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## POSTMODERN LACKADAISICAL STAGS: THE PROTAGONISTS IN UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S SEQUELS

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**Abstract:** Upamanyu Chatterjee is an Indian Civil servant remarkable for his unique talent for writing fiction. He has penned half a dozen novels so far and we find two pairs of sequels among them. His main concern is Indian urban educated youth who are anglophiles, underscoring the postmodern traits of tedium, queer responses, uncertain and myopic vision of future and finding a soul-mate in life. They are not misogynists but nonchalant, and their indecisiveness makes them obstinate. They are neither monkish nor celibate nor chaste but they just cherish the new postmodern value of 'undecidability'. This paper attempts to present the postmodern discourse of Chatterjee's two pairs of sequels i.e. his four novels, chiefly focusing on the two lead roles and their inability to come to the terms with the institution of marriage, who often appear to be losers, lackadaisical and remain unwed stags.

**Key words:** Upamanyu Chatterjee, Agastya, Jamun, Postmodern, sequel, marriage, undecidability, depth less ness. hyper- subjectivity.

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**Introduction:** Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels are unique and remarkable for their fresh and unexplored themes of Indian modern urban educated youth and their striking postmodern construct. His characters exhibit postmodern traits representing millions of Indian educated youth who are essentially anglophiles. While many contemporary Indian writers, live abroad, indulge themselves in writing fiction of Diaspora, Chatterjee, being a full time Indian Civil Servant of Maharashtra cadre, lives in India, writes about the indigenous youth, mirrors their postmodern lifestyle and their aspirations. So I developed an interest in his works and selected them as my topic to pursue my research. Born to Bengali parents in 1959, Chatterjee was graduated from St. Stephens College, New Delhi that produced nearly a dozen creative writers and often referred as Cambridge of India. He got into Civil service in 1983 and is at present officiating as Secretary, Petroleum & Natural Gas Regulatory Board, New Delhi. I personally feel that adequate research on the works of this native, unique writer has not been done so far as his narrative is fragmented, unconventional, highly postmodern and even at times obscene. After attempting some Research papers on different aspects of Chatterjee's novels, I have recently developed an inquisitive of why Chatterjee's protagonists are unwed despite their intimacy with some eligible women, remain single and incomplete men, in contrast to the practice that the Indian society gives much hype for marriage and parents are

really eager and enthusiastic to see their children married off. This curiosity led me to make a survey of Chatterjee's novels in this particular aspect to find out the reasons behind their perpetual bachelorhood. Of Chatterjee's six novels, I find only one novel i.e. 'Weight Loss' (2006) which depicts Bhola, the protagonist getting married but is unsuccessful in his life. But in all other novels Chatterjee portrays his protagonists single, leading to suspicion that the author himself does not believe in the wed lock. Chatterjee married Anne, a French journalist and was blessed with two daughters. His personal life is not much known to the readers whether he is happy with the relation. However, in this paper I stuck to Chatterjee's two pairs of sequels and tried to premise the postmodern mindset as the reason that made the protagonists remain unwed stags. For an easy reference, I used the word 'sequels' in plural sense to denote both a Prequel and its Sequel, constituting a pair. Thus we have the following two sequels for discussion in this paper.

The two pairs of Chatterjee's novels are:

1. *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988), (E,A) & *The Mammaries of The Welfare State* (2000), (TMWS)
2. *The Last Burden* (1993) (TLB) & *Way to Go* (2010) (WTG)

**Main Paper:** Chatterjee's maiden novel "English, August: An Indian Story" was a critically acclaimed fiction and was later made into a successful English feature film. Chatterjee introduces a lovable young, dope smoking IAS trainee Agastya Sen, an anglophile

who likes to be called August, was posted to Madna, a sleeping town somewhere in the hinterland of India. The novel is a hilarious account of Agastya's tedium, observation of his seniors and his bachelor musings. In continuation to his maiden novel, Chatterjee made a sequel "The Mammaries of the Welfare State" in which the same protagonist Agastya put up eight years of service, held seven different positions and makes satiric comments over the corruption, greed of the Civil servants and Politicians in our big Democratic-Welfare country. In another set of sequels "The Last Burden" and "Way to Go" Chatterjee introduces young Jamun, a convent educated youth from an urban, above middle class family becomes an officer in an Insurance company. This pair of novels records the waning bonds of the modern nucleus family and strained filial ties. In both the sequels, the lead roles Agastya and Jamun are highly educated, cultured, sensible, westernized and responsible, yet they could not enter the essential phase of life i.e. sweet bond of marriage. It doesn't mean that they are austere, not interested in women or sex but the postmodern condition abstain them away from the institution of marriage.

