



A NOVEL PRESENTS A PORTRAIT OF LIFE

Dr. Umar Farooque

Dept. of English , H.P.S.College, Madhepur (Madhubani) Bihar ,
L.N.Mithila University, Darbhanga.

ABSTRACT

A novel presents a portrait of life. A novelist takes into account the tendencies, habits, nature, conscious and subconscious traits of his characters. According to Stephen Spender a novel is a "house built of facts about people; their environment, development, income, passion." (Spender, 25) Characters make alive the atmosphere of the novel. The nature of a character and its action are closely related to each other. The character takes its shape through interactions of society and nature. W.J. Harvey observes



The human context is then primarily a web of relationship; the characters do not develop along the single and the liner road of destiny but are, so to speak human cross-roads. (Harvey, 69)

KEY WORDS: *tendencies, habits, nature, conscious, society, philosophy.*

INTRODUCTION

The novelist skill making lies in the interactions of his characters simple and while doing so, he creates living and authentic characters. E.M. Forster Opines

A character in a book is real when the novelist knows everything about it. He may not choose to tell us all he knows...but he gives us the feeling that though the character has not been explained, it is explicable. (Forster, 61)

It is observed that a good piece of fiction constitutes the biography of an imaginary character and when the biography is complete, the character is no longer imaginary. He assumes the real persona. Human behaviour has always been the subject of writing and a novelist/ short story writer always endeavour to present the depth of his characters. Characterisation is the skill of throwing light on the features and nature of characters. Chris Baldick defines

Characterization is the representation of persons in narrative and dramatic works. This may include the direct methods like attribution of qualities in description or commentary and indirect methods inviting readers to infer qualities from character's actions, speech or appearance. (Baldick, 34)

Thus characterisation gives readers an insight into the characters form different angles. Apart from plot-construction and subject matters, Rohinton Mistry also focuses his mind on characterisation. He does not take a huge canvas. Against the restricted backdrop, he chooses a restricted number of characters and focuses on their full and pragmatic portrayal. A number of devices are available to the writer for the purpose of characterisation. Apart from the dramatisation of character in action, narrative of the story, dialogue, symbolic nomenclatures and attributed qualities are often used effectively in fiction for the portrayal of characters. With the help of these devices, the novelist writes about the intricacies at different levels, the development of characters and also their inner life to the extent needed in the over-all structure of novel.

In the art of characterisation the frequently used method is the participation of characters in action. The characters, who are agents of action, get dramatised, described and portrayed through their behaviour. We have many examples in which Mistry presents his characters in action to reveal their most potential qualities and traits. In *Such a Long Journey* Gustad's assistance to his friend Jimy and Dinshawji's assistance to his friend Gustad reveal their characters in their actions. Again in *A Fine Balance* Dina's decision to live her life independently without her brother's patronage after the death of her husband and in *Family Matters*, Roxana's care of her old father while facing hardships of life determine the frame of their mind and outlook of Mistry's characters.

Rohinton Mistry displays his acumen in using both the analytical and dramatic methods of portrayal of his characters. In his dramatic method, his characters are presented in and by their speech and action. After introducing his characters, he wants them to speak and act and leave his readers to imagine about them. Like an analytical writer, he likes to focus on dress and other features of his characters. But to get more knowledge about them, he portrays them by their speech and action.

In the novels of Mistry, chance and coincidence play a significant role in determining the onward movement of the action. His characters serve as tools for forming the sequences of events of the story. Dina's husband dies and all of a sudden she starts facing hardships of life. It is a coincidence in the novel *A Fine Balance*.

A novelist like any other artist is a maker. He imitates life that he encounters around him. He makes a working model of life as he sees and feels it. His conclusions about it are expressed in the characters he invents and the situations in which he places them.

A novelist imitates the actions and behaviour of individuals like a small child, who arranges his toys at play in a manner which indicates his emotional relation to the world. Just as a child's play expresses his personal myth, the novel expresses the personal myth of the novelist. He unfolds this myth using his characters and actions. Since a novelist's subject comes out of his sensibility, his conclusion about life can be drawn from the characters he has created. Hence there is a need to discuss the characters of the novelist.

It is worth quoting what Schreiber observes about the creation of characters :

The power to create living characters is the novelist's indispensable contribution. For not only do we read novels for the pleasure and emotional release of living in the lives of people other than ourselves, and not only does whatever truth the novel may contain come to us embodied in virtue of his imaginative power to create such characters that the novelist himself comes to know the truth about them. (Schreiber, 127)

It seldom happens that the fictional characters represent the living persons, though they have something in common with them. The writer chooses only those traits that strike him and are useful for his purpose as his world is fictive. Real people enter the imagination of the novelist, fuse with it, and come out as different people. However, it is a matter of fact that novelist's own self inspires and determines the process of character-creation. The great source of character-creation is of course the novelist's own self. The novelist gives them a part of his own qualities, to one his sensitive nature, to another, his pragmatism, to somebody else his philosophy and to others his own eccentricities and so on. But the character he invents and his attitudes towards them are conditioned by his bias. Whatever he writes is the exposition of his personality and it is the manifestation of his innate instincts, his feelings and, his experiences. The characters are individuals and at the same time types and they bear the stamp of the novelist. If they embody the universal in their individual selves, they become living characters appealing to all people of all times.

