



The Technique Of Narration And Communication In Indian English Novels Before 1980: A Critical Study

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Abstract: Narrative communication is the process of conveying information through storytelling, aiming to engage audience emotionally and rationally. It involves structuring information into a coherent narrative with a proper beginning, middle and end, including characters, setting, and conflict, to create a relatable memorable experience. With the help of suitable narrative strategies, the speaker can easily get connected with the audience. The present research paper makes a critical survey of Indian English Novel before 1980 from the point of form, communicative and narrative techniques. Such a brief survey will help to study how the Indian writers in English have employed the art of narration to communicate their thoughts and stories in the novel form, which is a borrowed form of literature from the West. A brief survey of Indian English novel before 1980 from the point of view of narrative and communicative techniques is also helpful to provide the knowledge of the narrative techniques employed by the novelists to express their views, their contribution to the Indian English novel and to find out the main trends in the novelistic techniques employed by the novelists before 1980.

Index Terms: Interior monologue, Narrative Language, Overt Commentary, Stream of consciousness

(I) Introduction

India is blessed with a rich competency for the novel form as the tradition of storytelling in India goes back to the *Rigveda* and the *Upanishadas* and the great epics like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. As the story telling is common to both the epic and the novel, India is older than the West in the issue of the development of this form of literature. Besides these ancient works in verse, some significant prose works are also written such as Dandi's *Dasa-Kumaracarita*, Vikramaditya's *Vetal-Punca-Vimsat*, Somdeva's *Kathasaritsagar* and Vishnu Sharma's *The Panchatantra*. In all these ancient works, stories are narrated in the form of allegories, fables and parables. The new phenomenon of novel as a narrative form communicating the contemporary situations in a realistic manner is a Western literary phenomenon and came to India through the influence of the Western literature. Dr.K.R.Shrinivas Iyengar remarks:

The novel as a literary phenomenon is new to India Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories and fables have their respectable ancestries, going back by several centuries, but it is only during a period of little more than a century that the novel, the long sustained piece of prose fiction has occurred and taken root in India (Iyengar, 314).

In India, this new literary form was first practiced in Indian regional languages. Babu Piari Chand Mitra, a Bengali writer wrote *Alader Gharer Dulal* in installments from 1855 to 1857 and Baba Padmanji, a Marathi writer wrote *Yamunaparyatana* in 1857. But these works are very weak in their use of narrative techniques. The novel form in regional languages attained technical maturity a little later. Bankimchandra Chatterji wrote his first novel *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) in English. He practiced the form of novel in his regional language, Bengali. In Marathi literature, Hari Narayan Apte wrote novels on historical and social themes

after 1885. Similarly some other novelists like Sharad Chandra Chatterji, Rabindranath Tagore, Munshi Premchand and others dominated the literary scene. Thus much before the blossoming of Indian English novel, Indians have exposed a great sense of compliance of the new narrative form of prose fiction in the Indian regional languages. It is generally believed that with his first novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee installed novel as a significant form in Indian English literature. His novel can be interpreted as an allegory of modern India. The novel has a simple narrative structure. The novelist employs the prominent narrative device of symbolism to depict the struggle between tradition and modernity.

