



Psycho-Narration in Nitasha Kaul's Future Tense

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Abstract

The theory of Expressionism by Germans and the Theory of Impressionism by the French were instrumental in paving the way to Stream of consciousness by English. Ever since the advent of the Stream of consciousness, modernists, in the likes of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Laurence Sterne, have used the technique to depict or narrate the voice of the inner mind, which science calls consciousness. Dorrit Cohn's coined term, *Psycho-Narration*, is an extension to the narrative style associated with stream of consciousness. The theory thrives on the understanding of not only the character in discussion and his psychological make-up but also the analysis of action performed by him at a given point of time. Psycho-narration, as explained by Cohn, is a mode of rendering consciousness in a more literary manner, rather than linguistic, considering stylistic, contextual, and psychological aspects. From a holistic point of view, psycho-narration aims at penetrating and understanding the subliminal zones of mind. Thus, analyzing the concept of psycho-narration in Nitasha Kaul's *Future Tense*, this paper is the study of the psyche of the characters, the narrator discourse, and the techniques defining psycho-narration.

Keywords: psycho-narration, third-person narrative, trauma, narrator discourse, monologue, Kashmir

Introduction and Theoretical Background

In her book *Transparent Minds* (1978), Dorrit Cohn does a classic study on the representation of consciousness from a narrator's perspective in a fictional narrative. Citing the ideas and examples by critics like Fredrich von Blanckenburg and Derek Bickerton, Cohn compares the elements used in the study of Stream of consciousness (hereafter SOC), quoting passages from the narratives written by Erich Kahler, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, Henry James, and Laurence Stern, to that of her proposed theory of Psycho-narration. She identifies two ways of representation of consciousness in a fictional narrative: First-person narrative and third-person narrative. Under each of these two-narrative representations, Cohn follows a more literary approach than a linguistic one in defining the techniques which apply to both the narrative styles. For a fictional narrative that uses human psychology at its core, Cohn lists three dimensions of study: Psycho-narration, Quoted monologue, and Narrated monologue. Besides, she also analyses the works of SOC authors from a *retrospective technique* and *autonomous monologue* point of view, thereby contrasting and supporting the narratives using her theory of psycho-narration.

On the study *Future Tense*, this essay looks at the discourse of the novel from a psycho-narration perspective and use the techniques as listed by Cohn.

Psycho-narration, as defined by Cohn, identifies both the *subject-matter* and the *activity* it denotes. She also says that psycho-narration is distinctive, as it focuses attention on the neglected part of the basic techniques, "ironic or lyric, reductive or expansive, sub- or super-verbal functions" (Cohn, p.12) of fictional discourse, which is mostly disregarded by the SOC writers of the narrative. She compares this to the approach to the work by SOC narrators, stating that all fictional psyches since *Ulysses* come at the reader directly, without the aid of the narrator. Upholding the notion further, she writes,

“...linguistic-structuralists critics, by reducing the technique to an unvoiced indirect discourse, disregard the ironic or lyric, reductive or expansive, sub- or super- verbal functions that psycho-narration can perform, precisely because it is *not* primarily a method of presenting mental language” (Cohn, p. 12)

Thus, she is implying that psycho-narration is the narrator's discourse consisting of ingredients from a character's consciousness. Robert Longacre in his book *The Grammar of Discourse* defines narrative discourse as "Narrative (story) discourse has some sort of a non-durative preterit or historical present, while the narrative has a future tense and is usually in the first or third person, is actor-oriented and encodes accomplished time and chronological" (Longacre, 1996, p. 13)

