

ABSTRACT

Feminist narratologists from Susan Lanser to Ruth Page have been vociferously explicit in their grievance that Narratology is gender blind. They contend that gender makes a difference at the level of discourse. This research project examines the narrative structures and strategies of a cross-section of Indian English Women's Fiction as represented by Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Nina Sibal's *Yatra: The Journey* (1987), Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988), Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999), and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* (2002) in the context of the cultural construction of gender. In the corpus under consideration, each novelist approaches her subject matter differently. Yet each narrative bears the brand of gender too strongly to be ignored. Women's writing is "different" in that it gives voice to not only the whine and the whimper, but also the growl of the underdog. One major cause for grievance is woman's universally lauded "selfless" state. Thus, much of women's fiction is dedicated to the charting of the quest for selfhood. When such is the theme, certain techniques are inevitable. When technique echoes theme, both work together, each complementing the other to make the medium the message. Some narrative techniques figure regularly in women's fiction to facilitate the quest for selfhood. Focalization through women characters serves to force the demurely lowered female gaze to raise itself, and boldly confront reality. Interior monologues initiate the reader into the intricacies of the female mind. Flashbacks help identify the milestones of the past. The frame narrative thrusts multiple women's stories to the forefront in a bid to alter accepted modes of thought. Further, the techniques of "reflexive perception" and "inversion" help dramatize the peculiar predicament in which woman discovers her "self". Metaphor is another rhetorical device whereby the woman is able to access the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. Metaphors work better when activated through the techniques of magic realism and ecofeminism. Such then are the narrative techniques that women writers exploit to give explicit articulation to implicit grievance.

Keywords: Internal Focalisation; Frame Narrative; Inversion & Reflexive Perception; Metaphor; Magic Realism; Ecofeminism.