

CHAPTER IV

Moral Degeneration

Novelists are the best spokesmen of their period who portray the events and beliefs and create characters to represent what they see around them. Upamanyu Chatterjee has emerged as a powerful realist and by bringing out the characters who are morally degenerated depicting the present condition of the society.

The materialistic modern man lacks faith in God. He is alienated from society and its values, from his own self and from God. The world presented by Upamanyu Chatterjee is a world of decay, chaos and corruption and his protagonists illustrate the modern traits of rootlessness, trauma, anxiety and absurdity. They are considered as antiheroes who do not have faith in God or in moral and traditional values.

The novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee give a powerful presence of several major and minor characters who are antiheroes of different shades. Chatterjee clearly reflects the collapse of Indian value system and portrays the absence of good qualities of a hero and the decline of the Indian value system and of social and family life.

In India, industrialization and urbanization altered the life and culture of people. Thus the emergence of a new elite modern culture changed the people who are educated and wanted to follow modern paths irked by the traditional bound persons. Upamanyu Chatterjee's protagonists Agastya in *English, August: An Indian Story* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, Jamun in *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go* and Bhola in *The Weight Loss* are the victims and they are uprooted from the cultural roots. They do not have any regard for their society and their family and they do not show any commitment towards their work and their responsibility.

Chatterjee has chosen the world of bureaucrats and Indian family system to explore the human psyche and present the condition of the Indian urban society. His exploration is

focused on the outward as well as inward experiences of man as he is concerned with the condition of the mind. His protagonists are modern antiheroes who lack the good qualities of a hero. R.P.Singh in his article “The Concept of Anti Hero in the Novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee” says:

The common thread that binds all the novels is the antiheroic image of the protagonists and other characters. 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 split between man and his environment; and lastly split between man and his inner being. Chatterjee in his novels is deeply concerned with the consequences of the encounter between the British colonialists and the Indian society. (1)

M.H. Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines:

The chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that which we associate with the traditional protagonist or hero of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest. . . . The term “antihero,” however, is usually applied to writings in the period of disillusion after the Second World War, . . . (11)

In *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* edited by Roger Fowler, it is said that the absurd, villainous and in some narrator heroes have produced the term. Antihero is “the hero who has re-emerged, in complicity with the author against ‘the norms of the whole’” (114).

Chatterjee’s novels are on the influence of British colonists and the consequences between East and West. The concept of the antihero is based on the colonizer and the

colonized. Chatterjee's novels reveal that the antihero is the product of colonial discourse. Graham Huggan in "Ultima Thule/ The North" quotes Edward Said's view of the colonized mind:

I use the word 'arbitrary' here because imaginative geography of the 'our land barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds, 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mantling are designated as different from 'ours.' (333)

Chatterjee shows that the antiheroes of his novels Agastya, Jamun and Bhola are the victims who are uprooted from their cultural roots. They are the products of this modern age filled with chaos and confusions arising out of the decline of moral values. They lead the life of despair and they live without commitment, faith and hope.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's antiheroes do not have native intellectual history, and traditional, cultural and moral values. V. S. Naipaul, in his book *The Writer and the World: Essays* observes the state of the Indians who are leading a westernized way of life: "a blending of the vulgarity of East and West – A certain glamour attaches to the Philistinism, a glamour attaches to those Indians who, after two or three years in a foreign country, proclaim that they are neither of the East nor of the West" (6).

According to Saul Bellow the antihero is:

. . . the individual under a great strain. Labouring to maintain himself or perhaps an idea of himself (not always a clear idea), he feels pressure of a vast public life, which may dwarf him as an individual while permitting him to be a giant in hatred or fantasy. In these circumstances he grieves, he complains, rages, or laughs. All the while he is aware of his lack of power, his inadequacy as a moralist, the nauseous pressure of mass media and organization. (23)

Chatterjee's protagonists are all urban educated men who are away from their natural communities and their way of looking at things and their personal life go against the values of Indian culture and tradition. Agastya who is a bureaucrat sees corruption, power and injustice around him; Jamun considers his parents as 'burden' and he does not want to be in 'family-ties'. Bhola is a man who has a shocking personality obsessed with sex. Totally all the protagonists are antiheroes and they are morally, spiritually and culturally degenerated.

Antihero is a principal character who does not possess noble and good qualities and characteristics that would make him a hero. Earlier, in Literature heroes and heroic characters have been given importance. A hero is a man who symbolizes honesty, bravery, truthfulness and morality. This type of heroes changed with the changing times. Today in literature the character of the protagonist has undergone a great change. The hero is replaced by an antihero. This chapter analyses issues like the moral degeneration, the concept of anti heroism, the antihero and the protagonists who fail to follow the socially accepted manners thus training into antiheroes.

In the anthology of C.G.Jung's *Psychological Reflections*, archetypes are defined:

Archetypes are, by definition, factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal, but in such a way that they can be recognized only from the effects they produce. They exist preconsciously, and presumably they form the structural dominants of the psyche in general. They may be compared to the invisible presence of the crystal lattice in a saturated solution. As a *priori* conditioning factors they represent a special, psychological instance of the biological 'pattern of behavior' which gives all living organisms their specific qualities . . .

We must constantly bear in mind that what we mean by ‘archetype’ is in itself irrepresentable but has effects which make visualizations of it possible, namely, the archetypal images and ideas. (40-41).

The archetypes are components of the collective unconscious and serve to organize human thought and behaviour. The life and the condition of the modern man are quite relevant to the study of the antihero in the contemporary society. It is the common contemporary-man who represents the antihero. In the earlier period, the most important character in the plot is the hero but today, it is the antihero who occupies the central position in the plot in contemporary literature. The Antihero, in *Chambers Concise 20th Century Dictionary*, is described as “a principal character who lacks noble qualities and whose experiences are without tragic dignity” (39). In *The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* the antihero is “the non-hero or the antithesis of the old fashioned kind who were capable of heroic deeds, who were dashing, strong, resourceful . . . he is the person who is given the vocation of failure, a type who is incompetent, unlucky, tactless, clumsy, backhanded and buffoonish” (42-43). He does not have the qualities of nobility or magnanimity of the like traditional heroes and heroines. Though antihero is a failure and loser, he should not be confused with the villain.

