CHAPTER II

*English, August: An Indian Story*: A Farce on Anatomy and Politics of Sahebgiri

The novel *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988) is an artistic attempt in exploring the very anatomy and politics of Indian bureaucratic system and impact of this system on the people, causing the sense of servility, hypocrisy, cynicism, servitude etc. in them. Such social phenomena of colonizing powerful bureaucracy and resultant snobbery, cynicism and hypocrisy find ample treatment at the dexterous hands of Upamanyu Chatterjee in this novel. It is objectivity in Chatterjee’s style that he vividly delineates various shades and characteristics of Indianized but British-styled bureaucracy. Through the observations and perceptions of Agastya Sen, the protagonist, the novelist objectively throws light on various aspects of Indian administrative system; that how the hierarchy therein keeps the practice of *Sahebgiri* alive and throbbing. The novelist explores the shades and aspects of this *Sahebgiri* and, thus, it is necessary to evaluate and study the aspects of anatomy and politics of this practice first.

The term ‘Sahebgiri’ is a conjoined form, i.e. ‘Saheb and giri’, which, in a way, refers to the enslaving influence of bureaucracy on subordinates and on the ordinary people. Morphologically speaking, the Hindustani word ‘Saheb’ denotes to a bureaucrat or a powerful person at coveted position whom others are supposed to obey slavishly. However, originally the term relates to Arabic language which was adopted in Urdu and then in Hindi and now is widely used world-wide. Notwithstanding the origin of its meaning it refers to possession, a position; Saheb or Sahib means ‘holder’ or ‘master’ ‘or ‘owner’ in all languages wherever it is used. Though this term already existed in Indian culture, it came to be taken into large business during British times as it specifically referred to white-skinned superior British; the Indian enslaved mentality thus took the use of this term to exclusively ascribe it to the Western rulers. And the suffix ‘giri’ is often used in terms of influence and sway of a group, person, community, idea etc.

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary reads against the entry of the term ‘sahib’ that this expression is typical of India; used to address some European man,
especially one with some social and official status. Nonetheless, such practice did not come into advent during British Raj, it had earlier existed at the very political, cultural and social core of India. In ancient India, Sultanate and Mughal eras there thrived the practice of feudalism which essentially implied the exercise of powers in the form of Sahebgiiri in their own cultural forms. The suzerain, the land owner and the royal representative, were used to be addressed as ‘maharaj’, ‘sahibs’, ‘malik’, ‘sarkar’ etc. by the poor people and by the vassals, the peasant working class.

Actually, ‘Sahib’ or ‘Saheb’ was in use to refer honorific title e.g. Sahib-i-barid, Sahib-kotwal, Mansab, in Mughal times; colonel Saheb, viceroy Saheb, collector Sahib etc. were the honorific addresses to those who were tangibly superior, powerful and wealthy during British empire. This legacy of social and political history owing to specific hierarchy-based ranks and nomenclature continues in post-colonial India and Chatterjee presents the true picture of such prevailing Sahibgiri in Indian bureaucratic system. In film adaptation of the novel in study the director, Dev Benegal specially emphasizes such use of ‘Sahebs’ in address to the man in authority, “Naib Tehsildar. Sen sa’ab? Sen sa’ab? IAS? IAS?.” (Chatterjee & Benegal 06) Here the use of the term ‘Sahib’ is twisted in typical Indian official language and it is the rank what ensures here such address by the subordinate i.e. Naib Tehsildar.

But the writer and the director do not take time to unravel the mood in the situation in such address and the use of the term ‘Saheb’. Even senior officer such as the Deputy Commissioner can address a subordinate as ‘Saheb’. But the tone in this address is entirely different; the senior, who is otherwise always arrogant, is trying to make the junior comfortable in the given work, “SRIVASTAV. Joshi sa’ab, arrange for some language tutor for Mr. Sen...”(11) In this situation the tone in such address is different, devoid of any sense of pleasing, fear, insecurity and servility. Srivastav is the Deputy Commissioner and Joshi is the Additional Collector, but the former is trying to give respect to the latter who is junior officer. Chatterjee very efficiently handles such descriptions and treatment of Sahebgiiri in the novel.

However, what makes this novel class apart is the treatment of the subject such as Sahebgiiras Chatterjee does not join the band of literary preacher or philosophers to propound a point of view or philosophy as such. In the treatment of this Sahebgiir red-tape dominance the novelist is hardly found to get biased with
any side in this hierarchy of Sahibs and non-sahibs. The radical Marxist shadows in the treatment of hierarchy-based bureaucracy does not envelop the narrative in the discourses of pure social sciences; rather the writer enjoys the objective reality in describing the core of the events. Chatterjee, keeping the objective distance from variously shaped but ethnically same characters, views the Indian bureaucratic reality from the perceptions and perspectives of his young protagonist Agastya Sen. He is a newly elected anglicized IAS who is a terribly misfit in a cog of Indian hinterland called Madna. Bestowed with essential attributes of free thinking and freedom of choice his perceptions and attitude are free of the influence of colonial reality prevailing in India.

Nonetheless, the objectivity in narration does not take away social concerns from the novel. The novelist does have reformist intention therein, but he has artistic objectivity from the characters and the plots. Since Chatterjee takes resort to certain artistic tools such as irony and humour in order to satirize the incongruities, follies, hypocrisy, snobbery, cynicism etc. of the people therein, the novel ends up to be a typical comedy but as an artistic satire on ridiculous situations and general social phenomena of post-colonial Indian life. However, Chatterjee does not end up in just spewing out pungent literary satire on the sorry state of affairs in the society.

He rather goes ahead with literary ease of R K Narayan in the narrative, letting no reformist zeal mar his literariness in story-telling. He takes the serious issues of efficacy of Sahebgirion society in very comic manner, describing the sorry things in humorous and farcical manners. He artistically takes the charge of exposing the follies and foibles, satirizing the system which is responsible for nursing the germs of colonizing practice. The ridiculousness and ludicrousness are handled with dexterous literary acumen as the narrative does not take the colourings of any moral fable.

Chatterjee does away with the pungent attacks and thus there runs the sense of mild satire in the narrative with humour, irony, comedy of situation, errors and manners. And that is why, this novel is a typical farce with artistic representation of the very common things such as official workings in very humorous colourings. Representation of things in funny and humorous ways is the essential characteristic of a farce and the novel is no exception in this regard. Going again by the definition in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary it can be related that a farce refers to a funny
act based on ridiculous and unlikely situations or events. It is a situation or event that is so inaptly organized that it becomes ridiculous. What strikes most significantly is the fact in this definition that the representation of things or events is ridiculous in a farce. *English, August: An Indian Story*, in this way, is a type of farce with the representation of ridiculous events in humorous situations describing the frivolity of human predicament. Any page of the novel can be taken to find the description of the situations with ridiculous dint:

On the fourth afternoon he had finished a joint when a very noisy jeep stopped outside the room. A knock on the door. A smiling stranger. Before he could say anything Agastya said, ‘I’m ill. I can’t go anywhere.’ Behind the stranger stood the circus-jeep.

‘Myself Adho Tiwari,’ said the stranger. (Two months later Agastya realized that Adho was not the part of Tiwari’s name, but actually ADHO, Aditional District Health Officer). ‘Mr. Bajaj has sent me. You wanted to visit Baba Ramanna’s Rehabilitation Home?’

‘Certainly not.’ Tiwari (quite predictably) looked a little non-paused at the vehemence of this answer. ‘But…’ He began in reply, and of course, eventually Agastya lost the argument and sat in the jeep, and not totally reluctantly. For one thing, it felt nice, just to sit inside such a jeep, he felt little like Yuri Gagrin. Then, he would be travelling alone, because Tiwari explained, Bajaj saab has work, and DHO saab also, and myself also, Bajaj saab said you were so eager to see the Home, so I have made a ring to the Home and said Mr. Sen IAS is coming, and they have said welcome. (*English, August* 231-32)

This randomly taken passage is the telling as well as appropriate instance of farce, situational as well as verbal. The writer is at ease and in light mood to describe the workings of administration in projecting an IAS under training; how things are taken and handled at whims with no planning or strategy. IAS is the highest position in the Indian administration which owes much to the public. Yet an IAS, here, is depicted as just following his nose in his official and personal affairs. The official jeep is very noisy, yet Agastya’s moody choice for it is quite ironical; things which are
monotonous and despicable for him are deliberately chosen by him owing to the fact of having nothing to do but to take what comes first. The situation becomes more ridiculous when Agastya does not hear the visitor and at once utters his reluctance to leave owing to illness. The discomfited petty officer seems at sea to reply this sudden mood swings of Agastya.

