

## Narrative Technique in ‘And the Mountains Echoed’ by Khaled Hosseini

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### Abstract:

It is a story of separation and union. Abdullah and Pari are the siblings who are separated in their childhood and reunited when they are old. What all happens in between is what the story speaks about. Though it is the story of Abdullah and Pari, it would be wrong to say that they are the central characters. Uncle Nabi who is the cause of their separation is given much space. Even Markos who helps them get reunited also spreads through the novel. It is a novel of loss and gain. However, unlike the other novels, it is not written in a linear narrative style. Characters go into flashback and come to the present. Events are not set chronologically. For instance, Part One and Part Two are set during the ‘Fall of 1952’. Part Three is set in the year 1949. Thus, there is a back and forth movement which makes the story too complex to comprehend easily.

**Key Words:** Narration, Narrative Technique, Narrator, Point of View, Repetition

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### I. Introduction

There is no doubt that novel is a European invention. Its origin lies in the word ‘novella’ which means a new thing. One of the earliest novels in Europe was Cervantes’ Don Quixote. Thereafter, there was no looking back. Many novels were written and are being written all over the world. It is the most comprehensive literary form. Many novelists have defined Novel in their own way. Henry Fielding called it ‘a comic epic in prose’. Milan Kundera, in his famous work *Art of Novel* says, “The novel is a meditation on existence as seen through the medium of imaginary characters.”<sup>1</sup> He further adds that the novel has accompanied man uninterruptedly and faithfully since the beginning of the Modern Era. A novel consists of these aspects: Plot, characters, setting and theme.

It is the ‘Fall of 1952’. The story opens with a father telling his children a story. Saboor is father and Abdullah and Pari are his children. We come to know from their conversation that Pari and Saboor are about to leave Shadbagh the next morning.

The story father tells is about a family in a little village called Maidan Sabz meaning Green field. The head of the family was Baba Ayub. Baba Ayub had three sons and two daughters: five children like fingers of a hand. He was fond of the youngest, Qais, a three-year old boy. Life in Maidan Sabz was difficult. People were hard-working. One day a div came to the village. Whenever div comes, it used to ask a child from a home and take the child to its fort. This time div tapped Baba Ayyub’s house. He has to give one of his children. He gave the child whom he loved the most. This is a situation where ‘a finger had to be cut to save the hand.’<sup>2</sup>

After some years, Baba Ayub went in search of his son Qais. He went to div’s fort to kill him. Div takes him in to his fort. Div led him into an enormous room, at the far end of it was a curtain. Div pulls the curtain open. Behind it was a glass window. He saw his son playing in the garden with other children.

Div says that he could take his son back with him but asks him what sort of life awaits him in Maidan Sabz. Thus, he left his son there and returned his village. Div gives him potion so that Baba Ayyub forgets his visit to div’s mountain and even his son, Qais. Saboor tells this story to his children.

Significance of the story lies in the fact that it foreshadows the future events in the lives of Abdullah and Pari. It works like motive. In the chapter Seven of the novel *Things Fall Apart*, the arrival of locusts to the village of Umuofia is given. “And then the locusts came... The elders said locusts came once in a generation, reappeared every year for seven generations and then disappear of another lifetime.”<sup>3</sup> The arrival of locusts to the village prepares the readers for the descending of colonialism on the village of Umuofia. Likewise, the story prepares the readers for the events to come in the lives of the characters. One more thing to note is that it is a monologue. Nowhere the children interrupt during the narration of the story by their father.

Part Two also takes place in the year 1952. Story continues. In this part, Saboor travels Kabul. The love of Abdullah for his sister Pari is expressed to heighten the effect of their separation. The narrator says, “Pari was the only person in the world who would never, could never, hurt him. Sometimes Abdullah felt she was the only true family he had.”<sup>4</sup> He thought that looking after is purpose of his life. The reason God had made him so the he

could be there to take care of Pari when He took away their mother. Here we learn that they have lost their mother. After their mother's untimely death their father marries to Parwana, his childhood friend.

