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A Comparative Analysis of Narrative Techniques in the Works of Namita Gokhale and Bharati Mukherjee

Dr. Priya Wanjari¹, Asma Bano Mohammad Rafique^{2*}

¹Principal & Head, Department of English, Santaji Mahavidyalaya

²Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, Santaji Mahavidyalaya

*Corresponding Author E-mail: asmabano197@gmail.com

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Abstract

In the rich landscape of Indian English fiction, storytelling is not merely a vehicle of meaning but an art that shapes perception, emotion, and identity. The works of Namita Gokhale and Bharati Mukherjee exemplify this narrative artistry through their distinctive approaches to form and voice. This paper explores the narrative techniques employed in Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story* and Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, focusing on how each writer constructs meaning through storytelling. The study examines key elements including point of view, characterization, narrative structure, and linguistic style to understand how narrative form enhances thematic depth. Gokhale's writing is marked by lyrical prose, intertextual resonances, and engagement with Indian mythology and folklore, creating a layered narrative texture. In contrast, Mukherjee employs first-person narration, fragmented temporality, and vivid sensory detail to capture psychological and cultural dislocation. By integrating narrative theory with close textual analysis, this study highlights how both authors transform storytelling into a medium of emotional resonance and intellectual inquiry. Ultimately, the paper underscores their significant contribution to Indian English literature through innovative and compelling narrative techniques.

Keywords: Narrative Techniques, narratology, perspective, focalization, characterization, narrative structure, diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary literary discourse, narrative technique is no longer regarded as a mere stylistic device but as a central mechanism through which meaning is constructed and interpreted. The way a story is told, through narrative voice, temporality, structure, and language, significantly shapes the reader's understanding of themes such as identity, gender, and cultural belonging. As Gerard Genette argues, narrative discourse determines the mode of representation and the reader's access to the story,

making technique inseparable from meaning (Genette 27). Similarly, Seymour Chatman emphasizes that narrative meaning emerges from the relationship between story and discourse (Chatman 19).

Within this framework, Indian English literature has witnessed significant contributions from women writers who have redefined both thematic concerns and narrative forms. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, Indian fiction in English reflects a continuous negotiation between tradition and modernity (Mukherjee 45). Women writers, in particular, have created alternative narrative spaces that foreground female experience and subjectivity (Showalter 13). Among such writers, Namita Gokhale and Bharati Mukherjee occupy a prominent position due to their distinctive narrative strategies and thematic depth.

Namita Gokhale's fiction is deeply rooted in the Indian socio-cultural context, offering a nuanced portrayal of history, memory, and the position of women within traditional structures. Her narratives are marked by lyrical prose, intertextuality, and a blending of mythology and everyday life. Critics note that her work "blends the personal with the mythic to create layered identities" (Trivedi 112). By dissolving boundaries between past and present, myth and reality, Gokhale constructs a reflective narrative space that emphasizes cultural continuity.

In contrast, Bharati Mukherjee's works engage with migration, diaspora, and identity transformation in transnational contexts. Her novel *Jasmine* portrays a protagonist who undergoes continuous reinvention, reflecting the fluid nature of identity. Drawing on postcolonial theory, Homi K. Bhabha asserts that identity is "never fixed, but always in process" (Bhabha 2), a concept that is central to Mukherjee's narrative. Her use of first-person narration, fragmented temporality, and vivid sensory detail creates immediacy and effectively captures the complexities of diasporic experience.

While Gokhale's narratives emphasize introspection and cultural rootedness, Mukherjee's fiction foregrounds mobility and transformation. Despite these differences, both writers employ sophisticated narrative techniques that engage readers at emotional and intellectual levels. However, much of the existing scholarship has focused primarily on thematic concerns, often overlooking the structural and stylistic dimensions of their works.

The central research question guiding this study is how narrative techniques shape the representation of identity, gender, culture, and transformation in Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. In the present study, narrative technique refers to the formal devices employed by authors in the construction and presentation of a narrative. Drawing upon the narratological theories of Gerard Genette and Seymour Chatman, the study focuses on four major elements; point of view, characterization, narrative structure, and linguistic style, because these constitute the primary means through which narrative meaning is generated and communicated. Through a comparative examination of these elements, the study seeks to demonstrate how narrative form contributes to thematic expression and reader engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Narrative technique has been extensively theorized within narratology. Gerard Genette defines narrative discourse as the relationship between story and its presentation, emphasizing categories such as order, duration, and frequency. He argues that "the narrative discourse is the only means we have of accessing the story" (Genette 27). Similarly, Seymour Chatman distinguishes between "story" and "discourse," asserting that narrative meaning emerges from how events are structured and presented (Chatman 19). These theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for analyzing narrative strategies in fiction.

