

THE PIONEER - FRIDAY JUN 30, 1995

Another fast-paced and gripping film is English, August based on Upamanyu Chatterjee's novel. It captures in acute detail the turning point in the life of a young civil servant who comes from a well-to-do, urban background. Like others who come from this milieu, he speaks and thinks in English. His father is the Governor of West Bengal and his mother a Goan Christian. He listens to Bob Dylan, rock and jazz. He reads Marcus Aurelius till someone introduces him to the Bhagavad Gita, but continues to read Aurelius.

August (Agastya), as part of his training in the Indian Administrative Service is posted in Madna, an obscure small town in Andhra Pradesh. The film captures the culture shock that he faces when arrives to live in Madna in a room with lurid bright blue walls. His companions are his books, cassettes, mosquitoes and after a while, a huge frog.

One by one, those he encounters become permanent fixtures in his life: Ravi Srivastava, the collector and district magistrate of Madna, his wife, Malti who is famous for her black bras, Govind Sathe, the cynical cartoonist, Kumar, the Superintendent of Police, who has a porn video library, Laxman Shankar, the drunken deputy engineer whose passions are singing and astrology, Mandy, his acquaintance with an American accent who is posted as a forest officer in the vicinity and Vasant, his lousy cook.

Stuck in a haze of meetings with indifferent Government officials, grappling with the local language life overwhelms him and fills him with a sense of inadequacy. It makes him question his life and he decides to take a year off from work. Irreverent, amusing and sensitive, the film shows how India exists at all levels, in chaotic harmony.