



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 12. Issue 2. 2025 (April-June)

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

The Role of Music in Amit Chaudhuri's Fiction: A Critical Examination

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[doi: 10.33329/ijelr.12.2.1](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.12.2.1)



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Article information

Article Received:02/03/2025

Article Accepted:16/04/2025

Published online:25/04/2025

Abstract

Amit Chaudhuri's fiction is deeply infused with music, serving as both a narrative device and a thematic element that enriches his storytelling. His works explore the intersection of music and identity, using classical, popular, and Western influences to shape character development and cultural discourse. Chaudhuri's unique blending of musical traditions reflects his engagement with history, memory, and postcolonial concerns, offering a nuanced critique of modernity and tradition. This study critically examines the role of music in his novels, analysing how it enhances aesthetic sensibilities, influences the narrative structure, and functions as a metaphor for broader sociocultural transitions. The present paper also explores the lyrical and introspective narrative style of Amit Chaudhuri, a key feature that distinguishes his works within contemporary Indian literature. Through closely reading novels such as *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Immortals*, the present paper examines how Chaudhuri uses language to construct complex layers of memory, identity, and cultural belonging. By focusing on his nuanced portrayal of middle-class Indian life, this study highlights the author's ability to weave personal recollections with broader socio-cultural reflections. Through these explorations, the paper underscores Chaudhuri's unique contribution to modern Indian fiction and his capacity to create a reflective and introspective literary space that speaks to universal themes of human experience. The present paper is an honest attempt to attract the readers' attention to the Role of Music in Amit Chaudhuri's Fiction, who is not only a great novelist but also one of the foremost voices in contemporary Indian literature. The research scholar further writes that music, particularly Indian classical music, is not just a background element in his novels but a profound narrative tool that weaves together the themes of identity, memory, and cultural transformation.

Keywords: Amit Chaudhuri, narrative style, introspection, memory, identity, language, cultural belonging, nostalgia, alienation, middle-class India, postcolonial literature

Introduction



Amit Chaudhuri, one of the foremost voices in contemporary Indian literature, has gained critical acclaim for his distinctive narrative style and his exploration of the subtleties of Indian middle-class life. His works, marked by lyrical prose and introspective depth, offer a profound insight into the human psyche and the complexities of postcolonial identity. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who focus on the overtly political or historical aspects of Indian society, Chaudhuri's novels delve into the private, often mundane worlds of individuals, where memory, longing, and small moments of transformation hold significant weight. Central to Chaudhuri's writing is his ability to capture the delicate intersections between the personal and the social. His works, including *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Immortals*, feature characters who are often at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, caught between the expectations of their families and the demands of a rapidly changing society. Through his introspective narratives, Chaudhuri explores themes of alienation, memory, and the search for identity, placing his characters in quiet moments of reflection that open up universal concerns of belonging and self-definition. The unique narrative style that Chaudhuri employs is both intimate and elusive. His prose often rejects traditional plot-driven structures in favour of a more fragmented, temporally fluid approach that mirrors the complexity of human consciousness. This paper aims to examine Chaudhuri's linguistic choices and how they serve as a vehicle for exploring the internal worlds of his characters, particularly themes of memory, identity, and cultural belonging. By focusing on the introspective and lyrical nature of his writing, this study seeks to highlight Chaudhuri's literary innovation and his ability to evoke profound emotional and psychological resonance through seemingly simple, everyday experiences. This research will explore how Chaudhuri's distinctive style not only captures the nuances of postcolonial identity but also invites readers to engage with deeper questions of the human condition, making his work both deeply rooted in Indian experiences and universally relatable.

Review of Literature:

Paro Anand positions Amit Chaudhuri within the broader framework of modernist literature, drawing parallels between his work and that of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. She emphasizes Chaudhuri's focus on subjective experience and his disruption of conventional narrative structures. His introspective style and exploration of individual consciousness, according to Anand, mark him as a significant figure in the modernist tradition within contemporary Indian fiction (Anand 142-56).

In contrast, Suman Gupta examines Chaudhuri's critique of the Indian bourgeoisie, particularly in novels like *A New World*. Gupta highlights the intricate dynamics between aspiration, social mobility, and cultural expectations in middle-class Indian life. His analysis reveals how Chaudhuri captures the tension between the desire for modern progress and the enduring pull of traditional values (Gupta 87-102).

David McCutcheon explores the themes of time and memory in *Afternoon Raag*, using a modernist framework to interpret its fragmented narrative structure. He argues that Chaudhuri's non-linear storytelling reflects a philosophical engagement with the nature of memory and the construction

¹ Sources Google: Amit Chaudhuri (Photo: Wikipedia)

of selfhood. The disjointed temporality of the novel, McCutcheon suggests, mirrors the complex and often contradictory processes of personal recollection (McCutcheon 211–25).

