

**CHAPTER - III**

**NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF  
THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL**

## STORY

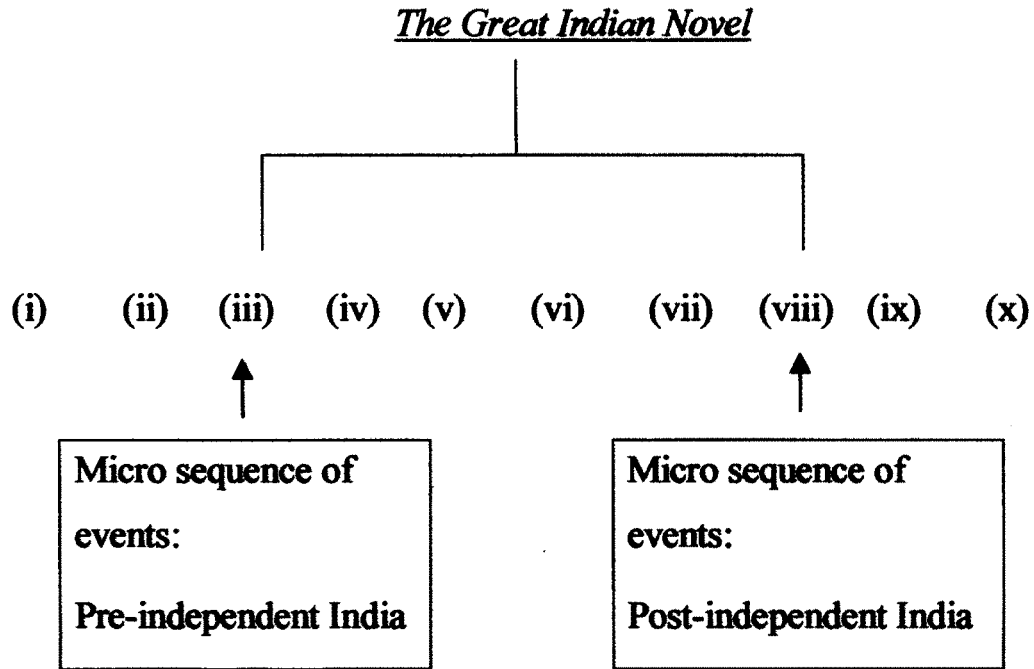
### Events

*The Great Indian Novel* is a story of modern India. It is about India's struggle against British Empire and aftermath of India. *The Great Indian Novel* starts with chaotic situation in India under the British rulers and ends with chaotic uncertainties of India under the Indian rulers. The story takes place in Hastinapur around the Kaurav family.

The events in the story of *The Great Indian Novel* take place in Hastinapur around the Kaurav family. They move from India under the British rule to the post-independent India by placing contemporary political history in the spatial frame of Hastinapur. All the events of the story of *The Great Indian Novel* can be divided into two parts which in turn have the following five episodes with independence as the dividing line.

	<b>Pre-Independent India</b>	<b>Post-Independent India</b>
1	Beginning of family relations	Merging of states
2	Ganga Datta active in freedom struggle	Rivalry between Pandavas and Priya Duryodhani
3	Indian struggle against the British	Political Struggle between Kaurav (O) & Kaurav (U)
4	Indian Politics under the British rule	Internal siege and elections
5	Pandu, Dhritrashtra and his family	Priya Duryodhani loses her power

These events can be re-charted as:

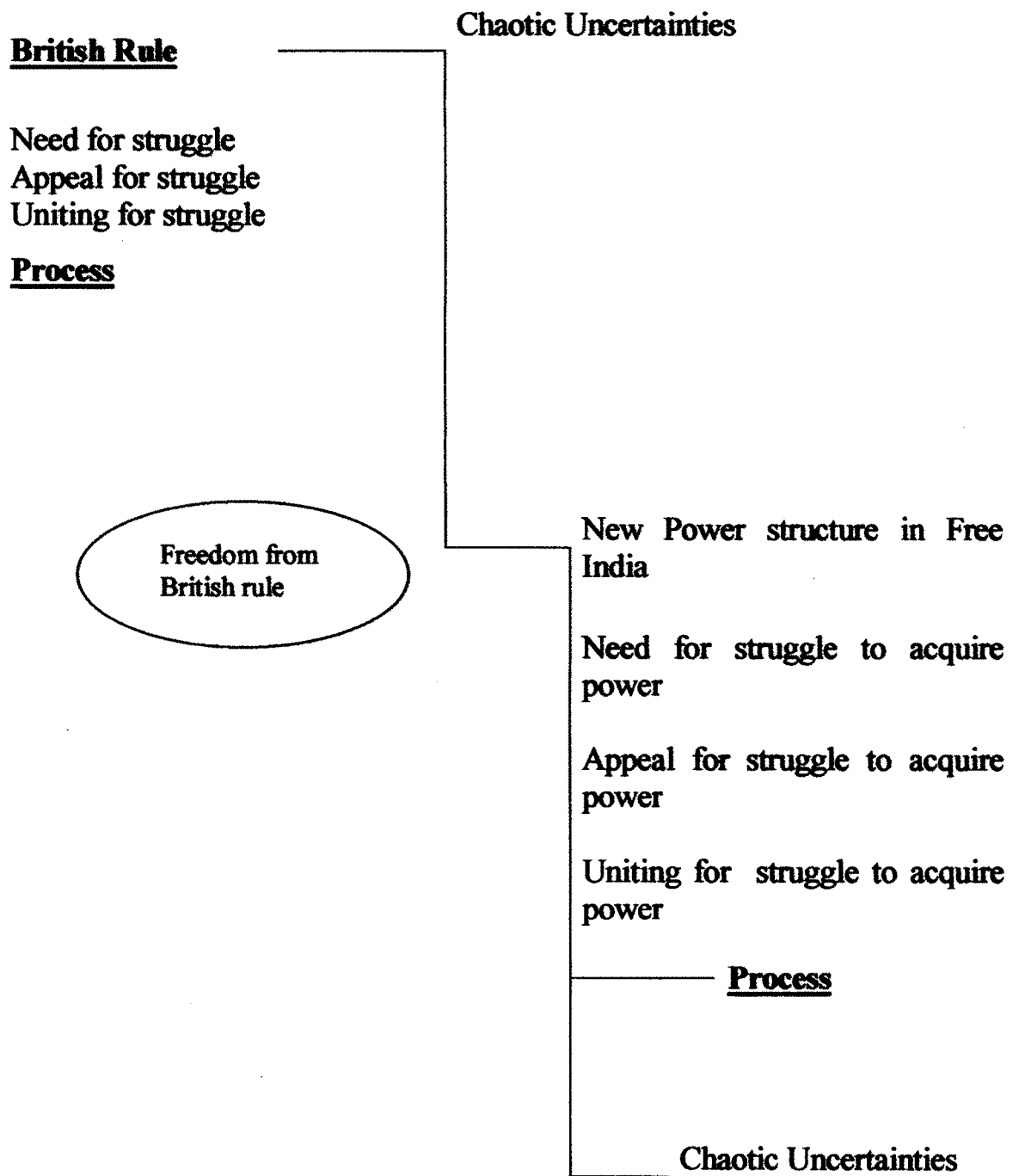


As the diagram makes it clear, the story of *The Great Indian Novel* can be bifurcated to show the struggle between the polarities represented by the British and the Indian freedom fighters in the first part and Yudhishtir and Priya Duryodhani in the second. In the first part, struggle is between the Indians and the British rulers. The Kaurav party under the leadership of the Mahaguru fights against the British rule. In the second part, the struggle is between two Indian parties: party under the leadership of Priya Duryodhani and the party of Yudhishtir.