Erich Fromm in his book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* states about human nature:

. . . Man was defined as a rational being, as a social animal, an animal that can make tools . . . or a symbol making animal. More recently, this traditional view has begun to be questioned. One reason for this change was the increasing emphasis given to the historical approach to man. An examination of the history of humanity suggested that man in our epoch is so different from man in previous times that it seemed unrealistic to assume that men in every

age have had in common something that can be called ‘human nature’ . . . The study of primitive peoples has discovered such a diversity of customs, values, feelings, and thoughts that many anthropologists arrived at the concept that man is born as a blank sheet of paper on which each culture writes its text . . . in order to prove the rationality and necessity of the capitalist form of society, scholars have tried to make a case for acquisitiveness, competitiveness, and selfishness as innate human traits. Popularly, one refers cynically to ‘human nature’ in accepting the inevitability of such undesirable human behavior as greed, murder, cheating, and lying. (247)

In mythological sphere, the hero was seen as a saviour. He was a symbol of power and knowledge which made him conquer evil and free his people from destruction and death. Man himself is a crucial mystery in the contemporary society. Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* says, “Man is that alien presence with whom the forces of egoism must come to terms, through whom the ego is to be crucified and resurrected, and in whose image society is to be reformed” (316).

But in the contemporary world of exhaustion, the antiheroes are the representatives of the society of failures having lost hope and faith. They are themselves victims of alienation, cultural and spiritual sterility seeking solace and refuge in alcohol and social withdrawal. The archetypal characters depicted man in his journey through life. The various forms of mythic patterns are found in and out of literature. This helps to know the intricacies of man’s archetypal and mythic mind. The contemporary antihero represents exhaustion and chaos. He knows that there is no way out of life. Thus the antihero has become a dominant archetypal character in the contemporary world. His state in the contemporary world is symbolic of the universal condition.

The antiheroes of Upamanyu Chatterjee are more steeped in existential philosophy. Each man is what he chooses to make himself and he cannot escape his responsibilities of his character by saying that they are pre-determined consequences of factors beyond his control and justify what he does in terms of external or objective standards imposed from without. The antiheroes are unable to mediate between the external society and the internal world and between the outer and the inner real self that leads to the splitting of their personalities.

Antihero is a literary device used by writers for a central character in a play or novel which has characteristics opposite to that of a conventional hero. The hero is generally admired for his valour, charm, strength, kind heartedness, morality etc., but an antihero is typically clumsy, unsolicited and unskilled and has both good and bad qualities. Nowadays the usage of antihero in cinema, television and books has increased and there are thousands of shows, books and movies which are portraying such characters and they are widely admired by audiences. The different types of antiheroes are the classical antihero, the ‘Disney’ antihero and the ‘pragmatic’ antihero; the unscrupulous hero and the ‘Hero’ in name only. The classical antihero is terrible in a fight but riddled with self-doubt, and makes decisions on self-preservation instead of bravery. The ‘Disney’ antiheroes are basically good but do not have the intention of a classical hero. They tend to be more realistic. The pragmatic antiheroes are equally as likely to defect from classical heroism by the end of the story. The unscrupulous heroes’ intentions are good. They fight on the moral high side, but they do not really care how much damage they cause and to whom they affect on the way to achieving their goals. The ‘Hero’ in name only fights on the side of good but they have no good motivation. Their intentions are completely selfish and their motivations are only slightly less terrible than the villains.

Usually the antihero is the protagonist or a main character. Generally he has human frailties; he has flaws; he is accessible to readers because he is more “real”; he does not

always think about what the right, moral thing to do; he often thinks about what is right for him; he has the qualities generally belonging to villain, such as violent tendencies, greed, untruthful and immolating, the rejecting of traditional moral values.

Upamanyu Chatterjee came into prominence with his realistic novels. He is himself a product of his times and societies probing the moral degeneration of the human beings which is common to the whole of modern fiction. He reveals the chaos in this world. Chatterjee's Agastya, the protagonist of *English, August: An Indian Society* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, Jamun, the protagonist of *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go*, and Bhola, the protagonist of *The Weight Loss* are all antiheroes. They do not possess the qualities of a hero. These protagonists are immoral and they remain unchanged. They do not have pure intentions and love for specific persons or humanity. Their motives are selfish. They are bad guys in manner and speech and they are complicated characters who reflect the ambivalence of many real people. Thus all his five novels depict the vulgarities, absurdities and corruption which have been seen as a social reality today. One of the heroic qualities is responsibilities of a man, but to these modern men it has become 'a burden' which everyone wants to shed off. Jayasree A. in her article "'Anchorlessness' in Upamanyu Chatterjee's Protagonists with reference to *English, August: An Indian story*, *The Last Burden* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* says "If Chatterjee's Protagonists were to be described in one word, they would be rightly termed as 'anchorless' (57). She also adds that "Agastya is representative of contemporary youth totally unsure of his goals, ambitions and future. In Madna, he is reduced to a pathetic position of a foreigner in his own country experiencing, for the very first time, the culture shock and chaos of the real India its babble of tongues and attitudes, corruption and bureaucratic hurdles" (58).

Agastya who is urban and westernized suffers lack of interest when he was posted as an IAS trainee in Madna:

He eventually got to know, but by accident as it were, what a Deputy Collector (Direct Recruit) was, and where a naib teshildar stood in the Revenue hierarchy. He himself made no effort to know his how world; as it infolded, it looked less intensity to him; and later, even to see how far he could extend his ignorance became an obscure and perverse challenge. (EA 13)

Agastya is a culturally and emotionally fragmented man. He is disillusioned with everything connected with India. The two books on his table are *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius and *The Bhagavad Gita*. Agastya, being an Indian living in the twentieth century initially feels closer to *Marcus Aurelius* than to *Gita*. Agastya is a great sage in Hindu mythology. He is August to his friends and Ogu to his parents. His cultural fragmentation is revealed in his comments about the use of English in India. “Amazing mix, the English we speak. Hazaar fucked. Urdu and American’s, Agastya laughed, a thousand fucked, really fucked. I’m sure nowhere else could languages be mixed and spoken with such ease’... And our accents are Indian, but we prefer August to Agastya” (EA 1).

Agastya does not enjoy the role he has earned for himself by virtue of his competitive qualifications. He is accustomed to metropolitan life. Meena Belliappa in the article “Urban Consciousness and Indian Fiction in English” says, “Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian story* counterpoise against the city, the small town (which may be seen as an extension of the village) to generate a new kind of awareness of the implication of the implication urbanization in a tradition bound like India, . . .”(94). He does not find happiness in his job and he is not satisfied with his present position. He wonders if it was because of a new place or a new job or missing the urban life. The job for him is boring.

Chatterjee produces a kind of inner self of his characters who are trapped in cultural dilemmas; he also portrays how modern youth’s mind is occupied with carnal thickness, and willingness. The external life of the Indian youth may look different, but in reality he

finds himself in a western culture. Agastya in many situations reveals that he hates not only his present assignment of an IAS Officer, but also himself. Chatterjee offers a terrifying glimpse into an age where booze, work and sex are all that India's young men have to look forward to. He smokes ganja, drinks whisky and masturbates. The humanistic values like abstinence from drinks, and sex are pooh-poohed in the novel. The official life of Agastya is inauthentic. According to him the time life is in his own secret life lived in the Madna guest house with marijuana, boozing, masturbating and nighttime joggings. He is isolated from society and its values.

