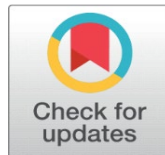


A STUDY ON THE IDENTITY AND ROLE OF NARRATORS IN MAHAKABI ANGANGHAL'S KHAMBA THOIBI SEIRENG

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DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.1785](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.1785)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to examine the role of narrators in Mahakabi Anganghal's Manipuri epic, Khamba-Thoibi Seireng with the intention to study the epic as a narrative text by analyzing it through the theoretical framework of narratology. In the epic, there is the presence of both the 'primary external narrator' and the 'internal narrator' who narrate the immortal love story of Khamba and Thoibi. The 'primary external narrator' narrates the events of things or situations from outside the world of the story as the narrator of the main story whereas the narrations of the characters serve as 'internal narrators' who maintain the continuity and flow of the story. The omniscient narrator of the epic serves as the primary narrator and narrates the story of the parentage of Khamba and Khamnu, the legendary story of Kunjamala in the form of a digression etc. the main characters like Khamba, Khamnu, Thoibi etc. serve as internal narrators who narrate the stories associated with their lives through analepsis.

Keywords: Analepsis, Epic, Internal Narrator, Narratology, Primary External Narrator

1. INTRODUCTION

Events alone do not make story. It includes events (action and happening) and existents (character and setting). The modus of representation, how the events are presented in the story, makes the plot. Story is the arrangement of events in a time sequence or chronological order. Plot, however, is based on causality. It is the cause-and-effect arrangement of events in a narrative text. There is no justification that the author's order of presentation of events should correspond with the natural logic of the events. Emplotment gives freedom to the author from the constraints of chronology and to choose and design his own subject so as to engage reader's attention and interest while also providing a framework to expose his message to the readers. In the epic, the author presents the plot according to his authorial design and progressive structuration of the plot in the story. This is clearly evident from what Anganghal mentions in his introduction to the epic, "Hourakpham". The

author was well aware as to which parts were to be left out and which ones were to be part of the text while he was gathering the story of the epic from the pena singer Chungkham Manik. "Ibemmana Kabowdagi Karakpa manai naijahanbana liba amasung takpa lammit tumitki wari mayam asigumbadi chaokhibagi athakta chaokhigani haibagi lairik asina thadok ee" (Anganghal, 2013, p.IV). Besides this, Anganghal also mentions that he begins the story of the epic from 'San Senba' (Herding the Cattle) instead of from the birth of Puremba, the father of the protagonist Khamba. But it must be the craftsmanship of the traditional pena singers or Mahakabi Anganghal, the gaps or seeming holes are fill up in the narrative flow through the use of analepsis technique for instance the ancestors of Khamba are revealed much later in the canto Kao when the male protagonist Khamba meets the king of Khuman through analepsis. This suggests that the singers and Anganghal know every detail of the story and after getting hold to the details, the form and structure of the epic is thus constructed to attain their artistic effect to the maximum.

The attempt in the paper is to unpack how the story is told in terms of the narrative voice by analyzing Khamba-Thoibi Seireng as a narrative text through the theoretical framework of narratology. Epics are purely narrative texts like novels. The narrative of the epic is broken into story, the organization of events and narrations, the organization of how the events are told by the external and internal narrators in the text.

Kege Moirang leibakta hanna yengba udraba'
Magi damak haidana tumit phaoba paidraba
Kege sara oiraba Moirang lamja taraba,
Khamba-Khamnu koubadi machin-moupwa anini!
Wakhre Khamba ngasidi machem dugi damakta.

Machem Khamnu yengduna Khamba mana hairaki- (Anganghal, 2013, pp.1,11,1-6)

In these opening lines of the epic, here, it is the voice of the anonymous external narrator which is heard when the story of the epic opens. In these opening lines, the narrator is not a part of the world of the protagonist and his elder sister whom the narrator is going to introduce in the story to the readers. He narrates the events of things or situations from outside the world of the story yet he recounts the main story. In Jong's terminology, he is the 'primary external narrator'. Here, he is in the narrative discourse only but not in the story. He narrates the story and within his narration, the story flows and progresses through the internal dialogues and also narrations of the characters who serve as the 'internal narrators'(Jong). Here the external narrator introduces the characters, situation, happenings etc. and then he hands over the presentation of the events of the story to the characters.

Machem Khamnu yengduna Khamba mana hairaki-

"Palem sembi ichem-hal! Ichem kouraroi, ima!.. (Anganghal,2013, pp.1, 11, 6-7)

Upto line no 6, it is the voice of the external narrator, but after that the voice of the character narrator i.e. the internal narrator continues the narrative process. The primary narrator hands over the presentation of events to the story to the characters who then recounts the event maintaining the continuity and flow of the story. The characters being narrated in the story also function as the narrating agents in the story. Such a pattern is followed in each canto of the text. The external introduces the events of the story and then the internal narrator furthers the story.

