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# The Art of Surprise: A Comparative Analysis of Mukund Bapat and O. Henry's Short Stories

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### ABSTRACT:

The "art of surprise" as used by Indian author Mukund Bapat and American short story master O. Henry is compared in this abstract. A defining characteristic of their unique writing styles, both authors are praised for their deft and surprising plot twists. Ironic reversals of fortune are common in O. Henry's stories, such as "The Gift of the Magi" and "The Last Leaf," which emphasise human nature, sacrifice, and the peculiarities of fate while containing a distinctive mix of humour and melancholy. As seen in his novel "Nisha," Mukund Bapat also skilfully weaves tales that have unexpected endings. This study will examine the various narrative techniques each author uses to create tension, how character growth helps the plot twist, the type and emotional resonance of their unexpected conclusions (such as tragic, ironic, or hopeful), and how their cultural backgrounds may have influenced the themes these unexpected resolutions express. This study intends to appreciate the particular artistry of Bapat and O. Henry while shedding light on the general attraction of this literary device by analysing their distinct approaches to the surprise ending.

**Keywords:** Ironic reversals, Plot Twist, O. Henry, Mukund Bapat, Short Stories, Irony, Narrative Technique, Comparative Literature.

### Introduction

As a literary form, the short tale thrives on being succinct, having a clear narrative, and frequently having an engaging conclusion. The "surprise ending" stands out as a masterful method among the many used to make an impression on the reader. This essay compares and contrasts two different authors of short stories, Mukund Bapat and O. Henry (William Sydney Porter, 1862–1910), looking at how each approaches the "art of surprise." O. Henry is well known throughout the world for his witty and surprising turns, which typified a period of American short fiction. A well-known author of Marathi literature, Mukund Bapat, also uses surprise deftly, though frequently in a distinct cultural and thematic context. Examining their narrative techniques, character growth, thematic issues, and the actual content of their revelations will help us comprehend how these writers subvert reader expectations to get the effect they want and what special contributions they each make to this fascinating literary device.

#### *O. Henry: The Ironic Twist Master*

The unexpected conclusion is almost synonymous with the name of O. Henry. His extensive body of work, which includes hundreds of short tales, is characterised by plots that steadily intensify until they reach an unexpected—and frequently humorous—climax. His brilliance resides in his ability to construct complex narratives that appear to have a predictable course until abruptly revealing something that puts everything that has happened thus far in a different light.

#### **Techniques Employed by O. Henry:**

1. **Ironic Reversal:** Perhaps O. Henry's most distinctive technique is this one. The conclusion frequently depicts a scenario that is completely at odds with what the reader or perhaps the protagonists had anticipated. An iconic illustration is "The Gift of the Magi." Della sells her hair to purchase a chain for Jim's watch, while Jim sells his watch to purchase combs for Della's long hair. The heartbreaking irony is that their presents are worthless because of their altruistic efforts, yet they are also priceless in terms of love. This is not only a twist; rather, it is a twist that is rich in thematic and emotional resonance. Similar to this, in "The Cop and the Anthem," a homeless man named Soapy makes a valiant attempt to get arrested in order to get out of the winter. However, just as a cop arrests him for loitering, ironically achieving his earlier, undesired aim, he finds true contrition and a desire for change.
2. **Misdirection and Red Herrings:** O. Henry is skilled at gently guiding the reader in a particular direction by laying down hints that appear to lead to one conclusion but actually reveal an entirely different reality. Jimmy Valentine, the infamous safe-cracker in "A Retrieved Reformation," is presumed to be unable to change his ways. This impression is deliberately constructed throughout the story. The detective who had been pursuing him witnesses his true metamorphosis when he dares to risk exposure and arrest in order to save a youngster who is locked in a vault. Subtle surprise and moral complexity are further enhanced by the detective's decision to act as though he doesn't recognise him.
3. **Character Concealment and Revelation:** A character's actual identity or motivation is frequently kept a secret until the very end, which makes the surprise crucial. This is best illustrated in "The Ransom of Red Chief," where the power dynamics are totally upended when the kidnappers pay the boy's father to return him rather than receiving a ransom. The reader only fully understands the boy's intolerable nature through the extreme desperation of his kidnappers, and the "surprise" is not merely the reward.
4. **Colloquial Language and Humorous Tone:** The discovery is made the more powerful by O. Henry's surprise endings, which are frequently presented in a light, conversational, and occasionally hilarious manner. This subtle delivery enhances the abrupt change from an apparently ordinary story to an astounding twist, giving the surprise a natural yet startling quality.

