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**Phase 2- STRANGE OBSESSIONS AND EVASIVE FEAR IN UPAMANYU  
CHATTERJEE'S FICTION**

**Abstract:**

The intricacies of family life have been extolled in this particular novel. Jamun's return to the family after hearing the illness of his mother shows the familial knots and yet the disruptions in it. Jamun knows it very well that it is to be a great strife to his life that he comes at a time when everything is not going conveniently. Jamun exposes his angst for the successive burden which befalls on him. The dichotomy lies in the fact that Jamun never says 'no' to the familial duties yet his inner-self tries to wander like a bird in the open sky.

**Keywords:** Problems in lower middle class families in India, Rituals, Traditions

**Introductory notes:** The given study on strange obsession, evasive fears in Chatterjee's novel is an impact of modern India. The author himself reflects his image through the characters in his novel. He has been a self made and down to earth. Bhola, Jamun, etc. are his imagination through which he scratches the stories.

**Symbolism:**

The following passage will prove the budding relationship between Agastya and Daya:—

*“Agastya spent three to four nights a week at Daya's, a forty - five - year - old divorcee whom he'd met on the luxury coach that he'd caught out of the Transit Hostel on*

*the occasion of his transfer. They'd found themselves sitting side by side at the rear of the hot and crowded bus. Luxury simply meant that its tickets cost more. Daya was bespectacled, and had been dressed in a whitish salwaar-kameez.*

*Agastya had been in his valedictory present from the staff of his Rehabilitation office, his new blue jeans. After eight years in the civil service, he'd come to dread farewell gifts chosen by subordinate office employees; after the tearful speech-making, they'd routinely, on each occasion, given him a clock.*"<sup>11</sup>

This passage shows the growing intimacy between Daya and Agastya but the more important fact is that the relationship is established in such a way that it gives relief rather comic relief to Agastya's over burdened mind. Similarly, the shabby duties of Agastya have been hinted out realistically through the authorial voice:—

*"Night Duty was in the Secretariat Control Room. Up and down the sixteen floors, out of the Annexe and into the East Wing, withdrawn from the New Extension and eased into the Old Basement, over the years, the secretariat Control Room had changed venues in the manner of a file being tossed about from Home Affairs to Labour to Finance to Employment to Personnel to Home Affairs. When Bhanwar Virbhim had been Chief Minister the first time, the idea of a Control Room in the Secretariat had been suggested by his Principal Secretary to 'convince the electorate, sir, that yours is a government committed to delivering the goods.'*

*The Secretariat Control Room was supposed to monitor and sift the information relayed to it by the thousands of Police-, Earthquake-, Flash Flood-, Cyclone-, Typhoon, Fire-, Landslide-, Other Acts Of God-, Communal Riot-, Festival Mishap-, Special- and General-Control Rooms located all over the region. To show that the Bhanwar Virbhim government was serious about the Secretariat Control Room, they set up the first one on the sixteenth floor itself, within the Chief Minister's Secretariat, just a few doors away, in fact, from his suite of rooms. After three months, however—'It's a security risk,' opined the police on the basis of the evidence that began to be discovered there in the mornings.*"<sup>12</sup>

### **Dilemmas:**

Rightly says Vasabraj Naikar, "The entire novel is a galaxy of odd events and glaring circumstances and shows the insanity and the disorder of governance and of Agastya."<sup>13</sup> As the novel advances forward the intimacy between Daya and Agastya becomes more prominent than ever:—

*"He continued to feel nervous and depressed as he adjusted the pillow beneath his neck. You deserve this, you Dildo King, he told himself again as he watched her toss her hair off her shoulders and straddle his stomach. He'd generally lived his life according to two dictums: Finish what you start, and Don't start what you can't finish. He couldn't quit his job, for instance, because of his dictums, just as because of them he now had to swallow whatever this middle - aged bomb was going to dish out. He was*

*nervous because he would have preferred to be in control. Couldn't she've asked him first whether he'd relish being suffocated by her pussy? Wasn't he too a human being, with feelings? She wriggled about a bit till her vagina was split wide and tight against his solar plexus. She then began to ride back and forth, slowly at first, then with gathering momentum, lazily but irrevocably sliding up over his chest towards his face. With her hands, she fondled her breasts, teased her armpits, kneaded her stomach, played with her hair, adjusted the sound from the stereo by the bed. Rhythmically, she groaned and gasped, deep but subdued, and licked her upper arms, her breasts. By the time that she'd crossed Agastya's nipples, his spunk was flying all over the room like Casper the friendly ghost."*<sup>14</sup>

