
UNIT 32 THE NOVEL : A CONCLUSION

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32.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully, you should be able to:

- describe how different novelists use different methods and styles;
- outline how characterisation contributes to effective story-telling;
- explain how the novelist has the autonomy to project his/her social concerns through the story; and
- understand that reading a novel involves a three-way interaction: between the author, the text and the reader.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading novels has been a form of popular entertainment for more than three hundred years. The origin of the novel may be traced to the prose writings of seventeenth century Europe. It was only in the beginning of the nineteenth century that the novel came to India. Though it was the Europeans who introduced the form as it existed in their languages, there were traditions of longer prose narratives in many Indian languages. However, Indian writers soon began to experiment with the new form as well in their own languages. In a country where the literacy rate is not so high, novels generally find a place in the bookshelves of only those who are literate. You will find ordinary people reading the novel in very ordinary situations. We see people reading the novel while travelling, or for a little relaxation after dinner. Some of them are even addicted to novels, specially crime thrillers. In fact, today if you were denied access to cinema, video and television, you would probably be reading a novel. It is true that to a large extent cinema, television or video has displaced the novel as a form of popular entertainment but you may have noticed that the most popular television serials or films are generally based on a significant and popular novel. In simple terms, the novel is a literary way of telling a story, whereas the film is an audio visual method of story-telling. Therefore, 'story-telling' is a crucial aspect of the film as well as the novel. The popularity of the novel or the film rests primarily in this inner desire that perhaps we all share, to be a part of a 'story-telling' session. The weaving of a story and its narration is an integral aspect of the culture of any society. Most

cultures of the world are replete with a rich matrix of epics, myths, fables, legends and fantasies. These stories are not only an expression of the human imagination but serve the purpose of providing a moral and ethical code. These stories and their essence were passed on from one generation to another over a period of time and a cultural bridge was established between the past and the present. Initially the communication was oral, but with the invention of the written word, and subsequently writing, the communication became literary. The four novels that you have studied (and five that you've read) are essentially five different stories. You may have wondered why you were studying these novels and not say, a *James Hadley Chase* novel. After all even a crime thriller is a story. You may have also wondered if, reading a popular novel in a railway carriage is the same as studying the novel for a course, (the way you have studied these five novels). The answer to both the questions lies in the fact that even though the 'story' aspect is central to a novel, it is not the only thing that the novel offers. What else does the novel offer?

32.2 NARRATIVE

Firstly, there is the novelist, or the story-teller. The manner in which s/he tells us the story is what we may understand as narration. We have seen that there are many narrative methods and styles that the novelists employ. For example, the way **Dickens** tells the story of *The Tale of Two Cities* is not similar to the narrative methods of **Gopinath Mohanty** in *Paraja*. The skills of the story-teller are as important as the story. In fact, a poor story-teller may ruin a good story by not being able to create and sustain enough interest in his/her readers. The novelist is often able to make ordinary and simple aspects of life seem extraordinary and remarkable by employing and exploiting various narrative methods. S/he may tell the story in the first person, or use one of his/her characters to narrate the story, s/he may use the present tense and take you into the past through flashbacks. S/he may disappear from the text completely and let the characters and the situation take over completely. Each of the texts that you have read employ various narrative techniques sometimes, within the same text and it would be an interesting exercise to identify these techniques and to chart out the similarities and differences in each novel.

32.3 THE LANGUAGE OF FICTION

For long, critics have made a distinction between poetry and prose on the basis of the use of language in them. **I A Richard**, for instance, spoke of the two uses of language: scientific and emotive. The former, to which the form of novel comes nearer, is used for reference, for 'creating the impact of something being true or false'. The emotive use of language, on the other hand, is used 'for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude', as in poetry.

According to **Northrop Frye**, the use of language in poetry is 'inward or centripetal in which we try to develop from the words a sense of the larger verbal pattern they make' whereas in prose it is outward or centrifugal, 'in which we keep on going outside our reading, from the individual words to the

things they mean, or in practice to our memory of the conventional associations between them'.

For **Coleridge**, 'the definition of good prose is - proper words in their proper places; of good verse - the most proper words in their proper places'. This, according to him, is the general rule. However, some prose verses may border on mere narrative, and there the style may be simpler.

Building on this, **Paul Valery**, has used the difference between walking and dancing as the analogy for drawing a distinction between prose and poetry. According to him, 'walking, like prose, always has a definite object. It is an act directed towards some object that we aim to reach'. Dancing is quite different. 'It goes no where'.

