

# LITERARY TECHNIQUES: A STUDY OF AMIT CHAUDHURI'S NOVELS

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## ABSTRACT

Style in literature is the literary factor that explains the ways that the author uses to include the author's word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement which work together to establish mood, images, and meaning in the text. A writer's style is what sets one's writing apart and makes it distinctive from others. It is the way in which writing is dressed to fit the specific context, purpose, or audience. This paper will discuss the literary techniques used by Chaudhuri in the novels undertaken, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, *Freedom Song*, *A New World*, and *The Immortals*. He has used various techniques like Bengali words, imagery, allusions, irony, etc. which make his novels more interesting.

**Keywords:** Literary technique, Style, Imagery, Irony, etc.

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## INTRODUCTION

Literary techniques provide deeper meaning for the reader and help the reader to use imagination to visualize the situation. They also add texture, energy, and excitement to the narrative, grip the reader's imagination, and convey information. There are different techniques used by an author by which he makes his work expressive to the audience. Amit Chaudhuri is also amongst the one who has used different literary techniques in his novels. His way of using things is simple and various different techniques are discussed as follows:

## IMAGERY:

Imagery means to use figurative language to represent objects, actions, and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses. Strong imagery is created in the novels of Chaudhuri. Thus readers are forced to use their imagination and to focus on the minute details used by him. Such images are actually countless to take note of individually, but some of the more stunning and remarkable ones may not be passed over without a remark. Chaudhuri's novels abound in beautiful images. He is an expert in creating images. For Chaudhuri, image is important as it is a visual experience for him. So, he poetically renders the events and characters in his novels. He describes them so vividly and beautifully and in such a way that they seem new and interesting. As far as sight is concerned, nothing which can kindle the imagination of the writer can escape him. He can register all kinds of sounds and can represent various kinds of smell and tastes. He can feel the breeze as well as the storm. Imagery in fact is an indispensable part of his writings.

In his first novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address* here are some of the examples of imagery used by the author:

1. The author has described the way women wash the clothes:

Sometimes, in the afternoon, Sarswati would wash saris and sheets, tedious yards of cloth, beneath the running tap, sitting fixedly on her haunches, rubbing the clothes, banging them

repeatedly with a loud watery ‘pluff’ on the floor. As she banged them, the bathroom echoed with a strange rhythm. Later she would wring the saris into long, exhausted pythons of cloth. (8-9)

2. Bengalis love food and the author being a Bengali never leaves a chance to write about Bengali food. Author has explained how Bengali people eat their food and what they eat:

Pieces of boal fish, cooked in turmeric, red chilli paste, onions and garlic, lay in a red, fiery sauce in a flat pan; rice, packed into an oven-white cake, had a spade-like spoon embedded in it; slices of fried aubergine were arranged on a white dish; dal was served from another pan with a drooping ladle; long, complex filaments of banana flower, exotic, botanical, lay in yet another pan in a dark sauce; each plate had a heap of salt on one side, a green chilli, and a slice of sweet-smelling lemon. The grown-ups snapped the chillies (each made a sound terse as a satirical retort) and scattered the tiny, deadly seeds in their food. (9)

3. The author has also described the ways in which people sleep and the various movements taken by them during their sleep. There is a very lovely sleeping scene described by the author as how the things around Sandeep’s mother and Mamima are in active stage though they are not using them:

Chhotomama fell asleep, the newspaper covering his face. When the breath came up from his nostrils, the newspaper rose and fell lightly, as if it were breathing as well. On the big bed, Mamima and Sandeep’s mother began to dream, sprawled in vivid crab-like postures. His aunt lay on her stomach, her arms bent as if she were swimming to the edge of a lake; his mother lay on her back, her feet (one of which had a scar on it) arranged in the joyous pose of a dancer. (10)

4. Author has not only praised Calcutta but also criticised it. The roads are always dug and he describes: “The old houses, with their reposeful walls, are crumbling to slow dust, their once-gleaming gates are rusting. Dust flakes off the ceilings in offices; the buildings are becoming dust, the roads are becoming dust” (11).
5. The sweeping and scrubbing of house by the maid servants, Chhaya and Maya are symbolically described through the eyes of Sandeep:

