EXISTENTIALISM IN THE NOVELS OF UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE

by

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO AVINASHILINGAM INSTITUTE FOR HOME SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN, (DEEMED UNIVERSITY), COIMBATORE - 641 043 - IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

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DECLARATION

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **"EXISTENTIALISM IN THE NOVELS OF UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE"** submitted to the Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (Deemed University), Coimbatore - 641 043, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the **DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH** is a record of original research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. (Tmt). Shyamala Sivanandham, M.A. (Nagpur), Dip. Ed., Ph.D., (Madras), Professor and Head of the Department of English, and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree / Diploma / Associateship / Fellowship or other similar title to any candidate of any University.

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CERTIFICATE

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **"EXISTENTIALISM IN THE NOVELS OF UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE"** submitted to the Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Deemed University, Coimbatore – 641 043, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the **DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH,** is a record of original research work done by **Ms. S. CHITRA**, during the period of her study in the Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Deemed University, Coimbatore – 641 043, under my supervision and guidance and the dissertation has not formed the basis of the award of any Degree / Diploma / Associateship / Fellowship or other similar title to any candidate of any University.

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Man is nothing but,

A sum of his choice and action,

There is no soul, no religion and no God,

'Man is all in all' of the Universe. (Patil 12)

Over the years, many men of thought and action have been preoccupied with philosophical studies searching for new ways of life, which has resulted in the birth of many philosophical trends. The philosophy of existence appeared in nineteenth century Europe, challenging the then existing absolute objective idealism of Hegel (1770-1831).

Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine basic to existential psychiartry. It focusses on the individual's subjective awareness of his style of existence, his intimate interaction with himself and his environment. It is a set of philosophical ideals that emphasizes the existence of human beings, the lack of meaning and purpose in life and the solititude of human existence.

Existentialism is broadly an important aspect of modernism in art and literature. It is basically a philosophy of existence. Following the horror and chaos, despair and disillusionment of the First World War, the philosophy of existence emerged as a tendency in Europe and spread through the West during and after the Second World War. It owes its development to the combined impact of several contemporary forces – social, political, intellectual and cultural. After the First World War a new world order of different human experience was becoming more

powerful. People's faith in the progress of human civilization was shattered due to the colossal destruction caused by the warfare. Traditional beliefs and morality were seriously threatened. In fact, the essential value of life began to appear meaningless and even absurd to the people of the West. At a juncture of global anxieties and persistent sense of crisis, the existential outlook in literature became the most powerful vehicle of human expression.

The underlying concepts of existentialism are:

Man has free will.

Life is a series of choices, creating stress.

Few decisions are without any negative consequences.

Some things are irrational or absurd, without explanation.

If one makes a decision, he or she must follow through.

Existentialism, broadly defined, is a set of philosophical systems concerned with free will, choice and personal responsibility. Existentialism does not deal with the state of existence, it depicts the act of existing of the individual. According to Sheikh Mushtaq Ahmad,

> Existentialism, in the strict sense, is not a system of philosophy but an approach to the study of man [. . .], it is not only the expression of the moods and experiences of man but also an agonized cry against all the processes of dehumanization, essentialism, objectivization, bad faith, alienation and an all embracing intellectualism. (14)

It may thus be said that the doctrine is dynamic and living. In such a depiction of human life, man becomes completely involved with the riddles of life – always striving for absolute freedom, identity and purpose. Existentialism analyses

and unfolds the mystery of human existence and emphasizes the importance of human personality and dignity.

The existential theory is based on the fundamental assumption that existence precedes essence. In Existentialism and Human Emotions, Sartre says that existence precedes essence:

> It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills to be after this thrust toward existence. (15)

An individual first exists and then, by choosing what he determines to become, provides essence to his existence. To say anything 'exists' is simply to point out to the fact 'that it is'. Thus, existence is characterized by concreteness and particularity. If the existence of anything has to do with the fact 'that it is', its essence consists in 'what it is'. The essence of an object is constituted by those characteristics that make it one kind of object, rather than another.

The phrase 'to exist' has its etymological roots in the Latin 'ex-sistere', which means, 'to stand out' or 'emerge' (Cuddon 251). To exist is to emerge or stand out from the background. That is, to exist is to stand out from nothing.

Essence and existence can be distinguished by their respective meanings; essence denotes an idea or a mental abstraction; existence is concrete; it is facticity. The two terms, essence and existence, can be related to each other;

> Existence is not only primary but that every human existence is unique. Existence is neither a secondary nor a common quality that is added to something to produce man. Man is without any essence and there is no universal essence to which existence is added. We cannot define man first, for instance, a rational being and then as a professor or an engineer are part and parcel of his existence and apart from them he is no-body. (Ahmad 105)

Throughout the history of philosophy sometimes essences and sometimes existences have dominated the thought. Sartre tries to make existence great at the expense of essence. In order to establish the principle of the primacy of existence, Sartre divides 'being' into two poles, that is, Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself. Being-in-itself is undifferentiated, massive, timeless self-identity, it is what it is; Being-for-itself on the contrary, never 'is' but continually has 'to be'. Thus Sartre ends up, in a particular way, in existentializing essence. Essentialists ignored existence totally, Sartre ignored essence totally. Essentialists essentialized existence, Sartre existentialized essence.

The existentialist thinkers accept the view of Aristotle that 'Being' is existence and 'Becoming' is transcendence. They think that 'Being and Becoming' are inter-related. But they do not accept Aristotle's view of pre-destination, which curbs human freedom and responsibility for self-realization. They think that 'Being' is superior as it precedes 'Becoming'.

The existentialists firmly believe that every individual is unique and free to define himself. But his freedom is limited and laden with responsibility. The existential attitude does not show any faith in determinism. It is seen that in the

moments of crisis and complications, the existential protagonist feels quite alienated and forlorn. This sense of alienation, along with the feeling that his very existence is threatened, deepened his sense of desperation. And, when the world fails to make acts of his choice, which his special situation demand, he tries to assert himself, establish his identity and achieve his sense of the meaning of existence.

The existential writers are of two classes – theistic or Christian and atheistic. The Christian existentialists believe in the Supremacy of God. They maintain that an individual is inseparable from God, the Ultimate Reality. He has true being in the Being of God. The atheists on the other hand, do not believe in the existence of God. According to them, the relationship between men and the world may be explained without any reference to such reality as God or Being. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus are atheists while Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Marcel are thesists. Existentialism may perhaps be considered most fruitfully as a historical movement in which connections of dependence and influence can be traced one writer to another. Thus, even if two writers who are both rightly called existentialist differs enormously in doctrine, they can be placed in the same family tree.

Following the impression laid down by Kierkegaard, modern existentialists became aware of different aspects involved in human existence – dread, anxiety, anguish, death, freedom and despair. Such themes as freedom, decision and responsibility are elaborated upon by all the existentialist philosophers. These matters constitute the core of personal being. It is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from all the other beings that are known on the earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes

authentically himself. Another group of recurring existential themes includes such topics as finitude, guilt, alienation, despair and death.

The main aim of existentialism is to focus on the problems of human existence with a view to providing solutions. As a result, the leading existentialist thinkers have reinforced the importance of the subjective attitude towards life. They have undermined the importance of objective way of life, which either materializes human existence or makes it artificial. Existentialism is certainly a subjective interpretation of life and it is mainly concerned with human existence in its totality.

Existentialism is not something irrational and absurd or pessimistic or atheistic. It is a new philosophical trend or an attitude which manifested itself in Germany and France to make human existence secure, stable and authentic. It is a philosophy of freedom and responsibility which has beset the people of the twentieth century in all aspects of its culture and civilization, the private as well as the public. It is frightening because it hardly believes in the existence and benevolence of God and it is liberating because it emphasizes on freedom and responsibility for an individual's self-preservation and self-realization.

Broadly speaking, existentialism is a subjective interpretation of human life. Although it appeared as a reaction to the then existing Hegelianism, it renewed human existence in relation to transcendence. It is a way or philosophy of life which enables every human being to lead an authentic mode of life. In fact, it is ethic for human action and involvement for self-realization. In Mary Warnock's opinion, "The appeal of Existentialism has been largely practical, and the people have been fascinated by it because they actually want to put its principles of individual freedom into practice in society" (132).

Existentialism is not dark. It is not depressing. It is about life. Existentialists believe in living and fighting for life. Camus, Sartre and even Nietzsche were involved in various wars because they believed passionately in fighting for the survival of their nations and peoples. The politics of the existentialists varies, but each seeks the most individual freedom for people within a society.

Existentialism states that man exists and in that existence man defines himself and the world in his own subjectivity, and wanders between choice, freedom and existential angst. Man always has a choice. Existentialism does not stand for any kind of determinism except the one that determines the individual facts (existence). One chooses, and in choosing (in good or bad faith) one defines oneself. Choice is a definition of an existence in the world, towards an object outside itself. Choice is all that a person has, without confirmation of his act; he never knows what was right to choose. The doubt of a man's acts, together with the contingence of existence leads to angst.

Existentialism deals with the problems faced by man in his acts of choice which is not the case with religion. Perhaps the most prominent theme in existentialist writing is that of choice. Humanity's primary distinction in the view of the most existentialists, if freedom to choose. They have held that human beings do not have a fixed nature, or essence, as other animals and plants do; each human being makes choices and that create his or her own nature. Choice is, therefore, central to human existence, and it is inescapable; even the refusal to choose a choice.

Freedom of choice entails commitment and responsibility. Since individuals are free to choose their own path, existentialists argued, they must accept the responsibility of following their commitment wherever it leads. The roots of

existential freedom lie in the soil of authentic commitment. Renunciation of abstract freedom leads one to make free choice by committing oneself to real freedom. Sartre accordingly proclaims, "What is at the very heart and center of existentialism, is the absolute character of the free commitment, by which everyman realises himself in realising a type of humanity" (qtd. in Ahmad 117).

Hence, a man, even if he commits freely to some goal, does not lose his freedom; he rather enhances it scope. By commitment he receives an essence but this essence is not inherited – it is his own work, his own choosing, which is, however, immediately thrown into his past. This choosing in his essence which can determine him – making him an in-itself. But, since nothingness separates him from past, he remains all the way empty for-itself. Sartre tries to defend existentialism against the charge that it was a negative, gloomy and depressing philosophy:

> Existentialism is an optimistic philosophy, since it inspires people to action by showing them the extent of their freedom to action; and it also shows them that they are responsible not only for their own destinies but for other people's as well. For whatever a man chooses, he chooses for everyone and not only for himself; for the notion of choice entails the notion of a thing's being good, and 'good' means 'good for everyone'. Thus if a man chooses freedom for himself, he is thereby committed to choosing for freedom for everyone. (Warnock 124)

Becoming a Being is one of the major characteristics of Existentialism. Men are what they can become. Theirs is a process and their becoming is their ontic possibility of becoming. Human existence is a project, in which past and present are

subordinate to future, is the main residence of our existence. Man first of all is the being who hurls himself toward a future and who is conscious of imaging himself as being in the future. If existence really does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is. Being in the case of human beings, is equivalent to doing. Man reveals himself, under observation, as an organized unit of behaviours and comportments.

Moral individualism is one of the major themes of existentialism. Most philosophers since Plato have held that the highest ethical good is the same for everyone; in so far as one approaches moral perfection, one resembles other morally perfect individuals. The nineteenth century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who was the first writer to call himself existential, reacted against this tradition by insisting that the highest good for the individual is to find his or her own unique vocation. Other existentialist writers have echoed Kierkegaard's belief that one must choose one's own way without the aid of universal, objective standards. Against the traditional view that moral choice involves an objective judgement of right and wrong, rational basis can be found for moral traditions.

All the existentialists have followed Kierkegaard in stressing the importance of passionate individual action in deciding questions of both morality and truth. They have insisted, accordingly, that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth. Thus, the understanding of a situation by someone involved in that situation is superior to that of a detached objective observer. This emphasis on the perspective of the individual agent has also made existentialists suspicious of systematic reasoning.

The emphasis of the existentialist on personal existence and subjectivity has led to a new stress on freedom and responsibility. Man is the project which possesses subjective life. Apart from this projection of self, nothing exists. The responsible for whatever he does and, in this way, the whole responsibility of his action falls on his own shoulders. Man has considerable freedom within his own being in case he wills to express it. According to Karl Jaspers, the dignity of man is in his freedom.

The existentialists conclude that human choice is subjective, because individuals must make their own choices without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are free; but because they freely choose, they are completely responsible for their choices. The existentialists emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility.

Nothingness appears in existentialism, as the placeholder of the possibility. The awareness of anything in the world that is "not my non-existence" is an awareness of nothingness, that is what I, this existence am not, and in some cases I could become. Nothingness comes into the world through the human being. Similarly, man's tendency to question is also meant to negate, Sartre puts it thus: "The being by which Nothingness arrives in the world is a Being such that in its being the Nothingness of its being is in question. The being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness" (qtd. in Ahmad 30).

Nothingness is not, according to Sartre, an annihilating act of being but purely an ontological character of being. Sartre however uses the concept of Nothingness for making a distinction between human consciousness and the world.

The function of Nothingness is to select and render meaning to things, which constitute being-in-itself.

The absurd is one of the main characteristics of existentialism, specially in Sartre and Camus. It is sometimes possible to overcome the absurd, with absurd itself. They viewed the human being as an existent who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value or meaning, and to represent human life in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it much end – as an existence which is both anguished and absurd. In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs,

> In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and to light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as mush as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (13)

Belief in the absurdity of existence must then dictate his conduct. In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco also phrases the same idea when he says absurd is something which is devoid of purpose. Cut off from his religions, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost and all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless. Existentialists found life meaningless, aimless and inexplicable: something about which no one knows anything substantial.

In Albert Camus's philosophical and literary works, the recognition of the absurdity of human existence is a central principle. The realization of the absurdity of human existence is a necessary condition for accomplishing anything to life.

Absurdity is a process which develops in the human being. It becomes a concrete attitude towards the universe in which human being recognizes that there is no scope for transcendence and the objective structure of the universe does not accommodate an optimistic outlook. The human being encounters absurd walls that limit and trap him. Life always remains incomplete. This incompleteness of life makes it purposeless.

According to Camus, the human being has to directly and readily encounter the absurdity of universe in all aspects. For the human being, the absurd is the real relationship arising from the dialectic unity of his nostalgia and the irrationality inherent in the universe. The absurdity of the human existence lies in its insecurity, its rejections, its agony and its disappointments.

Our view of the world is enough to become truth, because it is based on our facts. What we do with this truth, depends on our good or bad faith, that is, the ability to act the entire mankind would be represented. That is enough to prove an ethical one. What art and ethics have in common is that we have creation and invention in both cases, man makes himself. He isn't readymade at the start. In choosing his ethics, he makes himself, and force of circumstances is such that he can not abstain from choosing one. We define man only in relationship to involvement. It is therefore absurd to charge with arbitrariness of choice. Though the content of ethics is variable, a certain form of it is universal.

Everything in the world except an act of will can, according to Kant, be described in casual terms; that nothing has any value except the act of will, which brings values to existence: "The central belief of ethical voluntarism is the Kantian

belief that human beings are totally different from all other beings in the Universe by reason of their will, the existence of which is the source of all value" (Warnock 5).

Hence man suffers alienation, which is yet another feature of the existentialist thought pattern. The concept of alienation has been in use of theology, philosophy, politics and psychology for long but the feeling of alienation has become more subtle and pronounced in the modern age. Moved by the harsh realities of modern imperialised life, man experiences alienation. The sense of unreality and purposelessness is prevalent in the whole ethos of modern age.

Existentialist philosophers have written about the crisis of identity of modern man and his mal-adjustment in society. Alienation, or some other foreign name given to it, is used by existentialists Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich and Jean Paul Sartre in their own way. Terms like 'fremd' (alien) and 'fremdheit' (alienness) are frequently used by Jaspers. Existentialists believe that alienation is a permanent feature of man's existence since it is not possible that he will always able to lead an authentic existence.

Contemporary existentialism is deeply indebted to the Hegelian concept of alienation. Hegel employs the word 'experience' to analyse the process of alienation.

Exile as a human situation always implies a dramatic relation between two fundamental categories for the course of common existence: the places where human beings are located, as well those into which they have moved by different ways of compulsion; and the travel that directed from one place to another, developing a specific notion of parallel time that opposes the past and the present. The opposition normally means consideration of differences existing between both spatial and

temporal levels. However the category of space is in this case more relevant in order to define the configurations of feelings, judgements and other orders of manifestation of sense that result from the expression of this specific situation in art or in literature.

