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Maternal Intertextuality, Diasporic Identity, and Narrative Hybridity in Amit Chaudhuri's *Odysseus Abroad*

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Abstract

Amit Chaudhuri's Odysseus Abroad is a subtle expedition of identity, belonging, and meaning in the globalised era. The novel's explorative narrative structure interweaves genres, blending themes of diasporic experience, cultural hybridity, and existential introspection. Through its non-linear narrative, stream-of-consciousness narration, and intertextuality with Homer's Odyssey, Chaudhuri both reinstates essentialist notions of identity and celebrates its temporal, conditional nature. The paper examines how Chaudhuri's narrative techniques depict the intricacies of identity formation in a transnational world. His fragmented self mirrors the novel's hybrid form, which resists simplistic categorisations and embraces multiplicity. Chaudhuri's intertextuality with the Odyssey deepens the exploration of identity, reimagining Homer's epic in a contemporary context. Ultimately, the novel presents an intricate understanding of identity as a palimpsest, written and rewritten through history, culture, and narrative. By accepting this ambiguity, Chaudhuri presents an image of self-identity that is subtle, multi-stratum, and deeply human.

Keywords: Identity, Hybridity, Diaspora, Intertextuality, Narrative Structure.

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Introduction

Odysseus Abroad by Amit Chaudhuri is a proficient exploration of identity, belonging and meaning in the transnational age. The novel ingeniously combines themes through an innovative narrative structure that blurs the boundaries between travel narrative, memoir, and fiction. The paper will address major elements of the narrative structure and identity in *Odysseus Abroad* with references to the hybrid form and politics of identity, intertextuality and the Homeric parallel, stream of consciousness and introspection, and nonlinear narrative and fractured self.

Amit Chaudhuri is a famous Indian novelist, poet, essayist, literary critic, editor, singer and music composer. He was born in 1962 in Kolkata, brought up in Bombay, and studied English literature at University College London at Balliol College, Oxford.

The contemporary interpretation of *Odysseus Abroad* :

Homer's *Odyssey* is an ancient Greek epic that tells the story of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, and his long journey home after the Trojan War. His journey lasts ten years and is filled with adventures, trials, and challenges. The epic's central idea is homecoming, as Odysseus finally returns to Ithaca, reunites with his family, and regains his position as king. The poem explores themes such as survival, intelligence, loyalty, identity, and human endurance. Chaudhuri's *Odysseus Abroad* draws on this classical story and sets it in contemporary London. Both *The Odyssey* and *Odysseus Abroad* use the protagonist's journey to explore questions of identity and belonging. They also contain stories within stories and connect the protagonist's present experiences with memories of the past. However, the two works differ in their narrative style and setting.

The Odyssey is an epic poem that begins *in medias res* and uses a non-linear structure, with important parts of Odysseus's earlier journey being narrated later. *Odysseus Abroad*, by contrast, presents a more contemporary, introspective narrative, using stream-of-consciousness techniques to explore the protagonist's thoughts and memories. While Homer presents Odysseus's journey as a heroic quest for home, Chaudhuri transforms the journey into an exploration of modern identity, cultural displacement, memory, and belonging. In this way, *Odysseus Abroad* reworks the structure and themes of *The Odyssey* while giving them a new meaning in the context of contemporary London.

The Odyssey is part of Odysseus's journey of identity discovery, a manual, metaphorical journey. Likewise, *Odysseus Abroad* moves through the cities of Europe and lives through his Indian heritage and globalisation. To indicate this resemblance, some of the references are: Non-linear narrative: Book 5-12 (Odysseus flashback) of The Odyssey vs the disintegrated, self-apologetic narrative of *Odysseus Abroad*.

Inner voyage: The face-off challenge of Odysseus shapes his personality; *Odysseus Abroad* reflects this approach.