The antihero, Agastya finds himself a misfit and is always in restlessness. Mansing G. Kadam in the article "Alienation in *English, August: An Indian Story*" says, "His divided self is unable to hold communion with anything around him in the society which he lives" (102). He is not comfortable in Madna and has no sense of belongingness wherever he goes. He does not want to achieve anything in his life and he doesn't think that his life should be purposeful. The protagonist Agastya seems to be self obsessed. His women friends like Renu and Neera, his friends' mothers and his fellow officers' wives are sexual objects to him. When his friend Dhruvo's mother opened the door to Agastya she looks 'tired and sexy' (EA 151). After reading Renu's letters he comments to Dhruvo; "What a naked letter. She sounds quite sexy. You should marry her on the condition that she communicates with you only through letters" (EA 158). When Agastya attends an exclusive officer's party, he "wondered if he could slip away to eye the wife of the Deputy Superintendent of Police. . ." (EA187).

Marriage, a sacred family and societal institution is not given any importance and Agastya doesn't bother to follow ethical values. Agastya knew that he would marry,

Perhaps not out passion, but out of convention, which was probably a safer thing. And then in either case, in a few months or years they would tire of disagreeing with each other, or what was more or less the same thing, would

be inured to each other's odd and perhaps disgusting ways, the way she squeezed the tube of toothpaste and the way he drank from a glass and didn't rinse it, and they would slide into a placid and comfortable unhappiness, and may be unseeingly watch TV every evening, each still a cocoon, . . . (EA 167).

Agastya Sen tries to avoid all human contacts except sexual contacts. When he returns to Madna from Delhi, "He lays down on his upper berth to avoid all human contact, and said silently, to anyone who would listen, no more journeys, please no more" (EA 177). Agastya fails to relate himself to the society and the people of Madna. He does not even know the real Madna beyond its offices. Agastya does not think seriously about Indian Administrative and his role in it. He does not show any interest to learn about the District Administration. He is delighted more in *Bhagavad Gita* and Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* than the District Gazetteer. His lack of determination makes him to write a letter to his father and his uncle about his wasting of time in Madna. Dissatisfaction makes him suffer from dullness and his innermost desire is "to lie in the winter sun on the roof of the house in Delhi, or that decaying mansion in Behala, smoke, read a little, listen to a little music, have sex with someone, anyone, who would not exist before and after the act, and work only so I can do all the rest" (EA 136). And when Agastya goes on leave for ten days to Delhi he tells his uncle that he doesn't want any challenges or responsibility or anything. He wants to be happy.

Agastya is a reluctant hero upon whom the task of heroism is trusted, who may also typify as an antihero. He has no way out and goes by the expectations of others. He is burdened by his role as an IAS Officer. C. N. Ramachandran in the article "'Groping for Space': Tentative Comments on a few Recent Indian Novels in English" says "The Protagonist of Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: The Indian Story* is an antihero. Urban and westernized Agastya-turned-August, suffers from total or pathological apathy. He is disillusioned with India, but has no desire to escape India also" (52). In the end when

Agastya decides to give up I.A.S., it is not sure that it is a conscious choice or a way to escape to the city for its comforts. Towards the end of the novel he confesses to his friend Sathe at Madna:

I feel confused and awful. Journey after journey, by train and jeep, just motion. Integration Meetings, Revenue Meetings, Development. First the job didn't make sense, and I thought then, when it does, I'll settle down. When it did, if didn't help, I'd always be wandering, thinking chaotically of alternatives, happy images of my past, mocking. Most of the time I felt guilty. At Chipanthi I thought, if my mind wasn't so restless, if it cohered somehow, then I'd be working, getting water to a village, something concrete. (EA 284).

Traditional depictions of fictional characters meant that they were good guys with traits but the antiheroes turn the assumption upside down.

Agastya Sen is back to Madna in the third novel *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*. It brings out the multi departmental decay and depravity of India. Chatterjee's antiheroes are too self obsessed to mingle freely in the mainstream of the life in which they are forced to live.

P.V.Jayaraj in the article "A Deconstructed Malgudi" says "Agastya fails to rest his convictions in a meaningful context. Even after ten years of service Agastya remains an outsider in Madna, during his return to that district in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*. Despite having a highly receptive and sensitive mind, he makes no significant efforts to know his new world" (125). There is no peace of mind for the real self. In the case of Agastya, anchorlessness is to be one of his chaotic concerns during his life in an unfamiliar Madna. He also has to battle a sense of waste. The novel reveals his inability to relate himself to his job. He feels that he is a man without any ambition in life and he is suddenly forced to change his personality to suit the conventional goals in an ordinary life. A sense of 'waste' assails him

throughout his tenure in Madna. Agastya does not look forward to challenges or any responsibilities like heroes. According to him they always end up in destroying his happiness. Agastya has eight years of service but without any satisfaction or contentment.

He prepared for war by threshing about all night in Bed No.2, drafting in his head letters of resignation from the Civil Service. It had been one of his favourite pastimes in the last eight years. 'I'm sick of the pointlessness of the work I do and the ridiculous salary that I get for it, you fuck faces,' was what he, by three a.m., finally settled on; he repeated the line till dawn like a litany just to check the rhythm, its fall. (TMWS 12)

P. V. Jayaraj in the article "Postcolonial and Postmodern Trends in the Works of Upamanyu Chatterjee" opines, "Agastya is not worried about his ability to learn anything from an unfamiliar terrain or his reluctance to conjoin his restless set with the imperfection of the outside world in which he finds himself (6). He escapes into a secret world built up by drugs, liquor, sex and music that enhance the level of his fantasies. Such secret lives are much more actual and exciting than the outside world for Agastya.

Agastya Sen's bachelor life has lots of dope and sex. It is quickly remedied. He sits next to sexy and talented Daya in a bus. He decides to marry Daya. But Daya is a fleeting presence in the novel. His obsession with sexual acts with the domestic help is found in all his novels. Agastya feels secure within bureaucracy; "because within the civil service, one is likelier to know somebody who knows somebody who knows act" (TMWS 26).

Agastya tries to escape from Madna and goes to the other places to take up his duties. He even manages to get sent on a training course in France. As Madame Europe Olympia tells Agastya that over the years, the country's record, its performance has been abysmal. But Agastya Sen is not surprised and he does not do anything to improve the Welfare State's reputation. Agastya can survive himself in his job because he carefully balances work with as

much leave as he can afford to get away with. But even here, the Welfare State makes life complicated for him.

A bureaucrat is a man who is supposed to serve his nation but the bureaucrats here are corrupted and not committed to their work. They are not interested in public welfare and the governance is weak and poor. This is because of rising immorality. *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* vividly depicts the reality.