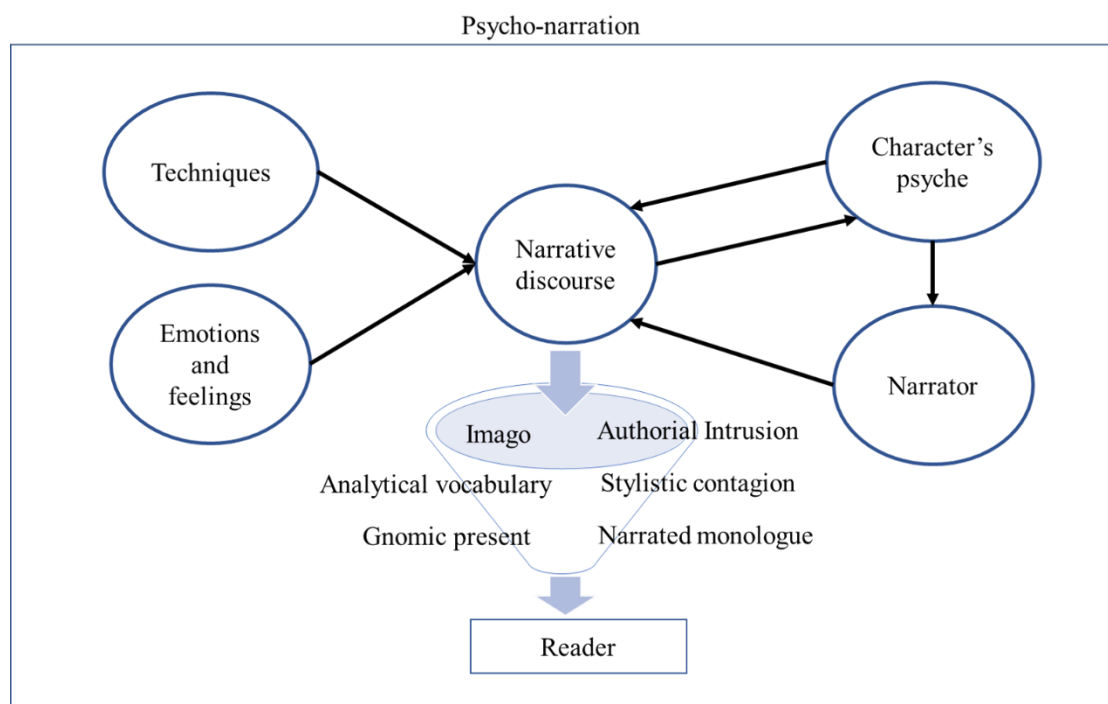


Figure 1. Pictorial representation of core elements in Psycho-narration

Figure 1 is a pictorial representation to depict the core components that help in categorizing a narrative for the use of psycho-narration. The elements attributing to the content of the narrative discourse, wherein the narrator is the author of the novel are

- Techniques in terms of syntax and grammar that an author uses to convey his/her ideas
- The sublime language used to express emotions and feelings by the usage of idioms, phrases, thereby create empathy in the reader's mind.

- The character's psyche, wherein there is two-way communication between the narrator and the discourse. The narrator virtually analyses the mind of his/her personality with the influences from the environment and other characters created within the discussion adding the author's research on the subject matter

As the author shapes the narrative, the style in which it presents itself to the reader takes precedence. A novel characteristic of psycho-narration uses techniques as an authorial intrusion, stylistic contagion, narrated monologue, gnomic present and the concept of imago, introduced by Cohn and discussed further in this essay

The flow of third-person narration in Nitasha Kaul's *Future Tense* records the characters' consciousness and that of the protagonists in the form of a discourse that is heavily influenced by the political and social environment in Kashmir. Kaul has written the novel in three parts. Part I and II, *What Happened After* and *What Happened Before*, respectively, are narrative discourses about the central characters in the story, influenced by a real-time incident – the annihilation of Burhan Wani¹, by the Indian military forces in July 2016. The third part, *What Comes Next*, is the conclusion and resurrection of the lives of characters in the novel post the military combat and anti-insurgency operation post-Burhan's killing that adversely altered the lives of the people in Kashmir. Kaul has woven the narrative with characters' lives and real-time incidents that created a traumatic past, present, and an unparalleled future for Kashmir and her inhabitants.

The authorial intrusion of an estranged wife's tale

Psychoanalysis, as an attribute of psycho-narration, follows the principle of unraveling the subconscious motives and thoughts of the characters in a fictional narrative. It aids in exploring the actions, desires, and opinions of the characters as a reflection of authorial intrusion. The term as defined by Paul Dawson is:

Authorial intrusions are typically characterized, and criticized, as interruptions to a narrative that disrupt the illusion of fictional truth to varying degrees. In this way, intrusions highlight, by contrast, our sense of two formative elements of the novel: its narrative structure and its referential status. (Dawson, p. 145)

Kaul uses the technique of authorial intrusion to depict the Zeenat's psyche, through her interior monologue about the instances happening in her life. Kaul conveys all her emotions and thoughts directly through Zeenat's addresses. As the psychoanalytical criticism involves the analysis of the subconscious, it takes into account the character's tone, expression, dreams and desires, interior monologues, actions and behavior, and any other demonstration of repressed thoughts that would help in determining the nature of a character in the narrative.