Major themes of The Odyssey:

Odysseus's journey to his homeland, Ithaca, brings together several important themes, including homecoming, belonging, identity, self-discovery, strength, intelligence, loyalty, and storytelling. His journey is not only a physical return to Ithaca but also a search for his identity and his place in the world. Odysseus faces many difficulties, but his courage, patience, intelligence, and determination help him overcome them. His cunning and wisdom become essential to his survival throughout the journey. At the same time, Penelope's loyalty and faithfulness to Odysseus represent the importance of love, family, and home. The epic also shows the power of storytelling, as Odysseus's experiences become part of a larger narrative of memory and myth. These themes also connect to the writing of Amit Chaudhuri, whose works often explore identity, belonging, memory, and human experience. His lyrical prose presents ordinary experiences with poetic sensitivity, while his self-reflective characters express questions of individuality and cultural belonging. Chaudhuri also combines different forms, such as fiction, memoir, and essay. Thus, both Odysseus's journey and Chaudhuri's writing explore the human search for identity, belonging, and a sense of home.

The conventions that have become famous in Amit Chaudhuri's novels include lyrical quality and an introspective style, Stream-of-consciousness narration, blending genres (memoir, fiction, poetry), a focus on day-to-day life and trivial moments, and the exploration of identity, memory, and belonging. His works tend to avoid narrative stereotypes, emphasise characters' introspection and thought, and reflect elements of Indian tradition and history.

His diverse narrative style is evident in novels such as A Strange and Sublime Address, Freedom Song, and *Odysseus Abroad*.

Fragile Self and Narrative Non-linearity.

In *Odysseus Abroad*, Amit Chaudhuri unfolds over one day, but its time structure is not linear. The protagonist Ananda's experience in London is constantly interrupted by Calcutta, family recollections, and fragments of previous journeys. This literary device reflects the confusion of identity in a globalised world. Chaudhuri states that memory is not faithful; time is a deception (Chaudhuri 43), which makes time's unreliability as a structuring mode more prominent.

Chaudhuri creates a palimpsest of identity by intertwining the past and the present: Ananda's sense of identity is rough, paraphrased, and fragmented. As an example, in Chapter 3, The City and the Sea, the narrator, Ananda, takes a walk through Dublin streets, and his sensory memories of Calcutta are stirred: the smell of wet earth, the light falling on the stairwell, etc. It was like being in that house, in that other life. This confusion of temporal boundaries shows that identity is not stable but is always negotiated between multiple geographies and pasts.

The diasporic condition is also reflected in the non-linear storyline. For migrants, memory often takes over the present moment and creates a fragmented personality that oscillates between the motherland and the host country.

"Immigration is an activity that has been present in the human development process throughout history. This phenomenon is created by diverse motivations and has positive and negative effects that impact the immigrant, the home country, and migration nation" (Zapata Serna 143). Ananda's memories of Calcutta are not nostalgic escapes but recollections of the unpredictability of belonging. He is torn between London's urgency and India's haunting.

The key point is that Chaudhuri's technique aligns with the modernist tradition of non-linear narrative and echoes writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. But unlike Joyce's Ulysses, which celebrates Dublin, Chaudhuri's story centres on ordinary life. The fragmented self lacks theatricalization through dramatic, grand events, and instead focuses on ordinary sensations: the smell of soil, the descent of the sun, and the beats of feet. This transition between meta-narratives and minutiae emphasises what Chaudhuri uniquely attributes to Indian English literature: the glorification of the mundane as a site of identity formation.

The non-linear form also disrupts the reader's expectations. Just as Ananda cannot resolve his identity in a single, linear flow, the reader cannot rely on a simple narrative trajectory. This confusion reflects the protagonist's fractured consciousness, inviting readers into a precarious state of self-consciousness.

In developing the theme of fragmentation, Chaudhuri can be read as criticising the very concept of coherent identity. He goes against the ideas of essentialism of cultural belonging as he opposes linearity. Identity is conditional, like narrative, and always disruptive. The novel itself becomes, therefore, a reconciliation to the impossibility of going back, not only to a homeland but also to a stable self.

Introspection and Stream of Consciousness:

The reliance on stream-of-consciousness narration is one of the least common aspects of *Odysseus Abroad* by Amit Chaudhuri. This narrative method lets readers enter Ananda's inner world, know his thoughts and feelings, and have their understanding shift in real time. Ananda considers himself in Chapter 5, "A Day in the Life", and says, "I am a creature of routine, but my routines are shifting" (Chaudhuri 75). This seemingly naive observation demonstrates the tension between stability and flux, routine and change. Through such introspective thoughts, Chaudhuri shows the protagonist's transforming identity, driven by personal routines and alienation from this culture.

