Chapter Four

The Changing trend of Man–Woman Relationship

D.H. Lawrence in *Morality and the Novel* observes:

The relation between man and woman will change forever and will forever be the new cultural clue to human life. It is the relation itself which is the quick and the centre due to life, not the man, nor the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship as a contingency. It is no use thinking you can put a stamp of the relation between man and woman to keep it in the status quo. You can’t. (551)

Man-woman relationship in modern times has undergone a radical change. Formerly, the Indian woman was a typical product of tradition, destined to represent a shadow of her husband. In the agricultural sector, women enjoyed the privilege and were entitled to give food grains and other household possessions to the labourers for the work done. With the change in the socio-political scene after independence the influence of Gandhian values enabled women to enjoy greater importance, and their role in freedom struggle became quite significant. With the advancement of education, women started handling both their career and family duties. On account of these changes women started realising their individuality and thereby learnt the means to establish separate entities both in the society and domestic circle. This social and economic upliftment in the status further resulted in a change in their behaviour pattern. Their attitude towards issues concerning sex and sexuality also underwent a notable change. It resulted in more of self expression and far less inhibited assertion of their inner violations in their sexual roles. Such drastic changes are unimaginable in pre-independent India.

In the traditional society every Indian had a well defined identity in which his caste, family and village or town decided a whole lot of things for him. The traditional
society was subjected to inevitable changes and innovations. Several changes were introduced due to foreign invasions. Thus, new patterns and motifs were introduced in the decorative arts. Architectural styles and forms changed too and new words as well as expressions crept into various languages.

From time to time Indian society was rocked by great religious movements. These movements transformed society by changing the ideas and values which governed life, the deities that were worshipped, the forms of worship, food habits, emotional responses, modes of thinking and a whole lot of their life.

The impact of these powerful forces and events did not simply result in the rejection of the old ones. It was much more complex and there was often an acceptance of new beliefs and habits without a rejection of the old ones. Sometimes the new was merged with the old in ways that were fascinating and strange. So as a result, over the centuries the social structure became quite complex. It accumulated diverse myths and legends, which enriched awareness, opened up a number of options and led to the acceptance of inconsistencies, ambiguities and dichotomies. It developed various mechanisms of coming to terms, with change, exceptional situations, ambiguities, dichotomies and inconsistencies. A multiplicity of deities has become different manifestations of one god. A number of alternative systems of medicine and physical culture now coexist. The woman who had only a subordinate status in the old Indian society, was in the Indian culture also given a very high status to woman as a mother, wife and sister. She is considered a goddess. This ambivalence and resultant inconsistency were accepted in traditional Indian society.

With the introduction of modern education in India by the British rulers, which helped the Indians to imbibe liberal values, Indians realised that at the roots of the prosperity, power and the superior social system of their foreign rulers was their
educational system. This new education made them vividly realise the shortcomings of their own culture and social structure, and the need of social reforms. As a result a great social reform movement was launched which changed the face of India.

The social reform movement not only gave a new identity to the upper caste educated elite but also gave to women as well as members of the lower castes a new identity. Their roles in traditional society were of subservience. They were compelled to view themselves as lesser beings who existed to serve the superior constituents of society. Thus, the modernisation has brought about a revolutionary transformation of their perception of themselves, by the demand of a total rejection of the traditional social order and value system which held them in such humiliating and debilitating bondage.

The problem of this acceptance of an identity is in harmony with modern culture and demands of modern life. The development of such an identity is a continuing process and in the course of this, proves that the core of Indians has been shifted and changed over time. So have the pulls and pressures exerted by tradition and modern life. There is of course not one identity which Indians in general have assumed in this long and tortuous process of cultural transformation.

In modern Indian English novels, many writers including Upamanyu Chatterjee have tried to reflect these significant changes by creating illustrative situations and characters in different novels. The additional charm of these novels also rests in the graphical analysis they had been able to chart out due to the advancement of women from the traditional role to a modern role.

Man-woman relationship in modern English novels has acquired varied dimensions. The hidden meanings and the sexual innuendoes in the conversation point to a rapidly changing society in which conventional values are crumbling. Social norms and conventions have been thrown into winds. The modern Indian man and woman have now
become acquisitive – the age of go-getters has set in. The novels focus on issues like marriage, commercialisation, destitution, communalism, crisis of the individual, alienation and a general dilution of values once most valued. Above all writers of the modern English novels reveal the flux in the world around them and there is an ease about the mixing of the real and the fantastical western influence and the Westernisation of Indian society, with special reference to the upper class who stand in sharp contrast to the traditionalism of the middle class and the lower class.

The changing pattern of man-woman relationship can be traced in the works of Upamanyu Chatterjee. Novelists have projected how the modern Indian woman attempts to free herself sexually and domestically from the bondage of the past. The male and female characters in the novels handle their interpersonal problem with or without success, but at the same time, unlike the readers, the novelists give no room for logical analysis of emotions. Mostly the novelists focus on the lack of emotional fulfillment in man-woman relationship. In Upamanyu Chatterjee’s novels selected for study, the man-woman relationship is highlighted in the relationship between Agastya-Neera, Renu-Dhrubo, Shyamananda-Urmila, Burfi-Joyce, Jamun with Kasturi as well as with Kasibai, the servant.

The changing pattern of man–woman relationship is evident in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s The English, August: An Indian Story. It is featured on the protagonist Agastya Sen, who is posted to Madna to commence his training as an IAS trainee. Having been brought up in a cosmopolitan city all his life, he feels very difficult to live to the ambience in Madna.

In the very beginning of the novel, Agastya before he could leave for his probationary period as an IAS Officer, meets his friend Dhrubo who has been back from Yale University after his higher studies. He asks “What do you do for sex and marijuana
in Madna?” (3). Agastya finds himself trapped in a strangulation situation like the fallen Adam” (5). So for him sex and marijuana serve as a vital factor even before marriage in an Indian society, which in turn reflects the impact of Western culture and Western education. Due to the lack of these things Agastya feels dislocated, alienated and frustrated in Madna.

Agastya’s father had presumed metropolitan upbringing to be the root cause of his tendency to shrink from responsibility towards his career, while Agastya’s aunt had always tried to relate his behaviour “to the original sin, the marriage of a Bengali Hindu to a Goan Catholic” (288). According to her she suspected his very birth, of being born of the original sin to be directly related to his unique mannerism. So the man–woman relationship under the pretext of Indian culture is been pointed out to ensure the fate of the offspring.

In the novel according to the Indian culture, each one’s identity is justified by his marital status. However when one is obliged to introduce oneself by his / her name according to the western culture, the Indian soil categorizes oneself further by adding on his marital status. So when this question is repeatedly thrown at Agastya,

“Are you married, sir?” Agarwal’s voice dropped at ‘Mrs’; in all those months all references to wives were in hushed, almost embarrassed, tones. Agastya never knew why perhaps because to have a wife meant that one was fucking, which was a dirty thing. ‘She’s in England. She’s English, anyway, but she’s gone there for a cancer operation. She has cancer of the breast’. He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to spread out his fingers to show the size of the tumour and then the size of the breast, but he decided to save that for later. Later in his training he told the District Inspector of Land Records that his wife was a Norwegian Muslim. (13)
Agastya gave a false identity of himself, about his wife and his family though he was not married. He took up the pride of relating his identity with the west which again gives the impact of his western life. The man–woman relationship which is considered sacred in the Indian culture seems to have taken a different mode being governed by the spirit of alienation in one’s own land. Further Agastya added all false identity regarding his parents that they were in Antarctica, members of the first Indian expedition and that his mother was a doctorate in Oceanography from Sorbonne. Agastya seemed rather least bothered of the latter influences when the truth would come to light. Agastya comes to know through Mr. Sen regarding Mr. Srivastav the IAS Collector:

A female Block Development Officer in Nurana committed suicide a few days ago. Yesterday a local newspaper the Dainik said that she had been having an affair with collector Saab and that she committed suicide because he wasn’t divorcing his wife to marry her. (29)

Further this incident implicates the man–woman relationship where the Indian culture seemed to have buried, for a married man has sex with a Muslim woman and remains the ultimate cause of her death in a sensitive Indian society. Here the injustice seems to be hoisted and the truth remains buried under the power of status of being a collector.

These erstwhile dead officers and their “wives” come alive in Chatterjee’s description, each character is like the other, all monuments to bureaucratic existentialism, and yet no two characters are same. There is Kumar, the “boozing” SP Sahib, who bemoans the timidity and passivity of Indian woman while he watches an American blue film, where five white girls “demented with lust” get to work on a lucky black bastard” (140). These lines reveal the fact that the officials of higher order though they remain genuine in the eyes of the world are found to be trapped under the western influence and
have a darker side within them. Saul Bellow opines that “Modern life meets every creaturely need. Everything we ever wanted is here; except...transcendence” (*It all Adds up*, 44).

