

Narrative Architecture of Suspense in Neil D'Silva's *Maya's New Husband and Pishacha*: A Narratological Study

Tushar Subhash Tambade

Research Scholar, Department of English,
Shivaji University, Kolhapur.

Abstract: *This paper examines the creation and sustenance of suspense in Neil D'Silva's novels Maya's New Husband and Pishacha through the integrated application of Maria Anastasova's suspense model and Gérard Genette's narratological framework. Anastasova's model, comprising Gradually Developed Suspense Motifs (GDSM), Climactic Suspense Episodes (CSE), and Mini Suspenseful Episodes (MSE), structures suspense as a rhythmic and escalating emotional experience. Genette's categories—order, duration, frequency, focalization, and voice—offer tools to analyze how narrative form manipulates temporality, perspective, and pacing to intensify suspense. The analysis first applies Anastasova's model to identify and explain suspense motifs and episodes in each novel, followed by a detailed application of Genette's narratological elements to reveal how narrative techniques regulate suspense. A comparative synthesis highlights thematic and structural divergences and convergences, demonstrating how suspense operates both as plot-driven and narratively constructed phenomena across different horror registers.*

Keywords: Suspense, Neil D'Silva, Maria Anastasova, Gérard Genette, narrative theory, horror fiction, narratology, narrative temporality, suspense motifs

Introduction:

Suspense is a vital narrative mechanism in horror fiction, shaping reader engagement through the strategic management of uncertainty, revelation, and emotional intensity. Within the landscape of contemporary Indian English literature, horror has evolved from traditional ghost stories into a sophisticated medium capable of merging visceral terror with profound social and ethical critique. Siddharth Nirwan's novels, *The Last Witch Trial* and *Dead People's Town*, exemplify this transition, utilizing the mechanics of fear to interrogate complex themes such as historical memory, gendered violence, and biomedical ethics.

This paper undertakes a detailed critical assessment of suspense in these novels, guided by the integration of two robust theoretical frameworks: Maria Anastasova's tripartite model of suspense and Gérard Genette's narratological principles. Anastasova's model provides a structural taxonomy for tension, categorizing it into Gradually Developed Suspense Motifs (GDSM), which offer sustained uncertainty; Climactic Suspenseful Episodes (CSE), which serve as pivotal turning points; and Mini Suspenseful Episodes (MSE), which maintain a rhythmic pulse of dread throughout the text. By identifying these elements, one can map how Nirwan builds a "rhythmic and escalating emotional experience" for the reader.

To complement this structural view, the study employs Gérard Genette's narratological categories—specifically order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice—to explore how the manipulation of narrative form regulates the flow of information. Genette's tools allow for an analysis of how temporal distortions, such as prolepsis and analepsis, or shifts in focalization, can intensify psychological impact and moral unease. The study aims to unpack this layered architecture of suspense, elucidating how it operates not merely as a genre spectacle but as an ethical and temporal force that interrogates power, responsibility, and the nature of evil. Through a comparative lens, this research highlights how Nirwan adapts these universal narrative strategies to distinct thematic landscapes, ranging from the supernatural echoes of the past to the scientifically grounded catastrophes of the present.

Anastasova's model conceptualizes suspense through three core components:

- 1) Gradually Developed Suspense Motifs (GDSM): Recurring narrative elements that unfold progressively, generating sustained tension via delayed revelation and repetition.
- 2) Climactic Suspense Episodes (CSE): Pivotal narrative moments where suspense peaks, merging emotional and moral stakes and often resolving or complicating prior tensions.
- 3) Mini Suspenseful Episodes (MSE): Brief, intense scenes that punctuate the narrative rhythm, maintaining continuous emotional arousal and preventing relief.

Genette's narratological framework offers analytical categories that modulate narrative time, perspective, and voice to regulate suspense:

- 1) Order: Manipulation of narrative sequence through techniques like prolepsis and analepsis to control information flow.
- 2) Duration: Variation in narrative pacing, balancing detailed scenes and summary to manage tempo.
- 3) Frequency: Repetition of events or motifs to reinforce thematic patterns and anticipation.
- 4) Focalization: Shifts in narrative perspective that control the reader's access to knowledge and emotional engagement.
- 5) Voice: Narrative distance between narrator and characters, oscillating between objective reportage and intimate immersion.

