

**“A short summary- The idea of the welfare state in Upamanyu  
chatterjee's fiction”**

*by*

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**Abstract:**

The idea of the **welfare state** is one of the major themes in the fictions of Upmanyu Chatterjee. Being an IAS officer he very much stresses the point of the welfare state. Through the protagonists in the novels Chatterjee tries to show the significance of the welfare state amidst the ambiguity and gloom of the protagonists. He shows that how the heroes of his novels themselves ridicules the “waffle”.

**Keywords:** Protagonist, waffle, lower middle class families

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**Introduction:**

How finely Chatterjee builds up the structure and also the superstructure of his novel through these sharp, vivid, minute and poignant observations. In this case the illness of the mother was highlighted with utmost attention as well as with passion. Jamun never intends to fall in such a condition or in the midst of such a chaos, or to say, in a 'hurly-burly' condition. But as life has no definite way of maintaining its pattern rather as life is patternless or designless, so also the life of Jamun and his surroundings. He never feels kinship with this particular world as well as with his family but the given situation, the incidents or episodes in his life compel him to think, his thinking enables him to undergo the journey of frustration, of anger and pain, of ordeal and anguish.

#### **Discussion on Novels:**

All these make the character of Jamun more unpredictable as well as undesirable as post-modern critics as well as the deconstructionists always emphasize in their treatises.

Moreover, the sharp-edged description reminds us of the indecisive qualities of the heroes in T.S. Eliot. As we know, T.S. Eliot was the progenitor of the new sort of writing in the modern age. All sorts of literature, whatever genre, written after Eliot follows the same 'aesthetic of indeterminacy'. Upmanyu Chatterjee also follows the footsteps of Eliot in the sense that all his heroes or rather characters follow the same dynamics, the dynamics of indeterminacy. Whether 'English, August' or 'The Last Burden' or the fiction 'Weight Loss' we always find the same tensions and 'aporias' as it is the characteristic method of the novelist.

#### **A brief Study on Welfare State:**

Some more textual input would suffice the tale of struggle and pain:—

*“At fifteen, and at twenty-eight, Jamun recognized the disparity in what money denotes to him, and to Burfi—rather, at fifteen, he was witheringly certain; at twenty-eight, he fancied that a difference in their attitudes might exist, but also that it might no matter. He himself gauges money to be wily. If he has the money, he’ll buy chewing gum, or condoms, or a refrigerator. If he doesn’t, he will muzzle himself to do without; the self-discipline becomes in itself quite piquant. But for Burfi, deprivation is failure, a cudgel to his self-esteem.”<sup>13</sup>*

In this decisive paragraph also the story of deprivation and failure looms large and Chatterjee presents both the characters larger than life. They, as it seems, are the stalwarts of attaining the life and its meaning at any cost. The problem and meaning of life becomes very relevant here, so also the piquancy of the situation. Both the characters have their way to tell the world the shortcomings of their own as well as their perceived emotions and passions. They never fight out or ruled out the given situation in which they are in; rather they wished away all the hindrances of life, though ambiguous in their own way. Now, the question of ethical purgation that comes into mind should be sorted out. In few sentences, we should try to summarize the point. Ethical purgation is the summum bonum of all human beings whether of a man belongs before modern period or of a story of a person of the post- modern age. The purgation or the biological release as we were hearing from the days of Aristotle still having its relevance in the novels of Chatterjee. Whether Agastya or Jamun or Burfi—all tends to be purgation, or to say, all are having their release through different sorts of activities. The activities may be in the form of taking drugs or marijuana or having condoms in the pocket or

through uttering strange like ‘hazard fucked’ at the very first novel. Their frustration finds its release through these obscene, rather adulterous activities. In this sense, we can compare the heroes of Chatterjee with the heroes of Henry Fielding, especially with Tom in ‘Tom Jones’. In both the novels ‘Tom Jones’ or to say in Chatterjee’s ‘English, August’, or ‘The Last Burden’ we find a series of adventure. Though the adventure was not well organized in ‘Tom Jones’, it was episodic and having no brevity of expression. But in Chatterjee’s novels the adventures are not grand in scale; these are more, naive adventures of life in which the heroes plunge deep into the sea of life as well as in the world but ultimately ends with dissatisfaction and frustration. Only journey remains, the works or the naive deeds remain in the pages, in black words, not the essence. This is the way the world ends, and this is also the way the heroes of Chatterjee ultimately reach to their ultimate destination or to say more specially, to the ‘doom’.

