



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

**Elements of Humor and Satire in Upamanyu Chatterjee's
*English, August: An Indian Story***

Barasara Brijesh

Research scholar,

Dept. of English,

Shree Govind Guru University,

Godhara

Dr. Vinay Patel

Assistant Professor,

Neotech Institute of Applied Science & Research,

Vadodara



ABSTRACT

Literature is propelled by humour. It is the propensity for certain cognitive events to provoke laughter and amusement. Satire is a literary genre in which vices, follies, abuses, and deficiencies are held up to scorn with the purpose of shocking people, government, or society into greater development. The main purpose of satire is to effect social change. This study examines the use of humour and satire in a particular work by Upamanyu Chatterjee. He is referring to politicians' and bureaucrats' ludicrous imitations of western living styles and manners, as well as their self-serving mentality. His *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988) is a well-written and amusingly humorous work. The use of humour in this novel is the most impressive and astonishing part about it. Aagastya, a metropolitan young boy heavily impacted by western society, is stuck in a tiny town with an uninteresting job. In the novel, emphasis is placed on western culture and its influence on the younger generation, as well as the stark contrast between urban and country life in humorous manner with satirical tone.

Key Words: Humour, Laughter, Amusement, Satire, Western Culture, Bureaucracy

Introduction:

Indian English writing has seen a significant revolution in the last thirty years as a result of the influence of fresh perspectives and voices. Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Geeta Mehta, Kiran Desai, Vikram Chandra, and Chetan Bhagat are just a few writers who have investigated the new possibilities of life and literature. The rich humorous vision of Upamanyu Chatterjee, one of the most compelling new voices in the field of the Indian novel in English literature, has earned him a well-deserved reputation.

Upamanyu Chatterjee was born on December 19, 1959 in Patna, Bihar. His educational institutions were St. Xavier School and St. Stephen's College in New Delhi. Chatterjee wrote a play in high school that was never published but won the school's dramatic competition. In 1983, Chatterjee joined the Indian administrative service as a member of the Maharashtra Cadre. Chatterjee wrote a novel entitled *English August: An Indian Story* which was adapted into a highly acclaimed film of the same title. Chatterjee consistently seeks to highlight the



amusing aspects of ordinary life. References to several types of humour, including farce, satire, and irony, were made using perfect techniques. Upamanyu Chatterjee's outstanding works are *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). Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* won the Central Sahitya Academy prize in 2004. His tone was sarcastic, and he made fun of every bureaucratic flaw in India in his novels.

Role of Humour and Satire in Literature:

Humour is described as "the trait of being funny or humorous and the capacity to make others laugh, particularly as represented in literature" (Keenoy 112). The core of literature is humour. Without humour, literature is bland curry without seasoning. One of the most prolific critics, G.K. Chesterton, once stated, "Literature is leisure, but humour is a necessity." Humour and satire are, in reality, separate literary characteristics. The authors use humour and satire for distinct goals. Humour is the disposition of certain cognitive events to elicit laughter and generate entertainment. People from all around the world are very interested in humour. It is not a literary genre, but rather a literary substance. Humour focuses on emotional components. Palmer (1994) offers a more nuanced definition, stating that "humour is everything that is really or potentially humorous, as well as the process through which this humorousness happens" (3). Beginning in the time of Chaucer, amusing literature has been used to make us laugh for a very long time. It is one of the most powerful literary tools for engaging the audience. It aids the reader in gaining attention, sustaining focus, identifying with the characters, emphasizing and connecting concepts, and visualizing the scene. Additionally, it offers surprise and discovery.

The origin of the term "satire" is the Latin word "satura." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the phrase goes back to the 16th century, and some critics believe it derives from the Latin word satira, the later form of satura, which means mixture. Arthur Scott, in *Current Literary Terms: A Concise Dictionary*, defines satire as "the ridiculing of vices or foolishness" (257).



M.D. Fletcher termed it verbal hostility that ridicules some parts of historical fact. Satire is the literary art of ridiculing or demeaning a topic by rendering it absurd and arousing pleasure, disgust, scorn, or wrath (Abrams 352). Professor of English at the University of Miami, Frank Palmeri, adds, "Satiric storytelling operates indirectly via the parodic transformation of celebration forms, established discourses, and dogmatic assertions" (1). The purpose of satire is to reform and mend organizations and individuals and to eradicate stupidity, sorrow, and evil. Again, it aims for flawless criticism of people, businesses, the government, or society itself. Although satire is sometimes humorous, its main purpose is to provide constructive social critique via the use of wit to bring attention to both specific and general faults in human society. A satirist, on the other hand, attempts to bring about change by creating situations in which folks feel humiliated of their follies and errors. It is used by satirists as a correction for human errors. Those who employ satire often justify it as a correction to the human voice and stupidity.

