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**Beyond Borders: Dislocation, Identity and the Immigrant Experience in
Amit Chaudhuri's *Odysseus Abroad***

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Abstract

Amit Chaudhuri's *Odysseus Abroad* offers a sophisticated examination of the immigrant experience, emphasizing the mental and emotional challenges people have while attempting to reconcile their identity with the intricacies of a new culture. The novel explores Ananda's battle to negotiate the social and cultural environments of both India and Britain, overcoming feelings of alienation and the challenges of creating a new identity in a strange place. The story powerfully depicts the feeling of being caught between cultures, experiencing a sense of not fully belonging in either the homeland or the adopted country. Ananda's relationship with his uncle Radhesh, a long-time London resident, highlights the contrasting perspectives on cultural adaptation. The novel also explores the difficulties of establishing one's identity in a cross-border setting. Ananda's internal struggles as he tries to reconcile his Indian heritage with his British experiences are central to the narrative. Chaudhuri depicts the psychological and emotional costs of migrating, such as homesickness, loneliness, and the challenge of adjusting to new expectations and social conventions. Through the character of Ananda, a young Bengali man studying in London, the research paper examines the issues of identity, displacement, and the immigrant experience.

Keywords: Displacement, Identity, Rootlessness, Immigration, Alienation.

Introduction

In the age of modern technology, "dispersal" is seen as inevitable in everyone's life. Whether forced or motivated by personal interests, people do migrate everywhere. They face numerous obstacles and trouble adjusting to the new surroundings when they migrate from their own country to a foreign one. Through their novels, authors depict every predicament that migrant people face. In his novel *Odysseus Abroad*, renowned Indian author Amit Chaudhuri uses the protagonist Ananda to paint a vivid image of the immigrants. This research paper examines the agonizing experience of immigrants, how they suffer from dislocation, and how it causes them to search for an identity.

Dislocation

Odysseus Abroad by Amit Chaudhuri explores displacement and its effects by following the day-to-day activities of Ananda Sen, a twenty-two-year-old student at London University who studies Romantic poets. As he presents Ananda to the readers, the author shares his passion for English and its literature as well as his individuality. In England, this perspective shifts. Sadly, the people of England disregard Ananda, who is fascinated by English culture and intends to reject his identity there. Ananda must change with the times. He stood out from other students in India because he ate sandwiches, wore jeans, and talked and read English extensively. However, everyone speaks English in England. He was a modern Bengali and Indian, with a cursory but much of his life,.... that his early teenage years he'd subsisted on a diet of he'd Agatha Christie and Erle Stanley Gardner; that he'd developed a taste for corduroys over jeans recently- almost none of this counted for anything in London, Since everyone here spoke English,.... wore jeans or corduroys. In this way, his identity had been taken from him. (Chaudhuri 18). Ananda feels dislocated when he settles in a foreign country.

Dislocation can be viewed as a departure from one's previous identity. As a result of their ethnic persecution and lack of acceptance by the host society, they feel alone in a strange place. Why is Ananda in London, he questions himself. "What am I doing in London?" (Chaudhuri, OA 10). While staying in Britain Ananda compares London and Bombay: How is it that our cities are so different?....He briefly ought but couldn't find a connection between London and Bombay- except, of course, the red double-decker buses and postboxes. (Chaudhuri 11)

The displaced immigrants deal with a variety of circumstances, including issues of acceptance and rejection. The issue would be adjustment if they were accepted; if they have trouble integrating, it causes them to feel anxious, disappointed, and alone, and ultimately, they experience rejection and failure. "Being unhomed is equal to feeling like you don't belong," says Homi K. Bhabha. He describes the agony and predicament of the unhoused immigrants in his essay *Location of Culture*. Being homeless is not the same as being unhomed, because the unhomely cannot be readily accommodated in the well-known separation of social activity into public and private domains. The strange moment sneaks up on you like your own shadow. (Bhabha 9). People developed a strong feeling of binary opposition in the Derridian terms "self" and "other" as a result of the identity issue, colonial power, and hegemony. The colonized nations rebuilt their identities following colonization.

