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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Author	Title of the Paper	Download
1	Dr. Sherin Shervani	Analyses of the Identity of Muslim Women in Modern Non-native English Fiction	<a href="#">2401.PDF</a>
2	Dr. B.V. Rama Prasad	Realization of the Distance between the Writer and the Focal Character in Vasudendra's Short Story "First Time at the Pinnacle"	<a href="#">2402.PDF</a>
3	Jaisingh K.	Innovative Techniques in Language Teaching: An Analysis of the Computer Assisted English Language Learning Software used in most of the Engineering Colleges in India	<a href="#">2403.PDF</a>
4	Mohammed Najmuddin Khan	Superheavy Elements: Its Annals	<a href="#">2404.PDF</a>
5	B. Moses	Problems of equivalents and morphology in translating the Tamil novel "Helicoptergal Keezhe Iragi Vittana" into English	<a href="#">2405.PDF</a>
6	Shram Mustafa Hama-Salih & Dr. Muktaja Mathkari	Women in Chinua Achebe's <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (1958)	<a href="#">2406.PDF</a>
7	Shivani Jha	<i>The Hungry Tide: A Discourse of Dispossessions</i>	<a href="#">2407.PDF</a>
8	Prin. Dr. D.M. Muley	Political Impact of Reservation Policy on Scheduled Castes	<a href="#">2408.PDF</a>
9	Dr. Smriti Singh	Identity and Ethnicity in Kiran Desai's 'The Inheritance of Loss'	<a href="#">2409.PDF</a>
10	Dr. Muktaja Mathkari & Shram Mustafa Hama-Salih	Women in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's <i>The River Between</i> (1965)	<a href="#">2410.PDF</a>
11	Nisha. K. P.	Reflections on Research Studies in Stress and School Environment	<a href="#">2411.PDF</a>
12	Dr. K. A. Attar	Displacement and Search for Home in Jean Rhys's <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	<a href="#">2412.PDF</a>
13	Dr. Ashok Wagh & Dr. S.T. Gadade	Activity and Periodicity in Financial Planning and Performance in Colleges	<a href="#">2413.PDF</a>
14	Dr. Muktaja Vikas	Pronouncing and Denouncing Motherhood: Rama Mehta's	<a href="#">2414.PDF</a>

	Mathkari	<i>Inside the Haveli</i> and Margaret Laurence's <i>A Jest of God</i>	
15	Dr. Archana Durgesh, Md. Osama, Md. Ashraf, Md. Faiz, Md. Md. Kashif, Md. Ammaar	Revolution 2020 - Battle for a Perfect Life	2415.PDF
16	Mrs. Mishra Santwana Gopalchandra & Dr. K. L. Chincholikar	A Study of Correlation of Academic Achievement with Aptitude, Attitude and Anxiety	2416.PDF
17	Dr. Manju Lalwani Pathak	Economic Thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore	2417.PDF
18	Solanki Milind Kantilal	The Effect of History and Post-Modernism in Today's Indian English Literature	2418.PDF
19	Dr. Archana Durgesh & Dr. Pooja Singh	Communicating Across With a Touch & a Glance	2419.PDF
20	Anil Kumar Singh	Motifs of History in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh	2420.PDF
21	Dr. Franz Josef Gellert & Professor Dr. Hugo Velthuijsen	Gradual Retirement Schemes and Older Workers Social Inclusion and Employability in The Netherlands	2421.PDF
22	Dr. Raji Ramesh	Negotiating the Patriarchal Authority: The Magic Toyshop	2422.PDF
23	Jayasimha P.	Transmutation of Confession as Devotion: Cognitive Modeling of Saint Augustine's <i>Confessions of a Sinner - Book One</i>	2423.PDF
24	Bijayata Pradhan	Voices from the Margins: A Study on the Texts Based on the Life of The Tea Workers in the Tea Estates of Darjeeling	2424.PDF
25	Nivedita Ghosh	The Emerging Marital Trends in Indian Scenario	2425.PDF
26	S.N. Sithi Shamila	Redefining 'Quality' through Student Participation: A Holistic Perspective	2426.PDF
27	Isha Dhar & Zia Afroz	Bitcoin-A Historical Perspective of the Effects of the New Currency on the Global Economy with the Future Speculated	2427.PDF
28	Dr. Santosh J. Mishra	Painful Journey of Self Discovery through Different Cultural Spaces in <i>Desirable Daughters</i> by Bharati Mukherjee	2428.PDF
29	J. Kirubakaran & Dr. M. Dharmalingam	A Study on Impact of Financial Sector Reforms in India with Reference to Indian Capital Market	2429.PDF
30	Mr. Kailas B. Aute	Contesting and Voicing non-normative sexual Identity: A Critical Study of Shyam Selvadurai's <i>Funny Boy</i>	2430.PDF
31	Zia Afroz & Sumbul Fatima	Need of Entrepreneurship Development in Rural Sector in India	2431.PDF

**Realization of the Distance between the Writer and the Focal Character in Vasudendra's Short Story "First Time at the Pinnacle"<sup>i</sup>****Dr. B.V. Rama Prasad***Kuvempu University, Shankaraghatta, Shimogga (Karnataka), India***Abstract**

This paper tries to analyze a short story about a homosexual character written in Kannada. The paper asks why the third person narrative is used even when the writer and the focal character share many traits. It will look at the cues available to the reader that will help him/her to form an idea of the distance between the writer and the focal character.

