

**NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE OF  
THE NOVELS OF  
BHARATI MUKHERJEE AND HANIF KUREISHI**

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**Abstract**

Writers use different techniques and styles in order to describe their experiences. While evolving narrative strategies they are faced with a problem: how to step out of the framework defined by patriarchal values and how to identify and create a tradition of their own. Both the writers Bharati Mukherjee and Hanif Kureishi use various techniques in order to create spaces for themselves at various levels. The fundamental aspect of the novel is its narrative technique. The methods of narration are – letters and diaries, chronological development, anticipatory method, regressive method and stream of consciousness. The techniques to tell the story are flashback, foreshadowing, third person omniscient and dural narrative.

**Key Words:** Technique, narration, narrator, omniscient, Language, lexical, Vernacular, flashback, dramatic, narrative,

**Introduction**

Narrative Technique is the particular way in which something is done and Narrative Technique to a fiction writer is basically the way of using words to express thoughts. Every author has his own individual way of expressing his experiences and thoughts which is known as his Narrative Technique. To the novelist, language is what colour is to painter and sound is to the musician. Each painter and each musician develops his own technique the same is true of novelists. In

novel writing technique involves communicating the author's vision to the reader by effective use of words. In the narrative technique of a novelist each word has a separate identity and meaning. Infact the words are brought together in special ways to give a highly systematic order from which we get a meaning. Altering the position of words in a sentence alters the sense of the sentence. Narrative technique then is not random behaviour but is systematic where certain orderings are accepted as having prescribed meanings. Narrative techniques provide deeper meaning for the reader and help the reader to use imagination to visualize situations. Thus narrative technique is the method that writers use to give certain artistic and emotional effect to a story.

Traditionally narrative technique is explained through point of view in novel. There are three points of view to present a narrative: first person point of view when the narrator is one of the characters. First person narrator can be major or minor character he participates in the action and also comment on the events. Third person point of view when the narrator narrates the story in an objective manner and omniscient point of view where the narrator is God like and can also make his presence felt with authorial intrusions.

First-person narrative is a narrative mode where the story is told from the perspective of one character at a time. The narrator uses the pronouns "I" or "we" depending on the number of first-person narrator. First person pronoun "I" is usually subjective through which the reader come to know about the thinking of narrator and his reaction towards the events. On the other hand if the first person has been used as an object then he will tell the readers only what people said and did without comment. The writer may choose to tell the story from the point of view of someone who is involved in the action. Alternatively he may write from the point of view of a witness to the story before whom the events are unfolding.

Third person narrative is a story told by a narrator who assumes the voice of another person. Third-person narration is usually connected with omniscience and objectivity where the narrator has ultimate knowledge and control over the story. By using omniscient power author can go anywhere. He can narrate conversation that took place long ago and what is happening behind the locked doors and in the mind of the characters. The whole narration depends upon the person who narrates the story. The most Important and oldest method of narration is one in which the author uses the omniscient power and plays the role of God. Omniscient power is used by the author to convey information to the reader about characters, environment and events so that the reader may understand better and appreciate the story. However in comparison with first-person narration, third-person narrator is alleged to hold an objective reality. Third-person narration does not have the ability to characterize the narrator which is something that only the first-person narration can.

Bharati Mukherjee's narrator has to bear Family history, international terrorism, software programmed or world-wide media in order to tell the story. In Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* the omniscient narration can be seen while in other novels *Wife and Jasmine* she has used third person narration. Although in *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Jasmine* she makes use of objective-third person narrator. She reveals the mental disturbance of the character in the method of a psychological build up to the final catastrophe. The point of view is usually that of a woman's who happens to be the main character. In *Jasmine* though it is a single person speaking but the voice acquires the identities of different persons having different perspectives under different conditions. In allowing the past and present to merge Mukherjee succeed in taking the reader in to the psyche of these characters. Her novels *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife and Jasmine*

tell the heroine's journey either in first person or third person and either it is from east to west or from west to east to fulfil the dreams of life.

Mukherjee's third person narrator of the novel *The Tiger's Daughter* tells a tale of a Bengali girl named Tara Banerjee born in Calcutta, studied and married in USA. She returns to India after seven years of her migration and finds the city in political turmoil. She is caught between the two worlds and feels equally an expatriate in both of them. She desires to return to her husband in America but caught into the political turmoil of India. Mukherjee makes her to be caught in the dilemma to display migrant's state as an expatriate at home. Mukherjee's Tara is caught in the position in which old values and her choices are being examined because of several identities she acquired and lost. By her origin she is Indian Bengali Brahmin. It is her given identity but her migration and marriage made her American. It is her made identity. She is nowhere woman, a foreigner and outsider at her home.

