

# The “Panchatantra” Narrative Structure and the Writing of Indian Women’s Dilemma in *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda*

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Dharamvir Bharati’s *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda* connects the text with the social reality, through the multiple narrative perspectives of the “Panchatantra” Narrative Structure and the love stories, and narrates the survival and spiritual dilemma of Indian women in the transformation of India’s modernization. The novel depicts in both content and form the plight of Indian women’s physical and spiritual dependence under the traditional concepts of arranged marriages, caste marriages, dowry system and patriarchal will, and shows the process of women’s body and self-consciousness gradually moving from vitality to extinction.

*Keywords:* *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda*, Dharamvir Bharati, The “Panchatantra” narrative structure, dilemma writing

## Introduction

Dharamvir Bharati’s novel, *The Seventh Horse of the Sun God (Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda)*, is a poignant exploration of the romantic narratives within the fabric of post-independence India. The novel, published in 1951, captured a period of transition in Hindi literature, as it moved from modern to contemporary literature. *The Seventh Horse of the Sun God*, as one of the masterpieces of experimental fiction in Hindi (Nagendra, 2015, p. 699), has attracted scholarly attention for its “serial insertion” narrative structure and the author’s intent to reflect social realities through literature. Agyeya noted that the novel’s narrative structure, which interweaves a central plot with a myriad of subplots, and its humorous, straightforward narrative language, serve not merely as entertainment but are integral to the author’s creative purpose: to humorously depict the struggles of post-independence India’s transition from tradition to modernity. “The exquisite manipulation the plot, the courageous acceptance of profound social essence, and the unwavering faith in the future bestow upon this novel its significance” (Bharati, 2018, pp. 9-10).

While existing interpretations have touched upon Bharati’s writing skills and creative intentions, they have not effectively integrated content, form, and intent of the novel. In essence, current research has overlooked the role of the novel’s narrative structure in generating and discussing the love story, which weakens the novel’s “experimental” attempt to refer to and influence Indian society and to reconnect literature with society. This paper focuses on the “serial insertion” narrative structure, scrutinizing its utilization of the stories of two female characters, Jumna and Sati. Through their experiences with free love and arranged marriage, the paper explores

the complexities and etiology of the Indian middle-class female condition, thereby re-establishes the link between literature and reality.

### The "Serial Insertion" Structure with Multiple Narrative Perspectives

The "serial insertion" narrative framework with multiple narrative perspectives is a distinctive feature of the narrative style in this novel. Based on the critical inheritance of the Hindi literary tradition, Bharati experiments with narrative forms to reflect upon and contemplate the complex social realities of post-independence India.

If the text is considered the core of the novel and real life the outermost layer, then the novel's narrative can be seen as having a three-layered structure, extending from its core to its outermost layer. In the inner narrative framework, Malik tells the love story of Jumna and Dena, of himself and Sati in the third-person limited perspective, depicting the life of the Indian middle class, which is the core and cornerstone of the novel.

The intermediate narrative framework, proximate to reality, encompasses the introduction of Malik and discussions among the characters following the stories of the "tragedy of love". These discussions address the plight of women in the Indian middle class and delve into the Potential causes of women's plight, such as arranged marriages, caste marriages, and the dowry system.

Malik's viewpoints directly disrupt the narrative process to comment on the narration itself, blending narrative and critical discourse within the text. Bharati, through Malik, explicitly expresses his realist creative purpose: the selection of themes and content, as well as the design of the plot are all in the service of reproducing, reflecting on, and transforming Indian society.

Malik uses the entertaining nature of literature to serve serious contemplation, stating that the choice of the theme for the love stories is based on readers' interests. "Love is chosen as the theme of the story because romantic love stories have deeply fascinated our minds, and we have no intention of listening to other themes besides love stories" (Bharati, 2018, p. 78). However, these love stories are not romantic tales of talented scholars and beautiful ladies, but rather a form of "neti love" stories.<sup>1</sup> By determining 'this is not love, nor is this love,' it locates the role of love in society. "If love does not promote social progress and personal development, then love is meaningless. This is the truth, and what novels, poems, and magazines call love is nothing but a gorgeous lie, nothing more" (Bharati, 2018, p. 78).

