The success of *Midnight's Children* has undoubtedly played the single most decisive role in ushering in a literary 'glasnost'. Rushdie's novel created the literary environment for the growth of a new, liberated form of storytelling, that marked the beginning of a new phase of writing. It also heralded the arrival of anti-hero figures, a cosmopolitan sensibility and an uninhibited use of English. The adoption of a comic epic mode intertwining the personal and the historical, and the use of an unapologetic, unselfconscious idiom of a hybrid kind found numerous takers. Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988) (*EA*) was an instant success and even became a major film released through Twentieth Century Fox, India. The interesting title strikes one by its contradiction – a colonial obsession with the Raj coupled with the Indian reality. It is an account of a thoroughly urban Indian's encounter with provincial Bharat. The novel at a superficial level is a scathing attack on the Indian Administrative Service with its baggage of "interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, ill will and selfishness" (*EA* 121). At a deeper level it is an interior voyage of self-discovery by a confused young man with an anachronistic sensibility, out of joint with his
contemporary ethos. The narrative charts the protagonist’s trying to come to terms with the reality around him.

Agastya Sen, or the anglophile August, and again the Bengali Ogu is an IAS officer posted at Madna, a back water town in central India for a year's training in the wiles of administration. The son of a governor, an elite public school product and a "megalopolitan Indian, who ate hamburger" (EA 205), Agastya feels totally lost in the provincial setting of Madna. The offices and officers he encounters are distasteful and revolting. The District Collector, Srivastav, is a typical bureaucrat who misuses the services of the peons, specializes in keeping concerts waiting to make his presence felt and generally indulges in insulting and bossing over and misbehaving with his junior officers. The IAS hierarchy with its class distinctions is exposed. Officers in the Indian Police Service are said to be jealous of their Administrative counterparts. One of the officers Bajaj is "a bloody promotee" and in "Srivastav's vocabulary 'promotee' was a vile curse ranking somewhere between bastard and mother Fucker" (EA 58). These men have inflated egos, are corrupt and inefficient. Their wives misuse power to gain admission/get jobs in local institutions. Besides Bajaj and Srivastav, Kumar, the Superintendent of Police, Mishra, the District Judge are all power mongers who do precious little for the public. Stories of corruption and inefficiency, long purposeless meetings and back biting form part of the Indian story.
In a bid to turn his back on such hypocrisy, Agastya chooses the shortest cut to escapism: the private world of his room where, with the help of music, fantasy, marijuana and masturbation, he tries to relive the past. But there are times when he takes stock of the havoc created by the colonial powers and cynically studies the status of English in India. Agastya's musings make him more and more inscrutable, for even as he detests westernized fads and yearns for a resurgence of everything native and ethnic, he recklessly indulges in lying, blaspheming and using sophomoric excesses of word play and scatological grotesqueries. The voice that comes through loud and clear is that of the angry young man, the disillusioned bureaucrat, the sex starved bachelor – in short, that of a chauvinistic male whose world has no space for the other sex except for physical fulfilment. The language is loaded with sexist connotations showing up an agenda to 'other' the women in the story.

The protagonist of the novel belongs to the new generation variously described as the "cola generation" (*EA* 47) "the generation that doesn't oil its hair" (*EA* 47) the "generation of apes" (*E.A* 28) and the generation that would love to "get AIDS because it is rampant in America" (*EA* 76). He may not share all the oddities of his generation but he is a westernized Indian trying to grapple with the discord that results from his interaction with society. Nayanthara Sahgal in her essay, “The Schizophrenic Imagination” speaks of
a new rationalism that emerged in the post 1980s and the product of this new
movement:

… another breed of westernized Indian for whom his
plural culture meant a bewildering reckoning with
himself, a balancing act, where the priorities were never
in doubt, but where, 'who am I?' remained an on-going
search and question. (Rutherford 30-31)

Agastya is also left to ponder over his true self and relate with his
surroundings more meaningfully.

Upamanyu Chatterjee writes about a society which has lost almost all
its moorings. His protagonist fails to find answers to many questions about
life. He experiences a sense of alienation and he inhabits a world that is
filled with people who have a strong sense of dislocation.

Agastya Sen is a hybrid hovering in the twilight zone between the east
and the west, the colonizer and the colonized. He is, despite his IAS status,
rootless and drifting. "You are an absurd combination," says Agastya's uncle,
"a boarding school – English – literature education and an obscure name from
Hindu myth" (EA 129). Posted at Madna, Agastya is a fish out of water,
leading someone else's life, "ravaged by mosquitoes with no electricity, with
no sleep in a place he disliked, totally alone with a job that did not interest
him, in murderous weather, and now feeling madly sexually aroused" (EA
To escape from his claustrophobic room, he indulges in sexual fantasies, exercising, drinking and smoking. His aunts relate his behaviour to "the original sin, the marriage of a Bengali Hindu to a Goan Catholic" (*EA* 288).

