NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA

Bhattacharya’s technique as a novelist is based on the traditional novel of a number of English, American, Scottish and Indian predecessors. Bhattacharya never fails to captivate the subtleties and surrounding nuances that light up the facts of life. He not only describes and explains but also dramatizes incidents and creates characters which are very vivid and realistic. Bhattacharya is a conscientious artist and he is most methodical in his work. His capacity for creative writing is surprisingly tremendous.

Bhattacharya has proved himself a consummate artist in his novels and his contribution in this respect to Indo-Anglian fiction is remarkable and cannot be denied. As a portrayer of the life of the Indians, he is unique. Bhattacharya has managed to pierce through the political and ethical attitudes of the people to the human depths beyond. He generally concentrates on a small upper-class; the qualities on which he emphasizes have a universal significance. Though a lover of tradition, he is not against every modernity, progress and development. As he is against the tyranny and superstitious restrictions of tradition, so is he against the negative qualities of the modern times like corruption of all types at the cost of human values. His view can be observed in his second novel as:

“Corruption had had grown like an epidemic and money had become a mad – hunger. Never in the land’s history had the process that made the rich richer, the poor poorer, gained such ruthless intensity. The authority took little heed and set it aside as a passing phenomenon. But the poor suffered untold misery and the end of one tale was the beginning of another.”

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The novels of Bhattacharya are happily free from two evils of the twentieth century novel that have alienated readers even among the intellectual elite. Those evils are the extreme subjectivism so prominent both in the well-made novel and among the modernists and the emphasis laid on abnormal types. The reader had been baffled by an excess of the intellect. While the writers have been interested in what their characters think, the readers are eager to know what the characters do. His novels insist on what the characters do rather than on what they think. That is perhaps the secret of their success and popularity.

His plots are not structures suggesting something static but processes of change- unraveling the continuing interrelatedness of the exterior states of mind_ which uncover a change in the nature of the character or in their situations, or in our understanding of them, or in all.

The action of the various novels offers diverse situations and events and incidents to the characters when they try to assert their identity and grow. The life pattern of the characters of Bhattacharya is a quest for identity and fulfilment, and they all bravely encounter the various problems of life and death while resisting the temptations of evil which may be traditional, social, modern or moral.

The action in some of his novels is complex as it does not begin at the actual beginning of the action but breaks into the middle, then flashes back to the earlier scenes, and then picks up and the continues to the end. Bhattacharya seems to favor the circular pattern in narration. Speed and movement and action are the primary traits of Bhattacharya’s narrative art, and his action which is centered round the hero and heroes and their life pattern solves the problem of unity in the novels of Bhattacharya.
In most of his novels Bhattacharya employs the cinematographic technique. Flash back, juxtaposition and montage are finely fused with conventional chronological sequence. The technique adopted in *Shadow from Ladakh; Dream in Hawaii* is retrospective narration. Emotional concentration is achieved by telescoping events. He is quite an adept in the use of the flashback technique and it is used effectively in the above novels. The frequent use of flashback does not result in the disjointedness of the narrative which is as usual unimpeded in its flow, but is able to achieve a considerable emotional concentration. Bhattacharya’s exploitation of the flashback is so judicious and adroit that it does not affect the progress of the action in the episodic structure of his novels.

Bhattacharya is most skilful in the manipulation of various narrative techniques. He is a superb story teller. He is so conscious of minute details that very often the most trivial incidents are described in an elaborate and detailed manner. While analyzing events and characters he rises above the personal level and is quite objective. Bhattacharya’s art of characterization is superb. A character can be presented in various ways, by a psychological analysis of character, by dialogue, by action and reaction which is very closely connected with the main concern of the narrative. Bhattacharya’s characters are not types but are individuals with strongly defined personalities.

