

DISSECTING THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE EMPLOYED IN *PSALM 91*

^{1*} Harikumar Pallathadka, ²Tiganlung Rikhi Panmei, ³Shoraisam Kiran Singh

^{1*,2,3} Manipur International University, Imphal, Manipur, India

^{1*}harikumar@miu.edu.in, ²tiganlung.panmei@miu.edu.in, ³kiran.sorai@miu.edu.in

ABSTRACT:

Psalms is a book in the Old Testament, which is negotiated as a collection of sacred songs to be sung. Bible scholars approach it as poetic composition because of its tone and form. They consider the Book of Psalms as a hymn that disseminates the joyous celebration of the psalmist. The Book of Psalms is treated as an anthology of individual songs, which are composed by the psalmist, David. But this fact has been rejected by many Bible scholars. Still, it is considered a debatable area in the study of the Bible. The content of the books talks about the love of God and the relationship between the psalmist and God. Also, the Psalms comfort the heavy-laden heart and soul. The poetic language and technique employed in the Book of Psalms are what keeps it different from the other books of the Bible. The narrative technique and form used in the compositions sound significant enough to be explored. The present research aims at researching the narrative technique used in Psalm 91. The author of the Psalm 91 chapter is unknown but the poetic form and narrative technique have spurred to carry out the present research.

KEYWORDS: *psalm 91, love, protection, narrative technique, points of view*

INTRODUCTION:

The Holy Bible comprises of New Testament and Old Testament. There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. These books were written by the men of God who lived in different ages across the globe. The *Book of Psalms* is one of the books of the Old Testament. It is believed that the book of *Psalms* was written by David, who is popularly known as the psalmist. *Psalm 91* is a special chapter of this book that has plunged the Bible scholars into bewilderment as nobody knows who has penned this chapter. Charles H. Spurgeon has recorded that *Psalm 91* does not have any title so; the author of the book is anonymous. It is believed that this chapter has been written by Moses, the man of God, as there is some resemblance between *Psalm 91* and *Deuteronomy*. Therefore, this chapter is often denoted as the *Psalm* of Moses. Scholars have pointed out that there are some similar phrases that are seen in *Psalm 90* that can also be traced in *Psalm 91*. Hence, scholars claim that this chapter should have been written by Moses. Campbell Morgan has remarked *Psalm 91* as 'one of the greatest possessions of the saints'.

Psalm 91 heralds God as the refuge and fortress. The psalmist has employed multiple switches over in the narration to introduce the voice of God. This psalm motivates the one who is

in deep mourning and wrestling with the loss of hope. The entire chapter has been divided into sixteen verses to deliver the voice of God and the psalmist. He encourages the readers to get strengthened and not to get desolated as He is the refuge. The psalmist reiterates God as the refuge of His people. In the course of his narration, the psalmist takes multiple switches to convey the message: 'God is the refuge and fortress'. The unique employment of the narrative technique of the Psalmist has immensely contributed to composing *Psalm 91*. It is believed that the narrative technique employed in *Psalm 91* has influenced its readers; thus, the present study intends to explore the narrative technique employed by the psalmist.

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY:

The narrative technique of the psalmist is quite captivating. He has employed stylistic devices and other technical tools in the narration. Generally, the narrative technique is a method adopted by the writer. Every writer has his/her way of narrating the story in an influential way. The narrative technique adopted enhances the presentation of the writer and it is that narrative technique makes the story more interesting to the reader. According to David McIntyre and Tim Pruzinsky, the narrative techniques can be divided into four: 'point of view,' 'narration,' 'speech,' and 'tense'. They believed that these tools play an essential purpose in narration and evaluating these devices will detect the efficacy of the narration. The present study aims at examining the function of such tools in Psalm 91. Primarily, 'point of view' assists in finding who tells the story, and narration helps in finding who is the narrator speaking to. Speech works to detect how the narrator and the character of a story speak, and 'tense' helps in finding when the event has taken place.

Points of View are usually employed to deliver a story in a way the author intends to deliver. He can adopt different modes to communicate the plot and to exhibit the Character and setting. A single work of art can project a diverse method to deliver the content. Point of view has three categories under: a) the First-person point of view, b) Second-person point of view and c) Third-person point of view. According to M.H. Abrams, the first-person point of view "limits the matter of the narrative to what the first-person narrator knows, experiences, infers or can find out by talking to another character" (233). This mode of narration can be detected by looking at the function of the first-person singular pronoun 'I'. In the second-person point of view, the author employs 'you' and this kind of narration is seen in the traditional fictions. Abrams has enumerated a few writers who have employed such a mode of narration: Michel Buter, a French novelist, the Italian novelist Calvino and Jay McInerney, American novelist. Abrams has articulated that