As Cohn theorizes, "a passage of psycho-narration in a narrator-oriented novel starts with a brief sentence or two in the past, followed by several longer and elaborate sentences in the present" (Cohn, p. 23). Such a novel not only captures the rhetoric flow of thoughts, but also expresses tender emotions, and persuades readers to move into the character's frame of mind. Zeenat is introduced amidst the unrest following the assassination of Burhan, by unannounced arrival at her maternal home, traveled all alone, without being accompanied by her husband, Fayaz, which itself is a societal stereotype in the Kashmiri culture. Kaul captures Zeenat's happenstances of abandonment by her husband, Fayaz and narrates the flux of her consciousness as below:

¹ Burhan Wani – commander of militant organisation Hizbul Mujahideen, in Kashmir

She felt as if she was an albatross hung around his neck- a burden that he had to carry when all she wanted from his was the warmth of care and affection.... It made her feel unattractive, foolish, older, and the last was particularly harsh since it was truly the case that she was three years older than him (Kaul, 2020, p. 7)

As Zeenat monologues about the happy marriage and beginnings with Fayaz and her weakening relationship, Kaul raises a value judgment within Zeenat, making her criticize herself, "unattractive, foolish, older" (p.7), thereby responsible for not being able to capture Fayaz's attention. As thoughts of distress and self-accusation consume Zeenat, there is a change of tense, from historical past to a gnostic² present in the passage. Kaul narrates about the floods of 2014, which had caused massive devastation in the Kashmir valley and thereby, marking the beginning of a chaotic life for Zeenat. Kaul refers to the floods as a "sheet of watery chaos" (p.7) wherein the chaos is metaphorical in representing the conditions in Kashmir and the chaos of the start of a strained relationship in the life of Zeenat.

Cohn theorizes that psycho-narration is an analogy of psychology and psychoanalysis. Kaul extends into the psychological realm of Zeenat, where she expresses the feeling of self-derailment along with Fayaz's resentment towards her. She sinks into despair and agony, feeling unattractive and foolish, who could not please Fayaz. It reflects that all her efforts to salvage the broken relationship go in vain, seemingly making Fayaz predisposed to reach out to her for sheer bodily pleasures rather than her actual self. The existing misery of abandonment and loneliness of Zeenat amplifies by the political unrest in the valley following the assassination of Burhan Vani. Kaul maps Zeenat's agony to that of the existing political situation as:

She spent most of that night knitting dark shrouds of sorrow for herself from the shadows on the wall.... She would hear about young men dying, the little girl blinded by pellets, the men beaten to death. It was as if a dam had been burst with Burhan's killing and another kind of flood- of despair and defiance had swept the entire valley (p. 9)

While the cited passage is looked at from a psychoanalytical perspective, a theory proposed by Lacan is pertinent, stating, "The primary purpose of the modern text is to get closer to the readers that every reader can interpret it in their own way" (Leitch, 2001.p.1107). Referring to Lacan on the same theory, Mirjana Lončar-Vujnović, while researching the SOC technique by the modern authors writes:

According to him (Lacan), a text without the influence of psychological factors, which make both life and characters more realistic, is not art. The link between the external world and a man is presented through a mirror that Lacan tentatively calls "imago." Imago of the outside world or one's appearance is present in hallucinations or dreams, always reflecting the internal state of an individual, its fragility (senility) or its fair projection, thereby making this "subjective-objective" relationship unbreakable (Lončar-Vujnović, p. 70)

Kaul draws parallels between Zeenat's consciousness and the traumatic happenstances of the environment outside. The imago that Zeenat creates of herself while suffering from a traumatic phase overlaps with the traumatic scene in Kashmir. Kaul by saying "depression related to her misery as a woman, as a wife and daughter, and as an organ of the Kashmir body that was being besieged, blinded and brutalized" (p.9) is envisioning the trilogy of a woman, wife, and daughter in Zeenat's persona. Zeenat's depression is akin to that of the one felt by Kashmir. Thus, she projects an *image* of Kashmir as a body feeling depressed and traumatized by the brutality of

² expressed in or of the nature of short, pithy maxims or aphorisms.

incidents happening in her. Kaul's psycho-narration to relate Zeenat's psyche based upon Cohn's conceptualization relates to psycho-narration as:

Table 1

Psycho-narration - Zeenat's psyche

Zeenat's psyche – in narrative	Relevance to psycho-narration
Everything played out in her head – her days of loving Fayaz She felt as if she was an albatross hung around his neck- a burden that he had to carry when all she wanted from his was the warmth of care and affection.	Starts with a brief sentence or two in the past, followed by several longer and elaborate sentences in the present
spread a sheet of watery chaos all around them	The rhetoric of the flow of thoughts
Felt as if she was an albatross hung around his neck	Expresses the tender emotions
depression related to her misery as a woman, as a wife and daughter, and as an organ of the Kashmir body that was being besieged, blinded and brutalized	Imago of the outside world