Together, these models provide a robust framework to dissect how suspense operates structurally and emotionally in D'Silva's novels.

Objectives:

- 1) To elucidate the mechanisms through which suspense is created and maintained in Maya's New Husband and Pishacha.
- 2) To apply Maria Anastasova's suspense model to identify and analyze suspense motifs and episodes in both novels.
- 3) To employ Gérard Genette's narratological categories to explore the manipulation of narrative form in sustaining suspense.
- 4) To conduct a comparative analysis highlighting thematic and narratological distinctions and convergences between the two novels.

Methodology: The study undertakes a close textual analysis of Maya's New Husband and Pishacha, applying Anastasova's suspense model to identify narrative motifs and episodes that generate suspense. Subsequently, Genette's narratological categories are systematically applied to examine how narrative temporality, pacing, perspective, and voice contribute to suspense construction. The findings from both frameworks are synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of suspense as both content and form.

Analysis:

1) Maya's New Husband

Suspense in Maya's New Husband is intricately constructed through the interplay of Gradually Developed Suspense Motifs (GDSM), Climactic Suspense Episodes (CSE), and Mini Suspenseful Episodes (MSE), each shaped and intensified by Genette's narratological categories.

Gradually Developed Suspense Motifs (GDSM):

- 1) Kidnapping Motif: This motif evolves through repetition and delayed revelation, beginning with ambiguous references to abductions and culminating in the identification of Bhaskar as the perpetrator. The use of Genette's order manipulates narrative temporality, employing prolepsis and analepsis to foreshadow and then retrospectively clarify events. Internal focalization immerses the reader in victims' terror, while heterodiegetic voice maintains a detached tone that paradoxically enhances horror.
- 2) Heart Motif: Initially introduced as a clinical specimen, the heart transforms into a symbol of obsession and death. Its narrative function shifts from scientific object to macabre fetish through strategic manipulation of duration and focalization, juxtaposing Maya's innocence with Bhaskar's cannibalistic rituals. The motif's frequency creates a rhythmic countdown that governs the pacing toward the novel's climax.
- 3) Garage Motif: The garage operates as both a physical locus of horror and a metaphor for Bhaskar's psychological disintegration. Its gradual revelation—from a dark, undefined space to a grotesque shrine—exemplifies Genette's manipulation of spatial narrative and duration, with internal focalization aligning the reader's knowledge with Maya's growing terror. The motif's culmination in Maya's discovery marks a pivotal Climactic Suspense Episode.
- 4) Aghori Motif: This motif introduces ritualistic and spiritual dimensions, linking Bhaskar's cannibalism to a corrupted religious legacy. Through analepsis and controlled focalization shifts, suspense is maintained by oscillating between Maya's ignorance and the reader's broader awareness. The motif culminates in a ritualistic tableau blending sacred symbolism with grotesque imagery, intensifying moral and emotional suspense.

Climactic Suspense Episodes (CSE):

In *Maya's New Husband*, the Climactic Suspense Episode is structured around the final revelation of the hidden truth that has been gradually constructed through recurring motifs such as bodily violation, secrecy, and ritualistic violence. Throughout the narrative, the text systematically withholds crucial information regarding the antagonist's actions and the significance of certain spaces, particularly those associated with concealment. This sustained delay prepares the ground for a climactic moment in which ambiguity is replaced by direct knowledge.

The climactic episode is marked by the exposure of concealed realities, where the protagonist is confronted with the full extent of the horror. At this point, suspense shifts from a state of anticipation to immediate experiential tension. The narrative intensifies this moment through the slowing down of time, allowing detailed description to heighten emotional and psychological impact. The use of restricted focalization ensures that the reader experiences the revelation simultaneously with the protagonist, thereby amplifying fear and urgency.

Importantly, the climax does not function merely as a resolution but as a moment of irreversible realization. While certain mysteries are clarified, the emotional and ethical implications of the events extend beyond the immediate scene. Thus, the CSE in the novel represents both the culmination of narrative tension and the point at which suspense transforms into direct confrontation with horror.

Mini Suspenseful Episodes (MSE):

In *Maya's New Husband*, Mini Suspenseful Episodes function as recurring moments of localized tension that sustain suspense throughout the narrative. These episodes are typically brief and are characterized by the strategic withholding of information, suggestive details, and the gradual disruption of normalcy. Rather than resolving uncertainty, they introduce new layers of ambiguity that contribute to the overall structure of suspense.

