CHAPTER II

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Life is the material of art. In order to make the work of art aesthetically more valuable, the artist strives to represent only certain significant and selective aspects of life. The prevailing tendency of the modern novelist has been selection and discrimination of significant aspects of life to represent in his work of art. A modernist writer, like James, obviously feels that his attitude to the art of fiction accords maximum importance to 'form' because "form alone takes, and holds and preserves, substance."¹ James felt the necessity of a strict frame, a consistent form for a work of art, which only could delete or exclude all that is irrelevant from life. To James, art represents the best part of life. His ingenious use of the figures of 'window' and 'frame' in his 'The Art of Fiction' points to the necessity of selection. Only through 'selection' can an artist render the 'effect' of life. "The novel of selection, by laying emphasis on the "pointed intention" or "Centre of interest" lends great importance to the question of how the story is to be told."²


Modernist fiction, being experimental and innovatory in form, markedly deviates from traditional modes of narration. It is concerned with consciousness, the subconscious and unconscious workings of human mind. To accommodate the essential introspection, analysis, reflection, the previous structure has to be dissolved to make way for a new kind of presentation. As a result, "Modern fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator." These are the changes which ultimately led to the evolution of the technique of point of view.

The medium of expression through words, one of the privileges that literature enjoys, imparts both advantages and disadvantages to it. "While it can express more ideas and attitudes, it presents qualitatively weaker images .... The writer is torn continually between the difficulty of showing what a thing is and the ease of telling how he feels about it .... Literature derives its very life from this conflict—which is basic to all its forms." Point-of-view is related to this conflict, and to this tension as part of the whole.

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"Point of view" is "the relation in which the narrator stands to the story." \(^5\) Percy Lubbock claims, "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be exhibited that it will tell itself"\(^6\). Living, means to James, to see and apprehend life. Conrad's idea of life seems to be the same as is revealed through his own words in his Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all to make you see."\(^7\)

James and Conrad both have refined form so as to achieve a finest rendering of their human material. Point-of-view provides a focus, a unity of impression to the tale to be told. James' preoccupation with the problem of finding a "centre," a "focus", for his stories is clearly stated in his later novels and in his prefaces to the New York edition of his works. He solved the problem by framing the action inside the consciousness of one of his characters, that is, by making a character tell the story in the third-person which makes the reader perceive the


\(^6\)Ibid., p. 62.

action as it filters through the consciousness of the character. James thus achieves objectivity by employing a "centre of consciousness" which filters the life-experience, the material of his art. Thus instead of receiving the narrator's report, "we now see him in the act of judging and reflecting his consciousness, no longer a matter of hearsay, a matter for which we must take his word, is now before us in its original agitation."8 The framing of the action inside the consciousness of a character is the distinctive feature of the Modern novel and, which is, as Allan Tate says, "in all the infinite shifts of focus which it is capable, the specific feature which more than any other has made it possible for the novelist to achieve an objective structure."9

The really significant advance in the theory of point of view was made when Mark Schorer wrote his "Technique as Discovery" in 1948, where he claims that "the difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique."10 Technique, of course, includes "point of view," above everything else. If Lubbock was concerned with point-of-view as a means to coherent and vivid presentation, Schorer took it


9Allan Tate, "The Post Observation in Fiction", Maryland Quarterly, II (1944), in Friedman, p. 1168.

a step further by examining "the uses of point of view not only as a mode of dramatic delimitation, but, more particularly, of thematic definition" in his "Technique as Discovery." A work of art, normally reveals certain values and ideals, and point-of-view enables the novelist to isolate himself and his own prejudices and presuppositions from those of the characters and to evaluate those of the characters dramatically. The modern novelist not only pays much attention to his medium but also to evolving a new subject matter from his medium. Under the "immense artistic preoccupations" of James, Conrad and Joyce, many changes took place in the technique as such, and as a result, in point of view, and in the understanding of fiction. With this established distinction between the 'telling' and the 'showing', 'point of view' came to give new dimensions to the 'novel'.