She would sweep the floor - unending expanses, acres and acres of floor - with a short broom called the jhadu, swiping away the dust in an arc with its long tail, which reminded one of the drooping tail of some nameless, exotic bird. She would collect the dust in a corner, and then she would dip a grey rag into a pail, and sit on her haunches at one end of the room, and swish the rag around the floor. Her odd movement forward on her haunches had an amphibian quality, half human and half of another world. (12)

6. The author has described a scene when Sandeep and his family had to go for an outing. All the members of the family had to adjust in the car: “Chhotomama sat at the steering-wheel with superior confidence; Mamima and Sandeep’s mother huddled in womanly league at the back; the three boys were crammed together in the front” (14).
7. With a loaded tray in her hands, Sandeep’s aunt came into the verandah, “There were cups of tea on the tray, and three tumblers of milk for the boys. There was also a small, earthen pot with dark, fried sweetmeats, each an orb, dipped in syrup” (21). Then she sat on the floor of the verandah and bent her knees: “Her legs, like two romantic, indefinite paths on a mountainside, were lost in her sari’s vast landscape” (22).
8. In Calcutta “jaams” are prepared in every home and even Sandeep’s aunt prepared jaams for the family: “It was served in bowls to Chhotomama and his friend, who ate the rich, battered flesh and spat out the thick seeds after sucking them dry onto a platter” (24).

9. A scene of power cut has been described by the author: “Whenever there was power cut, they fanned themselves meditatively with newspapers or bamboo fans, and the children deserted the bed and lay down or sat down on the floor” (26).
10. There was a prayer-room in Chhotomama’s house and different gods and goddesses were kept in various postures: “Krishna was there with his flute... Lakshmi was accompanied by her mascot, the white owl; Ganesh, with his humorous elephant-head, had been afforded a place as well, with his unlikely mascot, the giant rodent. Durga, the mother-goddess, had been given a slightly more prominent place than the rest” (32).
11. Sandeep’s father had accompanied him on second trip to Calcutta. They came to Calcutta to spend their vacations. Sandeep’s father decided to stay at the Grand Hotel on Chowringhee. The author describes the hotel: “The thrill of exploring the large lobby with its mirrors and sofas, of dining at the restaurant at night while a band played and couples danced, of gazing out at the swimming-pool in the afternoon” (83).
12. In the evenings, Chhotomama would come home and have: “a small simple meal of yoghurt and khoi and slices of bananas, mixed together with sugar, the smallest, simplest meal a Bengali can have” (87).

In *Afternoon Raag*, following are the examples of imagery created by Chaudhuri:

1. The narrator would miss his mother and remembers: “...I would think benignly of my mother’s good health, and how she suffers from nothing but constipation... she will concoct a mixture of Isab-gol and water, and stir it ferociously before drinking it” (189).
2. Early mornings his mother would make tea: “Water begins to boil in the kettle; it starts as a private secluded sound, puree as rain, and grows to a steady, solipsistic bubbling” (192).
3. He even talks about his mother’s beautiful hair: “Her hair is troublesome and curly... It falls in long, black strands, but each strand has a gentle, complicated undulation travelling through it, like a mild electric shock or a thrill” (192).
4. The working and movement of harmonium is keenly observed and shown to the readers. The author explains:

Each time the bellows are pushed, the round holes on the back open and close like eyes. Without the body music is not possible; it provides the hollow space for resonance as does the curved wooden box of the violin or the round urn of the sitar. At the moment of singing, breath tips in the swelling diaphragm as water does in a pitcher. The voice-box itself is a microscopic harp, its cords tautening and relaxing with each inflection. (195)

5. The author describes his room and the clothes hung on the back of door: “To my door was screwed a simple hook, from which my sweater and jacket, and later, in winter, my overcoat and scarf also, hung in a warm and voluminous pile” (209).
6. Chaudhuri makes a comment on the libraries through the narrator of the novel and says: “I hated libraries, where human beings hunched strangely over their books, behaving like birds who are not eating, but studying, their prey, in a silence where the only things that whispered were the leaves of the books” (210).
7. Sharma’s room used to blaze with pictures of gods: “Sharma stuck calendar pictures on the wall, in red, blue, orange, Kali biting her tongue, Parvati riding a tiger” (275).