When we examine *So Many Hungers*, one of the examples for his good characterization, each of the character stands as an individual and at the same time as universal. Samarendra, who is a very shrewd person, manages to be in the good looks of the Governor and other British officials. He tells the Chief Secretary to the Government a lie that Rahoul might discover a Death Ray which the allied powers could make use of in order to win the war. However, his dreams are shattered when Rahoul joins the quit India Movement and Kunal is reported missing. He is totally a lost man. It is at this moment that he learns
that the British government has honoured him with the award of the title, Companion of the Indian Empire, C.I.E.

Devesh Basu, Samarendra’s father, is a true Gandhian. He is a patriot and loves the common people. It is for their love that he settles down in a village called Baruni. He is a very popular figure amongst the villagers. They all adore him and call him Devata. Rahoul and Kunal are more at home with their grandfather than with their father. When the question of sending Rahoul to Cambridge was being discussed Devata emphatically said that the country came first and that Cambridge could wait. He tried to convince the people that their fight was not with the British people but with the British Government.

Devesh was fond of a particular family in Baruni which consisted of a farmer, his wife and their two sons Kanu and Onu and a daughter Kajoli. Their father was imprisoned for participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Devesh Basu considered Kajoli’s mother as his daughter and Kajoli as his granddaughter. He always preached ahimsa to the villagers. He was arrested. As he was being taken to prison, he advised the people of Baruni to be strong, true and deathless. When the quit India Movement was at its zenith he undertook a fast at the Dehra Dun Prison. Kajoli symbolizes the cruel fate of the rural population of Bengal.

Within his limited sphere he has achieved a vision of simple, normal human relations. There are many scenes in his novels which are very sensitive and touching. His heroes are larger than themselves as they are both individuals and types Bhattacharya does not lead his reader to an interest in character for its own sake like some extreme realities and psychological novelists, nor does he neglect to deal at sufficient length with the motivation of characters and working of their minds. For the characters of Bhattacharya the world is the biggest school and life is the best teacher.
In *In music for Mohini*, the forces of tradition are at their strongest. Mohini, a Modern city-bred, continually comes up against strong forces of tradition. Living in the city, she can lead a modern life, but has the old mother to contend with, who is a symbol of tradition in the modern city. The old mother lives in the city but does not relent or give in to the forces of modernity. She has a strong moral code by which she lives her life, and directs the lives of her sons and grandchildren who are very modern in their outlook. The old mother is strict in bringing up the children, and allows them only that much freedom as tradition would allow. She inculcates in them respect for their elders. However, living in the city, she has to compromise with forces of modernity sometimes. She has to agree to send Mohini to convent school. She also strongly disapproves of Mohini singing over the radio and of having her songs recorded.

When marriage negotiations are going on, Mohini is expected to remain quiet. She is not expected to raise her eyes and must speak only when spoken to. Then members of the family of a prospective bridegroom examine her critically and heap all kinds of insults on her. The indignity and insult that Mohini suffers is the fate of the girls brought up in a traditional society.

Jaydev wishes that he and his wife should be like Yagnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi. He wants Mohini to be with him in everything that he does. Jaydev has been a scholar all along and is disappointed to know that there is no scholarship in his wife. The grave mistake that Jayadev makes is to separate spiritual love from physical love. Real love can be achieved if the spiritual and the physical planes are one.

The titles of the novels of Bhattacharya show how conscious he is of his art and technique. They are not causal or simple or plain. But they are highly suggestive and deeply symbolical and throw light on the direction and meaning of the novels. *So Many Hungers* suggests the ecosystem in the human society.
One person may become a prey to the hunger of the other. Hunger is described in many shapes. They are hungers of food, money, sex, freedom etc.

In *Music for Mohini* music suggests the deep tunings in a young woman who wants to make her life melodious in her married life. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* the writer compares the society to the tiger in which everyone is part and parcel and no one can live against its traditions especially in Indian society which is full of orthodoxy. Kalo becomes the rider of the tiger. So he is in the dangerous situation to get down from the back of the tiger. However, finally he gets down from it back. Bhattacharya maintained well the theme of retaliation through out the novel. In *Goddess Named Gold* the novelist symbolically explains man’s greediness, and his concentration towards temporary materialistic world. He also points out how man degrades himself for temporary things.