The anglophile is precariously positioned between the anglicized August and the very native Agastya. The name is much discussed in the text. To an engineer who is irritated by the name, Agastya explains:

He is a saint of the forest in the Ramayana, very ascetic.

He gives Ram a bow and arrow. He is there in the Mahabharata too. He crosses the Vindhyas and stops them from growing. (*EA* 4)

Dr. Multani's father extracts the meaning of the name through an etymological dissection:

*Agam* is mountain. Agastya could be *agam* plus *asyati*, one who pushes a mountain. Or *agam* plus *sthayati*, one who stops a mountain. We often have this ambiguity, an uncertainty about our names, their origins. It should also be linked to the Latin *augers* which means to advance. That is appropriate since the sage Agastya was also the wanderer who pined for Benares. (*EA* 227)
A name steeped in mythology however irks its owner. Many attempts are made to subvert its sanctity. According to Shankar, the Deputy Engineer in Minor Irrigation:

Agastya, a good name, quite rare, means born of a jar. The jar is the womb, and thereby the mother goddess, but the jar could just as easily have contained Vedic whisky. Soma types, good quality scotch, bottled for twelve years.  

(EA 28)

In Agastya's own terms the name assumes weird even repulsive connotations. He gets cynical and sacrilegious when he blatantly says, "Agastya' is Sanskrit ... for one who shits one turd every morning" (EA 15). Scatology reigns supreme when he unashamedly tells the collector's wife, "It's Sanskrit for one who turns the flush just before he starts pissing, and then tries to finish pissing before the water disappears" (EA 54). In short, he seems to be a vulgar parody of the Agastya of antiquity, for he compares inversely to all the mythical nuances of his name. He is inert, ineffective and totally lost, not a hero by any standards. The author intentionally presents the protagonist Agastya as a kind of anti-hero.

_English, August – An Indian Story_ can be placed in the postmodern metafictional literary tradition. The parodic and self-parodic, mode and intent are embedded in the textual structure of the novel. Besides Agastya, one
other name that is parodied is Mohandas Gandhi. This name when first mentioned "sound (s) familiar". Mohandas Gandhi of the story is the Assistant Conservator of forests. The ironic twist to his tale when his hands are chopped off for raping a tribal woman, deepens the parody. Ahimsa and celibacy, the two principal virtues associated with Mahatma Gandhi are happily flouted. According to Linda Hutcheon:

Parody is a typical postmodern paradoxical form because it uses and abuses the text and conventions of the traditions. It also contests both the authority of the tradition and the claims of art to originality. (123)

A distinct postmodern sensibility is in operation throughout the text. Though postmodernism had its origins in the post second world war Europe, it was only in the eighties that its relevance was tangibly felt in the Indian English literary scene.

Peter Brooker observes:

From the first, post modernism presented an argument for sensuous response and the languages of the body over intellectual analysis. It declared itself for open randomized and popular forms and looked to an alliance with the counter culture of youth, drugs, rock and roll
and a new erotics in a deliberate affront to the decorum's
and hierarchies of the literary establishment. (2)

Chatterjee's hero creates a secret world as an escape route for his
troubled self. Drugs, liquor, sex and fantasy become the props of living.
"What'll you do for sex and Marijuana in Madna?" (EA 3) asks Dhrubo. But
he is certain about one thing "... August, you're going to get hazaar fucked in
Madna" (EA 1). This perhaps sets the tone of the narrative. A conventional
or stereotypical bureaucrat with clean ways and official competence is not the
role that Agastya fits into. On the other hand, in Dhrubo's words," (Agastya)
look(s) like a porn film actor, thin and kinky, the kind who wears a bra" (EA
3).

Obviously, Agastya is no macho hero with either muscle power or
ambition. In a school composition he once wrote that "his ambition was to be
a domesticated male stray dog because they lived the best life". The reasons
are not far to seek. Such a creature was assured food, needed no commitment,
and above all enjoyed a lot of freedom to sleep, bark and, more importantly
"got a lot of sex" (EA 35).