Mukherjee's third person narrator of her second novel *Wife* again narrates the story of a Bengali Brahmin girl Dimple Dasgupta who migrates to America with her husband. She is also caught between the two worlds and its culture. She is unable to break away from the original culture and feels trapped in it. She turns neurotic and kills her own husband.

First person narrator Jasmine tells her own life-time stories of multiple identities. Her multiple names display multiple identities of an illegal immigrant in America. Mukherjee's use of first person narrator can be seen in many of her novels. This narrative method enables the writer to go on in a friendly conversational style and present freely the reflections of the narrator. In all the three novels heroine's journey is from India to USA and the tales are narrated by first person or third person narrator. The first two heroines Tara and Dimple are expatriates but the third Jasmine is an immigrant.

Like Bharati Mukherjee the most significant and important literary device which Kureishi uses in his novels is the use of first person narration. His novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* is written in first person narration and the speaker is the protagonist Karim. This use of first person invites the audience to identify with Karim. Unlike other novels written from the same point of view the narration of the novel is straight. The use of first person narration can be seen in the starting lines of the novel-“My name is Karim Amir and I am Englishman born and bred almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories but I don't care- Englishman I am though not proud of it. (Kureishi 90) Kureishi gives his narrator the redundant clauses that keep in the reader's mind of a person speaking to him: I can tell you, I bet, I reckon. The first person narration is often unreliable because the reader knows all the events through the eyes of the narrator - so only one person but the reader does not deal with such a situation in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Although throughout whole novel Kureishi uses Karim's voice to present the plot. Along with the first person narration Kureishi presents the outer view of the incidents. He does it using main protagonist's thoughts about other people's outlooks on given situations as well as by dialogues.

Kureishi's second novel *Intimacy* also written in the first person narration, Jay is the main character of the novel and its first-person narrator also. The whole story is mediated to the reader through his confessional narrative and he is the only character whose perspective regarding his family is presented. The reader relies solely on what Jay says about the members of his family or his relationship to them. His narrative is straightforward. In the course of one night he not only confides in the readers the thoughts that enter his mind at that moment but he browses through his past as well as future life. Unlike others Jay does not use any bribing

methods to keep the readers at his side. Jay's narrative differs in many ways from others. One of the ways is that the narrative consists mainly from the scenes.

Mukherjee has made the language a perfect medium for her meanings. "Language is a code where by ideas of the word communicates in a conventional system of arbitrary sign" (Dwivedi 81). Language is an immensely rich and complex entity and it is the channel which relates a human being with his fellow human being and their culture. In novel writing language involves communicating the author's vision to the reader by the effective use of words. Mukherjee discovered a language that was amenable. Its structure was total and capacious and its forms were impressive. The language of Mukherjee is simple and straightforward with occasional flashbacks. As a novelist Mukherjee starts from the principle that the language of a novel must be related to everyday speech. When it depends far from living speech and common idioms it loses its vitality. She tries to make her language as effective as she could.

It's again the matter of language of adopting English language as a medium of expression to convey Indian thought and sensibility. For many Indian authors writing in English is no more than the medium through which they express themselves and through which they can reach to audience. She is also fond of using Indian names like-Patel, Kusum, Panna Bhatt and many others in her novels.

Similarly Jyoti in Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* address her parents and teachers as- Pitaji, mataji and masterji Mukherjee uses lexical items to evoke a host image and picture of Indian surroundings. They are highly evocative and connotative with regard to particular culture. It means that these lexical items are primarily register of culture and act as an effective medium for expressing the multidimensional Indian sensibility. Katie Wales defines-"Vernacular is a term from Latin which means native or domestic, this term is related to the language of native country or mother tongue" (p.274). Mukherjee has used locale lexical items related to different registers in her novel displaying her deep penetration to Indian tradition. B.B. Kachru writes about vernacular term that- "These items are restricted in their use to India and have not yet been assimilated in British or American English" (p.82). The borrowing of Indian sources items in English language provides a good taste of Indianness to the language of the Novel

Mukherjee also uses Indian lexical words like-Gobi aloo, matarpanir, tika, kurta, salwar, bazaar, charpay, kameez, These words show her linguistic competence for switching from one code to another along with her inclination to use Indian lexicons in their narration. In her novel wife she uses the word "mangalasutra" for the marriage necklace. This word takes the reader back to Indian tradition. There is a sprinkling of Indian usages in Mukherjee's writing- gharjma, mlechha, arre baba, These are Hindustani local expressions. Besides it she uses American slang like automobile for car, motel for hotel and so on. She is an expert at mimicking different local languages in her writings.

