

Chapter-II

Disorientating Humanity in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Way to Go*

English now is not looked as a colonial legacy and a sign of slavery rather it is an instrument of progress and prosperity. Today Indian novel written in English has attracted the attention of the critics and readers more than ever before. Just twenty five years back, Uma Parameswaran, a leading literary critic, had a very bleak and dismal view of Indian English literature. She even went to the extent of saying that this literature would meet to its doom up to the year 2000. But nothing has occurred like that, and so time itself has refuted her opinion because, not to speak of the success of Indian novelists on national level, even on the international level, they have acquired tremendous success and won the highest literary awards. In fact, this series of success started with the phenomenal emergence of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* which infused new energy and courage into a number of Indian English novelists—Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga.

Recent years have witnessed a good number of Indian English fiction writers who have stunned the literary world with their works. Their works have enriched the world literature, and they have been awarded with accolades and prizes in the field of literature. A careful study of their development makes it clear that there are two kinds of writers who contributed to the genre of novel—the first group of writers focused on the various social problems of India like poverty, class discrimination, social dogmas, rigid religious norms etc. The second group of writers includes those who are global Indians for their being Indian by birth and stay abroad. They see Indian realities objectively and they are at ease with the English language. While handling Indian sensibility, these writers are no longer the slavish imitators of English. They have used English so creatively that the freshness becomes a prominent feature in their language. They have experimented with the language and fused Indian spirit in the foreign language. They have coined new words and idiomatic expressions in English and added a new flavour in English language. Some of these terms are now accepted as English words. The West relishes their writings with zest and they have their unique place in the world literature.

The novelists of present era are obsessed with the emerging postmodern issues concerning their own generation and contemporaneity. *Globalisation* implying universal brotherhood has

always been a celebrated concept in India. Our past stands testimony to the fact that India introduced the ideal of *vasudhaiva kutumbkam* to promote universal brotherhood, peace, prosperity and harmonious co-existence. The spirit of global harmony is challenged when it leads to the colonization of ‘other’ and to what Giles Gunn terms, “the homogenization of culture and the expansion of western” (quoted in Shukla, 3). With the changing global scenario, the concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbkam* has now got a different connotation as it is now appreciated in terms of opportunities of economic growth irrespective of the threats it poses to the integrity of humans. The kind of globalization that is being thrust on India is tantalizing but disastrous. In the wake of globalization, human advancement is now measured through newly defined parameters which take into consideration all material assets and objects which an individual possesses while ignoring the essential element of humanity.

No doubt, the land of sacrifices is now being considered as a land of opportunities. The land of snake charmers is now considered a land of fashion designers. The land of traditional crafts is increasingly perceived as a land of Information and Communication Technology. The land of bullock carts or steam trains is beginning to be seen as a land of automobiles or jet planes. So, the external as well as inner construct of humans is now guided by seemingly fascinating but afflicting consequences of globalization i.e. growth in the reforms period of economic liberalization, Information and Communication Technology, and unrestricted movement across boundaries.

Now people are badly after upward social mobility and it diverts them through traditional ethical codes and cultural practices. Now their life style is marked with austerity and sacrifice. Today, globalization lies at the heart of modern culture and transformed cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization. This is the reciprocal relationship which the present research tries to explore. This is not a reckless claim that globalization is the single determinant of modern cultural experience, nor that culture alone is the conceptual key that unlocks inner dynamics of globalization. The huge transformative processes of our time cannot be properly understood until they are grasped through the conceptual vocabulary of culture. Likewise, these transformations change the very fabric of cultural experience and, indeed, affect our sense of what culture actually is in the modern world.

The present generation is hypnotized by the dark spirits of economic globalization to the extent that the darker side of the picture is generally backgrounded so much so that the glamour of

page 3 celebrities, soap opera, mall culture, BPOs and soaring apartments take precedence over the real issues like poverty, human trafficking, missing children, sexual harassment at work place, the wider gap between rich and poor, plight of farmers, violation of human rights and displaced people. Today, even literature and media have equally been glamourised as in the race of Target Rating Point (TRP), TV channels are more obsessed with the reality shows devoid of any fraction of reality than with the programmes highlighting the concerns of larger citizenry. Ironically, the popular programmes like *Big Boss* (where the triviality predominates), *Comedy Circus* (where comedy signifies vulgarity), *Crime Reporter* (with sharp focus on love, sex and murder), *Rakhi ka Swyamvar* (ridiculing the practice of personal choice in marital affairs) and intermittent commercial breaks to advertise the products of MNCs, hardly ever appeal to the millions of poor, underprivileged sections and subalterns in general. Detailing the negative effects of globalization through television, Kameshwar Singh remarks:

