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Multiculturalism in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story*

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Abstract:

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian story* displays the perplexing presence of a person who lives in a general public going under the new effect of globalization. It additionally depicts how the shadow of frontier past poses a potential threat over the existences of individuals in a nation where provincial metropolitan partition becomes glaring when Agastya Sen, an IAS, conceived and raised in the metropolitan urban communities, for example, Delhi and Calcutta, begins living in the hinterland of India. His feeling of estrangement in his own nation owes an extraordinary arrangement to his tutoring and sustaining under the impact of the Western culture. It brings about an emergency of personality which can never be characterized by a couple of sets of values. His disposition to language, religion and culture is irresolute and a large portion of the times scoffing. Presumably, hybridity best characterizes an Indian lifestyle and the searcher of a character wanders in the labyrinth of multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic aspects of the country. MLA eighth edition has been used to cite references.

Keywords: hybridity, western, multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic, *thumri* music.

Introduction:

Indian English has been universally accepted as a unique style of discourse with its own shades giving expression to Indian Multiculturalism. In the works of Indian English writers, those living abroad, the new Indian writers in the west, expatriates, second and third generation writers, and the classical authors including A. K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Bhabani Bhattacharya are being interpreted in the new critical mode and style of multiculturalism. The study of Multiculturalism explores the

cultural diversity within a society and has enlightened contributions to society made by the authors of diverse backgrounds. In fact, as a social theory it brings together various facets of society such as cultural diversity, recognition, mutual concern, and peaceful co-existence of many cultures and sub-cultures.

Multiculturalism is the way in which cultural and ethnic differences can be accommodated in social, political and economic patterns. In multicultural societies, specific groups and their cultural forms are selected as worthy of study and official recognition, protection and possessions. However, but not all the multicultural societies are successful in accommodating the discrepancies.

The discourse of multiculturalism is based on realism and its core matter centres around issues related to race, class and gender. It shares some common themes in the writings of authors from many different cultures like discovering personal identity in the society which marks multiculturalism, forming individual and cultural values, familial relationships, childhood games, folklore of the culture, societal pressures: rewards and punishments, religious background, environmental adaptations that resulted from historical factors, socio-economic changes, contact with other cultural group and forming personal relationships such as establishing family/marital roles, understanding gender role, developing friendships and social groups and adapting to roles, developing friendships and social groups and acclimatizing to roles defined by age. It explores opposing social injustice and cultural conflicts in the people of various ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. It often focuses on the social contexts in the multicultural societies, on the experiences of the people of these societies, on the mixed reception which the minorities may receive in the country of arrival, on experience of racism and hostility and on the sense of rootlessness and the search for identity which can result from displacement and cultural diversity.

Upamanyu Chatterjee, always remembered for his debut novel *English, August: An Indian Story* which is one of the powerful and emerging voices amongst India's post-colonial literary stalwarts. His novels are written in a humorous style and are intended to go beyond the basic concept of comedy. He defied conventional traditions and created a niche for himself. Through his works, one can see his protests against the austere world of the Indian Administrative System. Most of his novels focus on the life of a young westernized diplomat who is posted in a non-descript town. The characteristics of his novels have a wry sense of humour, amazing language and an eye to portray the life of middle-class India. The satirical aspect of his novels sometimes shocks readers. However, there are critics who are of the view

that he has not achieved the success which was promised by with the launch of his debut novel. He received Sahitya Academy Award, 2004.

A bureaucrat by profession, Upamanyu Chatterjee penned two short stories and five novels. The short stories include *The Assassination of Indira Gandhi* and *Watching Them* and novels include *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988), *The Last Burden* (1993), *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000), *Weight Loss* (2006) and *Way to Go* (2010), etc.

His *English, August*, was first published in India in 1988. The story of a young civil servant posted to a fictional rural town, it was hailed as the country's *Catcher in the Rye* a novel that captured the zeitgeist of the 1980's, when India was uncertainly emerging from decades of economic isolation and ill-conceived socialism. A portion of his portrayals is suggestive of the late R. K. Narayan, whose fiction occurred in the imagined provincial town of Malgudi. To be sure, what's striking and brilliant about Chatterjee's hero, Agastya Sen, is his aimlessness, his refusal to be nailed down to a specific assessment or fabulous thought. Agasyta, a metropolitan Bengali who consistently carries between Ella Fitzgerald and Rabindra Sangeet, joins the Indian Administrative Service and gets posted in the lap of India's hinterland - a shabby little town called Madna.