Both the struggles are marked by the power relation between the politically dominant and subservient. The British rulers are politically dominant in the first part and subservient Kauravas fight

against them to get the power. In the next part, Priya Duryodhani, and her party is dominant and the subservient party of Yudhishtir fight against them for political power and ends in uncertain chaos.

The power-relations can be structured as:



As shown in the chart, Shantanu, Parashar, Satyavati and Ganga create their ancestry as Ganga Datta, Vichitravirya and Chitrangada and they, in turn give Pandu, Dhritrashtra and Vidur. The ancestry gets obvious political strength in Hastinapur. The political leadership comes in the hands of Ganga Datta who inspires Dhritrashtra and Pandu alongwith others of The Kaurav party to struggle against British Empire for political power. The strong force of agitation by the Kaurav party at Motihari, Budge-Budge and Quit India movement gives independence and new power.

In the second section, the conflict is between Priya Duryodhani and her party on one hand and Yudhishtir and his party on the other. The Pandavas under the leadership of Yudhishtir with the support from Jayprakash Drona and D.Krishna Parthsarathi struggle to get the political power they have lost. At last, they acquire the power and Yudhishtir becomes the Prime Minister. Now, though shift in power occurs, no one gets 'salvation' and all remain in chaotic uncertainties.

It can be seen in the above two parts that the force behind the story is structurally same wherever characters are motivated for the struggle. In the beginning, someone motivates them for the struggle, they are appealed and brought together for the struggle. Ganga Datta and Jayprakash Drona do the act of motivation in the first and second

part respectively. They remain a motivating force for the acquisition of their target, i.e. power.

### **Allegory and the Story**

At the surface level, the story of *The Great Indian Novel* directly involves descendants of Shantanu and Parashar and relation between them. They are inter-related in the context of power play at Hastinapur. However, at the deeper level of the story, it refers to the modern Indian history, on the one hand and the *Mahabharata*, epic on the other. In this sense, it is an allegorical mode of presentation of the story where objects, persons, and actions are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative. The story of *The Great Indian Novel* makes sense of things through correspondences, by relating experiences and phenomena to the ones 'already known'- casting works in a mould of correspondences with the narrative schemas, system of beliefs and thoughts of already known stories of the *Mahabharata*. In such allegorical representation, the writer can exploit tensions between two contrary impulses of story which are always at work: that of closing, as far as possible, the gap between his work and the one he is appropriating as a base or model and providing divergences between the two, especially in their meanings. In the story of *The Great Indian Novel*, the persistent efforts seem to work out varying levels of similitude with the *Mahabharata*. The writer of

*The Great Indian Novel* has an advantage of gaining historical value that comes from appropriation of base text of the *Mahabharata*. Since the *Mahabharata* does not have a fixed text and because it has gone through various versions of story-telling from the time it was first conceived, it provides great deal of flexibility to the writer to use it as a model. The characters and the events of *The Great Indian Novel* clearly represent modern India while their historical actions and interactions are made to confirm to the *Mahabharata*'s well-known characters and the events.

At the structural level of the narrative, a benefit of the allegorical mode of *The Great Indian Novel* is that the storyteller does not have to argue or prove like a scientist when he tells the story of *The Great Indian Novel*. It has 'story-ness' of its own. Here, the researcher would like to make a point that the authority of a story of the *Mahabharata* comes out of its historicity and the recognition it gets in the course of time through the "process" of telling itself. It could be one of the reasons of accepting it as base narrative text or in words of T.S. Eliot who comments on use of myth in fiction:

"The author uses myth to manipulate a continuous parallel between the contemporaneity and the antiquity. It is simply a way of controlling of ordering of giving shape and significance to immense panorama of futility

and anarchy that is contemporary history. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art toward order and form.”<sup>1</sup>

The story achieves coherence in its order and structure by combining the events according to organizational principles. Here, again, an advantage of allegorical mode is that the organizational unity is presupposed on the basis of what is given in the *Mahabharata*. The root of impulse towards allegory is, relating experience and phenomenon to the ones already known. As Stephen Barney writes,

“allegory is rooted in the principle of interpretation to which the correspondence of the text to the old, authoritative text, which encourages the reader to look for a principle of interpretation to which the correspondence points.”<sup>2</sup>

The ‘correspondence’ is between the events the base text and the events in the given narrative text. In *The Great Indian Novel*, the events related to the characters and their action can be seen in correspondence with their parallels in the *Mahabharata*. Then, the story has its own organizational unity similar to that of the *Mahabharata*. The shift of action from one state to the other ‘already known’ is similar to the narrative flow of the *Mahabharata*. Thus, the



organizing principles of combination in *The Great Indian Novel* remain inherited property of 'story -ness' that comes from the *Mahabharata*. The causality of *The Great Indian Novel*, has the fictional causality accepted by the story-teller, however, on the other hand, it remains parallel with the *Mahabharata*. The beginning, middle, and end-structure of story of *The Great Indian Novel* preconceive the structure of the story of the *Mahabharata*.