...it is having an adverse impact on our family life, mainly through television and technology. Television lessens the amount of time that families spend together. It also exposes children to new value systems, makes them grow up faster and gives them a thirst for consumer goods. It's disturbing impact on family and the drastic erosion of traditional social life is a matter of concern for all of us.¹

India exists at two levels— Bharat of the mass and India of the elite class. The metropolitan lifestyle is a potent vehicle to highlight the existing disparity. The modern Indian society influenced by the western values is experiencing a cultural shock and drastic changes. Similarly, our writers have not been able to keep themselves away from it. It appears that with some exceptions, Indian English novelists are just dipping their feet into the stream of life rather than plunging deep into it. The Indian novel in English has been dogged by the question of the authenticity of its Indianness right from the beginning. The issue became quite pertinent in the nineties with the onslaught of globalization and metropolitanism.

The basic question is: where does this Indianness lie in? Does it lie in such issues as feminism, existential agonies of the individual, search for identity, post colonialism and postmodernism or other isms, universal in nature but specific to India, like castism, regionalism, communalism, nepotism and so on. It is difficult to answer. (Shukla, 3)

¹ The Times of India “Globalisation making people slaves of money,” Apr 23, 2011.

K.R. Srinivas Iyengar further adds that, “the Indianness of Indian writing consists in the writer’s intense awareness of his entire culture” (1978, 8). The young novelists are encompassing metropolitanism, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in their works. Even while narrating life of the metropolis, and its wondrous routine, they appear to invite the suspicion of hype and exhibitionism. Everyone knows that people do have sexual perversities but the account of sexuality which we find in the novels of Khushwant Singh and Shobha De is nothing but blue-film montage. It is not the question of sexual frankness and we are not shy of sex, that is why postmodern Indian English Literature which generally foregrounds the scintillating picture of modern humanity, identifies itself with glitterature, twitterature or chick-lit. This is the reason that writers like Pankaj Mishra, Amit Chaudhuri and Upamanyu Chatterjee, just scrape the outer surface of the seething and teeming, multidimensional and mystifying reality that India is: reality that baffles the foreigners and makes Indians feel at home, in spite of piling up of realistic details.

Upamanyu Chatterjee is one of the recent generation of Indian authors to find success outside India with his debut *English August*. Most of Indian authors who have recently achieved success with western publishers, reside at least partially in the U.S or England. Chatterjee who works for the Indian Administrative Service, carries with him a different set of experiences. His realism is of different nature. His novels are rarely about the grand sweep of Indian history, or the epic mythologizing of the great Indian family or the confused angst of the Diaspora. His focus is on the inescapable failures of our lives, the fact that most of us are unmoored by history and unable to hold on to the new promises of India shining. The absurdities of the welfare state are bizarre enough for many entertainments and he marks the most of them. He also lays bare strictly ritual nature of political, bureaucratic and social systems with his trademark black humour and impeccable comic timing as the reader observes in *Way to Go* where reporting of the missing person is meaningless, but necessary ritual. Chatterjee says, “All fiction is autobiographical. It’s what you have heard, seen, felt” (Singh, 134). In 2008, he was awarded the Order of Officer des Arts et des Letters by the French Government for his contribution to literature. Upamanyu Chatterjee is perhaps the only contemporary Indian writer in English who belongs firmly to the school of Jonathan Swift and Rabelais, but his irreverence encourages one to refer to a plebeian source in which the hashing song of life presents a dismal picture:

Life presents a dismal picture,
Dark and dreary as the tomb,

Father's got urethral stricture,
Mother's got a prolapsed womb.
Uncle James has been deported
For a homosexual crime,
Nell, our maid, has just aborted
For the forty-second time.²

His use of language has mystified some of his critics, "... the reader often has to struggle through prose thick with obscure words. His characters don't whine, they pule, they don't speak, and they discourse. His aim may be to double reader's vocabulary".³

Upamanyu Chatterjee is a social realist for whose creative endeavour the over-arching theme of identity and its plight in a hostile world forms what may be called the bed-rock. The concept of anti-hero which we find in the novels of Chatterjee is central to the colonial disruption of the urban Indian educated personality in terms of multiple splits. There are splits between man and his traditional moorings, between man and his family, between man and his environment; and lastly the split between man and his inner being. The concept of anti-hero as reflected in the major characters of Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels rests on this divorce of the urban educated man from the different segments of society and its institutions. The most devastating and so most potent factor in creating fertility for the production of anti-heroic denizens of society is the exhaustion and collapse of the force behind motivating ideas and ideologies. In the post-modernist jargon, these have been collectively called 'grand narratives' or 'meta narratives'.

