

36.

Humour & Satire in Upamanyu Chatterjee's
The Mammaries of the Welfare State

Mr. S. Rajadurai, Research Scholar, PRIST Deemed University, Thanjavur.

Dr. K. Shibila, Research Supervisor, PRIST Deemed University, Thanjavur.

ABSTRACT : Humour means the thing that we enjoy and laugh by hearing some comical words. Satire is nothing but a criticism on something. Many novelists employ their comic vision to attack the shortfalls of the people, society and human errors. Chatterjee is gifted with a rare talent of wit, satire and black humour. He uses various forms of comedy to depict the harsh realities of life. In his novel, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* the narration is comic, but the issue is too serious to be ignored. It is appreciable on the part of the author to scan through the polluted government officials. It describes the protagonist, Agastya Sen who is in the first year in the Indian Administrative Service. The mental pain, distress and the weight through which a managerial officer works in the present-day situation are indicated.

The following abbreviations are used after the quotations

MWS -*The Mammaries of the Welfare*

Humour means the thing that we enjoy and laugh by hearing some comical words. Satire is nothing but a criticism. Comedy and satire have been used by many noted writers throughout the world.

The world of Upamanyu Chatterjee, a powerful novelist of postcolonial India paints the colourful world of post-independent youth in a realistic way. Chatterjee is always attracted towards comic aspects of everyday life and uses various forms of comedy like farce, black humour, satire and irony to portray the follies of Indian society. The novelist employs the elements of comedy as an attack on the shortfalls of people society and human errors.

The novel, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* is a mirror in which the multi-departmental corruption and immorality of the Indian state gets reflected in their harsh details. The title *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* is quite suggestive. It conveys the corrupt elements among the politics and non-elective government officials in the interest of their own personal and familial ends. The purpose of this novel is to display a canvas of sordid personalities indulging in their sordid deeds.

The Mammaries of the Welfare State is a follow-up to his debut novel, *English August*. The novel is about the welfare state. The welfare of the people is managed by a political dynasty and civil servants. The fiction describes the protagonist, Agastya Sen who is in the first year in the Indian Administrative Service. Agastya is a split-personality character. The novel starts with a threatening of Agastya discussing in an intoxicated condition about the whereabouts of Dhruvo. When the discussion comes to the childhood days, it is said of him:

That was a ten-year-old joke from their school-days in Darjeeling, when they had been envious of some of the Anglo-Indian boys who spoke and behaved differently, and did alarmingly badly in exams and didn't seem to mind, they were the ones who were always with the Tibetan girls and claimed to know all about sex... And like most names, they had paled with the passage of time and place, all but August, but they yet retained with them the knack of bobbing up out of some abyss on the unexpected occasion and nudging a chunk or two of his past. (MWS 2)

Agastya has become a veteran employee in the department of government Civil Services. The mental pain, distress and the weight through which a managerial officer works in the present-day situation are indicated. The political obstruction in decision making, the undue weights from the political gatherings and weight bunches on a regulatory officer has appeared in this novel. The state of the dry state of a regulatory officer:

Early one June morning, the Municipal Corporation showed up at his door. It had decided that week to clean up his part of Bhayankar—a routine exercise that it undertakes every month in different parts of the city, to tear down the shacks of those without clout, harass all who do not bribe to devastate the property of the unprepared. Under the noses of the police and the demolition squad, however, Bhootnath Gaitonde waved a stay order from the court. The worm had turned—and moved like lightning. (MWS 13)

The above-mentioned lines demonstrate the monotony and the hectic way of life of the officers and their works.

Agastya Sen is renamed as August. The focus is on his surroundings, his working area where he has settled down. It shows how he suffers in the world of corruption even though he is an IAS officer. He tries to compromise himself by seeing the cruel activities of the other IAS officers such as Bhupen Raghupati and Dr. B.B. Bhatnagar. These two persons are fully corrupt. One of the politicians Rajani says to Agastya that, “If you can't stand even the possibility of his appointment, you should stop sucking up to the authority. My favourite commandment from the Reader's Digest: If you don't like what you do for a living, quit. If you can't quit, shut up.” (MWS 22)

In the novel, Chatterjee presents several incidents and activities of the politicians and the government officers who are totally money-minded. “Oh no, I'd instead assert that we're a rich country and rich government and a poor civil service” (MWS 29). In the government office not even, a simple work will not happen without money. It plays the most vital role in government office, from low level officers to high grade officers will act regarding to the money that has been given as a commission for them. In Agastya' office, the same thing happens. She feels a lot by seeing the corrupted government officers.

In Madna, to protest the recommendations of commissions a rally is organized by the Raichur, “We will fight to the finish the recommendations of the Kansal commission. If you value Justice, Liberty, Equality, Honest and Truth, Join our Massive March to our Parliament on March 24” (MWS 70).

When the city Madna is plague-stricken, the Chief Revenue Divisional Commissioner Bhupen Raghupati hasn't taken any immediate action. He is busy in playing the game known as

Love-Like-Hate-Adore. He satisfies himself that Lina Natesan Thomas who is going to Madna on special duty in the Disaster Management will take care of her duty in a well manner. Natesan writes a letter to Dr. Harihar Kapila, Secretary of the Welfare State explaining in detail that how far she has faced the misbehavior and sexual disturbances given by her male colleagues and superior persons:

I haven't been assigned any personal staff—no personal Assistant, no peon, no clerk. I was offered a seat on a cane sofa in the chamber of then Deputy Secretary, Shir O.P. Chandha. I have that time complained in writing that it was neither possible nor proper for a Junior Administer, a lady officer, to function out of the chambers of the Deputy Secretary, a satyr. My complaint, which can be perused at Annexure L, had noted that Shri Chadha had verbally proposed to me at that time that if I did not care for the cane sofa, I could be sitting on his lap (MWS 49).