The chief pursuit of the Modern novel, as is clearly evident, is to achieve authorial extinction partially, or totally. 'Point of view' provides a means for determining the possible degrees of authorial extinction in narrative art. But even in the novel in which no narrator is dramatised and the author, as such is completely absent, there is an implicit

11 Friedman, p.1169.
picture of an author who stands behind the scenes. This implied author, as Wayne C. Booth says, "is always distinct from the "real man." ... creates a superior version of himself as he creates his work; .... (he) amounts to a kind of "Second Self." This second self is usually a highly refined and selected version, wiser, more sensitive, more perceptive." Booth, in another context, says, "the emotions and judgements of the implied author are ... the very stuff out of which great fiction is made." The implied author is always present, though invisibly, in the interplay of characters and situations thus providing the novel with his own emotions and judgements. Turgenev was of the opinion that the chief thing in writing a novel was to cut the umbilical cord connecting one's characters with one's own person. This impersonalizing of the personal experience has been the major preoccupation of Conrad too.

The implied author may be made distant from the narrator or character or reader by a careful manipulation of point of view, which replaces the real author by an interaction among the implied author, the narrator, or the point of view charac-

12 "Distance And Point of View": An Essay in Classification", Essays in Criticism, 11, No.1 (January 1961), pp. 60-79.

ters and other characters in the novel. The distance which thus separates the author, the reader, the other characters from the action is called the aesthetic distance. The aesthetic distance may be moral as in *The Sound and the Fury* between Jason and Faulkner, or intellectual as in *The Quiet American*, between Fowler, the narrator and Pyle, the American, or emotional as in Maupassant's "The Necklace", or physical as in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

The distancing or the disappearance of the author from the reader and from the novel, achieved by means of any of the above said ways, results in an illusion of reality and an intensity of experience. This is because the reader is made to confront and experience life directly without any middle-man in between. This method opened the doors wide for the complexity and ambiguity in the interpretation of a work which is indicative of the changed intellectual temper of modern times characterized by scepticism and non-conformity. Point of view may be used in a variety of ways by which the novelist can successfully present everything, in a disinterested way, without aligning himself to the characters personally or ideologically. It thus helps him to arrive at an artistic definition of a created world of values and attitudes to be revealed in his work of art.

An exploration of the variety of points of view used
by the novelists starting from Defoe to James enables us to arrive at a just estimation of the significance of their accomplishments through the manipulation of the point of view of their choice.

There may be unlimited number of ways of telling a story, but all these are evolved directly or indirectly from either of the two basic ways of story-telling. They are, 1) the **first-person** narration, in which the novelist tells the story from the inside, that is, he makes one of the characters tell the story, and ii) the **omniscient** or **third-person** narration in which the novelist tells the story from the outside.

The other important things which are aligned to the aspect of the point of view are the person chosen by the author to tell the story, whether it is the author himself in third- or first-person or character in first, or no one, the angle of vision, the channels of information used by the narrator to convey the story, and the distance between the story and the reader.

The fundamental function of fiction is to **sound true**. This makes verisimilitude the ultimate objective of all the narrative methods. The quickest way by which it could be accomplished is to let a witness tell the story, because the first-person narration is the most direct method and the author
cannot interfere with the character's point-of-view because he is one with the character. Novelists like Defoe, Dickens, Melville, Conrad, Fitzgerald and Hemingway used this method extensively. This kind of narration or point of view is most suited to the romantic novels of adventure such as Robinson Crusoe, Stevenson's Kidnapped, because it gives an air of authenticity and credibility to what in actuality sounds strange and unrealistic. It could be so dexterously used that sometimes there occurs no apparent difference between a fictional autobiography such as Crusoe's and a real one like Benjamin Franklin's.

At the same time, in such first-person point of view, where the protagonist is the narrator, the narrator is limited completely to his own thoughts, feelings and observations and cannot have access to a variety of sources of informations as his angle of vision is fixed at the centre.

To overcome such difficulties, in some novels such as Dickens's David Copperfield and Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, where the story is so complex and involves so many other characters, the writer resorts to the device of a series of documents, diaries, intercepted letters and overheard conversations by other people, which, he edits and lets the story be told by a series of witnesses.
One variation of the first-person point of view is the multiple-first-person method in which the point of view shifts from character to character. This method is found extensively in the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century such as Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker* etc. This method has the advantage of allowing the characters to tell the story in their own words. But this form has since become extinct because of its artificiality and want of credibility.

