

Impact of First Person Narration with Reference to Select African Writers' Autobiographies: A Study of Narrative Techniques

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Abstract:

Storytelling is an art. Every successful story teller has his/her own strategy to hold the readers. Writers use their imagination or blend imagination with real life incident/events/history to not only attract the readers but also to send strong messages to the society. The world has seen great novelists such as Charles Dickens, Chinua Achebe, Mark Twain, Mulk Raj Anand etc. These writers are successful in their career because they had their own style of writing. Moreover, they had different stories/ messages to tell the world. The present article discusses the narrative techniques and the uses associated with them especially in creating impact on readers. The impact writers try to create among their readers using various narrative techniques is a common one in literature. Nelson Mandela's autobiography Long Walk to Freedom and Maya Angelo's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings are the two autobiographies taken for the study.

Key words: narrative technique, impact, point of view, perspective, meaning

When it comes to Colonization, almost all the nations were under the clutches of the British either directly or indirectly. Africa is one of the hugely affected nations by the British. One of the richest countries in the world, Africa has lost most of its resources to the British Isles. Today, Africa is one of the poorest countries in the world. There are so many people actively involved in the fight for freedom from the British. One of the most important personalities in Africa spearheading the freedom fight is Nelson Mandela. His service and sacrifice to his people and nation cannot be expressed in words. Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years by the British backed African government. Mandela had been in prison from 1964 to 1990. The reason for his imprisonment is his fight against South Africa's apartheid system.

African literature holds a very important place in the context of world literature. Africa has gifted many great writers to literature. There are millions of readers across the world that Africa holds. Predominantly preoccupied by Colonialism and the untold miseries as their subjects, African literature equally focuses on the plight of apartheid system existed in Africa for centuries. The Google defines apartheid as “a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa from 1948 to the 1990s”. This policy separated all the people as different race groups. Pathetically, this system suppressed the rights of the Black Community but upheld the powers of the White people who were less in numbers in the then Africa. The native Africans were subjected to restrictions in housing, education and other normal human activities. The apartheid system predominantly supported the White people at the cost of the normal daily life of the native Black people. This system has cost the lives of thousands of native Africans who fought for freedom from such clutches.

Nelson Mandela was an anti-apartheid activist belonging to the African continent. He, a very famous African leader, has been known across the world for his fight against apartheid system that simply suppressed the rights of the native Black African with an iron hand. The cost Mandela paid for spearheading the anti-apartheid system was that he was sentenced to 24 years of imprisonment by the then African government supported by the British. Nelson Mandela's service to his country and the sacrifice he did to his people leave an indelible mark in the history of African freedom fight from the worst apartheid system that nobody except the White supporters liked. From 1964 to the 1990s, Mandela had been imprisoned for his active part in the anti-apartheid system. Having spent 27 years in prison in his 95 years of life, Mandela had been rewarded accordingly to becoming the first African President of his nation in 1994. Considered as a symbol of peace, Mandela was conferred on the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

Long Walk to Freedom is Nelson Mandela's autobiography featuring his fight for anti-apartheid system. Published in 1994, the book details the days Mandela spent in prison and the release subsequently that took place in 1990.

Nelson Mandela has written his autobiography Long Walk to Freedom in such a way that the readers immerse themselves in reading the entire book. In narration, point of view matters a lot. In order to involve the readers, writers use different points of view accordingly. Google defines points of view as the perspective from which a story is told. It is the lens that the readers use or put on to understand the story better. Writers usually use first person, second-person or third person narration to elaborate their stories on. They use such techniques to reach out to the readers and to serve their purpose of writing such stories.

Autobiographies, as it goes without saying, are written in first-person point of view. An incident or event narrated by a third-person is entirely and understood differently than when it is narrated by a first-person. Autobiographies reach out to readers fairly easily because they, by and large, immerse the readers with the course or the flow of what is narrated by the writer.

Maya Angelo, another African writer, has readers throughout the world because of her writing style. She successfully pulls her readers into the story, or poem or whatever she writes. Again, Maya Angelo did not lead a happy, comfortable and normal life. She had stories to tell by means of her writing. That resulted in the publication of her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. What prompted Maya Angelo to write her autobiography are events and incidents in which she was treated otherwise. The famous African writer had been a waitress, dancer, activist and the like. She has undergone miseries in her life and career for the reason that she is a woman, especially an African Black woman. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* accommodates Maya Angelo's untold miseries she underwent from age 3 to 16. This includes racial prejudice, separation of her parents, sexual witness and the like. Maya Angelo, the writer with much will power, rises like a phoenix to continue her fight for women, rights of Black people and the like. Her first success is rising beyond the odds and atrocities happened to her and her Black people. Her second success is the ability and agile to record her life as an autobiography.

Writing in third-person narration only makes the readers as audience. They are just viewers in the story narrated by someone. First-person narration, one of the popular narrative techniques, helps readers understand the story from the narrator's perspective/point of view. It is famously said to walk a mile in someone's shoes. A change in point of view or perspective changes the understanding or meaning of the texts. Who says the matter is as equally important as what is said. First-person narration wears the lens of the narrator to understand incidents, events etc in a much better way. The reader is transported to another person's mind to experience firsthand in first-person narration.

In first-person narration, which more often happens in autobiographies, the readers are able to immerse themselves with the course or the flow of the story. Any writer who is able to make readers empathize with the characters is considered successful. A critic says that it is the readers who give life to the characters/story. Without readers, the story in any genre remains dead. The story gets life once the readers start reading it. It is not just reading, an immersed reading in which the readers empathize with the characters. Any writer who fails to trigger the empathizing part is a failed writer.

Nelson Mandela in his *Long Walk to Freedom* uses an inclusive language with the intention to unite people across divides, emphasizing shared humanity and a common purpose for a reconciled society. The African leader believes the afore-mentioned are possible through an awakening call by

means of his autobiography. The title 'Long Walk to Freedom' has been reinforced with the subtitle 'The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela'. The title clarifies its literary stance. The autobiography is in prose form of writing and it is factual than fiction (Shinde).

Maya Angelo in all her works critically registers her struggle in order to stamp her authority as an African-American woman. In order to understand what Maya Angelo intends to say will be understood only when it is said in first-person narration (Uriah S. Tetteh et al).

Nelson Mandela and Maya Angelo, both the African personalities are successful in their writing because they are able to trigger the empathizing part in readers. Both these writers include the readers as characters or close witnesses. Mandela through his 'Long Walk to Freedom' and Maya Angelo through her 'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings' bring the stories, incidents, events close to the readers which they cannot dispense with.

Maya Angelo in her autobiography discusses not only as an individual space of healing and resistance but also as spaces for collective representation of trauma experiences (Kumari). The African-American writer draws forth the contours of personal trauma and pain she underwent. This has been done by analysing the thematic and narrative construct of the same (Kumari).

Conjuring up is an art that some writers are good at. Any reader conjures up while reading automatically mandates that the writer is a greater one. While reading, readers are involved into the story by means of the words, expressions and themes writers use. Mandela and Maya Angelo are such writers who help the readers conjure up. By doing so, both the writers achieve what they intended through their writing. Again, readers, while conjure up, are easily able to empathize and understand the story and the writer's reason behind writing the story.

By using first-person narration, both Nelson Mandela and Maya Angelo help the readers understand the intensity of the event described and the grave of the situation. Readers easily put themselves in the characters' shoes or the writers' shoes when they read something in the first-person narration.

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