

Chapter-6

A New World

Chaudhuri presents cultural amnesia in his Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel *A New World* (2000), the most provocative of his novels. It depicts the predicament of a post-colonial Indian alienated from his country, his culture, his language, his parents, his wife, his everybody, in his pursuit of post-colonial success. Looking at the title of the novel, *A New World* may make one wonder if the novelist has set out to do something like Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Huxley's *Brave New World* or even Thomas More's *Utopia*. That Chaudhuri proposes to do something newer is indicated by the title in which article "A" is placed before "New World". The novelist problematizes the title and throws in a sense of ambiguity about the newness of the world. If we just run through the pages, we come across nothing very new or spectacular in the novel. The plot of the novel is simple- A third world cosmopolitan, working in America for a living, returns to India with his young son and spends his summer holidays with his parents who live modestly in retirement in Calcutta and again goes back to the U.S.A. The story element in the novel is thin; it can be called one, of Jayojit (Joy) who comes to Calcutta in April with his son to stay with his parents in order to get over the blues of his divorce from Amala. That he likes the city is far from truth.

The narrative of this novel starts with Jayojit, a Bengali economist,

teaching in America. He visits his parents in Calcutta during his college holidays with his seven-year-old son, Bonny. He has recently divorced his wife, also a Bengali from Calcutta, who has left him to live with her lover who is a gynecologist and lives in America. The story describes his stay in Calcutta. In the process, we see his interaction with his parents, his parent's relationship and his own relationship with his parents. There are also flashback's to his broken marriage and his parents' abortive attempt to arrange a second marriage for him with a Bengali divorcee. He had met her on his previous visit but they had got nowhere. She had backed out; he now leaves for America, because he had seemed to be looking not so much for a wife as a governess for his son.

Chaudhuri is excellent at portraying little boys. It was a little boy at the centre of *A Strange and Sublime Address* that gave its story a wonderful freshness: it was written from his perspective. Bonny, Jayojit's son is beautifully described too. The story comes into life whenever he is on the scene. It's not as if he is naughty or mischievous or does anything special-self-sufficient, self conscious, playing with his toys, just by being himself, he draws affection from his father, doting grandparents and from readers too.

A New World is all about relationships between parents and children. Jayojit's parents are deftly depicted. His father is a retired Admiral of the Indian Navy. After a life of privilege, the old man and his wife now have to fend for themselves and count every penny of their dwindling savings. The retired Admiral has to take the bus to the bank because he can no longer afford a chauffeur for his battered old car. But

he is proud, when Jayojit wants to buy a washing machine for his mother, his father objects. His mother is disappointed, but she can't go against her husband. It's a traditional Indian marriage. Jayojit's father doesn't even always speak to his wife though both of them clearly depend on each other.

One is struck by how reticent and under-constructive the whole family is. Jayojit's mother affectionately teases her grandson and tries to pamper him and her husband and son with food, but apart from that there is no overt show of love and affection. Even when Jayojit's parents want him to extend his stay and spend a few more days with them, they ask if he can postpone his return to America rather than request him to stay on. This implies the changing pattern of relationships in an upper-middle class Bengali household where the close emotional bond has been replaced by formal decency. The impact of modernization and western culture has led to the weakening of family-ties.

But Jayojit has to go back. Just as the story opens with him and his son arriving at his parents' apartment in a taxi from the airport, the story ends with the two of them on a plane after being seen off by his parents. As the two of them tuck into their in-flight meal, it is clear Jayojit isn't coming back to India for good. He has found a new life in America.

It is not the Calcutta of *A Strange and Sublime Address* and he is not Sandeep. "The city irritated him-yet he had decided that it would give him the space for recoupment" (*A New World*, 51). The novel ends with Jayojit's departure with his son for Claremont in the States where his son will stay with him till the end of July and go to his mother living with her

boyfriend without marrying far away from the place. There appears to be nothing very much new about the world that the novel encloses in its pages.

Jayojit Chatterjee, more promising of the two sons of Admiral Anand and Ruby Chatterjee, does his B.A. in Economics from St. Stephens, wins a government scholarship to study abroad, but turns down the offer and goes to California for Graduate work in Economics. After the successful completion of his studies he teaches in a college at Claremont in Iowa. He marries a Bengali girl called Amala whose ancestors migrated from Sind and settled in Jodhpur Park. Jayojit and Amala settle down in Arlington and have a son after three years of their marriage. After the baby's birth they lose interest in each other and their marriage breaks. Amala runs off with her gynecologist friend and lives with him in San Diego in Southern America. After eight years' protracted legal battle both in American and Indian courts the couple gets a divorce and Jayojit wins custody of the child for the summer days only. Deep in the heat of April, Jayojit visits his parents living in Sunny Park Apartment at Ballygunge in Calcutta with his eight-year-old, very American son, Vikram to spend his summer vacation and return to America in June.

