



UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S *Fairy Tales At Fifty* : A TALE OF CRIME AND CRUELTY

First writer: Sangeeta

Research Scholar

Department of English and Other Foreign Languages

DSMNRU, Lucknow

Second writer: Dr. Pragya Srivastava

Assistant Professor

Department of English and Other Foreign Languages

DSMNRU, Lucknow

Upamanyu Chatterjee is regarded as one of the best writers in Indian English fiction. His novels are known for the presentation of the rich cultural diversity of India. The varied and vibrant shades of India come alive in his works. His sixth novel, *Fairy Tales at Fifty* (2014) focuses on the criminal instincts of people belonging to different strata of society. This novel begins with the folktale of Angulimala and later on his negativity and bitterness seeps in almost all the major characters of the novel. *Fairy Tales At fifty* is the story of twin brothers, Nirip and Jhabua who meet each other at their fiftieth birthday. When they finally meet it becomes difficult for both of them to accept the truth related with their birth. They share experiences of last fifty years with each other. Their life stories are presented by the novelist as fairy tales. Both brothers share criminal background. Nirip spent fifty years in Pashupati's house. Pashupati was a wolf in the sheep skin because he is a tactful businessman involved in criminal activities. Eventually the dark shadow of his wicked deeds affects his personal life as his family members also develop criminal mentality. Upamanyu Chatterjee sets up the life

of the twin brother Jhabua in rustic background. Jhabua's father Jayadev was a truck driver actively involved in smuggling. His son Jhabua also wanted to become just like his father -truck driver and a criminal. Finally after spending most of his life like a criminal he changes the course of his sinful life and ends up going to Takshasila.

Key words: Bitterness, Crime, Folktales, Mentality, Sinful and Smuggling.

Upamanyu Chatterjee is regarded one of the best writer in English literature. He was born in 1959 in Patna. He received his higher education from Delhi University. He joined the prestigious Indian Administrative Services in 1983. His fiction is replete with the experiences of his own personal and professional life. His writings are mainly concerned with the depiction of Indian culture and customs. He began his writing career in 1988 with his novel *English, August* which was declared best seller of the year. The success of his debut work encouraged him to write more, and he has produced novels, novella and short stories to enrich the treasure trove of Indian English literature. His extraordinary power of observation is witnessed in his first book *English, August*, and its sequel *The Mammaries of Welfare State*. The two novels are based on the condition of bureaucracy in India. His next work *The Last Burden* and its sequel *Way To Go* deals with distractions and attractions of Indian family system. His third novel *The Mammaries of Welfare State* won Sahtiya Akademi award in 2004. He concentrates on Indian youth's psychology in novel *Weight Loss*. He has produced a novel *Fairy Tales At Fifty* in 2014. His novella *The Revenge of Non-Vegetarian* was published in 2018. Presently he retired from Indian Administrative Services in 2018 and is settled in Sri Lanka with his wife.

His sixth novel *Fairy Tales at Fifty* focuses on the theme of criminal mentality of individuals irrespective of their socio-economic status. Upamanyu Chatterjee successfully fuses the Buddhist folktale of Angulimala in the plot of his novel *Fairy Tales at Fifty*. Upamanyu Chatterjee created a fantastic maze of characters in this novel. All the major characters of this novel display a glimpse of Angulimala's criminal aspect. This novel opens with the narration of the folktale of Angulimala by the grandfather of Jhabua. He is the first major character to get influenced by Angulimala. He gets fascinated with the story of Angulimala and dreams to become like him. He also plans to kill people, just like Angulimala. He prepares a list of ten people to kill. He deliberately decides to keep his target lower and kill only ten people on account of his young age. He began his

