



## **Vikram Chandra's 'Sacred Games', satirical on Bollywood's Plastic Beauty**

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### **Abstract**

This article is intended to probe the reality about the satirical elements in the novel 'Sacred Games' written by Vikram Chandra the Indo-American novelist. The novel mirrors the life and struggles of the migrants of Mumbai. The mega-city is dominated by migrants from the different parts of the country and Bollywood, the film industry, is an indispensable part of the metropolis of Mumbai. The study gives its focus on the life of the affluent in the metropolitan of Mumbai, especially in the glamorous world of Bollywood.

**Keywords:** 'Sacred Games', Vikram Chandra, bollywood, cosmetic surgery, indian cosmetic market, disposable income, beauty pageants, metropolis

### **Introduction**

Every human being is interested in making himself or herself more attractive with regard to his or her physical appearance. But in Bollywood the actresses and actors have an unending obsession for enhancing the physical appearance. This article is intended to bring out the satirical elements in the novel 'Sacred Games' written by Vikram Chandra an Indo-American novelist. The novel mirrors the life and struggles of the migrants of Mumbai. The mega-city is dominated by migrants from the different parts of the country and Bollywood, the film industry, is an indispensable part of the metropolis of Mumbai.

Satire as we know is a literary work that ridicule and scorn the contemporary human life with its vices and follies. This genre of literature is primarily for the purpose of humour but it does have a greater hidden intention of constructive social criticism. It actually draws the attention of the reader to the issues of the society. This research is an attempt to find the reality of the satirical elements in the novel. The focus is on the life of the affluent in the metropolitan of Mumbai, specially in the glamorous world of Bollywood.

### **Plastic Beauty; the satirical term as synonym for cine beauty.**

Vikram Chandra through the character of Jamila Mirza, in 'Sacred Games' caricatures the obsession of the film celebrities and the affluent, who spend millions of rupees for buying 'plastic beauty' as he terms it. The film artistes do have a feeling that their fans want to see them young and beautiful always. In order to upkeep the glamour for satisfying the fans and to remain at the top in this highly competitive world, a lot of time and money are invested. But they do not realise that this craze reduces them to beautiful plastic dolls useful only for reel life. Enhancing the physical appearance of entire body or parts of the body has become a matter of high priority and importance in the materialistic outlook of metropolises. Peripheral things of human life like hair styles, facials, cosmetic surgeries and different treatments for enhancing the physical appearance have become very expensive and time consuming, especially in metropolitan cities. Women and men with a lot

of money have got addicted to it. I have a guess that, if the money that has been spent for the enhancement of physical appearance by the rich in India is put together, it would suffice for the alleviation of the poverty in the country. Let's look into some of the facts in the light of the novel 'Sacred Games'.

### **Beauty Pageants and Social Dynamics**

Vikram Chandra observes that the craze for enhancing one's beauty has enormously increased after Indians won Miss World titles, not only every locality in the metropolitan of Mumbai had beauty parlours after that but also aspirations of poor and middle class girls too grew higher.

Two years after Aishwariya and Sushmita won, a beauty parlour had opened right by our mohalla. The young girls and wives used to go there, to get eyebrow plucking and facials" (Sacred Games: 665)<sup>[1]</sup>

The author refers to the beauty contests won by Aishwarya Rai 'Miss World' in November 1994 and Sushmita Sen 'Miss Universe' in May 1994. Since then many changes took place in the country as a whole and Mumbai in particular. The young girls who took pride in the country's victory of the crowns of beauty, started nurturing higher aspirations and many wanted to try their luck in Bollywood and this new trend gave a boom for the beauty-salon industry.

The business of beauty salons is growing rapidly in India. The frequency at which consumers visit salons has gone up to 2 to 3 times a month—and is inching closer to the global average of four times a month. Salon-chains reckon that consumer spends on grooming has doubled over the last five years, despite the high prices charged by such services. A haircut along with colour at a mid-level to premium salon costs a consumer anywhere between Rs 2,000 and Rs 5,000<sup>[2]</sup>.

Affluent people of the metropolises of India are ready to spend a lot of time and money and that is why the famous Italian stylist Rossana Ferretti's branches thrive in Mumbai, Bangalore and Delhi. The prices of hair styling and other services are very high here.

Blow dry	from \$30	from Rs. 2000
Up do	from \$50	from Rs. 3400
Haircut	from \$80 to \$155	from Rs. 5400 to 10500
Inoa Color	from \$40	from Rs. 2700
Balayage (sunlit -colour)	from \$120 to \$250	from Rs. 8000 to 17000
Kerastase Treatments	from \$100	from Rs. 6800 <sup>3</sup>

Styles and colours of hair keep changing often and this changing nature of styles and colours make the beauty-parlour-goers very much restless as and when they change. They end up asking for a new style or colour for their hair for the next season. People especially young girls became more conscious about their presentability. They have a tough time with their costumes, hair colour and style and the mannerisms as they need to be aped according to the filmy-trends.