**Key Words:** deictic centre, focal WHO, author WHO, narrative focalization

The aim of this paper is to look at the cues that help the reader to realize the distance between the writer and the focal character in a Kannada short story by Vasudendra written in third person narrative. There have been many studies about the deictic distance in narratives (see, Jacobs; Bennett; Elliston.) But we are not aware of any studies that deal with the way in which the writer's real life persona is related with the focal character through the textual and contextual cues in the narrative, which is what this paper will attempt. In this paper we will first try to establish the fact that the narrative focalization of the short story often merges with that of the main character called Mohanaswamy. Then we will look at the cues in the short story that help a reader is establishing details about the WHO of Mohanaswamy. After that we will look at the contextual cues available to a very novice reader about the WHO of the writer as available in the introduction to the writer in the first page of the book of which this short story is a part. Then we will draw certain conclusions about the distance between Mohanaswamy and the writer.

Finally we will pose the question as to why the writer has made a choice to use the third person narrative.

The concept of the distance and the deictic centre has been dealt with in Rapaport, et al, pg 4-7. We will use some of the concepts, but will use only those that are necessary for this paper. The following terms will be used in this paper:

**Focal WHO-** the character who is the main character in the sense that he is the object of focalization throughout the story

**Non-focal characters-** characters who are objects of focalization only in parts of the story

**Narrative focalization-** the point of view from which the narrative is presented to us except in direct speech and direct thought which are presented in inverted commas.

**Author WHO-** the real life author the cues to whom are available even to a very novice reader: the cues we consider will be those given in the introduction to writer in the book of which the selected short story is a part.

We will begin by giving a very general background to the writer and a very short summary of the story. Vasudendra is one of the recent writers in Kannada short story world who has brought in the corporate world into Kannada literature. He himself is part of the corporate world having worked in software companies. The present short story is from the collection of short stories called "Mohanaswamy". Most of the short stories in the collection deal with the character called Mohanaswamy who belongs to sexual minority. To be specific, he is gay. This is the first attempt in Kannada literature to deal in such detail and depth with the homosexual experience. To that extent, it would have taken a lot of courage to write such stories. Though Vasudendra has published many short stories, only a few of his previous short stories dealt with this experience.

In this particular story that we are analyzing, Mohanaswamy is the central character. The story is written in third person narrative. Mohanaswamy is 'living-in' with his same sex partner Karthik. The story begins with Mohanaswamy getting ready to catch a flight. The first episode of the story deals with the domestic atmosphere of Mohanaswamy's home. He takes leave of his partner Karthik to catch a flight to Delhi. In the flight he meets a middle aged man called Ramesh, who talks to him about his pre marital love affair (heterosexual). Caught up in the spirit of conversation, Mohanaswamy is also made to talk about his love life, but Mohanaswamy presents his own love life as heterosexual talking about Karthik as if Karthik is a girl with whom he is in love. Then the plane crashes, but

Ramesh and Mohanaswamy miraculously survive. After this life changing experience, Mohanaswamy confesses to Ramesh that he is gay and that Karthik is in fact his boyfriend and not girl friend. The story ends with Ramesh saying, "It's alright. You have not done any mistake that has to be pardoned" (translations mine).

Mohanaswamy is the Focal character of this story because the narration moves along with Mohanaswamy (from his house to bus stop, bus stop to airport, and into the plane). We will now try to see how the narrative focalization merges with that of Mohanaswamy. Though there are many possible markers to indicate the narrative focalization, we will use the way in which people are referred to by the use of the proper nouns. We will look at how the two important characters –Mohanaswamy and Karthik- are referred to by the use of proper noun. We will look at

- a. how Mohanaswamy refers to Karthik as given in direct speech and direct thought
- b. How the narrative focalization refers to Karthik except in direct thought and direct speech.
- c. How Karthik refers to Mohanaswamy in direct speech and direct thought.
- d. How the narrative focalization refers to Mohanaswamy except in direct thought and direct speech.

Let us now look at how Karthik is referred to by the use of proper noun. The name is used in the short story in three forms- Karthy, Karthika, and Karthik. In Kannada the first term can be called proximal, the second the middle and the third distant in

terms of distance of the person from the one who is using the terms. The following chart shows how Karthik is referred to by Table 1: Reference to Karthik

Mohanaswamy and by the narrative focalization:

	Proximal Karthi	Middle Karthika	Distant Karthik
Moahanswamy	9	Never	never
Narrative Focalization	48	6	never

Let us now look at how Mohanaswamy is referred to. Mohanaswamy is referred to as Mohana, Mohan, and Mohanaswamy. Among these, the first is proximal, the second is middle, and the third is distant in terms of distance.

