

CONTOURS OF CONFLICT IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE

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Abstract:

Upamanyu Chatterjee is a gifted writer in Indian Writing English. This paper makes an attempt at ‘Contours of Conflict in the Selected Novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee’. ‘*English, August: An Indian Story*’ is sequel to ‘*The Mammaries of the Welfare State*’ and ‘*The Last Burden*’ is sequel to ‘*Way to Go*’. ‘*Weight Loss*’ is a single novel. Chatterjee portrays the suburban lives of people in Calcutta in the fifth novel. All major characters of his novels are suffering in personal life. Chatterjee’s main characters are facing conflicts. Chatterjee’s characters are restless, disinterested, enervating, feel alienated and face the inner conflict, arduously try to find universe.

(Key words: conflict, personal, sequel, exploration, suffering, restless)

Upamanyu Chatterjee is gifted with an extraordinary talent in Indian Writing English. He joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1983. His professional career not only marked the beginning of his literary career but also was the source from which he created in his novels. Major characters of his novels have sense of humour, amazing language and eye to portray the middle class India. The common thread that binds all main characters is, suffering in personal life.

Conflict is defined as any struggle between opposing forces. Usually, the main character struggles against some other force. Internal conflict and External conflict are important types of conflict in literature. Internal conflict is the struggle which actually occurs inside a character. In Internal conflict, the character struggles with a decision he must make or with his own weaknesses in his personality. External conflicts are struggles between the protagonist and some other external force.

His first novel '*English, August: An Indian Story*' is a fascinating metaphor of contemporary English educated Indian Urban youth's failed quest for self-realization. The very important aspect of this novel is the message that the Indian society did not undergo cultural decolonization. Chatterjee portrays in '*English, August*' some serious issues that revolve around the urban educated youth. Agastya reflects lighter side of the affection and pompous lifestyle of the bureaucrats. He is suffocated in his heinous condition and the protagonist finds no relief in his life, the door of entertainment is closed to him. He has no respect for his working place and no job satisfaction. So he is unable to adjust himself to his society. This novel is all about the protagonist's experiences and reflections as a Trainee Civil Servant at a small ugly town Madna. Agastya finds himself lonely, bored, sex-starved and disgusted with his colleagues in the service. He feels dislocated, living without any ambition, preoccupied by marijuana, alcohol and

sexual fantasies. After some encounters with senior officers he observes the dire living conditions of the tribal habitants, visiting a leper rehabilitation center. He realizes his responsibilities and is finally posted as Assistant collector at Koltang, another small district. Chatterjee shows in this novel protagonist's struggle of self.

His Second novel '*The Last Burden*' portrays life in an Indian middle class family. Chatterjee portrays the sense of this location and alienation felt by the protagonist. This novel is moderate and mournful. This is a portrayal of the financial, social and emotional problems that make people favour an atomic family in contrast to a joint family as was the predominant practice in India. It elegantly portrays the decisions and sacrifices made by different people in a family and the frictions and the frustrations thereby. It also expresses the struggle of the newer generation in order to move into an atomic family structure from a strictly hierarchical joint family structure. The novel talks about Jamun, a work less young man and his old father, Shyamanand, his dying mother. The novel focuses on the family's time together dealing with Urmila's illness with Jamun's memories of the past childhood and youth rounding out the pictures of cultures clash too. The children have moved away from modern India, with looser ties of obligation and family, which causes additional strains. There is also Joyce's insistence on raising their sons and money problems are brought to the fore by the medical bills. Jamun sadly responds to the death of his mother. He accepted the burden of his aged father. He realized his responsibilities as a father of a child. Domestic conflict constitutes the axis in the novel.

