

A Penetrative Look into Ajneya's Novel Shekhar: Ek Jiwaneer as an Open Novel

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Abstract: In the novel *Shekhar: Ek Jiwaneer (Part-I)* the life of Shekhar is projected from his childhood rolling down to adolescent period and later on to his attaining of youth and in the *Part-II* of the same novel he is drawn to that field of life wherein he faces the rough and tough struggles that come to him while facing the complexities of the then society. The free movement of the characters of the novels concerned in the light of the modern concept of life arising after or during the period running from the beginning of the Second World War which totally changed the orthodox beliefs of the then Indian society. The beginning chapter of the novel *Shekhar: Ek Jiwaneer* introduces us with Shekhar who has been convicted of death sentence for his offence, the reason of which is not clearly disclosed by the author till the end of the last episode of the second part of the novel concerned is also left unexplained to the readers, which is a big question mark for us and as research workers it has come to our mind that the author might have the intention to go for another part of the novel in question because the sending of Shekhar to Lahore does not give us the clue what happens next in his life after staying over there and the author did not make it clear as to why his second part of the same novel did not have a concrete ending for the fulfillment of the readers' inquisitiveness. This is one of the novels in Hindi literature which able to reach an additional height from the view point of modern and open novel.

Limitation of sphere of study

It is a well-known fact that the Mediaeval period replaced the literary importance of Epic which was a recurrent type of literature in the Ancient period by extensively following the literary genre, i.e., Romance; a narrative of the experiences of knights, squires or any travelers of aristocratic class which were symbolic representations of feudal system during that period. Likewise novels began occupying a room of prominence as a genre in the modern age and certainly it is the novel which could attract the attention of the readers by replacing the one way traffic of representation of the expression which became lethargic and monotonous, for which the readers took to reading novels as their best choice in the modern period. Whatever it may be our attempt is not to make a look into the rapid transition of taste and colour of readers' choice and likewise our endeavour is not to go in details regarding the nature of novels and its related philosophy. While delivering a lecture on modern novels in the University of Cambridge, Virginia Woolf started her speech by saying that:

"On of about December 1910, human character changed." ⁽¹⁾

Our million-worth question is as to why Virginia Woolf mentioned the month of December of 1910 as the border line in her speech at the very beginning. Perhaps Virginia Woolf was immensely moved by the demonstration of pictures of post-impressionist movement held in the city of London and without doubt she could realise the reactions of viewers of that art and it was she who could penetrate in to the outstanding as well as extra-ordinary responses of the people whose mental set-up started changing in the year 1910. That is why the literary persons did not give stress on the superficial aspects of incidents that we witnessed in our day-to-day life; but instead they took to picking up the indistinct shape of any circumstances that could arrest the

(1) Dr.Gobinda Prasad Sarma, *Upanyas Aaru Asomiya Upanyas*: Pg.-42

readers inner psychology and so they basically focused on that point of human aspects. On the basis of our studies at the perspective, we can boldly take up a notion that in the expression and outburst of feelings of modern novelist there has been tremendous influence of post-impressionist movement. That is why the modern novels are occasionally named as post-impressionist novels. It is to be seen in those novels of the modern era that out pouring of thoughts, the elemental expression of philosophy represented by the characters and at the same time in the dialectic outburst of the inner psychology, the unending imprints of post-impressionist can never be overlooked.

In the traditional novels we often see the addition of a certain kind of narratives and so in between there must be a beginning, middle and end which are basic requirements of that kind of novels. But especially in modern novels instead of some certain set rules such as inclusion of narratives, there is a continuous flow of psychological insights in to the characters. It is generally seen that the modern

novelists take forward the plotline with amalgamation of actions and reactions of the characters as they appeared in course of time as well as the inflow of the inner working of the conscience of the characters. In this connection Allan Fritmann can be quoted wherein he opined that as there is certain narrative in the traditional novels, so with the end of the narrative, the inflow of the inner psychology comes to an end. That is why Fritmann termed traditional novels as close novels. On the other hand as modern novels are free from such set regulations, so there is no end to the outburst of inner conflicts or inflow of workings of conscience of characters whatever may be. In simple words the stream of consciousness of the characters continues to flow even though apparently the novel ends. All materials brought together to give a shape of a novel stretch out to the unending horizon from finite to infinite. Therefore, Fritmann is of the opinion that modern novels are open novels. In this piece of work we will make an attempt to label a signature of elements of openness in Ajneya's novel Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee (Part-I & Part-II).