*The Great Indian Novel* inherits the narrative structure of the *iti-ha-asa* tradition. The term *iti-ha-asa* can be explained as 'so indeed it was'. It is a traditional account of former events, legend, history, and thus indeed according to tradition. It may mean either a class of literature of popular characters, associated with the record of the events or events themselves. The *iti-ha-asa* tradition of the *Mahabharata* is a record of the events kept by Ved Vyas in the form of epic tradition. The narrative structure of *iti-ha-asa* narration is apparently complex but it is a complexity that incorporates and conceals a profound simplicity. The complexity emerges out of the myriad events, plots and subplots with connecting patterns that give each its meaning and significance. The main force behind the patterning in the *Mahabharata* is its lineage structure. Besides causality and temporality of story, the transition from one state to the

other is part of transition of lineage system to the state system. Romila Thapur writes,

“ The *Mahabharata* has a lineage system of corporate group of unlineal kin with the formalized system of authority.”<sup>3</sup>

She then observes,

“Central to these early sections of the *iti-ha-asa purana* tradition was the genealogical data. This was crucial in a society where kinship links are determined status. Land rights, wealth, marriage relation and reservation of tribal identity. The genealogies from the core of tradition.”<sup>4</sup>

*The Great Indian Novel* also gives an account of former events and history. It becomes record of popular characters and their events in modern political India. *The Great Indian Novel* maintains event structure similar to the temporal patterning of the genealogical structure. However, the researchers in no way tries to say that the forces influencing genealogical data are same in *The Great Indian Novel* as in the *Mahabharata*. The forces of power relations in *The Great Indian Novel* replace the issues like land rights, wealth in the *Mahabharta* of the *it-ha-asa* tradition by the political rights, greed for power. In fact, by accepting genealogical similitude with the

*Mahabharata* in *The Great Indian Novel*, Shashi Tharoor legitimizes causality of his story. As a part of inherited the narrative of the Mahabharata, the flow of characters can claim obvious causality and temporality at the structural level of the story. The causality in turn operates at the level of transition from non-state to state and shifts from one state to other. As in the *Mahabharata*, *The Great Indian Novel* has the lineage group of Kaurav family with the non-state status in the beginning that changes in the state power at the end. As mentioned by Romila Thapar, in the *Mahabharata*, the genealogical data is transferred, in the form of state power, from the ruler inside to the ruler inside. The struggle between Kauravas and Pandavas in the *Mahabharata* is within the same family structure. But, in *The Great Indian Novel*, the state-power transformation is in two parts. In the first part, the shift of state power is from the ruler outside to the ruler inside and in next part, it is shifted from the ruler inside to the ruler inside within the same family structure.

As an obligatory link between two generations, the genealogical structure promotes cause-effect relation within the extended family. The individual member is guaranteed both identity and legitimacy through the tracing of his lineage to founding father: the family's origin and the first cause. In *The Great Indian Novel*, Shantanu and Satyawati are the first cause, for they separately and unitedly extend

their 'effect' progeny bestowing upon them an authority in genealogical structure for the next 'cause-effect' relation. The same causal decorum is brought with all possible random events into an alignment of relevance. At the point of conclusion of the genealogical structure, all possibilities are converted into necessity within the kinship. Hence, Yudhishtir or Priya Duryodhani is referred to Pandu and Dhritrashtra or to the beginning of the genealogy.

The temporality in *The Great Indian Novel* covers change in the state from 'before' and 'now' to 'then'. The chronological sequence of *The Great Indian Novel*, at the deeper level of the narrative, is a part of the historical, political changes in Modern India. The sequence seeks to capture the historical event in the allegorical mode. This capturing operates on the levels of both history and fiction. As Roland Barthes puts it:

“Therefore, narration, a form, common to both Novel & History does remain, in general, the choice or expression of an historical moment.”<sup>5</sup>

In *The Great Indian Novel*, 'the choice of expression of an historical moment' is modern India. The choice itself makes the story move in certain chronological frame of time. Shashi Tharoor gauges the historical forces of before and after independent India to be

responsible for the temporal dimension of *The Great Indian Novel*.

The temporal structure in *The Great Indian Novel* can be seen as:

1. shift from the 'X' moment to the 'Y' moment and so on.
2. dichotomy between the 'X- before' to the 'Y- then' and the fresh perspective on both.
3. structural demonstration of cyclical nature of history.

The 'X' moment in *The Great Indian Novel* is the Indians under the British rule. The 'Y' moment is a shift from the rulers outside to the rulers inside. The shift from the 'X' to the 'Y' moment is a part of the struggle of the Kaurav party under leadership of the Mahaguru. In the second part of the novel, the shift from the ruler inside X1 to ruler inside X2. The dichotomy between these two states of temporal movements presents a fresh perspective of looking at them in contrast and similarities. The change in state power is observed but no change in the nature of political chaos, both under the British rule and Indian rule. The unchanging nature of chaos brings the story at a point where the next story starts in cyclical presentation. At last, when no one gets 'salvation', the ultimate nature of cyclical structure is demonstrated to occur again in time.

## **Characters**

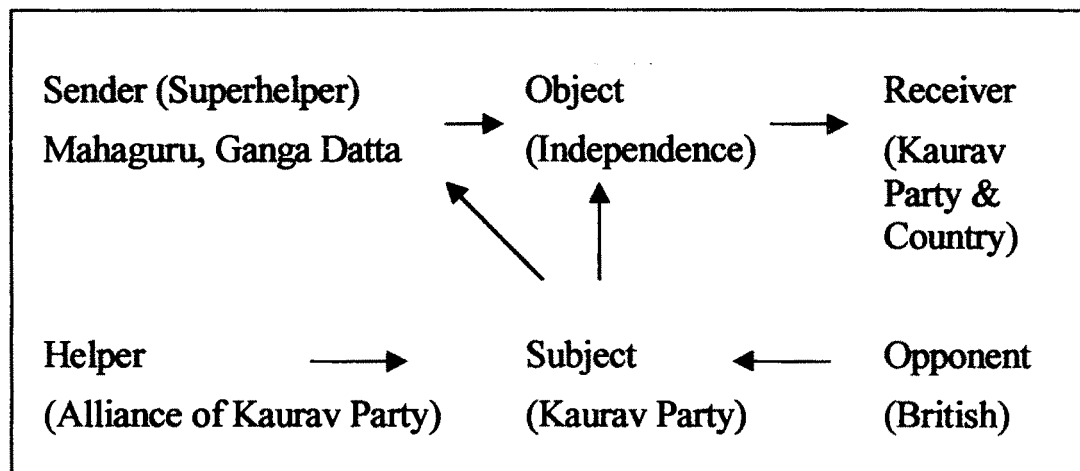
The characters in *The Great Indian Novel* are modeled primarily on the author's perception of the *Mahabharata* on one hand and modern Indian history on the other. The reader understands these characters based on what he knows of the *Mahabharata* and modern Indian history.

A phenomenon at the root of allegorical writing is to relate to the old that is 'already known'. For example, Dhritrashtra is shown blind, Ganga Datta vows not to have children, Pandu has five sons etc. In this sense, the characters in *The Great Indian Novel* are simple as there is not / cannot be further development beyond certain stage since they are also part of already known text. However, these static, undeveloping characters are not limited to one trait. For example, Ganga Datta though decides not to have sex with women, sleeps with Ambika and Ambalika to save Hastinapur.