The presence of noisy circus-jeep also adds hints of irony, satire and thus farcical element here. Ridicule does not stop here but there is more farcical tinge further. The information within parenthesis that--it took two months for Agastya to understand the meaning of this strange-but-much-used title ADHO i.e. Additional District Health Officer—is replete with irony and humour. But the visiting official uses this title with his name viz. Tiwari and anyone from distant culture like Agastya has every reason to take it as his first name. It sounds a unique example that someone is using his position and rank with his name with such intensity and culture. Actually, the novelist focuses this fact of Indian bureaucratic life that one is supposed to use or be addressed with their rank and position. Sen is addressed always with emphasis on IAS and this makes the difference in the minds of those who are caught in this vortex of colonizing Sahebgiri. The farcical situation is heightened when a responsible IAS shows ridiculous irresoluteness, caprice and volatile moods in his behaviour and decision-making.

It seems absurd that Agastya is reluctant to leave but suddenly gets ready to leave for Rehabilitation Home in the noisy, coarse jeep. But the description of this mood of caprice is quite farcical. The vehement refusal of Agastya and then sudden readiness and strange gasping of the visitor for the proper words to utter—all are the elements of farce. Chatterjee’s sense of humour leaps up at once when Agastya is compared to none other than Yuri Gagarin, going to unknown, unexplored, adventurous expedition in the space sitting in noisy vehicle which is, no doubt, sarcastically compared to space shuttle. The situation is added with more discomfiture and thus humour when this pertinent Yuri Gagarin in noisy vehicle comes to know that no one is going to be his companion in this expedition; he just expresses no reluctance or second thought but accepts meekly what is there. What he can do, then; he just takes resort to his solace-giving imagination of the place and the people therein. He lets the wildness of his thought prevail upon his perplexed mind with the
thrilling ideas of nymphomania and prostitution---and this becomes all the more ridiculous, “Hopefully the Baba was rehabilitating nymphomaniacs or prostitutes. The acceptance was much less strenuous than refusal, again, he smiled, the softer option.” (232)

Indeed, the situation described is the fine example of the ludicrousness and ridiculous situation in the life of an officer-under-training. He has nothing to do but just to let others make choice for him. Chatterjee’s style of describing his predicament is masterly when he brings out the subtleties of his mood. Humour, irony, ridiculous situation, discomfiture, foolishness, typical bureaucratic hypocrisy and incongruities etc. in this situation sound nothing but farcical. Apart from the substantiation from the text it is useful to further go into the definition and characteristics of a farce. Renowned scholar M H Abrams includes a farce in the category of comedy in his celebrated book A Glossary of Literary Terms. Taking the term ‘farce’ into critical evaluation in context to a drama Abrams holds:

Farce is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple, hearty laughter---“belly laughs,” in the parlance of the theatre. To do so it commonly employs highly exaggerated or caricature types of characters, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and makes free use of sexual mix-ups, broad verbal humour, and physical bustle and horseplay. Farce was a component in the comic episodes in medieval miracle plays, such as the Wakefield plays Noah and the Second Shepherd’s Play, and constituted the matter of the Italian commedia dell’arte in the Renaissance. In the English drama that has stood the test of time, farce is usually en episode in a more complex form of comedy…. (Abrams 39-40)

Abrams relates this genre to purely dramatic reality but cites certain necessities for it. The characters in a farce, for Abrams, are caricature and things are exaggerated; the situations are ludicrous and improbable. Viewing it in strong connection to classical comedy the critic finds the comic actions necessary for it, but in modern parlance the action has come to shift from physical plains to the mental realms owing the shifting paradigms of narrative to inclusion of psychology in literature. The film form of the present novel aptly enacts the ridiculous things artistically to let the film be in the
category of a farce. Nasty whims, sneaky imagination, unusual reactions of Agastya in a given situation provoke laughter in the film:

*Agastya looks at Srivastav and then turns to Malti.*

*Agastya POV—Malti.*

*For a moment, it seems as though her bra has superimposed over her blouse.*

*Camera angles on the dining table.*

*The camera is circling them. Multani is the other guest. Agastya keeps stealing glances at Malti’s blouse and seems to be fascinated by her.*

*The camera moves past Srivastav tickling his children, Shpra, nine years, and Shekhar, six years, who are giggling and clambering all over him at the table.*

(Chatterjee & Benegal 29)

Chatterjee, in fact, is never found involved in the business of idealizing his hero but, he lets his essential being be there in the narrative as he is and Benegal also follow this suits aptly. The jerky thoughts of Agastya characterized with his immoral approach to the reality around bring ample humour to the comedy of situations. But the lewdness and indecency, though in other forms, are taken as the essential components of the artistic representation of comical reality called farce. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* adds further more elements in the representation of farce in a special type of comedy:

Farce is a kind of comedy that inspires hilarity mixed with panic and cruelty in its audience through an increasingly rapid and improbable series of ludicrous confusions, physical disasters, and sexual innuendos among its stock characters. Farcical episodes of buffoonery can be found in European drama of all periods since Aristophanes, notably in medieval France, where the term originated to describe short comic interludes… (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 126)

This definition of ‘farce’ signifies further dimensions pertaining to this genre of humorous representation of life. Here, the audience is also involved with the ludicrousness of the characters and the situation; panicking the people in the theatre with starkness and nakedness of the things therein giving them pertinent thrill. Following the confusing situation and mixing-up of the things the characters in such
farcical enactment are found hitting objects at each other, involving the audience in such chaos. Hilarity, boisterous laughter, pertinent humour on the confused characters and the situation itself owing to some misunderstanding--are the features of such farce. The perplexed, puzzled, discomfited, buffoon etc. is the character generally in such drama of humour and such state of mind is deployed by the dramatist for creating the humorous and hilarious situation. Buffoonery and burlesque are also other genres of the representation of human follies, trivialities, incongruities, frivolities, ridicules, ludicrousness etc., instigating humour and consequent thoughts in the audience and the readers.

Nonetheless, the definition here is focused on the classical dramatic form of farce, particularly those which had come to be popular in Europe during renaissance. Since then much water has flown under the bridge and the genres of literature has been constant transgressions. In Indian context the form of drama has been popular enacting the Indian legends and myths to the cultural fulfillments. In such enactments the comic relief in the melodrama has been very popular; the clownish outside could become the part of the main action and intermingle with the legendary characters to let the lightness of mood prevail in the situation. Such comic reliefs were also almost inevitable in the Shakespearean tragedies which were potent tools in the hands of the Bard to deploy them in contrast to the tragic plot, heightening the feelings of pity and awe in the audience and catharsis too. But farce pertains to different sets of situation mainly characterizing the perplexity, confusion, ridiculous representation etc. Whereas a burlesque is the deliberately contrived representation of a serious issue in very non-serious or ludicrous manner. It is a parody of some action in entirely different form. But buffoonery somehow comes closer to farce as a buffoon is a confused, perplexed character in comic representation of things; the discomfited buffoon has similarity to the confused characters in a farce.

Nevertheless, English August: An Indian Story cannot be labeled as the typical farce in the strictest sense of the definition. Here, the action is in fictional form, depicting the predicaments of a confused typical post-modern protagonist who is the end-product of cosmopolitan culture. The settings are entirely different from classical environs and thus the focus of the postmodern novelist is different; the focus penetrates the mental action which lays bare the perplexity of the hero. Yet, the
essential elements of a farce, particularly the farce in postmodern settings, are very much present in the novel. Confusion, shambles, predicament, incompatibility, mal-adjustability, discomfitures, pertinent helplessness of the protagonist—all form the farcical situations throughout the narrative. In fact, such elements work as the connecting paradigms of the plots and the events in the novel. What commonly run in the narrative are these characteristics of the protagonist and the relating situations signifying the farcical reality therein. And it is through farcical representation of the things that Chatterjee is able to bring out the truth of life of typical postcolonial India; the contrasting values, multi-faceted Indian society, bureaucratic reality and the angst of the transgressing youth who is misfit in the system.