The fictional world of Upamanyu Chatterjee is a postmodern world marked by the visible symptoms like collapse of the grand narratives of Indian values and an emphasis on consumerist style of living. It is remarkable, in the context of Upamanyu Chatterjee that the postmodernity which we encounter in his novels is just a socio-cultural condition which traps the anti-heroes. Chatterjee has emerged as one of the most compelling new voices in the domain of Indian novel in English. His debut novel *English, August: An Indian Story* is a fascinating metaphor of contemporary English educated Indian urban youth's failed quest for self-realization. Agastya Sen,

² <http://akhondofswat.blogspot.com/2010/05/book-review-way-to-go-upamanyu.html> 17th July, 2011.

³ Far Eastern Economic review by Theresa Munford 27/1/1994

the antiheroic protagonist of the novel is a victim of the bureaucratic system he comes to join. He represents his time, i.e., the last quarter of the twentieth century Indian urban life at multiple levels.

The focus of Upamanyu Chatterjee in the novel *English, August: An Indian Story* is on the fact that the urban Indians like Agastya are victims of an alien cultural discourse which has been internalized by them in the course of their educational cultural nurturing. The concept of anti-hero as we find in this novel reflects very sharply on the pathological careerism of modern Indian youth. The central opinion of Upamanyu Chatterjee in this novel is that the careerist English educated Indian urban youth suffers alienation at his deeper psychic level from his roots and becomes doomed to a life of unhappiness and boredom.

The novel, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) is a sequel to Upamanyu Chatterjee's debut novel *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988). The novel *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* is a mirror in which the multi-departmental decay and depravity of the Indian state gets reflected in their bitter details that are horrifying. The title is quite suggestive in the sense that it conveys the resourcefulness of the corrupt elements managing the politics and bureaucracy to milk the system in the interest of their own personal and familial aggrandizement. The central fictional emphasis here is on the antiheroic turning upside down of the putative system of the state bureaucracy as a system of delivery of benefits to the deprived sections. The very title of the novel suggests, in its suggestive bareness, a routine of daily, rather hourly, milking of the docile, inexhaustible and seeming land of abundance that is the 'Welfare State'. A close reading of these novels reveals that their antiheroes and their families have failed to understand the meaning of reality, having forever mistaken the trapping for the real thing. The dominating presence in this novel is of the antiheroic deeds of the mandarins and politicians of the Welfare State, because the purpose of this novel is to display a canvas of sordid personalities indulging in their sordid deeds.

In the novel *The Last Burden* (1993) we see the anti-hero as trying to shed the 'burden' of family ties, the terrain of his operation being the personal world of familial relationships. The antiheroic protagonist of *The Last Burden*, Jamun, reflects the average Indian growing up in an Indian megapolis and feeling constantly that he will be more at home in New York or London than in a small place of India. The antiheroic protagonist of *The Last Burden* is born into a family which is hate-filled. The social realism of Chatterjee turns its focus to the issue of relationship in an ordinary middle class family, thereby exploring the state of Indian antiheroic personality. After a

close textual analysis, one can't help the impression that in the novel *The Last Burden* the family relationship itself appears to be disappearing. Similarly, in the novel *Way to Go*, the protagonist, Jamun fails in his marriage life and also in the search of his father and becomes a victim of the bureaucratic system.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Way to Go* as a novel portrays disorientated Indian society where individuals follow the contemporary idiom of growth and ignore the sanctity of social institutions like family and marriage. The title of the novel *Way to Go* is quite suggestive as it reflects the anxiety, flux of the protagonist who is in dilemma where to go or not, what to do or what not to do. In the American past, certain values had been held in high esteem, as a result of which the society as a whole had been peaceful, cooperative, hardworking, and virtuous, and made America the greatest, the most prosperous, the freest, and politically the most stable republic on earth. If we try to define family values, they seem to fall into five major groups affecting behaviour in five different areas. First comes the attitude toward the relative roles of the society and the individual and the socialization of the child to fit into the group; second, attitudes toward work and the accumulation of worldly goods; third, the rules and regulations governing all aspects of sexual behaviour; fourth, attitudes toward religion and finally, attitudes to race. While considering marriage, men and women yearn for certain things. They want to be accepted unconditionally by each other. They want their marriage to be filled with love and happiness. They want a family. In short, they want their marriage to be a source of joy and fulfilment throughout their life. The novel *Way to Go* offers the harsh observations like death is all around us; life is corrupting and filled with disappointments; most people live lives of desperation; love and sex have nothing to offer; most relationships are failed ones; God is dead; we are all rotting corpses on our way to the morgue. It presents the sordid picture of Indian society where people have no passion for life, ideals, morals and principles guiding them towards becoming 'human'.

