



THE ART AND TECHNIQUE OF STORY TELLING

Dr. TANVEER KHADIJA

Associate Professor, Department of English
K.M.C. Urdu, Arabi-Farsi University, LUCKNOW



ABSTRACT

Story telling is an art since the times immortal but it developed into a technique in the sixteenth century. Stories have told in form of epics, ballads, anecdotes or romances. This art reached to its perfection in the eighteenth century which gave birth to the novel; a well constructed prose narrative. In fact we trace the development of the novel to Sidney's Arcadia in the sixteenth century and Richardson's Pamela in the eighteenth century. Novel was the last literary form to be established but its growing popularity knew no bounds. The focus of my research paper is to highlight those elements of storytelling which make the narrative interesting.

KEYWORDS:- narrative, point of view, technique, device, tools.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

A **narrative** in its broadest sense is anything retold or recounted, often in words of something that happened; more narrowly, and more usually, something retold or recounted in the form of a causally-linked sequence of events; account; tale; the telling of a happening or connected series of happenings, whether true or fictitious. Sometimes certain events are left out because they are from some perspective insignificant, and perhaps emphasizing others thus giving shape and form to something that happened (a story).

Now for giving shape and form to a series of events some technique needs to be employed more narrowly for literary fictional narratives, as a **literary technique, literary device, or fictional device**, is any of several specific methods the storyteller uses to convey what they want in other words, a strategy used in the making of a narrative to relay information to the audience and, particularly, to "develop" the narrative,

usually in order to make it more complete, complicated, or interesting. Literary techniques are distinguished from literary elements, which exist inherently in works of writing. Often we find that 'how' a story is told is more important than 'what' is told. Thus it is the narrative technique selected by the storyteller that makes the story interesting. The narrative technique consists of the following tools :-

- a) The point of view; who tells the story ?
 - I. The first- person narrative is the narrator of the story.
 - II. The second- person narrative is the reader of the story.
 - III. The third-person narrative is someone else, an outsider looking at the events objectively.
- b) The narration of the story; who the narrator is speaking to?
 - I. Direct narration is where the narrator directly speaks to the reader.

- II. Frame narration is where the narrator tells the reader someone else's story from the first-person's point of view but we see more of the third person.
- III. Indirect narration is where the narrator may address an absent audience.
- c) Speech selected for the story; how do the people in the story speak?
 - I. In the direct speech the characters speak directly for themselves in form of dialogues and quotations. Nothing is summarized by the narrator.
 - II. In the indirect speech the narrator summarizes the events in reported speech. The story is retold or reported.
 - III. In the free indirect speech the narrator cleverly slips from telling the character's thoughts to simply writing them. It is third-person narration.
- d) Choice of the tense; when did the events of the story happen?
 - I. The narrator tells the story in the past tense because the events have already taken place and the story is retold.
 - II. The narrator tells the story in the present tense by unfolding the events before the reader's eyes.
 - III. The narrator tells the story in the future tense in form of predictions or instructions.

AIM OF NARRATIVE TENSES: The aim of the narrator is to make the narration interesting, therefore, the choice of tense is very important. Generally speaking the present is there for all of us to see for ourselves, the future is only available to us in form of predictions but the events which took place in the past are the one which sound interesting and exciting because we know nothing of the past and cannot even predict it. So it is the past that gives the narrator maximum scope for creativity as well as arousing the curiosity of the listeners and the readers.

DEFINITION OF NARRATIVE TENSES: Narrative tenses are verb tenses that are used to talk about the past; generally used to describe events, situations and activities that took place in the past. They are often

used in narration of the stories, past events such as personal anecdotes.

TYPES OF NARRATIVE TENSES: There are **four** types of narrative tenses such as :-

- 1) Past Simple e.g.; a) I loved.
b) I spoke.
c) Babar defeated Rana Sangha at Kanwaha.
- 2) Past Continuous e.g.; a) I was loving.
b) I was speaking.
c) While they danced we sang.
- 3) Past Perfect e.g.; a) I had loved.
b) I had spoken.
c) British kings were crowned in the Buckingham Palace.
- 4) Past Perfect Continuous e.g.; a) I had been loving.
b) I had been speaking.
c) When I saw him he was playing chess.

PURPOSE OF NARRATIVE TENSE

- Past simple is the most commonly used narrative tense and the other three tenses namely the past continuous, past perfect and past perfect continuous help us to narrate the events more effectively.
- These tenses are the grammatical structures that we often use while referring to the events that took place in the past.
- Whenever we try to narrate an event or a story we are supposed to organize the matter by using appropriate tenses; it could be past, present or future depending upon the choice of the point of view which forms the anchor that governs and affects our narration.
- **One of the first** decisions for a writer beginning a new story is the choice of narrative tense—will the story be looking into the past events or will it race through the present? That is, will the writer use past or present tense in terms of verbs and the action of the story?

- Either they insist upon using simple past is the only way to tell a story or they feel present tense has much to offer and is equally valid. But actually the narrator has options and limitations, and he also faces the expectations of readers / listeners.
- What we are talking about is the manner in which you present the actions of your story world. Do narrator, viewpoint and characters see actions and events as happening in the past or do they act as if the events are happening right now?
- In order to arouse the curiosity of the reader as well as the listener while telling a story, we often begin close to the climactic event and its resolution. Indeed, this was one of the basic rules for writing a story: *Start as close to the end as possible.*
- However, the reader may need to know about something that happened before the main event. If we are already in the past, we need to go one step further back, into what some call the "super past" or the past perfect that tells us what happened before the events we are already reading about in the past.
- Another important rule is that when narrating past events do not mix past and present tenses (avoid using the present perfect and present simple), as these will confuse the reader/listener about when the things had really happened.