In Indian English literature, critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee emphasize that women writers reshape narrative forms to articulate identity and resistance. Mukherjee notes that Indian fiction in English often negotiates "the tension between tradition and modernity" (Mukherjee 45). Likewise,

Elaine Showalter highlights that women's writing constructs alternative narrative spaces that foreground female experience and subjectivity (Showalter 13).

Critical responses to Namita Gokhale underline her use of myth, memory, and lyrical narration. Scholars observe that her fiction "blends the personal with the mythic to create layered identities" (Trivedi 112). In *A Himalayan Love Story*, Gokhale's non-linear narrative and introspective tone have been interpreted as reflective of fragmented selfhood and emotional depth.

On the other hand, Bharati Mukherjee has been widely examined in diasporic studies. Critics such as Homi K. Bhabha conceptualize cultural identity as fluid and hybrid, noting that "identity is never fixed, but always in process" (Bhabha 2). Mukherjee's *Jasmine* exemplifies this through its shifting narrative voice and fragmented temporality. As noted by Inderpal Grewal, Mukherjee's protagonists "redefine the self through migration and transformation" (Grewal 67).

Despite extensive scholarship on both authors, comparative studies focusing specifically on their narrative techniques remain limited. Most critics emphasize thematic concerns such as identity and migration, often overlooking the structural and stylistic mechanisms through which these themes are conveyed. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this gap by offering a comparative narratological analysis of their works.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative comparative methodology grounded in meticulous textual analysis. The theoretical framework is based on Gerard Genette's narratological theories and Seymour Chatman's differentiation between story and discourse. This study conducts a thorough analysis of Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, focusing on four essential narrative elements: point of view, characterization, narrative structure, and linguistic style. These elements have been chosen due to their substantial impact on the portrayal of identity, gender, culture, and displacement in the selected texts. The study utilizes a comparative method to examine how storytelling approaches serve as artistic and ideological instruments for constructing and conveying meaning.

Analysis of Narrative Techniques

Narrative technique is fundamentally realized through the manipulation of point of view, which determines the perspective from which a story is presented. In narratological terms, this corresponds to what Gerard Genette conceptualizes as focalization, that is, the distinction between "who sees" and "who speaks" in a narrative. Broadly, narratives are presented through first-person and third-person modes, each shaping the reader's access to events and consciousness in distinct ways.

In the first-person narrative, the narrator is a character within the story and uses pronouns such as "I" or "we." This perspective may belong either to a central participant or to a peripheral observer who witnesses events. The first-person mode is inherently subjective, as it provides direct access to the narrator's thoughts, emotions, and interpretations. While this creates immediacy and psychological depth, it also restricts the narrative to the limits of the narrator's knowledge and perception.

In contrast, the third-person narrative employs a narrator external to the story. Contrary to the common assumption that third-person narration is always objective or omniscient, it can operate at different levels of knowledge. In third-person limited narration, the narrative is confined to the perspective of a single character, corresponding to Genette's internal focalization. In omniscient narration (or zero focalization), the narrator possesses complete knowledge of all characters, events, and their inner thoughts, and may intervene through authorial commentary. This omniscient mode allows greater narrative flexibility, including shifts across time, space, and consciousness. Thus, point of view, in conjunction with focalization, functions as a crucial narrative device that shapes not only the structure of the narrative but also the reader's interpretation of characters and events.

Viewed through Genette's framework of focalization, both novels predominantly employ internal focalization, though in different ways. In *A Himalayan Love Story*, Namita Gokhale uses variable internal focalization; a multi-perspective narrative method, alternating between different characters' points of view to provide a comprehensive picture of Himalayan culture and history. The first part, "Parvati: The Dance of the Honey Bee", is narrated by the character Parvati. Parvati describes her story from childhood to her husband's death, "when I went to the bathroom to wash up, I was started by the face in the mirror. It was an old face, a fat, haggard old face; it was not my face at all. It couldn't be me, I decided. This was an imposter." (Gokhale 50). Her experiences of love, loss, social restrictions, and personal growth are filtered through her own perspective, enabling readers to understand the psychological and emotional dimensions of her life. The use of internal focalization creates intimacy between the reader and the protagonist, highlighting her struggles within a patriarchal society and her search for selfhood. The next part of the novel is narrated by Mukul: "I work for the International Relief Organization. Our main task is to assist the U.N. High Commission for refugee n logistical matters." (Gokhale 57). Gokhale's use of several perspectives helps to explore a wide range of experiences and worldviews, adding layers of complexity and depth to the narrative tapestry.

