The narrative technique in *The Home and the World*

The novel tells a story in many ways. In fact, the fictional technique of story-telling has diverse manifestations. Besides the epic or direct method, there are two other popular processes—the epistolary process and the autobiographical. There is still another way to weave the texture of the story. This is the first person narration. The novelist does not here directly relate or develop the story, but makes his characters speak out individually to build up his theme. The novel, in which different characters are made to narrate their experiences, feelings and situations, is known as the first person narrative.

In the first person narrative, different persons relate incidents or situations in their own person. They speak in the first person and view and judge from their own specific angle. It is their separate narratives, spoken in the first person, that form the total fictional theme. In this connection, the first person narrative is to be distinguished from the autobiographical novel. In the autobiographical novel, the speaker is single, mostly the novelist, who is also the hero of the story. He is the sole observer, scrutiniser and story-teller, and everything is viewed and presented from his particular view-point. He also speaks in the first person, but he is the only person to speak. But, in the first person narrative, the speaker is not one. Different characters speak, no doubt in the first person, but with difference in approach and assessment. This is autobiographical revelations, quite unlike what is in the autobiographical novel, vary and show the varied aspects of the same matter. Of course, repetitions are not unlikely in, rather natural to, such a first person narrative. After all, different persons may be found to speak on the same matter, no doubt from unlike angles. This may well involve some sort of sluggishness in story-telling. But, at the same time, it achieves the study of psychology which is always a salient feature in modern fiction. Rabindranath's ***The Home and the World*** is no direct or epic pattern of fiction. The great master does not relate or describe anything directly and personally. He does the whole story-telling through his three important characters, who form the centre of action and interest in the novel. In fact, each of these three characters—Bimala, Nikhil and Sandip—is employed by the novelist to speak out individually. Through her or his self-narration, the story is unfolded, developed and brought to a conclusion. It is obvious that each of them speaks in the first person and presents the matter or studies the situations or characters from her or his distinct angle of vision.

The Home and the World comprises twelve chapters. Some chapters contain more than one self-narration. The total number of such narratives is twenty-three. Bimala is found to speak on ten occasions, while Nikhil and Sandip speak eight times and five times respectively. Of course, the opening and concluding narratives come from Bimala.

Although set against the momentous freedom movement in India in 1905, ***The Home and the World*** is a psychology oriented novel. The basic advantage of the first person narrative is well exploited by the novelist in this respect. Each narrative well reveals the nature of the speaker concerned as also her or his attitude or angle of vision. Of course, events and situations, constituting the action or theme of the novel, are related in such narratives, but the most engrossing element—human psychology—is well brought out particularly in these. It is not immaterial to mention here that in each first person narrative, the thematic situation is found less woven, while the speaker's mood of mind and personality are more expanded. In fact, out of the thin texture of fictional setting and story, this has made a deep probe into the inner world and lightened the dark corridor of the individual mind. This has brought ***The Home and the World*** close not merely to the psychological but also to the stream of consciousness technique in novel-writing.

Bimala's opening story, no doubt, sets the entire background of her life— her conjugal happiness with Nikhil. Psychological twist is not much here and she speaks out as a simple happy wife of a highly aristocratic and wealthy family. This also bears out her great regard for her husband and fidelity to the rigidity of the family of her father-in-law. Her husband's idealism to make her an ideal woman by bringing her out of the pent up home to the wide world and her reluctant surrender to his desire only to appease him are all narrated here. At least Bimala's narrative in the opening chapter has more of story and little
of psychology.

It was Sandip's arrival that tossed the quiet home of Bimala and Nikhil. The national awakening, steered by the visitor, had a new awakening in her, and she came out of her home to the world outside. Bimala's second story is mainly about her reaction to his glamorous appearance and all glowing speeches. Her hero-worship of him, her personal view of the role of Indian womanhood and her fascination for him fill up the major part of this. In fact, her sharply stirred psychology overweighs material events here. Her subsequent narratives contain, besides some incidental matters, her intense problem, her inner conflict, the pull between her home and the world, between her calm domesticity and the sparkling call of ***swadeshi.*** Her last narrative is a sort of retrospection,, a self-analysis, a repentance and an anxious anticipation of her fate. "But my feet refused to leave the window in quest of it. Was I not awaiting my fate?"

Nikhil's narratives are less emotive, more theoretic, idealistic- and fully introspective. In these narratives is marked his approach to life and the world around him, and this seldom seems practical. He is found to speak out his heart, diagnoses his own pang and realizes his own error in understanding and judgment. His statement is quite frank and self-analytical: "Men, such as I, possessed with one idea, are, indeed, at one with those who can manage to agree with us; but those who do not, can only get with us by cheating us. It is our unyielding obstinacy, which drives even the simplest to tortuous ways. In torturing to manufacture a helpmate, we spoil a wife." Of course, his assessment of Sandip is definitely very sober and appropriate, and not sentimental like his Bimala's: "His (Sandip's) intellect is keen, but his nature is coarse and so he glorifies his selfish lusts under high-sounding names."

Sandip's narratives distinctly mark his differences from Nikhil's or Bimala's. They have nothing of idealism, nothing of self-study to determine his own deficiency or conflict of mind, for he seems to have nothing .of the same. Sandip's narratives are least intended for any developmental effect of the story-element. These are mainly his blatant self-advertisement and Machiavellian ascertainment. In fact, he speaks constantly of his own self, and is eager to establish whatever is his outlook or aspiration. He does not hesitate to eulogise his method to win over others, including his little Queen Bee, Bimala—"My poor little Queen Bee is living in a dream. She knows not which way she is treading. It would not be safe to awaken her before the time. It is best for me to pretend to be equally unconscious." This smacks of intrigue distinctly. More naked and aggressive is his outspoken emphasis— But the lesson of the whole world is: "That is really mine which I can snatch away. My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force." Finally, there is the poetic charm of all these narratives. The poet in Rabindranath is all operative here and makes his speakers rich in poetical graces. Here ***The Home and the World*** is more a subjective lyric than an objective story-telling.