

Grotesque Sexual Humour in Upamanyu Chatterjee's Weight Loss

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Abstract: Sexual Relationship was considered as a vital aspect of Indian Society. In modern times the word 'sex' produces very outlandish, sturdy and bitter reactions among Indian people and they are not able to converse it and most even refute it. Due to the lack of adequate education and formal and informal training in this crucial field, sex is conditioned and controlled. Sex is deemed as a veiled, occult phenomenon, something to be embarrassed about. Sex is considered as sin, crime and never to be talked about in public. In India people try to conceal the apparent and the innate aspect of sex and there is scarcely a place where a young person can go to consult. There is a hidden fear in the minds of the Indians as far as their attitude towards sex is considered, and this fear of sex goes to hysterical and creepy levels. This actually causes a lot of anguish, ignorance and social turmoils in subtle ways. Sexuality, thus, remains a taboo and discussing it is detrimental and unholy. The Indian society had been rigid and more orthodox in sexual relationships during earlier times. But, in the present times the Indian society has become free and frank about sexual relationships. People have started to talk and discuss sex openly and many writers opt the sexual theme for their works. There is a shift from sex as something hidden to sex as something inseparable healthier. The modern people of India have been attempting to redefine the sexual vocabulary on their own. Sex has become ordinary and acceptable for modern generations of India. Majority of Indian English writers discuss sex in their works and, Upamanyu Chatterjee is no exception. Chatterjee has used sex in his novels in abundance. This paper makes an attempt to study the grotesque sexual humour prevalent in the pages of *Weight Loss* by Upamanyu Chatterjee.

Index Terms: Humour, Sexual, Taboo, Spiritual, Grotesque

I. INTRODUCTION

"The grotesquery of the sexual and the spiritual pervades the pages of *Weight Loss*...An unrepentant pornographer's bumpy road to salvation is a delight in Upamanyu Chatterjee's new novel", states India Today. *Weight Loss* (2006), Upamanyu Chatterjee's fourth novel focuses on the bizarre life of a sexual aberrant named Bhola. According to Bhola, the protagonist of the novel, sex is a form of debauchery and he manifests it on everybody, from his school teacher to the road side amateur.

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The whole novel deals with the depraved sexual relation which Bhola exhibits right from his teenage. In fact, "His entire life was to be a quest for sex on tap and on payment with females and males of the lower orders" (38). Bhola is keenly aware of his fanatical compulsive condition, always repulsed by his desire, the object of it, and the depths to which it takes him. For him sex with the lower classes is not merely inconvenient; it changes his life, the circles he moves in, the choices he makes.

Weight Loss tells the narrative of an urban youth who is involved in both homosexual and heterosexual activities. He has relationships with both male and female. Through the character of Bhola, Upamanyu Chatterjee has represented sexual degradation, the loss of moral ethics, and the illicit sex in man-woman relationships and corrosion in human relationships. Bhola has four male and four female partners in all his life. A tall, soft, white and almost looks like Kashmiri with hefty hips, Bhola indulges in illicit sexual activities and never feels regret. Initially, Bhola is presented as a fearful child who refuses to show his body to others while other students enjoy swimming during sports period. He is afraid of his impotency. His schoolmates call him as Cleopatra. Bhola is conscious of his allure of sex during his school days. At earlier stage of his life, Bhola gets sexual satisfaction by writing letters to his teachers, whether he is a male or female teacher. Being sexually attracted towards his sports teacher, Anthony, Bhola writes a letter to him.

I am a boy and you are my God. I saw you once and can't get out of my mind or body. I want to worship your strong manliness and feel your great hard buM forever over my face. Please my God meet me on the 13th at 7 pm at the North Gate of Centenary Stadium. I want to be your woman.[1]

From your slave. (10)

It is apparent from this letter that Bhola is fascinated towards homosexuality. At the age of thirteen, Bhola takes interest in his new class teacher Miss. Jeremiah but he simultaneously takes interest in Anthony as well. Thus, Bhola experiences homosexual attraction and heterosexual attraction at the same time. Now he visualizes Jeremiah's new body in his fantasies along with Anthony's. Thus, Bhola experiences strange sexual feelings by writing letters to his teachers, Anthony and Miss Jeremiah.