To make us understand the chief postmodern tenet, James Morley in his article "Postmodern Culture" defines, "Postmodernism is a rejection of the sovereign autonomous individual with an emphasis upon anarchic collective, anonymous experience. Collage, diversity, the mystical unrepresentable, Dionysian passion are the foci of attention. Most importantly we see the dissolution of distinctions, the merging of subject and object, self and other. This is a sarcastic playful parody of western modernity and the "John Wayne" individual and radical, anarchist rejection of all attempts to define, reify or re-present the human subject". ( Virginia. edu.web)

**Apathetic Agastya:** Agastya Sen or August, the protagonist of *English, August: An Indian Story* (E, A) exhibits the postmodern traits of disinterestedness, playfulness and challenges the traditions in all his responses in his office. In his early days as trainee IAS, Agastya frequently visits his senior officer Srivastav, the Collector of Madna. He seems somewhat drawn towards his wife, Mrs. Srivastav, a middle aged socialite who used to invite him for dinners and make enquiry about his family. He, often is careless and dishonest in giving facts about his personal details. He lies to his subordinates on his first day at office that he is twenty eight and married,

though he is just then twenty four and still a bachelor. He says, "She is in England. She's gone there for a cancer operation. She has cancer of the breast'. He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to spread out his fingers to show the size of tumour..." (E,A.3). Agastya's remarks or lies indicate his carelessness and disrespect about the life partner and on the whole his contempt towards system of marriage.

In fact he has a girl friend Neera who exchanges letters about her disgusting studies and boredom in her life. Chatterjee records a very little account of their meeting in which they talk about other matters except love and marriage. Later at the end of the novel, Neera confirms that she had lost her virginity to a journalist friend. Agastya does not care for it and doesn't feel even possessive of his girl friend. It all shows his 'non commitment' towards his beloved. The postmodern youth are not obsessed with true love or even zealous to own a soul mate. He says "I don't want challenges or responsibility or anything: all I want is to be happy" (E,A . 148). Contrastingly Agastya is not a man without physical desires. In his school days, he even fanaticized his friend Dhruvo's mother and it shows his silly, immature mind regarding women and their relation. Agastya seems to be very childish and silly at school when he replies to his new English teacher about his life ambition. He says that he wants 'to be a male, domesticated stray dog as it has lot of freedom, sleeps a lot, barks unexpectedly, got a lot of sex and has no responsibility'(E,A35)

Jim Powell in his book "*Postmodernism for Beginners*" writes, "According to Baudrillard, in the new postmodern era sex is dead, because everything is sex. Sexual stimulations are everywhere in advertising, in fashion, on TV, in film. Sexuality is no longer intimate, personal, and private behavior. It is open, encouraged, unlimited, unrestricted, mandatory- a command to release sexual tensions through sexual codes. Thus everything is sexuality". But if everything is sexuality – then nothing is sexuality. ( Powell, P.96). If Agastya in schooldays wished to have a life of a mongrel dog, it's due to the impressions that he established the opinions about sexual freedom influenced by postmodernity and seductive lifestyle images of advertising. It is also considered that the postmodern life is drawn towards the Simulation that means the copy or image of the reality. The copy is more attractive than reality for postmodern youth.

Agastya does not care for the real girl friend, neither love her whole heartedly nor try to enrich their relation and make it a perpetual bond. But ironically he wished to be a male dog for freedom in all respects. Thus he conveys his hyper individuality and non commitment towards a permanent relation and non adherence to the established system of marriage as the Postmodernists challenge or ridicule the morals and conventional practices.

In their book "*An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*", Andrew Bennett & Nicholas Royle state that "The western philosophical tradition of aesthetics has relied heavily on a distinction between the real and its copy.....This thinking has given rise to a hierarchical opposition between the real and the copy. The postmodern, however challenges such hierarchies and shows how the set of values associated with these oppositions can be questioned.... can give us more reality than nature can ....a postmodern fascination with the technologies of virtual reality .The real becomes unthinkable without the copy..... Jean Baudrillard calls it hyperreal in which reality is fabricated by technology....he puts it : Simulation is no longer that of territory, a referential being or substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal ...Henceforth it is the map that precedes the territory (Bennett & Royle.p.283). So Agastya lacks the real vision of love and marriage but he just loves its copy or duplicity, living in hyperreality, which are postmodernist's inherent traits. Agastya even received letters from his uncle Pultu Kaka suggesting some girls and select one to marry. Agastya has no clear idea regarding marriage though he is 24 years old and settled in a comfortable position as an IAS officer. When his father and uncle pressurize him to decide about his marriage, he is indecisive and exhibits the true postmodern trait of undecidability. He muses about to resign, run away from the job and become a publisher or something, but he never does so. Agastya's father accuses this age as tradition-breakers and he calls them 'Cola generation; the generation that does not oil its hair'. His uncle rightly assesses Agastya's personality and tells him "You are interested in nothing and you think that is a virtue" (E,A.161). But Agastya seems to be content with his uncertainty and aimlessness. Shankar, Agastya's friend states, "We are men without ambition, and all we want is to be left alone, in peace, so that we can try and be happy. So few

