

A study of Vikas Swarup's Q&A in Bildungsroman

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Abstract - The main objective of this research paper is to focus on the term 'postmodern Bildungsroman' and to operate the same to study Vikas Swarup Novel, Q&A. The aim of the research is to analyze how the genre is aligned to understand the Novel. It also focuses on the odyssey of the protagonist, his psychological and moral growth that centers on the character and its transformation to reach maturity.

The study also intends at the Novel's educational and philosophical theme of how hope makes life bright by striving and learning from one's own experiences in life by the portrayed characters who seek to better themselves and develop in pursuit of higher goals. Studying the Novel in the Bildungsroman genre gives a better understanding of the work and enhances the appreciation of the Novel to justify and support the arguments.

Key Words: Postmodern Bildungsroman, Moral growth, Transformation, Maturity, Hope, Educational and philosophical themes, Higher goals.

METHODOLOGY:

The word Bildungsroman is a combination of the German word 'Bildung,' meaning formation, and 'roman,' meaning novel. Bildungsroman is a genre which depicts the life of a young hero from immaturity to maturity and moves further by focusing on the trials and misfortunes that assist in the character's growth. Q&A identified as a novel that had educational and philosophical values for young adults as it portrayed the characters who not only strove to better themselves but also who were able to outgrow or leave behind childish behaviours in the pursuit of higher goals.

Q&A begins with the protagonist who feels alienated but ends on a positive note with the character finding a sense of belonging or self-realization as in Bildungsroman. Q&A depicts the traditional notions of plot, narrative, and character development like postmodern Bildungsroman. Vikas Swarup expounded on the themes of the rags to riches, class struggle, alienation, physical punishment, and harsh living conditions in the novel that are the significant features of Bildungsroman.

The novel Q&A is structured in different stages like the protagonist's childhood, experiences that shape in building up his character and emphasizes his maturity which is common for Bildungsroman. Bildungsroman has been reinvented and due to its flexible characteristics, it is chosen to address the issues like identity, trauma, race, and violence. This research paper discusses Postmodern bildungsroman which forms a new approach in Indian English literature as a literary theory and how it is related to study Vikas Swarup's novel Q & A published in 2005.

Literature Review:

Many scholars expressed their views on different aspects of selected Novel through their research articles, dissertations, and theses according to their interests and topic are chosen. The researcher aligned Bildungsroman to study the Novel for a better understanding of the work and develop an appreciation of the Novel to justify and support the arguments.

The study has the scope to analyze various historical, psychological, and sociological aspects in the novel that reflect the present-day scenario.

Introduction:

The possible literary form for a writer to keep himself in touch with society and the common readers is only fiction. Indian writers in English have made a tremendous contribution to the growth of the English Novel, which is popular today among all the genres. Indian Novel in English has grown by leaps and bounds with the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's first Novel Rajmohan's wife (1864) the first full-length Indian Novel in English, and Lal Behari Day's GovindSamanta (1874) or the History of a Bengal Raiyat. English Fiction not only addresses the traditional Indian cultural ethos but also present multi-cultural reality, thematic concerns, and the development of new forms of expression that resulted in ever-increasing distribution and the readers.

Salman Rushdie's bagging of the Booker Prize in 1981, was a momentous event that made Indian English writers instil confidence. The advent of the 20th century marked a significant paradigm shift in almost all walks of life. In the realm of world literature, Indian English literature has attained its independent status, represents Indian tradition, the social and religious structure of India, political issues and so on.

Modern and current novelists have a more range of topics to deal with. With the advancement of globalization and rapid industrialization, the modern world has become a complex sphere where writers have crossed all geographical boundaries. The focus of the writers has shifted from general to specific and exclusively post-colonial writers before and after independence dealt with social themes but now the contemporary writers focusing on life of the individuals and the journey of the personal and psychological maturity by exhibiting different styles in form and expression that enriched Indian Literature. Most of the Indian English novels deals with the protagonist's development or maturity with his or her earlier years struggling with caste, class, religion, identity, or belongingness which are the major features of Bildungsroman.