The stream-of-consciousness style shows thought as disrupted. Ananda's thoughts wander, swapping commonplace details for meditative thoughts. He listens to the beat of footsteps or the cry of an oncoming bus or the feel of light before he slips into recollections of Calcutta or musings about literary work. This fluctuation between external provocation and internal spaces underscores this instability of identity: the self is never permanent, but it is constantly negotiating.

Chaudhuri uses introspection to place himself in an elder literary lineage. Like Virginia Woolf in Mrs Dalloway or James Joyce in Ulysses, *Odysseus Abroad* favours the interior over the exterior, revealing how consciousness itself becomes the space

of story. However, by focusing on the tediousness of daily life, Chaudhuri does not implicate himself in these modernist forerunners. The idea of Ananda does not sound pompous and grand, but plain and clear as she ponders family, food, or the mundane annoyances of daily life. This banality makes the story special and exceptional. Identity is built not through phenomenal moves but through the nuances of day-to-day life.

The diasporic state also comes out in the introspective style. To Ananda, the conflict between Western modernity and Indian tradition shapes identity. His memories often drift back to Calcutta, family traditions, cultural practices, and childhood memories. However, these memories are contrasted with the modern life of the narrator in London, where he navigates multicultural terrains and Western tendencies. The stream-of-consciousness story, therefore, is a medium for exploring hybridity: Ananda is neither purely Indian nor purely Western, but a blend of both.

In addition, Chaudhuri's introspection reveals the psychological impact of relocation. The thoughts of Ananda frequently lead to a feeling of estrangement in his efforts to balance the past and the present. Ananda's inner contemplation reveals doubt, self-doubt, and anxiety about belonging. For example, his struggle to change his habits reveals a more troubling aspect of composure related to cultural adjustment: to what degree must one alter oneself to belong in a new country? This conflict of the soul is conveyed through stream-of-consciousness, helping readers understand the protagonist's struggle.

The method also fosters the connection between the reader and the character. By giving readers access to Ananda's personal meditations, Chaudhuri creates a sense of oneness, as though the reader were a participant in the protagonist's life. This closeness is crucial to the experiment with identity: the reader does not simply read what happened to Ananda but engages in his self-exploration, grappling with the same questions of belonging and self.

The stream-of-consciousness narrative depicts the temporality and shortness of memory. Ananda often distorts time, shifting easily between past and present. Any sound or smell in London recalls Calcutta, and there is no clarity in distinguishing between here and there, the past and the present. This fluidity over time demonstrates the instability of diasporic identity, in which the past always intervenes in the present.

> Migration—whether spiritual, psychological, or physical, across oceans of space and time, or simply from one state to another—begins as a dramatic tension between resignation and restlessness, as a struggle between satisfaction with what one has and longing for something more, as a response to exigent circumstances such as political oppression, religious persecution, or economic depravation. (DeHaan 115)

Chaudhuri's stream-of-consciousness and introspective techniques transform *Odysseus Abroad* into a reflection on identity. The novel brings out the struggles of belonging, displacement, and hybridity by involving readers in Ananda's inner world.

The narrative style not only traces the protagonist's changing self but also critiques fixed concepts of identity, highlighting their impermanence and temporality

The Homeric Parallel and intertextuality.

The novel *Odysseus Abroad* by Amit Chaudhuri is highly referential: it addresses the themes of Homer's Odyssey while also imagining Odysseus's themes in the contemporary, diasporic world. This conversation is already foreshadowed by the very title of the novel, which puts the journey of Ananda in the context of the epic Odysseus. However, the main character of Chaudhuri's novel *Odysseus Abroad* is not an athletic traveller; he is a contemplative, homeless man stumbling over the banalities of modern city life. This contrast between past and present underlines the insecurity of belonging and identity in a globalised world.

Chaudhuri very obviously accepts this intertextual relationship when he pens the words: "Under the question of, I am not sure where I am returning to, The Odysseus is a poem of returns" (Chaudhuri 112). This question redefines the main theme of Homeric epic, the homecoming to Ithaca, as diasporic instability. Home is an ambiguous term, then, in Ananda's case: is it Calcutta, or London, where he currently resides? The Homeric parallel, therefore, becomes an intensifier of sorts through which Chaudhuri examines the issues of belonging, hybridity, and cultural displacement.

