

A Study on Sin of Dominance in Vikram Chandra's Select Works

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Abstract: *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, an epic novel set in India, inspired by the autobiography of Colonel James 'Sikander' Skinner, a legendary 19th-century soldier, half-Indian and half-British, includes characters such as witches and heroic soldiers of fortune, porn stars and boys begotten miraculously by the consumption of sticky buns. The book *Love and Longing in Bombay* consists of five short stories: Dharma, Shakti, Kama, Artha, and Shanti. All the stories are long, and Chandra wants to treat this subject at various levels. *Sacred Games*, Chandra's second novel, narrates the story of Sartaj Singh and the underworld don Ganesh Gaitonde.

Keywords: sin, domination, sex, pride, complex

Studied Film at Columbia University in New York and Creative Writing at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Houston; Vikram Chandra started his career as a Creative Writer and worked as a journalist, independent software engineer, and consultant. His first novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), won the 1996 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best First Book).

Red Earth and Pouring Rain, an epic novel set in India, inspired by the autobiography of Colonel James Skinner, a legendary 19th-century soldier, half-Indian and half-British, includes characters such as witches and heroic soldiers of fortune, porn stars, and boys begotten miraculously by the consumption of sticky buns. This novel has naive magic, mannered conceits, lush fantasies, and plenty of psychologically realistic accounts of family relationships and Love. Shashi Tharoor in "Los Angeles Times" suggests that *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, stories which "he has so vividly brought to life, have ceased to be his. They are ours now, and in the exhilaration of discovering them, all of his readers have cause to be profoundly grateful."

Sikander in *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, Dolly Boatwalla in *Love and Longing in Bombay*, and Ganesh Gaitonde in *Sacred Games* sin dominating fellow human beings. Sikander's mother has baptized her children with the name of the hero who fought against the British, Alexander the Great his mother sees in them her revenge for "the world" (135). She plies them with glorious tales full of "Rajput warriors exhibiting casual, towering bravery and matter of course chivalry" (193). His early

lives are understood as preparation for his vocation as a brave warrior who will avenge the insult to Rajput honor endured by his mother in her marriage. This is the inheritance that Janvi urges her son to cling to in her dying exhortation to "Remember who you are." He joins the service of Benoit de Boigne and battles for their Maratha employer against rival Maratha factions, as well as the Rajputs and the British, details faithful to James Skinner's account of his life. Sikander's victories in battle and his skills as a soldier are the confirmation of the talent and promise of his childhood. The "legend of Sikander the soldier" grows with each passing: he is brave, generous, wise, and dashing. Hearing the tales of his exploits, Sanjay begins to think, "maybe he will become a king after all." (392)

When Thomas learns who Sikander and Chotta are, he refuses to fight with them. However, Sikander boasts that he defeated Thomas. Thomas may have reasons to withdraw from the battle, but whatever the reasons, he can boldly claim the title "Indian" while simultaneously challenging Sikander's ability to do the same. For "the Irish raja," it seems, Indianness is not a matter of bloodlines but rather a decision, an unwavering commitment.

Thomas's challenge to Sikander - "but what are you?" - marks not Sikander's failure to make an emphatic choice but rather a shift in the mechanisms by which such choices are honored; Sikander vehemently denies his association with his

English father. Because he abides by the Rajput codes of behavior, insult, loyalty, and honor, he claims, like George Thomas before him, membership in the clan those codes define.

Sikander's glorious rise to military prowess and virtues is based on bravery and honor. After being released from service with the Marathas, Sikander wept, "Smearing face with the dust of country," and turned to seek employment with the British, having no choice but to work as a soldier where work is to be found. He is accepted by the British and assigned "to pacify, to police, to guard Delhi," the center of British India. The rest of his career is a descent into the decay of his Rajput warrior heritage; he is deadened to the mythic part and inexplicable magic of India by the white walls and brown desk of his new post as "policeman for British rule" (423). He is proud to be selected to command the soldiers under the British.