This second person may turn out to be a specific fictional character, or the reader of the story, or even the narrator himself as herself or not clearly or consistently the one or the other, and the story may unfold by shifting between telling the narrator what he or she is now doing, has done in the past, or will or is commanded to do in the future. (234)

The last mode of narration is the third-person point of view. In this mode of narration, the author employs either 'he' or 'she' and sometimes both 'he' and 'she' to narrate the story. This

narrative point of view is divided into ‘omniscient point of view’ and ‘limited point of view’. In the omniscient point of view, the narrator is exhibited as the all-knowledgeable person. The narrator is projected as a character knowing everything about the agents, actions and events. This omniscient point of view is looked at from two angles: the intrusive narrator and the unintrusive narrator. The former takes the role of an authoritative narrator. Apart from narrating, the narrator also “*comments on and evaluates the actions and motives of the character and sometimes expresses personal news about human life in General*” (Abrams 230). The latter type of narrator is seen as an impersonal or objective mode of the narrator. This mode of narration does not express any comment or judgment of the narrator.

The present research engages with the narrative technique that has been employed at the level of turn-taking. Points of view are strongly associated with turn-taking in narration therefore the present study emphasizes the different points of view that have been employed in *Psalm 91*. It aims at exploring the function of all the three points of view. The present research uses English Standard Version text for the study.

ANALYSIS:

Psalm 91 begins with the third-person point of view. The verse springs out with ‘he’: “*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.*” (530). The narrator of this verse is presumed to be God. Here the narrator is projected as the all-knowledgeable person. There is no doubt that God is all-knowledgeable who created the universe through his words. The psalmist has positioned the Almighty as the narrator thus emphasizing the crux of the verse. The verse, *Psalm 91: 1*, assures that the person, who takes shelter in God, will live in the shadow of God. The tone of the verse reflects the fact that God himself speaks to His people. There is an evident link that exists between the first verse and the second verse of the chapter. In the first verse, though the psalmist speaks the verse, it sounds like that the Almighty Himself utters it but in the second verse one can transparently find the psalmist articulating the verse. He narrates to disclose his faith in God for which he has employed first-person singular pronoun ‘I’. The psalmist says that “*I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.*” (530). In this verse, one finds the function of the first-person point of view dominating the narration. The pronoun ‘I’ reappears twice in the verse and confirms the tone and technique of narration. The psalmist plays the role of a narrator in this context to convey his faith in God. The tone of the verse communicates that the psalmist is eager to talk to God in order to confess his faith in Him. In this verse, the psalmist confesses his faith in God and registers his willingness to converse with God to reaffirm his faith. From this, it is evident that the psalmist is skillful in employing the narrative technique. Though he switches over from a different point of view, in *Psalm 91:2* he is able to deliver the essence effectively using the narrative point of view.

The third verse of *Psalm 91* is composed using the third-person point of view and second-person point of view. The psalmist utters that “*For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and the deadly pestilence.*” (530). He employs the second-person point narration to

indicate the readers and the third-person point of view to denote the Almighty God. The function of 'he' and 'you' takes a dominating position in this verse. The psalmist gives an assurance that 'God will deliver you from the snare'. He mints to strengthen the reader's faith by rendering abundant assurance through his narration. For this purpose, his narrative technique contributes immensely. He gives the assurance that God will keep the readers away from the snare and deadly pestilence. The intermix of the third-person point of view and second-person point of view have worked together to kindle up the narrative effect of the verse.

The third verse of *Psalms* 91 is connected with the fourth verse of the chapter. The psalmist has used the same technique to continue his narration. The psalmist says that "*He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*" (530). It is obvious from the verse that the verse has both the second-person point narration and the third-person point of view. The psalmist has employed 'he' and 'you' to indicate the omniscient God and the readers of the text. He has offered 'he' to the omniscient God and has used 'you' to signify the people. He records that God is aware of everything and He has control over every happening. The psalmist portrays the Almighty as the protector of the universe and the strong shield of his people. This verse reassures the safety of the readers and the function of God. Besides, it exhibits the characteristics of God and projects God as the protector.

Like the previous verse, the fifth verse deals with the quality of God and sheds light on the function of God. The psalmist utters that "*You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,*" (530). Though this verse discloses the function of the second-person point of narration as the employed narrative technique, many scholars have argued that this verse has the tone of omniscient narration. It sounds that God himself articulates these words in order to assure His people about his protection upon them. God is Almighty and omnipotent who wishes to converse with his people and guide them in a way that pleases him. Therefore, He guides and leads the people who listen to His words. This is apparent throughout the Bible. For instance, Moses was a God-chosen person with whom God was conversing and guiding him in each step and move of his life. Moses was given a huge responsibility of leading the Israelites. He was a single leader who had to lead a massive crowd. Bible says that God was with him and leading him in every step that he took. Psalm 91:5 reconfirm this quality of God protecting and leading his people safe. This verse gives a strong assurance that God safeguards his people from all terrors. His people are away from terrors and evils because He plays the role of a shield. The narrative technique that the psalmist has employed in this verse has assisted him to project God as the omniscient and omnipotent God.

