

## **The Novel as an Interpretation of Life<sup>1</sup>**

Kabita Khadka

Instructor at Department of English, Koshi Saint James College, Itahari

email: *kindkabita@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

The novel presents and captures the remarkable moments of human life presenting its different aspects even if it is called fiction. A novel, in this regard, interprets life in the form of plot, characters, costumes, and through many more things. This research paper aims at investigating how novels interpret human life through their presentation of characters, plot, language, design and the narratives centered on human societies. For this, the study has employed qualitative methodology, and data in the study were brought from secondary sources. Those secondary sources included different journal articles, books, novels, and other publications related to the novel as a literary genre. The major finding of the present study includes that novel has the specific power to portray different ups and downs of human life; it is an interpretation of human life; the novel works as a discourse of life; and it recaptures the spirit of time through different incidents.

*Keywords:* discourse, novel, spirit of time

### **Introduction**

The word novel has been derived to English from the Italian word *novella* which means new (Gillespie, 1967). The novel is one of the most powerful forms that emerged in all literatures of the world, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries. It is a literary type of a certain length that presents a 'story' in the fictionalized form (Taylor, 1981). Although it is a stretched narrative, it is different from the short story and the genre called novelette as the extent of the novel covers a great range of characters, greater complications of the plot, and fuller development of its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, the greater complication of the plot (or plots), fuller development of situation than the other

shorter genres (Abrams, 1998). The novel is often described as a "pocket theatre" that consists of not only the plots and characters but also costumes, scenery, and all the other accessories of drama without the need for actual representation on the stage (Crawford, 1895). Reeve and Runge (2007) defined the novel as a depiction of actual life and behaviors of the time in which it was written.

The novel is a narrative work of prose fiction that describes the story of particular experiences of a man over a considerable length (Watt, 2001). The inner feelings and thoughts which can be complex to conflicting ideas are particularly reconnoitered in the novel (Temmerman, 2014). Novels support freedom that is beyond the experimental

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forms of scholarly research writing. Due to that freedom, it has the power of delivering how things are, might be, or can be, and it invents new ways of seeing as well (Beyes et al., 2019). Though the novel is specifically a work of fiction, many novels do knit the actual human antiquity (Groot, 2009). Therefore, the novel can be regarded as an effective means for the description of life which consists of elements like plot, character, dialogue, time of action, and criticism of life for the total cohesive effect to be reflected in it (James, 2011).

The novel is extended narrative fiction generally written in prose in the form of a book. It presents the holistic aspects of human life whereas a short story merely shows the particular aspects of life (Kirby, 2002). Similarly, the novel, the most artistic and democratic genre, presents a conflicting, contradictory, and diverse voice of the society, which is a powerful instrument to articulate philosophical, historical, social, cultural, and moral facets of life (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Mostly, novels are committed to communicating the personal experiences of an individual crafting a complex representation of people from various walks of life as they live in. The novels explore the inner psyche, thoughts, feelings, and sentiments of an individual so as to reflect the complete picture of society. The most interesting aspect of writing a novel is to equally respect all voices of the people. Such space is less available in other genres of literature. As there are several characters, they truly have diverse knowledge, point of view, and thoughts, in contrast to poetry that is considered one of the most autocratic genre and has given the

honor to the almost dominant voice of the speaker.

On this background, this paper has tried to explore how novel represents human life in literature.

### **Method**

The primary objective of this study is to find out the ways a novel interprets human life. To carry out this, a qualitative method has been used. Secondary sources of data were consulted. The study has consulted previous studies to support the claim that is made in each theme. For it, different academic papers, websites, journal articles, and seminar papers have been studied. The study has brought the claims and arguments from the studies of Pearce and Littlejohn (1997), Kirby (2002), Carr (1986), Eder (2010), Cronin and Berger (2015), Abrams (1998), Albrecht (1954), Carroll (1987), Cuddon (2012), and Fedsova (2015).

Moreover, in the result and discussion section of the study, different themes have been divided so that every aspect could be given due emphasis. Moreover, each theme is a claim and it has been exhaustively supported by argumentation. The argumentation has been presented by citing the assertions of previous studies so that there will be no problem with reliability and validity since the drawback, according to many researchers, is biases in qualitative research.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Types Representing Varieties of Life**

There are different types of novel as novels come in all styles imaginable. Among them, a few of the major types of

novels are mystery, science fiction, fantasy, horror, thriller, romance, historical, and realist fiction (Wyatt et al., 2007). The mystery novels rotate around a crime that should be solved. The typical format will have a detective as the protagonist, who is surrounded by a group of characters who help to solve the crime (Walker, 2004). Some of the best-known mystery novels are *Nancy drew*, *Sherlock holmes*, and *And then there were none*.