A New World, though a third person narrative, focalizes the consciousness of Jayojit and it is primarily his consciousness which helps us discover the trajectory of the new in the novel. To him, the life in a suburb of age-old metropolis Calcutta where he has gone to stay with his parents appears to be immersed in the new. The consciousness of other

characters, namely that of Admiral Anand Chatterjee, his wife Sumitra Chatterjee and his grandson Vikram (Bonny), has also been explored but it has been done just to help the protagonist define and refine his perceptions about a phase of life which is new and which **he** newly entered. The suburban life in Calcutta, the life lived in the eighties and nineties, is certainly new-the word new has often been attributively used-when set against the old world by which Jayojit "meant the fifties and sixties, where everything seemed more sacrosanct than at any other point in India's history" (148). Incidentally, though Jayojit lives in America and favours economic liberalization, he is bewildered by the new and "given a choice of being born at any time in India's past, he'd have chosen to be born in the thirties, so that he could have a taste of the first years of post-Independence India" (148).

What hurts Jayojit is the shrinking space that Bengali culture carries with itself and the changing face of the metropolis. His is a sensitive soul like the Clarissa of *Mrs. Dalloway*, who records everything he perceives with utmost sensitivity, economy and effect. There are things which may appear to be commonplace to others, for example, the rise of the moneyed people, "who had guaranteed their own self-perpetuating well-being, it seemed, for generations to come and the spurge of consumer culture but to Jayojit they do not. The dominance of the Marwaris and other Hindi speaking people in the city, especially its suburbs, ("Most of the residents of these flats weren't Bengali") the way the settlers bring with them the space that belongs to another culture, the change in the dress code of women with increasing popularity of *salwar*

and *kameez*, the craze for foreign things and travel, the institutions of "*adda*" giving way to increasing isolationism, the "banal nouveau-riche chatter" combining the "new street-talk with the immemorial, histrionic platitudes of traditions" (191), all these appear to be defamiliarizing the life in Calcutta.

But, above all these, it is the increasing encroachment of the Western mores in the traditional familial and societal relationship which perturbs the protagonist as well as the novelist. The major narrative statement in the novel is the breakdown of Jayojit's marriage and the resultant tensions and apprehensions. Jayojit's experience of going through it is new and unexpected. He is simply intrigued by it and fails to understand it. Though Amala and he could not get on from the very beginning "some urge to rehearse what their parents had done before them had taken hold of him, of her" (32).

Whereas he clings to it, Amala breaks out of it and he finds her getting involved with her already married gynecologist, "a not unpleasant-looking man in his forties who was balding slightly, and surely not charismatic", a person with bad breath. To imagine "how any woman in her right mind could prefer him to Jayojit" (57) is impossible for him as well as to "understand or interpret". Even Admiral Chatterjee, whose married life is deeply sunk in the unquestioning roles of the past, cannot explain this act of Amala and takes refuge into an old Sanskrit saying about women's nature. The effect of Jayojit's failed marriage is shattering on his parents "or, since the divorce, the Admiral and his wife had withdrawn into themselves and gone into a sort of mourning; their

flat had become a shell, and the neighbors' flat in their imagination, had moved further away" (44).

Even Dr. Sen, the cardiologist, who lived on the eighth floor in the same building and visited Admiral Chatterjee, whenever required, is astonished when he learns about this divorce. He cannot believe "that these things which he'd only remotely heard about could actually happen to real people. Part of his surprise was that Jayojit should be the incarnation of this breakdown; such a fine 'boy' educated abroad, obviously doing well in America, earning a sizeable amount in dollars, a person who should be eminently desirable, a 'catch', not a divorcee" (82).

What the divorce of Jayojit signifies is the emergence of the new world in the novel. This, however, is not so new - divorces happened in the old world also- as the cause for the divorce which we come by deconstructing the narrative discourse but which eludes the protagonist. At the back of his mind is the ancient Indian ideal of marriage - marriage for procreation and not recreation. This is why Bonny "instead of bringing them together, actually enabled them to separate into their own spheres of desire and loneliness" (57).

