

Epistemological Narration in Vikas Swarup's *Q & A*

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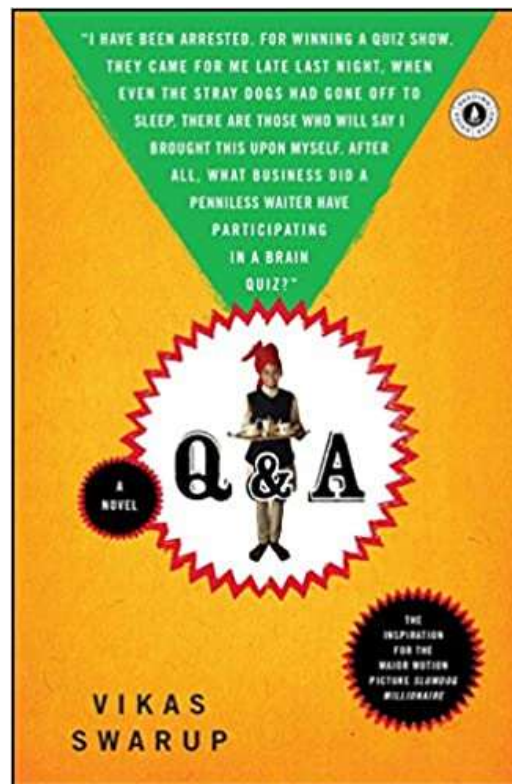
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Abstract

The present paper discusses epistemological narration in Vikas Swarup's *Q & A*. Swarup recorded the attitude of contemporary youth of Modern India in different ways focusing on the ways youths are experienced with their knowledge rather than education. It demonstrates the agony

of unprivileged people in reaching ambitions. The main focus is to bring the art of virtue and aspirations through epistemology of narration. The contemporary Indian milieu is satirized. It describes the high privilege of long-lasting democratic status. The protagonist tries to confer judicious grades of freedom in win-win situation. Ram accomplishes his ambition through various experiences in modern India. Swarup creates an interesting portrayal of the contemporary social issues.

Keywords: Vikas Swarup, *Q & A*, epistemological narration, friendship, religion, sexual harassment, child labour, women emancipation

Vikas Swarup is a Contemporary Indian diplomat and writer. At present, he serves as a Secretary (West) at the Ministry of External Affairs, India. He is the renowned author of *Q & A*, which was adapted to the Oscar film called as *Slumdog Millionaire*. The film *Slumdog Millionaire* won Oscar award in 2008. Both the novel and the film have been acknowledged all over the world. The debut novel, *Q & A*, with the credit of international best-seller, has been translated into 43 different languages. It was shortlisted for the Best First Book by the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and won South Africa's Exclusive Books Boeke Prize in 2006, as well as the Prix Grand Public at the 2007 Paris Book Fair.

Swarup's debut novel *Q & A* is framed as the epistemological narration of the protagonist. It presents the philosophical study of the traits and limits of the human knowledge. Ram Mohammed Thomas is a penniless waiter in Mumbai, who becomes the biggest quiz show winner in history. The plot of the novel revolves around the mystery of the winning in the quiz show by Ram Mohammed Thomas "His amazing journey reaches its climax when he gets a chance to participate in a quiz named 'Who will Win a Billion?'" (Valiyamattam, 50). Ram Mohammed Thomas, an illiterate slum boy won the competition.

In the quiz arena, the voice of Ram Mohammed Thomas has been equipped with English language. "Here the protagonist Ram Mohammad Thomas speaks in English, but the pathetic thing is that he is dwelling in a biggest slum Dharavi." (Mariyappan, 471). Though the protagonist hailed from slum, he was familiar in English language to converse among the society. It is crystal clear that Vikas has given utmost importance to the English language rather than the culture.

Vikas Swarup expounded the enthusiastic theme of the rags to riches as the prologue of the novel. The problem was raised as the police accused Ram Mohammed Thomas that he cheated in the quiz show. The producers of the show are not ready to pay the amount which would deprive him of the prize. It is only through the lawyer Smita, he proves his innocence by sharing the episodes of his life and travels in India. Smita plays dual role to shield Ram from the critical situation. She was introduced as Gudiya, a slum girl and later part was Smita. Here, Vikas Swarup

symbolizes the character Gudiya as the society and Smitha as the justifier. She is considered to be the only character who believes the philosophical aspects in Ram's life.

Smitha nods her head. "I think that is the key. After all, a quiz is not so much a test of knowledge as test of memory."

"You mean the year I was born? Year number one?"

"No. From Question number one. But before we start, promise me, Ram Mohammed Thomas, that you will tell the truth." (*Q & A*, 18)

The narrator interprets his past life as the answers to the Questions. The strong influence of epistemological narration is based on his experience of knowledge and truth.

