Chapter Five

Summation

In this chapter, the investigator sums up what she has discussed in the first four chapters and conveys her observations on the relevant themes of the novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee under study. The history of Indian English Writing is divided into three important phases. The first phase comprised imitating the English language, context, style and culture without any trace of ‘Indianism’ in it. The second phase dealt with changing the theme and context according to the Indian style but yet writing in an English manner and style. The third phase is called the Authentic Phase which initiated the real way of writing in English in an Indian context. The novelist Upamanyu Chatterjee can be located in this authentic style of writing in English in an Indian way. His works can be considered under the concept of ‘Cultural Ambivalence’ as they depict a battle within an individual in trying to compromise between the two entities of different cultures. And as a result, there is an existence of split personalities in his characters. The consequences of all these are reflected as a struggle or the inability to fit into the existing Indian society. It is the generation that is not only entirely disaffected or alienated but that is also unsure of its future, its goals and its ambition. These initiatives are deep rooted in the characters of Upamanyu Chatterjee.

This uprooted ‘Cultural Ambivalence’, its implication in the characters, struggle within oneself, and the tendency to live with the compromise, leaving no way to get away from the Western culture or to be immersed in it and this trauma of crises continues and rules over the characters in the major novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee.

The colonial fiction writer’s story, its subject matter, emphasis and subordination, inclusion and exclusion in it would be conditioned by his preferences and predilections. The post-colonial writer, however, who has inherited the same literary genre and
employing strategies excepting a few changes which creep in natural course, rejects the
preceding stories about his people and weaves his own. He may not at times delve deep in
the stories of the past narrated by the colonisers, yet they always remain at the back of his
mind when he writes about his own period in his stories. The contemporary Indian fiction
in English tries to break into, at times successfully the enigma of the colonial syndrome
which may still be at work.

Upamanyu Chatterjee tells his stories about the post-colonial bureaucracy,
development, politics and political leaders, education, language, and so on through
various characters in the drama of an Indian situation. In a sense, his novels appear to be a
cluster of different stories, inextricably woven with the main story. These stories, finished
and unfinished - the latter outweighing the former - tend to be various layers of the
amorphous structures of the novels.

*English, August: An Indian Story*, is a note of reality, conscious work brought out
through the decay and death of the power conventionally attached with educated and
intelligent persons. Agastya’s identity is seen to be confusing as he changes his name to
August in English. This linguistic displacement and play brings to the fore the intricate
relationship that existed between colonialism and its entrenched influence on post-
colonial subjects.

After the achievement of independence, with the dismantling of the so-called
structures of colonialism there persists to be a deep-rooted influence of those institutions
on education and jobs resulting in alienation of the participants, as their own cultural
“referents” are missing in the whole process. The institution of Indian Civil Service has
continued to value the colonial way of life and its culture, thereby creating a sense of
alienation of its members of a linguistic, cultural and religious community. This creates
an artificial distance from the people the post of civil servants who are supposed to
administer. The protagonist is a member of the most coveted Indian Administrative Service. This theme of disconnectivity is the central theme of Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian Story*. The novel presents the new generation of Indians, being influenced by the western culture. Agastya represents an unlikely bureaucrat and does not even take the initiative to fit into the mould. But he remains anxious to find a meaning and urges to get a sense of direction in life.

Agastya, the protagonist in the novel *English August*, comes to Madna on a posting as an IAS trainee. From the very day of his footing in Madna, he realizes himself as an alien being and wasting his life which means to him only to exist in this place. Dhrubo, who is the best friend of Agastya wonders how Agastya is going to survive in such a place and makes a straight enquiry of what he will do for sex and marijuana. Dhrubo remains very well aware of Agastya’s personal life and his thirst towards Western culture just like him.

Dhrubo also is of the view that Agastya looks like a porn film actor and seems to be in no way fit for the Administrative service. Agastya on the whole finds the place Madna, people and everything around him unfit to support his existence. And he realises himself as a misfit. He dreaded the government rest room, the unhygienic food, the multicultural people without any originality of their own, the unhealthy place, and everything about the place.

