AN INVESTIGATION ON THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE’S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to investigate the narrative techniques of the novels of Bharati Mukherjee. Experiences of the authors are to be highlighted in a careful way. For this, they use different techniques and styles. While writing, women writers should be little bit shrewd. Any caligulism on the part of women writers may bring callout among the male writers. This paper brings out clearly how the female writers exhibit their inner feelings through their writings. Infact each and every writer has their own techniques and styles to be followed in their works. The chosen writer Bharati Mukherjee has made a splendid effort inorder to show her uniqueness in her writings by adopting different narrative techniques and styles in her novels.

Keywords: immigrants, expatriates, neurosis, caligulism.

Technique is the means by which the writer’s experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it.

- (Technique as Discovery 18)

Narrative technique used by the writer in his or her fiction is fundamentally the way to render the thoughts. In other words, each and every writer has a way to express the experiences or thoughts and this is known as Narrative Technique. In a novel writing, technique conveys the author’s idea to the readers by effective use of words. These words tell separate identity of the novelist. Narrative Technique requires certain ordering to gain the meaning of the text. It provides deeper meaning to the reader and he has to visualize the situation given by the writer through his imagination.
Thus, it is a method, through which the writer brings out the emotional effect to the story artistically.

Experiences are to be highlighted by the writer in a careful way. For this, they use different techniques and styles. While writing, women writers should be little bit shrewd. Any caligulism on the part of women writers may bring callet among the male writers. This is expressed by Jasbir Jain in her article *Gender and Narrative Strategy*. She says:

Women writers while evolving narrative strategies are faced with a double problem: how to step out of the framework defined by men and patriarchal values; and how to identify and create a tradition of their own. (p.32)

It is clear, when writing about unique experience and feelings, the female writer should not be viewed as svengali of the family as well as the society. So, women, when she aspires to write, should prove not to be banausic by endearing gender inequality. This is applicable more to neoteric women writers, when they try to bring hunky feelings of dander against repression or oppression against women. They have to be very careful, when they try to suscitate their feelings and experiences through their narratives.

A so-called new fangled women writers use narrative technique in order to have ‘ne plus ultra’ existence. While doing so, the women writers try to get out of their neshness among their male counterpart. As a result, they tend to create nainsell among men. This is aptly brought out by Jasbir Jain in the following lines:

It is not a difference of form - I cannot say that men write about external facts and women about internal lifes: one cannot also say that men write about thickly inhabited worlds and women about solitary figures - but women do write about the response of women of the shadows which they alone can see and the anguish they alone can feel. It is a difference of perspective. (p.36)

It is understood that the narrator can bring out three points of view in a narrative technique. The narrative can be given in the first person point of view or third person point of view. In the first person, the narrator is one of the characters. Here, the narrator may be a major or minor character in the action or in the event. The first person narrator uses the pronoun ‘I’ or ‘We’ depending upon the number. Also, the narrator is subjective, which also helps the reader to know about
his or her thinking along with one’s reaction to the events. In third person point of view, the narrator tells the story or events in an objective manner and even takes omniscient point of view, where the narrator acts as God and also comes out with authorial instructions. Here, the narrator also assumes the voice of another pers

Bharati Mukerjee’s narrator has to bear ‘family history’, ‘international terrorism’ on. It involves objectivity, where he or she has ultimate knowledge and controls over the story. It does not have the potentiality to characterize the narrator, which is something that only the first person narrator does or ‘world wide media’ in order to bring meaning to the story. Mukerjee’s first novel the Tiger’s Daughter has been resorted to omniscient narration. The other novels like Wife or Jasmine follow the third person narration. In Tiger’s Daughter and Jasmine, the writer makes use of objective third person narration. She reveals the mental agony of the characters using psychological build up to their barathrum. In Jasmine, the voice longs for the identity of different persons, different perspectives under different scenario, though it is presented in first person narration.

By mixing the past and the present, Bharati Mukherjee succeeds in taking the readers to the psyche of her characters. The novels of Bharati Mukerjee like Tiger Daughter, Wife and Jasmine also tell the protagonist’s journey either in first or third or neither from east west nor west east in order to have belgard to their life of dream. Wife, a novel which is presented in third person narrative, narrates the story of Dimple Dasgupta. She migrates to America with her husband. There, she is caught in the web of two worlds and its culture. She finds it very difficult to get away from her original culture and feels trapped to it. This creates neurosis and even she goes on to the extent of killing her husband.

