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THE METHOD OF INTRODUCING CHARACTERS IN PAUL SCOTT'S *SIX DAYS IN MARAPORE*

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ABSTRACT

Plot, theme, setting, character and point of view are the major elements of a novel and they are interrelated. It is always a matter of craftsmanship on the part of the author to introduce the characters in the first few chapters. It is the character that creates the first impression on readers' mind. Character development is a key task. A novelist tries to introduce his characters to the readers so as to seek their emotional involvement. Without it, the plot crumbles. Paul Scott's novel *Six Days in Marapore* exhibits some of the best techniques with regard to introducing the characters. A study of first three chapters of this novel reveals as to how Scott introduces the characters to his readers. This paper shows how the first three chapters contribute to introducing the characters.

Key words: elements, craftsmanship, techniques, readers

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INTRODUCTION

As a thumb rule, a novelist introduces his characters to the readers through the initial few pages of the novel. Above all, he gives priority to introduce his protagonist, his goal and the main conflict. This is how we read the powerful first chapter of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* wherein we learn more about Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Long, Mr. Morris, Jane, Lizzy, Lydia etc. The main conflict is also hinted at as they have different opinions with regard to their daughters' marriage prospects. And particularly, the character of Mr. Bennet whom the narrator sums up thus:

'Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.' (Austen: 17)

Or sometimes the writer simply describes the physical attributes of his people so as to help us visualize them. Though this is required in a novel, it is often advised not to give a lengthy description of the physical details of the characters that is likely to mar the prospect of proper development of the character. In this regard, Rabindranath Tagore strikes a perfect balance while introducing his protagonist Gora.

'One of his college Professors used to call him the Snow Mountain, for he was outrageously white, his complexion unmellowed by even the slightest tinge of pigment. He was nearly six feet tall, with big bones, and fists like the paws of a tiger.' (Tagore: 06)

Paul Scott's Method of introducing characters: Paul Scott, the English novelist, gained tremendous popularity for his *The Raj Quartet*. Besides, this phenomenal work, he is noted for his novel *Six Days in Marapore* for depicting the political uncertainty of 1947. This novel is divided into three parts and has seventeen chapters.

The first chapter opens in Marapore, the British Cantonment town, amidst the final days of the British withdrawal from India in June 1947. As soon as the novel opens, Paul Scott introduces the first major character, MacKendrick, an American, lying in Room Three of Smith's Hotel. He soon acquaints the readers with the conflict. The visitor was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Desai, the hotel manager, who begged him to relocate to Room Twelve. On inquiry, MacKendrick came to know that some Mr. Jimmy Smith was to arrive soon and Room Three being his favourite was to be vacated. It was also learnt that the Hotel was built by Mr. Smith's grandfather and the Maharajah of the princely state of Kalipur. But MacKendrick is reluctant to give in.

'Look. I'm the guest who's renting Room Three. If Mr. Smith doesn't like any of the other rooms he will have to camp out on the verandah.' (Scott: 13)

Then Scott takes the opportunity to introduce us with the goals of the characters. Having finished his lunch, MacKendrick began to think about his mission in Marapore. He had arrived to India all the way from England. He had been in Mumbai and then in Calcutta for a few days and now he is in Marapore. But to no avail. He had not accomplished the mission yet. And that thought made him more uneasy.

'The room gave him no clues. It was static. Confined in it he was static too, he had not come to Marapore to lie on his back and stare at four walls like a prisoner. He had come for quite a different purpose.' (Scott: 14)

That very purpose keep readers engaged throughout the first two chapters. It is amazing that the purpose and the story gets unfolded slowly. So Scott then brings in Bholu, MacKendrick's bearer, whom he had hired in Bombay. Due to the unbearable heat, MacKendrick asked Bholu to go and find out if there was any swimming pool around. Bholu is a typical bearer who always tried to cheat their gullible masters and least interested in rendering services. We also learn that owing to the political instability, Bholu would soon leave India for Lahore, his hometown. In fact, he had kept his bag and baggage ready in Bombay and as soon as MacKendrick trip was over, he would be absconding. He was aware of the fact that the peace that prevailed in Marapore was short-lived. Come August and India would be partitioned and the situation would go from bad to worse.

