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**Phase 1- STRANGE OBSESSIONS AND EVASIVE FEAR IN UPAMANYU  
CHATTERJEE'S FICTION**

**Abstract:**

Modern novels, down from the age of Virginia Woolf or Evelyn Waugh, the most important trend that has been seen, is its realistic nature. Strange obsessions and evasive fear syndrome is the altered reality in Upmanyu Chatterjee's novels. Strange obsessions and evasive fear looms large in his novels through realism, if not naturalism. Realism may be conceived as realistic portrayal of the society and men; the other way of realism is what we call 'naturalism'. The novels of Camus or Kafka are naturalistic rather than realistic. Naturalism as we know is extreme realism that we find even in Honore de Balzac's 'Pere Goriot' where father Goriot is facing extreme realistic way of life, the reason being his own daughters. Realism is of different kinds and colours, that depend on conceiver what one actually conceives.

**Keywords:** Indian novels, Upamanyu Chatterjee's style in his novels

**Introduction:**

Indian English literature has had a great legacy of portraying the realistic literature down from the three musketeers, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan. The realism of these masters is of different kinds, quite alike the realism of the new novels presented in Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Arun Joshi and even in Upmanyu Chatterjee. Upmanyu Chatterjee, quite alike the other novelists of his era has depicted the bleak realism and the hard times which he faces in his life. Chatterjee always wrote in an ironic mode, his brand of irony requires as its vehicle a peculiar language. It should be the language that looks playing but at the time unfolds layers of suggestions and innuendoes. He wields his ironic flail against degenerated society which has brought about socio-moral corruption in the national scene. His novels are also political and represent the political reality in a veiled form. He

analyses the matrix of existence in post- modern India and finds it to be largely woven with the warp and woof mainly political in nature and traces the perversions and total loss of values in national life as well as in our personal life. He points out the ill politics which has become so all embarrassing that there is no vital area of our life which is not governed by the nature and quality of the political life and atmosphere we are creating and living in. For all the ills that we set our life, degeneration and corruption, corroding our identities, total loss of moral values, gloom and frustrations pervading everywhere. The source of the malady lies deeper and consequently does not warrant such a sweeping generalization; at the same time it may be admitted and our experience bears it out, that it is difficult to disagree with Chatterjee.

#### **A Brief Study:**

Actually Upmanyu Chatterjee is a novelist of a disillusioned age. He is by his education and heritage, a misfit in the modern world. He had a profound sense of his age. He was pre-eminently concerned with urban life. Though the places in his novels are the tiny cities and villages, but he portrays the features of big cities. His novels are of streets, houses and people and not of the woods, fields and flowers. We are much impressed by his characters and their gross selfishness and sensuality. The novels of Chatterjee are pervaded by dissmelled steak in passage ways, of stale beer, of cocktails and cigarettes, of dusty paper flowers, of females in shuttered.

The very first novel of the author shows the utter realism. In ‘English, August’ the very opening paragraph itself strikes the key- note what is yet to happen in the novel:–

*“Through the windshield they watched the wide silent road, so well lit and dead. New Delhi, one in the morning, a stray dog flashed across the road, sensing prey. ‘So when shall we meet again?’ asked Dhrubo for the eighth time in one hour. Not that parting was too agonizing and that he couldn’t bear to leave the ear, but that marijuana caused acute lethargy.*

*‘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. Watching him Agastya laughed silently.*

*Dhrubo exhaled richly out of the window, and said, 'I've a feeling, August, you're going to get hazaar fucked in Madna.' Agastya had just joined the Indian Administrative Service and was going for a year's training in district administration to a small district town called Madna."*<sup>1</sup>

The ominous paragraph and the references of witches from Macbeth, 'forty - third cigarette', 'hazaar fucked' etc. show the depressing and bleak atmosphere of the novel. The life of Agastya and Dhrubo had been shown with great detail in the novel. Another paragraph will clarify the point:–

*"They smoked Dhrubo leaned forward to drop loose tobacco from his shirt. 'Madna was the hottest place in India last year, wasn't it. It will be another world, completely different. Should be quite educative.' Dhrubo handed the smoke to Agastya. 'Excellent stuff. What'll you do for sex and marijuana in Madna?'"*<sup>2</sup>

The detailed description of Madna is also a representation of the reality in which the people of Madna live:–

*"Glimpses of Madna en route; cigarette- and-paan dhabas, disreputable food stalls, both lit by fierce kerosene lamps, cattle and clanging rickshaws on the road, and the rich sound of trucks in slush from an overflowing drain; he felt as though he was living someone else's life.*

*His education began on the first evening itself. The room at the Rest House was big, and furnished not like a room, but like a house. It had a bed, a dressing table, a dining table with four chairs, a sofa, two armchairs, a desk and chair, two small tables and a beautiful bookshelf. The room looked like the storehouse of a dealer in stolen furniture. 'Why all this furniture? I don't need all this'"*<sup>3</sup>

Then, again the lamponery and grotesquery of the governance set the realistic tone most significantly:–

*“District administration in India is largely a 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. He is as human and as fallible, but now others can tell him so, even though he still exhibits the old accoutrements (but now Indianized) of importance—the flashing orange light on the roof of the car, 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 expected it of them, which was sickening, or perhaps they were humouring them, which was somehow worse.*

*And administration is an intricate business, and a young officer who lacks initiative can not really be trained in its artifices. There is very little that he can learn from watching someone else; Agastya learnt nothing. For a very short while he worried about his ignorance, and then decided to worry about it properly when others discovered it.”<sup>4</sup>*

This paragraph shows the bourgeois traditions in the core of the governance. Mostover, the paragraph shows the life of a bureaucrat and the predicament of bureaucracy in the core of the governance. Mostover, the paragraph shows the life of a bureaucrat and the predicament of bureaucracy in the post independent era.

