

**Navigating Identities: The Intersections of Ethnicity in Amit Chaudhuri's
*A New World***

Sandhya Dushyantkumar Vyas¹

Research Scholar (Ph.D.), School of Languages, Department of English, Ahmedabad,
Gujarat, India, E-mail. - sandhyavyas94@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Jagdish Joshi²

Professor-Director, UGC Human Resource Development Centre, Gujarat University,
Ahmedabad

Article Received: 14/04/2025

Article Accepted: 16/05/2025

Published Online: 18/05/2025

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.19.05.354

Abstract: This paper will attempt to dismantle the relatively complex interrelation of ethnic identities within Amit Chaudhuri's novel *A New World*, focusing on how the protagonist Jayojit tries to navigate through the intersections that encapsulate his Indian heritage and experiences in America. In close analysis, one may examine how Chaudhuri portraiture the fluidity of cultural identity within an increasingly globalized world. The three themes that concentrate in the novel are the displacement sense of the protagonist upon returning to Calcutta, cultural differences between generations, and the experience of working abroad that impacts personal relationships. Through Jayojit's relations with his family members, especially his parents and son, one finds undertones of cultural differences arising and the practical issues of keeping cultural links across distance. Chaudhuri thus elaborates the subtle, detailed description of those dynamics and reveals a deeper perception of diasporic identities and their constant process of negotiation between tradition and modernization. This study compares *A New World* with issues of cultural hybridity and displacement to place it within the broader context of postcolonial literature. Given the impact of globalization, the research emphasizes the opportunities and challenges of navigating diverse cultural environments and examines how Chaudhuri's novel contributes to the discourse on ethnic identity in modern literature by addressing the unique experiences of Indian Americans.

Keywords: Ethnic identity, Cultural hybridity, Diaspora, Postcolonial literature, Globalization

Broad Theme: The intersection of gender, caste, and ethnicity in Indic Knowledge Systems.

Introduction: Culture and sensibility are the two distinct elements of human life. The term sensitivity refers to the conscious ideology of a person's moral, emotional, and aesthetic

convictions. Culture, on the other hand, pertains to the behavior and beliefs of a certain social age group. Cultural identity is therefore formed from common characteristics among a group of people, such as language, heritage, and cultural commonalities. Geographical proximity, shared foods and diets, religious beliefs, and the list goes on in redefining these cultural identities. Culture is one of the strong influences that have molded personalities and inspired various pieces of literature—often believed to be a superhuman entity that can defeat death and decide life or death. Bilingual culture literature depicts the contradictions that exist between cultures in stories.

Amit Chaudhuri's novel *A New World* is a nuanced exploration of identity, family, and the immigrant experience. The story revolves around Jayojit Chatterjee, a Bengali-American professor who returns to his hometown of Calcutta with his young son, Bonny, following a divorce. As he navigates the complexities of his American and Indian identities, Jayojit reconnects with people from his past, including his parents—who affectionately call him "Admiral"—and his estranged wife, Amala. Ms. Shyamala presents that the novel is 'many ways avant-garde and post-modern. His syntactical structure, his conception of the story without any beginning, middle, or end, his spatialization of time, his use of memory, his non-linearity, his use of narrative voice, and the stream-of-consciousness are postmodernist as well as modernist. He turns exclusively to modernism in underpinning his creative writing with a focus on physicality, locality, and sensibility and also in his deep inclination towards formalism.' (Shyamala, 152)

The novel presents a "miniaturist concept" of family, contrasting loyalty and tradition with the fractured, modern marriage of Jayojit and Amala. Against the backdrop of Indian law, where Jayojit is fighting for custody of Bonny, the narrative highlights the tensions and complexities of Jayojit's identity as a Bengali man living in the United States. Chaudhuri's keen attention to the 'ordinary, the unsensational, and the mundane' details of life in Calcutta illuminates the cultural and geographical distances that Jayojit must navigate.

The novel focuses on the visit of a father and son to their homeland, Calcutta, beginning with Jayojit's arrival in the old world and concluding with his departure. It is largely free of dramatic events; instead, it aims to capture the small, everyday occurrences of life—such as eating, going to the bank, and interacting with neighbors, servants, relatives, and friends. Jayojit's father (Admiral) describes the real image of most Indian banks and their officials based on his own experience. He says, 'It's a miracle these banks work, and that any money flows through this state!... Everyone belongs to the trade union, and no one believes in service. You ask them a question, and they're busy talking to each other about a cricket match or a relative's wedding!'. (Chaudhuri, 33) Calcutta, and India as a whole, no longer feel like Jayojit's world, and his relationship with his parents has shifted due to the distance and his divorce. He wanders through these familiar yet only half-remembered experiences, uncertain whether he is trying to reclaim the past or move toward a new future.