There is an exterior exile and an inner exile. There are plenty of causes as concerns exile: political, social, economical and so forth. It is a question of time, of course of place. These two fields define the exile, together with its characteristics.

Kierkegaard held that it is spiritually crucial to recognize that one experiences not only a fear of specific objects but also a feeling of general apprehension, which he called dread. He interpreted it as God's way of calling each individual to make a commitment to a personally valid way of life. The word anxiety (German Angst) has a similarly crucial role in the work of the twentieth century German Philosopher Martin Heidegger; anxiety leads to the individual's confrontation with nothingness and with the impossibility of finding ultimate justification for the choices he or she must take. For Kierkegaard, it is a desire for what one fears. For Sartre, it is the immediate consequence of facing the possibility of nothingness.

In the philosophy of Sartre, the word nausea is used for individual's recognition of the pure contingency of the universe, and the word anguish is used for the recognition of the total freedom of choice that confronts the individual at every moment. The fear of dread which is not directed at any specific object, its just there. In Being and Time, Heidegger draws between two related but different attitudes, that is between fear and anxiety:

> We experience fear as we recognize some specific threat, constituted for us by our situation, typically a threat to our life itself. We experience anxiety, on the other hand, in the face of nothing in particular in our situation. We are driven by fear, and this is its sense or purpose, to save ourselves; we are driven by anxiety to drown ourselves in the trivial, the social, in all the ingredients of inauthentic existence. (Warnock 56-57)

The human being experiences anxiety. It is not anything in particular which afflicts him. It is simply his unsupported, isolated condition in the world. He begins to doubt the reality of the world, because he realizes that he is the source of its reality. Even his own place in the world is doubtful, and he cannot take anything for granted anymore. In this condition of anxiety, he may seek to protect himself by becoming yet more deeply engaged in the ordinary, the everyday and the practical.

Anxiety ascends from the human beings realization that the human being's destiny is not fixed but is opened to an undetermined future of infinite possibilities and limitless scope: The voidless of future destiny must be filled by making choices for which he alone will assume responsibility and blame. This anxiety is present at every moment of the human being's existence; anxiety is part and parcel of authentic existence. Anxiety leads the human being to take decisions and be committed. The human being tries to avoid this anguish through bad faith.

Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence, the meaningless of it. According to Kierkegaard, anguish is the underlying, all-pervasive, universal condition of man's existence. Anguish is doubtless a particular experience but

through anguish we arrive at the general conditions of existence, or what Heidegger calls "the existentials".

In seeing the contrast between the world we re thrown into and which we cannot control and the absolute freedom we have to create ourselves, we must despair of any hope of external value or determination and restrict ourselves to what is under our own control. Sartre says,

> As for despair, the term has a very simple meaning. It means that we shall confine ourselves to reckoning only with what depends upon our will, or on the ensemble of probabilities which make our action possible. When we want something, we always have reckon with probabilities. (29)

Another predominant theme employed by the existential writers is the idea of death – a sort of final non-existence – a wiping out of consciousness – another testimony to the miserable human existence. The theme of death follows along with the theme of nothingness. Death is always there, there is no escaping from it. To think of death, as everybody does sooner or later causes anxiety. The only sure way to end anxiety once and for all is death.

Major exponents of existentialism are Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Jaspers, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Simoue De Beauvoir, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Albert Camus and Franz Kafka.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), generally regarded as the founder of modern existentialism, reacted against the systematic absolute idealism of Hegel. Modern existentialism began with him although there are much earlier references including The Bible. In contrasting philosophy from Plato and Hegel with authentic

Christianity, he emphasized the concepts of individual of choice, of dread and of paradox.

It is gradually agreed that existentialism derives from the thinking of Soren Kierkegaard, and especially in his books Feard and Trembling, The Concept of Dread and Sickness Unto Death. In these and other works of Kierkegaard was for the most part of re-stating and elaborating upon the belief that through God and in God man may find freedom from tension and discontent and therefore find peace of mind and spiritual serenity; an idea that has prevailed in much Christian, thinking over many centuries.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who was not acquainted with the work of Kierkegaard influenced subsequent existentialist thought through his criticism of traditional, metaphysical and moral assumptions. In contrast to Kierkegaard whose attack on conventional morality led him to advocate a radically individualistic Christianity. Nietzsche proclaimed the "death of God" and went on to reject the entire Judeo Christian moral tradition. His main works are Zarathustra and Antichrist. He replaced the God of Christianity, the creator of man, with the "will to power" which according to him, is the soul of the world and is scattered among individual men. Each man is a center of "will to power", and his existence can be represented as the will to dominate the whole universe. The human will knows no obstacles no limits.

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) was one of the architects of contemporary existentialism and one of the first philosophers to use the term "existentialist". He was considered with human reactions to extreme situations. Kaufmann says, "It is in the works of Jaspers that the seeds sown by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche first grew

into existentialism or, as he prefers to say Existenzphilosophie" (22). For Jaspers, the human being's freedom of being is existence, not man's being in the world. He laid two distinctions of Being: Dasein is the ordinary being and is open to the objective inquiry of science; and existence is the mode of authentic existence of freedom, infinite possibilities, loneliness and responsibilities. These are what he describes, "boundary conditions" of human conditions in death, agony and suffering.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was the teacher of Heidegger and the founder of the phenomenological school. According to him, philosophy must be able to present a doctrine of truths of absolute validity. In his search for this absolute truth, Husserl starts from the phenomenology of the spirit, with the purpose of discovering a truth of absolute validity can be drawn from an analysis of the phenomena which are present to man's consciousness. He says that the objects of his experience may be real or imagined but his experiences are genuine contents of his consciousness; and such they have an absolute element (ideal essence) which has to be distinguished from what is contingent (the existence). It is the ideal essence which gives a significance to the facts of experience. Any knowledge and judgement of the facts of experience must be preceded by knowledge of the ideal essences, because they open the way to an understanding of what reality is.

According to Martin Heidegger (1890-1976), Atheist, the only form of being with which we are truly in contact is the being of man. Since God does not exist, the existence of man is forlorn. Man's existence is infinite and death puts an end to all possibility. The authentic person is one who will face up to the fact of his existence and take destiny resolutely into his own hand. His masterpiece Being and Time, argued that confronting the question of the meaning of being encompassing one's own

death, was central for an authentic human existence. He contributed to existentialist thought an original emphasis on being and ontology as well as on language.

The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), recognized as the most powerful intellectual force in France in the mid-twentieth century, was one of the leading exponents of existentialism. His writings examine man as a responsible but lonely being, burdened with a terrifying freedom to choose and set adrift in a meaningless universe. He nevertheless insisted that his existentialism is a form of humanism, and he strongly emphasized human freedom, choice and responsibility. In Being and Nothingness, Sartre argued that an individual must detach oneself from things to give them meaning.

According to him, the human being is nothing at birth and in life he is just the sum of life. To take refuge in bad faith is to despair freedom. The human being, Sartre declares is the maker of his destiny and is condemned to make his own decision. The human being uses his freedom to create and to be committed. The psychological problems of life are portrayed with an incomparable literary brilliance, creating and imagination in Sartre's philosophical essays, novels, short stories and plays. This made him one of the most influential authors of the contemporary times.

Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986), was the best known French writer, existentialist and feminist. In Ethics of Ambiguity, she offers a lucid and accessible ethics based on existentialism. At the centre of this ethics are assumptions about a good will, the social character of people and the claim that nothing is good or bad, useful or useless; there are no external justifications for whatever people have. According to her, Existentialism puts humans at the centre of all action. If the world is not "given" in that, it is not the product of God, or some other cause, it is the result

of human action. Beauvoir's two parts of argument is this: if one has a good will, one cannot harm to others. She claims that one exists in relationships to others; she concludes that one's freedom depends on the freedom of others. She says that man is free but he finds his law in his freedom.

The nineteenth century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) is probably the greatest existentialist literary figure. In Notes from Underground, the alienated anti-hero rages against the optimistic assumptions of rationalist humanism. At the centre of all Dostoyevsky's writing is that problem of freedom. What is permitted and what is not permitted is a question that Dostoyevsky dramatizes again and again, and one can regard the development of his work as a dramatic destiny of the limits of freedom and a progressive refinement of what he meant by the concept of freedom.

Man for Dostoyevsky, is limited by society, economic conditions, laws, history, the church, and especially by God . He is classified, defined and fixed by a hundred institutions and a thousand conditions. Man, however, does not want to be defined and limited, he wants to be free and he wants to be totally free. According to him, he is right in wanting to be free; for freedom is the essential attribute of his identity. This free man must be a revolutionary. He must refuse what society, economics, religion, other peoples and his own past have made of him.

Albert Camus (1913-1960), the French writer is usually associated with existentialism because of the prominence in it of such themes as the apparent absurdity and futility of life, the indifference of the universe and the necessity of engagement in a just cause. The Rebel is the greatest manifesto, in which he says that life becomes meaningful only when the prospect of death is confronted and the

exercised with sense of its essentially creative nature. The starkness and hopelessness is portrayed in The Myth of Sisyphus. We are isolated by our own autonomy. The values and decision of others, whether authentic or inauthentic, will be foreign and irritating. This sense of estrangement from others is found in the novel The Stranger.

Franz Kafka, Austrian Jewish writer, stands between Nietzsche and other existentialists. He pictures the world into which Heidegger's man, in Sein and Zeit is "thrown", the godless of Sartre, the "absurd" world of Camus. Kafka presents a world that is at once real and dreamlike and in which individuals burdened with guilt, isolation and anxiety, make a futile search for personal salvation. His novels, such as The Trial and The Castle present isolated men confronting vast, elusive, menacing bureaucracies. Kafka's themes of anxiety, guilt and solititude reflect the influence of Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche.

Existentialist themes are also reflected in the theatre of the absurd, notably in the plays of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. In the United States, the influence of existentialism has been more indirect and diffuse, but traces of Kierkegaard's thought can be found in the novels of Walker Percy and John Updike, and various existentialist themes are apparent in the works of such diverse writers as Norman Mailer, John Barth and Arthur Miller.

In the works of modern writers, a clear diffusion of existentialist ethic is evident. Almost all writers, who directly or indirectly are aware of the importance of existential philosophy, have expressed their views on Man, Nature and Society, and their relationship with one another. On the one hand, God and Religion and the moral and social order of life and their relation to man on the other. They have

pictured man's life in his fortunes and misfortunes with a view to delineate man's struggle for existence in a new perspective.

The philosophy of existence is similar to that of Romanticism and it is the basis of modern theatre of the absurd. Existentialism, like Romanticism, restores man, his dignity as a human being. It marks the most important stage in the history of human self-consciousness. It introduces a subjective way of life in which an individual in his own depths continues to be himself and fulfils his destiny. Though it is a subjective way of life, it enables every human being to attain truth, power and glory.

To sum up, what the existentialists chiefly demand of man is the courage to see things as they are, and to build life upon the freedom of a being who exists for a while, he knows not how or why, but who can at least stamp his existence with the choice of his will. Thus existentialism is modern and realistic. The lesson it teaches is one of complete independence from the authoritative formula of intellectual, social and political doctrines, a liberty that each individual is to enjoy and leave other men to enjoy whatever their nation or their class gives.

The present thesis aims at studying the existential elements in the novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee.

CHAPTER II

THE INDIAN SCENARIO : A BRIEF REVIEW

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The Indian Novel in English came of age in the 1930s with the emergence of three major writers Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. The increased social and political concerns of Indo-Anglian are signalled in the novels of these three writers. The themes of Indo-Anglian novel are many and varied. The major themes are the portrayal of poverty, hunger and disease; portrayal of widespread social evils and tensions; examination of the survivals of the part; exploration of the hybrid culture of the dislocations and conflicts in a tradition-ridden society under the impact of an incipient half-hearted industrialization.

Some other themes of the novel in English are inter-racial relations, the Indian national movement and the struggle for freedom (Raja Rao's Kanthapura), Partition of India and the death, destruction and suffering caused by it (Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan), Depiction of hunger and poverty of Indians (Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers), Indian rural life (Venkataramani's Murugan, The Tiller), Conflict between tradition and modernity (Anand's Untouchable), continued to engage the attention of the novelist. The theme of the confrontation of the East and the West has been successfully dealt with by Kamala Markandaya and many others.

After 1950s, the novelists display an increasing inwardness in their themes. The themes of loneliness, of rootlessness, the exploration of the psyche and the inner man have been dealt with by Anita Desai and Arun Joshi, who are considered as major existential novelists in Indian English Literature. The other writers who

portray the existential problems of man are Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Chaman Nahal, Bharathi Mukherjee, Githa Hariharan, Chitra Banerjee, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry and Upamanyu Chatterjee.

Anita Desai is one of the literary luminaries of contemporary fiction writing in English. Her chief concern is human relationship. Her central theme is the existential predicament of the individuals projected through the problems of the self in an emotionally disturbed milieu. Delicately conscious of the reality around them, her protagonists carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. Desai adds a new dimension to the genre of Indian fiction in English by probing the unquestionable existentialist concerns of her protagonists.

Desai's novels like those of Franz Kafka's are about human fate, human bewilderment and human suffering. Her novels are peopled by women who are in perpetual quest for the meaning and value of life. The existential struggle of the women who refuse to float along with the current forms the core of Anita Desai's novels. Her characters refuse to surrender their individual selves. Their inability to compromise and surrender inevitably results in isolation and loneliness.

Desai's novels from Cry, the Peacock to Journey to Ithaca are a study in the depth and persistence of human affliction, inexorably sensitive and loving and compassionate as her protagonists are. Cry, the Peacock depicts existentialism in its deep-seated morbidity through the neurotic and hysterical self of Maya pining for companionship. Maya thinks that Gautama does not understand her emotional needs. So, she feels frustrated, alienated and isolated. Maya's suffering enmates from her existential struggle to make her relationship with Gautama meaningful. Her

loneliness, her aching heart and the progressive disorientation of self make her an existential character. The loneliness corroding her heart and lacerating her psyche is existential in nature. The novel is a disturbing portrayal of an individual in desperate struggle to experience life and love.

All the three major characters in Voices in the City are tortured by their hollow existence. Nirode is a rootless character drifting directionless, shifting from one goal to another, finally faced with a void, a sense of emptiness. He experiments with failure like a true existential hero. His existential search for meaning and value in life ends in emptiness. Monisha feels totally neglected, isolated and lonely even in a bustling, joint family in Calcutta. Like Nirode, Monisha too looks for loneliness and longs for privacy. She prefers non-existence to a meaningless existence. Amla seeks to opt out of the absurd into a life of parties, dinners and dances. Nirode, Monisha and Amla are not concerned with simple problems of work-a-day existence since the journeys they make are essentially spiritual.

In Bye-Bye, Blackbird, Desai's existentialist concern is rooted in expatriate experience. The novel explores the existentialist problems of alienation, adjustment, rootedness and the final decision in the lives of the three major characters-Dev, Adit and Sarah. In Where Shall We Go This Summer, Anita Desai reverts to her favourite theme of probing into the consciousness of an introvert and sensitive woman who is bored and frustrated by her commonplace and life and tries to escape into purposeless and unproductive loneliness. Sita is a sensitive emotional and middle-aged woman who feels alienated from her husband and children. She undergoes acute mental agonies. She silently suffers isolation because of her sharp existentialist

sensibility and explosive emotionality. She is uncertain of her own self, little knowing which half of her life is real, which unreal.

In Fire on the Mountain, two alienated souls confront each other. The novel mainly deals with loneliness and isolation as well as the resultant anguish and agony in the deserted life of an old widow. Nanda Kaul is an unsentimental and old widow living as a recluse in an isolated house in the hills and Raka her great grand daughter, a shy, lonely schoolgirl, who is a recluse by nature and instinct. Clear Light of Day breaks new ground in the sense that it dwells on an existentialist theme of time in relation to eternity. Delineating the life of two brothers and two sisters who grew up in a house in old Delhi, the novel is about time as a destroyer and a preserver, and about the bondage of time does to the smooth and unruffled existence of human existence.

In Village by the Sea existentialism occurs rather thinly. Through the life of a young village boy Hari, Desai captures the existential predicament of the ruralities undergoing the pangs of a society in transition. This shows the sense of struggle in simple Indians and their desire to exist perfectly on the earth. The drama in the novel is something different. If it is not psychic, it is certainly existential. In the novel In Custody, Desai has again tried to focus on the existential dilemma of an individual, called Desvan, a lecturer in Hindi at Lal Ram College in Mirapore. In a limited sense only the novel is open to interpretation of existential philosophy.

