CHAPTER -II

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s
*Mamaries of Welfare State*
and
*English August: An Indian Story*
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2.0. Upamanyu Chatterjee’s Novel  *Mammaries of the Welfare State*: A Scathing Satire against Indian Bureaucracy

2.1. Introduction


M. David Raju writes in an article that “Chatterjee is gifted with an extraordinary talent for irony, satire and black humour. His young modern educated characters express the sense of ennui as they are restless, disinterested, enervating, feel alienated and face the inner conflict and arduously try to find their place in the world”(Raju 195).

Upamanyu Chatterjee Chatterjee’s *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* wins the Central Sahitya Academy award in 2004. The present fiction enjoys worldwide acclamation from the readers. The book is amazingly brilliant and humorous. Prof Jitendra Narayan Pattnaik in *Post Modern Indian English Fiction* (2012), remarks that the novel is a comic one and provides a lot of ease moments for the readers. According to Prof. Pattnaik the novel, “(...) is both hilarious comedy and sharp satire on the functioning of the so called welfare state, which is India” (45). *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) is a follow-up to his debut novel, *English August*. The novel is
about the welfare state. The welfare of the people is managed by a political dynasty and civil servants. The fiction describes the protagonist Agastya Sen who is in the first year in the Indian Administrative Service. Agastya has become a veteran employee in the department of government Civil Services. *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* picks up some seven or eight years after the time of *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988). Prof. Pattnaik gives an assessment on the character of Agastya and observes that “(…) during these years, Agastya Sen’s perception of the absurdities of bureaucratic life around him becomes sharper and his irreverent attitude towards the grotesque ways in which civil servants function turns bitter and wry” (45). Writer and critics, Geeta Doctor in *Literature Alive*, appreciates the novel of Upamanyu Chatterjee for “the accumulation of details that produce a powerful image of Madna and the oppression of a way of functioning that passes for life in an IAS” (9).

The *Mammaries of the Welfare State* recounts the story of Agastya who is in dismay with his service. Agastya has not found happiness in the bureaucratic functions. The book finely delineates the grotesquery of governance and worthless of the administrative posts in India. Akram Mahammad writes, “The boon of civil servants becomes bane in the twentieth century India” (Vol-1, Issue 5 May 2014).

Mini Kapoor observes that the fiction is “an urbanite young civil servants acclimatization year in hot dusty and depressing Madna” (Kapoor 30). The opening passage of the novel indicates the amount of desperation and disinterestedness as “Agastya was so enervated by his lie in the city that ever so often, when he was alone. He found himself shutting his eyes and weeping silently” (Chatterjee 3). Murari Prasad observes Agastya as, “[…] detects the bureaucratic setup, dominated hierarchy and statistics, and seeks cravings […] The novel is particularly harsh on the self seeking politicians and a various bureaucrats who feed on the drugs of the Welfare State” (Prasad 12). The pangs, agony and the pressure that reigns over the administrative officer is a topic of criticism. The novelist makes an attempt to mention the various departments of the government like public health, heritage labour, culture, housing
problems, police and misappropriation of public funds. Again Chatterjee wants to make the readers aware the pervasiveness of the evils in all the walks of our life. The novel is about the journey of single Agastya, who doesn’t mind smoking and submitting to the sexual advances of a forty something detached socialite greatly influenced by yoga and veganism. Moreover the book is eye catching amidst an entertainingly confusing background of housing problems, transfers, goons and girls. Agastya constantly confronts the absurdities of the bureaucratic life around him.

Prof. Jitendra Narayan Pattnaik writes in his Post Modern Indian English Fiction that the novel “[…] is a story of Agastya, a civil servant, who confronts life and society in its myriad dimensions and is amused at the senselessness and frivolity with which a nation that claims to be welfare state conducts itself in the spheres of bureaucracy, politics and sexual relationship” (Pattnaik 48).

The story starts with Agastya in confronting himself with a housing problem. Life in the city is not good. Agastya manages to get assigned a room in The Raj Atithi Guest House, a fourteen-storey building crawling with low life in which a five-foot high wall “[…] separated its compound from the world’s largest garbage dump” (5). The novelist satirizes the true picture of urbanity with bureaucratic negligence and mentions:

The wall stretched four rows of the barbed wire, from various points of which sagged torn polythene bags of diverse colours. These contained human shit in different stages of decomposition. They’d been flung, of course, at the dump and hadn’t made it across the wall. They, in fact looked pathetic, like POWs in a Hollywood movie ensnared in a vain attempt to escape from a concentration camp (6).

