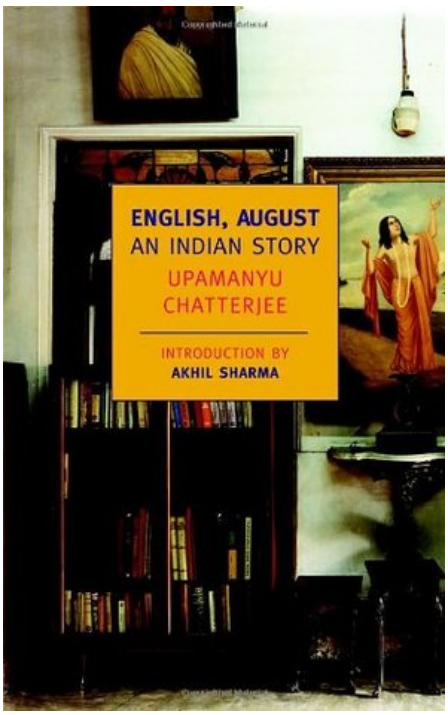

English, August: An Indian Story

Upamanyu Chatterjee , Akhil Sharma (Introduction)

English, August: An Indian Story

Upamanyu Chatterjee , Akhil Sharma (Introduction)

English, August: An Indian Story Upamanyu Chatterjee , Akhil Sharma (Introduction)
Agastya Sen, known to friends by the English name August, is a child of the Indian elite. His friends go to Yale and Harvard. August himself has just landed a prize government job. The job takes him to Madna, “the hottest town in India,” deep in the sticks. There he finds himself surrounded by incompetents and cranks, time wasters, bureaucrats, and crazies. What to do? Get stoned, shirk work, collapse in the heat, stare at the ceiling. Dealing with the locals turns out to be a lot easier for August than living with himself. *English, August* is a comic masterpiece from contemporary India. Like *A Confederacy of Dunces* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, it is both an inspired and hilarious satire and a timeless story of self-discovery.

English, August: An Indian Story Details

Date	:	Published 2006 by New York Review of Books (first published 1988)
ISBN	:	9781590171790
Author	:	Upamanyu Chatterjee , Akhil Sharma (Introduction)
Format	:	Paperback 326 pages
Genre	:	Fiction, Cultural, India, Asian Literature, Indian Literature

From Reader Review English, August: An Indian Story for online ebook

Annette mathews says

DNF

I am not annoyed , but guilty for dragging two of my friends to read this book. One of them finished it and the other well, let us just say i followed her suit .

The story was not going anywhere . I didn't like the language used . It was rude and the lead was just an ordinary guy.There was nothing special about him.Why should i waste my time reading about him when i see the same set of people in my day to day life. He saw women in a different way .No, this book is not my cup of tea and never will be . I was blinded by all the great reviews in Good reads .So much for nothing.Maybe it gets better as it goes. But i don't want to try it .

I wont recommend this book for anyone .

Rukmini says

'How old are you, sir?'
'Twenty-eight.'Agastya was twenty-four, but he was in a lying mood. He also disliked their faces.
'Are you married, sir?' Again that demand that he classify himself. Ahmed leaned forward for each question, neck tensed and head angled with politeness.
'Yes.' He wondered for a second whether he should add 'twice'.
'And your Mrs, sir?' Agarwal's voice dropped at 'Mrs'; in all those months all references to wives were in hushed, almost embarrassed, tones. Agastya never knew why, perhaps because to have a wife meant that one was fucking, which was a dirty thing.
'She's in England. She's English, anyway, but she's gone there for a cancer operation. She has cancer of the breast.' He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to spread out his fingers to show the size of the tumour and then the size of the breast, but he decided to save that for later. Later in his training he told the District Inspector of Land Records that his wife was a Norwegian Muslim.

Agastya Sen ('August' to his school friends) is twenty-four when he drifts into the Indian Administrative Service, mostly because he can't think of anything else he wants to do. The novel describes his year of training in small-town India. Horny, supercilious, and a little too clever for his own good, August spends his time in Madna getting stoned, masturbating constantly and lying inventively about his background.
I couldn't stop laughing through the first half of this book. The langauge is rich and creative; Chatterjee excels in juxtaposing words and phrases in ways that startle laughter out of the reader.
The book is also surprisingly affecting when it describes August's loneliness and disorientation. More than that, it speaks to the identity crisis that many middle-class Indian kids go through at one point or another: when your first language is English and everything around you reminds you of something you've read in a foreign book, how authentic an Indian are you?