'Now, it was June. In August the British were going and in Lahore the long knives would be out. Everyday spent fruitlessly in Marapore was like a thrust of the knife into his own flesh. He hated Marapore. He had hated Calcutta too. Only his need of money, kept him at MacKendrick's side.' (Scott: 15)

Due care is also taken by Scott to reveal the readers the purpose of MacKendrick's sudden visit to Marapore. It is through Bholu that Scott tells us much about MacKendrick's uneasiness in the Smith's Hotel. Bholu was trying to steal money from MacKendrick's wallet and came across the photograph of a girl. He wondered that it must be the reason of MacKendrick's sudden visit to Marapore. Bholu, a man of quick humour, took no time to connect the photograph and MacKendrick's intent of visiting the remote cantonment town of Marapore in such a scorching summer. Scott makes a judicious use of the typical psychology of the bearer class and does not forget to connect it with MacKendrick's uneasiness.

'Was it, he wondered, because of the girl in the photograph that they had come at such a short notice all the way from Calcutta? If that were so then it was more than likely that the girl had been the reason for MacKendrick Sahib's uncertain behaviour in the past, in Bombay, in Calcutta, the inexplicable departures, the unexpected returns, all of which had made life so difficult to bear. He had been a fool not to consider the problem of the girl in the photograph.' (Scott: 16)

Chapter two opens with the introduction of Major Milner. Scott does not indulge in describing the physical details of Milner. Instead he describes his personality and character. The tonga stopped at the Smith's Hotel and Milner came out and yelled for Mr. Desai. He booked single, cheap and clean Room Number Nine for Miss. Anderson, the guest to be expected. He had been in India for the last fifteen years. Earlier, he planted tea and then got recruited in the Army. As in case of Mr. Desai, here too, the omniscient narrator proves pivotal. Scott lets his narrator speak about Milner and also reveals his peculiarities through his behaviour. He had a limp hand. He always showed his foot and fist instinctively. He had no stable career: he was transferred from one position to another. He served as 'a war time instructor at the Officers' Training School'. He always tried to get Indianized for he had learned some of the often used Urdu phrases and words. Scott utilizes Major Milner to plunge his readers into the main action of the novel. While travelling in a tonga towards the club, he apprised MacKendrick with some of the important developments of Marapore. Therefore, he asked MacKendrick to join them at the sports grounds where exciting tournaments were taking place and where prominent British people usually gathered and sought entertainment. Milner also introduced Vidyasagar.

'Young Vidyasagar's worth watching. Bloody fine athlete. But then on the whole Indians are. Poor boxers though. Not enough stamina. No bulk. But Vidyasagar's high jump's is a class by itself' (Scott: 20)

At the deserted club a lot of conversation happened between MacKendrick and Harriet and Cynthia. While most of the Englishmen were at the *maidan*, these two women preferred to stick to the club. MacKendrick was invited for tea by Harriet Haig. Scott gives a brief description of her physical features: 'She was bulky, her bones were large; but in spite of this, the boyish hair and the severe grey linen suit, he sensed her frailty.' (Scott: 30) Harriet was sixty six and like Milner had no plan of leaving India. There was another woman with her named Cynthia Mapleton who was bent on going to Kenya. Harriet reiterated: 'I'm going to die in India. Not Kenya.' (Scott: 28) And again in an answer to MacKendrick's question she repeated it thus: 'But it is not true in my case. England's not home and I'm afraid its beauty is only memory for me. I'm got rather used to India and so I'm staying.' (33) She had one more trait in common with Milner who assured MacKendrick while dropping him at the Club: 'Anyone asks why you're in the club tell them Major Milner brought you. They know me.' (21) Hearing the splash at the swimming pool, Harriet said that it must be MacKendrick which took Cynthia by surprise. Like Milner, Harriet Haig too kept a general track of things happening in the town.

'It must be Mr. MacKendrick,' she said.

Cynthia looked at her, suspiciously. 'MacKendrick? Never heard of him. Is he new?'

'He's staying at Smith's I'm told.'

'Since when?'

'Since last night.'

'Who told you?'

'Hussein.'