Elements of Humour in Satire in *English, August: An Indian Story*:

The protagonist of the novel, Agastya, is an urban boy who is brought up in Delhi and Calcutta. As a civil worker, he is sent to Madna, a tiny, unremarkable district town, for a year of training in district administration. Since he was raised in cosmopolitan places like Calcutta and Delhi, he finds it difficult to settle in Madna's culture and environment. He struggles to adapt to the cuisine, people, work, and environment since he is an urban lad. His difficulties adjusting in Madna are partly a result of his English education and background. In the beginning of the novel, Dhruvo informs Agastya that he would encounter significant difficulty in Madna when he says, "I've a feeling, August, You are going to get hazar fucked in Madna" (01) (1). In actuality, Chatterjee is constantly drawn to the humorous parts of ordinary life, and he employs a variety of comedic styles, including farce, black humour, satire, and irony, to depict the follies and foibles of Indian culture. The raucous talks and attitudes of these two friends startle conservative readers. Agastya confesses his apathy in his employment, which has been ingrained in his head for quite some time. His lack of commitment to his career exemplifies and reflects the attitude of today's Indian youngsters toward their chosen profession. The work is made more engaging and relevant to reality by



the novelist's amazing command of language. On his first morning in Madna, he felt like "fallen Adam" after being bitten by mosquitoes on his cheeks, beards, ears, and eyes. He believed that the insects in Calcutta were more civilized since they never touched his face. At Madna, Agastya is housed at a Government Rest House, where he is served insipid food by the attendant Digamber and the chef Vasant. However, Agastya comments on the first day, "Dinner was unbelievable, the dal tasted like lukewarm chilled shampoo" (6). When an odd and unexpected analogy is made between face and food, there is an element of dark humour in it.

The novel's portrayal of the protagonist also has a strong sense of humor. Agastya chuckles at his own anguish, boredom, and dislocation. Agastya comes to the unfathomable realization that he must guide the lives of other people. Madna provides him with a variety of experiences that result in several departmental tasks. Agastya's aloofness causes him to secretly enjoy doing drugs, masturbating, and drinking. This episode provides a funny allusion to his private life. Once again, the novel's protagonist is quite careless and quickly makes up the narrative. Agastya revealed that his wife was a Muslim from Norway to the District Inspector of Land Records later in his training. When the English teacher at school inquiries about his goals, Agastya is a little reckless and shapes the narrative in accordance with his gut. This new intriguing childhood memory will delight the readers once again. Agastya moulds the fact according to him and says that "his parents are in Antarctica-members of the first Indian expedition. Yes, even his mother; she had a PhD in Oceanography from the Sorbonne" (15).

Another enjoyable and humorous part of the book is when Agastya tells Superintendent of Police Mr. Dhiraj Kumar that he climbed Everest the summer before. Agastya feeds his mindset with personal information and varies how he discloses his marital status to other people. When Mr. Kumar inquiries about his wife's disease, he replies, — "I am not married, yet, sir. I would have been married long ago, but my father disapproves her, she's a Muslim" (110). Interestingly when Kumar recalls as heard that his wife was dying of cancer in England, Agastya says — "Me? My wife? No, Sir, there is some confusion that's my cousin" (110).



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

Later after few days S.P. Kumar asks —When are you getting married? Sen? Not for a while. “He had forgotten that what story he had fabricated to Kumar” (139).

The comic components are used by the authors of the novels as a critique of human nature and its flaws. Humour, according to Mark Twain, is ultimately the best and most beneficial thing. As soon as it appears, all of our restraints give way, all of our irritations and resentments go, and a cheerful attitude takes their place. However, the phrase ‘Black humour’ or ‘Black humour’ refers to a different kind of comedy that may sometimes seem weird, grotesque, and disturbing. The morbid and grotesque are combined with humour and farce to create a frightening impact and to illustrate the folly and brutality of life, according to the Random House Dictionary of English. According to the dictionary, "writing that juxtaposes morbid or gruesome aspects with funny ones that underline the senselessness or the futility of existence" is what is meant by ‘the dark humour.’ To make the main character Agastya and others express sardonic humour about the cynical, unpleasant, perplexing events they encounter, Upamanyu Chatterjee uses his dark comedy with a dash of sarcasm. The author illustrates strange and odd events utilizing techniques like fragmented narrative and several points of view, allowing the readers to often see hilarious and enjoyable "tongue in cheek" expressions.