But all types of farcical representations with varying degrees of hilarity, ridicule, irony, etc. cannot be strictly in the same category of farce. The literary form of farce is artistically designed and deployed to target some trends or institutions; this target has satirical literary features signifying the things or events in the light of ironies. English August: An Indian Story, thus, should not be taken merely as a light-hearted satirical farce with no purpose. Upamanyu Chatterjee has a purpose here, and that is why the narrative is flawlessly rich with mild humour in the light of irony, but with serious leitmotif therein. Undoubtedly the narrative is characterized with presence of the elements such as irresistible humour, comedy of situation, comedy of errors etc. Katherine A Powers’ analysis in her review of the novel holds the truth, "This is a very funny novel, but a humane one as well. The unattractiveness of the supercilious brat through whose eyes we observe immense poverty and filth lends poignancy to the people whose lives are immersed in these conditions, rather than making them the object of sport." (Powers: April 09, 2006, The Boston Globe)

Hence, the novel cannot be categorized as a farce in strictest sense but as a light farcical satire on the anatomy and politics of Sahebgiri. Since the novel is a literary satire, some of the thematic concerns of it cannot be traced on surface level with the noncritical mappings of mere angst, anomies, alienations of the protagonist. Very apt critical analysis of R P Singh pertaining to this aspect of the novel in his book, The Concept of Anti-Hero in the Novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee holds substance:
On the surface level, this novel (English August: An Indian Story) is a commentary on the administrative services of India: the corruption in high bureaucratic places, high handedness, inefficiency, oppressive routine of the system, utter indifference of the administration to the eradication of poverty and social evils, acute class and rank consciousness among the IAS hierarchy, and the little snobberies and petty jealousies of the so-called public servants---all these form the surface texture of this novel. (Singh 46)

In the light of this critique it can be understood that such ironical representation of rootlessness of the central character is not to be restricted to the postmodern phenomenon that is indicative of his existential crisis only. The deeper truth inside this phenomenon gives the clear idea of the mechanism of the shaping of one’s mind, the conditioning for the anatomy of Sahebgiri, the Indianized version of British-styled bureaucracy. On the face of it Agastya Sen is a non-reacting, happy-go-lucky typical non-heroic, post-modern guy with American dreams and predicaments caught in the Indian rural, rustic situation, non-belonging and lacking adjustability in the given settings. But the deeper truth, as Singh’s criticism goes, relates to the fact of his having been shaped by the prevalent sense of Sahebgiri which implies, for him and others like him, the sense of ruling instead of serving. But here, he is misfit in administrative services as, by nature, he is unable to take onus of the things; he opts for escape in loneliness, in drugs and in sexual escapades at imaginative plains. Though he holds the position of power, yet, “He is powerless in action; his only power lies in phantasy.” (47)

Being the student of English literature Agastya seems to believe in Miltonic maxim of serving heaven and ruling hell. Perhaps he might have opted out any teaching profession which is characterized as powerless job while the coveted IAS, stands as a promising job with unchecked powers to be shed on general public. For Agastya like people with such mundane mind the heaven is the West, the land of modernity and unbridled freedom while Indian hinterland such as Madna or Jhompana is hellish place where they love to rule. But Agastya’s essential being does not project him in a situation to dominate, convince or make a decision as an officer. Being an escapist he takes solace in his fantasies. He shows no pertinent spunk and dominance typical of an officer; rather stays meek even to his domestic servant
Vasant. He cannot ask Vasant for better tea, cannot instruct him at all and stays at his mercy as if the latter is his master. In a farcical situation this city-bred urban modern young man gets terrified with the presence of an amphibian guest in his bathroom i.e. a frog. He cannot even convince his servant Vasant to oust this creature, stays completely discomfited and helpless:

How does one, he thought, get a frog out of the bathroom? The frog looked black-green and quite demure. Or is it OK to share one’s bathroom with a frog? He couldn’t decide, so he closed the door and went out to look for Vasant.

Vasant’s entire family slept in the open. Their part of the compound looked like a relief camp after a riot; bed after bed amid chairs and posts and pans.

‘Vasant, Vasant.’ He soon woke everybody but Vasant. Three others got out of bed and shook Vasant awake. May be he stole some of my Somnoraxes, thought Agastya. ‘Will you come with me for a moment?’ Much to his credit Vasant didn’t ask questions and followed, rubbing his eyes, rearranging his lungi, yawning.

Agastya showed him the frog. ‘There.’ The frog looked at complete rest, almost philosophic. ‘How do we push it out?’ Vasant gave him a look. Agastya wilted. ‘You think, it should remain there? (E, A 96-97)

The novelist in this passage makes it clear that his non-heroic protagonist is misfit in the society which he wants to put under his command but cannot, owing to his innate docility. Even he has to bow to the will of his servant; Vasant seems in his action mastering his humble master. Agastya’s projection as humble and meek is indicative of his destiny to be governed in such social set up wherein snobbery and the concept of might is right throb. It is not only Chatterjee’s narrative style but also projection of unheroic hero that has analogy with that of R K Narayan. Nataraj in The Man-eater of Malgudi (1961), Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets (1967) represent the common Indians in Narayan’s fictional world of Malgudi. Such protagonists and others like them present a contrast to what, in Aristotlean terms, is called the ‘hero’; the classical hero endowed with natural qualities of manliness, bravery, velour and readiness for action.
Shakespearean heroes thus are larger than life with great ambition, action and hailing from the royal clans.

But in modern literature, particularly post-world war literature, there came the vogue of anti-hero and even unheroic heroism in the experimenting hands of typical modern men of letters who found literature as the means of rejection and even self-reflexivity. D. H. Lawrence, Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, Harold Pinter etc. were the prominent harbingers of such vogue whose heroes in their literary works veered out the attention of the world to the new definition of the ‘hero’. Have-nots, the representation of Marxist concept of radicalism, dominated the literary spheres from mid to later half of the twentieth century. Such anti-heroes popularized the novel concept of ‘angry young man’ much against the classical concept of chivalrous male hero. These ‘angry young men’ stormed already upheaval-ridden era with typical attitude of rejection, disdain and cynicism. Such have-not anti-heroic heroes epitomized the class struggle in Marxist lines.

Agastya Sen, in this way, by and large, has essential connect with Narayanan unheroic heroes having temperamental streak of character. Yet, he is a class different from that category who plays the prototypes of cultural values in Malgudi world. Agastya is non-belonging, rootless, ‘coca-cola type’ Americanized post-modern youth who puts down the cultural practice of applying oil in hair. Keeping his hair shampooed and dry he seems to be dried of emotions for the needful people with whom he wants to have no relation. He is despising, distancing, escaping, rejecting all the milieus around which comprising the rustic essential India. One aspect of such attitude of a youth, who is driven with the typical concept of Sahebgiri, must be taken into pieces of logical criticism that he has inherited and earned power to exercise, being the heir of a governor and having gained to the coveted, prestigious rank of IAS. He is at advantageous position, can veer out his career to the heights in the form of public services. On the other hand, the typical unheroic heroes, such as those of Narayan’s, are found grappling for powers owing to their cultural obligations and humble origin.

This prototype viz. Agastya, the IAS, therefore, should be put on the anvil of critical testimony in the light of his expectation from this coveted public services against the back drop of the popularly held concept of Sahebgiri. This novel, hence, is
not to be narrowed down within the framework of hypocrisy of Indian bureaucracy but to be put into broader comprehensions. Deeper study of the novel lets one get into the undertone of the novelist exposing the cosmopolitan generation which has lost the cultural moorings and thus sense of belongingness to anything indigenous. The passion for public service and true idea of service would have shaped Agastya’s mind in different way and he would have well adjusted in the circumstances with no angst. In the final pages of the novel the novelist drops a hint of the possibility of Agastya’s adjustability in his service following the advice of his father. A completely different Agastya is projected in a rather adverse situation dealing with local hooligans:

Agastya looked at him with distaste. ‘Chhopa is the sabhapati’s village, isn’t it. It’s probably as wet as—‘ He was going to say, the sabhapati’s puss, but checked himself in time. ‘No, let’s do it my way.’ He smiled wickedly at Chaudhri. ‘It’s good that you brought your jeep. You go back in that jeep, take everybody with you. You’ll reach Jompanna by about two thirty, I think. Arrange for one tanker, and your— ’ he stopped, wondering what they were called—‘gang that cleans up wells to come here. I’ll wait here for them, to sort of ensure that you—’ he paused, and then decided to be recklessly truthful—‘you do some work about this when you reach your office.’ (E,A 256-57)

In the final pages of the novel Agastya appears almost in new avatar, a serving, just, bold IAS officer fetching some water for the poor tribal villagers; challenging the authorities of local mafia who have hold on politics. A meek and docile Agastya has been replaced by the bolder one who seems to have spirit in his work in village. However, Chatterjee ends the novel with uncertain note with no definite idea of the protagonist’s next possible move. Though, he is seen working around in the district of Madna, Chatterjee does not try to give any focus to his passion or any sort of budding likings for his job; rather he leaves the things as they are, Agastya working as well as escaping. Nor does the novelist focus on Agastya’s reactions to the advice of his father in a letter and thus apparently active Agastya should not be mistaken as a changed man. In the sequel novel The Mammaries of a Welfare State (2000) Chatterjee’s firm but true view of the flatness of character and incorrigibility of
human nature comes into light when same Agastya is found more in angst, restless, rootless and all the more non-belonging.