Keywords: Modern and Open novel, Stream of Consciousness, Post-Impressionist novel, Post-Impressionist Movement, A Record of Personal Suffering.

INTRODUCTION

At the outset although it seems to be unacceptable but it is a real fact that a traditional novelist spent his entire time and energy in order to develop the plotline of the novel and obviously during this process somehow he used to lose his freedom in a number of directions. As a result of which a traditional novelist becomes aloof and he discover himself alienated from the crude reality. As a matter of fact, the credibility of a traditional novel entirely depends on the quality of the plotline which has been chosen for a certain piece of work and its smooth progress without any interruption till the end. That is why a traditional novelist has to pay his rapt attention on the aforesaid parameters for the sake of the success of his novel. In order to express such a hopeless situation of a traditional novelist, Virginia Woolf explains:

“The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest...”⁽²⁾

However a modern novel is generally presented on the basis of stream of consciousness of the characters concerned and naturally a modern novel is always subjective. Such a modern novel never emphasizes on the happenings in the real world, instead the

(2) Modern fiction, in *The Common Reader*, First series 1925 The Hogarth Press London 1948, Pg-188.

main attention as well intention of a modern novelist is to portray the internal mental conflicts of the characters concerned. That is why in comparison to a traditional novelist, perhaps a modern novelist enjoys more freedom of expression, more realistic attitude as well as having a bold outlook to their subject-matter chosen for any of their artistic piece of creations. May be under the influence of such circumstances Ajneya was inspired himself which may be noted down in the following few lines which are added in the preface of his novel Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee(Part-I):

“Main ek swatantr byakti kee pragati ka darshak aur itihaskar hun. Uske jivan par mera kisi tarah ka bhi bash nahin raha hain.”⁽³⁾

We never come across any sort of resistance initiated from the part of Ajneya towards the activities of Shekhar in his entire journey of life, even though occasionally some of the activities and unruly behavior (in the eyes of so called the then existing society) of Shekhar breaks down the existing rules and regulations, rituals of the so called society. Ajneya never took any single step which may stand as an obstruction on the infinite line of freedom of his characters. To be honest a common reader will witness him not as a novelist, but as one, who happens to be a very simple and silent observer in the entire journey of the characters during the course of time. The kindness of Ajneya towards the characters portrayed in his novel can easily be understood through the following lines mentioned in the preface of his novel Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee(Part-I):

“Shekhar se aapka hakshyat kara dene ke baad ab main alag hat jata hun. Ab aap use swyam parichay prapt kare. Shekhar koi barha aadmi nahin hain, who atchha bhi aadmi nahin hain. Lekin who manabata ke sanchit anubhab ke praksh me imandari se apne ko pahchanne kee koshish kar raha hain. Who atchha sangi nahin bhi ho sakta hain, lakin uske ant tak uske sath chalkar aap ke uske prati bhaw kathor nahain honge, eisa mujhe biswas hain. Aur kon jane aaj ke yug me jab ham, aap sabhi sanchilist charitra hain tab aap paye ki aap ke bhitar bhi kahin par ek Shekhar hain jo barha nahin, atchha bhi nahin, lakin jagruk aur swtant aur imandar hain, ghor imandar.”⁽⁴⁾

If we have a pipe-line view of the activities of a modern novelist during the course of his creation, it will be clear that a modern novelist never ever have any prefixed work-plan to complete a perfect piece of his creation. A modern novelist will never possess any fixed idea about the end point of his novel or intentionally he never tries to overburden himself under the shadow of additional pressure to conclude his propose piece of work. Instead, the stream of consciousness of the characters portrayed by the novelist will automatically conclude

according to the demand of the plotline. Perhaps this added an extra dimension in the freedom of a modern novelist. According to one of the modern and open novelists Antony Trollope :