### **The Second Part of Novel:**

The second part of the novel 'CONDUCT UNBECOMING OF A CIVIL SERVANT' is more realistic, if not naturalistic. The second para is a beautiful instance of the protagonist's pent up feelings:—

*"Love-Like-Hate-Adore isn't as well-known a game as it should be. It is a splendid time-killer because while squandering away one's most precious resource, it permits one at the same time to rove from one object of one's lust to another to gauge whether—and to what extent—they reciprocate one's affections—and indeed, deep in one's heart, what one oneself truly feels for them. It—LLHA— also encourages one to spell correctly. On a piece of paper, one*

*writes the name of whoever one is idly itching for at that moment, or on that day.*"<sup>15</sup>

The passage shows the colour and variegated life of Madna as well as of Agastya. Similarly, bureaucratic life has also been portrayed with accuracy in this narrative:–

*“One - eleven p.m. The Commissioner needed to return home for his bracing massage and his light lunch. He smiled at Suroor, scarcely disarranging the hard fat of his face, and pushed a paan into his mouth. He was a perennially hungry, carnal man. In his unending, unscientific tussle with obesity he’d snacked for years on paans. Stocky, the hard fat enclosing cold eyes and a gap-toothed, brutish mouth, the sort of figure that, while erect, rocks all the time on the balls of its feet. ‘The Collector told me that you and he enjoyed a long chat last evening.’ Raghupati disregarded the minutiae of his work, but was on the ball, intuitively, about the stuff that cast long shadows. So to Suroor he added in a purr, ‘I’ll be delighted to attend the performance on Friday.’ ”<sup>16</sup>*

*“Two decades ago, when he’d been Assistant Collector at Koltanga and had all but sparked off a riot because he’d buggered his bungalow peon who hadn’t liked it one bit, who’d caved in and squealed blubberingly to his parents, the crowd that had gathered around Raghupati then had, without altogether swallowing his protests, finally done nothing but complain to his Collector. It hadn’t quite known how to touch– leave alone manhandle him. In that golden time, he’d been a thousand*

*rungs above the hoi polloi and their law that he administered. But with the years, that interspace had narrowed and warped considerably, and a few of them had even begun to dress like him— in tight safari suits of elaborate stitchery—and he simply couldn't risk buggering bungalow peons anymore, and could just about get them to massage him instead.*"<sup>17</sup>

Such a searing passage uplifts the realistic fibre of the novel. Further the author says in nutshell the predicament of the Welfare State:—

*“The Welfare State hadn't been paying her either for her views or for the mulish determination that'd changed her face, and he hadn't cared for the ease with which she'd stopped calling him 'Sir' or 'Saab' in bed, so he'd rammed into her for another fifteen seconds, and then declared in farewell, 'you know, our country's not progressing because of people like you only.'*

*The following week, she'd sent him the first of her two anonymous letters on the subject of employment in the government. She'd signed both Tina Munim, but since that hadn't been her actual name, he'd considered the petitions to be simply two more in the endless list of unsigned letters received every week in numberless offices across the land.*"<sup>18</sup>

Being an administrative officer Upmanyu Chatterjee digs deep into the root of the Indian administrative system, rather we may say that, it is a satirical portraiture of the Welfare State that is India. The lackadaisical atmosphere of the governance and the indifferent attitude of the bureaucrats have been finally explored page after page in this novel. The

Loneliness and boredom have also been hinted in this narrative, quite like the very first novel of Chatterjee whereas the solitariness of Agastya finds a fine expression:–

*“Nervous, in two minds, without saying anything, Agastya put the phone down. It immediately began ringing again. Ignoring it, he watched his host carry a plastic water bottle to the window, rinse his hands, gargle and spit out into the void three mouthfuls of water, return to the desk, pack up his lunch box in a plastic bag, in passing drop a cupful of water to douse a spark atop a mound of files that had been smouldering menacingly, flick invisible specks of dust off his suit, and with a last, sad glance at Agastya, toting the plastic bag and the water bottle, make his way to the door.*

*It unnerved Agastya to realize that he was going to be left alone in the room. ‘Oh, I ought to be leaving too. Many thanks for the light for the cigarette...Aren’t you going to switch off your heater?’ ”<sup>19</sup>*

### **The Last Novel:**

To quote ‘The Hindu’, “The passage is raunchy and tough, smooth and almost facile, Mammaries shares with all good satire, its power to simultaneously shock and amuse.”<sup>20</sup> The last part of the novel *OUT OF THE WAY*’ predicts the total massacre and the hurly-burly situation of the governance, though there is a ray of hope of rejuvenation and reincarnation of the system. There is a gap between the aspiration and accomplishment at the end of the novel. But Chatterjee finely adjusts the situation among terrific take off.