His love life leads to complications in his life. His relationship with Daya is an unhappy one. They both are self-centered and unhappy. He is a frustrated man. He does not have any interest in his work. He does not want to take up the responsibility and act accordingly. He is an antihero who does not do his duty and does not take up the responsibility.

Chatterjee's protagonists' moral weakness, their indecisiveness and their addiction to sin define them as antiheroes. Jamun, the protagonist of *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go* is an antihero who has flaws. Amit Chaudhuri in his review of the novel *The Last Burden* "Hollering in the Dark" points out, "the protagonist of this novel, Jamun, is leading a city-bred bureaucrat's life of boredom and lust in an unnamed small town in Maharashtra" (18). Burfi and Jamun, who are displaced from Calcutta, have grown up into westernized, rootless individuals. They are unable to form lasting relationships. The cruel relationship between sons and parents is clearly revealed early in the novel:

They've never threshed about for their parents with any remotely comparable strain. Burfi has scarcely troubled his head about them, or so Jamun reckons, with the entangled malevolence of the younger sibling. Yet parents can lacerate with equal virulence, so Burfi avers. 'You must recall - on the morning of my marriage, and Joyce within range, fixedly simpering and

steaming in her Kanchipuram, weighted like bedding, Ma distraught and asking whether what I was about to sign held the provisos for divorce.’ (TLB 26)

Jamun’s attitude to his father is cruel. He does not have any positive relationship with his father. The quarrel between father and son gets worse and worse and Chatterjee creates a sense of exhaustion on Jamun’s part through a nauseating image:

He is queasy, as though a vigorous talon has gashed through his muzzle down to his belly and is foraging in his guts. His calves bubble but the warm tears feel easeful, like cleansing. His father looks shriveled and appalling, but something baneful and primal in him craves to flail back, monster versus monster. He snarls snatchily, spite stifling rage, ‘You bastard - we should thank God that we are sons. If you’d hatched a daughter, you’d’ve bedded her – you fucking ingrate – this as recompense for what’ve done for you—.’ (TLB 51)

Namratha Mogaral in the article “Confronting Modernity and Post-Coloniality: *The Last Burden* and *English, August: An Indian Story*” opines, “In the character of Jamun and Burfi, Chatterjee depicts the slow erosion of the Indian mores by Christianity and English education, tolls of capitalism and urbanization and the middle class status it bestows” (60). The novel is in an urban space which is physically clean but socially and spiritually dead. His story begins with the modernist desire for the city. Throughout this novel, Chatterjee focuses on how values and cherished relationships suddenly get distorted to mutually destroying burdens. Twentieth century literature sees man as an ordinary creature, bogged down by the circumstances and victim of his free will.

Jamun’s relationship with Kasturi reveals the character of Jamun. She is Jamun’s friend and lover. Though married to another man, she is always available to Jamun whenever he needs her. After the period of ritual mourning for his mother, he visits Kasturi in her home

quite a few days after she has delivered his child. Kasturi shuts her eyes when she accepts his gift leaving Jamun quite unaffected by it. “But being self-absorbed, he’s viewed it just as an item in the larger shambles of his life – that is, as a detail that he can only observe; inertly, as on a screen” (TLB 290).

This shows that his relationship with Kasturi is an unattached relationship. So it does not create any inhibitions on him in his relationship with his maidservant Kasibai and her son. The arrangements with Kasibai is perfect because it does not make any demands on him emotionally. However, the sense of guilt pursues him:

Jamun feels droopy and immature, ashamed of his existence. When he is enkindled by them, he is frequently disgusted by their boorishness, by the smacking sounds that Vaman emits . . . principally because he isn’t interested in them as fellow creatures. Which stricture Jamun himself will parry with, ‘Balls, they aren’t my family, or anything like that . . . I’m not yoked to them by blood, or nurture, or the years. In any case, all these shackles can splinter; what endures is only a blind and unreasoning notion of duty. If we acquitted ourselves with others as they merited, then we would it’ve abandoned our aya in a charitable hospital with just her TB and her diabetes for company. She wasn’t us, so we exonerated ourselves.’ (TLB 287)

H.S. Hema in her article “Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *The Last Burden*” says, “The novelist brings into focus the visceral reality of life today and in performing this task emerges as a commentator with commitment to morality” (58). Jamun tries to free himself of the burden that the relationships had become to him. As an antihero he avoids his responsibilities as a son. He alienates himself from everything that would bind him emotionally. He makes all human relationships manageable.

In *Way to Go*, Chatterjee views life through the eyes of Shyamanand and his two sons Jamun and Burfi. Their relationship with each other is not very healthy and they dissect sex and human excreta with same degree of amusement. This novel has excessive amounts of depressing thoughts about life and death in general. Nisha in her article “*Way to Go: A Critical Study of Tradition – Modernity Conflict*” says, “In today’s modernized condition, this message truly makes sense, and makes the book relevant to many of us. This modernized situation is marked by Sudden and unexpected breaks with traditional ways of viewing and interacting with the world” (6).

The novel opens with a very strong sentence, “FOR NOT HAVILNG LOVED ONE’S DEAD father enough, could one make amends by loving one’s child more?” (WTG 3). The protagonist Jamun is now in his mid 40s and the father Shyamanand who is 85 years old and half paralyzed has now disappeared. His friend Dr. Mukherjee has committed suicide. Jamun is trying very hard to overcome the situation.

Chatterjee’s sequel *Way to Go* to his 1994 novel *The Last Burden* shows that India has become more vicious and more consumerist. The characters in *Way to Go* have moved on, too, and not necessarily for the good. Chatterjee exposes the more unpleasant facts of life: turds, suicides, corpses, uncongenial sex, and shifters on train tracks, bad breath and sweat. Upamanyu Chatterjee in conversation with Gowri Ramanarayan says, “In *Way to Go*, life is summed up as a simple dreadful business. A writer must be true what he sets out to do” (n.pag.).

The main character of the twentieth century literature is often an antihero who is accompanied by social isolation and a disillusioned view of life as he is the embroiled in a new cultural situation as an isolated being confronting existential pain and despair, drifting through life purposelessly.

Chatterjee explores the orifices of Indian society. Jamun and Burfi belong to a world of tedium, despair and violence. The builder Lobhesh Monga stands for the vicious, corrupt, unstoppable energy of the new India. A neighbour who is plagued by leucoderma and tries to find a cure in the blood of a freshly – decapitated chicken. And Jamun’s former life is summed up in Kasturi’s serial, Cheers Zindagi.

