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# GREGORY DAVID ROBERTS' SHANTARAM AS CULTURE NARRATIVE

Prof. Parul Mishra<sup>1</sup>, Dr Manoj Kumar<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Amity University Rajasthan, India, [Pmishra@jpr.amity.edu](mailto:Pmishra@jpr.amity.edu)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor , Amity University Rajasthan, India, [Mkumar1@jpr.amity.edu](mailto:Mkumar1@jpr.amity.edu)

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Wayne C. Booth claims that an author, while narrating a story, creates a second self of himself called the implied author and this implied author creates an illusion in the readers that they are listening to a 'loud' (16) narration within. The implied author's voice is the narrative voice in a fiction. Technique maximizes the author's approach and plays a pivotal role in accentuating the theme of the novel. Elissa Hansen (2017) says in her article titled, "Literary Definitions of narrative Techniques" that, "Narrative techniques are the methods that writers use to give certain artistic and emotional effects to a story" (Pen and the Pad). Narration is the soul of fiction which can easily influence the readers which will ultimately lead to understand the mind of the author. A good narration can challenge the post-modernist views that favors 'death of the author' and discards the existence of the writer. Pictorial quality of the writer focused on capturing the beauty of the place or city. Now the writer does not only depend on beauty descriptions neither the reader expects the pomp and show; both wait for real impressions on them. This was observed in the introductory chapter of *Shantaram* by Gregory David Roberts where he uses *mumbaiian* dialect to bring actuality in the expression. The aim of the writer was to make the readers feel the connectedness with their own self. The aim of the author was to connect the folks to the lore of the city- "when the bus was close to full, the driver turned in his seat, scowled at us menacingly, spat a jet of vivid red betel juice through the open doorway, and announced our imminent departure. "Thik hain, challo!" (8) The author goes on to explain minute details of his journey by bus. "The engine roared, gears meshed with a growl and thunk;(8) he uses the word 'thunk' which denotes sound caused by putting vehicles into gears.

It is intensely rich to read the novel if one wants to know Bombay or its folklore. Mr Roberts found it relevant to explain the

'artful animosity' (7) of the bus conductor calling names to the street landers who were coming in the bus's way and creating jammed narrow roads. At the same time, he is lulled back to his nation Australia when he sees "the neat pragmatic landscape that surrounded the international airport at his city, Melbourne. The scene took him to his own motherland developing a sense of complacency, which was shattered at the very moment when the bus entered a narrow lane showing slums of the dreamland, "For the first sight of slums, as the lanes of the motorway became one, and the trees disappeared, clutched my heart with talons of shame" (7). Further Mr Roberts use quite poetic tone to describe the images of the slum area, "Like brown and black dunes, the acres of slums rolled away from the roadside, and met the horizon with dirty heat-haze mirages. The miserable shelters were patched together from rags, scraps of plastic and paper, reed mats, and bamboo sticks. They slumped together, attached one to another, and with narrow lanes winding between them. Nothing in the enormous sprawl of it rose much above the height of a man" (8). No doubt the city has its own natural landscape which adds to the description of cityscape. *Shantaram* is packed with the description of city and its people; it seemed to be injustice to overlook any utterance of the city. He goes to the extent of imagining a tragedy taken place, "My first impression was that some catastrophe had taken place, and that the slums were refugee camps for the shambling survivors. I learned, months later, that they were survivors, of course, those slum-dwellers: the catastrophes that had driven them to the slums from their villages were poverty, famine, and bloodshed. And five thousand new survivors arrived in the city every week, week after week, year after year" (8). It is remarkable that a westerner describing such details of a city which he is visiting for the first time. Moreover, it can be concluded that Mr Roberts had portrayed mini India in form Bombay cityscape. In

