
Glocal Perspectives in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri

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Article Received: 13/04/2025**Article Accepted:** 15/05/2025**Published Online:** 17/05/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.18.05.252

Abstract: *Glocal perspectives* refer to the blending of global and local influences, experiences, and perspectives. This concept recognizes that in our increasingly interconnected world, local communities and individuals are affected by global trends, ideas, and events, and vice versa. Glocal perspectives emphasize the interconnectedness of local and global dynamics, highlighting the ways in which global forces shape local contexts and vice versa. Amit Chaudhuri's novels often offer glocal perspectives, blending local and global elements to provide nuanced portrayals of characters and settings in his novels. His characters navigate between local traditions and global influences, reflecting the complexities of contemporary identities shaped by both local heritage and global interactions. Through his characters' experiences, he examines issues such as migration, economic inequality, and cultural exchange, shedding light on the complexities of adapting to a rapidly changing world while maintaining ties to one's local roots. Despite the global themes, he retains a strong sense of place, grounding his stories in the specific locales of India. Through vivid descriptions of streets, neighborhoods, and landmarks, he captures the unique atmospheres and rhythms of urban life, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the glocal settings of his narratives. Overall, Chaudhuri's novels exemplify glocal perspectives by blending local specificity with global themes, offering nuanced portrayals of characters and communities navigating the complexities of a rapidly globalizing world.

Keywords: Glocal, Local tradition, Global influence, Migration, Cultural exchange

Introduction: Amit Chaudhuri being a realist, his novels highlight the minute details of everyday life, hopes and desires of middle class people, changing traditional values, etc., A writer with social consciousness, becomes genuine in representing the human condition as he converges reality into fiction.

In the fictions of Amit Chaudhuri, one can find the true representation of Contemporary Indian life, traditions and culture in its vivid and realistic form. His social realism includes his understanding that human lives in middle class who are limited with opportunities. Social customs and reality are intensely described with unbiased objectivity and

complete detached observation. His novels are the expression of various problems of middle class society in which he has been involved. He has an eye for everything that relates to and is related to the life of middle class, Bengali middle class, he delineates in his works. His creative focus falls on customs, traditions, superstitions, the way people talk, take bath, drape themselves, meet, worship, and indulge in singing and music and the way people, things and happenings interact with one another, in brief the humdrum quotidian routine of life.

Amit Chaudhuri's novel celebrates the local culture of Bengal and highlights the significance of the middle class life in Bengal, especially in Kolkata. His fictional range is limited and he has confined himself to the representation of the Bengali middle class and its culture. Such small things as applying mustard oil to the limbs of the child, washing of cloths, wringing them and spreading them on a clothes-line, serving and eating various kinds of food, graffiti on the wall, the birds especially pigeons spontaneously making abstract designs with their droppings, cannot escape his eyes.

All his novels revolve around family life. His Characters in his novels may be it children in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Adolescence in *Afternoon Raag* and *Odysseus Abroad*, Professional men in *A New World* all in one way or the other are connected or related to a family. Bengali Middle class family is the thread that weaves his novels more realistically. His novels have become wider and more realistic in their depiction of the social life within and outside Bengal.

In *A Strange and Sublime Address*—Chaudhuri comes out with an astounding sense of reality. The boy Sandeep, who visits his uncle's house in Calcutta- is merely surprised by the buzzing activities of the city life. Through the eyes of narrator, as if he peeps over the shoulders of Sandeep—the minute details have the strokes of accuracy of everyday life. The writer grips our attention with observations like, “Daily, Calcutta disintegrates, unwhispering, into dust, and daily it rises from dust again” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 13). Here the city Calcutta is compared with the mythological bird, the Phoenix. Every detail in the novel has its proper place and the detail is linked with the child's world view that juxtaposed against adult choices and attitudes. Chaudhuri celebrates not only the simple joys of childhood - bathing, eating, sleeping and exploring the city - but also the business of living, streets of Calcutta and their style, etc.

Facets of life in Calcutta in 1980s are revealed with minute accuracy and unflinching humour. He beautifully weaves the fascinating novel and depicts the ordinary details of everyday life of an individual. He is conscious of his surroundings and never skips a smallest thing like killing the insect, lizard catching an insect, a rickshaw puller killing mosquitoes, etc. This novel has no mystery, no suspense, no heroism and no miracle but it is quite fascinating with ordinary day to day reality.