Dhrubo, in his letter to Agastya writes about his friend Renu:

She said that was the only way to break our relationship, some first world stance she’s adopted before she’s even got there – ‘independence’ and discovery of self’, she even used these phrases before she left. Beneath her tears she seemed to half enjoy everything. Quite probable that creating a mess made her feel mature and adult look, everybody, please I’m breaking a relationship, so I’m adult, aren’t I? It’s not the same as eating an ‘icecream’, is it? Her behaviour has made me feel like a child molestar. (118)

Renu, as Dhrubo recreates her in his letter, has contracted American cultural virus and in this state of transition she seems to be in a state of utter confusion. She confesses in the rather lengthy and naked letter that she feels ‘wary and strained’ and her face becomes ‘blank, bored and closed’ and she feels her American friends’ warmth like ‘a terrific obligation and a responsibility’ (156). In the words of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer this failure to strike at the root of obscurantism got translated into a new alienated hierarchical sense of life backed up by a facade of false love for progress and fellow-feeling. In the course of time it grew into what came to be called, ‘the indefatigable self-destruction of enlightenment’ (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, XI).

The fact that the anti-heroic predicament of the characters is the result of modernity has gone haywire. In these novels, the phenomenon of modernity appears in its indisputable form, i.e., an extreme emphasis on individuality alienated from the common sources of traditional warmth and emotional sustenance. It is remarkable in this context that Chatterjee does not offer any decontextualised hint toward real or false
modernity. He is simply concerned with the socio-cultural condition in which the urban educated Indians find themselves owing to their cultural upbringing guided by their Anglo-centric educational training. The chief consequence of living in this sea of modernity is a shift away from the mental sphere where a critical reflection on the prevailing culture takes place to one where it is merely consumed. In the process is engendered the anti-heroic condition of alienation from the larger public sphere symbolised by society, state and family.

Renu, Dhrubo’s lover, brings out her feeling of dislocation and tends to be very much afflicted towards the American culture. Thereby she plans to break her relation with Dhrubo.

You can imagine that whoever you’re writing to is interested and understands exactly what you mean – writing letters is a wonderful way of criping out of everything – the lectures that go so bably, all the people in this place whom I can’t talk to. It’s so tempting to take all the easy way out, to go on about how the people here are so dull, ignorant, smug and provisional. They are all that but there’s also something very wrong about my attitude to them. (155)

Renu no longer wants to retain herself to waste her life according to Indian living in having relation with one man. Rather she wants to change to Western style where sex and relation can be extended to anyone, according to one’s own likeness. Relationships can also be broken and more relations can be mended for it is one’s own individual liberty in the Western world. Agastyà’s girl friend Neera in Calcutta loses her virginity to a journalist. She discloses this to Agastya:

I’d like to say that I lost my virginity last week. How do you like my formal announcement? I haven’t yet told anyone else but I was bursting
with the news all these days. All oddly, my main feeling is one of great grief of shedding a burden. (287)

As a result Agastya’s emotional bond with her comes to an end. So the pattern of man–woman relationship puts a great impact on the truth that sexual relationship is no longer a sacred issue but has become a very light headed matter under the influence of western style. Even the losing of one’s virginity is taken to be a formal matter.

The anglicised Indian ruling class stands in the same relationship to the rest of its countrymen as the coloniser was to the colonised. To understand this aspect of the neo-colonial phenomenon, one will have to rethink the concept of India as a homogeneous entity producing in our minds some sort of wholeness, because the fallacy of homogeneity does violence to the lived reality of all Indians.

Upamanyu’s *The Last Burden* is a direct attack on the middle class life of the Indian society. As Jamun’s mother Urmila is in her dead bed, Jamun makes his way to see his mother. Jamun’s long wait is agonising. He senses that his mother is crying out to him and he recalls the emotional bonds that all flesh creates. But at the same time Jamun’s arrival has another purpose which is to be close to his lover Kasturi.

In the view of Tarun J. Tejpal, in “The Literary Babu”, “He (Upamanyu Chatterjee explores the dark side of kinship and family ties because his thesis is that one is naked only with one’s family. The writer probes into the mysterious working of the human mind and delineates the complex problems of the complex age in contemporary Indian society. Being a sensitive writer, his concerns are disintegration of the family, discontinuity of the tradition, conflict between the generations and several other issues which result in loneliness and isolation of an individual. The novel records the hero’s changing moods and the ebb and flow of his emotions.
Jamun, the protagonist in the novel *The Last Burden* is informed through telegram about his mother’s ill health. So he decides to go and see his mother at a crucial stage. Jamun’s brother Burfi, his wife Joyce and their two sons, and their parents Shyamanand and Urmila “carp at each others’ infirmities, callous with their emotions” (124-125). Jamun decides to stay at home as his mother feels more secure in his presence. Also there is another reason – an old friend Kasturi, now married and pregnant – holds back Jamun. The plot culminates to heighten emotions inside the narrative. The characters too have tremendous capacity to evoke and sustain the intensity of “emotion bonds” that in Chatterjee’s words are “very very tiring and yet very life sustaining” (124-125). Chatterjee adopts the technique of flashback to remain in control of the things.

Jamun’s presence consoles his mother, amidst her elder son Burfi, her husband Shyamanand and her daughter-in-law with her two grandsons. Burfi, Joyce and Jamun seem to be the imitators of the Western style, for the background of the Western education remains a reasonable background to it. In the school life Jamun had many times yearned his mother to look fashionable as Mrs. Raizada while Urmila remained a simple Indian lady. But Shyamanand and Urmila never had a happy married life, they were mostly discontent as Shyamanand was away from family bonds and was engrossed in money and his enjoyment. Added to it even Burfi ended up in a love marriage with Joyce. It was an undesirable fact to digest according to Shyamanand. Finally Urmila’s deteriorating health resulted in her death and the family separated, including Shyamanand for loneliness killed him in his old age.

‘The ‘Burden’ of love, possession and ties is most evident in the relationship that exists between Shyamanand and Urmila. Though they have been married for forty years, they have failed to enjoy the fruitful life of understanding, love and tolerance which ends up in a destructive atmosphere of squabbling, bickering and accusation.
As an impact of past happenings, Urmila is quite aware of the destructive power, since her girlhood days, which has dominated the Indian society. As a child, she had watched her favourite brother Belu being beaten up by her father for the reason he had expressed his desire to marry outside his caste. Out of rage he consumed rat poison but even then continued to survive, emblematising in his half paralysed and speechless existence. This incident symbolises the fact that intercaste marriages were strongly opposed and such relationships were hardly entertained in the Indian society. Just as much violence goes into the maintenance of patriarchal status while Urmila’s son Burfi gets married to a Christian girl namely Joyce, breaking down the Indian tradition of intercaste marriages. But even then such a marriage is invited by Urmila’s though Shyamanand remains discontent with this reunion.

Urmila’s situation in life is exemplary of women’s life as wife and mother being caught in the tangles of modernity. Bitterness and bickering is all she knows. Her life with her husband, her children and everything around her is an inescapable burden that cows her down. She had only the Aya who had served the family for long, with whom she shared her feelings for she had no one in the family to partake her pain:

Seven times out of ten, Shyamanand fathered her woe: “Oof, you’re such a goose, Ma, for allowing us to harrow you in a thousand ways”. He kisses her eyelids. “We must’ve angered you numberless times to retaliate, return like for like, but you’re as mulish as an ass – oh, how idiotic that sounds. But if Baba’s not speaking to you, then don’t ask him a thing! He must learn through discomfort how vital you are for him”. (180)

Jamun in one of the occasions has a very intimate conversation with his mother Urmila regarding his father’s behaviour and his mannerism towards her. Jamun makes a direct statement to his mother, asking her why she remains so tolerant enough enduring
everything within herself, without raising any voice against him and rather rendering all her duties due to her husband. Jamun without any hesitation questions his mother how she can confine within herself that the role of wife remains only with respect to sexual basis with regard to her husband and nothing beyond that. Such a question from her son Jamun, really pulls down Urmila to a state of great embarrassment. This statement remains as a reflection of the close emotional bond that prevails between Jamun and his mother. His main concern is that his father never seems to feel the importance of his mother.

According to Urmila her role as a bread winner in addition to that in the place of a mother goes beyond her limits to endure all types of suffering for the sake of her children. Her story reveals her as an ever complaining woman whose life is wound with eternal sufferings marked out to her in the form of her incorrigible husband, while her sons are constantly involved in dodging her and succeeding always in doing so. In addition to this she has failing health and has to endure agony and pain of her piles that compel her to go to lavatory for long time. Urmila has suffered untold suffering in the hands of Shyamanand:

When Shyamanand was courting Urmila he couldn’t make up his mind about marriage, Urmila had to go for abortion twice and the instant when Jamun was conceived it was then that Shyamanand suspected his wife for one Shireen Raizada of his office as a consequence of which by that stage of their marriage husband and wife had forgotten what coition was and bedded down in separate rooms. (301)

On account of the misunderstanding between Jamun’s parents, as well as due to Shyamanand’s suspected illegal relation, Urmila and Shyamanand remained as couples, though falling out, yet were not separated. So the man–woman relationship in their case is seen to be destructive in nature. Urmila accounts up the corrosive basis of such a
relationship where they “rancour for one another, the most guileless event milks from us our watchful malice – living together merely to thrill in unkindness, marrying, mounting and spawning because we are all afraid being corporeally alone” (54).