Agastya prefers to be called "August" or "English" and was born and raised in a city. She is a well-educated Anglophile. His father and uncle affectionately refer to him as "Ogu." His father is a retired IAS, and he lost his mother while he was a little child. Agastya is hired by the Indian Administrative Service and sent to Madna, a tiny, hot, and unattractive hinterland town in south India, as a trainee. But in this instance, Upamanyu Chatterjee uses his satirical style to exploit a flaw in the character of Agastya, who struggles to fit in at Madna, is disinterested in his work, and discreetly makes jokes about every circumstance. The focus of the novel is the protagonist, a trainee in a small town where he feels out of place, without ambition or conviction, and is concerned with marijuana, booze, and sexual fantasies. After a few contacts with his higher officials, seeing the appalling living circumstances of the tribal residents, and visiting a leper rehabilitation facility, he ultimately receives a posting as Assistant Collector at Koltanga after realizing his obligations. The work is a vivid satire that



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

well captures the thoughts of contemporary urban educated youth and the lighter side of the affectation and pretentious lifestyle of Indian bureaucrats, according to Chatterjee.

The protagonist stands for a mocking childhood, adolescence, and subsequent development. The whole novel's premise accurately depicts the socioeconomic circumstances of an Indian resident in a rural hinterland. The fiction is an accurate depiction of the harsh reality of India and the Indian people, including their average lives and that of politicians, bureaucrats, businesspeople, people from the working class, and employees from various professions. It stands for the generation of young people who have strayed from a structured lifestyle. Once again, the educated young in India are at the mercy of drug abuse and drunkenness. The main character deals with the collision of eastern and western currents. The lazy lifestyle of educated kids in India, who are disconnected from their inner selves, is a blatant sign of the marginalized youth. The work describes the typical Indian psychology and ideological difficulties that are visible in society in a pleasant way. It is a light-hearted, merry, and playful criticism of Indian politics, institutions of society, and social customs.

The main character is a representation of many urban Indian teenagers. Even though he is a young adult with education, his predisposition to lack strong morals is evident from the moment he appears in the narrative. Words like "time," "stray puppy," "marijuana," and "acute lethargy" in the first sentence show the negative stance of Indian youth. In addition, the state of the young is frightening since they have been used to the slang vocabulary that has been influenced by western culture.

Agastya's adolescence did not go as planned in Darjeeling because he was unable to immerse himself in achievement. Agastya's friend group was noticeably limited to a small number of people. Because it was "not like theirs," Agastya and his companion Prashant envied the colour of their "Anglo and Tib thighs." The author pokes fun at the way he felt disconnected from his own identity and yearned to seem like an Anglo-Indian. Agastya progressively began to want to be an Englishman and showed signs of using soft drugs even while he was still in school. Agastya is not pleased with his rich employment, which is something that every Indian hopes to have. But for him, everything is totally different. Agastya feels



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

compelled by external circumstances; thus, he lacks interest, passion, and enthusiasm for this difficult work. Agastya's first rail trip from Delhi to Madana leaves him with a peculiar feeling-filled head. He "smoked some marijuana" while locking himself in the bathroom. Agastya first feels quite uncomfortable throughout the training since he is having trouble adjusting to life in Madna and feels out of place.

...shabby stations of small towns, incurious patient eyes and weather-beaten bicycles at a level crossing, muddy children and buffalo at a water whole pass behind his mind and he doesn't understand if he would be spending months in a dot in this hinterland (4-5).

Since he comes from an urban upbringing, the rural India with its traditional "cigarette and pan dhabas, terrible food booths, both lighted by blazing kerosene lights, livestock and clanging rickshaws on the road" etc. are upsetting features. Although Dhrubo has a feeling of self-satisfying satisfaction in having received the greatest academic degree—a Ph.D. from Yale—he simultaneously forgets that he first received the necessary training in India. The first day of Agastya's tenure as district administrator has been outstanding. He claims that colonialera traditions serve as the foundation for the district administration. The rules had been established by the British. But afterwards, it was given an Indian flavour. Every regular guy may reach the collector in the postcolonial era. Agastya is really deficient in this area. The author claims that administration is a difficult field to work in and that the rookie officer lacks initiative and cannot be effectively taught its tricks. Agastya learned nothing, in actuality. Agastya lacked energy and zeal. His thoughts are obscured and illogical.