Note. Table to understand the techniques of psycho-narration in a selected passage

Through the tumults of incidents hovering over Kashmir, and the dismay ensuing from abandonment, Zeenat's character takes an unprecedented turn. As the story unfolds and a series of events lead to the suicide of Imran, Fayaz's nephew, the traumatic incident influences Zeenat in a very revolutionary manner. Instead of succumbing to her misery, she decides to save herself and save another life.

The dissonance of a bureaucrat's ambivalence with Kashmir

To explain the term *fictional consciousness*, Cohn has referred to the works of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*. Both Mann and Joyce were among the novelists who introduced a perceptible narrator into a third-person narration and put this person in the service of individual psychology. Fictional consciousness is a form of imitation or a tool to undermine literary conventions and explore the relationship between literature and reality, life, and art. Cohn says:

In psychological novels, where a fictional consciousness holds center stage, there is a considerable variation in the manner of narrating this consciousness, and these variations range between two principle types: one is dominated by a prominent narrator who, even as he focuses intently on an individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates; the other mediated by a narrator who remains effaced and who readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates (Cohn, p. 26).

For a fictional narration to be impactful in psycho-narration text or novel, the narrator of the story must hold the firm stance of a wise and rational psychologist, whose area of expertise is the psychology of creative artists. The steadiness of the narrator's view thence reflects as well dispersed across the novel. *Future Tense* is about reliving the traumatic past and the impact of insurgency and violation of the human rights of the Kashmiri people. Kaul, being a Spokesperson, an Economist, a Professor in Politics and International Relations and also of a Kashmiri origin, though is not a certified psychologist but has a hold over the psychology of the characters she writes about, owing to her extensive research on the lives of Kashmiri people (Kaul & Zia, 2018). Thus, as a narrator and author, she is dominant, and in words of Cohn her narrative is "dominated by a prominent narrator who, even as he focuses intently on an individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates" (Cohn, p.26)

As Kaul takes up the task of narrating Fayaz's consciousness, her introductory remarks about him generate disparity about his persona. Kaul's transition from describing Zeenat's knowledge to that of Fayaz brings significant changes in the mental image of Fayaz held by the reader, and it undergoes a rapid shift. Giving the readers an insight into Fayaz's life, Kaul writes:

And this city had never welcomed him with open arms. Like the woman he ended up marrying.... it was occasionally all plain to him, and he could love it for the highs and lows of the experiences he had shared with it, but it was resilient and unforgiving too, and harsh and petulant at times(Kaul, 2020, p. 21)

Kaul's narrative style resonates with psycho-narration, with "maximum dissonance" (Cohn, 1978, p. 28) wherein dissonance is apparent in the narration of Fayaz's feelings about the city he inhabits. He shows a love-hate connection with the city, wherein he loves the city for its picturesque beauty and, at the same time, is repulsive towards it for the traumatic past it holds within. He compares Srinagar to Zeenat in terms of the feeling of un-belongingness and the resistance both show towards accepting him. Fayaz recollects having spent his childhood running and hiding from the shackles of his militant father and uncles to have a future devoid of violence and trauma, yet as his life unfolds, he ends up being fundamentally alone. Kaul relates Fayaz's inner consciousness; thus, "You grew up, and look, how free are you!' His inner voice said with a cruel laugh. 'What have you? Neither the faith of the devout nor the freedom of the irreconcilable!' he could not counter this." (Kaul, 2020, p. 24).

According to Cohn, "a highly abstract analytical vocabulary is used to describe the inner world, or to elucidate the obscurer sides of the psyche"(Cohn, 1978, p. 28), which could serve as a determinant for identifying a psycho-narration passage. An *abstract analytical vocabulary*, as proposed by Cohn, is a text which has the combination specific to the characteristics of an obscure word and analytical term. Table 2 cites Fayaz's psyche as narrated by Kaul and the corresponding lexicon given by Cohn