In fact, the critical journey through the mental alcoves of a culturally uprooted man leads to the deeper understanding of the transitional phenomena of the time of the newer generation with cosmopolitan values. Bijay Kumar Das applies his critical yardstick to assess this phenomenon of changing values in context of the present novel:

*English, August: An Indian Story* has an appropriate title for it suits the hero’s mentality and mood, particularly when the hero is alienated from his land and the people. Both thematically and technically this novel breaks a new ground. The novel combines the consciousness of the novels of nineteen sixties and eighties---that is, the former’s problems of uprooted self and the latter’s hybridity and intellectual idiom. If the place of action of contemporary novels has shifted from village to the urban area like town and cities…(Das 62)

Chatterjee artistically exposes the hypocrisy of such hybrid product and thus hits double pronged satire on *Sahebgirias* well as Agastya-like-products. Owing to such aspects a critic tends to expand his findings in the novel to the concerns of the novelist to the changing scenario of shifting preferences for urban to rural, for agrarian to industry, simplicity to ostentations. Thomas Hardy was the prominent novelist who, through his artistic acumen, drew the attention of the world to such shift of values during late Victorian era and the beginning of the modern age; when novel concepts of disbelief and consequent skepticism, industrialization, colossal urbanization etc. were storming the world. Loss of virginity of pure Tess in the *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1892) was the symbolic representation of loss of agrarian blessings. His characters, the typical pure and rustic *woodlanders*, had to suffer at the hands of the powerful tyrant which artistically symbolized the clash between natural and mechanical, agrarian and. industrial, rustic and urban. That is why Tess has gained eternity as hinted by Irwing Howe, “Though, like the greatest characters in literature, she (Tess) lives beyond the final pages of the book as a permanent citizen of imagination…”(Howe 110)
Agastya’s indifference and dryness to those who need him most is symbolic of mindless inclination of post-modern youth to mechanical world. The miseries of tribal poor in Jompanna, gloominess and ignorance in Madna, tyrannized expecting public visiting the Collectorate with somber eyes---nothing seem to have touched this well-bred, egocentric urbanized young man. Through such immature, irresponsible, caught-in-vicarious-life type of IAS Chatterjee offers in the novel an ironic contrast between history and the contemporary scene of Indian Civil Services. During British regime the Sahebgiri held full sway over the people of dependent nation, but the bureaucrats of Indian origin at that time used to be mature enough to take responsibility of their job. While in post-colonial India Chatterjee delineates the reality that even those enter in civil services who have no clear idea of their careerism. With such contrast between British time bureaucracy and the contemporary bureaucratic history Chatterjee, who himself is a bureaucrat, raises the questioning finger to such possible corruption and to the workings of independent Indian public sector recruiting forces.

Srivastav, the Collector, Kumar, Bajaj, Bhatia, Joshi, Mohan and even Agastya seem to be the prototypes of the mentality of typical Sahebgiri. Their public behaviour, mental in case of Agastya, shedding the influence on those who are at receiving end, clearly shows the present day condition of bureaucracy. These denizens in this traditionally-defined realm of bureaucracy are the prototypes, working robotically in strict conformity to the anatomy of Sahebgiri. The system of red-tape which signifies the functioning from ivory tower. But such shaping of mentality and conditioning is not the recent phenomenon in India, rather it has moorings to the anatomy and politics of British time Sahebgiri and even to traditional Indian feudal system. In fact, as the findings of the psychological studies relate, it is not individual that has effect in the making of culture and society, in fact it is vice-versa. One’s culture, traditions, values, the structure of the society etc. have deep shaping impact on the mind of an individual, and this leads to shaping of one’s attitude, philosophy of life.

In fact, apart from psychological, various history and culture studies have unraveled the fact that owing to continual colonial rule and feudal practices in India since long the common Indian mind has come to develop the mentality of servility
and perceives the bureaucracy in parlance of typical Sahebgiri. The case of Agastya and Co. in the novel are the illustration of colonized mindset in the form of snobbery, servility, anglophilia, social cynicism and so on. Colonial rule, even before the British, feudal practices and caste hierarchy had shaping influence on the minds of the people. Such social reality, shaped by the feudal and colonial hegemony can be understood on psychological plains that how an individual cannot form his own ego and free thinking. Scientific observation and study of Dr. Sudhir Kakar, the psychotherapist at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, reveal this fact of conditioned mind in Indian reality. V S Naipaul in his famous book *India: A Wounded Civilization* quotes this study:

> We Indians, Kakar says, use the outside reality to preserve the continuity of the self amidst an ever changing flux of outer events and things. Men do not, therefore, actively explore the world; rather, they are defined by it. It is this negative way of perceiving that goes with ‘meditation’, the striving after infinite, the bliss of losing the self; it also goes with *karma* and the complex organization of Indian life. Everything locks together; one cannot be isolated from the other. (Kakar Qtd. in Naipaul 91-92)

The perception of an average Indian, as Kakar’s study relates, has deep influence of inevitable culture; while the culture itself has colourings of colonial practices and collective commonalities. Perceptions, thoughts, predicaments, needs, general approaches and attitudes are determined by outside world, the colonized culture. This psychological inner phenomenon of making perceptions and attitudes can be better taken into critical analysis by likening it to computer functioning. The electronic device is given input then there is inner process and the result is output which is always in accordance with the characteristics of input. In similar ways, in a country which has been witnessing the unending cycle of colonial and feudal practices such perceptions and attitudes of individual are shaped which has typical characteristics of snobbery, hypocrisy and cynicism.

Although, the protagonist in the novel may be hypocritical, indifferent youth yet, he is an instrument and even spokesman for Chatterjee to enunciate the anatomy and politics of Sahebgiri. Hence, it is through his observations that Chatterjee scoffs the farcical situations of *Sahebgiri* in the form of---servile attitude of the discomfited
subordinates in presence of their seniors. These subordinates otherwise bully the ordinary people and their subordinates. Such cycle of shaping of perceptions of cynicism, snobbery and servility keeps an individual in the grip of such system, preventing him from further developing free thinking. The novelist artistically lays bare the stark reality of deep rooted inclinations of average Indians to serve the powerful and higher snobbishly and bully the inferior. Vivid and humorous descriptions of the discomfitures of subordinates and of average people carry the fact of enslaving dominance of Sahebgiri. Subordinates are found piteously uneasy in the presence of higher authority; the novelist satirically ridicules the discomfitures and robotic servility of such official caricatures:

If you can tick off a subordinate in the language, thought Agastya, you are really fluent. On the far side of the desk stood a trembling suppliant, weeping fresh tears, as though he had just been beaten. The other old man being shouted at turned out to be the District Supply Officer. Later Agastya would conclude that they all looked the same, the denizens of the Collectorate, aging, with soft faces that hasn’t seen much sunlight. They all wore pale shirts and loose pants. Their short pockets bulged outrageously with pens and spectacle cases. Most smelt nice, of some very Indian perfume, or scented hair-oil, or paan, they would withstand like placid buffalo, anything that an industrious superior could shriek at them. (E,A 14)

The influence of Sahebgiri is not confined to lower rank officials only but the entire society seems under the sway of towering Sahebgiri, “The petitioners always stood. Srivastav asked them to sit only if it seemed that they would take long; if they sat it was on the edge of the chair.” (18) Although the chairs in the office of the Collector are meant for the general public, no one dares to sit comfortably before the powerful bureaucrat. The bureaucracy always has colonizing impact on the general masses. Those on higher positions such as Deputy Commissioner are also under the influence of snobbery, cynicism and hypocrisy as shown in the novel. Quite hypocritically Srivastav takes it his pride to reach late on his duties and deliberately being unpunctual on other occasions. Chatterjee misses no chance to expose the hypocrisy and hollowness of these propagators of Sahebgiri; the man in higher authority is
hardly conscious of the presence of others when he boasts of Sahebgiri. Actually, apart from influencing and impressing others such bureaucratic vanity is a psychological tool for him for self-assurance.

Attributes like austerity, punctuality and regularity are ascribed to subordinates as Sahebs are the royal gods and thus no one can expect them such virtues, “Take my case. Office starts at ten thirty, I reach at eleven sharp.’ He made it sound like a virtue.” (25) Different forms and shades of the anatomy of Sahebgiri are enumerated by the novelist through arrogance and despotic pride of such officers holding positions. But one can trace the shade of pigheadedness and sense of idiotic pride in obvious arrogance that such bureaucrats are so engrossed in vanity. In another instance Srivastav ensures telephonically that everyone in a music concert has reached ahead of him since his arrival late and at the last of all is a testimony of being most VIP in the gathering:

…the passes for the first row at the sitar recital, which will not start until he arrives and for which he will not arrive until he has ensured by telephone that everyone else who has been invited has arrived first. In Madna, as in all of India, one’s importance as an official could be gauged by how long one could keep a concert (to which one was invited) waiting. The organizers never minded this of the officials they invited. Perhaps they were humouring them, which was somehow worse. (10)

It should go without debate that this novel is an extensive critique of the anatomy of Sahebgiri with typified caricatures of bureaucracy enacting in strict conformity of stipulated legacy of arrogance, pride, snobbery, egoism etc. These are the red-tape customs of bureaucracy that Agastya is to learn that if one keeps people waiting then he is a successful officer, no matter how uncomfortable people are. What Chatterjee reveals is the fact that the bureaucrats such as Srivastav and others regard themselves as true VIP in social terms.