Agastya's obsession with sex is a kind of defence mechanism to ward
off his bewildering sense of anchorlessness. He is alienated and misplaced,
feeling empty and lonely. At the very beginning of the novel Chatterjee spells
out his protagonist's predicament:
Anchorlessness – that was to be his chaotic concern in that uncertain Mean, battling a sense of waste was to be another. Other fodder too, in the farrago of his mind, self-pity in an uncongenial clime, the incertitude of his reactions to Madna, his job, and his inability to relate to it-other abstractions too, his niche in the world, his future, the elusive mocking nature of happiness, the possibility of its attainment. *(EA 25)*

It is this theme of "anchorlessness", the weariness of an era, the loneliness of an entire generation that the novelist explores along with the satiric portraiture of the entire Indian Administrative Service. What brings him closer to his college mate Bhatia is again this sense of dislocation. Drugs, booze and masturbation are touted as means of getting out of this situation. This is conveyed in existential terms by the author. Meenakshi Raykar in an article "The Intellectual in a State of 'Anomy'" analyses Chinua Achebe's *No longer at Ease* and *English, August* to point out that both the protagonists and their respective periods suffer from a state of 'anomy' – reminiscent of Wole Soyinka's *The Season of Anomy*. 'Anomy', a word resurrected by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim from the Greek, denotes the condition of society which results from the disintegration of commonly accepted normative codes. Somewhat akin to the idea of alienation, it refers to a condition when an individual loses his traditional
moorings and is prone to disorientation. Agastya is not unaware of his state of alienation and is consciously at war between his anglicized colonial imaginary self and the deeper native realistic instincts. Either way, the text is reduced to an expression of typical male angst. To this end, the narrative is generously spread over with phrases that describe a disillusioned/confused male youth's predicaments. The protagonist is powerless and struggles to come to terms with his new experiences, to unearth a more coherent self.

Exercising becomes an obsession with Agastya:

His exercise was something he felt he must hold on to, some anchor of stability, without it the day would slip into anarchy. And only after its completion was he ready for anything, for any act of illogic and unreason. (EA 120)

Physical exercise gives him a sense of identity at least temporarily. It is like his good deed for the day. At other times he tries to confront, or circumvent his loneliness by verbalizing his frustration in obscene language and scatology. Taboo language becomes a weapon, as it were, in his hands. One is inclined to understand that this is just one of the ways by which Agastya exercises his power or superiority over the unintelligible world around him.
The text unembarrassingly displays liberal use of four letter words. For example the use of the word 'turd' that is normally avoided in the cultured world. The word is used with reference to food – 'eating Vasanth's turds, (EA 49); in swearing 'your mother uses her turds as a dildo' (EA 106); and while referring to words – "like turds falling in a commode" (EA 21). Arse, semen, shit, balls are other taboo words that are used with absolute ease.

Agastya's heightened olfactory sense too contributes to his ability to conjure up disgusting, even repulsive, images. The antibiotic capsule Agastya is given "smelt like a stale sweaty armpit, like a crowded Calcutta bus in summer" (EA 92). His own body smelt of "rotting lizards and smegma" (EA 93).

Bengalis, says Agastya, would love London because it is like "washed Calcutta" since they are "Anglophiles to their balls" (EA 93), as if to imply that all Calcuttans are men! An intimidating superior officer like Collector Srivastav can be challenged only through language. Srivastav's "mercurial profile" becomes an object of Agastya's study. According to Agastya, Srivastav scowled so much that "his eyebrows were like worms in one's shit, real wrigglers" (EA 113). Even Agastya’s descriptions of people are not immune to vulgar verbal assaults. For example, of Prashant he says, ‘When he squats to shit he has to flick his boobs over his shoulder, otherwise his nipples tickle his balls’ (EA 121). Tamse the artist is described thus:
He tried to visualize the painter, and couldn’t. He thought, Had the painter been brushing his teeth or bending over trying to get his cock in his mouth, or what, when he painted this one? There wasn’t a single thought behind a single brushstroke. (EA 8)

Such an aggressive use of language is not intended to shock the readers out of their complacency but is also definitely indicative of the phallogocentricism at work in the novel.

To all appearances Agastya is born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His is a "soft success story", "the son of a Governor, Anglicized and megalopolitan, now in the Indian Administrative service, all he has to do is recline and fart to earn you money" (EA 224). However, Agastya cannot recline at ease for he suffers from this terrible feeling of "restlessness". In Madna "all that his mind seemed to have learnt was the impotence of restlessness" (EA 165). Getting 'stoned' or drunk or even inertia do not help him cope with this restlessness. Agastya struggles to overcome this:

I want to know in the present he said to himself, I want my reason, and not even my intuition, but my reason, to tell me here, you are now master of your time to come, act accordingly. (EA 114)
His options are limited. His occasional recourse to the *Meditation* of Marcus Aurelius and *The Gita* do not help him very much. He would have to turn like Shanker to the goddess, Jagadamba or believe in special providence even in the arrival of a frog. Another option would be,

> to slink away from having to think, to wish to be that pair of ragged claws that had so tantalized him in his college years, settling over the flowers of silent seas.  

