
Narrative Technique of Bhabani Bhattacharya

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Abstract

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a literary giant in the galaxy of Indian English writing of fiction. He uses both the conventional and the modern methods in his fiction. As a true artist, he does not adhere to any single point of view for the presentation of his stories. Though he prefers, for the most part, to narrate the stories from the traditional omniscient point of view, yet at times he resorts to interior monologues to reveal the inner experiences of the characters. In his three novels, viz. *So Many Hungers*, *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *A Dream in Hawaii*, Bhattacharya makes experiment with this new technique of narration, though without exclusively depending on it. The reader becomes aware of the stream-of-consciousness of his character: the flux of their mind, its continuity and yet its continuous change, as he happens to know of their silent musings or immediate thoughts or reactions to incidents. Rahoul in *So Many Hungers* and Kalo in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, are the characters who brood often, and their broodings reveal their immediate thoughts and reactions. The reader's communication with these characters takes place through their thoughts. Bhattacharya's last novel, *A Dream in Hawaii*, particularly opens with the musings of the protagonist, Yogananda. The internal monologue that takes place within Yogananda's mind at once illustrates to the reader what is passing in his mind. Nowhere does he become conscious of the writer's presence in the narrative.

Keywords: point of view, methods of fiction writing, misusing the protagonist, internal monologue, retrospective introduction, stream of consciousness.

In matters of narrative technique, Bhattacharya uses both the conventional and the modern methods in fiction. As a true artist, he does not adhere to any single point of view for the presentation of his stories. Though he prefers, for the most part,

to narrate the stories from the traditional omniscient point of view, yet at times he resorts to interior monologues to reveal the inner experiences of the characters. In his three novels, viz. *So Many Hungers*, *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *A Dream in Hawaii*, Bhattacharya makes experiment with this new technique of narration, though without exclusively depending on it. The reader becomes aware of the stream-of-consciousness of his character: the flux of their mind, its continuity and yet its continuous change, as he happens to know of their silent musings or immediate thoughts or reactions to incidents. Rahoul in *So Many Hungers* and Kalo in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, are the characters who brood often, and their broodings reveal their immediate thoughts and reactions. The reader's communication with these characters takes place through their thoughts.

Her ideas, plans and recollections are all conveyed in such a way that the reader finds himself identifying with her and her experiences. Nowhere does he become conscious of the writer's presence in the narrative. The fact stands out that in this novel Bhattacharya frequently uses the stream-of-consciousness technique with its stress upon the interior monologue, though for artistic purposes, he mingles it with other conventional narrative methods, too.

In one of his short stories, "A Moment of Eternity," too, the stream-of-consciousness technique has been employed. The story opens at the moment when the heroine is standing in the court of justice, waiting for the decision to be announced. As soon as the judge starts reading the judgement, her thoughts fly back to her past life. The moment prolongs into eternity. An entire panorama of the bygone days with all the intricate details of happenings and incidents flashes before her inward eye at that moment. She does not remain conscious of her surroundings at all. The reader comes to know the true sequence only at the end. Before it, the whole narrative seems illogical and incoherent.

In almost every book, one sees Bhattacharya introducing his characters, describing their peculiar traits in detail and sometimes even commenting upon certain happenings in the course of his narrative. Thus Kalo in *He Who Rides a Tiger* is introduced by the novelist from the point-of-view of the omniscient author. A number of incidents and occurrences that take place in this novel have also been either commented upon or reported by Bhattacharya from his own viewpoint. For this purpose, he uses the third-person narrative technique.

The novelist, for the sake of artistic success, quite often shifts the point-of-view from himself to a limited omniscient point-of-view of a single or a few characters. The writer, hiding his own individual self, either identifies himself with a single character, or projects his ideas through different characters. In Bhattacharya's case, various characters are individualized in each novel, and the story is told from their respective viewpoints. It is they, and not the novelist, who illumine the true nature of things in the contemporary society by revealing one another's characters and relating the happenings around them. Notwithstanding Bhattacharya's occasional intrusions in the course of narrative, the reader comes to know of the Bengal famine, the Quit India movement, the struggle, the miseries and the degradation of masses, fully through Rahoul, Kajoli and Devata as they talk with each other, and through their dialogues with other people in *So Many Hungers*. A major advantage of this method is that Bhattacharya as the omniscient and omnipresent author succeeds in unfolding before his readers comprehensive details about his characters and incidents in a logical, sequential and coherent narrative.