In his next novel *Shadow from Ladakh* by using the word shadow the novelist reveals fears of war which is due to suspicious activities of china against India. In his next novel *Dream in Hawaii* Bhattacharya reveals the illusions and assumptions of the modern man who proposes many things for the sake of material gains but fails to fulfill them. Hawaii stands for the west. Bhattacharya compares and contrasts values of the East and West, and spiritual and material worlds.

Whatever he writes about, be it war, army, rural life, city life, bureaucrats, criminals, the English and Indians, he writes it most authentically and authoritatively. His style is characterized by lucidity, precision and control, quickness, confidence, eagerness and masterly control over vocabulary.
It is as if his own life of action and drama has been transposed into the pattern of his novels. His main concern is with humanity, but not the average and democratic but unusual and exceptional in human experience and tradition and the disintegration of these values is disheartening to him. In keeping with his choice of subject and vision Bhattacharya chooses his own form and style. He has firm convictions about his aim as a novelist that is to tell a story well. He specially admires the novelist Tagore because his novels are well-constructed and dramatic and they are not afraid of incident.

Bhattacharya’s conservative attitude to technique is extended also to his use of language and style. While surmounting the initial difficulty with the language_ even though he is supposed to have remarked that the English language writer often experiences a counterfeit feeling as if he is going about with a false caste mark_ Bhattacharya is also able to cultivate a highly individualistic and sensitive style.

He might not write like the masters of English fiction as the language they used was suited only to their conditions. But an Indo-Anglian writer consciously or unconsciously tries to develop a separate and distinct dialect of English which does not go against the basic pattern of English but at the same time is capable of expressing the Indian spirit and sensibility.

He doesn’t consciously attempt to imitate either American English or British English. On the other hand, he uses it as he knows and as effectively as he can. He tries to overcome his limitations by bringing in sometimes Hindi and Bengali words and phrases. He chooses phrases and words from Indian languages only when he feels sure that they are more effective than the English equivalent he knows.
Bhattacharya is a conscious and effective artist and he is acutely conscious of the problem of his medium. Even a casual examination of the various speech styles he employs in his very first novel So Many Hungersbears testimony to the care and accuracy with which he uses the language. His mastery over the foreign medium is strikingly evident in all his works of fiction which he organizes mainly in terms of action and characters.

The most significant thing about the style of Bhattacharya is his originality and his effort to forge his own language. His English is neither derivative nor imitative of English English or American English. His style has all accuracy, ease and grace which a good style should possess and it does not suffer from clumsiness of expression. His style is free from ‘an excess of solemnity’. His style and contents are inseparable. It is not artificial but natural, not affected but genuine, not pretentious but authentic, not dull but dynamic.

Bhattacharya has achieved a style which is special. He manages to avoid monotony by not having a long succession of too many short sentences and saves the reader from bogging down in a quagmire of extremely long sentences running to several lines. The variety is secured sometimes by an alternation of short and long sentences and sometimes by varying the structure of the sentence. There are loose sentences, period sentences, and balanced sentences in his works. His sentence or paragraph the claims exerted upon it by the total composition.

Bhattacharya has the necessary vocabulary to ensure that each character speaks his own language. Bhattacharya uses the different speech styles of his characters not only to give an insight into their mentalities but also to indicate the influence of the vernacular. The pronunciation and intonation of the typical Indian is different. The speech pattern of the Bengali is again different and distinctive from that of the man from the north of India. Bhattacharya was
acutely aware of the problem. The language used by Kajoli in *So Many Hungers* and Meera in *Goddess Named Gold* becomes their characters. They are typical girls from the country side. His characters are not careless in and indifferent to the use of their words.

Bhattacharya is at his best in his descriptions and he is a master in the use of the epithet and very unusual stylistic devices. Generally Bhattacharya uses the vocabulary of an educated Indian, but it changes with the situation. In a situation where there is a dialogue between people whose relations are not very intimate and cordial he uses a formal diction. Normally, however, he tries to use an informal and colloquial type of language.