After selecting the theme, he turns to a public discussion of the relationship between plot design and social reality. Holding the views of literary representation and practicality of literature, Malik's plot settings are conclusion-oriented. "No matter whether the story is romantic or progressive, historical or ahistorical, secular or sectarian, it should always have a conclusion, and this conclusion should be beneficial to society" (Bharati, 2018, p. 16). And almost every time, before the story is told, Malik does draw some conclusions about the story and provokes discussions among everyone: such as the direct connection between love and economy, class status; the dangers of the dowry system, and the oppression faced by the lower middle class in the form of the feudal system and capitalism.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "neti" directly translates as "not (this), not (that)", and is taken from the Indian philosophical classic *Upanisad*. As a way of cognizing and expressing the supreme being of Hinduism, Brahman, "neti" is a way of constant negation, also known as "the method of masking",

The outermost narrative framework is closest to reality. "I" break the fourth wall, speaking directly to the reader, thus making a connection between the text and reality at the level of narrative form. Both Malik and "I" have the ability to traverse the narrative frameworks. Malik moves between the inner and intermediate narrative framework, where in the inner narrative he is a participant in the story; in the outer narrative, he becomes the storyteller, with absolute dominance over the deletion of the story's content and the switching of the story's order. "I", on the other hand, moves between the outer narrative and real life. "I" am neither the reader nor the real author Bharati, but a potential author created by Bharati. The potential author's direct intervention from the perspective of content and form demonstrates their "presence" within the text. This "presence" gives "me" the ability to break the fourth wall and speak directly to the readers.

The three-tiered narrative frameworks constitute the novel's "serial insertion" narrative structure. However, this is not an original creation of Bharati, but rather an influence from Indian narrative traditions. Through this, the author is able to conduct heterogeneous textual experiments with different narrative perspectives and styles within the three narrative frameworks, and complete the integration of all plots, forming a complete story.

This narrative structure offers readers an enjoyable and relaxed reading experience, but Bharati does not stop there. Novel writing for him is by no means for filling idle hours or seeking transient amusement; it is meant to "pierce the heart" and "prompt readers to engage in deep reflection" (Bharati, 2018, p. आठ). The narrative structure he employs serves the purpose of criticizing reality, which is Bharati's critical realism starting from the literary form.

### **The Plight of Women Under the Caste System: The Tragedy of Jumna's Free Love**

Jumna epitomizes the young women of the lower middle class in India. Affected by economic status, the lower middle class possesses fewer educational resources. This situation leads to a younger generation that, on one hand, adopts the Western modern values of freedom and equality, while on the other hand, remains entangled in the constraints of traditional culture. In terms of love and marriage consciousness, they aspire to free love and autonomous marriage, but when they get married, they are more likely to accept arranged marriages (Liao, 2011, p. 69).

The content of the inner narrative and the ensuing discussions between Malik and "us" in the intermediate narrative reconstruct the love story between Jumna and Dena, as well as analyze the causes of the tragedy of free love in India.

In the first story, "The Repayment of Salt," Jumna, the neighbor of Malik, and the young man Dena, both belong to the lower-middle class of Indian society. They are in love with each other but their caste status and economic capabilities do not match, and both elders do not agree to the marriage. The second story, "The Horseshoe," tells the story of Jumna. she is forced by her parents to marry a frail old man, and after the marriage listens to the horseman's advice to make a wish with the help of a horseshoe to give birth to a son. Soon after the death of the old man, Jumna becomes a rich young widow.

The inner narrative, through its plot and characters, actively imitates Indian society. The two narrative structures work to replicate and reflect upon the love story of Jumna and Dena, and the tragedy of free love in India. Dena and Jumna engage in free love, but both sets of elders disapprove of their marriage. The fundamental reason lies in the mismatch of their caste and economic status. Caste has become a crucial metric

for Indian people to gauge their own caste affiliation and the identity of others or non-caste individuals. The caste system views marriage as the primary connection between the caste domain and kinship relations (Dumont, 2017, p. 194). Jumna's family caste is pure and holds a certain prestige within her caste. Her sub-caste is considered higher than Dena's, and their marriage would be classified as "hypogamous", which would undoubtedly dilute the purity of the female family's caste and undermine their status. Not only is there no precedent for such hypogamous marriage in Jumna's family, but the image of Dena's father, Maheshwar, who is "combative, greedy, and lascivious," and "strikes fear into the whole neighborhood," also makes Jumna's parents cautious about this marriage.