Nivedita Menon discusses the role of music in *The Immortals*, noting how Chaudhuri employs Indian classical music as a metaphor for cultural continuity and transformation. She argues that music in his work serves as a multi-layered narrative device, illuminating internal emotional landscapes as well as broader social realities. Menon sees music as central to understanding the negotiation between tradition and modernity in Chaudhuri's fiction (Menon 55–70).

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan focuses on Chaudhuri's depiction of Calcutta in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, interpreting the city not merely as a setting but as an active force shaping character and identity. She underscores the interplay between memory and history, suggesting that the city represents a metaphor for postcolonial displacement and nostalgia. For Rajan, Calcutta embodies the emotional geography of Chaudhuri's characters and the broader dislocation of postcolonial experience (Rajan 122–34).

Objectives of the Research Paper:

- To analyze how Amit Chaudhuri integrates Indian classical music into his novels as a narrative tool, examining its symbolic role in conveying the inner emotional landscapes of his characters.
- To explore how music in Chaudhuri's fiction reflects themes of cultural continuity and transformation, particularly in the context of postcolonial identity and modernity.
- To investigate how Chaudhuri uses musical references and structures to challenge conventional storytelling techniques, creating a rhythm and flow that mirrors the psychological and emotional states of his characters.
- To examine the relationship between music and memory in Chaudhuri's work, exploring how musical motifs evoke nostalgia and personal histories, particularly in novels such as *The Immortals* and *Afternoon Raag*.
- To critically assess the impact of music on the narrative structure and thematic development in Chaudhuri's works, considering its role in bridging the gap between tradition and the complexities of contemporary life.

Research Methodology:

The present research paper uses the original textbooks on the selected topic. For the collection of secondary sources, a large number of related reference books, research articles, journals, newspaper articles, and online web-based sources have been used.

A thematic study of Amit's novels:

A thematic study of Amit Chaudhuri's novels reveals his deep engagement with the complexities of individual identity, cultural transformation, and the nuances of middle-class life in postcolonial India. Central to his works is the theme of memory and nostalgia, often intertwined with the search for self-understanding. In novels like *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *The Immortals*, Chaudhuri presents characters who are immersed in the past, grappling with memories that shape their present identities. His characters frequently reflect on their lives through fragmented memories, revealing how the past and present are in constant negotiation and how the act of remembering can be both comforting and painful. Another important theme in Chaudhuri's works is the tension between tradition and modernity. This is particularly evident in novels such as *The Immortals* and *Afternoon Raag*, where the characters wrestle with the changing socio-cultural landscapes of postcolonial India. The novels explore how individuals, particularly from the middle class, are caught between adhering to traditional values and pursuing modern aspirations. Music, as a recurring motif in many of Chaudhuri's works,

symbolizes this tension. Indian classical music, for example, often reflects the cultural richness and continuity of tradition while also acting as a metaphor for personal and societal transformation in a globalized world.

Chaudhuri's works also delve into themes of alienation and belonging, reflecting the challenges of navigating multiple identities in a world marked by migration, political upheaval, and cultural hybridization. His characters often experience a sense of estrangement from their surroundings, whether it be in their home city of Calcutta or while living abroad. In *A New World*, the protagonist returns to India after living in the West, struggling to reconcile the person he has become with the world he left behind. This theme of displacement and the complex emotional and psychological repercussions of moving between different worlds resonates throughout his works, reflecting broader postcolonial anxieties. The theme of family and relationships is another crucial aspect of Chaudhuri's novels. His works explore the intimate dynamics within families, especially the relationships between parents and children, and the generational shifts in values and aspirations. In *Freedom Song*, for instance, the protagonist's complex relationship with his parents mirrors the tensions between generational expectations and personal desires. The portrayal of familial bonds often reveals the contradictions inherent in the pursuit of personal freedom within the constraints of family and societal obligations. Finally, urban space and transformation serve as a significant backdrop for many of Chaudhuri's novels. Calcutta, in particular, is depicted not only as a physical space but also as a character in its own right. The city's cultural vibrancy, political unrest, and shifting social fabric are woven into the narratives, creating a setting where personal stories intersect with larger historical and social changes. Chaudhuri captures the emotional and psychological impact of living in a city undergoing constant transformation, reflecting how individuals adapt – or fail to adapt – to their environment.