*(EA 114)*

The unnumbered chapters of the text can be roughly divided into three sections. The first one hundred and forty one pages present Agastya's depraved, listless life in Madna; the next short section speaks about his Pooja break at Delhi where he meets Dhrub who has given up a plush career abroad to prepare for the IAS exams; the final section contains Agastya's return to Madna. It is in this final phase of the novel that Agastya gets to visit Baba Ramanna's Rehabilitation Home for Lepers. This visit touches Agastya as nothing before had ever done. "Initially, to him, Baba Ramanna had seemed pleasantly mad and completely remote, a do-gooder out of a book of legends for children, a small time Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar or a male Mother Teresa" *(EA 235)*. But later "in unsettling flashes" this man seemed more than human as he saw the immensity of the work achieved out of barrenness". For the first time, Agastya is genuinely moved by a human endeavour. He is not only wonderstruck by the immensity of ambition but also by "its nobility
and virtue... the limitlessness of the potential of human endeavour" \textit{(EA} 235-36\textit{)}. This proves to be a turning point for Agastya and he realizes that human beings are not entirely worthless.

When Agastya proceeds as B.D.O. to Jompanna, he fervently hopes that his "restlessness would dissolve in action" \textit{(EA} 253\textit{)}. His attempts at helping the tribals get clean drinking water is a move in this direction. Agastya manages to do some straight talking to the naxalites who pose as spokespersons for the tribals. These morale boosters however are short lived. He finds he has had enough of "the mockery of his restlessness, Sathe's cartoons, Shankaran Karanth dedication, and naxalite fanaticism" \textit{(EA} 274\textit{)}.

Sathe, the cartoonist, has a key role in helping the protagonist to slowly come to term with himself. It is Sathe who accompanies Agastya in the quest for the Sadhu; it is he again who blends the reality with the myth and the legend of the Sadhu, so reminiscent of the Fisherking myth. \textit{(EA} 282-83\textit{)}. The legend of the Sadhu symbolically relates to the protagonist’s own quest for self-realization. Sathe, in a sense, prompts self-recognition in Agastya who remarks: "Today I have got myself out of all my perplexities; or rather, I have got the perplexities out of myself - for they were not without but within, they lay in my own outlook" \textit{(EA} 283\textit{)}. The words do not seal Agastya's thoughts or end up as a philosophical solution to his problems, for he is amused by the apparent truth. The novel concludes when Agastya turns his
back on Madna to take a year off, as the Americans do, and goes to meet his father. *English, August* thus traces the progress of a disillusioned young man through a desultory career. Agastya’s self examination of sorts, interrupted by brash acts of instinct, project him variously as an absurd/existential/quester hero.

However, a major portion of the text, or maybe the sub text, has to do with Agastya’s attitude to women. *English, August* reads like a male fantasy narrated in recklessly chauvinistic language. The entire narrative is coloured, one may say, with the 'male gaze'. Sigmund Freud in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* speaks of **scopophilia** or pleasure that is derived from looking. He associated this with taking other people as objects and subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. It becomes the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object. He says that at times, it can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other. The pleasure in looking is split between active/male and passive/female. The determining ‘male gaze’ projects its fantasy on to the female figure. Thus woman is reduced to an erotic object. Laura Mulvey speaks of the 'male gaze' as a feature of power asymmetry in her "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." ‘The gaze’ or 'the look' first came to be associated with film theory during the 1970s. Today the 'male gaze' refers to the voyeuristic way in which men look at women. Feminist
theory sees ‘the gaze’ as an instrument that describes power relations between women and men in society. Here the ‘gazer’ is always superior to the ‘object of the gaze’. ‘Male gaze’ denies women human agency by relegating them to the status of objects. According to Mulvey, sexism can exist not only in the content of a text but also in how the text is presented and in its implications about its expected audience. Going by this, one could say that *English, August* has been written predominantly with male readership in mind.