Baumgartner's Bombay belongs to the genre of the novel of the 'absurd'. The novel focuses on the absurdity of Baumgartner's existence both in Germany and India. In Germany he was a Jew, alienated from the mainstream of life. In India he is dubbed as a Firangee, unwanted. His existence is an absurd odyssey from

nothingness to nothingness, from nowhere to nowhere. He realises that life is nothing but an ironic dilemma of pointless activity. This realisation leaves him aimless and absurd. Journey to Ithaca is a compassionate portrait of people struggling to find a spiritual home. It delineates Matteo's alienation and the concomitant quest for spirituality. Disgusted with the drab and mundane reality of familial and conjugal life, he is all out for the life of a sage in an ashrama. His quest for eternal truth is a struggle for spiritual sustenance. A split self, Matteo's existential suffering springs from his constitutional inability to adjust to his self-created situations and the challenges of spiritual life. Alienated from the milieu, he neglects his duties towards his family, the society and towards his own self. His is a case of double alienation – alienation from the self as well as the society.

Kamala Markandaya is essentially a sociological writer. Unlike Samuel Beckett, Saul Bellow, Richard Wright, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya does not treat the theme of alienation either at the psychological or at the philosophical level. Her forte lies in her sociological vision of human life. In her novels she mainly deals with the sociological alienation of her characters. In the novels of Kamala Markandaya, protagonists seem to suffer from sociological alienation in the beginning and, in the end, they suffer from individual alienation.

In Nectar in a Sieve Markandaya portrays how people become alien into the new surroundings i.e., the city after they get uprooted from their native soil. In The Nowhere Man she depicts how people feel alienated and suffer from identity crisis when they migrate from India.

Kamala Markandaya's novel, significantly named The Nowhere Man, deals with the plight of a lonely man, Srinivas, in an alien land. It explores his inner crisis i.e., the crisis of alienation and loss of identity as an Indian immigrant. He is depicted as a figure of loneliness, a 'disoriented' person and a tresspasser, even after staying for half a century in England.

Possession also presents an account of de-Indianization and the resultant loss of identity. The central character in the novel, Val, is not only culturally and psychologically conditioned and alienated by the West he is 'possessed' by it. It is symbolized by the taking over of him by an English woman Caroline Bell. With a ruthless dedication, she moulds him into a man, an artist and a lover after the image she has in her mind, and in the process ruins him, depleting him of independence and spiritual strength and thus incapacitating him for a search for, or an awareness of his identity. In A Handful of Rice, Kamala Markandaya depicts the protagonist's dilemma at the sociological plane. She tries to project dark and desolated life in the town. Ravi records all his sufferings, disillusionments and tragic experiences that are part of the predicament of identity.

Nayantara Sahgal has shown remarkable growth both as a novelist and political analyst. Women in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal question of validity of the accepted set of values and rebel against the existing moral codes and social norms which deny women the oxygen of freedom that nourishes individual self. Their concept of freedom is not confined to the realms of social and economic freedom. It is the freedom of mental make up and emotional attitude. In Storm in Chandigarh, Saroj's struggle to be accepted on equal terms cannot be viewed as just an emancipated woman's demand for equality. It is the existential struggle of the

sensitive soul against the oppressive dual standards and condescending attitude adopted by the chauvinistic society intended to make her, feel conscious of a moral depravity of which she believes she is not guilty.

The existential situation in The Day in Shadow is familiar and envelops and exposes the easily recognizable social taboo, the daily living in Delhi: its political masters, business barons, bureaucratic machinary, and social parasites in interaction with intellectuals, free lance journalists and liberal thinkers. It is to be read an adult novel, which concerns itself with the twin problems of rootlessness, peculiar to the world of adults, symbolized by Simrit and Raj. The novel excels in the portrayal of woman's predicament. It centres on Simrit, her divorced husband, Som, and Raj, her friend whom she marries in the end. The novel delineates a sensitive account of the suffering of a woman in the Indian society. In Rich Like Us, Sahgal fuses the life of the individual with the larger background of history highlighting the predicament of a young and idealistic woman government officer during the brief period of the emergency when the human rights were suspended in India.

In all her novels, Sahgal seems to be under the charm of existentialism. All her protagonists support the formal cause of existential philosophy. Her central theme is the existential predicament of an individual, which is projected through uncompromising couples. Thus, Sahgal presents a new dimension to Indian English fiction through the exploration of the troubled sensibility, a typical new phenomenon.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has achieved an international reputation as the most popular novelist who deals with the social and economic problems of the present century and is also popularly known as a short story writer, though she seems better-

known abroad than in India. Jhabvala's novels are never about abstractions such as racial conflict or racial integration: they are about human beings in love or in marriage, who may sometimes belong to widely different races and religions. The two novels A New Dominion and Heat and Dust are the sordid story about European women coming to India in quest of spirituality and finally ending up with self-delusion and frustration.

Heat and Dust observes the sentiments, expressions and realities of the darker side of the human value system in India. The novel is appropriately suited to the purpose of reality, a novel written in the form of a journal, a spiritual diary, recording the process of change and transformation of individual consciousness through its confrontation with various facets of Indian society. Jhabvala is pre-eminently a novelist of domestic life, its joys and sorrows, its harmony and fiction, its fulfilment and frustration. Esmond in India projects the experiences of the two girls who are misguided by the new tendencies in the society and end up in a hopeless disillusionment

Arun Joshi is an important Indian English novelist of the younger generation. Joshi started writing in a period when the western existential angst struck its roots in India. Though a businessman by profession, he felt the call of the muse to write. As a product of the materialistic world, he knew the sense of the materialistic world, he knew the sense of alienation first hand. His novels are The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, The Apprentice, The Last Labyrinth and The City and the River. His novels present the dialectics of existential despair. They are easily comparable to those of Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Saul Bellow in respect of their

attempt to project encaged sensibility that faces the threat of isolation and even madness.

The protagonists of his novels are subjected to extreme social, cultural and psychological pressures. The inter-generational tensions engendered with the changing ethos, make increasing demands on the individual and contribute in creating a void, which is nothing but a chaotic feeling of rootlessness in life. This awareness of rootlessness and consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshi's existential vision of the plight of modern man. The individual's alienation from his fellow man and from himself and his search for identity constitute the thematic center of his novels.

Arun Joshi's The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas and The Apprentice are successful attempts in portraying self-alienated persons who finds themselves adrift in a universe which is indifferent to them. The Foreigner, in spite of its indebtedness to Camus and the western existentialist belief is uniquely Indian in its perception of human condition. If it is nausea in the case of Sartre's hero, Joshi's hero in this novel is afflicted by a gnawing loneliness. The narrator, the hero of the novel, Sindi Oberoi finds himself in the predicament of a 'Foreigner' wherever he might be – Kenya, Uganda, England, America, India. The protagonist of the novel goes on hoping from one land to another because he finds his life meaningless and rootless. Born of an English mother and Indian father in Kenya, he finds his life a burden after the death of his parents. This novel can be read as an existential quest to find a meaning in the absurdity of life.

Finding one's roots and exploring human values, however, is the theme of what may be Joshi's best novel, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas. This novel has

carried the exploration of the consciousness of hopeless, rootless people step further and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery. The search for identity in this novel assumes a spiritual dimension. Joshi treats the theme of alienation at full length. Arun Joshi, in the first part of the novel narrates the story of a person who finds himself alienated from individuals, society and civilization as such. Though Billy goes on making efforts to remain a part and parcel of the society and civilization by pinning his hopes on individuals, yet he fails in his very efforts. He is alienated from the higher middle class society in which he is nursed and nurtured. He suffers from acute social alienation and he cannot identify himself with the society to which he belongs.

In The Apprentice, Arun Joshi experiments with the technique of dramatic monologue to unfold the life of the protagonist, Ratan Rathor, who struggles for a career in the corrupt society of the post independent India. The central theme is undoubtedly the existential struggle of Ratan Rathor, the protagonist – narrator – his idealism and alienation, fall, expiation and recovery: The Story of Ratan Rathor is the story of modern man's alienation – of his relentless struggle to conquer alienation and to achieve some form of identity with the world.

The Last Labyrinth has won 1982 Sahitya Academy Award. The novel shows the dilemma of modern man, living in turbulence and groping in the darkness of life, existence and reality. The hero Som Bhaskar is a young educated, intelligent and millionaire industrialist. Som lost his mother when he was just 15. He feels insecurity and loneliness. This novel explores the pains of alienation and the intensity of quest with a greater force and complexity. The City and the River treats the predicament of his characters in a hostile milieu. The crisis of the individual is

replaced by the socio-political crisis of the city, which represents the whole community. The novels of Arun Joshi successfully reveal the subtleties and complexities of modern life. They have excelled in exemplifying the existential dilemma of the self in the society.

Chaman Nahal is a very optimistic writer. His novels are embodied with ethical and moral values, which are the very soul of human life. Almost all his novels end with an optimistic vision. He upholds values of life and shows that life is worth living with all its vicissitudes and challenges. Based on the inherent conflict between group and individual living, Nahal's first novel, My True Faces, offers a brilliant expose of Hindu homes dominated by religious dogma and tradition. It is essentially a philosophical novel depicting the puzzle, the riddle and the mystry of life. The novel deals with the marital discord between Kamal Kant and Malti Meena leading to their separation and traces the anguish of Kamal's 'tormenting self' caught in conflict with his wife, on the one hand, and with his sense of 'Drama' on the other. The suffering of the self originated in the clash of wills representing different backgrounds of tradition and westernization and in the desertion of Kamal by his wife. The flow of his thoughts of pain, anxiety, anger, depression and philosophical realism are evident in the novel.

Sunrise in Fiji is a multi-stranded, complex novel, quite different from Nahal's earlier novels. Like many novels of the 1980s, it is about both the individual and the country. The novel spans forty-five years of life of an individual, Harivansh, as well as of the country's development during the period. Through the life of Harivansh, the novelist faces the growing materialism in the country and the gradual spiritual impoverishment. The novel raises the pertinent question of human

happiness – why human beings in modern day consumer societies, which fulfil all bodily needs and wants, still remain unhappy, lacking in mental peace, and answers it through the life of the materialist – turned spiritualist – Harivansh. A striking quality of Nahal's novels is affirmation of life running through all of them. He views life in all its totality and achievements, joys and sorrows, jubiliations and tribulation it offers.

Shashi Deshpande has come to be known mainly for her strong and vivid portrayals of the dilemma of contemporary women caught between traditional role given to them by society and the desire to forge individual identities: Deshpande's range is not limited to this area, however, The Dark Holds No Terrors is a psychological novel designed to portray and understand the essential nature of the terrific darkness and blurs the perception. Emotions of anger, hatred, frustrations, lovelessness, etc., grow in and around this darkness and cause terror and despair to the victim. But at the end of the novel the victim discovers the heart of the darkness and develops into the psychic realities of life. In this novel, the central figure Saru's case is basically existential and the novelist is chiefly interested in showing the necessity of a happy balance between mind and body.

Concerned with the quest for an authentic selfhood and an understanding of the existential problems of life, Deshpande's heroines, all along, try to retain their individuality in the teeth of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity. In Roots and Shadows, through the character of Indu, Desshpande has portrayed the inner struggle of an artist to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potential for creative writing. Her feeling of

isolation from the milieu is almost Camuseque. Indu asserts her individuality as a woman and also as a particular in the endless cycle of life.

A search for 'self' necessarily implies an individual's quest for identity in this distracting world. It is a self-analysis and a self-probe into the existential problems of a woman. The predicament of Jaya in That Long Silence, who is presented as torn a 'self' between what she was before marriage and what she is after it. Hers is an alienated 'self' by all means, longing for love and companionship. Jaya attempts to break not only her own silence but that of women, specially women writers, down the ages. It is only at the end of the novel, after a period of withdrawal, exile and upheaval, that Jaya faces the realities of life and decides to break her silence by speaking out.

In Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande has raised the problem of working women. Loss, loneliness and grief are quite common in the life of all the three characters Savithribai, Leela and Madhu. There is full freedom in it to take anti-traditional decisions. Existential elements like freedom, projection and anti-traditionalism characterise the lives of Savitribai and Leela. Madhu projects her self through writing. Loss, loneliness and freedom are the important existential elements found in these three major characters.

Though the metaphors used in her novels are not many, they powerfully highlight the dichotomy of human life, characterised by sorrow and joy, failure and success, death and life, alternation and attraction, thereby the scale of existence balanced and reasonable, though the scale sometimes does swing towards misery and anguish, death and destruction, hopelessness and helplessness.

Bharathi Mukherjee's works focus on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and their feeling of alienation, as well as, on Indian women and their struggle. Her own struggle with identity, first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as an immigrant in the United States, has led to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants. Her novel Jasmine, is an ambitious endeavour to outline the life of a woman engaged in a serious quest for values. Being an issue of widespread contemporary interest, this suggests an important link in the chain of new literature that is written at present by women and about women.

In her novel Wife, Amit Dasgupta and his wife Dimple face the problem in their own ways, as Amit devotes himself to money making and Dimple, for whom coming to America is a dream come true, finds if difficult to live there. She cannot forget Durga Puja when the month of October comes and feels her own body to be curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt. The principle characters of Mukherjee's fiction are housewives and hookers, accountants and executives. She portrays them as they seek to mould life to their purposes and their struggles.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works are partially autobiographical. Not only are most of her stories set in the Bay Area of California, but she also deals with the immigrant experience, which is an important theme in today's world, where the immigrant's voice is rarely heard. Much of Divakaruni's writing centres around the lives of immigrant women. Arranged Marriage and The Mistress of Spices, are both highly acclaimed works by Divakaruni. In The Mistress of Spices, the character Tilo

provides spices, not only for cooking, but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in her shop experience.

V.S. Naipaul is a principle figure in commonwealth and post-colonial literature. Naipaul's work, straddling both colonial and post-colonial periods, constitutes an invaluable documentation of one individual's experience with hegemonic cultural duality. Naipaul's early fiction The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira and Miguel Street shows him caught between local and metropolitan values, groping for the right voice with which to relate the lives of rural and urban Trinidadians of the 1940s. Some critics read the novel as an allegory of colonialism, but such interpretation cannot obscure the novels brilliant portraits of complex individuals.

In a Free State, the only common thread is the concern with issues of freedom for the individual and the decolonized world. Exile is a site of alienation and reconnection. This ambivalence of exile is visible in The Mimic Men. On the one hand, there is Ralph's feeling of temporariness on the island, and on the other, there is his undeniable rootedness to the island. This dual sense has resulted from an accident of history. Ralph's struggle to negotiate his identity provides a significant post colonial narrative which explores how colonisation has exiled the subject from knowing himself/herself. The Mimic Men is interested in the idea of originary identity but more in terms of its loss than its recuperation. Naipaul's writing while similarly expressing a modernist yearning for lost of essences, possess a post-colonial bent in which he suggests that colonialisation and migration are directly responsible for this alienation. Themes of alienation, mistrust, rootlessness, mockery and self-deception will certainly continue to pervade throughout his work.

Githa Hariharan's The Thousand Faces of Night compels the reader to undergo an enigmatic experience, along with the protagonist, straight from a woman's life. She ferrets out the struggle of Indian women in her affiliation with society and man for the sake of preserving her identity. This novel exemplifies the multiple existence of Indian women which has potential to suffer and sustain life through her struggle and self-realization. Devi, the protagonist strives to preserve her life. Devi returns after experiencing the world (so-called male world) which she realizes is full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Like women characters of Kamala Markandaya, Bharathi Mukherjee, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai, Devi also adds a new dimension to psychological complexity of Indian women. Devi represents the present day intellectual women, confronts loneliness and alienation. However, some of the incidents of her life are very close to day-to-day reality.

Amitav Ghosh has employed the technique of Magic Realism (i.e., realism plus fantasy) and carried forward to the Rushdie tradition. Using the technique, Ghosh has tried to present a vision of life that is based on contemporary reality. In its handling of time frames and experiences of men and women who belong to different generations and cultures, The Shadow Lines calls to mind Jhabvala's Heat and Dust.

In The Circle of Reason, Amitav Ghosh pursues a way out of the angst and existential turmoil of modern man. The novel is a collage of myths which strives to rearrange the discrepant, chaotic and cacophonous existence of human race at last. Here the author underlines man's desperate effort to elevate himself from his own condition. Actually Ghosh implies that everyone is learning the purpose of existence through trial and error. The novel is the perpetual history of man's purposive evolution.

