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Phase 1- The idea of the welfare state in upamanyu chatterjee's fiction

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Abstract

The present study is about Upamanyu Chatterjee's anxiety for Indian states. The idea of the welfare state is one of the major themes in the fictions of Upamanyu Chatterjee. Being an IAS officer he very much stresses the point of the welfare state. Through the protagonists in the novels Chatterjee tries to show the significance of the welfare state amidst the ambiguity and gloom of the protagonists. He shows that how the heroes of his novels themselves ridicules the "waffle".

Keywords: Upamanyu Chatterjee, Indian State, English Language

1. Introduction

Literary scholarship has traditionally invested superiority in the tragic hero over the hero of a comedy. Such an assumption, even when it concedes not to conform fully to the Aristotelian precepts of tragedy, is founded crucially on one factor: that conflict is the making of the hero whose mission is ultimately to resolve it. The resolution connotes the triumph of the hero. But this triumph is a moral survival that looks beyond the inevitable physical or physiological extinction of the hero. Comedy insists on the survival of the hero in physical terms at the end of a work.

2. Comic approach of Chatterjee

The tangible nature of the conflict in the comedy justifies such an ending. Bonamee Dobree in his essay on Thomas Hardy, had asserted:—"the great tragic writer says yea to life in every fibre of his being, however, terrible, grim or ghostly it may appear."^[1] It is perhaps to debunk such simplistic assertions about tragic vision that Eugene O' Neill gave the subtitle 'A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Times' to his essentially tragic 'The Hairy Ape'.

So, how shall we surmount the difficulties in identifying the hero in the fictions of Chatterjee. In all the fictions, the central characters have local habitations and names. In spite of their tangibility and substantial existence and their structural centrality within the fictions why do we struggle to recognize the hero in them? Can we classify them into a genre with predictable features and traditional roots? Actually, they are caged within masks that lead the critic and the spectator astray. A specialized body of parameters is needed to decode the 'hero-complex' or 'hero-system' in Chatterjee's fictions. But before we structure the tools to unlock the 'hero-syndrome' in Chatterjee, certain notional aspects of the hero need to be clarified.

The hero is bound to act out of his commitment to a system of values. His value-system may be political, moral, religious, social or all these together; but what is important is his courage of conviction. When his value system is an entirely private and arbitrary one which is usually in conflict with that of his society, he is labelled as an anti-hero. Thus an aesthetic polarity emerges between two ethical codes, one public or social and the other personal or anti-public. The religio - ethical representation that a hero enacts makes him an "establishment figure".^[2] As Roger B. Rolin points out, "A hero's acts are sanctified by his society, an anti-hero's by himself."^[3] The hero that conforms to the code of the establishment is more easily intelligible and acceptable to society. The anti-hero's personal value scheme stands in the way of his acceptability by a society that insists on public sanction of its standards. It is perhaps too presumptuous at this stage to identify Upamanyu's heroes as anti-heroes although one cannot miss the elements of the anti-hero in them. Yet it is significant to recognize the validity of personal codes of values in the evaluation of the heroes of Chatterjee's fictions. It is equally important to be wary of misreading this personal code as arbitrary or motivated by

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self-interest. The value system of Chatterjee's heroes is essentially attached to a universal system of values that transcends not only those of the establishment but also of the worldly and the fleshly. But this point shall be elaborated in a later part of this chapter.

Northrop Frye in his 'Anatomy of Criticism' has classified heroes into five broad groups namely, the Super Man, Supreme Man, Leader Hero, Common Man Hero and Lowly Man Hero. This classification is based on the power of action of the heroes so far represented in literature. His classification does not take into account the moral stature of the heroes but only their potency to control the natural and human worlds in which they function. The Super Man is superior to and greater than mortals whereas the Supreme Man is human yet more powerful than the mortals. There is a Godlike aura about him like Beowulf although he is physically vulnerable and ultimately mortal. The Leader-heroes are unmistakably human, prone to error and even sin. They are worldly, subject to the laws of the world, yet are the best that the world can create. The 'Common Man hero' is just an ordinary person who is capable of mustering his natural resources when the occasion demands, and can then evolve into the extraordinary. The 'Lowly Man hero' is a disreputable figure with an everlasting naivete, who except in his climactic moments of transcendence, fails to inspire us. But he has an innate virtue that triumphs over the seemingly virtuous and sophisticated.

