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**SOCIAL REALISM IN UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S
THE MAMMARIES OF THE WELFARE STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The word 'Social' is a broad word that covers all facets of human action that display an awareness of others. 'Social Realism' is nothing but reaching out to an understanding of social life. Social Realism entails individual, social and cultural modifications in all the spheres of life with their intricacies, and nuances: essentials relating to family, the class, the marriage, the school, the politics, the interrelation, economy, morality, religion, and educational standards. It communicates social problems such as unemployment, youth unrest, industrial indiscipline, crime, war and their causes and consequences. In the novelists' hands it remains a technique by which truth is represented in an artistic way. As we observe, recent Indian English fiction demonstrates social realism in numerous implications, like depiction of the social panorama, emphasis on political and historical ambience, and mapping of Individual's state of mind in engagement with the outer world. The novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee are a very noteworthy addition to the body of realistic fiction. He is basically a creative artist and realist who moves around the society and experiences the crisis and tensions of the youth generation, thereby arousing his deep creative impulse. This paper makes an attempt to analyse how Upamanyu Chatterjee exploits the literary technique 'Social Realism' to depict the pitfalls of Indian society, along with Indian Bureaucracy in his notable novel *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*.

INTRODUCTION

I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me as a sound Judgment. (qtd in Singh, *The Fiction...* 130)

The literary manifesto of many a novelist in the past as well as in the present is to write for social, political and economic purpose. The purpose is not only to throw light upon the social evils and malpractices prevailing in the society in those days,

but also to employ fiction to the cause of social amelioration. The establishment of novel in the world of literature manifests itself multifariously encompassing almost every facet of social life, which is regarded as Social Realism. Realism is considered to be introduced during literary movement in 19th century France, though we cannot restrict it to any one century or group of writers; it is often linked with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac. George Eliot introduced realism into England, and William Dean Howells introduced it into the United States. Realism has been mostly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of

social factors and environment is the fundamental constituent in the dramatic complications in literature, an approach that proceeds from an analysis of reality in terms of natural forces. Realism records or reflects truly the real way of life. It authentically depicts the dreams and ambitions, the failures and successes, the motives and experiences of life. Over the years, literature has mirrored the existing social problems in many prominent works of literature under the shadow of realism. There have been sincere attempts to reconstruct incidents from great literatures of the past ages. They express the truth, the truth of emotion, which is the ultimate of realism. This feature of realism is lacking in the works of some of the writers. Realism should be truthful and honest depiction of society. It should be true effort to concentrate on reality with the concern to make it superior world.

Realism in literature is the theory or practice of loyalty to natural world, or to real life and to honest depiction of daily life without glorifying it. Realism has also been used significantly to represent minute details or concern with insignificant, disgusting or dirty subjects. Realism in art and literature is an attempt to depict life as it is. It portrays life with camera trustworthiness, deleting nothing, that is gruesome or agonizing, and romanticizing nothing. For the realists, the artist's primary function is to depict as truthfully as possible what is observed through the senses. Realism was recognized as a potent movement in the 1700's, and by the mid 1800's it became a leading art form. Basically, realism came as a revolt against classicism and romanticism, and does not twist life by compelling it to agree with their own wishes or with the principles of art. However, while choosing and showing their stuff, the realists do get influenced by what they feel and think. Even the most systematic realism is the outcome of observations and personal opinion. Realism became increasingly popular not only because it was a revolt against the romantic fiction, but also due to two major factors – the development of modern science, which gives prominence to facts and figures and the growing craving of artists as well as readers for matter-of-fact depiction of different social problems. In this connection James Connolly rightly assumed:

Just as it is true that a stream cannot rise above its source, so it is true that a national literature cannot rise above the moral level of the social conditions of the people from whom it derives its inspiration. (qtd in Manser 254)

