

# Diasporic Elements in Amit Chaudhuri's *Odysseus Abroad*

Makwana Ajay



**Abstract:** *The present paper has been specifically designed to investigate diasporic elements in the selected novel of Amit Chaudhuri's Odysseus Abroad. Indian diaspora literature has emerged as an academic discipline in the age of multiculturalism and transnationalism. It has been flourished by Indian origin authors who have migrated in different nations for different reasons. The galaxy of Indian Diaspora literature is enriched by notable male-female authors who have projected the trauma and complexities of abroad life in their fictional works. Amit Chaudhuri is a prestigious literary figure in the modern indian diasporic writing. The novel portrays a saga and suffering of young indian Bengali boy Ananda who migrate to the Oxford University, England to peruse his degree in literature. Ananda face many challenges in newly adopted western culture. Throughout his journey in foreign land, Ananda exhibit different tropical issues like identity crisis, homesickness, displacement, exile and alienation. Odysseus Abroad is a conspicuous diasporic text which represents a painful journey of a young indian student in abroad. The selected novel will be scrutinized from the angle of diaspora literary study.*

**Key Words:** *diaspora, identity crisis, complexities, exile, migrate, alienation*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Originally, the word 'migration' has been derived from the Latin word 'migare' means 'to move'. Human migration is not a newly formed phenomenon; it has been running since older times. People migrate from one place to another to gain better prospects. Migration can be occurred voluntarily or involuntarily. In the simplest sense, migration means geographical transformation with the purpose of shifting- permanently or temporarily in a new land. Invasion, conquest, colonization and immigration are the distinctive forms of migration.

A Diaspora study has been evolved in the last phase of 20<sup>th</sup> century to study the dispersed ethnic community. Diaspora study critically examines the external affairs, issues and challenges of immigrants that they face in abroad. The present research would critically analyze the problematic life of indian immigrant in abroad. The prime objective of the present research is to explore *Odysseus Abroad* as a diasporic text by exemplifying numerous diasporic elements in it.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present research is based upon the following methodology:

1. Amit Chaudhuri's novel *Odysseus Abroad* is the main research tool of the present research.

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2. The relevant diasporic elements in *Odysseus Abroad* would be explored through extensive study and close reading.
3. The findings and observation of the present research would be based upon the primary and secondary data.
4. The present research would be descriptive and analytical in nature.

The previous works which have been taken as a reading source are ethically cited in reference section.

## III. RESULT ANALYSIS

Diaspora studies evolved during the late part of 20<sup>th</sup> century to study the affairs of ethnic community. This newly academic body focuses upon the issues and challenges of immigrants. The present research is particularly undertaken to trace out the diasporic tendencies in the novel *Odysseus Abroad*.

The novel portrays a mental turmoil of the protagonist Ananda in his adopted land. Ananda swings between two culture- eastern and western. He does not forsake a deep bond with his motherland; on the contrary western culture does not allow him to be a part of their society. He has stored the former memories of his homeland in his mind which he recalls in his loneliness.

Amit Chaudhuri has successfully drawn a realistic picture of abroad life. Ananda's adjustment and discomfort in London implies that migration isn't a delightful pleasure for everyone. Overall, the novel *Odysseus Abroad* projects a dilemma of a young indian who survives in abroad. Ananda's feeling of homesickness, his state of loneliness, his struggle with western culture, a crisis with identity and his displacement in London substantially carried out the diasporic symptoms.

## IV. DIASPORA AND INDIAN DIASPORA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The word 'Diaspora' has been derived from the Greek word 'dia' means 'through' and 'sparian' means 'to scatter'. Historically, the word 'Diaspora' was used to denote the dispersion of Jews community from their homeland Israel and their settlement in different parts of the world.

In modern terminology, the word 'diaspora' has been utilized to address the migration of any individual or community from their original homeland. The word diaspora anticipate the concept of Third World which adherence the state of dislocation and displacement. Hareshwar Roy comments on the modern usage of the term diaspora in the following words:

Today the term diaspora has made dynamic comeback in the debates around ethnicity, nationality and nationhood, boundaries and identity.



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It has returned to assist the understanding of migration, post migration and re-territorialization, people's multiple senses of belonging and loyalties beyond national boundaries. More recently and with increasingly frequency, this term is being used to encompass the dispersal of any group or community outside the country of their origin. (Roy: 12-29)

International migration has been increased swiftly in the age of globalization. People adopt their desirable destination land to gain better prospects in their lives. Better economical opportunity in abroad has been placed as the dominant motive in the contemporary migration. Education, family, peer group and marriage are other determining causes to adopt migration. In case of India, well educated, professional and skillful Indians have been scattered in different continents of the world. As per the report of Ministry of External Affairs, there are 28 million people in different corners of the world who are Indian origin living outside from the country in recent years.

