cut off from her old friends, her college routines, and her tutor, an old don in spectacles (99-100).

Mandira feels deceived by the Narrator and is not able to return to normal life. The narrator used to get comfort from Mandira and left her abruptly. Mandira was only a source of entertainment for the narrator. He used her for his own purposes. Mandira is not able to cut off herself from the narrator's memories. Finally, she decides to return to her family:

Mandira decides to go back to her parents and her, wisecracking sister, she will never mention it to them, and then she will get married. If she is married, she would like to have a baby in a year; it is something she has thought of, in a vague but intense way, for a long time. She will begin another life (123-24).

It becomes crucial to understand the behavior patterns of characters to get an idea of them. We, as human beings, are sum total of our past experiences and memories. Chaudhuri's third novel *Freedom Song* depicts the mindset of two characters Khuku and Bhola. They belong to a middle class family and are always worried about their children. Khuku and her husband Shib live a peaceful life and their son is doing research in Economics. Khuku conveys her mental disturbance because she is alienated from his own son, Bhaskar. He is involved in politics. He sells "Ganashakti" for Communist party. His being a party worker also bothers her. Bhaskar is a short-tempered person. His parents are concerned about his reluctance to find a lucrative job. He is not on good terms with his family members because he feels that they belittle him. He is frustrated because of his unfulfilled ambitions and seeks escape from reality in the projections of his imagination. He is thus in a state that Patañjali terms as *vikalpa* (imagination/mental speculation). He has created an imagined world for himself based on his mental proclivities. He had been interested in politics since childhood.

Bhaskar spends his time in performing plays and selling newspapers. He does not care about others' opinions. But he is frustrated. Even his cousin Mohit tells him to do *yoga* so that he could relax mentally. Mohit said:

You are growing old Bhaskar. The party must be in a bad way if they're taking members like you.' 'What do you think I should do?' 'I think you should do *yoga*,' said Mohit. Buy a book and learn *asanas*. Or you won't be selling newspapers for long. (15)

Bhaskar's wife Sandhya also feels agitated and lonely. She has no friend. Only her father and brother used to visit her to give her some comfort. She spends her time reading books and doing household chores. Bhaskar's relatives are excited to witness the change in his behaviour. But he remains the same:

Chaudhuri teases out their small secrets and pleasure, yet he is dismissive of their fears and anxieties, reluctant to explore their darker, more complicated recesses of their personalities. (Adil 20)

Each character is mentally tangled. One needs a strong mind to tackle the problems in life. Emotional attachment and mental bondage create suffering in life.

The novel *A New World* is about Jayojit Chatterjee's diasporic consciousness who feels alienated even in his native land. He feels uprooted and unsettled and is searching for his roots. Jayojit fails to relocate himself because of the cultural and economic changes that took place in India. He returns to Calcutta with much hope and aspirations but it is not the same city of his childhood. The technical advancement, globalization, cultural transition because of modernization and a more advanced way of living makes Jayojit feel stranger in his native land. He feels more restless when he realizes that even the city and its weather are causing problems for him and his son Bonny anymore. In the context R. Senitha and M. Prema in "Folie of Home in Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World*" remark:

He is a person who rests his home in an alien land, feeling that it would give him comfort. He is not able to rest himself in his homeland India, even though his parent lives there...Jayojit has fixed his home in America, but he is not mentally happy. Because it is the place where he has lost the belonging of his son and his wife....Psychologically he is in between the space neither to leave the place nor to accept it heartily. (168-69)

Chaudhuri himself has gone through the experiences of being a migrant. His other novels *Afternoon Raag* and *Odysseus Abroad* also deal with the problems of Indian emigrants. Nidagundi, in her article "Projection of Otherness in Indian Diasporic Writing" correctly opines that Chaudhuri's "protagonists live and study in England, but still they feel their otherness, not belonging to the place; they feel lonely and homesick. They crave everything Indian while they are away from home. In both the novels the author pay a lot of attention to the feelings and inner voices of the protag-

onists, their sufferings and sorrows, connected to being away from their homeland. Both the characters look forward to their move, but once in England, feel trapped and alone" (115).