Jamun brings out his father’s views towards life, Shyamanand, for instance, certainly bequeathed to Burfi both his yearning for money and his incapacity to hoard much of it; and Jamun did share with his mother to snap his fingers at its frightful power.

“But to ignore the weight of cash”, he concedes, “is damn hard, you know. We ourselves have suffered from not having enough of it. I mean, when we were young weren’t Ma and baba hard up because they had to raise the two of us – and bloody Chhana (Shyamanand’s niece)? They became comfortably off only after we’d made it” (264).

Shyamanand gave more importance to money and his pleasure than to the fundamental requirement of life that is love, family and relationship. Shyamanand’s scorn blazes forth thus: “You’ve goofed everything. You’ve not fostered your children rightly. They have discounted their traditions, culture, parents - because of you. As a mother, as a mortal, you’re a disaster” (74 – 75). According to Jamun he had never seen his parents touch each other with love. Whereas it has only been hatred that prevailed between them. Jamun realizes “that you have never celebrated even one of your wedding anniversaries or birthdays even once unless it be to bicker with more than everyday malevolence” (158).

Upamanyu Chatterjee brings out the depthness of the relationship that existed between the two life partners Urmila and Shyamanand in the novel ‘The Last Burden’. The adverse nature of their relationship remains unbroken even when Shyamanand gets into paralysis. Urmila’s pulped face is as much an image of home as their diminutive unkempt garden, or the leavings of lunch on the dining table that Aya won’t evacuate till dinner. Though Shyamanand suffers stroke and paralysis of one arm and leg, bickering
still goes on. “Jamun’s pity would see-saw between Urmila’s crumpled face and Shyamanand’s jagged silence till it brewed with the rage of impotence, and he’d once more be embroiled in the exhausting business of taking sides” (198). Only Jamun is compelled to play the dual role between his parents due to their unhappy married life.

The views that exist about each other, between Shyamanand and Urmila are extremes and there is no room to compromise or to be submissive at any part of life. According to Shyamanand, Urmila is a Masochist: “She craves to feel persecuted and harrowed – it’s her way of tugging at attention” (200). While for Urmila her husband is her obsessive topic with regard to his incivility, his nutrition, and his gluttonous appetite. For thirty seven years she has been experiencing a catastrophic marriage, on the other hand she is decreed to be the family’s punching bag. Urmila also considers herself playing the role of both wife as well as mother. She has to endure herself with patience just like a punching bag. Her prediction is evoked in the following lines: “For her entire existence in those years has seemed to her to have been tyrannized by a medley of fear – terror that Shyamanand die on her hands, when she’s alone in the house and floundering in a cold sweat” (210).

Urmila’s heart attack widens the gulf on economic grounds. Shyamanand and Jamun take up to bear her medical bills. But Shyamanand has well accomplished his duties towards his children and been loyal to household but has given more importance to inanimate things than to people. For according to Shyamanand his first love is money. According to Jamun his father’s first love was money and first hate was his wife. He says, “Baba’s first love, his money, will now be gobbled up by this hocus-pocus to extricate his first hate, his wife” (63).

In one instant Shyamanand and Urmila, seem to be dead against the decision of their daughter-in-law Joyce about aborting her child. They protest against this issue that
they even go to the extent of calling Joyce “a killer’ and they directly head Burfi to talk to Joyce and change their decision. Generation gap and lack of understanding is one of the prime factors for such a decision:

“Abort? Why? You’re married, aren’t you, carps Shyamananda”, and to Urmila, apart, hyperbolically, “we’ve hatched a killer”, she compliantly remonstrates with Burfi “you’ll regret this abortion”. Next both parents, mordantly, “Can’t you dictate you own hankering even once to your wife? Isn’t the foetus yours too?” Jamun probes Burfi: “What d’ you really feel? D’ you itch for a second child?” He’s truly interested. “If I want my way, I suggest to Joyce the precise opposite Jamun.” (102 – 103)

Burfi thus directly proclaims himself and his ambivalent views, which is a big blow on the cultural values which were built by the families in an Indian society. Burfi wants to live the life of his choice and decision and never wants to compromise anything for anything, be it his own parents.

The entire novel suggests its multiple fingers to the phenomenon rooted in the expansive economic opportunities which take the children away from their warm sources, in terms both of geography and value systems, turning them into plastic human beings enamoured of their own idea of good life. This idea operates on the premise that family relationships, even filial responsibilities, are ‘burdens’ that have to be cast off. The time-rootedness of the novel The Last Burden brings to mind the stark prognostication made by a commentator on Indian socio-cultural issues, expressed in very clear terms, “For the first time in its history, economic change has accelerated; if it goes on like this the young will no longer need their parents” (“The Clash of Generations” 176).

Urmila’s elder son Burfi continues his extra-marital relationship with the maid servant though he is married to Joyce and has two children:
This tendency is indeed quite widespread, and is certainly conspicuous even in the subsequent relations between Burfi and Joyce, that is after their marriage really sours and Burfi begins his second extramarital affair, about which he breathes to Joyce not a syllable – but naturally did you exclaim? No, in Burfi’s case, not naturally because, soon after his maiden adulterous fling had started to jade a bit, he had felt sheepish and had actually owned up to Joyce, and afterwards also unburdened himself, in turn, to Jamun, Urmila and Chhana, (Shyamanand’s niece) muttering, with sloshed, crimson – eyed gravity, “My marriage’s cracked up – and someone in the family must be told why”. (263)

Burfi’s reaction toward his father after his marriage and his father’s opinion towards his Christian wife Joyce and his adverse reaction even go to the extent of hindering their sexual life.

Jamun’s attitude to his father is much more cruel than his attitude to his mother. The bickering between father and son gets worse and worse, trading charges and countercharges. The sense of exhaustion on the part of Jamun is evident from this: “He is queasy, as though, a vigorous talon has gashed through his muzzle down to his belly and is foraging his guts” (15).

Jamun shows his contempt for his father thus: “Too old, Jadedness has coated his soul” (53). Further, Jamun wonders how he has looked for alleviation from his father who so bitterly needs alleviation himself.: “Jamun introspects, as he has done before, gazing at his parents, one with her bubble life, the other mentally worn, futile, too late her protector, which of them will be the first to slip away, and which of them he will ache less to see off first” (59 – 60).
Even in the crucial stage of Urmila’s heart attack, Shyamanand finally decides with much hesitation to spend some of his own hard earned money on her treatment. Burfi gives his caustic remark regarding his father: “Baba’s first love, his money, will now be gobbled up by this hocus-pocus, to extricate his first hate, his wife” (63).

Upamanyu Chatterjee takes pain to show that the incongruity between two generations parents and son is hideous. This aspect is very much explicit in Burfi’s attitude. Burfi routinely has to vindicate his parents and his wife, one to the other, as his parents and his wife seldom communicate straightforwardly. Shyamanand is always ready to blame Urmila for not having brought up the children well. Chhana, (Shyamananda’s niece) who happens to be the only relative met by Burfi and Jamun once in a while. Burfi tells Jamun that she is:

the other image of a single woman foot loose and hassle free, leading an discreet but exciting life with a variety of men Someone must be regularly mounting her may be that fuckface slave of hers – these Bong spinsters can be desperately horny, and entwining with her menial’ll spice it with extra kink – you know, cast’n all. And she’s wombless, remember, totally hassle free. (264)

Such an opinion remains entrusted on a woman who doesn’t get married and remains spinster all through her life. And this ideology persists in an Indian culture even today.

In the family Jamun strives hard to release himself from the burden of relationship. For he remains related to Kasturi his old lover and serves as the biological father of his child after her marriage to another man. Kasibai is the prostitute who is serving as a servant for many years and Jamun continues his sexual relation with her. Jamun deliberately alienates himself from things that are supposed to bind him emotionally in the case of a home, or a wife or even to his servant.
The central focus is on the Westoxicated Indians who, owing to their uprootedness, come across as unhappy solitaries forever locked in a doomed and torturous quest for transcendence in a well-to-do, successful and vulgar social existence which they can neither love nor leave. In the merciless observation of what prevails around him (Firdaus Kanga, the writer of the novel *Trying to Grow*, calls Chatterjee a mercilessly gifted observer in the context of *The Last Burden*) the anti-heroes like Agastya Sen, Jamun and his lesser clones appear as sufferers of an existential situation which they want to transcend but find themselves unable to do so.

The novel *The Last Burden* is an example of a man and woman relationship in which both learn the tricks of survival rapidly. Through the influence of different media the rapid growth has led to the loss of innocence that now comes a trifle too early. Consumerism has taken a vital place on the life, styles of urban Indians. Due to the impact of commercialism and consumerism, the ‘I, me, Mine, syndrome’ has found its way into the home fronts resulting in more heart breaks, discords, separation and broken households.