The sequel to Upamanyu Chatterjee's novel *The Last Burden* (1994), *Way to Go* is a just account of humanity devoid of warmth, love, sacrifice, fellow feeling and made-for-each-otherness. The novel brings back a familiar set of people— Jamun, Burfi, Shyamanand, Kasturi, Pista, Doom and Joyce from his second book *The Last Burden*. It also brings back the loathing sort of love that they specialize in. Chatterjee on his fondness for the dysfunctional and why sequels

are important says, “*I write by hand to cut out the crap.*”⁴ Like his previous novels like *The Last Burden* and *Weight Loss*, it is a dark absurdist, raunchy take off on bleak, upper-class characters and disintegrating family life. In the intervening time, India has become more corrupt, more vicious, more consumerist. Jamun’s divorce has yielded a cheerful child and a long running TV soap opera produced by his ex-wife that reveals their lives together to attract a sound TRP. His father has gone missing for reasons that remain murky until the end of the novel, and his brother Burfi faces his own set of dismal vicissitudes. It is divided into three parts, each part begins at the same location i.e. police station. The novel opens with a sad, but hilarious first chapter, much like Chatterjee's debut *English, August*. The police station is described with a sense of futility and dejection that are perhaps part of Jamun's disposition by now. “FOR NOT HAVING LOVED ONE’S DEAD father enough, could one make amends by loving one’s child more?.” (3)

The novel portrays the degeneration of the people in the age of globalization, urbanization, consumerism and economic liberalization. Jamun, the protagonist of the novel is now in his mid-40s, and is preoccupied with the search for his lost father who is 85-year old, half-paralysed whom he misses a lot—sometimes out of love and at other times, out of sense of duty of a son towards a father. It is quite ridiculous that he realises his sense of duty towards his father only occasionally. Though his stay with his father had never been pleasant, he comes to realize as to how his father’s presence engaged and absorbed him. He also feels, “Something dies with you when your parents die, no matter how old you are” (343). His long-time solitary friend, Dr. Mukherjee has committed suicide and Jamun is trying very hard to grapple with the situation. On being left alone in his father’s house, he reminisces the moments when “they had all (his entire family) lived together under one roof as one large, unhappy family...on Jamun’s return to the city of his mother’s death—for that is how he had come to think of it, forever polluted.” (29)

In the first part, one can find how both – time and common sense are suspended when bureaucratic red-tapism takes center stage. Jamun goes to make report of his missing father and he finds that the constable offers him seat only after concluding that Jamun looked well bread enough to deserve a seat. This shows that the police department is one of the corrupt departments in India and it serves only the elites and not the poors. A poor man cannot even lodge F.I.R as it is the

⁴ <http://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/metroplus/article396215.ece> June 27, 2011.

prerequisite for the complainant to be rich or influential. The constable shows deliberate over-attention to details and opens a register almost at its mathematically exact middle with “Bittoo” printed on its cover. The order of questions asked by the policeman regarding the lost father of Jamun is as bizarre and illogical as the life of people in this world is. Though Jamun has provided a detailed description of Shyamanand, he is asked by the policeman an absurd question, “Missing person was Male or Female?”(9) and shortly afterwards, “Missing Person failed his school/college exams and therefore left home?”(12) or “He had any Love Relationship with anybody?”(12), after having made it clear at the outset that the person in question was Jamun’s 85-year-old father. Anyone who has ever had the experience or misfortune of visiting a police station in India would immediately recognize the atmosphere of sordidness and absurdity created in the episode, which is repeated with variations twice more in the novel, as later Naina Kapur, and then Jamun himself, go missing.

The novelist introduces Jamun as the representative of wastelandish character of lower middle class characterized by the obsession with upward mobility, erosion of traditional values and diluting sociological institutions like marriage and family. He stares at the lady constable and tries to avoid his *jumpy malevolence*, and tries to look down at the printed form from which he had been reading out the questions. He also tries to look away at the top button of the constable’s tunic. The increasing urbanization and consequent dirt, squalor, congestion and unhygienic living conditions form the setting of the novel. In his seminal book, Sunil Khilnani brings to the fore the disasters of extensive movement of people towards the cities either for employment opportunities or for the better education of their children. Khilnani comments:

India’s cities are hinges between its vast population spread across the countryside and the hectic tides of the global economy, with its ruthlessly shifting tastes and its ceaseless murmur of the pleasures and hazards of modernity. How this three-cornered relationship develops over the next decades will decisively mould India’s future economic, cultural and political possibilities. (149)

For him, India’s cities present the panorama of the entire historical compass of human labour, from the crudest job of stone-breaking to the most sophisticated financial transactions, export-import transactions, services and corporate ownerships. Similarly, *Way to Go* brilliantly puts forward the contradictions of growth by highlighting the gloomy environ of emerging India at the wake of our entering into the select nations priding themselves on resisting financial recession and volatile market practices. The novel touches upon the successes and failures, hopes

and despairs, past and present, traditional and modern, and nature and culture. Present day Indian scenario reflects upon the contradictions which are:

...intimately and abruptly pressed against one another, and this has made the cities vibrate with agitated experience. All the enticements of the modern world are stacked up here, but it is also here that many Indians discover the mirage-like quality of this modern world. (Khilnani, 109)

Way to go is not merely a contemplation of myriad “*ways to go*” rather it is a chronicle of many deaths foretold, witnessed, heralded or surprised—but hardly ever mourned. The disillusioned denizens of the suburban slums are picturised in the novel with a set of imagery symbolizing darkness, gloom and frustration. Upamanyu Chatterjee presents the stark realities of contemporary urbanizing India when he gives an account of the disappointed people opting to commit suicide by putting their necks on the railway tracks. He satirises the essential gloominess prevailing among the present generation posed with the new set of challenges in the context of globalization. He observes:

How couldn't they recall the shitters on the tracks, two hundred million of them every morning? Surely, just when it was too late, at the last absolute nanosecond, realizing that they'd been resting their chins on month-old turds, they changed their minds; just before their skulls became blood and mincemeat, they wept and climaxed out of fear and depression at how sinfully they had abused the gift of life. (16)

Way to Go is generally regarded as a novel marked with dry humour and emotionless extravaganza of crumbling institutional structures—social, economic, familial and individual. The novel exhibits a country of a billion plus with a quarter of a million people who are really insignificant and non-existent. Jamun's tale represents the odds of locating an individual in the meandering complex of human existence. Individual identity has become as scarce and rare as the attempt to locate the rudiments of demolished structures. The picture that the novel creates before our eyes is that of an over-populated metropolitan city where traffic has doubled, neighbours have changed and older houses have been destroyed to make way for apartment blocks. The people like Shyamanand who have volunteered to disappear from the mainstream of life, could hardly survive in a sprawling city taking the shape of the concentration camp where “gates had been walled up, walls topped by barbed wire and everyone had looked permanently apprehensive.” (17)

Jamun's father invested all of his resources in constructing a house which he could call his own, which he both liked and disliked. On the one hand, Shyamanand took immense pride in the

house that he had built on his own crumb of earth while on the other hand; he could sense the absurdity of his decision to sink his life's savings in choosing to live in a housing estate that had become a sort of concentration camp. He relished the partial pleasure in the house for having the company of a 'son of his own blood' and the barbed wires and the cementing up of the gate giving him the feeling of security which he considered as rare accomplishments not many of his contemporaries could boast of. "It (house) was the grandest material remains of his family, it was his family made concrete... both a dream realized and an idea of the family idealized and then made real brick by brick." (201)

As we have earlier said that his realism is of different nature. Here, we can contrast him with Adiga who believes that property is the reliable index of human happiness. No doubt real estate blues also darken the narrative in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Way to Go*. But unlike Adiga, Chatterjee does not care to assign redeeming features to his builder, Monga—the man hungry, all through the book, to buy out the family home. Even the newly emerged lower middle class consisting of the people like Jamun, Burfi and Lobhesh Monga are observed compromising their essential human dignity for short-term material gains. Monga, the builder, performs certain religious rites only to beguile others. He organizes the bonfire on the occasion of Holi festival and partakes frequent pilgrimages only to divert the attention of the people from the crimes he commits. He is a hypocrite who goes away soon after the bonfire (burning Naina dead or alive) to Nasik or Ujjain or Puri, a religious journey necessitated by some business requirement. "He (Monga) never said no to anything; like the successful amoral businessman that he wanted to be, he viewed every situation as a potential source of profit." (43)

With the soaring real estate business in post-reforms India, Monga represents lacs of property dealers and builders who have dreamt to rise overnight from huts to sky-touching apartments. It happens so because the value of real estate has appreciated about two thousand per cent in the last two decades. So, the builders like Monga believe in the fact that, "time is money and thinking a waste of both" (49). For Monga, "the two (religion and crime) for him were indistinguishable, artha and dharma strolling hand in hand into one of his pilgrim resthouses..." (110) and "He fucks everything that moves" (44). He also seduces Mrs. Naina Kapur whom he calls his cousin, but in reality she is her mistress. When Jamun tells about the disappearance of Baba to Burfi who lives in Noida, Burfi does not bother and says, "Just check the toilet. Look, I'll call you back in five minutes" (61). The filial relationship is taken so non-seriously that whenever

he visits the city, he never stays with his father, but with his friends. After fifteen minutes, Burfi calls Jamun back, but when asked about Joyce, kids, cops and crime rate, he just disconnects the phone. This shows how people are becoming so indifferent to blood relationships and social relationships.