From verses 6 to 10, it is evident that the protection of the God-fearing ones has been extended. The peculiarity of these verses is that there is no change in the narrative pattern. The psalmist has adhered to the same narrative pattern and technique which he has employed to verse 4 and 5 of *Psalms* 91. He articulates that "*nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.*" (530). This verse does not disclose the narrative technique explicitly instead it implicitly reveals the narrative technique employed. To detect the narrative pattern, one must connect it with the previous verse. Scholars look at this verse as the

interconnected verse of the previous verse in terms of form and context. The context and the point of view of narration are the same as in the previous verse. The psalmist continues to reassure the protection of God on his people and adds that no matter how critical the destruction is, God is the hope and protection.

The psalmist extends the act of cultivating faith in the readers about God. To achieve this purpose, the psalmist proceeded employing the same narrative pattern within the context of instilling faith in the readers. *Psalm 91:7* tells that “*A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.*” (530). This verse points at the presence of the second-person point of narration. Here, God takes the role of the narrator and the readers take the role of the listeners. It sounds like that God is assuring his people that no disaster will harm you. The psalmist continues narrating in the same pattern and technique to foster faith and to prove how loyal and faithful the Almighty is. One can interpret this as the understanding of the psalmist about God. There is a high chance to argue that the psalmist has tasted the love of God personally therefore he is able to encourage the readers to have trust in God. To bring an effective change in the readers, the psalmist has employed quite many assuring words and phrases.

The next word of *Psalm 91* is different in its tone, but the context and the narrative pattern remain the same. The psalmist says that “*You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.*” (530). It is unambiguous from the verse that the psalmist has employed the second-person point of narration and omniscient narrative pattern. The appearance of the word 'you' denotes the function of second-person point of view, but there is no explicit proof to argue in favor of the omniscient narrative. This can be figured out only by looking at the context and the essence of the verse. The clause: '*look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked*' indicates the function of omniscient narration. The verse assures the blessing of God to his loved ones. By the way, God loves everyone and treats everyone as His chosen one through the Calvary. It promises the shelter of His loved ones by asserting that no evil shall harm them in any way. It assures that the enemy shall be brought to the ground to lift His loved ones. This verse profoundly talks about the recompense of the enemy thereby nurturing faith in the readers. The second-person point of narration has assisted the narration of the psalmist greatly. Above all, the omniscient narrative pattern has enhanced and enriched the narrative technique of the verse.

The psalmist goes on with the same tone, context and narrative pattern to articulate verse 9 of *Psalm 91*. It says that “*Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place- the Most High, who is my refugee*” (530). It is evident in this verse that both the first-person and second-person points of view reoccur. For instance, the presence 'you' points out the function of second-person point of view and 'my' shows the function of first-person point of view. It connects the reader, God and the narrator. The first phrase '*because you have made the LORD your dwelling place*' discloses the function of second-person point of narration and the second phrase '*who is my refugee*' emphasizes the function of first-person point of view technique. In this verse, it is evident that the narrator has employed both points of view to project the sovereignty and

supremacy of the Almighty God. The psalmist treats God as his Most High therefore he takes refuge in him. He passionately believes that taking refuge under the supremacy of God ensures safety and protection.

Like the previous verse, *Psalm 91:10* also reassures the protection that God renders to his people. The psalmist narrates that "*no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.*" (530). This verse guarantees the well-being and security of God's people. It has the tone of omniscient narration and brings perplexity to the narrative tone. Readers fail to figure out the technique exactly as it has multiple narrative patterns and tones. The word 'you' validates the function of second-person point of narration, but overall, the context of the verse points out that the verse also has the omniscient narrative pattern. The verse underscores the truth that God will safeguard and shield his people from evil and no plague shall even approach the house of His people. It is because that God's power brings impact only on the people who accept His supremacy. When a person denies and rejects to come under the supremacy of God, he gets into the supremacy of evil which certainly troubles and makes life miserable. The narrator desires to bring people under the supremacy of God so that they do not suffer and struggle. For this, he gives assurance and employs different narrative techniques to embellish the context with the idea of faith. The narrative technique employed in this verse has assisted the narrator to convey the essence of God.

Once again from verses 11 to 13 of *Psalm 91*, the readers can find the same tone and climate prevailing. These verses communicate about having faith in God and exhibit the sort of security one gets when one is under the supremacy of God. The psalmist declares that "*For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.*" (530). The appearance of the word 'he' indicates the function of third-person point of view and the presence of 'you' underscores the function of second-person point of view. In this verse, the narrator plays the role of an outsider to position the Almighty and the readers. He uses 'you' to denote the readers of the text and 'he' to signify the Almighty God. The narrator announces that God will instruct the angels to guard his people. Repeatedly, the protection of his people is ensured. To ensure the security of the readers, the psalmist has employed influential and attractive techniques.