*The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins is written in another version of the multiple first-person method. It has "eight narratives," written by six characters, each recounting the same events from his point of view, with gradually intensifying the suspense.¹⁴ In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner renders the thoughts of nineteen different characters in fifty-nine sections, as each of them participates in the action. The rendering is done chronologically giving the feelings of each of the characters at a particular moment of time.

To overcome the limitations imposed by the protagonist-narrator, some novelists have made use of the witness-narrator, who is, most often, a minor character in the action and who is

more an observer than a participant in the action of the novel. This kind of point of view is employed by Laurence Sterne in his *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, in which Tristram is the narrator, the "I-as witness" who tells more of his father and of his uncle Toby than of himself. This kind of point of view depicts only those scenes in which the witness is a participant. It gives only the thoughts, feelings, and reflections of the witness-narrator. This method has the advantage of summarising the narrative at any point and thus it can control the distance between the reader and the story freely. The scenes could be presented with utmost immediacy because they are presented directly as the witness sees them.

Another variation of this witness-narrator point-of-view has been employed by Emily Bronte in her *Wuthering Heights*. In this novel, narration by the protagonist-narrator is made impossible because both of the protagonists, Cathy and Heathcliff die before the story is over. It is Nelly Dean who is a witness to much of the action and a minor participant too, and above all, a confidante of both Cathy and Heathcliff who narrates the story not directly to the reader but to Mr. Lockwood, who is also a witness to part of the action. In this way, Emily Bronte provides a double point of view. The advantage of this method is that the narrator-participant-
witness provides a consistent and definite focus for the action, and acts as a guide to the reader. And as the story is told from inside, it has the resultant verisimilitude. Above all, it adds to the complexity and richness of the texture of the novel.

Though first-person narration is potential enough to make a realistic and complex rendering possible, it is the omniscient or third-person narration that has been more widely used. In the third-person narration, the author being omniscient knows everything about his characters, their appearances, their feelings, emotions, thoughts, actions. In spite of the freedom it offers the author, one cannot but feel the continual and intruding presence of the author, between the action and the reader.

The omniscient narration is employed in many different ways. Panoramic narration is one of the devices employed in novels such as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* in which a large number of major characters are presented and where the action is spread over a longer period of time. In this type of narration, the action is described in general terms, sweeping over large vistas of time. The story is told sequentially, from the shifting points of view of many characters, according to who is at the centre of attention at a given instant of time in action. The extent of omniscience employed in such kind of
narration is literally wholly unlimited. "The story may be seen from any or all angles from a god-like vantage point beyond time and place..." The author is allowed even to make generalizations about life, morals etc., and he goes to the extent of commenting on and criticizing the thoughts of the characters. This kind of omniscience is employed in the old novels by writers such as Fielding, Thackeray, and George Eliot. Modern novelists like Lawrence also has applied this kind of narration in his *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*.

The novelist may sometimes restrict the point of view only to a few of the main characters and thus restrain his omniscience to a certain extent. Some of the late nineteenth- and the twentieth-century novelists used this kind of narration as could be seen in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. This kind of omniscience also allows the author to intrude as a guide or a commentator. But in most of the recent novels, the novelist has presented only the action and dialogue objectively without any intrusion on the part of the author.

Neutral omniscience is another kind of third-person narration in which the author, in spite of his being privileged to have all information, allows his characters to speak and act.

15 Friedman, p. 1173.
for themselves. He tends to describe them to the reader in
his own voice. Instead of presenting the mental states of
the characters scenically, they are narrated indirectly as
if they have already occurred and analyzed. Huxley uses this
kind of narration in his novels, to achieve the effect of a
social milieu, as he is concerned more with people's intellec-
tual hobbies than with people's dramas. His *Point and Counter
Point, Antic Hay* suggest the problems of those caught in the
tensions of actual living. This kind of narration enables the
author's superior tone to dominate the perception and aware-
ness of his characters.

