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A Study of Transgender Narratology with Special Reference to *the Parcel*

There are three points about stories: if told, they like to be heard; if heard, they like to be taken in; and if taken in, they like to be told.

- Ciarán Carson in Fishing for Amber

(Kearney 125)

It is customary for human beings to tell or narrate stories through various means and modes of communication i.e. art, dance, music, painting, sculptures, cinema, and literature. Stories being the repository of our shared and collective wisdom of traditions, cultures, behaviors etc need to be told and retold. Literature, an amalgamation of facts and fiction, has always played a crucial role in translating the pain, agony, and sufferings of humans by portraying the depth of human psyche and revealing their hidden dependencies and wounds. Telling a story is technically known as narrative in literature. It can be in the oral, written or imagined form transforming a piece of work into a living organism. Moreover, Barthes has rightly pointed out,

Under the almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives,

enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans-historical, trans-cultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes 237-272)

The success of a literary piece lies not only in the theme or story but also in its way of its expression or narration. A story is not only about a plot, character, words, images, passions, emotions, etc but also a beautiful structure of a pattern of narratology. Gerald Prince (Prince 186), defines narrative as a product, process, an object, or an act of structural exercise of refolding and narrating one or a number of actual, and real and fictitious events by single, two or more several narrators', however it underestimates the concept of narratology. Umberto Eco, a famous philosopher, critic and semiotic, compares this process and practice of narrative techniques with playing a game

by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world. By reading narrative, we escape the anxiety that attacks us when we try to say something true about the world. This is the consoling function of narrative — the reason people tell stories, and have told stories from the beginning of time. (Umberto Eco 87)

Therefore, many research investigations and writings on narratology and narrative techniques are coming into light. Besides, research scholars have been trying to focus on analyzing a story structure for the better understanding of writer's intention, purpose and potential behind writing a literary piece, and how narrative styles are arranged in different stories to order to make a powerful impact on readers. The theory of narratology propounded by Gérard Genette is a landmark in the field of narratology as he mentioned, every text discloses traces of narration, which can be studied in order to understand exactly how the narrative is organized (Guillemette and Lévesque 01).

A narrative of any literary work can be analyzed based on its main parts. Many critics and theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Steward, Gérard Genette, Stanzel, Roland Barthes and M. Jahn etc. have posited different constituent components in Narratology. M.Jahn, one of the luminaries in the field of narratology and criticism, has proposed three comprehensive categories of narratology in his famous book “Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative” (2005). The first category consists of narration (voice), focalization (mood), and narrative situation whereas the second category mentioned in the book is action, story analysis, and tellability¹. The third category covers the aspects of tense, time, and other Narrative modes. (Jahn: PPP/Narratology).

The first type i.e. Narrative Voice immediately reminds us of Genette who differentiates it in two types. The first type of narrative voice is absent from the story whereas the second type of narrative voice exists as a character or persona in the story. He categorizes the first type as *heterodiegetic*, and the second type as *homodiegetic*" (Genette 244-245). In addition, he prefers the term *autodiegetic* to those narrators who act as the protagonist of the story. M Jahn classifies *autodiegetic* as homodiegetic. He explicates this classification by referring ‘prefix ‘homo-’ as redolent of the narrator working within the level of action’. (Jahn N3.1.5.) Jahn further says,

There is another term in relation to homodiegetic narrator, which is autodiegetic narrator and which has the same meaning; but the only difference is that the narrator here, is the protagonist. But in a heterodiegetic narration, the story is told by a heterodiegetic narrator who is not present as a character in the story (Jahn N3.1.5.).

¹ Tellability is an idea that was first developed in conversational storytelling analysis but later was alluded in other narrative forms. It is a quality for which the story is told and inspected as noteworthy with its constructed merit.

Next is Focalization or Mood that succeeds the Narrative voice in the classification of Narratology. Focalization or Narrator's mood denotes narrator's replacement for perspective or the point of view. Genette defines the focalization as,

...a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience* (Genette 74).

