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Narrative Techniques of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract:

In a work of fiction, the narrator of the story, also regarded as the second author, plays an important role in shedding light on a reader's experience. The experience which the reader achieves towards the end of his or her reading is decided through the narrative technique adopted by an author in the concerned work. In a fiction, there are two ways of narration which are 'telling a fiction' and 'showing' it. When an author is 'telling' a story, he often makes an entry in the narrative and provides information about the material in the fiction which helps in understanding the story better. According to Wayne C. Booth, "*In literature from the very beginning we have been told motives directly and authoritatively without being forced to rely on those shaky inferences about other men which we cannot avoid in our own lives.*" (Booth 3).

Mulk Raj Anand, having the zeal of a social reformer, in his novel 'Untouchable', portrayed the sufferings and pains of the poor and the downtrodden in our society and in different situations, the narrator takes control on the material through his limited and unlimited knowledge. It is dedicated to Bakha who is a scavenger or the person who picks up the filth to keep the surroundings of the people neat and tidy and it starts with a description of the colony of the outcastes' situated on the outskirts of the town of Bulashah. The realistic portrayal of the houses, the living conditions of the outcastes, the soiled brook, the land filled with slush, dirt and filth and the human as well as the animal refuse in the area fills the reader with revulsion.

Stream- of- consciousness is a style of writing or speaking in which a person says or writes anything as it comes to his mind. As our brains are able to create thousands of thoughts and impressions at a stretch, it is impossible to give shape to what we speak or write in the same words as we think. Thus, stream- of- consciousness is not fully organised, is random, filled with our impressions as well as pretentious.

While concluding, it can be safely said that the techniques of telling, showing and stream- of- consciousness has been deftly used by Anand to bring out the feelings of the protagonists leading to passionate discussions by the characters. Further, it will not be out of place to compare the author to a painter who gives life to

his art by giving him different colours so also the author does the same with his characters through his pen.

Keywords: Fiction, sufferings, stream- of – consciousness, impressions, pen.

In a work of fiction, the narrator of the story, also regarded as the second author, plays an important role in shedding light on a reader's experience. The experience which the reader achieves towards the end of his or her reading is decided through the narrative technique adopted by an author in the concerned work. In a fiction, there are two ways of narration which are 'telling a fiction' and 'showing' it. When an author is 'telling' a story, he often makes an entry in the narrative and provides information about the material in the fiction which helps in understanding the story better. According to Wayne C. Booth, "*In literature from the very beginning we have been told motives directly and authoritatively without being forced to rely on those shaky inferences about other men which we cannot avoid in our own lives.*" (Booth 3).

When the author is 'showing' fiction, he gives freedom to his reader to mingle with the story through his or her own efforts.

The narrator has knowledge of the characters, events, incidents etc. and brings out the story. He maintains a distance from the material and trusting the situation, the nature of the fiction and so on, he comes closer to the fictional material. When the narrator advances towards the material, he has unlimited knowledge about it and supplies information about it before its time limit expires. When he maintains distance from the material, his knowledge will be inadequate and the reader will not know much about the story because there will be scant information about the material.

Mulk Raj Anand, having the zeal of a social reformer, in his novel 'Untouchable', portrayed the sufferings and pains of the poor and the downtrodden in our society and in different situations, the narrator takes control on the material through his limited and unlimited knowledge. It is dedicated to Bakha who is a scavenger or the person who picks up the filth to keep the surroundings of the people neat and tidy and it starts with a description of the colony of the outcastes' situated on the outskirts of the town of Bulashah. The realistic portrayal of the houses, the living conditions of the outcastes, the soiled brook, the land filled with slush, dirt and filth and the human as well as the animal refuse in the area fills the reader with revulsion. The perspective of the protagonist Bakha is shown and so, the author acquires knowledge over the principal character. This is shown in the opening of the novel: '*And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an 'uncongenial' place to live in.*

At least so thought Bakha, a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied, the son of Lakha, the Jemadar of all the sweepers in the town and the cantonment, and officially in charge of the three rows of public latrines which lined the extremest end of the colony, by the brook side.'

