Chapter - 6

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‘Red earth and pouring’ is a novel about storytelling. Vikram Chandra, the novelist has stressed on the importance of stories in our lives. Stories are actually what make us who we are. This novel is about a monkey who inhabits a house in an Indian city and in order to save his life from Lord Yama he goes on to tell a story about stories. The novel is arranged in three sections: now, before and after.

God Yama, Hanuman and Ganesha descend on a house of retired couple in an Indian city. Abhay, son of Ashok and Mrinalini has shot a white faced monkey with bullet. Monkey regains conscious with memory of his past life as Sanjay (Parasher), a poet. He bargains for his life with Yama by telling stories. Saira, neighbour girl also joins them. Monkey begins, Sandeep has returned to Shank Shakti, a lady. He narrates the stories he heard from her. He speaks of Benoit La Borgne who comes to India to be a soldier. He fights fierce battles before returning home with a title of De Boigne.

Abhay joins storytelling and tells about his grandfather’s death, Tom, Amanda and a thunder lightening. In spite of people’s fear the storytelling continues. George Thomas is with Uday Singh, practicing war techniques and fighting battles. Reinhardt suggests them to visit Sardhana, so they join the services of Begum. Begum marries Reinhardt whereas Thomas serves in Bejagarh palace where he meets a Rajput lady, Jhanvi. He rides away as British Officer Skinner attacks the palace. Story moves to Arun and Ram Mohan who are story tellers in Bengal. Jhanvi, now married to Skinner, asks Uday Singh to meet Thomas. He brings back mysterious Ladoos that bears her two sons. Arun’s wife Shanti eats one Ladoo
and delivers a boy. Jhanvi’s sons Sikander and Chota are unbelievably strong; however, Shanti’s son Sanjay is a language lover.

Abhay tells about his friend Kate who has committed suicide. Later in car Tom shares a story with him and Amanda.


Outside motel Abhay meets Kyrie who tells them her story. Abhay visits Amanda’s parents. Her father invites him for a local cricket match.

In Lucknow Sikander becomes a warrior while Sanjay a poet marries Gul Jahan. With a British doctor’s help Gul Jahan finally delivers a boy. Doctor tricks them; angry Sanjay sacrifices himself to attain immortality. On monkey’s request all enjoy feast with Ganesha’s special Ladoos and storytelling continues. Sanjay asks Chota and Sikander to join him. Chota kills himself while Sikander refuses and is killed by Sanjay. British win the war leaving Sanjay half dead. Yama tells Sanjay about Sarthey who is killing people in London. With the help of an officer, he finishes Sarthey; later he offers himself to death. Thus, monkey finishes his story and asks Abhay to finish his. Abhay tells that he wins the match. Amanda accompanies him to India but returns back on being uncomfortable. At home Abhay shoots the monkey in frustration.

At present Saira is in hospital injured due to an explosion in the maidan packed with audience. Monkey (Sanjay) has asked Abhay to tell stories to help Saira and thus Abhay starts...
The subsequent section answers the research questions with the help of the quotes from the novel:

**Research Question 1: As an act of communication, how meaning is created in Fictional Novels, with reference to Identity and Multiculturalism embedded therein?**

Meaning to the identity of the characters in the novel is assigned not through words but with events. The events built the characters, their personality, and their overall identity, their place in the novel and in their own lives too. Events work in the cycle of semiosis, unique semiosis processes, bind to each other in semiotic actions, representamen signifying object through interpretant. However, simultaneously it turns the distinct sign again into representamen for further signification. Sanjay is introduced as Parasher with an event of daily theft by monkey; he is later reintroduced as a boy born after seventeen months, a miraculous event. Then his personality’s strength is depicted by the event of putting cipher into Markline’s book and then swallowing whole set of metallic types. The warrior side of his identity is fabricated in his efforts that dig out the event of his sacrifice and immortality.