The novel has been claimed by its subtitle as an Indian story, but after reading to it, one is compelled to ask how much Indian is the instinct of story? In this context, I am reminded of the concluding paragraph of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. Said says:

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting- points which, if followed into actual experience for only a moment, are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of culture and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively white or black or Western or Oriental. (Chatterjee, *English, August* 408)

Chatterjee's hero Agastya whom Kumar calls an 'English type' is the side-effect of Macaulay's schooling strategy which has been incorporated by Indians clearly. Agastya is an Indian by the shade of his skin however English man by his schooling and childhood. The pictures of the administrative, administrations, the Railways and the English language as it has been Indianised by the Indians unequivocally attest the presence of the Empire in India. The steady depiction of the old, flimsy yet emblematically most remarkable structures of the collectorate displays the propagation of the frontier structures as well as outlooks.

Amazing mix, the English we speak Hazaar fucked. Urdu and American,' Agastya laughed, 'a thousand fucked, really fucked. I'm sure nowhere else could languages be mixed and spoken with such ease. The slurred sounds of the comfortable tiredness of intoxication. You look hazaar fucked, Marmaduke dear. (Chatterjee, *English August* 1)

In India one can't, but present oneself simply by uncovering one's name: one unquestionable necessity arranges oneself further Might it be said that he is hitched or not? This question is tossed at him over and over again, albeit "all references to spouses" are, Agastya notes, "in quieted, nearly embarrassed tones. The humour in the book goes from the diverting to the idiotic, from the absurd to parody, however any of the humour seem to be constrained. Also, in all the humour, Chatterjee makes due to attack a colossal assortment of Indian attitudes and indecencies. Only for instance; his interpretation of relationships or religion for example, in a sanctuary of ruler Shiva at *khajuraho* Agastya is constrained to draw a lined up among sexuality and religion and sees this:

There was a tube-light in the inner sanctum directly above the black stone phallus of Shiv. There the wives came into their own. They took turns to gently smear *the shivling* with sandal-wood paste, sprinkle water and flowers over it, prostrate and pray before it, suffocate it with in scene, kiss their fingers after touching it. Agastya found the scene extraordinarily kinky.... But Agastya was not conscious of any blasphemy. Religion was with him a remote concern, and with his father it had never descended from the metaphysical (Chatterjee, *English August* 28)

The collector, Mr. Srivastav driving a moderately luxurious way of life keeps the social scene very dynamic. Work takes a secondary lounge for everybody and Agastya, trapped in torpidity and dormancy, is glad to pull off doing scarcely anything. More often than not his head is turning, as he considers what a person like him could be doing in a spot like Madna. Be that as it may, such is the greatness he feels surrounding him that he can't assemble the will to pull himself. It's a horrible circle and the creator splendidly and capably portrays a large number of pages Agastya's developing feeling of fatigue, disappointment and absurd presence. He reflects:

God, he was fucked weak, feverish, aching, in a claustrophobic room, being ravaged by mosquitoes, with no electricity, with no sleep, in a place he disliked, totally alone, with a job that didn't interest him, in murderous weather, and now feeling madly sexually aroused. His stomach contracted

with his laughter. He wanted to rebel. He said loudly, 'I'm going to get well, shave my head, put on a jock strap and jog my way out of here. (Chatterjee, *English August* 93)

It's truly one individual's record as he goes by his life erratically, yet Upamanyu Chatterjee mixes his story with such differed and vivid episodes, spots it with so many nuanced characters, makes such an ideal feeling of the spot, that you are easily brought into a story that stays energetic notwithstanding the fundamental static existence of Agastya, and this is related with a bold feeling of forsake and wry humour that it makes you laugh and grin.

Agastya's feeling of distance develops not tracking down a sensible solution to the inquiry as to what his identity is. He misses the mark on clear feeling of character which comes from being established in one's culture. The thought of disengagement and personality are interconnected. Each human subject is essentially 'encultured' and a character is comprised out of social experience. Agastya has most likely that he is an Indian, a Bengali.