At Kabul, Uncle Nabi received them and took them to his employers' house. Uncle Nabi was Parwana's elder brother and Abdullah's step uncle. It was he who has called Saboor to Kabul for some construction work at employers' house. Suleiman Wahdati and his wife Nila Wahdati are Nabi's employers whom we come to know about later. When Abdullah entered into Wahdati's house he felt as though he had stepped in to the div's palace. In the story that Saboor tells to Pari and Abdullah, the character called Baba Ayyub also visited div's fort. It foretells what is awaiting.

On seeing Pari, Mrs. Wahdati quotes from Rumi, "today I have seen the charm, the beauty the unfathomable grace of the face that I was looking for."<sup>5</sup> It is a clue that something was amiss in her life and she had found it in Pari.

Mrs. Wahdati is incapable of giving birth to child. Nabi had given her idea to adopting Pari. The event of separation is heart-touching. After they come back from Kabul, neither Saboor nor Abdullah had peace. Saboor stopped telling his children stories. He spoke little. Abdullah thought that his days in Shadbagh were numbered. There was a dog at their home named Shuja. Pari loved it and when she did not return to Kabul it waited for her many days and, at last, one day it disappeared.

Part Three is titled 'Spring 1949'. In this part of the novel, the childhood life of Saboor, Parwana and Masooma, Parwana's sister, is depicted, and the darker side of Parwana is revealed. From the beginning, Masooma was liked by everyone; moreover, she possessed what a girl should, beauty. Both of them loved Saboor. Parwana never expressed her thoughts for him to anybody, not even Saboor. One day, in the morning, both the sisters sat on a branch high up the oak tree, Masooma tells Parwana that Saboor has expressed his love for her. She was searching for her pocket to show the evidence when she fell off the tree and lost her legs. It was all Parwana's doing.

All these years Parwana looked after Masooma, even after the former got married to Saboor. One day, Masooma asks her to take her to Kabul where Nabi lives. They leave for Kabul but don't reach it, because Masooma tells her sister to leave her in the desert and return which Parwana does. The narration here is such that it is difficult for the readers to understand whether Parwana is happy leaving her sister behind or she left her reluctantly.

Part Four is untitled. A new character called Markos is introduced. This part is narrated by Nabi. He writes a letter to Markos who is a tenant staying in the house of which Nabi is the owner now. It once belonged to Mr. Wahdati. This letter, in fact, is a confession. He says that he worked both as a cook and chauffeur for Mr. Wahdati. Nila Wahdati was his wife. Their married life was not happy one. Nila could not produce a child. With Pari's arrival, Wahdati household resembled a proper family. It did not last long. In the spring of 1955, Mr. Wahdati had got paralytic attack. After a few days, Nila left Kabul for Paris. After that, Nabi was the sole companion for Mr. Wahdati till he dies in 2002. In the end of the letter, Nabi asks Markos to find Pari and give her the will which he leaves the house, money and his other belongings to her.

Part Five takes place in Spring 2003. This part looks like a digression from the main story but it is not. It gives information about Bashiri family, the neighbours of Wahdati. After Nila leaves Kabul for Paris, Nabi was the one to look after Mr. Wahdati. He used to take him for a morning walk. During their morning walk, they used to see Bashiri children playing. Idris and Timur, are cousins. Their families fled after the Soviets rolled in, they spent a year in Pakistan before settling in California in the early eighties. They have visited their native country after twenty years. It was Timur's father, Idris' uncle, who sent them to Kabul so that they could reclaim their property.

Part Six is titled 'February 1974'. It was the year of Nila Wahdati's death. It consists of an interview of Nila by one Mr. E.B. The editor of the *Parallaxe*, a quarterly in which Nila's interview had been published, announces her untimely death. It is through this interview that we get further information about her life and her character. Her father was an Afghan and her mother a French. After Nila's parents divorced in 1939, she was only ten years old. Her mother left for Paris to live with her sister Agnes. Nila's character is negative right from the beginning. The interview reveals more about her character and helps us understand her rift with Pari.