In *Freedom Song*, following are the examples of imagery:

1. Minute things like door, windows, house, verandah, etc. are important for the novelist. He describes them in such a manner that even these ordinary things become interesting. He can notice “A maze of

houses, predominantly off-white and red, with scattered island of green, dull facades, one lot of houses hiding from another” (351).

2. The author has beautifully described the throwing of the newspaper in every house by Bhaskar: “Bhaskar aimed his paper at one or two of the porches, where it fell on the floor with a sharp sound, or sent it flying at a first-storey balcony, a swift journey in the course of which the paper arched in mid air and finally landed just beyond the flower-pots” (291).
3. In the afternoon Khuku and Mini would asleep on the double bed and the room without the hum and movement of the fan: “the world outside seemed proportionately larger, with more space having come into existence to accommodate the different afternoon noises, of bird call and bird chatter, and vendors, hammering, and taxis” (292).
4. Nando saw Uma and Jochna sleeping: “The two figures stirred as if they had been immersed in something, lifting their heads like cats raising their whiskers from a bowl of milk” (294).
5. Haridasi was a maid servant at Bhaskar’s house and she would help in very household chores. Her way of working and eating has been described magnificently:

..., had cleared the dining-table, first cupping her endlessly compliant palm and pushing bits of moist rice and salt that had littered the table into its dark cave, to rest there between her heart line and her life line, collecting bits of fishbone as well to deposit them there, and then curling her fingers as if she were holding a secret and throwing the debris into the kitchen basin, though she had been told not to. (304)

6. Once Bhaskar had a book which had ghosts in it: “Once he had lain there on his stomach with a new book before him and seen rakkhoshes with fangs and nose-rings drink the blood of innocent kings, rakkhoshes who married female rakkhoshes and produced hordes of little khokkhoshes with small fangs and round eyes” (309).
7. The factory of Bhola was far from his home. He had to leave the home early in the morning: “...it meant crossing the Howrah Bridge; then passing through places that were neither towns nor outposts, but that had names; and negotiating a bad road” (397).

In *A New World*, following are the examples of imagery:

1. Food imagery is very strong and effective: “Bonny liked the Bangladeshi Biman chicken curry!” (11), said Jayojit. Jayojit’s mother emerged and said to Vikram: “Come on, we are going to have nice Bengali fish for lunch. So let us have bath now” (11).
2. Vikram’s grandmother said, “Come - I will bathe you,” tying the aanchal of her sari around herself (12). She advanced a few steps to the lever on the walls with the hot and cold water knobs on either side, which to the boy probably looked acquainted and she said: “I turn it like - this - and then I turn on the water like - this! She was standing to the right, her left arm straining as she turned the knobs, and her two bangles, her iron wedding-bangle and a gold one, clashed against each other” (12).
3. When Jayojit reached his home in Calcutta, there is an incident of opening his luggage, an image has been created by the author:

He unzipped the shoulder bag and retrieved his shaving things and his and Vikram’s toilet accessories, Aquafresh toothpaste, Head and Shoulders shampoo, Bodyline deodorant, a cylinder of Old Spice shaving foam, a Backwood Insect Cutter which he’d bought in case of mosquitoes; these things gleamed the most and looked the most foreign and desirable; even the toothbrushes were different and, curving oddly, seemed to belong to the future and some fragile, opulent culture. (17-18)

4. There is a scene in which Bonny fell asleep on the sofa and his father picked him up in his arms: “The boy knitted his eyebrows, turned his mouth, and sniffed, as if he could smell something. There was probably nothing more peaceful for him than these moments of subconscious awareness, suspended in his father’s arms, between two places of rest” (19).
5. Jayojit’s mother was very loving and caring. She loved her son and was always troubled by his food habits and health but she could do nothing about his life in America as she was not there. He was alone there and had to manage everything on his own. According to the author:

She could not know the secret life in that continent, 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 other people like him, wandering around aisles of the supermarket in shorts, with wives, or perhaps alone, with the ex-wife somewhere completely else, running into each other and saying, ‘How are you? Still around?’ His mother could not imagine it. (24)

6. The weather was very hot and everyone was waiting for rains so that they could get some relief: “The monsoons, like some messenger hurrying through the land, throwing his moth-like shadow...” (139).
7. Another episode in which Jayojit’s resemblance his father has been described:

Jayojit took off his glasses and wiped the lenses that had misted over the perspiration. His face bore a remarkable similarity to his father’s, the same lines around the mouth, the nose curving gently, the same fair complexion, both faces marked by education, a privileged background, and, it was clear, some sort of achievement. (62)

#### ALLUSIONS:

Allusion is a figure of speech, in which one refers covertly or indirectly to an object or circumstance from an external context. It is left to the audience to make the connection, where the connection is directly and explicitly stated by the author, an allusion is instead usually termed a reference. Here are the examples of allusion which Chaudhuri has used allusions.

In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Chaudhuri has used following allusions:

1. Indians mostly believe in the producing many children but how to bring them up is not their problem. Sweeper Nimai had four children and when Sandeep’s mother asked him whether he would be able to take care of them. He replied that he would definitely try to take care of his children. Everyone wanted to hold Nimai’s new born baby in their arms, even Sandeep and his cousins wanted to hold the child. The author here has very skilfully compared the holding of child with an episode in the *Ramayana*. Here allusion has been drawn from Hindu mythology, *Ramayana* where King Janak’s bow had to be held by various princes in order to marry Sita but only Ram could hold the bow in his hands and was the one who married Sita. The three boys discovered that there was no Ram among them and they do not have the proper knowledge of holding the child.
2. In India there is belief that when left hand itches one spends money and if right hand itches one gets money. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Mamima’s palm of left hand itches and she says, “Today the palm of my left hand’s itching,” Mamima said. ‘God, God, I wonder - it means I’ll have to spend more money - on what, I wonder.’ If the right hand itched, it meant one was going to get money - but it seldom itched, and when it did, money seldom followed” (42-43).
3. Once Chhotomama had the backache and Babla was asked to climb on his back. It was like the picture of Edmund Hillary on Mount Everest and he needed just a flag. He climbed on his father’s back and that was compared to the Shiv Tandav. In this incident allusion has been taken from Hindu mythology:

The Shiv Tandav: in the last phase of the universe, when the world is old and corrupt, Shiv wakes from his trance, and sets about destroying everything. With giant strides, he stamps out life. This is the Tandav, the terrifying, cosmological dance of destruction. The sculptors traditionally represent this with Shiv dancing, arms gracefully apart, one leg raised, the other foot on a helpless child lying on his stomach: the latter probably symbolizes the innocent life which is crushed as a part of the dance. (64)

4. Children were playing and Chhotomama asked them about their game. They told him that they were playing freedom-fighters: “We’re killing the British. We’re cutting the British to pieces” (65). Chhotomama asked them, “Who are you?” (65). Babla said, “I’m Subhas Chandra Bose,” (65) and then there was a fight between Babla and Abhi as both wanted to become Subhas Chandra Bose. Sandeep explained, “I’m Mahatma Gandhi,” (66). Then Chhotomama told him that Gandhi was no freedom fighter. Here allusion has been drawn from freedom struggle.

In *A New World*, Chaudhuri has used following allusion:

1. In *A New World*, Vikram was playing with his toys which had pictures of dinosaurs and: “By half past three, it was not so much the boy but the dinosaurs that had become exhausted; two small blue and pink creatures that had once ruled the world, they lay now on their sides upon the floor, their tails still curving, their heads bent and mouths open to roar, but strangely frozen and dumb” (18). Allusion has been drawn from extinct animals, dinosaurs.