The most appropriate statement of such a distinctive description, however, comes from **Christopher Caudwell** who observes that the poem and the story both use sounds which awake images of outer reality. Elaborating on this, he states that poetry, through the use of language "continually distorts and denies the stature of reality to exalt the structure of the self. By means of rhyme, associations or alliteration, it couples together words which have no rational connection, that is no nexus through the world of external reality". The novel too, blots out external reality by substituting a more or less consistent mock reality which has sufficient 'stuff' to stand between the reader and reality. This does not mean that in the novel the emotional associations are attached to words but to the moving current of mock reality symbolised by the words. This is why rhythm 'preciousness' and style are alien to the novel; why the novel translates so well; why novels are not composed of words; they are composed of scenes, action, stuff, people, just as plays are'.

For more discussion on this, you may consult *Language of Fiction* by **David Lodge**.

32.4 STYLE

The manner in which the story is told often determines the style of its narration. Is the novelist going to adopt a serious tone or is s/he going to be humourous? S/he may be prophetic in style or satirical. In fact, you have perhaps noticed that each novelist has a different way of telling a story. The style and tone of the novel is not only determined by its socio-historical context but also by the subject matter of the novel. **Attia Hosain** uses a lyrical style to evoke a sense of tragedy that lies intertwined in time. **Dickens** employs a style which is reportorial and journalistic and involves his readers in the immediacy of the drama that unfolds in each event that he narrates. Each novelist employs a style by which s/he is able to successfully communicate the essence of the story to the readers.

32.5 CHARACTERISATION

A novelist must create characters in order to tell his/her story. How characters are realised in the minds of novelists is a fascinating question. In the five novels that you have read you have come across characters, each unique in

his/her own way. You may have not experienced the life of a tribal as it exists in a remote corner of Orissa or in the heart of Africa, or you may have read about life as it was in the Victorian Age in England, but when you read the novels you feel as if each character was alive and real and you are in complete empathy with the characters as you share their experiences. Actually, the novelist is able to take you close to the character and you are a kind of witness to the intricate and complex manner in which the mind of a particular character works. In fact, the more complex the mind seems to be, the more fascinating and real the character. Sometimes novelists create characters who are 'types'. These are easily recognisable. The novelist is assured that the readers will be able to anticipate some of the actions of this character because s/he would be doing something typical. **Charles Dickens** was a master in creating such characters and made them unforgettable by sketching them boldly and never missing out on the important details. This way **Dickens** was able to establish his characters quickly in the minds of his readers and then go on to focus their attention to more serious issues of social concern.

32.6 AUTHOR-TEXT-READER DIALOGUE

Coming back to our original question as to what does a novel offer other than a story, we may say that a novel provides an opportunity for an interaction and dialogue between the novelist, characters and the readers. The reading of a novel is in some ways a drama that is enacted out between three parties. The novelist, is the master puppeteer who not only controls the destinies of the characters but also plays with the emotions and feelings of the readers. The second party in this dialogue are the characters, who seem to become almost independent as soon as their creator has given life to them. They also establish rapport with the readers irrespective of the novelist. In fact, so real is the relation between a character and a reader that sometimes we compare real people with characters from novels. In the novels that you have read, have you discovered any character whom you could compare with someone you know? Finally, the third party in this drama is the reader who not only interacts with the characters, but also indirectly interacts with the novelist. There are many ways that a reader may respond to the novel. The reader may find the characters fascinating but not the plot, or vice versa; the theme of the novel may have an appeal but not the narration. As readers, you have also responded to the novels in your course. Don't you think different readers may respond to the same novel in different ways? For example, an Englishman's response to *Paraja* would not be the same as yours, just as your response to the reading of *Things Fall Apart* is different from the way an African would understand that novel. The reader has certain advantages and disadvantages. S/he has the advantage of a spectator who views things from a vantage point, but s/he may also have the disadvantage of certain prejudices and limitations of knowledge that might colour his/her perceptions. For example, is it really possible for an urban readership that has no experience of rural and tribal life to actually understand and appreciate the life that has been described in **Mohanty's** novel *Paraja*? You have a valid argument if you say that it is not essential to experience rural and tribal life at first hand in order to understand the tensions, the drama, the emotions and the struggle in *Paraja* because it is so universal. But as urban people with a particular kind of educational background, it is quite possible that we harbour some preconceived notions and ideas about

tribal life that might influence our reading. In fact, even the novelist may have some preconceived notions about his/her subject which may influence his/her creative output. The reader has the advantage of changing his /her opinion but the novelist cannot change the novel once it has been published. It is only in his/her next novel (that is if s/her writes one) that s/he gets an opportunity to revise his/her opinion about something. So, if you read more than one novel of a novelist, you may discover that the novelist has changed and altered his/her opinions and attitudes from one novel to another. There are many such interesting questions which may tease the reader. The broader the novel's spectrum in terms of characterisation, social relevance and artistic endeavour, the more would be its ability to pose question to its readers.