Rohinton Mistry is an expatriate Indian-Parsi writer living in Canada. As a Parsi and then as an immigrant in Canada himself is a symbol of double displacement. Expatriate experience is a recurrent theme in his literary works. Swimming Lessons and Other Stories From Firozsha Baag, Mistry's short stories describe the characteristics of middle-class Parsi life, and show the characters's struggle between modernity and tradition the characters represent Parsis at odds with their religious beliefs and the larger community, and also conveys the common human issues of spiritual questions, alienation, fear of death, family problems, and economic hardships. Mistry's Such a Long Journey marks the beginning of the detachment and dismemberment, while A Fine Balance deals with characters who are displaced, isolated and estranged, framed against the background of the anonymous impersonal and terrifying metropolis.

A Fine Balance is a fictional presentation with three major strands in it – the stories of Dina Dalal, a Parsi widow who bravely strives for a free and independent existence; Young Maneck Kohlah who grapples with problems of existence and the charner – turned – tailors Ishvar and Omprakash's struggle for survival in a world that is hostile, but occasionally allows them to find refuge in feelings of kinship and togetherness. After Iswhvar and Omparkash's entire family is ruthlessly murdered, pressured by joblessness and hunger, they decide to migrate to Bombay and become exiles by choice. Dina too chooses to be displaced from her home, because she wants to assert her individuality and sense of self. Maneck too, is displaced from his home in the hills, to the college in the city, where he is constantly humiliated by his seniors. He endeavors to adapt himself to the political atmosphere of the college, but feels alienated.

presents an all – encompassing bizarre welfare state outside which nothing exists making self which seeks itself in the nation state grotesque.

English, August: An Indian Story is of young civil servant Agastya Sen (who prefers to be called August). Joining the Indian Administrative Service, which the author himself joined at the same age in 1983, Agastya is sent off "for a year's training in district administration to a small district town called Madna" (1). This novel reads like a satire o the bureaucracy. It also deals with renunciation and self-knowledge.

It is a story of Agastya Sen who smokes marijuana and reads The Bhagavadgita and Marcus Aurelius in the secrecy of his room. On the eve of his departure for Madna, Sen is warned by his friend Dhrubo that he is not the type to succeed as a bureaucrat. In hot and dirty Madna, Sen felt as though he was living someone else's life. In this novel Chatterjee employs the familiar literary motif of a journey to the other world. Agastya, the protagonist is named after the mythical Indian stage who crossed the Vindhyas never to return.

Agastya is restless, and he does consider escape from Madna and a career in the IAS. He flees, briefly, back to the big city, and considers taking a job in publishing. But he does return to stic out in Madna. He is struggling with a double life, outwardly and quiet and inwardly cynical. He leaves the place apparently on leave, but then thinks twice and decides to stay in Delhi. Sen quits the job and tries for an executive position in a private company. Dhrubo, his friend on the other hand, resigns from the job of an executive and prepares to take the IAS Exams.

English, August is a subtle metaphor of contemporary youth's quest for self realization . The novel can be read at two levels. On the surface level the book is a commentary on the administrative services of India. At the deeper level it is a frank discussion of the predicament in which an intelligent educated modern youth finds himself. The casual informal abrupt and open-ended termination of Chatterjee's Indian Story and calls upon the reader to step in and shape the remaining story according to his own designs and dreams. It is to be 'made' rather than 'retold'. This novel is exceptional among different works of fiction of the 1980s.

His second novel The Last Burden can be read as a journey from rootlessness to maturity, but the emphasis this time seems to be on the 'burden of the family ties'. He portrays the destructive relationship between father and mother and the two sons, between the sons and the elder son's wife and finally between elderson and his wife. It is about familial ties in a middleclass family in the backdrop of a fast changing socioeconomic scenario creating by the rising modernity in society. The novel focuses on how values and relationships are suddenly seen as burdens, which could destroy one's individuality.

Jamun, the central character, is a bachelor and stays away from his family. Jamun returns home when he comes to know that his mother is hospitalized and then decides to stay for some more time. During this period both the sons crib with their father regarding the expenditure borne by them for the mother's treatment. Jamun has also another reason to stay behind and that is the presence of an old friend Kasturi who, though married to another, is bearing Jamun's child. After the mother passes away there is palpable sense of relief among the family members. Jamun then decides to leave for the town where he works. Later, Jamun's brother passes on the

burden of looking after his father to Jamun who aggrees to the proposal. Chatterjee adopts the technique of flashback and flash-forward to project the ideas. It is a powerful and mature exploration of the changing face of the Indian family and notions of filial responsibilities. It is a funny but a bitter portrait of family ties.

The Mammaries of the Welfare State is a tale of serialized angst of Agastya, the protagonist, serving as a sequel to his 1988 novel The English, August. Its theme is about the corruption in the Welfare State. According to Nandan Lal, "the camera zooms in on the faceless, cynical bureaucracy that is panting very hard and milking the State very dry – and this takes care of the action" (20). Chatterjee writes unselfconsciouly about humour and sex, a quality very few Indian writers possess. He succeeds in writing wittily on an existence that is both corrupt and dreary.

The novel begins with Agastya finding himself with a "Housing problem". He manages to get himself assigned a room in the official Guest House, but he finds himself sharing these quarters with six strangers. Agastya happens to have worked with Menon, the "Deputy Secretary". He becomes involved with Daya, who runs and soft sell ad agency. Daya even offers him a position, but Agastya remains devoted to bureaucracy.

Agastya escapes Madna and gets sent around elsewhere to pretend to do his duties. He even manages to get sent on a training course in France, a huge but unappreciated perk. Agastya himself only survives his job because he carefully balances work with as much leave as he can afford to get away with. But even here the Welfare State makes life complicated for him.

The Mammaries of the Welfare State is more a collection of loose episodes than a carefully structured novel. There are a lot of drifting characters who fade in and out of view. The Welfare State of contemporary times offers many targets. There is frustration, but also humour throughout.

Upamanyu Chatterjee is a fairly recent novelist, and not many have worked on his books. A. K. Singh's article on English August is a significant one. He delves into the background of the novel and gives a vivid picture at the society the protagonist Sen is a part of. He points out how Agastya's background has become a powerful alienating force and how that has created displacement in Agastya. He also focuses on the language used. It also shows that Agastya's irreverence enmates from his angst against social, political and moral institutions and dispensers of this contaminated culture. Sanjay Kumar talks about the theme of exile that runs throughout the novel.

According to Nomratha Mogaral, Upamanyu Chatterjee is the most representative novelist. His novels reveal anxiety about the modern identity. Pradeep Trikha's article on The Last Burden shows how the author probes into the mysterions working of the human mind and delineates the complex problem of the complex age in contemporary society. His concerns are disintegration of the family, discontinuity of the tradition, conflict between the generations and several other issues which result in isolation of an individual. According to Mohan Ramanam, The Last Burden is remarkable for its cynicism. He discusses malaise that has crept into the Indian middle class family. C. Sengupta's article shows how the novel presents family ties as a burden. According to Namratha, the protagonists of Chatterjee's novels suffer from "acute alienation from their post-colonial milieu being too modern. Agastya's

picaresque as IAS officer in E,A and Jamun's nuemonic journey as son at his mother's death-bed in TLB are journey of modern exiles in their own land seeking after self-discovery" (46).

Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels present a very morbid picture of society. He writes about a society which has lost almost all its moorings. His works reflect the dull and monotonous cycle of existence. He portrays the 'existential cirsis' of modern youth. There are shades of Camus in his works, which, in a way, reflects contemporary life. The next chapter deals with the problems of boredom, alienation, dislocation, anchorlessness, anxiety, dread and despair, experienced by the characters.

CHAPTER III

ELEMENTS OF EXISTENTIALISM IN CHATTERJEE'S WORKS - I

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During the 1980s Indian fiction in English witnessed a new crop of writers who, equipped with idiom, strove to assert themselves and strained to express in their writings their observations summative of the human situation in the Indian subcontinent. They unfettered Indian fiction in English from the 'complexes' which plagued their predecessors and changed its tone, tenor and content. Upamanyu Chatterjee has emerged as one of the most compelling 'new voices' of considerable import.

The novel of the 1980s brings to the fore a new cosmopolitanism in its exploration of the complex nature of the human experience. It deals with transnational, transcontinental and transcultural experiences. It projects the human struggle to come to terms with a cosmopolitan reality. The latter type of writers present man as a solitary being by nature, who is unable to enter into any relationship with other human beings. He may establish contact with other individuals, but is incapable of establishing significant human relationships. Upamanyu Chatterjee's works depict this human condition. He portrays the basic solitariness of man. They seem to represent a passage from alienation to connectivity and then a journey back to alienation.

As individuals are evolved and moulded by society, the protagonists of English, August: An Indian Story, The Last Burden and The Mammaries of the Welfare State are distinct from one another. This is partly because the society

expects the writers to adhere to certain traditions even as they mould the characters. In some cases the protagonists are rebels who refuse to succumb to the pressures of the society and revolt against the social rules in different ways. In Upamanyu Chatterjee's milieu, these values have no relevance and most of the people have broken away from their cultural moorings. It is the differences that are mirrored in the lives of the protagonists. These three novels portray the frightening reality of the existential angst in today's youth and also the total loss of traditional values in the society.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's protagonists are existential characters. They experience all the existential problems. His novels present a very morbid picture of society, reflecting the dull and monotonous cycle of existence.

His first novel, English, August: An Indian Story, deals with the contemporary youth's search for identity. Agastya Sen the young I.A.S. officer's sense of dislocation, when suddenly transplanted from his megalopolitan background (in Delhi) to the realities of life in a small backward town Madna, is emblematic of the predicament of young Indians with similar backgrounds. Their cosmopolitan upbringing is a powerful alienating force, leading to a disturbing sense of rootlessness, disillusionment and disaffection. The narrative takes the protagonist through different stages in his attempts to come to terms with the new environment. In the course of his quest, he moves from a debilitating sense of alienation to an urge towards escapism and finally, finds his own solution through a positive involvement in the compelling realities of life in this country. Agastya suffers from boredom, alienation, rootlessness, nothingness, dread, despair, anxiety and the absurdity of life. He is not satisfied with the society and gets frustrated.

Many novels in recent years have focused on the family, and Chatterjee's second novel The Last Burden is in that category. This novel is a work of far greater substance and originality as compared to his first book English, August: An Indian Story. He explores the dark side of kinship and family ties. The author probes into the mysterious working of the human mind and delineates the complex problems of the complex age in contemporary society. Being a sensitive writer, his concerns are in contemporary society. Being a sensitive writer, his concerns are disintegration of the family, discontinuity of the tradition, conflict between the generations and several other issues which result in the loneliness and isolation of the individual. The novel records the hero's changing moods and the ebb and flow of his emotions. In this novel also, we find the existential struggles of the protagonist, Jamun.

The Mammaries of the Welfare State is a tale of serialised angst of Agastya, his protagonist, serving as a sequel to his 1988 novel English, August. It reveals the grim reality that encompasses a country, where the poor and the downtrodden lead a miserable life. People at the helm of affairs enjoy their life and are insensitive to the miseries of the underprivileged class. Agastya Sen is back and lives the life of absurdity. He finds only boredom and dullness in his job. He only survives his job because he carefully balances work with as much leave as he can afford to get away with. But even here, the Welfare State makes life complicated for him. There is frustration, but also humour throughout.

In these three novels we find the 'existential crisis'. They focus on the protagonists' subjective awareness of his style of existence, the existentialists' concern with the absurd, alienaion, exile, dread, anxiety and despair. In English, August: An Indian Story, the substance of life is experienced through social and

political relations. Agastya Sen, the outsider, becomes a commentator on the absurdities of provincial Indian society: attitudes, behaviour, systems of belief of the administrator, the doctor, the holy man, the illiterate workman – all at one time or another discussed, observed, catalogued; the whole process raising in him a sense of paralysis at the hopelessness of making sense of it all. He is confronted with two extremes of experience, Madna and Delhi, his mind confounded by the effort of bringing his disparate together: "Madna and Delhi seemed two extreme points of an unreal existence; the only palpable thing was the rhythm of the beast beneath him, a wonder that could link such disparate worlds together" (177).

The first twenty pages set the tone of the entire novel. The landscape of Madna is peopled with various men of the officer class and the vast agglomeration of groupies and sycophants who gather around the man of importance. These erstwhile 'dead' officers and their wives come to alive in Chatterjee's descriptions, each character is like any other, all monuments to bureaucratic existentialism, and yet no two characters are alike.

The coherence Sen seeks in his life eludes him: he cannot bring urban and provincial India, the conflicting strands within his family background, and the world beyond India into a meaningful can believe. His drifting life encounters situations and responds with detached irony, or by withdrawing drug-induced dreams. By the novel's end, the reader is invited to consider Sen's position in the light of a quotation for Marcus Aurelius. "Today I have got myself out of all my perplexities; or rather, I have got the perplexities out of myself – for they were not without, but within; they lay in my own outlook" (288).

The same may be said of Agastya Sen, although it can be added that the perplexities seem to have an independent existence as well; Sen merely compounds them.

The main theme of existentialism is absurdity , which is compounded of dullness, boredom, anchorlessness and hopelessness. Agastya suffers from lambent dullness and boredom. He considers himself as one "with no special attitude for anything" (3) and thinks "I should have been a photographer, or a maker of ad films, something like that, shallow and urban" (13). He considers himself a misfit anchorless, unhinged and misplaced by virtue of his competitive qualifications. Accustomed to metropolitan life, he finds happiness in nothing and thinks of himself as misbegotten in a world which he does not seem to fit in. He feels "emptier than usual" (134) and thinks that he is "wasting my time here" (131).

His mundane life consists of dozing a little in his claustrophobic room, watching lizards racing across the room, day dreaming, thinking of the past, extracting an invitation for a meal either from his seniors, friends or subordinates to escape the awful meals prepared by the guest house cook, and visiting various officers to learn the intricacies of bureaucracy. His accomodation in the rest house is drab and to add to his woes, is an indifferent cook Vasant who serves him insipid meals.

For a year Agastya has to move from one room in the rest house to another room in some other house; it is homelessness of a kind, a physical manifestation of an inner sense of restlessness. His experiences on the first day, consisting of an integration meeting, the sea of humanity waiting for justice around the collector's office, the collector's overbearing manner leaves him with a lambent dullness. He

does not see a way out of his uneasiness and suffocation. He wants to run away from this situation. The exercise as a willed action provides a relief from vagrant thought and the absurdity of his daily routine: "Running felt splendid, clockwork movement, the crisscross of arm and leg, rhythm and balance, the steady, healthy panting, the illusion that the body was being used well. The mind wandered pleasantly, yet not into chaos because the physical strain provided the leash" (36).

Agastya is preoccupied with sex, both natural and unnatural, literature (Marcus Aurelius) and soft drugs (marijuana and wine). A pertinent question is asked by Dhrubo at the time of his departure for Madna: "What'll you do for sex and marijuana in Madna?" (3). He could easily avail himself of these in Delhi but Madna could offer him only a semblance of these. So he sustains his wearied existence on their fantasized manifestation. But Agastya is not cast in the staple mould. In spite of his moorings in a high rank and lineage, he is shown as suffering from that problems which are part of contemporary heritage.

The government officers teach Agastya not about the intricacies of administration, but something of the "ways of the wider world" (71). Anchorless he had arrived in Madna to keep afloat the ship of state; and in Madna, enlivened by the company of a frog sunk in "amphibious nirvana" (97), he learns "the impotence of restlessness"(165). Life imposes its own patterns upon the living; the young Agastya finds that in Madna "living had become a simpler business, gliding form day to day and discovering more and more what he did not want" (177).

At the very beginning of novel Upamanyu Chatterjee spells out his protagonist's predicament:

> Anchorlessness – that was to be one of his chaotic concerns in that uncertain year; battling a sense of waste was to be another. Other fodder too, in the farrago of his mind, self-pity in an uncongenial clime, the incertitude of his reactions to Madna, his job, and his inability to relate to it – other abstractions too, his niche in the world, his future, the elusive mocking nature of happiness, the possibility of its attainment. (24-25)

It is this theme of "anchorlessness" the weariness of an era, the loneliness of an entire generation that the novelist explores along with the satiric portraiture of whole Indian Administrative Services. The sense of bewilderment is stronger in his official interaction. Appreciating the commitment of men like Srivastsav, he is confused about his place in the bureaucratic set-up. The inability to reconcile this reality with his father's inspiring vision of an IAS officer's responsibility aggravates his feeling of anchorlessness.

Agastya constantly feels that he is living somebody else's life, for he finds no coherence between his past and present life, or even between the three spheres - the official, the unofficial and the private, of his Madna life. The chasm between thought and action, private and public life compels him to define himself, his own identity and, to his great discomfort, he realises that he is totally confused about what he wants in life or how he could find a way out of his vague restlessness. He has no hope, no aim. He wants to be happy in a modernised society. August also knows that he represents many who are like him – with no special attitude for anything, not even wondering how to manage, not even thinking.