Rajani Suroor's theater group Vyatha enacts the play representing the real condition of the government officers. He is a friend of Ministry of Culture, Heritage and Education Mr. Bhanwar Virbhim. Minister uses Rajani's theatre group for the promotions and diffusion for the common people and indigenous drama and other expressions. The theater group proposes to enact a play representing an event that has occurred in Madna. Karam Chand who is considered as an angry man has pierced with a knife in the right eye of a blind girl because she has asked one more gruel. After the incident an enquiry is done by the higher officials. He refuses and blames for being the victim of caste politics as he belongs to the lower caste and there is no witness of the incident. "Before the enquiry Committee, he deposed indomitably, denied the accusation, contended that h was the victim of the caste politics of the Home, and emphasized that there weren't any credible witnesses against him, for however could the testimony of eleven blind juveniles be considered sound?"(MWS 55). He has been suspended for seventeen months.

Chatterjee points out that how far government officers are paying a little attention to the economic measures suggested by the government. One circular from the government regarding the use of air-conditioner is issued to all the officers which itself costs the much amount nearly forty million but not even single officer followed these guidelines. Everybody discourses about the money paid on air conditioner and other things in the government office and they are very much eager in buying the new things for their office such as, "Brought over a thousand air-conditioners—and a good many fridges, freezers, chillers and ice buckets—for the offices, official motorcades and residential officers of their Cabinet ministers and First Speakers, their Chairmen-Designate and Common Judges." (MWS 63) The use of electricity is also a major problem in the government offices.

Through the character Bhanwar Virbhim who is a minister in the story, Chatterjee criticizes the behaviour of the politicians. He will conduct some fake parties to seduce the voters in the form of giving food, drink and costly wine. Sometimes by giving money he will buy the voters. People are voting for that criminal.

All the civil servants are not at all doing their work properly for the salary amount they are receiving. They are wasting time by doing personal works in the office and chatting with one another by seeing these things he says, "Yes, I feel weird. I ask myself all the time: How do you survive on your ridiculous salary? At the same time, I feel grossly overpaid for the work I do. Not the quantity, which on certain days can be alarming, but the quality. (MWS 23).

Some higher officials enjoy a lot of police security. They have costly cars, government apartments and houses. The government is spending some amount of money for the higher civil servants for this purpose. The Prime Minister decides to visit the Welfare State and to meet the plague attacked areas. This visit requires a heavy police force. Chatterjee condemns these activities.

These types of politicians will depend upon mostly on their caste to run their political life. They just hide themselves in the name of community and mention it for their own desires. There is a lot of criminal records up on Bhanwar Virbhim but he never feels guilty of that. But he just feels proud. This is the pathetic condition of the current politics.

Chatterjee satirizes bitterly social reality of the castes in this country. It is considered as a crime because it gives advantage to some and injustice to many. Dr. Kapila views on caste is shocking when he says, “Caste is a much more reliable factor than merit, you know... because merit? Every Tom, Dick and Harry has merit, but how many have the right temperament, the right ethos, genes, lineage, morality, attitude, biases, hang-ups – in short, the right caste – for a job?” (MWS 145).

Chatterjee attacks and criticizes the belief on God. The inhuman Bhupen Raghupati beats a small boy Chamundi and tries to give sexual torture to him. All these things happened in front of the statue of Lord Ganesh. After this big incident, Chamundi disappears and it remains a mystery. The police have not filled an FIR against Raghupati. The local politician, Gatonde takes this matter to Agastya Sen, the D.M. of Madana who is facing charges of sexual assault. But Agastya is in critical position that he can't take any action up on him.

Chatterjee presents the absurdities and the intangible nature of bureaucracy in India along with its association in politics, “I can't eat anything today. My mother died today. The man looked puzzled again. ‘I mean, this is the anniversary of my mother's death, and I fast’. For a moment he contemplated adding, ‘In penance, because I killed her’” (MWS 78). These lines add to the grotesque kind of humour which Agastya enjoys during his stay at Madna. These are a sort of a comic relief from the dry, drab life of the town. He finds no respite even at the guest house or in the Collectorate. Agastya's character is more ambiguous and round than the other persons in the fiction.

The style is very often mock-serious. “We can never eradicate poverty...but we can eradicate the poor. All we need is intelligent legislation.” (MWS 120) There is a sharp, penetrating pinch of humour that has been heightened by the perfect use of mock-serious tone. The whole novel consists of satirical attitude which is both cynical and realistic.

In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, the satire is on target and the humour sharp. Upmanyu Chatterjee's genius is revealed through the use of humour and satire.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source:

Chatterjee, Upamanyu. *Mammaries of the Welfare State*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd., 2001. Print.

Secondary Source:

Akram, Mahammad. "A Short Summary the Ideas of the Welfare State in Upamanyu Chatterjee's Fiction". Rev. *An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*. Vol. 1, Issue 5, May. 2014.

Helene Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*. trans. S. Gilbert and B. Wing. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 1986. Print.

Markapudi David Raju, "Dysfunctional Democratic Behemoths: Politician Mandarin Nexus" In Upamanyu Chatterjee's "The Mammaries of The Welfare State" *International Journal of English Language Literature & Translation Studies*. Vol.3.Issue.4 Oct.-Dec. 2016.

Nidhi, Nema. Rev. "Exploration of Latent Irony in Explicit Grotesquery of Upamanyu Chatterjee's Weight Loss". *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Transition Studies*. Vol. 3. Issue. 2. 2016.

Pattnaik, Jitendra Narayan. *Postmodern Indian English Fiction*. New Delhi: Adhayan Publishers and Distributors. 2012.

