

SIGNIFICANCE OF SATIRE IN UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S *ENGLISH AUGUST AND WEIGHT LOSS*

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Abstract:

Upamanyu Chatterjee is a well-known Indian writer whose works mostly deal with satire, irony, humour, comedy etc. This article contains the outline of the story English, August: An Indian Story and Weight Loss, the major characters and the significance of satire and comics in the novels. The main characters Agastya Sen and Bhola, whose sufferings in the modern society are reflected in these novels by Upamanyu Chatterjee. The paper makes an attempt to study how Upamanyu Chatterjee signifies the satirical elements in his novels.

Keywords: *Humour, irony, satire, exaggeration,*

Indian writing in English has prominent and profuse phases through which one can understand and analyse the origin of English writing in India. Literary historians describe two general phases of 20th century literature divided by the world war. Modern Literature (roughly 1900 or 1914-1945), contemporary literature (1945 to present). This 20th century like victorian era, is a period characterized by the dizzying rapidity of change. Major modern novelists are Franz Kafka, Erich Marie Remarque, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, Andre Malraux, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence and William Faulkner, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, Bamkin Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Henry Isben, Nirad C. Chaudhudri, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya.

Srinivas Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English* divided it into five periods. The development of the genre began from the mid- nineteenth century to 1930. The second phase is from 1930s to 50s, where R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao began writing. The third phase saw the emergence of younger writers like Santha Rama Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantra Sahgal, Ruskin Bond, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi. The fourth period began with Salman Rusdie's *Midnights Children* which heralded greater freedom with language, fantasy, irony and satire. Other writers of this period include Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Shashi Deshpande and Upamayu Chatterjee. The fifth phase saw the widening of themes and greater stylistic experimentation.

Many Indian writers use the techniques like humor, satire, comedy etc to reflect the society's misdoings in a comical way. The formal definition of satire is "the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices" It's an extremely broad category. Most satires are humorous, ironic, and exaggerated. The concept of satire is very close to that of verbal irony, or saying the opposite meaning of what one says. It's extremely common for satirists to use verbal irony or sarcasm to make their point. Irony is often a part of satire.

Upamanyu Chatterjee was born on 19th December 1959 in Hindu Bengali Brahmin family in Patna, Bihar. He joined the administrative service in 1983 and later he published several works which includes short stories like *The Assassination of Indira Gandhi*, *Watching Them* and novels like *English August: An Indian story* (1988), *The Last Burden* (1993), *The Mammaries of Welfare State* (2000), *Weight Loss* (2010),

Way To Go(2010), and *Fairy Tales at Fifty*(2014). He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for “*The Mammaries of Welfare State*” in 2014. In 2008, he received the accolades of order of officer des Arts-et-des Lettres by the French Government for his contribution to literature.

English, August is a story of a young civil servant Agastya Sen, who joins the Indian Administration Service (IAS). He is sent off for a year's training in district administration to a small district town called Madna but he feels strange and alienated in his working place and wants to escape from there. The training is a dreary part of his life so he finds it dry. His imagination is dominated by women, literature, masturbation and soft drugs within four walls in his room. He is surprised at the system of Indian civil administration which does not develop the sense of responsibilities in the office. Agastya belongs to upper middle class youth and he presents westernized generation. He is not able to adjust at Madna. His disinterested reflects when he comically speaks with officers and ironically comments on Indian admistration. Chatterjee makes the novel satiric one with the help of comical element used by modern bureaucrats which shows his unwillingness.

In the novel, when Agastya leaves for Madna, he talks to his friend Dhrubo who was stoned due to marijuana. Dhrubo says “August, you are going to get hazar fucked in Madna” (1) “You look like a porn film actor, thin, kinky..... I'd much rather act in porn film than be a bureaucrat. But I suppose one has to live” (3) and he also admitted that “I don't look like a bureaucrat, what am I doing here? I should have been a photographer or a maker of ad films something like that, shallow and urban” (14). Opening of the novel, the conversation between two close friends, Agastya expresses his disinterested toward his job before reaching Madna, even before joining job.

