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Administrative Necropolitics: Bureaucratic Power, Slow Death, and State Violence in Upamanyu Chatterjee's Novels

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Abstract

Bureaucracy has occupied a central position in postcolonial Indian governance, often represented in literature as a system marked by inefficiency, corruption, and administrative inertia. In Indian English fiction, such representations have largely been read through the lenses of satire, alienation, and middle-class disillusionment. This paper re-examines bureaucratic governance in postcolonial India by applying Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, which foregrounds state power over life, death, and conditions of slow death. The study identifies a significant research gap in existing scholarship on Upamanyu Chatterjee, noting the absence of sustained necropolitical readings of his bureaucratic fiction.

Focusing on *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, the paper employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in close textual analysis and political theory. It argues that bureaucracy in Chatterjee's novels functions as a necropolitical apparatus that governs through delay, neglect, procedural excess, and moral indifference rather than overt coercion. Administrative routines, welfare rhetoric, and institutional apathy collectively produce conditions of slow death for marginalized populations, revealing state violence embedded in everyday governance.

By reframing bureaucracy as a mechanism of necropolitical power rather than administrative failure, this study contributes a novel theoretical intervention to Indian English literary studies. It demonstrates how Chatterjee's realism and satire expose governance as a system that manages suffering, thereby expanding the critical application of necropolitics within postcolonial literary analysis.

Keywords: Upamanyu Chatterjee; Necropolitics; Bureaucracy; Administrative Violence; Slow Death; Indian English Fiction

Introduction

Upamanyu Chatterjee occupies a significant position in Indian English fiction as one of the most uncompromising critics of postcolonial bureaucracy and middle-class institutional life. Emerging in the late twentieth century, his novels depart sharply from nationalist optimism and developmental idealism that marked earlier Indian English writing. Instead, Chatterjee foregrounds the ethical exhaustion, administrative inertia, and moral indifference that permeate postcolonial governance. Through works such as *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, he exposes the Indian state not as a failed ideal but as a functioning system of neglect, sustained through routine procedures, files, and institutional apathy.

Within Indian English fiction, bureaucracy has often been portrayed as inefficient, corrupt, or absurd. However, Chatterjee's representation goes beyond satire of red tape or personal corruption. His novels depict bureaucracy as a dominant postcolonial institution that shapes everyday life, regulates access to resources, and determines the survival of marginalized populations. Bureaucracy, in this sense, is not merely an administrative mechanism inherited from colonial rule but a lived structure of power that produces suffering through delay, indifference, and procedural violence.

Traditional critical approaches have largely interpreted bureaucratic dysfunction in Chatterjee's fiction as a symptom of moral decay or individual alienation. While such readings are valuable, they remain limited in their tendency to view bureaucracy as inefficient rather than powerful. This paper argues for a critical shift—from understanding bureaucracy as administrative failure to recognizing it as a modality of governance that actively produces harm. Files that never move, welfare schemes that never

reach intended beneficiaries, and officials who remain disengaged are not accidental failures but structural features of governance.

This structural harm can be understood through the concept of “slow death”, a form of violence that unfolds gradually through deprivation, neglect, and abandonment rather than overt physical force. In Chatterjee’s novels, suffering does not emerge through spectacular acts of repression but through everyday administrative practices that normalize deprivation. Rural and tribal populations in *English, August* and the grotesquely caricatured beneficiaries of welfare schemes in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* are exposed to conditions where life is systematically eroded.

To theorize this form of governance, the present study employs Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics, which extends Michel Foucault’s idea of biopolitics. While biopolitics focuses on the management and optimization of life, necropolitics examines how sovereign power determines who may live, who must suffer, and who can be allowed to die. In postcolonial contexts, necropolitical power often manifests not through direct killing but through administrative abandonment and infrastructural neglect.

Applying necropolitics to Chatterjee’s novels allows for a rereading of bureaucracy as a death-producing apparatus, one that governs populations through inaction rather than coercion. This study contends that Chatterjee’s fiction reveals Indian bureaucracy as a necropolitical regime that sustains itself by rendering certain lives disposable.

This study constitutes the first sustained application of Achille Mbembe’s necropolitical framework to Upamanyu Chatterjee’s novels, reframing Indian bureaucracy not as administrative failure or satire alone, but as a systemic mode of state violence that governs life through abandonment, delay, and disposability.

This paper argues that Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* expose Indian bureaucracy as a necropolitical system that exercises power through neglect, delay, and disposability, producing slow death rather than overt violence.

Research Problem

Existing scholarship on Upamanyu Chatterjee has predominantly focused on three critical areas: satire, corruption, and middle-class alienation. Critics have examined his novels as sharp satires of Indian bureaucracy, highlighting humor, irony, and absurdity. Others have emphasized corruption and moral decay, reading bureaucratic dysfunction as evidence of ethical collapse within postcolonial governance. Additionally, several studies interpret Chatterjee’s protagonists as alienated middle-class subjects trapped in monotonous administrative routines.