criminal journey with the murder of his step brother Bakra, second target was his school teacher and further list of victims goes on. As a young boy Jhabua admired Angulimala and renames himself as Anguli. Jhabua does not only replicate Angulimala's criminal aspects but also has his unending thirst for knowledge. In the concluding part of the novel, Anguli (Jhabua) renounced everything and went to Takshasila in search of knowledge. He could have led an easy and indulging criminal life but the craving and curiosity for knowledge led him to Takshasila like Angulimala. In the novel, Upamanyu Chatterjee has justified the analogy between Jhabua and Angulimala. The deft handling of characters by the novelist amazes the readers. The novel revolves round the life of twin brothers Jhabua and Nirip who get separated at the time of their birth. During the course of the novel, they meet each other after fifty years and share their experiences with each other. The folktale of Angulimala narrated at the beginning of the novel, has a lasting impact on the whole plot. Jhabua lived in the rustic surroundings and lacked the conducive environment for his healthy mental development. On the other hand, his brother Nirip enjoyed the city life and got ample opportunities for his intellectual development. The life had been a rollercoaster ride for both the brothers. Jhabua's criminal instincts get intensified in his adolescence when Satte, a truck driver tried to snatch his gold chain gifted to him by his godmother. Jhabua was greatly attached with his gold chain and did not want to share his gold chain with anyone. Satte was attracted by the yellow glitter in the Jhabua's neck. He snatched Jhabua's gifted gold chain. Satte's act instigated Jhabua's anger and without giving a second thought Jhabua ceaselessly stabbed Satte and killed him. He snatched his gold chain from the Satte's dead body. This brutal act of murder completely eliminated his hesitation and guilt. He murdered almost fourteen people in his life after this first attempt.

Upamanyu Chatterjee elaborately described the luxurious lifestyle of Nirip. He got admission in good school. He had great regard for his father and considered him to be decent businessman. Pashupati always projected himself as sober and generous man but actually he belonged to the heinous world of crime. Pashupati always tries his best to hide his criminal connection to his son. Nirip gets to know about his father's profession when he had to finish project in school regarding father's occupation. Nirip started investigating about it. His sister Magnum furnished details about their father's occupation. He got shocked and surprised to know about the reality of his father's life. He always had a sober and decent image about his father and his social status. Upamanyu Chatterjee also highlights the inherent goodness of Nirip's character. Nirip was reluctant to be a part

of his father's illegal business which reveals the basic nature of his character. Upamanyu Chatterjee has effectively painted the contrasts in the life of father and son. Nirip's life was a smooth sail for him but at end of the novel, he turns out to be a weakling who had no guts to remain firm on his own decisions. Despite of his hatred for his father's business he ultimately decides to join it. He surrenders before his father's will and unwillingly enters his father's empire of crime.

Upamanyu Chatterjee carefully outlines the criminal instincts of Pashupati, another important character of the novel. He is portrayed as a loving and caring father but at the same time, he is deeply submerged in criminal activities. As a loving father, he seriously wished his son to remain away from the dark world. His determination reflects the strength of his personality which is completely missing in Nirip because towards the end of the novel, he supports his father's criminal profession. Pashupati is presented as caring father. Despite of his criminal connection, Pashupati always tries his best to save his son from the evil shadow of his wicked acts.

Upamanyu Chatterjee traces the growth of Pashupati as a criminal. He began with the business of skull and human skeleton. Pashupati was an experienced and wily rogue who procured bones from the dead body. Later on, he inaugurated his own hospital to legalize his illegal bone business. His criminal growth reached new heights when Pashupati joined politics. His political approaches paved the way for his immense success in the criminal world. He made all efforts to hide his actual identity from his son. Being a criminal, he did not want his son to become like him. It shows that he himself disliked his profession. He wanted to make his son an honest man. He appreciates honesty despite of his own criminality. He projected himself as a social worker and later on became a politician. His social status allowed him to enjoy a noble esteem.

Upamanyu Chatterjee portrays another criminal father figure in ruler setting through the character of Jayadev. He loved his son Jhabua and narrated Angulimala's story to him. At the very outset of the novel, he is the key figure to introduce Jhabua to the world of crime. He represents Indian rustic criminals in the novel. Upamanyu Chatterjee explores the criminal incidents on the road through the lives of the truck drivers. He highlights the darker side of truck driver's life through the story of father and son-Jayadev and Jhabua respectively. Basically, Jayadev is portrayed as an unemotional smuggler engaged in his transport business to cover up his illegal business.