Bhola is very cognizant about his manliness. He fears about his impotency and *Weight Loss*. In order to regain his manliness and become robust and strong personality, he starts to jog secretly over footpath and across the main street. Bhola never thinks to lead a blessed and virtuous life. He is haunted by sex. When, alone, he

satisfies himself by masturbating. He maintains a grudge against his mother for not appointing any sexy maid servants. He has only one friend in all his life. In fact, he and Dosto do all illegal activities together in the school. Bhola and Dosto change the onomatopoeic Dhuk Dhuk instead of fuck fuck and sing the song loudly and elatedly in school bus, class room and playing field all the day.[2]

Dil kare fuck fuck
Bombay se Baroda tuk
Hum sub tub tuk
Karte rahen fuck fuck hmmm hummm. (66)

Even they change all the onomatopoeic words and make vulgar adaptations of bollywood songs.

One day, during early April, Bhola meets a person called Sadhu on the street, he is aroused sexually. Sadhu holds Bhola's hand to stop him from dodging and asks him why he looks so sad at this young age. To cheer him up, Sadhu twines the cord in his other hand around Bhola's index finger. "Pull it with love in your heart, have pure thoughts and you will see a miracle" (24). Bhola, as a protagonist presents himself as a product of the ambivalent notions, gets a misconception that through the power of Sadhu his power is doubled towards his goal of getting on with sexual relation with others. So Bhola, instantly remembers his first love, Gopinath, the family cook. Bhola had a homosexual relationship with Gopinath when he was only eight years old. He used to watch the movements of Gopinath during cooking a meal. Bhola feels very poignant when he comes to know that his neighbouring friends refer Gopinath as a eunuch. Bhola wants to verify whether Gopinath is a eunuch or not, asks him to remove his clothes. Gopinath is the first man with whom Bhola instigates homosexual relations. Bhola would sit in his cot and watch him slowly change into another being. Gopinath disappears from his life some six months after. He goes to his home on his annual leave to his village and never returns back. He feels very sad as Gopinath vanishes from his life. One day Bhola fantasizes about his visit to the village house of Gopinath in order to, learn music and dance. He fantasizes that they have eloped and are living together happily and he "became his servant's servant and his cook's cook" (31) and one day his father, mother and brother come there and they are horrified to see Bhola in the arms of Gopi.

'Let go of my son instantly!' He shouted at the servants. 'I can't, Sir' retorted Gopisimply, 'for he is my life' and holding Bhola hard till the boy felt that he would stop breathing and a cent to heaven, kissed him full on the lips. Gopi's tongue tested of sweet paan and sweeter mango. In this way, living in the cook's ancestral mud hut in the village, Bhola become diabetic. (31-32)

Though Gopinath has disappeared from his life permanently, but he constantly fantasizes about him. His father all the times recites lines from Manusmriti in order to inculcate moral lessons in his son, "No redemption is prescribed for a man who drinks the Saliva from the lips of the servant woman as is tainted by her breath or begets a son in her" (36). However, Bhola does not pay any attention to the teachings of Manusmriti and continuously hunts for sex tap. Further, in the novel, he takes interest in a vegetable vendor named Titli and her husband named, Moti. The vegetable vendor is a juvenile and pretty woman and her husband also has slim and stout body. Out of his habit, Bhola also writes two love letters to Titli and Moti. Bhola is

not only losing his body weight by eating only vegetables, but also his spiritual weight by touching hands and forearms of the vegetable vendor during their interactions. The thought of sex with Titli or Moti or both together are more explosive in his head than in reality. In short, we can say that during the school time he runs after his teachers, Anthony and Jeremiah, during the afternoon he runs after vendors and at night he passes his time with the reminiscences of his first love, Gopinath.