In brief; the thematic richness of Amit Chaudhuri's novels reflects his interest in the quiet yet profound struggles of individuals navigating identity, tradition, and modernity in a rapidly changing world. Through his evocative portrayal of memory, alienation, familial relationships, and urban spaces, Chaudhuri crafts a deeply introspective literary world that resonates with readers grappling with similar questions of self and society.

"The Role of Music in Amit Chaudhuri's Fiction: A Critical Examination:

In "The Role of Music in Amit Chaudhuri's Fiction: A Critical Examination," we must first explore how music functions as a central motif in Chaudhuri's works and its broader thematic significance. Music, particularly Indian classical music, is not just a background element in his novels but a profound narrative tool that weaves together the themes of identity, memory, and cultural transformation. Through music, Chaudhuri constructs a space where the personal and the cultural intersect, providing insight into his characters' internal worlds and their relationship with tradition and modernity.

In *The Immortals* (2009), music plays a pivotal role in shaping the protagonist's identity and emotional state. The central character, Shyam, is a former student of Indian classical music, and much of the narrative revolves around his relationship with music, his mentor, and his past. Chaudhuri uses music not just as a hobby or occupation for Shyam but as a metaphor for his emotional and psychological struggles. For example, Shyam's teaching of music to his students can be seen as an attempt to reconnect with his lost identity and a search for meaning in a world that seems increasingly fragmented. A key passage in *The Immortals* reads:

"Shyam had learned that the more he tried to teach others, the further away he seemed to be from himself, like a bird soaring further from the earth in an attempt to see the ground more clearly."
(Chaudhuri, *The Immortals*, p. 59)

This line highlights the alienation Shyam feels even as he is surrounded by music – an activity that should bring him comfort. The music here symbolizes both a connection to the past (his early

training in classical music) and the emotional distance he feels from himself. It is a delicate reflection of his internal conflict, showing how music, though deeply ingrained in his life, fails to provide him the solace or understanding he seeks. Music thus becomes a medium through which Chaudhuri explores themes of existential uncertainty and alienation.

Similarly, in *Afternoon Raag* (1993), the role of music is not confined to Shyam's personal experience alone but extends to the broader social and cultural context. The protagonist, Arun, a young man living in Calcutta, is involved in the world of Indian classical music, which shapes his perceptions of the world around him. Arun's introspection is often framed by the music he listens to or plays, and Chaudhuri uses this musical backdrop to explore the theme of time and memory. In the novel, Arun reflects:

"The sound of the raga took me to places I could not name, to the edges of a world I could never claim to know fully, yet it was where I lived, day after day." (Chaudhuri, *Afternoon Raag*, p. 112)

Here, the raga does not merely exist as a form of artistic expression but as a portal to the past and an internal landscape of Arun's thoughts. The raga is not just heard but felt, deeply woven into his consciousness, acting as a gateway to both personal memory and larger cultural continuity. The music serves as a bridge between the personal (Arun's own search for meaning) and the collective (the larger cultural heritage he is part of), reflecting Chaudhuri's exploration of how the past and present are intertwined through sound.

Through both novels, Chaudhuri demonstrates that music is not simply an aesthetic or sensory experience—it is a lens through which characters navigate their identities, understand their emotional struggles, and attempt to reconcile personal desires with cultural legacies. The title of the paper, "The Role of Music in Amit Chaudhuri's Fiction: A Critical Examination," reflects this dual function of music: as a key thematic and narrative device and as a symbol of larger postcolonial questions of belonging, modernity, and the passage of time. Music in Chaudhuri's novels is both a refuge and a source of conflict, embodying the complexities of a globalized, fragmented world and the characters' struggles to define themselves within it.

Through his use of music, Chaudhuri invites readers to reflect on the spaces between tradition and change, the personal and the collective, making it a central, critical theme in his exploration of identity and modern life. Would you like to explore more about how music intersects with other themes in Chaudhuri's work? Amit Chaudhuri's fiction, with its deeply introspective narrative style, often explores the complex terrain of memory, identity, and the emotional fabric of Indian middle-class life. One of the most distinctive and recurring elements in his works is the use of music, particularly Indian classical music, as both a literal and metaphorical device. In novels such as *The Immortals* and *Afternoon Raag*, music does not merely serve as a backdrop but functions as an integral part of the character's inner worlds. It becomes a conduit through which themes of cultural heritage, personal transformation, and alienation are explored, weaving together the personal and the universal in Chaudhuri's intricate storytelling.