32.7 SOCIAL CONCERNS

A good novel has yet another very important thing to offer. It is through the novel that the novelist is able to express his/her social concern. If you study the genesis of the novel you will find that the central impetus for the novelist to write was his/her urge to diagnose the society s/he lived in the expose his/her readers to the various ills that afflicted society. What s/he thought was immoral and wrong, s/he protested against and upheld those values s/he thought would make society healthy. This is true of the novels you have read. **Attia Hosian** analyses the life of a woman caught in the twilight of a feudal society. **Mohanty** and **Achebe** make a study of tribal society and focus on those external influences that disturbs and often destroys the delicate pattern of tribal life. **Dickens** is concerned with those larger forces that operate in society and have a bearing on individual life and human relationships. Similarly, **Kate Chopin** examines the question of a woman and her role in a male dominated society. Reading a novel would directly involve you in a study of a social structure and involve you in a debate about what is right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, just and unjust. But let us also remember that all this comes to us filtered through the eyes of the writer and becomes his/her social vision.

32.8 ANALYSING THE NOVEL

A crime thriller like a **James Hadley Chase**, or a *Mills and Boon* romance provides you with just a story and perhaps nothing else and sometimes even the story may not be able to sustain your interest for long. If you were looking for any of the things we have discussed above, these novels will fail to satisfy you. But the person who is travelling in a train or a bus, reads a novel only as a diversion so, for him/her just a story would be enough. You, on the other hand are studying the novel, which means you are looking in your text for all those aspects of the novel that we have discussed above and will not be satisfied with just a story. *Studying a novel means a critical appreciation of the text.* A critic uses perspectives to critically examine a text. In the next Unit we shall have a look at some of the different critical perspectives that are available to you. You may apply them to the novels that you have read and discover for yourself that though the novels are independent texts, written by different people at different points in time and place, yet they are all

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3. Which of the five novels did you like the most? Why? Which one did you like the least? Give reasons.

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4. List some of the important novels written in English by Indian writers according to the year of publication.

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32.9 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has been a quick recapitulation of the aspects of the novel that you have studied in Block 1. But here we have discussed the novels in your course in relation to these aspects. While all novels tell a story, it is the novelist's craft that creates a text which we are able to read and re-read. We may read a crime thriller or a romance with great delight but it is purely for the story - line that we read these books. Once we know 'what happens next', there is very little incentive to return and re-read the book. On the other hand, Edna

Pontellier or Madame Defarge lives with us long after we have put down the novels. Some novels we enjoy because of the memorable characterisation, others for their narrative structure and yet others for their social concerns. As readers, we are individuals living in a certain moment in time, in a particular society and these specific aspects about our individual histories are bound to affect the way we read a particular novel. Thus a reader, in a way, recreates the text for him/herself.

32.10 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

1. Your list could be very different from ours. However, let us give you some names.

Amrita Pritam, Mulk Raj Anand – Punjab; Munshi Prem Chand – Uttar Pradesh; Nayantara Sahgal – Uttaranchal; Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahashweta Devi – West Bengal; U R Anantha Murthy, Raja Rao, R K Narayan – Karnataka; T Siva Sankara Pillai, Kamala Das – Kerala; Krishna Sobti, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal – Delhi

2. You can look at Blocks 1, 2, 3 4, and 5 once more and then write the answer in your own words.
3. In your answer, you can mention any novel that you may have read in English or Hindi or any other Indian language and explain why you enjoyed reading it or otherwise.
4. Some of the important novels written in English by Indian Writers are listed below in chronological order:

Mulk Raj Anand:	<i>Untouchable</i>	(1935)
Raja Rao:	<i>Kanthapura</i>	(1945)
R K Narayan:	<i>The English Teacher</i>	(1945)
	<i>The Guide</i>	(1958)
Kamala Markandaya:	<i>A Nectar in a Sieve</i>	(1954)
Arun Joshi:	<i>The Foreigners</i>	(1968)
Chaman Nahal:	<i>Azadi</i>	(1975)
Anita Desai:	<i>Clear Light of Day</i>	(1980)
Nayantara Sahgal:	<i>Rich Like Us</i>	(1985)
Amitav Ghosh:	<i>Shadow Lines</i>	(1988)
Shashi Deshpande:	<i>That Long Silence</i>	(1988)
Githa Hariharan:	<i>The Thousand Faces of Night</i>	(1992)
Vikram Seth:	<i>A Suitable Boy</i>	(1993)
Arundhati Roy:	<i>God of Small Things</i>	(1997)
Manju Kapur:	<i>Difficult Daughters</i>	(1998)
	<i>A Married Woman</i>	(2004)
Jhumpa Lahiri	<i>The Namesake</i>	(2003)