Reimagining Voices in Contemporary Literature: History, Humanity, and Ethical Representation

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ENG-2026-140311107

Volume: 14

Issue: 3

Month: June

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 02.04.2026

Accepted: 10.05.2026

Published Online: 01.06.2026

Citation:
Naha, Abhijit, and Sreeramulu Patnam. "Reimagining Voices in Contemporary Literature: History, Humanity, and Ethical Representation." *Shanlax International Journal of English,* vol. 14, no. 3, 2026, pp. 8–16.

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v14i3.11107

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Abhijit Naha
Research Scholar, GSHS
Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India &
Assistant Professor, Department of English
Nagarjuna College of Management Studies, Chikkaballapura, India

Sreeramulu Patnam
Assistant Professor, GSHS
Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract
In modern literature, the concept of narrative voice has shifted from being a position of authority to being an ethical response to historical trauma, displacement, and human vulnerability. Modern stories of history do not claim to be complete, nor do they claim to be able to recover it all.Modern history stories do not state that they are complete, nor do they state that they can recover all of it. These approaches demonstrate the challenge of portraying the historical experiences of pain, including colonialism, the Partition, and ecological crises. Narrative voice is thus an ethical field of responsibility: an area in which the writer recognizes that they cannot claim to represent anything absolute but rather must acknowledge the boundaries of representation. This is an alternative to dominant historical narratives, which can exclude vulnerable voices. In contemporary literature, memory, absence, and incompleteness are considered meaningful narrative strategies, as emphasized through relational storytelling. Ethical narration does not exploit suffering for emotional or political gain but rather engages with the experience of others. Humans are not a universal abstraction; in this context, they are a vulnerable and shared state of being that has been affected by historical violence.
The paper suggests that the reimagining of voice enables literature to hold onto contested histories and fosters "interpretive humility and ethical engagement. Thus, in modern literary discourse, the use of narrative voice has become an aesthetic and ethical means of expression.
Keywords: Narrative Voice, Ethical Representation, Contemporary Literature, History and Memory, Humanity Postcolonial Criticism, Trauma Studies

Introduction

In contemporary texts, the growing number of texts is a very important source of new reflection on the relationship between the voice of narration, ethics, and historical representation. In the context of a world literary landscape defined by the ruins of colonialism, mass displacement, political violence, and ecological crisis, questions of who speaks and how voices are mediated, along with what ethical obligations go with representation, have become urgent once more. Questions of speaker and voice mediation, ethical obligations to representation, and who speaks are more urgent in a world shaped by the ruins of colonialism, mass displacement, political violence, and ecological crisis. Literary text is not only about history but also questions the manner in which history experiences can be recounted and ethically communicated. This change indicates that literature is not merely a vehicle for evidence but an ethically charged affair of dealing with the fragmented history and lives of the vulnerable.

Traditional literary criticism has been transformed into one that emphasizes the voice in the narrative in terms of authority, authenticity, or testimonial presence. Voice is seen as a marker of narrative control, an expression of a real subject, or a rescue of silenced experiences. They have long been considered indispensable in questioning the dominant narratives of history, but they also have the potential to rewrite new forms of mastery over history if history is thinkable, recoverable, understandable, or resolvable by means of a historic narrative. This is especially an issue regarding extreme violence, such as colonialism, partition, forced migration, and environmental damage. The desire to "give voice" may even lead to the degeneration of suffering, to the reduction of the historical and complexity, or to coherence over experiences that do not close in narrative.

In this paper, this topic is addressed by suggesting that the voice in contemporary literature is not a representational claim or an ethical practice, but the voice of today. Modern fiction, however, also revisits the idea of restraint, mediation, and attentiveness to that which is given up or untellable – not to the power over history, but to give evidence of truth. Voice is not a loud claim; it is hesitation, fragmentation, silence, and relational storytelling. These narrative strategies do not signal failures or gaps but ethical acknowledgements of the limits of representation and responsibilities for the performance of the narrative of history.

The reimagining of voice is the most important aspect of this reimagining of history. Modern literary writing, however, rarely concerns itself with history as an integral whole or a continuous stream of events on which narratives can be built. Instead, history is broken, violent, incomplete, and hampered by erasures, gaps, and contestations. Literary fiction offers no compensatory wholeness, but if it is going to attempt to talk about it, it will be in the fullness of justice. Narrative voice provides a means for ethical negotiation, not historical mastery, because the past is over.