Similarly, Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is predominantly narrated through fixed internal focalization. Bharati Mukherjee uses a first-person narrative to immerse readers in the protagonist's inner world and subjective sensations. As Jasmine says when she reaches America "I wonder if Bud even sees the America I do. We pass half- built, half deserted cinder- block structures at the edge of town, with mud spattered deserted cars parked in an uncleared lot, and I wonder, who's inside?" (Mukherjee 109). The reader experiences migration, cultural displacement, trauma, and empowerment through Jasmine's consciousness, making her personal journey the focal point of the novel. The first-person perspective helps readers to empathize with Jasmine's hardships and accomplishments, resulting in a strong emotional bond between the protagonist and the reader.

Both novels indicate that internal focalisation is an effective narrative method for depicting female subjectivity. Gokhale's multiple focalised perspectives in *A Himalayan Love Story*, through Parvati and Mukul, let readers to gain a more nuanced and deep understanding of cultural identity. The interaction of several narrative voices makes identity a communal and multiple phenomena, affected by memory, history, tradition and social interactions. On the other hand, Mukherjee's use of first person in *Jasmine* allows the reader to enter the mind of the protagonist, to feel what she feels, to see what she sees, to negotiate her identity, to undergo her metamorphosis. This narrative approach highlights the psychological aspects of migration, displacement and self-reinvention. Through many perspectives, Gokhale foregrounds the communal and culturally entrenched element of identity, while Mukherjee, through a single narrative voice, brings forth the growing sense of self of the individual. Genette's theory of focalisation gives, then, a useful framework for understanding how these novels develop and express women's experiences and different kinds of cultural identity through character-centered narrative viewpoints.

In *A Himalayan Love Story*, Gokhale offers a wide ensemble of characters deeply embedded in the cultural and natural landscape of the Himalayas, each with depth and complexity. The protagonist, Parvati, is a very contemplative character whose life is connected with the majestic yet harsh environment of mountains. "I have always recognized that I carry an emptiness inside me although I did not at first understand it." (Gokhale 3). Parvati's internal monologues demonstrate her strong connection to her surroundings, as well as her struggle with the intricacies of love and grief. Gokhale delves into love, sorrow, and resilience through Parvati's encounters and internal monologues.

Other characters in the novel, such as Lalit and Mukul, add layers to the story by sharing their unique perspectives and experiences. Lalit's enigmatic presence represents the strange and often unexplainable essence of life in the Himalayas; Parvati narrated about Lalit: "My young husband looked puzzled, even oppressed, and kept a stubborn, watchful distance from me...Lalit was not very

clean in his personal habits, and a dank, stale smell of sweat sat upon his body.” (Gokhale 33-34). Mukul, on the other hand, embodies the contradiction between modernity and tradition, attempting to balance his aspirations with the expectations put on him. “I wondered about Irra’s name. I could only connect it with the river Irrawady, in Burma, which reminded me of my wife, for whom I had not spared a thought since leaving Hong Kong. Adeleine and Nainital? The two were quiet incompatible, I told myself guiltlessly.” (Gokhale 77). Gokhale's characters are more than just individuals; they represent bigger ideas and cultural narratives, and their lives reflect the ageless and cyclical nature of mountain life.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* provides a more focused glance at a single character's journey, which has become deeply rooted in the immigrant experience. Jasmine, the protagonist, is a lively, brave, motivated, and resilient woman who courageously navigates cultural dislocation and identity transformation during the narrative. Her journey from the little village of Hasnapur in India to the United States is characterized by constant reinvention and adaptability. Jasmine reflects on her identity and transformation with profound insight: “I have been reborn several times, and each time I have brought a different part of myself to life” (Mukherjee 126). This quote encapsulates Jasmine's ability to adapt and survive, her resilience becoming a central theme of the narrative. This phenomenon is described by Dr. Priya Wanjari as, “immigrants who were born at the nexus of two dominating cultures find themselves in a transitional space where they can distinguish themselves from both fixed identities while still navigating both environments with ease and assimilating elements both apparently opposing cultures.” (Wanjari, 244) Regarding Jasmine's pace of accepting new values, Rao comments, “Jasmine learns to adapt herself to the new surroundings and responds to the speed of transformation, to the fluidity of America character and landscape” (Rao 165).