chapter one of the novel, the narrator takes name of Rajneesh, that is Osho. "We're going to stay at an ashram," his friend announced. "It's run by the Rajneesh's, at Poona. It's the best ashram in the country." (9) This shows the secrecy of his mindful art of writing. However, reader is so much engrossed in enjoying the poverty described that he forgets that the title of novel is *Shantaram* an Indian descent name. There are several instances in the novel where it can be felt that the objective of Mr Gregory David Roberts behind writing the novel *Shantaram* was to present the idiosyncrasies of the city. No postcolonial element was observed until the half novel however, the novel is claimed as a postcolonial or postmodern writing. The narrator has really worked hard to pin down the facial expressions of the characters of the novel *Shantaram*. Mr Roberts not only analyses the expressions of his chief character but along with details of Prabaker he equally discusses the two mates from Canada; he mentions each of them, "My two roommates were stretched out on their parallel beds. They looked at one another and exchanged similar expressions, raising their foreheads in sedimentary wrinkles, and pursing their lips as Prabaker pulled the piece of hashish from his pocket. They stared with fascination and dread while the little guide knelt to make the joint on the dusty surface of the dressing table." (18)

Minute detailing of every commoner is the soul of the writers technique of narrating. His narration involves everything which could be used by the writer and even that which can be missed by some. For instance, remembering the color contrast worn by the household ladies. Using vermilion, holding their babies on which side of their body is also noted by the author. Moreover, he is successful in gaining the applause from those he has unknowingly mentioned. Another remarkable thing about this foreign land

writer is his ever-positive psyche condition. At the very outset of the story the narrator declares that he is a fugitive who has successfully dodged the police of his own nation and now doing the same in India. Meeting Prabaker was his first experience. The time he spent with Prabaker, and his family was unexpectedly time spent in ignorance- on both sides, the family and the narrator. Mr Roberts as a narrator appears to be Indian. It can be assumed that the narrator tried his hands-on picaresque technique; where he is the rogue who has become hero of the small village. Each line of the novel has a touch of shift in places. The time when he is travelling to find a suitable guest house for himself with Prabaker, he memorizes how his friends have bid him farewell, "I was on the run." (18) The novel does not skip a single emotion of the main character and his friends as well. This takes the reader into a conflicting situation as to who is the protagonist of the novel. There can be a serious debate on the topic regarding the selection of the protagonist. A protagonist is the character, person through whom the author tries to speak his mind and heart. No doubt, it is evident that Mr Roberts is the protagonist of his novel, but the way he has detailed the character of Prabaker, one can be misled in imagining Prabaker to be the protagonist. If biography of Mr Roberts is thoroughly studied, then only the reader can deduce that Mr Roberts is the protagonist. The instance of India Guest house, the place where Prabaker took Lindsay or Mr Roberts, focuses on listing the happenings going on at the place. The narrator somewhat sounded humorous as well, "No problem dying, baba," Prabaker soothed, offering the distraught Canadians his neatly rolled joint. The taller man took it and puffed it alight. "Not many people are dying here in India Guest House, and mostly only junkies, you know, with the skinny faces. For you no problem, with your so beautiful big fat bodies." (18)

Language depicted by the author is fantastic if considering that the writer belongs to a foreign origin. The form of spellings he has used to give the real Indian accent feel to the people who rarely speak English; words like 'teeny' for tiny, 'first number' for number one or 'very best' for 'the best'. "Bottle back a third time. "Sorry, aaah, very sorry. Is so good this whisky, it is making a bad-manners on me." (19) The sentence shows the missing syntax of the language. Mr Lindsay was quite humble to give the whole bottle to Prabaker: "Listen, if you like it that much, you can keep the bottle. I've got another one. I bought them duty free on the plane."(19) All this exhibits the narrators sharpness of his observing conscience. Time and again in the novel the protagonist is seen supporting Prabaker for these choices. The narration takes the reader to believe that Prabaker is equally interested in enjoying the fun of Bombay city: "'Yes, yes, Mr. Lindsay, very yes. But if I knew this was my whisky and not yours, I would not have been so generous with my good self in the drinking it up." The young Canadians laughed. "I tell you what, Prabaker. I'll give you the full bottle, to keep, and we'll all share the open one. How's that? And here's the two hundred rupees for the smoke." The smile shone anew, and he swapped the open bottle for the full one, cradling it in his folded arms tenderly (20)

