

**ALIENATION OF PROTAGONIST IN UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S
*ENGLISH, AUGUST: AN INDIAN STORY***

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Abstract

Upamanyu Chatterjee, one of the realistic novelists today has portrayed the social dissociation and alienation of the westernized urban English educated youth through his novels, *English, August: An Indian Story*. It is in fact, the impact of westernization and urbanization that a person particularly from the English educated group alienates or detaches himself from the mass. He feels that he is not of their rank. It may be due to his superiority complex due to having mastery over the global language, English or his feeling of being born in a wrong country among wrong people. He feels himself an English Indian. It is the case of the protagonist Agastya Sen in *English, August: An Indian Story*. He is not in a position to bind himself with the mass around him either be it his office of the Indian Administration or at the pooja festival. He maintains an unknown distance from others even from his self. He is not happy either in the provincial place Madna, where he is posted as an administrative trainee or in Delhi. He is divided between these two places. He longs for peace but finds it nowhere.

Key words: westernization, alienation, restlessness.

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One of the best works of Upamanyu Chatterjee, a realistic writer speaks the tale of woes of an Indian Urbanized educated youth Agastya Sen. He is not happy in anything even he dislikes his own name which is given by his father. Instead, he wants to be called and known as August. Dominated by western culture, he feels he is not an Indian or in a different country. He criticizes his neighborhood, the people who are his own counterparts. He is an epitome of the westernized English educated urban folk of the twentieth century.

The reader of this novel is toured to the Indian soil. The Indian mind and behavior be understood from this work of Upamanyu Chatterjee. The situation of Agastya, the protagonist in English, August: An Indian Story is not new to a reader if he or she is attached to the Indian soil. The reader is taken to the location where he or she sees the protagonist struggling with the unsolved problems. He finds no solution to what is happening around him. He many a times wants to come out of them, but each time he draws a blank. It is his struggle that he feels himself alienated and dissociated with the surroundings.

The protagonist though has many persons with whom he could mingle and share his restlessness so that he could get some solace, but he remains aloof from everybody. It is his

thought that he is alone. He thus alienates from the gathering and tries to find solution to his stress everywhere except himself. He is not happy with anybody's company.

English, August: An Indian Story is the most successful work of Chatterjee. The westernized thoughts of the protagonist demonstrate westernized class in India. He represents the contemporary urban youth who are attracted towards the aesthetic atmosphere rather than rationalistic. It is the domination of the globalization that estranges an Indian from his or her counterparts even their parents. The protagonist is alienated by others and even by his inner beings. He does not enjoy his surroundings but criticizes them. He is not able to enjoy sound sleep. He is insomniac spending his nights in his closet watching the glow of the tube light or the ceiling above his bed.

In order to come out from his alienation, he involves in masturbation. He does so because he grows narcissist and to overcome his loneliness. He takes much tea and marijuana. He hates the food served to him. He is very particular about the water whether it has properly been boiled by the servant. He is very cautious of health. It is evident that he is almost or totally westernized. The creation of the protagonist is evident that Chatterjee is a keen observer of his brotherhood as is the best quality of a genius novelist. He stands unique among his contemporary novelists. He has his own brand of depiction.

The protagonists of Chatterjee are educated and westernized. They are not attached and mingled with the people associated to them. Agastya Sen is the great instance in this regard. He is not happy either in Delhi or Madna. He is divided between the two places.

Agastya Sen being westernized likes to be called and known as August (short form of Agastya). It is his estrangement that keeps him away from everybody and everything. Though he has a number of companies to enjoy but his heart is always hanging for something beyond. He longs for the untouched situation. He dislikes the people, their way of life, their superstitions, and their celebrations. He above all dislikes the food in Madna. He observes an unhygienic atmosphere there. He is particular about the water whether it has been boiled properly by his servant.

On keen observation the protagonists of Chatterjee are the people who live for their own sake and benefit. They are not associative and affable. They have their own world of estrangement and dissociation. They live in their own fantasies.

It is the impact of the globalization that forced many educated urban Indians to adopt and adapt the western culture. Even the conservatives dreamt of becoming westernized. It was the colonial system of education that separated many Indians from their own counter parts. They saw their own brothers and sisters as aliens. They believed that they are Indians in color but Western in style.

The protagonists of Upamanyu Chatterjee live in a world of dissatisfaction. They do not take things whole heartedly. They are lethargic and without interest even in performing their job. They are not in a position to take strong decisions. They are helpless and feel themselves alone. When they are not in a position to take decision, they become restless and long for peace of mind. Their restlessness makes them fickle-minded. The following quote justifies this situation.

“He had written to his father that he wanted to change jobs but he didn’t really want to- that had merely been a gesture, of the rage of despair imprisoned by impotence. He wanted nothing; it seemed-only a peace, but was too pompous a word” (p-136)

The protagonist Agastya Sen is not contented in his current job and at the same time wants to settled down somewhere but does not know where. He longs for peace without being associated with others and particularly his job. Had he been industrious, and responsible in his work, he would have got some peace of mind. The situation is not his rival, but it is he who takes his surrounding not adjustable or lively.

During his station in Madna, Augastya grows restless and insomniac. He is of two minds. He is not happy there and at the sometimes does not wish to leave his job. May be he prefer to stay on his job as his father had advised him so. That he would adjust in Madna later after sometime. He feels in Madna that he has come to other universe and he is like an alien. Chatterjee marks that dissatisfaction makes a room in people when the gate of current joy is

closed. They are at once dejected when they see things not up to the mark of their expectation. This situation could be gauged from the following quotation:

“Not a word about Madna. Another universe; yet he had been part of it just two months ago; now disturbing in its complete difference ” (p-118) In the same novel, the desperateness and helplessness of Agastya is pointed out by the novelist.