The next type of novel is science fiction and fantasy which is based on hypothetical world-building (Ketterer, 1992). The science-fiction inclines to imagine a world that is different due to technology while fantasy is focused on the world of magic (Slusser & Rabkin, 1993). Some of such popular novels are *Lord of the rings*, *The chronicles of Narnia*, and *Harry*. The next types of novels are horror/thriller novels which are sometimes joined with other genres, mostly mystery or science fiction. The sense of fear, suspense, and psychological horror in the reader are the characteristics of these horror novels (Carroll, 1987). Examples include *The count of Monte Cristo*, *Heart of darkness*, and *Stephen king*.

Likewise, romantic novels are the next type of novels. The end goal, the occasional scandal, intense emotions, and love between the characters are the features of romantic novels (Nissen, 2009). Similarly, historical novels include fictional or semi-fictional stories related to historical figures (Gearhart, 2019). The iconic creations of historical fiction are *Ivanhoe*, *Gone with the wind*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Likewise, realist fiction on the other hand is fiction that simply represents things truthfully,

without artistic flourishes (Rignall, 2016). All these types of the novel fictionalize different facets of human existence and actions.

### **Elements Correlating Life**

A novel is a narrative piece of work written in prose form that acutely reflects a particular human experience that has a substantial length (Newton, 1995). In other words, it is one of the powerful media of art sharing human emotions, experiences, sentiments, joy, and pain in the form of artistic and creative language. People often regard novels as a synonym for fiction. However, novel is a specific genre of fiction that falls under the domain of fiction, an umbrella term to the novel. It has several elements such as story, plot, setting, character, narrator, point of view, language, and style besides theme (Taylor, 1981).

The novels are written at a certain length. However, there is not any hard and fast rule regarding the length of the novel. It is a widely accepted fact that the novel is written from 10,000 to 40,000 or more words; and a novel that is written above 40,000 words is considered a full-length novel. Similarly, the plot/story is an important feature of the novel. Generally, the plot refers to the chain of events maintaining coherence and cohesion having a definite beginning, elaborative middle, and proper ending in a novel. This is also defined as a systematic arrangement of events and actions following the rule of the story such as initial incidents, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement or closing action to arouse pity and fear in readers (Childs & Fowler, 2006). There are different types of stories,

for instance, simple plots, complex (the flashback technique), and the story written in the stream of consciousness techniques.

Moreover, characters are the most crucial components of a novel. It is through characters, the story in a novel goes ahead. All the characters are imaginative; however, they are true to life in most cases. In other words, they are like the characters of blood and flesh. There are diverse characters in terms of their role and nature. For instance; in terms of role, characters can be distinguished as protagonists, antagonists, and supporting characters. Whereas, regarding their nature, they are round, complex, static, and as such (Eder, 2010).

Furthermore, dialogues are a crucial feature of the novel. Through dialogue, the characters express emotions, moods, intentions, attitudes, and actions that impart actual life effect or reveals complications, show psychological development, and finally the author's opinions add life to the story. Similarly, the setting and atmosphere, as the name suggests, refers to where and when the events occurred. They play a harmonious role to make the story rich and contextual in terms of meaning and connection to life.

Likewise, point of view is related to the first, second, and third-person narrators in telling the story in a novel. For instance; the biographical and autobiographical stories are written in the first-person point of view; whereas the remaining types of novels are generally written in the third person. The third person narrator's point of view is further divided into omniscient points of view and limited points of view (Lejeune, Tomarken &

Tomarken, 1977). Finally, theme, a central idea or concept is regarded as another powerful element of the novel, contributed by different other elements of a novel, such as characters, dialogues, plot, narrative, scene, and atmosphere to present through and derive the meaning from the novel (Cuddon, 2012).

### **Mirroring the Society**

The novel is the reflection of life as well as a mirror of human society as it represents the social, political, cultural, and historical growth of the society it portrays. The statement that "novel is a mirror of life" can be strange at first as in the novel there is a clear sequence of action and an interesting story; but life is boring and pointless on most occasions (Tiffin, 1978). However, it can be called a mirror of life as it reflects on various aspects of events that people face in their lives.