Ashish says

Well, this book was everything I didn't expect it to be. I had very little knowledge about the book to begin with other than the fact that it has bern adapted into an acclaimed movie (which now I need to watch). I had no idea it was a stoner novel, but I enjoyed it nonetheless.

The book gets off to a slow start but shapes up beautifully, and some parts are beautiful. Its one of the few Indian novels that I have read that touched upon existentialism, although it does come across as the ramblings of a pothead. If only the author had made it not seem so, I would have loved it even more. Thats doesnt take away from some of the pretty imaginative and sometimes hilarious observations and thoughts of the protagonist.

The overall theme of the book, I would say is about alienation; about the sense of not belonging, about being so far from home, and about being out of the comfort zone. Overall I would say its a pretty honest look into the human mind and how people (atleast some people)think in all its naked glory.

René says

My father used to disappear in the evenings.

After supper, when my mother, brother and I would sit in front of the tv to watch Cheers, Moonlighting, Family Ties, this soft-spoken, mild-mannered Bengali man would take the dog and quietly slip out the kitchen door to spend hours walking in the woods behind our house.

I hope that the magic of those evenings spent in the silence of the forest somehow compensated for living thousands of kilometres from his family in India, in a god-forsaken Canadian hick town freezing his ass off with no friends to speak of. I hope so because he got no gratitude from his own sons, sullen little bastard that I was biding my time in that rural backwoods and looking forward to coming of age in the sophistication of the biggest city I could think of. In retrospect, I suspect that with children out of the picture, he would have gone back to India, or at least to Montreal or Toronto, both of which fostered Bengali communities.

I can only speculate.

He never voiced any regret at the choices he had made that led to the life he led. Like all parents, his inner life was mostly shielded from his children. And so, while I won’t compare him to the character of Agastya in this book (for one, my father never smoked marijuana or thought about sex, ever), that universal, desolate immigrant’s alienation certainly made me think of him while reading it, which is telescopic in a sense because Agastya himself is also thinking of his father during his stay in Madna.

It’s very difficult to articulate exactly what this book elicited in me while reading and make it cohere, so I’ll just throw stuff at the ceiling like semi-cooked pasta and hope some of it sticks, to amuse the guests.

Agastya (August) is an Indian Administrative Service officer in training, who has left the bustling energy of Calcutta for a forlorn existence in Madna, buffeted from one official to the next and trying to conserve some

sense of self. He is unhappy, and lends this unhappiness the credence it warrants.

Afternoons, he spends time with exiles such as himself, drinking whiskey, smoking marijuana and voicing desultory thoughts. His mind wanders, restless, and during sleepless evenings he engages in nightly runs to tire his body and force it to remember what life should feel like. He sits in his room listening to of jazz music on cassette player (the story takes place in the 80's) and reading Marcus Aurelius' Meditations. He suspects that his cook serves him faeces so scrounges meals off his social acquaintances and observes their family dynamics.

But Agastya is not lazy or without ambition. He aspires whole-heartedly to be happy. His senses are keen and he is always on lookout for perspective on his existence, the possibility of a way out, the conclusions of kindred travellers.
I read this book in the mornings. After dropping off my younger girl at school, I walk toward work and stop off every day at a youth hostel in Paris' 19th arrondissement that has an open café. There, seated in a corner with my coffee and book, I hear other languages, mostly European but also some Asian, people come from all over, there's a tingling in the air. It's a good place to read a book like this one, steeped in an sense of passage, of curiosity, of search.

Charu says

The frivolously rude book is written with humor and candor. Cheeky, sarcastic and impregnated with the characters, recognizable to anyone familiar with bureaucracies - sycophant colleagues, overbearing boss, infamous police inspector and unreliable servants makes it convincing and gripping.