Besides allegorical similitude, the characters in *The Great Indian Novel* can be analyzed in their relations to the action or the function they carry before and after getting freedom. In the first part, the characters are divided into two groups according to power relations between the ruler and the ruled. The ruler-characters have common traits like, they are outsiders, British, dominant in power, white skinned people, drinkers etc. The character like Ronald Heaslop

represents these traits. On the other hand, the ruled-characters are insiders, Indians, subservient in power, black skinned people. The characters like Ganga Datta, Dhritrashtra, Pandu represent these character traits. When they carry their functions on their own they are characters like either 'Indians' or 'Englishmen' but when they are brought in relation to the other group, the relation pattern becomes as the ruler and the ruled.

The researcher would like to look into these relations by applying Greimas' model to the first part of *The Great Indian Novel* as:



The subject / hero is the Kaurav party, under the leadership of Ganga Datta, struggles for independence (object), in which case the Kaurav party and the Indians will be receiver or beneficiaries. In this struggle, the party is helped by other party members or non-party individuals but with limited success. Their combined efforts count for

in the struggle against opponents (powerful British). At last, the Mahaguru Ganga Datta is presented as the sender with his Quit India movement to achieve the object of independence.

When we turn to the application of the Greimas-model to the second section of *The Great Indian Novel* of action (s) in story. Yudhishtir's Kaurav party is clearly the subject and the receiver and their object is to get political power. In pursuit of this object, Jayprakash Drona, D. Krishna Parthasarathi are helpers and Priya Duryodhani is their opponent.

According to their mode of presentation in the story, various character-traits are combined according to the principle of repetition, similarity, and contrast. The repeated act of agitation of Ganga Datta and his companions against Heaslop and other British rulers shows their struggle. In the same way, Priya Duryodhani's repeated offence against Yudhishtir and Pandavas show rivalry between them. The contrast between these groups at the level of their actions and reactions to each other prove that they are opposite forces. The similarities between five sons of Pandu as they are brought up by Kunti, trained by Drona and their unanimous action against Priya Duryodhani help them to group as one. Permutations in both the sections of the story of *The Great Indian Novel* are different on the basis of the mode of their power play. In the first part, the power play



is between the ruler outside and the ruler inside and in the second, the ruler inside, and the ruler inside. Both the power- plays have their own force behind power. The rulers inside in the first part want to get freedom from rulers outside and they struggle for the ultimate power after freedom. The rulers inside in the second part struggle against the ruler inside within the political frame to get ultimate political power. To simplify, the force behind the enterprise of power play in the first part is imperialist greed and in the other part, leadership and domination is the force behind the power play.

#### TEXT

The paratextual entries of *The Great Indian Novel* are strong enough for the referential statement about the base text: *The Mahabharata*. The author in the beginning informs:

“ The Great Indian Novel takes its title not from the author’s estimate of its contents but in deference to its primary source of inspiration, the ancient epic the *Mahabharata*. In Sanskrit, *Maha* means great and *Bharata* means India.” (*About the title, The Great Indian Novel*).

For anyone to whom the *Mahabharata* is accessible, the author’s note about the title is a key to the meaning of the text. It performs a dual function of referring narrative of the *Mahabharata* as

pre-textual on one hand and as hypotextual reference that the author intends to narrate in his text. In this sense, it could be seen as interfacing of two narratives to create the fictional world of *The Great Indian Novel*.

The author gives three quotations in the beginning of *The Great Indian Novel* in the pretextual entries as:

“The Mahabharata has not only influenced the literature, art, sculpture and painting of India but it has also moulded the very character of the Indian people.” -C. R. Deshpande (*The Great Indian Novel*)

“The essential *Mahabharata* is whatever is relevant to us the second half of the twentieth century.” - P. Lal (*The Great Indian Novel*)

“I think in India, some stories should be kept alive by literature. Writers experience another view of history, what’s going on, another understanding of ‘progress’...Literature must refresh memory.” - Gunther Grass (*The Great Indian Novel*)

The Great Indian Novel thus gives three remarks about its base text: the *Mahabharata* as:

1. powers of the base narrative

2. accessibility of the base narrative in the fiction-making.
3. the author's proposal about the base narrative in narration making.

The remarks show the way the *Mahabhartata* has influenced various art forms of India and has moulded the very characteristics of the Indian people. The form of the novel is not exception to that. Infact, the author does not access the *Mahabharata* as mere historical narrative of the distant past but he intends to relate it with the contemporary reality. He assumes all possible powers of narration of the *Mahabharata* and wishes to appropriate them for his novel that deals with 'whatever is relevant to us the second half of the twentieth century'. The pretextual references thus construct very notion of copy and reproduction and wipe it out by referring to the base text as,

"No epic, no work of out, is sacred by itself, if it does not have meaning for me now, it is nothing it is dead." - Gunther Grass (*The Great Indian Novel*).

### **Time**

As discussed above, the paratextual entries directly refer to 'time' of the narrative. The 'time' at the story level refers to the sequence of the *Mahabharata* and modern Indian history. The author

brings these 'two' times and 'discourses' them in the text of *The Great Indian Novel*.

The narration starts as, "They tell me India is an underdeveloped country..." narrating in the present tense. On the one hand, this is a position in the present of the act of narrating and on the other hand, it is logical because of its position of the narrator, Ved Vyas.

"This is my story, the story of Ved Vyas, eighty-eight years old and full of irrelevancies, it could become nothing less than the Great Indian Novel.

I suppose I must begin with myself. I was born with century, a bastard but a bastard in a fine tradition, the offspring of a fisherwoman seduced by a travelling sage."  
(18-19)

The narration jumps from the present to the past of the narrator and again enters in the past of the past to tell his own story that takes narration back to eighty years. In Genettian term, it is analepsis of analepsis. The move from the present to the past of act of narrating at the beginning of the text has two implications: first, is to carry information about the narrator, Ved Vyas and second to come to the point where the narrative can introduce and focus a character like Ganga Datta. Here, the narrative explores breaking time frames to

move in and out of the narrating time. We can witness the following remarks about Gangaji:

“In later years he would be accompanied by a non-violent army of *Satyagrahis*, so that the third class train carriages he always insisted on travelling in were filled with the elegantly sacrificing elite of his followers, rather than the sweat-stained poor, but on this occasion it was a band of ministers and courtiers he took with him to see Satyavati’s father. Ganga D would always have a penchant for making his most dramatic gestures before a sizeable audience. One day he was even to die in front of the crowd.” (23)

In this passage, the narration, again in Genettian terms, has prolepsis in analepsis. After entering in to the past, the narration reveals distant future. The prolepsis here removes suspense about the character’s closure since text reveals it long before chronological imperative. The reader knows what will happen to Gangaji. Nevertheless, on the other hand, such strategy is to engage the reader in puzzle of how characters move towards distant future located from their current situation. Consequently, he/she is intrigued to learn of intervening happenings about Gangaji.