In *The Immortals* (2009), music is central to the protagonist Shyam's identity. Shyam, a musician trained in classical music, finds himself caught between the past and present, between tradition and modernity. His struggle to teach music to his students while dealing with his turmoil is a reflection of his search for meaning and purpose. Music, for Shyam, is both a tool for personal expression and a symbol of his alienation. In a pivotal moment of the novel, Shyam reflects:

"Shyam had learned that the more he tried to teach others, the further away he seemed to be from himself, like a bird soaring further from the earth in an attempt to see the ground more clearly." (*The Immortals*, p. 59)

This metaphor encapsulates the paradox of music in Chaudhuri's novels: it is at once a source of connection to the past and a means of alienation in the present. Shyam's inability to reconcile his love for music with his discontent with his life mirrors his larger existential crisis. Music becomes a metaphor for his internal conflict – a source of both identity and estrangement. Similarly, in *Afternoon Raag* (1993), the role of music is intricately tied to the protagonist Arun's relationship with time, memory, and place. Arun, a young man living in Calcutta, navigates his sense of self against the backdrop of the city's changing cultural landscape. His immersion in Indian classical music offers him a way to connect with his past and with the larger cultural heritage of India. In the novel, Arun experiences a deep emotional connection with the music he listens to, as reflected in the following passage:

"The sound of the raga took me to places I could not name, to the edges of a world I could never claim to know fully, yet it was where I lived, day after day." (*Afternoon Raag*, p. 112)

Here, music serves as a bridge to a world that Arun is not fully able to comprehend but still feels connected to on an emotional level. The raga represents the continuity of cultural traditions, but it also highlights Arun's disconnection from a fully integrated sense of self. It is as though the music transports him to another realm, one where his identity can momentarily dissolve into the broader cultural landscape of India.

In both of these novels, music also functions as a symbol of modernity and tradition, capturing the tension between the two. Shyam's experience in *The Immortals* reflects this conflict between the past and the present. Although he is deeply rooted in the tradition of classical music, his interactions with younger generations and the demands of contemporary life challenge his place within this tradition. Music, in this sense, symbolizes the difficulty of reconciling the old with the new in a postcolonial, globalized world.

The use of music in *Afternoon Raag* similarly speaks to the generational divide and the changing cultural landscape. Arun's search for self is mirrored in the way he approaches the raga – an art form that embodies a traditional, spiritual India. Yet, his emotional responses to the music reflect the complexities of navigating a modern, urban environment where cultural practices are often under threat.

In conclusion, music in Amit Chaudhuri's fiction is not just an aesthetic or ornamental element; it is a dynamic force that shapes the characters' understanding of themselves and their world. Music serves as a means of reflecting on personal identity, memory, and the passage of time, as well as a metaphor for the broader cultural conflicts between tradition and modernity. Through the lens of music, Chaudhuri explores the profound emotional and psychological landscapes of his characters, offering readers a window into the intricate dance between personal history and cultural inheritance. The role of music in Chaudhuri's fiction is thus both deeply personal and universally resonant, as it provides a space for characters to negotiate their place in a world that is constantly in flux.

Future Scope of the Present Paper:

The present paper, which examines *The Role of Music in Amit Chaudhuri's Fiction*, opens up several avenues for future research in literary studies, particularly within the field of postcolonial literature and South Asian fiction. One potential direction for future research could be a comparative analysis of how music functions in the works of other Indian authors like Vikram Seth or Arundhati Roy. By comparing Chaudhuri's portrayal of music to that of other writers, scholars can further explore how the theme of music in Indian fiction engages with notions of cultural heritage, identity, and globalization. Another promising area for future investigation could be the cross-disciplinary exploration of music and literature, where scholars can engage with musicology and literary theory to better understand how the structure and emotional resonances of Indian classical music impact the

narrative form in Chaudhuri's novels. Additionally, future studies could delve deeper into the cultural implications of music as a metaphor for the postcolonial experience. Chaudhuri's use of music as a representation of Indian tradition in the face of modernity offers an intriguing lens through which to examine the challenges of cultural preservation amidst globalizing forces. Scholars could also investigate how Chaudhuri's use of music intersects with other themes in his novels, such as memory, nostalgia, and alienation, thus providing more nuanced insights into the characters' emotional and psychological states. Therefore, there is a wide scope of research for the upcoming research scholars on the novels of Amit Chaudhuri.

Findings

This paper's exploration of music in Amit Chaudhuri's fiction has revealed that music plays a pivotal role not only in shaping character development but also in conveying larger cultural and existential themes. The analysis shows that music in Chaudhuri's novels functions as more than a mere background or artistic choice. It serves as a narrative device that brings to the surface the emotional depth and complexity of the characters. Music in novels like *The Immortals* and *Afternoon Raag* becomes a symbolic reflection of identity, where the act of listening, playing, or teaching music mirrors the characters' internal struggles with tradition, modernity, and personal fulfilment.