The book builds around, Agastya, a half-Bengali, half-Goan guy, who procures a bureaucratic post in the Indian civil service and is posted to a rural village for his training. However, the book doesn't feature anything close to the dignified, aspiring profession of IAS. The protagonist gets his posting in Madna, a place which is a true caricature of any other town in India – oppressive, dusty and being rural devoid of the basic facilities. For most of his stay, he shirks work and feels trapped between the worlds of modernity and tradition, both extremes familiar yet distant at the same time. He finds himself an absolute misfit and incapable of communicating or connecting to the locals or colleagues.

Agastya's lethargy is spent largely in trying to adjust, pondering, smoking pot, locking himself in his stifling room, masturbating, and fantasizing. By the way, yes, there is a fair amount vulgarity that runs throughout the book, but somehow it never feels like the author is going all lowest common denominator on you.

I would not say that the writing is phenomenal, but some of the descriptions would leave you into splits. The story lacks a strong plot but the author has an uncanny ability to pull it through the characters which seems real and engaging - fantastically farcical !!

Honestly, I think "English, August" is a riot. I'd recommend this book for anyone looking for engaging comic novel or going through quarter-life crisis, indecision, dissatisfaction with the working world. It is a read that could be finished in rather few chugs (granted, I took a little longer to finish it off).

Kunal Sen says

Nearly twenty-five years after it was first published, Upamanyu Chatterjee's 'English, August', remains as contemporary, as relevant and as annoyingly brilliant as it was back then, back when it came out of nowhere to light up the literary fiction scene here that was in a post-Rushdie slump.

If one were to ask me to do that obnoxious job of 'summing-up' a literary fiction novel, I would base it more or less, on its old blurb. So 'English, August' is a darkly-comic story of Agastya Sen, a young civil servant who at the age of twenty-four, finds himself posted in the obscure town of Madna—located somewhere in the great Indian hinterland—and stuck in a job that bewilders him and in a place he can't relate to. Slowly, over the course of a year, with his time divided between Marcus Aurelius, masturbation and marijuana, he begins unraveling his country and in the process, discovers himself.

To me, the book—and this is what I fall for the most and every time—is a story about homelessness. Motherless Agastya, with a VVIP father in Governor Sen, is an urbane but lonely child. After passing the civil services, possibly on behest of his father and faced with the responsibilities that are more expected of him, he finds himself caught between two worlds or his three lives, as he describes them in his own words in the book.

The two worlds, comprise his carried-over world of Carlos Suarra, Werner Herzog, Dhrubo, his father and his old, hometown's 'urban and shallow' life (or so he believes) and the new and alien world of Madna, of heat, mosquitoes and corruption. The three lives consist of the professional life in the office, working under Srivastava's surprisingly able guidance; his social life with Sathe, masticated kebabs and other new-found acquaintances. His private, secret life is one of ennui, soft-drugs and reveries of sex.

About Madna, Agastya says when he first finds himself there—"I found myself, dislocated and unhinged, albeit without the compensations of wisdom."

For much of the early part of the book, Agasta Sen can be likened to Josef K in Kafka's 'The Trial', finding himself in a surreal and baffling world that till then he had heard of only in newspapers when something bad happened in them. Madna is a place on the newspaper margins—insignificant and generic on one hand but allegorical and somewhat of a metonym, on the other. And through the prism of this rambling town, Upamanyu paints a composite picture of an India where surprisingly little has changed over the years.

The novel is helmed by a cast of eclectic characters: the major ones include the conscientious Mr. Srivastava, his wife, the jovial and enigmatic Sathe, Agastya's best friend in that straight-from-a-Bruce Robinson movie kind of guy: Dhrubo, the intimidating yet vulnerable Governor Sen; and a whole gamut of minor but quirky characters that make up the third-leads. The characters could also be divided into the originals: Agastya, Sathe, Mr. and Mrs. Srivastava, etc., and the adapted: Krishna, Arjun and Marcus Aurelius