Being a master artist, he utilizes all resources of the language with utmost effect. His reliance on adjectives seems to grow less and less, though he is not completely free from it. Adverbs, verbs, and nouns also are used effectively. Repetition of words is one of the devices he uses to acquire an emphatic utterance. His similes are simple and functional and they are not intended to impede the progress of narration and action and cloud the clarity of thought. They are a part of the total composition and do not draw special attention to themselves.

Bhattacharya has a pronounced preference for simple and effective words which make his style very distinctive and at the same time he does not ignore the utility of abstract the general words. He makes a judicious use of both. His passages of description and narration thrive on the specific and concrete words; his passages of exposition and argument find a use for abstract and general words. His economy and control over his medium is admirable.

Bhattacharya has deliberately used slang not only to isolate the identity of the speaker but also to create a specialized atmosphere. He makes copious use of official and diplomatic terminology in *Shadow from Ladakh*. In *Dream
in Hawaii the American element is predominant and thus he uses typical American slang. Punctuation also plays a very important part in his style. Many a time he uses an accentuated manner to indicate a special attitude.

Many Indo-Anglian novelists have been responsible for many innovations and experiments with their native languages as a part of creating Indian atmosphere in their novels. Bhattacharya’s distinction does not lie so much in his experiment with language. In his novels, there are more Indian words and expressions, just to such an extent as one finds them in the novels of Anand, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh, Malgonkar and some others.

Bhattacharyas also used some of the methods or strategies employed by other Indo-Anglian novelists in tackling the problem of dialogue. Whenever necessary, he uses Bengali, Hindi and Sanskrit words and phrases and also Indian proverbs:

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\text{Ramayana, }^2\text{ Maidan, }^3\text{ Puja, }^4\text{ Pujari, }^5\text{ Bhai, }^6\text{ Yagna, }^7\text{ Tantra, }^8\text{ Saitan. }^9
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It is a special feature, generally employed by a few other Indian novelists that whenever he used an Indian word or a phrase he gives the English translation.

The dialogue between a village pandit, rather a priest, and an old lady withered and shriveled with the experience of life is very well portrayed. The Indian words are ‘Siva’ and ‘Ganges’ evocative of Indian culture and religion; there are sayings from popular folklore; the use of typical Indian proverbs brings out the Indian spirit in the dialogue. Bhattacharya also uses the native words, translations of certain characteristic expressions, idioms, and sayings, the syntax of the native tongue and its speech rhythms.
Bhattacharya uses ‘free indirect speech’ as well as the mixed dialect, useful for characterization, most skillfully and their English equivalent is cleverly inserted in dialogues. Bhattacharya’s prose has a fine rhythm and at times is poetical. It is the rhythmical quality of prose that makes it great.

Bhattacharya’s mastery over language proves equal to the difficult task of expressing most competently and sensitively the subtle and complex nature of the variety of characters and situations that one comes across in his novels. His dramatic personae range from governors, viceroys, ambassadors, professors, and the top brass of the army to the meanest of the coolies and black smiths. They include the English, the Americans, the Japanese, the Chinese, Hindus Christians and Muslims. The situations vary from the public events of national and political importance to those of the most intimate contact between wife and husband.

Through his skilful use of language Bhattacharya is able to achieve authenticity and verisimilitude in expressing the Indian vision of the reality and experience almost on all occasions and there is no jarring effect on the reader, whether Western or Indian. His preference for the more conservative style of language is a mixture of deliberate choice to suit his traditional mode of technique and the peculiarity of the situations in his novels. His real strength and value as a novelist lies in the recognition of his limitations and the meticulous maintenance of integrity in the use of his material and medium.