Jamun leads an immoral life. Jamun’s sex life has “dwindled to a sort of dry, rotting peanut” (WTG 36) and “it was hurried, stinking, dry and gave more dissatisfaction than pleasure to its participants” (WTG 37). The entire novel deals with Jumun’s struggle to find out Shyamanand. The character of Jamun doesn’t reflect anything of the mythological heroes. He is immoral and leads an isolated life.

Every character in Chatterjee’s novels reflects an antihero’s face of this contemporary society. There is no place for morality, nobility, goodness of purpose and action. Both the sons try to neglect the responsibility of their own father:

Periodically, one brother had tossed the father to the other for safe keeping.

With his mother’s death, for example, till that point of his life its most fateful event, Jamun had surrendered Shyamanand to Burfi by simply leaving the nest to catch a train to return to Kasibai and Vaman. Four months later, Shyamanand had followed him, after whining about having been neglected and slighted by his elder son’s family, had been escorted down to the flat by the river a thousand kilometres from home, to while away his evenings, for five placid years, on the four-foot-wide terrace, relishing both the hot frothy tea in his hand and complaining about it. (WTG 62)

In *Weight Loss*, the protagonist Bhola is a person who is morally degraded obsessed with sex without caring for traditional and moral values in his life. Nidhi Neema “Exploration of later irony in explicit Grotesquery of Upmanyu Chatterjee’s *Weight Loss*” states, “The

thing that makes him stand apart is his sexual propensity that is far more intense, so much so that it becomes the focal point of his life as well as the novel”(40). He lives his life only for sex. He does not have the responsibility towards his family. When he was at school, he was mischievous and gave troubles to the teachers. He is expelled from school for excreting on the teacher’s belongings. His obsession with Moti and Titli is seen throughout the novel. He is ready to do anything for Moti. In his young age, after seeing this couple for the first time he is attracted towards these two people. He even tried to visit their house. He continued his relationship with them.

Bhola married Kamala but he is not truthful to his wife. After the marriage also, Bhola is obsessed by being in good shape which means for him thin, without weight, malnourished Moti becomes his obsession. It is the dark picture of India shown by Chatterjee. He clearly portrays how the young people are obsessed with sex and their relationship with their parents does not have love and respect. The present generation lacks all the virtues. Bruce King in his review of *Weight Loss* says,

Although Chatterjee’s novels so far have been about an India unanchored from moral duty and purpose the stories have pattern. A member of the English speaking elite stacks off, behaving outrageously until he is long past amusing. Almost unnoticeably the story changes as events and explanations are presented less directly and fewer reasons given for what occurs, but by conclusion it can be implied that the antihero is one of many signs that things are badly out of joint in the state of India. (79)

In *English, August: An Indian Story*, Agastya sen is a son of a Governor and a university graduate. He scores high in the Indian Administrative service examination. But when he is posted to Madna, a provincial town to learn his job, all he does is masturbate, smoke pot, and avoid work. Agastya Sen reappears in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, a

novel set seven years later. The state of bureaucracy is not changed. Everyone is governed by self-interest in the novel but lead a purposeful life.

Agastya Sen is detached from his work and his alienation makes him an antihero who is incapable of doing his duties. Chatterjee describes him: "Every now and then in his career, once a week on the average, Shri Sen regrets his decision to join the topmost Civil Service of the country. On the other days, when he reflects, life outside the Government appears tense-making, obsequious and fake" (TMWS 117).

The state of Indian family seems at fault. It is a world where love and meaningful relationships have no place. Chatterjee's second novel *The Last Burden* is a realistic study of a lower middle-class family. The need for financial survival as well as ambition makes each person go his or her own way. Its sequel *Way to Go* also reflects the same kind of demands and qualities like jealousy, cruelty and selfishness. The disappearance of Shyamanand makes Jamun to regret but still he feels that:

'Exactly what I said. He's disappeared. I was sure he was dead and when I awoke, my first thought was that you'd taken the body away to be cremated, quietly, to save us the bother. Or maybe he went out for a walk at three in the morning and hasn't returned yet. It's been-' Jamun actually calculated, 'thirty-two hours. A thirty-two hour walk at the age of eighty-five. When you're half-paralyzed in one leg to boot.' (WTG 45)

Weight Loss reveals how modernization has affected India. The antihero deviates from the heroic standards of the day. The history of the antihero is nothing but the history of man's changing awareness of himself. The antihero rejects the structure of the life cycle and the concept of quest and journey.

Bhola rejects the possibilities to lead a purposeful life in college. Chatterjee opines that Bhola still needs Moti:

In the months that he had spent in those hills, their barren and enduring contours had frequently dispirited Bhola, upset him with a sense of time's fruitless passage, of a wasted life, of his shrivelled, empty and friendless existence. In that mood, he had from time to time felt that he wouldn't mind never seeing again even Dosto, his only friend. Yet, just the sight of Moti's rear ten paces ahead altered everything, gave the world bounce and exhilaration, reddened and warmed up his ears and cheeks, blurred the surrounding landscape into an Impressionistic fuzziness of brown and green and dust, and honed his life down to revelling in the tingling in his thighs as he vowed never again to lose sight of the figure in red. (WL 116)

Chatterjee's antiheroes look at women only as sexual objects and they do not have any respect and concern for womanhood. Traditionally Indian women are worshipped as gods and respected. But in the contemporary society they are treated badly. Fiona Tolan in her article "Feminism's" in the book *Literary Theory and Criticism* states that:

Throughout history and across cultures, women had always been second-class citizens. Even when worshipped and adored, they have had no autonomy and received no recognition as rational individuals, any more than when they have been abused and denigrated. Biological differences do not provide a casual explanation for women's oppression, however their reproductive function has placed women at a disadvantage by trying them to the domestic sphere and associating them with the body and thus with animals and nature. Just as man considers himself superior to nature, so he considers himself superior to woman. (321)

Chatterjee, in his novels, has not given much importance to the women characters except *The Last Burden*. His *English August: An Indian Story* and *The Mammaries of the*

Welfare State have a very few women characters. In both the novels, they are looked at in the perspective of Agastya. When Agastya comes across a woman character, she is viewed only as a sexual object by him. It is clearly seen in both the novels.

How children are attracted towards beauty and sex even at a young age is seen in Chatterjee's first novel *English, August: An Indian Story*. Agastya in his conversation with Shankar reveals his attraction towards his friend Dhrubo's mother when he was young: "I want, decided Agastya with a silent shameless smile, to fuck Dhrubo's mother (who had been an adolescent fantasy for all of Dhrubo's school friends, and for Dhrubo too, they insisted, only that he couldn't admit it, she had been slim and warm and in accessible)" (EA 33).

Whenever Agastya sees a woman or a girl, he thinks only of her physical beauty. He admires the physical beauty of Mrs. Srivastav, the collector's wife and even her six year old daughter. This is the dark side of India portraying how modern man is obsessed with physical beauty and sex. For him Mrs. Srivastav looks "sexier than usual" (EA 121). Agastya, his friend Dhrubo and most of the male characters are morally degenerated. Agastya has the habit using marijuana and has the habit of masturbating.