“Most men like him, chose in ignorance, and fretted in an uncongenial world, and learnt to accept and compromise, with or without grace, or slipped into despair” (p-113-114)

The protagonist in English, August tries his best to overcome his loneliness by indulging in ignoble activities. The passage under the sub-title “The Life of Loneliness” will justify the statement. He is not able to understand the mystery of life. Every second during his stay in Madna brings him closer to puzzlement and confusion. It is his loneliness that caused restlessness in him. He anyhow wants to come over it. To him this restlessness was his actual rival.

“For life had suddenly become a black and serious business, with a tantalizing, painfully elusive, definite but clichéd, goal, how to crush the restlessness in his mind” (p-135)

Loneliness takes birth in the life of Agastya Sen during his station in Madna. His life seems to be meaningless. He grows alienated without his knowledge. Chatterjee points out from the character Agastya Sen that man is not easily contented or never lives a fulfilled life. His life always drags him to a queer world. So he wants someone to solve the mysterious riddle of life. He finds none except himself. He grows insomniac.

“It had become just a part of the fact of being alive, to watch the surreal glow of the tube-light three or four in the morning” (p-134)

His loneliness forces him to indulge in ignoble activities like marijuana and masturbation. He does not get rejoiced in such things even. He anyhow wants to be entertained. It is his loneliness that tortures him with such situations.

“He had begun to masturbate more, but more mechanically. That he did not enjoy it did not worry him. Nothing worried him. He met the same people and continued the rounds, but without his mind” (p-134)

It was the effect and domination of the west that the protagonist Agastya wants to be alone and peaceful. But the fate plays a trick on him in Madna. Though he gets his choice of being alone yet he is not able to adapt himself.

“He had always wanted to be alone by choice, but in Madna he was lonely, there was a vast difference. The novelty of Madna had aroused his mind, but now no more. He didn't feel rewarded, only deprived, time was running out” (p-136)

Agastya in attempting to compromise with his loneliness reluctantly surrenders to the new scenario at Madna. He welcomes the unhappiness arising from the situations. He understands that he cannot change the circumstances. Rather than committing suicide like his friend Prashant, he wants to fight the situation. Here Upamanyu Chatterjee has portrayed him to be the real hero. Though he surrenders to the situation, he at the same time is prepared to live with his loneliness.

“Perhaps he was merely longing for the past in an uncongenial present, forgetting its petty unhappinesses, bewitched by it only because he was not its master” (p-145)

The loneliness of the protagonist is presented again in the following words.

“And Agastya again sensed the largeness of the world, and the consequent littleness of his own crises; while he had been in Madna, talking to Mohan or walking carefully to avoid a buffalo's tail from flicking dung on to his arms, Dhrubo had been where he, Agastya, had wanted to be, but struggling against the surreal. ”

The protagonist Agastya Sen does not take the advice and suggestion of others. When his well wishers either be his father or friend Dhrubo suggest him in coming out of his boredom or loneliness and relectance, he does not grave accept the idea of his father when he asks him to remain in Madna and that he would adjust himself with the situation in the later time. Once, his friend Dhrubo advices Agastya to some extent the same thing as his father advised. But he not agreed to his words, reversely thinks to break his friendship with him.

“Decide yourself, it’s your nightmare. Or just live with the indecision, everyone does it all the time, you’ll get used to it soon enough. Then, when you ever take any snap decisions, you’ll feel odd, like withdrawal symptoms or something.’ He wanted to sound callous; Dhrubo’s question had irritated him, reminded him of his own incommunicable and secret inquisitions” (p-158)

The station of Agastya keeps him away from all things even sometimes from his own sense. He does not wish to participate in any of the gathering even in the festive occasions. He remains like a broken bow of a tree. He does not understand his own status despite tries to understand the people around him. When he fails in the attempt, he blames either the society or Madna.

He shares his bitter experiences with Dhrubo. When he tries to console him with practical piece of advice, Agastya Sen, gets disturbed. It seems he does not like someone advising him. He does not participate even in the religious ceremonies and occasions.

“Through the eucalyptuses he could see the Puja ground. The crowd had thinned. He could hear snatches of the film dialogue. The tops of the trees stood silent against the stars” (p-164)

When he finds none who could hear or understand his tale of woe, he speaks to himself silently in his solitude. He feels rejoiced in doing so. He tries to fight his loneliness from consoling himself with the following words:

“I was not born for this, said Agastya silently. He had said that all he wanted was to be happy. Now alone under the stars he could admit this to himself without embarrassment” (p-165)

The life of Agastya is like a pendulum. As long as he is in Madna, he hates his station there. When he goes to Delhi on holidays, he does not completely enjoy them but starts counting the days. Each passing day reminds of his station in Madna. He does not wish to work there and similarly not able to enjoy his holidays in Delhi.

“And Madna had tainted his old world here in the city, the crowds at the Puja had remained him of the Madna Club, Durga had recalled Jagadamba. It was too much, to endure the load of more than one world in the head” (p-165)

Conclusion:

The protagonists of Chatterjee belong to the elite Indian mass which is attracted by the westernized thought and culture. It forces them to stay away from their own counter parts. The neither mingle with others not are affable so that others could make friendship with them. As a result of this, they grow alienated from everybody even from themselves. Such is the case of Agastya Sen, the protagonist of English, August: An Indian Story.

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