

Introduction

Narrative strategies are rooted in our culture from the birth of language. Both narratives and language have indispensable connections with each other, since the existence of narratives cannot lie outside language. The form and structure of narratives, ever since their origin in the distant past, have been in a flux all the while. The history of humankind has witnessed this flux in narratives: oral narratives and written narratives. Oral narratives have been supplanted/supplemented in the changing world with various written narratives. The element of flux, however, is in motion, and consequently, the written modes such as poetry, drama, fictions, and non-fiction arts have been in the state of constant transformation. If we examine the history of narratives, we can discover the fact that they are always prone to changes. This flux of change is visible in the fiction, just as it can be seen in other forms of writings.

In fictions, during several eras of history, different practices and experiments can be seen. The form of the novel, in particular, has gone through several phases of change ever since its existence. During various phases of history, it has kept on evolving into ever changing new forms. The function of narrative strategies in fiction is to narrate the stories or to represent the ideas of the novelists. The form of the novel generates the scope for various narrative strategies to flourish, with the help of which ideas and messages are conveyed by the writers. Narrative strategies, during various times, are assigned different roles and purposes. The novel of various eras such as the Classical Era, the Romantic Era, the Victorian Era, the Modern Era, and the Postmodern Era has passed through the phase of evolution. The novel before postmodernism has either realistic patterns or experimental patterns.

In the realist fiction, the period before modernism, all the unities of fiction are observed faithfully to represent the reality as it is. Fiction becomes the mirror of society as it aims at representing a complete picture of society objectively. The realistic fiction portrays the utopia of stable, concrete, and final representation of society and the world. The realist writers such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, George Meredith, William Makepeace Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, and Anthony Trollope portrayed social, political, and economic conditions of society. The metanarrative of the realistic fiction considers language as a stable and reliable tool to narrate the ideas and realities.

In the modernist fiction, the writers, with the spirit of experimentalism, question the finality and the possibility of objective realism by offering an alternative in subjectivism. Despite rejecting the realism and its objective claims, the modernists find new unities and finalities in the form of subjective styles of narration. The technique of stream of consciousness allows the modernists to portray the deeper levels of inner self. They do not accept the objective claims of reality and truth, but their search for universal truths/deeper levels of reality continues. The structuralist wing of modernism posits the possibility of a stable signified that could offer a stable concept of the truth. The modernists such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, and Thomas Mann search for the unities and the truth in their fictions.

In the second half of the twentieth century, postmodernism goes beyond the modernist experimentation. Postmodernism, with the stalwarts such as Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes, rejects all the truth claims, whether subjective or objective. The philosophical wing of postmodernism questions the possibilities of the truth claims pertaining to both epistemology and ontology. All the metanarratives specified by the previous eras are either questioned or subverted. Postmodern fiction

gives up the quest for the truth; it proposes either plurality or nothingness in fiction and refrains from providing final answers.

Postmodern fiction with ‘kaleidoscopic’ plurality evolves out of mass culture and deconstructs notions of history. The ‘well-wrought urn’ unity and totality from the perspective of culture, literature, art, and history are both present and absent in the ‘double voiced’ postmodern politics. Totality and unity are subsumed to be defied endlessly in the process. The metanarratives of history, society, literature, and art are questioned and subverted by the postmodern thinkers. Postmodern fiction, similarly, finds alternative versions in multiple mininarratives. The ironical fragmentation is celebrated in multiple ways. Fiction devoid of center plays with peripheries and indulges into multiple threads rather than adhering to one final center. This decentered fiction diverges into several forays generating endless narrative possibilities.

Postmodernism, with its pluralism and multiplicity, allows the writers to create fictions with multiple narrative patterns. With a view to deconstructing the existing fixities and finalities in the fiction, the postmodern writers create multiple narrative styles of representation. In fictions, the writers flout the unities and create different possible ways of narrating the stories. History, in postmodern fiction, becomes a subject of postmodern narrative play. Postmodernism accepts history and acknowledges its existence and relevance in the present context, but it questions the metanarrative of its supremacy, authenticity, and objectivity. In fictions, writers like Fowles, Marquez, Doctorow, and many others narrativize history and diminish the distinction between fact and fiction, or history and fiction. They question and subvert the objectivity and transparency in historical representations. In fact, they subvert the very difference between historical texts and fictions by considering them as acts of narrative, and hence, the rules of narrative equally apply to both historical documents and fiction. Along with this historical

narrativization, postmodern writers, in order to deconstruct the past, also integrate parodical inversions of the past. The play of parody revisits both social and literary history. Unlike the conventional parody, postmodern parody increases its scope and encompasses a wide range of areas that includes the literary works, historical incidents, and various forms of the art. Postmodern parody, unlike the conventional parody, assumes the nature of 'double-voicedness' that both inscribes the past and subverts it by ironizing it. In the play of these parodical inversions, irony becomes its chief weapon to deconstruct the past.