Diaspora literature is an academic body of writing produced by the migrated authors. As it is written and composed by immigrant authors, it is also recognized as 'immigrant literature'. Diaspora literature has been written with certain common tenets. Alienation. Identity crisis, socio-cultural conflict, racial segregation, homelessness, rootlessness, memory, nostalgia and displacement have been prominent thematic tendencies in diasporic writing. Diaspora writing is fascinating in its literary expression. The diasporic authors have fruitfully projected the traumatic experiences of diaspora community in their fictional writing

Indian diaspora literature has emerged with the emerging of new dimensions and perceptions on the vast canvas of literature. It has been flourished swiftly since last four decades and became a mainstream of Indian English Literature. The migrated authors have substantially exemplified India, Indianness and Indian culture in their creative writing. Many Indian origin authors settled in abroad during colonial and post colonial period. These migrated authors advocate newly academic discipline which flourished as 'diaspora literature'. Indian diaspora literature has generated a powerful literary network by characterizing eastern and western culture in their writing. Bhikhu Parekh observes,

The Indian diaspora is like the Banyan tree; the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, spread out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world. (Parekh: 106)

Modern Indian diasporic writing has been categorized into two groups: First and Second generation. First generation is the inclusion of those authors who are born and brought up in India and then move to abroad. Those who are born in foreign land but tied up with the land of their ancestors are placed in second generation. The former group is victimized of displacement, nostalgia and memory while later group suffers from the identity crisis and rootlessness.

Notable authors have developed a new arena in literary grounds through their kaleidoscope approach. Male authors like V.S.Naipual, A.K.Ramanujan, Vikram Seth, Ved Mehta, Rohinton Mistry, M.G.Vassanji, Amitav Ghosh, and Salman Rushdie have glorified the literary path of Indian diasporic writing by their deep diasporic visibility and consciousness. Female authors on the other hand subtly

project the trauma, agony, dilemma and psychological suffering of migrated Indian women in their host land. Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharti Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Kamala Markandey, Uma Parmeshwaran, Sujata Bhatt, Anita Desai, Meera Syal and Sunetra Gupta have emerged as the prominent figures who have woven the actual issues being faced by Indian women in abroad. Salman Rushdie observes,

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expirates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind. (Rushdie: 10)

### V. DIASPORIC ELEMENTS IN AMIT CHAUDHURI'S *ODYSSEUS ABROAD*:

There are number of prominent Indian-origin authors who have settled in abroad and established themselves as a successful venture. Amit Chaudhuri is one of them who have moved to the U.K in recent years. Amit Chaudhuri is an eminent poet, novelist, editor and literary critic of contemporary Indian diasporic writing. He has been awarded by prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *A New World* in 2002. He has also received the Commonwealth Writers Prizes in 1991 for his debut work *A Strange and Sublime Address*. Chaudhuri's other novels include *Afternoon Raag* (1993), *Freedom Song* (1998), *A New World* (2002), *The Immortals* (2009), *Odysseus Abroad* (2015) and *Friend of My Youth* (2017). Currently Chaudhuri is giving service as a professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of East Anglia. London Review of Books appreciates the legacy of Amit Chaudhuri by stating, 'Chaudhuri can write better than just about anyone of his generation.' Amartya Sen admired Chaudhuri's literary activism in the following words:

He has been of course a remarkable intellectual with a great record of literary writing showing a level of sensibility as well as a kind of quite humanity which is quite rare. It really is quite extraordinary that someone could have had that kind of range that Amit Chaudhuri has in terms of his work and it could be so consistently of the highest quality. (Web)

Chaudhuri has been credited as a versatile author whose works are deeply engraved under the texture of diasporic consciousness. As a diasporic novelist, he has coherently estimated the complexities of emigrants in foreign land. He has composed his works in different genres like poetry, novel and short story. Chaudhuri's works have been pretended as documentary which touches to the reality, his works deal with realism rather than romanticism. Chaudhuri's use of language exemplifies the insights of diaspora community.

Amit Chaudhuri's *Odysseus Abroad* published in 2015 by Hamish Hamilton publishing House. It is hailed as one of the acclaimed works of Chaudhuri in which he has embodied the problematic struggle and psychological suffering of young Indian student in abroad. The novel is a journey of Ananda who migrate to the Oxford University, London to fulfill his bachelor degree course in English literature. An enthusiastic, ambitious and goal achiever Ananda arrives in London to establish himself as a poet. Initially he feels nostalgic and displacement in foreign land but his vision encourages him internally to adjust there and focus on his goal. Anand encounters certain hardship and embarrassment in alien land. *Odysseus Abroad* is set into six different parts; each part is coded by specific title. The novel is well written diasporic work and it contains conspicuous diasporic elements in its theme. The different diasporic elements to be scripted in the novel are as follows.