It is true that the novels of Bhattacharya have all the elements of a best seller like sex, sensationalism, religion, revenge, love, war, romance, hunting, adventure; a wide canvas, a variety of characters, incidents and situations. They have not only width and range but also depth and height, not only entertainment but also significant. His technique is that of the art as an aesthetic experience.
Bhattacharya has a realist’s perception of the way things are and romancer’s vision of what ought to be. In his novels one finds a fine blending of these two. If it is the quality of a work that is taken into consideration, when assessing the achievement of a novelist, then perhaps the six novels of Bhattacharya are not sufficient claim to his position as a major novelist. He may be only a minor novelist in the world of commonwealth writers in English, but in India he is a without doubt a major Indo-Anglian novelist. He cannot be considered a classic but he is definitely a very rewarding writer. Dr. K. R. S. Iyengar appreciates his achievement as a writer:

“The Sahitya Academi Award to him in 1967 was fitting recognition of his standing achievement in the field of Indian fiction in English”\(^{10}\)

His ability to use the English language with subtlety and sensitivity, his story telling skill, his deeply particularizing quality of imagination, his capacity to embody Indian experience and sensibility make his talent a rare and significant sort. K. R. Chandrasekharan says as:

“He is a realist and at the same time a visionary and his achievement as a writer is substantial”\(^{11}\)

His wide and varied experiences of life in Indian life, his fiction is Indian in the deepest sense; it shows Indians experiencing mysticism.

Bhattacharya is quite a craftsman in the art of storytelling and nowhere does he lay any claims to a profound philosophy of life. He is not a didactic writer; his main aim is to entertain and to present a humanistic vision of life through the rich and varied themes in his novels. His main concern is for character and the tangle of human emotions and relationships and this together
with his very sound and accurate historical sense makes him a novelist of vision and power in Indo-Anglian fiction.

Bhattacharya’s works reveal that his style is not only indisputably personal and distinctive, but often rises to high literary achievement. The success of a novel, or indeed of any other form of literature, is a success of the language used, the success of the manipulation and exploitation of the resources of style, because it is through style that the plot and character and the point of view come alive and impinge on the consciousness of the reader.

It is the writer’s creative use of language that unfolds its hidden nuances and invests familiar words with usual freshness and force. A great writer adds to the store of language as much as he draws from it. The word acquires much power and plenitude when the writer performs a unique creative function when he restores to the word its pristine purity and power and almost lends it the ring of the Divine. In his hands the English language acquires a distinctive and unmistakable Indianness in style, idiom and syntax.

His style is richly Indian. He draws his similes from Sanskrit literature, and mostly from vernacular speech and folk-lore. Even the sentence patterns are moulded on the basis of the regional language so that they are far from idiomatic English expressions. His style carries an exotic flavor to the Western reader. Being an Indian to the core and adopting English as his medium of expression, he contributes not a little to the English style. His style has an ambitious motto behind it. He wishes to capture the grandeur and sublimity. There is little occurrence of word juggling in his style. While expressing the inexpressible truth, Bhattacharya employs such a style which seems to partake of the intricate nature of the thought.
Quite a few of the Indian novelists have tried to impart Indianness to their English style by translating the idioms and phrases and introducing the speech patterns of the vernacular. But Bhattacharya is by far the best example for this expression of the Indian sensibility in English, because in his hands the English language and vernacular idiom achieve a happy and harmonious marriage. What he does is not merely to introduce translations from the vernacular; the English language is creatively moulded and renewed so that it effortlessly absorbs the raciness and vigour of the vernacular. The success of the experiment lies in the fact that the reader is hardly conscious of this process of stylistic manipulation.

He feels convinced that the Indianness is not an extra tagged on to the style but an organic element of the very texture and structure. But, then, Bhattacharya handles the Indianness with a sense of proportion. While *So Many Hungers*, *He who rides a Tiger* and *Goddess Named Gold* abound in examples of this type, in *Music for Mohini*, *Shadow from Ladakh* and *A dream in Hawaii* the examples are not many. For, in most of the short stories, Bhattacharya has created the typical Indian rural scene and so the vernacular turns of phrase and idiom have a proper place.