Apart from the mentioned narrative strategies, magic realism, Bakhtinian Carnavalesque and heteroglossia, and the problem of representation are the other major areas that are explored by postmodern writers. Magic realism, which dwindles the distinction between the real and the magical and repudiates all the binaries by creating a chaos in which the binaries assume the opposite characteristics of each other, corresponds with the carnivalesque and the heteroglossia. Magic realism becomes a significant tool for postmodern writers to subvert the metanarratives and propound plurality in fictions. The heteroglossia becomes a natural environment in the polyphonic postmodern novels. Postmodern plurality and its 'double voiced' nature creates a suitable platform for Bakhtinian heteroglossia. Further, magic realism, too, becomes a suitable site for the carnivalesque to flourish, and postmodern writers aptly explore the possibilities of a combination of the two. Their corresponding nature enhances their coexistence, as can be seen in the major magic realist fictions such as *What the Crow Said*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Nights at the Circus* and many others.

Postmodern writers equally explore the question/problem of representation. Postmodern writers reject the idea of stable, objective/subjective, or final representations. In the process of deconstructing the entire metanarrative of representation, postmodern writers

subvert both language and form, since they are the tools that can be utilized for representing the world and ideas. In order to deconstruct them, the writers employ a narrative play that flouts the conventional norms of fictions. Language ceases to be a reliable tool of representation; it becomes an environment with floating and endless signifiers, or an environment with nothingness. Postmodern fictions explore means and ways to deconstruct both form and fiction. Fictions become a narrative trap for the readers, who search for meanings in it and are lost in an endless game of representation. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, *V.*, and *The Name of the Rose* are some of the examples that narrate the question/problem of representation.

The need for postmodern narrative strategies arises as a part of cultural contextualization. Ever growing mass media culture, disillusionment from the utopian centers of the world and a rejection of metanarratives are the direct causes that result into postmodern plurality and multiplicity in fictions. Mass media culture diminishes the real sense of identity; Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, which results from mass media culture, does not lead to the stable concepts of the world and the self. The world of hyperreality leads postmodern writers to deconstruct/subvert both the branches of epistemology and ontology.

Postmodern narrative strategies are not limited to the aforementioned ones, since postmodern plurality allows the scope of endless possibilities. In fact, postmodernism cannot be limited to any number of narrative strategies. Postmodern plural self generates multiple threads of narrative strategies in various cultures of the world. Its inclusiveness and pluralism allows it to be accepted by the writers across the world. This is the reason why postmodern narrative patterns are always in multiplicity, and can never to be limited to specificity and finality. Different cultural contextualization allows the writers to produce fictions with multiple different narrative strategies. For instance, Japanese,

American, Indian, African, and Canadian writers narrate the problem/question of representation differently. The present study focuses on major postmodern narrative strategies that have wider influence on postmodern writings.

My thesis, entitled, “Narrative Strategies in Postmodern Fiction”, examines various narrative directions that emerge in the postmodern era. There are five chapters in the thesis based on dominant postmodern narrative strategies. Except the first chapter, which focuses on the emergence of postmodern fiction, the other four chapters focus on various dominant narrative strategies. Each chapter is allotted one central book in which a particular narrative strategy is examined. Apart from the detailed study of the central book, many other postmodern texts from various authors are also scrutinized to support the argument of a particular chapter. All these narrative strategies are interlinked and carry similar postmodern purposes. This inter-relationship is also shown in all the chapters while focusing on any dominant narrative strategy.

In the first chapter, “Postmodernist Narrative: Text and Context”, the key introductory aspects of postmodernism and their major roots are discussed. Postmodern narrative techniques are the resultant factors of predominant cultural and theoretical changes that take place in the postmodern era. The disruption of cultural norms that exist due to technological advancement and the horrors of two wars change the entire scenario of postmodern thought, and because of that, philosophers, cultural critics, and linguists posit revolutionary theories in terms of culture, language, and philosophy. Postmodern thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard, and Baudrillard express the mood of the cultural context and change all the modernist preoccupations negating their conventionalities. The same cultural, philosophical, and linguistic mood is reflected in the postmodern narrative as well. Post-structuralism, for instance, propagates new and different language theories and that new linguistic approach is utilized in postmodern

fiction as well. Postmodern fiction represents fragmentary life coupled with the fragmentary form where there is no substance but just irony left as its residue. The postmodernists revisit the past and parody it and naturally, their acts become ironical.