(Anand 1).

From the beginning till the end, the narrator stays close to Bakha. Since, the story is narrated keeping Bakha's view point in mind, the reader hopes that Bakha is the central character. The picture of the outcastes' colony has been realistically drawn because the same situation prevails in the slums, situated in the towns and the cities in India which any reader who possesses a heart with imagination can easily step into the shoes of Bakha to feel the sadness and pain which eats our protagonist from within.

A novel focuses upon a conflict which is developed and continued to its conclusion through characters engaged in action, how their interactions are influenced by events, situations and by the comments of an author. In 'Untouchable', the conflict is shown when Bakha desires to lead the life of the Tommies or the foreign soldiers who treat him humanely as well as he craves for the recognition of others in the society. While developing this conflict, the author adopts 'telling' and 'showing'.

After working very hard, Bakha is exhausted as well as hungry. His sister Sohini goes to fetch water from the well due to lack of it. Here the narrator makes his presence felt and 'tells' her feelings. By sensing the crowd at the well, Sohini is filled with anxiety and assumes that she might get delayed in getting water. After some time, her expectations arise because on her arrival to the well, only nine people are seen waiting for their chance and as a result, she will be the tenth person. During this period of waiting patiently, she forgets the crowd and affectionately contemplates the situation of her brother. After cleaning the latrines, he was tired and thirsty and since there was no water in the house tea could not be prepared. The narrator points out to the reader that upon remembering the plight of her brother, Sohini is disappointed. A sense of uncertainty prevails as there is no caste- Hindu appearing for their help to get some water with the aid of a bucket due to the strong presence of the caste system which prohibited the low castes from using the well during 1930s and 40s in India. Patiently, Sohini is waiting for her chance as the narrator 'tells' her situation: *'She had sensed with her deep woman's instinct the feelings in her brother's soul. He was tired. He was thirsty. She had felt like a mother as she issued from her home to fetch water, a mother going out to fetch food or drink for her loved ones at home. Now as she sat in a row with her fellow-sufferers, her heart sank. There was no sign of any-one passing that way who could be a possible benefactor. But she was patient. She had in her an instinctive fortitude, obvious in her curious reserve, in her composed and peaceful bearing.'* (Anand 15).

When Bakha finishes cleaning the commodes in the barracks, he enters the temple in order to sweep the shrine. How the temple looks from inside, the presence

of an entity, the devotees and their eagerness to meet that entity remains a mystery to Bakha. The massiveness of the temple's structure, its architecture and the intricacies of the decoration fills him with astonishment. Bakha is full of agitation and is calmed down by the cooing of the pigeons. He is despaired, fearful and a sense of longing emerges within him to experience something new when he hears the chant of 'Om Shanti Deva' and the sound of the conch. Bakha faces a new reality in the form of the shrine which was filled with silence a moment back: *'Bakha was profoundly moved. He was affected by the rhythm of the song. His blood had coursed along the balanced melodic line to the final note of strength with such sheer vigour that his hands joined unconsciously, and his head hung in the worship of the unknown God.'* (Anand 52).

This is a very good time for our protagonist because he is an untouchable and has not entered a temple in his life. He watches the deity and the worship on its threshold. The narrator intervenes and 'tells' Bakha's feelings which the reader is unaware of and therefore is the ideal example of 'telling' the fiction.

The technique of 'showing' is put to test by the narrator at the end of the novel when Gandhi is speaking to a large assembly of people at the maidan near the railway station of the town. The Mahatma is presenting his viewpoint on the glaring issues of caste, religion and untouchability which like the termites are sapping away the energy of our country from inside thus weakening it and he seeks their eradication from India. Though Bakha attends the meeting by seeing the huge crowd, but he remains puzzled throughout Gandhi's speech. After the departure of Gandhi, an analysis of his speech is done by two men, the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar and Barrister-at-law Mr.R.N.Bashir. Sarshar, also the editor of a newspaper 'Nawan Jug' [New Era] criticises Gandhi's speech. He said that the best way to eradicate untouchability is through the introduction of the flush in India because it is a machine which will teach our countrymen to clean the dirt and filth by themselves and if people learn this art, then there will not be any scavenger and untouchability will vanish by itself.