Agastya also senses that no one speaks proper English even in the official status. They all spoke with a mix of Hindi. And the only person who proves to be a good company for Agastya is Sathe the cartoonist in the Dainik dailies; he seems to be the only personality to impress Agastya and of his taste. As Agastya finds Sathe of his attitude he gets along with him. In one particular situation Sathe remarks to Agastya that,
I wanted to suggest an Indian writer writing about India, after having spent many years abroad and living there. There are hundreds of them – well if not hundreds at least twenty five I find these people absurd, full with one mixed up culture and writing about another, what kind of audience are they aiming at. That’s why their India is just not real, a place of fantasy, or of confused meta physics, a sub-continent of goons. All their Indians are caricature. Why is that. Because there really are no universal stories, because each language is an entire culture. (48)

This passage points out to be the most essential statement pertaining to culture in India and the ambivalent views of the Indian generation towards India. The traces of such opinion are still prevalent in India at large. Agastya remains discontent with the inefficient administrative setup without any moral values or good conduct. At one point of his career when Agastya makes up his mind to change his profession to journalism and advertising, his father Mr. Madhusudan Sen, then the governor advises him that real India lives in villages and very soon there will be a change for betterment. So Agastya in a confused state stays in Madna out of compulsion and with no options. But soon he gets transferred to Koltanga and thus reconciles himself and continues his service as an IAS officer. Thus, the novelist Upamanyu Chatterjee brings out the ambivalent views of an IAS bureaucrat which of course has its roots on the Western educational system in which he has imbibed himself and this attitude has a far reaching influence towards everything around him and his own life. There is no place for any reconciliation or regrets by the protagonist but still he persists to live with the same feel and gets along with only those who synchronise with his views. Agastya remains strongly afflicted towards the Western world and never wants to come to a compromise or change and his ambivalent views affect his own self to a great deal.
Upamanyu Chatterjee’s entire story is narrated in a serio-comic vein and humour, which arises from incongruity and dislocation. He is explicit in mixing the absurd with the poignant. Agastya as well as his companions seem to be both troubled and dominated by the Western culture. During Agastya’s stay in Madna he begins to have some sense of what is of importance and of interest according to him. On the whole there are no absolutes, no certainties, but a growing realization of the need to be self, to be rooted and the ultimate need to be happy.

Even after independence, the same practice is continued by the Government of Independent India, where an IAS Officer enjoys enormous power and functions like a colonial administrator even though the contexts of governance have vastly changed to post-colonial condition from colonial imperatives. The novelist attempts to deconstruct the myth of Indian civil servants in post-independent India.

The protagonist explores the institutional identity of an IAS Officer in independent India, his predicament and the dilemma that he confronts. In his struggle to discover himself he remains trapped by the continued influence of colonialism in creating a new class of Indians, those who are confused about their own identity and value system. In this race they keep themselves from their culture and from their most authentic selves.

The novel clearly sketches Agastya’s hybridised position. The novel also pictures out, the troubled consciousness of Agastya and the conflict within his fractured self. This conflict finally enforces him to step out of his colonial self, his Western education and training and thereby discover himself through his own cultural moorings. The novel however does not highlight on Agastya’s plight alone but on the plight of the entire “Chola generation”, who suffer from the sense of inauthenticity and dislocation like Agastya.

An identity involves a continual interface and exchange of cultural performances that in turn produces a mutual and mutable recognition of cultural identity. Agastya’s past
does not integrate into his present. The dislocation between his present and past makes him restless. He thus seeks succor in the psychedelic and unreal world of drugs. The novelist Upamanyu Chatterjee focuses on the immediate need for decolonisation not only of the bureaucratic structure in India but also of the colonial mind.

The protagonist of the novel ‘The Last Burden’ is born into a middle class family which is extremely hate-filled. Jamun’s parents share little in common; they make up their mind to live together stewing in mutual resentment as well as competing bitterly for the son’s allegiance. Thus his parents, Shyamanand and Urmila are falling out but not separating. Even though settled and married for forty years their family life on the whole seems to be destructive. The plight in which the couple, and the entire family suffers is due to tragedy of loneliness, pain, the agony of inner separation, the state of isolation which as an entity does not fit in with anything.

Upamanyu’s ‘The Last Burden’ focuses with a close look at an Indian family change as a cataclysmic event occurs, thereby exploring the state of an Indian. Being displaced from Calcutta, their cultural home, Shyamanand’s sons Burfi and Jamun have grown up into Westernized, rootless individuals, each in his own way, unable to form lasting relationships. In the struggle of life, they are neither able to define themselves in terms of their culture or religion. Burfi’s attitude is simply too callous; he wants to be utterly devoid of any filial sense of responsibility to his parents. His wife is his first allegiance. Burfi and Joyce, represent the conjugal characters, through whom the novelist has tried to capture the rising breed of those Indians whose lives are marked by a centrifugal energy, drifting away from the cohesive warmth of the traditional joint family.