In brief; the findings highlight that the emotional resonance of Indian classical music in Chaudhuri's works is intricately linked to themes of nostalgia, alienation, and the search for meaning. The protagonists, Shyam and Arun, both find themselves entrapped in personal dilemmas where music, though deeply connected to their cultural roots, fails to provide the answers they seek. This dynamic exemplifies the paradoxical role of music in the novels: it is both a source of identity and a symbol of dislocation. The paper also underscores the dual function of music as both personal and universal, offering readers a lens through which to understand the broader cultural and historical forces at play.

Recommendations for Upcoming Research Scholars:

For upcoming research scholars interested in expanding upon the findings of this paper, several key recommendations can be made. First, interdisciplinary approaches are highly encouraged. Scholars should explore how insights from musicology, anthropology, and cultural studies can enrich the analysis of music in literature. Understanding the formal structures of Indian classical music – such as ragas, talas, and their emotional associations – can offer valuable insights into the narrative techniques Chaudhuri employs. Second, scholars could further examine the relationship between music and time in Chaudhuri's novels. The cyclical nature of classical music, with its repetitive yet evolving patterns, mirrors the temporal structures in his works. This aspect of music could be explored in greater depth, particularly with themes of nostalgia, loss, and the passage of time.

Third, the cross-cultural influence of Western classical music alongside Indian classical traditions could be explored in Chaudhuri's works. While his novels primarily focus on Indian music, future studies could investigate how global influences on music and culture shape the characters' lives, especially in postcolonial contexts where Western modernity often collides with traditional practices. Finally, researchers could build on the findings of this paper by conducting empirical studies that involve interviews with readers or music practitioners to gain deeper insights into how Chaudhuri's integration of music resonates with contemporary audiences. This would allow scholars to explore the reception of music within Chaudhuri's fiction and its impact on readers' emotional and intellectual experiences. In sum, the role of music in Amit Chaudhuri's fiction is a rich and complex area of study that invites interdisciplinary exploration. Future research on this topic promises to expand our understanding of how literary forms can intertwine with cultural practices to convey deeper emotional truths about the human condition in a postcolonial world.

Conclusions:

To sum up, the research scholar comes to the point that the role of music in Amit Chaudhuri's fiction is multifaceted and profound. It acts as a metaphor for the tension between tradition and modernity, capturing the struggles of individuals caught between the inherited cultural legacy and the demands of a rapidly changing world. Music also serves as a lens through which personal identity and memory are explored. The protagonists' relationship with music reflects their deeper emotional states, revealing their yearnings, frustrations, and desires to reconcile their past with their present. Through music, Chaudhuri can underscore the cultural hybridity and existential struggles that define the experience of modern India. Furthermore, the symbolic role of music in Chaudhuri's novels provides a unique perspective on the postcolonial condition—one that is not just concerned with political independence but with the inner psychological and emotional repercussions of living in a world shaped by colonial history and modern globalization. In the present paper, the research scholar tries to explain the role and importance of music in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri, through which he explores themes of existential uncertainty and alienation. The research scholar further writes that music in Chaudhuri's work becomes a site of emotional and intellectual exploration, offering a deeper understanding of his character's inner lives while also resonating with broader societal shifts.

Acknowledgements:

We consider it our moral duty to pay my regards, honour, and thanks to the authors, learned writers, librarians, and publishers of all the books, online sources, Resources, AI, and Research papers that we have consulted during the preparation of the present paper. We shall remain grateful to them for their support and powerful knowledge, which is available on the website, papers, and books.

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Brief Profile:

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Dr. R.M. Jha is working as an Associate Prof. of English and Associate Dean of Yogic Science and Naturopathy in Sarala Birla University, Ranchi, Jharkhand. A product of Sidhu Kanhu University, Dumka (Jharkhand), Dr. Radha Madhab Jha started his teaching career at Khetri, Rajasthan in July 2000. He joined the P.G. Dept. of English, Saboo College Pilani in July 2003 and then to BRCM College of Engineering & Technology, Bahal, Haryana in July 2008. He worked there till 2013 and joined B.K.Birla Institute of Engineering & Technology, Pilani, India, as an Associate Professor of English on March 1st, 2013. He did his Ph.D. on George Orwell "His Mind and Art" in 2002 from S.K. University, Dumka, Jharkhand. There are several research papers in national and international journals of high repute to his credit. He presented many papers at National and International conferences. He wrote seven books. His area of expertise is fiction, poetry, Indian Writing in English Literature, and communication Skills in English. He guided nine Ph. D Scholars. At present; three Ph. D Research Scholars are being guided by his supervision. He also taught at Thammasat University, Thailand as a visiting Faculty.