In fact, the age-old feudalistic and colonial bent of mind and British styled bureaucracy have been shaping factor for the present day Sahebgirias is hinted in the novel. Besides, constant hierarchy in Indian Babugiri owes much the age-old Indian caste-system and feudal system and hence it inevitably inculcates the sense of
snobery, hypocrisy, cynicism, servility and even servitude in the minds of the people. With advent of Vedic culture centuries ago, there ensued the social system of certain discriminatory codes which created segregation and division of the human being on the basis of karma or profession. This class system was strictly based on hierarchical patterns and still, having long journey of thousands of years. This system thrives and permeates the very blood of Indians and Chatterjee delineates this reality in the form of hierarchy in bureaucracy. Discriminations and unequal treatment on the basis of one’s origin in a particular caste reflect the very mentality of that system which has been *alpha and omega* of social life in this country. Here in the novel also one is treated on the basis of rank he holds.

Although, according to the Constitution of the Republic of India there is a system of democracy and everyone has right to reach at highest position, yet the meaning and use of such rights for those who are restricted to the life from hand to mouth is just a fib. And still, despite the so-called egalitarian boon of democracy, the society is governed with those unwritten norms and stereo-types which keep the dalits under the burden of customs and rituals. The lower class officials are treated as dalits by the seniors as Srivastav does in the novel. Chatterjee does refer, though very briefly, such sorry state of affair, “To him, these places had been, at best, names out of newspapers, where floods and caste wars occurred, and entire Harijan families were murdered,…” (*E, A* 05) The matter of concern, here, is that an IAS officers relates such miseries through the imageries from newspaper since he has hailed from rich upper-caste family.

The hierarchy in the social system thrives, flourishes unchecked, though the hypocrisy is the tool in the hand of the sophisticated upper-caste tyrant who openly does not spew the venom of caste and discrimination fearing the law. This caste hierarchy has extended to other spheres of life such as royal anatomy in rule, business and trade, education and ,of course, bureaucracy as depicted in the novel. The reflection of such hierarchy based construct can be found working in bureaucracy. The officers, though academically qualified, who are shown to be the components of *Sahebgiri* and, after all, end-products of this very society which is strongly based on caste and hierarchy. The commissioner enjoys the treatment of Brahmin, the highly placed, within his jurisdictions and the other sahibs also get the feeling of highness in
comparison to their subordinates as underpinned by the novelist in the novel. But the concept of Brahmin or sahib remains same, as only those are given royal treatment who hail from so-called upper caste. In case of Agastya things are intact since he has hailed from upper-strata and thus is given the special treatment as of an IAS wherever he goes.

The present day Sahebgiri, therefore, is not resultant form of British-styled bureaucracy only, but the very indigenous caste hierarchy has deeper shaping impact on it. The Collector or Deputy Commissioner, Sub-divisional Magistrate, City Magistrate, Block Development Officer, District Health Officer, Superintendent of Police, Forrest Officers, Executive Engineers etc. are some conspicuous bricks in the edifice of this power-politics in bureaucracy. Chatterjee very clearly focuses on each brick of such edifice. One officer is found humbled down, helpless at receiving end in the presence of higher authority but the same officer does not miss chance to shed off humiliation by bullying up his juniors. The sense of hierarchy has firm grip in the mind of these denizens of the world of typical babugiri. Pride, vanity, chauvinism, flattery, sycophancy, servility, snobbery, cynicism etc. form the very core their talk, thought, approach and general behaviour:

‘Kumar’s an Indian Police Service specimen, they are all jealous of the IAS, said Srivastav. ‘You must also call on the District judge Mishra and the District Development Officer Bajaj. Bajaj is another specimen, a bloody promotee.’ A promotee was one who was not recruited to the IAS through the national Civil Services examination like Srivastav, Menon and Agastya, but promoted to the cadre from something lower, the regional Civil Service or the engineers. In Srivastav’s vocabulary, ‘promotee was a vile curse, ranking somewhere between bastard and……...(E, A 58)

Each officer gets treatment in the culture of bureaucracy in strict conformity of his position and rank. Though, all bureaucrats are clubbed together by the government for the smooth functioning of the administration at each level viz. village, block, district and state, yet there thrives the sense of divisiveness in the sick mentality. Since an IAS, such as Srivastav and Agastya, is recruited by the Union government they develop the sense of superiority, always trying to have upper hands on the officers
recruited through regional Civil Services. Almost in every page of the novel the author exposes the components of the anatomy of \textit{Sahebgiri} with ridiculous shades. That is why the novel is peopled by the grotesque end-products of this system such as robotic clerks who are always keen to serve and please their bosses. This \textit{Sahebgiri} can be seen as colonizer with feudalistic characteristics even in the postcolonial Indian society which is still replete with people of servile mindset.

The perception and attitude typical of snobbery and cynicism have been laid bare in the novel with Chatterjee’s profound discerning insight into the slavish minds. The mind of a layman is so conditioned to the fact of \textit{Sahebgiri} that the position and rank matter more than anything. “A fat officious man said, ‘Yes?’ The naib tehsildar mumbled something and the officious man immediately turned servile. ‘Good morning, sir...’” (12) Such mentality of twin but opposing obsession of snobbery and cynicism of an average officious clerk shifts at once in accordance to the type of person he is dealing with. To naib tehsildar, who is of equal rank to him, the officious man very indecently and straightforwardly says ‘yes’ which signifies cynical attitude. Whereas when the rank of Agastya is mumbled into his ear he turns servile to serve the IAS, the master positioned at higher rung in the vast scheme of \textit{Sahebgiri}. The sense of snobbery is so deeply rooted that human values are put on stake but the rank and position in power hierarchy are blindly worshipped. If the appellations like IAS and IPS are put with the names of the person the name and identity as a human are lost in bureaucratic zilch while one’s rank and position of power only matter for the society, “Srivastav introduced him to somebody, no one heard anything except IAS’, then they began fawning on him too.” (21)

By evaluating the anatomy of such snobbish madness with ranks, positions and power Chatterjee raises finger at the very ontology of human life in colonized society; the existential crisis of where one’s identity as a human is in peril. The man is seen, as analyzed in the novel by Agastya, still in shackles when his name and life are overshadowed by positions in the system. Actually, anatomy and politics of such snobbish attitude and servile mindset in the bureaucratic hierarchy and power position not only reflect typical shades of Indian caste hierarchy but also the deep influence of Imperial Raj. While exploring the connect of British influence in post-1947 bureaucracy and mapping its imperial characteristics the findings and views of R P
Singh deserve mention again. He quotes the prominent views of a prominent figure viz. Lloyd George who oversaw the steel cage of British bureaucracy to perpetuate the colonial slavery of Indians in it:

Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister had described the Indian Civil Services (ICS) as the ‘steel frame’ of the British empire in India. The introduction of the competitive examinations in the fifties of the nineteenth century largely eradicated the spoils system in the superior British Indian services. There was a time when lack of integrity was seldom laid at its door even by the bitterest critic of the British regime. For the existence, functioning and progress of independent India, it was thought by our founding fathers that India’s ability to tolerate the inevitable depredations of democracy in its infancy needed to be substantially assisted. This was sought to be provided by the subconscious confidence that somewhere just below the newly elected masters there existed a steel frame that could be relied on to ensure that the more things change the more they remain the same. It was assumed that the prior-existing structure of administrative command and control, renamed Indian Administrative Service (IAS) would provide the substantive elements of confronting continuity… (Singh 68-69)

In this lucid write-up it appears, in no ambiguous terms, that the structure of the British-styled bureaucracy in India is very strong and firm. The envisaging British Prime Minister could foresee the steel agent of Western colonial force in the form of the properties of Sahebgiri. The founding fathers or policy-makers of Independent India did come forward with certain reformist alchemies which would turn inefficacious on colonially-designed bureaucracy. The critic, here, highlights the admittance of those native statesmen that more things would not change, the British imperial instrument of colonizing i.e. powerful bureaucracy would irrevocably continue its sway. Despite the efforts in ridding the system of colonizing propensity, the post-independence Indian Administrative Service continues as the misbegotten, corrupt, wanton child of pre-independence Indian Civil Services. The concept of ‘steel frame’ has been lately re-stated by Arvind Adiga in his celebrated novel The White Tiger (2008) to relate to the agonizing reality of colonial perpetuity in India; the
steel frame, in that novel, is in the shape of Rooster Coop, captivating the roosters to be slaughtered. Adiga, however, being a Marxist voice, devises the escape from Rooster Coop, the escape for those who are different cattle of fish such as a white tiger among many captive animals in the Indian dark jungle.

