



## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN VIKRAM CHANDRA'S FICTION

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to account for the Indian English fiction. The main focus will be placed on the narrative techniques in Vikram Chandra's Fiction, who lives between Bombay and Washington. He is a real master when it comes to fictionalized oral storytelling, echoing the traditional Indian epics- the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is no wonder, then, that Chandra would define himself as a storyteller. The generic shaping of a text tends to voice the ontological conception of literature that an author has, as it is the case with Chandra's transcultural narrative. Narrative Techniques like postcolonial subjectivity, intertextuality masical realism, narratology, postmodernism, meta narration, feminism, epic features are depicted in his works Red Earth and pouring rain (1995), Love and Longing in Bombay (1997), and Sacred Games (2006).

**KEY WORDS:** Indian English fiction, narrative techniques, postcolonial subjectivity, narratology, intertextuality, postmodernism, metanarration, feminism

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### INTRODUCTION

The story of Indian English novel is really the story of a changing India. There was a time when education was a rare opportunity and speaking English was unnecessary. Though foreign is its origin, English has been adopted in India as a language of education and literary expression besides being an important medium of communication amongst the people of various regions. The beginning of Indian literature in English is traced to the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, by which time English education was more or less firmly established in the three major centers of British power in India, Calcutta madras Bombay.

Not much surprising enough, Indian literature in English and its historical evolvement had happened alongside the consolidation of British

imperialism in India. There however exists a variety of opinion about the first definitive Indian text in English, although critics come to the agreement that history of Indian English literature dates back to at least the early 19th century. The 1990's May aptly be described as the decade of the fiction. Certainly there are more novelists publishing now than ever before. They are treated as the new generation of Indian English writers like Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu chatterjee, RK. Narayan, George Orwell, Rudyard Kipling, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sarojinidau, Mulkaraj Anand, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Ministry, Firdaus Kanga, Farooq Dhondy, Anurag Mather, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Rani Dharkar, Manju Sarma, Vikram Selth, Vikram Chandra and others.

The main focus will be placed on Vikram Chandra's narrative techniques particularly in his

fiction. Vikram Chandra was born in New Delhi. He completed most of his secondary education at Mayo College, a boarding school in Ajmer, Rajasthan. After a short stay at St. Xavier's College in Mumbai, Vikram came to the United States as an undergraduate student. He then attended the Film School at Columbia University in New York. In the Columbia library by chance, he happened upon the autobiography of Colonel James "Sikner, a legendary nineteenth century soldier, born of an Indian mother and a British Father. This book was to become the inspiration for Vikram's novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995). He left film school halfway to begin work on the novel. *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* was written over several years at the writing programs at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Houston. Vikram worked with John Barth at Johns Hopkins and with Donald Barthelme at the University of Houston, he obtained an MA at Johns Hopkins and an MFA at the University of Houston. A collection of short stories, *Love and Longing in Bombay*, was published in 1997 by Penguin India in India; by Faber and Faber in the UK; and by Little, Brown in the United States. *Love and Longing in Bombay* (1997) won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book (Eurasia region); was short listed for the Guardian Fiction Prize; and was included in "Notable books of 1997" by the New York Times. A novel, *Sacred Games*, was published in 2006 by Penguin India in India; and by Faber and Faber in the UK. It will be published in January 2007 in the United States by Harper Collins.

#### **Narrative techniques**

Narrative Technique is the method of telling a story effectively. It may be defined as an account of a sequence of events. Realistic fiction narrates events typical of life as it is. The novelist at times assumes the form of an omnipresent narrator there by establishing a close link with characters and situations through his point of view, consequently, while studying narrative technique of a particular novelist, one must view how form and content are intermixed. Mark Schorer in *Technique as Dictionary* says,

...Technique is means by which the writer's experience, which in this subject matter compels him to attend to it, the technique is only means...he

is discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning and finally evaluating it (387)

The art of narrative is a highly aesthetic enterprise. There are a number of aesthetic elements that typically interact in well-developed stories. Such elements include the essential idea of structure, with identifiable beginning, middle and ends, focus on temporality, namely, retention the past, attention to present action and future anticipation; and a substantial focus on characters and characterization. The novel is often enmeshed in intertextuality, with copious connection, references, allusions, similarities and parallels.

The narrative techniques in Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* is taken up for discussion. Chandra's earlier short story collection *Love and Longing in Bombay* echoes throughout *Sacred Games*. The character worked as the well-respected handyman of a pickle factory, an unusual position, which further develops Chandra's engagement with the city by narrating a plot full of intrigue, melodrama, sex and violence that can rival any late Victorian novel or Bollywood film. The main focal point is the individual's negotiation of his role, space and place in this often hostile urban environment, which Chandra explores on all levels of Bombay movie starlet, the rich businessman to the airline stewardess, the corrupt politician to the high court judge, the gang lord to the airline stewardess, the corrupt politician to the high court judge, the gang lord to the spiritual guru, and the hairdresser to the policeman.

The idioms in which the novel is written are equally striking and unapologetic. The argot of the Bombay street and the idiom of the world of the gangster is splattered with an array of Hindi expletives and phrases that remain translated. Chandra masterfully narrates so that their meaning becomes readily discernible from their context. While Chandra includes a list of 'Dramatis personae' the main actors in this saga he does not provide a glossary. Chandra puts the reader into sink or swim situation and then the reader is forced to engage on a different level with the characters and the city and encouraged to get involved in the story characters and their language and their idioms.

