

## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXT OF A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY IN KIRAN DESAI'S NOVEL THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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**DOI: 10.5958/2278-4853.2024.00009.6**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The architectonic and structural quality of the narrative technique in postmodern Indian English novel has undergone a metamorphosis, and it has made the novels more sophisticated in structure and unity. The objective of studying the use of the narrative techniques in a text is to analyse the forms of narratives regarding the common features, the divergent elements, and the combinations of features employed by the narrator to skillfully connect them into a fabric that the reader or spectator recognizes as a narrative. The present paper aims to explore how the words and phrases from the Indian languages that Kiran Desai uses in her novel The Inheritance of Loss are culture specific and go a long way in conveying certain aspects of the Indian culture and ethos to the readers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Narrative Technique, Inheritance, Linguistic, Similes.*

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

Narrative technique refers to the way an author presents the content by using different techniques of narrating the story and styles to express the subject matter. It involves a careful selection of the plot, character and setting in the construction and communication of narrative. With the imaginative and accumulative experience a writer may create the narrative believable to the readers. The success of the narrative depends mostly on the narrative technique and style employed by the author. In the reception of narrative and the kind of impression it creates on the reader's mind, the role of narrative technique is vital. Christopher Cascio in his article "Literary Definition of Narrative Techniques" (education.seattlepi.com) has defined narrative technique as

... The methods and devices writers use to tell stories, whether in works of literature, film, theater or even oral stories. Many techniques work upon specific uses of phrases, punctuation or exaggerations of description, but nearly every storyteller, regardless of genre or style employs a few foundational techniques....point of view ...flashbacks...foreshadowing... similes and metaphors ... evoking the imagination,... dialogue....

The narrative technique is a critical tool which helps in unraveling the varied layers of the narrative. It is an exciting area of enquiry and keeps the reader actively involved in the story. It

belongs to the field of narratology and stylistics and analyses the structural, narrative, stylistic and linguistic aspects of the text. When properly applied to the study of a literary text, it is the science, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the narrative's entirety. Mark Schorer in his essay "Technique as Discovery" says:

When we speak of technique, then we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it. (67)

The objective of studying the use of the narrative techniques in a text is to analyse the forms of narratives regarding the common features, the divergent elements, and the combinations of features employed by the narrator to skillfully connect them into a fabric that the reader or spectator recognizes as a narrative. The architectonic and structural quality of the narrative technique in postmodern Indian English novel has undergone a metamorphosis, and it has made the novels more sophisticated in structure and unity.

Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is written in a down-to-earth, everyday language and gives a realistic picture of the various events described. She has experimented freely with language and combined fact and fiction. The use of sentence construction, experiment in the arrangement of words and use of linguistic devices are reflected in the novel. Her novel is filled with charming phrases, elegant sentences, felicitous expressions and throbbing sentiments. The novel illuminates the rich and powerful nuances of the English language. Her use of Indian vocabulary, metaphors and imagery etc. is quite effective in the context of her narrative skill.

The novel is written in the third person narrative. The ideas and opinions presented in the novel, in general, are of the omniscient third person. With simple linear narrative structure, with shifts in time and sometimes with the use of flashback technique, the author has brilliantly delineated the highly stratified societies of USA and India and the various personal, familial, social, political issues engulfing the people of these two countries. Narrative threads loop forward and backward as the story jumps continents, and the reader is deftly introduced to a notably idiosyncratic cast of characters. Omniscient narrative technique enables the writer to control and manipulate the novelist's world in such a way as to control and sustain her reader's interest in the problems and pangs of her characters and the narrative movement. Being a third person omniscient narrator, the writer is able to dive into the minds of her characters, explain their acts and also to present the characters' views or thoughts on men and the matters handled in the novel. By making the narrative move backward and forward she explores and presents very deftly the inner world of her characters' dreams and desires and their search for identity. While narrating the present she goes into the past. For dealing with the past, Desai has used technique of flashback. This particularly we see in projecting the life and character of the judge Jemubhai Patel who is triggered by a present situation, is lost in the past; his life moves in front of him, right from his childhood, education, journey to England and back, service as a Magistrate etc. Sometimes the judge himself reveals his past; at times the cook is shown to narrate the life of the judge and his wife.

Kiran Desai uses wide range of words and expressions to enrich the communicative context of a multicultural society. Her use of Hindi language and songs as “Mera joota hai jani...” and “Bombay se aaya mera dost—Oi!”(53) and mention of Indian actors gives a touch of authenticity to the characters. She uses both gentle (Namaste, Dhanyawad, Shukria etc.) and sometimes vulgar (behenchoots) colloquial, vernacular expressions in Hindi. Some of the popular slangs, abuses of various regions, and frequently used Indian expressions are: nakhara, huzoor, mia-bibi, mithai, pitaji, Angrezi Khana, salwars, Baapre! ladoos, dhotis, Budhoo, Neps, Namaste, atta, srikhand, kundan, peepal, phata phat, Bilkul Bekar, Jai Gorkha, saag, bhai, fucking oil, jamun, gadhas, parathas, tamasha, chappals, desi, etc. Postcolonial writers often take this liberty to have the flexibility of using English language along with native words according to the socio-cultural situations where their characters are put in and to express the emotions, feelings and issues confronted by them. The words and phrases from the Indian languages that Kiran Desai uses are culture specific and go a long way in conveying certain aspects of the Indian culture and ethos to the readers.