The safety of his people is ensured repeatedly, and it can be proved with verse 12 of *Psalm 91*. The psalmist says that "*On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.*" (530). This verse sheds light on the function of second-person point of view and the word 'you' validates it. The narrator says that God will protect his people from all evil and when they go out the angel of God will go with him to safeguard them. Through this verse, the psalmist discloses the wish and desire of God. Even a small stone shall not harm the people of God that is what the plan and wish of God. The psalmist is profusely influenced by the love of God therefore he writes these verses out of interest and driving force. He has been conscious in transferring the tone and narrative technique of the verse to the readers. The love that he has tasted cannot be tasted by anybody but the almighty safeguards and protects every child that believes God. So primarily, the psalmist is instilling faith in the readers through his narrative technique and choice of words.

The psalmist extends his belief in God by confessing it through verses. He adds that "*You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.*" (530). The psalmist has been careful enough to employ the second-person point of view in the process of narration. The reappearance of the word 'you' denotes that *Psalm 91: 13* takes the function of second-person point of view. This verse reassures the protection that God has rendered to his people at the time of crisis. The psalmist has dexterously employed the second-person narrative technique to deliver the majesty of God. He assures that nothing can harm the people of God because they have the potential to walk over the lion and serpent. The narration of the verse has enhanced the tone and pattern of the verse.

Psalm 91: 14 discloses the function of the narrative technique and sheds light on the majesty of God. The psalmist says that "*Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.*" (530). This verse points at the presence of 'I' and 'he' and reaffirms the function first-person point of view and third-person point of view. It highlights the conditions and response. The condition present in the verse is "*Because he holds fast to me in love*" (530), which states that when a reader understands God and obeys all the commandments, he shall be blessed. The condition mentioned is '*holding to the love of God*' and the response is '*God delivering and protecting*' the one who holds faith in God. The psalmist narrates the condition and response using the narrative technique called points of view. He has employed the third-person point of view to indicate the reader and first-person point of view to signify God. The notable aspect of this verse is that it sounds as if it was narrated by an outsider. The psalmist takes the position of an outsider to connect the reader and God.

Verses 15 and 16 of *Psalm 91* have been composed in the same tone of utterance and a similar technique of narration has been adopted in communicating the essence. The psalmist writes that "*When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble.*" (530). It is transparent from the verse that the psalmist has employed first-person point of view in addition to the third-person point of view. The tone of the verse reflects the omniscient narration and confirms that this verse is spoken by God himself to the psalmist. It validates the omnipotent tone of narration with the phrase 'when he calls to me' and '*I will answer him*'. In these two phrases though the point of view is different the tone remains the same. The phrase: '*I will be with him in trouble*' signifies the same omnipotent tone of narration. These phrases function as the words of God and cultivate the faith of the readers. The psalmist through his narrative technique tries to instill faith and assure the protection of God in addition to disclosing the love of God.

The last verse of *Psalm 91* is also been composed with the same omniscient narration. The psalmist utters that "*With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.*" (531). It is evident from the verse that the psalmist has employed the first-person point of view and third-person point of view. The phrase: '*with long life I will satisfy*' carries the first-person point of view, which has enhanced the omniscient narrative technique. Likewise, 'show him my salvation' points out the omniscient narrative tone and the function of first-person point of view of narration. The psalmist offers the narrative position to God to elevate the tone of narration. He has rendered an omnipotent tone to cultivate the faith of the readers. This final verse has the tone

of benediction which is pronounced by God himself upon the people who hold on to him in faith. In order to expose the blessings of God, the psalmist has employed both the narrative points of view.

CONCLUSION:

Psalm 91 has been composed wonderfully with a high narrative technique. The different points of view what the psalmist has employed has immensely contributed to the structure and content of the psalm. Though the psalmist has switched over from the narrative pattern multiple times, he was able to deliver the tone and content in the exact manner it had to be delivered. He has practiced the first-person point of view of narration and third-person point of view of narration extensively in the *Psalm*. This technique has aided the psalmist to generate a kinship between God and his people or the readers of the text. The psalmist has sought to bring God and the believers into contact through his narrative technique. It is observed that the narrative technique that the psalmist has adopted has elevated the position of the omniscient God and exposes the love of God for His people. Though the present study has concentrated only on the points of view of narration, it has achieved discovering the patterns of narration and the essence associated with it. It can be summed up that the points of view have hugely contributed to delivering the essence of the verse with an omniscient and omnipotent tone.

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