

Classic Poetry Series

Amit Chaudhuri

- 4 poems -

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Amit Chaudhuri (1962 -)

Amit Chaudhuri is an internationally recognized Indian English author and academic. He is currently Professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of East Anglia.

Life

Amit Chaudhuri grew up in Bombay. He has written numerous novels, short stories, poems and critical essays in English. He attended University College London, Balliol College, Oxford and has also been Creative Arts Fellow at Wolfson College. He was Leverhulme Fellow at Cambridge University, a Visiting Professor at Columbia University, and Samuel Fischer Guest Professor of Literature at Freie Universität Berlin.

His novels have won several major awards and he has received international critical acclaim. His latest book is *The Immortals*, a novel about music in the modern world. 2008 saw the publication of *Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture*, bringing together his major work as a critic. A collection of poems entitled *St. Cyril Road and Other Poems* appeared in 2005, and in 2001 he edited the influential *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*. His study of D.H. Lawrence's poetry, *D.H. Lawrence and 'Difference': Postcoloniality and the Poetry of the Present*, was called 'truly groundbreaking' by Terry Eagleton in the *London Review of Books*. His work appeared in *The Guardian*.

Amit Chaudhuri is also an acclaimed Indian classical musician, and an internationally recognised singer and composer of Indo-Western experimental music, with an album from each of these genres. His project in experimental music, bringing together the raga, jazz, the blues, rock, techno, disco, and the Indian popular song, is called *This is not Fusion*, and has been performed worldwide.

On March 18, 2008, he was included in the panel for the Man Booker International Prize 2009, alongside writer Jane Smiley and essayist Andrey Kurkov. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Personal Life

He is married to the granddaughter of Satish Ranjan Khastgir, a noted physicist, and elder brother of painter and art educator, Sudhir Rajan Khastgir.

Awards

1991 Betty Trask Award and Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book for A Strange and Sublime Address
1994 Encore Award, winner for Afternoon Raag
2000 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for A New World
2002 Sahitya Akademi Award, winner for A New World
2011 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, shortlisted for The Immortals

Works:

Novels

A Strange and Sublime Address, 1991; Minerva, 1992.
Afternoon Raag, Heinemann, 1993.
Freedom Song, Picador, 1998; Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.
A New World. Picador. 2000.
The Immortals. Picador. 2009.

Short Stories

Real Time: Stories and a reminiscence, Picador, 2002

Poetry

St. Cyril Road and Other Poems (Penguin, 2005)

Non Fiction

D. H. Lawrence and 'Difference': Postcoloniality and the Poetry of the Present (Oxford, 2003)
Small Orange Flags (Seagull, 2003) reviewed
Clearing A Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture. Peter Lang. 2008.

Anthologies

Picador/Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature (2001)
Memory's Gold: Writings on Calcutta (2008)

'Apples Still Come From Kashmir'

Apples still come from Kashmir
pale pink in crates in winter's market.
Each grew through the year till it absorbed
the valley's sweetness and undertaste
and reached its final shape and weight.
They are not dead, but come to fruition.
When you bite them, not blood,
but the valley's clear juice floods your mouth.

[From St Cyril Road and other poems]

Amit Chaudhuri

Going for A Drive

The watchman waves. The garage door
stutters open. It's dark inside, dark. Grope for a switch.
'Where are you going?' We're going somewhere not dark,
somewhere clear and sunlit,
where the frank wind touches our faces. The watchman
brushes open the gate by habit.
Leaves—wrinkled, yellow tongues—pastiche
the driveway by habit. When you turn the key, the car
throbs, and there's a sharp, bitter aura of petrol.
Then light a cigarette. A point glows
like an ache for the past. When was I last with you in this car,

in this closed space?
Outside, wind and dust glaze the windows. Young, I loved
that smell
of fuel washing the car-intestine, its suddenness,
vits spontaneous personality.
I grew intimate with its bitter exactness. In every derelict
service station, or among ruined despondent engines,
or bleary pools in dumps
with rainbows
in their eyes,
I inspired that fragrance. It was everywhere, it was

a wise spirit, a timeless,
unromantic, amor mundi spirit,
haunting the dark cogs and the pistons
like despair, or love,
or one of those emotions I wouldn't experience with clarity
until long after,
and not even then.

[From St Cyril Road and other poems]

Amit Chaudhuri

The Bidet

In my cousin's mansion in California
my uncle and aunt, tourists
saw it separately.
At first, they didn't know what it was -
neither basin nor commode
neither bowl nor bathtub
they circled round it anxiously
and silently.
Could it be a drinking-water fountain?

Later, when they knew, they tried
it tentatively; the dwarf-
like jet of water sprang ceilingward
and surprised their secret regions.

[From St Cyril Road and other poems]

Amit Chaudhuri

The Writers

'On constantly mishearing 'rioting' as 'writing' on the BBC'

There has been writing for ten days now
unabated. People are anxious, fed up.
There is writing in Paris, in disaffected suburbs,
but also in small towns, and old ones like Lyon.
The writers have been burning cars; they've thrown
homemade Molotov cocktails at policemen.
Contrary to initial reports, the writers
belong to several communities: Algerian
and Caribbean, certainly, but also Romanian,
Polish, and even French. Some are incredibly
young: the youngest is thirteen.
They stand edgily on street-corners, hardly
looking at each other. Long-standing neglect
and an absence of both authority and employment
have led to what are now ten nights of writing.

[First published in The Observer]

Amit Chaudhuri