Jasmine, presented in first person narrative, tells the protagonists ‘life time stories of multiple identities’. When she takes different names, it displays her multiple identities of immigrant women in America. The first-person narrative guides the writer to have conversational style, which is friendly in its nature and also express the reflections of the narrator freely. Also, the first-person narrative with unfolding of each episode like a scenario creates a sense of immediacy. In describing different immigrant type, Mukherjee has explored her theme with its many nuances. In all the novels, like Wife, Tiger’s Daughter and Jasmine, the protagonist’s journey is from India to America and the actions are narrated by first person or third person. Dimple and Tara are expatriates and Jasmine is an immigrant.
In novel writing, language involves communicating the authors mind to the reader by the effective use of vocabulary. Mukerjee has made the language, a perfect medium for her meanings. To her, as Dwidevi points out, ‘Language is a code where by ideas of the word communicates in a conventional system of arbitrary sign’ (p.81). Mukherjee’s language is always caller to her readers. The form and structure of her novel, with the help of the language, is dautie to her readers. It is very simple and also straight-forward with daimen flashbacks. It also expresses Indian ethos and sensibility. In *Jasmine*, the protagonist's addresses to her parents and teachers such as ‘Mataji’, ‘Pitaji’ and ‘Masterji’, which highlight Indian surroundings. In them, one can see connotative and evocative ideas pertaining to culture. In other words, the words not only register the culture but also brings out her sensibility which coincides with Katie Wales, when she defines language and its impact on the writer in the following lines: ‘Vernacular is a term from Latin which means native or domestic, this term is related to the language of native country or mother tongue’ (p.274).

Mukherjee’s handling of words displays her in-depth knowledge about her Indian tradition. She uses Indian words like ‘gobi aloo, matarpanir, tika, kurta, salwar, bazaar, charpay, kameez,’ to show her native linguistic efficiency. The word ‘mangalasutra’, a nuptial knot for marriage is used in her novel *Wife*. This particular word takes any reader to Indian tradition. Words such as ‘gharjma, mlechha arre baba’ are the local expressions used by the writer efficiently. Along with this, she also uses American slang such as ‘automobile, motel’ in order to show her expertise in foreign languages in her writings. She uses adjectives in abundance. Her mastery over images are highlighted, when she uses hyphenated words like - diamond-hard light of stars, sand-yellow sun, flame-bright, Jazz-worthy California, lion- riding dispenser, night-vision implants, bile-poisoned-self, etc.

Mukherjee’s using of flashback technique, which reveals her past memories, helps her to probe more about her native land. According to Katie Wales, ‘Flasback technique is a technique employed in fiction and film by which it indicates whatever has happened earlier is recalled’ (p.78). The effective use of flashback technique also helps the readers to know about the plot, background, scene, characters and the events in the novel. Further, this also helps the writer to portray various aspects of society and complexity of different characters. For instance, Mukherjee, in *Jasmine*, portrays a young Indian wench. She hails from a rural village in India. She
tells the story through flashback and through this technique she has brought out the struggles and turmoils also. The following lines tell how the protagonist uses flashback effectively: ‘Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears - his satellite dish to the stars - and foretold my widowhood and exile. I was only seven then, fast and venturesome, scabrous-armed from leaves and thorns’ (p.3). Rhodd Koening observes this technique of Bharati Mukherjee in the following manner: ‘Mukherjee relates Jyoti-Jasmine-Janes story in fragments, flashing back and forward so that her heroine’s uncertain present reflects painfully, and glistening shards of memory’ (p.208-09).

Bharati Mukherjee also uses irony and satire in a very vivid manner. In an interview with Alison B.Carb in the Massachusetts Review, Bharati Mukherjee herself says ‘My first novel, The Tiger’s Daughter, has a rather British feel to it. I used the omniscient point of view and plenty of irony’ (p.649). It is clear that the writer uses these tools to describe the experiences of Indian women abroad either as immigrants or when they return to India for a visit. In Tiger’s Daughter, Bharati Mukherjee seems to speak satirically about the sudden change of Tara’s ideas about India. Her dread about her native soil is expressed in the following lines: ‘First the corrosive hours on the Marine Drive, then the deformed beggar’s in the railway station, and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reverse’ (p.25).

The irony of the situation is also revealed when Tara belongs neither to New York nor her home land, India. The rootlessness of Tara is revealed, when she says, ‘The years away from India had made her self-centered. She took everything, the heat, the beggars, as personal insults and challenges’ (p.86).