In The Mammaries of the Welfare State also, Agastya Sen continues to be an absurd hero. Though he moves from Madna to the capital's corridors of power, he continues to complain about the pointlessness, the horrifying comic futility and irrelevance of the daily acts: "I'm sick of my life here'' (8) and "I'm sick of the pointlessness of the work I do and the ridiculous salary that I get for it" (12). His feelings of loneliness and boredom are seen throughout the novel: "Agastya was so enervated by his life in the city that ever so often, when he was alone", he found himself "shutting his eyes and weeping silently"(1). He is constantly confronted by the absurdities of bureaucratic life around him.

In Madna, Agastya feels a sense of waste and anchorlessness. The inability to reconcile the reality of an IAS officer's responsibility aggravates his feeling of anchorlessness. His life in Madna exposes the shallowness of his existence and the feeling of loneliness. "Every now and then in his career, once a week on the average, Shri Sen regrets his decision to join the topmost Civil Service of the country. On the other days, when he reflects, life outside the government appears tense-making, obsequious and fake" (117).

The Indian bureaucracy, of which Agastya is a part, has rendered him a crippled person who still suffers from the hangover of a colonized past Indianization of the administration has taken place but it is in a form which is almost absurd. According to the author, the whole structure of the Civil Service is its administration, but it is a part of something bigger and has nothing to offer.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's second novel, The Last Burden, is a story of what happens to familial ties in the fast changing economic scenario. The novel reveals another traditional value, that of the joint family being replaced by nuclear families

due to the onslaught of modernity. As values and cherished relationships get distorted due to the importance given to materialism in modern society, relationships become a burden. Jamun, the protagonist of this novel is a sensitive individual. The change in social values and standards makes him believe that parental love is a burden. Though he is ridden with a sense of guilt at the thought of neglecting his duties, he is unable to do much to rectify the situation. Chatterjee satirizes the hopes and aspirations of the educated middle class people who are wary of shouldering any responsibilities. The whole family waits for Urmila's death. There is hardly any love or tenderness. There are several hot exchanges between Shyamanand and his sons on money matters, on the will which Urmila is supposed to have written and on questions of what obligations children have to their parents. The sons quarrel between themselves over the expenses and speculate on how much they will get out of Urmila and what should be done with Shyamanand when Urmila passes on. Chatterjee seems to be suggesting that this is the true nature of family relationships in India which avoids responsibilities. After Urmila's death, Jamun scrutinizes her existence:

> What had her life been for? Why had she come to life, and why had she survived for over sixty years? Surely, at bottom for nothing. The aspiration of her existence had for sure not been happiness, [. . .] to be one feasible vindication for living, the single glow amongst the anguish, malevolence rancour and range.[. . .] drab childhood, her toilsome youth or her catastrophic marriage. (255)

Symbolically, the book opens in the month of August when the leaves turn a shade of yellow revealing a decay, which has stepped into the atmosphere. This

decaying atmosphere is reflected by characters who are named Jamun, Burfi, Pista, etc., commonly available sweets. The choice of names suggests that the life of characters are not after all sweet. The names, in fact are ironic, because, behind this facade of ordinariness, one can see the fabric being torn away to reveal the flaws in the Indian tradition and customs. The joint family set up, once a cherished institution in Indian society, now reveals the rottenness which has steeped in.

No momentous event or change happens in the life of any character in the novel. They pass through the cycle of existence with childish bickerings and squabbles. These bickerings and misunderstandings gain a great deal of importance due to Chatterjee's use of hard-hitting words. The mundane fights are mere diversions for the family members, who otherwise lead a dull monotonous life. Chatterjee reveals the break-up of a joint family system as the members come to terms with the changing value systems. One example can be seen when Urmila and Shyamanand talk about the abortion. They are against abortion but Burfi feels that it is because of their child that he and Joyce have married, revealing the fact that the child was born out of wedlock. As he talks to Jamun about his son Pista, there is no sign of affection (102-103).

It is the middleclass that has a great say in the Indian political conditions and it is this class which tries very hard to adhere to the traditional roots. People who are middle aged in this social set-up are the real conservers of traditional values, but they are also plagued by mid-life crisis. There is a resurgence of glimpses of man's existential loneliness and triggers the anxiety associated with one's ultimate helplessness. All these aspects are well portrayed in the character of Shyamanand, who after the death of Urmila is seen reminiscencing: "In Shyamanand, alongside

this caring, her departure appears to have planted a more persistant acrimony, so that when one death leads him to reminisce of others in his long, undistinguished life, [. . .] – more the comfortless, bitter sensations kindled by each event" (254).

The book deals for the most part with wasted aimless lives and it becomes a metaphor of a monstrous ugliness. The characters, Chatterjee describes are tawdry and dispiriting and a burden of human failure subsumes the novel. Perhaps the only redeeming feature in the book is a slight trace of maturity in Jamun's character.

In these three novels, we find the sense of alienation, dislocation and exile. In English, August, Agastya's arrival in the hot, dusty, unglamorous town of Madna triggers an acute sense of dislocation. He is jolted out of the placid, complacent attitude he had so carefully cultivated. Adding to his woes in his inability to adjust to the mindless functioning of a pompous bureaucratic set-up. In Madna, he encounters a variety of people who hold out possible ways of overcoming his sense of dissatisfaction and alienation. Finding all these unacceptable, he takes recourse to escapism and retreats into an enclosed world of his own. As a result he is compelled to lead three lives in Madna to keep up his social and official pretences. This juggling with three lives confounds him further, leading to an acute sense of alienation.

The narrating protagonists of these novels suffer from acute, alienation from their post-colonial milieu being too modern. Agastya's picture as IAS officer in English, August and The Mammaries of the Welfare State and Junun's nuemonic journey as son at his mother's death-bed in The Last Burden are journeys of modern exiles in their own land seeking after self-discovery.

Alienation is seen throughout the novels. In English, August: An Indian Story, Agastya Sen experiences as an IAS trainee at Madna, an imaginary town in Maharastra. His background which has been responsible for shaping his sensibility is established in the very first chapter of the novel. He is a product of a very prestigious public school at Darjeeling. He wished he had been an Anglo Indian, that he had Keith or Alan for a name, that he spoke English with their accent. From that day his friends gave him many names 'Last Englishman', 'hey English' and 'August' which he finally accepts.

The reason for his rootlessness is not too hard to perceive. As Meenakshi Raykar comments, "His background has been a very powerful alienating force which has left a sense of displacement" (110). His elitist education and the frivolous luxuries afforded by cities like Calcutta and Delhi have obviously conditioned his mind to just one way of life. Professor Nissim Ezekiel has perceptively pointed out in his review of the novel in the Indian Post, August 21, 1988, "It is Agastya's Darjeeling School that established his alienation of which he remains conscious virtually throughout this Indian Story" (qtd. in Ravi 123).

Agastya seems to be misbegotten in a world which he doesn't seem to fit in. He is dissatisfied with the contemporary culture, its standards and its moves which are perenially being imposed by its corrupt agents or creatures aching with listlessness. The protagonist's sense of alienation is counterpointed against his father's maturity and knowledge of life, and the letters he writes to his son are eloquent testimony of these traits. For example, this advice: "But Ogu, remember that Madna is not an alien place. You must give it time. I think you will like your

job eventually, but if you don't , think concretely of what you want to do instead, and change" (95).

Not only professionally, but even socially and culturally Agastya feels alienated. Before coming to Madna, he has never had an experience of a provincial town. Places and people and events which had earlier been just names out of newspapers, suddenly assume a reality whose meaning and significance escape him.

> Glimpses of Madna en route; Cigarette – and – paan dhabas, disreputable food stalls, both lit by fierce kerosene lamps, cattle and clanging rickshaws on the road, and the rich sound of trucks in slush from an overflowing drain; he felt as though he was living someone else's life. (5)

This is the first impression of Madna, an impression which is going to haunt him for the remainder of his stay there. Unable to relate to the life around him, Agastya retreats to his own private world, the privacy of his room in the rest house.

Agastya's journey does not reveal a nation less lost than his own self. The bureaucratic processes of the Welfare State of which he is an agent are essentially intrusive and all pervasive appendages of colonial origins as also the proliferating grid of modernity which is systematically destroying the traditional India. In The Mammaries of the Welfare State, Chatterjee is ever more pessimistic and presents an all encompassing bizzare Welfare State outside which nothing exists making the self which seeks itself in the nation-state grotesque.

Agastya does not relish the state of corruption, exploitation, indifference, snobbery which aggravates his problems in Madna and makes him develop a strong aversion for this much-coveted job. He tries to escape this crass culture. The

protagonist feels impotent with rage at his inability to accommodate himself in accordance with the moves of his job or in changing the administrative system for the better. Thus we see that anchorlessness and alienation have taken deep roots in Agastya's psyche.

The Last Burden is a novel of narration rather than action. The narration revolves the central character, Urmila the mother of Jamun, the narrating protagonist. Her illness, a symbol of maternal malady at the heart of the Indian family, epipanically initiates reconnaissance of her scattered family. It leads Jamun to a questioning journey into the innermost recesses of his memory to find the remedy elsewhere outside himself, his family and his mother.

Jamun could never find any compatibility with his father and brother, he is emotionally attached to his mother, whose agony has no measure. She "had to combat her hypertension, her piles, corns, arthritis, heart, marriage, her mind" (4). Her only solace is Jamun, she unfolds her "emotional self", her "alienated self" and her "isolated self" to him. She knows,

> All family narratives are despicable hideous – if they're faithful to the essential life – aimless rancour for one another, the most guileless even, milk from us, our watchful malice – living together merely to thrill in unkindness, marrying, mounting and spawning because we're all afraid of being corporally alone. (55)

In this novel, all are in the 'alienated world'. They experience alienation in the family itself. Both Jamun and Burfi are alienated from the family. Urmila suffers from loneliness and alienation; so does the father.

Shyamanand fails in his relationship with his sons. He is at loss to deal with them when he needs them most, at the crucial moment of Urmila's heart attack. They seem to him: "brand-new and alien, in jeans and T-shirts of dubious shades, and articulate a puzzling species of English; whereas Urmila and he had ripened in a earlier, illusory genial world [. . .]" (108).

This novel can again be read as a journey from rootlessness to maturity, but the emphasis this time seems to be on the 'burden' of family ties. As the novelist himself has pointed out, "I wanted to write about the suffering that family members inflict on each other and the terrible responsibility of emotional dependence, I wanted to describe the burden, I suppose of attachments" (qtd. in Sengupta 29).

He has overdone the confused and often destructive relationships within the Indian family eventhough it belongs to the nineties. To show the family 'burden', the author takes upon himself of depicting of family ties, what Rushmee Z.Ahmad calls "the residue of decay, the crud of companionship gone sour" (qtd. in Sengupta 30) – the destructive relationship between the family members. The only saving grace of the book is a glimmer of maturity that dawns on Jamun towards the end of the book.

The life of Shyamanand and Urmila and their two sons Burfi and Jamun and Burfi's Christian wife, Joyce and their sons Pista and Doom, set in a city by the sea it becomes an almost painful but necessary incursion into a world that is palpably real. It is a family that is peopled with human beings deeply despairing, cynical, lacking in warmth, violent and divided but not without their small redeeming acts that at once is uplifting but tragic.

The burden of love, possession and ties is most evident in the relationship between Shyamanand and Urmila. Even though married for about forty years, they have not been able to establish a meaningful relationship and live in a destructive atmosphere. Both the brothers wait eagerly for the death of at least one of the parents amid a destructive atmosphere of squabbling, bickering and accusations.

Jamun struggles hard to free himself of the burden that relationships had become to him. This he could do only by relating himself to Kasturi and Kasibai in the most perfunctory manner possible. Since he reckons that relationships become bondage only through blood, nature and time, he is careful to steer clear of any such situation in the human environment that he builds for himself. He deliberately keeps away from anything that would bind him emotionally, be it a home, or a wife, or even a sense of duty to his servant. In fact all the protagonists of Chatterjee are seen cutting themselves away from the society and family in the same way as Jamun.

The novelist at the beginning of the novel stresses his protagonist's sense of 'dislocation". Agastya is in a state of 'dislocation' in an environment offering him legitimate roots. He starts looking for roots when he is physically dislocated in Madna. It begins with food:

> The problem of food gave him something concrete for cogitation. Lying on the bed, staring blankly up at the ceiling [. . .] he would ask himself where his next meal coming from [. . .]. Before Madna, he had always taken food for granted, like air. [. . .] Now he did hope that there were places in Madna where one could eat cheaply. (65-66)

There is also a sense of 'dislocation' from all traditions and conventions which he finds meaningless. The novelist tells us that slowly, but surely, Agastya is

trying to come out of Cocoon of financially-well-off and public school background in whose warmth and comfort he had divorced himself from the harsh reality of life. In other words, he is trying to get over his sense of dislocation. As the novelist puts it:

> On some nights he would listen to the nine o'clock radio news. Earlier he had generally avoided newspapers and what they called current affairs. [. . .] But in Madna he began to listen to the radio carefully, sometimes just to have another voice in the room [in other words, he is trying to get out of loneliness]. It became a major link, the only objective one, really, with the world beyond Madna. (73)

He finds himself in the type of places he had read about only in newspapers – "where floods and caste wars occurred, and entire Harijan families were murdered" (5). This disparity between the two worlds obviously creates a strong sense of dislocation.

It is his sense of dislocation that brings him closer to Bhatia: "he would never have accepted that he and Bhatia could have anything in common, but now they palpably did: their dislocation" (76). Even the protagonist's insomania seems to be symptomatic of this sense of dislocation and his efforts to drown himself in drugs and booze and masturbation, his need to "fantasize without restraint" (92). The novelist conveys this sense of dislocation in existential terms:

> Suddenly he [Agastya] was laughing loudly in that silent, closed room. God, he was fucked – weak, feverish, aching in a claustrophic room, being ravaged by mosquitoes, with no electricity, with no sleep, in a place he disliked, totally alone, with a job that didn't interest him,

> in murderous weather, and now feeling madly sexually aroused. His stomach contracted with his laughter. (92)

In the months of adjustment, he writes several times to his father about his feeling of dislocation. All the time there is no real involvement either in his social or official life, as he feels that this situation is somehow unreal, and just a temporary sojourn in Madna. He goes through the motions of a hectic social life without making any impression.

The trauma of dispossession and migration is at the base of the family tensions in the family. The migrant experience which is part of the movement to the city with its promise of unlimited prosperity sharply followed by a failure to create a brave new world, lies at the heart of the family. It is such a tale that gets written in Upamanya Chatterjee's The Last Burden which is a story of what happens to familial ties in the fast changing socio economic scenario created by the cataclysonic hurtling of India into modernity.

Jamun is quite at home in his work place in the company of his colleague and friend Hegiste. His is an urban space that is physically clean and orderly but socially and spiritually dead. The narrative begins at the stage in Jamun's life when he has left his home and family behind and in the process yearns for them. Jamun lives in a boomtown waste where he tries hard to reproduce the home atmosphere by buying the same brand of refrigerator and geyser at home. His story is one that begins with the modernist desire for the city, a desire to live openly with the split and unreconciled character of his lives, and to draw energy from his inner struggles, wherever they may lead him in the end. It is a story of his learning to construct a halo around his private space and around himself and gradually to lose these halos in

the process of finding himself anew and of realizing that his story is an ever repeated tale that had been lived by his father, and by his mother and perhaps would continue for ever.

The theme of exile runs through most of modern literature and one of its persistent concerns is to explore the possibilities of a reconciliation between man and his situation. George Lamming says:

> The exile is a universal figure [. . .] we are made to feel a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society whose past we can't alter, and whose future is always beyond us. Idleness can easily guide us into accepting this as a condition. Sooner or later, in silence or with rhetoric we sign a contract whose epitaph Reads: To be an exile is to be alive. (qtd. in Kumar 101)

This issue assumes an immediacy of concern with all post-colonial literatures as they are an outcome of an unequal dialectic between a violent and rapacious imperialistic culture and a subjugated, though often rich and complex native culture. This dialectic has caused in the colonized societies a large scale displacement, dispossession and dislocation – social, cultural, linguistic and geographical – thus resulting in a crisis of identity and creating a sense of exile.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's three novels raise the issue of identity in post-colonial society and problematize the issue by implicating the subject in a web of contradictory and opposing material and discursive practices. The protagonists of English, August: An Indian story and The Mammaries of the Welfare State suffer from an inexorable sense of exile and this feeling of exile is produced in them by an

acute awareness of their colonial legacy, the two mutually opposed traditions, they have been heir to. They also search in vain for any reflection of self.