(II) The Big Three in Indian English Novel

The real blossoming of the Indian novel in English in India took place in the nineteen thirties, which approximately corresponds to the period after World War I. The novel writing in English in India seems to have been influenced by the Western literature. During this period, three eminent Indian English novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, known as the 'Big Three' (Walsh, 6) appeared on the literary scene. These three novelists have rendered a significant contribution to Indian novel in English. Mulk Raj Anand is one of the 'Big Three' novelists and the earliest to be known as an important Indian novelist in English. Though he is mostly a traditional novelist, one can find out the nineteenth century narrative techniques in his novels. Besides the traditional narrative techniques of realism, use of myth and first person narrative, Anand also employs certain experimental techniques like 'stream of consciousness', psychoanalysis and the use of trilogy form. Anand's novels can be categorized into two different groups based on the two different tendencies which determine his use of narrative techniques. These two tendencies are 'introvert tendency' that is the 'voyage within' and 'extrovert tendency', the 'voyage without'. Anand's extrovert tendency can be easily discerned in some of his novels in which he uses the technique of social realism to probe the social reality in one form or the other. His such novels are *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), *The Big Heart* (1945), *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), *The Road* (1961) and *Death of a Hero* (1963). Anand makes use of traditional techniques like plot, character, and setting to deal with certain social problems and suggests a feasible solution. Anand's first novel *Untouchable* (1935) is a novel of social consciousness. Anand employs the technique of three unities to narrate the experiences of a single character named Bakha's during the period of a single day. The story is narrated through the consciousness of his central character Bakha. Anand makes a skillful use of stream of conscious technique in the form of interior monologue of the protagonist. Anand's second novel *Coolie* (1936) has been written in five chapters and acquires almost 'an epic quality' (Naik, 44). Anand makes use of third person point of view to narrate the story of a character named Munoo. In this novel, Anand employs the technique of picaresque manner of narration which helps him place his hero in different situations to present various social issues. He uses the device of contrast, poverty against richness in this novel. The novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) is a unified narrative that tells the story of Gangu, a proud peasant turned labourer in Asam. The incidents in the life of the protagonist shape the plot of the novel. Anand makes use of the third person omniscient narrator to narrate the story and also employs the device of contrast and parallelism. He also employs flash-back technique to provide the background information of the characters. One can clearly identify the use of narrative within the narrative in the novel. Similarly Anand also employs traditional devices like 'types' of characterization, satire and melodrama.

The second group of Anand's novels deals with the 'introvert tendency' of the author. The author uses autobiographical techniques in this group of novels. In *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, Anand employs first person narrative device, an eye-witness narrator named Dr. Hari Shankar to narrate the story of his friend, the Prince Victor of Shampur. The novel is Anand's attempt to write a 'creative autobiography'. Thus Anand uses various techniques to narrate his stories. He is a traditional novelist and a social reformer who uses simple, unsubtle and straightforward narration. He uses third person point of view and simple plot structures in the first half of his literary career. In the second half of his literary career, Anand uses first person point of view and loose plot structure. Anand is a significant Indian novelist in English, yet he misses the label of being a distinguished writer because of his practice of shifting his attention towards certain considerations which are not certainly creative.

R.K. Narayan, the second of the 'big three' is one of the most significant novelists. His work is "an original blend of Western method and Eastern material..." (Walsh, 3). The novels of R.K. Narayan can be divided into five different categories on the basis of the theme and narrative techniques employed by the novelist. R.K. Narayan's three novels such as *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), and *The Dark Room* (1938) can be categorized in the first group. The technique of 'Episodic Narration' is the dominant narrative device used in these three novels. The narrative plot of *Swami and Friends* is mostly episodic. The novelist also gives some autobiographical references in the novel. It is in this novel that Narayan first introduces his fictional world of Malgudi which afterward becomes the setting of most of his

novels. The plot of *Bachelor of Arts* has episodic structure and the central character acts as a unifying principle. The novel has a thin plot and the irony used is a quiet, gentle humour that is not intended to satirize. The other narrative techniques employed in these three novels are the use of third person point of view narrator, character development by using dialogues and overt commentary of the narrator and the use of gentle satire. The second group of R.K.Narayan's novels includes novels such as *The English Teacher* (1945) and *The Guide* (1958) in which R. K. Narayan makes use of first person point of view narrator. *The Guide* is Narayan's greatest success. In this novel Narayan makes enough experimentation with the narrative technique. He employs two different points of view narrators. Some part of the story is narrated by the third person narrator who is dramatized and the remaining part is narrated by using first person narrator who is the protagonist of the novel. This technique of using two points of view narrators in one single narrative is a significant aspect of this novel. In the first half of the novel, Narayan employs flashback technique to narrate the story of Raju as the great Swami of the village of Mangala. Another technique which Narayan exploits with a skillful manner is a technique of 'dramatic summary'.