But the powers and sway of British bureaucratic legacy goes unchecked, Chatterjee rather satirically refers to this legacy as, “…Relics of Raj. The bureaucracy to be Indianized,’ and ‘Difficult question. An officer’s wife should mix with others, but without jeopardizing the dignity of office” (E, A: 39). Though, on the face of it, the remark carries the comic tone with burlesque analogy, yet it implies the very truth of the anatomy and politics of colonizing Sahebgiri. Mixing of an elite wife with other wives signifies Indianization of this Raj legacy, while required resistance to maintain the dignity of the office is suggestive of keeping alive the colonizing, discriminatory sanctity of British ruling through Sahebgiri. Chatterjee very clearly expounds the fact of the ‘Relics of Raj’ in context to District Administrative system, since the main settings and the narrative are focused on the aspects and functioning of the administration at district level and the choicest place of setting is Madna, a cog in Indian hinterland:

District administrative in India is largely the British creation, like the railways and the English language, another complex and unwieldy bequest of the Raj. But Indianization (of a method of administration, or of a language) is integral to the Indian story. Before 1947 the collector was almost inaccessible to the people; now he keeps open house, primarily because he does a different, more difficult job. (10)

The British colonizers’ legacy has played a great role in giving present day bureaucracy such a non-human-friendly form; as the construct of the politics of bureaucracy owes much to the British contempt and cynicism against Indians during Raj. Since the novelist is preoccupied with the concept and aspects of Indian bureaucracy as the legacy, inheritance, heritage of British Raj, the novel ends up as nothing but an artistic panorama of this tradition of Sahebgiri. This cynical and contemptuous attitude towards the natives during colonial times gradually infused the sense of deep snobbery and servitude in typical Indian bureaucracy, “From the Indian
point of view such British bureaucracy was not only mechanical but also insensitive. It had thoroughly crushed the Indian self respect and left no trace of national feeling in the minds of the Indians. The attitudes of the British Civil Servants was contemptuous. (*Modern India: A Textbook for Class XII* NCERT 67)

Significantly enough, this legacy of British contempt is continuously reflected in the general behaviour, attitude, approach of the administrators who have got the power positions. However, Chatterjee resorts to mild satire to expose the shortcomings and serious flaws of bureaucracy through farcical situations. Srivastav is sophisticated prototype of this British legacy of Sahebgiri. What constantly goes with Srivastav in the pages of the novel is his scowling at others; each time he is found scowling and this seems to have become his identity, his presence, “To which Srivastav scowled and added…” (*E,A* 80) The term ‘scowl’ denotes someone’s looking at others with annoyance and anger. Srivastav’s annoyance at petty issues, for subordinates and servants, is suggestive of his impatience and more of arrogance. Besides, annoyance along with anger in public dealings also signifies I-know-more-and-better attitude for which Srivastav, the highhanded Collector of Madna, is known. As the findings of R P Singh relate that incompatibility, restlessness, discomfort of Agastya in rural, humid, hot settings owes much to his cherished idea of Sahebgiri; the British bureaucratic contempt for the masses who are rustic and dirty continues in the urbanized youth.

Agastya intends to opt out the most coveted job since he finds himself unable to rule in comfort. His indecisiveness, contradictions, indifference are highlighted when departing staggeringly arguing with Dhrubo, his friend. Representing the post-colonial weirdly-believing generation Agastya ridiculously smokes down his absurd desire for his career while enjoying a joint of marijuana “…I’d much rather act in a porn film than be a bureaucrat. But I suppose one has to live.” (03) And little later he unravels his absurd philosophy and weird wisdom, “You are wrong about education, though. Most must be like me, with no special aptitude for anything, not even wondering how to manage, not even really thinking. try your luck with everything, something hopefully will click. There aren’t unlimited opportunities in the world.” (03) What Chatterjee tries to bring home the idea is that such post-colonial toppling-
on-predicaments youth take the serious matters of life and career just as marijuana and sex but with no wedlock.

Another aspect of this professional and cultural misfit may be seen with the idea of choice in one's careerism; most of the young people are made to take the career of the choice of their parents much to the expectations of the social trends. Chatterjee also wants his readers to tickle their heads for understanding the concept of freedom of choice in careerism. Had Agastya been given freedom he could have chosen the career of his choice on the basis of the fact of belonging to the rich family unlike millions who are bound to follow the dictum that beggars cannot be choosers. That is why, Agastya is quite weird and absurd in dealing in his bureaucratic job; he could have contributed his share in some other fields of art, literature, entertainment, philosophy, explorations, or what he himself says in pornography. His reluctance makes him lazy and unthinking, just letting the things happen to him rather than have some efficacy on the milieus. Here, in this instance, he shows his will to end up as a porn actor instead of making clamour for the poor from echelons. In next instance Chatterjee reveals the desire of such highly educated man which is more absurd but telling of his anguish, misfit and wrong choice of profession:

In his essay Agastya has said that his real ambition was to be a domesticated male stray dog because they lived the best life. They were assured of food, and because they were stray they didn’t have to guard a house or beg or shake paws or fetch trifles or be clean or anything similarly meaningless to earn their food. They were servile and sycophantic when hungry; once fed, and before sleep, they wagged their tails perfunctorily whenever their hosts passed, as an investment for future meals. A stray dog was free; he slept a lot, barked unexpectedly and only when he wanted to, and got a lot of sex. (35)

But since this novel is an artistic journey through Indian bureaucracy and the mind of a misfit post-colonial officer in training, the critical discerning into the things described herein is much required for the better understanding of the ideology in the novel. Undoubtedly the novel is an intended satire on ridiculous aspects of Sahebgiri and hypocrisy of those who join it. The above stated excerpt is the symbolic indicative of the hidden desire of an educated young man who, in the tune of
commonly held notions, takes bureaucracy as an echelon, the profession of utter laxity, luxury, shedding influence on the masses, or in other terms a typical Sahebgiri. The metaphysics of Chatterjee to give the idea of bureaucracy and one’s expectation from it through the metaphor of a dog is telling of his artistic excellence and great satirical powers. To Agastya and others like him, a bureaucrat sahib is like a domesticated but stray mongrel which has no responsibility but to enjoy utter hedonism. He does not have to guard the people and their houses whose services he is meant for.

His livelihood is ensured by the government but still keeps greedy eyes on the public money for his luxuries. Most significantly he is servile and sycophantic to his seniors and those who hold the power in politics. But things go down to nadir with the fact that a man of highest bureaucratic place is a drug-addict; it is the efficacy of marijuana that he is found staying calm and cool in all situation, “Agastya didn’t catch a single name, and didn’t bother. Thank God for marijuana, he thought.” (12)

Sex for such lewd hedonist is mere time pass and carnal delight, devoid of any social morality or code of relationship, “Perhaps the falling of pearls means the breaking of a hymen?’ Chhee, chhee, chee, Sen sab, Sen sab! Sahnkar looked outraged and drunk.” (98) While enjoying the hospitality at the home of his senior Srivastav, he shows no moral scruple and shamelessly fantasizes the sexual attraction of Malti, the wife of the latter; he misses no chance to steal the glimpses of her voluptuous body wrapped in ‘yellow blouse and black sari’.

It is ironical that an IAS officer is always obsessed with the thought of sex and driven by soft drugs. Though Chatterjee presents this fact about Agastya in farcical form and light mood, it is a great matter of concern that an IAS officer is irresponsible and indifferent to the hopes of the general public. This really unravels the sorry state of affair in a country which is already in the gloom of corruption. Agastya is presented with no moral obligations despite the fact that his decisions, attitude as an officer can have effect on many lives. Having no such concerns with the expectant society he confines himself in the room wherein he takes joint to stone himself, masturbates, fantasizes for women as if he has no responsibility on his shoulders. The representation of such ludicrous case relates to the fact that in post-independent India the concept of Sahebgiri has come to deteriorate more further with the people who are
uprooted and have no sense of social services. The case of the protagonist presents the ideological paradox that on the face of it he seems reluctant to join IAS but deep inside he cherishes a desire to join it for Epicurean delectations but for the service.

The analysis of the novel in terms of the case study of the protagonist, as the novel focuses more in mind than milieu, relates to hypothesized propositions of condemnation of him as a hypocritical, highly snobbish, non-heroic Hamletian character, caught in the questions of ‘to be or not to be’. Years after, Chatterjee brings forth his condition in the sequel novel where he is found irrevocably angst-ridden, all the more helpless. Even his name and the title of the novel mark the underlying irony on his very existence as may it be ascetic Agastya or his favourite Marcus Aurelius viz. Roman King August, he fits in the role of none. He is ‘English type’, but ‘August’ in his vicarious settings of imagination, unchecked thoughts, absurdity. Ascetic rishi Agastya was the apostle of service to humanity who brought life to many.

Marcus Aurelius, whose book Agastya Sen keeps with himself, is remembered as the great king known for his bravery and service to his subjects. The references to both the legends signify the great irony if compared to the case of Agastya, the IAS who would not use his powers for service of masses. Irony is heightened all the more as he never bothers to find any connect with his name and the legends, rather he scoffs off any query related to unusualness of his name. It is ridiculous burlesque analogy with the Sanskrit legend who had once explored water, “It is Sanskrit for one who turns the flush just before he starts pissing, and then tries to finish pissing before the water disappears.” (54)

Nevertheless, it is on the basis of the profound study of the predicaments and other aspects related to Agastya’s characters study that one can critically discern the streak of his true character. More, the understanding of his essential true being, of his role in society, would enable us have the true critique of Sahebgiri. On surface level study, or a bit deeper penetration into Agastya’s mind as proposed by the worthy critics, a non-belonging, indifferent and misfit Agastya comes out who has been put at the receiving end of the shelling of criticism, accusations as non-heroic or anti-hero. But a true research is that which necessitates it to scientifically explore the shades of milieus, practices, phenomena in the narrative through the corridors of deeper mental
recesses of the characters. This is possible only if one is able to delve deep into the
tone, undertone as well as overtone, of the style and narrative; the concealed
intentions of the novelist what he artistically wants to address therein. Agastya’s
passivity, indifference, surrender, jerkiness to the circumstances is an intended
projection and assertion of his individuality and type. Through such projection and
affectation Chatterjee satirizes the very credentials of the mechanical workings of
bureaucracy and attitudes of the people therein.