The novel, it would appear, does more than a little disservice to women in its representation of them. The women characters in the novel who appear at random have little or no role in the development of the plot. Though some of the women characters in the novel are portrayed in a fairly individualistic manner, they do not have an independent existence but are defined only in relation to male desires. In the final analysis, in *English, August*, woman is reduced to being a mere sex symbol, an object of desire. Almost all the relationships between the men and the women in the novel do not go beyond the physical. The officers' wives lack individuality. The adjectives and metaphors used to describe them are sexist and at times even border on the pornographic and the text is replete with such usages. Mrs. Malti, wife of Srivastav may wield power over her husband, but to Agastya she is a mere
sex symbol: "Mrs. Srivastava was fat, friendly and surprisingly sexy; throughout the evening Agastya kept looking at her thighs. He thought he saw her marriage perfectly" (EA 53). The arrival of the same lady, in a car, to the club is also described in a similar way. She was given exclusive permission to drive in "as though her arse would break if she walked from the gate" (EA 116). When Mrs. Srivastava seriously asks Agastya what his full name is, one is taken aback by the prompt observation – "Mrs. Srivastava was wearing a black bra beneath a yellow blouse" (EA 54) as though to belittle the gravity of the query.

Rohini, wife of Mohandas Gandhi, Assistant Conservator of Forests, is described as "a sexy and patient wife – cook" (EA 105). The first mention of this woman is made by Bhatia rather casually. Mohan is "a nice guy, simple, from Alwar" but the emphasis is on his spouse. "His wife's really sexy, too rural, though. Wish I could fuck her" (EA 101). When Agastya first meets Mohan and thanks him for inviting him to the forest colony, the text becomes coloured with sexist implications:

Please don't mention it. We should have met earlier, but my wife hasn't been well.' Mohan’s voice also dropped a decibel at 'my wife', Agastya was distracted for a moment by a vision of the two writhing in bed. Later Bhatia told him that 'my wife hasn't been well' was
Mohan's euphemism for the early weeks of pregnancy. 'Gandhi finds it embarrassing, see, to say that his wife is pregnant, because he thinks it's as good as saying, we've been fucking'. (EA 105)

'Mrs' becomes a dangerously vulnerable prefix – even suggestive. Voices drop when it is uttered. The reason is not far to seek:

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. (EA 13)

When the rains break over Madna, Agastya watches Vasant's children play in gay abandon. The narrative is on the verge of taking off on a poetic vein about the magic of the monsoon, when the text is again interrupted by references to the female body:

The rhapsodizers were right, thought Agastya, there was something uplifting about the monsoon, and I don't mean the saris, ha, ha, as Vasant's wife, prematurely haggard with child bearing, came out to discourage her children, she had unexpectedly slim ankles and calves. (EA 99)
He however, does not stop there, but sustains the interest, "Some very unexpected women have wonderful ankles and calves, slim and blossoming up towards the knees . . ." (EA 101).

Agastya silently shrieks with joy when he comes across "a wonderfully pretty tribal woman . . . tall and rigid" (EA 101). He takes a fancy to her "large cracked feet and veined forearms" and finds them more alluring in comparison to women who are "soft-white – thighed and demanding of tenderness after coitus." The references are purposeful because he "smiled wickedly at his adjetival phrases" (EA 101).

Teachers and mothers are also not spared. They are projected as objects for 'consumption', for male enjoyment. Agastya recalls an English class during his student days. 'Stoned" he was watching "the new female teacher perform." He remembers a note that was passed to him by his classmate commenting on the teacher's response to a "stupid question". The teacher becomes "my lovely bitch" whom he will give “lust-gnaws between (her) absalom and achitophel” (EA 14). Vatsala Rajan the “bossy” wife of the collector of Paal is described variously as 'bitch' and 'hippopotamus' (EA 190). The Deputy Superintendent of Police's wife is "Startlingly sexy" (EA 183). Dhrubo's mother, we are informed, "had been an adolescent fantasy for almost all of Dhrubo's school friends, and for Dhrubo too, they insisted, only that he couldn't admit it, she had been slim and warm and inaccessible" (EA 33).
When Dhrubo invites Agastya home for lunch, the afternoon his mother was leaving for Khartoum, pat comes his reply; "If she's free, may I have a quickie with her?" (EA 151). When Dhrubo's mother opens the door she looks "tired and sexy" (EA 151). Agastya calls Dhrubo's westernized secretaries "whores". Women are either desirable, craved for or condemned in vulgar terms. Women-mothers-wives whatever be their status, have just one function, which is to satisfy male sexual hunger. Shiv, brother of Shanker, a Deputy Engineer in Minor Irrigation flaunts his 'adjustment' with Shanker: ". . . I cook for him if required, wash his clothes, go out to buy his whisky and paan. When he's away I sleep with his wife . . . " (EA 30).