The external narrator serves as a constant reliable companion who guides or plunges his supposed readers or narratees to the flow of events in the story. His presence is visible throughout the narration of the story. The information given by the narrator about characters or events to the readers suggests that he has prior knowledge of the characters which he can identify with the readers. Thus, he is omniscient and looks everything in the story from above the action as the one who sees and knows all the action or events. The external narrator narrates the events of things in the story in the third-person narrative. In the omniscient narration of the external narrator, the characters as the internal narrators narrate the story in the first-person narrative. The internal narrators serve as secondary narrators in the text, as they recount a story in direct speech which is handed over by the external narrator. In the case of internal narration, there is the presence of 'beyond the human' narration for example narration by non-human beings. The text is replete with animals, trees or the moon giving account of situations or happenings in the text. In the canto 'Kao', the bull, a non-human subject, presents the story just like as a human character like Khamba, Khamnu or Thoibi does in the first-person form.

Sangi jatta pokpana pari imom anigi,
 Chengmaru amatabu peruk mana ama phaoba,
 Pina naoyokchababu ngamdare eihakna!
 Kege macha kananalakchareidi ichabu
 Manbiichi asina thammoi phirak haigaige
 ...- Eigi pangal leitare!

(Anganghal, 2013. pp.273-274, ll, 8265-8271)

The epic follows both the third-person narrative which is provided by the external narrator and the first-person narrative which is provided by the characters. Not every line in the narrative text is narrative because it does not tell the story. For a text to be narrative, an agent or subject should tell a story according to Mieke Bal, and so she terms those passage of text that does not further the progress of the story as 'non-narrative comments. In the epic, the external narrator provides "argumentative textual passages' which do not refer to any element of the fabula but to an external topic.

In certain cases, the external narrator instructs into the diegesis narrative (or break the frame of narrative) disrupting the boundaries between the world of the story and the narration (in the form of digressions) and also blurs the boundary between narrator and author. Instead of narrating events in the third person, the author intrudes into the narrative and passes his subjective and personal comments on many extraneous subjects in the first-person narrative. Here the voice of the narrator and author is blur. The words, actually, are authors, but author is not present in the text and story because he has surrendered the authority of narrating the story to the narrators whom he creates. This complex where the barrier between author and narrator; and the story world and real world is broken up with the author giving his personal, subjective authorial comments on various extraneous subjects can largely be found in the following digressive parts in the following cantos.

Canto V, IV, p. 267-268, ll. 8078-8121 (43 lines)

Canto XIII, XXI, p. 1069-1073, ll. 32374-32470 (96 lines)

Canto XIV, p. 1084, ll. 32768-32817 (49 lines)

In these digressive, the author brings in many topics like the inability of words to express human sorrow, the ras found in the text, the difference of taste that one

would from listening to the pena singers rendering the story to reading the present text etc.

There should be no blurring between the author and narrator in a text because author is the authority who writes the text while narrator is the subject which fulfills the duty of narrating the story to the readers. The one who writes the text should never be equated with the one who is telling the story. According to Mieke Bal, a narrator in a text is a subject and function of the text, he is not an individual like the author but only a narrating agent, "the linguistic subject, function and not a person which expresses itself in language that constitute the text" (Mieke, 2017, p.119). Thus, author is absent in a text. The voice found in the text is not his but his substitute narrator who is narrating the story to the readers. The presence of author in the text can, however, be clearly be felt. Sean Burke comments that to remove author totally from a text is untenable and thus he remains an integral part of the text. Not every line is not part of the narrative of the story. According to Mieke Bal, in order to be narrative, a subject or agent should narrate and maintain the progression of the story. She calls those parts that do not help in the progression of story as "non-narrative comment" which include digressions like authorial comments, vivid and detail descriptions or epic similes.

In fact, the incarnation story of Khamba and Thoibi as found in the text, was only a short tale until 1874, later it evolved into an elaborate story with the help of pena minstrels in due course of time. Anganghal has himself mentioned the intention of writing the book is to be read and also his huge praise in the ability and accomplishment of the pena singers whom he called them blessed singers in the introduction to the epic "Hourakpham." The elaboration of the ideas or statements that are in the paratextual element of "Hourakpham", again in the story and providing elements that are extraneous to the story itself at times creates problem in identifying the narrator in the text. Irene de Jong has called it a less fortunate term to always stick to the notion that the internal narrators as 'first person narrators' because external narrators can also refer to themselves as 'I'. To illustrate this, she gives the example of Homeric narrator who refers to himself in the person in 'tell me, Muse, of the man' (Lattimore, 2007, p.1.1). So, concluded that the use of the 'I' form is not a watertight criterion for distinguishing narrators. (Jong, 2014, p.19). In Khamba Thoibi Seireng, the external narrator also has referred to himself in the 'I' form, for example-

Khamba- Thoibi- Seireng" bu kaoba ngamde kanasu.