Since the truth of life lies with great paradoxes, in this case too it is great
paradox that Agastya’s assertion of his individualized being can be perceived
thorough his docility, his acceptance through his rejection and escape. Hence, the
intended idea that Chatterjee endeavours to bring home is that in the very construct of
the bureaucracy and society as a whole only more mechanized, robotic items can fit
into; only those people who work in strong conformity to the stipulated norms and
culture are suitable. Inclusion and projection of Agastya, who is highly educated,
perhaps overeducated for this position, brings out the contrast and true critique of the
vile practice of Sahebgiri.

Through such misfit protagonist the novelist presents a contrast and thus raises
the question that where and how such modern generation, highly educated prototypes
can fit into. The question also involves the modern education system and its use and
relevance. The intended idea embedded in the satirical tone in the novel is that the
modernized education system, within the highly urbanized boundaries of Kolkata,
Delhi or foreign land, may not inculcate much-needed passion for serving the society
and cultural values. Chatterjee’s pointed finger also moves to the fact that can a
highly educated in intellectual and philosophical sublimity come down to rub
shoulders with those who are in the gloom of ignorance for centuries? Or the very
high level education ensures the aloofness and cynicism; the man with excellence in
erudition finds himself with philosophical disillusions of absurdity of life and thus
uselessness of all ideals. Chatterjee himself highlights this truth of Agastya’s being at
the very beginning of the novel when he is found reluctant to leave Delhi’s urban
promising environs for sad Madna, ‘a cog in the universe’. Chatterjee ponders over
such aspect of Indian education system of ‘waste of human potency’:
Let’s smoke a last one, shall we,’ said Dhrubo, picking up the polythene bag from the car seat. ‘In Yale a Ph. D. wasn’t a joke. It meant something it was significant. Students thought before they enrolled. But here in Delhi, all over India’ Dhrubo threw some loose tobacco out of the window, education is biding time, a meaningless accumulation of degrees, BA, MA, then M. Phil. while you join the millions in trying your luck at the Civil Services exams. So many people every year seem to find government service so interesting,’ he paused to scratch his elbow, ‘I wonder how many people think about where their education is leading them.’ (03)

The frustrated youth such as Dhrubo, Agastya and many others are forced to mechanical Sahebgiri which would never fascinate their philosophical, imaginative mind. It is rightly believed that philosophy is the mother of research, giving the research much-needed imagination and novel ideas. Art, philosophy, aesthetics, stylistics, music, other forms of creativity are looked down contemptuously in India as they are narrowly ascribed to the zilch in one’s career, ‘What was your discipline, Sen, in college? ‘English, sir,’ said Agastya, and wished that it had been something more respectable, Physics or Economics or Mathematics or Law…(59) Agastya is very much conscious of such narrow mentality of all and sundry; his hesitation in pronouncing his subject of academics is proven right when mechanized end-product of Sahebgiri Srivastav bluntly disapproves it, “A useless subject,’ said Srivastav, unless it helps you master the language…” (59) Such slavish preference for non-humanity subjects has crowded the Civil Services with the people who have science as academic background, a technocrat entering the bureaucracy specializes it with much-respected pragmatism and thus corruption. This has worsened the things in bureaucracy all the more as the recruits having no feel of humanity-subjects, viewing English as language study only, supposedly cannot serve the society.

Agastya is educated in English literature and supposedly has formed a philosophical, intellectual mental framework, but placed in the labyrinths of bureaucracy which requires assertion, boldness and arrogance. Besides, in all Indian Civil Services an officer is required only a degree of graduation in the name of academy, thus he has no concerns with higher level of education and research. What type of product is expected from such recruiting process when only a graduate, no
distinction matters, qualifies stages of written exams and proves his might of problem-solving in the interview.

According to Chatterjee, the present day bureaucratic system is the legacy of British time bureaucracy. British system exactly needed such prototype Babus or bureaucrats who have no concerns with intellectual loftiness of life. The present day education system, which is more or less the dregs of typical Babu-producing British imperial requirements, supports the industry of such bureaucracy. A thinking analyst on the politics of British empire in India G. Viswanathan in the essay ‘The Beginnings of English Literary Studies in British India’ throws ample light on this issue of education, “The English education was introduced in India with an object to achieve and maintain political domination. Through cultural hegemony, by discreetly introducing western values and perceptions among the natives and moulding them as subjects.” (Viswanathan in *Oxford Literary Review*, 9, 01, 18) It goes without saying that the introduction of Western education system was the tool of colonization in the hands of the British rulers. It was the politics of perpetuating the colonial impact in the third world countries including India that determined the nature of this education. English language was thus the most potent tool to spread that education that led to perennial dependency of India on the West and economic and cultural hegemony of the latter. The views of Tiffin and Lawson hold the key to this political reality:

Imperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpolative phase largely by textuality, both institutionally…and informally. Colonialism (like its counterpart racism), then, is a formation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpolates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representations. (Tiffin & Lawson 03)

Undoubtedly, the bureaucratic system is the weird result of that politics executed through language, text and novel education system introduced by the colonizers. Such bureaucrats are true results of the politics of British education system to keep ‘Steel Frame’ or ‘Rooster Coop’ intact and firm. Needless to say that education is the foundation on which edifice of a society, a country can be built; it is a key which helps open the ways of immense opportunities and thus leads to
civilization. Indian society having such West-supporting, baffling education system is, therefore, far away from the path of civilization and there thrives the gloom of ignorance. In his literary undertones of humour and farce Chatterjee describes the sorry condition of education in India and thus satirizes it:

‘Two years I taught there. It was horrible,’ Mohan smiled shyly. The college was supposed to be post-graduate level, but the labs weren’t even worth Intermediate. Everything broken or stolen. There were two old goondas claiming to be Principal, each had younger goondas as bodyguards. I used to wonder which of them was drawing the Principal’s salary. When they met in the corridor they used to curse each other quite colourfully, and most students would rush out of the class to hear them. (E,A 106)

In this farcical narration having bright luminosity of humour, there runs the thick darkness of the ignorance, signifying very sorry state of education in the country. This illustration from the novel appears to be representative one of the motley cases across this large nation where education has been brought down at bog to be mere business of accumulation of money. The novelist presents very sorry state of affairs of educational system that how the wives of bureaucrats, such as Malti, the wife of Srivastav, keep accumulating degrees and teach in any institute of their choice. Scoundrels, hooligans, goondas are the architects of the present day education system which will further produce the same stuff. The tainted professionals coming in various fields further deteriorate the system with inefficiency or pigheadedness. Since bureaucrats promote the products of such laizes-faire education, bureaucracy is one of the most affected fields. Things go all the more gloomy when teaching profession comes under the sway of down-to-drain corruption.

Bureaucrats and the politicians are found so pragmatic and lacking visions that they just let the wrong things happen, never trying the sense the drastic consequences of their decision. Chatterjee highlights the ludicrousness of the process of recruitment in this serious business i.e. teaching. A servile education officer is taking interview of the future teachers in the office of Bajaj, the BDO:
‘Twenty-three applied for the posts, we called eighteen for the interview, six turned up. All the candidate are tribal, the posts are reserved for them.’ With his elbow on the table and an immovable forearm, Bajaj flicked his wrist at one of the men beside him. ‘Meet our Education Officer.’ The other man seemed too important to be introduced. Agastya’s entry seemed to have interrupted the interrogation. The Education Officer, solemn and enthusiastic, continued, ‘What is twenty per cent of eighty?’

She giggled, put the edge of her sari in her mouth, and asked in return, ‘Twenty-five?’ Bajaj pushed over a sheet of paper to Agastya and tapped his pen on one name. The giggler, Agastya read, had passed her Senior School Exam and even held a Diploma in Education from some hole. If she got the job, she would teach Maths, History, Geography, Civics and a whole lot of other things to ten-year old victims. (E.A 86)

Though the situation is farcical, yet Chatterjee is able to raise the serious issue of the ludicrousness in education system which ensures the future of the students, the victims, to be put on stake, thanks to such teachers recruiters. Although, bureaucrats have powers to effect the workings of the society, they have to compromise and bow to the whims of never-been-in-academics, hooligan type of politicians:

‘Last candidate, sir,’ said the Education Officer, as a small dark teenager entered. He was a BA. He mumbled the answers to preliminary questions. Then Bajaj asked, Who is called the Father of the Nation?’