'*The Mammaries of the Welfare State*' is a sequel as well as an extension of first novel. Chatterjee remarked on the character of Agastya Sen who lived a full life in two novels. The title is quite suggestive in the sense that it conveys the resourcefulness of the corrupt elements managing the politics and bureaucracy to

milk the system in the interest of their own personal and familial aggrandizement. In the novel, there are often contractors, mafia, corrupt and venal bureaucrats and manipulators who make money through using the political system in their own personal interest, and are therefore interested in the continuance of chaos and a patronage-based administration. This novel one finds various incidents and examples presenting the immoral, unbecoming and sometimes even too much cruel conduct of the civil servants caused by the intoxications of power and safety of their posts. Chatterjee presents this dark side of their mind, conduct and behaviour, mockingly no doubt, but with keen, sharp psychological insight. A major theme of novel portrays the solitariness of the modern man. Agastya expresses sexual perversion, loss of faith and moral values, lack of human relationship, commercialization of life, mental tension, war and politics in this novel. He never finds solace in the course of the novel and his adventures turn to misadventures, his patience to visual situation and frustration. Disease and degeneration are everywhere in every nook and every corner of the novel. Societal conflict provides the basis for the main thread in the novel.

'Weight Loss', the fourth novel of Upamanyu Chatterjee, Bhola, the central character of the novel. The novel finally demonstrates Chatterjee's notions of the self. He is a post modern man and the novelist has finely showed the curve of vicissitudes of the mind of protagonist. Bhola throughout his life has done wrong things, made wrong choices even then life give him a chance, a golden opportunity to reform, to be pure by giving him a really good wife and a fairy like daughter, but just as the worms of the drain do not understand the value of a rose, do not feel any yearning to smell its sweet fragrance, in similar manner. He does not understand the value of what he has got. The door of the heaven is before him, but he preferred to remain in his self- made hell. However, he tries his best to pass his time by

reading, keeping diary, and by not thinking about anything. Two aspects are very strong in this novel from the very beginning, one is Bhola's consistent effort for losing his weight, physically and mentally, especially mentally, as he is almost always thinking of jogging, that continues in a parallel line with all the actions and reactions of incidents and the other sexual perversion, his quick degeneration. Chatterjee focuses the strange life of main character. The protagonist's life story is a conflict between his conscious and subconscious self. Consciously he thinks one thing and subconsciously the other thing. The feeling of dread and disgust, misery and pain, tedium and weariness is expressed in his novels. The protagonist in this novel could not adjust himself to social condition and the result is poverty and misunderstanding and licentiousness.

The novel '*Way to Go*' is sequel to '*The Last Burden*'. The characters, Jamun and Burfi belong to a world of tedium, despair, violence and spectacular dysfunction. Jamun's sex life has dwindled to a sort of dry, rotting peanut, giving him leisure to examine the wretchedness of his carnal life. Even suicide is compromised, as Jamun wonder whether those who play their necks on the railway tracks recall the products of the morning shitters' efforts. This novel illustrates the suburban lives of people in Calcutta. It highlights the fact that every person who seems to have a normal life actually hides a bag full of dirty within. Chatterjee talks about family and how love, even though extremely imperfect, can make all the weird instances that life provides more bearable. The most important relationship in the novel is on between father and son and the problems they face while living together and the underlying problems they have for each other. Chatterjee probes the relationships of father and son, husband and wife under the rise of modernity. He has tried to represent the modern world with different eye where growth and progress run parallel with death; decay and alienation of one

own self. The novel ends, there will be more deaths and more disappearances, but the real flaw in 'Way to Go' isn't the darkness of Chatterjee's vision, or even the relentless scatology embedded in the prose. The most powerful themes in 'Way to Go' are death, old age and tedium and in many ways, this is the age-old rant against the dying of the light. This is a more or less universal protest against the human condition; it isn't tragedy that overtakes most of us so much as indignity and even that will be meted out in small doses of humiliation. He is the quintessential novelist of protest, and his black humour masks, in a way, a kind of idealism. Domestic conflict is probed against the modern background.

Chatterjee succeeds in presenting the hideous in humorous way. But the truth is that, though apparently comedies, his novels are actually tragedies showing again and again the suffering and fall of man, who experiences Internal External Conflict against the background of modern society. Agastya, Jamun and Bhola all are suffering rootlessness and alienation. To find the root means to find the lost relation. Chatterjee's all main characters are in the process of searching the strong tie of human relationship, of love which is selfless, or pure and holy lives but they know not the ways, hence, lost in the unsolved riddles, they, in quest for the right path, unfortunately choose the take the wrong way experience conflict and as a result they suffer.

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