The success of a novelist lies in his ability of creating characters, but he can make characters very much better or worse than himself, in one way his own nature definitely limits his range. He cannot make them much more witty and intelligent than what he is.

E.M. Forster divides characters into flat and round. Flat characters are constructed round a single idea or a quality, and are easily recognized and remembered by the readers afterwards. A flat character is two-dimensional: there is nothing to it except the side, which the novelist shows us, and it

is unchangeable. Flat characters are seen in the novels of character, and they are found in large number in Dickens, whose people are nearly all flat.

A round character changes and "it is capable of surprising in a convincing way" (Forster, 79) and it is three dimensional; we can walk round it and see for ourselves all that the novelist has not told us.

Living characters stand in between the flat and the round characters. Maugham's characters are flat and they are either types or caricatures drawn from life, and a few reach the stature of living characters also. He "turned his mind to writing novels about the kind of English society he knew best—doctors, the clergy, the military, the lawyers and formidable women folk" (Ibid., 85) and was content to observe their follies and vices without scorning and ridiculing or moralizing. W.J. Harvey says "Our faulty common use of the word 'character' occurs in a phrase like. What a character he is!" (Harvey, 35)

Characters are acting individuals generating the will-power that overcomes all obstacles. Action becomes a creatively motivating force for them. Their physical features are delineated with keen perception and they bring out the inner qualities of the character. The neat and graceful clothes they wear, the lines on their face, the thoughts in their minds, the character they develop by those thoughts constitute an attractive personality for them.

It is imperative to understand Rohinton Mistry's conception of characters and methods of characterisation in order to understand his idea of the individuals as a social reality and in order to deduce from it his mode of perception of life around and reality. Every novelist has his own approach to characters. This approach reveals the author's idea of individuals and thereby his attitude to life.

He is endowed with the gift of inventive power with which he has created a good number of characters in his novels. His fictional world is peopled with characters drawn from various sections of Indian society. He portrays people belonging to various professions. He enables the readers to explore his fictional world through characterisation. The lives of his characters are journeys on an unfamiliar road. Every turn in the road holds a promise and a peril. On this journey there is no turning back. We travel with the characters speculating their decisions at decisive crossroad. We begin to examine our own values with reference to their insights and intentions.

He offers us a gallery of characters of diverse types such as dabblers in magic, an ageless aphrodisiac vendor, barefoot pavement, painter of ecumenical saints and gods, a malcontent hurls defiance at God, the disabled Tehmul, perhaps Mistry's finest creation who exhibits a child's mind and a man's sexual urge.

Rohinton Mistry has created minor characters whose actions address moral, practical and pragmatic questions. In an ingenious manner of characterisation, he creates the character of the administrator, the Facilitator, the Motivator, Slumlord, the Thakur and Bal Baba. Each of these men is a parasite feeding on the helplessness of the common man. They annihilate those who dare to question their principles or challenge their commands. The administrator rails against the state machinery involved in brutal sterilisations; the Facilitator and the Motivator represent corrupt bureaucracy that takes a heavy cut for providing facilities. The Slum-lord and the Thakur are the agents of repression, letting loose their goons on all those who try to break free from the chains of the strict codification. Bal Baba represents the hold that ruthless gods have over the illiterate.

His rich and varied characterization beckons the readers. Inevitably, there arise a host of issues related to the moral dimensions of the lives of Mistry's characters. No less important are the lives of a host of minor and middling characters, the moral implications of whose lives are equally compelling and how they face the challenges of life.

Mistry's chief asset in his novels is its characterisation achieved with deft, precise strokes and an unflinching eye for the incongruities of human nature tempered with compassion. The characters are individualised and memorably drawn with humour, anger, pain and with all sorts of emotions. He has certainly created the most affable character - funny, comical, tragic, pastoral, without pretense or deceit. He becomes a hero in his orderliness and restores our faith in human nature piteously arraigned against the sordidness, vanity and shady urbanity of a metropolis.

Mistry often departs from his commitment to full-bodied characterisations to offer scathing portraits of both the street-level perpetrators (goondas, police, Family Planning enforcers) and the smug bourgeoisie for whom the top-down suspension of human rights means improved labour relations and tains running on time.

CONCLUSION:

The novelist skill making lies in the interactions of his characters simple and while doing so, he creates living and authentic characters.

Apart from the dramatisation of character in action, narrative of the story, dialogue, symbolic nomenclatures and attributed qualities are often used effectively in fiction for the portrayal of characters.

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