#### ***Impact and Legacy:***

In addition to stunning the reader, O. Henry's "art of surprise" frequently highlights life's ironies, the complexity of human nature, and the unexpected turns fate can take. Though gently conveyed, his endings usually have a moral or philosophical message. He had a huge impact on short story writing, popularising a genre that emphasised deft structuring and a powerful ending. Critics counter that his dependence on the twist may occasionally obscure thematic depth or character development, resulting in a repetitive approach. Despite this, his mastery of the profession is solidified by the sheer inventiveness and reliable execution of his surprise endings.

#### ***Mukund Bapat: Surprise in the Context of Social Realities and Human Psyche***

Although he uses surprise as well, Mukund Bapat, a prominent figure in Marathi short fiction, frequently departs from O. Henry's strictly plot-driven twists. A closer examination of human psychology, social conventions, and the subtle ironies present in daily life usually yields Bapat's shocks. Bapat's shocks can be more internal, exposing a hidden aspect of a character, an unanticipated truth about a relationship, or the subversive subversion of social expectations, whereas O. Henry's surprises are more exterior (a plot reversal).

#### **Techniques Employed by Mukund Bapat:**

1. **Discovery of Inner Truths:** One of Bapat's most frequent surprises is the disclosure of a character's actual emotions, driving forces, or secret history. The surprise is more about a greater comprehension of human nature than it is about an abrupt plot twist. In a story, for example, a seemingly normal character may be shown to have a deep sense of loneliness,

a covert act of rebellion, or an unanticipated capacity for cruelty or empathy that totally changes the reader's perspective. The reader is forced to reevaluate their first assessment of a character by this type of surprise.

1. **Subtle Irony in Social Commentary:** Bapat's irony usually functions as social commentary, whereas O. Henry's is more situational and dramatic. A shocking conclusion could reveal the limitations of common wisdom, the hypocrisy of social values, or the silent struggles hiding behind a calm exterior. The "surprise" can be the sobering insight that outward appearances are misleading or that an apparently little incident has huge ramifications for a person or a community. This frequently captures the complicated interplay between Indian customs, modernity, and society.
2. **Ambiguity and Unsettling Revelations:** In contrast to O. Henry's clear-cut, frequently tidy conclusions, Bapat's surprises occasionally leave the reader feeling unclear or uneasy. Instead of providing a comprehensive explanation, the surprise may expose an unsettling reality or an unsolved conflict that forces the reader to consider the ramifications long after the story concludes. More disturbing and thought-provoking than a purely clever story twist, this can be.
3. **Psychological Nuance:** The psychological terrain of Bapat's characters is intricately interwoven with his surprises. The unexpected turn frequently results from a character making an unusual decision, motivated by a deep realisation, a fear, or a desire that was previously concealed. With its roots in the complex mechanisms of the human mind, the surprise lies not just in what occurs but also in why.
4. **Cultural and Contextual Specificity:** The unique socioeconomic and cultural makeup of Maharashtra and India frequently informs Bapat's surprises. The unexpected components may result from a conflict between tradition and modernity, the demands of family obligations, or the particular difficulties that people encounter in a particular social context. Appreciating the surprise is enhanced when one is aware of the cultural background.

#### ***Impact and Legacy:***

Mukund Bapat's "art of surprise" adds depth and psychological realism to his stories. His conclusions frequently offer a silent realisation, a flash of deep understanding, or a shock that upends assumptions about societal systems and human nature. Bapat's surprises create a more reflective and frequently unnerving impression than O. Henry's, despite possibly being less obviously dramatic. This encourages the reader to explore the human condition and the complex dynamics of society in greater detail. His contribution is to show that surprise may be used as a tool for deep social and psychological investigation as well as amusement.