None of these women mentioned are invested with a personality. They have no function in the plot, but only serve to feed the fantasies of the protagonist who sprawls across the narrative spewing vulgarities. Rosalind Coward sums up the relevance of the polarized positions of observer/observed to the relations between the sexes:

In this society, looking has become a crucial aspect of sexual relations, not because of any natural impulse, but because it is one of the ways in which domination and subordination are expressed. (76)
Chatterjee's text is obviously an exercise in 'othering' women. They are reduced to being mere objects of pleasure. As de Beauvoir says of woman:

... she is simply what man, decrees; thus she is called 'the sex' by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to men ... she is the incidental, inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other. (de Beauvoir 16)

Two women characters venture into some degree of a personal relationship with Dhrubo and Agastya are Renu and Neera. But they too get a raw deal. Dhrubo's girl friend, Renu, walks out of the relationship and moves to America for very personal reasons. This important decision that she takes is however trivialized by Dhrubo when he writes to Agastya conveying the news. The letter defines Renu’s bold stand as immature and attention-seeking.

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 thing
as eating an ice-cream, is it? Her behaviour has made me feel like a child molester. \((EA\ 118)\).

Later in the narrative, Dhrubo insists that Agastya read Renu's long letter from the U.S. His immediate response is, "I don't think I want to read her letter, unless it's full of fond remembrances of your sexual technique". \((EA\ 154)\). The letter however is Renu's mature analysis of the western misconception of India and her disillusionment with it. Reading through the letter Agastya is unimpressed by its contents. His comment is a blatant expression of the typical male propensity to trivialize the female. The letter itself becomes a personification of its writer. "She sounds quite sexy. You should marry her on the condition that she communicates with you only through letters" \((EA\ 158)\). This is as if to say that a woman is bearable as long as she is sexually appealing. One cannot help noticing the element of sexism that pervades the entire text. The male characters also seem to be dissipated vehicles for macho behaviour. Dhrubo's accusation: "Her (Renu's) behaviour has made me feel like a child-molester" \((EA\ 118)\) when stylistically analysed, can throw ample evidence of how grammatical structures become gendered. Renu's firm resolve which should be seen as an act of empowerment is trivialized through the gendered sexist position of Dhrubo. By placing Renu in the subject position she is made the agent and forced to bear the responsibility for the action. All activity centers round male fulfilment at a very basic, elementary and physical level.
Neera's confession to Agastya about the loss of her virginity comes as a triumphant announcement. The letter conveys a sense of relief, of getting rid of a burden, "unlike the sense of loss a lot of girls told me they felt" (EA 287). The experience however leaves Neera's life "as dull as ever" as though virginity were no big deal. For once, Agastya seems interested as he chuckles with glee over the gesture of the "darling bitch" (EA 287).

When the wives of the I.A.S. officers go on a picnic they offer their prayers at a temple. The ladies' worship of the Shivaling there comes in for much sexual interpretation by Agstya. A ritualistic worship of the ling by the women is viewed as "how women behave in front of a Shivaling" (EA 127). The entire process is labelled "a blue film". The I.A.S. wives,

. . .took turns to gently smear the Shivaling with sandalwood paste, sprinkle water and flowers over it, prostrate and pray before it, suffocate it with incense, kiss their fingers after touching it. Agastya found the scene extraordinarily kinky. (EA 128)

For Agastya, these are some of the ways of coping with his boredom. When his occasional dabblings in music, philosophy and scriptures prove ineffective to quell his boredom he returns to his mainstay - women and sex.

There is a hint of retribution, of poetic justice when Mohan, subsequently, is punished by the tribals for seducing one of their women. His
hands are ruthlessly cut off. The woman seems to have been avenged by the law for her violation but, Agastya has his own views. He says, "If Gandhi seduced a tribal woman, surely it was equally true that she liked the seduction" (EA 126). This is fully in keeping with the generally prevalent male view that for any act of violation the woman too is equally culpable even when she is the victim.

S. Kappeler in *The Pornography Of Representation* (1986) elaborates on the technique of ‘fragmentation’ used in pornographic literature. Fragmentation robs women of unified personalities by splitting them into anatomical parts. This has two primary effects. First, the body is depersonalized, objectified, reduced to its parts. Secondly, since the female protagonist is not represented as a unified conscious physical being, the scene cannot be focalized from her perspective. A woman’s perspective is therefore ruled out. She becomes the passive object of male control. Sara Mills in *Feminist Stylistics* (1995) links fragmentation to male focalisation. According to Sara Mills "...effectively, her [woman’s] experience is written out of the text. Fragmentation of the female is therefore associated with male focalization – the female represented as an object, for the male gaze" (172). Instances of women being fragmented into anatomical elements occur far more frequently than do such representations of men. The world of advertising, for example, thrives on such an exercise. The camera’s lens is pressed into service to explore the sexual “possibilities” of woman, whereas
the representation of the male escapes being specifically sexual. Fragmentation, thus, seems to be a devise which comes into play especially to focus upon female sexuality. This is obviously a strategy which operates at a more primary level than even language. This same technique of fragmentation may seem at work in *English, August*.