Another salient feature of Bhattacharya's narrative technique is the mode of telling the story partly through recapitulation or reminiscence, or flash-backs. Bhattacharya uses this technique in all his novels. He describes the situations or the turning-points in his characters' lives long after they actually took place. In *So Many Hungers*, Chapter Thirteen opens with Kajoli's family on the road leading to Calcutta and the novelist, recapitulates her harrowing experience. In *A Goddess Named Gold*, the story of Nago's rescue from the well by Meera is narrated in the opening pages but her risky adventure inside the well is recounted in Chapter Twenty Seven. Shadow from Ladakh, too, provides a striking instance of Bhattacharya's use of the recapitulation technique. Sumita's going to the Meadow House, her slipping and the subsequent spraining of an ankle, Bhashkar's holding her tightly clasped against him and escorting her to her house, are all described earlier in Chapter Sixteen, whereas what Sumita feels at the moment of Bhashkar's hugging, and how she reacts, has been narrated later. In *A Dream in Hawaii*, the novelist relates the story of Professor Neeloy Mookherji turning Swami Yogananda in the opening chapter, but what happens to Devjani after his departure from Varanasi, and her reactions on being denied initiation by him, are not told immediately. The reader comes to know of these incidents only in Chapter Twelve when a long span of time has passed and Devjani is in America, brooding over her past. Once again in Chapter Seventeen, Devjani

recalls to her mind the orama of the past days at Varanasi, a state of loneliness and panorama desolation, after Swami Yogananda suggests that in coming to America he committed a blunder, and that he should have been in India at that time, doing some constructive work for the society. Actually, Bhat- tacharya adopts the method of retrospective narration throughout this novel. The major characters of the novel, viz. Yogananda, Devjani, Stella and Jennifer, muse and recollect the events of their past.

Bhattacharya also employs myth as a part of his narrative technique in his fiction. At least one of Bhattacharya's novels, *Shadow from Ladakh*, exemplifies this. In this novel, Suruchi and Satyajit represent Sita and Gandhi, respectively. But Bhattacharya's use of myth is neither for digressional purposes (as found in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*) nor as a structural device (as seen in R.K. Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Mal gudi*). He takes up his mythical parallels simply to interpret certain situations or characters. One more peculiarity in Bhattacharya's treat- ment of myth is that he follows the mythical design to a certain point, and then, changes it completely, suggesting perhaps that the same ending is not relevant to the modern times.

The novelist delineates Suruchi's character as the archetypal figure of Indian womanhood- the Sita image-in all her silent suffering and sacrifice. Though he has "reduced the Sita myth to its sexual level," yet "Kasturba has not been instead of narrating the story further, takes a retrospective step to describe the circumstances in which they have left their home the previous day. Similarly, Rahoul is shown telephoning his father from the police custody, while the details of his arrest are disclosed later.

In *Music for Mohini*, Mohini comes to know of Sudha's story in Chapter Eleven, but the reader is told in Chapter Thirteen what happens to Sudha a few months before Mohini's marriage with Jayadev. Chapter Twenty opening with Mohini riding a cart with her mother-in-law to the temple of Virgin Goddess records the happenings of the previous days that have finally culminated in the temple-visit. *He Who Rides a Tiger* presents another example of Bhattacharya's use of the flash-back technique. The reader does not get the details from Chandra Lekha's entry and distressing experience in the harlot-house in the chapter describing her rescue by Kalo. The novelist does not wish to end Suruchi's career like Sita's and as such, the suggestion is made towards the end of the novel that her future life will be happy and fulfilled physically by her husband.

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Dr. Puneet Kumar Upadhyay (born 1981) is a permanent employee in Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, New Delhi, an autonomous body, under Ministry of Education, Govt. of India since 2008. Presently he is posted as Lecturer (English) at Kendriya Vidyalaya, Barabanki, U.P. He received his Ph.D. (English) degree from V.B.S. Purvanchal University, Jaunpur, U.P. His critical articles have been published in reputed journals including, Explorer, Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research and Shodh Drishti. He has presented many papers at various international conferences and seminars including The international Conference “ Empire, Nation and Diaspora: Mapping the Trajectories of Transformations in Indian Diaspora” in February 2012 organized by the University of Hyderabad. He gave a presentaion on “the contribution of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi” at a seminar organized jointly by D.C.S.K. P.G. College, Mau and Hindustani Academy Prayagraj, U.P. in March 2021. Recently he has presented a paper in the Global Multi- Track Conference (STAR 2023) jointly organized by Special Minds India, Unifacvest University, South America and Integral University, India in October 2023. He presented a paper in Singularities International Conference on Fantasy 2024 jointly organized by

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