The new theories deny the totalitarian metanarratives of the past. Lyotard propounds mininarratives as opposed to the previously available metanarratives. According to him, the postmodern world does not and cannot have metanarratives. There are multiple and innumerable small narratives that have to be counted instead of the all-encompassing and dominant narratives. Postmodernists such as Rorty, Derrida and Wittgenstein go to the extent of denying truth altogether. There is no permanent truth available to us, or truth simply does not exist in the postmodern era. Naturally, unity and truth as concepts, so valuable previously, fade away and lead to complete fragmentation, and this is reflected in fiction. We cannot find reliable, author-centric, and cohesive fictions in this era. When the culture itself is changed into ironical fragments, the fiction, too, disintegrates into fragments.

The narrative strategies are explored with their inseparable connection with the theoretical and cultural background of the era. Various postmodern authors and their works are studied, and the narrative techniques utilized by the respective writers are presented in this chapter. Narrativized history, referential problems of language, deformed form, deconstructed realism in magic realism, parodical intertextuality, Bakhtinian carnivalesque and heteroglossia, and an ironical self-reflexivity are found in postmodern fictions irrespective of their being in various cultural and regional locations. The approaches and narrative tendencies carried out by the writers are different from one another. These differences, in terms of the utilization of narrative strategies, and their cultural and theoretical associations are identified in the chapter. Postmodern fictions in Latin America, America, Italy, and Canada differ with respect to their approaches but

narrate the same decentered world. In this chapter, postmodern narrative tendencies are foregrounded historically, culturally and theoretically, since history, culture, postmodern theories, and fiction inescapably correspond with each other.

In the second chapter, “History as/and Fiction”, the relationship between history and postmodern fiction is explored. The study displays the blurring of conventional boundaries between history and fiction, and exposes the inherent narrativity among them. Taking an explicit route to history, postmodern fiction includes historical data and personages in the framework of fiction. These historical explorations, however, are not simple in any way as they are full of contradictions and paradoxes. Postmodern revisit to history is not nostalgic but ironic. It does not depict history as a kind of authentic representation of historical reality but problematizes the entire notion of historicity.

Postmodern writers and even historians like White acknowledge the existence of narrativity in history. They assert the fact that history is always subjective and a matter of reconstruction. Postmodern writers question the available version of history and present many alternative versions. The fictionalization of history in fiction is an ironical attempt to narrate alternative versions of history. It rejects and blurs the difference between fact and fiction, or history and fiction. In this chapter, E. L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* is explored with this postmodern idea of historicity. Both history and fiction mingle and become a process of narrativity. Doctorow offers an alternative and a fictional version of twentieth century American history. Historical figures in connection with fictional characters are assigned both historical and fictional roles. The process mingles fiction and history inseparably. Historical figures like Evelyn Nesbit, Harry Houdini, Henry Ford and others are shown in fabricated association with fictional characters such as the Younger Brother, Father, Coalhouse Walker and others.

History is narrativized in such a way that facts and events can no longer be verified. The notions regarding authenticity and objectivity are questioned and subverted in the process of narrativization/fictionalization of history. The narrativized and fictionalized history of the historical figures such as Houdini and Nesbit suggests the postmodern phenomenon in which the personal lives of Houdini and Nesbit are narrativized. The narrativization of history poses certain questions to both authenticity and objectivity. The amorous relationship between Evelyn Nesbit and the Younger Brother, and Houdini's obsession for his mother and his subsequent efforts to establish connections with his dead mother suggest alternative versions of history. The writer, in fact, ironizes the historical figures instead of the conventional way of glorifying them and subverts the glorified and recorded versions of history. The writer does not deny the existence of history, but he questions the authenticity of the recorded/textualized history.

Apart from this, other novels such as *The Name of the Rose*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *The Public Burning*, *Immortality*, *The White Hotel* and many other postmodern novels suggest the postmodern viewpoint of history. History is visited by postmodern writers but with a tinge of irony. The subjective or alternative narrative of Goethe and Bettina in *Immortality*, and an interpreted and ironical version of Holocaust in *The White Hotel* cannot be found in any historical record. Postmodern fiction presents an alternative version of history and thereby, questions objectivity and authenticity of the textualized history at large. Postmodernism usually contests the reliability of the past as the past is available through human constructs/textuality. Fictionalization of historical characters and surrounding them with fictional events and fictional characters suggests their intensified questioning of the past or history.