This paper analyzes how Chaudhuri engages with the microcosm of the family and the narrative strategies he employs to examine the intersections of ethnicity, identity, and immigration in *A New World*. It focuses on the intricate ways in which the novel explores the fluidities and complexities of modern diasporic identities, ultimately interpreting how Chaudhuri portrays Jayojit's cultural hybridity.

The Sense of Dislocation Upon Returning to Calcutta: Jayojit's return to Calcutta with Bonny highlights a complex mix of familiarity and estrangement. Now, Calcutta feels alien to him, reflecting his disconnection from both the city and his roots. His life in America, shaped by work, divorce, and a different pace of living, has created considerable emotional distance between him and his family as well as his surroundings. Jayojit describes his own secret life in America where no one is concerned about you. As he says in his monologue in his answer to his mother,

...of driving down the motorway, going to the supermarket, filling up a trolley with things, his orphanhood, and distance from his country and parents, and that of the other people like him, wandering around the aisles of the supermarket in shorts, with wives, or perhaps alone, with ex-wife somewhere completely else, running into each other and saying 'How are you? Still around?' (Chaudhuri, 27)

In Calcutta, Jayojit is surrounded by the everyday activities of his family, yet his introverted nature keeps him at a distance. Jayojit, although physically attractive and financially secure, struggles with feelings of insecurity and often neglects his responsibilities. This neglect has a negative impact on his son and parents, who gradually retreat into their own private world. As a result, there are no significant events or strong emotions in their lives. Jayojit's attachment to his neighborhood is superficial; Calcutta feels alien, while Claremont represents his mother. He dislikes the city's heat and dust, reflecting a common skepticism among diasporic Indians. He feels both amusement and amazement at the simplicity of his parents' home and their way of life. The subdued existence of his elderly parents, who are now immersed in the rituals of old age, stands in stark contrast to the dynamic, albeit tumultuous, life he experiences abroad. Many diasporic Indians, like Jayojit, speak English and live in Claremont, USA. He never wants to drop his identity as an Indian. He wants to uphold the rich cultural heritage and values of India.

Cultural Differences between Generations: Dr. V Meenakshi has traced some general features of Chaudhuri's works and she observed that 'The socio-cultural aspects are used as the background support in his works. It plays a vital role in the development of the plot and characterization. The society-oriented cultural elements participate in the works of Chaudhuri with all its aspects: nature, culture, legend, customs, conventions, superstitions, topography, and environment.' (Meenakshi, 36). The Chatterjee family exemplifies two contrasting worldviews shaped by different eras and values. Admiral Chatterjee, Jayojit's father, represents a very conservative, hierarchical perspective. He clings to the past when authority was paramount and struggles to adapt to a world that no longer values his military

stature. In contrast, Jayojit's mother is more adaptable yet fulfills her domestic duties in a somewhat detached routine. Jayojit's mother's efforts and love in taking care of her grandson Bonny also show the cultural difference of America and India as Mr. Kittur has observed in his research paper. He has touched the very soft corner of the heart by presenting this observation that '...in India so many children will grow up by listening the folk stories of grandmother and the grandmothers of India are the great story tellers but we cannot see the same in the Western country like America.' (Kittur, 11) This generational divide is evident in how they view Jayojit's Americanized lifestyle and divorce. While they try to adapt to his Western ways, they still mourn the loss of the traditional family unit. This clash is also noticeable in smaller details. Contrasting between tradition and modernity Dr. S. Karthik Kumar, and G. Ganga justify in their research that,

A New World reveals disparity in perceptions, especially between generations. For example, the Admiral does not like the concept of buying a washing machine, even though Jayojit is very eager to buy one for himself. All this is in order to reduce pressure on his mother. Very sensitively, the traditional and the new ideas are collated. Jayojit reads an editorial about the need for the nation to pursue "economic liberalization" in a wet newspaper. There are people who appreciate this idea and this imperative in the Indian context whereas some others occasionally disagree. (Kumar and Ganga)

Chaudhuri explores life's mundane reality, highlighting its beauty and terror. The novel centers on Jayojit, a young man who returns to his parent's home in Calcutta to examine the rift between generations and cultures. It celebrates the beauty found in everyday life, even within its most ordinary aspects, through the lens of various itinerant (travelling/wandering) characters, including a dhobi (laundry worker), a maid, a bhelpuri vendor, and a taxi driver. The narrative emphasizes that life is worth living by finding value and virtue in small things, showcasing the beautiful aspects of existence.

Personal Relationships: Tradition and Modernization: Jayojit's life in America as an academic, along with his failed marriage, leads to isolation in his relationships with family and friends in Calcutta. His American identity creates a distance even within his marital relationship. This is particularly evident with his son, Bonny, who does not speak a word of Bengali and feels divided within the family. Jayojit reflects on his life choices, particularly the ideas of freedom and prosperity that his American lifestyle promotes. This perspective clashes with the expectations of his parents, who prioritize community over individualism. Traditionally, many Indians believe that marriage is not just a bond for this life but a sacred union destined to continue into the next. Indian parents often hold the view that marriages are made in heaven and that love marriages frequently end in divorce, as they are based on attraction rather than true love.