#### **Apt Symbols:**

The portrayal of modern, young India with all its nuances finds perfect expression in ‘English, August.’ Upmanyu Chatterjee tries to give the reader a

detailed description of the modern and young India through his characteristic realism and through the way of depicting catchy and apt symbols:–

*“He stayed in his room for the next three days, to exercise, masturbate, listen to music, stone, read slim books on philosophy, and live his secret life. In Delhi’s sun the three days might have been terrestrial bliss, but in Madna he enjoyed his usual tepid insanity, the lizards chasing one another around Tamse’s painting, an exhausting courtship. Then the dubious consolations of Marcus Aurelius, whose wisdom, at moments, he found infinitely amusing (‘Do unsavoury armpits and bad breath make you angry? What good will it do you? Given the mouth and armpits the man has got, that condition is bound to produce those odours...’), yet who continued to fascinate him by his oscillations between disgust and a longing for the cessation of its causes. For three days he opened the door only for Vasant and Digambar. On two nights he walked along the rail tracks, for miles.”*<sup>5</sup>

These lines altogether show the inevitable gloom as well as the realistic, if not naturalistic picture of a metro city, Delhi, quite apart and away from the life of Madna, the life of insanity and boredom. The reference of ‘masturbation’ adds special dimension in the sense that no other novelist of the era, except Salman Rushdie makes it clear that masturbation may be, rather should be a part and parcel of life, of the young people who entered into their very youth. Similarly the passage also shows the limitation of man as he can’t do anything without the acceptance of the society. Though Chatterjee oftentimes overrides, rather excels in portraying the natural code and conduct that lies covertly in the mind of minds of young men. So also the realism is hinted in almost every page of the novel down from the first page to its ultimate catastrophe. The paragraph below should attract the attention of the critic:–

*“Perhaps it was the drink, or Bhatia’s use of the word ‘fucking’, or some grotesque reaction to the inglorious horror of the story, or a secret relief that it was after all someone else who had suffered retribution for his sins, but suddenly both of them started laughing. They were deeply shocked at themselves, and that*

*somehow made them laugh the more, in a kind of panic. Agastya switched on the ugly bedside lamp and switched off the tube - lights. 'That's better, laughing in soft light.' Bhatia drank from his glass and his daughter turned to chocking."*<sup>6</sup>

This passage also portrays the condition of Agastya, the so-called hero of the novel but the way in which Chatterjee portrays it, shows his mastery over the language.

### **Literary Review:**

Throughout the novel there is a surprising amount of divorce, adultery, and similar failures. The novel is written in the family structure and is a more domestic novel than existential.

The second novel 'The Last Burden' is also tinged with the same reality as we find in the first novel. Jamun's story has been highlighted very realistically and in a domestic setting. How beautifully Chatterjee picks up the minutiae of Jamun's day to day life:–

*"Hegiste and Jamun step out for cigarettes at six. Hegiste's son, three and a half, endomorphic and captious, wants to go too. He puts Jamun in mind of one of his own nephews, Doom, aged four, though between the two there is no specific likeness. On his last visit, on the last day, on his way out, he had gaped at Doom kicking up a big big fuss. 'I want to go with Jamun, I want'. No Uncle, nothing, just Jamun and with each 'want' Doom's head bobs. Everyone is amazed, for Jamun is not irresistible to children. Jamun is unduly touched and mantles with delight. This hankering for his company— who has evinced it? Kasturi? His mother?"*<sup>7</sup>

This passage shows the familial ties and the decreasing bond of relationship in this novel. Then, again the passage fully testifies Jamun's character:–

*"He is in a kind of rowing boat, closing in on the waterline of a river, or a lake. Everything is in focus, the keen night, the deathliness, the swish and suck of the oars and the water, the hush. Then the clotted ooze of the bank, like phlegm and mud. The lights on the salt knolls loom ice - blue in the moonlight, the livid white of the tube lights hemming the road pale into the wetlands. Other contours*

*in the boat, intimate yet shadowy. Jamun is wearing his customary clothes, jeans etcetera, and somehow knows that in everyday light the sand will be oyster - grey and not brown. (How was he privy to those settings, runs in his head hourly—why had he sensed that on those flats he was no stranger? Perhaps he tacks on some minutiae later, in the discursive light, but the gooseflesh defies the day—he had trodden those sands before; on that ashen alluvium he had not lurched.) Perhaps the hours just before dawning. The two boatmen (Jamun is an extra for that one particular crossing) are of a piece - diminutive, swarthy and rock - hard (like those labourers who transit past his kitchen window at daybreak tea on their route to some sweat-and-blood slog.”<sup>8</sup>*

**Result of the Study:**

The study shows Jamun’s happy go lucky situation as well as the stormy self which is torn between ‘to be or not to be’. The author’s character-cast is so important that Jamun here finds special dimension amidst the bulgy humour and racy dialogues.

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