'Well, we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognise and equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone. The Mahatma didn't say so, but the legal and sociological basis of caste having been broken down by the British- Indian penal code, which recognises the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it- the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society.' (Anand 145-146).

Though Bakha cannot make two and two four of their talk, he somehow learns that his misery of handling human filth will come to an end. *Bakha had stood aside, beyond polluting distance, thinking vaguely of the few things he had understood*

from the poet's outburst. He felt that the poet would have been answering the most intimate questions in his (Bakha's) soul, if he had not used such big words. 'That machine,' he thought, 'which can remove dung without anyone having to handle it, I wonder what it is like? If only that "gentleman" hadn't dragged the poet away, I could have asked him.' (Anand 146). Caste and untouchability are complex problems and hints of their removal are given in this situation. The reader is able to understand and so can better respond to the fiction and it even encourages an emancipated fictional experience. The narrator does not interfere in the story and try to take hostage the view point of the reader and as a result, the best artistic experience in the reader is given a powerful boost.

In 'Untouchable', the author has used the narrative techniques of 'telling' and 'showing'. While 'telling' a story the author provides all information to the reader in order to 'tell' him how to appreciate the story. When the author is 'showing' fiction, he gives freedom to the reader so that he can experience the story when the characters interact with each other. In 'Untouchable', Anand has mixed and matched both 'telling' and 'showing' which gives a unique experience to the reader.

Another work of Mulk Raj Anand, 'Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts' is the story of a person's struggle with death mixed with his past memories, even though, he is suffering from Tuberculosis.

Stream- of- consciousness is a style of writing or speaking in which a person says or writes anything as it comes to his mind. As our brains are able to create thousands of thoughts and impressions at a stretch, it is impossible to give shape to what we speak or write in the same words as we think. Thus, stream- of- consciousness is not fully organised, is random, filled with our impressions as well as pretentious. The author has justified the use of stream- of- consciousness technique by putting forth his view that in this technique the protagonist has started to know about his own despair, even though he very well has the knowledge of the despair associated with life from the very beginning. He has the ardent wish to attain freedom from life despite knowing that all odds are against him and death eagerly awaits for him. He is the main actor in the drama of self- consciousness and his memories help him in this process.

Like in the novel 'Untouchable', the action of 'Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts' happens for a day in the life of Nur, who is the hero of the story. He rises up early in the morning on the day of the action and his soul flies away from the cage of his body that very afternoon. On the outside, there is hardly any or no action because Nur remains bedridden from the beginning to the end. He is paid a visit by his close relatives, his doctor and his friend as well as his old classmate Gama, who takes part in conversation on varied topics with the protagonist. In the mind of Nur, a rapid movement takes place and a series of the images of the past continuously frightens him. His health worsens rapidly. The author takes the help of flash back with the aim of finding the causes that lead to his frustration, desperation and physical

deterioration. His condition is painted in vivid colours by the narrator in the following lines: *'His fine face, ... with the brown eyes bulging out of the deep sockets, and the indrawn cheeks, was flushed ... with the shame of a rose which has withered before it has begun to bloom. His body was limp except for the spine, which ached as it had ached increasingly through having to lie in bed day after day for five months, and the hard ribs and collar bone which seemed to crack as they rose out of his transparent flesh like the dry roots of a bare tree still sound at the heart.'* (Anand 9).

This narration is suitable for the description of his sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, a body wrestling with pain and drying flesh because any other mode would have been unsuitable to produce a profound effect. The auto- biographical mode of narrating the story would be jarring to the reader's mind because the character of Nur and his condition was created by the author in such a manner that prohibited him to reveal his own condition.

Even though, our protagonist wants to live but he is so much repudiated by his father that he loses his determination to survive in the following words: *'He really wanted to die and escape into the greater freedom of the divines.'* (Anand 52). The stream- of- consciousness technique, consisting of interior monologues and flashbacks is ideal for expressing the feelings and emotions like sea waves arise and fall in his sad heart.