Agastya is deeply shocked over the situation there. “Hmmm…breathe deep, my dear, this fragrant, invigorating air,’ said Agastya to himself as he crossed the covered
car park towards the stairs” (6). Amongst and in the twenty odd white ambassador cars there nested the low life with its charpoys, kerosene stoves, lines of washing and racing children. All sections of people are dwelling with a lot of housing problems as Chatterjee mentions as “…a million of other servants of the Welfare State in the city: he faced a housing problem” (6). Pattnaik writes on the housing problems of Agastya who is shocked “…to find himself sharing the room and its toilet with six strangers, four men and two women” (Pattnaik 46).

Satiric elements prevail here with the description of the actual condition of the Raj Atithi Guest House.

On the first floor, Reception was a noisy ceiling fan, a declaimed-topped counter with an abandoned dinner thali on it, a flickering tube light, a vacant arm chair, and behind it on the floor a snoring maid in a blue sari. Agastya rapped on the counter, and ‘koi hai?’ he hollered in his “we’re-the-steel-frame-that’s-kept-the-country-together voice” (6). From his room on the twelfth floor Agastya finds “a spectacular view of both the garbage dump and the slum (7).

Day to day life is frustrating for Agastya showing his discontent in different intervals. The administrational dysfunctions were horrifying. The Welfare State is a mystery within and without and getting things done is pretty much last on the list of everyone’s priorities.

A good sense of ironic humour is pertinent by the novelist when Agastya finds his unoccupied second bed in his room was filled in the midst of night when he was asleep. “The room had two separate beds. The second bed had been unoccupied when he’d nodded off, thinking of Daya’s blue thighs and regretfully –smirking. He awoke early and abruptly to discover two men in the second bed and two women and a third
man on the floor, all asleep” (7). In spite of housing problem Agastya was insecure to ask his senior about the difficulty. Usually the bureaucratic supremacy is subject to be satirized here. “Once in the secretariat, insecure, disoriented and unhappy wanted to meet the Housing Secretary to discuss his housing problem. He couldn’t because the Housing Secretary was too senior. He’d joined the civil service before Agastya had been fathered” (7). Agastya was advised to meet Menon, the Deputy Secretary who was found unpleasant to him. The way the situation is described aroused fun among the readers. “His PA told Agastya to go and call on Menon, the Deputy Secretary (Pesonnel Housing) instead. Menon wasn’t in his room; Agastya could finally meet him two days later. Eight years ago, they had been posted together in the district of Madna and had pleasantly disliked each other” (8). Prof. Pattnaik takes into account that Agastya faces a lot of problems regarding and “[…] finds that, despite his position, it took three years before he could allot himself his own flat, he loses all hope of being allotted a flat’”( 46).

Again the way the letter was written for substandard houses of type- A is quite funny.

“Subject: Invitations for Applications for Unclassified Substandard Houses of Type-A.” (9). With his posting on night duty in the Secretariat Control Room, Agastya solves his housing problems partly by quietly moving into his office room and partly “by spending three to four nights a week at Daya’s where he had crazy grueling sex” (35) and where he befriends Rajani, Suroor a political heavyweight. The housing problem finally gets solved when Agastya gets appointment as Collector of Madna “to fight the plague on a war footing” (41). Atleast Agastya finds some female company to keep; he gets attached with Daya, who runs the soft sell Ad agency. When Daya offers a position Agastya remains unaffected and shows his devotion to the bureaucracy.

Again the letter by Lina Natesan Thomas, Junior Administrator in the Ministry of Heritage, Upbringing and Resources, to the Secretary of the Welfare State was comic and satiric. The conducts unbecoming of the civil servants are quite visible expressions in a satiric mode. She finds difficulties to meet the secretary but the principal private secretary made it problematic for the inability to understand the language except
Punjabi and says that he is unable to “[…] speak any other language. In fact, in your office, one gets the impressions that Punjabi is the official language of the Welfare State.” (48) How the lady civil servants face uncomfortable situation in their work place is effectively satirized.

