



SIGNIFICANT ATTRIBUTES AND STEREOTYPES OF PROTAGONISTS IN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Protagonists play a crucial role in fictions. They basically perform structural role. Being the soul of the story, they take initiative in moving the plot of the story. The present paper examines the significant attributes of the protagonists. This helps the readers in understanding the nature of the protagonists. The researcher tries to investigate the important dimensions of the protagonists in different situations. He focuses his view points about the protagonists effectively. As far as the attributes are concerned, protagonist is the primary figure of the fiction. The events of the plot are closely associated with the protagonist. This study concludes that the protagonists enjoy most empathy as well as the focal point of the narrative from the audience and are always driven by a goal, duty or curiosity.

Key Words: *Protagonist, attributes, stereotypes, primary figure, focal point of the narrative, fiction etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Bonnie Hearn Hill rightly asserts,

“Protagonist drives the story. He moves the plot forward. He swerves i.e. changes or causes to change the direction abruptly around obstacles. Sometimes he barrels over the antagonists in their paths. Sometimes the antagonists barrel over them.”

The protagonist is the primary figure of any narrative. The events of the plot are closely associated with the protagonist. The plot of the story revolves around the protagonist. The obstacles may be in the form of natural calamities such as floods or storms or may be in the form of human obstacles known as the antagonist who impede the progress of the protagonists and deter him from achieving success. When the narrator introduces the protagonists in the novel, he checks the necessary traits of the protagonists. He asks certain questions to himself about the protagonists:



“Are they really intelligent, warm, clever, and brave? Are these traits making him a perfect protagonist as a perfect person? Great protagonist may possess many qualities but they must be both proactive and sympathetic in nature. A protagonist who cares for nothing, who feels nothing or who robotically floats through his life is just as unsympathetic.” (Fresh News Daily, 23 January 2012).

As far as the study is concerned, the protagonists have the following attributes. These traits help the readers to know them well.

Prime mover of the story:

The narrator of the fiction tells the story of the protagonist in detail. He has the un-quenching quest for different aspects. He has the ability and reasons to act. A good protagonist makes things happen and moves the story along through his actions and choices. He jumps in any given situation and takes necessary action. While dealing with others, he takes utmost care about his behavior, his choices, his reactions, his response etc. Thus he works as the prime mover of the story.

Protagonist: A loser or winner

A protagonist of the story should be strong and pro-active. A change in something forces him to take action. Regardless of how reluctant the protagonist, something compels him to move forward and refuse to give up, win or lose. For instance, Kushank Purandare in *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*, Zia Khan in *God's Little Soldier* etc. He is either a loser or winner. Losing something that matters is a powerful motivating tool and it forces him to do the things courageously. He takes risk without considering the consequences. Even he doesn't afraid about the loss. Readers want to see a protagonist rewarded for all his hard work and sacrifice, and a reason for him to keep going when everything tells him to give up.

Special Skills:

Protagonists often possess special skills or partake in unique experiences. They are generally put to some test in activity that will challenge what the characters know, or how they handle the new demands.

Remarkable virtues:

Some protagonists are un-heroic, brave, and realistic; some are intellectually sophisticated and post-modernist. The readers experience the novel through the lens of the protagonist. If the protagonist lack any praiseworthy qualities, then the reader concludes that the novel



makes no real stand. Protagonists should be heroic and have remarkable virtues. Steven Fernandez proclaims about the realistic state of protagonists,

“None of these characters are all-perfect. Yet each has a heroic streak in them. And this is exactly the way it should be with the protagonists that you, yourself, create in your own novel. Apart from inner virtues, a protagonist should also have a noble or praiseworthy goal. Few protagonists elicit reader’s sympathy more deeply than ones with noble intentions. Sometimes they are seriously flawed, hopelessly misguided, or comically incompetent.” (Story and Structure, October 16, 2012)

Sympathetic and Empathetic:

The protagonists should be sympathetic and empathetic. He must have a hole in his life and readers should reveal it. The holes may be in the form of unfulfilled ambition, unfulfilled dreams etc. A hole in his life is some missing element that both drives and impedes him. The hole in the character’s life will make the reader care. They reveal deep emotions and feelings which are universal to human conditions. Readers should discover what lies at the heart of the protagonist. They should endeavor to find some shared human experience. For instance, the readers show their sympathy for Kushank, Ravan and Eddie, Zia Khan etc. for their pitiable condition.

Likable and Unlikable:

The character that takes centre stage and writers attention is a likable protagonist. They are page turning and unpredictable in nature. Sometimes fictional characters go out of their way to make other characters lives miserable. Readers try to know their protagonist by asking the questions such as

“Is there a single protagonist in the story? Are the protagonist’s motives understandable? Does the ending have a takeaway message about morality and humanity?”

Sometimes unlikable protagonists have redeeming qualities, which makes them enormously complex, sometimes they are understandable or redeemable and sometimes they are such scoundrels that we shield our children from them. Cris Freeze propounds about likable protagonists,

“He should have a feel for the characters and craft biographies to understand them better. With a character biography, he has a starting point to work from; but he should leave a room for flexibility in case the character starts developing in an unimagined ways. As he keeps refining the story, he makes decisions on just how



likable, unlikable, or evil characters will be. Sometimes they start whispering suggestions to us. This delightful intimacy with the characters can only come about if we understand their hierarchy of traits, their contrasting traits, their morality and factors from their back-story that have shaped them." (Immoral and corrupt protagonists, January 15, 2014).