The researcher wants to make some more observations concerning certain instances of narrative time as in following passage:

“ I cannot bear to think much longer of my pale pained son, Ganapathi. I don't wish to prolong his stumbling saga through the various stages of this narrative. Let us pay the chronological inexactitude to follow the rest of his story now, so that I may relinquish his heavy burden of historical memory, strained by the additional weights of paternity and helplessness. Come, Ganapathi, we shall leave the others frozen in their places in time as we unravel Pandu's destiny in the only form that suits its bathos.” (175)

The narrator's dialogue with Ganapathi is in the 'present' of the act of narrating. The narrator along with his narratee looks at 'what happened' and 'what may happen'. He takes adequate freedom for 'chronological inexactitude' to move backward, forward and obviously to remain in action. In addition, it is important to note the function of the narrator when he takes obvious freedom to break through the time frame of narrative. For the narrator, it is but natural to jump to the subsequent event in the narration associated with his narrative intention. It is an interesting game for both the narrator and the narratee to play with the narrative time.

The pace in the narrative time is maintained by accelerating or/and decelerating the time by the devices like ellipsis, summary, and scenes. To exemplify:

“And thus it was that Mohammed Ali, adopted son of a rich man’s driver, became Mohammed Ali Karna, destined to be star of the Inner Temple and Defender of the Mosque.

You don’t seem particularly convinced, Ganapathi. Well, neither was I. It is only a story. But you learn something about a man from the kind of stories people make about him.

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Of course, one must be wary of history by anecdote.

It would be too facile to suggest that the incident at the meeting alone led to Karna’s resignation from The Kaurav party. There undoubtedly were a hundred complex reasons that drove Karna out of the party...(141)

The pace in the above passage is accelerated and decelerated by using the device of summary as ‘and thus...’ and by the elliptic jumps from one situation to other. With such devices, the narrator could easily move from Karna’s status in party to his resignation from the party.

In the narrative pace, the inter-textuality of *The Great Indian Novel* plays an important role. It has some obvious benefits as it is closely associated with the narrative design of the *Mahabharata*. The reader gets easily accustomed with the certain kinds of duration links of the two narratives. The genealogical presentations, inter-relations

of its constituents in the *Mahabharata* are directly utilized in *The Great Indian Novel*. Obviously, the narration of the novel follows the fixed pace between the opening and the closure of the narrative situation of the specific event. The reader gets used to the certain kind of length of presentation of the details of the characters like Vyas, Pandu or Dhritrashtra and the pace attached with their developments. The reader becomes partly inter-textual and intra-textual as well as he accepts certain extendedness of characters' development as he/she has certain access to beginning and closure of the specific character.

### **Characterization**

*The Great Indian Novel* has the characters with various traits identifiable at the level of the text. The indicators of the character-traits are dispersed through out the text-continuum of *The Great Indian Novel*. The characterization in *The Great Indian Novel* is a part of allegorical presentation with its roots of impulse of relating experiences and phenomena to one 'already known'. The 'already known' are the characters of the *Mahabharata* in the context of the political history of modern India. The narrator's stance is to depict 'the Song of Modern India in my prose'. The characterization in the *Mahabharata* and *The Great Indian Novel* resemble each other in terms of their development. For example, names of the characters (Pandu, Dhritrashtra), birth of the characters (like, from Satyawati,



Shantanu, Ganga), and their further developments. However, as a need of novel making, some deviations from the original become inevitable. To exemplify, the space devoted to their development, like hundred sons of Dhritrashtra replaced by Priya Duryodhani, mistaken percentage of Pandavas, events related with Eklavya differ from *Mahabharata*. The famous character of Kunti is presented in *The Great Indian Novel* in the following manner:

“ The five went together to take leave of Kunti. She was seated in the living –room, half-smoked Turkish cigarettes overflowing from a near-by ashtray whose silver matched the tint of the hair at her temples. Her Banaras sari, Bombay nails, Bangalore sandals and Bareilly bangles all advertised her fabled elegance- a elegance betrayed only by the strain at the corners of her red eyes and by the quick darting puffs she took through her ivory cigarette holder.” (266)

The writer of *The Great Indian Novel* has a special problem of fitting the actual historical personages and events in to the narrative design and cast of the characters of the epic that he had to make changes and adjustments of various kinds :

“...the yoking of myth to history restricted some of my fictional options: as the novel progressed, I was obliged

to abandon novelistic conventions and develop characters who were merely walking metaphors.”<sup>6</sup>

It can be seen from the characterization in *The Great Indian Novel* that the characters are always kept in binary relation to each other. They can be easily grouped in the binary of *dharma* and *adharma* according to the thematic structure of the text. In the first part, the characters are either Indians or British or ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’. In the second part, characters are either from the group of Yudhishtir or from the group of Priya Duryodhani.

“And what were they meant to prove?”

‘Prove?’ Dharma seemed vaguely puzzled. ‘Only the eternal importance of *dharama*.’

‘To what end? If it makes no difference to all these people, who all have their place here...’

‘Everyone,’ Dharma said, ‘finds his place in history, even those who have failed to observe dharma. But it is essential to recognize virtue and righteousness, and to praise him who, like your yourself, has consistently upheld *dharma*.’” (417)

The characterization is a part of the binary: *dharma* and *adharma*. The character traits attributed to them can easily be identified either as from the group of *dharma* or *adharma*. As given in

the introduction, two basic types of textual indicators of the characters are present in the text: indirect presentation and direct definition.

In indirect presentation of the characters through action, speech, external appearance and environment, the narrative unfolds the characters in the text in the thematic context. In the first part of the text, the characters' actions are centrally oriented around independence. Ganga Datta motivates others to carry further actions of struggle against the British rule. The actions divide the characters either as Indians or British. In the second part of the text, the characters' action revolves around party politics. Both the parties of Kaurav (O) and Kaurav (R) struggle against each other for the political dominance. One, under the leadership of Priya Duryodhani and other, under the leadership of Yudhishtir looks forward for the democratic victory through elections.

The chapter "Forbidden Fruit" brings into a sharp clash of two distinct worldviews: The ruler (Sir Richard) and the ruled (Gangaji). Gangaji is kept waiting by the Viceroy even after having been an appointment. In the light of the renowned English sense of punctuality, this act is meant to show who the master is. Sir Richard condescendingly keeps Gangaji in company until the Viceroy joins them. He uses the insincere expression 'unavoidably detained' to explain to Gangaji why the Viceroy had not shown up. Gangaji,

without entering into a conflict holds up Sir Richard to ridicule merely by repeating the latter's own expression which enables him to show up Sir Richard's/ the ruler's hypocrisy. This is how the conversation goes:

'I hope I have not come too early,' Gangaji said at last.