Despite being trained as an economist, he struggles to offer financial advice to his father, highlighting how impractical his foreign knowledge can seem in light of his family's humble and cautious financial habits. His own failed marriage underscores the tensions of

living between cultures. Jayojit considers his wife a cheater as he had thought that his wife Amala and her gynecologist who himself was a married man had an affair as Amala claims, 'He was kind to me.' (Chaudhuri, 67) His wife left him, disillusioned with life in America and feeling disconnected from her own family. Jayojit's relationship with his son evokes a sense of incompleteness and restlessness, revealing his longing for the traditional bonds that anchored his identity back home.

Describing the significance of the title, Kumar and Ganga observe that,

Looking at the title of the novel, one may wonder whether the novelist has any desire to do something like Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Huxley's *Brave New World* or even Thomas Moor's *Utopia*, Chaudhuri problematizes the title and throws in a sense of ambiguity about the newness of the world. (Kumar and Ganga)

The novel features traditional Indian middle-class characters, including Admiral Chatterjee, Jayojit, his mother, and his son. Together, they illustrate the interests of the middle class. Jayojit returns from America in a taxi, characterized by its rusty windows and the cacophony (unmusicality/discordances) of harsh noises. He accepts the taxi as a natural part of his environment, and his son, Vikram, shares a similar sense of comfort in the vehicle. The author vividly describes the flats, trees, and the residents' interest in having pets, effectively evoking the lifestyle of the Indian middle class. The couple's married life was also dry and gloomy, especially after the birth of their son, Bonny, without their noticing.

After discovering that their son was going through a divorce, the Admiral and his wife slowly started to withdraw from their neighbors and certain relatives. They found themselves grappling with feelings of awkwardness and discomfort whenever they encountered others in their community. Despite knowing that they had no role in the Othem. This reaction highlights the deep-seated traditional views on marriage in India, especially within the context of Hindu culture, where familial ties and social perceptions can heavily influence personal circumstances. In a typical relationship, a child often serves as a glue that strengthens the bond between partners. However, for Jayojit and Amala, the arrival of their child, Bonny, only escalated their ongoing conflicts. Instead of bringing them closer, Bonny's presence deepened the rift between them, ultimately leading to the unraveling (Seperation) of their relationship. The joy of parenthood, which usually fosters unity, instead became a catalyst (something that brings significant change) for their emotional distance, and their once-strong connection faded away.

Conclusion: The novel provides a "miniaturist concept" of family, speculating loyalty and tradition against the fissured, modern marriage of Jayojit and Amala. Against the law in India, where Jayojit is now fighting to regain Bonny, the story draws out tensions and complexities in Jayojit's position as a Bengali man living in the United States. Chaudhuri's minute attention to the "ordinary, the unsensational, and the mundane" details of life in Calcutta throws much lighter on the cultural and geographic distances Jayojit crosses.

Jayojit, a man struggling with failure, spends the summer with a friend and is not originally from America, India, or Calcutta. He searches the airport for familiar Bengalis, showcasing his connection to his Bengali roots and local culture. Amit Chaudhuri's novel *A New World* explores themes of transition, family, and economic changes within Indian society and culture. The novel's worldliness, along with its stylistic elements, allows for an examination of the significance of family and home in representing middle-class values. It raises questions about specific segments of society and captures the essence of the former middle class.

By analyzing the ways Chaudhuri engages with the microcosm of the family and the narration strategies used to discuss the gaps of ethnicity, identity, and immigration in *A New World*, this paper focuses on the intricate ways the novel tries to explore the fluidities and complexities of modern diasporic identities, an interpretation of how Chaudhuri narrates Jayojit's cultural hybridity.

Work Cited:

Chaudhuri, Amit. *A New World*. New Delhi: Penguin. 2012.

Kittur, Mr, Jagdeesh. "The Cultural and Social Issues in Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World*". *Epitome: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*. Vol. 5, no. 2, Feb. 2019. <http://www.epitomejournals.com>

Kumar, S. Karthik, and Ganga. "Tradition vs. Modernity: A Study of Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World*." *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)*, vol. 12, no. 7, July 2021, p. 12385. <https://www.tojqi.net/index.php/journal/article/download/6333/4526/6852>

MEENAKSHI, V. "Socio-Cultural Aspects in Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World*." *Bodhi International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science*, by Government Arts and Science College. https://www.bodhijournals.com/pdf/V4N1/Bodhi_V4N1_010.pdf

Shyamala. "Old Snapshots in New Album: Realism in Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World*." *IJELLH - International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 4, Dec. 2013, pp. 151–57. <https://ijellh.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Old-Snapshots-in-New-Album1.pdf?x72302>