In Chapter 8, The Return, Ananda's encounter with a beggar in Athens echoes Odysseus's disguised homecoming to his homeland. However, the parallel is deliberately downplayed, simplified to heroic magnitude. Ananda instead confronts the mundane realities of city living rather than reclaiming a kingdom. This intertextual scene shows the novel's main theme: identity is not forged through heroic acts but through daily events shaped by memory, culture, and displacement.

Another difference emphasised by the Homeric parallel is the contrast between the epic and contemporary narrative. The Odyssey by Homer is chronological, organised well with a clear quest goal and mission. The novel by Chaudhuri, by contrast, is complex, segmented, and contemplative. By reworking the epic into a modern story of wandering, Chaudhuri critiques rigid ideas of identity and belonging. Odysseus's voyage was toward a safe haven; Ananda's justifies the pointlessness of such steadiness in a globalised world.

More than that, the intertextuality places *Odysseus Abroad* in a broader philosophical canon of revising classical texts. As in Ulysses by Joyce, which follows Homer's epic pattern to Dublin life, Chaudhuri applies the Odyssey to the diasporic condition of an Indian author in exile. "The migratory process involves multiple griefs and has a strong emotional burden, so in this work we take into account the personal conditions and the social conditions of the migratory process of the people interviewed and how they are related to the appearance of a process of grief and stress that can lead to Ulysses Syndrome" (Caprari Ayala et al. 190). However, Chaudhuri does it differently: while Joyce idealises the city, Chaudhuri shows the meaninglessness of everyday life; the epic framework emphasises detail rather than

phenomenal events.

It is also an intertextual intervention that portrays the politics of identity. By comparing Ananda and Odysseus, Chaudhuri highlights the hybridity of diasporic identity. Ananda is both Western and Indian, and he is plotting two cultures. The Homeric parallel becomes a metaphor for this hybridity (the fusion of two things): as the Odyssey is redefined in a contemporary context, Ananda's identity is constantly rewritten, shaped by various influences.

More to the point, intertextuality cannot be organised into simplistic categories. Ananda is no longer Odysseus in the modern sense; he is a disruptor, unpredictable, and self-centred. The novel is therefore critical of dogmatic ideas of identity, but instead focuses on its fluid, conditional character. The parallel of Homer is not just a map; it's a conversation—a space where historic themes reverberate in the present migration and globalisation conditions.

Odysseus Abroad becomes more serious through Chaudhuri's engagement with Homer and the Odyssey, which adds themes of identity, belonging, and displacement. By reconstructing the epic as a contemporary story of drifting, Chaudhuri highlights the ambiguity of place and identity in a globalised world. The intertextuality highlights the novel's central idea of the self: narrative is never fixed, but shaped by various histories and cultures.

Form and Identity Politics Hybrid.

Odysseus Abroad by Amit Chaudhuri is praised for its hybrid structure, its combination of traditions and genres, which help to reveal the complexity of the issue of identity in the world of globalisation. The novel resists classification, leaping rapidly through fiction, memoir, travelogue, and essay. This hybridity describes the identity of the protagonist, Ananda, who is caught between Indian heritage and Western influences. The fluidity of this nature is seen through Chaudhuri himself when he writes that identity is a palimpsest, a written and rewritten text (Chaudhuri 185). As a palimpsest records traces of different inscriptions, Ananda's identity is multidimensional, unstable, tense, and repeatedly restructured.

The novel's hybrid form makes the fusion of cultural traditions evident. On the one hand, Chaudhuri draws on Indian literary sensibilities and emphasises memory, family, and the traditional aspects of daily life. Conversely, he aligns himself with Western modernistic ideas of stream-of-consciousness and intertextuality, linking them to Homer's Odyssey. This mixture signals Ananda's hybridity: he is native to Indian culture but shaped by Western standards. Identity is not singular but a multiplicity created through various narratives and histories.

Through this hybridity, the politics of identity begin. In a global world, strict concepts of belonging are hard to preserve. Ananda's experiences in London's diverse spaces reveal the complexity of moving across cultural spaces. He does not entirely belong to India or to British influences. Rather, Ananda is a hybrid influenced by both traditions but does not fit into a fundamentalist category. The novel critiques fixed definitions of identity and embraces fluidity and multiplicity.