**Selective omniscience** is another kind of third-person
narrative method in which the author restricts the point of
view to that of a single character, giving his thoughts only
and presenting only those scenes in which he or she appears as
in the case of Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and
Prejudice*, of Lambert Strether in Henry James' *The Ambassadors*
and Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a
Young Man*. In *The Ambassadors*, the effect is much closer to
that of the great first-person novels with greater objectivity
because Strether most of the time narrates his own story,
though he is referred to in the third-person. Henry James was
the first to employ self-consciously and consistently an inside
viewer in the novel, which has helped him to remain invisible in his works. He thus remains uncommitted to any of the characters, situations and their ideologies. This lends him greater freedom to criticize and laugh at the human behaviour and present the predicament of modern man, without restricting his point of view to any single theory or value. This device successfully maintains an illusion of reality making the reader aware of the complex realities.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the reader is not told about Stephen. Stephen is placed on the stage, acting out his destiny. What is dramatized is his mental record of everything that happens and not his actions or speeches. It is his consciousness at work on the world that is shown to the readers. Everything including description and narration of action, the workings of his consciousness is presented with detachment and with no external, or direct comment. This results in a unity of focus, and strong identification of the reader with Stephen and an aesthetic distance that is impossible in first-person narration.

Dostoevsky employs a similar kind of omniscience in his *Crime and Punishment*. Though the narrative is given in the third-person in which Raskolnikov holds the centre of stage for most of the time, the reader tends to identify him-
self with Raskolnikov. The story is told from Raskolnikov's point of view and not in the third-person. Dostoevsky employs the expository method through which the reader is informed from without about the time and the place and the physical action of the so far unnamed individual.

Another and the most modern kind of omniscience is the Multiple Selective Omniscience, which is a step towards greater objectivity. The author disappears along with the "I" as witness. With no narrator to speak, the reader listens to none. The story comes directly through the mind of the character as it passes through the consciousness of the character in question. This is also called the 'Stream of Consciousness' technique. The narrative summary is either provided "unobtrusively by the author by way of stage directions or it emerges through the thoughts and words of the characters themselves."16 Thus everything about the character, his appearance, actions, speeches and the scene, comes to the reader through the mind of some one present. Virginia Woolf employs this device in her To the Lighthouse. It differs from normal omniscience by being confined to a scenic presentation. It renders the thoughts and reflections while they are passing through the mind yet, whereas normal omniscience summarizes them after they have occurred.

16 Friedman, p. 1179.
Both the first-person and omniscient points-of-view have their own defects apart from their merits. At this juncture it is noteworthy to mention Conrad who succeeded in evolving a new method of mixed-point of view.

To deal with an "exquisite sensibility" like Jim's in Conrad's *Lord Jim* and with Jim's moral ambiguities, an omniscient point of view would be lacking in focus. The first-person point of view does not permit competing subjective viewpoints and also does not admit of multiple dimensions and perspectives. A strictly dramatic rendering of the action would lose the potential advantages the narrative resources provide for the novelist.

To overcome these difficulties, Conrad combines the advantages of both an "I" narrator and an omniscient narrator without their disadvantages or their limitations. He evolves a mixed-point of view in the form of the Marlow. In the complex probing of Jim's 'exquisite' sensibility and the ineffable aspects of his moral problem, the use of Marlow becomes an artistic necessity to Conrad. He provides a third-person frame work and then introduces Captain Marlow as the narrator who tells the rest of the story. After four chapters of omniscient authorization about Jim's life as water-clerk, Marlow himself enters into the action as a participant. Everybody
in the novel seems to know the facts of the Patna episode and Marlow gathers a variety of judgements. Neither the reader nor Marlow is any the better for these judgements because each angle confirms only elusiveness. The method employed finds its justification in the complexity of the problem, a complexity created by the method. Conrad makes Marlow assume a delicate interplay of roles - that of a narrator and of an actor in the action. Marlow forces himself to gather opinions on the Patna episode, from a variety of angles. The method also provides the narrative frame, lent by the dramatic situation in which Marlow unfolds the tale. And there is Marlow's easy acceptance of fixed and unquestioned values, of his membership in a moral fraternity that gives meaning to his crucial phrase, "one of us." "Conrad's simultaneous pursuit of two occasions, the one we are being told about and the one of the telling itself, allows us to be at once outside and inside our narrator, his story and his view of it. Unlike an omniscient author, the narrator gives us a particular perspective upon the series of events. Further unlike an "I", he has a specific identity, an objective reality for us."  