In English, August, Agastya takes adolescent pride in his non-conformity. It pleases him when people remark that he doesn't look an IAS officer, or even they feel uneasy with his rare and obscure name and he becomes a fitness maniac to remain different from the pot-bellied bureaucrats. But neither the approval of his superiors nor even his easy success as an administrator manages to quell his discontent and he finally quits the job to return to Calcutta where his father is the Governor of West Bengal.

Agastya's mind is preoccupied with the mundane pleasures of the metropolitan life of Delhi and Calcutta. Deprived of the familiar diversions his mind learns to notice things, and what is observed begins to register and affects his mind: "[. . .] he realized, that in Delhi and Calcutta his mind was much more busy with trivia, [. . .]. There, his mind was just too cluttered up for him to notice anything" (123). Cut off from his roots, life for Agastya in Delhi becomes an endless trip of boozing, doing soft drugs and sex. But this fails to relieve his sense of exile; a vague sense of dissatisfaction and dislocation persists. By opting for the Indian Administrative Service, he hopes to find some meaning and purpose to his life. But life in Madna proves to be no different.

Agastya disavows the western values, but this rejection does not imply a return to the pure precolonial past, because Agastya realizes that this return is neither possible nor desirable. He resigns his job and leaves in search of alternative values which would provide him with a stable identity. But until this search ends, he must continue to remain an exile.

For Agastya and Jamun there is no separate exile period. They are not innocent, as they are aware of the weakness of the society. But there is no disillusionment with the world around them; they accept the world as it is. These two protagonists live a life of seeming ignorance. The process of initiation of the exiled here starts when he enters into an unfamiliar world to undergo an ordeal, which would inevitably result in an expansion of his consciousness and also a metamorphosis of his being. Jamun has what can be termed a love affair with Kasturi, but he is not affected when she marries another. He is satisfied with the arrangement in the relationship as he has no additional burden. In this contended situation there is no chance of taking a decision which would transform the life of the protagonist.

Chatterjee offers a complex view of the post-colonial society where exile and alienation seem to be an integral part of human condition. The colonial legacy makes man suffer from an inexorable sense of alienation and exile and the portrayal of this suffering is evident in Agastya, who according to Kumar can be rightly called the "bastard of the west"(102).

Another important theme is that of frustration. The protagonists' frustration towards life and bureaucracy is evident in all the three novels. The heroes are influenced by westernised thought and hunger for that kind of life. The protagonist of English, August belongs to the new generation termed "Cola generation" (47), "the generation that doesn't oil its hair"(47), the "generation of apes"(28) and the generation that would love to "get AIDS because it is raging in America" (76). "You are an absurd combination", says Agastya's uncle, "a boarding-school-English-Literature education and an obscure name from Hindu myth" (129). He is named

after Agastya, which is transformed into August by his anglophile friends because August is more convenient than Agastya. His parents too add their bit to this and his name is compressed to 'Ogu'.

In Madna, Agastya has become more perceptive and sensitive. His first trip into the district opens his eyes to new realities. In retrospect he realizes that in Delhi and in Calcutta he was insensitive to his surroundings as he was "busy with trivia, talking rubbish with someone, filled with impatience to get somewhere in time for something [. . .] his mind was just cluttered up for him to notice anything" (123). In spite of these positive indications, his frustrations continued to build up slowly rising to a crescendo. The rains came to Madna, refreshed and put new life in everything around it. But Agastya's mind continued to be restless and unsettled. His bureaucratic life – the overbearing presence of Srivastav and Kumar with their intimidating behaviour, his social life with its trivialities are both equally unsatisfying. In such a mood, "Agastya was enraged at himself [. . .] for not having planned his life with intelligence, for having dared to believe that he was adaptable enough to any job and circumstance, for not knowing how to change either, for wasting time" (112).

He felt that he was neither master of his fate nor time. Agastya strongly felt that most men like him "chose in ignorance, and fretted in an uncongenial world, and learnt to accept compromise, with or without grace or slipped into despair" (113-114).

His anger is also directed at the failure of reason to direct significant action. Agastya resolves that reason is incapable of answering questions. At the same time he also realizes, much to his dismay, that all human relationships are futile. The

realization dawns on him that he is alone in his quest for identity. The contrast between his life in Madna and Delhi exposes the shallowness of his existence. The feeling of loneliness starts haunting him.

Earlier he was worried about the future but now he could not see it at all, engulfed as it was in a void. Life had suddenly become a black and serious business "with a tantalizing, painfully elusive, definite but cliched, goal, how to crush the restlessness in his mind" (135). He also was got frustrated in his work and Madna also. Finally, Agastya departs to Delhi with the thought nth he did not want challenges or responsibility, but just to be happy, to lie on the roof of his house in Delhi and be immersed in himself.

In The Mammaries of the Welfare State, a sequel to English, August, one finds the same feeling dominating the mind of Agastya. According to him, day-to-day life is frustrating, even for someone ensconced within the administration of the Welfare State such as Agastya. He is a girder of the Steel Frame. Agastya reminds others by the way of explanation why he shouldn't get the usual runaround. But it is hopeless, the Welfare State is a mystery within and without and getting things done is pretty much last on the list of everyone's priorities. As he is reminded that the self-interest is the only commandment – naturally of the Welfare State, he manages to survive. These two novels can be called as a satire on Indian Administrative Service. Agastya Sen's job is the main reason for his frustration towards life, society and his job also.

In The Last Burden, Jamun is also frustrated in life. He longs for modernized and city life. His family is not a happy one. Even as a teen ager Jamun "feels for his parents a love that is only the tenderness of remorse, just a sorrow, a shame at

their unhappiness (198). Jamun has not found a truly happy rerlationship. His early love Kasturi remains a friend, occasionally a very close one indeed; but she is married. Jamun's deep emotional bondage to his parents makes it impossible for him to enter into a responsible and independent life of his own. The novel ends with hope, Jamun finally picks up the pieces from his last burden at the end of the tunnel; "For the millionth time in his life, he suddenly, in a panic that time's running out, wants to expiate himself before his parents for the wrongs that he must've done them, years to convince them that he, despite his vulnerabilities, is truly grateful to them for the gift of life" (193).

Feelings of dread, anxiety and despair are the hall marks of the protagonists of the three novels under discussion. These have a remarkable influence on matters of choice. Kierkegaard held that it is spiritually crucial to recognize that one experiences not only a fear of specific objects but also a feeling of general apprehension. Anxiety leads to the individual's confrontation with nothingness and with the impossibility of finding justification for the choices he or she must make.

For Agastya, an oppressive atmosphere has become a bleak business with a tantalizing, painfully elusive, definite, but clichéd goal he does not see a way out as to how he should crush the uneasiness and suffocation of his mind. He finds happiness in nothing. No one, like Agastya, knows whether he shall be able to peep into dark cells of soul and escape that suffocating situation by fleeing from it like a fugitive or not. But there is something in his deeper life that all other moderns who rebel against everything that is burdensome or strangulating also feel. And without making compromises he expresses his generation angst against social, political and moral institutions with irreverence.

In English, August and The Mammaries of the Welfare State, despair is seen throughout the novel. Agastya doesn't have any hope towards life. He just wants to lead a happy and westernized life. Agastya constantly feels that he is living somebody else's life:

> He finds no coherence between his past and present life or even between the three spheres - the official, the unofficial and the private – of his Madna life. This chasm between thought and action, private and public life compels him to define himself, his own identity, and to his great discomfort he realises that he is totally confused about he wants in life or how he could find a way out of his vague restlessness. (Vijay Kumar 172)

His anchorlessness loses some of its romantic uniqueness when he acknowledges, even against his wish, similar symptoms, not only in his friends, but also, in some whom he considers profoundly insensitive;

> These cries of despair from an inarticulate mouth embarrassed Agastya profoundly, he would never have accepted that he and Bhatia could have anything in common, they now palpably did their dislocation [. . .].
>
> Bhatia made Agastya's secret life seem so ridiculous, he wanted to laugh. Its major consolation had been the possibility that it was a profound experience, something rare; now it seemed as common as a half-bottle of whisky, [. . .]. Agastya faintly disliked him for this, for shattering one of his last consoling illusions. (76)

In The Last Burden also, Jamun is chastened by his extreme exhaustion:

> Nothing else appears to wriggle into his skull. This is the real life, he ruminates messily, this fatigue, these aching calves, this bedpan world.[. . .] Thus existence has trundled along for thousands of years, and will chug on till Time itself peters out, and its hellish and dreadful designlessness is at last immaculately clear when one witnesses, at close quarters, the sickness of death. (225-226)

Agastya's cynicism is only a mask for rage and despair. This is a book that tells us in the first paragraph that every so often, Agastya rests his head on his armrest and weeps silently. His non-conformity, his discontent despite "success" make him a member of the large family of existential heroes encounted in the novels not only of Camus, Kafka and Sartre but also Arun Joshi, Nagarkar and Mukhopadhyaya.

Thus, all the heroes experience existential struggles in the modern society. These sufferings are also found in other characters. In English, August, we find these problems in Dhrubo, his friend, Shankar, Sathe, Dr. Multani, John Avery, Renu and Neera.

The story of Govind Sathe, a cartoonist, "a yellow journalist" (42), as Kumar designates him, serves striking contrast to the protagonist's. 'Visibility' is a problem for Agastya and a quest for Sathe, who knows how difficult it is for one to make oneself visible. He was worried about being invisible in Bombay where he might have lost himself. On the contrary, Agastya wants to escape notice which he as an IAS officer in a small town like Madna attracts. He wishes to go back to Delhi and get lost.

Sathe tells his own story beginning with his father's migration from Bombay to Madna to his father's business as a forest contractor and his brother's course in Hotel Management. When Agastya puts the question, "Then what are you doing in Madna?", he replies, "I like the place" (43) and then turns it around, "with a question like that you really reveal yourself, Mr. Sen, your past, your bewilderment and boredom. Aren't you surprised at seeing me in Madna, I wear Levi's and read Yes, Minister?" (44). The real answer to Agastya's question is suspended till almost at the end of the novel where Sathe points out:"Madna is home for me, August, in Bombay I felt lost. My best years, my past, is here, bittersweet because it is gone. Whatever you choose to do, you will regret everything or regret nothing" (285).

There is a striking resemblance between Sathe and Agastya in one respect, for neither of them opts for the profession seemingly imposed on them by their parents. The contrast to Agastya's state of displacement is provided by an Englilshman John Avery and his wife to be 'Sita', a South Indian girl whom he met in England. John has specially come to India in search of the place 'Gorapak' where his grandfather, the collector of Madna fifty years earlier, was mauled by a tiger. Agastya finds the whole idea of the visit quite bizarre. His grandfather was quite happy in Madna, says Avery to Agastya who is thoroughly bored at the place.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's English, August touches but briefly on the saga of partition. In a couple of pages it catches essence of the emotional turmoil of people of a divided nation. It has been one long and lonely trek from Lahore to Madna for Dr. Multani. The dictum that life has to go on finds its best expression in the trials and tribulations of Dr. Multani. The satisfaction of seeing his son through medical college may be a comforting thought but true happiness is elusive as old memories

continue to haunt him. The pathetic condition of displaced people, victims of partition, is conveyed most poignantly when he tells Agastya Sen, "Darson [his son] is lucky, I would think, he has not been a refugee like me – wanderers clutching only our pasts – we had nothing else" (229). Many years later this emptiness continues to haunt Mr. Multani.

Renu and Neera emerge as offshoots of an era of post-modernity characterized by confusion, nihilism, scepticism verging on cynicism, incoherance, irrational and disbelief. Renu has constructed American cultural virus and in this state of transition she seems to have been wrenched by confusion. She confesses in the rather lengthy and naked letter that she feels "wary and strained" and her face becomes "blank, bored and closed" (155). She feels her American friends' warmth like "a terrific obligation and responsibility" (156). The spirit touches its acme in the letter of Neera recording her feelings at the loss of her virginity, (286-287) which expresses her angst and symbolic revenge of the natural and biological forces against customs, creeds, conventions and taboos so unnaturally imposed against them.

Shankar, an executive engineer who also feels banished in Madna, abandons his destiny to goddess Jagadamba. Agastya is however unable to identify with this determinist philosophy. Equally unacceptable is the attitude of the judge, which is as fatalist as Shankar's philosophy. Having already spent a considerable period of time in Madna, the judge is yet unable to grapple with the feeling of dislocation. He feels that, for him, salvation is only possible with his retirement.

In Delhi, Agastya, to his dismay discovers that his bosom friend Dhrubo, is unhappy with the nature of his job in the corporate world and is even contemplating joining the IAS. His indignation when told of Agastya's desire to quit his job is

evident when he remarks: "Just who and where do you think you are, an American taking an ear off after college to discover himself?" (153). His cousin Tonic's anger is equally clear when he admonishes Agastya, telling him that leaving such a job "is a ridiculously high price to pay for trying to regain some of the shallow pleasures of our past life" (171). He suggests that as an IAS officer, he has a real chance to do something constructive about the social system. Madan, his other college friend, is also frustrated with his job in a chartered account's office. Agastya realises that restlessness crosses the boundaries of place, that his friends in Delhi were as restless as he had been in Madna.

In his third novel, Agastya suffers from the same kind of boredom and alienation. When compared to the protagonist of the first novel, he is a matured person. He has understood the realities of life. Though he dislikes his job and other officers, he manages to survive there. In other characters like Raghupati, Bhanwar Virbim, Makmal Bagai, Bhootnath Gaitonde, Dr. Chakki, A.C. Raichur and others, we find the dissatisfaction towards their job. Throughout the novel we find moral degradation and a sense of displacement from all traditions and conventions. They are simply wasting the time and misusing the government facilities. According to Mr. Dastidar, "Because within the Civil service, one is likelier to have a peon, a Personal Assistant, and on Ambassador car as buffers between one's good self and the rest of the government" (170).

The Last Burden is a more sombre and sober book, smaller in ambit, different in its ambitions. Shyamanand is the anachronistic, displaced and dispossessed patriarch who doesn't miss any opportunity to exercise his authority over his wife,

children and servants; an authority that does not subsume any responsibility. His character seems to be the source of all troubles within the family.

Urmila's situation in life is exemplary of woman's life as wife and mother getting caught in the process of modernity. She is its first unmistakable victim within the house and outside. Burfi does not have any affection for his family members. Within one roof, all are alienated from one another. When Urmila was admitted in the hospital, Joyce refused to stay with her: "Your mother hates me, Joyce screeched, why should I yawn about in a hospital watching a shrivelled cow die?"(84).

In this novel, Upamanyu Chatterjee has painted a world where all the characters are filled with the same sense of disquiet and so there is no one in the novel who can judge the protagonist and his activities. The characters who interact with the protagonist have no moral standards, they themselves are emotionally isolated and so it is difficult for them to judge the loneliness of the protagonist, Jamun.

The characters in Chatterjee's novels retain an opacity, which highlights the major tragedy of the twentieth century boredom. Boredom is another form of passivity. It usually envelops societies that have lived long under foreign domination.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's characters Agastya and Jamun find no redemptive power in the society that they belong to. Agastya compromises with the societal pressures by masturbating and becoming an outsider to the happenings around him. For Jamun, it is an indifferent acceptance of the burden which society has thrust on him. Thus Chatterjee presents a very disturbing picture of the contemporary society.

CHAPTER IV

ELEMENTS OF EXISTENTIALISM IN CHATTERJEE'S WORKS - II

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Equipped with perspicacity and penchant for irreverence for what was earlier considered untouchable, immoral or low, Chatterjee has extirpated many unnatural an nugatory taboos pertaining to theme, its treatment and language. Besides the novelist's concern with the context, country and culture, it is the protagonist who lends a discernible dimension to the novel. It would be interesting to see how this 'different' hero fares in a hostile world.

It would be interesting to study the heroes by taking into account one archetypal pattern involved in their making. Archetypes are the deep and abiding patterns in the human psyche and remain powerful throughout one's existence. An archetypal hero moves through different stages in life to achieve his goal. A hero undertakes a journey, confronts dragons and other terrifying obstacles and then discovers the true meaning of inner self. Though he may be lonely during his quest, at the end he is rewarded with a sense of community.

In Chatterjee's English, August: An Indian Story, The Last Burden and The Mammaries of the Welfare State, we find the theme of quest for self-realisation or a journey from rootlessness to maturity. His first novel English August has been described by C. Sengupta as, "a subtle metaphor of contemporary youth's quest for self-realization" (110).