Development of the identities of both Benoit La Borgne and George Thomas follow a similar pattern of events taking their personalities to shape it into invincible warriors. Their identities have been shown as tested by injuries, casted by victories, styled by discoveries and formed by stories. Uday Singh’s identity is revealed akin to that of a warrior. But with an elegance of an Indian Rajput that differs from the swiftness of the two foreign warriors. Events concerning his companionship with Thomas, his service for the British and his love for Jhanvi have given a unique form to his identity in the novel.

Victory of British over Bejagarh and then Jhanvi’s marriage with Skinner is what has given an outline to Jhanvi’s character. Her silence is a sign of her vigour and also of her struggle in being what she does not want. Sikander and Chota, mirror image of each other, only the latter
a slightly dull image of the former. With persona of warriors and dream of conquering the world their identity comes out to be more of adored leaders and loyal employees. Greatness skips their way as being swept by the events that turns out to be the main player in this overall signification.

Chandra has picked up the sketching of identity of his characters from the events and the events take their form from the previous event itself. It profoundly expresses a process of representation that is endless.

Multiculturalism in *Red earth and pouring rain* walk through many boundaries. It blurs the boundary between centuries, continents and cultures. And to do this it only uses one tool that is imagination. Imagination, that communicates meanings through storytelling and storytelling that is wrapped in other endless stories.

The novel runs vivid picture of two centuries together. On one side is the depiction of modern America, floating in the era of post-modernism along with Indian site of developing days. However, on the other side is the history of British invasion in India, falling emperors, active missionaries, scared countrymen and brave warriors. The author has done justice to the true sense of culture by carving it out from history. What could possibly a culture be without historical events? Along with history Chandra takes the texture of culture from three continents: America, Britain and India. And the thread weaving this texture is of one language: English. Sanjay is able to communicate with Abhay’s family as he remembers the knowledge of English language from his past life. Abhay in his childhood is fascinated by his senior’s use of English accent. And dreams of what it would be to live in America.

Chandra’s novel raises a point very subtly about what might British have left here. They have gone, with them their rule has gone but what remain are the effects of their culture, effect of their and our culture’s blend. And what remains with us is their language; it is still there in
our veins. The point that have risen up here is that people might inhabit a place and leave but the product of their interaction with the environment, that is the product of culture remain unquestionably present in the lives of the people.

**Research Question 2: How impactful/influential an author’s personality shades are in shaping the personality of characters in a Fictional Novel?**

Vikram Chandra, the author has added his true colours to the shade of characters’ personalities in the novel. The passion of the characters that is present throughout the novel in each and every action of the characters has come down from its author. This passion, this intensity of the emotions that is unbound and moulds the story of the novel is what Chandra has given to his characters. Sanjay’s passion for life, his determination to live takes him and the story to new heights. In his conversation with Lord Yama and Kala, in his actions to defy the very existence of death and in all his desires to be alive he is passionate past limits. The whole novel is a result of his bargain with Yama to let him live in lieu of storytelling.

The character of Benoit La Borgne and George Thomas are also under influence of similar seamless passion. Their passion to become a warrior, fight battles, to build kingdoms and to lead soldiers. It earns them the title of Chiria Fauj and Jahaj Jung respectively.

Skinner and Jhanvi both stand on the same plane of passion only with different directions. Skinner is obsessed to rewrite Indian thoughts with Christian beliefs while Jhanvi is determined to have sons that will be worthy of her revenge over British. Their sons: Sikander and Chota, fervour warriors, brave and courageous are passionate but with a subtleness that is present in the novel in spite of all the mythologies, fantasies and mysteries it creates.

And then there is the gift of the art of storytelling to all the characters in the novel from the author. Each one is a story teller and what holds the value is the word “Listen”. Listen, as this is only important, to listen stories and more stories. As the story of the novel precedes each
character takes the position of a storyteller. Even Moulin, sitting on the merge of death tells his story to three young boys. Benoit La Borgne remembers his past life as a dream, full of twists that can fabricate number of stories. And his visitors do treat his tales as mere stories. What is important to author has influenced the course of the novel by turning each character into a storyteller. As life in itself is a story. And every simple or complex gesture we enact of communication in it is an act of storytelling. This world is a product of representation and representation involves incessant storytelling.