Immigrant Experience:

Identity

Radhesh, a character in Amit Chaudhuri's book, makes reference to colonization. Each host country has unique alienation issues. Because there are no emotional ties between people in this environment, a man may feel alone even in a big group. It is challenging to assess a person. When there is no purpose, people nevertheless live.

People frequently live in emptiness, a state of mental exile, as a result of feeling uprooted. The inability of Asians and Indians to interact with the indigenous population is depicted in this book in a straightforward manner. In London, Indians are always labelled as 'Asians'. This label made feel Ananda an outsider. He had an identity of his own- as a Bengali from India.

Ananda didn't see himself as 'Asian'. He was keen to militate against the category though his militancy must, naturally, remain incommunicable to the people it was intended for. He was Indian. He'd go back home someday – the deferred promise defined him. When he'd visited London in summer of 1973 and 1979, he'd seen 'Asians' for the first time- a family in Belsize Park. (Chaudhuri 113)

This clearly shows that Indians in abroad are divided among themselves.

Through Ananda, Chaudhuri portrays on how the Bengali middle-class migrants living in London have accepted and adopted the British Culture, its language and its lifestyle. He recalls:

When he'd visited London in summer of 1973 and 1979, he'd seen 'Asians' for the first time- a family in Belsize Park in particular, whom his parents knew from time here before they returned. The nice Bengali bhadralok lady had a boy who was Ananda's age- eleven. He had casual long hair which fell repeatedly on his eyebrows, and he spoke exactly as a London boy would, unobtrusively dispensing with many of his t's. He was, actually, English. Speaking the language in that way translated his features, his facial muscles, into the idiom of this city's culture. They'd run into each other during subsequent explorations in the neighbourhood that summer, but never talked again. Ananda was convinced

that this was an Indian boy who belonged more to Belsize Park than to India.... (Chaudhuri 113- 114)

The effects of being uprooted and the never-ending experiences of societal rejection are depicted by Chaudhuri. "Black" and "White" were the two cultural identification categories in London. "The gradations of colour between white and black were infinite in London, you didn't need the seven colours of the rainbow here – these two were heterogeneous enough to suffice," writes Chaudhuri, addressing the themes of race, ethnicity, and culture in this novel (Chaudhuri 115). The term "Asian" has recently taken the role of "black." Chaudhuri offers us a clever satire on race and ethnic identity in this passage.

Through Ananda's uncle Radhesh, who spent nearly thirty years in London, Chaudhuri describes his cultural identity as follows: 'I'm a black Englishman', he'd say proudly to fresh acquaintances. He always wore a tailored three-piece suit with a maroon silk tie nearly ensconcing his collar, and a matching handkerchief in his breast pocket. The matter of colour was a joke to him. (Chaudhuri 115- 116) He always wears three-piece suits and dresses like an English man. When the opportunity to interact with the English is denied, he remarks that "Western civilization was all vanity" (Chaudhuri 116). This demonstrates his desire to reclaim the identity he had for thirty years. The yearning to fit in with groups or the society one lives in is a normal emotion that never goes away.

Culture

Ananda is ashamed that once his country was colonized by the British. "...But we were colonized by them," he thought... It made him ill at ease over and above having to swallow the insult of having been ruled by this nation!.(Chaudhuri, OA 10) Ananda observes English culture and mannerisms while she is in Britain: 129 The English were a peculiar bunch: they made you feel on show even if they didn't

acknowledge your existence. Although they did not specifically examine you, their texts promoted the benefits of observation. English etiquette, or cultural norms, dictated that you might as well not be present if you were seated across from an English person. It wasn't ignorance. They did work on the skill of surreptitious observation. (Chaudhuri 89)