Chatterjee's third novel *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* gives a similar picture of Agastya's character regarding his attitude towards women. The best example is his relationship with Daya; when he first meets Daya in the bus, for him she looks: "She had large, tired eyes and a wide mouth. Agastya had immediately yearned to go to sleep with his face restful between her ample, firm breasts. Only repressed homos, his soul had pointed out to him then, long to fuck women old enough to be their mothers, especially when their own mothers are dead" (TMWS 5). Uma Mahadevan Gupta in the article "The Return of August" says, "his character's obsession with sexual acts with the domestic help carries on from *English, August: An Indian Story*, via the utterly forgettable *Last Burden*, into *Mammaries*. . . (27).

The image of the hero is totally changed in the modern days. In the earlier days, heroes respected women and treated them as their own sisters and mothers. But now they consider the women only for their physical needs. This flaw is seen almost in all the characters. This depicts the decay and the disintegration of human values and people like Agastya reject traditional and moral values.

Rochelle J. Almeida in the article “Upamanyu Chatterjee (1959)” states about the life that is led by Agastya in Madna as:

Agastya finds himself lonely, bored, sex-starved, and disgusted with his colleagues in the service and with what seems to be the pointlessness of his own life. He passes his days in a blur of marijuana - induced moments, masturbating frequently in the privacy of his depressing room with its one bed, desk and almirah (wardrobe cupboard). Through the complicated stages of his training –during which he meets a vast array of comical, pompous, pretentious colleagues and their similar spouses –he reads Marcus Aurelius voraciously and maintains a steady correspondence with the father. . .(28)

Thus the protagonist of these two novels is shown as a morally and culturally degraded man having lost noble qualities. He is the best example of an antihero because he does not have any good qualities of a hero. Moreover, he is not interested to work for the welfare of the people even though he has a chance to serve the people of India. His mind is totally corrupted with all the bad things and he fails to respect womanhood.

Jamun, the protagonist of the two novels *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go* indulges unashamedly in sleaze and the pleasures of multiple partners like Kasturi and Kasibai. In these two novels, Chatterjee gives a picture of Indian family bereft of the qualities of love and affection. Jamun and Burfi do not have any responsibility and love for their parents. In the Indian society ‘mother’ is ‘everything’ but she becomes ‘nothing’ in Chatterjee’s novels.

Urmila suffers a lot physically and mentally. She sacrificed her entire life for her sons and her husband and she has gained nothing from them in the form of love. The state of mothers which is clearly expressed by Eric Fromm using the symbols of milk and honey is brought out by Usha Bande in the introduction to her book *Mothers and Mother Figures in Indo English Literature*:

Milk is the symbol of the first aspect of love, that of care and affirmation. Honey symbolizes the sweetness of life, the love for it and the happiness in being alive. Most mothers are capable of giving 'milk', but only a minority of giving 'honey' too. In order to be able to give honey a mother must not only be a 'good mother', but a happy person . . . and this aim is not achieved by many. (qtd. in Bande 3)

Since literature is a product and mirror of the world, it reflects the reality and the way people lead their lives both individually and collectively. Thus most of the literary texts portray 'human experience'. Even though he lives in a joint family, Jamun lives a lonely life. He fails to respect and understand his parents. Thus he becomes an antihero as he fails in his role as a son and a family member and by having sexual relationship with his old friend Kasturi even after her marriage and also with his maid servant. The mother figure is respectable and modest undergoing everlasting suffering. In the article, "Feminism and the Romantic Perspective of the Text" in the book *Critical Responses to Feminism*, Dr. D.S. Kaintura states that:

The gender became a major division between man and woman as the two different biological individuals, who became two social categories of men and women having the different psychological behaviour of their inherited genders. Thus gender became a cultural construct instead of a biological distinction of men and women. And thus the characteristic features of

behaviours were established according to their belief of the discrimination which is not required one, but inherited. (2)

In spite of their being educated modern men still feel superior to women and they try to dominate them. In such a situation love and respect do not find a place in the human relationships. The male dominated Indian society recognizes a woman as a daughter, a sister a wife, a mother and also a goddess. A woman is considered good based on her degree of submission and servitude to her father, brother, husband, sons and almost every other man in the society. This is evident in the character of "Urmila." Nobody understands her including her husband Shyamanand. The sons both Jamun and Burfi try to neglect the responsibility of taking care of their parents. The male characters become antiheroes by not doing their duty as sons. The antiheroes of Chatterjees are "self centered" and they want to enjoy and to live their own life. Indu Saraiya in her review of *The Last Burden* points out that "*The Last Burden* is a infuriating book at the start, but finally quite compelling in its honest appraisal of the harsh realities and erosions facing Indian Middle-class/life today" (35).

The old social and moral stands are distorted by the modern and younger generation. Severe criticism is inevitable in modern literature. Upamanyu Chatterjee belongs to a postwar literary movement and he satirizes the dislocated persons and society by portraying the disgust and despair seen in the antiheroes. Chatterjee has carried sensations and perceptions of the characteristic features of antiheroes in his novels.

Rumina Sethi in the article "All Dressed-up and Nowhere to Go" states about the novel: "Bizarre and bitter, the novel nonetheless takes us away from the routine expressions of many Indian novelists into a relatively unexplored domain of lower middleclass materiality, meanness and avarice" (104). Jamun, antiheroic protagonist considers family ties as an unbearable burden. His love for Kasturi remains only because of his physical needs. For man, woman is an amusement, a pleasure, a company and an essential born. But for women,

a man is the meaning, the justification of her existence. Mahan Ramanam in his article “Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *The Last Burden*” says that the novel “explores that life with a rare linguistic brilliance and wryness” (99).

Way to Go also gives a picture of depressing thoughts about the futility of life. Veturisarman in his review of *Way to Go* says, “In *Way to Go*, Upamanyu views life through the eyes of a father and his two sons whose relationship with each other can be termed as one only when they are not with each other and they dissect sex and human excreta with same degree of amusement, often making the readers wonder if they are spending more time and efforts on the later” (1).

Jamun’s relationship with the servant maid and her son Vaman shows how the modern man is addicted to his physical needs. He continues his relationship with his former lover Kasturi who is now a TV Producer. The entire novel talks about death, loneliness and degradation. Chatterjee describes the kind of life Jamun is leading as:

He felt extremely low, paralyzed – like his father, virtually – by the weight of woe, of purposeless mediocrity and - unable to discipline himself – wondered yet again whatever happened to the sorrow of the loved ones who disappeared one by one. Urmila first and next Shyamanand. Perhaps that sadness returned to where he had for long felt that it rightfully belonged, to the air that we breathed. Or perhaps it could be bequeathed like a house and he was the proud inheritor of both Urmila’s and Shyamanand’s. That was one hell of a lot of sorrow, wasn’t it, for a solitary to bear. As a man of inaction he needed someone else’s arms to carry things through for him. (WTG 245)

Priya Savor in her review of the novel *Way to Go* says that the book, “highlights the fact that every person who seems to have a normal life actually hides a bag full of dirty secrets within” (1). The novel talks about family and the love of father and son.