At the age of sixteen, Bhola is debarred from his school for his immoral activities in the school campus. He is expelled from school for defecating in his sports teacher's room. After being expelled from the school he enters into the new life full of sex, lust, physical hunger etc. He does not regret over his illegal activities. Instead, he wanders in the parks and on the streets during his school time. He doesn't tell his parents about his expulsion. He fills the form as a private candidate and passes his twelfth standard as a private candidate. His past sexual life begins to appeal him. His pusillanimous nature does not permit him to further sexual relationship with Anthony, Jeremiah and others, yet he is haunted by their sexual thoughts. Even, his cowardly personality does not allow him to discuss his sexual itches with anyone. All the time he searches for the vegetable vendors Titli and Moti, who work in the house of Dr. Borkar as a nurse and an assistant, respectively. Bhola daydreams Titli and Moti in their nudity while laying on the terrace unclothed. At this point of time, Bhola meets the third woman called Anin while laying bare on the terrace and masterbating. He hears a voice from across the wall, "Why do you always sleep with your back to me?" (71). Anin watches him masturbate secretly, make love to an old cushion and smoke cigarette. On hearing his name, Anin expresses her feeling, "Ohhh, Such an unsexy name for such a sexy person!" (77). Thereafter, Bhola and Anin begin meeting each other secretly and indulging in sexual activities, two or three times in a week. However, both remain alien to each other on the streets. Upamanyu Chatterjee, thus represents a besmirched contemporary urban society where men and women are free to have intercourse and get involved in illegal sexual activities. The novelist has attracted our attention towards the loss of values in our contemporary society. Instead of a reproductive and functional process, sex has reduced to an act of pleasure, bodily fulfillment. [3]

After completing his twelfth, Bhola takes admission in M.K.M.Z.A.P College because he comes to know that Titli and Moti along with Dr. Borkar live in the same city where this college is situated. That is why Bhola goes there. Again, Bhola's college life is full of immoral and illicit sexual activities. There he meets Mrs. Manchanda, a middle aged woman who is separated from her husband. Being a paying guest of Mrs. Manchanda, Bhola comes very close to Mrs. Manchanda. Initially Bhola feels very intricate to communicate with her and leads a forlorn life in his early college life. He spends all the time doing yoga and jogging in order to lose his weight. On the one hand Bhola does yoga in order to reduce his weight, on the other hand, he does seven types of exercises to

recoup his masculine power. Upamanyu Chatterjee has presented urban youth caught in the whirlpool of being totally removed from spiritual awareness. Even the title of the novel is ironic as it indicates the physical weight loss at the surface level. But at the deeper level the novel is about spiritual weight loss. The novelist does not approve of illegal, immoral, heterosexual and homosexual activities. Instead, he assaults metropolitan youth involved in illicit and immoral sexual activities through the characters of the novel.

Bhola's college life starts with his mania with sex. Bhola finds Titli and Moti there and establishes physical relationship with both the husband and the wife. They are in need of money because of Moti's operation. Taking advantage of their poverty, Bhola agrees to fulfill their demands and in return demands sexual relations with both of them, individually. Having satisfied Bhola sexually, Moti expects money in one installment in order to have medical treatment, but Bhola refuses to pay him in one installment because every installment will ensure another sexual interface with Moti. In this way Bhola relishes many delightful weeks seducing Moti. He pays fifty rupees per encounter. Through their relationship, Upamanyu Chatterjee attacks homosexuality blatantly.

Upamanyu Chatterjee has also presented extra-marital relationship where sex plays a vital role. Titli and Dr. Borkar's, Titli and Bhola's and Bhola and Mrs. Manchanda's relationships are the finest examples of the extra marital relationship. Titli works as a nurse in Dr. Borkar's clinic. However Dr. Borkar takes excessive interest in Titli and utilizes her physically. Titli also lets him exploit her as she needs Dr. Borkar's contact to survive. However, their sexual relationship is a strange one. Titli's description of Dr. Borkar and his sexual stance is rather weird: "...she didn't have to do very much to please the doctor, didn't have to shed her clothes in the cold, had to just stand stare at the wall and maintain her balance while bruised his lips or his groin against some part of her..." (138)

In fact Dr. Borkar is impotent. Still, he takes interest in Titli and seek sexual gratification in his manner. She even permits Dr. Borkar to bruise his organ against some part of her in order to earn livelihood. Bhola goes to Borkar's clinic to hear him talk on sexual power and the mysteries of the human body. In fact, his actual purpose of visiting Borkar's clinic is to have intercourse with Titli and Moti. Thus, Upamanyu Chatterjee presents the utter degradation of sex in the Indian society. Chatterjee has chosen his protagonist, Bhola to represent the modern generation caught up in both heterosexual and homosexual activities.