For example, even the futuristic novel *The hunger games* reflects life although the world is alien to the modern human being. Here, the protagonist, Katniss, struggles with issues like love, care, family, and death. The struggle of Katniss is the reflection of teenagers who face difficulties in adjusting to life (Bland & Strotmann, 2014). Though Katniss is in an alien world, she is human; so, she loves, fears and does not understand things. She is the representation of many teenagers for whom the world is alien until they learn to adjust to this world.

Likewise, *Of mice and men* is another novel that reflects the nature of human existence with a true reflection of human society (Sabolick, 2005). It narrates the experience of George Milton and Lennie Small who were displaced migrant

workers who moved from place to place in California searching for jobs. Almost all the characters including George, Lennie Candy, Crooks, and Curley's wife at one point or the dreams had to live a different life (Levenson, 2005). For example, Curley's wife wanted to be a movie star, and George and Lennie dreamt of possessing a farm. Through these characters and their actions, this novel projects the friendship, dreams, hope, tragedy, sense of freedom, and the importance of relationships. These features are the nature of human beings. So, we can say that the novel reflects human life in fictional world.

Similarly, another novel, the *Red badge of courage* is a war novel written by American author Stephen Crane narrating the story of young soldier Henry Fleming who ran from the battle field (Levenson, 1995). To overcome the shame, he desired for a wound 'a red badge of courage' to counteract his cowardice (Binder, 1978). This novel reflects the inner story of the protagonist which is more the portrayal of the psychological fear. This work of fiction also explores the maturation, heroism, cowardice, and the indifference of nature.

Correspondingly, projection of human life as though it happened is another feature of the novel in which the novelist tries to reflect social norms and values in such a way that the events depicted in as the novel read like real-life anecdotes. For example, the novel *The good earth* by Pearl S. Buke (1931) projects the life of a typical Chinese character called Wang Lung. In the novel, Wang Lung suffers from poverty at the beginning. It reads like a real story of farmers in China in the 20th century as modern cultivation techniques were not

implemented on one side and on the other side drought and over-rain were causative factors for the farmers to suffer from (Cevasco, 1967). On the other side of the spectrum, when Wong Lung had enough from his farm, he started keeping a concubine which was prevalent during the later part of the 20th century in China.

Therefore, the novel does not always produce something fictitious; but most of the time, it depicts human society as it really exists. It is because the dialogue characters speak in the novel do not come from the vacuum; rather those linguistic chunks that people speak in human societies are picked up by the novelists and enabled the characters to use those in the form of dialogues. The actions are just some modifications of the real life action of the people and many fictional settings are the extended forms of the real world itself.

### **Expressing the Spirit of its Age**

The novelists, like the creators of other literary genres, reflect human society through the medium of language in an imaginative way (Kellman, 2000). Looking from this sense, it looks as though the novelists are the change-makers of the society by reflecting on their period, and articulating innovative ideas and attitudes (Albrecht, 1954). Similarly, Fedosova (2015) argued that time is one of the significant components of life across the globe which was beautifully seized and also reflected by the spirit of the time in a literary text. For instance, a novel written in the 20th century provides an alternative ending to the story, metaphorically suggesting the uncertainty of life. Supporting this stance, Kracauer (1966)

opined that a novelist can assist the totality of the historical spirit of the time; for instance, the sickness of Germany was reflected in Thomas Mann's *Doctor faustus* and Gunter Grass's *Tin drum*. Evelyn Waugh's trilogy *Sword of honour* examined the moral decline of English society after the World War II. Therefore, I believe that 'fiction' is the most influential genre to catch a certain period of the past and so it can make the time and reality immortal and eternal because the 'fact' only exists for a second or it takes a certain period.

Moreover, a novel can play an instrumental role to understand the bygone days. For instance, Wagner et al. (1987) argued that Hemingway's *The sun also rises* was highly successful to catch the destructive period of World War I. Elaborating the same idea, let's have another example of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel and short stories which seized and beautifully presented the period of the American 'Jazz Age'. These examples show that literary texts, especially novel, are useful to study the spirit of the time, social values, norms, tradition, and religious economic and political situations. Likewise, J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (Kheirkhah & Pishkar, 2018) and Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954) depicted the unrest and bewilderment of the adults caused by the World War II (Londe, 2007). Another beautiful example was how beat-generation novelists such as Saul Bellow and Philip Roth artistically crafted the beat movement and social evil prevailed in that period (Cronin & Berger, 2015). Most importantly, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin examined the racial issues, White supremacy and White hegemony over the

Blacks. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, every writer/novelist tries to see society from the perspective of time- that is the spirit of the time because of the demand of the time.