Seeing her father in photos made Pari feel like something is amiss in her life, something 'fundamental to her own existence'. Sometimes she felt it so acutely like when, in Provence, she had seen a massive Oak tree outside a farm house. The oak tree comes in the narration again. In the beginning of the novel, Saboor tells Abdullah that the oak tree in their village is so old that must have witnessed Babar's army marching past it. When Pari was sold to Wahdati, Saboor cuts down the tree because it reminds him of his most beloved one, i.e., Pari. It means that memory is blurred in her mind but not completely wiped off.

The narrator tells that when Pari was young, she used to ask Maman about her cousins, uncles and aunt, and grand-parents in Kabul. She asked why they had not visited; could she write letter to them. The memory of a dog with a severed tail and ears strikes her mind every now and then. She had asked Maman once if they had ever owned a dog in Kabul.

When the rift between Nila and Pari widens they live separately. In the conversation on telephone, Nila says, "I look at you sometimes and I don't see me in you. Of course, I don't. I suppose that isn't unexpected after all. I don't know what sort of person you are, Pari. I don't know who you are, what you are capable of in your blood. You are stranger to me."<sup>6</sup>

Through these incidents and conversations Pari had already doubted that she was not the child of Wahdatis, which is evident in a conversation between Pari and her husband Eric. She tells him her plan to go to Afghanistan. Eric asks her whether she thinks she was adopted to which Pari asks him if he will come with her. They decide they will travel that summer but Pari discovers that she is pregnant. Later, when her first child, Isabella, is born she no longer felt the urge to searching answer for the questions about her whereabouts as intense as she used to before. The questions, which were like, water always dripping from faucet in the back of her mind. It is in this part of the story where Markos contacts Pari through facebook and later calls her. He tells her about her past life.

Part Seven, like Part Five, appears to be a digression from the main plot. The narration begins with the description of new characters and events unrelated to the previous ones. As the story moves on we learn that it is about Iqbal, son of Saboor and Parwana. He, along with his family, lived in Jalozaï refugee camp in Pakistan. Pakistanis shut down the camps saying that Afghans belong to Afghanistan. The family returned to Shadbagh. The smell of nativity is prominent here. Iqbal tells his children about sweetness of water in Shadbagh and the grapes that grow nowhere in the world except here.

After returning, he claims for his ancestral property where a former Commander, who fought against Russian invasion, has built his mansion now. He goes to courthouse but justice was denied. In rage, he throws stones at Commander's house and the glasses shatter. In the newspaper it is given that he is a former refugee who is suspected with ties to the Taliban. What happened to him is unknown. In Part Nine of the novel there is a hint that he was killed but not openly expressed.

Part Eight is about Markos' life. He was from Tinos, an island in Greece. He is a surgeon. He goes to Kabul as a part of a medical group that had come to Kabul to operate on children who had suffered injuries to their face. He stayed in the house of Wahdatis. That is how he comes into contact with Nabi. Later, Nabi writes a letter to him and tells him to search for Pari. In the spring of 2010 he calls Pari. He searches her through facebook.

The Ninth and the last part of the novel witnesses the meeting of Abdullah and Pari. She visits Shadbagh after speaking with Markos on a phone call, where she learns about Iqbal. It is there that she learns that Iqbal, when he was in a refugee camp in Pakistan, used to receive money from his step-brother from northern California. That is how she finds out Abdullah.

When Abdullah's daughter tells that she feels sorry for her because she is late in finding him out. He is old and he often forgets the things. He forgets even that his wife died long back. To this, Pari says, "But we *have* found no? And this is who he is now. It's all right. I feel happy. I have found a part of my self that was lost."<sup>7</sup> This is how the story of searching ends.

Some images often recur in the novel, like the oak tree in Shadbagh. Desert is a part and parcel of life in Afghanistan. Pari and Abdullah rest in the desert at night on their way to Kabul. At night Abdullah gets up and not seeing his father around he is taken aback. The vastness of the desert fills in him fear. When Parwana leaves her sister Masooma in the desert, the vast expanse before her looks like a womb of a mother. It is a new life she moving towards.

Some parts of the novel are narrated by the characters themselves. Part One is narrated by Saboor. It is a story within a story. Part Four is narrated by Nabi. It is a letter to Markos. Part Eight is narrated by Markos. Part Nine is narrated by Pari. She is not sister of Abdullah, but his daughter who had the same name as her aunt.

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