In the novel The Last Burden, Jamun the protagonist is compelled to live in his home on account of his mother’s illness. But his attitude towards his father is ambivalent, owing to the past consequences of his father’s behaviour towards his mother. And
Jamun’s mother was well aware of the nature of the society, which had been a male dominated one and she feels herself to be a victim to such a society.

Burfi, the elder brother represents the ‘ambivalent baby’ of the generation, thus expressing himself as a product of the Western world. His wife Joyce unites with him in love marriage but even then he remains discontent. Not enough with being caught under the tangles and ideology of western world, he even goes to the extent of having immoral relationship with the servant. Burfi has an indifferent attitude towards his father but always longs for getting the privileges and grants from his father’s share but never turns up to give him due concern, care and love in life.

According to Jamun, Burfi is found to resemble his father in his attitude towards life, in giving more importance to one’s own individual happiness and selfish motives. Just like Shyamanand who had never been thoughtful about his wife and family, he rendered his primary duties due to his family, but never ever bothered to share his love and concern. Above all, his ultimate aim in life was for pleasure and in enhancing the growth of fixed deposits. Thus, unlike an ideal Indian father Shyamanand remains ambivalent towards his family. And even the unhappy married life never seems to affect him in any way nor is there any place for repentance. But with all such drawbacks of lack of understanding, discontent and hatred towards life, he lives in his own world of money and pleasure.

Urmila though represents an ideal Indian woman, being devoted towards family and children as in an Indian society, remains out of reach in receiving her husband’s love and care. Jamun, in one instance makes her aware of her state of being a wife and her privileged bond with her husband. The utter bitterness and hatred results in leading an isolated life though put together. Though they live together they are separated.
The depth of the relationship between the parents and its consequences, is a deep-rooted impact on the life of Jamun who never realises the essence of family life in the pretext of an Indian society and remains far away from it. As a consequence of this he continues to get involved in sex before marriage and even continues to involve in such immoral acts with Kasibai, his servant.

In the novel ‘The Last Burden’ the parents are to be blamed for failing to inculcate values within the institution of the family. This affects the children. The children fail to realise the importance of family life in an Indian society and in their life they prove in no way to have a positive attitude towards family. Though such influences on Western culture are adopted through the impact of Western education, even then in this novel the ambivalent views buried in the minds of the Jamun and Burfi are mainly due to the indifferent attitude of their parents which affect them to a great deal. The burden of the family turns out to be the burden of the children and finally moulds them to be indifferent to their family and the society.

The flatly anti-heroic personality of Jamun’s elder brother Burfi in The Last Burden is an exaggerated version of the excessive attraction toward the things and styles of Western brand. A conscious and flagrant disregard for the traditional Indian values like caring for the aged elders of the family, sacrificing one’s desire for a wealthy prosperous life for the riches of emotional experience got from service of community are traits of Burfi. All that he is concerned with is getting the best of what the family can give with the least trouble and spending on his past. Burfi’s concerns are limited. His desire to chart the frontier dictated to chart out an identity of his own stops at the equation with himself. This is the reason for Burfi to appear too flat to qualify for the load of being a protagonist.

Jamun represents the central character. He is a young man, unmarried and staying away from his family, with his parents, his elder brother, his Christian sister-in-law his
nephews, and an old aya. He is supposed to live in an urban space which though physically clean and orderly is socially and spiritually dead. The story begins with the modernist’s desire for the city, and at the same time to live openly with the split unrecoiled character of his life and to draw energy from his preferred inner drivings, away from the space called home.

Jamun’s generational conflict is not so unproblematic. It is the evident fact that the two brothers wait eagerly for the death of one of the parents i.e., the mother, Urmila in a destructive atmosphere of squabbling, bickering and accusation. Jamun’s attitude towards his father is much crueler than that to his mother. Above all the home which he has left pulls him; and this is the cause of his suffering. He further remembers with pangs in his heart the lurid prognostications made by all in the family about the mother’s illness and laments for the loss. Jamun the protagonist of the novel is the victim of the trauma of dispossession and migration. His trauma is intensified by the fact that his movement to the city with its promise of unlimited prosperity is sharply followed by a failure to create a brave new world. This failure lies at the heart of the protagonist’s insularity, and becomes an agent pushing him to the home that he has left behind.