'No, not at all,' Sir Richard found himself forced to reply.

'His Excellency has...er...been unavoidably detained.'

'Unavoidably detained', Gangaji repeated, 'Unavoidably detained.' He savoured the words, seeming to taste each syllable as he uttered it. 'Another one of your fine British phrases, suitable for so many occasions, is it not? I wish I knew some of these myself. I myself listen carefully to my English friends, like His Excellency or indeed you, Sir Richard' - Sir Richard coughed unaccountably - 'and I always intend to use these phrases myself, but somehow they never come out of my mouth at the right time.' He laughed, shaking his head, as Sir Richard reddened dangerously, 'I often say to Sarabehn, we Indians will never learn this English language properly?'

Sir Richard did not know if his leg was being pulled, but he did know that he did know that he did not care too much for the trend of the conversation....' (P.128)

*The Great Indian Novel* in its indirect representation of the characters becomes metaphorical. The post independence Indian politics seem to have been interpreted as fluctuations in the fortunes

of Druapadi Mokراسي, i.e. D. Mokراسي (Democracy). It was after the death of Dhritrashtra (Jawaharlal Nehru), the great 'visionary' democrat, who with his eyes fixed at the stars, failed to see the dangers and pitfalls right under the nose and with the coming into power of his daughter Priya Duryodhani that D. Mokراسي's problems began. Priya Duryodhani's revolt against the old Guard of the Kaurav Party (the Congress), her suggested marriage (in V.V. Ji's dream) with Eklavya (V.V. Giri), the decision to hold to a 'swayamvara' in which only Arjun (the press) is able to meet the challenge of opening the huge ballot box in which she stands, thus becoming her natural guardian. In the 'swayamvar' (outside V.V.Ji's dream), D. Mokراسي chooses Arjuna in the modern ambience of a coffeehouse of a seminar.

The eighteen parts of *The Great Indian Novel* are given the titles based on the famous literary works, most of them about India. Paul Scott is a favorite- there are chapters named "The Duel with the Crown", "A Raj Quartet" and "The Powers of Silence." His name is also used for an administrator sympathetic towards Indians, "Lieutenant- Governor Scott with a soft spot for the uppity natives." (P.63) A chapter called "Passage Through India," and Ronald Heaslop is the name given to an important character. The kingdom of Hastinapur employs the Englishman as a secretary. Rudyard Kipling

is taken as the archetype of the imperialist: “Colonel Rudyard of the Fifth Baluch” is the army officer, who orders the soldiers to fire on the unarmed crowd in the Bibigarh Gardens Massacre (Jallianwala Bagh).

The directly defined characters are at the hands of the narrator, Ved Vyas who carries authoritative voice and hence most authentic voice for the direct definition of characters. The narrator primarily focuses on his own story and Ganga Datta’s characterization.

“This is my story, story of Ved Vyas, eighty- eight years old and full of irrelevancies. I suppose I must begin with myself. I was born century, as bastard a in fine tradition, offspring of a fisherwoman seduced by a travelling sage.” (18-19)

The narrator starts with his own and then turns towards others, as they are part of his own continuum. In the course of his narration, the narrator attributes some qualities to the character as:

“Dhritrashtra was fine- looking young fellow, slim, of aquiline nose and aristocratic bearing. His blindness was, of course, a severe handicap, but he learned early to act as if it did not matter.... he devoted himself to developing another kind of vision and became, successively, a formidable debater, a bachelor of arts and Fabian socialist. I have often wondered what might

have happened had he been able to see the world around him as the rest of us can. Might India's history have been different today?" (41)

The narrator presents character with his/her physical attributes, behavioral patterns, what he/she is, what he/she is not and what he/she could have been. As the narrator of the story he tells, it becomes authentic definition of the character. Throughout the narration, the narrator's voice remains dominant in his direct definition of characters. Consequently, the dominance of the narrator produces authoritative but static presentations of the characters. Thus, Pandu's character is described as 'pale' who 'never lacked in strength or courage' but the narrator adds as:

"What Pandu never had much of was judgement- or, as some of his admirers prefer to see it, luck." (42)

In the course of such direct definition of characters, the narrator not only defines them but he tries to impose his own judgements on characters other than characterizing them through actions. The direct definition of characters in *The Great Indian Novel* can be considered as an asset with authoritative voice behind it but it remains reductive in grasp. Though characters are presented through their indirect presentation, as explained above, they are sidelined by the narrator's

voice and it remains a major drawback in the characterization of *The Great Indian Novel*.

### **Focalization**

In *The Great Indian Novel*, the focalization occurs from an orientation inside the story. Every thing is seen through the perspective of Ved Vyas, a character, and the narrator. He is the focalizer of the story. One of the reasons of using Ved Vyas as focalizer is his position as ‘narrator’ who starts writing the story of India. The narrator-focalizer’s perception orients the narration and he perceives India in *The Great Indian Novel* as an Indian. The narrator who is a character and the narrator remains in the premises of his own characters. Since the whole text is internally focalized by one of the Indians who never disappears and keeps on seeing, commenting on whatever happens in the narration, no details of British characters and their views are elaborately given.

The narrator- focalizer, at every point, after giving details of action, intrudes the narration and comments:

“Some people said we had acted too hastily: that in our greed for office we sacrificed the integrity of the country; that had we been willing to wait and to compromise, partition would never have occurred: that Karna was the most surprised man in India when our



resolution was passed because he was only asking for the mile of separation in order to have the yard of autonomy and we should have called him bluff. To all these theorists, Ganapathi, I say: That's absolute cowardism. Or it's male equivalent. We gave in to partition because Karna's inhuman obduracy and Drawpad's incident haste left us no choice". (224)

In the above example, the focalizer takes position as an Indian about events and justifies them at the narrative level. Moreover, after a long dialogue between Yudhishtir and Dharma about uncertainties and chaos, at the closure, the narrator does not avoid intruding flow of the narration and he justifies it as:

"I woke up, Ganpathi to today's India. To our land of computers and corruption, of myths and politicians and box-wallahs with moulded plastic briefcases. To an India beset with uncertainties, madding chaotically through to the twenty-first century." (418)

The focalizer's intrusion averts the narration from being a panoramic in worldview.