The third group of R.K.Narayan's novels consists of three novels such as *Mr.Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952) and *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967). The dominant narrative motif used in these three novels is the parabolic rise and fall of the central characters. In all these three novels, characterization becomes the chief interest of the novelist and story in such novels revolves around one single character. In his novel *Mr.Sampath*, Narayan makes use of the comic mode of narration. The narrative structure of *The Financial Expert* is an improvement over *Mr.Sampath*. The novel *The Financial Expert* is divided into five parts relating to the different phases of life of the main character. Narayan employs 'smooth plot craft' as the plot gradually rises up to the climax and suddenly falls to the catastrophe at the end of the novel. The novelist attempts to reveal the generation gap in a humorous way and also to present the characters and situations in an ironic juxtaposition. The fourth group of R.K.Narayan's novels includes two major novels such as *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) and *The Painter of Signs* (1976). Narayan uses the form of tragi-comedy in these two novels. In both the novels Narayan deals with the theme of love and employs his favorite device of irony. The novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma* characterized by an episodic mode of narration. The story is narrated through the first person point of view of the of the main character, Sriram. *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962) is Narayan's only novel in which he employs mythological motif. The demon Bhasmasura's mythological story is used as a structured organizing principle of this novel. Narayana draws parallelism between the puranic story of Bhasmasura and the story of the taxidermist Vasu. There is a skillful use of various narrative devices like suspense, climaxes and anti-climaxes and also the use of mock-heroic technique and the use of 'narrative within the narrative'.

Raja Rao is one of the most original Indian novelists in English. He has developed his own technique to present his perspectives of life in words. He has made certain experimentations with the narrative form and narrative language and skillfully selected the narrative devices that are closely connected with the subject he deals with in his four novels. His first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) is an endeavor to 'Indianize' the novel form as well as English language. Raja Rao uses the form of '*sthala-purana*' to narrate the story of a small South Indian village caught in the maelstrom of the freedom struggle of the 1930's. Raja Rao aptly chooses an old woman who is a first person narrator to narrate the purana of the Gandhian movement. Raja Rao here uses the mythology of the *Ramayana* to depict the peculiar Indian sensibility. The narrative language used by the old woman is framed to adopt the Indian local idiom and the rhythm of the local language. This kind of experimentation in narrative technique is unique in Indian English Fiction. Published in 1960, Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is perhaps the most substantial contribution to the Indian novel in English. Though there is no plot in the traditional sense, it is a well structured novel with a unity of its own. The protagonist, Ramaswami's intellectual and spiritual development provides the organizing principle of the novel and and this endows the book its unity. Dr.M.K.Naik remarks that Raja Rao has employed traditional Indian narrative techniques to produce his 'Mahapurana'. Raja Rao makes use of the technique of puranic and digressive mode of narration of a story based on myths, legends and fables. All these factors give the novel the touch of an Indian 'Mahapurana'. Raja Rao employs stream of consciousness and also makes skillful use of narrative metaphors. Use of mythology is an important feature of the novel.

(III) Experimentations in Narrative Language and Techniques

With five major novels to his credit, Manohar Malgaonkar has achieved amazing success as a novelist in English. Influenced by Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, Medows Taylor, Maud Driver, Kipling and Forster, Malgaonkar has practiced 'well made novel' with well constructed plot structure. About Malgaonkar's narrative technique, Dr.K.R.Shrinivas Iyengar remarks, "In plotting as well as telling his stories, Malgaonkar displays an ability that compels recognition"(Iyengar, 423).Malgaonkar has made the latest political history of India the theme of his novels. Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) is his most important work. According to Meenakshi Mukharjee, the novel is Malgaonkar's most ambitious effort, his "attempt to write The Great Indian Novel". (Mukharjee, 58) .The novel has circular plot structure. The novelist employs third person omniscient point of view narrator. Malgaonkar has maintained a fine balance between what Jonathan Raban calls the 'micro-narrative' and 'macro-narrative'- on one hand there is a fine story of the heroes-Gyan Talwar and Debi dayal Kerwad and on the other hand there is a story of partition of the country. In this novel, Malgaonkar uses the narrative device of contrast and parallelism to underline the gap between two opposite views of life: violence and non-violence. The novel has an epic sweep of time and space that covers a period from 1938 onwards and deals with the Quit India Movement and World War II and the action ranges from Punjab to Delhi, from Andaman Jail to Madras and from Lahore to Bombay. Malgaonkar uses the same principle of contrast and parallelism even in his characterization. In order to analyze the behavior of the characters, he makes use of dialogues and overt commentary. Malgaonkar has carefully handled the plot and has made much experimentation with the narrative language.