The book *Love and Longing in Bombay* consists of five short stories: Dharma, Shakti, Kama, Artha, and Shanti. All the stories are long, and Chandra wants to treat this subject at various levels. For instance, in the Kama, he deals with middle-age sex, promiscuity, divorce, and consequent frustration. In Artha, the subject is an estranged woman's longing for self-sufficiency and a relationship with a man of art and culture, a young man's homosexual yearnings for a companion, and an artist's desire for a wealthy sponsor. In this regard, Chandra has too many irons in the fire, and

consequently, his many stories meander on and on, leaving the reader high and heavy.

Dolly inherits the feeling of superiority and obsession with an order from her property. Brought up rigidly, Dolly has been very sensitive about right and wrong all her life and boasts of knowing what sin is, and in knowing that, she regards herself as superior to others.

Basilea Schlink observes: "Self-righteousness is the root of all other sins. Self-righteous are so proud and are not prepared to admit that anything in their words and actions is not right. It would humiliate them to do that" (155). By the views of Basilea Schlink, Dolly as a proud person, never admits her mistakes. Being the daughter of a great family, who imbibes royal regimentation, authoritative domination alone comes closer to her notion of order. She has been brought up in a very orderly fashion that has been an act entirely out of keeping with the serene and orderly character of her life.

Dolly Boatwalla, representing the ancestral money, blue blooded who yearns for leadership in the tight, snobbish exclusive circle. Dolly traps to win over and be on the head of Sheila and corner her and has used the love affair between her daughter Roxanne and Sheila's son Sanjeev. Sheila later realizes it "was a trap finely honed for her by the years of victory. Even now, she had to appreciate the justice of its bitterness" (60). Her offer of truce is out rightly, rudely turned down. Before she left the Boatwalla mansion, her strategy was

fully formed in her head. "She was going to buy the mansion, she would buy them out completely; lock, stock, ship and the house. Finally, it came to this vulgarity that they had the pride, and she had the money." (62)

She magnifies the simple mistakes of Sheila and glorifies herself by pointing out the mistakes of others. Her feeling of superiority and righteousness is revealed in her statement during their meeting at Lunch club: "Dolly sniffed and said, Not our type..." (37). As an egoist, she always boasts about her generous attitude towards Sheela.

Sacred Games, Chandra's second novel, narrates the story of Sartaj Singh and the underworld don Ganesh Gaitonde. Two narrative strands intersect when, after a tip-off, Singh apprehends the Hindu gang lord Ganesh Gaitonde in his hideout, a nuclear bunker, in a Bombay suburb from which this story of intrigue, greed, corruption, sexual exploitation, violence, and intimidation grows into a political thriller. Scott McClintock of National University opines in *violence After the Sacred* Millennial Indian Novel that "Vikram Chandra's novel, whose title invokes not only the Cosmic play of Lila but also, I suspect, the aphorism, especially concerning Salman Rushdie's Shalimar, the clown." (74)

Ganesh Gaitonde in *Sacred Games* sins dominating fellow human beings. We may say that *Sacred Games* portrays the evil in human nature and the fantastic powers of humanity to endure suffering.

Gaitonde in *Sacred Games* recalls the beginning of his friendship with Jojo. He has come to settle at Kailashpada, a small town in Bombay, shifting from Singapore. For the service rendered by Jojo, Gaitonde generously offered a considerable sum. He did not offer to pay for it, not because he did not have any money with him but because decency, good sense, and pride had left him.

The pride of Gaitonde does not allow him to believe Jojo, "Bas, I warned her." "Enough, Be quiet" (813). Jojo agilely dodges the blow and counterattacks. His masculine pride cut to the quick, Ganesh Gaitonde forgets that Jojo is as fragile as he is, and so she is afraid as he is. Jojo becomes immense, supported by the mocking choir of the women she has procured for him. He felt that the fleas of life were constantly biting him. The bitter sufferings experienced by Gaitonde make us recall Shelley's words in *Ode to the West Wind*: "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed" (54). His pride forces him to become submissive to Jojo.