Desai has mastery in saying so much in a few sentences in a terse style. For example the typical Indian attitude towards foreign returned diaspora is realistically projected by the novelist through the ironic, witty and suggestive arguments given by Mr. Kakkar ( an Indian), a travel agent in America to whom Biju goes to buy a ticket to India :

‘Going back?’ he continued, don’t be completely crazy – all those relatives asking for money! Even strangers are asking for money – maybe they just try, you know, maybe you shit and dollars come out. I’m telling you, my friend, they will get you; if they won’t, the robbers will; if the robbers won’t, some disease will ; if not some disease, the heat will ; if not the heat, those mad Sardarjis will bring down your plane before you even arrive.(269)

Through these remarks of Mr. Kakkar, Desai has given the true depiction of the fate of many Indian diaspora (legal/illegal) who come to America (transnational land), to earn money to fulfil their American dream which they do by working hard but on return to their homeland many of them meet the fate of Biju, remaining poor subalterns – having nowhere status.

Desai has made many new innovations in her narrative. She has used Indian imagery and metaphors like “cheeks like two Simla apples” (262) to give a feel of the locale. Whenever Desai aims to emphasize an expression, she adopts different methods like the sizes of the letters go on increasing or decreasing: “paaaaaWWW!”(49). Kiran Desai uses another device in which she skips the punctuation marks “Cups plates beds chairs wiring light fixtures...” (43). Her language is marked by precise and pithy expressions. The other innovations of Kiran Desai’s include use of Hyperbaton, “Mutton curry muttonpulao vegetablecurry vegetablepulao...” (207). It is used in the novel as the speech of a busy restaurant waiter who is struggling hard to make money in the alien land.

Hundreds of similes used in the novel express the creative potentiality of Desai. Some similes from the text are:

The Nepali insurgents who come to take the judge’s hunting rifles are described as screaming “like a bunch of school girls.” (4)

Mom Ami's vegetable patch is described as a

hut (that) come up like a mushroom on a newly cut gash. (240)

Besides the innovative use of language, Desai also uses multiple question marks???, multiple exclamation marks!!!. Her use of italics, periphrasis, insertions of simile, analogy in all the descriptions, and the intermingling of three worlds with ease make her novel amazing and unique. Further there are wide and generous uses of capital letters to give special emphasis to the speech and to attract reader's attention to certain issues that are important. This we can see through the communication between the cook and his son Biju over the telephone:-

Are you alright? biju shrieked on the new york street. Don't worry about me don't worry about anything here. Are there proper arrangements for eating at the hotel? is the restaurant giving you accomodation? Are there any other people from uttar pradesh there?(231)

Thus through capitalizing these sentences and asking such questions the novelist wants to attract readers towards the feeling of unrest experienced by the father and the son. Another aspect of Desai's novel is her concern with Indian history. The novel is set against the backdrop of the insurgency with the rise of Nepalese movement during the 1980s India. The incidents described in the novel cover up the entire period of Indian history from 1920s to 1980s and the national and international relationships between India and the other countries are successfully portrayed by the novelist. She has successfully attempted with the technique of stream of consciousness. In the novel the characters move between their present and past all the time in a perfect way. The cook's past memories are presented in the novel with this technique. At many places with the use of this technique brilliantly Desai takes the readers to wherever she wants.

She has mixed two different styles in her novel to portray the spaces occupied by two different classes -high and low- elite and non-elite. For portraying the former category she generally uses traditional English and for the latter, generally the popular oral is used. We can note a typical Indian color in several places in the novel as;

Standing at the threshold...Biju sang loudly O yeh ladki zara si deewani  
Lagti hai... Old songs best songs. (51)

The novel also abounds in rich and sensual descriptions. There are beautiful images of the flourishing of nature in spring, beautiful descriptions of Mount Kanchenjunga and the landscape. The novel begins with-

All day, the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountain possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light...(1)

The title of the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is also very suggestive and suits very well with the central theme of the novel. Through the characters, the novelist wants to give message to the readers that everyone in this world has inherited loss, whether it is the loss of love, loss of faith, loss of relations, loss of life, loss of peace, loss of humanity for the immigrants, loss of feelings and emotions, and the loss of identity. It also suggests that the characters featured in the novel inherit the loss of the Indian national identity during the British empire, and even after India's

independence from the colonial rule there is instability and unsettledness among the free citizens living in Indian nation, and the loss of dignity is inherited by the Indians who have crossed the borders to settle in their land of their dreams- America.

To sum up, Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* is written in a highly original style and her narrative skills and stylistic craftsmanship have helped her convey multiple concerns effectively. With her second novel, Desai has secured her place in the list of great contemporary Indian authors. The magazine *The New Yorker* states about the book (included in the section mentioned in the beginning of the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*):

Briskly paced and sumptuously written, the novel ponders questions of nationhood, modernity, and class, in ways both moving and revelatory.

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