In the first part of the narration, the narrator focalizes Gangaji and his struggle for freedom as his focalized object to show power relations in colonial period. Only in the first part of the narrative, the

focalization becomes compound where the focalizer, the narrator embeds Gangaji as his focalizer. Then the schema becomes:

$$F = [NF1 [CF2]]$$

[F- the focalization under analysis, NF- narrator focalizer, CF1-character-focalizer]

In this embedding process the narrator -focalizer justifies Gangaji's action and makes other characters justify Gangaji:

“to leave Gangaji aside for moment though that, as you can see, Ganapathi, is never easy; you see how he keeps taking over our story- let us return to his words.....”(109)

In the second part, Yudhishtir, and Priya Duryodhani, with their greed for power, become focalized objects representing chaotic party politics in post-independent India. The party politics and rivalry between Yudhishtir and Priya Duryodhani takes agonizing turn. Priya Duryodhani and Yudhishtir are focalized to show the power relations and its effect on individuals losing their identity. The narrator focalizes them to show binaries of the ruler and the ruled in the post-independent Indian politics. The schema becomes :

F = [NF [CF1 + CF2]]

[NF = Narrator focalizer; CF1 =character-focalized, Yudhishtir;

CF2 = character -focalized, Priya Duryodhani]

In both the schemas, Ved Vyas, the narrator-focalizer (NF) remains a special authority to impose his own views over the narrative. As the narrator-focalizer dominates focalization, the narration does not move through various levels of focalization. The focalizer and his focalized objects attract not only attention of the reader but also create sympathy among readers, for what they propose to say with the systematic manipulation of the device of focalization. In the course of this manipulation, the assumed objectivity of the narrator –focalizer and his objects remain questionable. All of them are presented that suits the narrative agenda. Consequently, the focalization in *The Great Indian Novel* does not focus a panoramic worldview but presents an authorial stance demanded by the text of *The Great Indian Novel*.

## NARRATION

The question, hereafter, is to whose voice we ‘hear’ telling us the story when we read a novel. The characters and their doings in time and space remain questionable if they are taken as the presentation of an ideal objective, unbiased, and ultimately undivided narrative voice. However, no characters or their actions are objective

or unbiased but are ever undivided and complex in presentation. The researcher would like to proceed further with a detail discussion about narrative instance and its relation with story, levels of the narration, the narrator and the narratee.

A chief temporal determination of the narrating instance is obviously its position relative to the story. It seems evident in *The Great Indian Novel* that the narrating is subsequent to what it tells. The narrating act is ulterior narration as Ved Vyas tells the story of his own past.

“Dammit, what I am about to dictate is the definitive memoir of my life and times.” (19)

The narrating instance of Ved Vyas and Ganapathi is at the higher level than the actual story they are narrating. In Genette’s term, The ‘extradiegetic level’ of Ved Vyas narrates ‘diegetic level’ of *The Great Indian Novel*.

“Yes, yes, put it all down. Every word I say, we are not writing a piddling western thriller here. This is my story, the story of Ved Vyas, eighty-eight years old and full of irrelevancies, but it could become nothing less than the Great Indian Novel.” (18)

The narration follows the story of Ved Vyas. At this point, Ved Vyas has completed eighty-eight years of his life and has stopped being hero of a story to narrate the story of *The Great Indian Novel*. An interval between the end of the story and the moment of the narrating is a time of interval like a “flash of lightening” for the story and the narrative. It is the point where narrating act is reduced to zero by reaching narrating in the “present” position of the ‘here’ and the ‘now.’

Yet, a distance between narrating instances of Ved Vyas and his story exists. The narrating instance of Ved Vyas and his narratee remains at the higher level than the story they narrate: the ‘extra-diegetic’ level of the actual story. The narrator of the extra diegetic level is the fictive author of *The Great Indian Novel* who later becomes a character in his own narration. It is a point at which the narrator connects two levels of narrative. He brings his hero’s story-his own story precisely to the point when hero of the story becomes the narrator.

In *The Great Indian Novel*, the relation between the extra diegetic and the diegetic level is of two types. The first type of relation of direct causality between the events of the extra diegetic level and the diegetic level. The narrating instance of Ved Vyas is a cause of the story of *The Great Indian Novel*. The narrator wants to

tell his own story that could become 'nothing less than the Great Indian Novel'. Obviously, what he intends to say is explained at diegetic level of narrative.

The other relation is of theme. The theme of both the levels is to tell the story of India, the story of Ved Vyas as,

“doddering and decrepit though you may think I am, and yet it is also the story of India, your country and mine. Go ahead, Ganpathi, sit back, I shall tell you at all.”

The transition from one level to the other can in principle be achieved only by narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of narration, the knowledge of another situation. The transgressive change from one to another is in the form of *it̄ha-asa* as discussed in the chapter of text. The narrator, Ved Vyas announces to tell the story of legendary part of history of India. The shift is an activity to draw the reader's attention to keep him/her with story.

“To leave Gangaji aside for a moment- though that, as you can see, Ganapathi is never easy, you see how he keeps taking over our story-let us return to his wards, the newly political, newly parental princelings of Hastinapur.” (109)

Here, the narrator treats the extradiegetic level as if it was contemporary with the diegetic level and consequently fills the 'gap' between them. The narrator Ved Vyas tells Ganapathi,

“You can imagine the relief we all felt that day.  
Ganapathi, and the sense of triumph.”

It is the narrator's one more act of keeping himself contemporary with the story. It is an advantage of the character-narrator playing role at the level of story to witness actions in the story.

The narration of *The Great Indian Novel* is self-conscious that plays with the narrative levels in order to break temporal boundaries or to suggest that there is no boundary between reality and narration. The narration begins and ends with, “ They tell me India is an underdeveloped country.” Such a comment in the 'present' tense certainly does take the story in specific conditions of reality. There,

“they attend seminar, appear on television, even come to see me, creasing their eight-hundred rupee suits sand clutching their moulded plastic briefcases... I tell them they have no knowledge of history and even less of their own heritage... they laugh at me pityingly...”(17)

The interchangeability of narrative levels repeatedly reverses the hierarchy and the very distinction between time, narrated object and narrating subject.

### **Narrator and Narratee**

The discussion of the narrator could be done along with the level to which he belongs, the extent of his participation in the story and his reliability in the act of narration. The narrator, Ved Vyas is an 'extradiegetic narrator' as he is 'above' or superior to the story he narrates. At the same time, he is a character as he takes part in the story. The narrator as being superior to the story he narrates, he gets narratorial authority. As a result, Ved Vyas, as the narrator can easily relate himself with settings in the story, character's innermost feelings and thoughts, knowledge of past and knowledge of what happens in several places with several characters at the same time. Thus, Ved Vyas overtly presents himself through description of settings as:

“Permit an old man a moment's indulgence in nostalgia. The palace at Hastinapur was a great edifice in those days, a cream-and- pink tribute to the marriage of western architecture and eastern tales...”(31)



The narrator directly goes to the setting and describes it in his own language. Sometimes, the narrator describes the place like Hastinapur in the form of prose along with verse as,

“The towns and the city of Hastinapur overflowed with businessmen and shopkeepers, coolies and workmen, travelling seers and travelling salesmen. Yes, Ganapathi, the story of those days drives me to verse:

“With the birth of the boys  
Flowed all the joys  
Of the kingdom of Hastinapur;  
The flags were unfurled  
All was well with world  
From the richest right down to the poor.”(40)

The information likes,

“from Ambika emerged Dhritrashtra, blind, heir to the Hastinapur throne” (32)

gives identification of the characters at the stage when characters are not developed in the course of the narration. It shows the narrator’s prior ‘knowledge’ of the characters on his part who can therefore identify such character at the very beginning of the text. Such identification also implies an assumption that the narrator

communicates to others what they do not know. In addition, the narrator compresses period in the development of characters.