This is why the second marriage proposed between Arundhati and Jayojit does not come about because, according to Dr. Sen, "they said the man wants not a wife as much as a governess to look after his child"(83). The narrative of Amala is embedded in Jayojit's narrative. We know what she says and does through Jayojit's voice - a technique that Saul Bellow has used in his novels to characterize his women-and yet it is clear that Jayojit fails to recognize her sexuality and her selfhood. She is drawn to a

person who was kind to her and was a gynecologist. That the lover of Amala is a gynecologist is self-revealing: it indicates that he understands a woman (the root-word *gyne* means woman). On the contrary, Jayojit, whose name significantly means "one who is victorious over victory itself, is unyielding in place of understanding as far as Amala as "other" is concerned and cuts off sexual activity after the birth of Bonny and thinks that to feel desire is to be "vulnerable and exposed". He fails to understand why she should choose to go her own way when they "had grown up with the same background."

Now, Amit Chaudhuri is in no way a feminist nor is Jayojit, who considered feminism "an intellectual plague" (168) and had once argued with a Jewish colleague, "That America had taken away the constraints of the institution of marriage but replaced them with nothing else" (169). He is also aware of the extremities of feminism and, looking at the pictures of Bonny sans parents, he imagined "as if he'd been conceived in future when parents, were not only but also no longer necessary, but were no more possible" (48). All the same, Jayojit fails to understand Amala's assertion of her sexuality and selfhood semiotically encoded in his narrative: and it is this, not divorce, which causes commotion in the seemingly stable world of Calcutta. All this and much more, so minutely and sensitively observed and recorded, are enclosed by the trajectory 'new.'

But as new, if not newer, is Amit Chaudhuri's way of rendering this by offering a sudden insight into the soul of things, his use of epiphany. In place of hanging around foggy postcolonialism and postmodernism,

even Jayojit has no respect for them; the novelist uses some modernistic devices like "spatialization of time" (spatial juxtapositions) and creates masterly effects which appear to be as fresh and new as ever. He can catch the subtlest change in the mood of the weather, the minutest detail and the faintest shade of the landscape and the obscurest aspects of human action and interaction through the rendering of apparently ordinary looking episodes, happenings and the human and non human participants. He can illumine a character, a happening or an episode by the use of a word, a phrase or a sentence. This kind of literary technique sets him apart from his other contemporaries and adds richness to his writing.

What he does is equivalent to Joyce's use of epiphany in *Dubliners* which can broadly mean a sudden revelation of or insight into what Wordsworth calls: 'the life things'. It is needless to go into Joyce's conception and practice of epiphany as Chaudhuri is not consciously following his example but attempts something similar to what he has done. It is worth examining a few examples of what the novelist has achieved in this novel, Jayojit observes how his father never called him *baba* as many Bengalis do following "the age-old loving, inexplicable practice of fathers, calling their sons, 'father' (25).

He, however, finds him calling Bonny *dadu*, letting himself be more paternal and Bengali with him than with his son but doing it self-consciously. All this appears to be something commonplace though revealing a psychological insight into the Admiral's character. But in a flash the whole business of living is summed up in an innocent remark,

"Till they die, people keep trying to innocently adjust to life" (26). The sentence not only reveals essential reality of life but throws sidelight on the deep structure of Bengali culture under the surface structure of Western mores. On another occasion a digression into a "conversation about mortality" (172) between Admiral Chatterjee and Dr. Sen further digresses into the price of vegetables, fish and prawns, the advantages of a lower middle-class Bengali's meal, and the risks of eating meat. Now the Admiral throws in a question: "What's the point of living forever?" (173) and the Doctor quips in "That's a good one, Admiral Chatterjee, but you mustn't deprive me of a job" (173).

All this appears to be banal and Dr. Sen's remark is apparently humorous. All the same, it illumines a significant fact about life, that living is not an individual affair but a communal one: the life of one depends on the other. Similarly, the small episode of Bonny's asking "What's Kwality?" (94) And Jayojit's trying to explain what "quality" is and thinking to him how "everyday speech had entered the language of economics and vice versa" (95) is just ordinary and also charged with humour. It is only when Bonny asks "Why's it painted on the vans?" Jayojit realizes that his son is asking about and for ice cream and that he has become "something of a pedant with his son", a thing which suggestively reveals his inability to see into the "otherness" of others. Equally revealing is Mrs. Chatterjee's wrapping *guru* and sending it with her son when he leaves for America in spite of being told that such things are not allowed by the customs officials:

Jayojit unzipped his bag and took out the *Asian Age*. Beneath

it, there was a lump *of guru* that his mother had kept aside in the fridge from March, wrapped in newspaper and stored in a polythene packet-she'd been firm in her belief that the American customs men would look upon it kindly and let it through. (199-200)

Mrs. Chatterjee's secretly sending *guru* without telling Jayojit and believing that American customs men would at least allow this transforms this ordinary looking passage and *guru* does not remain "a clod of earth" as it is for the Americans but becomes a sign of love, wish for the well-being and sweetness, which it is to most Indians. It reveals spontaneous and not labored Indianness of the author and adds an old world flavour to the new one in which the protagonist finds himself.