### **The Mammaries of the Welfare State:**

‘The Mammaries of the Welfare State’, though it is a sequel to ‘English, August’, finely delineates the grotesquery of governance and worthlessness of the administrative posts in India. The boon of civil services becomes a bane in the twentieth century India.

The pangs, agony and the pressure through which an administrative officer works in the present day scenario are hinted out in the novel. Furthermore, the political interference in decision-making the undue pressures from the political parties and pressure-groups on an administrative officer–has been emphatically shown in this particular novel. An example from the text would suffice the routine-work as well as the arid condition of an administrative officer:–

*“Early one June morning, the Municipal Corporation showed up at his door. It had decided that week to clean up his part of Bhayankar—a routine exercise that it undertakes every month in different parts of the city, to tear down the shacks of those without clout, harass all who do not bribe to devastate the property of the unprepared. Under the noses of the police and the demolition squad, however, Bhootnath Gaitonde waved a stay order from the court. The worm had turned—and moved like lightning.”<sup>14</sup>*

The passage aptly shows the monotony and the hectic life-style of the officers as well as their works. Moreover, the monotonous activities mar the intrinsic as well as the innermost life of the officers. The problem of delivering the act of development to the general public also comes to the forefront because, at times, the work, especially in the public departments, suffers from the complexity of red-ribbons. And the officers have to undergo these trials and tribulations in their journey to the administrative reforms. In this context, the words of Khushwant Singh are apt to notice. He asserted that “most of the services done by the administrative officers are forgotten, but the lacuna in them highlighted in the print as well as in the electronic media”.<sup>15</sup>

### **General View on Augustya Sen:**

This is the other-way of looking to the life of those officers and their lives. Here also Augustya finds no respite as in ‘English, August’. His restlessness looms large in the periphery of the novel. He becomes a tiny-tot in the hands of fate, or to say, in the chain of norms, rules and regulations. The entire novel, indeed, is a commentary and a saga of the dismantled predicament and condition of the administrative reforms in

India. Through a particular instance, the novelist tries to hint out or focus on the general scenario of the nation.

Now, coming to the last but not the least fiction of Chatterjee's 'Weight Loss', we can unhesitatingly say that novel also focuses on the discrepancies of the society. It is also searing passage through bureaucratic India laughter and disgust, grotesquery and astonishment looms large in the novel. The lines that follow would prove the point:–

*“Something seemed to fit into place in Bhola’s head accompanied by the click made by the safety catch of a gun in a slick gangster film soundtrack. In a dozen assignments, he had seen Moti naked in the back room of Mrs. Manchanda’s flat, shy and happy at being desired, yet with his face suffused with blood, crimson with mortification at his own eternally flaccid state. ‘He can’t get it up, so that’s it.’ Bhola blurted out the revelation, and then tensed as he wondered whether Borkar would be puzzled by how Bhoola knew.”<sup>16</sup>*

So the paragraph is sufficient enough to comprehend the hectic schedule of Bhola in the midst of pressure as well as the difficult circumstances. Chatterjee, very minutely discusses the day to day activities here to create a sort of poignancy in the novel.

### **Consequence:**

However, the discussion of the four succeeding novels of Chatterjee makes it clear that the crazy clamour of voices does revolve round the every nook and corner of his novels. The actions and interactions along with the 'life's little ironies make the situation more complex for the characters in the novels. But Chatterjee's busy eyes and brilliant observation made it possible to delve deep or peep through into

the characters and show their ‘aching joys’ and dizzy raptures that brings out the notion of the welfare state.

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