Yet, he is removed from his local culture and custom, from ties that tight spot family, companions, history, and fantasies of the land. Agastya views himself as occupying an outsider land among outsiders. Also he feels very alright with just those characters, as Dhruvo his companion, Sathe, the Cartoonist, Shankar, the Engineer who additionally displays specific level of his perspectives and mentality towards their life in Madna. Agastya is drawn to Shankar who is committed to *thumri* music and Sathe to his kid's shows.

Both regardless of, having no assumptions to elitism have endeavoured to develop a cutting edge Indian creative mind. Chatterjee even finds in these debauched specialists a proto-type for a cutting edge Indian culture, a combination of the relative multitude of broken pieces of the Indian reasonableness, the universal past, the frontier experience and the advanced post-free India. They view themselves as in the journey for self-character and affected by social struggle. In any case, by virtue of the outrageous impulse of his dad, Agastya attempts to spend his hard days with outrageous resilience however genuinely anticipates an exchange to a superior spot which is the main means by which he could lessen his distanced feeling and his nauseating mentality towards life and work.

Through the portrayal of starkly contrastive ways of life-middle-class urban; tradition-bound Bengali; peasant-class rural; student life abroad-and the structural incorporation of multi-language, multi-ethnic Indian settings, both authors argue convincingly for the pervasive influence of multicultural environments on people in India, particularly in Indian writings in English. As one of Chatterjee's characters puts it:

You are what you are, just as English here too is what it is, an unavoidable leftover. We can't be ashamed of our past, no, because that is to be ashamed of our present.

Chatterjee's hero in the novel, Agastya Sen, has attended public school in Darjeeling; his father is governor of Bengal; his own mother died young. This is a convenient social matrix, sidestepping as it does potential areas of friction or inconsistency in the creation of a mixed family background. Agastya Sen chooses the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), India's elite civil service, as the site of his professional training. He is sent to a rural district somewhere in central India. For the structure of the novel, it is important to note that this place is the hottest in India according to meteorological records, and that the people there speak a language he cannot understand, and does not want to understand.

Chatterjee clearly portrays a picture of contemporary India in this novel. The novel is set in Madna, a small town in West Bengal. Agastya, the protagonist of the novel, joins the Indian Administrative Service and goes to Madna for training. He is not interested in administrative service, but he is compelled to join in the service. Later Agastya realises that the life in Madna makes him to understand the day-to-day problems of rural people. It is a new experience for the modern youth. There are many people come to collector office with a complaint. Chatterjee draws the clear picture of collector office, where crowd of people standing to meet the collector and some people arguing with the officer who has to give answers to their questions.

The Collectorate was a one-storey stone building. Its corridors had benches and more people. (*English, August: An Indian Story* 12)

Agastya tries to learn many things from Srivastav, who has been in Madna for so many years. As Agastya belongs to a modern youth, from urban area, so it took time for her to understand the problems and struggles of rural people. The training gave him a good experience about the rural life.

The Visitors came all day. Agastya could eventually categorize them. Indeed, that was all he could do, since the conversations were beyond him. The petitioners always stood... the variety of complaints, from the little that Agastya grasped through instinct, gestures... Labourers on daily wages at some road site complained that the contractor paid them irregularly... Srivastav ought to be confident because he had been dealing with such matters for years. (Chatterjee, *English, August: An Indian Story* 18)

Conclusion:

Thus, in essence, culture is all about being human and expressing humanity without recourse. Indian English Writing has acquired a distinct and unparalleled position with an individual character of its own in a multicultural setting. So, in this context multiculturalism the selected novel is explored and analysed as amalgamation of various cultures, achieving the great ideals of world peace and universal fraternity. The process of globalization has not only disconcerted people and cultures but has created new identities and affiliations in terms of both clashes and collaborations. Thus, to conclude, the novel finishes on a note of confusion in Madna's commitment to the trim of the hero's personality. In the event that Madna the corrupt, in reverse spot has not had the option to give him anything positive, it has basically had the option to stir him out of his conceited lack of concern and make him see there is a different universe than the one young fellow like Agastya that substitutes fittingly the masturbation, pot and alcohol; where no language is perceived except if it is flavoured with four-letter words and no food as delectable as weed. He chooses to go on leave for a year and think ideally to come to a more significant presence.

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