Chaudhuri's novels are a discourse on the ordinary and commonplace but unless he is able to show how unique the ordinary and commonplace can be, he cannot be at peace with his creative self. He does so by the use of a literary strategy peculiar to himself and uncommon among other Indian English writers. He illuminates what is wondrous in the ordinary by carefully structured expressions or images. His comparisons, which remind us of metaphysical conceits, are especially striking: they are apt, suggestive and unexpected. He can transform a scene and charge it with human sensibility by the adroit employment of his words - adjectives, adverbs and verbs. Thus, Bonny's own shirt "dangled over him indeterminately" (41), the age of the girl, sitting" hovered anywhere between seventeen and twenty one (54) the sound of the crickets is "ancient but entirely of the present (73)

The novelist not only enlivens the quotidian reality but also humanizes it. He describes a banyan tree standing in the courtyard of a big house: "A banyan stood alone in the courtyard, and its shadow sat meditating beneath it" (93). One sentence alone can evoke the whole scene. Again the troubles of the long distance calls are not called technical problems but the mischief of some playful spirit: "The roar of the long-distance line that swallowed voices and sometimes sent them back" (90). Even the suitcase of Jayojit at the time of his departure for America acquires a life of its own: "Jayojit dragged out the suitcase to the front door; it seemed to possess suddenly, after months of invisibility, a stubbornness and independence" (186).

Chaudhuri's images are drawn from his wide experiences of life so minutely observed but when they are used to vivify the ordinary reality, they are charged with poetry, with the effect of the familiar and the strange going hand in hand with each other. The way people usually read stories provides an apt image for a very dissimilar kind of feeling - Admiral Chatterjee's interest in his younger son. "The thought of his other son, the younger one, Ranajit married (happily, he hoped!) for four years ... disturbed him only remotely, as would a story he was reading with interest, but mainly to get to the end" (67-68).

The Admiral feels irritated and intrigued at family planning of young people especially that of his son and daughter-in-law and this deliberate and preplanned act is likened to gambling: "No sign of children as yet; his daughter-in-law, Anita, was twenty-seven years old; couples waited and waited these days for the opportune moment to arrive as if it

were some kind of secret, as if they were gamblers hedging their bets endlessly" (68).

Jayojit's eagerness to write something to the *Statesman* after a considerable gap reminds the novelist of a teething child, though biting and writing are so disparate. "Later that afternoon, he even wondered if he should write the *Statesman* a letter; leisure had slowed down his thoughts, and he'd been too long away from the lecturing mode; like a teething child, faintly despondent, he needed to bite into something" (112).

There are numerous other images of this kind. The schoolmates of Jayojit would vanish from Ooty as the rains came "as if they'd muttered a mantra that made them dissolve into the atmosphere" (139). Dr. Sen's hesitant way of speaking is compared to a musician's "sounding ... the first, tentative notes on an instrument" (135). The popularity of *salwaar kameez* instead of traditional Bengali dress for women strikes Jayojit as it would strike a sensitive poet, "When he'd married Amala, the *salwaar kameez* had just come into fashion; it had multiplied multifarious and pleasing, like an annual blossoming" (144).

Banal and commonplace things like hurry to catch the train, noise in the railway canteen and announcement in the departure lounge also come handy for powerful imagery. Thus, houses in Jodhpur Park, were "hurriedly and frantically, numbered ... as if the planner, when conceiving of this serene and perfectly pleasant area had a train to catch" (138). Anand Chatterjee behind the sound of the cutlery "made a lot of noise like one busily dispatching a meal in a railway canteen" (75). The

watchman gets distracted when Jayojit's car stops at the gate "like a traveler in a departure lounge, who, realizes after an unspecified interval that his name's being announced" (37). Chaudhuri does not leave out using even "discotheque" (disco) a new feature in the new world, for an effective image: "Near the steps was a group of teenagers in t-shirts. They were half-defined; in semi-darkness, as in the inside of a discotheque" (126).

It would be in place to underscore Chaudhuri's tendency to use, a little too; much, expressions like "as if, "in the way as", "as ...as", "like" as well as; metaphorical constructions. By doing so he elevates even the banal and commonplace to the level of literary.