Table 2

Melancholy of Fayaz's psyche

Technique	Definition / Meaning	Reference from <i>Future Tense</i>
Abstract	An abstract is from a Latin word meaning "pulled away, detached," and the basic idea is of something detached from physical, or concrete, reality. It is often used of ideas, meaning that they do not have clear applicability to real life, and of art, saying that it does not pictorially stand for reality.	But it was resilient and unforgiving too, and harsh, and petulant at times
Analytical vocabulary	Language creates an image or idea; text can be compared to another, or linked to a theme or design; techniques might the writer be using	And this city had never welcomed him with open arms. Like the woman, he ended up marrying

Note. Table to understand abstract analytical vocabulary

As further implied by Cohn, the stylistic features of psycho-narration text need to necessarily point in one direction – "the narrator's superior knowledge of the character's inner life and his superior ability to present and assess it. To a certain degree, the superiority is implied in all psycho-narration, even where there is greater cohesion between the narrating and the figural

consciousness” (Cohn, 1978, p. 29). Expanding the purview of the techniques that define a text or passage supporting psycho-narration, the below passage from *Future Tense* as cited:

There were prisons of memory and pain, which made history challenging to understand. There were prisons for children who threw stones. There were prisons for women, sometimes with mirror-lined walls and open doors.... The sense of suffocation was unbearable if one thought about it (Kaul, 2020, p. 38)

Cohn substantiates that the stylistic features of psycho-narration point in one direction - the narrator’s extensive knowledge of a character’s self and his superior ability to present and measure it in such a way that there is cohesion between the figural and narrating consciousness. In the passage cited, Kaul narrates Fayaz’s consciousness haunted by the various incidents hovering the lives of people in Srinagar. He feels deep sorrow and empathizes with people being subject to a traumatic culture and environment. At one instance, Fayaz addresses Kashmir as *King of Prisons*, emphasizing the various bondages as prisons, people of Kashmir are either obligated to or forced. The passage in the discussion is a *consonant* type psycho-narration, as there is an agreement in harmony with the narrator and the character concerning the actual instances and the turmoil happening in Kashmir.

Through the narration of Fayaz’s inner psyche, Kaul portrays Kashmir as a prison for her inhabitants in every walk of their lives.

- Of memory and pain – various instances of the traumatic past, which led to insurgencies, human rights violations that affected the people of Kashmir, and lives as a painful memory in the present.
- Of children who threw stones – young boys influenced and brainwashed by militants to revolt against the government and Indian forces to create a rebellion of freedom for the Kashmiris.
- For women – burdened and suppressed by the societal norms, been through transgressions by male dominance, and unable to embrace and fight for a rightful future.
- Of the comfortable life – of people in high society, with proper education and a healthy lifestyle, money wasted over luxuries, while the ordinary man suffered.
- Of graves and gardens – the land held memories of death and bloodshed, leaving the remnants of the past and imprisoning the present and the future caused by insurgencies and revolt.

Kaul thus voices the cry of Kashmir, as a state imprisoned under the shackles of various forces condemning and violating her as a body that invariably torments the people living within her.

Stylistic contagion of a Kashmiri Pandit’s dream of traumatic past

An attribute of psycho-narration seen quite evident in many psychological and fictional narratives is in the modulation of a dream and an inner state of mind, which is never related to the present state of mind of the character. A narrator achieves this by penetrating in the subliminal zones of the brain. Such narration, is rich in an assortment of authorial and figural voices, resulting in a lengthy and vivid description of the sequence of thoughts as described by the inner conscious of the character through the narrator.

Another significant character Kaul introduces in *Future Tense* is Sheerin. Sheerin is a Kashmiri Pandit, living in Delhi, and fostered by her grandparents for as long as she remembered. Sheerin comes forth as a lone woman, devoid of any ties with her kin. The only people she called as a *family* were her grandparents, as she has no recollection of any acquaintance with her biological parents. Sheerin's story unwinds with a phone call announcing the demise of her grandmother, who was the only person left alive in Sheerin's *family folder*, and now that folder was removed. As she goes ahead with the rituals of the deceased, Sheerin stumbles on the journals of her secret agent grandfather and comes to face with the truth about her lineage. Sheerin learns that her father had been an illicit child born of her grandmother's rape during the invasion of 1947 in Kashmir that traumatized and devastated the lives of hundreds of Kashmiri Pandits, especially women. The stigma of being the child of a raped woman gropes her consciousness and causes her to feel paralyzed, and she wishes to get into a world where her traumatic past would vanish away. Kaul pens her dream as:

In her dreams that night, the spinning blue sphere of water and mud entered her insides. She slowly started to ingest the globe, with all its countries, peoples, and names. Everything was one in her...She could see this cosmic city from the sky and know that it was inside her body. Then, a giant picked up a soap of light and dark and started rubbing it on her body, on the body of the world in her. When the froth appeared, it was her breath (p. 162)