In the novel, Dr. Borkar considers sex as a medium for the supreme spiritual experiences. According to him, Sex is a means of salvation and redemption. Behind this cosmic life lies the union of male and female, according to Dr. Borkar.

There is an intimate connection between cosmic creation and the primal urge of men and women; and differences are resolved and harmony achieved between the macrocosm and the microcosm through sexual union. The sex act therefore, properly regarded and approached, is a channel for the highest spiritual experience, a means of salvation. (143)

Bhola asks Borkar "Should the loss of semen, Doctor Saab, be construed as weight loss, a good thing, or as essence loss, something bad?" (146) At this Dr. Borkar replies Semen is the quintessence of all manifested things. You will find that the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says: Verily, of created things, earth is the essence; of earth, moisture; of moisture, plants; of plants, flowers; of flowers, fruit; of fruit, man; of man, semen." (147)

Borkar thinks that the retention of semen is a feasible approach for achieving spiritual vigor. Bhola further asks about women. And Dr. Borkar replies

Woman's hips and haunches are the sacrificial ground; the mons veneris the altar, the public hair the kusa grass burnt in the ceremony, the moist labia the soma press that provides the juice of the gods, the yellow vulva the prepared fuel, the red-headed phallus the ember, lust is smoke, penetration the mystic chants, orgasm the living flame, and semen the oblation. (147)

And he further says:

Semen...is believed to have an irresistible adhesive and magnetic power, particularly when it is retained in the body and made the centre of a field of force. The man who desires to attract men and women to himself should first deliberately practice celibacy by concentrating on the power stored in and generated by his unexpended semen" (149)

Thus, Borkar is in favour of man-woman sexual relation only. But, Bhola cannot rise above his indulgence in homosexualities. Bhola's relationship with Moti starts with massaging sessions "Each week when they had met for his massage, he had encouraged Moti to undress a little more and had flattered and touched his slimness. When Moti was completely nude, in April, the massages stopped altogether and Bhola got down to business right away (141)". After every sexual encounter with Moti, Bhola wishes Moti to disappear instantly, "...not return to Bhola's surroundings for a week or two" (141), a period during which he follows the laws of Manu and consequently undertaken penance and fasting from sex:

Should... a man... eat semen, urine or excrement, he should undertake the Painful Vow... eat in the morning for three days, then in the evening for three days...(then) for three days... food that he has not asked for, and for the next three days he should not eat. (141-42)

When the sap in him increased again, he would walk down to the clinic, listen Borkar on sexual power and the mysteries of the human body, make eye contact with Titli and with convoluted simplicity arrange the next meeting with her husband. Thus, Bhola's mind is possessed by the thoughts of Titli and Moti. No doubt he is also aware of the various diseases related to sex. His promiscuous relationship with Titli gives him a disease called herpes. He is aware that the disease is transmitted to him by Titli. Though Bhola feels disgust at the sight of lice moving in the hair of Titli, but his sexual urge and obsession of sexuality make him share bed with Titli. Bhola pays Titli a hundred rupees per encounter when he establishes sexual relationship with her. Even Titli prepares herself by wearing a nice sari and makeup that makes her to look like a prostitute. She shares bed with Bhola in order to earn money. Bhola never shares his things with her. There is

mingling devoid of love and affection. It is lust that brings them together. Both share bed secretly during the afternoon. In fact Titli establishes relationship with Bhola in order to make money because her husband is suffering from an incurable disease and she wants to get her husband operated. She is need of money and thus goes to Bhola stealthily so that her husband does not suspect her. Even Moti is not doubtful about the relationship between his wife and Bhola. He thinks that there is nothing wrong in doing homework in Bhola's room or planning a strategy in peace to convince Dr. Borkar to operate on him.

