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Research Article

Fragmented Protagonism: Collective Character Structure in Savi Sharma's *Everyone Has a Story*

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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in Indian popular fiction reveal a gradual movement away from single-hero narratives toward stories structured around multiple central figures who share narrative attention. In *Everyone Has a Story*, the progression of events unfolds through four interconnected yet independently sustained character arcs, none of which dominates the textual space. This balanced distribution of narrative focus enables parallel development and creates structural symmetry within the novel. Such an arrangement enhances reader engagement by offering varied points of identification and sustaining momentum through alternating perspectives. The organization of chapters, the proportional presence of dialogue, and the careful transitions between character trajectories collectively contribute to a sense of equilibrium that binds the text together. Rather than privileging individual heroism, the novel advances through shared narrative authority, reflecting a contemporary storytelling tendency within Indian mass-market fiction. By decentralizing protagonism and maintaining structural coherence across multiple arcs, the text demonstrates how collective character design can function as an effective narrative strategy in shaping modern popular narratives.



KEYWORDS: Ensemble Narrative; Narrative Design; Popular Indian Fiction

FULL PAPER

Introduction

For a long time, novels have been built around a single central character whose journey shapes the story's direction. In such narratives, the plot usually unfolds through the growth, struggle, or transformation of a dominant protagonist. Other characters often support this central figure and contribute to the main arc. This model has been widely accepted as a standard form of storytelling in both classical and modern fiction. However, contemporary popular fiction has gradually begun to experiment with different narrative patterns. One noticeable shift is the movement away from a single hero toward a structure in which multiple characters share equal importance.

In recent Indian English popular fiction, several novels present stories that do not revolve around one commanding presence. Instead, they allow different characters to occupy the narrative space in a balanced way. This shift reflects changing reader expectations and storytelling styles. Readers today often prefer narratives that represent diverse experiences rather than focusing on only one life. Such an approach creates a sense of collective movement, where the story progresses through interconnected yet independent journeys.

Everyone Has a Story by Savi Sharma clearly demonstrates this narrative tendency. The novel does not establish a single dominating protagonist. Instead, it presents four primary characters whose lives unfold alongside one another. Their stories intersect at certain points, but none of them controls the narrative completely. Each character receives attention, development, and resolution. The progression of the novel depends on the coordination of these parallel arcs rather than on the transformation of one central figure.

This structural choice influences the reading experience. The narrative moves through alternating focus, creating rhythm and balance. Emotional developments occur simultaneously across different characters. The absence of hierarchical prominence allows the novel to maintain equilibrium throughout its progression. Rather than privileging a single voice, the text distributes narrative authority among its central figures. This paper examines how the novel constructs such a balanced narrative design. It explores the way character focus is organized, how structural symmetry is maintained, and how closure is achieved collectively. By studying these elements, the paper aims to show that the novel represents a move toward shared

protagonism in contemporary Indian popular fiction, where storytelling is shaped by distribution rather than dominance.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative analytical framework grounded in close textual examination of *Everyone Has a Story* by Savi Sharma. The research concentrates on the internal organization of the narrative, particularly the distribution of character focus and the structural arrangement of events. As the novel has received limited scholarly attention to its narrative architecture, the analysis primarily draws on the text rather than existing academic criticism. The interpretative process involves systematic reading to identify patterns of focalization, chapter sequencing, proportional character emphasis, and transitions between storylines. Attention is directed toward how narrative space is allocated among central figures, how plot progression is coordinated across parallel arcs, and how closure is structured collectively. Instead of examining thematic concerns or socio-cultural implications, the study isolates structural features that reveal the mechanics of shared narrative authority. By mapping these recurring patterns within the text, the paper develops its argument through internal textual evidence. The method prioritizes structural observation and narrative coherence, allowing conclusions to emerge from the organization of the novel itself rather than from externally imposed theoretical constructs.

Rotational Focalization and Shared Narrative Space

Rotational focalization is a narrative strategy in which attention shifts among characters rather than remaining fixed on a single dominant protagonist. In such a structure, narrative authority is shared, and the story advances through alternating perspectives. This technique creates structural balance and prevents the plot from being dominated by a single emotional or psychological journey. In ensemble-based fiction, storytelling itself often becomes the connecting framework through which multiple lives intersect and develop.