Humour exaggerates common people or circumstances well beyond what is often done with satire or irony. Even the major national symbols, religious convictions, and deeply ingrained attitudes of the populace are mocked by satirists. For instance, Agastya is perplexed by the Gandhi Hall next to the Madna police station's crumbling stage, shattered windows, and aged walls. To him, it seems like a scene from a TV news report about "bombhit Beirut." He queries the collector over the odd-looking statue. The DDO Mr. Bajaj and the education officer interrogate applicants during the interview for the position of teacher. Agastya comes in and joins them as they continue. When Agastya arrived, the atmosphere became sombre.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

Only six of the twenty-three hopefuls had shown up. The last applicant, a graduate who slurred her responses to the opening questions, was summoned. Then Bajaj asked “Who is called the father of nation? ‘Nehru’. A pat reply. I see, and what is Gandhi then? Perhaps the uncle of the nation” (88) He has an unerring touch and perfect balance to maintain continuous comic entertainment without ever descending into farce.

The majority of young people in India experience worry and uncertainty in the workplace and in society as a whole. Ambition may not line up with what young people anticipate. The unemployment rate among them is growing. He must make concessions about his ego, identity, and position. The works of Upamanyu Chatterjee are characterized by a feeling of identity dispersal. However, Agastya is unquestionably incredibly fortunate to have attained the most desirable position in our nation. Agastya really differs from others in that he prefers a clandestine lifestyle free from all ties and constraints.

Thus, the novel is written in funny and humorous manner. Another topic that is well highlighted is the effect of the West on the younger generation and the stark contrast between urban and rural life. It is a wry criticism on the enormous bureaucracy in India and its ineffective administrative staff. Once again, the work offers a sharply satirical portrayal of the alienated and deceived youth of modern India. The conflict between modernity and tradition casts a tremendous shadow on the protagonist's existence. Once again, it is fuelled by a liking for colonial want and personal need. The characters' efforts to express their identities are distorted by the social ills. The more the protagonists look for the proper route, the more difficulties they run into due to the socio-political temporalities of the time. The narrative of Agastya is realistic, amusing, heart-warming, and ageless, and it deserves praise for its inclusion of the funniest components. In reality, the majority of the characters genuinely live two lives—one in externally abstract concepts and another in psychological interior realities. Readers may see through their phony selves. This is one of the author's funniest works and may be her greatest attempt at blending humour with satire. The protagonist of the book, a compassionate and sceptical guy called Agastya, takes the reader on a thought-provoking journey through the Indian bureaucracy and all of its unwelcome horrors. In actuality, the book is a humorous examination of Agastya's sentiments of



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

alienation, dislocation, everyday meditations, and profound and perplexing ideas. Alcohol use and marijuana prevent Agastya from being perplexed or confused. Through the persona of Agastya, the author attempts to highlight many vices and follies while also providing readers with amusing moments. The author contains allusions to items that are of Indian origin. Obviously, the novel's mainstay is humour. This book's humour goes from humorous to foolish, ludicrous to satirical. Comical references are used freely and without interruption. Chatterjee is able to analyse a vast array of Indian attitudes and vices. It is noteworthy because readers identify with the protagonist despite all of his transgressions and bewilderment about it, and that the book aids them in learning about new vices and follies in Agastya's worldview. Despite his wrongdoings, Agastya is liked by readers because he lacks self-importance and confidence. Agastya succeeds in winning the readers over. The novelist's references to Indian bureaucrats, who remain the same and unchanging despite all the regulations that have been given to them, are more sarcastic. The book has a very original concept that is well carried out.

Conclusion:

The novel discussed in the paper mostly cantered on satirical themes that reveal the alienation, regression, and post-colonial hangover of Indian adolescents and youngsters in the late twentieth century. It portrays the contemporary socioeconomic landscape in a realistic manner. One of the key voices in the field of Indian novels in English literature, Upamanyu Chatterjee leaves readers with a deep, humorous perspective. Chatterjee always aims to capture the humorous sides of daily life. Different types of humour, including farce, satire, and irony, gained popularity. His characters develop via a variety of social, historical, political, and familial accumulations that are then represented in each person's subjectivity through an appropriate sense of humour and sarcasm. A highly noticeable theme in the novel is also the lack of the battle to create one's identity. Characters fall prey to traps and ditches that prevent them from comfortably asserting their presence.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

References

- Chatterjee, Upamanyu. *English August: An Indian Story*. London: Faber & Faber, 1988.
- Pattnaik, Jitendra Narayan. *Postmodern Indian English Fiction*. Adhayan Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2012.
- Abrams, Meyer Howard, and Geoffrey Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning, 2011.
- Fletcher, M.D. *Contemporary Political Satire: Narrative Strategies in the Post-Modern Context*. Maryland: Lanham, 1987.
- Mathur, Anurag. *The Inscrutable Americans*. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi: 2011.
- Palmer, Jerry. *Taking Humour Seriously*. London: Routledge. 1994.
- Pattnaik, Jitendra Narayan. *Postmodern Indian English Fiction*. Adhayan Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2012.
- Ross, Alison. *The Language of Humour*. London: Routledge. 1998.