Gaitonde's hold over Jojo is based on the supply of girls to him. The foremost important reason for Jojo to allow the domination of Gaitonde, whose cruelty and meanness are different, is a sense of tolerance, prized as the sponsorship she receives for her models from him. Truly, Gaitonde brings Jojo in order to save her. He accommodates her with five-star utilities, "...the treadmill, and the weights... Konkani food that she loved... a new television serial" (852). However, she

tries to trap Gaitonde by saying, "Gaitonde, do want women?" (853). However, his over pride makes him refuse the offer, and he understands it is a trap to escape from that place. Though his abundance of everything spreads out everywhere, they are immaterial to her rather than escaping from that place. "I need to get out of here." (854)

The extreme domination of Gaitonde reaches its zenith when he presents the most outstanding personality so that he can make more money can satisfy more women. This provokes unpleasant feelings in the readers' minds since it forces us to visualize the picture of a monkey chained, obeying its master, and entertaining a crowd with its performance. Sudipta observes:

Every human being has been endowed with an independent mind and free will. It is an offense to humanity if a man leads a life of subjugation, as his prime duty is to nurture his personality and ensure its optimum growth. (61)

By his behavior, Gaitonde has violated human dignity. He has proved himself a beast, bastard, crook, and a viper, "Maderchod, Gaitonde" (853). The horridness of this scene is heightened by Jojo begging Gaitonde not to ill-treat her. She begs Gaitonde to realize her condition of Jojo and asks him, "I need to get out of here, Because it is driving me crazy. It will not get better, only worse." (854)

This behavior of Jojo makes us agree with the comment of William Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks that "there is no one norm of human behavior, but many; some of widely divergent them and even contradictory." (55)

In the beginning, Jojo becomes a slave to Gaitonde only to improve her network. As days pass on, she wallows in slavishness because of her greediness. She has been brought to the bunker to save herself from destruction. Gaitonde is ready to offer anything for the Loyal relationship. However, Jojo fails to move with him as he thinks. Her commitment to Gaitonde is in terms of business.

As the inheritor of the G-Company, Gaitonde rules over it. Empowered by his wealth, Gaitonde sins, dominating fellow human beings. The rich financial status endowed by him makes him so proud that he can adore anything in the world. Gaitonde's relationship with Jojo and Dolly with Sheila is of master-slave bondage; Gaitonde's relationship with Zoya and Dolly's with Sanjeev is different.

Just as Dolly felt happy over her control of Sheila, Gaitonde feels proud of his control over Jojo. If Dolly's domination of Sheila is one kind, Gaitonde's domination over Jojo is of a worse kind. How Gaitonde treats Jojo and the worst kind of slavish relationship between them induces a feeling of repulsion in the reader's heart. Without even a tinge of ego, she allows him to beat, shoot, and do anything he desires with her. He kicks her face with

his legs "Her teeth shone white through a mess dark blood" (855), and Jojo bears all these. A normal human being will regard all these treatments as unimaginable and unendurable.

Gaitonde and Jojo in *Sacred Games* maintain an ambivalent relationship, which is revealed in the novel. At one point, Jojo describes Gaitonde as her savior. He can be described both as the savior and destroyer of Jojo. The process of Jojo's destruction begins at Kailashpada; Gaitonde completes it in Kailashpada. At times, Gaitonde is afflicted with madness, and the readers can comprehend his madness of him. He is affected by the widespread antisemitism and his inability of Gaitonde to live safely anywhere in Bombay. Though at times Gaitonde is capable of boundless generosity, most of the time, he tortures her for her unwillingness to stay in Kailashpada.

The sin of domination is best exemplified in *Love and Longing in Bombay* and *Sacred Games*. Most of the time, this domination is gained through materialistic possessions and earthly power. The barbaric practices make us recall the dictum - "Power Corrupts ." We are reminded of the views of Isabella in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*:

.....

He plays such fantastic tricks
before the high heaven

As makes the angels weep;
(2.2.117 - 122)

Sikander, Dolly, and Gaitonde sin
domination over fellow human beings.

Gaitonde's and Dolly's desire for domination is revealed through their behavior not only to Jojo and Sheila but also to Subhadra, Zoya and the G-Company, Sanjeev, and Ganga. They have to behave so in order to feed their pride and to escape from the loneliness.

If we review the entire humanity, we may say the prominent theme in human beings has desired to dominate one another. The attractive opportunities we have as human beings are destroyed because of our proclivity toward hatred and massive domination of each other. Moreover, evil is defined as the total domination of human beings by others up to the notion of absolute evil. Inhumanity to fellow human beings can be regarded as the greatest sin,

and the works of Vikram Chandra best exemplify the evil inherent in man's nature.

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