Upamanyu Chatterjee usually projects the male point of view in his works but this text remarkably explores some glaring examples of feminine criminal aspects. He introduces Magnum, Mansa ma, Shivani and fairy godmother. Magnum and fairy godmother' characters are portrayed in criminal light. Manasa-ma and Shivani extend their full support to their criminal husband. Magnum is the unwanted daughter of Pashupati. He always gave privilege to his son. She highly disliked this attitude of Pashupati. On many occasions, she openly expressed her feelings against this discrimination. Unfortunately, no one showed concern to her. Upamanyu Chatterjee elaborates Magnum's character as of dual gender. In the beginning of the novel, she is introduced as a sister of Nirip. Both brother and sister shared a good bond. Magnum always complained regarding equality between her and Nirip. The discriminated parental treatments between them never overshadowed the brother-sister love for each other. Magnum made plan of Nirip's kidnapping for extracting good ransom from their father. It is quite shocking to see that she planned such serious criminal act along with her brother Nirip. Pashupati never favourably answered her demands therefore, she plotted against him to recover some money for him. Magnum's character throws light on feminine criminal instincts in the novel. Pashupati's partial behaviour left her in pain and she decided to change her sexuality. In the course of the novel, Magnum got her sex changed but that did not change her criminal DNA. Pashupati fixed his marriage but the marriage did not last long as he killed his bride after a heated argument related with his extramarital affair. Pashupati used his superior position to covers up this crime. He fixed Magnum's marriage again to his first bride's younger sister. This whole episode exposes the criminal mentality of family. The reaction of family over murder of bride is also shocking. Instead of regret, they used their power and position not only to pacify the matter but also to remarry the murderer. Upamanyu Chatterjee introduced fairy Godmother as a strong female character. Jayadev and Jhabua visit her house. It is quite evident that she channelized some criminal activity. She is represented as a lady don in the text. Manasa-ma played the role of an adopted mother of Nirip and Jhabua. Shivani is the biological mother of their kids. These two ladies extend their full support to Jayadev and Pashupati. Their wholehearted support further heightens the criminal tendencies of their male counterparts in the novel.

To conclude it can be said that Upamanyu Chatterjee has successfully delineates the vicious characters in the novel, *Fairy Tales at Fifty* and has showcased the criminal aspects recurrent in both higher and lower sections of society. He has deftly analyses the criminal mentality of different genders. Angulimala was just a

character of folktale but Upamanyu Chatterjee brought him alive through his characters of *Fairy Tales at Fifty*. Upamanyu Chatterjee presented a veritable account of the criminal aspects in this work. The novel effectively projects the presence of criminal instincts in both male and females in otherwise patriarchal society of India. He focuses on lower class criminal mindset through Jhabua and Jayadev and keys out high class criminal tactics through Nirip and Pashupati. Both father and son projects themselves as decent educated gentlemen but internally they are deeply stuck in the filthy criminal world always planning and plotting to modernize their criminal business. Thus, Upamanyu Chatterjee's latest novel, *Fairy Tales at Fifty* is a captivating tale of coldblooded cruelty and heinous crime.

WORK CITED

- Chatterjee, Upamanyu. *Fairy Tales at Fifty*. India: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014. Print.
- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. 1999. Bangalore : Prism Book Pvt. Ltd. , 2003. Print.
- Ahmed, Sohail, 'Burden of Family Ties in The Last Burden', *Cyber Literature*, Vol.9, No.1, June, 2002. Print.
- Dass, Veena Noble and Dhawan, R.K. (eds.). *Fiction of the Nineties*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1994. Print.
- Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1990. Print.
- Kripal, Vinay. Introduction. *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s*. Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1990. Print.
- Ravi, P.S. *Modern Indian Fiction: History, Politics and Individual in the Novels of Rushdie, Ghose and Chatterjee*. Delhi: Prestige Books, 2003. Print.
- Sengupta, C. "Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden: The Burden of Family and the Burden of Language*", *Indian Fiction of the Nineties*. R.S. Pathak (ED.) New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997. pp. 29-40. Print.
- Singh, A.K. "Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Agastya: A New Voice's Angst*". *Quest for Identity in Indian English writing Part 1: Fiction*. R.S. Pathak (Ed.) New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1992. pp. 16-17. Print.
- Singh, R.P. "*The Mammaries of the Welfare State: Everyday of Moral Degeneration*", *The Quest*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Dec. 2002. Print.
- Singh, R. P. *The Concept of Anti- Hero in the Novels of Upamanyu Chatterjee*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2010. Print.