When the IAS families set off on a picnic to Gorapak, an announcement is made on the order of the motorcade. “Food, women, children and peons first” (*EA* 122). The juxtaposition of “food” and "women" is an open acknowledgement of the fact that these two items share the same characteristic/fate of being consumed/enjoyed. At Gorapak the picnickers gather round the fire indulging in "frolic and laughter". A moment of uncorrupted joy is broken again by the haunting ‘male gaze’:

Sweat coursed in rivulets through the make-up of the wives. He (Agastya) was roused by the sweat patches under Rohini's arms. Bitch, he said silently, for being inaccessible. (*EA* 131)

On one of Agastya’s nights out with his friends in Madna, he runs into Joshi, the RDC. Joshi is accompanied by a woman, and this generates speculation:

He was with what looked like his wife, but he didn't introduce her. Be charitable, said Agastya to himself,
may be she's his mistress, may be he has a harem of tribal women and dances naked with them every evening before dinner.  

\textit{(EA 79)}

The Englishman and his "outspoken sexy wife" \textit{(EA 185)} meet Agastya at a party. The narratorial voice glosses over the husband with a minimum of description; "light brown moustache and small, rather timid, blue eyes". The lady, on the other hand, is subjected to a more penetrating gaze, ". . . [she] was heavy and full, like the centre of an adolescent wet dream, in a dark blue salwar kameez" \textit{(EA 184)}.

In narratology, focalization is a key term which denotes a means of identifying the consciousness through which fictional events are presented in a text. Focalization can be either external or internal to the story. According to Schlomith Rimmon-Kenan external focalization 'is felt to be close to the narrating agent' (74) and is termed 'narrator-focalizer' (Bal 37). The classic position of the narrator - focalizer is the bird's-eye view. There is omniscient access to the activities of all characters. If the narrator-focalizer is male then, naturally the male point of view dictates the course of the narrative. The narrative voice is external and omniscient. This voice is not present in the text as a fictional character but is external, yet can reveal the characters' motivations and thoughts to the reader. Theoretically, therefore, the narrative is reported by a disembodied, impersonal voice, which objectively records the
course of events and the psychology of the characters. In *English, August* the perspective is undoubtedly Agastya's. The women are presented through the consciousness of Agastya. None of the women are shown to possess a unified consciousness. The focalization through the male perspective inevitably represents the female as the object of the male gaze. Though the text seems to be narrated by an external narrator, there are instances where the narrative voice and Agastya's consciousness seem to merge. When this happens, the focalization seems to be at once that of an internal character as well as that of an external narrator. When the points of view of both coalesce, the male perspective gains strength—since it highlights certain power relations embedded in the text. *English, August,* through such a reading, emerges as a convincingly male text.

In *English, August,* Chatterjee's candour may seem disarming especially because of the overtones of humour, but one cannot fail to notice the sexist implications that lie embedded in its sub text. Sara Mills warns us that "sexism may be disguised under the cover of humour, the reader may unwillingly participate in the perpetuation of the sexism embedded in the text when she/he laughs at the wit" (138). Mills continues, "... this type of humour is seen as a male domain and humour has often been portrayed as a form of bonding and solidarity display" (139).
An important factor one has to take into account is the gendered positioning of the reader. Judith Fetterley in *The Resisting Reader* (1978) describes the way that most texts in American literature appear to address a general audience, while in fact, they are actually addressing the male reader. Fetterley's work is primarily a content analysis, in which, she examines various depictions of female characters. She points out the difficulty posed for females to read easily unless they adopt the position of a male reader.

Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader* conceptualizes the process of a feminist reading. This happens only when informed female readers confront an androcentric or even a misogynist text. A male text offers only the male experience and thus becomes exclusive. Chatterjee's *English, August* easily falls into this slot. The dominant voice is male as also the consciousness through which this voice is filtered.