The novel can be read at two levels. On the surface level, the book is a commentary on the administrative services of India, the corruption in highplaces,the

high-handedness, inefficiency, the oppressiveness of the system, its utter indifference to the eradication of social evils, the acute class consciousness among the IAS hierarchy, the little snobberies and petty jealousies. At the deeper level, it is an exposition of the predicament of the modern youth in this vast and complex country. There is a sense of dislocation and a general meaninglessness, as the result of the protagonist's search for identity is sometimes pathetic, sometimes humorous, even ridiculous. However, it ultimately turns out to be a journey from rootlessness to maturity, in short, a struggle to come to terms with oneself against the complex realities of the country.

The crux of Agastya's quest lies in striking a balance between his megalopolitan sensibilities and the realities of life in a background town of this country. Madna, a provincial town, serves as the background to Agastya's quest. Right from the first day in Madna, Agastya suffers from a sense of rootlessness.

Life has become a black and serious business "with a tantalizing painfully elusive, definite by cliched goal, how to crush the restlessness in his mind" (135). Unable to confront this reality, his static mind had even contemplated suicide as a release from this burden that too he felt required too much effort. Very strangely, he did not long for a megalopolitan life. He missed nothing, felt no contempt for the world; all that he wanted was "peace". The idea that men were sometimes masters of their fate teased haunted him. He felt that the precious seconds of his life were ticking away uselessly and that his unhappiness proportionately increasing every moment, with the bitter agony of not being able to confront it. Agastya wondered if he should resign himself to fate or else take solace as action is better than nothing.

To get away from everything was Agastya's immediate concern. In that state of mind, action is interpreted as escape from Madna.

Action is thus regarded as an opportunity to recast his life's design, little realising that he is once again relapsing into escapism. Agastya departs to Delhi with the thought that he did not want challenges or responsibility, but just to be happy, to lie on the roof of his house in Delhi and be immersed in himself.

He realizes that restlessness crosses the boundaries of the place, that his friends in Delhi were as restless as he had been in Madna. The illusion that Madna was the source of his restlessness is soon dispelled. The sight of people sticking like from over crowded buses, brings home to him contrast between the concrete realities of their predicament and a nebulous nature of his own condition. The expectations of reassurance, with which he had come to Delhi remaining unfulfilled, he returns to Madna with his mind in even greater turmoil.

A small but decisive turn occurs when he meets Govinda Sathe, a cartoonist by profession, hence called the "Joker of Madna". Sathe gives Agastya a copy of The Bhagavad Gita and insists that he read it. Agastya had always associated The Gita with age, when the after life begins to look important. As a result he approached The Gita with the degree of apprehension. Agastya reads those passages in The Gita which discussed the problem of the restless mind, where Krishna tells Arjuna: "It is indeed hard to train. But by constant practice and by freedom from passions the mind in truth can be trained" (84). He had earlier taken recourse to Marcus Aurelius, finding in problems a bonding with the ancient Roman Philosopher. On the other hand, The Gita offers the possibilities of solutions. Although unable to comprehend many obtruse passages, he implicitly understands

that it can unfold solutions to his problems. This shows Agastya's newly formed desire to look for solutions rather than brood on the problems. It is thus we find a positive step in Agastya's quest for identity.

It is Sathe who helps the protagonists slowly to come to terms with himself – it is in the company of Sathe that Agastya goes in the quest of the Sadhu; it is Sathe who blends the reading with the myth and legend of the Sadhu so that we are almost reminded of the myth of the Fisher King:

> Some obscure tribal chieftain had a bastard child. He disowned both the woman and the son. She committed suicide in this pool, and the waters turned red. [. . .] she abandoned the child on one of these stones. [. . .] Some how the child survived in this 1,000-square-yard oasis. [. . .] But the waters remained red, and they wouldn't turn normal until the chieftain said he was sorry. Then there was a great drought, [. . .]. Everyone went to the King and said, Help. He came here and was hit on the head by lots of guilt. He renounced his kingdom to his legitimate children and came here to stay. So father and son stayed together, the father turned holy and taught the son about the wicked world, meaning himself. The waters turned clear, and thousands of fish bobbed up in this pool. (282-283)

Thus the legend of Sadhu symbolically relates to the protagonist's own quest for self-realization, his attempt to divine meaning of life.

The opportunity to give a concrete shape to the positive inclinations comes with his posting to Jompanna as the Block Development Officer. The bureaucratic hautear and the inefficiency of the entire set up which had so deeply troubled him in

Madna is neutralised in the obscure tribal village of Chipanthi. The sincerity of his efforts and his human understanding rise above the artificial barriers of language. Chipanthi brings him face to face with soul-rendering realities of life where "tribal parents were compelled to risk the lives of their children for half buckets of mud" (259) which passed off for water. Agastya's first constructive step is taken when, over-riding official apathy and insensitivity, he finds a solution to their acute problem. He is warmly appreciated for his timely action; the farewell accorded to him by the people of Jompanna is replete with affection.

Back in Madna, Sathe's words of wisdom "whatever you choose to do, you will regret everything or regret nothing. Remember you're not James Bond, you only live once" (285), strikes the decisive chord in Agastya's mind. The lure of a lotus eating life, escaping responsibility and action is banished his mind. Because, at first Agastya's journey in life remains one of the Lotus Eaters in Tennyson's poems:

> How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
> With half-shut eyes ever to seem
> Falling asleep in a half-dream!
> To dream and dream, like yonder amber light. (99-102)

He realises that the crux of his search for identity and the solution for his restlessness lies in coming to terms with the harsh realities of subcontinent.

He is stirred by the single-minded dedication of John Avery, the Englishman who had travelled over half the globe to pursue a dream – to pay respects at his grandfather's grave in a remote place. He is moved by Ramanna's labour of love, his rehabilitation of lepers, a singular story of "the immensity of human ambition" (235) and the Naxalites fiery determination to create social awareness and put an end

to the exploitation of the tribals. He is influenced by Dr. Darshan Multani's sense of satisfaction and happiness in his chosen profession. His identification with the myth of the Fisher King, where the Fisher King is able to receive his problems and divine a meaning in life, is another positive step in this stage of his quest for identity. The novel ends in a note of confusion. He decides to go on for a year and think – hopefully to come to a more meaningful existence.

The Mammaries of the Welfare State is also like the first novel. But here, the protagonist Agastya accepts the reality of life. He has not found happiness. This is seen in the first page itself. He can able to manage himself in the job, even though he dislikes his bureaucratic life. He cannot escape from the Steel Frame. That has eaten into his soul. The novel is a chronicle decay of Agastya's soul, that is how he evolved since the time of August.

Sen is a trapped man:

> Every time that he'd drafted a letter of resignation, a Pay Commission had been set up to hike his salary up by a millionth of a fraction. A raise, as Jesus said, is a raise. One can't, you know, leave one's mother's lap. The outside world is much less funny and far more wicked. Out there, all of them would trip head over heels over the lowest efficiency bar. (342)

Agastya finally reaches the perfect balance between cynicism. In the last paragraph, we hear the dying, but not quite-dead, Rajani Suroor grown. "To Agastya, it sounded dreadfully like a long-drawn-out Pa-yn-cho-om. They were a set of syllables appropriate for the occasion, he felt, a couple to bid adieu to the dead and with the balance, to greet the world of the living" (437).

In The Last Burden, the sons, Burfi and Jamun have grown up into westernised, rootless individuals in their own way unable to form lasting relationships. Though the attitude of Burfi to his parents seems to be utterly callous, Jamun shows some concern for his parents because, according to his mother he hasn't married thus far. The cruel relationship between sons and parents is revealed early in the novel. Both the brothers eagerly wait for the death of at least one of the parents amid a destructive atmosphere of squabbling, bickering and accusations. Jamun's attitude to his father is much more cruel than his attitude to his mother. There is a sense of dislocation and a general meaninglessness, as a result, the protagonist's search for identity is sometimes pathetic and ridiculous.

After their mother's death, Burfi and Jamun participate in the rituals but their ambivalent attitude about these superstitions is clear. Burfi is worried that they have to eat plain vegetarian food and to slave off Urmila's spirit, wear iron next to the skin. Hardly the traditional attitude of the eldest son of a Hindu family, Burfi and Jumun have nothing wit which to replace the loss of traditional, cultural values.

But perhaps Chatterjee suggests that it is at this point that the journey for Jamun from rootlessness to maturity begins. This comes out forcibly in the passage quoted below, which seems to sum up the very theme of the novel, and which reveals Jamun's realization of the eternal truth that:

> The world is indeed composed of these cyclical, wellworn tracks that every generation shambles about on, age upon age, that nothing that falls to one's lot is new, that maturing and growing old really signifies encountering, in the particular, what has already occurred numberless times in the universal.

> [. . .] When one takes the family and not the individual, as the unit nothing shocks anyway, as though the fellowship of one's blood itself is a kind of cushion, a buffer, or a diluting agent, for all singularities. (263-264)

Though Chatterjee calls this fellowship of blood the 'last burden', he is quick to point out through Kasturi that there is no such thing as 'last burden'.

Thus, in the three novels we find a journey from rootlessness to maturity, self-realization, a struggle to come to terms with oneself against the complex realities of this country.

They can be seen as archetypal heroes who make a lonely journey only to get more integrated in the society where they find peace and salvation. These characteristics are present in Agastya and Jamun who are unwilling to risk a journey to discover their inner self. They are content to live life as it comes. Though in the process they are numb to any sensation, they are happy to live that life. Instead of taking a journey, which would create a positive impact in their characters they internalise their journey by pondering over aspects of their character and displeases others. Jamun knows that his failure to accept the family responsibility is a sore issue with people at home but fails to do anything about it. Agastya knows that the other officers find it difficult to adjust with him as he cultivates an ambience of aloofness, yet Agastya lead a lonely existence and makes no more to establish a rapport with other officers.

An archetypal hero passes through six stages in his journey to achieve the goal set for himself. The six stages that hero passes through are the innocent, orphan, martyr, wanderer, warrior and the magician stage. The first stage that of the

innocent is the stage prior to fall, where man has no goal. Next is the orphan stage where the hero senses abandonment and loneliness. In this stage the hero wants a care taker or an authoritative or supportive figure to depend upon.

The contemporary society does not have many ideals which can decide goals for achievement and so Upamanyu Chatterjee's characters remain in the orphan stage. Both Agastya and Jamun are unhappy with their surrounding by they prefer to languish in it rather than risk and journey into the unknown. Agastya finds the civil service full of corruption but does nothing about it. Though he visits Ramanna Ashram and sees the good work done for the lepers there, he takes no step to make his contribution to the society or change the society in spite of all his chances as an IAS officer to bring about changes. Jamun refuses to take any decision unless the problem thrust on him. Though he has affair with Kasturi, he is scared of taking journey into the world of commitments and is happy to see her married off some one else.

The most common character archetype is that of the hero. Tales of heroes are not merely a means of teaching people about their own history, but demonstrate cultural goals and values. Heroes of ancient legends reflect the aspirations as well as the experiences of the society which retells the stories of their achievements. Exclusively male, the heroes exemplify the power relationships and gender which preserve the status and beliefs of particular social group. The myth of the fall of the hero has many versions. For many it can be disillusionment with their parents and Jamun and Burfi are examples of this. Parents are always seen as perennial source of love and giving but when the tables are reversed and the parents expect things from the children, make demands on them and want the children to look after them. The

two children are disillusioned. The fall can also take the form of political, religious or personal disappointments. Agastya is disgusted when he finds the prestigious Civil Services make no difference in the life of the common man.

Agastya is unlike the archetypal hero who finds society in a state of chaos and sets out for a series of adventures resulting in confrontation with the evil and, after weathering many fluctuations, overcomes the evil and the society is restored to its Edenic state. In the archetypal myth, when the hero goes on the journey, his kingdom is a barren landscape but with his return the landscape is transformed reflecting the change in the hero. In Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels there is no journey and the book ends where it begins with another burden to carry in the bleak August month. Chatterjee's characters are more of antiheroes with an urbanised sensitivity.

Modern man becomes more and more unhistorical, estranged from himself and from his past, opposed to traditional values and disloyal to his cultural heritage. Modern man's existential conditional depicted with dark shades and colors applied in a gloomy mood of overpowering pessimism which can be best identified as the symptoms of an overall crisis of life.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's protagonists, both Agastya and Jamun, are morally and culturally degenerated youths. In them we cannot able to find moral values. Both reject the values of life. Agastya is preoccupied with sex, both natural and unnatural, literature and soft drugs. A pertinent question is asked by Dhrubo at the time of his departure for Madna: "What'll you do for sex and marijuana in Madna?" (3). He could easily avail himself of these in Delhi but Madna could offer him only

a semblance of these. So he sustains his wearied existence on their fantasized manifestation.

Agastya fabricates stories to avoid being grilled on certain delicate subjects, or to exteriorize his fantasies, or to nonplus the questioners who keep nagging him questions or certain aspects. He cooks stories even about his parents, education and his marital status. He understands that he is telling lies but he feeling of remorse flees after sometime. The novelist, however, leaves all the options open for the reader to judge the fabricator, the stories and the motive on merit. It is more out of his bewilderment and confusion that Agastya acts in the manner most unsuitable to him. The real cause may be found in his psychology which appears to have been dented due to overexposure in an entirely new world, for which the new generation could not prepare itself as its preceding generation did, and the old generation could not understand the new generation which is absolutely different goals and ideals for itself.

Chatterjee seems evavasive in his portrayal of women in this novel. All his women characters seems to titillate man's sexual instinct and the male characters in turn seem o describe the officers' wives whose main interest is gossiping and using their husbands' clout to get a degree and a job in some small college. Then there are women like Neera, Agastya's cousin who stands out from the rest of the nameless women characters in the novel. Neera writes in no mincing words:

> To my closest friend, I'd like to say that I lost my virginity last week. How do you like my formal announcement? I haven't yet told any one else but I was bursting with the news all these days. And oddly, my

main feeling is one of great relief. It was like shedding a burden. (!) Unlike the sense of loss a lot of girls told me they felt. (286-287)

This statement reveals the cynicism rampant in today's society. Love What was once called love ceased to exist. When traditions and customs fail, the sacrament attached to these traditions also ceases to exist. For Neera virginity is no longer shrouded with a halo. Instead of seeking fulfilment in love, she starts seeking fulfilment in physical satisfaction. Neera realises that nothing has changed after the loss of virginity. Everything seems usual.

Dhrubo who writes about his girl friend Renu, reveals another example of woman breaking away from the bonds of the society (118). Here Renu is scared of entering into a relationship. The western concept of losing one's individuality in any relationship has made its inroad into the traditional Indian belief where relationship binds everything.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's second novel, The Last Burden is a story of what happens to familial ties in the fast changing economic scenario. The novelist shows the incongruity between the two generations – parents and son – is hideous. This is revealed forcibly in Burfi's attitude: "Burfi routinely has to vindicate his parents and his wife, one of the other, his parents and his wife seldom communicate straight forwardly" (101). This generation gap is also revealed in Joyce's wanting to abort when she conceives a second time, though Shyamanand thinks Burfi and Joyce are being deviant in not hankering for a second kid (103). Jamun seems to sum up the whole bitter relationship between Shyamanand and his elder son and daughter-in-law: "He's corrosively dubbed you and Joyce, 'Grammy Sugars' a delicious

expression"(103). Burfi's attitude is pure hellish as he points out to his parents that "Staying with them is screwing my marriage up" (116).

Joyce, who is an outsider, goes one step further. In the five days Urmila has spent at the ICU Joyce hasn't visited the nursing home even once. She justifies her action: "I'm not a fraud. To bob about her bed looking pathetic, while speculating every second when it'd be okay to glide away – that's how you all behave there, anyway" (234).

Upamanyu Chatterjee appears to be very satirical as he analyses human relationships in his novels. Our lives revolve around relationships in some form or other. And it is relationships which make all the difference in life. In India, even today, marriages give sanctity to man woman relationships. He says that marriage as an institution has collapsed. Both men and women have become irritable and impatient with each other. Geeta doctor makes a valid point when she says: "Obviously Chatterjee does not feel at ease with women characters yet. He still seems to see them as August does, purely as objects of lust" (19).

After their mother's death Burfi and Jamun participate in the rituals, but their ambivalent attitude about these superstitions is clear. Sadly Burfi and Jamun's have nothing with which to replace the loss of traditional cultural values. Jamun's relationship with Kasturi shows the moral degradation in the society.