Therefore, different genres of literature capture the most beautiful or remarkable times in one's life and the novel is one of them to capture such moments. Because of the content of the novel, many changes have been witnessed in human society since they are the agents of changes. On the other side, a novel captures the artistic moment of human society, their culture, people's identity, social way of life, people's expectations, and human nature. Hence, many novels in different languages have been written to reflect the spirit of the time.

### **Discourse in the Novel**

The novel, one of the influential democratic and artistic genres of literature, depicts the multiple voices of diverse walks of life. For example, Bakhtin (2005) argued that discourse is not merely a system of abstract linguistic categories; but it is an ideologically produced world perspective that is reflected in the multiple characters in the novel. He further opined that the novel reflects the entire aspects of human life as Lawrence understands the novel as a 'book of life'. Influenced by the Bakhtinian notion of the novel, Fonseka (2014) asserted that the novel is a word game, arranged creatively, artistically, and thoughtfully in a sequence of heteroglossia conditions displaying speech acts, human emotions, feelings, sentiments, and world views that constitute a narrative sharing different context with the readers. He further took the reference from Bakhtin's words and contended that words are

utilized nomologically in the verse as if they have no relationship to human, social, cultural, historical, and economic realities of life. On the other hand, in the novel, words are uttered by characters dialogically to represent the multiple realities of the society in their particular context. Following the above logic, I also believe that the novel is an appropriate genre representing contradictory voices, ideologies, and the world view of society through the medium of dialogue.

Moreover, Naughton (2015) claimed that Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic novel was even beneficial to know the struggles of everyday realities and respecting own opinions among students in the classroom. He further opined that a dialogic novel also aids to challenge authorities, injustices, exploitation, promote community learning, and build critical thinking by creating open-ended discussion forums. Additionally, applying the Bakhtinian lens, Pandya and Mills (2019) contended that the Carnavalesque notion in the novel dismantles all the hierarchies at least temporarily liberates the individuals from external and internal fear. Because of it, I am also convinced that dialogic novels provide the same space to all the characters to put their opinions and arguments forgetting the social, cultural, economic, or all sorts of barriers among the people. Earlier, Gee (1996) argued that discourses played an amicable role to comprehend social realities and ways of behaving, being, and thinking in a written piece of prose especially in a novel. Therefore, it is believed that discourse is the source of constructing knowledge; and academic discourses that are used for pedagogical objectives are as important as

the characters in the novel constructing knowledge about the social realities.

### **Conclusion**

A novel is a beautiful projection of human life in the form of a plot in which characters express different utterances according to the situation they confront on one side and the other role assigned by the novelist. Among many genres of literature, it is through novels that the portrayal of human feelings, sufferings, ups and downs, and many more things are expressed by the novelist. Because of such things, a novel is called a reflection of human life since whatever happens, a novelist depicts all the incidents in the form of a story which can be different according to the custom, tradition, way of life, and many more things related to life.

Similarly, different types of novel show different aspects of human life and human society. For example, a mysterious novel shows a secretive type of story or plot that is revealed at the end of the novel. Similarly, there are other types of novel, such as science fiction and fantasy, horror and thriller, romance, historical, realistic fiction, to name a few; and they also portray similar types of the story through different characters in different settings. Moreover, the different features of the novel make it a distinct genre of literature. Those features comprise plot, story, setting, characters, narrator, point of view, language, style, and theme. As types of novel project types of content, special features of it make is very realistic on the one hand and on the other it projects life in the form of fiction.

A novel mirrors human society. It is because whatever incidents happen in

human society, the novelist picks it up and presents it in the form of a novel. It is not the novelists who present a particular point of view, it is the characters in the novel through which the novelist presents a particular point of view. Like a poem can be the product of extreme imagination ( for example W. B. Yeats's "Leda and the Swan"), a novel is a true reflection of incidents that happened in human life, for example, *Perl harbor*. In the same way, it is one of the facilitators for social change

since the point of view presented in the novel can be adopted by the people and people from other places also get to know about it. In this regard, novelists are change makers. Moreover, as characters present their point of view in the form of dialogues, information is distributed dialogically. On the other side, the novel is a phenomenon that captures the beautiful and remarkable aspect of human life; so, it is also called a spirit of the time.

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