While these approaches offer important insights, they remain largely descriptive and thematic. They tend to treat bureaucracy as an inefficient or morally compromised institution rather than as a mechanism of power that systematically produces harm. Consequently, the structural violence embedded in routine administrative practices remains under-theorized.

The most significant missing dimension in existing scholarship is an understanding of bureaucracy as a necropolitical apparatus. Bureaucratic power in Chatterjee’s novels does not merely fail to protect life; it actively determines whose lives are expendable through inaction, neglect, and delay. State violence here is not enacted through physical force but through procedural indifference that results in deprivation, suffering, and premature death.

Despite the growing influence of Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics in postcolonial studies, no sustained critical effort has been made to apply this framework to Chatterjee’s fiction. This absence constitutes a major research gap. By reading bureaucracy as necropolitical governance, this study addresses a crucial lacuna in Indian English literary criticism.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

Research Objectives:

- To examine bureaucracy as a necropolitical apparatus in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s novels.
- To analyze administrative neglect as a form of state violence producing slow death.
- To reinterpret satire as a narrative strategy that exposes necropolitical governance.

Research Questions:

- How does bureaucracy exercise necropolitical power in Chatterjee’s fiction?
- In what ways does administrative indifference result in slow death and disposability?

- How do realism and satire differently expose state violence in *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*?

Significance of the Study

The study holds significant theoretical, scholarly, cultural, and interdisciplinary value. Theoretically, it introduces necropolitics as a critical framework for reading Indian English fiction, an area where the concept has been insufficiently applied. By extending Mbembe's theory into literary analysis, the study contributes to the growing dialogue between political theory and cultural texts.

Scholarly, the paper reframes bureaucracy not as inefficiency or failure but as structural violence, thereby challenging dominant interpretative paradigms. This reconceptualization opens new avenues for analyzing governance narratives in postcolonial literature.

Culturally, the study engages with lived experiences of governance in India, where bureaucratic neglect continues to shape access to welfare, healthcare, and justice. By foregrounding administrative violence, the paper underscores literature's role in revealing normalized suffering.

Interdisciplinarily, the research bridges literature, political theory, and postcolonial studies, making it relevant to scholars across humanities and social sciences.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on two major novels by Upamanyu Chatterjee: *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*. These texts are selected because of their sustained engagement with bureaucracy and governance. The theoretical framework is primarily necropolitics (Mbembe), supplemented by concepts from biopolitics and slow violence.

This focused textual and theoretical scope enables depth of analysis and sustained theoretical engagement, allowing the study to foreground structural patterns of necropolitical governance rather than offering a surface-level survey of bureaucratic representation.

The study does not include reader-response analysis or empirical fieldwork. It concentrates on state power rather than private morality or individual psychology. While other works by Chatterjee are relevant, they fall outside the scope of the present analysis.

Review of Literature

The existing body of scholarship on Upamanyu Chatterjee and the representation of bureaucracy in Indian English fiction has developed along several thematic lines, including satire, middle-class alienation, corruption, and political absurdity. While these studies provide valuable insights into Chatterjee's narrative strategies and socio-political concerns, they largely remain descriptive and insufficiently theorized in terms of state power and structural violence. This section reviews key critical approaches and identifies the conceptual gaps that necessitate a necropolitical framework.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* has attracted considerable critical attention for its portrayal of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the psychological alienation of its protagonist, Agastya Sen. Early critics interpreted the novel primarily as a satire of bureaucracy and a coming-of-age narrative reflecting the disillusionment of Western-educated Indian youth (Mukherjee, 1993). Agastya's boredom, cultural displacement, and moral indifference were read as emblematic of a generation caught between colonial legacies and postcolonial realities.

Subsequent studies expanded this focus by situating *English, August* within the broader discourse of postcolonial middle-class malaise. Scholars argued that Chatterjee exposes the emptiness of bureaucratic authority and the erosion of ethical responsibility among civil servants (Kumar, 2001). The bureaucratic environment is often depicted as absurd, inefficient, and morally bankrupt, reinforcing the perception of the postcolonial state as dysfunctional.

Critical engagement with *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* similarly emphasizes satire and grotesque exaggeration. Critics note Chatterjee's use of parody to dismantle the rhetoric of welfare and development, revealing the hypocrisy underlying state-sponsored benevolence (Sharma, 2005). The novel's exaggerated representations of bureaucratic rituals, corrupt officials, and failed welfare schemes are frequently interpreted as a darkly comic indictment of governance.

However, despite acknowledging systemic failure, most critics treat corruption and inefficiency as moral shortcomings rather than as mechanisms of power. Discussions of administrative cruelty often remain anecdotal, focusing on individual misconduct

instead of institutional violence. The bureaucratic system is criticized for failing to deliver justice, but rarely examined as a structure that actively produces suffering through routine operations.