Ananda looked at the Hampstead hall, which made him think of the Pujas, on his way to Belsize Park. Ananda made two trips to London to attend the Durga Puja festival with his parents and uncle. The English are unsympathetic to the immigrants' religious feelings since they were unaware of Hindu mythology and gods. The novelist does a good job at highlighting this. As Forster had stated, the English disregarded the celebrations because they had only ever had goblins and fairies and no gods. They didn't know what to do with them, so they wouldn't understand what it meant to have gods watching over you (Chaudhuri 118). According to Anand, the English would act aggressively in public. His sentiments are articulated as follows: "What they do and how they behave is law. Their laughing can occasionally feel like an attack on the environment. Aggression is what it is (Chaudhuri 225). Chaudhuri emphasizes that this notion arises in the minds of the diasporic people by using italics in his work. Similarly, in order to survive in their host country, they must suppress their feelings, disputes, and hardships.

Racism

One of the primary issues that the settlers in Britain need to address is racism. For those of a different race, the issue is not straightforward; rather, it is complex. Ananda first feels the pain of racism when he is called "Vindaloo, Vindaloo" by an Englishman in the street. His uncle counsels him to comprehend the essence of racism that permeates English society, which endangers the settlers who wish to live in the host country while also experiencing resentment or disdain of the locals.

The settlers are viewed by the English as competitors who have come to steal their prospects. The feeling of racial supremacy is the cause of this.

Generational and Communication Gap

The generational divide is a major factor in the lives of immigrants. The environment in which Ananda is raised is completely different from that of his uncle Radhesh, who has lived in London for over thirty years. Radhesh frequently cautions Ananda against making eye contact with skinheads and even punks because of his unfortunate racial superiority. Would you look an animal in the eye? No. since it perceives it as a challenge. Having lived a long life, the uncle's motto is "that of a slave." Never follow Gandhi by conforming. Flip the other cheek (Chaudhuri 17). Anand was shocked by his uncle's duplicity and decided to face his neighbour, who constantly made fun of him, rather than heed his advice. And he prevails. The "battle" is lost by his neighbour (Chaudhuri 34). Despite being in separate age groups, Ananda and his uncle have differing opinions on their rights. Radhesh adheres to the colonial-era life philosophy of being inferior (settler) to the superior (native people). However, Ananda disagrees with his uncle, who still thinks in colonial terms. Since he is still a young lad, he is confident in his rights and is unaware of colonial times.

One of the most important aspects of diasporas is the relationship between their members and their native countries. For immigrants, communication with their home country is crucial because it helps them cope with the challenges and trauma they encounter in their new nation. Radhesh has close ties to his relatives in India and provides them with financial support, as the saying goes: "Every cloud has a silver lining" (Chaudhuri 18). Through the figure of Radhesh, Chaudhuri provides one answer to such issues in *Odysseus Abroad*. He claims that "such people were to be ignored and avoided; his uncle had said,

quoting Taranath, the tantric, that there are certain demonical beings in the universe that are dim but incredible powerful; they can grow a hundred times their size in a second; they have brute strength; they can fly; but they are intelligent you won't be able to beat them in a contest of strength, but you have to hold your nerve when facing them" (Chaudhuri 69).

By presenting the issue symbolically, the author attempts to document the challenges faced by Indians in a foreign area and implies that while it cannot be conquered by Indians or other settlers, it may be avoided. Chaudhuri acknowledges that the newcomers will never be able to interact with the English natives. This is effectively conveyed through Ananda's description. The world that had shaped his own parents was impossible for Ananda to be from, as he was from a new breed on a new planet (Chaudhuri 217). In actuality, any Indian in any host country must deal with this reality. Even though the settlers succeed in creating a new identity for themselves in their new country, they are unable to remove the mask that has been on them since birth.

Conclusion

Ultimately, *Odysseus Abroad* offers a moving depiction of the immigrant experience, highlighting the inner conflicts, cultural collisions, and enduring effects of displacement and diasporic identity on a person's sense of identity and belonging.

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