Example: Narration of an incident :-

"Mr. Williams, the gardener opened the door very slowly, looked carefully around the room and walked in. The window was open and the curtains were blowing in the wind. Clearly someone had left in a hurry."

The narration has made use of all the **three** types of past tenses;

Past simple: opened, looked, walked, was

Past continuous: were blowing

Past perfect: had left

EXAMPLE : Narration of an anecdote:-

A: I saw a UFO once. Well, I think it was one.

B: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah, really. I was in the country – in the countryside - on the moors...

B: What were you doing up there?

A: Oh, I was visiting some friends. They'd rented a cottage and we'd gone up to stay with them.

The narration has made use of all the **three** types of past tenses ;

Past simple: saw, was

Past continuous: (What) were (you) doing? was visiting

Past perfect: they'd rented, we'd gone

USE OF NARRATIVE TENSES: Here are the most common narrative tenses and how they are used:

1. The **Past Simple Tense** is used: to express a completed action at a definite time in the past. The separate events which occur in sequence in a narrative are expressed using this tense. It often occurs with adverbs or adverb phrases of past time. Sometimes the time is either implied or indicated by the context of the sentence.

Example:(i) The steamer sailed day before yesterday.

(ii) When I was a young girl I lived in a small village.

- a) to express past habits at a given time period.

Example: (i) I woke up very late on Sundays when I was a student.

(ii) I studied many hours everyday.

2. The **Past Continuous Tense** is used:

- a) to talk about an action which was in progress at a given time in the past , the time of action may or may not be given:

Example: (i) At 2.00 p.m. my baby was sleeping in his cot.

(ii) We were listening to music all night.

- b) to talk about an action which was in progress at a given time in the past when another action interrupted it, the past continuous and past simple are used together when a new action happened in the middle of a longer action. The past simple is used for the new action:

Example:

- (i) I was playing with my friend when the phone rang.
(ii) When I saw him, he was watching television.
c) to talk about two or more actions which were happening simultaneously at a given time in the past :

Example:

- (i) My children were watching television while I was reading magazines.
(ii) The light went out while I was watching the movie.
d) to give background information in a story about an event in the past:

Example:

- (i) It was getting really dark and it was raining heavily as I was walking to my office.
(ii) The snow was falling on the houses and it was appearing beautiful all around as I looked out of the window.

- e) to express persistent habits in the past this is used with 'always', 'continually' etc.

Example :

- (i) She was always nagging.
(ii) He was continually gloomy.

3. The **Past Perfect Tense** is used:

- a) to talk about two actions that had already happened in the past, it may be necessary to show which action happened earlier than the other. The past simple is used in one clause and the past perfect in the other:

Example :

- (i) Some students got late. When they arrived, the competition had already started.
(ii) I had done my home work when Sita came to see me.
b) to make the narration more interesting and easy to read:

Example :

- (i) When I reached the station the train had started.
(ii) I had written the letter before she arrived.

4. The **Past Perfect Continuous** is used :

- a) to talk about longer actions or situations which had continued up to the past moment :

Example:

- (i) Before I went to bed that night, I had been watching a very scary movie about a vampire.
(ii) When Mrs. Sharma came to the school in 1995, Mrs. Mukherjee had already been teaching there for ten years.

It is to be noted that **continuous** tense is not used to describe a state of being:

Example: 'love' which is a state verb, therefore, it is grammatically incorrect to say " I am loving it." It should be " I love it."

State verbs generally fall into **four** groups:

- 1) **Emotions:** love, hate , want, need etc.
- 2) **Possession:** have, own, want, belong etc.
- 3) **Sense:** see, hear, smell, seem etc.
- 4) **Thought:** know, believe, remember etc.

There are some verbs which are both state and action verbs :

Example : (i) I **have** a car.(state)

(ii) I am **having** a bath. (action)

(iii) I **think** you are cool. (state)

(iv) I am **thinking** about buying a new car. (action)

NOTE:- The past simple is the most common tense after 'When?' in questions.

Example: (i) When did you write a letter to your friend?

(I wrote a letter yesterday.)

(ii) When did you sleep at night?

(I slept at 8.00 p.m.)

(iii) When did you go to school?

(I went to school in the morning)

NOTE:- Used to + verb is often used to express past **habits** and **states** that happened in the past, but do not happen now. 'Used to' cannot be used for actions which only occurred once.

Example:

(i) I used to work for the Ambanis. (I don't work for them now.)

(ii) I didn't use to like living in Mumbai. (I do like it now.)

(iii) Where did you use to go for dinner? (You don't go there now.)

Thus we notice that the art of story-telling needs to be perfected keeping in mind the techniques that shall make the narration of an event, anecdote, incident or a tale interesting to the listeners or the readers. Therefore, the narrator keeps in mind the point of view, the choice of tense and the selection of speech which essential features of the narrative technique in order to make the story effective and interesting raising the level of curiosity among the listeners or the readers.

REFERENCES

Beach, J.W. *Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*. New York: Appleton, 1932.

Leavis, Q.D. *Fiction and the Reading Public*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1965.

Wren & Martin, *High School English Grammar & Composition*. New Delhi: S.Chand, 2014.

Colmer, John, ed. *Approaches to the Novel*. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1966.