Both Titli and Moti lead a life of poor quality. Moti signs an agreement and becomes sterilized for just a radio transistor and 200/- rupees in cash. A few years ago their son died of sunstroke and dehydration. Now they want a son, for that he must get back his generating power back that was locked by sterilization operation. Dr. Borkar has been demanding two thousand rupees for restoring the sterilization process. Dr. Borkar reveals his readiness to operate on Moti because,

...he was curious, needled by the itch to see for himself whether a bridled penis would effectively symbolize one of the notions dear to him – namely, the subjugation of the senses and the control of the lower self by the ascetic higher. The passive organ, with a slack cord attached to it, ought to be akin to the austere Shiva's jyahrod, his unstrung bow. (166)

And thus agrees to have a homosexual relation with him. Moti wants Bhola to give the money for the operation. At one such moment, Bhola shamelessly suggests group sex to Moti - Bhola, Moti and Titli – all at one time.

You can have a son through me!' He hissed excitedly to Moti in his room in the chill gloom of an autumn afternoon, 'It's perfect! You in my mouth while I'm in Titli! It's allowed in the texts!' ... You pump away while I gurgle out a sacred hymn or two. C'mon! She'll agree if you order her. You're the master!' (165)

Although, Moti doesn't like the idea, he grins and blushes so much that Bhola fears that blood may begin to seep out of his ears. Bhola's shamelessness is further revealed when he asks Titli about her daughter: "And your daughter, Titli? Where is she? Which of you does she look like? When she grows up, I'll marry her so that all of you can come and stay with me and we'll all sleep together in one enormous bed. Promise?" (165).

Thus, Bhola takes too much advantage of the poverty of Titli and Moti and offers his help craftily. Bhola promises that he could provide a child to them if Moti permit Titli to sleep with him. The moral deprivation is seen in Bhola's promise to marry the daughter of Titli and Moti. In fact, he wants to exploit both Titli and Moti sexually, and also their daughter when she grows up. Thus, through the above examples it is seen that Chatterjee has used his darkly comic vision to depict the poor conditions of Titli and Moti.

Bhola feels little remorse about his relationships. He has four male and four female sex partners, and feels no regret over his illicit sexual relations. He takes satisfaction and delight in his relations with four males and four females:

Between the ages of eighteen and thirtyseven, when he died, Bhola had just eight sexual partners, four women and four males. When he reviewed his life while bleeding to death in The Calm Centre that Anin and Dosto had created,

it pleased him that he had maintained a balance between genders in his choice of lovers. (153)

Bhola justifies his relationship with Titli and her husband Moti by citing extracts from Upanishad and Brahamanas: "Passages from the Brahamanas and the Upanishads speak of coition as a form of sacred rite and draw close parallels between the two" (317). Bhola regards sex as a dignified thing. According to him both homosexual and heterosexual relationships are pious and sacred. Such relationships are indispensable in order to make one's life absolute and perfect. Thus, the novelist Upamanyu Chatterjee uncovers the complex nature of social reality of Indian urban middle class life.

Apart from Titli and Moti, Bhola has one more sex partner, Mrs. Manchanda. He becomes very happy and very excited when she is alone at home, "What a bit of luck, Auntie... I mean, that I turned up to catch you in time, as he shut and bolted the front door firmly behind him (205). Mrs Manchanda is his landlady and a widow.

Sex with Mrs Manchanda became almost impossibly infrequent. In her husband's presence, she had taken to calling him Brother. It never failed to nonplus him, to make him wonder whether privately she thought of him as sisterfucker. (365-66)

He takes her to the bed, embraces her, kisses her full and hard on lips. When sexually aroused both share the bed. Mrs. Manchanda maintains a diary in which she writes the details from the day they started their sexual relationships. She claims that it is Bhola who makes her to take all her clothes off:

His face was warm in the crook of her shoulders. It was he who had coerced her to take all her clothes off when they were together. He didn't really believe that he was her first lover in the two decades since her divorce. And how strange it seems. (214)

Thus, again through the extra-marital relationship of Bhola and Mrs. Manchanda, Chatterjee depicts the married lives of today's generation.

Weight Loss weighs one down, its bleak portrayal of a depraved life only redeemed by Chatterjee's satirical humour. "It's a conflict between the sensual and the spiritual. The book is a requiem for a wasted life, about a person who knows that he is losing out, who makes his choices knowing that he is wrong. Bhola's end is awful, but it's inevitable," says Chatterjee, adding dryly that the perceived bleakness is probably "a fallout of growing old" (Sekhar).

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