Jamun’s family, which is the central subject of the novel, is not protected from, but shown to be constituted by, the terrible tension of the society of which it is a part. In it the exploitation and meanness of the world outside become entangled with the demands and resentments of domestic life to produce relationships that rot but never break. Amid all the emotional attrition and exhaustion, Jamun, the anti-heroic central character of the novel, does not seem to grow toward a constructive direction or dignified transcendence of his woes. Jamun grows from boyhood to maturity, in fact this process of maturation turns out to be illusory. He never really goes through the process of real growth.

In it lies the crux of Chatterjee’s social realism which has two dominant features rooted in the recognisably contemporary Indian milieu. First, there is the unavailability to
his anti-heroes of options in life that earlier generations had found viable; and secondly, reflection of larger issues in what seems to be an intensely private struggle. The urban consciousness as it has manifested itself in his novel is a pointer to its rootedness in the contemporary Indian reality whose complexities and the involved pressures resist simplistic stances and facile value judgements. This resistance makes Chatterjee’s vision pessimistic. In *The Last Burden* this pessimistic vision is basically enacted in the field of human relationship in which one discovers the hidden causes of sorrow. But the relationship is in reality a process of isolation because the so called bonds are tools of exploitation for egoistic gratification. Jamun thinks that he has grown but the reader knows that growth and maturity is not his cup of tea. It is a predicament which can be attributed to his being a product of a culture which views education as the economisation of learning, which transforms learning into the consumption of a commodity called knowledge. Despite being educated in the commonly accepted conventional sense of the term, he tragically lacks the vital competence to live with meaning and grow in maturity. He has lost his capacity to maintain a creative relationship with his world symbolised and constituted by his family and fellow human beings. He has been unable to realize that to know and be mature is a personal experience, and the only way to know, to widen the competence to mature is to learn from the world, not about the world. He is lonely, narcissistic and decoupled from community ties. For him consumption of material goods related with good stereotyped life is the ultimate value, a guarantor of social belonging and status. He compensates for an empty social life by consuming. This habit of consumption he has received from his educational and cultural upbringing. A mature insight into the vital issues of life and relationships is beyond his capability.

The novel *Way to go* of Upamanyu Chatterjee, is the continuity of the novel *The Last Burden*. It is a story on the desperate and isolated father who is missing. But at the
same time the protagonist remains entangled under the impact of the western world in his attitude towards sexual relation. Eighty five and half paralysed, Shyamanand is on his death bed when he goes missing. His apparent refusal to meet death and lying down is the cause for great anguish to his son Jamun. He leads a life of desperation, trying to balance feeling of despair and resignation, since the suicide of his friend and neighbour Dr. Mukherjee. As Jamun reports the fact of his father’s disappearance to a bored police officer in a depressing police station, the exchange moves into the realms of the surreal:

“Any hobby, passion or interest of missing person?” “He and I played chess on weekends. He watched TV, and being constipated, while waiting in the mornings for the urge to visit the toilet, wrote poems in Bengali” (8). Having established that the missing person is an eighty-five year old gentleman, widowed and given to a fixed stable routine, the constable proceeds with his investigation.

Unspoken in this exchange is the understanding that little will be done, and that the nature of the situation will not change – the reporting of the missing person is a meaningless, but necessary, ritual. Chatterjee begins the novel with the thought of reflection “For not having loved one’s dead father enough, could one make amends by loving one’s child more?” (3). After the death of Urmila (Jamun’s mother), Shyamanand had to seek his refuge under either one of his sons. But since Burfi has to move to Noida on transfer, Shyamanand staying with Burfi was out of his choice, so he had to come under the care of his younger son, Jamun.

The dead would always remain in service of the living. The living would forever depend for succour on the dead. To Burfi it seemed that he and his brother standing motionless amongst the dead and the dying had reached the end of the world – for his marriage, it was over and done with, its ashes
he could not possibly rekindle; for his children, they had grown out of reach. (359)

Kasibai, the servant had been in their house for more than fifteen years, after the death of Jamun’s mother Urmila. Within a year’s time Jamun quit his job owing to his father’s nit-picking behaviour. From that time onwards Jamun’s father had stayed with him. Jamun applied for his transfer and stayed with his father for the only reason he never wanted to abandon his house. And moreover Shyamanand has not been alone in the last two decades since his paralytic stroke. On the other hand Kasibai, having reported of some calamity in her village, had packed up, borrowed some money as well stolen some and had left.

Shyamanand had many times insisted Jamun that he should get married and particularly insisted him to go for a medical check up just to confirm whether everything was alright. Jamun had been once exclaimed by Dr. Mukherjee that “your father told me with tears in his eyes that a negative test report for you would be the best birthday present that he could ever possibly receive from anybody” (204). Sensing his son recede, Shyamanand had then raised his voice: “We should arrange at the earliest for an AIDS test for Vaman. Pity that Mukherjee’s gone”. Shyamanand was very well aware of the sexual relation that existed between his son Jamun, Kasibai and Vaman (Kasibai’s son) as a consequence of which Vaman had started to drink. Once even Jamun enquired Vaman “Does your mother know that you’ve begun drinking during the day?” Vaman elaborated to Monga (the builder) that “I (Vaman) wanted to speak to her. He didn’t let me”. His voice, louder, threatened to break again, “He said he’d smash her teeth in if I phoned even once more” (214).

With the soaring real estate business in post-reforms India, Monga represents the laes of property dealers and builders who have dreamt to rise overnight from huts to sky-
touching apartments. It happens so because the value of real estate has been appreciated about two thousand per cent in the last two decades. So, the builders like Monga believe in the fact that, “time is money and thinking a waste of both” (49). For Monga, “the two (religion and crime) for him were indistinguishable, artha and dharma strolling hand in hand into one of his pilgrim resthouses…” (110).

Shyamananda, in the place of an ideal father feels helpless in correcting his son Jamun, whose habits seem to go astray leading to his own destruction. But out of the way Shyamananda gives his advice with a negative remark to go for an AIDS test which again brings about the ambivalent view of the parent towards his son without reflecting the consequence of such a statement. There is no place for emotional bondage and parental care in reality between Jamun and Shyamanand. Such views and opinions seem to be the offshoots of the western world.

Shyamananda declined the offer of the second bedroom not because he wanted to avoid the coughing of one and the snuffling and wheezing of the other but to keep a watch on Kasibai, as he was well aware of their illegal relation. The author portrays Jamun’s feelings in the following passage:

In the bed, while waiting for Shyamananda to fall asleep, Jamun often nodded to himself. Those were the best nights, the most salutary for his mental and physical well-being. If both father and son remained awake and son couldn’t restrain himself any longer, he simply and quietly left his bed and the left room to go and prod Kasibai into wakefulness. He often finished prodding well before she was fully up and then returned to his own bed to finish his sighing. Shyamananda of course knew what his son was up to and remained mute with depression for the next couple of days after each one of Jamun’s nocturnal excursions. He (Shyamananda)
maintained silence on the issue because he was unsure of what to say, and the how and why of it as well. The house was no longer his, he was a guest in it. (37)

According to Jamun, on account of his father, his sex life “dwindled to a sort of dry, rotting peanut” (37). Jamun’s past relation is confined to Kasturi to whom he has lost his virginity and has become the biological father of her child after her marriage to another man. And even after Kasturi’s marriage they continue to meet each other and thus continue a premarital relationship to a post marital one. Kasturi then becomes very successful producer in capturing melodramatic moments of Jamun’s life into a Filmy Soap “Cheers Zindagi”. Jamun takes up with great pride when his child has the same blood group as his.

Northrop Frye speaks of the typical victim as the ‘pharmakos’ or scapegoat, and goes on to say,

The pharmakos is neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes....He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence. (Anatomy of Criticism, 41)

The inescapability of injustice, guilt and helplessness is, most observers agree, the dominant and pervasive problem confronting the modern self, a problem that the critic Wylie Sypher poses as central to modern man’s existential predicament:

Under the dominion of apparatus, the self acts, but acts do not express the self or lead to any assertion of the self or any sense of self-fulfilment....To adapt the self to the new realities of power is to feel a new kind of dread, to sense a new realities of power is to feel a new kind of dread, to sense a
new kind of guilt, to be weighted by a new kind of helplessness... (*Loss of Self*, 14)

Naina Kapur who has shared the house with Shyamanand and Burfi for the past four years happens to be the ex-lover of Burfi. Soon after Shyamanand’s disappearance, Naina is found dead. When police insist for postmortem, Burfi objects for the fear of getting involved into the problem. At last it is finalized that loneliness and lack of food hastened her to death.