Coming to the book's tone and language, I think the profanity is a shield, like the self-defense mechanism of a hurt child. And you, as a reader, need to get past it, because richer yields await you once you accomplish that. The title itself is a kind of euphemistic take on his name. At several places, we find an increasingly frustrated Agastya describe the genesis of his name to gullible listeners through a hundred elaborations. The oft satirical, postmodern novel never loses its wisdom once, in all its briskness. It never loses that little bit of lurking melancholy, despite all its ironic cynicism, wittiness and repartee. It is transgressive and soulful. Most of the humor is situational but that's only saying half the truth. The humor is essentially derived out of hyperrealism, a skewed, distorted distillation of the plain and baffling world and its ways, through the

dangerously inventive narrator, Agastya (“I lied. Besides, I also disliked their faces.”) So the fact that the files fall with sharp claps or dull thuds, depending on their weight—a passing line of ostensibly little significance—constitute a condemnation for the whole bureaucratic system and its red-tape through the very visual of the humdrum chore and its futility. In another little line about his father: “He read Sanskrit shlokas in the morning and ate corned beef sandwiches in the evening,” he questions the fundamentals of faith and religion and its rituals and the things in between and around. He talks about so many things, does Agastya/Upamanyu. A lesser writer would’ve had Agastya and Mrs. Srivastava embark on a doomed affair. But this is Chatterjee.

His craft bears birthmarks of a genius. How many writers would write something like, ‘Lambent dullness indeed,’ for example? He mixes high-brow and functionality. He combines chic and cheek, cynicism and vulnerability, bleakness and bravado like nobody's business. Embellishment goes with nakedness in his sentences. The book oozes exceptional prose, and then some. Most of his humor, though the humor here is a means and not the end, is outstanding and on par with the best of Bill Waterson’s deadpans. For example, when he imagines the dubious looking green chutney on his plate asking him, ‘Hi, my name is Cholera!’ or when he suspects his cook Vasant of poisoning him, and little, odd things like that.

Of course, then there’s Renu’s letter to Dhrubo; in what is perhaps the crowning glory in the book, Chatterjee, in two and a half pages, gives us a masterclass in writing.

‘English, August’ is essential reading.

Maura Finkelstein says

while possibly the most brilliant book I've encountered about bureaucracy, this novel crashes and burns around page 100, sadly dragging out it's swan song for another 200 pages.
Don't get me wrong: I truly appreciated the humorous story of a young Bengali man who, after enlisting in the Indian Administrative Service, finds his life directed to a small depressing dusty town 500 km from nowhere. How better to construct a backdrop for Sen's long hot days of locking himself in his stifling room, smoking pot, masturbating, and fantasizing about other men's wives? additionally, such lethargy is electrifying in it's ability to reveal the infuriating operations of daily administrative life in rural India, and the apathy of middle aged civil servants. However, I cursed Upamanyu Chatterjee as I forced myself to finish his novel: "English, August" is only worth starting if you are more than happy to put it down half-read.

Seemita says

> *Indecision will be your epitaph.*

As the statement rung in my ear for more minutes than I cared to count, I stared at the mouth that just uttered it. No, it was not Agastya, the hero of this story but his best friend, Dhrubo, a brain-wracked, stoned, cajoled-to-distinguished young man who spent his time between perusing applications and criticising its submitters in an MNC bank in the megalopolitan city of Delhi. What light was he showing to Agastya, the young conqueror of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS as we call it), arguably the creamiest cadre one can land in this country? Apparently, the designations that elongate our names on our visiting cards belie the stark commonality in the ways we validate them.

Meet Agastya Sen. Or simply August (for the Sanskrit-naysayers). A 25-year-old-city-bred-booze-refuged-IAS-entrant-with-a-rural-posting lad. When he lands at Madna, a quintessential small town in the hinterland of rural boundaries, he takes the first bullet on his limbs when he stumbles upon things during his ride from the station to the guest house, witnessed hitherto only in documentary movies: broken roads, parched lands, dilapidated buildings, stripped walls and minimal civic sense. A second bullet lodges into his mind when he takes his first walk into the town: sparse shops, robbed hygiene, comatose wells, defeated fauna and more defeated people. But the third bullet, like the last nail in the coffin, pierces right into his heart upon meeting his department on the first day of reporting to office: comfortable postures, wrinkleless foreheads, carefree laughs, peaceful meals, nonchalant hearings and undaunted indifference.

The entire setup, like an ephemeral nightmare, leaves him with a restless mind. And who has ever conquered that? The atoms of thoughts that bang its surface with undiminished energy transport him to his relaxed, identifiable days in Delhi where along with his friends, he had swung cig-butts in the air and chortled while sucking at empty liquor bottles. He had luxuriated in his Uncle's lush green gardens and ogled on a friend's reckless fantasies. What the hell was he doing in Madna? What administrative overhaul can he bring to this town far beyond its expiry date? This alien space where the monsters looked like him in flesh but possessed the clandestine weapons to drive him mad with some acoustic buzzing of listless existence?