Furthermore, the dowry is decisive in marriage. The dowry has become a primary cause of the low social status of women in India. In the Indian marriage concept that emphasizes fertility value, 20-year-old Jumna is already considered an older woman. Although her dowry is not explicitly mentioned in the novel, Malik's narration suggests that such an amount is already a burden for an Indian middle-class family. Jumna's father is just a bank clerk, and most of his salary is spent on social interactions and religious festivals, "already unable to spare the minimum amount of money for marriage" (Bharati, 2018, p. 19).

The psychological gap between the honor and mission of maintaining caste identity and the inability to pay the dowry makes Jumna's mother disapprove of the marriage. Mother proposes the only way of having Dena marry into their family. For the female family, the practice of the groom marrying into the bride's family provides the possibility of reversing the obligations and rights in marriage, both resolving the taboo of the hypogamous marriage and transferring the responsibility of giving the dowry. "When (the groom's family) gives the dowry, then the marriage will be completed. Otherwise, even if Jumna marries a Bodhi tree, she will never marry down" (Bharati, 2018, p. 42). Thus, Jumna and Dena's free love cannot break through the barriers of caste and dowry, and their relationship comes to an end.

If the inner narrative of their love story presents to the readers the predicament of free love in India, and readers have already formed a reflection on the causes of the tragedy of free love while reading their love story, then the discussion and analysis formed by the intermediate narrative provides readers with a space to exchange views with the characters in the text, while creating an immediate sense of participation in the discussion between readers and the characters.

In the intermediate narrative, "I" recalled the discussions between Malik and "us". Malik, "me" and other friends demonstrates the stance and attitude of middle-class men towards the subjectivity of young men and women in Indian free love, which is a product of the blending of gender and class ideologies. Malik acts as the central character of the intermediate narrative, leading the storytelling and discussion process of the love story. He serves as both the narrative voice of the inner narrative and the narrative perspective of the intermediate narrative. Both the narrative voice and the narrative vision contain the cognition and views of the agent of action towards the event.

After saying that Malik introduces a reflection on the relationship between individual and the culture and economy of a particular society, where all the inner emotions of the individual are "not free from the economic structure" and where the "poisonous customs and traditions of the middle class can mingle together to affect us all, leaving We are like evil spirits. Our dreams of nobility and greatness are shattered, spreading in us a strange senseless insensitivity" (Bharati, 2018, p. 38).

Although Dena belongs to the middle class, he is "simple, gentle, and upright, and liked by everyone in the neighborhood" (Bharati, 2018, p. 19), Malik believes that Dena's "filial piety and integrity" is a lamentable blind obedience. As an individual living in such environment, true integrity is to reject all the moral decay and all the false virtues imposed by the old system, "because the individual and the environment are two sides of the same coin... If one only distances himself from morally corrupt behavior without fighting the entire system, then it is just a cover for cowardice." "The most painful thing is when people do not realize this and keeps going round and round like a cow" (Bharati, 2018, pp. 38-39).

The close connection between a woman's age, fertility value, and dowry has made Jumna's parents increasingly anxious about their daughter's marriage. That's when a distant relative came along as a matchmaker for his nephew, Bukoda Dewar. Bukoda is only four or five years younger than Jumna's mother, and he is in need of a third wife because the first two wives had died. The matchmaker made great efforts to show Dewar's financial strength and caste status in both behavior and rhetoric—she took out Bukoda's earrings and said that Bukoda came from a prestigious and ancient family and that there were no other relatives, in-laws, or sisters-in-law in the house. Every room had a kitchen. The family was equipped with horses and carriages. "The girl (who marries him) will live like a queen" (Bharati, 2018, p. 28). Bukoda has dissolved the concerns of Jumna's parents about caste and dowry, ensuring the caste interests and benefits of the natal family. Jumna's parents quickly regard him as the most suitable son-in-law. Despite Malik's view that the difference between Diver and Jumna is like "the difference between a mottled old wall with peeling plaster and a terrace adorned with basil" (Bharati, 2018, p. 30).