One finds that Bhattacharya introduces the Indian element not as a fetish or filigree work; there is inevitability about these phrases and proverbs, idioms and similes. They illumine a situation or animate a character in a remarkable way and with striking oppositeness. This is how Bhattacharya adds a new dimension to the English language as only a writer of genius can. Almost all the characters including the narrator in the short stories and novels have their roots in the Indian soil: Some are illiterate like Kalo in *He who rides a Tiger*, some educated but without any influence of the West like Jaydev in *Music for Mohini*. So it is natural that Bhattacharya’s characters should generally spice their speech with Indian similes, proverbs and idioms.
The history of modern novel is an exciting story of the onslaught on traditional categories like ‘plot’, and many novelists, some of whom have significant achievement to their credit, have freely experimented with ‘plot’ and demonstrated that a novel can be successful and adequate even when there is an apparent disregard for ‘plot’. The discarding of the conventional ‘plot’ does not, however, create a vacuum and the modern novelist substitutes it by a framework which grows, as it were, on its own. This breaking and creating anew is necessary because the modern writer has often to communicate an experience which is complex and body forth the form and pressure of the modern situation.

Bhattacharya’s novels reveal that he is in the line of the great modern novelists who have this urge for experimentation. His novels are ‘open’ in their structure and there is no temporal or spatial limitation. Any criticism of Bhattacharya’s technique or style should, in fairness to him, take into account his attitude to novel writing contained in his works.

In his novels, *So Many Hungers, Music For Mohini, He Who Rides A Tiger, Goddess Named Gold, Shadow From Ladakh* and *A dream in Hawaii*. Bhattacharya presents India on the material and psychological planes. In *Music for Mohini* and *A Dream in Hawaii* he is concerned with India on the psychological and spiritual planes—mind being the connecting link between matter and spirit. The drama and the ethos of the race, the social problems, the religious superstitions and the political upheavals—these are his concern in his novels and short stories. The verities of the deeper levels of the Indian psyche and the glory of the Indian spiritual tradition engage his attention in his novels. Thus Bhattacharya succeeds in probing India on all the three levels—material, psychological and spiritual.
Each of his works brings out a profound truth and the narration is done in the typical Indian way of storytelling. His works apart from giving a taste of Indian stories and story-telling have a definite purpose and are deliberately woven in to perfect shape. Clarifications and comments on the profound philosophical disquisitions are found in his works. A complete picture of the Indian marriage is given when Mohini is married in the novel *Music for Mohini*. His narrative technique may not reveal the charm of a well-pruned and artificially laid garden but they certainly possess the awesome splendor of a forest, cultivationlands and Sheppard’s farm with their beauty that is natural, wholesome and bewildering.

There is consummate art in the apparent artlessness, supreme coherence seeming incoherence, and connected design in the sprawling structure, much sense hidden in the glib loquacity, so much impersonal in the personal musing of Bhattacharya. It is not as though he pours down his knowledge on the reader or exhausts him by his interminable expansiveness. Side tracking is there but it is deliberate. The thread is resumed and the link supplied at some later point and only then is the reader able to see the purpose and unity of the narrative. Bhattacharya as it were takes almost every branch of knowledge into his province. Music, Medicine, Astrology, Commerce, History, Philosophy and Religion both Indian and western, all form the stock house of his images. It is perhaps not an evidence of depth in every subject—which is humanly impossible—but it certainly is a proof of his versatility.

As a writer he makes wise use of all that he stumbles upon. Every reference is thus related to the context in which it occurs and is convincing enough as the character’s own utterance. An impression may, however, be created that the omniscient author is peeping in and interposing his comments or observations. The themes that they seek to embody and fictionalize the quintessence of the Indian spiritual tradition—that the narrative pattern and characterization had to be so devised as to sustain them. The ‘complexity’ in
Bhattacharya is thus integral to the technique, which again is necessitated by the theme. It also imparts a scholarly touch and an encyclopedic stretch to the works.
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