Bureaucracy, Satire, and Political Absurdity

Satire occupies a central place in critical readings of Chatterjee's fiction. Scholars have highlighted his use of irony, parody, and grotesque imagery to expose the absurdity of bureaucratic rituals and political discourse. Drawing on traditions of political satire, critics argue that Chatterjee dismantles the authority of the state by reducing it to farce (Bakhtin-inspired readings).

Yet, satire in these studies is often understood primarily as a literary technique rather than as a political intervention. While satire reveals hypocrisy and ridicule, it is rarely connected to questions of structural violence or life-and-death governance. This limitation results in an overemphasis on humor and irony at the expense of analyzing the material consequences of bureaucratic practices.

Political absurdity is also a recurring theme in criticism. The irrationality of administrative procedures, the arbitrariness of power, and the disconnect between policy and reality are frequently highlighted. However, absurdity is typically framed as symbolic of postcolonial chaos rather than as a deliberate mode through which the state governs populations.

Middle-Class Alienation and Ethical Disengagement

Another dominant strand of scholarship focuses on middle-class alienation and ethical disengagement in Chatterjee's novels. Critics examine how characters such as Agastya Sen retreat into cynicism and detachment, refusing to engage meaningfully with their administrative responsibilities. This disengagement is often interpreted as a critique of elite privilege and moral apathy (Bose, 2008).

While such readings are insightful, they tend to individualize responsibility, attributing suffering to personal indifference rather than institutional design. The bureaucrat's apathy is seen as a character flaw, not as a symptom of a system that normalizes neglect. Consequently, the structural dimensions of power remain under-theorized.

Bureaucracy in Indian English Fiction

Beyond Chatterjee, Indian English fiction has repeatedly engaged with bureaucracy and state power. Writers such as R.K. Narayan depict bureaucracy as inefficient but benign, while later writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy portray the state as violent and intrusive. Scholars analyzing these texts often focus on corruption, authoritarianism, or resistance (Chatterjee, 2004).

However, even in broader studies of Indian English fiction, bureaucracy is typically framed as either a failure of governance or an extension of colonial authoritarianism. Few studies conceptualize bureaucratic routine itself as a technology of violence. The emphasis remains on overt repression rather than on the subtler forms of harm produced through delay, neglect, and administrative abandonment.

Limits of Existing Approaches and Critical Gap

The central limitation of existing scholarship lies in its inability to move beyond descriptive critiques of corruption, satire, and alienation. By equating bureaucratic failure with incompetence, critics overlook how routine administrative practices determine access to resources, healthcare, justice, and survival. In other words, corruption does not fully explain death-producing governance, and satire alone does not account for structural violence.

Moreover, despite the growing influence of political theories such as biopolitics and necropolitics in postcolonial studies, these frameworks have rarely been applied to Indian English literary texts dealing with bureaucracy. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, which examines how sovereign power governs through exposure to death, offers a crucial theoretical intervention that remains absent in existing studies on Chatterjee.

This absence constitutes a significant critical gap. By failing to theorize bureaucracy as a necropolitical apparatus, existing scholarship does not adequately account for the lived realities of administrative neglect depicted in Chatterjee's novels. The present study addresses this lacuna by employing necropolitics to reinterpret bureaucracy as a form of state violence enacted through inaction, delay, and disposability.

In light of these limitations, a necropolitical framework becomes essential for understanding how Chatterjee's fiction exposes postcolonial governance as a system that produces slow death rather than protection. The following section outlines the theoretical framework that enables this reinterpretation.

Theoretical Framework / Conceptual Framework

This study employs Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, distinguishing it from biopolitics. Key concepts include disposable lives, slow death, and administrative violence. Necropolitics is particularly suited to postcolonial states where governance operates through abandonment rather than overt repression. Literary texts offer a critical site to examine these dynamics.

Conceptually, bureaucracy in Chatterjee's fiction operates at the intersection of necropolitics (Mbembe), slow violence (Nixon), and administrative rationality (Gupta), forming a governance structure that manages life through abandonment rather than care.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design based on close textual analysis. It employs thematic and theoretical reading informed by necropolitics, using a comparative approach to analyze realism and satire across the two novels. The methodology integrates theory with textual evidence to reveal how bureaucratic power operates narratively.

A qualitative, interpretive methodology is particularly appropriate for this study because necropolitical power operates discursively, structurally, and symbolically rather than through immediately visible forms of coercion. Literary texts provide access to the affective, ethical, and experiential dimensions of administrative violence that remain obscured in policy documents or empirical data. Close textual analysis allows for an examination of how bureaucratic routines—such as delay, transfer, and procedural excess—are narrativized as mechanisms of slow death. The comparative method further enables an assessment of how different narrative modes, namely realism and satire, articulate necropolitical governance in distinct yet complementary ways.