Jamun’s brother Burfi has loved and married Joyce, who is a Christian. But his family life remains discontent due to the vital factor of the ambivalent culture. This is revealed in the following lines:

Burfi hadn’t touched his wife in five years except to beat her even though he loved her very much, loved her most. When she was beaten and bleeding Jamun had held the phone tight against his ear and in disbelief his mouth had remained open like a fish’s. Burfi’s voice had been cold and low, completely exhausted by strain. He was so stressed out and fed by of his life of among other things – living with his cantankerous invalid father that he was taking it out with his fists on his wife and that too in front of the children. (220)

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s ‘Exploring the Orifices of Indian Society’, throws light on the impact of the consequences of taking quick decisions without reflection. Regret is also one of the themes reflected in his ‘Exploring the Orifices of Indian Society’. Burfi is never in good terms with his father: “Burfi the elder son had often summed up his father thus: He is an awful being. How much can you forgive a beggar just because he is good – looking?” (395). According to Upamanyu Chatterjee the generations of ambivalent culture remain far from maintaining a modest and cordial relation with elders. As a result,
Burfi feels dejected and pours out his anger to his wife by beating her and as he realizes himself as an alienated being finds no one with whom he could be considered worthy to share.

Thus, Jamun reflects that the attitude of Burfi towards his wife Joyce is the same that his father had towards his wife. This could also be regarded as one of the reasons behind Jamun’s negative attitude towards family life and considering sex as a concept of fun and pleasure and moreover keeping sexual relation with anyone no matter whatever way of life they may lead.

In the later part of his life Jamun somehow traces the residence of Kasibai and through her continues to have sex with Vaman her son who calls him as a “Male Prostitute” (71).

Shyamananda’s indifferent attitude towards his wife and children makes him a misfit in the institution of family. He blames his wife for his setbacks in health (164).

Jamun has no attachment towards money and wealth just like his mother, for according to him “It made swine of man. So what if they wore suits and spoke in a posh manner while dealing with it? Their eyes gave them away. And stealth? What of the wealth acquired by stealth? It’s totally unethical even to talk of selling my parent’s house at this stage” (228). On the other hand, Burfi has a high regard for his mother for he considered her to be a chief force to keep the family intact.

When Burfi moves to Noida, he feels that “those rooms triggered off memories of his familial life. He missed his sons and was unnerved to sense in himself a fear of the future spent alone. They missed him too, he was sure of it. Remember those who need you even if they don’t” (277). These lines emphasise the strength of man-woman relationship in an Indian soil, as well gives high regard to it.
Burfi is subjected to the same state of depression and loneliness just like his father. The death of Mrs. Naina Kapur has a far reaching influence on Burfi for as is seen in the following lines:

…tears of incomprehension and fear in Burfi’s eyes. The murmuring of others fading in and out. No need for a post-mortem to determine the cause of death. Nobody killed this one. She just simply stopped eating. Seventeen kilos she must’ve weighed; starved herself to death. He abandoned her and then she abandoned herself. (315)

The central ingredient in the phenomenon of the destabilisation of the Western man’s consciousness was the weakening of the belief in the much touted claim of rationality. It came to be realised that modernity was a cold-hearted neglect of important values of tradition, community of attachments and commitments which, even if non-rational, should not be rejected as irrational. The intellectual landscape of the second half of the twentieth century darkened with moral confusion raising doubts about the conceptual foundation of Western modernity.

That his father considered his sons to be his life’s achievements and him, Jamun, in particular, with his self-esteem that had been abused for years by his intimacy with the lower orders – that Shyamanand had decided – moreover, as a pleasant surprise, like an unanticipated gift for Jamun – to blazon in crimson the wretched qualification and designation of his wretched sons, alongside the gate of the house – his other triumph on earth – for the entire world to marvel at in passing that Shyamanand had acted so made his son feel ridiculous and humiliated, as though suddenly, without warning, a brazen male prostitute, a male Kasibai had spott paan on his face in the street and a sneer and an obscenity torn off Jamun’s clothes to reveal his pale, flabby lower – middle – classes. (340 – 341)
Jamun had to endure the consequences of his father’s behaviour even after many years of his mother’s death.

Jamun reflected that even after several years of passing of his mother Urmila, the sons had become accustomed by being sporadically tender with their father and had unremarkable became a part of their life. For Jamun, the days of wounding were over – or as Jamun would have imagined. Yet what had hurt the most by its unexpectedness was his pride in their mediocrity. (342)

The novelist brings about a most striking quote in this point of the novel that “something dies with you when your parents die, no matter how old you are” (343). Jamun even goes to the extent of having sexual relation with his father:

He smelt his father’s small, musty, hair oil, not unpleasant and remembered a famous English book that he had read once, the first page of which had said that ‘Mothers always smelt nicer than fathers’. After having spent few hours at his father’s feet who was in the armchair, Jamun goes to bed. (345)

The author once again brings the philosophical quoting. “Death cannot then squeeze the life out of your heart until you allow it to” (347). This incident is the epitome of the extreme destructive side of an ambivalent generation. Such a horrible incident had hastened the missing of Shyamanand.

Then the two brothers who have been in a thorough search for their father remain futile in their effort. Jamun consciously gives an instant reply which really puzzles the policeman. “The only person I know who was consistently more blue than him is me” (13). Above all to counteract the above questions, Jamun replies to the policeman “We lived together quietly and unhappily. I mean, if someone had to leave the house, it
shouldn’t have been he” (11). Through these lines Jamun brings about his ambivalent nature and regret about his father. Finally the policeman concludes that “The missing person is likely to be where now you think? I think he’s dead. While out on the road, he met with an accident. A hit and run, a heart attack. He’s lying now in a hole somewhere cold and half covered with earth” (14).

So Jamun starts in a move towards hunting his father in the places suspected by the policeman along with Bahadur in his neighbourhood who works under the builder Lobhesh.

Jamun is accompanied by Mrs. Naina Kapur with her leucoderma blotches on her arms, neck and forehead. So after Shymanada has left home, Jamun remains along with Mrs. Naina Kapur, forty five years old but who seemed to be ten years older, under the caretaker of the house namely Budi Kadombini.

Jamun is reminded of the five unsettled, dislocating years that Shyamanad has spent with him, Kasibai, his cook Trollop and Vaman her son. In the last five years Hegiste’s grandfather-in-law had been a great neighbour to Shyamanand and his death deeply upsets both of them. Another personality who also secured a good company for Shyamanand was Mr. Padakhar, whose presence embarrassed Shyamanand. He is more than twenty years senior and three times more energetic than Shyamanand himself.

Something that upset Shyamanand was that, he was avoided by the servant as one avoids a relative by marriage, with whom one has to converse in an unfamiliar tongue and for they would defeat within seconds of his entering a room. Moreover, Shyamanand, non plussed and upset them much as he had done his own immediate family. Shyamanand’s indifferent attitude which he had in his family also continued with the servant to the extent of driving them out.
Shyamanand declined the offer of the second bedroom exclusively in order to keep watch over Kasibai and Vaman for it gave on to the dining space on the floor of which they dosed. But Jamun reflected that his father would remain sleepless in a shared bedroom. But his father had assisted that in the middle of the night if his father had turned breathless he would seek the help of Vaman.

On the whole when Shyamanand would protest saying “Perhaps that in a normal household, servants and not masters were meant to do the work of servants, Jamun would deflect the objection with: “I think he’s in the toilet, He’d’ve heard your yelling for him, which would’ve made him nervous. He’s going to rush out in a panic and get you your glass of water without washing his hands”. ‘I’m not thirsty anymore; thank you, my thoughtful son” (38). Shyamanand had also tried to mend even the worst situation into a comic one, irresistible by his guilty conscious owing to his son.

Shyamanand had a desperate feeling of insecurity about himself and uncertainty of the future during his five years stay with Jamun: “What was truer of his capacity for happiness was that she wouldn’t recognise it even if it sat on her nose and warbled to her. Happiness requires courage, a willingness to put a foot forward and test its waters” (38). As a sign of discontent Shyamanand had also hinted to his son that he felt like going back to his house that he had built and continue his stay with his elder son and his grand children: “Truth to tell, Shyamanand knew that nobody dead or alive was interested in him, alive or dead. Life was one habit and keeping secrets from the world was another; the second was a means by which a flagging interest in the first could be kept breathing” (65). The desperate end of Shyamanand was due to his ambivalent view towards life and family.

Under this crucial stage Jamun gets a call from Mithi, the begotten child which he got through Kasturi to whom he had lost his virginity before her marriage. As a biological father of the child, Kasturi serves to strengthen the bond by putting forth the urge of her
daughter, in want of two parties to be arranged for her birthday one for her schoolmates and other for her neighbour’s. It is very commonly quoted that demons of the past do not let you rest, and it happened to be most appropriate and true in the case of Jamun. His former lover Kasturi, who is a hot-shot T.V. producer, wants to capture the melodramatic moments of Jamun’s life into a Hindi soap “Cheers Zindagi”. At the same time Kasturi, mother of Jamun’s only child comes back with a clear motive behind this move of hers to make Jamun aware of his responsibility towards his child’s life though not financially but emotionally and psychologically.