Due to her economically dependent position, Jumna easily internalizes and even extends her husband's patriarchal consciousness after marriage, considering child-birth and caring for the core family members as the wife's duty. Her parents become her natal family, and their status as core family members are replaced by her husband and children. After Jumna's marriage, her father is informed that the bank is short of more than a hundred rupees during the inventory, and if he do not make up the difference by the next day, he would be sent to jail. Although Jumna lent the money to father without hesitation, she has already started thinking: "Unfortunate event has already happened... The first two wives have already taken away a lot of property from my husband, and now if I also take money from my home to help my parents, what will be left for my children?" (Bharati, 2018, pp. 29-30).

Malik points out that "we must always remember that a woman is first and foremost a mother, and only then does she take on other roles. She is born to be a mother. Nature progresses in this way. This is the greatness of nature" (Bharati, 2018, p. 30). Malik's views and Jumna's thoughts converge at the patriarchal consciousness, linking female reproduction to the laws of nature and promoting an essentialist female reproductive will and role.

The value judgment of Jumna's experience under the gaze of the middle-class male perspective reflects a kind of hypocrisy of the superior. They sympathize with Jumna's plight. In Sham's view, Jumna is "a microcosm of 90% of Indian girls today, who cannot marry the man they love, and whose fathers do not have enough dowry savings, and can only get so-called education or relief or pleasure from the romantic love stories of adolescence" (Bharati, 2018, p. 26). But this sympathy leads to the consciousness that regards fertility as the ultimate belonging of women's value.

In the tragedy of Jumna's free love, on one hand author depicts the tragedy of Jumna's love for Dena through the inner narrative, which restores the constraints faced by lower-middle class women in India from the caste status and the high dowry system. From Jumna's experience of romantic relationship, marriage and widowhood, Jumna is transferred from her parent's family to her husband's family as an object of male power, and her self-consciousness cannot be explored. She achieves an improvement in her economic status and some freedom, and in ending she achieves a "serenity and fulfillment" in the Indian traditional cultural evaluation system. On the other hand, the author depicts middle-class Indian men's interpretations of traditional Indian culture and women's liberation through the intermediate narratives, which show the middle-class men's viewpoints on these issues during the early years of India's independence. Together, these two aspects imply the powerlessness of Indian women in the face of male power's control over real resources and ideology, and the dilemma of self-awakening and breakthrough.

### **The Plight of Women Under the Class System: The Tragedy of Sati's Arranged Marriage**

Compared to Jumna, Sati is more unfortunate, with fewer social resources, placing her in an even lower position in India. Sati lives with Jaman Tagore since childhood. Jaman was a low-caste soldier who found the three- or four-year-old Sati when he passed through one of the villages that had been completely destroyed by the war. Thereafter Jaman took her with him and brought her up. Jaman lost a hand while serving in the military and could no longer continue his ancestral profession of barbering. Then he uses his pension to start a business making and selling soap. Not only did Sati have to take on the job of soap-making, but she was also responsible for delivering the soap to the shopkeepers and collecting the money for the soap at the end of each half-month of the Indian calendar.

In the story "The Black Handled Knife", Sati and Malik fall in love with each other but Jaman accepts money from Mahesar to marry Sati off to him. and Sati stabbed him with the black knife handle she always carries. She suggests to Malik to elope but was forcibly taken away by Jaman and Maheshwar, who has been alerted. That night, Sati and Jaman disappear and later rumors of Sati's death spread throughout the neighborhood. Malik feel responsible for Sati's death and punishes himself with self-loathing. After a period of depression, Malik see Sati and Jaman again. By this time, they have become beggars, with Sati also carrying a child. Though Sati expresses great hatred for Malik, Malik suddenly relieves himself at the sight of the living Sati and regains his vitality.