He decides to quit and return to where he belongs. But *where* does he belong?

How many times has it happened that a noxious smell turns aromatic upon discovering its source? How often have we changed our abhorrence to appreciation towards a dress upon knowing its presenter? How frequently a scurry of meaningless scribbling appears inspiring upon finding its writer? How often we gather meaning in bricks upon realizing the homes they have erected?

In Chatterjee's exuberant, supremely humorous, soothingly lyrical and razor-sharp satirical recreation of a coming-of-age journey, one finds that a restless mind is one of the best gifts to have. This discoverer is so ardent in looking for coherence that, like a child scrapping balls of cream from a sandwiched biscuit, he slowly discerns delectable oxymorons of life: mordant humour, truncated ambitions, collective solitude, incomplete success, disturbing peace, refined crudity, contradicting togetherness, inactive thoughts and questionable beliefs. Agastya's evaluation and re-evaluation of life encompasses the tools and revelations which in their omnipresence, accord a uniform identity to all humankind without compromising on their autonomy; much like how a disciplined military block appears on the march, each fighting their independent battles but deploying some common warfare and techniques for the larger objective of thumping victory over the enemy.

Whether Agastya finds his calling in the climax is immaterial because even this final stoppage can be considered only a temporary halt; a halt where his mental transistor catches fleeting signals from unknown territorial towers and continues the tinkering to assign them a spot on his list. This fever of restlessness defies all boundaries and cures and even a divine invocation can be of limited help.

> The mind is restless, Krishna.

Vani says

Upmanyu Chatterjee's English, August is a witty (but in no way pithy!) commentary on the mammoth

apparatus of the Indian bureaucracy with its inefficient babus (officials) and their untrained lackeys (minions, urchins, whatever!) and their lives as seen through the eyes of a young Indian civil servant, Agastya Sen. Though the story has been written some twenty years ago, it is still relevant today as gives a snapshot of that reality which countless millions live in this country every day because of the apathy of senior government officials. In the author's own words: 'eventually he (Agastya Sen) learnt to see the pattern...of how... the passage of a petition or a request for redress (from a petitioner)...moved around from desk to desk, gathering around it, like flesh around a kernel, comment and counter comment, and irrelevant comment, till it was fat enough to be offal for the rats in the office cupboards.' And while the files keep accumulating in government offices, the pattern continues, only the faces change and each year when a new officer joins the service, he is inducted into the ways of this world with cups and cups of tea, followed by useless meetings, desultory conversations by lazy officials, more tea, more discussions and no decisions ever.

At the start of the story, Agastya is sent as a trainee officer to Madna, an 'eternally somnolent town' in the vast Indian hinterland, which, as per his bureaucrat father might prove to be a very 'educative experience' for him. Quite contrary to that, Agastya is soon bored by the pace of the town and depressed by the insipid lives of people that surround him and all that he ends up doing is 'exercise, masturbate, listen to music, read slim books on philosophy and live his secret life' which includes getting entertained by a pet frog or watching lizards on the wall. He feigns falling ill a couple of times to avoid meetings that promise 'slow death' even though scared his mentor might visit him and catch him masturbating or smoking a joint or both. The novel takes the reader through days spent in a town like this, observing the social life of its people, sulking at their lack of motivation, countless hours of brooding on their lifestyle which has little pleasures except scolding one's servants or showing off power to junior officers. It is at best a social commentary, peppered with wry boyish humour that keeps one entertained, even in the absence of a plot. In the author's own words: 'every day in the office I feel as though my head is being raped, like somebody's pushed his cock in through my ears and is moving it around in my brain, mixing his semen in my brain matter' or 'Agastya shook a warm, moist and sticky hand, and wondered if the fat man had been masturbating below the bridge table'.

Eventually, Agastya concludes that this world is way different from what he was a part of. In this world, 'life is a leisurely affair', one in which 'a bullock's tail could flick dung on to you if you weren't careful, in which a sulking district judge could ring you up to tell you that he was not inviting you to dinner, where you hungrily scoured the offices of subordinate district officials'. The story thus chugs along, from one scene to the other, from Sathe to Srivastav to Bajaj to Dr Multani to Vasant to Averys to Shankar to Dhrubo to Pultukaku, each character with its own eccentricities, and somehow the 'wit' never wearing away.