Jayojit's Bengali wife, Amala, puts her husband through a nasty divorce after falling in love with her gynecologist. She has also gained custody of their young son, Vikram or Bonny. Jayojit is allowed to have Bonny with him only during the boy's school vacations. Jayojit feels obligated to take Bonny to Calcutta to get him to meet with his grandfather Admiral Chatterjee and his grandmother Ruby. Through Chaudhuri's precise and evocative writing, the reader experiences Jayojit's inner life and his past, particularly his struggle between the memories of India and of America. He is in a confused state of mind. He is not aware where does he belong. The city, his parents, his surroundings and his son seem stranger to him. This dilemma has made his life more pathetic and miserable. Life has become eventless, dull, boring and melancholic for him. The circumstances force him to leave the city before his holidays get over.

Jayojit's parents fail to comprehend his marriage collapse initially. Chaudhuri portrays the Bengali life in the novel within four walls of a flat. It also juxtaposes the failed marriage in contemporary times with the success of tradition marriages. Chaudhuri, in a careful manner, questions the narrative's belongingness. "This novel also contains the theme of diaspora and hence is a South Asian diaspora novel" (Gerenin 316). Jayojit has been depicted as a migrant visitor from the US. Suddenly his life seemed to be filled with happiness which was otherwise mundane. He starts bargaining with the taxi driver and feels a sense of being an Indian. His sense of pride in earning dollars proved him to be an outsider. "As per Jayojit, the people come from outside always feel a difference between the two places" (Saha 186).

Jayojit's parents' relation is not very conducive rather it is based on interdependence. Whenever they are together, there is an awkward silence between them. They have no common likings. Their relation is based upon on proper gender discrimination. Jayojit's mother has no identity of her own; she just follows the instructions given by her husband. "She had adored and feared him, of course, and paled beside him" (7). She is completely dependent on her son and husband. She is considered a "a household machine" by her husband (63). Vikram suffers the most as a result of their separation. He is under the custody of Jayojit from April to July:

Children who have conflicting parents face the dilemma of cus-



today. If they live with one parent they crave for the love for other's love and affection. A child needs his both parents to develop social values and the emotional overtones that comprise his personality to such an extent that the sudden interruption of this relationship is a shock to his developing personality. (Ahuja 193)

Vikram has created his imaginary world. He lives happy there. According to him, his home is accompanied with non-living things like airplane, destroyed creatures dinosaurs. He is seen "playing with two toy dinosaurs in the balcony" (16). It shows how mechanical his life has become. For him, these toys are his family.

It is very important to realize the cause of our own suffering. For example, in *The Immortals* Nirmalya suffers because of his imaginary ideals. He believes that he is different from others and can change the world. He adopts a life style which is not main stream. Nirmalya is the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Sengupta. A young dreamer who loves Indian classical music, he never liked being the only child of a business tycoon. Born into a rich family, he prefers a life of simplicity. For instance, he always wears somewhat tattered *kurtas*, remains unshaven and keeps disheveled hair. His parents are worried about him because he is interested in philosophy which is not money oriented.

Nirmalya puzzles others with his out-of-place image. The son of a successful businessman, he wears worn hand-woven kurtas and jeans, clothes. To the incongruousness of his clothes he adds a book of western philosophy, which he always carries with himself. (182-83)

Nirmalya's spiritual yearning (*vikshipta*) seems real in a world of middle-class complicity and its mediocre materialist ambitions. He searches for the meaning of his life and the reason for his existence. Nirmalya's desire to find the reason for his existence is suggested by Chaudhuri in the following manner:

Nirmalya tries to understand what defines the life; he used to wonder sometimes what makes life's existence possible, the purpose behind a person's life-long journey. For him, the universe appeared to him like a show with multiple dimensions and we cannot focus on one. He'd found hollowness in the pit of his stomach that makes him feel exceptionally old. He feels as if he'd been travelling for centuries. (111)

Nirmalya leaves India for England in order to learn philosophy. But towards the end of the novel, the reader can see a different Nirmalya whose zeal has faded and who is preoccupied with his correct appearance. He is finally able to cope up with the reality.

... before removing his spectacles he checked his reflection sadly in the mirror. 'Just a trim,' he flashed his scissors and ran the comb through Nirmalya's hair as if stroking a musical instrument. Two weeks later, he shaves his hair, moustache and his goatee. He was in some kind of pain and hurt. His face appears normal now like any other face, surprising pleasant-looking, almost certainly respectable. (365-366)

The main cause of Nirmalya's mother Mallika Sengupta's suffering is that she does not have an identity of her own; she is identified as Mr. Apurva Sengupta's wife who "shaped her life, even as an artist" (*The Immortals* 117). Chaudhuri gives details of her past, when she was a girl of aspirations; she wanted recognition and prestige. The contradiction between Mallika's past and present is not nostalgic but ironic: it is based on the past expectations of Mallika and her present reality. Her real self is not contented. Mallika "felt she'd just begun to discover existence; she'd accepted the benefits that came with her husband's position without affection, as if they had always been her due" (136).