Swarup presents each question to the protagonist as a distinct chapter in the novel *Q & A*. It also formed as the reminiscences of the past life. By the way, Ram narrates his experiences. It is through Ram, Swarup carried the plot in telegraphic observance of current India's social structure. The first and the foremost walk off with a prize is the answer to the question *The Death of Hero*. Ram recalls his friend Salim who is the ardent admirer of Arman Ali. He doubles the award in the burden of a priest by interpreting his early life in the Catholic Church. Father Timothy christened him to protect him from civil wars raging in India. Salim is also appreciated for singing Surdas's Bhajan's perfectly.

Masterji is extremely pleased with Salim's progress. "You have now mastered the art of singing. Only one lesson is left."

"And what is that?"

"The *bhajans* of Surdas."

He is the most famous of all *bhakti* singers, who composed thousands of songs in praise of Lord Krishna. (*Q & A*, 95)

Swarup mirrors up the fundamental unity in bringing all the religion together with the double persona Ram Mohammed Thomas and Salim. Both the friends are represented as the social integration in the novel *Q & A*.

Swarup reveals Ram's virtue and responsibility in protecting the women in the Indian society. "Unlike his patriarchal inheritors, he never supports any disobedience against women;

rather he always tries his best to protect them from any danger.” (Biswas,14). In the response of the answer to Pluto, he is reminded of residing with Gudiya and her cat Pluto. Gudiya was saved from her father’s sexual harassment by Ram. Gudiya reveals her identity as a lawyer in return of her gratitude. Swarup elucidates women’s sufferings in upper and lower society. Ram illuminates the existence of women in the upper society through the Tragedy Queen Neelima Kumari, a famous actress who desires to be young and beauty forever. Her strong crave made her to commit suicide. In the same way, he accounts for the life of Nita who was forced by her brother to be prostitute for the sake of money. She had a quest to be freed from her brother by paying 400,000.

In India, young boys are maimed to make money. Sethji is ambitious to make money by transforming the young boys into crippled ones. It is Ram’s plan to escape from Sethji. He also saves Salim to run away from the orphanage and move to Mumbai. Swarup is keen to bring forth both the offence and moral in Ram’s narration. Simultaneously Ram owns the coin to signify that he was going to face two sides of present social milieu in India. To Swarup, it is not only the coin tossed for the choice for the answer but also to find the righteous way to live.

Swarup draws the picture of child labour and lust for money through didactic narration of Ram. Ram was adapted to work under Mr. Colonel Taylor in Dharavi, Mumbai. It was the first time, he experiences urbanized rich lifestyle. Being trusted servant, he was given an opportunity to access his den to deactivate the security alarm. Mr. Colonel is arrested for treason for being a double agent. Ram as a bartender at Jimmy's Bar, is skilled to use the tips by taking advantage of people’s drunkenness. Swarup uses the animal imagery for the drunkards. He also classifies the traits of animals such as horse that drank the most and asses to babble, dogs indulge in arguments, and the pigs vomit after last peg. Through this learning experience, Ram meets some unusual characters by the name Prakash Rao, who tells him all about his Haitian wife and his brother Aravind who died of a heart attack. He confesses his disloyalty of stealing millions of rupees of his brother’s money and caused troubles through the voodoo doll.

“Well then, I don’t see how you can answer the next question without making use of one of your Lifeboats. So here comes question number six, for a hundred thousand rupees. What is the capital of Papua New Guinea? Is it (a) Port Louis, (b) Port-au-Prince, (c) Port Moresby, or (d) Port Adelaide?” The suspenseful music commences.” (Q & A, 146)

Surprisingly, Thomas answers the correct answer and won hundred thousand rupees. The audience cheers him up. Ram got a link when third button of his shirt was missing. He trusted superstitious belief in Voodoo. Swarup projects an irrational sense to highlight the current Indian Societal. A holistic approach of Indian society possesses the blended form of **modern** and irrational.

Swarup portrays the astounding effects of modernization that prevails in India. He also made the Protagonist Ram to encounter the robber in the Western Express, a person who deceives as a soldier. He witnesses the social breakup that is bounded together through various crimes in the traditional society. Though Ram was exposed to negative aspects of the society, he imbibed the requisite of life to be the winner. His winning in each question in the Quiz arena means winning a life situation. Ram's virtue is further exposed by lending help to the man, whose son was suffering from rabies bitten by a mad dog by stealing money from the women.

Through epistemological narration of Ram's trait and the way he answered to all the fifteen questions in the quiz arena, Swarup builds psychological intelligence of the character Ram with the interpretation about society. "While in the larger sense Vikas Swarup's novel *Q&A* is a story about character development: Psychological, Educational and Moral" (Gondhali,4). Through the Bildungsroman formation, the protagonist attained a sense of realization. The dichotomies between knowledge of experience and knowledge of education are portrayed. The knowledge of experience is predominant in the path of quiz arena.

Ram is a moving pendulum hanging between the labyrinths of financial and psychological entrapments throughout the novel. Swarup uses the flashbacks techniques to showcase Ram as self-reflexive maturity, self-affirming, self-protecting and self-reliant person in Modern India. Thus, Ram's virtue of his life has brought to light through Epistemological narration.

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