This study addresses two concerns: What is the ethical process for recreating the voice of the narrative in contemporary literature? What becomes of literary engagement with humans and history? The questions posed in this paper are committed to an ethical approach to the practice of narrative that threatens historical history and its humanistic conventions. When these texts do so, humanity is no longer considered a universal moral abstraction but is embedded in vulnerability, interdependence, and responsibility for others, human and nonhuman.

In this paper, I make two important contributions to the current state of literary studies by moving the emphasis away from aesthetic value to ethical value. First, it is beyond formalist and testimonial voice readings; it puts the ethical side of its praxis. Second, it explores how the book moves between positionality (narrative voice) and history, vulnerability, and responsibility, demonstrating how literature is still relevant today in addressing trauma, memory, and historical injustice in other ways. This paper sets up an inherently problematic criticism of the way memory of the past is told, heard, and sustained in the present by introducing the critical ethical role of the re-imagining of the narrative voice.

Literature Review: Voice, Ethics, and Representation

Current scholarship on literature has addressed questions of narrators' voice and the ethics of representation, especially in narratology, postcolonial literature, and memory research. Along with foundational theoretical arguments, a growing set of studies has attempted to understand the role that the narrating voice plays in the history of violence, trauma, and ethical responsibility. Although these analyses have significantly improved our understanding of voice as a political and cultural problem, they often avoid the notion that voice is an ethical practice. These pages provide a description of the theoretical and scientific research of this paper, as well as the critical gap these two essays open

Narrative Voice in Literary Theory

In classical narratology, the term "narrative voice" refers to a formal-structural category of a narrative. In this tradition, it is considered a moral stance of voice for the scholars, but for scholars of the tradition, it is also a part of the narrative organization, along with the other aspects of voice (such as focalization and authority), but not necessarily a political attitude.

The importance of voice in narratives, particularly regarding ideology, has been discussed by later narratologists, but the ethics of voice – specifically, those that have influenced pain or history of suffering – are largely confined to formalist frameworks.

This limitation has been criticized by researchers. For instance, James Phelan states that narrative ethics should be included as a component of narrative practices, especially when the narrative in the text leads the reader through what they think are characters and events. Similar to Suzanne Keen's research on narrative empathy, her study conceptualizes the ways in which language creates affective engagement, as opposed to a tool for representational responsibility, but she is more concerned with the reader's than representational accountability. Although these studies also tend to contribute to the ethics of the narrative, as a position of the narrative they frequently see voice as a mediated narrative rather than as a narrative of the manner in which it is concealed, split up or altered in accordance to historical violence.

Thus, narratological studies provide valuable insights into the structure of the narrative, but are by no means restricted to the theory of ethical responsibility when a voice is transformed from within the extant literature of today.

Ethical Representation and Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial criticism has been much more aware of the ethical issues of representation, especially regarding marginalized and historically silenced groups. This is also a space with great sensitivity to the ambiguity of speaking to and with oppressed subjects. The debate on the recovery of the voice of the subaltern has been influenced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who has addressed the issue in ways that render alterity the dominant mode of narration. Later, researchers have continued to allude to it, although it remains a problem to be condemned by silence and non-recovery.

Scholars such as Benita Parry and Neil Lazarus have studied how postcolonial discourses confront agency and how difference is not erased in liberal humanist frameworks. In a critique of 'ethical universalism,' which obscures the material history of violence, Parry warns against narratives that define suffering without political responsibility. The interventions highlight the ethical consequences of appropriating narratives but are more likely to be charged with ideological critique than with the formal ethicality of the narrative voice.

In other words, ambivalence and narration studies of Homi K. Bhabha have led to a host of scholars and publications that have produced fragmented and hybrid voices in postcolonial texts. However, the contributions of some other scholars, such as Elleke Boehmer and Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2013), have expanded Bhabha's knowledge in the area of analyzing novelistic idiosyncrasies in the postcolonial novel by means of polyphonic and temporally unstable voices. This study focused on narrative inequality, but frequently regards fragmentation as a cultural response as opposed to an excuse for historical violence; the study frequently equates fragmentation with a cultural response to historical violence.