3. Chatterjee as a Hero

In which group shall we place Upmanyu Chatterjee's heroes? No category of heroes in Northrop Frye's comprehensive classification can wholly accommodate them, precisely because the criteria for the evaluation of their heroic content are primarily and solely related to spiritual values. In terms of the power of action, their heroism ranges from the super human powers of superman heroes to the powerlessness and naivete of the 'Lowly Man'. The hero in general is a traveller on a grand scale, scaling miles sometimes physically or at other times, undertaking an inner journey to the outermost reaches of his mind. As Rollin rightly observes, "Every hero has his quest, his vital mission. Whatever his goal, the hero must be a seeker. To decline the quest is to lose his opportunity as a hero. To decline the quest is to be less than himself."^[4] The purpose of the quest, the destination of the journey of each hero, determines the quality of his heroism. Whether he triumphs in his quest or not, the seeking is significant and the goal he envisions testifies to his tether. Honour, Glory, Victory, Social Order, and Love are the commonly professed goals of heroes. The end of the journey is marked by one indispensable experience on the part of the hero. It is the experience of self-discovery. The outward progression in the career of the hero is also counter balanced by this inward seeking. The process of self-discovery also inevitably involves the process of self-creation. "Whether hero, non-hero, or anti-hero every individual becomes what he experiences."^[5]

Now, to classify comprehensively, the heroes in Upmanyu Chatterjee we can, first of all, only say that the heroes of Chatterjee fall in no definite category as is discussed at length in the previous pages. If we look at the heroes in all his fictions we can at least say that they are common men, sharing the common views and visions in an uncommon way hitherto inexperienced by us. The very first novel, 'English, August'—follows Agastya Sen—a young westernized Indian

civil servant whose imagination is dominated by women, literature and soft drugs. This vivid account of 'real India' by the young officer posted to the small provincial town of Madna is, "funny, wryly observed account of Agastya Sen's year in the sticks,"^[6] as described by a reviewer in the observer. However, Chatterjee's heroes are mainly the average men seeking the earth for their favour. If we start seeking examples from the very first novel it will be more crystal clear. At the very second page of the novel, the ambiguity or the split-personality of Agastya is evident. As the novel starts with an ominous beginning Agastya is discussing in an intoxicated condition about the whereabouts of Dhruvo. At that time when the discussion comes to the childhood days, it is said of him:—

"That was a ten-year-old joke from their school-days in Darjeeling, when they had been envious of some of the Anglo-Indian boys who spoke and behaved differently, and did alarmingly badly in exams and didn't seem to mind, they were the ones who were always with the Tibetan girls and claimed to know all about sex... And like most names, they had paled with the passage of time and place, all but August, but they yet retained with them the knack of bobbing up out of some abyss on the unexpected occasion, and nudging a chunk or two of his past".^[7]

4. Symbolism

These lines altogether symbolize the hesitations as well as the shrinking character of Agastya in his childhood days. At the same time, the omniscient narration focuses the erotic nature or at least the eroticism in him. In the succeeding pages we find his longing, remembrances, pain and compulsion when at the guest house in Madna he read the poem written on the wall by R. Tamse, the Deputy Engineer, P.W.D.:—

*"Away from my old life and my spouse,
So many days at this circuit House,
Away from Goa, my dear home,
On office work I have to roam".*^[8]

These lines also symbolize Agastya's captivated condition at Madna and he finds no pleasure in the administrative service, rather it seems, that the world has been closed to him, no outlet is there to tame his feelings.

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