Mukherjee's portrayal of Jasmine is subtle, showing her as both weak and strong. Her interactions with other characters, including her husband Prakash, lover Taylor, and friend Lillian, shed light on various aspects of her personality and the obstacles she encounters as an immigrant. Prakash's progressive views affect Jasmine's early transition, inspiring her to imagine a life beyond traditional gender boundaries. Taylor represents the prospect of acceptance and belonging in a new society, whereas Lillian's mentorship offers Jasmine practical assistance and advice as she navigates her new existence.

Gokhale and Mukherjee then shine in creating well-drawn characters that mirror the concepts and cultural backgrounds of their separate narration. The lives of Gokhale's characters in *A Himalayan Love Story* are shaped by Himalayan myths and customs, which show the ongoing link between people and their environment. The protagonist of Mukherjee's novel, Jasmine, demonstrates audacity and flexibility through her character to face the problems of an immigrant in a foreign country. Jasmine's continuous reinventions and capacity to get strength from her several identities represent the difficulty of cultural assimilation and personal development. Jasmine's encounters and interactions help her to become a symbol of survival and self-determination. Her narrative connects with more general problems of displacement and belonging

Both of the novels have their different approaches to characterization, which depict insightful analysis of the human condition and explore how people's situations and experiences leave long-lasting impacts on their lives. Excellent writing by Gokhale and Mukherjee gives readers interesting and diverse characters who permanently influence the literary terrain of Indian and immigrant stories.

The distinct narrative structure employed by Gokhale and Mukherjee further shape the way their characters and themes unfold. Namita Gokhale has used a nonlinear narrative style in *A Himalayan Love Story* to weave together past and present, myth and reality, in a tapestry of interconnected stories. It moves back and forth in time, mirroring the fluidity of memory and history. For example, Parvati's views on her past are mixed with current occurrences, resulting in a tapestry of interconnected stories.

Gokhale uses flashbacks to construct a multi-layered tale that defies traditional time limits. Gokhale weaves together many tales, each providing complexity and context to the overall plot. The lives of Parvati, Lalit, and Mukul are connected, with their storylines intersecting and diverging throughout the novel. This strategy offers a rich narrative texture as the reader learns about the various aspects of living in the Himalayas.

In Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, the narrative generally traces the protagonist's journey from her early years in Hasnapur to her several identities in America. However, the novel is not strictly linear, as Mukherjee frequently employs flashbacks, memories, and temporal shifts that connect Jasmine's present experiences with her past. This combination of chronological progression and non-linear narration reflects the fragmented nature of immigrant experience and identity formation. The narrative framework illustrates the protagonist's transformation from a vulnerable young woman to a resilient survivor, emphasizing the transformative power of migration and adaptation. There are several phases of Jasmine's life presented in the novel, and each phase represents a significant change in her identity. Her character's development is highlighted as she moves from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jase, and Jane. Throughout the narrative, these phases are carefully delineated and provide the basis for the reader to understand Jasmine's continuous growth, reinvention, and evolving sense of self.

Both novelists give significant emphasis on narrative structures to narrate their stories and explore their themes. Gokhale has used nonlinear and multi-perspective techniques; this style presents a beautiful, detailed narrative that depicts the cyclical and legendary aspect of Himalayan existence. On the other hand, the linear structure in the novel *Jasmine* gives a clear and focused framework to the journey of the protagonist Jasmine towards change and adaptation. Mukherjee stresses Jasmine's determination and continual reinvention by depicting the stages of her immigrant experience in consecutive order. By using the direct narrative method, Mukherjee has made Jasmine's story more open and sympathetic so that readers can connect it on a personal level.

The language used by Gokhale and Mukherjee further enhances the impact of their narratives, shaping the tone and depth of their storytelling. Namita Gokhale has used evocative and poetic language in *A Himalayan Love Story*. Her minute description of the surroundings takes readers to the Himalayas' rich cultural and natural landscape. The poetic brilliance, use of vivid imagery, and a strong link to the novel's setting and subjects make the novel more lively. Gokhale's use of descriptive imagery is a defining feature of her writing. She creates precise and sensory-rich descriptions that immerse readers in the sights, sounds, and scents of the Himalayas. Such imagery immerses readers in the novel's physical and emotional milieu, making the setting a main character in and of itself. She narrates the surroundings in different seasons –

Every summer the smell of diesel would assail our senses, the incessant hooting and parping of the tourist buses would keep us the awake. Otherwise, the surroundings were sylvan, even idyllic. Rhododendrons, the local 'Burush', covered the slopes in March, and in April sharp red flowers illuminated the Krishnakali trees. A whole host of short-lived flowers bloomed and died through the rest of the year: arum lilies, gladioli, tiger lilies, marigold poinsettias, and the holly and mistletoe that grew in December and were sent to shops in Delhi for Christmas. (Gokhale 3)

Gokhale's language has strong roots in the Himalayan cultural and mythological history. She expertly incorporates local mythology, tales, and spiritual beliefs into the story, imbuing it with ethnic authenticity.