Chatterjee presents the filthy pictures of inner and outer lives of the bureaucrats. Vijay Nambisan in *The Hindu* writes about his interview with Chatterjee regarding the present fiction in which Chatterjee admits that the novel is an admirable corrective to its prequel. There are so many people who ought Agastya Sen is the sweet, lovable character. The protagonist is nothing of the sort who is a morally loose man in a morally loose world. Actually Agastya is a helpless person, helpless before the huge judgment of official corruption. Chatterjee’s fictional world is the offspring of his own experiences based on reality. Reality we all know is bitter experiences of life. Life is very often the jumble of the bitter and hideous experiences and he wants to present them before his readers without changing the essence, raw and uncooked. Satire is his effective weapon.

Agastya manages to escape from Madna to France pretending to do his duties. Agastya got remarks on “over the years your countries record, its performance at the Institute has been abysmal” (96). Agastya, in spite of doing something he does nothing to improve the bureaucratic conditions of the country. Again Agastya finds himself to survive is job because of his balancing adjustment to the situation. The Welfare State on the other hand makes life complicated. Other complication includes his love life.

Chatterjee satirizes the rich, greedy, and corrupted politicians at frequent intervals. Chatterjee introduces Bhanwar Virbhim, a senior politician who served as a member of legislative assembly and has been in different positions in the government, plays caste card posing him as Don of masses. ‘I am the voice of downtrodden; I am the soul of all depressed, backward, repressed, suppressed and unrecognized castes” (104).
Bhanwar’s son, Makhmal Bagai, a gun, notorious with his frightening temper moves around the city, abducts and molests girls in his moving vehicle and murders the victims like his father if situation demands. “…over the years the outrageous of Makhmal’s offences against society and the law had kept pace with his father’s increasing clout” (105). As a person Makhmal is incompetent and dangerous but his father made him to join in politics. Makhmal adopts all evil means to capture votes during election that distributes cheap whisky and beats the rival party men. Mathur criticizes the way he adopts the evil means to come to this position and remarks, “His father had wanted him to learn some of the facts of life, to revere wealth, not to remain forever retarded to grasp that money was infinitely more powerful than the gun, that nothing was socially more respectable than power, that to be on the right side of the law, one simply needed to be above it” (286).

R.P Singh rightly observes: “The Welfare State, here, doesn’t mean a state for the welfare of the people but a hunting ground for predatory sharks who masquerade as public servants.” The style of the fiction is sometimes serious and sometimes non-serious and very often mock serious. “We can never Eradicate Poverty…but we can eradicate the poor. All we need is intelligent legislation” (120). The fiction is a sharp, probing and penetrating pinch that gets heightened by the perfect use of mock serious tone. The fiction is full of satirical attitudes which are both cynical and realistic.

Chatterjee’s keen and sharp satire is visible in a journalistic manner when it comes to official matters, presenting the true scenario of the exploitative Welfare State, “To help you to use your time more efficiently in office and to ensure that you are economical in the use of the stationery and property of the Welfare State, your kind attention is drawn once more to rule 17c (iv) of section 28 of chapter 111.I quote and verbatim from the revised Manual. Please note that the Manual was last revised not in the last century, but in 1981…The last procedure, observed too often in our offices, smacks of laziness and lack of discipline. Also its end products reflect rather badly the financial resources of the Welfare State”(124). Through the protagonist Chatterjee
attacks the mindset of the bureaucrats regarding non-attention of the grass root problems of the society. When there was a problem locally, the civil servants bring another bigger crisis to minimize the former one. Plague had affected Madna, a hinterland town which was a big problem. At this crucial juncture, Priminister was about to visit to see his hospitalized friend making the visit more important. “...the crisis, by Welfare State standards, just wasn’t critical enough. When faced with a crisis, what all civil servants longed for was a bigger crisis. In the bureaucratic mind, the tensions of the demonstration, for example, were easily resolved by an outbreak of the plague, which in turn could be totally wiped out by the worst calamity of all, the visit of Priminister” (163).

Chatterjee attacks the indifferent attitudes of the government officials towards the poor and the deprived section of the society. The novel is more interesting that most of them intend to fulfill their personal aspirations instead of the welfare of the people. Dr. Onorary Kansal, the chairman of the commission misuses the state government helicopter to bring his sleeping suit from his home without having empathy to the rest. At the same time Agastya witnessed the cases of poverty that had compelled people to be bonded labour even for seventy-five rupees for year. “The bounty of welfare extends in all direction and knows no bounds; only the niggardly and the short sighted think of economics. In a large country you have to think big”(283).