Meitei eigi tari ngai phaobada (Anganghal, 2013, pp.1070, ll. 32396 -32397)

or

Apangba- "Angang" eina, leirang oina khangduna,

Nachom-ni tuk-ningba-sha, nachom oina punbani. (Anganghal, 2013, pp. 1071, ll. 43416 -32417)

It is, however, not just the use of 'I' (eigi) or (eina) form by the external and internal narrators. The narrations of the internal narrators are character-bound and are told in the first-person. But the problem is here is the complex created by the use of extraneous elements in identifying the blurring line between the author and the external narrator. The narrator who narrates the story should not equated with the author who is the authority who writes the text because a text is open to interpretation and if the author is asked about the meaning of the text then another text would be obtained instead of the original text.

The narrators do only fulfill the communicative function (with the readers or with amongst the characters in the story), they fulfill various other functions in

the text. To invest their (both external and internal narrators), Seymour Chatman's concepts of overt narrator, the internal character-narrators who manifest themselves throughout the story and covert narrator, the external narrator who does his work (of narrating) in a more implicit way. The function of the overt narrator is showing things and also telling i.e. they tell the stories themselves and also letting the readers aware that a narrator is present between the readers and recounted events. The paper uses two ideas of Monika Fludernik to substantiate the functions of narrator in the text-

- 1) To present the fictional world through their narration. (Narrative function)
- 2) To comment or expound why an event happens or indicate what motivates a character to do a certain thing. It arouses the sympathy and antipathy or certain. For example, readers love and have sympathy for Khamba because he is kind-hearted while Nongban is hated for his affluent.

The omniscient external third person narrator is an intrusive narrator who relates the character's thoughts, feelings, motives or states of mind, besides also pointing to the flow and providing information of the story. Besides, the narrator explaining the situation, feeling, motive and state of mind, the characters also express the same. Here the case becomes dramatic as if they are using the dramatic convention of aside through which they would pour out their inner thoughts to the readers. In the process, they drift away from the world of the story and come into the world of the reader.

The external narrator is basically an intrusive narrator. Even though he is not a part of the story but he joins in the narrative discourse and a constant reliable companion relates the inner thought, feeling and emotion of the characters and also the prevailing situations to the readers.

Lairabigi mabukta maon-maonkhallak e

"Pakhang mabuk chaobagi khitti thankhidara-boireko!

Pakhang mana suraga khitti yamna thokkani

'Duga maning thungani chaba-marang kaigani,

Idu ningthou nabukta khallaboiko" Ningkhare

(Anganghal, 2013, pp. 2, ll. 43 - 47)

Here, the narrator is telling to the readers what is going in the mind of Khamnu when her brother is asking from her to let him go in seek of work to take the responsibility of life and thus to relieve her from the undue burden of life. Besides, the use of words within bracket to express the inner feeling of a character. "(Thadoi magi masaksu/Nongyai haifet yengning e)" (Anganghal, 2013, pp. 31, ll. 907-908). Here the narrator reveals the inner thought and desire of Khamba using words within bracket. In some cases, narrator gives comments on the prevailing situation to reveal the inner joy of the characters.

... Jagoi share haibasi,

Lairik sigi waheini, - jagoi thekpa tourude

Yamna haraokhare hairubagi watani (Anganghal, 2013, pp.1081, ll. 32716-32718)

Here, the author enters into the space of the text, story and narrative to comment on the situation and excitement and jubilation on what was accepted on the proposal put forward regarding the marriage Khamnu as they were discussion that of Khamba. This authorial comment on the jubilant state of the minds of the characters in the context is, however, not composite and integral to the story. Such

authorial comments that are extraneous to the story can be found hither and thither in the text.

The epic is written in a highly decorous style by describing events, actions, happenings and character in detail and vividly with elaborate imagery and epic similes. It must be noted that since the epic is re-written from the oral tradition, the vivid and detail description of things that is found in the oral has clear reflection in the present text. Besides the listening of the earlier period who enjoyed the story of Khamba and Thoibi from the pena singers or parva singers were not as sophisticated as the present day readers.

2. CONCLUSION

Noted Manipuri critic Elangbam Dinamani opines that the story of Khamba and Thoibi in the oral tradition is an epic in itself and Anganghal does not have much to do but to assemble the scattered mass of the available stories to a complete dignified compact whole and render it well in vivid and detail way with an epic grace to the readers. In order to impart the true flavour of the story it is obvious that the singers had to give full and elaborate details of events or things. Ruth Scodel mentions that "The story-teller's task lay not in inventing it with originality, but selecting his story, telling it at the level of detail to the occasion, and deploy the familiar epic language to make it vivid" (Herman, 45). The basic aspect of the oral performance tradition is clearly visible in the epic.

Both the external and internal narrators perform the narrative function in the text with external narrator as the primary narrator which tells main story of the text while within his narration, the character internal narrators function as the secondary narrator who helps in the progression and flow of the narrative.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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