He further distinguishes focalization in to three types i.e. Zero, Internal and External Focalization whereas M.Jahn proposes four kinds of focalization i.e. fixed, variable, multiple, and collective focalization. Fixed focalization 'is the introduction of facts and events in a story from the steady point of view of a single focalizer. He further explains other categories of focalizations,

Variable focalization is the presentation of different episodes of the story as seen through the eyes of several focalizers'; multiple focalization which refers to a technique of 'presenting an episode repeatedly, each time seen through the eyes of a different (internal) focalizer'; and finally, collective focalization that is he says is 'through either plural narrators (we narrative) or a group of characters (collective reflectors) (Jahn N3.2.4.)

Narrative situation succeeds Narrative voice and Focalization in the narratology. Critics and Theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Steward, Gérard Genette, Stanzel, Roland Barthes and M. Jahn etc defined Narrative Situation by combining the first two subcategories i.e. voice and mood to accomplish a range of new interpretations.

The second category of Narratology i.e. action, story analysis and tellability address the question i.e. if the story is worth telling or narrating? by posing a question on the point of view.

The third category consists of narrative mode, time and tense. To apprehend the narrative mode, M.Jahn gives different terms like mimesis and diegesis (showing and telling),

scene and summary, and description and comment respectively through which narrator can present the narrative representation.

Time Analysis is the second category of the third type of narratology. It answers the questions of When, How long, and How often in the form of Order, Duration and Frequency. The theorists like Genette discuss this element with a view to 'the handling of the chronology of the story', 'proportioning of story time and discourse time' and the 'possible ways of presenting single or repetitive action units' respectively. (Genette 33-85, 87-112, 113-160) When the story follows the natural sequence of events and action, it is called the chronological order and if it does not happen, it falls under the classification of anachrony. Anachrony is essentially flashback (analapsis) and flash-forward (prolepsis). Besides, anachrony is categorized in to different categories such as Objective anachrony, subjective anachrony, Repetitive anachrony, internal, external and complete anachrony.

The role of tense in narratology are, as Jahn suggests, determined by the 'anteriority or posteriority relationship between discourse-NOW and story-NOW'. Manfred Jahn classifies this in to three different modes i.e. retrospective narration, concurrent narration, and prospective narration. These narrations deal with past, present and future as narrative recounts the event that took place in the past, taking place in the present or the events going to take place in future or have not happened.

Under the light of these narrative techniques or categories used by writers of third wave feminism and Queer theory writers is worth investigation. The narrative techniques used by queer possibilities have not been focused or given that much attention. This paper explores the narrative techniques of *The Parcel* by Anosh Irani, a book on Hijra community and

human trafficking in Mumbai and how the narrative techniques articulate the Hijra personality and their world both in implicit and explicit ways.²

The Parcel

The Parcel is a graphic novel based on the childhood memories of Anosh Irani when he used to live near the red light area of Kamathipura of Mumbai. His firsthand experience and incessant observations of transgender who are dependent on blessing, begging and sex work for their living and the young girls who are kidnapped, human trafficked, and are suffered take the form of this unsettling book *The Parcel*.

The beginning of the Prologue with the lines ‘I go by many names, none of my own choosing’ (Irani 01) divulges the struggle of identity, the social rejection and unrelenting external and internal pain of Hijras and Victims of human trafficking. The society even does not bother to call her by her name rather they call her as Anosh Irani mentions,

Ali, Aravani, Nau Number, Sixer, Mamu, Gandu, Napunsak, Kinner, Kojja ...the list goes on and on like a politician’s promise. The pervasiveness of their existence in every culture is evident with this very fact that, ‘there is a term for me in almost every Indian language. (Irani 01)

In the prologue of the novel, Anosh Irani clearly identifies the theme of Hijra isolation, loneliness, rejection, pain and humiliation from the family and society by stating their position as, ‘neither here nor there, neither desert nor forest, neither earth nor sky, neither man nor woman.’ (Irani 02)

For Madhu, the narrator, the word Hijra is associated with ‘Migration’ as Hijras are not allowed to belong to one place. She has been a migrant and a wanderer who was denied of her own home, comfort, and care as she had to go to ‘Bombay central for her daily bread and butter, and an array of abuses’ (03).