## VI. HOMELAND AFFILIATION

Diaspora community is deeply attached with the root of their homeland. Sense of homelessness resides in them. In spite of having settled comfortably in abroad, they never get disconnect from their motherland. Overseas Indian are very fascinating with Indian culture and tradition. Crane and Manmohan observes,

The notion of India as home might be repressed, but it reappears to punctuate the diasporic texts, overtly or in disguise, over and over again.... the clear border between the world and the home, the outside and the inside, the public and the private dissolves and each becomes a part of other. Such sensibility is repeatedly present in Diasporic writers. (Crane and Manmohan: 10)

The central character of the novel Ananda constantly remembers his land of origin. He has maintained a strong bonding with the Indian land and its culture. Ananda's excessive interest in Indian classical music brings him closer to his motherland. Ananda is a genuine lover of Indian classical music. Ananda usually practices different musical 'Raags' in his room. In this way he tries to connect himself with the ordinary routine life of India in foreign land. Ananda's outfit also exemplifies his deep attachment with India. He wears a typical kurta and pyjamas at night.

Unwashed, evacuated, clothed in the night's kurta and pyjamas, he sat on the rug to sing. He was an exile in his home. He frequently expected complaints. He knew the raags he sang were hopelessly alien to Mandy's ear (she too slept till midday) and foreign even to the boys upstairs. (Chaudhuri: 28)

Indians can't live without the taste of their delicious food even at the outside. Ananda seems to be a lover of Indian cuisine heartily. He visits many restaurants and cafes to taste Indian food along with his uncle. He terribly misses the taste and smell of Indian food in London. Unfortunately, the London restaurants do not serve the real taste of Indian food. They're fakes. They'll be nothing like the original.' It was the tragedy of London- to eat Indian food outside of the 'curry' and to constantly discover the unfamiliar in the familiar: dosas that looked like but didn't taste like the dosas, bhelpuri that resembled bhelpuri but was something else. Not that he cared for the mythology of the ladoo. He

had no idea why they were distributed jubilantly at North Indian celebrations. They were more a metaphor, a conceit, rather than a viable sweet. Their prestige had no explanation. (Chaudhuri: 176)

Diaspora community ties themselves with their motherland socially as well as culturally even after settlement in host land. They perform many rituals and follow the customs concerning with their origin land. India is a country of multiculturalism and multi-religion. Each religion and culture has their own customs and rituals. Bengal region is prominently famous for its culture and religious ceremony called 'Durga Pooja.' Durga Pooja is a unique religious ceremony performed by Bengali community. In the novel, Ananda attends 'Durga Pooja' twice in London along with his mother and uncle.

That was in the autumn, where the Durga Poojas were exiled from the Hampstead to the Camden Town Hall-which was just out of sight of King's Cross Station. Har-rumphing Bengalis with their slow footed wives had suddenly appeared.

They too, Anand's mother, his uncle, he-had come, having heard of the move. They'd crossed at the traffic lights, not certain where, in the by lanes, the venue was. His mother wasn't capable of long walks. It was Saptami, despite its meaning-'the seventh day'- was the start of festivities. (Chaudhuri: 170-172)

This religious ceremony signifies Anand's deep association to his religion and culture. Ananda has strongly preserved his 'Indianness' by maintaining such Indian rituals. He wants to survive as a 'pure Indian' in foreign land.

## VII. IDENTITY CRISIS

One of the major issues that diasporic community faces in their adopted land is the crisis regarding identity. The second generation immigrants are born and bred in foreign land, but socially they have been placed as an 'outsider'. Ananda's social identity marks certain disturbances in his journey. Initially he does not keep pace easily with western culture, he finds himself as an 'alien' in an unfamiliar land. Gradually, Ananda learns to live somehow in newly adopted culture and location.

None of the thing that defined him- that he was a modern Bengali and Indian, with a cursory but proud knowledge of Bengali literature; that he wrote in English, and spoken much of his life; that he used to be served lettuce sandwiches as a teatime snack as a child; that in his early teenage years he'd subsisted on a diet of Agatha Christie and Earl Stanly Gardner ; that he'd developed a taste for corduroys over jeans recently- almost none of this counted for anything in London, since everyone spoke English, ate sandwiches, they wore jeans or corduroys. In this way he, his identity had been taken away from him; and he'd become conscious, in England, of class. (Chaudhuri: 14)

London does not offer the same kind of atmosphere and liberation to Ananda as India has given to him. He does not feel a real sense of home in London.



