

The Dichotomy in *The Immortals* by Amit Chaudhuri

M. Balamurugan¹ and Dr. L. Baskaran²

¹Ph. D Research Scholar (Part-time), Rajah Serfoji Government Arts College,
Thanjavur (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli)

²Department of English, Associate Professor & Research Advisor,
Rajah Serfoji Government Arts College,
Thanjavur (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.)

Paper Received on 05-06-2025, Accepted on 01-07-2025
Published on 02-07-25; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.3.47

Introduction:

Amit Chaudhuri is one of the most distinctive literary writers in the English literature. His contributions extend not only in literary aspects but also in aesthetics also. He has participated in many music live concerts especially to represent the Hindustani music. Chaudhuri has written several collections of poetry, essays, short stories and novels. He has written seven novels. Among these novels *A Strange and Sublime Address* his first novel has won Betty Task Award and Common Wealth Writer's Prize. At Present he is the professor of contemporary literature at University of East Anglia. This paper primarily aims to explore the distinctiveness characteristics of tradition and modernity through the characters Mallika Sengupta and Nirmalya Sengupta.

Review of Literature

By comparing Amit Chaudhuri's writing to those of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, Paro Anand places Chaudhuri into the larger context of modernist literature. She highlights Chaudhuri's emphasis on personal experience and his subversion of traditional narrative frameworks. According to Anand, he is a key character in the modernist tradition of contemporary Indian fiction because of his introspective writing and examination of individual awareness (Anand 142–56).

Nivedita Menon explores in her discussion of music's function in *The Immortals*, Nivedita Menon points out how Chaudhuri uses Indian classical music as a metaphor for both cultural continuity and change. She contends that music functions as a multi-layered narrative element in his work, shedding light on both the larger social realities and the inner emotional landscapes. According to Menon, music is essential to comprehending Chaudhuri's fiction's balancing act between tradition and modernity (Menon 55–70).

The Immortals was his fifth novel which vividly portrays the legacy of two families, one impacted on corporate affluence and another family influenced on musical legacy. Nothing really dramatic happens in the story and not even a hint of romantic love in Amit Chaudhuri's earlier writings. The interactions between the two families occasionally raise the possibility of financial ruin or sexual impropriety, but these scenarios never come to pass. Smooth, well-behaved grooves are how life

moves along. Despite their stark differences, both of these families are members of the educated, urban, and westernized elite that represents India. They oversee the arts and the economy, which have elevated India to a global prominence. The workers and servants stay in the background, dealing with the devastation caused by a strong monsoon and gnawing hunger.

In *The Immortals*, Chaudhuri's fifth book, two families are brought together by their shared daily interest in music. It discusses Nirmalya's relationship with his Guruji and the effects that relationship has had on both their own and their families' lives. The father of Nirmalya Sengupta, a teenage boy, is employed in the corporate world. Nirmalya has access to all the amenities that a son of a wealthy family can have. He is pursuing his own goals with the hypercritical fervor that only the rich can display, in contrast to many youngsters. The book offers a thorough analysis of the connection between art and business. Chaudhuri uses classical music as a framework to talk about how Indian culture is changing.

The Immortals has a nostalgic feel to it, just like a lot of Chaudhuri's works. It is regrettable that the traditional singing style is no longer in vogue, that television soap operas are taking the place of classic stories, and that high-rises are erasing Bombay's historic architecture. The majority of this lament is focused on the undesirable changes in the musical tradition, particularly the guitar's replacement of the four-stringed tanbura. It is reported that the traditional tanbura sounds 'like a god humming to itself.' However, Nirmalya experiences a similar sense of loss when he discovers that his favorite coffee shop has been overtaken by a chain of stores. The themes which unite all of the characters. The tale begins with the notes of a Hindustani classical raga called Bhimpalasi, which were emanating from a corner of the room. The protagonist's guru, Panditji, was the author's main focus. He passed away, but he recalled that he used to sing brilliantly when he was alive. He had studied Hindustani classical music and was a sensitive man. Although he was not well-known, he knew a lot about his music.

Shyamlal entire family had received singing instruction. For Ram Lal, the worship of classical music was essential to his existence. In contrast to him, his son Shyamji studied music in order to get money. He saw music as a profession and supported its commercialization. He concentrated more on Hindi movie songs because they were a simple method to teach and make money, even though Nirmalya wanted him to be well-known in Indian classical music. Although Nirmalya was aware that Shyamji was the greatest instructor, he believed that an artist should focus on their craft rather than achievement.