“When I sit down to write a novel I don’t at all know, I don’t very much care, how it is to end.”⁽⁵⁾

METHODOLOGY

During our research work on the topic, Novels of Ajneya and Praphulladatta Goswami: A Comparative Study; one specific question regarding the openness of the novels of the authors concerned always hunting in our mind. As a result of which we have carried out this piece of work, though we could not include all the novels of the authors concerned into the preview of our discussion. No stone has been left un-thrown in order to achieve cent percent authenticity in the conclusion of this piece of work. In fact a good number of suggestions, critics were received from learned Professors, students of Colleges and Universities in

(3) Ajneya, Preface-VIII, Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee, Part-I

(4) Ajneya, Preface-IX, Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee, Part-I

(5) Dr. Parag Kr. Bhattacharya, Sahitya: Sanjna Aru Angik, Pg-70.

response to our quarry, for which we do have no words to express our gratitude towards them. We always acknowledge their suggestions and due respect has been paid towards their suggestions while drawing the conclusion of this piece of work. To justify the spirit of the entire piece of work occasionally we discussed all the matters included here with a number of persons having commanding authority on the subject matter chosen here.

FINDINGS

Evaluation of the novel Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee from the perspective of open novel:

The main flow of the plotline of the novel Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee revolves around the stream of consciousness and internal conflicts in the mind of its central character Shekhar who hails from a simple middle class Indian family. Here we have not witnessed any pre-fixed plotline as in case of a traditional and close novel. Instead, a reader will discover him among some pictures confronted by the central character Shekhar together with some supporting characters in the journey of his life as if these were displayed in a distorting mirror. One will certainly be disheartened if he or she expects the flow of these pictures in a synchronized manner, because nothing has been presented here in a sequential way. The entire plotline of the novel flows according to the flow of the stream of consciousness in the mind of the central character Shekhar, as it appears in the journey of his life and some supporting characters like Sarswati, Shashi etc. occasionally appears whenever it reflects in the stream of consciousness of the central character Shekhar. From the view point of the presentation one must agree to the fact that the very way of the presentation in the novel is really dramatic in nature. In order to add more to that Ajneya perhaps started the plotline of the novel with a horrible word Fashi (Death Sentence). Ajneya introduces his central character Shekhar really in a very critical situation, a helpless young agile man in the cell of an unidentified jail waiting for the execution of the death sentence offered as per the then British law. The irony is that the author did not allow his readers to know or he never aired out any clue as to why his central character has been offered the capital punishment. Without losing a fraction of second Ajneya expresses his own sentiment against the barbaric act like the capital punishment which is quite inhuman, ruthless, brutal, nasty etc. and at most such an activity results the end of a human life. Obviously, we do not have the right to destroy the life of someone as we cannot create such a beautiful gift of God at our own will. In simple words as stated by Ajneya, the intense pain pinching in the mind of a young man waiting in the cell for the execution of death sentence and the relentless movement of the internal conflict resulting in the flow of his stream of consciousness in a single night is all about the novel Shekhar: Ek Jiwanee, a record of personal suffering.

Death is the ultimate end of life. The author makes an attempt to formulate the inner sufferings confronted by Shekhar throughout his life in a frame of words that the protagonist reminisces at the ending point of life. In the novel so many things occur in Shekhar’s life; but those happenings make no stories, nor do they happen in certain order or in a systematic way. The fragmentary experiences that Shekhar gathers are the non-sequential incidents that reflect in the novel. This is the mirror or rather a record of personal feelings that he starts scripting in his life.

The conscience of Shekhar dwindles in the balance that he makes himself associated in childhood and adolescence period while heading towards the stream of life. As mind is ever turbulent and conscience is multi-leveled, so the flow of conscience in a modern novel never ceases like a flowing rivulet. Even at the end of the novel, the feelings, hopes and aspirations, weal and woe, conscience in the mind of the protagonist never ever arrives at culmination, rather it goes on lingering in the far off horizon. It characterizes as the elemental feature of a modern and open novel.