In the third chapter, "Con/fusion of Magic Realism and Bakhtinian Carnavalesque", magic realism and Bakhtinian carnivalesque spirit are shown together as complimenting and

corresponding with each other in their act of subversion in Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said*. Magic realism as an essential narrative strategy of postmodern fiction flourished in Latin America and then spread across the globe as an effective subversive tool. It plays a vital role in fiction along with the carnivalesque spirit to dismantle authenticity and norms of society.

Like magic realism, which blurs all the binaries, carnivalesque spirit, too, with its liberating spirit, associates itself in the act of questioning all the conventions, norms, and prevailing forces of society. Magic realism creates an atmosphere where magical becomes real and real becomes magical. Carnivalesque spirit, similarly, generates both subversive and liberating spirit, and their fusion creates an altogether different world filled with magical elements as well as liberating spirit. This con/fusion is studied in detail in Kroetsch's novel. The opening chapter of the book presents magical copulation between Vera Lang and the bees. The very act is both magical and suggestive of carnivalesque spirit. The narrator rightly says, "People years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started everything" (1). Representation of lower body strata is one of the focuses of carnivalesque practices. Body and its bawdy functions such as copulation, which are considered as taboo in the conventional officialdom, are celebrated in carnivalesque practices.

The fusion of carnivalesque and magic realism cause multiple voices conflicting with each other in the novel. This in turn invokes heteroglossia and its subsequent dialogism. Carnivalesque, a social theory propounded by Bakhtin, has been utilized in both novelistic form and content through the liberating spirit that allows the writer to distort and question all the social as well as novelistic norms. Representation of his theories is seen in the novel that replaces conventional monoglossia with polyglossia. Both,

subversiveness and plurality, found in Bakhtinian theories, compliment postmodernist narrative multiplicity.

It is this similarity and corroboration in both magic realism and carnivalesque, which becomes a natural setting in Kroetsch's novel: subversive nature, and eradication of the arch binaries such as the real and the magical, the center and the margin, the popular and the literary, the officialdom and the marketplace, the spiritual and the lower body stratum, morality and immorality, and life and death. The con/fusion transgresses all the conventional boundaries, whether social or literary.

The case of such fusion is prevalent in postmodern books. Postmodern works of various authors such as Marquez, Carter, Rushdie, and Llosa are fraught with this fusion of magic realism and carnivalesque, which acts to subvert the metanarratives and to repudiate the notions of realism and objectivity. Writers from different continents such as Japan, America, Latin America, Canada, Italy, and Argentina utilize this narrative strategy for their local purposes.

The narrative strategy is more popular among the writers of margins such as the feminist or the post-colonial writers as it becomes a weapon to dismantle dominant forces such as patriarchy, and colonialism. Angela Carter, for example, attacks the patriarchal system by narrating the story of the winged woman called Fevver. Writers from Africa, India, and Latin America utilize this narrative strategy to question the authenticity of dominant discourses.

In the fourth chapter, "Language, Form and the Question of Representation", the problem of representation is discussed. Form and language, instead of being supportive and transparent in terms of representation, become obstacles. Both the new linguistic theories and simultaneous deconstruction of center have caused this phenomenon.

With the advent of structuralism, language becomes a center of study in all the relevant fields. The concept revolutionizes the notion of conventional usage of language wherein Saussure posits that meaning is generated through the differential aspects of the signs and not through the etymological concepts. This play of signs in the meaning generation reaches new levels when post-structuralists such as Derrida, Foucault, and others as well as philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Rorty deny this concept of sign leading to the meaning through signifiers and state that sign might simply lead to yet another sign and the ultimate meaning might not be gained as sign does not lead to the ‘final signified’, as Derrida mentions, but simply to more signs. Form, like language, ceases to be reliable and authentic. Instead of becoming a reliable tool of representation for the writers, it proves to be a block that resists any kind of objective and authentic knowledge. Both language and form work together in postmodern fictions to stall/resist/deconstruct/defy representation.

In the chapter, this postmodern stance of language and the formless form is studied in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. It is a good example that narrates the problem of representation. Calvino deconstructs the myth of transparent language and form as a reliable tool of representation. In the deconstructive process of representation, Calvino questions both the branches of epistemology and ontology. He presents multiple narratives simultaneously working together to resist both the notion of representation as well as the temptation of interpretation.