R.P.Singh rightly comments, “...The mammaries of the Welfare State has its theme the day to day regimen of the corrupt and depraved mandarins of the welfare state. People like the high state official Bhupen, Raghupati, the politician Makhamal Bagal. The astrologer Baba Mastaram, the artist Rajani Suroor and several others play out the daily drama of venality and depravity on the bare bosom of the Welfare State” (Singh 51). Chatterjee ridicules the nepotism adopted by the political dynasty ‘Aflatoon’.
Murari Prasad writes “Agastya detests the bureaucratic setup, dominated by hierarchy and statistics and seeks cravings…The novel is particularly harsh on the self seeking politicians and avaricious bureaucrats who feed on the dugs of the Welfare State.” The novelist gives a glimpse on how the politicians and the bureaucrats are dysfunctional contrary to the notion of the Welfare State. The novel is full of innumerable instances of humour that turns sometimes into black humour which Chatterjee is gifted with. Chatterjee’s rare talent of wit, satire and black humour is concerned with the official absurdities of the Welfare State. Raghupati, the chief Revenue Divisional commissioner at Madna and who served in different positions at centre was an icon of proud vicious and corrupt civil servants with excessive greed for power and position is highly criticized by the novelist. Raghupati manipulates things to his own desire and utterly misused his position and commits a ghastly sin in his pooja room which indicates that his religious belief, meditation and faith in God is less important to his physical desire. R.P.Singh comments, carnal desire is “…a running motif at the level of fantasy as well as physically, and forms a crucial component of the exploitative psyche of the mandarin-politician nexus.” (32). Again the writer satirizes the nonfunctional attitudes and emptiness of the administrative functionaries. Agastya feels that the Welfare State is overloaded with many employees and officers of no importance. Moreover Chatterjee ridicules the various schemes, loans and projects which are misused by the beneficiaries as well as the sanctioning authorities.

Chatterjee attacks the existing politicians of the welfare state and compares them as inferior to the highly experienced and even retired bureaucrats when he mentions that the senior most civil servants are “…at the end of their careers have worked at all kinds of Government jobs for thirty five years on the job Training, absolutely, and probably more effectively than Plato’s more formal, academic cultivation of body and mind” (429).
2.2. The Protagonist as an Alienated Youth

Chatterjee’s novels are basically realistic in its approach and bear the testimony of an Indian novelist’s sheer power to hold its readers in its strong grip. Though Chatterjee’s literary works are pure world of entertainment, the novels go through lively, simple, lucid but powerful language. Chattaerjee is capable of amusing his readers with wave of new skills to entertain them. Most of his protagonists are mainly youth of emerging modern India. They represent a disdainful youth, adolescence and successive growth. The internal colonization after the Britishers make feel the central character Agastya feel alienated from the society and confronts a question in himself about the rationale of existing. Sanjay Kumar rightly observes that the central character, Agastya, “suffers from inexorable sense of exile and this feeling of exile is produced in him by an acute awareness of his colonial legacy, the two mutually opposed traditions he has been a heir to” (Kumar 102). The entire plot of the novel *Mammaries of the Welfare State* vividly represents the socio-economic conditions of Indian citizen in some backwater hinterland. The fiction is the clear representation of the stark realities of India and the Indians, their typical lifestyles, of politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, working class people and work culture in different walks of life. The fiction represents the generation of the youth deviated from the disciplined life. Again the Indian educated youth is under the whims of intoxication and abusive drugs. The protagonist confronts the clash between the oriental and occidental waves. The lethargic life style of Indian educated youth being detached from their inner conscience is a clear indicative of the alienated youth from the main stream. The novel delightfully narrates the typical Indian psyche and ideological issues as evident in the society. Again it is humorous, gleeful, and lightweight raillery on the Indian social ethos, social institutions and politics.