The abundance of verbs and nouns characterizes the psycho-narration in this passage. The vocabulary and rhythm are painted brilliantly by using comparative phrases, in the making of *stylistic contagion*. Though the term was used first by Leo Spitzer (Spitzer, p. 191) concerning the narrator's style, Cohn has broadened the scope for psycho-narration and redefined as:

Stylistic contagion can serve to designate places where psycho-narration verges on a narrated monologue, marking a kind of mid-point between the two techniques where a reporting syntax is maintained, but where the idiom is strongly affected (or in-affected) with the mental language of the mind it renders (Cohn, p. 33)

Adré Marshall adds another attribute to stylistic contagion in his book, *The Turn of the Mind: Constituting Consciousness in Henry James*, wherein he says, that "stylistic contagion frequently incorporates a cluster of images that could be attributed to either narrator or character..." (Marshall, 1998, p. 127). Understanding "narrated monologue" (Cohn, 1978, p. 99) concerning the technique of stylistic contagion in the context of psycho-narration, Cohn identifies it as, "the technique for rendering a character's thought in his idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration"(p. 100). Kaul is narrating Sheerin's dream from a third-person point of view and retains the same tense of narration throughout. The coined phrases, *water, and mud entered her insides, ingest the globe, soap of light and dark, body of the world in her* narrate Sheerin's troubled psychological state haunted by past.

Further to the technique of psycho-narration, which is evident in the cited passage of *Future Tense*, is the narration of the *inner state* of the consciousness, where the analogy of psychoanalysis criticism articulates. Critics in psychoanalytical criticism have sided upon the Freudian principle of psychoanalysis to correlate the relationship between literature, language, and a character's psyche. This critical endeavor seeks evidence of unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts, guilts, ambivalences, and so forth within what may well be a disunified literary work. Most of the times, subconscious thoughts are "indirectly, disguised, or encoded (as in dreams) through principles such as 'symbolism' (the repressed object represented in disguise), 'condensation' (several thoughts or persons depicted in a single image), and 'displacement' (anxiety located onto another image employing association)." (Delahoyde, n.d) In Sheerin's

dream, she visualizes the world to be inside of her, wherein the integration of her physical self is happening with the cosmos outside. Sheerin envisions herself from outside the cosmos, transforming into a *world* with all its inhabitants, countries, and the topography. By employing mystical imagery of a giant, Kaul extends Sheerin's thought by cleansing the world with soap of dark and light, thus frothing all around herself, to realize that it was her breadth.

By narrating Sheerin's influenced by the rape of her grandmother and being uncertain of her lineage, Kaul has brought to light the exodus of the Kashmiri pandits in the hands of militants and Indian forces. Like Sheerin's grandmother, a multitude of women were mass raped, tortured, and violated. Rape was often used as a euphemism for sexual violence, along with other inhuman acts of sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, and sexual humiliations, for no fault of theirs. The trauma experienced by a troubled psych is passed on to the generations, thereby causing a chain reaction of traumatic behavior in the lineage. Kaul thus concludes, "children crossed over into the lands of dreams, and their daily tasks done, women looked out from behind dusty windows, finding reasons to hope for the irrepressible life of freedom in a fugitive city" (p. 198) thus saying that the new dawn holds another uncertainty for people living in aspiration for a change to happen.

Conclusion

Psycho-narration as a narrative medium, along with a figural language, renders a pre-speech level of consciousness, giving a vivid linguistic activity to the imaginative mind. The narrator's ability to indulge with thoughts of internal memory and traverse characters through the foliage of dreams and imagery imparts depth to the narrative and leaves an unerasable mark in the minds of the readers. The intricacy of imprinting the conscious of a character by the narrator using speech patterns, idioms, and phrases, thus creates a connection between the reader and the subject at a subconscious level.

The narration in Nitasha Kaul's *Future Tense* bears a resemblance to the technique of psycho-narration by creating a relationship between the monologues and the levels of consciousness. She has intertwined the environment with the inner psyche of each of her characters. She delineates the thoughts flowing in the conscious paradigm, thus knotting figural speech with happenstances in the surroundings and the adverse effects of trauma on each of the subjects. Summing up, psycho-narration is a narrative medium and technique, when conjoined with a language abundant with enough force to penetrate the minds of the readers, can be a potent tool used by narrators in the realm of human emotions and subconscious for a lasting remembrance.

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