In her novel Wife, Bharati Mukherjee splendidly has brought out ironic situation through her protagonist Dimple. It is highlighted after her marriage to Amit Basu. In fact, the marriage has become an intolerable bondage rather than a lowse. The tragic irony of the situation is that she is even unable to choose the curtains in her bedroom at her in law’s place. There are umpteen numbers of instances to show the verbal irony of the writer. For instance, Dimple longs for the love of her husband. Ironically, he is unable to respond to it. This is witnessed in the following lines of Dimple, when she innocuously says, ‘I want you to say things to me. The way husbands are supposed to’ (p.22) and as a dunce she replies, ‘I’m not good at saying things’ (p.22).
Mukherjee uses various devices like Ellipsis, Italicization and Hyphen as a part of narrative technique. The exceptional use of narrative technique creates a balance also. The researchers should also try to investigate Mukherjee and her Narrative Technique in terms of female immigrant. It is important to examine the matters pertaining to immigration and its subsequent effect on national literature. Immigration, a traumatic process, follows a pattern today as he did in the early years when first generation immigrants arrived in America. Carl Wittke describes: “Immigration as a desperate adventure - the most important moment in the lifetime of any man when he (says) farewell to his native-land forever and its coast line sink beneath the horizon” (p.190). Further more, the problems faced by cultural minorities when they enter the United States are overpowering because there is a ‘conflict in the soul of the immigrant who must reject the Old World in order to be accepted in the New ‘anxiety, aspirations, unhappiness and sheer confusion’ (p.190).

Bharati Mukherjee’s novels do not claim to be moralistic or philosophical but the traumas that are gone through by her female protagonists and immigrants are not an assorted kind of emotional drama. The pain undergone is very much a part of every other Indian girl who lacks the self-confidence to revolt against the norms of the rigid society. Passivity is the only weapon which can give them a respectable life.

It is noted that the characters of Bharati Mukherjee are people who exist in reality. They might be fictitious but are very real with their own terrains to cross, a mixed bundle of emotional and mental fixations that have to be overcome through internalization or externalization of mind and soul, trying to carve a future for them. The first generation which was forced to cross to earn living had no choice. But the second generation in India with no opportunities within reach, in order to escape the dreariness had to resort to revolutions or to leave the country, cross the border to substatiate their own dreams in faraway continents. America being the land of opportunities, ‘American Dream’ lured people from all strata of society to merge into the melting pot. The characters reflect the personal experiences of Bharati Mukherjee yet they are independent of her. They are not bondaged to their creator as Bharati Mukherjee herself claims to Connell:

I didn’t know she was going to leave Bud at the end of the novel. She just up and went! Because she got bored with the situation. Not bored. She felt it was a regression, like going back to village life, a life of duty
and devotion, to stay on caring for this crippled fellow. The frontier was out there, beckoning. She just left. (p. 31)

Bharati Mukherjee has brought out unique thematic patterns as an immigrant writer to her novels. This is seen in the novels of *Wife, Desirable Daughters* and *Jasmine*. Maya Manju Sharma refers to this aspect of her creative personality in the following lines: ‘In her fiction Mukherjee handles Western themes and settings as well as characters that are westernized or bicultural. Yet, she if forced to admit that the very structure of her imagination is essentially Hindu, and essentially moral’ (p.18). Among the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* is known to be the novel of ‘transition’. In this novel, one can see Jasmine’s metamorphosis into various identities zooming and zipping to carvenish for her in an alien country, adopting all means to adjust into a life created by her. After this novel, the style of Bharati Mukherjee seems to mature and it takes of to unknown realms which are expressed by her in the following lines:

I experienced a miraculous emotional break-through. I heard Debby’s voice as she spoke the first page and a half of part one. After that, Debby took over, as had Jasmine and Hannah in my two preceding novels. She surprised me. She became my alternate self, the what if self. The pace, the language, the events all were dictated by Debby. I suppose that sounds a little crazy, but it’s the way I’ve always written fiction. (p.2-3)

Whenever Bharati Mukherjee completes her novel in tandem, she shows a caract of improvisation. This makes anyone to see a sign of evolution as a writer. The evincing of confidence can be hinted by the writer through her characters like Jyoti, Dimple, Tara, etc. The uniqueness of Bharati Mukherjee, as a writer can be seen when her characters try to acclimatize to their neo environ with the help of ‘adjusts and adapts’. At the same time, it is difficult to surbet style of Bharati Mukherjee in its forms. When she refuses to immit the norms, there comes complexity. The following lines prove this:

You seem to feel when you come into a Mukherjee novel, a kind of flurry and complexity in the writing. It’s rapid, darting, intense and energetic. Mukherjee is fascinated by people who are constantly on the move, who have to live a life in transit, who have to destroy their former identities in other countries in order to live fully in another. It’s an
astonishingly ruthless understanding of the personality. That the personality has to travel light and move across countries and assimilate other country’s culture and ideas and practices like putting on another skin. (p.1)

Work Cited
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