The protagonist is a prototype of large number of Indian youth from urban area. Although he is an educated youth his tendency of non existence to the good morals is clearly visible in the very first appearance of the novel. Existential dilemma made Agastya to develop a sense of ironic vision frequently at different occasions in the
fiction. He gets fun out of boredom and indulges in mean thoughts, desires leading to
pleasure from others suffering. A.K. Sing observes that, “it is more out of bewilderment
and confusion that Agastya acts in the manner most unsuitable to him” (Sing 92). The
novel is full of glaring satires which are really heart touching and memorable with lot of
morals to the readers. Chatterjee attacks the attitudes of the bureaucrats for their
carelessness towards government fund. Their excessive greed for foreign trip at the
expense of public funds is perfectly criticized. When they enter administration of the
center they talk much about UNICEF, ILO, IMF, FAO and plan to move around the
world, “…by Jove, the wide world at one’s feet, and in one’s pocket-and a salary in
dollars US to be spent in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Geneva, Newyork and Paris”.

Anjana Sharma, a noted critic on contemporary literature remarks in *The Hindu*,
“Mammries is not for the fai thearted, for those who like their real and fictional worlds
disinfecte d and deodorized”(www.complete-review.com >msotws). Though a bit
recurring, it is a novel which demands and keeps one’s interest not only by its irony
asides and insides jokes but also it dares to voice a moral outrage that very rarely finds
its way into fiction, especially recent Indian English fiction. *The Mammaries of the
Welfare State* is a criticism of corruption, clout, caste and complacency nature that
plagues the society and its values which is rampant in Indian political and
administrative set up which malign the nation or the so called welfare state.

Soumya Bhattacharya writes in *Hindustan Times*, “The Mammaries o the
Welfare State has a greater breath, a broader sweep, a far bigger mélange of
unforgettable characters and often dark, brooding, even scary. The humour is
sometimes all black. Nonetheless it is undoubtedly funny” (www.complete-review.com
> msotws). Nirmal Sandhu writes in *The Sunday Tribune* “It is hilarious satire. But the
issue it focuses on is too serious to be laughed off. It provokes one to realize, how
worthless ones upbringing has been when it comes to facing one’s own
country”(www.complete-review.com >msotws).
After all Chatterjee’s satire is sharp delineated and his lingering over a range of political sagas and descriptions of the vain attempts at getting anything done are pleasurable. His story is attached with all parts of the welfare state. The character ranges from non-acting and lethargic bureaucrats, politicians and businessman. There is frustration but humours throughout the fiction and his novels are basically realistic in approach. Though Chatterjee’s novels don’t have much publicity hype, his writings are pure world entertainment with characters deviated from disciplined life.

2.3. Comic and Satiric Aspects in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English August: An Indian Story

The English Literature in India that spanned over the last thirty years has undergone a dramatic change which witnessed new thoughts and voices in alteration in Indian English writing. Novelists like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Geeta Mehta, Kiran Desai, Vikram Chandra, Chetan Bhagat and a number of other novelists explored the new possibilities of life and literature. Similarly Upamanyu Chatterjee, one of the convincing new voices in the realm of the Indian novel in English literature who has captured a wide range of reputation for his profound comic vision in his writing. Upamanyu Chatterjee was born on 19th December 1959 in Patna, Bihar. He received his education from St. Xavier School and St. Stephen’s College in New Delhi. While studying in high school, Chatterjee wrote a play which was not published at that time, but won the school drama competition. Chatterjee joined Indian administrative service in 1983 from Maharastra Cadre. Chatterjee is a published author and best known for his novel English August: An Indian Story which was also adapted into an acclaimed film of the same title. “Most novel progress, but this one simply chronicles an ongoing anomie and spiritual restlessness (Wasington Post). Dr Nema Nidhi writes on the author in an article that Chatterjee is, “… endowed with a unique style of wry playfulness mixed with keen observation. He defies conventions and is rarely calm or normal in his novels” (Nidhi 40).
The world of Upamanyu Chatterjee, another powerful novelist of postcolonial India paints colourful world of post-independent youth in a realistic way. Iris Murdoh rightly remarks that “Fiction must contain comedy if it attempts a realistic portrayal of human life,” (Hague 9) In fact it is true that literature of any age is incomplete without the genre of comedy. They try to expose the lighter side of the sarcastic and hideous things in our life. The humorists also intend to attack the shortfalls of the people, society and human errors through their comic vision. Comedy as a literary form has been used by many noted writers throughout the world. On the importance of humour in life W.H Davies remarkably wrote in his famous poem, “Leisure”

“No time to wait till her mouth can

Enrich that smile her eyes began?” (Leisure)

George Meridith in Essay on Comedy (1877) Considers an excellent test of civilization of a country to be the “the flourishing of the comic idea and comedy”; and that of the true comedy is that “it shall awaken thoughtful laughter” (140). Thus the purpose of the comic vision is to satirize he shortfalls and promote change by doing so in a comic way.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her article ‘English August an Indian Story’, comments, every aspect of being an IAS trainee has been intelligently probed by the author. Chatterjee takes us inside the mind of a bureaucrat, and tries to show that they are no extraordinary beings, but very much vulnerable to all kinds of human follies.

