

Q. Critically appreciate Vikram Chandra's story "Dharma".

Ans : Vikram Chandra's story "Dharma" is set in Bombay, India, and revolves around Major General Jago Antia, a senior officer in the Indian Army. Jago Antia has built up a legendary career in the military and he is universally admired and respected by the junior officers. But when he resigns from the army because of an incurable "phantom" pain in his leg that had been amputated twenty years earlier, he returns to his empty family home in Bombay. There he discovers that he faces a test quite different from those he is used to encountering in army life: the house is haunted, and Jago Antia must somehow face up to the ghosts of his past.

"Dharma" opens with an unnamed narrator in a bar talking with his friend Ramani about a haunted house with which Ramani is familiar. The discussion inspires the elderly Subramanian, a retired civil servant, to tell the story about Jago Antia that follows.

The flashbacks fill in necessary background at the right points in the story. Jago Antia's fall from the balcony leads into the parachute drop in Sylhet that defines his courage and tells the grisly story of his losing a leg. In addition, after Thakker tells him he must go upstairs naked and alone, Jago Antia stands at the bottom of the stairs and in his musings recounts his childhood experiences with Burjor Mama, Soli, and his parents. This manipulation of time succeeds in maintaining suspense by not giving away too much too soon. Ramani's story of haunted houses anticipates the tale that Subramanian will tell, and a major example of foreshadowing occurs when Jago Antia during the battle for Sylhet stares at the radio in a tailor's shop and experiences a "flickering vision" of an earlier radio in an earlier room. This earlier radio emerges in the later flashback as one that Soli owned and that Jehangir was forbidden to touch.

The introduction—and abandonment—of Subramanian serves little apparent purpose, but "Dharma" remains continuously engrossing nevertheless.

To conclude, "Dharma" is a story not only about ghosts. It is also about duty (which is roughly what the title "Dharma," an Indian word, means), acceptance, and the peculiar ways in which past and present interact in the mind of a single individual.