Taking a departure from contemporary Indian novelists in English, Upamanyu Chatterjee gives due space to the themes concerning poors and other underprivileged sections of society. In the novel, the characters like Tekla, Vaman, Dhan Singh and Budi Kadombini represent the millions of poor inhabiting India. In spite of their low birth, status and restricted access to the opportunities of globalised India, they “have a deep and immediate understanding of power and power relationships. They know their own powerlessness in the context of deep-rooted inequalities in economic, social, and political structures.”⁵ Despite the suffocating and hostile environment, they display a strong internal sense of power, self-confidence, and will to persist, through various means—fair or foul. In the novel, Tekla, maid-servant’s son, runs a brothel house in a “three-storey shack from base to roof completely illegitimate—from electricity connection and water pipes to building plans, as illegal and inevitable as prostitution”(44). Similarly, Budi Kadombini’s habit to steal from kitchen also reveals the tendency among the poors to rise high.

The title of the novel is quite relevant and significant as it largely centres on the theme of life and death. At the time when human values, ethics and traditional norms are losing their sanctity. Chatterjee shows that death is the only topic that bonds father and son together. They couldn’t most of the time tell the difference between it and suicide (34). Dr. Mukherjee’s committing suicide, Shyamanand’s leaving the house forever and his two sons’ contemplating to meet the death, seem to be the only alternatives left with them. With human beings speckled mainly by painful maladies and their expensive treatment, it is best for these characters to think of themselves as already dead. The entire social setup is in the grip of varied influences of globalization—be it commoditization, consumerism, westernized life-style, mall-culture and the widening divide between rich and poor.

⁵ Deepa Narayan, Lant Pritchett and Soumya Kapoor, “I Believe I Can,” *Moving Out of Poverty*, Vol.2. (Washington, The World Bank, 2009) 171.

The spell of economic growth has even blinded the people to the sanctity of social institutions like family and marriage. The pious familial relationships like parents, brother, sister, husband, wife, son and daughter seemed to have lost their commanded reverence in the contemporary society. *Way to Go* by Upamanyu Chatterjee lays bare the stark realities of the existing socio-economic scenario, though sometimes with an indigestible brutality. The disappointing expression of sexual encounters in the novel adds to the pervasive gloominess of the novel. In the novel, “Jamun’s sex life dwindled to a sort of dry, rotting peanut... the wretchedness of his carnal life and how demeaning it had always been. It was hurried, silent, stinking and dry and gave more dissatisfaction than pleasure to its participants” (36-37). Even Jamun’s relationship with his own daughter delivered by ‘Kasturi to whom he had lost his virginity,’ (29) remains vague throughout the novel. In Kasturi’s serial called *Cheers Zindagi*, Chunmun the fictitious equivalent of real Mithi, has two fathers—Sidharth, her mother’s husband and Uncle Ashwamedha Ponytail (Jamun himself), her biological father. While Jamun liked himself to be addressed by his daughter as Babua or Popten, Mithi calls him Donkey Uncle. What agonises Jamun is the fact that though he is living a barren life in the absence of his daughter, “his character in the soap ... enjoyed a sizeable following; which his TV programme was, what he had been doing on the morning of the last heavy downpour, what he ate and how he maintained his health were regularly the subjects of articles in the daily newspapers.”(92)

The mockery of human relationships is exposed when Monga introduces Naina as his cousin but “the top floor has been reserved for his mistress” (124) where he exploits sexually only to burn her body in the bonfire. When Jamun and Monga go to report about Naina Kapur, Monga says, “we suspect that his father and my cousin—perhaps—ran away together” (136). He even says that she might have helped Shyamanand to disappear. Similarly, Burfi, Jamun’s brother, has severed his ties with his wife and stays away from his children. He “hadn’t touched his wife in five years except to beat her even though he loved her very much. He loved her most when she was beaten and bleeding” (219). Here, Upamanyu Chatterjee raises the issues as crucial as wife-beating and domestic violence which are against the dignity of human beings. The father-son relationship is shown to have become an old myth as instead of seeking pleasure in the company of father, “Between the brothers, whoever stayed with the father usually felt that the other had duped him into it, had won and escaped” (61). Ironically, Shyamanand was so excited about his sons that he “... had had painted, in crimson capitals, the details of the apex of his life’s

achievement, namely, the names of his sons, their educational qualifications and professional designations... (331). After getting disillusioned by his own sons, Shyamanand considers villainous Monga as his third son mainly because he found Jamun and Burfi quite unfilial. It makes one celebrate our past when a festival or a celebration was never constrained to a family or a home, and the whole community or neighbourhood used to involve in bringing liveliness to an occasion. Likewise, an Indian wedding was a celebration of union, not only of the bride and groom, but also of two families, maybe cultures or religion. Similarly, in times of sorrow, neighbours and friends played an important part in easing out the grief. Hence, in the olden times, Indian culture aimed at unification of souls and also the confluence of human soul and divine soul. Upamanyu Chatterjee's novel seems to juxtapose the past and present in a way that one comes to rethink his/her approach to India as a nation 'already emerged'.