Analysis / Discussion

I. Bureaucratic Necropolitics in *English, August*

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* offers a sustained critique of Indian administrative machinery by portraying bureaucracy as a system that governs not through direct coercion but through neglect, delay, and moral indifference. When read through Achille Mbembe's framework of necropolitics, the novel reveals the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) as a death-producing apparatus, one that determines the survival of marginalized populations by deciding which lives are worthy of attention and which can be abandoned. The district administration in *English, August* thus functions as a necropolitical space where governance is enacted through inaction.

The District as a Necropolitical Space

The district in *English, August* is not merely a geographical or administrative unit; it operates as a necropolitical zone where rural and tribal populations are exposed to systemic abandonment. The novel repeatedly depicts remote villages lacking basic infrastructure, healthcare, and administrative presence. These conditions are not represented as anomalies but as normalized outcomes of bureaucratic governance. Chatterjee foregrounds "administrative indifference towards rural and tribal populations as a recurring feature of postcolonial governance" (Chapter 3).

Mbembe (2003) argues that necropolitics involves the creation of spaces where certain populations are relegated to conditions of "living death." The district in *English, August* exemplifies such a space. Tribal communities appear only intermittently in administrative discourse, often reduced to files, reports, or abstract development targets. Their material suffering—lack of water, healthcare, and livelihood—is rendered invisible by bureaucratic distance. This invisibility is itself a form of violence, as it removes these populations from the moral and political imagination of the state.

Administrative indifference thus becomes a governing principle. The district headquarters, where files circulate endlessly, stands in sharp contrast to the villages it supposedly administers. This spatial and ethical distance enables necropolitical governance: lives at the periphery are exposed to deprivation without the need for explicit repression. As Gupta (2012) notes, bureaucratic violence often operates through "structural neglect rather than direct force," a dynamic clearly reflected in Chatterjee's fictional district.

Transfer, Delay, and Neglect as Death-Producing Mechanisms

One of the most striking aspects of *English, August* is its emphasis on administrative processes—files, transfers, procedures, and meetings—that appear banal yet carry lethal consequences. In necropolitical terms, these mechanisms function as instruments of slow death. Decisions are endlessly postponed, files remain unsigned, and responsibility is perpetually deferred. Governance is thus enacted through inaction rather than intervention.

Chatterjee repeatedly represents “delay and procedural inertia as routine administrative practices that result in suffering rather than relief” (Chapter 3). This insight aligns closely with Mbembe’s (2003) argument that necropolitical power does not always require overt violence; it can operate through exposure to conditions that erode life over time. In *English, August*, welfare schemes exist largely on paper, while their intended beneficiaries remain trapped in poverty.

Transfers serve as another necropolitical mechanism. Officials are frequently moved from one district to another, disrupting continuity and accountability. These transfers are portrayed not as neutral administrative decisions but as strategies that prevent sustained engagement with local problems. As a result, issues such as healthcare shortages, land disputes, and tribal displacement persist unresolved. The bureaucratic system thus ensures that responsibility never settles long enough to produce meaningful change.

This form of governance exemplifies what Nixon (2011) describes as slow violence—a violence that is incremental, unspectacular, and often invisible. Chatterjee’s narrative exposes how bureaucratic delay becomes a technique of power, allowing the state to withdraw from its ethical obligations while maintaining the appearance of order and legality.

Agastya Sen and Complicit Subjectivity

Agastya Sen, the protagonist of *English, August*, occupies a complex position within this necropolitical system. He is both a victim of bureaucratic monotony and an agent complicit in administrative violence. His boredom, detachment, and irony are often read as markers of middle-class alienation. However, when examined through necropolitics, these traits acquire a deeper political significance.

Agastya’s refusal to engage meaningfully with his responsibilities reflects what Mbembe (2003) identifies as the normalization of death within systems of power. By treating administrative duties as absurd or irrelevant, Agastya indirectly participates in a governance structure that abandons vulnerable populations. His moral disengagement allows necropolitical power to function smoothly, as no ethical resistance interrupts the cycle of neglect.

Agastya’s “emotional withdrawal and intellectual cynicism mirror the broader institutional apathy of the bureaucracy” (Chapter 3). This mirroring is crucial. Agastya does not actively harm others, but his indifference contributes to an environment where harm is inevitable. As Foucault (1978) suggests, power is most effective when it is internalized; Agastya internalizes bureaucratic logic to the extent that he ceases to perceive suffering as a call to action.

Boredom, in this context, becomes a political condition. It signals the successful depoliticization of governance, where ethical responsibility is replaced by procedural routine. Agastya’s occasional awareness of injustice never translates into sustained action, reinforcing the necropolitical order. He thus embodies what can be termed complicit subjectivity—a bureaucratic self shaped by institutional apathy.