Mukherjee's language is straightforward and precise, reflecting Jasmine's pragmatic and resolute personality. The plain style efficiently portrays the protagonist's ideas and feelings while avoiding superfluous elaboration. Despite its simplicity, Mukherjee's language is packed with emotional impact. She uses a sympathetic and empathetic tone to depict the protagonist's interior struggles, hopes, and concerns. Jasmine's observations on her various identities, such as "I have been reborn several times,

and each time I have brought a different part of myself to life" (Mukherjee 126), show the extent of her emotional and psychological development. Mukherjee's work provokes a powerful sense of empathy and connection from the reader; this makes Jasmine's journey very personal and relevant.

Mukherjee's novel depicts the cultural contrasts and adjustments that Jasmine encounters as she moves between locations. The language changes subtly to reflect the many cultural backgrounds, ranging from Hasnapur's traditional setting to America's diversified landscape. Jasmine's views, such as "In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn." (Mukherjee 181), reveal her process of cultural assimilation and character building. Mukherjee's use of language eloquently depicts the complexity of the immigrant experience, emphasizing the fluidity and diversity of identity.

In both the novels, *A Himalayan Love Story* and *Jasmine* language play a significant role in conveying their themes and emotions. Gokhale's use of poetic words and rich descriptive imagery presents a vivid and immersive picture of the Himalayan scenery. It also reflects the region's mystical and eternal attributes. Her use of language adds emotional depth and cultural authenticity to the story. It brings readers into the characters' contemplative and philosophical journeys. On the other hand, Mukherjee, uses simple and clear language to express her protagonist's pragmatic and resilient spirit. The language emphasizes the personal and transforming aspects of Jasmine's immigration experience. Her clear writing style and honest feelings show how hard it is to change to a new culture and find your own identity. This makes Jasmine's journey very personal.

Limitations and Future Scope

The present study is limited to a comparative analysis of two novels and four selected narrative techniques: point of view, characterization, narrative structure, and linguistic style. Other narratological dimensions such as narrative duration, frequency, narrative levels, and metafictional strategies have not been examined. Furthermore, the study focuses primarily on textual analysis and does not incorporate reader-response or reception-oriented approaches. Future research may extend this framework to a broader range of works by Namita Gokhale and Bharati Mukherjee, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of their narrative practices. Comparative studies involving other contemporary Indian women writers may also contribute to the development of postcolonial narratology and narrative studies.

CONCLUSION

Namita Gokhale and Bharati Mukherjee have used various narrative techniques to enhance the beauty to their stories. *A Himalayan Love Story* explores the Himalayan mythology and history through a multi-perspective view, nonlinear structure, and poetic style. Her use of language and narrative style give the complex and immersive storytelling experience that highlights the eternal and cyclical nature of the region's cultural history. Gokhale's gentle character development brings a wide range of people to life, and each one adds to the novel's themes of love, loss, and survival.

Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, on the other hand, uses an intimate first-person narrative, a nonlinear structure, and simple language to transport readers to the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and cultural assimilation. Mukherjee's crisp and succinct style captures the authenticity and immediacy of the immigrant experience, emphasizing the protagonist's tenacity and flexibility. Mukherjee's painstaking characterization creates an engaging protagonist whose path reflects the nuances of the immigrant experience, giving readers a deep knowledge of the obstacles and successes of cultural assimilation. Mukherjee carefully develops a believable main character whose journey shows the complexities of being an immigrant. This gives readers a deep understanding of the challenges and wins of cultural assimilation.

This comparative study demonstrates that narrative technique is not merely a structural component of fiction but a significant means of shaping cultural, psychological, and ideological meaning. Through their distinctive narrative strategies, both Gokhale and Mukherjee expand the possibilities of Indian English fiction and offer nuanced representations of identity, memory, gender, migration, and transformation. Their works illustrate how narrative form and thematic content operate in close relationship, enriching readers' understanding of individual experience within broader social and cultural contexts. The study therefore reaffirms the importance of narratological approaches in the analysis of contemporary Indian English literature.

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