
The Novels Of Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Survey Of Plot Structures

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Abstract

The study of Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels is incomplete unless he is examined as a craftsman. His themes are relevant and arrest attention of the readers but his plot structures, characterization, form, art of narration and diction etc. are also equally significant to be investigated. He is genuinely a literary craftsman. Balram S. Sarot remarks "whenever his acute sensitivity makes his creative urge afire, and a peculiar theme strikes his mind, Bhabani weaves the pattern of his story around it." (The Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya, 108). Since the entire gamut of a story is covered by its plot, Bhattacharya takes considerable pains in knitting the plots of his novels. Shiv K. Kumar and Keith Mckean reflect, being aware of the plot, "temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character and thoughts that constitute the matter of his invention," (Critical Approaches to Fiction, p. 45)

Bhattacharya's characters, originally created to fit in the action-plan, affect and mould it during its development, but are themselves also changed in turn by the events and incidents of the story. This is evident from characters like Kajoli, Rahoul, Mohini, Kalo, Chandra Lekha, Meera, Bhashkar, Sumita, Devjani, Walt and Jennifer etc. They have all been cast to project a particular point-of-view in the beginning, but as the respective plots develop and unfold gradually, all these characters respond to the new requirements of the situation and reshape and readjust themselves in the process of changing the course of events.

Another significant feature of Bhattacharya's fiction is that his plots are based on the traditional pattern. Often with a definite beginning and ending, these plots have a sequential evolution. The time element plays a significant role in the development of his stories, and the whole action of the plot or sub-plot remains linked with time taken. Seldom does Bhattacharya allow the free-flowing of his character's

consciousness, disregarding the time-element and the sequential development of action in his stories.

Keywords: form, plot structures, characters, traditional pattern, well knit and coherent, sequential evolution, point of view.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the most eminent Indian English novelists. He is gifted with both fictional and non fictional works but he attracts attention of readers and critics for his novels. There are a number of books on his contribution and several articles have been published in various journals across the globe. He has written all his six novels to mend the manners of society. He is a dreamer, visionary, philosopher, craftsman and leader who deals with contemporary socio-cultural issues of Indian society.

The study of Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels is incomplete unless he is examined as a craftsman. His themes are relevant and arrest attention of the readers but his plot structures, characterization, form, art of narration and diction etc. are also equally significant to be investigated. He is genuinely a literary craftsman. Balram S. Sarot remarks "whenever his acute sensitivity makes his creative urge afire, and a peculiar theme strikes his mind, Bhabani weaves the pattern of his story around it." (The Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya, 108). Since the entire gamut of a story is covered by its plot, Bhattacharya takes considerable pains in knitting the plots of his novels. Shiv K. Kumar and Keith Mckean reflect, being aware of the plot, "temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character and thoughts that constitute the matter of his invention," (Critical Approaches to Fiction, p. 45) and as a narrative of events in which the emphasis falls on causality, he makes his plots compact, organic and economical Instead of being loosely connected pieces of detachable harmony, his plots are well-knit and coherent.

Nowhere does the novelist stuff his novels with irrelevant or incoherent material. The action of the story, in his case, advances its latent thought-content with the help of various characters. The characters, originally created to fit in the action-plan, affect and mould it during its development, but are themselves also changed in turn by the events and incidents of the story. This is evident from characters like Kajoli, Rahoul, Mohini, Kalo, Chandra Lekha, Meera, Bhashkar, Sumita, Devjani, Walt and Jennifer etc. They have all been cast to project a particular point-of-view in the beginning, but as the respective plots develop and unfold gradually, all these characters respond to the new requirements of the situation and reshape and readjust themselves in the process of changing the course of events.

Another significant feature of Bhattacharya's fiction is that his plots are based on the traditional pattern. Often with a definite beginning and ending, these plots have a sequential evolution. The time element plays a significant role in the development of his stories, and the whole action of the plot or sub-plot remains linked with time taken. Seldom does Bhattacharya allow the free-flowing of his character's consciousness, disregarding the time-element and the sequential development of action in his stories. In his first novel, *So Many Hungers!*, though Bhattacharya divides his plot into two strands, the story of the Basu family of Calcutta and that of the peasant family of Baruni, yet he puts them together in a proper time sequence to make them complementary parts of one single whole. The first sub-plot unfolds itself right at the time of the break-out of World War II and the birth of Rahoul's daughter. Developing with the passage of time, it finishes its course now of Rahoul's landing in jail. Similarly, the second strand of the story has its beginning with the days of the Quit India movement. Covering the Bengal famine of 1943, it ends with Kajol slapping the betel-woman and deciding to become a newspaper vendor in Calcutta until the lean time passes.