In *Everyone Has a Story* by Savi Sharma, this structural pattern becomes visible from the opening chapters. The narrator reflects on regularly attending storytelling sessions at a café, expressing deep admiration for writers who could transform individual truths into meaningful narratives. She reveals her desire not only to listen but also to create a story that can change lives (Sharma 6). This moment positions storytelling as a shared cultural practice rather than a solitary ambition. The narrative focus is not restricted to personal experience; instead, it emerges through interaction with other storytellers. Shortly after, the narrator admits she lacks confidence in presenting her own writing publicly. She observes the small stage where other writers once stood and imagines herself in that position, yet hesitates due to uncertainty about

her abilities (Sharma 7). This hesitation does not elevate her into a heroic central figure; rather, it situates her among a community of aspiring voices.

The novel further emphasizes the evolving and incomplete nature of stories. At one point, the narrator reflects that life unexpectedly offers material for storytelling, yet what is available initially feels like only a fragment of a larger narrative (Sharma 27). This awareness of partiality suggests that no single perspective can contain the entire story. The repeated assertion that every individual carries a story, some expressed openly, and others hidden within the heart, reinforces this decentralization of narrative authority (Sharma 30). Storytelling becomes a universal condition rather than the privilege of one protagonist.

These textual moments collectively demonstrate how the novel constructs shared narrative space. The narrator begins as a listener and observer before gradually participating in the act of narration, while other characters simultaneously develop their own trajectories. The café functions as a common arena where different experiences converge, but it does not privilege one voice over another. From a researcher's perspective, these structural choices establish the foundation for rotational focalization. The narrative attention moves gently between characters, distributing emotional and experiential weight proportionally. By avoiding prolonged dominance of a single storyline, the novel sustains equilibrium and advances through coordinated character arcs. The shared narrative space thus becomes the organizing principle of the text, reflecting a contemporary ensemble pattern in Indian popular fiction where collective progression replaces singular heroism.

Parallel Character Arcs and Structural Symmetry

One of the most striking structural features of the novel is the way different characters develop simultaneously rather than one at a time. The emotional journeys of Meera, Vivaan, Kabir, and Nisha unfold simultaneously, creating a sense of balance and symmetry in the narrative. Their conversations at the café do not merely move the plot forward; instead, they mirror each other's fears, desires, and transitions. This structural parallelism allows the story to progress through shared emotional movement rather than through a single dominant transformation. The café becomes the central space where these arcs intersect, reflect, and gradually evolve.

The café first appears as a neutral, almost ordinary setting, but it quietly becomes the narrative's emotional anchor. Meera arrives late and anxiously searches for Vivaan in the crowded space, eventually noticing him seated away from the noise (Sharma 43). This scene, paraphrased, shows how even within a busy public place, intimacy and isolation coexist. The café is open and inclusive, yet it allows private emotional exchanges. From a structural perspective, this moment establishes the café as a shared emotional ground where individual arcs begin to intersect.

As conversations deepen, emotional complexity emerges simultaneously across characters. Vivaan shares his childhood, mentioning the loss of his mother and his father's love, and Meera observes the shifting emotions reflected in his eyes (Sharma 44). The description suggests that his face briefly reveals grief, then warmth, as if the colors were changing in a painting. This imagery connects internal emotional movement with external perception. At the same time, Meera's curiosity and emotional involvement grow. As a researcher, one can see how the author aligns Vivaan's vulnerability with Meera's increasing emotional awareness, creating parallel internal shifts rather than isolated development.

Dialogue in the café often exposes emotional tension while maintaining balance among characters. When Meera playfully yet insistently questions Vivaan about a possible girlfriend or boyfriend, and he laughs off her assumptions (Sharma 45), the exchange highlights both curiosity and guardedness. Their interaction is light on the surface, yet beneath it lies a deeper struggle for honesty and emotional clarity. This tension is not confined to one character; instead, it unfolds across both, reinforcing structural symmetry in their relational growth.

The café also enables emotional redirection. Vivaan remarks, "There are stories everywhere if you look," gently discouraging Meera from focusing solely on him (Sharma 47). This moment subtly shifts attention toward others, particularly Kabir. Soon after, Kabir joins the emotional conversation, hesitantly sitting down when invited (Sharma 48). The narrative thus expands from a two-person dynamic to a collective one. From a structural viewpoint, this widening of focus ensures that no single arc dominates; instead, multiple emotional paths unfold in coordination.

