

# UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S NOVELS ARE MIRROR TO THE SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** The Main Purpose of this paper is to discuss the themes of Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels and to focus on modern day problems portrayed in Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels. Upamanyu Chatterjee's writing has recreated a new approach of Indians towards the issues related to 21<sup>st</sup> century India. He has penned these literary miracles-*English, August: An Indian Story, The Mammaries of the Welfare State, The Last Burden, Weight Loss, Way To Go, Fairy Tales at Fifty, The Revenge of the Non-Vegetarian*. Each of his writings mirrors changing family fabric, loopholes in Indian administration and rootlessness of youth of the modern day India. He is the voice of upper middle class educated Indian youth who are attracted to western culture. His diction is fascinating, characters are life-like and his humour touches the heart of everybody.

**Key Words:** Rootlessness, diction, family fabric, wayward, dilemma, indecisiveness, bisexuality.

## INTRODUCTION

Upamanyu Chatterjee's themes of the above novels have novelty and a great power to pull the crowd. They have an impact on the 21<sup>st</sup> century reader. He depicts Indian youth who don't have spiritual strength and leading a wayward life in his novels. Chatterjee throws light on family life, institution of marriage, love, sex, gender inequality, extra marital relationship, child abuse, bisexuality, corrupt administration and the dilemma and indecisiveness of young India. People of different diaspora admire the works of Chatterjee. His themes highlight the conflicts of society, frustration and despair of men, women, and young people in the society. Science and Technology is not given much preference in his novels as we don't even find someone using a mobile phone for communication or for other purpose.

Chatterjee has a very good flow of thoughts, spontaneity in his expression and he deeply probes into the psyche of people. His works contribute in understanding the big problems existing in modern Indian society and this probe can contribute hugely in the area of literary criticism and in research areas.

## Upamanyu Chatterjee-A Biographical sketch

Upamanyu Chatterjee is well known Indian writer of fiction and is also praised by critics as an intellectual, conjurer of words as he creates magic with his words or language. He is admired by many people from foreign lands as there is a kind of newness in his thoughts and he is also gutsy to express his opinion on issues which people shy away from discussing in the society. He focuses on controversial topics, like bisexuality, addiction to drugs, child abuse and so on. He is invited to many literary fests as a guest and his works are discussed in conferences. Most of his works are critically acclaimed.

**Personal Life:** Upamanyu Chatterjee was born on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1959 in Patna, Bihar. His father's name is Mr. Sudhir Ranjan Chatterjee. His education started at St. Xavier's School and completed his graduation from St. Stephen's College, Delhi. He was influenced by a Hitchcock drama, 'Dilemma' and penned a play when he was still in High School. It also won the school drama competition. It satirizes the rules and regulations of school. Chatterjee mastered in English Literature from Delhi University. His career

started in 1983 when he joined the Indian Administrative Service and this is also a starting point of his literary career. It was his wish to become a literary person and his wish was fulfilled when he wrote his first novel *English, August: An Indian Story* in 1990, for which he received a huge standing ovation from the literary world and was accepted by people all over the world with open hands. He wrote seven novels and a few short stories. Chatterjee lived as a Writer in Residence at the University of Kent, U.K. He became the Director (Languages), in the ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India in 1998. He took voluntary retirement and he stays with his wife and two daughters. Now he is thoroughly enjoying his literary career by attending conferences and fests which give him scope to express his thoughts.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's collection of seven novels deal with a great variety of themes. *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988), was his first novel followed by *The Last Burden* (1993), *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000), *Weight Loss* (2006), *Way to Go* (2010), *Fairy Tale at Fifty* (2014) and *The Revenge of the Non-vegetarian* (2018). Though his novels focus on the family system, political and legal systems in a farcical way, he received appreciation from all for his portrayal of real life situations. He brings out the trifles of Indian family system, corruption in Indian bureaucracy with great ease. Upamanyu Chatterjee has written a few short stories to his credit.

Chatterjee's first novel is *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988). It is a fantastic piece of fiction with characters and situations so realistic. He narrates the story of Agastya Sen, an Indian Civil Servant who is fascinated by westernized lifestyle. Though August is an IAS, his thoughts are filled with women, literature and drugs.

Through this novel, he focuses on the essence of family life and certain issues that are based on the upper middle class westernized educated urban youth. This class of India is underplayed in English fiction. Its content has fascinated many people as it is about modern India, its family fabric and the alienation of educated young urbanites. The protagonist, Agastya Sen, who is called by his childhood pals as August, as he has a penchant for English language and western lifestyle, lands in Madna, the hottest region in India away from his urban lifestyle. He is bored, stoned, frustrated and also gets into masturbation when he is alone. He is into Indian Administrative Service not out of passion or to earn money or to enjoy power and authority but by chance. His journey from a lonely, disinterested young man to a slightly changed person becomes evident when he meets the father and son duo who run a charity institution.