Such episodes often emerge in scenes involving unexplained actions, incomplete conversations, or fleeting indications of hidden realities. The narrative frequently presents situations in which the protagonist encounters elements that cannot be fully understood at that moment. This partial knowledge generates curiosity and unease, compelling the reader to anticipate future clarification. The repetition of these episodes reinforces patterns that gradually acquire significance, linking seemingly isolated moments into a coherent structure.

From a narratological perspective, these episodes rely on restricted focalization and controlled disclosure. The reader is limited to the protagonist's perspective, which ensures that information is revealed gradually rather than all at once. This technique maintains a continuous state of anticipation.

Overall, MSEs in the novel function as structural units that bridge ordinary narrative progression and climactic revelation. By distributing suspense across multiple moments, they ensure that tension is sustained consistently, contributing to the gradual intensification of horror.

2) Pishacha

In contrast, Pishacha expands suspense into spiritual, mythological, and metaphysical realms. Suspense here is not only about external threats but also internal moral and existential dilemmas, framed within a cyclical temporal structure that intertwines past and present through reincarnation and unresolved karmic bonds.

Gradually Developed Suspense Motifs (GDSM):

- 1) Munirayyan Motif: The sage Munirayyan's recurring confessions and confrontations with the Pishacha form a central GDSM, embodying the tension between divine error and cosmic justice. Narrative order is deliberately non-linear, with analeptic withholding and proleptic anticipation deepening suspense. Internal focalization aligns readers with the sage's moral burden, while external narration preserves objective tension.
- 2) Duality of Pishacha: The Pishacha's nature as both demon and tragic figure is gradually revealed, producing a suspense that oscillates between horror and empathy. Alternating focalizations between victims, witnesses, and the demon himself generate complex moral suspense. The motif's frequency and order underscore the thematic tension between instinct and emotion, evil and love.
- 3) Cold, Wind, and Black Shadow Motif: Atmospheric elements serve as sensory codes for the Pishacha's presence, transforming natural phenomena into psychological and symbolic signals of dread. Their recurring appearances sustain suspense through partial revelation and shifting focalization, evolving from external terror into internalized haunting.

- 4) Nayantara Motif: The fragmented and non-chronological revelations about Neetika's mother, Nayantara, build suspense through emotional empathy and metaphysical fear. The motif's narrative layering, combining internal focalization and extradiegetic voice, creates a rhythm of partial disclosure that culminates in a climactic spiritual rescue, blending horror with grace.
- 5) Vision, Sajdhara, and Princess Motif: Neetika's recurring visions and connection to ancient Sajdhara palace serve as a metaphysical bridge between past and present. Through progressive revelation, temporal layering, and focalization reversal, this motif converts psychological suspense into metaphysical inevitability, linking identity, rebirth, and inherited guilt.

Climactic Suspense Episodes (CSE):

In *Pishacha*, the Climactic Suspense Episode is centered on the direct confrontation with the supernatural force that has been gradually suggested throughout the narrative. The text constructs suspense by maintaining ambiguity regarding the nature, origin, and influence of this entity, allowing tension to build through uncertainty and partial revelation. The climax represents the moment when this ambiguity is significantly reduced, though not entirely eliminated.

The climactic episode is characterized by a shift from psychological anticipation to immediate engagement with the supernatural. The protagonist is compelled to confront a reality that had previously been perceived only through indirect signs and fragmented experiences. This transition intensifies the narrative, as suspense becomes grounded in immediate danger rather than speculative fear.

Narrative techniques such as temporal expansion play a crucial role in this episode. The pacing slows down, allowing detailed depiction of the confrontation, which enhances emotional intensity. At the same time, focalization remains tightly aligned with the protagonist's perspective, ensuring that the reader experiences the unfolding events with limited knowledge and heightened vulnerability.

Despite the apparent resolution offered by the climactic encounter, the narrative retains elements of uncertainty. The supernatural is not entirely explained or contained, suggesting that horror extends beyond the immediate event. Thus, the CSE in *Pishacha* functions both as a culmination of suspense and as a continuation of underlying unease.