Research Question 3: What kinds of signs are present in the Fictional Novels significant for Theory of Mind’s improvement?

*Red earth and pouring rain* is a compound piece in terms of ToM. It does not portray simple emotions rather it offers awareness about intricate emotions. It takes the one decoding it higher on the level of ToM understanding. This novel is a good treat for those looking forward to enhance their understanding of the human emotions’ complexity.

Sanjay’s efforts throughout the novel reveal his zeal to live and this allows him to do everything to challenge the very existence of death as the ultimate reality. His words directed to Kala and Yama designate the intensity of his urge to defy death, failure and fragility:

‘You go to hell,’ Sanjay said. *(Red earth and pouring rain, p. 319).*

‘May you suffer as you make us suffer, Kala,’ Sanjay said, the tears starting from his eyes. ‘I curse you, I will defeat you’ *(Red earth and pouring rain, p. 337).*

His uncontrolled love for language, his skill comparable to the swiftness in the actions of Sikander and Chota is an icon of flair that needs refinement as well as control.

Kyrie mother’s unsaid thrust for perfection; for completeness that she missed in her life comes out on Kyrie. It knits a circle around her that slowly makes difficult for her to breathe. Her identity becomes a means to achieve wholeness for her mother. The novel makes one
sentient of the intricacies repositioning oneself in a different culture might bring; as happened with Amanda when she comes to India with Abhay.

The novel explains the notions of morality, status, and purity using the experience of reality by prostitutes, porn stars, thieves, and other outcast by society in general. It brings an individual face to face with the perceptions that are hidden in the roots of our political, philosophical, cultural and other views. It prepares one for an instant anticipation of events that are yet to occur in near time as in wars. And, it allows an acceptance of the past with a realization that it cannot be changed. It can only be given a better direction with efforts in the present. And with acceptance it warns against the effects of ignorance. A failure to anticipate what might be can make one lose control of what should be.

It permits simplicity to cloak multifarious emotions and let the decoder be known with the signs that represent this world and the meaning that travels inside out in the collective psychology of the world.

Research Question 4: What kind of psychological gratification authors seek through Defense Mechanism using Fictional Novels as a tool?

Psychoanalysts around the world till date have jointly listed fifteen types of defense mechanisms as the most commonly applied by individuals. But never the less these are not the only mechanism used as defense for blocking or avoiding painful thoughts by people. The list is endless and will remain so as the human race is ever evolving.

Chandra seems to have applied defense mechanism as the interpretant in the semiosis process of the novel. As the catalyst that accelerates the speed of the event, its reaction and its multitude. The whole event of Sanjay’s child’s birth by the help of Dr Sarthey is accelerated by his application of reaction formation. He hates Sarthey for what his father and other
British have done but his obsession with their language, their knowledge makes him unconsciously forget about the former emotion.

Defense Mechanism in the form of identification has worked in the novel as an unconscious desire of the brothers to have each other’s faculty. This identification results in Sikander gaining fame with his work in the world of books. And it provides an inner desire to heat up Sanjay’s sacrificing act to become invincible. Rationalization of Sanjay’s actions by him regulates the events in the novel. His prime rationalization is in defense against his acts of jealously and envy with Sikander and Chota. Offering it as an excuse to nobody else but him and continuing with actions sharpened with anger.

Denial of his and Chota life’s reality by Sikander serves the purpose of a favourable ground for events to unfold in the novel. Given the fact that there would not have been a disavowal by Sikander the story of Sanjay’s revenge would have ended too soon.

With all these used as an intricate feature added to novel, Chandra has taken myth as his armour. Myths have been regarded by psychoanalysts as powerful tool in shaping societal views. Chandra has not only taken feathers of myths to beautify the novel but also shaped his novel in an outlook similar to that of myth tales.