Criticism of something other than testimonial realism is another facet of scholarship, not only testimonial realism. Craps argues that the testimonial mode should not be thought of as a replacement for verbal clarity and legibility, but that too much of it may favor legibility and expressive clarity, thus marginalizing those other forms of suffering that cannot be easily captured and articulated. The need to be mindful of silence, delay, and narrative restraint are all qualities that are especially notable in the postcolonial trauma studies that Craps has completed herself.

History, Memory, and Narrative Ethics

In the field of memory studies and trauma theory, for instance, the problem of the limits of narrative recovery is another complicating issue that has been explored. Ethical storytelling is a practice that is deeply affected by trauma, which can be described as a disruption of narrative and resistance to representation, in which silence and repetition can be found. (Cathy Caruth, one of the earlier scholars on ethical storytelling, suggests this). Research scholars such as Dominick LaCapra therefore differentiate between acting out and working through, suggesting that the ethical narrative cannot be prematurely closed off, averted, or even be a redemptive narrative.

Contemporary fiction is also discussed by literature scholars such as Anne Whitehead and Michael Rothberg in their treatment of traumatic events in fragmented memory and multi-dimensional narratives. Rothberg's "multi-directional memory" is of special interest in this regard, as he illustrates how the voices of violence intersect without splitting apart. In this instance, historians have a tendency to focus on memory and trauma, and history as a subject matter, rather than on narrative voice and narrative voice as an ethics of mediation.

Identified Gap

The research undertaken in the literature, postcolonial critique, and memory studies is a fruitful endeavor: it illustrates how the themes of authority, silence, trauma, and historical representation can be productively dealt with. However, the ethics of creating the voice of a narrative through restraint, fragmentation, hesitation, and relationships have yet to be determined. These attributes have been typologised as style or ideology rather than moral reactions to historical vulnerability and violence. To fill this void, this paper proposes to examine the concept of narrative voice as an ethical concern and to place it at the heart of history, the human, and responsibility in modern literature.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive method based on literary theory, postcolonial criticism, and narrative ethics. This study does not view the use of voice as a formal or stylistic approach but rather considers voice as an ethically situated practice, one that is influenced by historical violence, vulnerability, and the limits of representation. The theoretical framework combines the concepts of narrative ethics, postcolonial theory, and memory studies to consider how voice is represented in contemporary literature in terms of mediation, restraint, fragmentation, and relationality.

This study addresses narrative ethics in terms of narrative theory and investigates the moral aspects of storytelling. According to scholars such as James Phelan, narrative techniques serve to position the reader ethically through interpretive restrictions, sympathies, and judgments. However, this study moves away from reader response towards the ethical conditions of narration itself. It explores the negotiation of responsibility through the voice of a story with histories that are unmanageable, unrecoverable, or not easily represented. Therefore, narrative voice is understood as a way of not only emotionally involving the reader but also negotiating the past and negotiating others.

This inquiry lies within the framework of postcolonial theory, as its moral and political basis. This study takes a cautious view of voice, drawing inspiration from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and her critique of representation and epistemic violence, with a view to avoid assumptions of recovery, authenticity, or narrative authority. This voice analysis is informed by Spivak's emphasis on silence, opacity, and non-transparency. In this context, the concept of silence does not imply that there is no sound but rather signifies a moral response to the challenge of fully capturing historical trauma.

Likewise, the study includes the ideas of Homi K. Bhabha, ambivalence, and narration, which can interpret voices that are fragmented and temporally unstable. By contesting linear historiography and non-mutable subject positions, Bhabha allows voice to be conceptualized as a site of negotiation and not singular authority or relationality. Although much of Bhabha's theory is cultural, this paper will take the discussion of narrative instability one step further into the ethical in relation to suffering and historical injustices.

The methodology also draws from trauma theory and memory studies to reflect on the problem of representation in narratives. Traumatic histories often fail to make a full story, and dealing ethically with the past means being aware of incompleteness, delay, and fragmentation, as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra suggest. Therefore, this study reads gaps, lost memory, and disruptions of chronological order not only as a way of doing art but also as a way of doing ethics, that is, to represent historical violence. History is thus viewed as "partially incomplete, disputable, and unretrievable.