India has a prosperous and ancient tradition of story – telling, a radiant galaxy of story - tellers who illumine the pages of its history and literature. The Indian English novel with a social purpose can be said to have caught profound roots in the Indian soil, by artistically treating the contemporary troubles and creatively discovering and interpreting Indian in all its multicolored facets. Critics may argue that since the Indian English novel with a social purpose is primarily concerned with the contemporary issues and relevant events in life, it may bound to have a universal appeal. But it must be remembered that the Indian novelist with a social purpose, like any good innovative writer, writes with a social consciousness born of the incidents performed around him. The Indian novel in English began as a novel of social realism, but not as a romance or historical romance. The rise of the novel in India was not purely a literary phenomenon. It was a social phenomenon, rather than a mere fulfilment of a social need or desire. It was associated with social, political and economic conditions of the country.

There is no doubt in saying that English Literature in India in the last thirty years has undergone a vast change. From the last decade of 1980s new ideas and voices came in a flux in Indian English Writing, especially in the arena of fiction. There are many novelists like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Geeta Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Chetan Bhagat, and many more who explored the new possibilities of life and literature. Similarly, Upamanyu Chatterjee's fiction highlights the botched civilization with a new perspective and difference.

Upamanya Chatterjee is an Indian author and administrator, notable for his works set in the milieu of the Indian Administrative Service, particularly his first novel English, August. Born in Patna, he was educated at St.Xavier's School and St.Stephen's College in Delhi. He joined Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1983, and his

professional career not only marked the beginning of his literary career, but also was the source from which he created his characters. Thus far he has published six novels, namely *English August: An Indian Story*, *The Last Burden*, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, *Weight Loss*, *Way to Go*, and *Fairy Tales at Fifty* and a handful of short stories of which 'The Assassination of Indira Gandhi' and 'Watching Them' are particularly noteworthy. All of his novels have received critical and political support in spite of the fact that the novels portray the legal and political systems in a satirical manner.

"Comic and Kafkaesque, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) is a masterwork of satire by a major writer at the height of his powers" (*The Mammaries... Cover Page*). In this sequel to *English August*, August is no longer the immature bureaucrat. He is no longer called August either. The identity of the book lies in its growth and development. Eight years in the service, August, has full-grown into a well rounded Sri Augustya Sen saab. Agastya is older, more harsher, but still unwilling to change into the monster that the system called 'The Welfare State' i.e. India compels its employees to become. He is the good man in a realm where being good implies being lethargic and uninterested. He wishes to change the system from the inside, but then he comes across the universal problem of being a speck in the ocean of the corruption and vile. He is a submissively guilty victim hero, trapped in an bizarre situation and unable to rescue himself from there. He is surrounded by eccentrics, conmen and corrupt officers, but he does not think of combating for courage, selfhood and a sense of moral human dignity. He faces corruptions of the bureaucratic world in a way typical of a man who has been rendered powerless to respond morally. When he refuses bribes, everyone looks at him with surprise and sadly and even when he passes bribes on to a family of beggars, some motorists snatch it. Though Agastya does not like the bureaucratic world still he is unable to quit his job. This impression gains vigor when we ponder over the question – why is it that Agastya, despite hating the bureaucratic world, still hangs around? The answer comes from him is that 'One can't, you know, leave one's mother's lap. The outside world is

much less funny and far wicked (342). He feels secure in the world of bureaucracy 'because within the civil service, one is likelier to know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody who knows a cop'(26).

August's purposeless life is shown in the context of building a welfare state where the viciousness of governance is a major factor. He is constantly confronted with the absurdities of bureaucratic life around him. It incites one to realize, how useless one's upbringing has been when it comes to facing one's own country. The bureaucrats are selfish by their nature and this nature of bureaucrats is reminded by him in the novel in these lines. "Self-interest is the only commandment-naturally-of the welfare state, the rest is waffle." (14) The novel gives an insight into the working of the 'system' in welfare state i.e. India. 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 that are shocking. The title is also quite indicative in the sense that it conveys the resourcefulness of the corrupt elements supervising the politics and bureaucracy to milk the system in the interest of their own personal and familial ends. According to a reviewer:

Mammaries is not for the faint hearted, for those who like their real and fictional worlds sanitised and deodarised. Though a bit repetitive, it is a novel which demands and keeps one's attention not only by its sarcastic asides and inside jokes, but also because it dares to voice a moral outrage that very rarely finds its way into fiction, especially recent Indian English fiction.

