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COMIC IN UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S *THE MAMMARIES OF THE WELFARE STATE*

PUTLA ANANDA RAO

Lecturer in English

Bapatla College of Arts and Sciences, Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh, India

Email: anandarao2001@gmail.com



PUTLA ANANDA RAO

ABSTRACT

The novelists like Upamanyu Chatterjee 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 who is concerned with the official absurdities of the native land. "Comic and Kafkaesque, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) is a masterwork of satire by a major writer Upamanyu Chatterjee at the height of his powers", though it is a sequel to 'English, August', finely delineates the grotesquery of governance and worthlessness of the administrative posts in India, Upamanyu Chatterjee's fiction highlights the botched civilization with a new perspective and difference in his comic vision. He uses various forms of comedy to depict the harsh realities of life. Thus, the paper makes an attempt to study that how Upamanyu Chatterjee uses his comic vision as his strategy to depict the drawbacks of Indian society. Comic vision makes fun of situations and people, while simultaneously provoking thought. In this novel the narration is comic but the issue is too serious to be ignored. It's really appreciable on the part of the author to scan through the polluted bureaucracy in which he himself is the part and he is unhesitant in attacking the dysfunction of the democracy and its main representative's i.e politicians and bureaucrats with his massive and sharpened tools of wit and satire. Finally research concluded that Upamanyu Chatterjee is a genius for black humour and the absurd has never been more compelling than in this unforgettable portrait of a lost life.

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Introduction

Comedy as a literary form has been used by many noted writers throughout the world. The world of Upamanyu Chatterjee, a powerful novelist of postcolonial India paints 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 and foibles of Indian society. The novelists employ

the elements of comedy as an attack on the shortfalls of people society and human errors.

M. David Raju writes in an article that —Chatterjee is gifted with an extraordinary talent for irony, satire and black humour. His young modern educated characters express the sense of ennui as they are restless, disinterested, enervating, feel alienated and face the inner conflict and arduously try to find their place in the world.

The literary world of Upamanyu Chatterjee includes some beautiful creations, but in the present

investigation selects only one novel, *Mammaries of the Welfare State* in order to find out elements of humour and satire.

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 Sharma:

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, 2001)

According to Soumya Bhattacharya (2015),

"Compared to *English August* (and one can't help the comparison of a sequel to a prequel) *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* has a greater breadth, a broader sweep, a far bigger mélange of unforgettable characters. It is also often dark, brooding, even scary. The humour is sometimes all black. Nonetheless, it is unputdownably funny".

The novel offers many targets, and Chatterjee goes after what seems like most of them. Far more often than not he is on target. The critique is not angry or dry: there is frustration, but also humour throughout. Nirmal Sandhu (2001) sates that,

"The *Mammaries of the Welfare State*" is Upamanyu Chatterjee's third book after his successful debut "*English, August*" and "*The Last Burden*". It is a hilarious satire. But the issue it focuses on — how the politician-bureaucrat nexus uses the rule-ridden system of governance to its advantage at the cost of the citizen — is too serious to be laughed off. It provokes one to realise, how

worthless one's upbringing has been when it comes to facing one's own country.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) wins the Central Sahitya Academy award in 2004. The present fiction enjoys worldwide acclamation from the readers. The book is amazingly brilliant and humorous. Prof Jitendra Narayan Pattnaik in *Post Modern Indian English Fiction (PMIEF)* (2012), remarks that the novel is a comic one and provides a lot of ease moments for the readers. According to Pattnaik, "hilarious comedy and sharp satire on the functioning of the so called welfare state, which is India" (45). The *Mammaries of the Welfare State* is a follow-up to his debut novel, *English August*. The novel is 25 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 has become a veteran employee in the department of government Civil Services. In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, the style is a little bit different, though not something totally unique. Chatterjee, in that sense, is never very much a writer having uniqueness of style, but, even then, he is always different from others. Here he adopts an allegorical style, presenting the Welfare State as a microcosm India and the administrators as the suckers. In fact, symbolism is always there, in all his novels, but here it reaches the height of allegory. A dynamic writer as Chatterjee is, his language cum style differ according to incidental backgrounds too.