To do so, this study uses close textual and thematic analysis of selected works of contemporary literature set in a postcolonial and global context. The analysis does not concern itself with claims of

historical authenticity and/or testimonial accuracy, but with the analysis of narrative strategies, including hesitation, silence, mediation, fragmentation, and the relational approach to the story. There is a special focus on the narrative voice's ethical reaction to the trauma of colonialism, Partition, displacement, ecological crisis, and historical trauma.

However, this study has some limitations. The analysis is qualitative and interpretive and is influenced by theoretical approaches and textual interpretation; therefore, there may be other ways of reading the selected texts. The study is also restricted in scope in that it does not aim for a more comprehensive comparison of a wider body of texts in a variety of historical and linguistic traditions. Moreover, focusing on ethical and interpretive aspects does not necessarily meet the sociological and empirical aspects of history. These constraints, however, do not detract from the study's aim: to consider the role of narrative voice as a moral intervention in literature today.

This study does not go so far as attempt to recover the real voice of the others or create an accurate history but examines the ways in which literature works to negotiate the impossibility of complete representation. The methodology places the voice of the narrative at the crossroads of history, ethics, and humanity, so that a focus on vulnerability, interdependence, and representational limits becomes a central feature of contemporary literary expression. This paper rethinks the concept of narrative voice, not only as a formal issue but also as an act of moral engagement in literary discourse.

Reimagining Voice, History, and the Unfinished Past

In contemporary literature, narrative voice has been redefined as an ethical engagement with history, not as a means of authority, recovery, or completion. Literary narratives in contexts that arise out of colonial violence, partition, displacement, and ecological crisis may not be direct or coherent. Rather, voice emerges from hesitancy, fragmentation, and narrative gaping – formal strategies that are a result of the ethical consciousness of the limits of representation. These efforts are not indicative of a failure in their narrative but of their duty to violent and incomplete narratives that are difficult to grasp.

Hesitation is a key element of the ethical voice of the writer in modern writing. Narratives tend to be slow or "pause in and out," which means that they pause and interrupt historical events. It is not that they do not want to state trauma in words. The narrator is aware of the danger of saying too much about suffering and cuts back on their speech or makes it slower. In this sense, voice becomes a practice of ethical caution, one that recognizes the immediacy and clarity of appropriation.

Fragmentation also complicates the narration, as it disrupts the linear time and perspective of the narration. Contemporary texts include a lack of synthesis, multiple narrative structures, disjunct temporal units, and scattered memories. This broken form is, in some ways, a reflection of history itself, particularly in relation to mass violence and displacement. Fragmentation challenges the illusion of fullness, coherence, and resolution, to a large extent, and coherence and resolution can be the traditional means of historiography and nationalist narratives. Instead, an ethical narrative voice makes the rupture visible.

The rhetorical gap, hesitation, and fragmentation are used in the ethical processes of deliberate ethics. Unspoken, unsaid gestures of violence, recognition of representational limits. These are not gaps in which suffering is consumed but gaps against the aestheticisation of suffering. Erasure does not come in silence, but in ethical sensitivity that some losses are not translatable into words without distortion.

There is no definite conclusion in the contemporary literature or a redeemed historical period, particularly in stories connected to colonialism or the Partition. Without a silencer, violence is explained, and with closure, it is satisfied. At the same time, the ethical voice is unfulfilled, uneasy, in a state of incompletion, like history itself is incomplete and not solved. This reworking of voice is not a contemporary analysis of history and memory. This is not a full but an incomplete, contested, and relational recurrence. This does not follow a tidy pattern of events but focuses on what is missing, what has been lost, and the ongoing presence of unhealed trauma. Memory is diffused and disjointed, existing in an unpredictable way from one generation to the next and from one geographic area to another. In these disruptions,

narrative voice takes a way away from what is found in its silence, the residue of ancestral silence, or archival certainty.

In contrast, contemporary texts react to traditional historiographic models based on linearity and completeness, disrupted chronology, and non-linear memory. By altering the spatial order of time, narratives uncover affective reality in the preponderance of chronological alignment. These methods cannot stand up to the nationalist methods that attempt to simplify history down to one story of origin, sacrifice, or victory. History seems plural and litigious, with multiple memories, none of which can be amalgamated into a single authoritative history, which is regressive and divided.