It is highly appreciable that the narrator has depicted the innocence of Indians in this post-modern time when writers write negative of India and Indianness to become best sellers' writers, because West loves to hear bad of India. This issue is of great controversy, but it is fact indeed. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth- they write of India sitting in America or London or wherever they have the green card of. They do so because their writing becomes business. Perhaps mt Gregory David Roberts is the

writer sitting in his native place writing of India, about Indianness, culture, spirit, consciousness so on and so forth. "But Mr. Lindsay, you are making a mistake. I say that this very best charras is one hundred rupees, not two". "U-huh". "Oh, yes. One hundred rupees only," he declared, passing one of the notes back to me dismissively- Perhaps, this sentence is worth reading to know the spirit of the narrator behind writing *Shantaram*. The very next page of the novel it is written to be aware of Indians. The Canadians are warning Mr Lindsay to be careful: "Listen ... take it easy on the street, huh? I mean, you don't know what it's like here. You can't trust no-one. This ain't the village. The Indians in the city are ... well, just be careful, is all. Okay?" (20) why does Mr author mentions this in his writing. The conflict arises at this point in his narrative technique- stating to be careful of Indians suggests that India for those Canadians was not a safe place to travel; Then why were they visiting, not only Bombay but other cities as well. This is narrated by the author in the introductory pages of the novel. It is even said that it was not the first visit of the Canadians to India as it was of the author. The narration goes to the edge of presenting India as a weak and poor nation, that too by a person who is taking shelter at the same place. The kind of cityscape Mr Roberts has depicted it can be to extremity compared with the spirit of RK Narayan in "Swamy and Friends", EM Forster's *Passage to India*. Furthermore, his Bombay can be matched with the Massachusetts or Rhode Island of New York. The way Mr Roberts has depicted the spirit of the Mumbains and Mumbai it reminds of New York of O'Henry. It was said New York was for O'Henry what *Mirror* was to women, likewise Mr Roberts is excelling in depicting the pulse of the people of India. Most prominent on the street, to my eyes, were the many crippled and diseased beggars. Every kind of illness, disability, and hardship paraded there, stood at the doorways of restaurants

and shops, or approached people on the street with professionally plaintive cries. Like the first sight of the slums from the windows of the bus, that glimpse of the suffering street brought a hot shame to my healthy face. But as Prabaker led me on through the roistering crowd, he drew my attention to other images of those beggars that softened the awful caricature presented by the performance of their piteousness. One group of beggars sat in a doorway, playing cards, some blind men and their friends enjoyed a meal of fish and rice, and laughing children took turns to ride with a legless man on his little trolley. (21) The crystal-clear illustration of the land and its people from a foreign mouth or hands is surprising all the way. The way he landed the airport without much preparation, as the novelists writes in the introductory pages, his conversation with Prabaker and his roommates exhibited some doubts on his pious visitation to the land of Mumbai. The narration of the writer also highlights the feeling of Indians which they felt after colonization. His saying that Bombay is free, frightening free depicts the boldness of the city. It can also bethought of that the writer thought India to be conservative in comparison to westerners, therefore the words came out spontaneously, after he saw Bombay its, folks, the city, the culture, which was undoubtedly, a blend of east and west. Each and every incident narrated by the author has a glimpse of the colonial mindset. This is somewhat which could be observed after reading the novel several times. Just one read of the novel would not lead to justification of the topic and for the understanding also. There is so much to write about the cityscape which Mr Roberts has poured out through is writing that it seems each page of the novel can be converted into an article praising India. The kind of narration Mr Roberts has used compels the reader to read the biography of Mr Roberts- Such an appreciation from a westerner is rarely initiated. There are many instances in the novel which

highlights the colonial mindset of the Indians or Mumbains. Furthermore, he has touched the variety of language the people spoke in Mumbai; he said he know none of the language they spoke, which shows only Mumbai city in itself spoke variety of languages.