Thus in both the novels *English, August: An Indian Story* and *The Last Burden* the protagonists are the by products of the Western education. A great damage has been done to them by the education they have received which has enhanced them with the lack of understanding of the ethos to which they belong, and rendered them self-indulgent. Education has made them identify with the Western way of life, and assume that the Western civilization embodied progress and advancement. The foundation of this alienating training and education is laid in the very beginning of the construction of the coveted structure.
Upamanyu Chatterjee, who represents one of the new generation novelists, depicts his novel *Way to Go*, about the disorientated Indian society where characters follow the contemporary idiom of growth and ignore the sanctity of social institutions like family and marriage. Jamun is represented as the character of lower middle class, characterised by the obsession with upward mobility, erosion of traditional values and diluting sociological institutions like marriage and family. Further the novel aims to touch upon the successes and failures, hopes and despairs, past and present, traditional and modern and nature and culture.

The novel *Way to Go* is a sequel to the novel *The Last Burden*. Shyamanand, after the death of his wife Urmila is compelled to stay either with his son Jamun or Burfi. Since Burfi has to move to Noida on transfer and since Shyamanand has difference of opinion towards Joyce, Shyamanand decides to stay in his own house with Jamun. Jamun has to endure all the mannerisms of his father for many years. He and his father are also accompanied by Kasibai and her son Vaman, who take care of the family. But very soon Shyamanand begins to realize himself as an outsider in his own house. And the feeling of loneliness and desperate condition of the family makes him reflect.

Shymanand’s only companion Dr. Mukerjee’s sudden death affects him a lot. Shyamanand is well aware of this darker side of his son’s life and tries his best ways to put an obstacle to it. He does this by opting the choice of second bed room so that he can take care of preventing such things. So he cannot prolong over this over a long time. But in contrary to this, his son in one instant has made a direct statement to get married and settle down in life. But before that he has been insisted to go for HIV – AIDS test and that this would prove to be the best birthday present for him. Shyamanand has also spoken on this issue with Dr. Mukerjee his friend. Shyamanand begins to feel within him that he is an alien in his own house and is rendered powerless with no role to play.
For the past five years, Shyamanand and Jamun have shared their house with Mrs. Naina Kapur who has leucodermal blotches all over her face and neck. The death of Mrs. Naina Kapur has a far reaching influence on Burfi. Under such as circumstance, one morning Shyamanand is found missing and Jamun after thorough search has to inform the police station about his missing. When Jamun is questioned in his turn about whether the missing person was despondent and had low spirit, Jamun gives an instant reply that the person who is consistently blue than his father is he himself.

But personally, Jamun is aware that the main cause is surely on account of him. He has an immoral relation with his father. Once when he is lying on his bed, the following morning, he is missing. This again reflects the extreme level of ambivalent attitude which goes even to the extent of shattering down the parental bond and is depicted as the dreadful evil of breaking the most effective institution of the society that is ones own family and further a threatening factor on our Indian culture.

Jamun’s tale represents the odds of locating an individual in the meandering complex of human world. Individual identity has become as scarce and rare as the attempts to locate the rudiments of demolished structures. Jamun’s father Shymanand, has volunteered to disappear from the main stream of life. He has invested his resources in building a house and takes up a great pride in its possession. At the same time he can sense the absurdity of his decision to sink his life’s savings in choosing to live in a housing estate that has become a form of concentration camp.

Upamanyu Chatterjee also paves way for the themes regarding the poor and the under privileged in the society mainly in the characters like Tekla, Vaman, Dhansingh who because of their low birth, status have restricted access to the opportunities of globalised India. The newly emerged lower middle class consisting of the people like
Jamun, Burfi and Lobhesh Monga are observed to compromise their essential human dignity for short-term material gain.

Shyamanand’s leaving the house forever and his two sons contemplating to meet death, seem to be the only alternatives left with them. However, Shyamanand’s disappearance makes Jamun exhibit his sensitivity to the undying bond with the father and rethink his approach to his father, when he deliberates not to let his father feel small. And Jamun who becomes the biological father of his child Mithi through Kasturi his lover and through the emotional bondage of love and compassion as a protagonist of the new generation, reflects whether one can (Jamun) make amends by loving one’s child more in the place of not having loved one’s dead father. These words call for reflection the real meaning of human relationship.

Even the loneliness and desperate condition of Shyamanand is due to his indifferent outlook of family, wife and children, which is the only statement which depicts a reflection of guilt on the side of the protagonist for his wrong doings. For the very first time Jamun regrets for his misbehaviour towards his father. And this guilty consciousness continues till the end of the novel when he fails to trace out for his father.