The novel is about the city Calcutta and the people like Chottomama, Mamima, Sandeep, Abhi, Babla Sandeep's mother and many others who live in it. The events that take

in place in Indian families are transformed into a verbal portrait in the hands of Chaudhuri. With parents and children, uncles, aunts and sometimes cousins, presided over by benevolent grandparents, all of them living together under a single roof.

Chottomama and his family is seen throughout the novel. He is a Marxist thinker. The narrator points him as “a water—closet thinker”, who ponders on ‘world affairs’, ‘home affairs’ (Chaudhuri, ASASA 61). His cousins Abhijit and Surjit (Abhi and Babla), younger than Sandeep, all are busy with their games wrestling to be the mode of intimacy, “an excuse for embracing, touching, exploring each other’s presence” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 5). Like this there are many incidents and situations in the novel, which have been described with wit and originality in which the readers can almost picturises every actions written in this novel. The narration becomes interesting when the author describes the soaking of tamarind and babies in mustard oil. He says,

In Bengal, both tamarind and babies are soaked in mustard oil, and then left upon a mat on the terrace to absorb the morning sun. The tamarind is left out till it dries up and shrivels into an inimitable flavor and a ripe old age; but the babies are brought in before it gets too hot, and then bathed in cool water. (Chaudhuri, ASASA 8)

His humour is also irresistible in the novel, the taxi which is hired by his aunt is on the verge of collapse, “only the dust and the grease and grime and rust between the arthritic joints kept it from falling into a desultory heap” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 52) and when Chottomama recovers from heart attack, the doctor advises him to avoid excitement, especially during matches between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan. His patients used to listen to the radio commentary on football matches, enthusiastically supporting Mohun Bagan. The doctor advises him to be impartial in his sympathies in future.

Chaudhuri being a realist, often talks about the renewal, even re-discovery of our perception of things, of investing them with magic- not with the magic of magic realism but with the magic of childhood, so the author also becomes a ten year old boy to understand the wavelength of Sandeep and his cousins in the novel. Childhood is a repository of treasurable experience that most of the novelists fall back on at least in their first attempt at writing. So does Chaudhuri’s journey as a novelist starts with his novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, which is a realistic portrayal of the childrens’ world. It seems that Chaudhuri is a psychologist who knows exactly about a child’s mind. The world of children has been presented with perfect details. Kolkata—the city becomes epicentral in Sandeep’s world, the ten year old, and the things related to the adults are being described by him. The world of adult’s seems strange and amusing to Sandeep and his cousins.

Through the eyes of the child he turns the adult’s world upside down. The world of children is full of fantasy, and they live in the world of illusion. The real world may be an illusion for them. This illusory world of children becomes successfully alive by the artist—Chaudhuri. These children connect the reality through fantasy. Sandeep feels that “‘real’

story, with its beginning, middle, and conclusion, would never be told, because it did not exist” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 68).

The world of Sandeep, Abhi and Babla, during their holidays in Calcutta seems to dream to them. There are many incidents that connect the real with fantasy in our day-to-day life. Each description of the objects is told with humour as these children try to make sense of the world of adult around them. They observe the actions of the adults as they are performing a play.

Chaudhuri stresses with great care the contrast between the adult’s way of life and the child’s world view. The following passage is written from the adult’s point of view:

They [the children] lived in their own world which was half illusion, because it was founded so much on fantasy and half real, palpably real, because its tissue was wholly made of sensations. When they would grow up, and their lives and the lives of the grown-ups would be retold, they would seem like fairy tales and legends....They roamed in a silent, self-created web of sounds, smells and colors. (Chaudhuri, ASASA 121)

Massage of the children before bathing, the act performed by Mamima, Sandeep’s maternal aunt becomes magic to these children:

She twisted them, took them apart, put them together; --- she rubbed an arm or leg, it appeared to detach itself from the body, with a wonderful absence of pain, and come into her skilful hands, a live, grotesque appendage. She would oil it till it shone, and then fix it, with a grim, satisfied smile, where it belonged. (Chaudhuri, ASASA 7)

While reading this passage, a simple act of bathing takes on the overtones of a ritual and a keen sense of nostalgia assails the readers. When Sandeep was to take his first bath in Calcutta, the narrator observes: “There was a tap in the middle; at the top, a round eye sprinkled with orifices protruded from a pipe that was bent downward like the neck of a tired giraffe; this was the shower” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 8-9). Here Sandeep compares the shower in the bathroom with Giraffe’s neck, which is beautifully described in the above lines. People use shower daily in their life but they have not imagined it to be a Giraffe’s neck as Chaudhuri has described.