Critical analysis of the narrative technique comes up with a huge tint of Indianness which can be observed in the character, Lindsay; it was so much that Mr Linsey easily accepted the name given by Prabaker, he was further till his time in Mumbai was known by that name, Lin. He confesses he could never have found out for himself. Broadly speaking, since fiction came into existence, there are thousands of stories written and published on Bombay or Mumbai or its culture, which is an example of hybridity – of culture, tradition, language, folks, including politics would not be a hyperbolic statement. The whole novel is written in first person, which

is again a claim of the author of authentication of his statements regarding the city and the nation as well. The delicate emotions expressed and explored by Shantaram draws the attention of the reader. Shantaram has poetic narrative technique or the other way around style of Mr Roberts is poetic in narration. For instance, words like “breathing silence” (36) “foliant blaze of her green eyes” (37); there are instances where the lines rhyme,

“But the living emerald in Karla's eyes,  
made luminous by the sunflowers of gold  
light that surrounded the pupils, was  
softer, far softer.

I did eventually find that colour,

the green in nature that was a perfect  
match for the green in her lovely eyes, but  
it wasn't until long months after that night  
in Leopold's.

And strangely, inexplicably, I didn't tell

her about it. I wish now with all my heart that I did." (37)

Another poetic instance:

"This is not India. There are people here from every part of India, but Bombay isn't India. Bombay is an own world, a world in itself. The real India is out there."

"Out there?"

"Out there, where the light stops." (43)

There are many instances where the author has gone to the extent of rhyming his words, but this is only when Karla, the female character of the novel, is around. The novel is rich

in use of embellished language which is result of the use of literary devices like figure of speech. For instance, "...the world and I are not on speaking terms", (43) "determination in her that was almost brutal, and the courage that was almost cruel". (44) There are manifold instances which are witness to the use of metaphor synecdoche, personification etc. The writer is adept in conveying his ideas related to serious issues of India has been debated by him and his characters of the novel, to name few-ranging from poverty, Language diversity, Population, Narcotics, quest of identity; not only this some statements even reflected the India Pakistan relationship issue. The instance when Didier talks about two "dangerous" people from Pakistan, who are boss of passports. Gregory David Roberts called Mumbai packed with people, packed with culture, packed with colors and rituals. This is something not very peculiar about writings of postmodern century; the idea behind long sentences is perhaps the extended thoughts of the author on the given subject, theme, or topic.

The technique of the narration of Mr Roberts is a delightful one; of such kind that the reader would wish to finish the novel first and then analyze or criticize it,

based on obligation. Moreover, it is a narration which makes Indian reader proud to be an Indian. The narration is so realistic that it compels you to forget Mumbai as land of dreams, however it can be termed as land of Drugs. Mr Roberts explanation of the city and the smell will take the reader to the wings of poesy, "I went out to my little balcony, and let the sound and smell of the city, settle on the skin of my bare chest. In a courtyard below." (Shantaram 606) Another instance, later in the novel, "He crushed the bulb, and a swirling belch of the noxious chemical mixture spurted from the belly of the goddess and settled on my trousers and my shirt. "Now," he grinned, starting the engine, and pulling out onto Marine Drive again, "we are ready for the life again! We are the lucky fellows, isn't it?" (465) Shantaram exaggerates the stark local culture, it also the glare of Cinema stars- Amitabh Bachchan, Rekha, Sanjeev Kumar, Guru Dutt, Geeta Bali. Perhaps this is author's another strategy of catching the conscience of the reader and public. India and abroad is aware of the underworld role, settlement, and involvement with the Muslim mafia. The aim of highlighting the mentioned point is to draw the attention of the reader, reviewer towards inflated role of Muslim mafia in whizzing the drugs, leading to doom. It is this very reason that the youth is involved exaggeratedly in the drugs. Perhaps by quoting Hare Rama Krishna movie, the author has endeavored to highlight the condition of youth after involving in drug abuses.

Gregory David Roberts did not miss a chance to praise the cityscape and the people of the city. Perhaps it was new to him, the color, the creed, the culture. Analysis show that however he was a westerner he found beauty in the dirt of the city. The strategies implied by the authors are quite successful in attracting the mind and winning the heart of the critics and readers. Use of Individual identity, multiculturalism of India, Travel, time and

space, family, feminism, relationships, adventure, and something of popular novel, which are quick reads targeting young readers with little time but plenty of penchant. However, the novels are not feminist fiction, but they abound in illustrations where women are found raising their voice.

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