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UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE: Phase 1- A STUDY OF HIS IMAGE AND SYMBOLS

Abstract:

There is no doubt in the dictum what French critic Buffon asserted long ago ‘l style est l home meme’ (‘style is the man himself ’). Though the dictum became a cliché in the arena of twenty-first century English studies, yet the dictum has its resonance in Upmanyu Chatterjee. Generally the students of literature begin their respective English studies at the graduate and post-graduate levels with Francis Bacon who happens to be the most economical writer till now (in respect of word-placement and syntactical pattern) in English literature.

Keywords: Protagonist, waffle, lower middle class families

Introduction:

Time passes and trends also change with the changing of time, still some basics never change. Image and symbols are the basic tenets, rather the primary pillars of stylistic motif of a writer whether he/she is writing in English or in other vernacular. As man becomes civilized through a gradual process of adaptations and evolutions, so also the case with the history of creative literature.

It changes its colour and shape according to the visions and voices of a particular author. There is a distinguishing method, rather a stylistic motif of all writers; everyone is special in their own way.

‘English, August’, Upmanyu Chatterjee’s first novel:

‘English, August’, Upmanyu Chatterjee’s first novel shows the author’s unique way of handling images and symbols. The very first paragraph is ominous for Chatterjee starts with a quotation from Macbeth where the witches’ words prove to be supernatural. In the very third line of the novel Dhruvo’s query, “So when shall we meet again?” finally records the uneasiness as well as the dreary world of Agastya. In the same way the use of Indianite English words like ‘hazard fucked’, ‘horny women’ etc. prove to be very symbolical as the novel advances forward. In the second page Chatterjee employs the symbol of eroticism when he, at length, describes his own childhood experiences at Darjeeling with Tibetan girls:–

“That was a ten-year-old joke from their school-days in Darjeeling, when they had been envious of some of the Anglo-Indian boys who spoke and behaved differently, and did alarmingly badly in exams and didn’t seem to mind, they were the ones who were always with the Tibetan girls and claimed to know all about sex. On an early summer afternoon, in the small football field among the

hills, with an immaculate sky and the cakelike white-and-brownness of Kanchanjanga, Agastya and Prashant had been watching (Agastya disliked football and Prashant disliked games) the usual showing off with the ball. Shouts in the air from the Anglos (which increased whenever any Tibetan female groups passed the field, echoing like a distant memory, “Pass it here, men!” ‘This way, men!’ ‘You can’t shoot, your foot’s made of turd or what men!’ (Agastya had never heard any Anglo say ‘man’).”¹

Then again the detailed description of Madna and the references of Ramayana and Mahabharata symbolise the kinky rural atmosphere where Agastya was bound to stay. The allusion of ‘the fallen Adam’ in the seventh page shows his acquaintances with English literature and Christian mythology as well as holds up the mirror of Agastya’s terrible feeling and disgust at Madna. Similarly, R. Tamse’s poem influences him a lot because it symbolizes longing, remembrances, pain and compulsion:–

*“Away from my old life and my spouse,
So many days at this Circuit House,
Away from Goa, my dear home,
On office work I have to roam.”²*

The rhymed verse:

This rhymed verse, though seems ridiculous and odd yet, symbolizes isolation and the pent up feelings which are the characteristics of a post modern man. Chatterjee is also a fine critic when we find his sharp criticism on the grotesquery of governance:–

“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 expected it of them, which was sickening, or perhaps they were humouring them, which was somehow worse .”³

The sense of purposelessness is writ large in the novel:–

“Sitting with the three men, he was again assailed by a sense of the unreal. I don’t look like a bureaucrat, what am I doing here. I should have been a photographer, or a maker of ad films, something like that, shallow and urban.”⁴

It symbolises the bordem of Agastya at Madna:

It symbolises the bordem of Agastya at Madna. As the novel advances forward we find thousands of some images that symbolize Agastya’s negation and anxiety. In the Glasgow Herald Review Prof. Mike Peterson comments, “Each and every line of English, August is a symbol in its own way. The novel is a jazzy, baggy, hyperbolic, comic,

wryly observed account of Indian bureaucracy and its dismal state of affairs as well as Agastya's myriad minded nature."⁵

Chatterjee further traces the point that Agastya is in a dismal condition and the story of Agastya is further revealed in the statement that follows:–

“Over dessert, Agastya encountered Rajan, the Collector of Paal. He was stunned to discover that Rajan was as lethal as his wife (and they recalled Madan, ‘I feel quite happy when two really fucked people marry each other-the world begins to look organized.’). Rajan was aggressive and open, and given to continual self-revelation in the conviction that he fascinated his listeners. He had taught Physics, somewhere in America, ‘with some Nobel laureate Physicists,’ pronounced fissicists. From a twenty-minute monologue Agastya learnt that Physics had led him to Kant who had led him to the Indian Administrative Service. ‘Even among those fissicists there were petty jealousies. I was getting nowhere, I felt. I was restless’– Et tu, Rajan, smiled Agastya.

‘Why are you smiling?’ ”⁶

The passage categorically symbolises the aggressive yet the humanistic nature of Agastya in the sense that he was in a dilemma how to resolve

the encounter with Rajan. Rajan is the colleague of ‘Paal’ and happens also to be the Collector of Paal. But the personal life of Rajan shocked Agastya rather mesmerized Agastya that how should Rajan live in a hostile condition. The entire passage is full of symbolical fabric not only for the omniscient narrative but the liveliness and the graphic images such as desert, aggressive and open really fucked etc.—all these symbolize the morbid state of Agastya as well as Rajan.

Similarly, at the end of the novel Agastya was not sure whether Kumar had been unnecessarily generous or incredibly base. Agastya’s attachment with Kumar cannot be looked aside and Kumar’s statement is also very symbolical in the course of the novel. Kumar’s statement with Agastya is crucial at the climactic point of the novel:—

“Kumar would have sent a police manial to buy those tickets, and given his style of functioning, would not have paid the menial any money in advance. And after buying the tickets the menial would not have had the guts to ask someone like Kumar for the money. If he was going to pay the menial 900 for two train tickets, he would hardly pay more than 300 for Agastya’s ticket out of his own pocket. Perhaps Kumar would repay the menial with a favour (a desired posting, or the stoppage of a transfer), and had smoothly pocketed for himself Agastya’s 100. In his place,

smiled Agastya, I' d' ve taken much more. May be it was a sort of deposit towards future blue films, and he smiled again, anarchistically, this was certainly a scoop for the Dainik, especially since it was all conjecture; he thought about this for a while, but there was no way of getting the story to the Danik without getting himself into a mess.”⁷

Literature Review:

The statement altogether symbolizes the idiosyncrasies of the administration. The entire passage seems to be more naturalistic through the symbols because Chatterjee has been delineated the Characters in such a way that all are bragging in the way as administrate does.

At the very end of the novel Agastya's odium feelings find no fine way and the embalming gloom is also all pervading in the novel:—

“He would have to get up, sooner or later, for something or the other. He joined his palms together and looked at them, mounds and lines, long thin fingers. He wished that he had believed in palmistry, believed in anything beyond himself. He tautened his fingers and let them collapse, again and again. Through them he could glimpse, darkly, fragments of two sunsets, and boatmen in Japanese conical hats.

He had met so many people in Madna, but not Tamse. But, then, he hadn't really wanted to meet him, just as he hadn't wanted to meet Baba Ramanna, they might have proved disappointments. He had liked this Tamse of 1962, but how ridiculous the later Tamse had become, the government artist, who created statues and Rest Houses for people whose idea of art could be found in the drains. Tamse had to learn, he thought, that to be lonely was not enough.”⁸

Result:

This is actually the catastrophic ending of this novel and Upmanyu Chatterjee finally sums up the dismal state of affairs and the inferno in which modern man lives.

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