‘Nehru.’ A pat reply.

‘I see, and what is Gandhi, then? Perhaps the Uncle of the Nation?’ Later Bajaj said, ‘Select the third, reject the other five,’ The Education Officer assiduously jotted down the pronouncement, and said, ‘But these six posts have been vacant for four years, sir. And the politicians and the schools have both been complaining for long.’

‘Well, then, appoint them all,’ Bajaj shrugged and smiled at Agastya. He had a reputation for quick decisions. ‘You’ll see, Sen, when you’re BDO later this year, and dealing directly with these things, what development really is… (87)
This situation is less farcical having a bit serious tone, indicating interrelated facts of compromise, pragmatism, irony, corruption etc. Owing to the influence of politicians and school authorities, Bajaj is helpless to exercise his powers to reject a candidate who is good for nothing for the job of a teacher. The situation is the representative at the foregrounding of the serious issues in the novel which Chatterjee satirizes. The true facets of the typical bureaucracy, though paradoxically in contrast to Sahebgiri, is addressed here; a Block Development Officer is highly pragmatic to select anything for local teaching irrespective to the concerns of the students who are going to be victimized and be shaped as idiots. The attitude is of indifference to the cause for the society, and it is the typical expected characteristics of an officer to be pragmatic, practical just solving the problem at the given moment, the future ramifications notwithstanding.

Bajaj's pragmatism presents a stark contrast to the projection of Agastya who is intellectual enough to cherish the idea of change. Here lies the crux of the protagonist’s restlessness, angst and maladjustment in Madna. He is an intellectual who can bring change with imagination, novel ideas, but is not an active social reformist. The invaluable views of Antonio Gramsci deserve mention here on the type of intellectual:

> Intellectuals in the functional sense fall into two groups. In the first place, there are the “traditional” professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations. Secondly, there are the ‘organic’ intellectuals, the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. (Gramsci 03)

However, Agastya does not represent a particular social group, any ideology or any cause for a social group or ethnicity in literal sense. He is a philosopher who reads Geeta and Marcus Aurelius together and thus epitomizes the universal ideas within
himself. His inclusion in the shoddy world of Sahebgiriis a big joke, and the reflection of this incompatibility finds ample echo in his unusual behaviour in Madna. However, his intellectual stance can be viewed in relation to both the categories; he being the student of literature and having philosophical bend, yet he represents a class of postmodern youth who are uncomfortable with the traditional genoses of British-styled mai baap culture of Sahebgiri. Such intellectuals' perception of viewing the things differs from those who pragmatically believe in passing the things next as they were, never taking pain to change them. That is why the form and anatomy of traditional Sahebgiri thrives, flourishes unchecked, unchanged in pragmatic hands. The novelist presents the contrast of approach of Agastya and Bhatia; latter being pragmatic, having no concern for the ramifications of something wrong he is doing. The politics behind keeping the things in their shoddy traditional shape owes much to deep rooted corruption in all spheres of life.

Notwithstanding the politics of education system, therefore, the hard-core politics in contemporary India which devilishly plays havoc with the country, corrupting all spheres including Sahebgiri. The absurd face of Sahebgiri in the novel seems to be the result of palpitated education system. The pragmatic, insensitive bureaucrats, such as Srivastav and Bhatia, are the instruments in the hands of white-clad politicians. For their selfish end the statesmen in power keep a strong unholy nexus with the bureaucracy through red-tapped puppets whose strings are held in their hands; thus, they manipulate and shape the things in accordance with their wicket needs. This concept of power-equation between politicians and bureaucrats does not escape from keen observation of Chatterjee as he highlights this sorry reality in the novel. When Agastya is given charge of the tribal people’s water management in Jompana, for short time he is himself and as a true officer and intellectual educated person stays uninfluenced from the authorities of Chaudhary, the local leader, “Chaudhri and his entourage subordinates were not used to inexplicable behaviour, but Agastya remained aloof and adamant…” (E,A 257) But such sincerity is taken as immaturity in unethical world of bureaucracy and the pragmatic approach of the officers like Bajaj and others is appreciated as mature, practical attribute.

Though, Chatterjee refrains from taking a serious journey through realms of deep rooted corruption that has firm hold on Sahebgiri, he drops hints, here and there,
of such blurred face of Indian administration. However, the accolades for the novelist originate from his artistic, realistic and literary description of the shades of bureaucracy. The novel gives the reader a plunge into the world of Sahebgiri, expounding the complexities of this world. Akhil Sharma in his *Introduction to English, August: An Indian Story* (2006) puts forward such aspects of the novel:

The reason *English, August* was such a popular success probably has to do with the Indian Administrative Service. In India to belong to the IAS is a little like being a movie star. Each year approximately two million people take the exam for eighty entry-level IAS positions. One of the lowest rungs of the IAS is district collector. Agastya is an assistant to a collector, though it is assumed that in time he will become one himself. A district is the equivalent of an American county, and the district collector runs or has great influence over the district’s judicial, police, and administrative functions. The IAS is considered to be honest for the most part, though there is a joke that if you become an IAS officer you can earn so much money through corruption that your family will have enough to eat for seven generations. (Sharma xii)

This is very often recurring phenomenon that whenever there is change of governance, particularly at state level, there ensues a shuffling of bureaucrats. The findings of Lakshmi Iyer and Anandi Mani in their survey report *Traveling Agents: Political Change and Bureaucratic Turnover in India* (Aug. 2008) such dialectics between Politics and Bureaucracy appear significantly:

…officers can take alternative routes to success investing in a reputation for expertise is not the only one. Further evidence for this is provided by the fact that officers who belong to the same caste as the Chief Minister’s party base are more likely to be appointed to important positions than other officers. The presence of subordinate politicians at the district level provides an alternative way for the Chief Minister to control bureaucrat outcomes at the district level. We nod that the Chief Minister is significantly less likely to transfer District Officers in districts where the local politicians belong to his political party. Further, a political change results in district bureaucrat transfers only when the party in power changes. (Iyer & Mani, Aug. 2008)
This is the way, that those who enjoy good-will with ruling (it must be serving) politicians get the big bite or pie from the tart of huge public money, while those who enjoy the blessings of previous political parties are kept away from booty. The culture of corrupt has so immersed *Sahebgir* that honesty is perceived not as a virtue but shortcoming in an officer. The successful officers in the novel are highly pragmatic and mature; they keep good nexus with the politicians, social service notwithstanding. The politics has corrupted the civil services system to the extent that an honest officer is termed as being good for nothing and immature in the school of life. Maturity is very happy term in Indian cultural context. Though, it is ironical that being mature in a corrupt culture is the clear-cut certificate of being corrupt as the very concept of maturity implies someone’s having been immersed in the prevailing culture and environs. Agastya is unable to adjust in the settings of Madna as an officer which results in his sense of non-belongingness and thus utter loneliness. He is, therefore, a misfit in the vast scheme of wholly corrupt Indian Bureaucratic system. Higher education, positive approach, selflessness, sincerity, research, innovation etc. are kept on the shelf for no use in life.

Owing to loneliness as a pariah Agastya’s actions go in unusual ways to bit abnormality and immaturity. His actions do not match his profession wherein maturity is the foremost requirement; this led the critic and the readers tend to put him in the category of non-hero or even anti-hero. What Chatterjee’s plan seems to be brought at home is to put a character in utter contrast to the things; the misfit in the circumstances and culture and thus Agastya’s case may be the leading one. And it is through this contrast that Chatterjee can bring to the fore the possibility and fact of the concept of an IAS officer representing the different category from the pragmatic rest. Agastya’s immaturity in the corrupt, disfigured bureaucracy has to be taken into account in contrast to the maturity of those mature officers who enjoy all-round accolades. Keeping in view the critique of Akhil Sharma, and of course the reality, the bureaucratic system is corrupt from head to the toe; to be mature in such system is to be corrupt. Agastya is an English literature student and the sole heir of the governor, he has no concerns for accumulating money like anything.

The officers with much-requisite maturity and pragmatics come in the first preference of the politicians who have power to appoint them at their desired stations.
Suitability to their mottoes and designs ensure the fate of an officer that where he is going to serve. In fact, the ruling politicians take good control over different zones of the state through their loyal bureaucrats; the loyalty is not, it must be made clear, to the sanctity of the job but to the ruling statesman. Such loyalty is, unfortunately, determined keeping in view the background, religion, caste and clan of the targeted officer. This nexus between politicians and the bureaucrats, the control of legislative over executive determine the politics of Sahebgiri. It is through such politics that Sahebs, the bureaucrats, have the reputation of mechanical, insensitive and pragmatic. Thus, the findings in the chapter are based on the thematic aspects in the narrative and the real happening in India society today. The anatomy and politics of Sahebgiri, as depicted in the novel, reveal the true facet of life in post-independence India.
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