The New Novelists under the leadership of Henry James

made important modifications with respect to narrative mode and point of view. In his works, James tried to achieve objectivity by employing a 'centre of consciousness' which filtered the experience contained in the action of the novel. This necessitated the placing of the observational centre inside the novelistic field rather than outside.

The relationist narrational theory of Sartre was followed by considerably larger number of novels organised around a pattern of rotating viewpoints presenting multiple perspectives of the same events where the characters, their actions and thoughts are presented from many angles. The various angles of perceptions of the characters placed in different locations attempt to illuminate a central truth bringing out uncertainties and ambiguities. One instance for such a kind of narration could be found in *Alexandria Quartet*, a tetralogy by Lawrence Durrell. The first two volumes, *Justine* and *Balthasar*, are narrated by Darley, one of the characters in the novel. The third volume, *Mountolive*, is told by the omniscient author with the point of view shifting freely at will from character to character without any authorial comment. All the first three volumes deal with action that occurs at the same period of time. These three volumes are deployed spatially. They interweave as if to urge the reader to read them simultaneously and not serially. The fourth volume *Clea* completes the sequence,
with Darely as the narrator. Durrell's technique makes it possible for the reader to see the action in which Darley participated as well as the statement of the action in which Darley has not participated so that the reader may himself combine everything into an organic whole.

The Sound and Fury by Faulkner employs a similar technique. The first three parts of the novel are told from the points of view of three characters. It is actually their stream of consciousness that the author reports. The first is an idiot, Benjy, the second, his brother Quentin, dead eighteen years; the third, another brother, Jason. The fourth section is narrated by Faulkner as omniscient author with the point of view moving among three other characters. This kind of narration enables the author to present an opportunity for insight which a single point of view could not have offered.

"The Camera" is another kind of point-of-view, which could be seen in Isherwood's Good-bye to Berlin. In this the narrator begins the opening of the novel by saying, "I am a Camera", with its shutter open, quite passive recording not thinking ...." "This kind of narration aims at transmitting a "slice of life" without apparent selection or arrangement, just as letting it pass before the recording medium."

Friedman, p.1182.
These are the major points of view from which the novelists have conveyed their stories. The variety of ways in which the point of view has been used with differing ranges of success makes us aware of the potentialities and possibilities of the technique of point of view in the depiction of the realities of life.

With a marked change in the cultural atmosphere, ideologies and values, the novelists were persuaded, by their commitment both to the society in which they live and to their art, to give up the omniscient narration. This led to the placing of the focus of narration within the framework of the novel, as seen in the works of James and Conrad. The focus of narration, thus, is shifted to one of the characters. He is an average human being who is not endowed with the privileges of god-like omniscience. He can arrive at the meaning "only through a complex interplay of many minds - the point of view character, other characters, and the reader. This method opened the doors wide for complexity and ambiguity in the interpretation of the work."19

The device of point of view helps the artist in more than one way. Firstly, it enables him to withdraw from his work, thus imparting an illusion of reality to the work.

Secondly, it furnishes an intensity of experience for the reader by making the reader confront the realities of life. It "lends credibility to the theme of learning and makes the reader aware of the complex realities of life." by making the point of view character strive for an understanding of himself or an understanding of the central character of the particular situation in the novel as could be seen clearly in Conrad's *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*. Thirdly, the device permits ample freedom to the author. There is no need for him to commit himself to any one particular character, ideal or theory, thereby enabling him to comment on or criticise the characters and their doings freely.

The technique of point of view thus adds another dimension to the novel with its emphasis on the imaginative perception of reality. The device has helped the novelists in widening the boundaries of fiction towards a thorough exploration of the deep enigmas of the human psyche, wherein the actual meanings lie. Conrad, being one of the chief pioneers of this tradition, naturally gives more importance to the meaning of what has happened rather than to the happening itself. And this tendency is clearly evident in the means and the unique techniques he employs in the writing of his works.

20 S.B. Mathur, p. 118.