Anjana Sharma compares Upamanyu’s idea with W.B. Yeats and observes that “Eighty years apart, culture, civilizations, even craft and temperament apart, Yeats and Chatterjee share an identical vision of a decent red, denatured world”(https://www.rjelal.com >…). English August is a novel, first published in 1988 and was adapted into a film of the same name in 1994. It is really a funny novel. Agastya’s story is realistic, amusing stirring and enduring. It merits a great compliment that is far harder to earn than genuine. The book is a typical one. The fiction is a story of young civil servant Agastya Sen, who joins Indian administrative service, which the author himself joined the same age in 1983. This newly appointed civil servant is sent
off for one year’s training in district administration in a small town named Madna. But the course of events is full of fun and satire which is heart touching. At the very outset of the novel Chatterjee aims to make the situation light. Dhrobo asks Agastya for the eight times in one hour that when to meet again as they have to depart for their posting place. Marijuana had caused acute lethargy in them. Agastya was not in position to answer. Dhruo took the day’s forty third cigarette for his lips and took a long time to find out the match box to light his cigarette. “Uh’…said Agastya and paused, for the same reason. Dhrubo put the day’s forty-third cigarette to his lips and seemed to take very long to find his matchbox. His languorous attempts to light a match became frenzied before he succeeded.”(01)

Agastya joins in a small district town at Madna. Again Dhrubo remarks Agastya that he is going to get into deep trouble in Madna. Chatterje’s language is comic oriented and aims to ease the readers. “Dhrubo exalted richly and out the window, and said ‘I’ve a feeling, August, You are going to get hazar fucked in Madna.’”(01) In fact Chatterjee is always attracted towards comic aspects of everyday life and uses various forms of comedy like farce, black humour, satire and irony to portray the follies and foibles of Indian society. The conversations between these two friends, the irreverent expressions shock the conservative readers. Agastya expresses his disinterestedness towards his job which is rooted well in advance in his mind. Lack of seriousness towards his carrier indicates and mirrors the tendency of the modern Indian youth about the very occupation they need to do so. Amazing mix of the language makes the novel more interesting and connects to the real life situation. On his first morning at Madna he felt like “fallen Adam’ after being bitten by mosquitoes on cheeks, beards, ears, got his eyelids swollen and felt that Culcatta’s mosquitoes seemed to be more civilized, they never touched the face. This place has drawn first blood, he thought, was not elephantiasis incurable?”(7) At Madna Agastya is accommodated in a Government Rest House, given the attendant Digamber and the cook Vasant who serves him insipid food. But Ahastya remarks on the very first day. “Dinner was unbelievable, the dal tested like lukewarm chilled shampoo.”(06) Later he says “…because at the rest house I seem to be eating Vasant’s turds” (49). An element of black humour runs here when a bizarre and an unusual comparison takes place between face and food.
Another good sense of humour prevails through the description of the protagonist in the novel. Agastya himself laughs at his own suffering, tedium and displacement. Agastya realizes that he himself has to lead life of different individuals incomprehensibly. Madna gives him a life of various situations leading to a number of departmental assignments. Agastya’s sense of aloofness makes him finding secret pleasure from doping, masturbating and boozing. This incident gives hilarious reference to his personal life and lies to everyone that he is twenty eight years old and married of course; he wanted to say twice, though he is twenty four years old and still a bachelor. “She is in England. She is gone for cancer operation .She has cancer of the breast” (Chatterjee 14).

Again the protagonist of the novel is quite casual and fabricates the stories soon. “Later in his training Agastya told the District Inspector of Land Records that his wife was a Norwegian Muslim.”(15) Another fascinating and childhood experience once again amuse the readers when at school the English teacher asks about his ambition, Agastya is bit careless and moulds the story according to his instinct. Agastya moulds the fact according to him and says that his parents are in Antarctica “… members of the first Indian expedition. Yes, even his mother; she had a PhD in Oceanography from the Sorbonne” (15).