The theme of everyday interactions further strengthens this symmetry. The friends meet regularly, question their readiness for change, and reflect on dreams and uncertainty (Sharma 60). Kabir fears change, Vivaan longs to travel, and Meera cannot imagine a life without their shared café conversations. Each character stands at a threshold of transformation, yet their uncertainties mirror each other. This coordinated hesitation builds narrative cohesion.

Routine and familiarity become equally important. Meera joins Vivaan after work, maintaining the habit of shared coffee despite professional stress (Sharma 62). Similarly, Kabir's growing connection with Nisha unfolds gradually through repeated café encounters. When Nisha orders coffee confidently, and Kabir nervously serves her (Sharma 62), their interaction mirrors Meera's earlier emotional vulnerability with Vivaan. These parallel romantic developments create structural balance between the two couples.

As the friendships deepen, the narrative convergence becomes more visible. The four characters meet every weekend, strengthening both personal and collective bonds

(Sharma 77). Nisha encourages Meera to recognize her feelings for Vivaan (Sharma 78), while Kabir advises her to confess her love openly (Sharma 79). These supportive exchanges demonstrate how one character's growth influences another's. From a research perspective, this mutual reinforcement suggests that the novel values relational interdependence over isolated transformation. The poem, expressing fear of beginnings, love, truth, and even the self (Sharma 80), serves as a structural pause that reflects the characters' shared internal anxieties. Although voiced individually, the fears resonate collectively. This reinforces the idea that emotional struggle is not singular but interconnected.

The symmetry becomes more powerful when Vivaan chooses to pursue his dream of traveling the world. His departure fulfills his long-declared desire to explore deeply and leave pieces of himself in different places (Sharma 88–89). Meera's heartbreak unfolds alongside this fulfillment. His expansion becomes her emotional contraction. However, both arcs reach a turning point simultaneously. Rather than resolving neatly, the narrative allows their journeys to continue separately, maintaining structural balance even in separation. When Meera struggles to write after Vivaan leaves, rereading her work through tears (Sharma 86), her creative paralysis parallels her emotional loss. Nisha's reassurance that destined souls reconnect (Sharma 87) echoes the novel's broader philosophy of intersection without force. Lives meet, change each other, and move forward sometimes together, sometimes apart. This structural symmetry is not accidental. The novel deliberately avoids placing one character's journey above others. Instead, it constructs a balanced emotional architecture in which love, ambition, fear, and growth unfold side by side. The café operates as a neutral yet transformative space, enabling convergence without erasing individuality. Through parallel arcs, the narrative achieves coherence within multiplicity, demonstrating that development can occur collectively rather than sequentially.

Decentralized Closure and Collective Resolution

In contrast to conventional narratives that privilege the culmination of a single protagonist's journey, this novel constructs its closure through distributed emotional stabilization across multiple characters. Resolution does not concentrate on a single triumphant transformation; instead, it unfolds through layered recognition, confession, trauma, reconciliation, and shared vulnerability. The decentralization of closure reflects the novel's sustained commitment to narrative balance between individuality and relational belonging.

The philosophical foundation of this collective resolution is reflected in the character's meditation on love and regret, in which they observe that love transforms perception, making the world feel expansive and luminous. However, its loss shatters

one's sense of coherence (Sharma 105). The assertion that people regret the love they refused and the dreams they did not pursue introduces a temporal and ethical dimension to emotional choice. Even the suggestion that pure love can alter destiny elevates love from personal emotion to metaphysical force. However, Vivaan's immediate hesitation, questioning whether he should abandon his lifelong dream of travel for one woman and whether she might not be right for him (Sharma 105), establishes the central tension between self-fulfillment and shared life. This moment is crucial because it prevents romantic absolutism. The narrative does not frame love as automatic salvation; instead, it situates it within the risk of sacrifice. From a research perspective, this dialogue quantitatively introduces a structural binary freedom versus attachment that recurs throughout the closing chapters, demonstrating that resolution must integrate, rather than eliminate, this tension.

Vivaan's internal fracture becomes visible when physical freedom fails to provide emotional satisfaction. Standing before a vast scenic landscape, he finds himself unable to perceive its beauty; instead, he imagines Meera alone and grieving (Sharma 107). His impulsive act of tearing grass from the earth functions symbolically, mirroring his own uprooted state. The narrative carefully emphasizes that his awareness of danger is suspended; he is emotionally irrational, driven by an overwhelming need to return (Sharma 107). This scene marks a shift from romantic idealism to psychological recognition. Earlier, Meera bore the pain of abandonment; now Vivaan confronts the emotional consequences of his departure. The narrative space devoted to his realization balances earlier depictions of Meera's suffering, reinforcing structural symmetry and confirming that closure will not privilege one perspective over another.