The stream of conscience of Shekhar to whom capital punishment is awarded draws him to the warm lap of his own elder sister Saraswati with whom he once fell in deep sensuous love and at the same time he reminisces those moments of his childhood when he climbed on a way side post box showcasing his pride while he was on his way to call for a doctor for treatment of one of his ailing elder brothers. In some moments when he memorizes the ever-fresh sweet thoughts that he tried to call his own elder sister Saraswati as Saras after imagining her as his beloved and simultaneously he brings back to his imagination those days that he raised his strong voice against the nepotism of the anti-social effects of rigid Indian cast system for which he left the hostel specially reserved for the students belonging to higher caste. Again Shekhar becomes cool after the rejection of his proposal offered to Sarada, a beautiful girl from South India, with whom he fell in love. On the other hand, sometimes he raises a strong voice of protest against the then caste system, atrocities against women etc. Above all the stream of consciousness in Shekhar never allows him to stand in a certain point being stationary. The constantly flowing stream of thoughts occupying the soul and heart in Shekhar rolling down from his childhood to the growth of youthful vigor wherein he gathers bitter and sour experiences, disjointed thoughts as if those got reflected in a broken mirror. The then British Govt. threw him to the jail after lodging a false allegation against him when he was involved in the freedom struggle. The colourful experiences that Shekhar gathered in the jail from his close associations with some of very ideal and matured persons could impress him by which the disjointed and fickle minded way of life of Shekhar could be transformed into positive line to some extent. On being imprinted by such stable and far-reaching attitude to look through with some sense of foresightedness that automatically began to grow with such association certainly helped Shekhar in taking bold decisions such as not to write any articles in English and to live together with his cousin, Sashi who had to leave her husband's house due to the latter's atrocities being meted out to her physically and mentally. It is not the subject matter of discussion on the part of the author as to how the activities and decisions taken by Shekhar influence the very structure of the then social milieu. Again it is not within the parameter of judgments of the author as to how the society accepts Shekhar. The author just showcases the way how Shekhar leads his life under the influence of stream of consciousness as the author admits his inability to keep control on the track of his life. As the stream of consciousness is multi-layered, no sooner did one incident happen than another new one starts occurring in his life. As soon as he did an inferior activity such as being involved in theft which became imperative for him to bear the expenditure of treatment for Sashi's prolonged illness, the freedom fighter Dada, popularly known so appeared on the scene. As and when Dada took leave after the examination of the usefulness of the arms accumulated for applying the same for the purpose of freedom struggle, Sashi breathed her last and he too moved to Lahore as per the will of Sashi at the thresh-hold of her death. In the novel one incident appears and then again another occurs in a very disjointed manner. We don't have much clear idea as to how Shekhar lives in Lahore. The novel does not offer or rather it is not allowed to reveal the fact related to the capital punishment announced in case of Shekhar as to why such judgment was delivered. Whether that judgment was executed in reality or not is still a matter that remained shrouded with cycles of doubt in front of the readers. Perhaps this might be the reason a modern and open novel takes its root to go forward without any definite plotline letting stream of consciousness occupy its pivotal role not only to the end of the novel but beyond its boundary and so a reader will have to accumulate the concluding lines of such novels to have taste out of it. Therefore the colour and quality of the concluding lines of an open novel will certainly depend upon the level of intelligence as well as the periphery of knowledge of the readers concerned.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Before the process of evaluation of the novel Shekhar:Ek Jiwanee authored by Ajneya from the view point of modern and open novel, we shall make an attempt to have an overview of a successful novel which could earn much repute by touching readers soft corner by which the novel became a milestone in the realm of modern literature by the same way as the novel under discussion in this write-up drew the elemental characteristics of the genre in question. In this regard Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway is brought into our purview of discourse mainly because the novel concerned was written in line with the same colour and literary style which was followed by Ajneya in the novel in question.