In The Last Burden, the analysis of the depravity of human relationships is done through the portrayal of sexual degeneration. From Urmila whose persona is closest to being respectable to Kasibai whose sexual depravity is not something that she cares to hide, not to mention Burfi and Jamum, in all these characters, sexuality becomes an excretory excess. The sons quarrel between themselves over the

expenses and speculate on how much, chatterjee seems to be suggesting that this is the true nature of family relationship in India. The myth of family togetherness perpectuated in India is exploded. The middle class, it is suggested, is insensitive, crass and cruel.

In Upamanyu Chatterjee's works, the women who try to reveal their streek of independence are seen as eccentric who have to be tolerated. Another feature is that the man-woman relationship is always seen from the point of male. In his novels, one cannot compartmentalize women into any fixed groups – mother figures or enchantresses. A woman's role is not clearly defined in his novels, reflecting the current situation, whereas a woman carries out so many tasks and one can hardly define her role. Even in the portrayal of mother, there is no ideal picture of motherhood. Urmila gives a description about her routine life (29-31). This description of Urmila only helps in breaking the glorified picture of motherhood. Today's woman has started questioning the role given to her by society. This novel gives a poetic rendering of the collapse and disintegration of familial ties and values in an average Indian family at the end of the twentieth century.

The Mammaries of the Welfare State gives the day-to-day regimen of the corrupt and depraved mandarins of the 'Welfare State'. People like the high state official Bhupen Raghupati, the politician Makhmal Bagai, the astrologer Baba Mastram, the artist Rajani Suroor and several others play out the daily drama of venality and depravity on the bare bosom of 'the Welfare State'.

The dominating frame is politico-bureaucratic larceny and rapaciousness, but the novel takes within its dimensions the entire ambit of socio-cultural life, making time itself appear 'our of joint'. In this novel, one can find a full-view glimpse into

the multi departmental degeneration of the entity called the Welfare State. The core of thus degeneration is a satanic hunger for power, pelf and flesh. The imaginative centre of this degeneration is the perverse and macabre puja room scene in which Bhupen Raghupati assaults, both sexually and physically, his lackey, Chamundi, a poor tribal boy from the dark undeveloped pit of the Welfare State. This scene touches the status of a metaphor which encompasses the psycho-physical crux of the moral degeneration of the institution 'allegedly' constructed for public service and welfare. Carnality is confidently boasted of as energy by Raghupathi who consults Baba Mastram on how to release it. For Raghupati, where "sensualism was legend" (87) in the grapevine, sexual escapades and assaults are manifestations of power. And he is committed to exercise his power. This metaphoric content could have been firmer and richer had Baba Mastram been allowed to develop as a caliberated and textured symbol of the religious establishment in collusion with the political. He appears just as a pliable tool to be deployed by Raghupati at will. He provides the 'spiritual' sanction for the predatory compaigns of the exploiter, but without having the critical mass required for the power to be representative of a complex socio-cultural force like religion.

Another central concept around which existential enquiry revolves is the concept of freedom so essential to human condition. Existentialist theory identifies freedom with human existence. Existentialists accord with the truth that all human beings are potentially to choose their own mode of living. According to Frederic Patka, "Man is the privileged being who chooses the form, content, and direction of his evolution on the immaterial level, for better or worse. Moreover, man is that peculiar being who may choose his existence or reject it altogether"(37).

But in an inauthentic mode of life, when man is completely absorbed in his present occupations, this freedom is obscured. Man realizes the concept of freedom only when he actively involves himself in taking personal decisions. It is important to note that freedom is not gained by passive acceptance of the human condition.

Existentialist thinkers regard man as a unique being, ruled by his passions and driven by his desire for consolation and contentment in the world in which he is placed. According to them man is free in the world to act according to his choice. Agastya Sen knows that he is leading a morbid existence in Madna and also sees the corruption in the civil services. His is an inauthentic existence. It is a passive acceptance of what live metes out to him. Either, he can actively change his surrounding for the better, or perhaps choose a new occupation hut he decides to take a break. As an existentialist he is aware of the despondency around him, but unlike the existentialist hero, he takes no efforts to make the situation better. The same is the case with Jamun. Till the end he keeps his relationship with Kasturi, cribs when he is asked to pay for his parents, carries on fucking his servant and reluctantly agrees to have his father with him. There is no active participation on his part. Unlike Agastya he is never found regreting his life. He becomes a part of the shallow middleclass and loses his individuality in the process.

For existentialism, responsibility is the dark side of freedom. When individuals realize that they are completely responsible for their decisions, actions, and beliefs, they are overcome by society. They try to escape from this society by ignoring or denying their freedom and their responsibility. But because this amounts to ignoring or denying their actual situation, they succeed only in deceiving themselves. As an IAS officer, Agastya has many responsibilities. But he rejects the

responsibilities and tries to escape from that situation. Agastya does not relish working in Madna, as Srivastav, Kumar and others do. His uneasiness is increased by his close observation of Indian bureaucracy, which he thinks is incapable of delivering desired goals. In spite of his prerogative as an IAS officer, he could not bring about the change in the bureaucratic culture, though he bridges the existing hiatus to a considerable extend between the agents of the administration and the tribals of Chipanthi village through his visit to this drought-hit area where the tribals risk their lives of children for a pail of mud. He could neither obviate his personal abyss nor could he find any suitable solution to the problems surrounding him. It made him increasingly aware of his perplexing predicament.

In The Last Burden, at first, Jamun rejects his responsibilities in the family. He does not want to spend money for his mother and waits for her death. There is no cordial relationship among the members of the family. But, as time goes on, he realizes his responsibility and undertakes to look after Shyamanand in his old age.

No ethical or moral values are dogmatized in the novels, yet, through the happenings and the behavioural changes of the characters, together with the emotional interplay, the positive and desirable ways of living are presented. The novels show how all the sound and fury of life does not quench the human spirit; the existential angst does not defeat man. He surges up from the vortex of troubles and tribulations and draws a meaning out of life.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

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The present thesis is an attempt to give a bird's eye view of existentialism, a philosophical way of looking at man's situations and functions in the world of arts. The work examines Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels in the light of existential features. Chatterjee is a noted Indian English novelist who has employed this doctrine in his novels, English, August: An Indian Story, The Last Burden and The Mammaries of the Welfare State, to depict his sense of the contemporary human predicament.

A modern philosophical movement, Existentialism deals with man's disillusionment and despair. Originating in the philosophical and literary writings of Jean Paul Satre, it was more an attitude to life, a vision, or what Kaufmann calls, a "timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in the past" (12). A philosophical idealism, existentialism in due course of time developed into a powerful revolt against reason, rationality, positivism and the traditional ways in which early philosophers portrayed man.

The main aim of existentialism is to focus on the problems of human existence with a view to providing solutions. As a result, the leading existentialist thinkers have reinforced the importance of the subjective attitude towards life. Existentialism is a philosophy of freedom and responsibility which has beset the society of twentieth century in all aspects of its culture and civilization, the private as well as the public. It is frightening because it hardly believes in the existence and benevolence of God, and it is liberating because it emphasizes freedom and

responsibility for an individual's self-preservation and self-realization. Broadly speaking, existentialism is a subjective interpretation of human life.

It is significant to note that existentialism does not deal with the state of existence, it depicts the act of existing of the individual. It may thus be said that the doctrine is dynamic, and living. In such a depiction of human life, we see a man completely involved with the riddles of life – always striving for absolute freedom, identity and purpose.

Existentialist thinkers are of the view that the metaphysical explanation of existence, as given by the traditional schools of philosophy, fails to produce satisfactory results. Existentialism stresses the risk, the voidness of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world, the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malaise and death dominates. The human being's role in the world is not predetermined or fixed; every person is compelled to make a choice. Choice is one thing the human being must make. The trouble is that, most often, the human being refuses to choose. Hence, he cannot realize his freedom and the futility of his existence.

Human life consists of its own absurdity and profound sickness. For the human being there is neither a promised land nor an utopia where all problems are resolved and the contradictions are harmonized. The human being is in a permanent exile and can never overcome his separation from the universe, and even from his own life, personal events and society.

These kinds of existential elements are seen in modern writers' works. Post independent fictions in India narrativize the confrontation between modernity and post coloniality in various ways. There seems to be a major reappraisal of the term

modernity in recent fiction in English in India. In an earlier decade, for Mulk Raj Anand, modernity meant social emancipation and progress, very often with technological and material issues. But in recent times, there has been the rise of the 'urban novel' which has all the ingredients of high modernist style and preoccupations – concern for one's roots feeling of alienation, exile, absurdity and ennui, preoccupation with sexuality, pull of the city and its corruption.

Upamanyu Chatterjee is the most representative writer of the 'urban novel'. His novels reveal anxiety about the modern Indian identity. There is also concern for rediscovering one's cultural roots and past and come to terms with post-colonical status. The novels give an account of geneology of modern Indian sensibility, its roots in modern domesticity and proliferation via bureaucracy. These novels are the fine portrayals of modern man's predicament, experiencing all existential struggles to establish himself as a worthy human being.

In recent years, existentialism has concentrated its attention on the problem of alienation, which has various implications. It includes an extraordinary variety of psychological disorders like ambiguity, dread, despair, anxiety, loneliness, nothingness, isolation, pessimism, absurdism, loss of faith and selfhood, rootlessness and meaninglessness. These sufferings are evident in the characters of Jamun and Agastya.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with the philosophy of existentialism, its origin, themes, forerunners and major writers. It was during the Second World War, when Europe found itself in a crisis and faced death and destruction, that the existentialist movement began to flourish. It owes its development to the combined impact of several contemporary forces – social, political, intellectual and cultural.

People's faith in the progress of human civilization was shattered to the colossal destruction caused by the warfare. Traditional beliefs and morality were seriously threatened. The essential value of life began to appear meaningless and even absurd to the people of the west. At this juncture of global anxieties and persistent sense of crisis, the existential outlook in literature evolved as the most powerful vehicle of human expression.

Though its origin can be traced back to Soren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth century distinguished Danish philosopher, the existential themes, may be seen to have been developed and illustrated by numerous writers of the world, in their own distinctive ways, from time to time. Friedrich Nietzshe, Fyodor Mihael Dostoyevsky, Nicholati Aleksandrovich Berdayev, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Edmund Husserl, Gabriel Marcel, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Marice Merleau Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir are some of its leading exponents.

All too often people link a lack of faith or secular beliefs with existential ideals. Existentialism has little to do with faith or the lack of it. To quote Walter Kaufman, one of the leading existential scholars,

> Certainly, existentialism is not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets. The three writers who appear invariably on every list of "existentialists" – Jaspers, Heidegger and Satre – are not in agreement on essentials. [. . .] By the time we consider adding Rilke, Kafka, and Camus, it becomes plain that one essential feature shared by all these men is their perfervid individualism. (11)

Existentialism is the title of the set of philosophical ideals that emphasizes the existence of the human being, the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and the

solititude of human existence. Existentialism maintains existence precedes essence: This implies that the human being has no essence, no essential self, and is no more that what he is. He is only the sum of life is so far he has created and achieved for himself. Existentialism acquires its name from insisting that existence precedes essence.

The second chapter deals with how the Indian novelists have portrayed the existential struggles of man. Right from the moment the novel became available to the Indian writers, it has been a powerful means of exploration of the human situation. Anita Desai and Arun Joshi are considered as major existential writers in Indian English Literature. Anita Desai's chief concern is human relationship. Her central theme is the existential predicament of the individuals projected through the problems of the self in an emotionally disturbed milieu. Delicately conscious of the reality around them, her protagonists carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. The awareness of rootlessness and consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshi's existential vision of the plight of modern man. The novels of Arun Joshi successfully reveal the subtleties and complexities of modern life. They have excelled in exemplifying the existential dilemma of the self in the society. Joshi's protagonists are singularly individualistic and completely self-centred. They violate norms of social life and indulge in actions which are instinctive and irrational. Alienated from the sinister, materialistic life around them, they try to work out their destiny in their own way.

Alienation has significantly affected the Indo-English novels. The problem of alienation is ultimately related to the loss of and quest for one's identity. In a number of novels a deep anguish, a sense of fundamental purposelessness of life, isolation

and despair from the chief thematic preoccupations. These problems are seen in the works of Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Chaman Nahal, Bharathi Mukhrejee, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, V.S.Naipaul, Githa Hariharan, Chitra Banerjee, Rohinton Mistry and Amitav Ghosh.

The third chapter deals with the 'existential crisis' of the major characters in the novels English, August: An Indian Story, The Last Burden and The Mammaries of the Welfare State. The protagonists Agastya and Jamun suffer from rootlessness, absurdity, alienation and exile. Agastya is not interested in his job and finds boredom and restlessness. So he decides of resigning his job. The main reason is, he is not interested in his bureaucratic life and wants to get away from this situation and wants to lead and happy life.

He soon discovers that the feelings of dislocation, rootlessness and alienation are not his problems alone but of the whole generation which, to use his father's works, does not oil its hair. Agastya like his friends, comes to question the bases of the western metaphysics, the very world view which has constituted him. This world view creates an alien sensibility in him, which produces a sense of estrangement from lived daily experience. Agastya does not enjoy his role and finds it difficult to get used to the workings of his job and the place. He says: "I'm wasting my time here and not enjoy the wasting" (131). He suffers from strange loneliness, whereas what he had wished to be alone. He considers himself to be one of the vanished in Madna but with a difference that he is possessed with a lively and sensitive soul. He goes for soft options and seeks shelter in sexual fantasies, literature and falsehood.

The Last Burden is an infuriating book at the start, but finally quite compelling in its honest appraisal of the harsh realities and erosions facing Indian middle class life today. According to Nilufer E. Bharucha:

> His first novel, English, August: An Indian Story had created ripples with its explicit writing about sex mainly auto-erotic-and drugs. Shock value apart, that text was rather self-engrossed and even self-indulgent. The Last Burden shares the technical brilliance and linguistic experimentation of the first book but not its draw backs. It is a powerful and mature exploration of the changing face of the Indian family and notions of filial responsibilities. (72)

In the family, all are alienated from others. There is no cordial relationship between husband and wife and parents and children. The sons Burfi and Jamum have grown up into westernized, rootless individuals in their own way unable to form lasting relationships. Jamun suffers from the existential problems of hopelessness, rootlessness and frustration towards life. The major impact of the novel emerges from the fact that Chatterjee deals with universal situations and relationships because in a rapidly changing society search of order, alienation, isolation and disintegration affect one and all in similar fashion.

The next chapter deals with archetypal heroes and the qualities of Agastya and Jamun. It also deals with the search for identity, individuality, moral degradation, choice and standards of morals in doing their duty. There is no positive result in all these themes. Here also, the heroes are not ready to do their duty. They want to escape from reality. Both novels give the picture of morally, culturally and conventionally degenerated society. Both the heroes avoid responsibilities.

Agastya goes for 'soft options' like reading Marcus Aurelius, indulging in sexual fantasies, exercising, boozing and smoking. His mundane life consists of dozing a little in his claustrophobic room, watching lizards racing across the room, day-dreaming, thinking of the past and visiting various officers to learn the intricacies of bureaucracy. He wants to run away from this situation. In his third novel also, Agastya escapes Madna and gets sent around elsewhere to pretend to do his duties. He even manages to get sent on a training course in France, a huge but much under appreciated perk.

Jamun and Burfi do not want to take the responsibility of looking after their parents. There is no love lost between them. There are several hot exchanges between Shyamanand and his sons on money matters, on the will and on questions of what obligations children have towards their parents. The sons quarrel between themselves over the expense and speculate on how much they will get out of Urmila and what they should do Shyamanand when Urmila dies. Chatterjee seems to be suggesting that this is the true nature of family relationships in India, which is rather difficult to believe. One cannot generalise in such matters.

Both Agastya and Jamun are not archetypal heroes. In their actions, the kind of archetypal consciousness is not explicit. Chatterjee has given a distinctly divergent treatment. Loss of shared communal values, scepticism, and unwillingness to idealise rampart in the 1980s were particularly instrumental in changing the concept of hero. Agastya and Jamun are not carved into the staple mould. The heroes disappear from the scene of action without making much dent and the society's return to its Edenic state hangs in the balance. They do not seen to possess the strong

traits that go into the making of a hero and they act in an unheroic manner and, instead of accepting challenges of life, they take the route of escapism.

Upamanyu Chatterjee is conscious of the absurdities inherent in human life. He feels that man is a incongruous with the conditions provided for his existence. The individual, he says, revolts against life when he fails to find any meaning in it and faces the unreasonableness of existence and absurdity of life. The existential encounter with 'nothingness' is the core of modern life. Today, everything conspires towards a philosophy of boredom, nothingness and absurdity. The protagonist adopts the existentialist, heroic posture necessary to face the ordeals of life. He adopts the decadent type of existentialism that borders on nihilism. Chatterjee's novels express this clearly.

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