The existential declaration that follows deepens this transformation. The speaker confesses that he never identified as a writer or reader and that he once struggled daily to find reasons to live and nightly to find reasons not to die (Sharma 107). The admission that meaning emerged only after meeting her reframes love as ontological awakening rather than mere attraction. Chaos and fear once existed both around and within him, but her presence reordered his interior world. The repeated oppositional structure of life and death, chaos and calm, time and fate creates rhythmic reinforcement of psychological reconstruction. When he describes her not simply as love but as an "infinity," a universe that is both external exploration and internal discovery (Sharma 107), the metaphor expands relational intimacy into existential completeness. This language is not hyperbolic ornamentation; it represents narrative healing. Quantitatively, the repetition of dualistic phrasing strengthens thematic cohesion, while qualitatively it signals identity reintegration. Closure begins to appear not as possession but as restoration of self through relational acknowledgment.

The emotional convergence reaches visible form when Meera appears, exhausted and tearful, and their embrace culminates in shared tears (Sharma 170). The mingling of tears symbolizes equality in suffering and transformation. The reunion does not elevate one voice above the other; instead, it stages mutual recognition. The absence of triumphal exaggeration preserves realism. Closure is presented as fragile reconciliation rather than dramatic victory.

However, the narrative deliberately interrupts any simplistic romantic resolution by revealing Vivaan's past. When he places an old wedding card dated years earlier into Meera's hand (Sharma 133), the physical object materializes hidden history. Her shock and anger are not rooted merely in jealousy but in the realization that his silence concealed profound trauma. The explanation that he once deeply loved Radha and chose to communicate his pain indirectly through Kabir's story (Sharma 134) demonstrates emotional avoidance rooted in grief. The subsequent account of Radha's disappearance on their wedding day, the police suspicion cast upon him, and the horrific discovery of her murdered body (Sharma 135) introduce violence into the emotional landscape of the novel. This revelation is narratively extensive and detailed, ensuring that Radha's presence is neither minimized nor erased. The trauma explains Vivaan's emotional paralysis: love, once associated with joy, became entangled with fear, accusation, and irreversible loss.

When he admits that he can never fully return Meera's affection because his heart still belongs to Radha (Sharma 137), his trembling hands and physical distress reveal unresolved grief embodied in the present. Importantly, the narrative does not condemn him outright; instead, it exposes the psychological complexity of loving after loss. Meera's response, a silent gesture of holding his hand while tears flow, constitutes a subtle but powerful act of empathetic recognition (Sharma 137). In this moment, closure does not emerge as a resolution of conflict but as acceptance of incomplete healing. The decentralization of closure becomes evident here: Radha remains part of the emotional architecture, even as Meera occupies the present.

Kabir's intervention reframes the ethical dimension of love. His assertion that the worst harm lies not in infidelity but in allowing someone to fall in love without intending reciprocity (Sharma 149) introduces moral accountability. He challenges Vivaan's claim that emotional withdrawal is protective, insisting instead that refusing to love is a form of self-punishment. This dialogue shifts closure from private grief to communal responsibility. The narrative thereby distributes authority; wisdom does not reside exclusively with the romantic pair but emerges through friendship. Decentralized closure is thus supported by relational networks rather than isolated realization.

The crisis intensifies when Meera's emotional turmoil culminates in a severe accident, leaving her unconscious and connected to medical machinery (Sharma 151–152)—the clinical description of her broken body strips away romantic abstraction. Vivaan's guilt becomes immediate and visceral. He recognizes that his emotional withdrawal contributed to her despair. The hospital setting forces confrontation with mortality, echoing earlier references to life, death, and existential meaning. However, even here, the narrative avoids melodramatic heroism. Stabilization is gradual and uncertain. The convergence of trauma, confession, regret, and hope reinforces the collective nature of resolution.