Arun Divakar says

A fresh recruit to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and his friend sit in their car, totally stoned and deliberating the relative merits of being a bureaucrat. Of top importance here is genuine concern of our protagonist's capability in being an efficient administrator. Here is how the conversation goes :

Friend : *Out there in Madna quite a few people are going to ask you what you're doing in the Administrative Service. Because you don't look the role. You look like a porn film actor, thin and kinky, the kind who wears a bra. And a bureaucrat ought to be soft and clean shaven, bespectacled, and if a Tamil Brahmin, given to rapid quoting of rules. I really think you're going to get hazaar fucked.*

Protagonist : *I'd much rather act in a porn film than be a bureaucrat. But I suppose one has to live.*

Friend : *Let's smoke a last one, shall we ?*

It was an excellent introduction to a novel character Agastya Sen who finds his befuddled way into the labyrinth of the administrative hassle of the Indian sub continent. His first posting as the lines above depict is to a place named Madna which is literally like saying it is in the middle of nowhere. The town is like an armpit for a city-bred, sophisticated youngster like Agastya and the government machinery in which he is now a part appears to him as the peak of inefficiency and complacence. Coupled with this is the mounting sense of loneliness and the absurd way in which the occupants of this small town appear to him. They are all caricatures and never fail to have him (or us the readers) cracking up in silent mirth !

Agastya finds his relief in three things : marijuana, masturbation and loneliness. It is a slow slide into insanity for him and the only two things to keep him company are two books : a copy of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the rare moments when his mind is not clouded by the blue smoke of marijuana, he finds intellectual solace in these works. The tale makes you feel an almost overpowering feel of dislocation for not one of the main characters are where they wanted to be in life. August has a huge differentiating factor from all of them in the sense that he has absolutely zero ambition in his life. Now I know someone like this personally and the person lives life each day at a time and never worries about his career at any point. He switches off his mind after office hours and goes home. The end result being that he climbs the steps of the corporate ladder much more easily than all the other rats who run as if their tales are on fire. Agastya is of the same breed for all that he can feel is a disjointed state of mind with the rest of the world. He is quite happy to let the world pass him by and will perhaps wave at the world halfheartedly if pressed to do so. Unfortunately, the world never gives him the peace of mind he so craves. His reflections and mental dialog in times of solitude at points was so engrossing to me personally that I could not discern where my thoughts ended and the character's thoughts began !

The book is extremely hilarious and at many a point had me collapsing in laughter. The sarcastic answers by August to the middle aged colleagues are simply a treat ! But beneath this sheen of comic relief lies a bare-bones look at the stranglehold that bureaucracy has on rural India. The lethargy and inertia of the *Sarkari Babus* (read as officials) is the punching bag on which Chatterjee lands his most powerful blows. As a reader, I however felt that the author did not give corruption among this mass it's due attention in this tale. Lethargy will only win the second prize when compared to how much corruption has rusted the machinery of Governance in India.

I never did know that this was a debut novel for such is the flair with which Chatterjee has written this novel.

One of the best reads in 2012 and very highly recommended.

Pawan Mishra says

I remember this book as a comic masterpiece. I had read it about 18 years ago - yet remember Madna and the protagonist's hilarious flirt with his own life and the surrounding.

Tanuj Solanki says

"The mind is restless, O Krishna"

I couldn't at once decide - in fact, I debated it a lot internally - whether to brand Agastya Sen's story as a 3-star serio-comedy or a 4-star piece of literature. I've finally decided on the latter. There is much variability in the criticism that this book has received. My reasons for placing it where I have are below:

1. It is beautifully written, even after allowing for the fact that it is a first novel. The language is consistently top-class

2. It is an Indian story. Chatterjee mentions this obtusely in the novel: this is not the NRI author pining about India. This is an Indian author writing about the severity of dislocation that we Indians may sometimes feel in our own vast country. The character appear real enough (although the dialogues may sometimes appear to be unreal. But then, so many authors have been excused this.)