The narrator in the novel, instead of leading to any closure or final meanings, plays with both the narratorial possibilities and the reader by including himself in the process of the narration. The reader is both empowered, as he becomes a central character, and enslaved as a helpless witness to this deconstructing process of form and language. The narrator opens the novel, “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a*

winter's night a traveler. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade" (3).

The other postmodern writers such as Pynchon, Fowles, Kroetsch, Barth, Auster, Rushdie, and Carter narrate the problem of representation in the same way as Calvino has done in the present novel. Except that the purposes of these authors that vary, the narrative techniques utilized by the writers fall in the same direction. The closure or the end is mocked at, parodied, and negated by the postmodern writers. In Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, the narrator falsifies her own claims made in the narration and makes the mockery of the finality of the end. Kroetsch does not present logical and coherent ends in his novels. These writers deconstruct the closure and defy logical conclusions found in realist/humanist tradition.

It is found that while language ceases to be a transparent material for representation, form assumes alternative qualities such as deviating from the unity or merging multiple genres and the like. In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, the phenomenon is presented by either deconstructing the unity of a particular genre or mixing multiple genres at the same time. The novel in the beginning seems to be a detective story that suddenly changes into multiple genres as it progresses. It turns into a diary, an erotic story, epistolary tale, and a magic realist story. Paul Auster in *Invisible* presents multiple points of view and breaks away from the unity by diverging into multiple genres such as an essay, letter, biography, poem, or non-fiction. D M Thomas's *The White Hotel* keeps deviating into an amorous narrative poem, the third person narrative, and an epistolary narrative.

This blurring of the form not only defies the unity of the novelistic form and closure, but also defies the possibility of stable and reliable representation. In the process of blocking simple and direct or authentic narration, the writers question the very possibility of

genuine authenticity, originality and sometimes blur the distinction between original and fake or the plagiarized. The narrator in Calvino's novel highlights the aspect on numerous occasions. He questions/fractures the entire process of the creation of novel and its publication. He diminishes the distinction between genuine creation, translated work, and plagiarized work. Marana, a fictional writer, translator, and plagiarizer, is shown to be publishing novels under his name and complicates the difference between the original and the fake.

In the fifth chapter, "Parody, Irony, and the Act of Subversion", John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is examined to discover the role of both irony and parody in the act of subversion. The novel parodies the Victorian Period in terms of its literary field, social conventions, and historical notions. Fowles parodies the realistic conventions of representation and through irony subverts it. The writer parodies the styles of major Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens and William Thackeray, thinkers such as Arnold and Carlyle, and poets such as Robert Browning and Lord Tennyson. He, simultaneously, parodies an entire society and its parochialism in the novel.

With multiple voices being employed in the novel, the novel becomes an example of Bakhtinian heteroglossia. Multiple voicing, parodical and ironical inversion of the past and plurality of form add to the Bakhtinian phenomenon. The conflicting voices are suggestive of polyglossia that enhances postmodern multiplicity and plurality in terms of both form and content.

Parody is a popular form in the postmodern era with the help of which authors both install various styles, works, or history in their works and subvert the same in the process of narration. D M Thomas in his *The White Hotel* parodies the entire branch of psychoanalysis in the case study narrated by the writer. He simultaneously parodies the

holocaust as well. Barth in his *The Sot-Weed Factor* parodies the styles of Henry Fielding, Lawrence Stern, and Tobias Smollet. Robert Kroetsch in his *The Studhorse Man* parodies the convention of representing objective reality in biography and goes on to question the entire notion of realism and its nature of unbiased objectivity. Postmodern parody becomes an essential tool for this ‘double voicing’ act of both using and abusing, installing and subverting the prevailing canons of both the past and the present.

Postmodernism with its disruptive and subversive nature assumes a quality of infiniteness in its journey of deconstruction. It is a process without fixed beginning or fixed end. Unlike any other age in the history of English literature, postmodern is and will remain a controversial material, as it does not believe in fixities and is inescapably inclined to questioning. This ceaseless questioning is the only thing that remains permanent in postmodernism. Critics like Josh Toth have suggested the end of the contentious era, but with postmodernism taking multiple routes and encompassing endless multiplicity, it is unlikely to resort to any stasis whatsoever.

Works Cited

Kroetsch, Robert. *What the Crow Said*. 1978. Alberta: U of Alberta P, 1998. Print.

Calvino, Italo. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. 1979. Trans. William Weaver. London: Vintage, 1998. Print.