Across these closing chapters, narrative balance is maintained through distributed emotional intensity. Significant textual space is given to philosophical reflection (Sharma 105), internal recognition (Sharma 107), existential confession (Sharma 107), traumatic revelation (Sharma 133–135), ethical debate (Sharma 149), physical crisis (Sharma 151–152), and mutual reconciliation (Sharma 170). No single event absorbs the narrative's closing energy. Instead, resolution is layered, cumulative, and relational. The preservation of Radha's memory alongside Meera's presence ensures that past and present coexist. Individual dreams, particularly Vivaan's longing for travel, are not invalidated but recontextualized within the framework of emotional responsibility. Thus, the novel concludes not by elevating a solitary hero but by synchronizing emotional stabilization across interconnected lives. Each character reaches awareness without overshadowing the others. Love is neither simplified nor romanticized; it is shown as vulnerable, ethical, haunted, and healing. Closure is decentralized because it belongs to the collective architecture of relationships rather than to a single victorious arc. In doing so, the novel departs decisively from hero-centric storytelling and affirms a model of narrative completion grounded in shared humanity, incomplete healing, and mutual recognition.

Conclusion

This study has examined the novel's narrative architecture through its structural multiplicity, parallel character arcs, and decentralized closure, demonstrating that the text departs significantly from conventional hero-centered storytelling. Rather than organizing itself around the linear transformation of a single protagonist, the narrative constructs meaning through interconnected lives, shared emotional spaces, and synchronized development. The café, functioning as a recurring spatial anchor, becomes not merely a physical setting but a symbolic site of convergence where individual stories intersect, unfold, and reshape one another. Through this spatial and emotional interdependence, the novel advances a collective model of narrative progression.

The analysis of parallel character arcs reveals that the novel's emotional growth is neither sequential nor hierarchical. Meera's vulnerability, Vivaan's internal conflict, Kabir's grounded wisdom, and Nisha's empathetic resilience evolve simultaneously. Their journeys mirror, challenge, and support one another, creating a sense of structural symmetry. This symmetry ensures that narrative momentum does not rely on one dominant transformation. Instead, development is coordinated across relationships. Emotional transitions, such as confession, hesitation, grief, and healing, occur in balanced distribution, reinforcing the idea that identity is relational rather than isolated. The novel thus resists privileging a single consciousness and instead foregrounds emotional reciprocity as its central organizing principle.

The decentralized nature of closure further strengthens this collective framework. In many traditional narratives, resolution arrives when the protagonist overcomes conflict or achieves fulfillment. In this novel, however, closure is distributed across multiple arcs. Vivaan's struggle between freedom and attachment, Meera's journey from longing to courage, Kabir's role as ethical mediator, and the lingering presence of Radha's memory all contribute to the narrative's final stabilization. Importantly, the novel does not erase past trauma to validate present love. Radha's tragic story remains integrated within Vivaan's emotional landscape, complicating rather than simplifying romantic resolution. This refusal to eliminate emotional residue demonstrates psychological realism and ethical depth.

Qualitatively, the novel presents love as transformative yet fragile, healing yet haunted. Love is depicted not as an instantaneous solution but as a process requiring accountability, vulnerability, and courage. The characters must confront regret, fear, guilt, and uncertainty before arriving at mutual recognition. The hospital scene, the confessional dialogues, and the existential reflections on identity all reinforce that closure emerges through confrontation with incompleteness rather than through dramatic conquest. Healing is gradual, shared, and imperfect.

Quantitatively, the narrative distributes emotional intensity across multiple chapters and perspectives. Significant textual space is devoted to philosophical reflection, the revelation of trauma, ethical debate, and reconciliation. This distribution confirms that no single event monopolizes the novel's concluding energy. Instead, resolution accumulates through layered interactions. Such structural balance supports the argument that the novel operates through collective stabilization rather than singular triumph.

The novel affirms that human lives intersect without demanding total possession or definitive finality. Dreams, such as Vivaan's longing to travel, are not abandoned but reinterpreted within a relational framework of responsibility. Love does not negate individuality; rather, it invites integration. The conclusion, therefore,

does not present a perfect or absolute ending. Instead, it offers synchronized emotional awareness among characters who remain distinct yet connected. This model of decentralized closure reflects a contemporary understanding of identity as fluid, relational, and ethically accountable. By challenging the dominance of hero-centric storytelling and foregrounding collective resolution, the novel contributes to evolving narrative forms that emphasize shared humanity over isolated achievement. Its structural symmetry, emotional multiplicity, and distributed closure demonstrate that fulfillment can emerge not from individual conquest but from mutual recognition and interconnected growth. In this way, the novel ultimately redefines narrative completion as a collaborative act that honors individuality while affirming the transformative power of human connection.

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