The Mammaries of the Welfare State recounts the story of Agastya who is in dismay with his service. Agastya has not found happiness in the bureaucratic functions. The book finely delineates the grotesquery of governance and worthlessness of the administrative posts in India. Akram Mahammad (2014) writes, —The boon of civil servants becomes bane in the twentieth century India

'The *Mammaries of the Welfare State*', however it is a continuation of '*English, August*', finely portrays the grotesquery of administration and uselessness of the authoritative posts in India. The help of common administrations turns into a bane in the twentieth century India. The pangs, distress and the weight through which a managerial

officer works in the present day situation are indicated out in the novel. Furthermore, the political obstruction in decision— making the undue weights from the political gatherings and weight bunches on a regulatory officer— has been unequivocally appeared in this specific novel. A case from the content would do the trick the normal work and additionally 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. (Page, 13)”

The above paragraph appropriately demonstrates the monotony and the hectic way of life of the officers and their works. Besides, the monotonous exercises damage the characteristic and in addition the deepest existence of the officers. The issue of conveying the demonstration of improvement to the overall population likewise goes to the bleeding edge in light of the fact that, on occasion, the work, particularly in people in general offices, experiences the intricacy of red-strips. What's more, the officers have of experience these hardships in their trip to the authoritative changes. In this unique circumstance, the expressions of Khushwant Singh are able to take note. He stated that “most of the services done by the administrative officers are forgotten, but the lacuna in them highlighted in the print as well as in the electronic media” (Singh, 2008).

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.

“‘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’.

The above line 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 where restlessness, purposelessness, cyclic journey hover him throughout the day and night. He finds no respite even at the guest house or in the collectorate. However, Agastya’s character, as evident in the novel seems to be more ambiguous and round than the other persons in the fiction.

In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, Upamanyu Chatterjee lists out the series of activities of clerks and officials that borders on corruption, bribery and dishonesty besides highlighting what is not dishonesty and corruption. As a matter of convenience officials change their attitudes and

orders and the frequency of corruption level changes as per the individuals.

Keen and sharp satire is found written in journalistic manner with the touch of objectivity when it comes to official matters, presenting the picture of sucking the country, the ways and the suckers.

To help you to use your time more efficiently in office and to ensure that you are economical in the use of the stationery and property of the Welfare State, your kind attention is drawn once more to Rule....The last procedure, observed too often in our offices, smacks of laziness and lack of discipline. Also, its end product reflects rather badly on the financial resources of the Welfare State (*The Mammaries of the Welfare State* 124-125).

Height of refined satire with mixture of penetrating irony can be found in these sentences where journalistic serious tone has been mingled with underlying satire producing the desired subtle mock serious effect. Vijay Nambisan, after his interview with Upamanyu Chatterjee, mentions:

It's a comedy, he tells me, "The idea that nothing should be straightforward is clear in *The Last Burden*, but here it's at least funny. It's a comedy: people don't change."

The Mammaries of the Welfare State is a novel where one finds the absence of the stream of consciousness technique. Unlike the other novels of Chatterjee, there is no flash back, though the novel sometimes jumps from one corner to another, from one episode or event to another, without giving any pre-signal. The style is sometimes serious and sometimes non-serious and very often mock-serious. Sentences like "We can never Eradicate poverty,...but we can eradicate the poor. All we need is intelligent legislation" (p. 120) have sharp, probing and penetrating pinch that has been heightened by the perfect use of mock-serious tone. This dark humour can be found in other novels of Chatterjee too. The whole novel consists this satirical attitude which is both cynical and realistic. "The book is a satire, strange obsessions and evasive fear looms large in every page of the novel." (Akram, 2014).

The title *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* is quite suggestive in the sense that it conveys the resourcefulness of the corrupt elements managing the politics and bureaucracy to milk the system in the interest of their own personal and familial aggrandizement. The central fictional emphasis here is on the antiheroic turning upside down of the putative system of the state bureaucracy as a system of delivery of benefits to the deprived sections. The very title of the novel suggests, in its suggestive bareness, a routine of daily, rather hourly, milking of the docile, inexhaustible and seeming land of abundance that is the 'Welfare State'. A close reading of these novels reveals that their antiheroes and their families have failed to understand the meaning of reality, having forever mistaken the trapping for the real thing. The dominating presence in this novel is of the antiheroic deeds of the mandarins and politicians of the Welfare State, because the purpose of this novel is to display a canvas of sordid personalities indulging in their sordid deeds.

The Mammaries of Welfare State is a masterwork of satire by a major writer at the height of his powers". It is the cover photograph by Ashish Chawla that is fascinating and intriguing but also leads one to interrogate the propriety of it. The picture itself is satirical deliberately shot to match the content of the novel. "Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire derides; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. The butt may be an individual or a type of a person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even against mankind" (Helene Cixous, 1986). The most powerful preoccupations in the novel being the desolation of bureaucratic life – all details of character, incident and setting serve this theme.

Conclusion

The Mammaries of the Welfare State is an enjoyable, if sometimes too-broad entertainment. One wishes for a stronger narrative thread, but the writing is good, the satire on target, and the humour

sharp. Really, Upmanyu Chatterjee's genius for black humour and the absurd has never been more compelling than in this unforgettable portrait of a lost life.

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