Chatterjee's novel resists a feminist analysis of the mother-son bonding. Agastya’s mother, a Goanese Christian, is mentioned to only to draw attention to the hybridity of Agastya Sen. The combination of a Christian mother and Hindu, Bengali father is used to deepen the ambiguity, of the protagonist. Agastya escapes labelling and resists categorization. He drifts as it were, unanchored to a home and family. There is no denying that he writes to his father regularly, even attempts to fulfil his father's dream for him of joining the Civil Services. The text contains a couple of letters
between the father and son. The father is evidently unhappy about Agastya's
dissatisfaction at Madna. Though the son has not openly mentioned it, the
father admits "it is palpable in every line of (his) letter" (EA 94). The father
also takes the blame for having put Agastya in a boarding school. Paltu had
pointed out that "a boy should always grow up at home" attributing Agastya's
lack of interest and perseverance to that particular deficit in his life. The
father however gives his son a long leash despite his advice to Agastya to
stick to Madna. The son writes, "I'm wasting my time here, and not enjoying
the wasting. That can be a sickening feeling" (EA 131). He puts in an earnest
request to his father to speak to uncle Tonic about his dissatisfaction with
Madna. In a later letter, his father, trying not to be too harsh, reminds
Agastya of how he had hoped Madna would be "an immensely enriching
experience". He even recalls his own experiences as a youngster when he
went to Konkan from Calcutta. What follows is a piece of advice that comes
from a concerned father.

Ogu, do not choose the soft options just because it is the
soft option, one cannot fulfil oneself by doing so. Yet it
is also true that it is your life, and the decisions will have
to be yours. No more homilies. (EA 149)

Agastya is given his space. The picture that emerges is of a father son
relationship built on mutual understanding and trust. The mother – who has
lived only briefly does not figure much in the narrative. The text does not give any evidence of a mother’s positive, ameliorating influence on Agastya and the father too is no role model. We do not find Agastya going down memory lane, returning to his past with nostalgia. A short break that he takes during the Pooja season to go to Delhi is in a sense, a return home. He had spent weekends and his entire last year at his uncle Parthiv Sen or Pultukaka, the bachelor and free-lance journalist's house. Agastya had spent almost six years in that house. He realises that "familiarity had bred a kind of love" (*EA* 147). This is perhaps one of the rare instances in the book that speaks of Agastya's positive emotion.

In the familiarity of his 'home' Agastya reaches the verge of confusion. He says: "... I don't want heaven, or any of the other ephemerals, the power or glory, I just want this, this moment, this sunlight, the car in the garage, that music system in my room" (*EA* 148).

He also adds,

This narrow placid world, here and now is enough, where success means watching the rajnigandhas you planted to bloom ... I want to sit here in the mild sun and try not to think, try and escape the iniquity of the restlessness of my mind.  

(*EA* 148)
The language becomes poetic as a kind of peace descends on an otherwise restless mind. The stark contrast to his previous life of dissipation is striking. But it is the ambience that does the trick. Parents or parental home have no role in this transformation.

Chatterjee's prose style is muscular and vibrant. It is free from all inhibitions, self consciousness and is spontaneous. His narrative strategy is sophisticated in its use of irony and farcical comedy. Chatterjee has no qualms about indulging in crass banality and is capable of shocking the finer sensibility of the readers. Analysing postmodernist writing in “Post Modernism and Consumer Society”, Frederich Jameson explains that there is "the effacement in it of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so called mass or popular culture” (165). In Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* one finds obscenity and explicit sex placed alongside lofty sentiments. On the one hand, the reader is bombarded as it were, with an overdose of the taboo four letter word, while on the other he/she is treated to philosophical speculations. The hard hitting style suggests a cocksureness and a sense of being fully in control. This façade however begins to slip away when vignettes of homely scenes are juxtaposed, thereby betraying the air of despondency that underlies the chauvinistic text. Occasionally the text brings to light contradiction in its central protagonist’s psyche. On the one hand we see a brash, cynical and
male chauvinistic Agastya, on the other, at extremely rare moments the text affords glimpses of a softer Agastya who loves words:

In his months in Madna, well-written letters would always excite him, disturb him by bringing him other worlds and perspectives. He would get to hate casual letters, those in which not a single line contained a thought... He himself would take great care while writing, and preserve good letters, reread old ones smiling at turns of phrase and recollection.  

This purer emotion glimpsed occasionally in the subconscious of the text is consciously negated by the main narrative. The omniscient narrator, the teller of the story enjoys the privilege of a subject’s point of view. He has authorial control over the entire narrative, which inspite of its overtly gendered perspective, gives the outward impression of being an objective account. This indeed is the power of narration that can present an overtly male text as a fictional masterpiece.