While trying to explore the new-comparatively new-we cannot ignore Chaudhuri's use of the English language for creative purposes which has been highly commended and recommended by the critics and reviewers, evident from even a cursory glance at the blurbs of his novels. Amit Chaudhuri the examples of A.K. Ramanujan and Dom Moraes, to name a few, who have successfully used ordinary English without bending or subverting it to render "a way of life (xxxviii)" natural to us. The novelist has his own ways of doing it and one of them is to aestheticize plain and simple words, to use them "estranging" and to evoke images of life which are familiar but peculiar.

It has already been illustrated how he uses comparisons to defamiliarise the familiar and how his suggestive use of expressions leads to what can be called epiphany. He aestheticizes his language by all sorts of tropes and is not shy of even alliteration as expressions like "airy-fairy

theory" (100), "fleeting fear" (67) and "amusement and amazement" (17) bear it out. Chaudhuri's sense of language percolates even to his sense of grammar, which unlike that of other Indian English writers is unerring. Thus, Jayojit cannot excuse Shaila Motane's "avail our services" in place of "availing yourself of" (126). On another occasion, Jayojit tells Dr. Sen to look after his parents after his departure for America but soon finds "look after isn't the right word, of course, look in on them rather" (174). The novelist can use simple, exact and minimum words for telling effects and vivification of the description. The "excitable" temperament of Admiral Chatterjee is rendered thus: "He's always been rather excitable", said Jayojit, looking back, for a moment, at his father's life. What he'd meant was that the Admiral had raw nerves; always in battle position" (174).

The expression "always in battle position" tells a whole world about the Admiral's disposition and cannot be bettered. We can take another random example; describing the dhobi returning washed and ironed clothes to Mrs. Chatterjee, Jayojit's mother:

He lifted the items of clothing, with a detached saintly but with an unobtrusive cunning as well, one by one and handed them to Mrs. Chatterjee, who inspected each with suspicion. It reminded Jayojit of the way he'd seen her, in the past, examining 'bargains with a tired but amenable gaze in various shops. Clean sheets, folded on top of each other, saris, pressed and starched, crisp with the heat; there were few things to rival washed clothes in their undisappointing

recurrence. (59)

The significant aspects of both Dhobi's and Mrs. Chatterjee's life could not be more perfectly rendered. Even the washed and ironed clothes of a dhobi yield the profound poetic sense of the writer and read like a line from a lyric. He moulds his English with such a profound skill that it turns into a convenient, agreeable linguistic tool, too, to capture the minutiae of local Bengali life and culture.

The kind of English Amit Chaudhuri writes is undoubtedly new, not that no one has so far attempted to do what he has done but only a few have been as successful as he. Another distinguishing feature of Chaudhuri's style is that he can use various registers and words from languages other than English effortlessly. The novel deals with the life of those who speak English or Bengali and sometimes have to use Hindi. Though the novel is written in English, Chaudhuri seldom leaves us in doubt as to who speaks which language or uses which register.

There are those who mostly speak English like Jayojit, Bonny and Admiral Chatterjee. Then there are some who usually speak Bengali like Jayojit's mother the maid-servants who work at his home, shopkeepers and others. There are a few who speak Hindi. Some of these characters can speak English, Bengali and even Hindi as does Jayojit. In spite of the writer using Bengali and Hindi words and expressions as well as various registers the novel does not acquire any postcolonial hybridity and the reader seldom gets stuck at any word or expression. The novelist uses such expression as "Jayojit said in Bengali, as if he were speaking in a foreign language" (94) or Admiral Chatterjee's "Bengali words (*Tumi ki*

bolochho oke?) sounded as unconfontational as flute-music" (106), Jayojit said to the watchman in Hindi" (150) and "Said Dr. Sen, again in English" (172).

The novelist often does not translate a Hindi or Bengali expression into English nor does he append a glossary of Hindi and Bengali words with equivalents in English at the end of the novel but often the meaning is adequately suggested by the context. For example, Jayojit, after touching his father's feet, tells his son Bonny (Vikram) "*Paranam karo, Bonny*" and the meaning becomes clear when he walked "towards his grand-father, to touch his feet" (7). Sometimes Chaudhuri gives only English equivalents of Hindi or Bengali expressions such as "dry vegetable preparation" (23) and the *luchis*, "droopy ones that hadn't puffed properly" (27). He also tells us how Indians use "abroad" to refer principally to America (78), and how "there" means America to Admiral Chatterjee now who thought it formerly meant in-laws' for him. Thus, words and expressions from languages other than English and even English equivalents of these expressions are artfully contextualized to make them yield their meaning to those who speak and understand English only.

Not much is new in the texture of the novel except that it is more variegated and skillfully woven than the earlier novels are. The novelist, as Naik and Narayan assert, "Seems to dispense with the narrative altogether" (71) and is interested only in discourse, not so much in plotting events and episodes as in capturing the moods of the people, time and place.