These multiplications further erode the claims of historical mastery. Many of the current stories oppose the voices but also unite them into a common narrative. This is what this tension takes, and it involves the disparity between memory and representation. Not an arbitrator between them, the ethical narrative voice allows contradictions and confusion to continue. Thus, it presents history as a site of continuous conflict rather than consensus.

In this ethical-historical context, silence is an important factor. Some moments of silence in the Partition or displacement narratives are associated with extreme violence or intimate loss. We fill these gaps with explanations, but contemporary literature leaves them intact, acknowledging the unspeakable. There is a difference between the silence of ethical recognition of loss and the failure of representation.

This mediation also uses a distant voice for the ethical narrative. Voices can often be found through memory, multiple narrators, or temporal disjunctions that convey the positionality and limitations of the narrator. These messages of authenticity are negated by the assertion that the user is authentic and has only access to an event of historical tragedy. The narrative voice recognizes its bias and demonstrates responsibility towards others.

However, such trends are more evident in the writings of authors like Amitav Ghosh, who frequently eschews any one point of view or narrative closure. In her stories, he uses layers of voices, recollection, and time that do not make the colonial or Partition history fixed. In these texts, this history is not remembered as an event of the past but rather as a present in itself, the result of past events.

Emotion is a key part of Benjamin's polemic against the idea of "historical progress," and the incomplete nature of the experience of history is central to it. For Benjamin, history is not a linear progression of redemption; it is broken, lost, and unfulfilled possibilities (Benjamin 1940/2003). This figure is parallel to modern literature, which reverberates with it. Not as issues to be addressed, but as things to be done. Remembered or critically reviewed the data. No one can say that the story voice is. It is not about changing history but about understanding its inevitable limits as representation. The moral obligation to see and see what is not yet complete.

Earlier, I said that narrative voice could not ethically stop from telling a story, but it is narrative excellence that cannot. Modern literature does not provide closure, total testimony, or authoritative historical reconstruction; it exists only when readers are able to comprehend history as an ethical commitment. Voice is about listening, not telling, about accepting limits, not exceeding them. Emotional narrative voice lives in the imperfect past; to the point that history is remembered, it is a suffering, it must move on its own duty in the present.

Redefining Humanity through Ethical Representation

Ultimately, the new narration of literature redefines man as man. Modern texts do not speak of a universal, stable humanity but of a vulnerable, interdependent, and ethically responsible one. This change represents a growing recognition that modern humanist strategies, often grounded in autonomy, coherence, and mastery, are no longer capable of dealing with histories of violence, displacement, and ecological devastation. Ethical representation as a narrative voice is to revisit the concept of human existence after a historical injustice.

There is no isolation in many modern novels, but there is spreading and humanity's sharing with one another. The universal view of the human was frequently blamed for the obscuring of difference, the blurring of life, and the smudging of power contradictions. However, ethical narratives construct

a sense of fragility and dependence on humanity; they rely on exposure, loss, or encounter with relationships. Characters are not characters; they are dependent on history and vulnerable to others.

This is a vital change in the definition of vulnerability. However, stories today seldom tell of heroic endurance or triumph, but focus more on fragility – physical and emotional. Resilience is not the only outcome of grief, uncertainty and incompleteness, but grief, uncertainty and incompleteness. It allows spaces for fragile states, and without having them become inspirational stories. So it is not assumed in literature that suffering will be found through strength and resolution. Even vulnerability is not an impediment to fight, but what's setting up moral relations.

In interdependence representations of humanity come to the fore in the defense of liberalism of autonomy. In contemporary literature, life is increasingly described as living in networks of care, responsibility and shared precarity. Narrative voice emerges from conversation, memory, silence, and inherited history, yet it is not a singular or personal voice or story. This relationality that connects is the manifestation of the idea of the Being of Human Beings made through connection and not isolation. This ideological representation does not differentiate between the speaker and the subject, but rather speaks of the voices of dependence and resonance in the history.

This defining identity is responsible and has an ethical dimension. Moral action does not necessarily correspond with abstract values; with the present narratives, it is called to the people, particularly to the absent, the silenced or the injured. "The narrative voice plays the role of boundaries of what cannot be said, knowledge, or recovered". The concept of change without appropriation, this moral barrier indicates the ethicalness of the concept. In this respect humanity is not more certain than in attentiveness and care.