In the love story of Jumna, Malik is a bystander, but in Sati's emotional feeling, he is a direct participant. Compared with being a bystander who analyzes and evaluates the ending of Jumna's love story from the macro perspective of culture and economy, in his own story with Sati, Malik focuses more on narrating his own experience from the more secretive and micro perspective of his personal psychology. The inner narrative and the intermediate narrative together reconstruct the emotional experiences of Sati and Malik and provide a self-psychological analysis of Malik.

Sati's experience centers on the process of the female body and individual consciousness from vitality to silence in a patriarchal society. Engaged in physical labor such as soap making and delivery, Sati develops a healthy physique and a confident, independent character, "radiant with an unyielding self-confidence in her conversation" (Bharati, 2018, p. 63), which is a kind of beauty full of vitality from the lower of society. In

Malik's opinion, this diligent and independent personality is something that the educated and sentimental Lili and the uneducated, repressed Jumna do not possess. Labor gives Sati such a vital personality and emotions, rather than "the lifelessness and emptiness like a doll in costume behind the mirror of middle-class virtues. These emotions contribute to the formation of a creative and laborious social life and should constitute such a life" (Bharati, 2018, p. 63). These emotions are the kind of meaningful love that Malik and also the author believes can contribute to the progress of society and the development of the individual.

Sati's upward vitality not only attracts Malik but also draws the attention of other men. If Malik is mainly moved by Sati's personality, it is Sati's young flesh that Mahesar covets. The transaction over Sati's personal freedom between Maheshwar and Jaman is the direct cause of destroying the emotional relationship between Sati and Malik, reflecting the plight of oppressed women in India being objectified and deprived of autonomy by patriarchy.

Class and caste are the two fundamental cells of Indian society, reflecting the complex nature of India's social structure (Bailey, 2015, p. 5). The difference between the two is that class is fluid, allowing for mobility based on changes in economic status; whereas caste is hereditary and unchangeable. In the love story of Jumna and Dena, caste status and economic ability are the core elements affecting their free love. In the emotional relationship between Sati and Malik, caste identity is not prominent, but rather class identity and the economic and cultural differences behind it play a determinative role. The novel does not provide specific descriptions of the caste of Malik and Sati or characteristics that reflect caste, but it is clear to see a class gap between them.

Malik belongs to the typical middle class. His brother works in the government, and he grows up following his brother and sister-in-law since childhood, joining the post office as an adult and writing romanticized poetry as his usual hobby. Sati lives with Jaman, making and selling soap, and belongs to the lower class as an individual craftsman. Although Jaman saved Sati during the war, he did not provide her with a good upbringing, but instead continues to oppress and exploit Sati's labor, keeping the vast majority of the profits from the soap trade for himself. In terms of subordination, Sati, as a bloodless "adopted daughter," is more nakedly shown to be in a relationship of dependence with Jaman. In Jaman's eyes, he is Sati's savior and naturally enjoys the right to make decisions about her, thus establishing the legitimacy of his hegemony over her. "If I had not picked her up and brought her up, she would have been caught and eaten by eagles and vultures" (Bharati, 2018, p. 65). Subsequent physical violence participates in the consolidation of the legitimacy of this male hegemony, that is, the actual acts of violence and the potential threat of violence inflicted on the body of the weaker party by the stronger party by virtue of his physical superiority. Jaman, having contracted a drinking and marijuana habit, often curses at Sati, "I'm going to shoot you and poke two bloody holes in you with a bayonet!" (Bharati, 2018, p. 66). Sati often hides alone somewhere in the hut to escape Jaman's beatings. When Malik is worried about Sati, he is cautious of Jaman's physical strength, "Drunk Jaman, that's a place where he only has one hand, but that is the hand of a soldier" (Bharati, 2018, p. 67).

When Sati knows that she had been sold to Maheshwar as a wife, the positivity and optimism gradually perishes, though at this point her spirit of rebellion remains unextinguished. One night, she takes all her money and seeks out Malik to elope with him. However, as a member of the middle class, Malik, exhibits a characteristic conservatism. The first thing that the middle-class people consider is to maximize their own

interests in a moderate way, and this sense of conservatism has already been internalized into the collective character and code of conduct of the group. Malik, who grows up in a middle-class family, is characterized by this conservatism and plays an inescapable role in the formation of the female dilemma.