G.V.Desani's *All About H.Hatterr* (1948) is a very significant novel characterized by distinctive form and peculiar language. No other Indian novelist in English has carried out such linguistic experimentations as G.V.Desani. The novelist uses 'mock-epic manner' of narration as in Laurence Stern's *Tristram Shanday*. The novelist employs first person point of view narrator and the narrative tone is often mocking and comic.

Bhabhani Bhattacharya is the follower of the doctrine 'art for life's sake'. His novels show a kind of social concern. In his first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947) Bhattacharya employs the technique of realistic depiction of characters and situations and deals with 'Quit India Movement' of 1942 and the great famine of 1943 in Bengal. His *Music for Mohini* (1952) narrates the story of a city girl who marries a village boy. *Shadow from Ladhakh* (1966) is probably Bhattacharya's most ambitious novel. The novelist draws his theme from the current Indian history.. The novelist uses third person omniscient point of view narrator to narrate the story which is set against the background of the Chinese Invasion in 1962. Kamala Markandaya is one of the major novelists who have given a substantial contribution to Indian English Novel. Her novels such as *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1952), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), and *Two Virgins* (1973) prove that she is an accomplished novelist. In her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Markandaya employs first person narrator. In *A Silence of Desire* (1960), Markandaya employs the technique of third person omniscient point of view narration to narrate the story of Dandekar and Sarojini and uses the device of suspense and surprise to keep the narrative on and to raise the curiosity of the readers.

Khushwant Singh's most popular novel *A Train to Pakistan* has a well organized plot structure. The narrative is replete with dramatic events and deals with the truthful depiction of the historical background. The running of a train between Delhi (India) and Lahore (Pakistan) and its arrival and departure at the small station named Mano Majra provide the plot of the novel. There is much emphasis on coincidences. Chaman Nahal is another prominent novelist popularly known for his partition novel, *Azadi* (1975). In this novel Nahal makes use of multiple narrators to narrate his story and to help his readers to have a more comprehensive understanding of reality. Like Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*, Nahal's *Azadi* is a modern historical novel. The multiple points of view in the novel raise numerous moral, ethical questions.

(IV) Conclusion

To sum up, with the help of narrative and communicative techniques, Indian English novelists successfully crafted meaningful and engaging stories in literature. With the help of various techniques, they effectively conveyed their messages and successfully got connected with the audience. Thus narratives can evoke emotions help to build rapport and create deeper connection with the audience. The prominent narrative technique that was used during the 1930s and 40s was the first person point of view. Most of the novels of this period were autobiographical in nature. The narratives were characterized by singular narrative structures. They mostly used character bound narrators to narrate their stories. The novelists before Rushdie used certain formal strategies like myth and reality. They used history as a truthful record of past events. Some of the novelists became more realistic and showed concern towards the psychological depth of the characters. The novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan and Manohar Malgaonkar have

shown certain technical consciousness in their novels. Mulk Raj Anand employed the technique of stream of consciousness, R.K. Narayan made use of irony and comic mode of narration while Raja Rao practiced self-conscious mode of narration. The other Indian English novelists before Rushdie though are significant in their own way, did not show any extraordinary technical experimentation in their novels and mostly imitated the techniques of the above mentioned novelists.

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