The impressions that stick to the mind are the feelings and emotions which may rise gradually but overwhelm us eventually. Jayojit, the protagonist, one of the incarnations of the novelist himself (consider his East Bengali origin, his views on theory, feminism, globalization and his sailing on two boats of Kolkata and Claremont), visits his parents with his son in scorching heat to cool down the heat in his heart, generated by his divorce from Amala and battle over the custody of his son. Nothing spectacular happens unless the usual daily activities can be called spectacular.

All we get to know about Jayojit is how he spends his day, how he gets up, takes bath, takes breakfast, goes to market, talks to acquaintances, spends time with his son and parents and so on. Neither anything romantic happens in spite of his faint desire for a second marriage and interest in Arundhati, his uncertain interest in girls at the bank and unexpected desire to meet the Salvation Army girl on his next visit to India. In fact, Chaudhuri's protagonists are hesitant to enter this volatile and stormy zone. Things happen as they happen in life with no planning and no expectation.

There are hardly any borders between present and past and we hover over the two without bothering or being certain where we are. We slip in and slip out from one place to another, from memory and desire to quotidian reality, from one frame of mind to another oneself-consciously. When we close the novel what strikes the mind is the poetic rendering of the complex daily life and personality of Jayojit, an economist and writer, who had "laid an early and important cornerstone" of "as yet unfinished,

brickwork of India's new economic order", who feels perturbed and puzzled by his wife taking divorce from him and living with another person and who feels bedeviled and beleaguered by the new economic and cultural forces swamping a comparatively placid but cultured society of Bengal. Jayojit's concern for his son and anguish at having him for a brief period also impinges on our consciousness.

We are given glimpses into Jayojit's childhood, his student days including interview for British scholarship, his marriage with Amala, drying up of love between them, his relations with his parents, his hesitant willingness to give" arranged marriage a second go", his views on social justice and liberalization, his fragile dollar pride, his awkwardness in dealing with a person outside his social sphere through a kind of interior monologue but without the sophistication and subtleties of such writers as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

There are other figures in the warp and the weft of the novel. There is Admiral Chatterjee and his wife, the parents of Jayojit, who are, like any parents, too much concerned about their son and grandson and who scatter the old world charm in the new world of the novel. Jayojit's ex-wife Amala engages the imagination of the novelist but she has been drawn as she emerges on the consciousness of her husband. Ranajit and Anita-Admiral Chatterjee's younger son and daughter-in-law-are seen through the eyes of the protagonist and serve as a sort of foil. Then, there is Dr. Sen, "a *bhadraloka* and healer personified", like some other characters casually mentioned earlier (81) he gets creative focus later on. We cannot forget gossipy Mrs. Gupta (129-130) continually chattering

about her niece in England, for whom England and America are the same. We have Arundhati, a girl having the same marital status as Jayojit, and sought in second marriage for him. There are servants, watchmen and shopkeepers who flit across our vision and are after a while are seen no more.

"Cultural amnesia" is implicitly manifest in the depiction of Bengali life, customs and affinities, and in the monotonous repetitive details of the engagements of the Chatterjees. The crux of the novel is neither economics nor emigration nor man-woman conflict nor adultery that the novel apparently touches upon nor the existential dilemmas of "forlornness, anxiety and despair" that the immigrants grapple with but the trivialities of everyday existence beginning from the arrival of Jayojit at his parents' residence till he boards the plane for America. Chaudhuri has no conflict to resolve, no novelty to explore, no nostalgia for the unattainable, no anguish of personal loss and what is more, there is even no suspense and surprise to engage the readers.

The major bulk of the novel consists of sentimental rendering of three generations of postcolonial Bengali *Babus* but the delineation lingers mostly on mundane banalities. It begins with the petty everyday life of the old Chatterjee what they eat, how they dress in different times of the day, how they spend their leisure, how they look after their son and grandson, how they remember their old acquaintances, the life they spent in the navy cantonments with privileges of high military rank; how Mrs. Chatterjee prepares delicacies for her son and grandson and how indolently she treats her grandson.