3. Although the many sly cultural references appear too cute at times, the main 'literary' ones - Bhagwad Gita and Marcus Aurelius' Meditations - are well used. The ending, with a superbly befitting quote from Marcus Aurelius, can be read many times without losing the pleasure in doing so.

4. Written just seven years after "Midnight's Children", the novel achieves a feat in not trying to ape the stupendous, but language-dependent, humour of Rushdie. Upamanyu has developed his own unique style, a blend of situation and causticity, that may often find the reader clutching his stomach.

5. Although there seem to be many variables floating throughout the novel - Indian bureaucracy, corruption, tribal development, moral turpitude among the ruling, etc. - Upamanyu resists the temptation to get preachy about these. This maturity is particularly appreciable - especially in my personal case - because of how it differs from the senility of Indian writers in Hindi (Case in point is Amritlal Nagar's "Karwat" which was written just three years before this book - and goes on and on about Swami Dayanand and arya Samaj and what not). Upamanyu relates this flotsam of topics to his protagonist's inner world beautifully, and never once does he commit the error of making the making the disillusioned Agastya take a side. Chatterjee classifies himself as an Indian Writer in English here.

But there are also the flaws of the first novel, which I believe a good editor would ahve tighetened a great de inserted only to accentuate the depiction of the dour and dull life of the protagonist. The reader can sometimes have too much of this life, yes. But all in all, the boredom manages not to seep too much, and the ride remains a humorous, enjoyable one.

Karan Bajaj says

My all-time favorite novel. Actually, it's much more than just a book for me, English August inspired me to become a writer. I was living in a village in my sales training with Procter & Gamble and feeling the same sense of utter dislocation that Agastya Sen felt and didn't think a soul in the world would understand exactly how alienated I felt with both my current life and my past life at B-School. Then, I ran into the wise (and wise-guy) Agastya Sen. And suddenly, my world filled up, as I felt truly understood for the first time, making me realize the incredible power of writing in connecting us in this messy, glorious human

experience. This was one that I made my (American) wife read before we got married, to help her understand parts of my 'coming-of-age' in India that would be otherwise difficult to convey. Not sure she appreciated it quite as much, but to me it's a classic.

Rishav Agarwal says

As the title suggests this is a very Indian Story and remains to be so even 30 years after it was first penned. It is heartening as well as uncanny to find having vile, vulgar and vague thoughts is an integral part of any generation and that existential anxiety runs in vein with the incredible experiences (only in Indian can you be shit upon by three different animals while being burnt to a crisp by the midday sun) that sum up our lives making us truly Indian. That being said, I find a lot of semblance between me (and my friends) and the 24 year old August who is clueless about his responsibilities as an civil servant, anxious about wasting his time and yearning to be happy.

Megha says

I am surprised that 'English, August' is not better known. It is well-written and is refreshingly funny. While the most outstanding aspect of this novel is its humor, what I like the best about it is that the story is told in such a genuine voice. For once this is not an NRI author trying to bring forth the truth about "real" India. Chatterjee draws heavily from his own experiences in the Indian administrative service to paint a picture of life in rural India, working of Government offices and bureaucracy in India of 1983. The story centers around a westernized city-boy Augustya who is stranded in a small village with a job he isn't interested in at all. The western influence on young generation and vast difference between urban and rural lives form a part of the theme as well.
There were many instances where I could easily picture the scenes in the book because it was all so familiar, it is a very Indian story.

Plot-wise not a lot seems to happen. But I guess this is a reflection of the situation at hand - just the way things don't seem to progress in government offices responsible for development and nothing seems to change from day-to-day in small villages and towns.

"Most novels progress, but this one simply chronicles an ongoing anomie and spiritual restlessness."- Washington Post.

Chatterjee doesn't let the narrative get dull at all. He presents a satirical and humorous view of the way things function. He introduces us to an array of characters who are not too far from the kind of people one could encounter in real life. And each of them is entertaining in his or her own way. Even if the situation is dull, he effortlessly evokes humor with his wit and play of words. The language perfectly complements the mood of the novel. It can be read multiple times and it still won't grow stale.

Without any doubt, Chatterjee's writing is way ahead of the likes of Adiga, Swarup or Bhagat. I am glad I came across this novel. Way to go Mr. Chatterjee!
I wanted to post some of the funny excerpts from the novel. But there are so many of them, I don't know how to pick. Just read the book...