Combination of likable-unlikable and flawed-human:

Jessica Morrell explains about the mixed nature of protagonists in her famous book, "Bullies, Bastards and Bitches, 2008:73,

"Protagonist is approachable. The reader can understand the condition of the protagonist. If your likable character does have a secret as part of the plot, the strong events will reveal it." She also boldly depicts the flaws of the protagonists. "His flaws are ones that we can all relate to, such as feelings of inferiority, an easily triggered temper or an inability to get along with family members."

Mixture of inner and outer story:

The protagonist should have an inner story and an outer story. The internal tracks the protagonist's emotional, mental, and spiritual state, where the external story tracks the character's actions and movements and corporeal health. The external story is obvious because, it's external. The internal story is hidden on purpose- exposing it to the light makes it artificial. We can conclude about protagonist that 'as a human, their physical lives are plainly seen but their inner existence is concealed.'

Ability of Problem Solving:

Protagonist is the central issue of the story. He has certain problems which have to be solved in the story. Readers find sadness inside the protagonist. They try to discover his sadness. Every protagonist should be wounded in some way. His wound and grief reveals his actual suffering. Smart protagonists are believable, clever and can figure out how to solve the problem.

Ability to learn from his own experience:

Protagonist has a secret, compelling quality and the capacity to change. If the protagonist is hiding something, readers will wonder what that secret is and how it affects the story. If the protagonist is of little obscure, readers are eager to know what his secret is. He should have something interesting qualities. He should have the ability to learn from his experiences and become a better person. He won't be the same person he was when the story started. He is the

arbiter of this change. He has the capacity to change the world. A protagonist either changes gradually over time as he encounters new events and other characters *or* he changes dramatically in response to a dramatic situation. A protagonist who suffers trauma changes drastically because we expect and allow that change. We must accept it. To some degree, we must even expect it.

Ability to know his strengths and weaknesses:

Protagonist should know his most vulnerable pressure points. Protagonist should know what and where his most vulnerable pressure points are. This works because you've drawn a connection between the audience and the protagonist. The audience cares or wants to remain compelled by the character's journey.

Agreeable, Vigilant and Emotionally Stable:

Joseph Carrol pronounces about the human nature of male and female protagonists.

“Male protagonists display a strongly marked preference for physical attractiveness in a mate whereas female protagonists display a moderate preference for extrinsic attributes. Protagonists and their friends would on average score higher on the personality factor agreeableness, a measure of warmth, affiliation and that protagonist would score higher than antagonists on openness to experience, a measure of intellectual vivacity.”

(Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice, 2011: 161-162).

Protagonists display motive dispositions that exemplify strong personal development and healthy social adjustment. They clearly represent the apex of the positive values implicit in agonistic structure. Edward Singerland and Mark Collard announce various motives and personality traits of the protagonists,

“Male protagonist possesses many motives and personalities. Good characters display wider divergences in scores than male and female characters. In novels, good characters score higher than bad characters on agreeableness, constructive effort, nurture and perfecting intrinsic qualities in mates. Good characters score lower than bad characters on dominance and dislike. Protagonists exemplify the traits that evoke anger, fear, contempt and disgust. They are agreeable, vigilant and emotionally stable.”

(Creating Consilience: Integrating the Sciences and the Humanities, 2012: 401-403).

Worthy to answer the questions:



The questions applied to the protagonist are-

“Who is he? What does he want? What conflicts and fears are standing in his way? And what is at stake if he fails?”

A Protagonist uses his intellectual capacity and gives the answers in an appropriate manner. He shows his worthiness and promptness.

Strengthened by antagonist’s power:

The antagonist opposes the protagonist throughout the story. The antagonist helps in defining the protagonist role and invokes a shape by coloring everything. He strongly opposes persistent conflicts created by antagonist. Thus protagonist is always strengthened by antagonist’s power.

Active presence throughout the work:

Being a dynamic or round character, protagonists move along their journeys and experience new situations and new people that change them in some way. The climax is usually the defining moment for this evolution of a character. For instance, in Kiran Nagarkar’s novel, *The Extras*, both the protagonists try to become actors in Bollywood, but unfortunately they adjust with their ambition and accept the job of Extras in the movie.

Performs at least one amazing act:

Protagonists are the heroes of the story. Many of them perform courageous feat. They show bravery and spirit in the face of adversity. For example, In *God’s Little Soldier*, Zia Khan performs many amazing roles.

Interacts with *theme*:

The protagonist interacts with *theme* in two ways, intersection or interweaving. At an intersection, he crashes head-on into the theme in a particular way. He is at odds with the theme and rails against it. Finally he overcome overturns, succumb and prove it out.

Protagonist has something interesting trying to stop him/her:

A great protagonist needs someone worth fighting or his victory is meaningless. Hardy Janice argues about the interesting aspects of the protagonists,



“A protagonist is only as good as the antagonist standing against him. Antagonist’s darkness and evil deeds ignite the passions of the protagonists.”
(blog.janicehardy.com)

Conclusion:

In summing up the paper, we can conclude that the protagonists are the cardinal part of the literary work. Their attributes help the readers to identify and recognize them in a clearer manner. Basically they can be worked as the prime mover of the story, they are either loser or winner, they possess special skills, they have remarkable virtues and human flaws, and they have ability of problem solving. They have ability to know their strengths and weaknesses. They are worthy to answer the questions. They are strengthened by antagonists’ power. They have active presence throughout the work. They perform at least one amazing act and interact with the theme. They learn from their own experience. They are sympathetic or empathetic, likable or unlikeable, agreeable, vigilant and emotionally stable. They have mixture of inner and outer story.

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