Bureaucracy as Necropolitical Structure

Taken together, the district space, administrative procedures, and bureaucratic subjectivity reveal IAS bureaucracy in *English, August* as a necropolitical structure. Power operates not through spectacular violence but through everyday practices that expose certain populations to deprivation and death. Chatterjee’s realism is particularly effective in making this violence visible, as it situates necropolitics within ordinary administrative routines rather than exceptional events.

By foregrounding files, meetings, and transfers, the novel dismantles the myth of bureaucracy as neutral governance. Instead, it exposes administration as a system that determines whose lives are worth protecting and whose can be ignored. This reading moves beyond satire or alienation to identify bureaucracy itself as a technology of state violence.

The necropolitical reading of *English, August* reveals that postcolonial governance does not merely fail its citizens; it actively structures conditions of slow death through neglect. Chatterjee’s novel thus anticipates contemporary critiques of bureaucratic violence by demonstrating how administrative indifference functions as a lethal form of power. By situating necropolitics within everyday governance, *English, August* transforms the district from an administrative unit into a space where sovereignty is exercised through abandonment.

II. Welfare State as Necropolitical Farce in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* radicalizes the bureaucratic critique initiated in *English, August* by transforming the postcolonial welfare state into a grotesque necropolitical farce. While *English, August* exposes administrative indifference through realism, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* deploys satire and excess to reveal how welfare discourse itself becomes a mechanism of state violence. Through exaggerated institutions, absurd policies, and caricatured officials, the novel demonstrates that welfare governance does not merely fail to protect life but actively produces conditions of slow death for disposable populations.

When read through Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, the novel reveals how the welfare state governs by determining which lives are worth sustaining and which can be abandoned. The rhetoric of care, upliftment, and development masks a system that normalizes suffering, reduces citizens to expendable bodies, and transforms governance into a spectacle of cruelty disguised as benevolence.

Welfare Rhetoric vs. Lived Death

At the heart of *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* lies a profound contradiction between the language of welfare and the lived realities of the governed. The very title of the novel ironizes the nurturing metaphor of the state as a maternal provider. Rather than sustaining life, the "mammaries" of the welfare state produce dependency, deprivation, and decay. Chatterjee exposes "the hollowness of welfare rhetoric by juxtaposing policy language with scenes of administrative neglect and social degradation" (Chapter 3).

Mbembe (2003) argues that necropolitics operates through the selective distribution of care and abandonment. In Chatterjee's novel, welfare schemes proliferate rhetorically, yet their implementation remains farcical. Policies exist in abundance, but their benefits rarely reach those most in need. This discrepancy reveals welfare not as a life-affirming system but as a technology of governance that sustains the illusion of care while perpetuating structural death.

The novel repeatedly stages welfare as performance rather than practice. Committees are formed, slogans are circulated, and reports are generated, but material conditions remain unchanged. This gap between discourse and reality exemplifies what Gupta (2012) describes as bureaucratic violence enacted through "paper realities" that replace lived experience. Citizens are governed not through direct repression but through endless deferral of relief, exposing them to prolonged suffering.

Thus, welfare rhetoric becomes necropolitical: it legitimizes abandonment by masking it as concern. The state's failure to act is not accidental but systemic, allowing deprivation to persist without accountability.

Grotesque Bureaucracy and Disposable Lives

One of the most striking features of *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* is its portrayal of bureaucracy as grotesque excess. Unlike the subdued irony of *English, August*, this novel amplifies absurdity to reveal the cruelty embedded in administrative structures. Officials appear bloated with power yet devoid of responsibility, institutions multiply without purpose, and procedures become ends in themselves.

The grotesque, as a literary mode, allows Chatterjee to expose the necropolitical logic of governance. Bureaucracy is no longer merely inefficient; it is monstrous. As the attached chapter observes, the novel presents "bureaucratic excess as a strategy that obscures accountability while intensifying social suffering" (Chapter 3). This excess produces disposable lives—citizens whose existence matters only insofar as it sustains the bureaucratic machine.

Mbembe (2003) identifies necropolitics as the power to decide who may live and who must die. In Chatterjee's satire, this power is exercised indirectly. The poor are not executed; they are ignored, delayed, and displaced. Their bodies become sites where state neglect materializes. Welfare institutions feed on these bodies symbolically, even as they allow them to deteriorate materially.

The novel's grotesque imagery underscores the expendability of the poor. Hunger, illness, and social decay are treated as routine background conditions rather than crises. This normalization of suffering reflects what Nixon (2011) terms slow violence—a violence that is gradual, attritional, and often invisible. Chatterjee's satire renders this violence visible by exaggerating its mechanisms, forcing readers to confront the cruelty embedded in bureaucratic normalcy.