'That bearer of yours knows things before they happen almost.' (Scott: 26)

From their talk we gain crucial information regarding their nature, attitude, likes and dislikes and also about other characters. In her opinion Milner is 'squat, fat and ginger' (34). MacKendrick's immediate reaction also speaks much about Cynthia's character: 'she was the sort of woman who frightened him (MacKendrick); taugt, skinny, calculating.' (30) It is revealed that Cynthia was all set to fly to Kenya; her financial condition was not good so as to meet her travel expenses. Therefore, she depended on Harriet. In fact, for the last few months she was staying with Harriet as a paying guest and now requested her for loan. The character of Cynthia too contributes to move the novel forward. Especially, the part of her conversation with regard to the Eurasian issues actually gives a glimpse of the main conflict of the novel. She represents the racial supremacy that was the characteristic feature of the British rule in India. She was proud of her high British ethnicity.

'Half-caste. Of the country. Half breed. Anglo-Indian. Eurasian. Different names, some gravy, as Robbie used to say. The results of misdirected passion. My dear! They're quite laughable. I've known some, black as your hat, who try and pull your leg...their hands are usually small-boned, like Indians.' (Scott: 35)

Despite all the financial crunch, she led a life of ease and comfort. She openly admitted that she felt very comfortable in the company of people with good physique. This club chat is instrumental for it is here that Cynthia refers to Tom Gower being a missionary who reportedly ran a farm at Ooni. From here onwards, the novel lands on a sure territory because the conflict widens its scope. Cynthia reports:

'Well, he's a crank, all the same. He'll end up wearing a *dhoti* and eating with his fingers. What he and his kind never see is how much the Indians really despise them.' (Scott: 34)

Scott divides his characters into two camps using the concept of Indianizing: those who are about leave India and those who are staying back. Cynthia was planning to fly to Kenya while Bholu would leave for Lahore. Haig was not going anywhere and so were Frank Milner and Tom Gower. Cynthia had a negative attitude towards the British people who wished to stay in India after August 1947. She made fun of the Indianizing endeavours done by people like Milner and Tom Gower. The upcoming partition would not make any difference to him. It was sure that two armies would emerge after August 1947, but Milner was sure to get promotion on a lucrative position either in the Indian or Pakistan army. He had already told it to MacKendrick.

'What odds? I get on with Hindus and Muslims alike. No communal problem in the army. Never has been. No matriculation. No politics. India, I expect though. I'm acting commandant of the M.T. N.C.O.'s school here. We've been Indianizing for some time you know. Matter of fact I'm the only European officer left in the School. Suits me. Most of them were toffee-nosed.' (Scott: 21)

Tom Gower was sure that his efforts in the field of rural upliftment at Ooni would tangible results very soon. Thus, Scott projects a kind of outspoken character of Cynthia in chapter three. To be precise, we can say that the author has deliberately granted maximum space to Cynthia and that gives Scott an advantage of portraying the characteristics of other characters. In a sense, the third chapter gives a thorough introduction to the characters. We also get a sense that this very Cynthia due to her aggressive and outspoken behaviour would be the catalyst for the conflict. We can infer that through these three chapters Scott takes us to two locations – the Smith's Hotel and the Club – in order to make the characters meet and interact. So the third chapter does not take a recourse to a mere description of weather but directly address the main conflict.

'It's the same with your story. You can create wonderful characters, but if they're talking about the weather or what they ate for breakfast, your readers will be asleep before they reach the bottom of the first page. Conflict is energy, and energy fuels your plot.' (Jones: 11)

Conclusions: It is an important task on the part of the novelist to introduce his characters. In *Six Days in Marapore* Paul Scott sets an example of introducing his characters. He does that superbly for he unfolds the main story, the conflict and the characters without taking toll on other elements of the fiction. He first introduces his protagonist MacKendrick, and then goes to delineate Mr. Desai, Major Milner, Bholu, Harriet, Cynthia. A detail reading of the first three chapters shows that Scott is very much consistent with his method of revealing the traits and personalities of his characters. Here, people are revealed through what they do rather than how they appear. Hence we can say that Scott lays emphasis on 'action' and seeks emotional involvement of his readers. For critics, readers and creative writers, the study of introducing characters that Scott employed in the novel should serve as a role model.

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