Bhattacharya's novels cover several events, but they are not irrelevant in the story; there is a sufficient need and cause for each one of them to be included in the action of the novel. They effect the course of the story in their own way. But these effects are directly related to the basic theme of the novel. Thus Kajol's rape by the soldier on the highway of Calcutta in *So Many Hungers*, Mohini's yielding to give her heart's blood to the goddess in *Music for Mohini*, Kalo's becoming a brothel-house agent and Chandra Lekha's rescue by him in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the minstrel's giving an amulet to Meera in *A Goddess Named Gold*, Sumita's Delhi visit in *Shadow from Ladakh*, Devjani's flying away to Benaras from her house and Sylvia Koo's attempt to debase Swami Yogananda in *A Dream in Hawaii*, are but a few instances which, when analyzed critically, amply emphasize what E.M. Forster calls "causality" in a plot. Bhattacharya's plots are generally simple. But he is also quite capable of weaving complex patterns for his stories. His *Shadow from Ladakh* is perhaps the best illustration of a traditional yet complex plot with various sub-plots and episodes which involve a number of characters. The action of Bhattacharya's novels is often not a swift one. Slow and halting, it takes place, for the most part, in the minds of characters. In *Shadow from Ladakh* and *A Dream in Hawaii*, particularly, the narrative runs on two levels: external and internal. The external one deals with events on physical plane while internal one is concerned with the musings and reflections of the different characters and flows in their sub-conscious inner self. The element of surprise or mystery to which E.M. Forster attaches great importance in a plot is also present in each one of Bhattacharya's novels. Occasionally causing a

shock, but generally giving an exciting turn to the course of events, this element not only keeps the readers's interest intact in the story, but also, being crucial to the development of the plot, leads to its final denouement. Every novel of Bhattacharya vividly illustrate the mysterious or the unexpected turn in the course of the events. In *So Many Hungers!*, Kajoli's decision to sell herself comes not only as a surprise but also as a shock to the reader who has known her as a brave and spirited girl so far. This momentary decision of the girl leading her to the betel-woman, and then, surprisingly enough, changing her mind and taking up the job of a newspaper vendor ultimately brings the story to a happy conclusion. Similarly Mohini's sudden decision to offer her heart's blood to the Virgin Goddess in *Music for Mohini* stupefies the reader for a moment. He is at a loss to understand how a modern-minded and educated girl like Mohini agrees to bow to such a primitive practice. But later on, the same incident forces Jayadev to come forward openly against his orthodox mother. A happy and perfect communion of Jayadev with Mohini- Bhattacharya's desired end of the novel- is possible only after this incident. Chandra Lekha's abrupt decision to marry Motichand is another example of the similar element of surprise or mystery in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. Her decision shocks and bewilders not only the reader but also Kalo himself. It is this decision, however, that is immediately behind Kalo's bold action in exploding the temple myth before an elite gather- in, and thus dismounting safely from the back of the roaring tiger of Brahminism. The throwing of the amulet by Meera into the river in *A Goddess Named Gold* also creates a sense of suspense in the novel. Later on the same incident brings the novel to a convincing end. In *Shadow from Ladakh*, at least two instances of the presence of the element of surprise and suspense may be quoted: firstly, Sumita's wearing of red lac bangles and a green bordered sari instead of the plain one after her return from the Meadow House show; and secondly, Bhashkar's sudden decision to lead the Steel town worker's procession towards Gandhigram. Both these incidents are of a vital importance in the novel. The second once, in particular, is crucial to a happy close of the narrative. *A Dream in Hawaii* also has similar surprising twists in its story. In the earlier part of the book, Yogananda's abrupt denial of Devjani's request for initiation against his inner wish creates a sense of mystery in the novel. Later on, Walt's sending of Sylvia Koo to seduce Yogananda in order to lower his prestige, and then, his unexpected shock and sorrow at the success of his plot and Yogananda's sudden decision to return to India give us good examples of the mystery-element in the novel. All these instances help the plot to develop and conclude convincingly by providing it the necessary turns and twists.