Happiness always passed. Sooner or later the happy client looked into her mirror and grew restless and wanted a new cut. The cuts came and went, and bangs were down one year and up the next and four years later descended again. What was in this season was sure to be out the next? Blonde came and went, and short efficiency was followed by long femininity. (SG 365)

#### **Jamila Mirza, alias Zoya Mirza—an epitome of ambitious, unscrupulous migrants**

Migrants to Mumbai migrate for better income and prosperity. Jamila Mirza in the novel 'Sacred Games', is from a poor family, with her new aspiration of making it big in the glamour industry, she migrates to Mumbai. Initially for her survival in Mumbai she becomes a prostitute with the help of Jojo Mascarenes, who supplies girls for rich business men and directors in the film industry. Later, she fixes her mind on altering her skinny, skeletal and unattractive appearance and for this purpose she finds someone to invest on her body. Ganesh Gaitonde the gangster in the novel, is the investor she found for enhancing her beauty. As he was a person always on the lookout for virgins to enjoy sexual pleasures with, he thought it was a wise decision to invest on a virgin so that she would be loyal to him always. He invested heavily on her body thinking that she was a virgin. Later in the novel, we come to know that her virginity was recreated by undergoing hymenoplasty. She becomes an actress with her newly gained 'plastic beauty'. She even changes her name to suit the new appearance and is later known as Zoya Mirza.

Vikram Chandra has caricatured cosmetic surgeons through Dr. Langston Lee in 'Sacred Games' who makes his business on 'appearance enhancement of human body parts'. He too was ready with his price tags like any other cosmetic surgeons. In the novel the character Jamila was ready with her list of body parts ready to be beautified or uplifted like many actresses of Bollywood.

She wants to do a lot of work on herself. It's expensive.' 'Work?' 'Plastic surgery. She showed me her plan. She's researched it. She has a little chart of the body and she's got it all marked on that. With prices next to each part. And she knows exactly which doctor, what the procedures are. She's got photographs of actresses and models and rich women, Gaitonde, and she knows what each one has had done. You

won't believe the kinds of operation all these famous people have had, Gaitonde, and how much this girl knows. This nose is good, she says, but that one's better. She's an expert. She has it all in a file marked "Body". (SG 564)

#### **Scornfully, 'Maha magician of flesh' means 'an expert in cosmetic surgery'**

Many women and a few men, who are aspiring for great careers in the glamour industry i.e. modelling and movies, resort to cosmetic surgeries. Although Vikram Chandra calls the procedure of alteration of the appearance of a person as plastic surgery in his 'Sacred Games' it is commonly known as cosmetic surgery in the medical world. All cosmetic surgeries are plastic surgeries but all plastic surgeries are not cosmetic surgeries. American surgeons in the field have given the difference between the both, and the usual procedures followed in them in their website <sup>[17]</sup>. These treatments are available in most of Indian metropolitan cities too today. Vikram Chandra has brought out his personal aversion to the 'plastic beauty' and to the surgeons who thrive on it charging extravagantly. In the following extract from the novel, he has mocked at the different procedures in cosmetic surgery.

We had remade that form. Jamila's bottom had been realigned. That is, the cheeks — which are naturally asymmetrical on all human beings — had been lined up. The fat inside the small rolls on her hips had been sucked out and inserted into her gaand, to make it properly plump and perky. The lower end of her thighs, the sides and the upper rear portions, just under her bottom, had all been liposuctioned. Her waist had been liposuctioned. As had her upper arms and the area behind her chin. She had new saline implants in her breasts, natural-shaped ones we had examined and handled and discussed at length. We had done all this at Dr Langston Lee's house of wonders on Orchard Boulevard. He had a peerless reputation, a clean and very modern clinic and extravagant rates." (SG 661)

Here the expressions like, 'bottom had been realigned,' 'cheeks [he refers to the buttocks)...had been lined up,' 'fat inside the small rolls on her hip had been sucked and inserted into her gaand', (Hindi slang for 'ass' meaning posterior) 'saline implants in her breasts' refer to different procedures in cosmetic surgery mentioned above. Vikram Chandra has put them in blunt language which shows Chandra's dislike towards the frantic race for plastic beauty of the Bollywood.

We had done all this at Dr Langston Lee's house of wonders on Orchard Boulevard. He had a peerless reputation, a clean and very modern clinic and extravagant rates. But he was a master, that small-eyed and funny-speaking man, he was a maha-magician of flesh, he could move it and transform it and make it vanish and have it reappear." (SG 661)

Nowadays there are so many expert doctors in the field of cosmetic surgery. Vikram Chandra has mocked at such doctors through the character of Dr. David Langstone Lee, using words newly coined by him, 'maha-magician of flesh' transformed Jamila the skinny and skeletal odd looking village girl to plump and perfect featured, glamorous and gorgeous like that of the Bollywood. She becomes a famous actress with her newly gained 'plastic beauty'. She even changes her name to suit the new appearance and is later known as Zoya Mirza in the film industry. Her beauty, sex appeal and virginity all were fake and plastic and these are all usual 'secret games' that big people play especially in

metropolitan cultures.