When the crisis does not directly affect Malik himself, this conservatism is specifically manifested as hypocrisy and self-deception. The inner and intermediate narratives jointly show this hypocrisy. In the inner narrative, when the tempestuous relationship between him and Jaman is known to his brother, the latter, citing the family's honor, suggests that Malik should go out and see the world rather than hang out with the local bullies. Malik also agrees with his brother, crying and promising never to see "those people" again, including Sati. In terms of avoiding female's emotional needs and refusing communication, the middle-class male Malik's evasive attitude and approach are similar to Dena's. On several occasions, when Sati comes, Malik refuses to meet her and do not leave any words behind. Facing with Sati's crying question about what she had done wrong, Malik only looks around in fear because it is time for his elder brother to come home.

This hypocrisy is not only revealed in the inconsistency of Malik's thoughts and actions, but also highlighted through his comments about others. The novel's multi-layered narrative structure provides a comparative space, allowing readers to compare Malik's "outsider" evaluations with his "insider" thoughts and actions in his relationship with Sati, thereby perceiving his hypocrisy. In the previous text, Malik once commented that Dena's "filial piety and integrity" is a kind of pathetic blind obedience, which is in fact cowardice, but he himself never breaks through the traditional culture and middle-class formed values when experiencing the emotional conflict, so "keeps circling around (within the original framework) like a cow" comment is suitable for himself.

When the crisis erupts and requires him to make personal judgment, this conservatism is specifically manifested as deception and cowardice. Facing with Sati's request to elope, he is "panic and confused," thinking to himself, "I am good at writing poetry, but when have I ever done something like eloping" (Bharati, 2018, p. 70). He pretends to promise Sati to elope and then turns around and tells his brother everything, buying time for his brother to go to Jaman. This is a choice Malik makes based on his identity as a middle-class family member. Although he is not the active perpetrator, his cowardly inaction acts as an accomplice.

Malik, his elder brother, Jaman and Mahsar belong to different classes, but as a male community of interest here temporarily bridges the gap between the different classes, the collusion directly leads to the survival and spiritual predicament of Sati, who completely lost self-reliance in terms of survival and spirit, and since then her sense of individuality has gradually gone from vibrant to silent and extinct.

### **Conclusion**

*The Seventh Horse of the Sun God*, through the "serial insertion" structure of love story theme and multiple narrative perspectives, connects the text with social reality and reflects on the plight and causes of women in post-independence India.

On one hand, Bharati inherits the tradition of Hindi novels, realistically portraying the Indian reality and depicting the "economic struggles and the breakdown of traditional morals" that bring about "degradation, despair, hatred, and blindness" for Indian women of the lower and middle classes (Bharati, 2018, p. 79). On the other hand, he uses multiple narrative frameworks to accomplish a dynamic imitation of lower middle-class

women in the form of a novel, restoring a multidimensional reality. This Panchatantra style is not "one story containing many stories, but many stories containing one story", all of them point to the depiction and criticism of social reality. This narrative structure can be seen as a mirror image of reality, where all elements in society are interconnected, interdependent and adaptable.

Content and form work together in writing about the plight of women in India. In the text, Jumna and Sati show an increasing intellectual independence, but a decreasing economic independence, ultimately being tied to childbirth and children, becoming victims of caste systems, dowry systems, and patriarchal hegemony, and other traditional Indian social concepts. Looking at the thoughts and actions of Jumna and Sati, Sati's lower social status and identity as a working class female make her more likely to resist than middle-class women, and she indeed resists in a self-destructive way that leads to mutual destruction, but the result of her individual resistance is even worse than Jumna's "submission" to patriarchy. Both are tools for childbirth, but the latter does not resist and actively attaches to patriarchy, and her economic status have improved; in contrast, Sati's resistance ends up as a beggar and is also helpless to accept her fate, which further illustrates the difficulty of Indian women's independence on both material and spiritual levels. How should Indian women break through their own predicaments? This is the unresolved question left by the author for the readers, and it is also a problem that India continues to face to this day.

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