Earlier, Indian family was a dominant institution in the life of the individual and in the life of the community. The Indian family was considered strong, stable, close, resilient, and enduring. Historically, the traditional, ideal and desired family in India was the joint family. A joint family includes kinsmen with three to four living generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household. It is a group composed of a number of family units living in separate rooms of the same house. These members eat the food cooked at one hearth, share a common income, common property and are related to one another through kinship ties, and worship the same idols. The family supports the old; takes care of widows, never-married adults, and the disabled. It also assists the youth during periods of unemployment; and provides security and a sense of support and togetherness. The joint family has always been the preferred family type in the Indian culture, and most Indians used to enjoy this institution. But with the advent of urbanisation and modernisation, younger generations are turning away from this joint family form.

However, it is only after Shyamanand's disappearance that Jamun exhibits his sensitivity to the undying bond with the father and rethinks his approach to his father when he deliberates not to let his father feel small. In such a hostile familial environment in Shyamanand's household, laughter was rare enough. Madhumati, A tenant in Shyamanand's house, is taken aback to learn that Jamun's—and Burfi's—ties with the extended family were so fragile that "they didn't even know the names of their maternal grandparents or their paternal grandmother, or the proper names of even one of their dozens of uncles and aunts..." (186). When Burfi's child Doom asked his

father the names of his great-grand parents and their parents to design a family tree as part of his homework, “Burfi impatiently suggested that it would be simplest for him to make up attractive names for all of them.” (187)

At the time when we are all the time engaged in debating the issues like 2-G scandal, black money in Swiss Banks, effective Jan Lokpal Bill and role of Civil Society in initiating positive changes, *Way to Go* rightly depicts the corrupt practices in government offices. The non-seriousness and consequent failure of police to search out Shyamanand, makes one comment that “I don’t think the police will do anything until they have a corpse. Preferably an influential one that can breathe down their necks” (153). With a serious crisis of basic amenities in the densely populated cities (facing largescale encroachments and cases of illegal construction), the novelist remarks that “the state has simply failed to provide in the taps of its citizens safe potable water. I personally believe that potable is a terrible word. I immediately think of having to drink the water from a toilet bowl. But this purifier is equipped with ultraviolet rays that—you know –treat the water ... ultra-violetically” (64). The red-tapism and rigid license rule still prevails Indian bureaucratic system captured by Upamanyu Chatterjee when he says that even death could not slip free of paperwork. Burfi’s decision to sell off his paternal house makes him undergo the trauma of complex administrative barriers just to create avenues for the corrupt officials to make money. Burfi observes:

The last two offices (notary’s and sub-registrar’s) resembled Third World railway stations from which several hundred are trying to escape some awful, typical Third World calamity—a communal conflagration, say, or the plague. At both he expected the crowds, fed up of having to pay bribes at every window and see their papers move only to disappear and later reappear only upon the handing over of some more grease—he expected the crowds at any moment to lose their tempers and burn the hideous buildings down. (323)

In the novel *Way to Go*, Upamanyu Chatterjee portrays the dark side of urbanisation. No doubt, people get attracted towards urban areas with some temptations in the form of facilities like education, healthcare, employment avenues etc. It further leads to more and more slum dwellers that have no sanitary, drinking water facility and they have to live on roads and bear the exploitation. So a large number of Indian citizens use the streets and other public spaces as their homes; it is not surprising that so much public interaction occurs in these spaces. The proportion of the population living in urban areas has increased from 16 percent in 1951 to 26 percent in 1991.

Now, nearly one-third of the population lives in towns and cities. Slums have become an inevitable part of the major Indian metropolises.

The proportion of the population living in slums in towns and cities has been increasing over the years, and it has risen from 18.8 percent of the urban population in 1981 to 21.5 percent in 1991. In absolute terms, the population living in slums in Indian cities has increased from 30 million to 47 million. The highest slum population resides in Maharashtra; it is nearly about 40 million people. Due to the high density of impoverished people living in urban India, space is used for multiple purposes. The novel exhibits the irony of Indian growth when people in the suburban areas are shown defecating at the roadsides and waiting perpetually for water supply, health/hygiene facilities and a better way of life. A typical street in urban India can serve as a road, a bed, a store, and a bathroom, all within a matter of hours. The people in slums live under the most deplorable conditions, with little access to effective social and health care services, potable water, or sanitation facilities and are therefore more vulnerable to epidemics and developmental challenges. Their low socio-economic status, low level of education and high fertility and mortality indicate that they need special attention in terms of public health, family planning and reproductive health programs. Presswala and his children, servants and workers display a horrible picture of Indian society dwelling in the cities.