In *The Immortals*, Chaudhuri has used following allusion:

1. In *The Immortals*, Shyamji got ill and was advised by the doctor not to have sweets. Mallika Sengupta said to Sumati, “You must stop him eating sweets,” “If he, a grown man, can’t control himself, you, as wife, must control him” (221). Sumati with a smile said, “Didi, you know that our Shyamji is like Shyam after whom he was named” “He’ll steal into the kitchen and eat what he pleases - no one can stop him” (222). There was an idiotic poetry to Sumati’s words that infuriated Mallika Sengupta and she recalled: “... the child Krishna stealing into his mother’s kitchen to satisfy his truant love of buttermilk. But Shyam was a god, a divergent figment of someone’s imagination, she thought; your husband has just had a heart attack” (222). Here allusion has been drawn from Hindu mythology in which Shyamji’s eating habits has been compared with Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna also symbolises calmness and tolerance.

## IRONY:

Irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that may end up in quite a different way than what is generally anticipated. In simple words, it is the difference between the appearance and the reality.

In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, here are the following ironical instances created by Chaudhuri:

1. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, as Shonamama entered the room and closed his black umbrella due to hot weather outside. He immediately asked for a glass of water from Saraswati and then turning to Sandeep said, “Now we really know that the Tropic of cancer runs through Calcutta” (26), this statement was ironical as it defines the weather, it was very hot outside and the author through Shonamama has tried to bring something out of nothing.
2. In India people usually the middle class has the habit of praying for little things like Mamima did that her husband’s car should start in the mornings. It is ironical as instead of praying for new car or bigger things in life she is happy that her old car starts in the morning. On being asked by Sandeep: “Mamima, what did you pray for today? Mamima replied: “Oh, I prayed the car would start in the mornings” (34). Innocence of Mamima is revealed here as it proved that middle-class people enjoy in their little happiness. Abhi being of modern age asked her in disappointment: “Didn’t you pray for a new car?” (34).

3. In an ironical situation when Chhotomama visits the old couple, the son of old couple tries to touch the feet of Chhotomama as mark of respect but Chhotomama said, “Oh no no no,” “There’s no need for all this. This was half a token gesture towards modesty, and half towards the new, ‘modern’ India - Nehru’s secular India, free of ritual and religion” (55). The young man replied that he had not met Chhotomama for two years and he wanted to touch his feet: “You must not stop me. This was half a token gesture towards modesty, and half towards the old, ‘traditional’ India - Gandhi’s India of ceremony and custom” (55).
4. Chhotomama was in hospital due to his bad health and he considered it as: “Being ill was a kind of entertainment, a communal ceremony; it involved such a lot of people. He had never seen so many people gathered in one room-three generations, at times-since his wedding or the time when he had passed his BA with a first class” (102). According to the author it is an ironical situation in which the hospital had become a gathering place where anyone would come and meet Chhotomama. People who had not met him since ages had come to meet him in the hospital.

In *Afternoon Raag*, here is an ironical example used by Chaudhuri:

1. In *Afternoon Raag*, the narrator was all alone in a foreign country. It is an ironical situation, he had so many people around him still he was alone. He always felt lonely and longed for home:

“I had a feeling of being surrounded, as on a ship or a train, by personal routines and habits that would not be known again, that had their natural place in some larger, more fixed habitat, and the morning noise had about it, therefore, the concentratedness, the temporariness, and the pathos of the noise of shared travel. (185)

In *A New World*, here are the following ironical instances:

1. In *A New World*, Jayojit lived in America and come to Calcutta to spend his vacations with his parents. His mother loved him and was very particular about his food and health. The irony was that she was not aware of the life he was leading in America as it was an imaginary place for her: “She had never been abroad; it was a far off place for her, a territory that intersected with her life without ever touching it, and which had, for her, its own recognizable characteristics” (40).
2. Jayojit wanted to come back to Calcutta but he did not like it. According to the author: “The city irritated him; it was an obstacle; yet he’d decided that it would give him the space for recoupment that he thought was necessary now” (51). It is an ironical situation though he is not fond of Calcutta but he thinks that this is the place which will give him solace and happiness.
3. There was a discussion between the Admiral and Jayojit about Jayojit’s married life, Admiral quietly quotes an ironical proverb where he says that about woman’s character and man’s fate even God does not know, so how can a mortal judge it. The Admiral quotes the proverb in Sanskrit, translating himself: “Of woman’s character and man’s fate even God is ignorant; what knowledge then can mortals have of these things?” (57-58)
4. Another incident is ironical where Dr Sen and Jayojit are discussing on Bengali community and Dr Sen says, “You know Bengalis, the doctor had said in his shy, lambent diction, ‘they come out during the Pujas. Then you’ll see them - heh, heh - bowing before Ma Durga! Others, of course, I-like y-you, live abroad, and keep the flats locked up, or give out the flats to Marwaris” (82).
5. There is an incident in which a conversation is going between Dr Sen and Jayojit which is very ironical. Dr Sen asks Jayojit: “Amartya Sen... My God, he’s done well! When d’you think he’ll get the Nobel Prize - or do you think he’ ll get it?” In reply Jayojit said: “It depends on which political lobby is currently dominant. . . They didn’t give it to Gandhi but they gave it to Kissinger!” (87).
6. Another incident between Jayojit and Dr Sen in which Dr Sen asks Jayojit: “do you eat a lot of meat?” Further in an ironical tone he gives his views on being a meat eater, he says: “I guess I grew up as more of a meat-eater than a fish-eater.” Though Bengalis claim that it’s eating fish that makes

them so brainy,” he laughed, “It doesn’t seem to have done any other part of their bodies much good” (172). He continued in the same tone, he laughed partly in embarrassment: “Bengalis go there and find a plethora of meat, and eat much more of it than they ever have, and consequently die like flies” (173)

7. It is very ironical when people change their place of habitat, they also change their outer appearance. In the novel when Amala had to go America for the first time with her husband: “On the way to the States, she changed from a Patola to a pair of jeans in the airport - Can you believe it, it’s the first time I’m going abroad?; sitting late into the night, they’d talked about their families” (145-146).
8. Another important example of irony is that Jayojit has compared Bengalis with people of other parts of the country. He had to buy some stuff for his friends in America and bought some Rajasthani bedcovers. He said, “All those lovely Rajasthani bedcovers and pichwais and tables - they cost a fortune in America.” He’d laughed rather loudly and said to his father: “You have to hand it to these Rajasthanis, with those traditions going way, way back! In the end, what do we Bengalis have except a few first-class university degrees - and a good command of English?” (165-166).

In *The Immortals*, here are the following ironical instances used by Chaudhuri:

1. In *The Immortals*, Apurva Sengupta got a promotion after Mr Deb’s death and he happily joins the new position. The irony here is that the world is changing rapidly and people are more after materialistic things. People wait to take the advantage of others miss-happenings: “Apurva Sengupta has had a promotion. Poor Mr Deb died suddenly, you know. Mr Dyer called Apurva Sengupta day before yesterday to his office and told him to take Mr Deb’s position” (32).
2. After Apurva Sengupta’s retirement they had to shift to a small house, the relationship between guru and student complicated. Shyamji would spend less time on Mallika Sengupta’s training. Shyamji was not a teacher in traditional sense. His disciple wanted only knowledge but he lived in a world of transactions. According to him:

He expected his students to promote him; his students expected him to promote them; it was a relationship of interdependence at once less calculating, less final, and more human - with all the oscillations of judgement and misunderstandings that humans are prone to - than one might be led to believe. (373)

The situation is ironical as teacher should have promoted students but here teacher wants his students to promote him.

3. In India, on ‘guru purnima,’ students give gifts to their gurus as a token of respect and love but commercialisation and materialism has changed everything especially the values and ironically in the novel, Tara, Pyarelal’s wife dropped a hint before ‘guru purnima’ to Nirmalya: “Baba, won’t you give your guru something?” (252)

This chapter deals with all the devices used by Chaudhuri in his novels. He has used various techniques like Bengali words, imagery, allusions, irony, etc. which make his novels more interesting. His style is realistic and language is simple. By doing so, the style he creates is unique and different from other writers.



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