

Bureaucratic Decay, The Struggle for Integrity and The Corruption in Upamanyu Chatterjee's Novel '*The Mammaries of the Welfare State*'

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Abstract: Upamanyu Chatterjee presents a biting satirical portrayal of the Indian Bureaucratic system and its widespread corruption in his work '*The Mammaries of the Welfare State*' (2000). He is not only the winner of Sahitya academy award in 2004, but also a civil servant, who knows the practical depth of his view point. In his work, *English: August*, he exposes the 'steel frame' of Indian Administration, which is not serving properly to its citizens and it has become self-serving. This paper studies themes of systematic corruption, moral degradation, bureaucratic alienation and individual's void resistance with in a degraded welfare state. Analysis of the key episodes –housing crises, reservation politics, plague outbreak, personal compromises- highlights Chatterjee's social vision. The study highlights Chatterjee's social vision: a critique of post-colonial India's governance failures. Public welfare was neglected because of personal ambitions and institutional decay in post- colonial India. This novel emphasizes how the honest individuals like Agastya Sen are gradually corrupted by a system, where exploitation and sycophancy was rewarded.

Key-words: Upamanyu Chatterjee, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*- Corruption- Indian Bureaucracy- post colonial governance- Agastya Sen.

Introduction

Upamanyu Chatterjee is one of the most sharp-witted voices in contemporary English Literature. He is famous for his sharp wit and unwavering depiction of societal absurdities. His novels like *English, August: An Indian Story*, (1988), and '*The Mammaries of the Welfare State*' (2000), focus on the cultural, political and Administrative struggles of modern India. '*Englis: August*' introduces the idealistic yet indifferent Agastya Sen (August), working in Indian Administrative service(IAS), and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* continues to depict the previous novel's evaluation eight years later. Now Agastya Sen is adjusted in to the 'steel frame' but mostly alienated.

Title of the novel metaphorically conveys corruption as sucking the mummies. Bureaucrats, politicians and opportunists continuously suck the welfare state. Chatterjee highlighted failures of the Welfare State in the areas of health, Administration, housing and social justice by setting places like Bhayankar and Madna.

"*The Mammaries of the Welfare State* is a mirror in which the multi departmental decay and depravity of the Indian State gets reflected in their bitter details that are horrifying. The title is quite suggestive in the sense that it conveys their resourcefulness of the corrupt elements managing the politics and bureaucracy to milk the system in the interest of their own personal and familial aggrandizement." ¹

This paper studies the novel's portrayal of institutional decay, and broader socio- political commentary, the internal conflict of the protagonist, and argues that Chatterjee uses satire to highlight how corruption is widespread every level of administration, and also argues that the system is not at all serving to individual needs of its public.

"...the welfare state can never adequately protect its citizens and that, as often as not, whether it be the riots of 1980 or the sad event of the not-as-yet-martyred Suroor, one could argue that it is the State itself, in the shape of its police force or political leaders, that is the aggressor..." (TMTWS, p.389)



Partial corruption and depiction of Alienation in a degraded system:

The novel's central tension is represented by Agastya Sen, who says, "I am dishonest, but not corrupted". He is an honest man but tainted by his environment. His emotional exhaustion is depicted in the opening scenes where he weeps silently in his office, more surprised by life in 'the world's longest slum'. Detailed depiction of endless garbage dumps symbolizes national decay.

Chatterjee contrasts systematic gradual rot of Agastya with lingering idealism. He was posted in the Housing Department, faces problems for basic accommodation, sharing a room with six others, even though he is an IAS officer in duty. Hierarchical culture which is pervasive in government officers is evident in his interactions with seniors like Menon. Agastya was frustrated with pointless work and low salary, and expresses resignation fantasies, drafting letters calling superiors 'fuck faces'. However, he admits his partial dishonesty in using office phones, by saying,

"I am dishonest, but not corrupt. I use my office phone to make personal calls- that's strictly speaking, being dishonest, but I haven't yet had my palm greased. I have received a box of mithai at Diwali and a bottle of Scotch at Christmas, though." (TMTWS, p.389)

This view point differentiates him from his colleagues who are corrupt. Agastya Sen's emotional vacuum is reflected amid professional drudgery and his relationship with Daya, a divorced older woman. Chatterjee highlights that good result cannot come out in the corrupted environment just as bad soil cannot give good trees and fruits. His gradual growth from the prequel shows maturity through efforts, but also alienation from the system which are proved futile.

The housing problem and Systematic degradation of the welfare State:

The core irony of this novel is established in the first chapter, 'The Housing Problem'. Officers who are working in the housing department are also suffering from lack of proper homes. Agastya's improper accommodation symbolizes the failure of the system itself. The city, Bhayankar, represents the microcosm of India where clerks, drivers and peons are neglected. Though these people are compared to the wheels of the welfare state, exploited by the "steel frame" or higher officials.

The imagery of garbage strewn landscapes, decomposing polythene bags filled with human waste symbolizes internal bureaucratic rot. The extent of corruption of the administrators who are pretending as governing, is evident at the clear depiction of the Raj Atidhi State Guest house, separated from a massive dump by barbed wire. The use of dark humour by Chatterjee is exemplified by Agasty's ironic self-reflection – "breath deep, my dear, this fragrant, invigorating air."

This setting portrays the condition of post-liberalized India, where urban areas are full of slums and inequality. The welfare state, which is intended to uplift society, results cycles of poverty and indifference.