Ethical conversations in the present are not only confined to human relations in the modern world. The impermanence of human life in a life system has been studied, and redefined the human life within it, arguing against anthropocentric assumptions. The increasing number of narratives, featuring a mixture of nature, animals, and ecosystem vulnerability, describe human histories of violence and decay, with the potential to situate human histories of violence and environmental degradation. These images suggest that ethical responsibility is not merely imposed upon human beings; rather, it is a responsibility that must be connected with interspecies and ecological interdependence. Humans can be more than human, and are almost impenetrable at that level of not being human.

The fragility versus heroism theme in literature is of special interest. Today's stories are not about conquest, survival, or mastery, but about common endurance, moral flexility, and common vulnerability. This shift destabilizes favored cultural discourses that have portrayed humanity as self-dominant, powerful over others, history, and nature. However, ethics do not yield to the story and make it difficult to maintain its shape.

Contemporary literature is concerned with the relationship between identity and the moral reconstruction of humanity. Self-sufficient identity is not identity; rather, it is a different type. Instead, a sense of identity is foregrounded through narrative voice, ethical encounters, and shared vulnerabilities as they relate to historical relations. It is not a sustaining self; rather, it is a lasting ethic based on control, control and responsiveness of care, restraint, and responsiveness.

In these representational techniques, contemporary literature creates a new paradigm of humanity—one of vulnerability, interdependence, and ethical responsibility. By creating this redefinition in storytelling, moral representation is not merely an account of how histories are told or of the way that human beings are fictionalized and sustained in our daily lives.

Conclusion and Implications

The study shows how the voice of the narrative is reconstructed in contemporary literature neither as a claim to authority, authenticity, or completion, but as an ethical move created by the violence, vulnerability, and representational responsibility of history. Contemporary texts often question the possibility of achieving a full recovery of history and a transparent narrative through fragmentation,

silence, mediation, delay, and narration hesitation. Narrative voice then becomes an ethical act that acknowledges boundaries, defies appropriation, and is vigilant about the legacy of historical trauma.

This study makes two important contributions to the field of literary studies. It breaks away from formalist and structuralist notions of voice in narration by emphasizing voice's ethical aspects. The study does not assume voice as a neutral narrative style or a sign of self-expression, but rather as a way of crafting voice through restraint, relationality, and ethical considerations of historical suffering. Second, this study critically explores and develops an important connection between ethics and history, as well as between literature and narrative form, by examining the ways in which the narratives themselves engage with processes of moral interaction and historical reflection. Ethical representation is thus not seen as an assessment made on literature but as a presence within a narrative form and structure.

This perspective has significant implications for modern literary criticism. It invites researchers to go beyond interpretive approaches that focus on representational fidelity, historical reconstruction, and the completeness of testimony. Rather, literary studies might be served by a focus on the ethical dimensions of the representation of silence, fragmentation, absence, mediation, and narrative instability. This is particularly pertinent in the context of postcolonial, trauma, migration, Partition, Indigenous, and ecological fiction literature, where histories are frequently traumatic, dislocating, and even contested.

This study also sheds light on future research directions in the field of literature. This framework can be further expanded by comparing the ethics of narration in various linguistic, cultural, and transnational literary traditions. Ethical narration in digital storytelling, climate fiction, narratives on refugees, and experimental literary structures that extend traditional modes of voice and testimony would be good areas for further research. Furthermore, an interdisciplinary project that brings together literary studies and memory studies, environmental humanities and trauma theory, as well as media studies could expand our knowledge of how responsibility, vulnerability, and historical consciousness are negotiated in contemporary narratives in increasingly global contexts.

In conclusion, this paper argues that the issue of narrative voice is more than formally or aesthetically interesting; it is also an ethical enterprise that questions the role of literature in the world today with respect to history, humanity, and responsibility. Today's literature opens new possibilities for interpretation, embodying and understanding historical experience with ethical mediation and humility, relational consciousness, and moral sensitivity, through rethinking voice as a practice of ethical negotiation rather than narrative authority.

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Author Details

Abhijit Naha, *Research Scholar, GSHS, Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India & Assistant Professor, Department of English, Nagarjuna College of Management, Studies, Chikkaballapura, India,*
Email ID: *friendkvr@gmail.com*

Dr. Sreeramulu Patnam, *Assistant Professor, GSHS, Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India*