

Sandeep (in Chaudhuri's novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*) Imaginative

Character The young boy Sandeep is an only child but he enriches his world by his imagination and observation. He is alert to sights and sounds, he is curious about why people act and he notices the clothes that they wear. He is vaguely amused by his aunt's constant performance of rituals and by his uncle's unsuccessful attempts to make a living. He is precocious

Activities Sandeep spends most of his time watching others, his parents, his relatives, his neighbours and people in the street. He also likes to play with his two cousins and to follow his mother and aunt around during their daily routine. Although he goes to school, we don't hear much about those boring hours, except in his humorous characterisations of his teachers.

Illustrative moments

Imaginative Sandeep's imagination has the power to transform the mundane into the mysterious, the familiar into the 'strange and sublime.' A good illustration of this occurs early on in the novel when the author explains why Sandeep listened so intently to his uncle's recounting of his day, which would not interest many ten-year-old boys. 'He [Sandeep] liked listening to his uncle about business. He liked it because his uncle's account of the small business world always seemed like a suspense story or cheats, sophisticated two-timers, astringent moralists, clever strategists, heroic fighters, risk-takers and explorers. Each new business venture sounded like a new military onslaught, each new product like a never-before weapon capable of conquering the world added to a nameless arsenal.'

Observant Allied to this ability to turn the everyday into a mystery is his keen powers of observation. This is how the author describes Sandeep's perception of the street where his uncle's house stood: 'Even at night, the streets were theatres full of actors and extras, reckless dogs, insufferable cows lying in the centre of the lane, families arguing, old women gossiping, children chasing cats, rickshaw-wallahs idling.'

Sense of humour Imagination and observation come together in Sandeep's sense of humour, which runs underneath much of his descriptions of his family and of Calcutta. The best illustration of this gentle satire occurs when he describes his uncle's daily, chaotic departure for work: 'He [his uncle] would become an archetype of that familiar figure who is not often described in literature -the ordinary breadwinner in his moment of unlikely glory, transformed into the centre of his universe and his home. Over and over again, he would shout, "I am late!" in the classic manner of the man crying "Fire" or "Timber" or "Eureka!" while Saraswati [his mother] and Mamima [his aunt] scuttled around him like frightened birds.'