Chatterjee represents through his characters the modern world where growth and development runs parallel with death, delay and loss of traditional and moral values. Nisha in her article “*Way to Go: A Critical Study of Tradition - Modernity Conflict*” states the present condition:

. . . modernized situation is marked by sudden and unexpected breaks with traditional ways of viewing and interacting with the world. Experimentation and individualism have become virtues, where in the past they were often heartily discouraged. Modernism is set in motion, in one sense, through a series of cultural shocks. Instead of progress and growth, the Modernist intelligentsia sees decay and a growing of alienation of the individual. The machinery of modern society is perceived as impersonal, capitalistic, and antagonistic to the artistic impulse. (6)

Srinivasa Iyengar, in his book *Indian Wiring in English* says that “the novel is a means of expression and it is ultimately born of understanding and love. The novelists understanding (of man, of Nature, of God) has to be as total, and as integral, as possible...”(322).

Chatterjee’s *Weight Loss* is a novel where the protagonist is sex-starved and the portrayal makes the readers to worry about the future of India. Chitrlekha in her review in *The Independent* says that Bhola is a “highly sexed over weight 11 year old boy.” Chatterjee himself said in the NDTV on January 2nd, 2006 about his novel *Weight Loss* that it is about the world that taught him. He becomes a satirist by exposing ills he finds in the society.

Bhola’s journey in the novel is his search for his sexual partners. He did not feel bad or ashamed of his affairs with both men and women. This is a shocking portrayal of India where importance is given only to good things of life. He is a morally and spiritually

degraded person. Nandini Lal in her review “A satyr’s Satire” of *Weight Loss* says that the book is a satire on the society:

It may not be an easy read, however, for readers squeamish about violence, squalor or graphic sex. Upamanyu takes seriously the satirist’s role of exposing society’s ills –he goes a step further and exposes body parts as well. It is a satyr’s satire, after all. The intended result is not titillation, but alternating currents of hilarity and nausea . . . But advances (of a sexual kind) made at the drop of a hat or pant is what this book is about. Bhola chases hideously ugly, disgustingly coarse Titli and her useless husband Moti and she rises up the social ladder from vegetable vendor to nurse to ayah to holistic health spa attendant. Bhola slides down in inverse proportion, compromising his studies, job, marriage and everything else in this pursuit. (7)

At the young age itself, Bhola starts misbehaving with his master and he deceives his parents by not telling about his dismissal from the school and he continues to make them believe that he is going to the school. When one does a mistake, that person feels guilty and becomes afraid. But Bhola does not feel guilty; nor is he afraid. He continues to do the same mistake and he is attracted towards Moti and Titli. If the youth who are supposed to be the backbone of the nation are morally degenerated like Bhola, life would definitely become a threat to our country.

Chatterjee is known for picking up things from the socio-cultural milieu. The unnoticeable matters are thought upon and presented in a new light with his imagination. Almost all Indian writers feel an urge to voice various conditions and realities prevalent in the society. In the fast changing modern world, the ancient norms are no longer observed and people live their life with freedom and this freedom used in excess paves way for an immoral life. As a novelist, Chatterjee records his observations of the society and presents them

before his readers with an aim to ponder over and mould their opinions successfully and tries to create awareness on the type of life they are leading.

Through Bhola and his friend Dosto, Chatterjee tries to reflect the present generation and their attraction towards sex even at their young age. When they were in School, they were attracted towards their teacher Miss. Jeremiah. Bhola in the class “would gaze at her knees and thighs and his skull would swell with lust. Look at me, he would scream silently, show me, let me lick” (WL 15).

His meeting with Sadhu has affected his life totally. Chatterjee portrays Bhola’s change after meeting the Sadhu:

The Sadhu had been both sexy and scary: Bhola dreamed and daydreamed of him for months. His mouth widened to engulf and suck on Bhola’s skull and at the end of the red cord jerked a fat, rigid snake, its sausage tongue twitching in and out like the head of a penis. The Sadhu joined the circus that had been performing nonstop in Bhola’s head for the last several years. Its lead performers included Gopinath; the cook, Anthony, Jeremiah, a couple of others and sometimes even Dosto in his swimming costume. They all uniformly behaved more outrageously than they would have in real life. Each of them had his or her characteristic, typical setting but the stage that Bhola most favoured, on to which all his fantasy lovers eventually drifted, was the rooftop terrace, where, in the company of Gopinath, he had spent some of the most contended evenings in his life. (WL 27)

Chatterjee depicts the strange life of Bhola, whose attitude to most of the people around him depends on their lust worthiness. It starts from his teachers both male and female, roadside Sadhus and servants. He is madly in love with the vegetable vendor Titli and her husband Moti. The last obsession is with Moti which the entire novel talks about. Bhola takes

a wrong and immoral path falling for the wrong people. This shows the moral and spiritual degradation of humans. Bhola decides to give up all that makes sense and worthy and spend his life in the indefatigable pursuit of his sexual fantasies.

Bhola used Moti and Titli for his lust. When Moti comes to know about the sexual relationship between Bhola and Titli, he becomes very angry and shouts at him: “First my wife, then me, sometimes on the same day with the same lips” (277). Alexander and Thirumalai Raja in their article “Black Humour in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *Weight Loss*” say that in this novel “Bhola goes through for all the wrong people” (54).

Bhola’s attraction towards Moti is clearly seen when he arranges job for Moti in Anin’s Gym and Titli as a toilet cleaner. He tries to have Moti to be with him. His another sexual partner is Mrs. Manchanda. Throughout the novel, Bhola is seen with the sexual obsession. He does everything for Moti. When Moti comes to know about Titli, he becomes angry and shot Bhola. After this incident, there is a change in Bhola because he thinks that being alive is a happy one rather than anything and later the birth of his daughter also has changed him a lot. Contemporary man lacks faith in God and fails to respect the culture and traditional norms. This becomes one of the reasons why they lead their life immorally without having any guilty feeling. Chatterjee clearly says:

One’s notion of the good life partly depended of course on one’s religious upbringing. Bhola had had none. He had spent eleven pleasant years in his Jesuit school playing cricket and lusting after diverse male and female teachers. He was Hindu by birth certificate and according to his father, a Brahmin to his toenails. He himself couldn’t have cared less. For him, godhead was mercurial and defined entirely by one’s mood. God was a nice guy on one’s good days and an absolute devil on Mondays . . .