#### ***Comparative Analysis: Distinctions and Commonalities***

Both Mukund Bapat and O. Henry are masters of the "art of surprise," yet their methods show intriguing differences based on their narrative styles, cultural backgrounds, and literary goals.

#### ***Distinctions:***

1. **Character of the Twist:** O. Henry's twists are primarily plot-driven, outside-of-the-story, and frequently humorous reversals of events or fortune. They offer an abrupt retelling of events that is frequently hilarious or moving. Contrarily, Bapat's surprises are usually internal, character-driven, and entail insights into human nature, ulterior intentions, or the subtle ironies of social interactions. Instead of a total plot reversal, they frequently result in a richer comprehension.
2. **Emotional and Intellectual Impact:** O. Henry's shocks frequently cause a laugh, a compassionate sigh, or a gasp of appreciation for his cunning. They are made to have an effect and be resolved right away. However, Bapat's surprises frequently elicit reflection, occasionally uneasiness, and a longer period of reflection on the state of humanity or social conventions. They may raise more questions rather than provide tidy answers.

3. **Narrative Focus:** O. Henry places a high priority on developing a deft storyline in order to deliver the punchline. His characters are interesting, yet they frequently support the plot. On the other hand, Bapat usually centres his stories on the characters' psychological growth, with the surprise coming naturally from their inner lives or interactions with their surroundings.
4. **Cultural Nuance:** O. Henry frequently uses downtown New York for his settings, and his surprises capture the ideals, hopes, and hardships of that particular environment. Indian (more especially Marathi) cultural and socioeconomic contexts are strongly ingrained in Bapat's stories. His revelations strike a chord with the subtleties of family dynamics, customs, and the changing difficulties of contemporary Indian society, providing insights that an outside reader might need more cultural background on.

### Commonalities:

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1. **Manipulation of Expectations:** Both writers are experts at creating expectations for readers and then deftly lowering them. Though in different ways, they both know how to guide the reader down a particular road before surprising them.
2. **Language Economy:** Writers of short stories are compelled to use sparingly. Bapat and O. Henry both use precise language, well-chosen details, and narrowly focused storylines that create suspense leading up to the big reveal to accomplish their unexpected results.
3. **Memorable Conclusions:** Both authors' conclusions are memorable, regardless of their particulars. In order to uncover the subtle hints that were overlooked, the reader is compelled to reread the story because they are meant to stay in their memory.
4. **Examination of the Human Condition:** Fundamentally, both writers employ surprise as a means of examining a number of topics related to the human condition, including love, sacrifice, ambition, desperation, social pressures, and personal growth. Often, the surprise helps to reveal a side of humanity that might otherwise go unnoticed.

### Conclusion:

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An author's narrative skill and comprehension of reader psychology are demonstrated by the "art of surprise" in short fiction. Despite their differences in geography, culture, and particular themes, O. Henry and Mukund Bapat are both excellent examples of this art. The eloquently written, frequently humorous story twist that provides an instantaneous and delicious shock is the foundation of O. Henry's legacy. His tales are painstakingly constructed puzzles, with the last piece fitting together with gratifying accuracy. In contrast, Mukund Bapat uses surprise as a more subtle instrument for social commentary and psychological insight. His insights frequently go deeper into the intricacies of the human heart and the covert hypocrisies of society, leaving the reader feeling either deeply understood or disturbed.

In the end, contrasting these two masters shows how adaptable the surprise ending is. It is a powerful literary device that may provoke deep thought, laughter, tears, and a lasting understanding for the complexities of storytelling. It is not just a gimmick. Bapat proved its ability to reveal internal, character-driven information, while O. Henry perfected the art of the external, situational surprise. When taken as a whole, their pieces show the wide range of ways writers can craft the unexpected, making a lasting impression on the reader's mind and enhancing the short story genre's diverse environment. Their contributions highlight the fact that true mastery of the "art of surprise" entails more than simply frightening the reader; it also entails making that shock memorable, significant, and indicative of more profound realities about people and existence.

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