The cross-over between genres also manifests in Chaudhuri's hybrid form. The novel combines both prose and poetic elements, narrative and essayistic concepts. This hybridity reflects the uncertainty of identity: like the text, Ananda's identity resists classification. His identity is not a vivid story, but rather a conglomeration of memories, experiences, and cultural influences. This hybrid form is therefore more likely to express the politics of identity, working out the conflicts and complexity of hybridity.

Besides, the novel's hybridity disrupts the dichotomy of tradition and modernity. Ananda's thoughts often swing between traditional Indian values and modern Western influences. His memories of Calcutta evoke family-level intimacy and cultural richness, while his life in London reveals cosmopolitanism and displacement. This tension is captured in the hybrid form, which reveals how identity is shaped by continuity and change.

The novel also deals with intertextuality, further drawing attention to the politics of identity. Chaudhuri highlights multi-layered identity by restructuring Homer's Odyssey in a contemporary, diasporic way. In the same way the epic is re-created in the contemporary version, so too is Ananda's identity rewritten, reinvented, and shaped by numerous stories. The hybrid form therefore resists simplistic divisions, focusing instead on the intricacies of life in a globalised world.

More importantly, the hybridity portrayed in Chaudhuri's adaptation reflects postcolonial issues on a larger scale. Theorists like Homi Bhabha have emphasised hybridity as a resistant site where rigid notions of identity are destabilised. *Odysseus Abroad* exemplifies this awareness, presenting identity as fluid, provisional, and shaped by multiple cultural forces. Ananda's hybridity is not a weakness; it is his ability to traverse cultural environments.

To sum up, the hybrid version of *Odysseus Abroad* presents the politics of identity, showing how belonging works in a globalised world. By interweaving genres, traditions, and stories, Chaudhuri shows identity's instability and plurality. The novel challenges essentialist concepts of selfhood and embraces the diversity of hybridity. Through Ananda's experiences, Chaudhuri shows that identity is not fixed; it is rewritten through history and across cultures.

Conclusion

Odysseus Abroad offers deep insight into identity, belonging, and the pursuit of meaning in a globalised society. The novel is not bound by categories; instead, it is fluid and multifaceted, with innovative narrative techniques: a non-linear plot line, stream-of-consciousness interior monologues, intertextual integration with Homer's Odyssey, and a hybridisation of genres.

> The current mass migration in the Mediterranean region could be seen as a recurrence of actions that took place in Homer's time. In an exemplary manner, this poetic narrative capitalises for posterity on circumstances, itineraries, and destinies specific to the primordial migration in that territory. In my article, I have suggested a reinterpretation of Homer's epic text starting from

> faithfulness to the literal text in order to bring forward broad associations and similarities between such documents we have of past and current European migration. (Cizek 175)

The broken self appears in the non-linear story, where memory encroaches on the present and disrupts time. When Ananda recalls Calcutta, his thoughts mingle with memories of his time in London, highlighting his diasporic status between geographies. The stream-of-consciousness style plunges readers into Ananda's inner world, revealing his insecurity, shifting habits, and struggle with cultural hybridity. Intertextuality with Homer's Odyssey situates Ananda's voyage within a wider literary tradition, but it recasts the epic's themes in terms of displacement and uncertainty rather than heroic mission. Lastly, the hybrid expression carries the politics of identity: a hybridisation of Indian and Western traditions, prose and poetry, and narrative and essay to show a layered self.

Together, these methods reveal Chaudhuri's central idea: identity is not absolute, fundamental, or unified. Rather, it is a palimpsest—written and rewritten, affected by several histories, cultures, and narratives. As Ananda's experiences show, hybridity is rich, with belonging provisional and self-negotiation ongoing. In doing so, Odysseus Abroad critiques simplistic ideas of identity and celebrates the richness of living in a globalised, multicultural society.

Chaudhuri contributes through both his themes and his style. He makes Indian English literature more possible by glorifying the prosaic, giving more importance to introspection, and re-examining classical texts. His narrative techniques encourage readers to consider their identities and ask whether memory is stable, whether home is real, and whether belonging is fluid. Odysseus Abroad is less about a destination than the journey. Like Odysseus, Ananda wonders; his wandering is internal, philosophical, and puzzled. According to the novel, identity, like the story, is in constant movement and provisional. By accepting this ambiguity, Chaudhuri presents an image of self-identity which is subtle, multi-stratum and deeply human.

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