Every one in this world knows what storm is, it is the disturbance of the atmosphere with strong winds, but for the children they think that is the work of ghosts and spirits.

Bend! Rise! Bend! Rise! And, Slam! A door or a window banged shut without warning; ghosts and spirits were abroad, making mischief, distracting the servants, knocking at the windows. Only the children had time to investigate or smile at the spirits, because the grown-ups were busy, panicky. (Chaudhuri, ASASA 85)

In this passage it is clear that, the children can comprehend the ordinary realities through fantasy. Here instead of storm the supernatural is given importance by the children, where the adults were busy with their own work and they had no time to think of storm but these children were in their own imagination world thinking that it is the effect of ghosts.

Here is another example for the children's imagination that an insect getting into the ear of child is a trivial matter for grown-ups but for Babla, he thought that the insect is on secret mission to spy on him and he describes the way the insect came out of his ear and it was killed by his mother, "a flying-ant came out from the darkness of the tunnel into the dazzling,Mamima killed it swiftly with a magazine, and it appeared quite ready to die, as if its mission in life were now complete. (Chaudhuri, ASASA 97)

Amit Chaudhuri uses child's view of life to see ordinary things in a new light. The daily happenings became defamiliarised when they are presented as miracles. Restoration of light after power cut is an usual thing which happens daily in the places of power shortage, but for the kids in this novel it is the work of some magician who do miracles by moving his magic stick. "The effect of the opposite of blowing out candles on a birthday cake: it was as if someone had blown on a set of unlit candles, and the magi exhalation had brought a flame to every wick at once" (Chaudhuri, ASASA 70). Here again the reality is compared with the supernatural, while describing about the power supply after the power cut is usual in real life, but for the children it is the magic done by the magician.

Sandeep observes that a child in Calcutta tries very hard in studies and this gives the image of slaves in Ancient Egypt building a pyramid. "Meanwhile, children, like Egyptian slaves, dragged huge blocks of frustrating study all day to build that impressive but non-existent pyramid of success" (Chaudhuri, ASASA 26).

Abhi has to learn English from his typical Bengali teacher who is engaged to teach him English. Here is an example of how English is taught in Calcutta schools;

- Whut ees thee name of thee boy?
- Thee name of thee boy ees John.
- Whut deed John habhfor deenar?
- John had meelk and bredfor deenar.
- Why deed John habh meelk and bredfor deenar? (Chaudhuri, ASASA 120-121)

Chaudhuri points out that in Calcutta English is taught by the person who does not have mastery over the language. The influence of mother tongue is apparent. It appears to be interesting, and it is naturally common that speaking in mother tongue fluently and finding difficult to speak fluently in a foreign language especially language like English.

The imagination of the writer connects the local ordinary happenings of life with the global world. Chaudhuri throughout the novel and in nine short stories did not give any clue

for the title of the novel, except in one single passage. In Abhi's school books Sandeep finds the address of his home as ever-widening, all- encompassing circles, like ripples in a pond:

Abhijit Das,
17 Vivekananda Road, Calcutta (South),
West Bengal,
India, Asia,
Earth, The Solar System,
The Universe.

Here the narrator remarks, "It was a strange and sublime address" (Chaudhuri, ASASA 72). Abhi just being a child is trying to include the earth and the solar system with his local house address. Through this the child connects his home with the solar system and the Universe imaginatively.

There is another instance that connects the local with the global; the towel wrapped around the waist of Chottomama becomes "the Chieftain of some undiscovered, happy African tribe (Chaudhuri, ASASA 64). Through this line it is evident that Chaudhuri's use of imagination is well expressed in this line. Through this scene he makes Sandeep to think that Chottomama as the leader of an African tribe who wrapped his towel around his waist.

When Mamima receives a sari from Bombay as gift by Sandeep's mother, she says that the pattern of the sari "which broke out into a galaxy of hand-woven stars, a cosmos of streaking comets and symbolic blue horizons" (Chaudhuri, ASASA 5). In this the stars and the moon are connected with the local images.

In the world of children not a single event is missed out . Here is another example that connects the religious and the national sentiment. Sandeep being a secular observer enjoys the colours of Indian flag, when Mamima goes to the prayer room and offering the gods of oranges, sweet white batashas and arranged slices of cucumber, the ceremony is observed by him and "to watch a grown—up at play. Prayer time was when adults became children again" (Chaudhuri, ASASA 44). Mamima feels secure in the world of mythology and the external symbols of Indianess. Sandeep's perception transcends the religious and the national, and remains open to new interpretation and ways of inhabiting the world.