Table 2: Reference to Mohanaswamy

	Proximal Mohana	Middle Mohan	Distant Mohanaswamy
Karthik	always	Never	never
Narrative Focalization	3	Never	100
Ramesh	never	Always	never

From the above two tables a clear pattern emerges. We are here not talking about individual cases of reference, but about the overall pattern and the overall pattern is suggestive of the distance between the narrative focalization and the focalization of Mohanaswamy. For example, Karthik is referred to by Mohanswamy always as Karthy in direct speech. The narrative focalization refers to him as Karthika 6 times and as Karthy 48 times. It never uses the most distant reference. Thus, what is proximal to Mohanaswamy is also proximal to the narrative focalization.

But in terms of reference to Mohanaswamy, a different picture emerges. Karthik always uses the proximal term, Ramesh always uses the middle term and the narrative focalization overwhelmingly uses

the distant term. In other words, when referring to Karthik, the narrative focalization merges with the focalization of Mohanaswamy. We can clearly say that Mohanaswamy is the deictic centre. However, in referring to Mohanaswamy himself, the narrative focalization seems to maintain a distance. Why is this so? The conventions of story writing may demand that full name be used to introduce a character. However, throughout the narrative it is strange that the distant term is repeatedly used. It seems interesting that the narrative focalization merges with that of Mohanaswamy but still tries to distance itself from Mohanaswamy the character by using his full name most of the times.

We can now look at another proof to show that the narrative focalization merges

with that of Mohanaswamy. When Ramesh first appears in the story, he is referred to as 'that person', 'that middle aged man', 'the man wearing the light green shirt', etc by the narrative focalization. This clearly duplicates the point of view of Mohanaswamy as well, because he as yet does not know who this person is. But once Mohanaswamy introduces himself, he comes to know the name of 'that person' as Ramesh. After that, the narrative focalization always refers to Ramesh as 'Ramesh', the way in which Mohanaswamy would address him. This clearly shows that the narrative focalization merges with that of Mohanaswamy. So we can declare that Mohanaswamy is very near to the narrative focalization and that he is the deictic centre.

Now let us move on to the next question of the distance between the writer and Mohanaswamy. We will look what cues are there in the text about the 'character' of Mohanaswamy. In other words, we are trying to establish the WHO of the focal character. We are trying to look at those details that help us in identifying the basic facts about Mohanaswamy and we are not attempting a character study of any psychological depth. The story tells us by direct reference that Mohanaswamy is based in Bangalore. Indirectly, we come to know of his job status. He seems to be someone working in a private company, who has to travel often, who is comfortable with travelling through air, who wears 'suit, boot and tie' and who is in a fairly good position because he has to train people. He has a laptop, uses words like virus attack, and who has prepared for a power point presentation. These make it clear that he is part of the

corporate world, most possibly connected with software. He reads Kannada books, and even if he is not one, he is aware of the fact that there is a Madwa sub sect of Brahmins. (When Ramesh says that he belongs to the Madwa sub sect, Mohanaswamy says "Yes, I know".) He is a very shy person. He does not like trekking, as his friend Karthik does. All these cues in the text allow the reader to form a mental representation of the WHO of Mohanaswamy. The reader can guess the class to which he belongs; guess that he is an educated person, that he is part of the corporate world; that he reads Kannada books, etc. But there are certain things which are not mentioned also. For example, it is not mentioned to which caste he belongs to, though it could easily have been done when the caste of Ramesh is mentioned.

Let us now look at the cues available to the reader about the WHO of the real writer. We can expect most readers to be aware of certain things about the writer. But even if the reader is a very novice reader, he/she are given some hints about the real writer. The write up at the beginning of the book tells us that Vasudendra is a part of the software world. It informs us of his hobbies that include squash, trekking, classical music, and studying Mahabharatha. Thus the reader can make assumptions about the WHO of the real writer.

What emerges from this is the fact that Mohanaswamy and the writer share some character traits. Their worlds are similar. In other Vasudendra stories, such a character who belongs to the same world as the real writer becomes the first person narrator of the story. But this story tries to use certain cues to deliberately distance the focal

character from the real writer. One of these is the information that Mohanaswamy does not like trekking. We also have the fact that the story uses the distant form of referring to the focal character in terms of personal reference. The use of the third person narrative itself is a distancing device. This fact becomes more interesting because Vasudendra uses the first person narrative in many stories of this connection. In most of these stories the first person narrator can very easily be identified as belonging to the similar world as that of the writer, including his sub caste (where as in this short story the caste of the focal WHO is left unclear). A relevant example is of the story "Bedbug" which also talks about a cross dresser. But here the cross dresser is from a different

social class from that of the first person narrator who himself is not represented as gay.

To conclude, the story that we have analyzed shows that there is a merging of the narrative focalizing and the focalization of the focal character. This can be seen in the use of personal pronouns to refer to characters. We can also see that the focal WHO and the author WHO share many things. Still, the story tries to pose a distance between the writer and the narrator. There seems to be a conflict between adopting completely the focalization of the focal character and the attempt to distance oneself from the focal character. The reasons for these may be probably socio-cultural than literary.

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<sup>i</sup> The story has not been translated in to English. Hence all the translations are mine.

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