It is notable that Mallika's lifestyle is in no way different from the lives of other wives of businessmen. She feels out of place in parties, which she attends for the sake of her husband. She says to her son, "I hate going to them. Your father says it is an important part of his job" (116). Chaudhuri evokes her inner struggle and the loss of selfhood thus:

Her own singing practices affected by parties. She was being sucked into the vortex and extravaganza of the company Managing Dictatorship; swallowed almost willingly, by its current. She couldn't remember what she said at the parties; others' remarks lodged themselves in her brain, what she said herself she often didn't know ... (115)

Mallika is not contented with her life, though she lives amidst plenty. "We are not rich, said Mrs. Sengupta. Infact, we are poor" (226). The phrase "we are poor" describes her inner struggle that there is a lack of something vital in Mallika's life. Chaudhuri thus captures tiny moments to probe the minds of characters. Galvan points to this aspect of Chaudhuri:

Quite often, to use Isherwood's phrase, Chaudhuri just behaves like a camera, he just follows them about, eavesdrops on their conversation and sees what they are doing. ("On Belonging and Not Belonging" 45)

Ramu, in *Friend of My Youth*, is addicted to heroin. His habit of taking drugs shows his psychological process. He is under some kind of stress and mental pain which has not been mentioned in the novel. He was restless and his mind keeps wandering. Chaudhuri's motive is to focus on his characters' interior rather than exterior behaviour. He reads their psyche to get a better idea of their personality. They all have different mind sets and traits. They have unfulfilled aspirations which lead to their suffering.

Chaudhuri's experiences have deeply influenced his writing skills. He always faced a paradoxical pull between the native land and elsewhere. His conflict of thoughts is revealed throughout his work. The writer feels great dichotomy between close and far, instead seeing the two as 'enmeshed intimately'. Chaudhuri believes that distance can produce a renewal of

Chaudhuri's consciousness is also filled with diasporic experiences because he has to leave in both Calcutta and Bombay, the cities of his birth and upbringing. He employs his experiences in all his novels. Chaudhuri's estrangement from his homeland creates a mood of nostalgia in his novels. For example, the narrator in *Afternoon Raag* feels loneliness at Oxford and often visits India, his parents in his memory. He does not feel at home at Oxford:

Strange place, Oxford, and strange discoveries one makes within it! Strange students' rooms, with their own, always slightly unfamiliar, dimensions.... Oxford is such a lonely place, such a small place, so few its streets and its landmarks that those who have felt some affection for each other come together again and again. (255-56)

Thus, most of Chaudhuri's narratives are a kind of search for home. His narratives are full of nostalgic moments. Chaudhuri is a great observer of human life with "nature and all natural objects in motion" (Spurgeon 50). His eyes are penetrating and he registers everything. To capture the motion of life, he shifts from one location to another, from present to past and from external impressions to internal.

Chaudhuri demonstrates a profound attentiveness to the workings of the

mind in connecting the senses with their objects. Noting this aspect, Galvan refers to Chaudhuri's perception of identity in these words:

You are a composition of interruptions, smells, sights, what you have overheard, memories ambitions, all kind of things. ("On Belonging and Not Belonging" 46)

Chaudhuri often describes places elaborately for their impact on consciousness. The landscape and its subtle impact on the consciousness of a person appeals to him more than the mental inscape. Calcutta, Bombay, England and Oxford frequently appear in his novels. These spaces announce the author's deep involvement at the level of observation. For instance, his first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* captures Calcutta with its unique cultural character perceived through the eyes of the twelve-year-old protagonist Sandeep. The boy's perspective transforms an otherwise ordinary place. The character's mind becomes a locus, a site of impressions, thoughts and feelings. The impressions created on the child's consciousness reveal a very different Calcutta. Chaudhuri emerges as a master in portraying the spontaneity of the human mind as well as human life.

## Conclusion

The present paper offers a practical perspective on the nature of human consciousness. As discussed above, Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* also provides some insights into the internal processes of Chaudhuri's characters. Although Chaudhuri's characters are grounded in his own experiences but he probes them sincerely. Chaudhuri, by the power of imagination, tries to live inside his characters and lets them live their reality.

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