When Kasturi meets Jamun after a long time, she enquires him. “Where did you hide yourself all these years when the child was growing up and needed to see you?” (101). But Jamun gives a very casual reply as he is aware of his identity as the biological father of the child. In reply to Kasturi he remarks, ‘She had - has a father. I was away rotting in a corner of the country with my father, a fat prostitute cook and her adolescent son who was fascinated by mirrors. But we – you and I we wrote, we kept in touch” (102). They moreover met each other infrequently when her husband was away - and were quite content not to exchange opinion and disagree, even under adequate provocation. Such an indifferent attitude again is a big blow on the so called Indian culture and society and it reflects the culture of the Western world. Chatterjee strikingly reminds one of the creative viewpoint of the famous American novelist, Saul Bellow. Bellow finds himself unable to ignore the reality which prevails around him as a socially conscious writer. He opines, “I cannot exceed what I see. I am bound, in other words, as the historian is bound by the period he writes about, by the situation I live in” (“Champion of the Novel”, Front line, 84). The direct and bare approach is what is demanded by the theme he chooses. A novelist of conscience that Chatterjee is indisputably, he finds it inescapable that a spade be called a spade to bring home the full force of his calling as a writer.
Following the disappearance of Shyamanand, his long-time solitary friend, Dr. Mukherjee commits suicide and Jamun tries very hard to grapple with the situation. On the other hand Jamun and his brother Burfi reconnect in their old home that builder Lobesh Monga has his eyes on. Mongo, the unscrupulous builder, has an ultimate business motive to demolish their home and build something new in its place.

Thus the search which the two sons began in the holy city for their father Shyamanand leaves them with many thoughts of reflection and heavy laden hearts of pain. The very first statement of the novel stands most appropriate at this junction of the novel. “For not having loved one’s dead father enough, could one make amends by loving one’s child more?” (*Way to Go* 3). These words reveal a thought of guilty reflection which haunts the minds and seems to seek an outlet for making amends. This thought creates an impulse deep into the heart of the protagonist. The famous post-colonial critic Ron Shapiro writes,

> In short, the postmodern is a mode which results in a disconnection from the actual world, and which displays a kind of nostalgic for the past....We further learn that postmodernist intellectual mode indulges in a nostalgic detachment from history, because it is unable to look directly at the real world of either the present or the past which remains forever out of reach. (*Surviving Postmodernism,* 22)

*Weight Loss* has other typical Upamanyu staples: the oppressiveness of family and career; an honest realization that there has been a settling for rather than an aspiring of; bleak situations calling for black humour. The novel focuses on the strange life of a sexual deviant named Bhola. According to him sex is a form of depravity and he manifests it on anybody, from teacher to the road side layman. The whole novel deals with the immoral sexual relation which the protagonist Bhola exhibits right from his
adolescent age. Bhola is keenly conscious of his obsessive compulsive condition, always repulsed by his desire, the object of it, and the depths to which it takes him. For him sex with the lower classes is not merely inconvenient; it changes his life, the circles he moves in, the choices he makes. (Weight Loss: A Comedy of Sexual and Spiritual Degradation, 424)

Bhola’s real consequences of such an odd behaviour can be dated back from his school days, which were one of the best years of Bhola’s life. Bhola was put up in a Jesuit School, where Dosto was his best friend. Anthony the physical education teacher is very strict and Bhola has had unhappy moments in his school. Anthony, often describes Bhola as womanish. “‘Womanish’ was his favourite adjective with the younger students of the school. With the seniors, he while stooging their cigarettes, exchanged jokes about the females on the staff” (Weight Loss, 4). On the other hand, the whole school referred to him as ‘Cleopatra’. While others have graduated to obsessing with their women teachers, Bhola and his friend Dosto, lust for men mainly, with Dosto in love with his driver and Bhola doing everything to get punished by Anthony, to touch him as roughly as the teacher deals with him. Soon, Bhola graduates to lusting after women teachers as well. But he is equally attracted and repelled by many others. (Weight Loss: A Comedy of Sexual and Spiritual Degradation, 424). Such is the destructive thought that rules the minds of the generation belonging to the ambivalent culture.

Bhola takes revenge on his teacher Anthony sir by writing three consecutive letters one after the other as a consequence of which his sir is enervated beyond belief, especially by the third letter. It was a device planned by Bhola in relating the sir in affair with Jeremiah teacher. Bhola was fascinated by his class teacher Miss. Jeremiah at the age of thirteen.
She was not the kind of woman whom any boy would admit to being in love with. It’s like wanting to sink your nose into the pussy of a bad tempered pig, mused a very senior boy in the school bus. She was fortyish, usually wore skirts and had vast lemon pale, soft-rubber thighs. In class, she generally sat in a voluptuous slouch in her chair alongside her table, her ankles worsened; legs spread wide, patches of sweat on her beast of a paunch, arms linked overhead to display armpits that were vast and grey wastelands of tacum and stubble. (Weight Loss, 14)

Dosto was an appalling student as well the son of an influential parent. When Jeremiah discovered the power of Dosto’s father she managed to get her phone connection at home within a week’s time. And subsequently Dosto’s marks also improved compared to the previous year, when Dosto had started to go to Miss. Jeremiah’s house three afternoons a week for extra coaching in Maths and Science.

The pattern sets in early in his school days. Bhola makes crank calls with his friend Dosto to Miss. Jiggletit Jeremiah - she of the paunch and the armpit stubble – not to be confused with Maths teacher Hema Olisboi who cannot possibly exist beyond Bhola’s feverish imagination, as ‘Olisboi’ means dildo. These calls usually consisted of yelling “Armpit!” into a hanky covered receiver and are preceded or followed by anonymous annoyingly cloying letters. Bhola has sado-masochistic bouts with his bullying sports teacher Anthony. Bhola progresses to sniffing and then wearing his teacher’s brief, writing anonymous letters to him as well, shitting on his floor, and being after all a considerate and well-brought-up boy wiping his arse thereafter. Unfortunately, he does this on Anthony’s photo frame and is caught in the act and has to be suspended. The intervention of Dosto’s dipsomaniac uncle posing as his father goes horribly wrong and Bhola is now expelled (Weight Loss: A Comedy of Sexual and Spiritual Degradation, 424).
According to Bhola he had seemed to exist for her only once when she had slapped him hard for a social studies essay that he had written. He had cried then, out of pain and rage, disappointment, loathing and lust, and she had grinned and slapped him again, saying, “Here, don’t be silly only girls cry. You aren’t a girl, or are you!” Then the class had chanted in a chorus, ‘Miss! Miss! Sir Anthony calls him womanish!’ (16).

Infact, he had written the essay on the topic ‘My Neighbourhood’ in order to impress her with his knowledge of the world. In another instant, for an Annual English Elocution Competition, Bhola had chosen an emotional passage from Patrick Henry’s “Give Me Liberty, Or Give Me Death”. While in contrary to his expectation, Miss Jeremiah was not amused and suggested that a funny poem would have suited him better.

“He was hurt. ‘But Miss, I want to do a serious piece’. ‘What nonsense’, she indulgently uncrossed her thighs and poked through their poetry book. ‘Here, do “The Owl Critic” (Weight Loss, 18). As a consequence of this, he phoned Miss Armpit that afternoon from home. ‘He would call her and say:

“Good afternoon, Miss how is your armpit today?” or one of its variations. He would disconnect immediately, for he could not bear to hear her stridently demand his identity for fear that he would wilt into giving himself away. Thereafter, in the classroom or the corridor, or on the stains, whenever he met her, passed her or sensed her, he played out his sham life with aplomb, with eyes, now little crafty, turned a way when he greeted her, terribly conscious of the dawn of adolescence on his upperlip. (Weight Loss, 18)

Bhola’s concern with weight loss dates from round about the time of his infatuation with Miss. Jeremiah. It could have been called a phase in his growing up had
it not remained a hub of his life for virtually the next twenty five years (Weight Loss, 19). Bhola initiated many other weight loss programmes. He jogged clandestinely after dark, wildly, stumblingly, over foot path and across main street and neighbourhood part but was very determined that no one must know about them. For, according to Bhola, to reveal his desire to be physically trim was to confess as shame and inadequacy and to be a matter of laughter for all.

Bhola’s first love was with Gopinath the family cook and involved in an immoral sexual relation. Bhola’s mother bemoaned never to hire a sexy servant. Following this incident, Bhola was next infatuated by the vegetable vendor and his wife. At the first sight Bhola remained impressed. According to Upamanyu Chatterjee, almost all his (Bhola’s) memorable encounters are sexual with his cook, or the eunuchs or with a flashing sadhu. The school section will encourage many into thinking that this is a vastly funny book that will show the growth and maturity of the protagonist, how he overcomes his Jesuit schooling and Hindu upbringing. However, neither the novel, nor the protagonist goes anywhere else (Weight Loss: A Comedy of Sexual and Spiritual Degradation, 424).

For Bhola, in contrast, the second most erotic experience of his life till that point – almost rivaling the moment when he, aged seven had seen for the first time and fondled the blood red cord that wound itself around the abdomen of the family cook and factotum and dangled down to run through his pierced foreskin - the second most memorable went had been trailing in a trance. Jeremiah on the school picnic day in the Jahanpanah public Gardens, hypnotised by her hips swaying like a duck’s in skin tight white slacks, he as helpless and out of control bitch on heat in a neighborhood rubbish dump. (Weight Loss, 21)
Bhola met a Sadhu who was short, slim with dark beard, who accosted him with some holy gibberish.