To be nearly killed is the price that one pays for all the fun that one's been having. After all, it could have been worse. One dutifully thanked God that one was still alive. At times in the last few days in the hospital, when he had for the moment to feel contrite, it had seemed to him that he bowed his head not to acknowledge but to ride the punishment, to conserve himself so as to bounce back, not so much repentant as heedless, forgetful. (WL 298)

In the contemporary age the antihero represents exhaustion and chaos. The present antihero is deeply afflicted by existential concerns and nihilism. He is the representative of the contemporary man and knows that there is no way out of life. The antihero has thus become a dominant archetypal character in the contemporary world. He symbolizes universal human condition. The antiheroes studied here are more steeped in existential philosophy. Existentially speaking, each man has freedom to choose and to make himself; he cannot escape responsibilities for his character or deeds.

Identity is the main problem of the antihero. His search is for existential fulfillment. The antiheroes are unable to mediate between the external society and the internal world and between the outer and the inner self. Along with identity another existential question is freedom. Freedom consists of revolt against morality and against the social order.

The antihero fails to rise to idealized expectations. Both Agastya and Jamun fail to rise to their expectations and dreams. They fail in their quest. Thus, more than their achievement, it is their defeat which is frequently emphasized. Nothing reappears in their life, nothing begins or ends. Everything is rooted in the absurd. Enjoying a considerable amount of freedom, they give the illusion of escaping from reality. Generally antiheroes reject the codes and standards of conduct or social behavior formerly held to be essential in civilized society.

Though all the three protagonists Agastya, Jamun and Bhola discussed here may not reflect these states of mind simultaneously yet they personify one or the other of these mental states. Jamun struggles hard and leads his life in isolation. Bhola is obsessed with sex and for this he lost everything in his life. The contemporary novel is concerned with pathos and immorality sums up the experience of the isolated hero. The heroes not only struggle against the world but also they struggle for and against themselves. The heroes in these novels are victims and are to be considered tragic.

All the three antiheroes are angst ridden, suffering from a feeling of dread, anguish and anxiety. They lead a meaningless life, trying to find moral justification for choices they have made. In the twentieth century, the main novelistic character is often an antihero. This is a reversal of the classical hero who is often accompanied by social isolation and a disillusioned view of life. The history of the antihero is a record of his self-degradation and of man's changing awareness of himself.

The problem of Agastya, Jamun and Bhola is essentially one of identity. They seek existential fulfillment and freedom. In its search for identity, it is attended by an acute sense of personal anxiety, a feeling of rage, loss and despair. They undergo a sense of alienation. These antiheroes try to create meaning on their own.

Homelessness and exile are universal features of the contemporary world. Rootlessness, absurdity, alienation, angst and fear are all experienced by antiheroes. Agastya experiences homelessness and exile when he is posted in Madna. He is not able to concentrate on anything and everything becomes a burden to him. He does not like food, accommodation and does not want to mingle with anybody. Jamun also undergoes the same problem. Existentialism emphasizes on individual existence, freedom and choice.

Choice figures prominently as a theme, depicting the reasons why the protagonists turn out to be antiheroes and how they made these choices. Man has freedom to choose. But

these choices have not always turned out to be happy ones. Choice is central to human existence and it is inevitable. Even the refusal to choose is a choice. Freedom of choice entails responsibility. Because all are free to choose their own path, people must accept the risk and responsibility of following their choices wherever it leads. Bhola in *Weight Loss* decides to have Moti in his life and he spends his time and even he loses his life only for his choice he has made. This choice is not a fruitful one. When Moti left him, he lost his peace of mind. He always longs for Moti. Because of this, his family and official life get affected. He suffers because of the choice he has made.

Alienation is a major factor in shaping a person psychologically. Alienation creates a belief that each man is and lives for himself. This attitude often turns out to be negative and destructive for the antiheroes in general. The whole process of life for them is an attempt to change life and their inability to attain it. Agastya undergoes a sense of alienation and this attitude deepens not in finding a reasonable answer to the question as to who he is. Here the problem of dislocation and identity are interconnected. Agastya's life in Madna can be attributed to Sartrean existential conflict. In his three part model of the self, Being-for-itself which incorporates self's action, will and idea; Being-for-others where the self constructs an image of itself as an object; and Being-in-the-world which derives from the consciousness of the world as a sum of possibilities, Sartre delineates the nature of conflicts. All these three are in conflict making Agastya confused over his identity. The dislocation and culture between his present and past makes him restless. Finally he realizes that his longing for the past is just to escape from the present.

These antiheroes suffer from anchorlessness. Agastya, Jamun and Bhola do not lead a purposeful and meaningful life. These three protagonists want to lead their life according to their own wishes without any consideration for anything or anybody.

Each of the antiheroes discussed here in his own way, illustrates rootlessness, trauma, anxiety, dislocation, identity crisis, alienation and chaos. Being an antihero and acknowledging a life of guilt and defeat, the only way left for them to continue existence is to go on in their own way as done by Agastya and Jamun, but Bhola chooses a way out through suicide. Agastya, Jamun and Bhola are not without qualities or passions but these have been rendered valueless in the chaotic and problematic world they inhabit. These three antiheroes represent the unspoken, the buried side of human nature.

These antiheroes seek freedom but are horrified and repelled by it. It leads the antiheroes' selves in the ways of violence and alienation, augmenting its sense of guilt and absurdity and offers an objective standard for evaluating the worth of human action. The antiheroes in the contemporary fiction must be viewed in the perspective of estrangement and desire. The characters of Agastya, Jamun and Bhola represent the antiheroes' qualities – comic and elegiac, revolting and pathetic, and remain rebel, victim and an outsider.

The antihero is thus situated in a paradoxical and contemporary social condition; his life is of the chaotic and problematic condition that is life today. An archetypal figure, the antihero represents the present day confusion and anguish of time, space and destiny. Though these novels are constructed with a solid base in realism, it renews the acceptance of flux and chaos. By presenting the alienated and a social antihero, the opposite of the hero as its protagonists, they demonstrate a protest against traditional themes.

In the contemporary age, the antihero represents exhaustion and chaos. The present antihero is totally afflicted by existential concerns and nihilism. The heroes of Upamanyu Chatterjee are the representatives of the contemporary man and know that there is no way out of it. Thus the antihero has become a major dominant archetypal character in the contemporary society. These characters symbolize the universal human condition. The antiheroes studied here are more steeped in existential philosophy who have the freedom to

choose and to make their own life. They cannot run away from the responsibilities for their character or deeds. Because they are not able to identify themselves with the values of life, they reach a point where they realize that all human beings are essentially alone and death is the only ultimate reality.