These is a vivid account of Jayojit's life with his parents-how he chats laconically with his ailing father, resists his mother's dainty dishes for fear of gaining weight, how he visits his bank, confirms his return ticket, encashes his traveler's cheques, converts them into fixed deposits; finally how young Bonny frightened by the 'foreign' local kids retreats to dinosaur games and walks the Kolkata streets with his father. Occasional references to glammers of American life add pleasant deviations to monotony of life at Ballygunge, to the din and bustle of the market places at the adjoining Gariahat, traffic jams, irresponsible and indifferent behaviour of the people at government offices, and banks, and the squalor and poverty around. Subroto Roy's remarks on the content of the novel are revealing:

The bulk of this book is, however, not about adultery or America's Indian immigrants or economics, as the author and publisher have projected it to be. The bulk has to do with the author speaking as he has done before, sometimes in excruciatingly tedious detail, about his own life as he has lived it in Calcutta's upper middle class Sunny Park Apartments, half way between the traditional Bengali area of Gariahat Market and the Muslim/Anglo Indian area of Park Circus and Park Street. (*The Literary Criterion*, 10)

What is new in *A New World* is Chaudhuri's poetic rendering of locality, temporality and humanity, both alternately and simultaneously and blurring the borderlines between them. The canvas is small but our vision is often led to the wider world by the novelist's masterly use of

irony, suggestiveness, imagery and epiphany. The "delicate *tableaux vivants*" (*TLS*) which the novel offers are sometimes clearly etched but often ambiguous and ambivalent, like any good literary creation. *A New World* may appear to be similar to other novels of Chaudhuri but in tone and temper it is significantly different from them and distinguishes itself from them by a new maturity and self-assurance in dealing with life, language and literariness.

Chaudhuri does not make the most of both the worlds-the Third World and the First World-but creates a new sociological reality, a perilous territory of not belonging-a new world where every character is a refugee. This world assumes that the most important events of life are not necessarily grand, spectacular or catastrophic but the apparently small and prosaic ones of everyday life. For Chaudhuri 'life insists on small movements' and there can be no final place in terms of 'space' in life. Appropriately his hero, Jayojit, just before boarding his plane to America, remembers moodily the spirit of the *Upanishads* and recites to himself: He moves, and he moves not.. -He is near, and yet he is far' (195).

A New World is conspicuous for its delineation of space which ranges from kitchen to airport lounge. A view of the kitchen, though only a fleeting one, throws light on the frugal eating habits of Jayojit's parents. Chaudhuri tells much leaving a lot unsaid to be gathered and surmised by the readers :

Jayojit's mother was in the kitchen. Tonight's leftovers would be eaten for lunch next day; she would be too tired to cook again tomorrow. And once Jayojit and Bonny had gone in the evening, they - Jayojit's

parents - would have a light meal of the daal and vegetables that Maya had cooked earlier. (176) Despite having lived in America, Jayojit has not been able to do away with Bengali appetite for fish. While he made a request to his parents for cooking a boneless fish, he had temporarily shed the air of formality which accompanied such an occasion. His parents complied with his wish and a parshe fish was brought from the market to be cooked on the eve of his departure to America. Alongside the taste for a particular kind of food - fish in this instance - Chaudhuri has placed a description of the club which his parents used to attend. If the kitchen stands for a private domestic space, the club also signals the public space where only the upper class gentry is allowed as members. The decorum of the club suggests a peculiar and specific culture - the elite culture which did not allow the outsiders to join it. In other words, it represents a cultural enclave which includes the chosen few, excluding the rest. Jayojit, for one, did not like this exclusionist community called a club :

He did not like the club. He wasn't a member himself, and not being one, had to accompany his parents as a guest, a sort of overgrown child, allowed to sit with them but not to sign the bills or pay for the meals and drinks. Reluctant waiters would come to take their orders, and intermittently people would drift through elegant arches towards their table to speak to his parents as they were passing. When they found out that he was a 'Non-Resident Indian', some would squint with curiosity, as once people might have regarded holy men or charlatans. (177-78)

In fact, Jayojit was introduced as a young economist to others in

the club who were inquisitive about his acquaintance with the distinguished Bengali economist, Dr. Amartya Sen. They took it as a cue but Jayojit was least interested in stretching it any farther, halting it with uncertain gestures. Chaudhuri skillfully points out the similarities and contrasts between Dr. Sen and Jayojit :

Really, he and Sen had nothing in common (given the fact that they were both Bengali, and economists), except that now, they had had the experience of a failed marriage as well. Sen, with chastening resilience, had married again, while Jayojit was still trying to grope for a balance in the second phase of his life, and the idea of marriage seemed to him to involve too much spiritual effort. (178)

Jayojit's failed marriage has left him disoriented. He is, in fact, on the horns of a dilemma particularly because he has lost his wife and enjoys only a partial custody over his son. He is neither of Calcutta or India nor of America. However, he looks inquiringly at the airport to find some Bengalis who are known to him. This desire to be in the company of an acquainted Bengali fellow points to his own Bengaliness, and his rootedness in local Bengali culture :