² Hijra is a term used eunuchs, transgender and intersex people who are neither male nor female. They are born as male but adopt the gender behavior of a female.

The novel opens with Madhu, a forty year old Hijra, who began her career as prostitution, later turned into a flopped badhai Hijra and eventually was compelled to beg for herself. She works for and lives with her old Godmother Gurumai, a charismatic guardian and protector, who transformed her life from a boy into a eunuch by castrating away her manhood. A day comes when on the order of her gurumai, she has to do a sentimental but perilous task of preparing a ten year old Nepali girl who was trapped by her own relatives and Padma Madam, a brothel owner, for the business of prostitution. In making the parcel trained, Madhu's past comes back to her haunting her to disentangle the ties of her identity and existence. This inner struggle continues with herself. At one point, she wants to live her past life as a boy but is unwelcomed by her apathetic family members. Therefore, she decides to free her soul from the world of pain and struggle of identities by helping a Nepali girl named Kinjal.

Anosh Irani in an Interview with National Post mentioned,

I do not like safe stories-I am not talking about shocking subject matter- I am saying when you do not take a turn that might lead you to a dangerous place. (National Post)

To show the strong subject matter i.e. struggle of transgender and victims of human trafficking, Anosh Irani has portrayed the story through the telescope of feministic and queer narratology. For this, he has taken up a transgender named Madhu as a narrative person³ who narrates the prologue in order to suggest 'transgressing normative sexualities, to dismantle sexual fixities, and to dismantle all fixities' (Lanser 924) related to the transgender.

The prologues are specific choices of any writer and it is writer's specific intension to make the readers delve deep into story through it. Besides suggesting themes and background information, the Prologue is more than a piece of information in *The Parcel*. It is a successful

³ Genette used the term narrative person in his famous work *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. "Genette introduces a distinction along different lines: *homodiegetic narratives* are told by a narrator who is present (though not necessarily as a protagonist) in the story he relates; *heterodiegetic narratives* are told by a narrator who is absent from that story. The purest form of homodiegetic narrative is *autodiegetic narrative* (what is normally understood by "first-person" narrative, where the narrator is also the protagonist."

attempt to establish the compatibility between narrator's body and voice. The primary story line has been narrated by the writer himself as *heterodiegetic* narrator i.e. as the third person narrative who is absent from the story. The Epilogue is on the other hand is narrated by Kinjal, thirteen year old Nepali victim of human trafficking as she begins, 'Hello, MY NAME IS Kinjal. I am preparing to tell the story of my life'(Irani 247).

Therefore, being a feminist narratology or queer narratology, *The Parcel* ceases to follow conventional categories of narratology where narrators exploited the structure of narrating a story in first person narrative. Like the complex physical and psychological structure of transgender, Irani has used both heterodiegetic narrative for three voices i.e. Madhu's, himself as absent narrator, and Kinjal. Madhu's identity is in itself clear in the prologue when she says, "I go by many names, none of my own choosing" (Irani 01) and call her by different names of different genders. The primary story line is narrated by Irani as third person narrator who is absent and does not play any role in the story also suggests the pervasiveness of ungendered heterodiegetic narration. The Epilogue is narrated by Kinjal, who throughout the novel is called Parcel, again reverberates the queer narratology as this noun 'parcel' has no sex or gender associated with it and it fulfills the third academic use of the verb 'queer' by Lanser i.e. 'to disrupt or deconstruct any entity by rejecting its categories, binaries, or norms'(Lanser 924).

