



VEDA'S

JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (JOELL)

An International Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

Impact Factor (SJIF) 6.12

<http://www.joell.in>

Vol.10, No. 3

(July-Sept.)

2023

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ROOTLESSNESS AND FRUSTRATION OF URBAN YOUTH IN ENGLISH, AUGUST-AN INDIAN STORY

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10301>

ABSTRACT



Article history:

Received on : 07-07-2023

Accepted on : 18-07-2023

Available online: 08-08-2023

The Main purpose of this paper is to discuss the postmodern world, where all human relationships are breaking and giving birth to existential crisis, alienation and immorality, rootlessness and frustration of urban youth. Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* is a lampoon or is a witty, sarcastic commentary on the giant apparatus of the Indian bureaucracy with its incompetent officials and their amateur minions or urchins and their lives depicted through the eyes of young Agastya. It also highlights Chatterjee's protagonist, August's rootlessness, frustration and his struggle to discover the root that means to discover the lost relation. The current paper is a modest attempt to highlight modern day urban youth, family dynamics, and socio-political conditions in Upamanyu Chatterjee's novel, *English, August*. The novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee have the profundity and rootlessness of *The Waste Land*. He succeeds in connecting with the common man and his psyche, as well as his relationship with his family, through the frustration and alienation of modern man, the moral degradation of his protagonists, and his Kafkaesque style of dark humour, which is terrifying and frequently nauseating.

Keywords: *Rootlessness, frustration, lampoon, sarcastic, cynical, personality, family, bureaucracy.*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1983, Mr. Chatterjee was enlisted in the Indian Administrative Service. He carved himself a niche in his literary career at the same time that he began working as an IAS official. It was not only the start of his professional career but also the commencement of his literary career, a desire he had always treasured. His professional career gave birth to the characters in his writings. He won praise for his debut novel *English, August: An Indian Story*. He is also the 21st-century equivalent of W.B. Yeats, whose characters lack moral guidance from parents and relatives who are not constrained by spirituality, and are incapable of appreciating the grandeur of God's works. In 1990, Chatterjee lived as Writer in Residence at the University of Kent, U.K. In 1998, he was appointed as the Director (Languages) in the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

In Chatterjee's works, modern man is shown as being constrained by Indian norms and morality due to the prevalence of western culture. The loss of values and the ensuing socio-cultural issues in modern society are revealed and highlighted in Chatterjee's works. His present novel persuades us that India's rich history, cultural values, and joint family system have become less significant as a result of westernization. Modern man does not value interpersonal relationships or worry about the nation being corrupt. Chatterjee's books are creative jabs at the ugliness, foolishness, and corruption of society. A detailed examination of his portrayals of literature and people reveals the contemporary sociocultural issues as well as the morally depraved and westernized youth.

ROOTLESSNESS AND FRUSTRATION OF URBAN YOUTH

Upamanyu Chatterjee's first novel, *English, August: An Indian Story (1988)* is one of the bestselling novels till today. It was fabulously written with real life characters and narrates the story of Agastya Sen, an Indian Civil Servant who is westernized, sophisticated and his thoughts are highly dominated by women, literature and soft drugs. *English, August: An Indian Story* offered innovation and vitality to the Indian literary scene because the peer group that tried writing fiction felt this novel accurately portrayed the 1980s youth.

The central character of the book is Agastya Sen, often known as August or Ogu by many people, who is only twenty-four years old and an IAS on probation. He is completely intrigued by western society. Agastya, who was raised by his uncle and guardian Poltu Kaku, lives a carefree childhood and adolescence in Delhi like any other youngster from a wealthy family. His father is the governor of Bengal, a decent and ethical man. When Agastya is a young boy of three years old, his mother passes away due to meningitis. He excels in his studies and passes all of his college examinations with flying colours. He embraces a lifestyle that is a combination of western society with a heavy dependence on booze and marijuana. Like most young people in every nation, he has no specific goals in life and prefers to be carefree. He does not want to adopt or fall victim to the daily routine of the majority of people, which consists of going to work, working hard there, returning home after work, and repeating the cycle until he passes away. He believes that life should be lived more care freely and that it should only be used



to relax, do nothing, and not be burdened. He sets himself the goal of becoming "a male stray dog" when he is a little child. Chatterjee writes,

"In his essay, Agastya had said that his real ambition was to be a domesticated male stray dog because they lived the best life. They were assured of food and because they were stray, they didn't have to guard a home or beg or shake paws or fetch trifles or be clean anything similarly meaningless to earn their food.....A stray dog was free, he slept a lot, barked unexpectedly and only when he wanted to, and got a lot of sex."(EA, p. 46)

For the reader, it is too clear that Agastya never makes an effort to be an honourable, diligent, and service-minded civil official. Even if he is given the greatest position, which also requires people who can provide selfless service to the society, there is not even the slightest bit of regret when he doesn't do anything for it. Agastya's thoughts are mostly dominated by women, sex, and marijuana. In spite of being an IAS official, it attracts him to be a performer in a pornographic movie.

We never get the impression that he has what it takes to become an IAS or that he is qualified for that position throughout the novel; not a single incident gives us that impression. He continuously lies without cause, is frequently careless with his work, smokes, does drugs, and never takes his instruction seriously. He begins work at 11:00 a.m. and continues working until lunchtime. After returning to his room, he spends his time using marijuana, masturbating, lying down and staring at the roof, occasionally reading Maurcus Aurelius, and

sleeping while listening to Rabindra Sangeet. Agastya handles individuals with ease by finding fault with everyone in his immediate vicinity. When he analyses their personalities, it occasionally gives us the impression that he is entirely cynical and mentally ill. It is amazing to watch someone who radiates such negativity and sees nothing admirable in the people around him. We ponder whether his frustration stems from the environment, the people, his upbringing, or the events, circumstances, and atmosphere of Madna. Because of the nature of his personality, he never hesitates to describe everyone in his immediate vicinity negatively.