Another delightful and light moment of the novel comes when Agastya is in the company of Superintendent of Police Mr. Dhiraj Kumar and lies that he has climbed Everest the previous summer. The protagonist is quite amusing and the author reveals laughter throughout the novel. Ahgastya feeds his personal details that fit to his mentality and tells differently to different persons about his marital status. When Mr. Kumar asks about his wife and her cancer he says, “I am not married, yet, sir. I would have been married long ago, but my father disapproves her, she’s a Muslim” (110). Interestingly when Kumar recalls as heard that his wife was dying of cancer in England, Agastya says “Me? My wife? No, Sir, there is some confusion that’s my cousin” (110).
Later after few days S.P. Kumar asks “When are you getting married? Sen?” ‘Not for a while’. He had forgotten that what story he had fabricated to Kumar” (Chatterjee 139).

The novelists employ the elements of comedy as an attack on the shortfalls of people society and human errors. Mark Twain remarks “Humour is the great thing, the saving thing after all. The minute it crops up, all our harnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments flit away and a sunny spirit takes their place.” But the other kind of comedy that sometimes looks bizarre, freakish and shocking is called ‘Black humour’ or the term ‘Black comedy’. According to the Random House Dictionary of English language, Black humour is a literary form that combines the morbid and grotesque with humour and farce to give a disturbing effect and convey the absurdity and cruelty of life. Encyclopedia defines the black humour as, ‘writing that juxtaposes morbid or ghastly elements with comical ones that underscore the senseless or the futility of life.’ Upamanyu Chatterjee employs his black comedy with a pinch of satire to make the protagonist Agastya and others expressing wry humour about the cynical ugly bewildering situations they come across. The author uses the technique like fragmented narration and different point of view and depicts wired and bizarre situations thus enabling the readers encounter frequent ‘tongue in cheek’ expressions which are amusing and entertaining.

Upamanyu Chatterjee published his novel English August: An Indian Story in 1988 and was filmed later on depicts Agastya Sen as a protagonist in the novel. Agastya is a city born and highly educated Anglophile and likes to be called ‘August’ or ‘English’. His father and uncle call him ‘Ogu’ fondly. He lost his mother at his early age and his father is a retired IAS. Agastya is recruited to the Indian Administrative Service and is posted at Madna, as a trainee in an ugly, hot, small hinterland town of south India. But here Upamanyu Chatterjee adopts his technique of satire pinching a hole in the character of Agastya who is unable to adjust at Madna, uninterested in his job and reflects in an ironic way, comments silently at every situation in a tone of humour. The novel is all about the protagonist’s experiences and reflections as a trainee
at a small town where he feels dislocated, lives without any ambition or conviction, preoccupied by marijuana alcohol and sexual fantasies. After some encounters with his senior officers observing the dire living conditions of the tribal habitants, visiting a leper rehabilitation center he realizes his responsibilities and he is finally posted as Assistant Collector at Koltanga. Chatterjee has been successful in making the novel a lively satiric novel that mirrors the reflections of the modern urban educated youth and the lighter side of the affectation and pompous lifestyle of Indian bureaucrats.

2.4. Chatterjee’s Fiction as the Expression of Stark Reality of the Society

The protagonist represents a disdainful youth, adolescence and successive growth. The entire plot of the novel vividly represents the socio-economic conditions of Indian citizen in some backwater hinterland. The fiction is the clear representation of the stark realities of India and the Indians, their typical lifestyles, of politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, working class people and work culture in different walks of life. It represents the generation of the youth deviated from the disciplined life. Again the Indian educated youth is under the whims of intoxication and abusive drugs. The protagonist confronts the clash between the oriental and occidental waves. The lethargic life style of Indian educated youth being detached from their inner conscience is a clear indicative of the alienated youth from the main stream. The novel delightfully narrates the typical Indian psyche and ideological issues as evident in the society. It is humorous, jovial, and frivolous raillery on the Indian social culture, societal institutions and politics.