people will understand this simplicity" ( E,A.269). The postmodern mind is obsessed with tedium, ennui and always oscillates to take decisions and fail to pursue the purposeful long term goals. They love the vast glittering world, but live in their own cocoon, love to be alone in the huge modern crowds without family or social responsibilities. He exhibits hyper-subjectivity of a postmodern individual who makes his choices by chance but not by reason.

In the sequel 'The Mammaries of the Welfare State' (TMWS) Agastya after eight years is still a bachelor, makes friendship with Daya, a middle aged divorcee working in an advertising agency. He used to spend nights with her in her flat due to housing problem. Though the physical gratification is achieved, he never thought of marrying her or any other suitable woman. Chatterjee writes, " Daya and Agastya have in common - they were both by nature composed, self-centred and unhappy, when they are far to each other. Their letters to each other reflected their sadness and confusion only indirectly, that is to say, they never straightforwardly described their feelings". (TMWS,323). In a serious government meeting, Agastya playfully sends Daya a note on a piece of paper to marry him. He was not serious in his proposal but he was bored in the meeting and wanted to beat it. His idea of spending time with her is of just 'surface', when it comes to the true relation it does not have 'depth'. The lack of depth in every relation is another apparent trait of the postmodern youth. Their view of a comfortable married life and necessity to have a life partner is a myopic vision. Daya's friend Lazy Susi, a white woman, member of Anand Marg and a yoga freak observed him and disclosed to Daya that the vibrations she had received from Agastya are cold, sneering and anti-life.(TMWS.324). So these two women felt that Agastya is not a serious man, would be a misfit in the frame of marriage. He is a disinterested, passive, playful and helpless in making a firm decision even about his own future .

Agastya meets a young woman Kamya Malhotra at Krishna Lunch home, who speaks Hinglish, works with 'TV Tomorrow'. She comes to Agastya's living cum office room after a drink, falls asleep. Later Agastya comes to know that she is the daughter of Dr. HariHara kapila, IAS, She abandoned her Ph.D. She changes her name from Sunita to Kamya after her favourite character from TV soap ' Hum Log' the mother of all epic TV shows. She is a single, attractive, young woman with a mind of her own. But

Agastya does not take much interest in her, though he meets her many times, finds her attractive, socialite, educated and almost has a chance to be his fiancé. Even this eligible woman's beauty, her social status, other acceptable characteristics to become a life partner could not entice the true postmodern Agastya to get inclined towards marriage.

He also shows some interest in his colleague Lina Natesan Thomas, Junior Administrator, Department of Heritage, Upbringing and Resource Investment. They both become close in a training camp in France, walk hand in hand and readers may be tempted to infer that at last Agastya had found his soul mate. But Chatterjee makes their friendship trimmed and sends Lina back to India to attend a legal dispute and further we don't see any progress in their relation. Lina is shrewd, always believes in the power of written word. Thus some women have their entry into Agastya's life, but Agastya, a true postmodern stuck to the traits of unconcerned and undecidability and thus fails to choose a suitable life partner.

"In the postmodern, all absolute values - such as the traditional values of God, Truth, Reason, the Law and so on - become sites of questioning, of rethinking, of new kinds of affirmation. The postmodern, that is to say, does not simply reject the possibility of making decisions. Rather it gives new attention to the value of undecidability." (Bennett & Royle. 280)

**Nonchalant Jamun:** In another pair of novels *The Last Burden & Way to Go*, Chatterjee introduces Jamun, the younger son of Shyamanand and Urmila, city dwellers. Jamun's elder brother Burfi is married to Joyce, a Christian girl and has two sons. But their family life is full of bickering, differences, disheartening and finally ends up in a divorce. But Jamun, the protagonist has never thought of marriage though he has a girl friend called Kasturi. He continues his relation with her even after her marriage with another man. Kasturi's daughter Mithi calls Jamun 'uncle' but actually he is her biological father. Ironically Kasturi was not even disheartened for not marrying Jamun, she continues relation with him and entrusts him some errands like picking up Mithi, attending her school functions, celebrating her birthday party, join her for shopping and so on. Jamun's parents know about their relation but never suggested to marry her or at least tried to stop their relation after her marriage with another man. His father knew well about his son's flirt and their lonely meetings in the upstairs bedroom of their house.