At Madna, he is accommodated in a Government rest house, with attendant Digambar and the cook Vasanth, who serves him tasteless and colorless food. Comically he says about first day food served by cook “Dinner was unbelievable, the dal tasted like lukewarm chilled shampoo”(6). On the first morning at hinderland Madna, he felt “like fallen Adam” after being bitten by mosquitoes on cheeks, beard, ears, got his eyelids swollen and felt that “Calcutta's mosquitoes seemed more civilized, they never touched the face. This place has drawn first blood, he thought, wasn't elephantiasis incurable”? (7). Agastya thus comically explains his sufferings in Madna.

In Agastya's childhood there is scene which highlights humour in the novel. At school his English teacher asks to write about the real ambition. Agastya writes that he wants to become a male street dog, so that he can be free without any work.

“...Agastya had said that his real ambition was to be a domesticated male stray dog because they lived the best life. They were assured of food, and because they were stray they didn't have to guard a house or beg or shake paws or fetch trifles or be clean or anything similarly meaningless to earn their food. They were servile and sycophantic when hungry; once fed, and before sleep, they wagged their trails perfunctorily whenever their hosts passed, as an investment for future meals. A stray dog was free; he slept a lot, barked unexpectedly and only when he wanted to, and got a lot of sex”(36).

Weight Loss (2006) is a story of Bhola, the protagonist of the novel and other characters. The story focuses on the extremes of their desires and behavior that it is tempting to reach for a term like Rabelesian. However, the comic focus on the body and its functions is less rebellious than a sign of lack of balance, in which Bhola's absurd sexual fantasies becomes a short life of wildly self-destructive impulses ending at the age of thirty nine in suicide. At school, Bhola at the age of eleven, attracted towards both male and female teachers.

The first chapter of the novel is “Womanish”. The word Womanish has two different meaning one is the person who is attracted towards woman, and another meaning is quality of woman. Bhola is introduced at the age of eleven, studing in school. Anthony is his Physical Education teacher, who calls Bhola as womanish. He is worried for calling womanish in front of girls. His classmates also make fun on

Bhola for his body shape. Chatterjee takes seriously the satirist's role of exposing society's ills and he exposes body parts as well.

In the beginning of the novel, Chatterjee describes Bhola's school life in which he had double sports period from 12.25 pm to 1.35 pm. Physical education teacher Anthony asks all students to swim in the swimming pool. But Bhola feels shame to show his body in front of other students. Chatterjee shows his sufferings satirically.

He hated swimming and displaying his body before others. It was hot and his scalp burned. He was scared and ashamed of himself for not being aroused by women. With his friends, he snickered and joked about breasts and cunt but he had the vaguest notions about the second; about the naked female form divine he was curious without feeling for it any desire. He had noted, for instance, that his stepmother's breasts were large but nothing within him had stirred at visualizing them. (9)

The ridiculous remarks made on Bhola by his classmates and physical education teacher Anthony make him feel inferior.

'Ridiculous'. Only when you die, my woman, will you cease to feel ridiculous'. With his thumb and forefinger, he began kneading the soft armflesh between Bhola's left tricep and armpit. 'You'll find time enough later in life, my boy, to learn big words.' ... butted his head into Anthony's crotch. 'I heard Cleopatra's balls go plish', he later told an envious Dosto. The teacher toppled over with a gasp Bhola stumbled to his knees, his upper arm jerking convulsively. Above him, Anthony spread his legs, thrust out his crotch, snarled and called him womanish. ... The boy then made to get up and that the class rejoiced to hear. ... Bhola knelt beside him, ... He trembled with the moment's perfect pleasure. (4)

Anthony addresses him as woman and says till the death you will remain a 'ridiculous' person and indirectly says that only death can give him freedom from all his shames. This incident has also become a cause of many things in Bhola's life.

Bhola meets Moti and Titli the vegetable vendors who are husband and wife and are low class people. Bhola has sexual relationship with both husband and wife. It is another satire which vividly described by Upamanyu Chatterjee. Here Chatterjee explains minor characters sufferings. Moti is the husband of Titli. Bhola used them for his lust. When Moti knows the sexual relationship between Bhola and Titli, he gets angry and so he scolds Bhola. "First my wife, then me, sometimes on the same day with the same lips (277)".

Chatterjee expresses the satire of minor characters. Moreover, there are also several dark humours delineated by Chatterjee. Especially Bhola's death and sufferings have been well described in the novel *Weight Loss*.

Thus, both the novels signify with the technique satire effectively. Chatterjee's novel *English, August*, Agastya Sen a young beaurcart who shows his hatred towards the corrupt society makes fun of the Indian Administration.

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