He held Bhola’s hand to prevent him from escaping and asked him why he at so young an age looked so sad. To cheer him up, he twined the cord in his other hand around Bhola’s index finger. “Pull it with love in your heart have pure thoughts and you will see miracles. Bhola who as the protagonist represented himself as the product of the ambivalent ideas, gets a misconception that through the power of Sadhu his power is doubled towards his goal of getting on with sexual relation with others. So Bhola, ‘instantaneously recalled his first love, Gopinath the family cook, and realized perforated foreskin’. (24)

In one occasion, Bhola’s father and stepmother had been to Gwalior and Gopinath was instructed to sleep indoors with the boys. Bhola,

Not caring whether the cook awoke, he crouched his teeth. One canine was almost wrenched out of his mouth. Unrewarded, aroused yet depressed, with aching jaws, he half heartedly tugged the pyjamas down and not having reckoned with those full – bellied adults who loosen their nightwear to breathe more freely during sleep, was tabernacle to have Gopinath’s loins pop into view, dramatically, like a black breakfast sausage – with accompaniments – produced by a magician. (29).

After this incident Gopinath disappeared from Bhola’s life with the appearance of Miss Jeremiah in Bhola’s life. In his ever–flowing adventure chronicles, the personality and physique of Gopinath underwent many changes. When Bhola was in fifteen he bemoaned his step mother’s strategy of never hiring sexy servants. Thus “his entire life was to be a quest for sex on tap and on payment with females and makes of the lower
orders. He considered himself a sort of stoic, impervious to both pleasure and pain; in reality; however he was impervious only to pleasure (38 - 39).

When Bhola was sixteen years of age he regretted for having taken economics though his first optional subject had been biology. For Dasto had also protested scornfully:

Are you crazy? Biology types have to stay back after school three times a week to cut open frogs and sniff their gonads while Economics types are flown to Bombay once a term to be wined and dined by the Captain of industry’. Only people like you who don’t have the marks for Bio take Eco. (49)

At one instant when Bhola was in the class, a peon came from the Principal to intimate him that his father was asked to meet the Principal. Bhola was charged for having gone to the toilet on the floor of a teacher’s room. So Swaraj chacha, a distant uncle and a cousin of Dosto’s father was requested to play the role of Bhola’s father to the Principal.

“The Principal was really quite adamant. He seemed to hint that he wanted to expel you from school. Frankly I approved of his decision and also added that I felt that you should spend a week or two in jail, Dosto’s father needs to be told about the company that his son keeps” (58). Further the Principal added “I am sorry that we have had to expel you we have no choice. You gave us none” (59).

And after the meeting of the Principal with Chacha Swaraj who disguised himself as Bhola’s father, the Principal concluded to Bhola that “Your father was encouraging and positive this morning. He gave us hope of your improving yourself in the future” (59). Bhola had a safe escape in this issue concerning his misconduct at school, as Bhola’s father and step mother had no friends amongst the parents of his ex-classmates.
The third person to whom Bhola was infatuated was the vegetable vendor and his wife. According to Upamanyu Chatterjee in “A Comedy of Sexual and Spiritual Degradation”, Bhola chases hideously ugly, disgustingly coarse Titli and her useless husband Moti as she rises up the social ladder from vegetable vendor to nurse to ayah to holistic health spa attendant. Bhola slides down in inverse proportion, comprising his studies, job, marriage and everything else in this pursuit.

Her face was warm and red and she was gently panting when she pulled the cart to a stop before Bhola. The short sleeves of her blouse disclosed stout, powerful upper arms that he wouldn’t have minded having himself. The patches of perspiration at her armpits extended to her breast with the edge of her sari, she scrubbed away at the exudation and heat on her upper lip cheeks, neck and throat. (424)

A flabby Bhola is obsessed by being in good shape which for him means thin, without weight, malnourished. Illiterate Moti becomes his erotic fantasy; Titli is one of the few women who excites him and he, a Brahmin, is perversely attracted to the odorous couple. He likes dirt. Titli’s whorishness adds excitement as Bhola is thrilled paying her (www.penguinbooksindia.com).

On the other hand, Bhola “to restrain himself from loutish conduct, briefly surveyed the disease that he could catch from intimate contact with the couple – syphilis, hepatitis B, tuberculosis, leprosy, herpes and what he could pass on to them in return” (41). At the same time Bhola got the address of their living place. Thus by this way Bhola went to their house and continued to have immoral relation with both husband and wife and paid them for it. Bhola was aware of the fact that both Titli and Moti owed money to someone else and took advantage of their need at that time.
Chatterjee’s creative commitment to the reality-rooted Indian perspective does not allow him to go for textual fripperies even when writing a novel in the year 2000. He cannot forget, rooted as he is in the realities of India, that here it is not uncommon to hear about woman being used, abused and sold. So he creatively insists, right from the suggestive title to the story-line, that woman symbolises docility in tolerating the ravages of power and hunger for flesh. He must have read Eric Hobsbawm’s comment, “The signs of significant, even revolutionary changes in women’s expectations about themselves and the world’s, about their place in society, are undeniable” (“The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century”, 312), but he doubts its applicability in the context to which he has dedicated his creativity. And the context is the reality called Indian society.

While Dosto and Anin also made their way to the hill station they seemed to be complete in each other’s company. They also met Bhola:

He shot Bhola a look, clearly disapproving of his silliness at trying to be witty all the time and synchronously apprehensive of his reaction to a grandiose statement’

‘Life is short and I have plans’. ‘Do they include losing weight?’ They did not for himself. Dosto could not provide further details of his blueprint for future. (113)

Bhola recognized Moti at a distance and went closer to him to have sex with him. Dosto in one circumstance had also revealed to Bhola regarding Anin to whom he had proposed that “God alone knew to how many others that she had lost her virginity” (118). Such a remark is again on account of the ambivalent attitude of Dosto towards his girl friend. Then when Bhola, Dosto and Anin were discussing very personal things Anin remarked that Dosto goes off wearing my underclothes first time I (Anin) had thought
he’d made a mistake and I (Anin) felt insulted, thinking to myself – surely my pantie size is smaller’ (119).

At such time Bhola disliked her for lying, for colluding with Dosto in faking the nature of their friendship. It was inconceivable that they could be speaking the truth. He knew them and their proclivities. Bhola had at times wanted to beat her till she confessed to her ugliness. (119)

According to the protagonist anyone revealing the privacy in the public is something intolerable and remains dead against such attitude. This also reflects the Western mannerism.

Bhola continues to be obsessed by thinness, by balanced weight loss as a principle to live by. He also goes to bed by nine thirty because he assiduously tries to devote only eight hours of sleep. Bhola frantically seeks Titli after she becomes an untrained assistant for a fake medical doctor who interrupts the treatment of patients to masturbate on Titli after arousing himself with mumbo jumbo about sex as spirituality. At one point Bhola also remains hesitant to have sexual relation with Moti:

He glared into Moti’s wide overawed eyes at the fleshless face, the mouth that jutted out sensually. ‘you’re not going to follow and disturb me. You look ill. For all I know you now have T.B. of the anus. You can’t jog okay? (127)

While this time Moti who was paid by Bhola for sex, demanded more money for his operation also. And later Moti took Bhola to Dr. Bokaro, where Titli worked and also had sex with him. By this Bhola was puzzled and scared of any other venereal disease that could be transmitted through Moti to him. Further Titli exclaimed that she loved the doctor for he proved to be a good lover and a master.
Later Bhola came to know through the doctor that Moti was supposed to be the son of Gopinath the latter servant of Bhola. The doctor further exclaimed that he would die before 40 years for all the semen was drained and nothing was in him and that he would die of stroke. Bhola also enquired the doctor that having sex would account for loss of weight and came to know that there was no such scientific reasons.

Between the age of eighteen and thirty seven, when he died, Bhola had eight sexual partners, four women and four males which seems to be the achievement of Bhola as an ambivalent being of the Western world. When he was bleeding to death in the calm centre that Anin and Dosto had created, it pleased him that he had maintained a balance between genders in his choice of lovers. Of course, it was ridiculous that he should at the age of thirty seven – and that too while feeling himself ebb away- be faintly and light headedly embarrassed about few curse the people he had slept with. Then he had reminded himself that was nothing new, that he had always felt ridiculous, no to worry. Besides the eight had all been top quality, no doubt about that, even though at that moment, he could recall the names and vaguely the faces of just five (154).

Titli had remarked to Bhola that when she was married to Moti they had children and were very poor and worked as casual labourers for building roads. And one day unwisely Moti went to vasectomy camp to have himself sterilized for the want of transistor and two hundred rupees. When Bhola enquired about the children Titli remarked that the boy died recently of sunstroke and dehydration and due to this Moti’s grief doubled due to his inability for another chance. On the other hand Bhola promised that he would marry their daughter and they all could live together. At the same time Mr. Manchanda wanted to propose his daughter in marriage to Bhola – who happened to be the husband of Mrs. Manchanda and the daughter that he got through second marriage. Bhola stated that it would take fifteen more years for him to get married and settle while Mrs. Manchanda continued her sexual relation with Bhola after Vivek left for his.
Bhola had planned to go back to his home and to start a gym and further presume his post graduate degree by staying there and attending classes in the morning hours. On the other hand Bhola continued his sexual act with both Moti and Titli without the knowledge of each other. Dosto and Anin had decided to start up a gym that actually happens to be a centre of prostitution system.