Read it if you can. (Sharma)

As a social realist, Upamanyu Chatterjee attacks injustice of socio-politico-economic exploitation with its numerous ramifications in the realms of bureaucracy, politics, caste, religion. He is as a realist concerned with the destiny of the individual trapped in the grip and whirlpool of a corrupt and anti-people system. As we see both in the novels of Chatterjee and the bureaucracy of India, there has unquestionably emerged a culture which can be best summarised as the lick-up and kick-below and

rules-are-for-fools culture. This culture ambience confronts Agastya Sen both in *English August: An Indian Story* as well as in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*. He notices with participative enjoyment the performance of this culture by the collector Srivastava in *English August: An Indian Story* and the Commissioner Raghupati in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*. This is due to the rising depravity and a growing belief, extensively shared among the political and bureaucratic elite, that the state is an arena where public office is to be used for private ends. The bureaucracy is impassive, disinterested in public welfare, and corrupt. Even many people choose bureaucracy as their profession only for the facilities which are provided to them. A bureaucrat, Dhruvo, Agastya's friend joins bureaucracy in a coldly confessional manner because 'within the civil service one is likelier to have a peon, a personal assistant, and an ambassador car as buffers between one's good self and the rest of the government'(97). People like the high State official Bhupen Raghupati, the politician Makhmal Bagai, the astrologer Baba Mastram, the artist Rajni Suroor, and several others, play out the daily drama of venality and depravity on the bare bosom of the state which is proudly called the welfare state.

The Mammaries of Welfare State also reflects the disintegration of the socio-cultural institutions in addition to the politico-bureaucratic systems. The character of the astrologer Baba Mastram brings in the distressing factor of the religious organization being in collusion with the corrupt systems of bureaucracy and politics. Baba Mastram is a character with whom the corrupt officials of the State plan about when to ask for salary and advantages raises and when to give vent to their beastly carnality.

If *English August* was a delicate outside-in peep into the Indian bureaucracy through August's eyes of *English August*; *The Mammaries of Welfare State* is a vast chronicle of the functioning of Indian bureaucracy and its hilarious yet inevitable association with the Indian politics. Many civil servants are profoundly involved in the adherent politics. They are preoccupied with it, penetrated by it, and take participation individually and collectively

in it. In the novel, these are often contractors, mafia, corrupt bureaucrats and manipulators who have made money through using the political system in their own personal interest, and are therefore interested in the continuance of turmoil and a patronage-based administration. Some of the characters like Makhmal Bagai, Bhootnath Gaitonde and Bhupen Ragupati symbolize those unscrupulous elements of a politico-bureaucratic system for whom the state's resources are the most valued prize for the fulfillment of their personal ends.

In the novel, Chatterjee also satirize another bitter social reality of our country i.e. Casteism. It is considered as an age-old heinous crime, because it is responsible for advantage to some and injustice to many. The excuse of Dr. Kapila on the subject of the role of caste is chillingly direct and 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?

Upamanyu Chatterjee is a social realist who steadfastly believes that fiction should tackle the facts of actual day to day living. His all the novels are imaginative attacks on the vulgarities, absurdities and corruptions that mark our current recognisable reality. It is the feature of the social realism of Upamanyu Chatterjee that he constructs a fictional world that refuses not to appear factual. He reminds us throughout his work that, as a perspective critic has remarked, 'Art is not created in a vacuum, it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important because articulate part'(scott 124). Thus, being an IAS officer Chatterjee accurately presents the absurdities and the intangible nature of bureaucracy in India along with its association with politics.

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