Chatterjee's second novel *The Last Burden* was published in 1993. Upamanyu Chatterjee is famous for his sardonic sense of humour and powerful diction. *The Last Burden* portrays the characters and the life of the twentieth century middle class. The highlight of the novel is its fabulous portrayal of characters, humorous diction, and how parents become arduous for their children. It brilliantly portrays the life of Shyamanand and Urmila who belong to a middle-class family. The couple stays with their two sons Burfi, Jamun. Burfi is married to Joyce and they have two children, Pista and Doom. Jamun comes home when his mother Urmila is on her deathbed.

The novel examines how family bonds are strained if there is no proper understanding among the members of the family and they don't give respect to each other. Jamun becomes nostalgic and thinks about childhood incidents in which his mother suffers gender inequality at the hands of society and her husband though she completely devotes herself to her husband and her children. After all this, she never gets any respect which she deserves from her husband.

When she is on deathbed, the same husband sheds tears as she is the only supporting system for him and gets angry with his son Burfi who never cares about his mother. Jamun loves his mother and does not want to lose her to death. Jamun does not have any respect for other married women. When Urmila was under medication, Jamun never loses an opportunity to have a physical relationship with Kasturi who was his girlfriend and married to someone else now. This moral degradation is evident throughout the novel. The story deals with family relations and selfishness of humans.

Chatterjee's third novel is *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* which was published in 2000. It is a sequel to his first novel, '*English, August*'. It is appreciated as a satire by a popular writer at the peak of his career. The humorous remarks and dark comedy by Chatterjee make us familiar with the dark side of Indian bureaucracy and he never loses the opportunity to lampoon the entire system. He received the Sahitya Academy Award in 2004 for this novel.

August is the protagonist of this novel who is matured in thoughts by now. He tries to help people and probes into the system which is rotten and corrupt. The novel deals with child abuse, superstitions of political leaders, their belief in babas and how honesty is not respected. The title of the novel itself talks about how the state is compared to a goat and its mammaries (Indian administration) are completely sucked and exploited by the political leaders leaving nothing to its lamb. i.e. the people.

Chatterjee's fourth novel *Weight Loss*, published in 2006 is a dark comedy by critics. The story highlights the main character, Bhola who leads a peculiar life and his sexual escapades make everybody wonder whether such people also exist in the society. The craftsmanship of Chatterjee is displayed through his characters and through depiction of dark comedy in his novel. Bhola is a bisexual who suffers from inferiority complex. This feeling of infra dig ruins his life as first he wants to lose his physical weight and craves for his teacher, Antony and another teacher, Jeremiah equally in his adolescence. Then he continues a physical relationship with Titli and her husband which is a weird quality of any human. He gets married but is unable to lose the weight of his weird and rotten feelings and relationships. Though he loves his daughter and tries to overcome physical and mental weight, it becomes an uphill task for him and commits suicide out of guilt.

The content and the theme of the novel may be shocking to those who are not exposed to this kind of raw characterization, language and story. Chatterjee is bold enough to expose the flaws of human beings with his bold statements.

*Way To Go* is one the most difficult books by Chatterjee and it is a sequel to Chatterjee's prequel *The Last Burden*. It deals with the relationship between father and son, loneliness and also deals with perils of old age, frustration, degeneration and death.

*Fairy Tales at Fifty* is his other novel which is discussed in this paper. This is the story of a pauper, Angulimala, a young man who is eccentric. Angulimala's sexual adventures are complete only if he kills his victims. He has his brother, Nirip, an "impotent prince." Angulimala was separated from his brother, Nirip at his birth. Nirip, lives in a Mumbai high-rise. The story is filled with witty remarks, horrific incidents. The story has a backdrop of Angulimala and Budha of ancient times, in which the serial killer Angulimala, kills his victims, chops off their thumb and makes a rosary of their finger bones. He wears it around his neck like a garland. Angulimala kills 999 people till Budha arrives and enlightens him.

*The Revenge of the Non-Vegetarian* was published in the year 2018 in India by Speaking Tiger. On a September night in 1949, a house is burnt in Batia and everything in it is reduced to ashes, including a family of six and their dog. Nadeem Dalv was the head of the family. The investigation is done by Madhusudan Sen. The novel throws light on disparity between haves and have nots as the murder takes place for the sake of non-vegetarian soup which the murderer, Basanth kumar craves for.

**Conclusion:** Upamanyu Chatterjee wrote his novels based on the Indian Administrative System, the institution of marriage and family, superstitions, bisexuality, child abuse which he narrated with gripping plots. This paper draws a conclusion or makes a logical judgment based on the discussions, intense comparative analysis executed in the previous paragraphs. It also enlists the findings of the research. The prime aim of this paper is to research and to study that Chatterjee's novels are an exact reflection of the society which highlight the change of family fabric in modern India, the conflicts in it, cultural clashes, Indian bureaucracy and its corruption. The paper investigates cultural hybridity, suggests gender equality, social equality. The paper makes a proposal for further studies.

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