One major characteristic of Bhattacharya's plots is that though they tend to be tragic in the beginning, they finally end happily. Every crisis is resolved in the

end, and the novels usually end with an atmosphere of calmness and serenity. Balram S. Sorot truly says:

“Each of his novels has various sub-plots which serve as different episodes in a play. The characters are usually assigned their respective roles, and the situations arise out of the characters’ development. These elements obviously point to the dramatic quality of his novels. Perhaps the most notable feature of all the novels of Bhattacharya is that they have a dramatic structure. All the major characters are generally introduced in the opening pages of his novels. The action in every story advances smoothly until it reaches the inevitable climax. Hereafter starts the anti-climax and the resolution of every crisis, leading to the end of the novel on a note of reconciliation and happiness.” (The Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya, p.111)

The conclusions of his novels correspond to Edwin Muir's conception of the end of a dramatic novel, the end of any dramatic novel will be a solution of the problem which sets the events moving; the particular action completed itself, bringing about an equilibrium, or issuing in some Catastrophe which cannot be pursued farther. Equilibrium or death, these are the two ends towards which the dramatic novel moves. Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!*, when viewed in this light, exemplifies that almost all the significant characters, viz. Rahoul, Kunal, Samarendra, Devata, Kajoli, Mother, Monju and Onu, have been introduced in the opening pages, leading happy and peaceful lives in their respective places in society. As the plot unfolds and develops, there occur certain incidents and events affecting the lives of people, bad times of the Bengal famine, life of the destitutes on the road, Kunal's joining the army, the hectic days of the Quit India movement, and the bitter experiences of both Rahoul and Kajoli- the former suffering a lathi-blow on his leg and the latter being raped by a soldier. G. Rai remarks genuinely :

“All these events inevitably lead to the crisis of the novel. Heavy blows fall on the heads of the characters; Kunal is reported missing in the battlefield, Rahoul is arrested for his anti-government activities, Kajoli decides to sell herself to the betel-woman in order to save her mother and younger brother from further misery, and last of all, Kajoli's mother, too, decides to commit suicide. This is the Aristotlian middle of the plot. But, with a view to saving the novel from lapsing into a tragic melodrama, the author resolves the crisis with the consummate skill of a master artist and concludes the novel happily.” (Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Study of His Novels p.121).

Music for Mohini also has a dramatic form. In the opening pages of the novel, Bhattacharya records Mohini's life at Shibpur. A little later, one sees Mohini's coming of age and her pangs of love. Jayadev is introduced in the plot at this juncture, and soon after he marries Mohini. The city- bred girl goes to Behula as the village-wed one. Living in her husband's house under the stern rule of her orthodox mother-in-

law, Mohini has to suffer much. She must change a lot in order to adjust herself to the wishes of the old lady. Still Mohini is unable to establish a harmonious relationship with her mother-in-law. This is the development of the plot so far. Then comes the crisis of the plot. Yielding to the ever exacting and persuasive mother-in-law, Mohini is, at last, prepared to offer the blood of her bosom to the Virgin Goddess, and sets out for the temple with her old mother-in-law. When Jayadev comes to know of this awesome incident from Sudha, he rushes to her rescue. He reaches the temple at the right moment, and Mohini is saved. The denouement of the action starts, and all the loose Strands are tied together convincingly. Mohini is discovered to be in the family way, and the old mother-in-law is very kind to her now. The discord between them ends and the novel concludes on a note of happiness and reconciliation. He Who Rides a Tiger is another link in the chain of Bhattacharya's dramatic novels. Opening with Kalo and his daughter Chandra Lekha at Jharna, the plot of this novel gradually unfolds itself. Forced by the raging hunger in Bengal in 1943, Kalo has to leave Jharna for Calcutta. On his way, he is arrested for stealing and is sentenced to four months's jail where he befriends B-10 who tells him a trick to avenge himself on the cruel society. Having served his term in the jail, Kalo reaches Calcutta and tries to settle down in some respectable profession but fails everywhere. At last, he becomes a procurer to a brothel-house.

Seduced by the agent woman, Lekha too falls a prey to the same brothel where Kalo serves. She is providentially saved by him in the nick of time. Thereupon, Kalo plans to avenge himself on the society. He creates a fake Shiva. A big temple is built soon, and Kalo becomes twice born as the temple priest. B-10 visits him after his release, and Lekha falls in love with him. Though Kalo is reincarnated as Mangal Adhikari, he is not happy and contented with his new life. Soon the course of the story takes an unexpected turn. Lekha who is deeply attached to the orphan foundling, Abhijit, agrees to marry Moti Chand whom she dislikes. This is a big jolt to Kalo. The story reaches its climax here. Suddenly the revelation dawns upon Kalo that if his daughter can sacrifice her life for his sake, why can't he? The story now heads for a convincing con- collusion. Every move from now onwards is for the resolution of this crisis. Disillusioned by the realities of life, Kalo boldly faces the full throng of elite devotees and exposes the temple myth to be a lie. Having dismounted the tiger, Kalo leaves the temple on his own. He, thus, gets reconciled with Lekha, B- 10 and Viswanath. Kalo was a blacksmith when the story commenced, and as it ends, we find him returning to his old job again. The cyclic motion of the story is complete in the end.