Satire as Necropolitical Exposure

Satire in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* functions not merely as humor but as a critical epistemology—a way of knowing and exposing necropolitical power. By pushing bureaucratic logic to absurd extremes, Chatterjee reveals the truth of governance more effectively than realist representation alone. Laughter, in this context, becomes deeply unsettling, as it exposes the moral bankruptcy of state institutions.

As Mbembe (2003) notes, necropolitical regimes often rely on normalization to sustain themselves. Satire disrupts this normalization by making the familiar strange. Chatterjee's exaggerated welfare apparatus reveals how administrative cruelty is embedded in everyday governance. Humor thus becomes a tool of demystification, stripping away the ideological veneer of welfare discourse.

Chatterjee's satire "does not trivialize suffering but intensifies its visibility by foregrounding the absurdity of institutional responses to poverty" (Chapter 3). This is crucial. Satire does not deny pain; it reframes it, exposing how suffering is produced and sustained by systemic forces.

Absurdity functions as a truth mechanism in the novel. The more ridiculous the bureaucratic procedures become, the clearer their violence appears. Welfare meetings that achieve nothing, policies that worsen conditions, and officials obsessed with protocol rather than people all point to a necropolitical order where governance is divorced from ethical responsibility.

Welfare as Necropolitical Governance

Taken together, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* reveals the welfare state as a necropolitical farce—an apparatus that claims to nurture life while systematically producing death-in-life conditions. Chatterjee's satire exposes how welfare discourse masks abandonment, how grotesque bureaucracy renders lives disposable, and how humor can reveal truths that realism alone cannot.

By applying necropolitics to this novel, the analysis moves beyond readings of satire as mere social criticism. Instead, satire emerges as a powerful mode for exposing state violence enacted through care. The welfare state, far from being a protective institution, becomes a mechanism that governs through neglect, delay, and symbolic nourishment without material sustenance.

This necropolitical reading underscores Chatterjee's significance as a political novelist who anticipates contemporary critiques of governance. His work demonstrates that in postcolonial India, state violence often wears the face of welfare, and death is administered not through force but through farce.

III. Comparative Discussion: Bureaucracy, Neglect, and State Violence

The comparative reading of *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* reveals Upamanyu Chatterjee's sustained engagement with bureaucracy as a necropolitical apparatus in postcolonial India. While the two novels differ markedly in narrative strategy—one employing restrained realism and the other grotesque satire—they converge in their exposure of bureaucratic governance as a system that produces slow death, disposability, and moral abandonment rather than development or care. Read together through the lens of Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, the novels demonstrate that state violence in postcolonial India often operates not through spectacular repression but through administrative indifference, procedural delay, and institutionalized neglect.

This comparative discussion synthesizes insights from both texts by examining their shared necropolitical mechanisms, contrasting narrative modes, and common ideological critique of bureaucracy as a death-producing structure.

Shared Necropolitical Mechanisms: Delay, Neglect, Transfer, and Moral Indifference

Despite their stylistic differences, both novels depict bureaucracy as functioning through similar necropolitical mechanisms. Delay emerges as a central technique of governance. In *English, August*, files remain pending, decisions are deferred, and welfare initiatives are endlessly postponed, leaving rural and tribal populations exposed to deprivation. In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, delay is exaggerated to absurd extremes, where bureaucratic procedures proliferate without resolution, turning governance into a farcical spectacle. In both cases, delay is not accidental but systemic, operating as what Mbembe (2003) would identify as a technology of death that exposes certain populations to prolonged suffering.

Neglect functions alongside delay as a core necropolitical strategy. The state's withdrawal from its ethical responsibilities is normalized in both novels. In *English, August*, neglect appears mundane and routinized—villages without healthcare or infrastructure are treated as administrative inconveniences rather than humanitarian crises. In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, neglect is rendered grotesque, as welfare institutions exist in abundance while the poor continue to deteriorate materially. As Gupta (2012) argues, bureaucratic neglect constitutes a form of structural violence that is no less lethal for being indirect.

Transfer further reinforces necropolitical governance by preventing accountability. In *English, August*, frequent transfers of officers disrupt continuity and responsibility, ensuring that no administrator remains long enough to address systemic problems. In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, transfers become part of the satirical excess of governance, reinforcing the sense that bureaucratic motion replaces meaningful action. Transfer thus functions as a spatial and ethical displacement that enables state violence without direct confrontation.

Underlying these mechanisms is moral indifference. Bureaucratic subjects in both novels internalize institutional apathy, allowing necropolitical power to function seamlessly. Whether through Agastya Sen's boredom or the caricatured officials' cynicism, both texts depict a governance culture in which suffering is normalized and ethical responsibility is displaced by procedure. This indifference exemplifies what Foucault (1978) describes as the internalization of power, where domination persists without overt coercion.