The protagonist is a prototype of large number of Indian youth from urban area. Although he is an educated youth his tendency of non existence to the good morals is clearly visible in the very first appearance of the novel. The first paragraph contains some words like ‘time’ ‘stray dog’, ‘marijuana’ and ‘acute lethargy’ indicate the negation of the healthy positioning of Indian youth. Apart from this the condition of the youth is really shocking as they have been habituated by the slang language being
affected by the western society. Dhruba, the closest friend to Agastya says, “I have a feeling Agust, you are going to get hazar fucked in Madna.” These slang language significantly elaborate the fate and future of Indian youth on the crossroads of the society. The colonial power has already gone but the neo process of neo-colonialism is coming to front with its excessive impact of western cultural values. Indian ideological impact goes in vain.

Agastya’s adolescence period is not fruitful as to expectation in Darjeeling who couldn’t immerse himself into success. Rather Agastya was distinctively confined to a handful to his friend circle. Agastya and his friend Prashant were envious of the colour of those “Anglo and Tib thighs” because it was ‘not like theirs’. The novelist satirizes at the attitude of alienation from his own entity as he wished to be like Anglo-Indian having same look. Agastya gradually develops the desire to be an Englishman and also developed the tendency of soft drugs even in his school days. Agastya is not happy over his lucrative job, which every Indian aspires to get. But it is completely different for him. Agastya doesn’t have curiosity, excitement and enthusiasm for this challenging job who feels him to be pushed under circumstantial compulsion. On his first train journey from Delhi to Madana, Agastya’s mind is filled with strange feelings. He locks himself in the toilet and ‘smoked some marijuana’. At the very beginning of the training Agastya feels very awkward as he could not adjust to the reality at Madna and feels alienated. The “shabby stations of small towns, incurious patient eyes and weather-beaten bicycles at a level crossing, muddy children and buffalo at a water wholes pass behind his mind and he doesn’t understand if he would be spending months in a dot in this hinterland”(4-5). The rural India with its typical “cigarette and pan dhabas, disliking food stalls, both lit by fierce kerosene lamps, cattle and clanging rickshaws on the road” etc are disturbing elements as he is from metropolitan background.

A sense of self satisfactory pride reigns in the character of Dhrubo for earning a highest academic degree Ph.D from Yale but at the same time he forgets the past where he earned previous requisite qualification from India. Agastya’s first day in district administration has been remarkable. According to him the district administration runs
on the basis of tradition set during colonial period. The Britishers had set the principles. But it was Indianized afterwards. In postcolonial period the collector is accessible to every ordinary man. In fact, Agastya lacks this quality. According to the author the administration is a complex business and the young officer lacks initiative and cannot really be trained in its artifices. In fact Agastya learnt nothing. Zeal and enthusiasm was absent in Agastya. His mind is caught in some obscure and irrational.

An eminent critic Dr. Mukhul Dikshit opines that “Chatterjee has, for the first time focused on the new class of westernized urban Indians that was hitherto ignored in the regional as well as English fiction of India” (Wikipedia). Humour takes of the ordinary characters or situations and exaggerates them far beyond the normal satire or irony. The satirists satirize even the great icons of the nation, religious beliefs and even the deeply rooted sentiments of the people. For instance Agastya observes the Gandhi Hall beside the police station of Madna and is bewildered at its dilapidated stage, its broken windows, old walls and it appears to him as a sight of a TV news clip of ‘bomb-hit Beirut’. He asks the collector about the funny looking statue. At the interview for the post of teachers the education officer and the DDO Mr. Bajaj asks some questions to candidates. Agastya enters, joins them in the process. Agastya’s entry made the situation solemn. Out of twenty three candidates only six had turned up. Last candidate was called who was a graduate and mumbled the answers of the preliminary questions.

“Yes Bajaj asked who is called the father of nation?’’Nehru’. A pat reply. ‘I see, and what is Gandhi then? Perhaps the uncle of the nation?’(88) He has an unerring touch and perfect balance to maintain continuous comic entertainment without ever descending into farce.

Most of Indian youths suffer from anxiety and insecurity in the society related to profession according to qualification. Ambition may not match to the expectation of the youth. There is a rising rate of unemployment among them. He has to compromise with his ego, identity and status. A sense of identity diffusion runs through the novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee. However Agastya is undoubtedly very lucky to have
accomplished most attractive job in this country. In fact, Agastya differs from others where he likes a secretive and complete freedom from any chains or restrictions.

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