Milking the Mammaries: Corruption is deeply rooted in the system:

Main theme of this novel is corruption. Instead of serving to the nation, Bureaucrats consider the state as a resource to exploit. Soon after entering into the service, Agastya Sen understand that many people try to "milk dry the boobs of the welfare state." Low salaries of the employs justify the side jobs like tailoring which is done by Karam Chand, and also pretty bribes, where as the seniors indulge in extreme waste.

"...to fork out official wages for the same, the simplest course would be to carry on a colonial tradition and open a camp office in the bungalow. (TMTWS, p.82) ... that involved, among other things, the selection of a hundred and seventy-two staff members, including personal Assistants, stenographers, clerks, typists, peons, chowkidars, gardeners and daily wage laborers who could cook, sweep, scavenge and massage.... And the choosing of curtains,



carpets, table, chairs, air-conditioners, cupboards, idols, cars and smaller idols for the cars. Setting up the Minister set back the Welfare State by the usual one crore.” (TMTWS, p.269)

Episodes of Multi layered corruption:

Files without precedent: Applications like installing a phone kiosk, are much delayed through authorized formalities of bureaucracy, it happens so, not always for bribes, but because of laziness of employs and incompetence.

Ph.D. Frauds:

B.B. Bhatnagar gets a doctorate by copied work and also by utilizing office time, highlighting academic and administrative substandard.

Manipulation for political gain:

Politicians give much priority to caste count over governance. Absurd ‘piss test’ of Kansal commission tells about implementation of reservations for political gains. Manipulation of deaths in the Madna due to plague diverts attention of the public.

How artists and activists earn funds under the guise of public welfare is satirized through the Rajani Suroor’s Theatre group “Vyatha” (pain). These voluntary organizations consider these kinds of performances as an income source, and misuse the funds. Satirically prime minister’s office also give patronage:

“...It is what in essence all your welfare state programs do to all your beneficiaries- what else is beggary but base exploitation, tell me? ...’Vyatha’, Suroor’s drama group.... the pressure is on us to prepare a backgrounder for a white paper for the department on this whole Rajani Suroor’s business. I told them that it would be easier to draw up an off-white paper.” P. no. 176.

Chatterjee portrayed corruption as systematic across all classes. Middle class individuals were looted by bureaucrats, while the system rewards those who “suck, suck, suck.” The view of Agastya about the inherent honesty among English-educated elites changed now on and criticized the upbringings of elite class.

“Truly the land of opportunity, the Welfare State could boast of thousands of officials, great and small, who hadn’t let a single chance to rake it in slip by-the accounts who charged a percentage for each salary, increment, allowance and emolument that they paid out to their colleagues, the section officers who picked up fifty rupees for each day of unauthorized leave that they permitted their clerks, the drivers who siphoned off petrol and diesel from their official car for sale- at bargain rates, of course to their buddies, overtimes bills, their superiors who took cuts from them for passing those same bills- the list is long, varied and intricately interwoven, and the corruption terribly insidious. (TMTWS, p.270).

Plague disaster in Madna: Negative, Shifting priorities and Hypocrisy:

Agastya’s honesty was tested by his transfer to plague-stricken Madna. The outbreak exposes governmental apathy. The beginning hype of the media disappears as political stories (reservations, appointments) dominate. Data manipulation and denial was revealed through under reported deaths.

The collapse of medical infrastructure was evident through the incident of Dr. Srinivas Chakki, who was inflected plague and ran from unhygienic hospitals. Lower staff faces ground level risks while officials waste crores of rupees on short visits. Dereliction of duty was exemplified by Raghupathi’s preoccupation with personal lust and astrology (consulting Baba Mastram for every decision.)



The plague symbolizes neglected public health in the political game. Agastya is uncertain whether his presence makes any difference when system's existence itself is uncertain. This reflects powerful message of individual powerlessness.

Power abuse, moral decay and exploitation:

Chatterjee unwaveringly depicts moral depravity. The ultimate perversion of power is represented by Bhupen Raghupathi's absurd act, blended with superstition with brutality where the tribal boy, Chamundi is sexually abused in a Pooja room before Lord Ganesha. Fake Babas and perform these kinds of acts.

Women officials and attendants were commonly vulnerable for sexual harassment. Personal indulgencies like overuse of air conditioners, junkets misuse public funds. The novel described bureaucratic lust for sex, money, power and sex with social decay.

Social Vision:

Critique of Institutions and Identity struggle:

Chatterjee's oeuvre critiques monetary, cultural, political and social imbalances. *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* extends issues from *The Last Burden* (familial erosion) to institutional ones. Agastya's alienation mirrors youth disappointment with discipline and honest living.

Social dominance Theory is applicable where the novel shows how elites maintain hierarchies through corruption and exploitation. Caste politics, fake babas, and media sensationalism sustain the status quo. Yet characters like Karam Chand who is diligent yet impoverished and Agastya offer glimmers of resilience.

The satire is joyful yet profound., using humour to underscore tragedy. As one critique notes, the novel mirrors "multidepartmental decay" in horrifying detail.

Conclusion:

The Mammaries of the Welfare State stands as a powerful satire of India's bureaucratic behemoth. Chatterjee reveals through Agastya Sen's journey that *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* nourish the corrupt while starving the honest. The realistic picture of governance is revealed through plague mismanagement, housing failures, reservation policies and moral atrocities that appear grotesque.

One should accept that Agastya's partial corruption is inevitable in the rotten system. The Novel calls for introspection: Can integrity survive in that so called system? Chatterjee is urging readers to confront the truth where power, responsibility and national character is at question? In an era of ongoing bureaucratic and political challenges, the work remains strikingly relevant, blending humour with humanist concern for a better India.

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