Dr. Puneet Upadhyay, in his thesis, reflects:

“A Goddess Named Gold is also dramatic in its structure. The story opens with the Cowhouse women planning to lead procession a towards the Seth's shop in order to make him sell cloth at a fair price, but Lakshmi, the Seth's wife, is hesitant at the moment. Suddenly, Nago, Lakshmi's only son, falls into a well and is rescued by Meera at the risk of her own life. Impressed deeply by Meera's courage, and out of gratitude for her, Lakshmi joins the procession and wins the battle for the village-women. The story develops smoothly from this point for the vil here are many turns in its course sheet's plan to deprive onwards.” (The Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Humanist Perspective, p. 204).

The men of witnessing the cinema horas ingenuity in the villaing the show, the minstrel's arrival, his songs to entertain villagers, the "Taveez" trick, the Seth's discovery of the alchemic povain villageera's talisman, and his contract with her to share half of the goldproduced by her-but the real crisis occurs when the touchstone proves troublesome instead of being a boon not only to the Seth and Meera, but also to the villagers. While the Seth has to suffer heavy losses on this account, the girl loses her reputation among the villagers who begin to consider her the scourge of the village. Atma Ram, the minstrel, arrives just in time to reveal the mystery of the amulet, and the novel concludes happily.

Bhattacharya's famous novel, Shadow from Ladakh, opens with Suruchi returning from the Peace Congress in Moscow. it is 1962 and China has treacherously attacked India. The country is in a state of shock and confusion. As the story unfolds itself further, Bhashkar Roy, the Chief Engineer of Steeltown, is shown planning to acquire the village pasture for the purpose of expanding Steeltown. Satyajit Roy, the moving spirit of Gandhigram, meets him in the meadow to dissuade him from acquiring the village pasture, but in vain. Bhashkar is im- pressed by Sumita's plain dress and serene looks, and there grows an intimacy between them. Bhashkar constructs the Meadow House, and a cultural function is organized there. Sumita watches the show and returns a bit transformed. Satyajit plans to take a Peace Mission to Ladakh but is not allowed by the Government. To aggravate the crisis, Bhashkar gets the official permission to extend the frontier of Steel- town to include Gandhigram. Satyajit declares his fast unto death to make the Government rescind its orders. This provides the novel with its climactic point. The atmosphere in both Gandhigram and Steeltown becomes very tense. The explosive situation is calmed down by Bhashkar's timely decision to spare Gandhigram. He announces his improved plans to the assembled workers and then leads them on towards Gandhigram to make Satyajit break his fast. Suruchi and Sumita who have backed Satyajit also become reconciled. Sumita meets him on the way and there emerges a new under- standing between them. The novelends with the suggestion of a happy

stammunion between Bhashkar and Satyajit, Bhashkar and Sumita, and Satyajit and Suruchi as well. A Dream in Hawaii is also conceived on the pattern of a dramatic novel. In the beginning, Swami Yogananda is shown at "Sadhana"-his Himalyan abode. Previously, he had been a Professor of Philosophy, named Neeloy Mookherjee, at Benaras University. In Benaras, he meets Devjani who has left her house in disgust because of the amorous affair of her mother, and joined the M.A. Philosophy class. Neeloy is charmed by her beauty, and Devjani, too, is deeply impressed by his learning. Later on, she becomes The Swami lectures to a gathering of the University students, and the youngmen come under his spell soon. His disciples plan to establish a World Centre for Yogic Disciplines in Hawaii. The growing popularity of the Swami arouses the jealousy of Walter Gregson, a staunch votary of sexual permissiveness. He considers the Swami an obscurantist and a threat to the advanced civilization of America. He hatches a plan to debase the Indian mendicant morally through his beloved Sylvia Koo. Though the Swami escapes he realizes that in spite of all his penance and fasts, he has failed to overcome his love and passion for Devjani. He makes a clean breast of the whole incident to her, and immediately returns to his Himalayan abode in India. Bhat- atcharya thus hints in the novel at the conflict between the powerful pulls of the spirit and passion in human nature, or the dichotomy of essence and existence. Towards the end of the novel, the novelist subtly suggests that a synthesis of Body and Spirit is an essential requisite for a peaceful and prosperous life. Bhattacharya's novels are thus dramatic in form, in which characters and plot act and react upon each other and advance the action to its inevitable conclusion.

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