She filters her American experiences through her consciousness and presents it in her fiction in her own way. Mukherjee uses language which is a mark of good style with inventiveness and originality for example she uses adjective in abundance and these combined with hyphenated words help in creating very effective images-Diamond-hard light of stars, sand-yellow sun, flame-bright, Jazz-worthy Californian, Lion-riding dispenser, night-vision implants, bile-poisoned-self etc.

These words help her in conveying significant rather than just ordinary meaning or cognitive information. Similar instances can be found in other novels of Mukherjee like-*The Tiger's Daughter*, *Desirable Daughter* and *The Holder of The World* etc.

Mukherjee uses flashback technique to reveal past memories which help her to remember her own country. According to Katie Wales- “Flashback technique is a technique employed in fiction and film by which it indicates whatever has happen earlier is recalled (p.78). It is used to explain plot, elements, give background and context to a scene or explain characters or events. For instance one chapter may be characters life years ago. The second part gives the meaning to the first as it explains other events. Through flashback technique she portrays the different aspects of society and complexity of characters. Mukherjee’s novel *Jasmine* and also the name of the narrator portray a young Indian girl in a rural village in Hasnapur, India. She tells her story through a flashback, while she’s pregnant and widow in Iowa. She also expresses all the struggles she went through from flashback technique- “Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears-his satellite dish to the stars-and foretold my widowhood and exile. I was only seven then, fast and venturesome, scabrous-armed from leaves and thorns” (Mukherjee.1).

Here Mukherjee uses flashback technique to explain Jasmine’s life. The use of various devices is a part of narrative strategies like Ellipsis, Italicization and Hyphen etc. Through flashback technique and past incidents of native country an immigrant tries to highlight his country yet he can highlight only the broken image of past incidents due to his long absence from original land.

Hanif Kureishi viewed language as a kind of music of words. For him language like music was an autonomous art. As music makes patterns of sequences of tones, language also makes patterns of sequences of words. The language of Kureishi is as vocative as possible. Kureishi describes his protagonists in a few standard language than Mukherjee. The language forms accepted ways of the social convenience. However it does not mean that there is nothing beyond the reality which language represents. Kureishi has made use of English language according to the situation and demand. Sometimes he has written his novels keeping the western readers in mind. If language is always contextual then every writer has to choose a language to suit the particular situation of his writing. In order to achieve the desired effect in his novels he employs dramatic and narrative method. The advantage of the dramatic method is the vividness of illusion it creates.

Kureishi also uses both compound words and Indian lexical items for example.- Multi-coloured, middle-aged, living-room, Hindu-Muslim these words save unnecessary use of articles and prepositions. To make his stories sound realistic he made use of many Indian words from Hindi. He also use Indian lexical words like- Roti, chapatti, samosas, sherbet, lassi and dal.

Kureishi highlights his male characters more than female. Only a few female in his novels and they are educated women so their language is of Standard English. Kureishi’s sentence structures are mostly brief and simple. His experiments with the language and its structure were generally a compulsion rather than a luxury. They give his readers a feel of his highly creative and fertile sensibility.

Kureishi uses simple everyday language. Sometimes the trailing sentences with their loosely linked with coordination and subordination clauses are suitable to highlight the complexity of female characters. His novel’s story takes a linear progression with occasional flashbacks

To conclude one can say that Mukherjee and Kureishi are remarkably successful in handling their narrative technique. Both of them uses language and technique in such a way that reader automatically attracted towards the story and enjoys it. Mukherjee and Kureishi both are novelists whose technique continuously grew. Their technique is thought provoking in all the

novels. These remarks and analysis of the various techniques used by Mukherjee and Kureishi reveal that both are great master. Both has exceptional ability to use a variety of techniques and create a balance too. This is the remarkable feature about them which made them experiment with words and create a new style of their own. Their greatness can be estimated from this fact that though several critics have written on different aspects of their technique yet there some dimension remains unexplored.

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