Because of the universal needs, today we have many technocrats, management professionals, Indian origins living in abroad has been contributing to the Indian Fiction and has become noted as bestsellers in India. The global interests and the shifting paradigms have transformed and influenced the needs of the readers and the themes of the writers as well. The ever-changing paradigms of the modern world has provided literature, not only an opportunity to re-examine its own theories and procedures but also paved a way for new ones to develop. Some of the modern writers in this era are Arundhati Roy, Vikas Swarup, Shashi Deshpande, Salman Rushdie, Arvind Adiga, Shashi Tharoor, Jhumpa Lahiri and many others.

Introduction of Vikas Swarup:

Vikas Swarup was born in Allahabad in an Indian family of lawyers. In his diplomatic career, Vikas posted to various countries like Turkey, the United States, Ethiopia, the United Kingdom, and South Africa.

He penned his first novel, Q&A, in two months when posted in London and published Q&A (2005) in 43 languages. Vikas Swarup presents a kaleidoscopic vision of the struggle between good and evil when particularly a boy who has no other choice in life but still needs to survive. Vikas Swarup emphasized that life is the best teacher who teaches many lessons with its experiences. He also says that everyone creates his luck and who strives wins. It's a message of humanity and hope, where hope makes life bright.

India is a land of multiple languages and cultures where the poor and the rich live in their preferences and choices in everyday lives. It is such a country where some of the World's Richest people live and is also a land where the slum and the poor reside, where most of them are illiterates and who struggle for their daily bread. They still lead their lives happily only because of their ceaseless desire to have a better life and prove that they are not places of hopelessness and despair but run for success and to become productive.

Swarup mirrors the fundamental unity in bringing all three religions together the Hindu religion, the Christian, and the Muslim. Ram becomes Mohammad for his Muslim friend, for the Australian Diplomat, he becomes Thomas, and for the Indian actress who varies of keeping a Muslim servant he becomes Ram, hence he utilizes his name to meet various circumstances, and this even represents the harsh religious tensions that are prevalent in India.

Vikas Swarup is a unique writer and is different from other writers. He has brought a novelty to Indian writing in English with contemporary themes, story line, unique structures, and fresh ideas. He starts the novel Q&A with the surprising lines - "I have been arrested for winning a game show".

Study of the novel:

According to the bildungsroman, the plot follows a specific pattern. Alienation from one's immediate family is one of the most common plots observed in Q&A. Protagonist Ram grows from an orphan child to an adult in the novel. Ram's parents leave Ram once in his childhood later he faces defenseless and alienated in several situations throughout his life. Ram was once again abandoned shortly after his foster parents' divorce. Hence, Father Timothy takes care of him and names him Ram Mohammed Thomas, as his religion was not known and even to protect him from communal riots that gives an insight into the religious tensions existing in modern India.

Harsh Living Conditions:

Living in harsh conditions is one of the most common plots in Bildungsroman. In the novel, Q&A Ram lives in the slums of Mumbai with agony and helplessness. Mumbai was depicted as a wasteland with over one million people living under no

circumstances of ventilation and fighting for everything essential for living in the greasy swampy area. Ram, in his journey of life sets goals for himself and envisions himself one day being considerably Rich. "Every night I dream of visiting the places I see in Australian Geographic." (Swarup, 80). It's understood that Ram works continuously to grow and reach his dreams irrespective of his poverty. The novel recites the unbelievable journey of a slum dog who becomes a billionaire. "After a while I, too, drift off to sleep, dreaming middle-class dreams of buying a million different things, including a red Ferrari and a beautiful bride in a blue salwar kameez. All with fifty thousand rupees." (Swarup, 108). This quote shows how he works to better his life and chase his dreams of becoming a rich man. Taylor's family has exposed him to the world's wonders, his desire to visit the exotic places personally and not in the magazines makes him to struggle for his upliftment and hope for the future. Each question he answers has a separate story in his life and his experiences. Every memory demonstrates how Thomas knew the answer to the respective quiz show question. Swarup builds the psychological intelligence of the character Ram through the interpretation of society. Ram is an ordinary street-smart boy adapted to the society which doesn't need expensive schooling and education for it. This intelligence makes him desperately to escape from Sethiji along with Salim. He is optimistic and believes in no religion but continues to help others and do good which paved his destiny turn upside down and luck heralded him.