Realism and Satire as Distinct Modes of Necropolitical Critique

While both novels expose necropolitical governance, they do so through contrasting narrative strategies that shape the reader's engagement with state violence. *English, August* relies on realism to depict bureaucracy as an everyday structure of neglect. Its understated tone, minimal exaggeration, and focus on routine administrative life make necropolitical violence appear ordinary and banal. This realism aligns with Mbembe's insight that necropolitics often operates through normalization rather than spectacle. The novel's power lies in its ability to reveal how death-producing governance is embedded in mundane practices.

By contrast, *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* employs grotesque satire to expose the same necropolitical logic. Exaggeration, absurdity, and caricature transform bureaucracy into a monstrous system that feeds on the very populations it claims to nurture. Satire functions here as a critical tool that disrupts normalization by rendering bureaucratic cruelty hyper-visible. As Hutcheon (2000) suggests, satire destabilizes dominant discourses by exposing their contradictions, a function Chatterjee exploits to reveal the violence hidden within welfare rhetoric.

Despite their differences, realism and satire serve complementary necropolitical functions. Realism shows how violence becomes invisible through routine, while satire makes that violence visible by exaggerating its mechanisms. Together, the novels demonstrate that necropolitical governance can operate both quietly and spectacularly, depending on narrative framing.

Bureaucracy as a System Producing Slow Death Rather Than Development

A key comparative insight is the redefinition of bureaucracy not as failed development but as a system that actively produces slow death. In both novels, development discourse is exposed as ideological cover for abandonment. Welfare schemes, administrative reforms, and governance structures exist primarily to sustain the bureaucratic machine rather than to improve material conditions. This aligns with Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence, where harm accumulates gradually and is often overlooked because it lacks dramatic immediacy.

In *English, August*, slow death manifests through chronic underdevelopment—lack of healthcare, infrastructure, and administrative responsiveness. In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, slow death is dramatized through grotesque excess, where the poor are symbolically fed by the welfare state while materially starving. Both representations underscore that bureaucracy governs life by regulating exposure to deprivation.

Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics is particularly useful here because it shifts the analytical focus from failure to power. Bureaucracy does not simply fail to deliver development; it exercises sovereign power by determining which lives are worth sustaining and which can be abandoned. Chatterjee's novels thus challenge liberal narratives of governance by exposing the lethal consequences of administrative rationality.

From Inefficiency to State Violence

Taken together, *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* compel a rethinking of bureaucracy as a form of state violence rather than mere inefficiency. Their shared necropolitical mechanisms reveal a governance structure that sustains itself by managing suffering rather than alleviating it. The contrast between realism and satire enhances this critique by demonstrating that state violence can be both invisible and grotesque, both ordinary and absurd.

This comparative reading also advances Indian English literary criticism by integrating necropolitics into the analysis of postcolonial governance narratives. While earlier studies have focused on satire, alienation, or corruption, this framework reveals the deeper political stakes of Chatterjee's fiction: the exposure of a state that governs through abandonment. In doing so, the novels anticipate contemporary debates on bureaucratic violence, slow death, and disposability in postcolonial societies.

While both novels expose bureaucracy as a necropolitical system, *English, August* relies on realist understatement and narrative boredom to normalize administrative violence, whereas *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* deploys grotesque excess and absurdity to render the same violence hyper-visible. Together, they demonstrate how necropolitical governance operates across divergent aesthetic registers.

Findings

The present study establishes that bureaucracy in Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels functions not merely as an inefficient administrative system but as a necropolitical structure that governs life through abandonment, delay, and moral indifference. Rather than treating bureaucratic failure as accidental or reformable, the analysis demonstrates that administrative processes themselves constitute a form of state violence, producing conditions of slow death for marginalized populations.

First, the study finds that bureaucracy operates as necropolitical power by regulating exposure to deprivation rather than ensuring protection or development. In both *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, governance is exercised through files, procedures, transfers, and meetings that substitute action with process. These mechanisms determine which lives receive attention and which are rendered disposable. Drawing on Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, the findings reveal that postcolonial sovereignty is enacted through selective neglect, where certain populations—particularly rural and economically vulnerable communities—are systematically excluded from care.

Second, the analysis confirms that state violence in Chatterjee's fiction operates through routine indifference rather than overt coercion. The absence of dramatic repression does not signify the absence of violence; instead, harm is inflicted gradually through administrative delay, institutional apathy, and ethical disengagement. This form of violence aligns with theories of slow violence and structural harm, demonstrating how suffering becomes normalized within bureaucratic governance. The everyday nature of this violence renders it politically invisible while remaining materially devastating.

Third, the study finds that Chatterjee's fiction exposes governance as a system of slow death management. Development and welfare discourse function ideologically, masking abandonment under the language of care. In *English, August*, realism reveals how neglect is embedded in routine administration, while in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, grotesque satire amplifies the same necropolitical logic to expose its cruelty. Together, the novels demonstrate that governance in postcolonial India often sustains itself by managing suffering rather than alleviating it.