**Research Question 5: How far the “Psyche” of the novel is the product of authors’ unconscious mind?**

The deciphering of the unconscious of the author through the words is similar like deciphering a dream. What appears on the layer might not be the reality. And what lies beneath cannot be dug; it can only be removed layer after layer.

Being Chandra’s very first novel, the novel exemplifies his approbation for the language. Everything what can be materialized into words: myths, fantasies, wars, magic, birth and
rebirth etc all are present in the novel. His unconscious has given English language a stature much above the characters, the identities and the events. Language of the novel like the author’s unconscious is strong enough to break the rules of the superego. The rules, that superego value as being a collective outlook of the society is challenged at every stance by the language of the novel. It works as the wild Id, ready and powerful to sweep the world of imagination with its own choices.

The psyche of the novel mimics the unconscious of the author by allowing questions about life and death, about love and envy, about past and future and about certainty and uncertainty to come in open and take concrete shape.

Novel’s psyche thrives on the imagination of the one enacting an act of communication with it. In line with the unconscious of the author that has not allowed a full stop to end the imagination of each of the sentences. Rather full stops, commas and semi colons have worked as the tools of the unconscious to baffle the intelligence of the conscious. All that is the product in the form of the novel is an effort of the unconscious hidden swiftly in the conscious allowing the imagination to take the charge.

Research Question 6: How diverse and independent is the world of Novel in itself?

Red earth and pouring rain claims its diversity and independence openly. It advocates independence of a story from its author or its speaker as soon as it is written or spoken respectively.

Monkey as Parasher suggests this while talking to Abhay about stories:

‘There are whole new stories in here,’ he said. ‘It’s not even our story any more, what these fellows are peddling.’

‘It ceased to be yours the minute you wrote it,’ I suggested,... (Red earth and pouring rain, p.231)
The stories ceased to be yours indicates that the novel too ceased to be author’s the minute it was written. Taking the same line, the novel belongs individually to the one who enacts an act of communication with it.

Its diversity is in its excellence to trade stories from stories, to draw on meaning from meaning, message from message and words from words. Generally, the idea of a beginning and an end is what makes a story complete. But this novel contrasts this idea, as a decoder of the meaning an individual enters in this circle of storytelling from a point quite far from the beginning. And where it makes the decoder stop is still much before the end. As note that the novel theoretically ends when Abhay says:

Listen. I am about to tell a story (Red earth and pouring rain, p. 669).

But practically it does not, it only restarts here. It is a novel with many beginnings and many ends, all beginnings are end in themselves and all ends beginnings to tell one more story. It is an independent maze of storytelling; one only joins to never leave. It ensures that it is reread so that all the stories that have been missed are retold. And this is similar in comparison of the novel to an act of communication. It is nearly impossible to locate starting and end point of a communication act. Only thing sure is that the act of communication has taken place earlier, it is taking place at the moment and will take place. The signs are into play, the semiosis process is on and meanings are being created.

**Research Question 7: To what extent the intended meaning differs from the words used in a novel?**

The intended meaning of Red earth and pouring rain makes one reach at the same point again and again. This point is about sole admiration of the power of stories. The power that has shaped our childhood and now in this contemporary world is shaping our awareness through a new way of storytelling altogether.
At the commencement of the novel the words may appear to be simply directing towards a story. Even a little further in it what comes into sight is extension of this simple storytelling into a complex one. But that’s not where the intended thought of the novel ends. It directs towards the potential of a story to give birth to millions of stories. The intended meaning of the novel is to revive storytellers and story listeners in each one of us.

In just one term, i.e. ‘Listen’ used all over again by each of the characters at one or the other point of time, the novel intends to continue the flow of storytelling. It aims to emphasize on the importance of storytelling in the joy and sorrow of the world, in the failure and victory of the wars, and in the birth and death of the people. The story must be told.

In fact, it is the art of storytelling that we still see in news broadcast. It is because of the concept of weaving all media messages as stories that we have come to become media addicted. And now in the era of internet, it is the fast way of storytelling through status updates that we all have become storytellers and listeners simultaneously.