The ostentatious and flirtatious life of the westernized Indian urban population is portrayed by the novelist when birth anniversary of Mithi who is born in November, is celebrated in March. The girl is nourished in a way that she has no feelings either for her biological father or his preferences. Jamun wanted to see either Mithi or Kasturi on the eve of Holika bonfire but he consoled himself by thinking that “Mithi wouldn’t because the bonfire clashed with her dance class or maths tuitions or something; and Kasturi certainly wouldn’t be able to get away from work, not for a piffling, middle class, neighbourhood community event” (162). Jamun finds that Kasturi’s world of make believe is so remote and insulated from her own that they simply did not connect. So, he is not in favour of his daughter being made as pompous, snobbish and fashionable as her mother. He feels irritated to observe that “it was fashionable in school for Mithi and her friends to detest Hindi, to find it dull and contemptible and incomprehensible.” (94)

The corporatized but exclusive education system is ridiculed by the novelist when he asserts that in spite of India taking pride in being the largest democracy in the world and provision

of Right for Free and Compulsory Education (RTE), a large number of children are still deprived of better education. Besides, the children are discriminated in the schools where “some parents and their cars were clearly more equal than others. The larger and more air-conditioned, the more outrageous, the automobile, the closer to the school gates to deposit its charges... Security and Identification. If you were a very important parent, you didn’t...” (172). Committed to present the panoramic view of contemporary India, Upamanyu Chatterjee mulls over the issues like homosexuality and lesbianism, besides the most common practice of extra-marital relationships. Perhaps the rising crimes against women in the cyber age sensitise the parents to deliberate well before finalising a tutor for Mithi. While finding a teacher for the girl, the parents agree only upon a female teacher in the pretext of the Supreme Court’s recent decision that ‘*women cannot rape*’ (178), which seems more a satire than a realized fact.

In *Way to Go*, Chatterjee seems to have been caught in an intricate trap where it is difficult to foreground one issue and background another. The collapse of institutional structures—social, political, economic and legal, is annoying, but equally crucial are the consequent maladies like corruption, widening gap between rich and poor, fatal diseases like AIDS, human trafficking and prostitution, crimes against women, familial bond, and social and financial security. Utterly disillusioned, Madhumati rightly passes her observation about life in the contemporary India when she remarks: “C’est fait, done, it’s done.... Marriage, c’est fait. Children c’est fait. Relationships, c’est fait... life too c’est fait...” (123). However, Upamanyu Chatterjee seems to have shed some of his burden when he proposes a way to go, though towards a gloomy future guided by the witchcraft of globalization and its allied forces. It is fitting that *Way to Go* ends in a place that clearly is Benaras, although it is left unnamed. In this “holy city”, where the sacred and the profane are interspersed, Jamun at last gives up the search for his lost father only to realize that the one with the capital ‘f’ has not been dead after all, along with the truth that the holier the city, the better the hash. No wonder they call it ‘Heaven’. (356)

The novel also depicts the pathetic condition of women. In the novel one observes that in spite of India taking pride in having a transformed image, the society is ridden with the issues like child marriage, dowry, discriminatory practices and gender biases. Dhobi Dhan Singh’s wife was only nine years old when she was married off. Dhan Singh also wants to marry his eldest nine year old daughter to some other presswala of his own age, without considering that “a little child that breaths lightly as it must, what does it know of lust? (18) Burfi beats his wife although he loves

her most. The novel also depicts that how in this era of cut throat competition people are getting insensitive towards social commitments. Women who are doing job don't have time for their family. Joyce returns home later than Burfi. After returning from her job, she doesn't interact with Burfi; rather, she maintains distance from him. To make Burfi realise his mistakes, she deliberately wants to "... show him his place laughed and nattered with children, locked herself up for hours for her bath, for dinner nibbled on a mushroom salad standing in the kitchen" (256). He even does not go downstairs to chat with his father.

The entire novel deals with the contemporary issues at different levels. It nicely captures urbanisation with its adverse impacts; westernisation as a corrupting influence; upward mobility and consequent erosion of values; economic growth benefitting the exclusive groups; commoditisation with the gloominess prevailing the lives of bar-girls/dancers; prospering India with millions of people deprived of health, education, sanitation and access to routine necessities; glazing modern India with the social evils like child labour; and potential India ridden with red-tapism, poor governance and apathy towards the subalterns. Moreover, the novel is studied as a literary piece highlighting the irreverence for the institutional structures— sociological, legal or economic. Starting from the tale of an individual lost in the crowd, the novel portrays the threat posed to the celebrated notion of India being a success story, rich culture heritage, familial bonds, coherent social setup and to the peace of individuals.

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