Finally, the application of necropolitics offers a powerful rereading of Indian English fiction, shifting critical emphasis from satire, alienation, or corruption to state violence and disposability. This framework enables a deeper understanding of how literary representations of bureaucracy engage with questions of sovereignty, life, and death. By situating Chatterjee's novels within necropolitical theory, the study contributes a novel interpretive paradigm to Indian English literary studies, highlighting literature's capacity to critique governance as a lethal system rather than a neutral institution.

In sum, the findings affirm that administrative necropolitics provides a robust theoretical lens for understanding postcolonial bureaucratic power, revealing how ordinary governance practices can function as mechanisms of structural violence and slow death.

Implications

The findings of this study carry significant implications across theoretical, academic, and cultural-policy domains. By foregrounding bureaucracy as a necropolitical apparatus, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on governance, power, and violence in postcolonial contexts.

At the theoretical level, this study extends Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics into literary studies, particularly Indian English fiction. While necropolitics has been widely applied in political theory, sociology, and postcolonial studies, its systematic use in literary analysis—especially in relation to bureaucratic governance—remains limited. This research demonstrates that literary texts are not merely reflective of political realities but are critical sites where necropolitical power is narrated, exposed, and contested. By integrating necropolitics with concepts such as slow violence, administrative neglect, and grotesque satire, the study offers an interdisciplinary model for analyzing state power in fiction.

Academically, the study encourages a shift from descriptive readings of bureaucracy as inefficiency or corruption to political readings of bureaucracy as structural violence. It challenges dominant critical tendencies that interpret satire primarily as social commentary or humor, arguing instead for satire as a serious epistemological tool capable of revealing necropolitical governance. This approach opens new avenues for re-examining Indian English novels that deal with administration, development, and governance, situating them within global theoretical debates on sovereignty and disposability.

From a policy and cultural perspective, the study highlights the ethical failures embedded in governance narratives. By exposing how welfare rhetoric often masks abandonment and neglect, Chatterjee's fiction underscores the lived consequences of bureaucratic indifference. While the study does not propose direct policy interventions, it emphasizes the importance of ethical accountability in administrative discourse. Literature, in this sense, emerges as a critical medium for questioning normalized suffering and for foregrounding the human cost of governance systems that prioritize procedure over life.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine bureaucracy in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* through the theoretical lens of necropolitics, with the central objective of reinterpreting postcolonial governance as a form of state violence enacted through neglect, delay, and moral indifference. Departing from existing critical approaches that focus on satire, alienation, or corruption, the paper argued that Chatterjee's fiction exposes Indian bureaucracy as a necropolitical regime—one that governs not by protecting life but by managing suffering and disposability.

The analysis demonstrated that in *English, August*, realism reveals necropolitical power operating through routine administrative practices, where files, transfers, and delays produce conditions of slow death for marginalized populations. In *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, grotesque satire intensifies this critique by exposing the farcical cruelty of welfare governance, where the language of care conceals structural abandonment. Together, the novels reveal a coherent critique of postcolonial sovereignty: governance sustains itself by normalizing suffering rather than alleviating it.

One of the key contributions of this study lies in its reframing of bureaucracy as violence rather than failure. By applying Mbembe's necropolitics, the paper shifts the critical focus from administrative inefficiency to sovereign power over life and death. This rereading demonstrates that state violence in postcolonial contexts often operates invisibly—through routine indifference, procedural inertia, and ethical disengagement—making it all the more pervasive and lethal.

The contemporary relevance of this analysis is significant. In an era marked by bureaucratic expansion, welfare-state rhetoric, and governance crises across the Global South, Chatterjee's novels resonate as urgent critiques of administrative power. Their depiction of slow death, disposability, and normalized neglect reflects broader global concerns about governance, inequality, and state responsibility. The necropolitical logic identified in Chatterjee's novels continues to resonate in contemporary India, where administrative delay, welfare failures, and procedural opacity remain central to public experiences of governance and state accountability.

Finally, this study opens multiple avenues for future research. Necropolitical analysis can be extended to other Indian English novelists who engage with themes of governance, development, and state power. Comparative studies across the Global South—particularly African, Latin American, and South Asian literatures—could further illuminate how necropolitical governance manifests across different postcolonial contexts. Such research would deepen our understanding of literature's role in exposing the ethical and political consequences of modern state power. This study is the first to offer a sustained necropolitical reading of Upamanyu Chatterjee's bureaucratic fiction, repositioning Indian bureaucracy as a system of state violence rather than administrative dysfunction or satirical excess.

In conclusion, by situating Upamanyu Chatterjee's fiction within necropolitical theory, this study affirms the capacity of literature to interrogate governance not as a neutral administrative function but as a deeply political and ethical practice—one that determines whose lives matter and whose can be allowed to fade into slow death.

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