Mini Suspenseful Episodes (MSE):

In *Pishacha*, Mini Suspenseful Episodes operate as recurring moments that generate and sustain an atmosphere of tension throughout the narrative. These episodes are characterized by subtle indications of supernatural presence, psychological disturbance, and unexplained occurrences. Rather than presenting overt horror, they rely on suggestion and ambiguity to evoke a sense of unease.

Such episodes frequently involve minor yet significant disruptions in the narrative environment, including unusual behavior, unexplained sensations, or fleeting signs of an unseen force. These moments do not provide immediate clarification; instead, they raise questions that remain unanswered until later stages of the narrative. This strategy ensures that suspense is maintained continuously, even in the absence of major घटनाएँ.

The repetition of these episodes contributes to the formation of recognizable patterns. As similar incidents recur, the reader begins to perceive a connection between them, even though their full significance is not immediately clear. This gradual accumulation of meaning reinforces anticipation and deepens engagement.

From a structural perspective, MSEs function as intermediate units that connect the ordinary progression of the narrative with its climactic moments. They prepare the reader for eventual confrontation by establishing a consistent rhythm of tension. Through these episodes, the novel sustains suspense as an ongoing condition, ensuring that the sense of unease persists across the narrative.

Descriptive Analysis of Gérard Genette's Narratological Tools in Creating Suspense in Maya's New Husband and Pishacha

Both novels demonstrate sophisticated manipulation of narrative techniques to construct suspense through temporal and structural complexity.

In terms of **order**, *Maya's New Husband* employs non-linear sequencing through prolepsis and analepsis, particularly in its Gradually Developed Suspense Motifs, where early hints—such as the kidnapping—are only later clarified through revelations about Bhaskar, creating temporal disjunction and retrospective coherence. *Pishacha* similarly uses anachrony by interweaving past and present, beginning with Munirayyan's confession that withholds causal clarity. The recurring kukri dagger across timelines exemplifies temporal layering and symbolic simultaneity.

Regarding **duration**, both novels strategically manipulate pacing. *Maya's New Husband* alternates between detailed, slow-moving scenes (e.g., the kidnapped girl's experience) and compressed summaries (e.g., Samar's murder), producing rhythmic tension. *Pishacha* expands key supernatural transformations to intensify psychological depth, while compressing sudden attacks into brief, high-impact episodes.

In **frequency**, repetition reinforces suspense and thematic cohesion. *Maya's New Husband* uses recurring kidnappings, ritualistic murders, and motifs like stolen hearts to create a cyclical pattern of dread. *Pishacha* echoes this through repeated pleas of the Pishacha and recurring atmospheric elements, with the kukri dagger symbolizing moral transformation through repetition with variation.

Focalization in *Maya's New Husband* shifts between Maya's internal perspective and broader narrative viewpoints, balancing empathy and dramatic irony. *Pishacha* adopts a more polyphonic approach, moving across multiple consciousnesses, thereby deepening emotional and moral complexity.

Finally, **voice** in both novels oscillates between objective narration and subjective immersion, enabling a dynamic interplay of detachment and emotional intensity that sustains suspense.

Together, these devices orchestrate suspense not merely as a function of plot but as an intrinsic feature of narrative form, complementing Anastasova's suspense motifs and episodes to produce a layered, dynamic suspense experience in both *Maya's New Husband* and *Pishacha*.

Conclusion:

The analysis establishes that Neil D'Silva's *Maya's New Husband* and *Pishacha* construct suspense through a sophisticated interplay of narrative techniques. By employing gradually developed motifs, temporal manipulation, and shifting focalization, the novels sustain psychological tension across their structure.

The integration of Anastasova's suspense model with Genette's narratology highlights the structural complexity of D'Silva's fiction. Suspense is embedded within narrative design, transforming horror into an experiential and interpretive phenomenon. These novels thus represent a significant contribution to contemporary horror fiction, demonstrating how narrative form can intensify emotional and psychological impact.

References:

- 1) D'Silva, Neil. *Maya's New Husband*. Grey Oak Publishers, 2014.
- 2) D'Silva, Neil. *Pishacha*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.
- 3) Anastasova, Maria. *The Suspense of Horror and the Horror of Suspense*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.
- 4) Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell University Press, 1980.
- 5) Prince, Gerald. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. Mouton Publishers, 1982.
- 6) Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Translated by Richard Howard, Cornell University Press, 1975.