A very sweet and beautiful morning of one Wednesday in the month of June.... No sooner did Mrs. Dalloway get up from her sleep in her own residence in the city of London than her consciousness becomes active and it goes on without interruption for a single moment. The consciousness that appears in her mindset, it starts drawing Mrs. Dalloway to various chapters of her past life. The past melancholic childhood memories related to her birth place starts haunting her like anything which brings lots of colourful incidents that had happened in her life during said period. At the same time the heavily laden memories of her past life full of bitterness and sourness drew her to various experiences that she had in her childhood. Sometimes, the moments that she spent with her husband Richard Dalloway, the only daughter Elizabeth that she occupied in her life as daughter, again those moments sweetened by the warm association with her shy and extreme nervous lover Peter Woyalesh, those never forgettable moments appear and reappear in her cycle of flow of thoughts evaporating the symbolic witness of stream of consciousness which was the prominent feature in Virginia Woolf's novel. At this very moment we discover Mrs. Dalloway in a street in the city of London when she was on her way to purchase flowers. This very scene is presented so as to let a reader know that she is having her birthday today which was never ever disclosed to the readers beforehand in the novel. At the behest of purchasing flowers in the name of having a fresh look at her birthdays in the past, she happened to meet a couple Lukrachia (a Jewish girl) and her mad husband Septimash on a bench in the Resent Park. Mrs. Dalloway was burdened with the shouting of war-torn Septimash who declared to commit suicide. In the evening all the well-wishers of Dalloway family met in the get-together held on the occasion of her birthday. To the utter surprise of all present the childhood lover of Mrs. Dalloway, Peter Woyalesh happened to arrive at the spot on the occasion. Mrs. Dalloway was pre-occupied with the thoughts of her husband's negligence towards

her and again she was over-burdened at the news of committing suicide by Septimash. All of a sudden Mrs. Dalloway disappeared from her birthday party to get relieved from mental agony which has criped-up on her due to the very professional outlook of the so called gentlemen in the party towards the existing society, humanity etc. The author makes an end of this piece of work with the reappearance of Mrs. Dalloway at her birthday party with a simple but very tricky information to the readers that she is a completely transformed Mrs. Dalloway. The reappeared, transformed Mrs. Dalloway may have bow-down in front of the so called aristocratic society, she may change her outlook towards the artificial behaviour of the existing people surrounding her etc. etc. It has been left in the court of judgement of the readers to decide what transformation they would like to view within the character of Mrs. Dalloway. The reader has sufficient freedom to make a conclusion at their own will. This is why the Novel Mrs. Dalloway stands as one of the mile stone in the field of infinite horizons of open Novels.

The same trend can be observed in the novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* authored by James Joyce`s. Here we can cite the name of one more novel *Remembrance of Things Past* authored by Marcel Proust which has been presented in the same line.

At the end of the novel *Shekhar:Ek Jiwanee* the author is running away from the readers very silently without any proper information regarding the execution of the death penalty offered to the central character Shekhar, though at the beginning of the novel clearly the author introduced the character Shekhar as one who is in a jail waiting for the execution of the death penalty. In fact the readers were kept purely in dark regarding the actual cause for which Shekhar was convicted by capital punishment. At best we can presume that some activities of Shekhar in Lahore (Now in Pakistan) which may goes against the interest of the then English rulers, as we know that Shekhar went to Lahore after the untimely demise of Sashi or it might be a very cruel conspiracy of the then English rulers against him. Considering all aspects, for instance the way of presentation of the plotline, the smooth progress of the plotline, the openness at the end of the plotline etc. undoubtedly one can infer that the novel *Shekhar:Ek Jiwanee* is an open novel in true sense and colour. In fact one can essence the flavour of openness of the novel at every now and then in the entire journey through the plotline of the novel. The author never tried to unfold the internal philosophy that he intends to outburst through some dialogues of a character or through some actions and reactions of a character in totality. He always left some wide space for the readers to unfold the internal philosophy of the dialogues, action and reactions of a character of their own way so that they can make out a correct judgement of their own skill. Such an artistic, elegant and unique way of presentation of the plotline wherein ample space has been left to the readers in order to analyse the happenings and its inner philosophy during the course of the progress of the plotline certainly helps the novel concern to reach a considerable amount of additional height from the view point of openness of a novel.

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