But Burfi’s affection remains only at a superficial level, for his ultimate aim is to get the best he can from his father but never realizes to give it back with his love and concern. Even after his father’s missing, his ultimate aim remains only in getting the house sold and settling down with a resort for himself. Burfi is also the ex-lover of Mrs. Naina Kapur whose death arouses only fear and he objects for postmortem for the fear of getting involved in it. The attitude of ‘self’ is also one of the primary issues of the ambivalent culture. So the ambivalent attitude of Jamun especially in the subject of sexual relation goes beyond the measures of even losing relationship and hastening ones end and leaves the protagonist regret throughout his life. Thus, Upamanyu Chatterjee has
succeeded to have shed some of his burden when he proposes a *Way to Go*, though towards a glooming future guided by the witchcraft of globalisation and its allied forces.

In the novel *Weight Loss* the protagonist Bhola considers sex as a form of depravity and manifests it on anybody irrespective of gender, class, status or age. Bhola’s obsession towards sex begins from his adolescent age at school. He was attracted towards his physical education teacher Anthony who often exclaimed him as “Womanish” with reference to his soft and fat physique. Then at the age of thirteen he was fascinated by Miss. Jeremiah his teacher, whom he often nicknamed as ‘Miss. Armpit’. Then he continued his sexual relation with the vegetable vendour Moti and his wife Title and then it was followed even in the latter part of his life. When Bhola had set out to pursue his graduation to the hill station there he continued his immoral sexual act with Mrs. Manchanda, who also had a son by name Vivek. Thus, Bhola between his age of eighteen and thirty seven has eight sexual partners, four males and four females until he is killed by Moti at the age of thirty seven.

The novel *Weight Loss* also reveals this same issue of immoral relationship of the ambivalent culture of the protagonist Bhola. Bhola remains possessed with the ideology due to the influences of the western world that getting indulged in sex with many number of individuals would be the best way to get rid of excessive weight. This particular indifferent fact captures him and even goes to the extent of destroying his own self. In one of the conversations with Dosto, Bhola has stated that “life is short and I have plans. Do they include losing weight? They did but not for himself. Dosto could not provide for the future” (113). So the attitude of Bhola has imbibed an indifferent desire in the ambition of Dosto to start a program which was in reality prostitution carried out in the name of gym. Though Bhola gets married, his married life does not last for a long time.
He finds his own wife Kamala indulged in sex with the Aya and this hastens the end of his married life.

These novels highlight the most drastic end of the ambivalent culture reaching its destruction and it is a big blow on our Indian culture and traditional values. The protagonists transform completely into alienated beings infected by the most dreadful values of ambivalent generation.

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s novels also deal with the collapse of institutional structures - social, political, economic and legal. The subsequent maladies like corruption, widening gap between rich and poor, fatal diseases like AIDS, human trafficking and prostitution, crime against women, familial bond, and social and financial security are the evidential facts in the novels *Way to Go* and *Weight Loss*. The attitude of the new generation towards sex and sexual relation is once again the evidential traces of western culture into the Indian soil. And the new generation takes up the perception that sex could be entertained with anyone and it only pertains to the freedom of the individuality.

The postmodern protagonists with the ambivalent cultures are the torch bearers of lighting up the flame of Cultural Ambivalence in the Indian Soil. And above all through these exemplary characters like Agastya, Jamun, Bholu etc., one is made aware of how far one has drifted away from our values being caught by the current waves of Westernisation. It awakens the consciousness and thinking of the reader that one needs to stand and realise that there are certain social values and ideologies pertaining to the motherland, our culture and our blood. And the urge should arise in each one to preserve few traces of these values adherent to the originality within the individual self and sow this seed of awareness in the future of generations to come.

The conclusion highlights the fact that in all the selected novels, there prevails an inability of the characters to fit into the Indian environment and they are blended into a
bifocal view of both Indian and western influences. The scholar is engaged in exploring this context of modernisation under the so called Western influence over-powering the prevalent Indian society and the resultant view, of how far these influences have far reaching consequences in their future life.

It is the right time for an awakening in this concept related to the Indian culture, because already more than half of our Indians seem to be living under the influence of this ambivalent culture. To retain the remaining population is a challenging concept. Thus, the novelist’s primary concern remains focused in directing each individual towards social responsibility.

Apart from the theme of cultural ambivalence research can be carried out on the themes of ideology pertaining to political science from the view of an ambivalent being. The language and style in the writings of Upamanyu Chatterjee can also be themes for future research.