As Nur is filled with despair towards his life, he scrutinizes his life punctuated by pain. His past is recapitulated through this technique. His early childhood is described with the help of his grand- mother's story which she used to narrate him when he was a small child: *'Once upon a time there was a little boy whose father was a confectioner in the bazaar and whose mother was a beautiful houri. And he had a grand- mother who loved him very much He used to toddle and walk, holding the hand of his father But when he was five, the cruel angel Izrael had come and taken away his mother.... And another woman had come into their house instead, who, his father had said, was his new mother. But she was only a little bigger than he and he could not call her mother, as she quarrelled with him over the toys when they played together'* (Anand 11-12).

This serves the reason of providing the nuances of his story from the starting. It is difficult for a person to remember his early childhood because another person who is witness to it has to tell him about it. The protagonist's early life is depicted through the grand- mother's tale. A person remembers about his school and college life. Nur's career is recreated by him through flashbacks appearing simultaneously. It goes back to an unpleasant experience of the fear regarding his primary school teacher's rod: *'...there was a queer impatience, in the feel of early mornings, the fear of being late at school... Thank God, one was rid of that, though it had taken a long time, for he was seldom really ill even though he had prayed in*

secret to be ill.... As he had hurried on his way to school, the dizzy vision of the Master's perpendicular rod had blotted out space and time, while the clothes stuck to the flesh in the clammy heat and perspiration of summer mornings.' (Anand 14-15).

His friend and companion Gama who is less educated visits him during his illness with a basket of fruit. The two friends after exchanging pleasantries debate on the utility of education. Gama calls it a futile exercise because it leads a person to no direction: *"What is there in education, brother? Waste of time."* (Anand 27). On the other hand, Nur heaps praises on it: *"Education means wisdom, wisdom means the correlation of the growth of body and mind: the correlation of the growth of body and mind is achieved through knowledge and knowledge is power..."* (Anand 28). The difference between the attitudes of the two friends appear in a convincing manner with the help of this dialogue. The author has also used irony in the person of Gama. Though less educated, Gama is more successful because by profession he is a tonga driver and Nur who is a Master of Arts is unemployed. Without interfering in the story, the author achieves his object of censure which stands for the educational system prevailing in our country. By delving into our protagonist's bitter and personal experience regarding employment, the recruitment opportunities of the government is given a tight slap by Anand because it only considers a person's financial background overlooking his or hers educational qualifications. He bares his heart to Gama about his desperate efforts to secure a respectable job by narrating his interview in Patiala. Although he is a highly- educated person, still he is unable to get into the service because he is a confectioner's son which is looked down by the panel of interviewers who think that if an ordinary person is given a chance it will lower their dignity as well as that of the job. Dejectedly, he puts forth his impression by saying that : *"jobs are given by the Public Service Commission for smartness, general appearance, the possession of a good pedigree and according to the number of testimonials and recommendations from influential persons that a man may have than for anything else."* (Anand 42).

The present and the past meet each other so that the mind of the reader remains steady when the past events are in the forefront. For example, Nur gives his comments on dirtiness as described below: *'What was the use of cleaning and purifying oneself, for instance, if the clothes one wore when saying prayers were soiled by all the dirt of the streets and the sweat of the body at night?'* (Anand 16).

A critic of Anand , K. N. Sinha has devoted his attention to the novelette. In his words, the novelette is *"a highly powerful lyrical novel which surpasses all the novels of Anand in its deep and authentic search for illumination."*(Sinha 45). The past and the present when properly mixed together brings out a realistic account which depicts the strength and the mental growth of the character. It is a very profound enquiry of the psychology of a man dying of consumption.

While concluding, it can be safely said that the techniques of telling, showing and stream- of- consciousness has been deftly used by Anand to bring out the feelings of the protagonists leading to passionate discussions by the characters. Further, it will not be out of place to compare the author to a painter who gives life to his art by giving him different colours so also the author does the same with his characters through his pen.

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