Cosmetic surgery corrects the natural looks and Botox treatment which is a part of the cosmetic treatment prevents ageing and grants a radiant look to those who undergo these medical procedures. Vikram Chandra has mentioned a few procedures in the cosmetic treatments in his novel. But there are many more which are unfamiliar to the common man but familiar to the plastic-beauty-celebrities. As per the American board of plastic surgeons some of the procedures are;

1. **Breast Enhancement:** Augmentation by implanting, Lift, Reduction;
2. **Facial Contouring:** Rhinoplasty, Chin, or Cheek Enhancement;
3. **Facial Rejuvenation:** Facelift, Eyelid Lift, Neck Lift, Brow Lift;
4. **Body Contouring:** Tummy Tuck, Liposuction, Gynecomastia Treatment;
5. **Skin Rejuvenation:** Laser Resurfacing, Botox®, Filler Treatments.<sup>4</sup>

### The less known truth about glamorous-celebrities

Vikram Chandra's Jamila in the novel is a sample of the many Bollywood actresses who spend excessively for purchasing plastic beauty. His opinion is not baseless because he himself comes from a family associated with movies and more over he had done good research before writing this novel. There are many actresses in the Bollywood who have invested huge sums for altering their bodies or on particular parts of their bodies to improve the looks and to stay evergreen in the glamour industry. Here I have mentioned a few of them and it is also true that actors too undergo such surgeries to enhance their looks but I have mentioned only the women because the term 'plastic beauty' in the novel is about the female artistes.

**Sridevi:** She is one of the most famous actresses who had an untimely death recently. Her surgeries were well noticed by the public and there were many panel discussions highlighting the plastic surgeries, being the cause for the cardiac arrest leading to her death. She had allegedly undergone many cosmetic surgeries like facial enhancement, facelifts, Botox, lip alteration and breast enhancement surgeries to look younger. She wanted to remain youthful forever and that was the guiding principal for taking up the surgeries.<sup>5</sup>

**Shilpa Shetty:** There is a lot of difference in her looks when compared to her entry into films as a newbie and of recent years. She believed herself as average and felt like she did not have the looks needed for the glamour industry which motivated her to invest on her looks. She has spent on perfecting her nose, breasts and butt. She was shot into fame after her plastic surgeries and fitness regime. Even though she is in her 40's, she still looks decades younger<sup>[6]</sup>.

**Preity Zinta:** She had good career in Hindi Telugu Punjabi and English films. Even at the age of 43 she neither has wrinkles nor saggy skin on her face that would confirm that she has undergone some surgeries for a tuck here and there. In the past, the actress' face was round but recently this has been altered to more of an oval shape. Her facial features have also become more defined with the cheek and lips implants<sup>[7]</sup>.

**Kareena Kapoor:** She ruled Bollywood for quite a few years and is rightfully doing so. But based on her recent pictures, one can easily understand that she has under gone

some cosmetic surgeries. The actress has not only succeeded in becoming slimmer comparatively, but also went under the knife to correct her face profile. She appears to have opted for cheek implants and some other alterations. The biggest highlight here is her jawline, which has been modified without compromise.<sup>8</sup>

**Gauri Khan:** She doesn't need any form of introduction because of her very famous husband Shahrukh Khan. Her transformation over the years is astounding all because of the many cosmetic surgeries like the lip job, facelift, facial implant, dermal injections. Her face looks younger, fresher, and it does not have ageing signs like wrinkles, crow's feet, age lines, and saggy skin. What we see on her face is just smooth and flawless skin. Such face appearances are very difficult to obtain by women in general, unless they have some sort of work done.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

Beauty services industry in India is on the rising in its popularity, because of the rising disposable income and changing lifestyles of the Indians. In an age where looking and feeling beautiful is given prime importance, beauty service industry is growing steadily in India, although at a slow pace. The beauty services industry that was largely unorganised earlier in India is steadily taking the organised route through franchising. Cosmetics market has seen major changes both in terms of user perception and product availability over the past five years.

According to a recent report by Research and Markets named "India Cosmetic Market Overview" (November 2016), the country's cosmetic market was growing with a CAGR of 17.06% over a period of five years. In 2008, the industry growth was counted to be 7% and it did a business of USD 2.5 billion. In 2016, the market size of India's beauty, cosmetic and grooming was USD 6.5 billion and is expected to reach USD 20 billion by 2025.<sup>9</sup>

The advancement of science and technology has brought in a lot of options available these days to make one look beautiful and youthful. Plastic surgeries and cosmetic surgeries are most sought after among them; for though they are expensive the outcomes are lasting. The rich in India metropolises are spendthrifts they do anything and everything for the appearance and the celebrities of the Bollywood nearly always think of their sexiness or sex-appeal as it is a part and parcel of their profession. The audience looks for it so the actresses and actors have to maintain it. In the novel while Gaitonde is planning about his movie, his boys share their opinion about the heroine. "And the heroine must be very sexy, but she can never have sex." This also could be one the reasons why the celebrities have to spend extravagantly on their bodies. Whatever be the reason for spending the sad fact is that the money that has been spent for the enhancement of physical appearance by the rich of India put together would suffice, for the alleviation of the poverty in the country.

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