... Jayojit looked around swiftly to see if there was anyone he recognized; there was always the risk, on Bangladesh Biman, of meeting someone you might have known casually in your past, of performing the usual surprised greetings, of slipping into small talk in a piecemeal hodge-podge Bengali and English about some wedding you were to have attended or some ailment you'd recently had treated and explaining, in front of the check-in desk, your presence here at this moment. (190)

Chaudhuri does not miss any occasion to depict men and manners which signify their cultural background. While Jayojit's parents sit in the hall of the airport lounge, there are other people waiting there too, with the sole purpose of seeing their family-members or relatives off. The author has noted their behaviour : Between them they shared laughter and what seemed to Admiral's ears like banal, nouveau-riche chatter; the kind of patois, increasingly heard, that combines the indecipherable new street-talk with the immemorial histrionic platitudes of tradition. (191) Jayojit steals sometime as an excuse to buy some book or magazine and in the process comes by a woman who stared at him dispassionately:

Someone was watching him. It was a woman in a wheelchair, a widow in a white sari, someone had left her at the entrance to the bookshop. She too was going to make a journey : Jayojit's return of her gaze had no effect on her. She continued to stare at him, without hostility or friendliness. (193)

However, leaving Calcutta is not an easy experience for Jayojit. It was the city of his boyhood, a place where his parents had settled for good but his new middle class ambition prompted him to leave it. In a way, he had come to Calcutta to feel some respite from the pain which was caused by the break of his marriage. Jayojit can ill afford to shake off the attachment with the city of Calcutta, the cornerstone of Bengali life and Culture. On board the place he comes across a Bengali woman : Among the passengers was the Bengali lady he'd had a few words with, in a seat a couple of rows behind him. He sent her a smile of cordial, if non-committal, recognition, so important in these situations. (195) His

attachment to Bengali people is manifest even as he is on board the plane : Getting up to go to the toilet, Jayojit looked round to see if there were any Indian Bengalis on the plane. There they were so easy to identify, myopie, the men slight and in nondescript Western clothes the women betrayed by the telltale trace of vermillion in their hair. (199)

However, along with all these, Amit Chaudhuri, has also hinted upon some of the other problematic aspects of the city of Calcutta such as the issue of unemployment and economic liberalization, the gradual decline of the industries especially the small and indigenous industries and enterprises in the city, alarming condition of health and hygiene in the metropolis, the ever haunting issue of the extended population in the city of Calcutta, and the issues concerning social life and relationship in an age-old metropolis like Calcutta. Problematic aspects apart, Chaudhuri, nonetheless, represents the city of Calcutta in his novels too ". . . like a work of modern art [too] that neither makes sense nor has utility, but exists for some esoteric aesthetic reason" (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 11).

Thus, the old middle class is represented by an unchanging material culture, whereas the new middle class has a material culture that changes according to fashion. It is worthwhile to investigate some of the different ways in which the new middle class material culture has changed: first through empirical examples and then through some examples from the Journalist Amrit Dhillon writes about India's middle classes, and in an interview with a young male professional about rising standards of living and disposable income, the professional says of his

lifestyle: "I spend on two restaurant meals what my mother used to spend running the house for a month" (Dhillon. 2004- 5). This comment highlights the extent of the pace of change in terms of salaries and the availability of opportunities through which to purchase goods and services not for necessities but for luxuries. This suggests that new ways of measuring wealth are developing among the middle classes. So alongside traditional forms of wealth such as gold, jewellery and property, there might also be added newer forms of wealth related to modes of consumption, and include activities like luxury holidays within India, foreign holidays, items such as imported clothing and cars, or restaurant meals as in the case of Dhillon's interviewee (Shurmer-Smith, 2000).

It is evident from the foregoing analysis of **A New World** that Chaudhuri has dealt with the themes of change and transition in relation to the family, the middle classes, and economic changes affecting employment and lifestyle, which are the hall- marks of the Indian society and culture. It has been possible through an examination of the worldliness of this novel, and through affiliation to other domestic novels in terms of style and themes to explore how the family and the home are important in symbolizing middle class values. As a whole during times of instability and change, the form and the textual response of the novel portrays the ambivalence of the 'old' middle class who appear to view themselves as staid and serious, and yet are critical of the 'new' middle class who are viewed as upstart nouveau riche. *Freedom Song* depicts the 'old' middle class lifestyle in a nostalgic time warp. It represents the

intrusion of 'gangster culture' into the narrative implying that capitalism is an imperfect ideology and way of living. **A New World** represents one distinct take on the 'old' middle class and raises issues about how certain sections of Indian society are coping with this transition from the old to the new.