Shyamji, why don't you sing classical more often? Why don't you sing fewer ghazals and sing more at classical concerts? Shyamji was always unimpeachably polite. He now turned to study the Managing Director's son's face with curiosity, as if he were reminded again of the boy's naivety. Baba, he said, let me establish myself so that I don't have to think of money anymore. Then I can devote myself completely to art. You can't sing classical on an empty stomach. (191-192)

Mallika Sengupta who was married to a royal business man whose influence was high on corporate. Mallika Sengupta's son, Nirmalya Sengupta wants to learn music, so he finds a guru, Shyamlal. He was very famous in Hindustani Music. Shyamlal is shocked by Sengupta's son's interest because in recent days, youngsters admired on western music but his son show interest in Hindustani music. Shyamlal is the guru for Mallika also, in his point of view surely, Mallika would become good singer, but she didn't get fame due to her married life. After her marriage she also slowly deviates from her wish.

Nirmalya's musical guru, Shyamlal was a son of ardent musician Ramlal. Ramlal was a man who believe everything is music. His son Shyamlal is also a good musician but his dedication to the music cannot be compare to his father. His thought provokes on money making and most of the youngsters are interested in western songs and film songs. It made him to rethinks on importance of music.

Nirmalya had heard these kinds of arguments before that one must first satisfy his bodily requirements like shelter, clothing than the psychological demands like culture but he did not believe in it. Mrs. Sengupta, Nirmalya, and Shyamji were all connected by music. Mallika Sengupta was taught by Shyamji, while Nirmalya became interested in music. He began hanging out with his mother and going to concerts with her. Even Mrs. Sengupta enjoyed spending time with her son, and they grew closer thanks to Indian classical music. They would talk about musical performances and the vocalists' performances. Nirmalya even desired to study classical music with Shyamji. Nirmalya began practicing bhajans, while Shyamji carried on Mallika's practice.

For Bengalis, Bengali food is a significant component. Bengali cuisine was a favorite of Apurva Sengupta's family. Apurva's buddies also enjoyed the cuisine that was made at his house. Sengupta's life included parties, which were significant events. Apurva's coworker, Philip Dyer, loved to eat and would frequently request the menu. He enjoyed the Bengali fish dishes prepared by Mrs. Sengupta. Mr. Sengupta would ask his wife if she was preparing fish while keeping a close watch on the menu. The head of HMV's Light Music wing, Laxmi Ratan Shukla, was a bureaucrat who had come to hear Mrs. Sengupta's song, but he didn't like the way she pronounced her words. He was offered luchis and a cup of tea because he enjoyed Bengali cuisine. He declined the offer of additional luchis because he was already full. He gently explained to her that although she could sing Bhajans, she finds Hindi challenging. Being Bengali, she had an accent that made it difficult for her to sing. Jairam began tutoring Mallika Sengupta after Motilalji was dismissed on his advice. The writer Chaudhuri has insisted and explored the differences even in the food facts, that luchi's and fishes made the combinations of tradition and modernity.

The characters in the novel have frequently become enmeshed in a web of opposing emotions, which makes their quest for self-discovery much more difficult. Each subject shapes and influences the others, forming a resonant and harmonious narrative symphony as the novel develops like a mosaic. Through his skillful storytelling, Amit Chaudhuri enables readers to observe the nuanced relationships

among ambivalence, selfhood, and exile. The story demonstrates how these deep issues are interconnected, whether it is through a character's internal monologue in the face of exile or a poignant moment of ambivalence influencing the course of self-discovery.

The impression of Shyamji as an ideal artist in accordance with the purest notion of an artist that Nirmalya had conceived in his mind has failed to come together with the Shyamji in reality because Shyamji was not a teacher in the mythological sense. This is perhaps the most obvious example of the conflict between tradition and modernity. He was surrounded with transactions. He anticipated being promoted by his students, and they anticipated being promoted by him. Both required and unavoidable are the clash of perspectives and the clash of the binary, which assumes the idea of transformation basically, the substitution of one element for another. No opposition or binary would have existed if there had been no change; their existence is essential to the continuation of the element they serve, just as it is to the life of the portion they contradict.

Thus, the characters Nirmalya, Mallika Sengupta, Apurva Sengupta have clearly depicted the impact of the tradition and modernity. The musical guru Shyamlal was also clearly exhibited the deviations of the youngsters when compared the life style of 1980's. As a Hindustani musician, he also supports the western music and adapted to the modern life.

References:

- Anand, Paro. "Modernist Perspectives in Contemporary Indian Fiction: The Case of Amit Chaudhuri." *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2002, pp. 142–156. ISSN 0973-1234.
- Chaudhuri. Amit. *The Immortals*. New Delhi: Penguin books. 2012. Print
- Menon, Nivedita. "Musical Narratives in Amit Chaudhuri's *The Immortals*: Tradition and Transformation." *South Asian Music and Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, pp. 55-70. ISSN 0975-8832.