



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

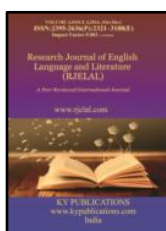
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

## SOCIAL PERCEPTIVES IN AMIT CHAUDHURI'S FREEDOM SONG

M.ANITHA<sup>1</sup>, Dr.K.SHIBILA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research scholar, PRIST University Thanjavur

<sup>2</sup>Research supervisor, PRIST University Thanjavur



### ABSTRACT

Amit Chaudhuri is a versatile writer of contemporary Indian English Literature. He depicts domestic life, gender roles and social relations. His works reflect the Indian values and Bengali sensibility. Chaudhuri's *Freedom Song* is about the family afflicted by old age. The young people are doing all kinds of things that are perceived as idiosyncratic. It deals with ordinary people's consciousness. The novel chronicles the lives of Bhola and his sister, Khuku and their respective families. It is set in Calcutta during the winter against a backdrop of growing political tension between Hindu and Muslim. There is a strong sense of stability and continuity of domestic life that anchors home against external changes taking place in Calcutta. These changes include communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, globalisation and economic liberalisation, diasporic scattering of family members living worldwide.

*Freedom Song* at a deeper level brings out the absence of freedom. Social freedom appears to be withering away with the ever-increasing intervention of multinationals and forces of privatization. Individual freedom appears to be at stale because of the compulsive, conventional social structures. The title sings of not the freedom of country but what freedom has come to.

Amit Chaudhuri is a versatile writer of contemporary Indian English Literature. He depicts domestic life, gender roles and social relations. His works reflect the Indian values and Bengali sensibility.

Chaudhuri's *Freedom Song* is about the family afflicted by old age. The young people are doing all kinds of things that are perceived as idiosyncratic. It deals with ordinary people's consciousness. The old couple, Khuku and Shib live in Calcutta. The novel chronicles the lives of Bhola and his sister, Khuku and their respective families.

The entire action of *Freedom Song* deals with the middle-class life in Calcutta. "They woke, slept, and talked. They eked out the days with inconsequential chatter." (FS 56) Chaudhuri adds that Bengali culture is a middle-class culture. So, there is a society of old people and children. Bhaskar

has joined the Communist Party because he is no good for anything else. So, the Bengal he considers psychologically to be his home, no longer exists.

The Bengali pulse can be well felt in the conversation between Bhaskar's mother and Mohit when he comes to their house. "Will you have luchi, Mohit? She asked. 'No', he said. 'Omelette?' 'No' 'Pithha? Have a pithha. I made them yesterday.'" 'No' said Mohit firmly as if he were used to warding off such requests. Typical Bengali food luchi, omelette, pithha and the culture of welcoming people are what Amit Chaudhuri has tried to present in the very first few pages of the novel.

The Hindu wife wakes up to the Muezzin's call. She finds the children are awake because of the sound that "They are going too far. It isn't really Indian, they sound like Bedonins." The word, 'they' reveal the gap that runs through India.

To Khiku's pride, Shib is working in Little's that produces sweets and chocolates. Bhola is a man of certain whims. His son, Manik has gone to Germany to study engineering. Bhaskar has left studies and joined his father's factory. The family and the relatives do not like Bhaskar joining a company which is a practically dying. Khuku's husband with the working experience in a private company takes the job of upbringing the sick unit. Within no time, he can bring drastic changes. He can raise the state of the company to a better position through his sheer work ethic. Bhaskar has presented his family with the dilemma that a suitable girl must be found for him, which is difficult because of his insistence on hawking copies of *Ganashakti*, every morning.

Dadmoni brings the other siblings but unfortunately has died at the age of forty-two. He is followed by his brother, Chanchal. The consecutive deaths of two brothers left the family astray. Mini has to take up jobs to run the family and does not get the chance to marry.

The novel is deeply rooted into politics. *Freedom Song*, is set in Calcutta during the winter against a backdrop of growing political tension between Hindu and Muslim. Towards the end of 1992, the demolition of Babri Masque happens. The demolition of the masque is a watershed to the entire trajectory of Hindu-Muslim relationship in India. This mishap and the resultant riot play more than a backdrop for the novel. Chaudhuri gives an impressionistic description of the riot and curfew. During the curfew, Jochna does not come to work for two days. This will irritate Khuku but this time there is sympathy.

Chaudhuri has very well woven Bengali life into a complex structure by representing the multi-faceted aspects of Calcutta within a framework surcharged against a political back ground. Bhaskar has direct connection to the leftist politics. He is committed to meetings, street-plays and a daily newspaper, *Ganashakthi*. The man in the sleeveless pullover emerges with a pile of *Ganashakti* and has transferred it from his arms to Bhaskar's. The many layers of Indian reality are suggested. A domestic scene where both women are sitting together eating oranges while discussing the Marxist party.

Bhola's family lives in a house on Ishwar Chandra Vidyanagar road with his wife and three children. It depicts the decline and eventual destruction of Chaudhuri's business and the loss of the extended family's houses, moving from a privileged cocoon life in the family's private compound to ordinary apartments in a municipal block. This loss of house and the decline of the family business is a metaphor for the decline of old middle class values in modern India. It shows that Chaudhuri has great concern for Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility. Transition and change have redefined life and transformed its contours at personal, social and economic levels.

The house represents a symbol for the stability of this family. This house has been a wedding gift from Bhola's father-in-law, part of a dowry. It is a symbolic of the traditions of the old middle class. The basic structure of the house remains the same- the red stone floors, the bottle-green coloured windows and the location of the puja room. The changes to the fabric of the house have been made as the family fortunes have grown. The kitchen is painted and new shelving has been added. The central heating has been installed as the stores of coal and wood are no longer needed. The earthen oven is replaced by a newer electric model. These changes from an extended to nuclear family set-up are visible through the representation of home in the novels. The two sisters, Khuku and Mimi converse in East Bengali dialect. The old middle class culture is changing and having the elements of the new middle-class culture and family life.

There is a strong sense of stability and continuity of domestic life that anchors home against external changes taking place in Calcutta. These changes include communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, globalisation and economic liberalisation, diasporic scattering of family members living worldwide. *Freedom Song* represents a more subtle shift in the changing middle class values showing gradual transition and change in the lives and reminiscences of two families, Khuku and her husband Shib.

The title, *Freedom Song* is difficult to explain. It must be a song which either leads to freedom or celebrates it. At a deeper level, the

absence and not presence of freedom-social, economic, individual- happens to be at core of the narrative. Thus, social freedom too appears to be withering away with the ever-increasing intervention of multinationals and forces of privatization. Individual freedom appears to be at stale because of the compulsive, conventional social structures. The title sings of not the freedom of country but what freedom has come to.

#### **Bibliography**

Chaudhuri, Amit. *Three Novels: A Strange and Sublime Address, Afternoon Raag, and Freedom Song*. London: Picador, 2001. Print.

Ghosh, Sumana R. "Aalap: In Conversation with Amit Chaudhuri." *The Novels of Amit Chaudhuri: An Exploration in the Alternative Tradition*. Eds. Sheobhushan Shukla, and Anu Shukla. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2004. Print.

"On Belonging and not Belonging: A Conversation with Amit Chaudhuri." *Wasafiri* 30 1999.15-20. Print.