Another young woman Channa, Shyamanand's niece, city bred and fashionable smoker often visits Shyamanand's house. Jamun and She are of same age but Jamun does not take interest in her. He seems to be a bisexual, had physical relation with a buxom servant maid Kasibai and her teenage son Vaman, when he was working in another city. At the same time he has great admiration for his sister-in-law Joyce without any physical intimacy, loves the nephews, enjoys their company and responds to all her odd jobs. Shyamanand accuses Jamun that he fancied her and was paying unnecessary interest in her, of course, it's a false accusation. Jamun's intimacy with a middle aged servant maid and his heterosexuality is presented to highlight the postmodernists' trait of erasing barrier between morality and immorality, principles and indiscipline, low culture and high culture or any other standard belief. Peter Barry writes about this aspect, "They (postmodernists) challenge the distinction between high and low culture, and highlight the texts which work as hybrid blends of two." (Peter Barry, 88)

The theme of depthlessness, is one of the major postmodern traits apparent in Jamun's life when we scrutinize his incapacity to initiate and continue healthy relation with women. He utterly failed in establishing a lifelong bond in marriage with a suitable girl. Other Postmodern tenets of amorality, metro sexuality, unholy and queer relations are noticeable throughout Jamun's life. He just shuns the idea of being moral, faithful and keeps himself distant from the institution of marriage. The Post Modern youth are not serious about chastity or the sanctity of marriage. The infidelity and extra marital relations are common and physical intimacy between a couple is viewed as just for gratifying temporary biological needs than to have an emotional everlasting bond between them.

There is no fear of God or values in the postmodern era as great thinker and German philosopher Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God and death of enlightenment values. He saw the present world as the dance of the destructively creative and creatively destructive. Previously the society believed in grand myths like Religion, Marxism, Reason or any other ideals of science and progress. The postmodernism stopped caring for all these values but rejecting every established truth and everything is decentralized as the unifying centre is lost. We in India strongly believe that family is the centre for our culture and

social life. The concept of family primarily arises from the institution of marriage. Postmodern society is about the relationship of the individual to the world of objects but not valuing human relations. "Postmodern city-dwellers are alienated, living in an hallucination, an exhilarating blur, a reality evaporating into mere images, spectacles, strange new warps in time and space, fixated on commodities... all surface – all depthlessness" (Powell.37) In the sequel WTG, Shyamanand disappears from the house and brother gets divorced. Mother passed away long back and Jamun remains bachelor, stays alone in the huge house. In a brief account Chatterjee records an incident of Jamun teasing his steno assistant Parameswari and fancies the company of Vaman the illiterate, a rugged servant boy. He is now in his forties and almost gave up the idea of marriage or even cherishing the company of women. This particular novel is remarkable for Existential elements where we see the temporariness of life and inevitability of one's end. A lot of drama takes place in the novel with the entry of land mafia. Even certain murders take place in the vicinity and the brothers plan a queer way to get the land mafia don Lobesh Monga murdered by his avengers, who were once his handymen.

**Conclusion:** The postmodernists question or challenge everything, any established truth, either it is a text, a belief, or even the sweet relation or human bond that is obtained in the institution of marriage. Bennett & Royle aptly state: "The postmodern challenges the Logo-centric ( the authority of the word , the possibility of final meanings or of being in

the presence of pure sense). It challenges Ethno-centric ( the authority of one ethnic identity or culture). It also challenges phallogocentric ( everything that privileges the symbolic power and significance of the phallus and therefore masculinity)" . "As Ihab Hasan remarks, the postmodern may be summarized by a list of words prefixed by 'de'-and 'dis': deconstruction, decentring, dissemination, dispersal, displacement, difference, discontinuity, demystification, delegitimation, disappearance. .... In place of centre , but not in its place, there is alterity, otherness, multiplicity and dispersal of centres, origins, presences".( Bennett & Royle.287) . Thus the protagonists Agastya and Jamun in Chatterjee's two pairs of sequels remain unwed- stags, making themselves comfortably de-linked from the bond of marriage as they are postmodern at the core. They exhibit infallible, essential postmodern traits of undecidability, hyper subjectivity, making choices by chance, eschewing reason, having myopic vision of future, lack of ethical binding, erasing cultural standards and challenging every institutionalized authority. They are nonchalant and prove themselves to be lackadaisical towards establishing a secured, perpetual bond in marriage thus ridiculing any belief or practice. I conclude with a statement from the wonderful book, "Beginning Theory" by Peter Barry, "Within postmodernism, the distinction between what is real and what is simulated collapses: everything is a model or an image, all is surface without depth; this is hyperreal, as Baudrillard calls it."(Peter Barry.86)

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