He gives the brief summary about Dhritrashtra, Pandu, and Vidur as:

“But we must get back to our story, where were we, Ganapathi? Ah, yes, my sons. When the three young men reached marriageable age, Gangaji summoned them to his study.” (43)

Here, the narrator compresses the mid-time period of three characters. It implies the presence of the narrator as well as his notion of what should be told in detail and what could be narrated with the greater conciseness. Whereas an identification of the character implies only the narrator’s prior knowledge about or acquaintance with him, specification also suggests an abstraction, generalization or summing up on the part of the narrator as well as a desire to present such labeling as authoritative characterization. It happens with Gangaji as,

“to have Gangaji aside for moment –though that; as you can see, Ganapathi, is never easy, you see how he keeps taking our story-let us return to his words”.  
(109)

Such specification tends to carry more weight when given by an extradiegetic narrator like, Ved Vyas.

The intrusiveness of narrator highlights his existence. As Gerard Prince observes,

“The intrusiveness of a given narrator, his degree of self-consciousness, his reliability, his distance from narrated of narratee not only help characterize him but also affect our interpretation of and response to the narrative”.<sup>7</sup>

The intrusion in *The Great Indian Novel* has different degrees of obviousness. It comes from Ved Vyas’s socio-cultural context like,

“Brahmin knew a great deal in those days.” [21]

Or

“Yes, we had kings in those days, four hundred and thirty five of them, luxuriating in titles such as Maharaja and Nawab that only airline ads and cricket captain sport provide anymore.” (21)

Such intrusions with the commentary on the story provide information about direct object and the narrator’s attitude towards information he has provided. At the same time, such statements become judgmental from the narrator’s point of view. The evaluatory comment and logical connection between event and intrusion is result of the

narrator's interpretation, the consequence of his special knowledge, the mere product of his subjectivity rather than well-established facts in the narrated world.

The intrusions of narrator at the level of the narration are a part of his narratorial authority as the narrator.

“Are you with me so far, Ganapathi? Got everything? I suppose you must have, or you couldn't have taken it down, could you? under our agreement, I mean. But you must keep me in check, Ganapathi. I must learn to control my own excess of phrases.” [35]

The narrator's commentary on the narration provides metanarrative signs to the text. As Gerard Prince says,

“Obviously, as verbal narrative itself may be metanarrative: a given tale may refer to other tales; it may comment on narrators and narratees; or it may discuss the act of narration. Just as obviously, particular narrative may refer to itself and the series of events which it is constituted and communicated.”<sup>8</sup>

The narrator, Ved Vyas is self-referential about his own narration. The narrator gives the metanarrative signs by its self-referentiality as:

“But my last dream, Ganapathi, leaves me with a far more sever problem. If it means anything, anything at all, it means that I have told my story so far from a completely mistaken perspective.” (418)

Such metanarrative signs by the narrator in *The Great Indian Novel* fulfil following functions:

1. The narrator and the narratee contribute to the rhythm of the narrative by regularly showing the pace at which new events are presented. The metanarrative comments in turn help us to define the narrator, the narratee, and their relation.
2. The mere presence of such comments may constitute precious information on the very identity of narratee.

“But I am, as Ganapathi indicates by the furrow on his ponderous brow, getting ahead of my story. “ (30)

The narratee is not shown directly active in narration but he comes through the act itself.

3. The metanarrative signs tend to reveal how the narrator Ved Vyas views the knowledge and the audience he is addressing. The metanarrative explanations that he feels obliged to provide and the degree of fact which he manifests in providing them show that he thinks of his narratee and he respects him. The

distribution of these explanations points out healthy communication between Ved Vyas and the narratee.

4. An important function of the metanarrative signs is organizational and interpretive. Above all, the metanarrative signs are glosses on various parts of the text of *The Great Indian Novel* and on the codes underlying them.

To some extent, they point out the set of norms and constraints according to which the text of *The Great Indian Novel* deploys and makes sense. In other words, the metanarrative signs partially show, how the text should be understood, how it wants to be understood: an Indian's story of India. As Prince comments,

“On the one hand, then, metanarrative signs help us understand a narrative in a certain way; on the other hand, they force us (try to force us) to understand it in this way and not other. They thus constitute the answer of a text to the question: “How should we interpret you?”<sup>9</sup>

As there is the narrator in the narrative, obviously, the narratee is present explicitly designated by ‘you’, ‘Ganapathi’, ‘Scribe’. The researcher has discussed about the narratee in the above parts. We learn very little about the narratee in, *The Great Indian Novel*, as such

except his scanty physical descriptions and his participation in the narration. We do not know what Ganapathi thinks of the event he is writing down as dictated by Ved Vyas, the narrator as,

“Put it all down. Everything I say.” (18)

The communication between Ved Vyas and Ganapathi is in the form of pseudo-questions as,

“Back to my offspring, eh, Ganapathi? (39)

The narrator does not expect immediate response. He merely plays with Ganapathi assuming his answer. However, the narrator, irrespective of the narratee’s response, knows what to narrate. The narrator asks pseudo-questions to carry forward the movement of narrative. In this process, the narrator gets affirmation from narratee about his arguments.

If the metanarrative signs, at the level of narration, guide our reading, they also help reader to understand better the stance taken by the narrative with regard to its own communicability and activity of the narration in general.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Eliot, T. S., *Ulysses, Order and Myth, Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode, London: Faber Paper Backs, 1923, p. 177.
- <sup>2</sup> Stephen Barney, *Allegory of History*, Hamden, Conn. Archon Books, 1979, pp.16-17.
- <sup>3</sup> J. Middleton & Tait D. as quoted in Thapar Romila, *From Lineage to State : Social Formations in the Mid-first Millenium B. C. in the Ganga Valley*, Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1984, p.10.
- <sup>4</sup> Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State : Social Formations in the Mid-first Millenium B. C. in the Ganga Valley*, Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1984, p.131.
- <sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes, *Writing Zero-degree*, Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1974, p. 635.
- <sup>6</sup> Shashi Tharoor, 'Yoking myth to the history', *Litcrit*, Vol.16, No. 1&2, June-Dec. 1980, pp.5-8.
- <sup>7</sup> Gerard Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, Berlin: Mounton, 1982., p.13.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.