Chandra's novel follows a comparable intertextual strategy. Intertextuality in literary kind is implied in detective conventions that Chandra's follows. As well as in the books character as urban epic and critics have variously suggested such presence as Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostovsky, Edgar Allan Poe and Raymond Chandler. There is also an immediate intertextual link within Chandra's own oeuvre through Sartaj Singh as recurring character, with story "kama" from love and longing in Bombay. Most striking, though is an intertextuality of a different kind, with the literary novel rubbing shoulders with Indian mass culture.

#### **Post structural subjectivity.**

Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games* depicts post structural subjectivity. The main objective of post colonial subjectivity is the glorification of binary oppositions like male and female, day and night, light and dark, dawn and dusk, crime and glamour and soon. In the same way Vikram Chandra in his novel clearly mentions the binary relations between police and criminals. The title of the novel itself is quite binary to its actual meaning. We may think that *Sacred Games* means some thing that depicts holiness and righteousness. But Chandra's title gives opposite meaning. Here it means the rivalry games between the criminals and the police.

The relation between richness and power, friendship and betrayal, crime and detectivity and ruthlessness and sentimentality are quite opposite the each other but continue with in the novel. This kind of meta narration is one of the primordial characters of post structuralism.

#### **Narratology**

Narratology is one of the main features of post modernism. It is, etymologically, the science of narrative. The term was popularized, however, by such structuralist critics as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince and others in the 1970s. As a result, the definition of narratology has usually been restricted to structural, or more specifically structuralist, analysis of narrative. The post-structuralist reaction of the 1980s and 1990s against the scientific and taxonomic pretensions of structuralist narratology has resulted in a comparative neglect of the early structuralist

approaches. One positive effect of this, however, has been to open up new lines of development for narratology in gender studies, psychoanalysis, reader-response criticism and ideological critique. Narratology now appears to be reverting to its etymological sense, a multi disciplinary study of narrative which negotiates and incorporates the insights of many other critical discourses that involve narrative forms of representation.

#### **Post modern literature**

Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is hard to define and there is little agreement on the exact characteristics, scope, and importance of postmodern literature. However, unifying features often coincide with Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the "meta-narrative" and "little narrative," Jacques Derrida's concept of "play," and Jean Baudrillard's "simulacra." For example, instead of the modernist quest for meaning in a chaotic world, the postmodern author eschews, often playfully, the possibility of meaning, and the postmodern novel is often a parody of this quest.

#### **Feminism**

Feminist literary criticism is the direct product of women movement of 1916. Later it has different changes at different stages. According to Margaret Walters, this is a historical account of feminism that looks at the roots of feminism, voting rights, and the liberation of the sixties and analyzes the current situation of women across Europe, in the United States, and elsewhere in the world, particularly the Third World countries. Walters examines the difficulties and inequities that women still face, more than forty years after the "new wave" of 1960s feminism difficulties, particularly, in combining domesticity, motherhood and work outside the home.

Shobha De has presented the problems of women caught in the world of glamour. She is a contemporary novelist who presents the modern Indian woman at the centre of her fiction. This woman is bold, daring and ambitious. Virginia Woolf in her polemical work *A room of one's own* says that language use is gendered and there is no common sentence which is ready for women's use. Similarly Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* we find that women are handicapped in their representations. All the

women characters in the novel are seen just as the symbols of sex and supporting their gangism. They are meant for promoting sex in the society especially in Mumbai. Women consciousness is quite absent in the novel and women are seen as the mediators of sex workers. Characters like Jojo, Jamila, Kanthabai, Iffath-bibi and Suzie are not allowed to present their inner thought and their actions are limited outside the bedrooms. Jojo is a personal of Ganesh who encourages sex and supplies the young and beautiful needy girls to rich demanding. Jamila mirza who was become a famous heroine and change a new name of zoya mirza. Iffalth –bibbi and Kanthabai are the business women who supplies money and women to Suleiman and Ganesh Gaitonde.

#### **Epic Features**

Epic is a traditional form of narrative story that portrays heroic deeds of great heroes in a war or adventure culture and history of a nation or race is often reflected in an epic. In an epic, a hero is often involved in a war or adventure or journey and encountered with various obstacles. Hero shows his heroic activities to reach the goal and overcome all the obstacles. Epic is generally very vast involving many nations or races and which begins in the middle of the story not from its beginning. Through a series of flash backs it is often presented past events and characters. Vikram chandra's *Sacred Games* is compared with epics of *Gilgamesh* (based on mesopotamian mythology), *Homer's Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Virgil's Aeneid* and so on.

Like Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* Vikram chandra's *Sacred Games* is an epic novel. Because it has many character with individual identities. More than a dozen are major characters. Though many characters are involved in the novel, the novel reflects and revolves round the characters like Sartaj Singh, Ganesh Gaitonde and Suleiman Isa those who show their power of authority against each other. But Sartaj Singh's determination to catch Gaitonde, is a major theme of novel. The frequent adventures are held between Ganesh Gaitonde and Sartaj Singh. Besides that uncountable wars occur between Ganesh Gaitonde and Suleiman Isa.

#### **Summation**

Thus Vikram Chandra place their novels in the literary post modernist context. In his novels he

seeks to present a reality outside the literature, with the narrator as one of the major connection between life and art. Thus Vikram Chandra proved, as one the leading master, using narrative techniques in the fiction.

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