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He himself confesses that it is difficult for him to survive in a land in which multiple identities exist together. Ananda becomes diplomatic in establishing his individuality in host land. At last he considers himself as an 'outsider' in that alien land.

### VIII. LONELINESS

Loneliness is the distinctive feature of diasporic writing. Diaspora people find themselves in state of alienation and loneliness because of socio-cultural barrier in their host land. *Odysseus Abroad* is a sensational exploration of isolation and loneliness. Ananda suffers from 'homesickness' and finds himself in isolation from his peer group. Ananda has very less communication with his neighbor due to socio-linguistic hurdle. Ananda lock himself in his tiny apartment and spent his time by getting involving himself in different activities.

The small amount of money in his wallet means he had to choose from an exceptionally narrow range of orders; but he didn't mind, because he mostly lacked appetite. The walk from Warren Street to the unexpected moonscape of Euston Road and back again, by when the Patels were stirring in expectation of the night, was so full of loneliness that it couldn't even be softened by self-pity. (Chaudhuri: 14)

### IX. DISLOCATION

Geographical transformation creates certain trauma and anguishness in diasporic community. Ananda was born and brought up in a Bengal region, a historical and cultural land. Ananda was habituated to live typical Indian life style as the normal Indian lives. His physical move to the London initiates many distortion and embarrassment in his life. He does not acquire same kind of lifestyle as he was getting in India. He finds many barriers in his normal routine life. 'What am I doing in London? And what I'll do once I'm back in India? What do I do if I don't get a first, will a 2:1 suffice? Of course I won't get a first- no one does. When will the *Poetry Review* send me a reply? I've read the stuff they publish – chatty verses are the norm- as they should be a stuck by my anguish and music. Such thoughts occurred to him during the day but were now set aside in the interests of following. In addition to the bass beat- the movement upstairs. (Chaudhuri: 8)

### X. ALIENATION

Etymologically, the term 'alienation' has been derived from the Latin word 'alienatio' means 'to eliminate'. Cambridge dictionary defines the term as 'the feeling that you have no connection with the people around you or that you are not part of a group'. Alienation is a painful feeling in which a person does not find any social connection with the people around them. Racism, inferior status and discrimination in host land are the basic causes that promote alienation.

In *Odysseus Abroad*, Ananda's uncle Radhesh was living in London since thirty years. But unfortunately he was not fully accepted by the native people of his adopted land. Radesh finds himself unable to raise his voice against humiliation. He bears his insult silently when he was attacked by white man who flung an apple on his face. Due

to having lower status, Radhesh tolerate this inhuman act hopelessly. Ananda himself encounter many strange experiences in London. He avoids to meet an 'English' person who ignores his physical existence.

He was going to see his uncle. But he must get some things to eat. Senate House was nearby. He decides he wouldn't. The busy Dining Hall on the top floor- it was far too English. The English were a strange lot: even if they didn't acknowledge your existence, they made feel you on display. How did they manage to do that? Their books advocated the virtues of observation-but they didn't look at you directly. If you sat opposite an English person, you may as well not be there- that was English politeness or the rules of the culture. (Chaudhuri: 73)

Once when he makes an eye-contact with a person in the bus, he was ignored immediately by the fellow passenger. It was a painful moment for him as he was considered as an 'outsider' by the native fellow.

They did practice the art of looking in secret; on the tube, in the silence of human contiguity, Anand's eyes had more than once alighted accidentally on the reflection of a co-passenger, and found he was found being studied. The eyes had immediately slid away, but he'd been startled that his existence had aroused curiosity, often warned him against making eye-contact with skinheads an even punks: 'would you like an animal in the eye? No. Because it thinks' it's a challenge.' (Chaudhuri: 73)

### XI. CONCLUSION

Amit Chaudhuri's literary mastery has successfully carried out the accurate diplomacy of how an 'individual' struggles to establish himself in his destination land. He has presented a dynamic and vibrant picture of abroad life through different circumstances. As a diasporic author, Chaudhuri is well aware from the complexities and traumatic experiences that diaspora community faces in a host land.

Ananda survives in London with his half-paralyzed identity. In spite of his mother's partial visits at his tiny apartment, he feels loneliness and finds himself in isolate state. Ananda feels sense of loss and geographical displacement in London. Ananda's dilemma and psychological suffering represent the typical suffering of diaspora community particularly of the Indian. Chaudhuri has excellently embodied the diasporic tendency through his vigilance and sensibility.

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