He never regrets using marijuana, and he represents a cultural shock to many Indians who would never dream of thinking such things. Even if many people around us exhibit some bad features, eventually they come to grips with their errors and make an effort to improve.

Agastya gives least priority to his job. He always shirks his work, tries to spend his time by associating with people of the town, Madna, where he is posted as a trainee and is likely to learn about administrative work of the district. He makes friends with Sathe, who is an iconoclastic editorial cartoonist, Shankaran, a good-hearted alcoholic government engineer and Kumar who is police chief of Madna from whom he receives porn movies. Although Agastya is a subordinate of Srivastav, the district collector, he idles away his time making fun of the life style of these so-called bureaucrats, their wives and children. His observation is so keen and notices minute details of the things and the people around him.



Agastya feels unfulfilled by his experience as an IAS officer and longs to return to his hometown to be with his friends. He frequently experiences nostalgia. Because of his experience as an IAS officer, Chatterjee was able to convey Agastya's persona extremely well. He also makes you incredulous with his descriptions of the Indian Administrative system and bureaucrats' working methods. Thus, *English, August: An Indian Story* is regarded by many as the Indian administrative service manual.

Meenakshi, in her article on *English, August: An Indian Story* published on Wednesday, October 27, 2010 comments,

Every aspect of being an IAS trainee has been intelligently probed by the author. He takes us inside the mind of a bureaucrat, and tries to show that they are no extraordinary beings, but very much vulnerable to all kinds of human follies...(6)

The average person is constantly impressed with IAS bureaucrats' work and way of living. According to Chatterjee, people constantly raise IAS officers to the status of demi-gods and put them on a very high pedestal without realising that they, too, are humans and may commit mistakes, be lazy, and have weaknesses. Even if there are some aspects about an IAS official that are unthinkable, Chatterjee does a fantastic job of portraying them in the role of Agastya. Even the smallest details are handled with attention.

Agastya spends time with his cousin Tonic and friend Dhruvo before he becomes an IAS officer. They spend a lot of time together and share cigarettes. Agastya frequently uses marijuana after

becoming an IAS officer and then goes to the collectorate while stoned to meet R.N. Srivastav IAS, Collector and District Magistrate of Madna. This demonstrates how ethics and morals have degraded even at the highest cadre. It also shows that becoming an IAS needs a great deal of initiative, an eagerness to master the nuances of his position, and love for his work and to work for the general public. These lessons are imparted to a child by his or her parents, teachers, and siblings.

Agastya, however, has no one to impart these lessons. For his job, Agastya lacks the conviction and conscience. If a rookie officer is willing to take initiative and can't learn everything by observing others, he should be trained in these artifices. Agastya lacks a good family and never gets advice from his family members on how crucial it is to uphold morals and values in one's own life. His buddies and others in his immediate vicinity have a greater impact on his character. His friend Dhruvo, who enjoys living in the city, is not bothered about constantly using vulgar language, and who has been through thick and thin with Agastya since he was a toddler, has had a significant impact on Agastya.

The character of Agasthya represents the urban youth of India to some extent as most of them are interested in enjoying life, and would not want to follow ethics, morals, and culture and service to the society is their last priority. Chatterjee's protagonists, August, Jamun and Bhola, all have a common problem, i.e. rootlessness and they struggle to discover the root that means to discover the lost relation. They realize the value of their family ties and become more matured though they don't have



complete control on themselves yet they know that they are not leading proper lives.

CONCLUSION

Chatterjee's novels start off by vehemently denouncing human follies and the shortcomings of society and its members. They undoubtedly elicit laughter by oozing humour, but they unmistakably convey the idea that these are modern tragedies. His main characters resemble Adam from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which masterfully depicts The Fall of Man and the breakdown of the marriage and family institutions as well as perversion are to blame. Satan is personified by lust, a desire for dominance, authority, corruption, and social superstitions. These things may cause man, the family, and even society, to fail. In Chatterjee's characters, Satan appears to be powerful, like in the example of August, who masturbates and is dependent on drugs and sex despite having knowledge and Chatterjee's misguided protagonists are in search of more meaningful lives though they have a lot of confusion about what they are doing. As a matter of fact, August admires Tagore, carries Marcus Aurelius's 'Meditations' and when he is in utter despair, even tries to get comfort by reading 'Bhagavadgita'. Bholu, who has no positive side, gets bowled over by the golden voice of his wife, Kamala, who is good at singing classical Hindustani music. Chatterjee is hopeful about the people and particularly the youth of India that they can never deviate from their own culture, inspite of the western wave, and in spite of all the postmodern trends which are trying to overpower the family system and institution of marriage in India like tsunami.

The main characters in Chatterjee's novels have many defects and terrible personality problems, not like real-life heroes or the heroes of Bollywood. They represent the impending end of the contemporary world and how civilization will be impacted by human greed, selfishness, and confusion, as well as breaches in the long-standing institutions of marriage, families, and values. They reveal our spiritual decline and our gloomy outlook.

It is difficult to distinguish between Hinduism and Indian culture because they are one and the same, and his heroes, who are from upper middle class and heavily impacted by British colonialism, education, and western culture, are likewise entirely unable to do so. No matter where they live—in India or overseas, or whether they adhere to western or Indian culture—family is paramount to Indians.

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