It has just been referenced above that perspective or point of view refers to the way a story is described. Percy Lubbock defines the point of view as:

The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view-the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story and his book. The novelist can either describe the characters from outside, as an impartial or partial onlooker, or he can assume omniscience and describe them from within

or he can place himself in the position of one of them. The question of point of view is directly related to the power of the writer-the creator.(Lubbock 12-16)

In the light of Lubbock's definition of general point of view in a story, it is observed that Anosh Irani has experimented with the point of view too. Hence, the Prologue in the book is written from Madhu's point of view, the primary story line is narrated by the writer himself as an omniscient narrator as he seems to know the thoughts, emotions, gestures, facts and words of all the characters, and the Epilogue is narrated from Kinjal's, akka parcel's point of view. Therefore, it is observed that the dismantled sexual fixities in queer studies and feminist approaches, the point of view in *The Parcel* is also not fixed, rather leads to intermingling of the feminist and queer voices in the novel. Therefore, like a transgender who are the third gender, we too have three narrative voices and focalization in the novel.

Besides, to present the theme of permanent exile, pain, trauma and internal as well as external struggle of Madhu, Irani has used the technique of analapsis and prolepsis anachrony. Madhu's recollection of her troubled childhood, trauma and shame she had to face, and her harrowing journey from a boy to a Hijra is an example of analapsis anachrony as we observe Madhu's developing psychology by relating events from her past. Prolepses anachrony, on the other hand, allows us to anticipate the events that can occur through the partially revealed facts that are revealed or surfaced later. Here in *The Parcel*, we have been informed about Padma Madam, a typical businesswoman, who has the documents of Madhu and her Gurumai's abode in her custody and can use them for her own profit if Madhu fails her by. These details of Padma Madam, her connection with Nayakas of different area who are struggling due to the politics of the real estate builders and their landlords, and their evil intentions of grabbing Madhu and her Gurumai's abode for their benefits permit us to anticipate Madhu as a hero who is going to sacrifice herself. This manner of using different anachronies again mark the unconventional narrative practice of the author.

It is said 'to have humour, you have to have hope'. Irani has portrayed the troubles, pain, and agony with humour and irony as 'hope is hopeless' about the future of these transgender and the victims of the human trafficking. Most of us may be familiar that people are reluctant to mix with someone who does not talk like them, walk like them, behave like them. This pain of being rejected and not needed is sarcastically portrayed when Madhu 'smiled at the beedi disappeared into a gutter. Even dead cigarettes wanted to get away from her as soon as possible.'(04)

Hijra is a clan and cannot be fit into any category. They follow rules and abide by the rules and the irony is that at every moment of their life, they are realized of their denied existence and rejection but they have to 'respect the passengers. They were allowed to abuse her, but she could not abuse back. That was a hijra rule. If someone abuses you verbally, take it. Do not react. Maintain your dignity'. (04)

The colours of the real estate builders are portrayed with appropriate sarcasm and with a tinge of reality when the prostitutes of a brothel are thrown out by their landlords so that tall towers can be constructed. Madhu found out a signpost of Free Bird Treatment Camp pasted on a wall right in front of her. She started laughing on her own condition as, 'at least ten women had been rendered homeless, tricked into an even darker future, when as tenants, they had had every right to be treated fairly; right before her eyes, a young prostitute had been enticed into a futureless future; (there are ruthless people)... offering a workshop to save birds.' (Irani 142) because birds cannot 'tell their stories, tell of the 'cruelty and injustice' or the wrongs done to them. But people do not seem to offer help to these transgender for they are afraid these helpless and victimized Hijras might come back again for more help unlike birds. Therefore, the inner pain of these Hijras to never fly away and not able to live a good, secure, safe livelihood like a common person is portrayed through the shade of satire on the indifferent society.

Conclusion

The hybrid approach by using homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrative voice, experimenting with different focalization or point of view in order to portray the realistic and close picture of the transgender, sex workers and victims of human trafficking, through satire, humour, irony and analepsis and prolepsis anachrony help Anosh Irani to portray his personal experiences and observations of people of red light area in Kamathipura of Mumbai and to present the amplified contrast between two worlds i.e. the world of gender and the world of ungended in his harrowing novel *The Parcel*. To showcase this, Anosh Irani has reconnoitered and explored the unorthodox narratology to dismantle the gender fixities in the culture and attitude of a society by associating the transgender narrative voice for the ungended body of Madhu and Parcel.

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