Mimic tendency springs forth from innocence. Children like to imitate elders. In one afternoon, Sandeep and his cousins played energetic 'pretend' game of freedom fighters. They acted as Subhash Chandra Bose and Mahathma Gandhi, Sandeep told Chottomama that he played the role of Gandhi. Being a Marxist, he lost his control and said Gandhi was not a fighter and he was a sham yogi and started lecturing to the children. Eyes burning, Chottomama began to lecture them on pre-independence Indian history, quoting several historians of several nationalities. As he spoke to the children, he behaved like a scholar at a seminar addressing a group of inimical scholars who had views hostile to his own. By a magical suspension of disbelief, he forgot he was talking to Sandeep, Abhi and Babla; he

saw, in front of him, three conservative, pro—congress intellectuals. (Chaudhuri, ASASA 93-94)

Through this, it becomes evident that the real histories are a kind of fantasy play to the children and this shows Chottomama as a devoted patriot and who strongly believes in Marxism. Abhi, the elder son of Chottomama presses his back from one point to another to get relief from his back pain. This is a normal act which can be seen in every Indian middle class home, but it is suddenly made an unusual use of typical images: “Searching for the exact spot of pain was a delicate matter, a life or several lives might depend on it; it was like trying to detect a mine in a minefield, or a vein of oil in a desert” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 89-90).

The novelist makes a sudden attack on literature, religion, mythology and science to create a new world and to connect with the world of Calcutta. The maid servant Saraswati’s footprints which are wet are “as rich with possibility as the first footprint Crusoe found on his island” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 88). Sandeep, Abhi and Babla used to be flitting around the members of the family, when Chottomama is ill they kept themselves away. This act of the children is compared to the satellites. “The children floated like satellites in the distance, afraid to collide with the painful orbit of adult lives, and yet always being pulled toward it against their will” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 129).

The flower of orange gulmohar reminds the writer, “of a volcano erupting and balancing, momentarily, the unspilled lava in its mouth” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 153). The narrator observes that, the patients walking in the hospital garden in their loose shirts and white pyjamas looked like Adam who had been expelled from the garden of Eve.

The children while playing hide-and-peek saw the bird Kokil and Abhi came to Chottomama and informed that they heard the funny voice of Kokil. When Chottomama asked him to go and find out the Kokil and tell him what it looks like. To find out the bird was the Herculean task for the children.

On seeing Chottomama lying on the bed when he had a heart attack, Sandeep imagined that his uncle is in board meeting with the Directors are gathered on beds instead of chairs. No one can imagine like this but it is possible only through the child’s imagination.

These innocent little children are not free from the fascination. Even small and ordinary things are observed and it is imprinted in the readers mind by the images and through the metaphysical conceit. In every home man shaving his face is not an abnormal one, but for the novelist it seems to be a holy ritual.

The children watching Chottomama shaving his face as passer-by watching a monkey-show on the roadside, and this act of shaving is compared to ploughing in a “primitive agricultural fashion” (Chaudhuri, ASASA 60).

In, *A Strange and Sublime Address* one cannot predict the imagination of the novelist. His imagination can land anywhere and he compares it to anything. Thus, the clothes which are wrinkled carried out by the maidservant become “wispy bodies of dying children” in the arms of Mother Teresa (Chaudhuri, ASASA 85). Similarly while carrying the small baby it was heavier for Sandeep, Abhi and Babla like “far heavier for them than King Janak’s bow was for Ram” they think that it is a big task for them to hold the child as King Janak’s bow was for Rama, through this the novelist transports us to a different world (Chaudhuri, ASASA 49).

In *A Strange and Sublime Address* the world of the children is charmed because of its melody and poetry. The novel is very poetic, not for passion but of routine day-to-day life of middle class Bengali family in Calcutta. However the universe of children is Chaudhuri’s special zone and this comes to life in this novel. He visualizes not only the physical or material settings in which he places the children, but also their physiological, emotional and psychological states of being.

Through this he proves that the routine life and normal things can be fascinating to children. In childrens’ world fantasy becomes a part of reality. This can bring all the joy and liveliness and magic of the short holiday, which is captured by Chaudhuri in this novel.

Chaudhuri engage in his novels the influence of globalization on the lives of their characters as well as on the condition of art in general. His novels show that it is difficult to separate the local and the global as they keep mutually informing one another. Characters in these novels, even if they live in a globalized world, do not cut their links with their home location. Thus Chaudhuri’s novels that describe the diversity of culture which can be preserved by the unceasing engagement of the global by the local.

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