The last novel of Chatterjee ‘Weight Loss’ is a dark comedy in the sense that it portrays the abnormality and adolescence of the character of Bhola. Bhola is a social misfit and his grotesque nature has been highlighted in this novel whereas the Bindu is a drop or globule. The Bindu is a metaphysical point out of time and space, the zone in which spiritual weightlessness is experienced. This description will certainly prove Bhola’s character succinctly:–

*“Bhola’s classmates thrilled at the sight of the stick being broken on his head. Anantaraman, however, a pale, sensitive, shy, nervous and complex boy, passed out. Anthony sneered at being distracted from his labours in so amateurish a fashion and walked across to loom, hands on hips, like a supervillain in a comic, over the bespectacled heap. He bent and nudged the body with the part of the stick that remained in his hand, then, straightening up and looking around commanded the group, ‘Here, some of you carry the ninny over to the Dispensary.’ Bhola, scalp aflame, stumbled forward to volunteer, to escape, for he found Brother Dr. David Tolaram at the Dispensary sexy too in a different, hairy sweat - and - cologne kind of way. Some of the boys snickered at seeing him lift up Anantaraman’s left leg but he had correctly—though instinctively—gauged that with one fainted student and one stick broken on another’s head, Anthony had sated himself with violence for the day—or for the afternoon, at any rate.”<sup>21</sup>*

Similarly, Bhola’s dreams and daydreams have been portrayed aptly in this novel:–



*“Bhola knew the cooker, a cheap, counterfeit product with a faulty lid, to be one of the most dangerous gadgets in a household already sufficiently menaced by violent and lunatic tempers, passions and temperaments. Four times a week, its lid flew off the handle and hit the ceiling, spraying the next meal of the trio all over the walls and bed. Moti found the antics of the cooker more amusing than dangerous. Bhola could see what he intended to do with it but was paralysed by the tension of waiting for the event. He opened his mouth meaning to alert the doctor; what emerged sounded like a saline, hot water gargle in the early morning. Positioning himself behind Borkar, Moti with both hands brought the cooker down on the back of his head with a thud that seemed to rattle the windows. Water splashed bountifully over the three of them. The bottle sank into the pleats of the sari at Titli’s abdomen before bouncing on to and trundling—frightfully loudly—away across the floor. With a soft, sorrowful moan, Borkar slumped sideways and across Titli’s legs. Moti flung the cooker down.”<sup>22</sup>*

His crippling obsession with sex becomes a burden to him but the novelist has finely explained the reality behind it. It is a real novel with a black - humour and absurdity and so it is very compelling. The CALM CENTER summarizes the entire tone of the novel:—

*“The silence was sudden and overbearing, accentuated by the gentle rhythmical sighs of Titli’s exhalations. She slept with mouth partly open and forehead a little furrowed – perhaps by the load of her sins. Even the*

*scarlet wall behind her with its geometrical designs in yellow and black appeared too dark and oppressive. Bhola shut his eyes. The room seeming to loom in towards him, became even more intolerable. He opened them again. He glanced around, arose and shuffled across to reposition himself on the mattress which the white women had abandoned a while ago.”<sup>23</sup>*

**Result:**

Indeed, it is a novel of angst and anger, medley and malaise, tension and terseness—amidst all these things Bhola’s character is blooming up and becomes larger than life.

Being a post independent novelist, Upmanyu Chatterjee tries to bring out all the nuances of human life and the complex mind of the people at the verge of twenty first century. Reality is a theme; rather a motif in all the novels of all the novelists writing in India about the diasporic experiences of the country but Chatterjee’s treatment of reality is distinguished in itself because of his intermingling of gloom and goodness, tragedy and taciturnity. His insight into the characters is more real than any other novelists of the time. All his novels are a psychological odyssey that can only charm and amuse us.

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