The essential message which emanates from this highly significant observation is that the growth of the anti-heroes contains the unmistakable tendency to turn them into future sufferers of an anti-heroic destiny marked by purposelessness, moral uncertainty and alienation from their sustaining sources of inner consolation. The most crucial years pass in a situation in which they are encouraged and even forced to cut themselves off from all those formal and informal learning environments in which they might encounter the messy and complex reality of the human condition. Additionally, family life is reduced to the relatively one-dimensional unit of the nuclear family: husband and wife and two children, leading anxious, shallow lives in a metropolitan flat. They lose the most formative years in which they might have become human and humane, the reason of this loss being the ultra competitive environment in which the children, rather the future anti-heroes, operate, rebounding between classes and more classes. Their educational nurturing cuts them off from their roots, moorings and environment. In the process, they grow as damaged individuals devoid of the values which have the creative capacity to mould and shape the growing personalities into truly human, sensitive entities. What happens in the absence of these shaping values is the mushrooming of success stories and role models whose anomic self-obsessions cast a comprehensive demonstration effect that reverberates through society as a whole. What stands out most starkly amidst all this is the lack of moral sensitivity in the thinking of the anti-heroes. They are so self-obsessed that the morally crucial awareness does not seep into their being - that the complex human world is an interconnected web of individuals, a world in which all our actions
have consequences for known and unknown others. This simple fact is the basis of morality; and unsurprisingly, its lack in the mental world of the anti-heroes makes them immoral. They do not realize that one is more or less moral to the extent that one’s mind and imagination have been educated, enabled and encouraged to comprehend this ramifying interdependence.

Through Bhola’s father, an alliance was fixed, who had been good neighbours for ten years in the past. “My daughters, Kamala and Kaushalya. Kamala is my elder daughter’ (216). So finally Kamala got married to Bhola and Anin to Dosto who was already pregnant on account of his friend. While Bhanu, Bhola’s elder brother got married after seven years and had two normal children and settled in life. Bhola was the second husband for Kamala, for she was a divorcée. After Bhola’s marriage Moti and Titli never turned up to disturb Bhola’s life.

Bhola was preparing for parenthood and during the time of confinement he had admitted Kamala in the hospital. At the same time he received a phone call from Moti after almost thirteen years his past man-lover who seemed to be affected with typhoid. When Bhola had met Moti in the garden he further accompanied him to his flat to have sex. Finally in the climax Moti out of rage shot Bhola on his shoulder and fled away. Finally Bhola recovered from his crucial stage.

Upamanyu Chatterjee states about Bhola’s passion for Anthony and Moti and his bisexuality:

Think of Shiva as Asdhanarishvara, used with the form of his consort Parvathi, Think of Krishna, who as the god head is the one true entity and the world and its creature are all female in principle created for his pleasure. In the mundane world too, all man and woman combine the same duality. One is complete when one accepts within oneself the qualities of both genders. (www.penguinbooksindia.com)
The full significance of Chatterjee’s concept of anti-hero is realized when we see him (protagonist) as, in the words of Salman Rushdie, ‘a clear-eyed witness responding to the here and now in precisely that fashion which Naipaul inaccurately calls uniquely Western’ (Step Across This Line: Collected Non-fiction, 172). He shows the present devastated condition of the modern urban Indian youth with ruthless realism of perception. His fiction examines how the public realm encroaches on the private and reduces the inner power of the individual, howsoever sophisticated he might appear in the public eye. For him, the public realm is a composite of institutions, attitudes, expectations and values particularised by readily identifiable spokesmen who are sustained by empty and meaningless self-centredness. He seems to agree with Saul Bellow that

...realistic literature from the first has been a victim literature. But any ordinary individual and realistic literature concerns itself with ordinary individuals against the external world and the external world will conquer him, of course. Everything that people believed in the nineteenth century about determinism, about man’s place in nature, about the power of productive forces in society, made it inevitable that the hero of the realistic novel should not be a hero but a sufferer who is eventually overcome. (It All Adds Up, 61)

It is the birth of his desired child and a near death experience that changes Bhola into a sentimental mode. Ironically, his life changes back again because he is wrongly suspected of having molested his own child, a child who seems to presage a second life for him, a life of emotional bonding and sharing that he had been incapable of till then. This reversal is also ironic because keen to celebrate life after his lucky escape he is finally left with no alternative but to take his own life – the ultimate act in his weight loss
The novel is an embodiment of immoral sexual relation of Bhola which in turn is due to the influence of Western and ambivalent culture.

In a sense, the anti-heroes are lifeless consumers of life’s amenities, for whom Francis Fukuyama prognosticates very poignantly:

... the end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring courage, imagination and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems... and satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. (“The End of History” *The National Interest*, 18)

Elizabeth B.Hurlock in her *Personality Development* has pointed out three concurrent symptoms of alienation which consist of being ‘recessive’, ‘socially disinterested’ and ‘socially ineffective’ (1976:41). Reserved, listless, having withdrawn behaviour, self-bound and self-centred are the other characteristics of an alienated person. Such a person becomes troublesome to others by noisy, boisterous and showy gestures, by resisting authority, ignoring rules and duties and rejecting the accepted cultural mores. Furthermore, Hurlock says, “In general, the alienation is marked by such unsocial behaviour as teasing and bullying, making unpleasant comments, being hypocritical, intentionally annoying people, lying and being sneaky, rising alibis or projecting blame on others and being sullen, sulky and moody” (41).

Pre-marital and post-marital relations are often the themes depicted by modern Indian writers. Upamanyu Chatterjee appears to be very satirical as he analyses human relationships in *English, August: An Indian Story*, *The Last Burden*, *Weight Loss*, and *Way to Go*. Our lives revolve around relationships in some form or the other. And it is
relationships which make all the difference in life. In India, till the present day marriage gives sanctity to man-woman relationships. However the writers bring out the fact that marriage as an institution of failure which results in irritable and impatient behaviour among them finally ends up with emotional imbalance and broken heart.

The noted Indian English critic, Meenakshi Mukherjee, calls our attention to the fact that right from the beginning of Indian writing in English as a recognisable literary phenomenon the writers, “as a ballast to the supposed alienness / elitism of the language, tended to deploy certain thematic or formal devices to tether their texts to indigenous texts” (“The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English” 81).

According to Upamanyu Chatterjee, the protagonists, Agastya in the novel *English August: An Indian Story*, Jamun in the novel *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go*, and Bhola in the novel *Weight Loss* remain deep-rooted under the influence of Western education and further take it to their life and thus present themselves as ambivalent beings in an Indian society to the extreme levels in life, family, society and matter relating to sex and relations. They remain total misfits in the institution of the family, society and the world at last. This chapter further broadens the trend of relationship that exists between the man–woman relationship in the novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee and the ways by which this ambivalent view changes the existational nature of such relationship in the Indian soil.

In the words of C.D. Narasimhaiah, it is well known that when societies are faced with a crisis of any magnitude, they can only fall back on their own time-tested resources, in the life of the spirit, especially so in India, because of impoverishment of the contemporary cultural scene in the so-called civilized world. The tiger and the ape snarl their teeth and bare their nails and we better look into ourselves for sustenance (“Makers of Indian English : Some Reflections”, 17).
In the view of T. G. Vaidyanathan, the concept of anti-hero as illustrated in the novels of Upamanyu Chaatterjee, as we have seen, takes a dim view of the spread of modernity, the calculating spirit behind it, the cultural fragmentation it promotes, and the cold impersonal world that swaggers at a life of comfort. The culture of runaway consumerism, indulged in by the anti-heroes is subjected to a merciless exposure. This exposure through the predicament of the anti-heroes contains a hidden but audible warning also, which brings to our mind the words of Walter Benjamin, “...The storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience-his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale” (“Mr.Naipaul’s Round Trip”, XV). As one reads and ponders over Upamanyu Chatterjee’s concept of the Indian anti-hero, our experience gets amply enriched.

The novelist, Bharati Mukherjee, candidly accepts about herself that “...Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of comprehending the world” (Preface to *Darkness and Other Stories*, vi). On the contrary, for Upamanyu Chatterjee, India is neither a metaphor nor a philosophical idea. Through his novels, he speaks to those for whom the murky reality of today’s India is confronted daily at a non-metaphoric level, for whom India is not merely a trope. And the significance of Chatterjee’s realistic vision lies in the fact that it resonates with the readers’ knowledge of present day Indian reality. Through his novels, he continues his exploration and excavation of the artifices of Indian society.

In this chapter, the investigator has picked out passages that reveal the deteriorating strength of man-woman relationship in the characters who feature in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s novels under study. She has further brought to light the Western impact on the Indian society as portrayed by the novelist.