Learning From One's Own Experiences:

Throughout the Bildungsroman formation, the protagonist attained a sense of awareness. Though Ram laments about lacking formal studies he uses his common sense and real-life experiences to win the quiz show. It shows his worth and success in life and proves that knowledge is not the monopoly of the educated elite. The novels emphasise the vast difference between the knowledge of practical experiences and the knowledge of education by highlighting the knowledge of experience which, prevailed in the path of prospering in the quiz show. Knowledge is the common sense that, one acquires in the process of attaining maturity irrespective of the formal education one possesses. Ram expounded on every experience in life and developed his mental ability by studying society. Living by battling and with the agony of estrangement has taught him the lessons of life which blossomed his character.

Character Growth:

Ram learns that only money doesn't bring happiness and success in life. One should find a way to get enough money and enjoy with what he does. One of the Famous actress Neelima Kumari who possesses much money, doesn't relish her life, and doesn't have close relations with her family. She was pessimistic and bruised by Premkumar. At last, she commits suicide as she couldn't tolerate and withstand the pressures in life. Ram participated in the quiz show not to acquire money but to take revenge on PremKumar the Host of the show, for abusing Neelima Kumari. Ram being an orphan, craves identity and keeps on helping others throughout his life by searching for relationships and gaining wisdom. In Salim, he finds his brother and Gudiya, his sister and keeps his promises. He has even found his paternal figures also that was shown as the woman in the white sari who appears when he needs reassurance to do the right things. He shapes his character despite his negatives. He is neither impeccable nor supremely intelligent nor reverently truthful but just an ordinary street-smart who knows how to survive after each disaster that brings him back to zero. It has made him threaten Premkumar during the game show and pinpoints his gun at him which has helped him to answer the question with the given hint.

Class struggle:

Class struggle is one of the main parts studied in the novel to understand the rich and the poor as an element of Bildungsroman. It also features the conflict between the protagonist and the society, though the plot is almost focused on winning the quiz show, the life of Ram is spent in utmost poverty and faces injustice at the hands of the rich is depicted in the novel. Ram arrested for winning the game show as the company couldn't afford to pay for him and couldn't digest how the slum could win the show without cheating. The show affiliates want the police to interrogate Ram until he confesses to cheating. Godbole, influenced by capital, begins physically torturing Ram, though he didn't cheat. It was understood that wealth has all the power, where one can buy freedom which was depicted in the novel by freeing Lajwanti from jail and Nita from adultery. It has even proved that effluence has the power to imprison someone, which is evident at the beginning of the novel with the arrest of Ram.

Identity crisis:

Ram travelled through many turns and twists in life that influenced him toward change and development throughout the novel. Ram also spends much of his life longing for a home and a sense of belonging. He was left alone and felt alienated in many situations in his life. Ram spent his life in utmost poverty and agony in the slums often thinks about why his mother has left him and how she will be. Ram struggled to live and fled to new places to survive by adapting to circumstances and earned to live in different professions right from childhood. He works as a waiter, works for actress Neelima Kumari, works in Taylor's estate, works as a tourist guide in Delhi, and as a Bar attendant finally, which inspired him to participate in the quiz show. He is always

involved in finding relationships and family throughout his journey, helping others who are needy and dreaming of acquiring a happy life.

Ram faced many outbreaks that changed him significantly. Ram has finally seen that he can impact others as well. Ram states that "I won't need it anymore. Because luck comes from within." (Swarup, 318). His journey proves that every man has an innate ability inside of him and proves when an opportunity knocks. The idea of the novel is entwined around the plight of ordinary people. The most interesting is, its theme of the endless possibilities of life, a reminder that anything is possible if you strongly believe and strive to achieve it.

CONCLUSION:

Though Bildungsroman is not a dominant genre but has a universal appeal as it deals with the universal experience of coming of the age. Bildungsroman was used in the postmodern era due to its flexibility in addressing the themes of globalization, identity, trauma, and violence. In the novel Q&A by Vikas Swarup, the primary character Ram is found searching to become responsible and seen in quest for his identity in the world. The protagonist is noticed towards a strenuous journey to attain maturity by experiencing different stages like conflict and growth. It is known that a well written story follows elements like plot, setting, tone and style Q &A" succeeds in using these traditional notions. Vikas Swarup expounded the themes of the rags to riches, class struggle, alienation, physical punishment, harsh living conditions in the novel which are the major features of Bildungsroman

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BIOGRAPHIES



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