



RESEARCH PAPER

Homodiegetic Narrative Voice in Sur Ranho of Shah Jo Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the deployment of the homodiegetic narrative voice as one of the narrative techniques in *Sur Ranho* of Shah Jo Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif, the Sufi poet of Sindh, Pakistan. The transgeneric narrative theory proposed by Huhn (2004; 2005) and updated and interpreted by Nkamanyang (2008) serves as the theoretical framework as well as methodology for this study. The narrative aspects pertaining to homodiegetic narrative voice function as analytical tools for analyzing the sur under study textually. The textual analysis of the sur revealed that Moomal, the main character in the sur, functions as the homodiegetic narrator. Ranho, Moomal's peers, and the messengers function as her silent narratees. Moomal tells her personal experiences to her narratees by means of narrative tools of simultaneous narration and monologues. This study also demonstrates that the transgeneric narrative theory offers both the theoretical ground as well as a suitable methodology for analyzing those lyric poems which are sung in story telling tradition.

KEYWORDS Homodiegetic Narrator, Narrative Voice, Shah Jo Risalo, Sur Ranho, Transgeneric Narratology

Introduction

This study examines the deployment of the narrative voice as one of the narrative strategies in *Sur Ranho* of Shah Jo Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, the Sufi poet of Sindh, Pakistan. *Shah Jo Risalo* is a collection of the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif. The *Risalo* is said to have thirty *surs* and each *sur* is claimed as lyric poem. However, the selected *surs* of the *Risalo* particularly love stories named after characters including the present *sur* are sung in story telling tradition (Sorley, 1989; Shaikh, 1991). Since these selected *surs* are claimed as lyric poems, if seen through the definition of typical lyric poems are nothing but challenge to the conventional generic definition. The appearance of characters as speakers and listeners in the dramatic situations under particular physical and human environments in the selected *surs* including *Sur Ranho* makes us to propose that these *surs* are not as pure lyric poems as claimed but are transgeneric in nature due to the presence of narrative aspects.

Hühn (2005) and Nkamanyang (2008) demonstrate that lyric poems are considered pure poetry but when they are told in storytelling tradition, they possess narrative aspects beyond the generic limitations. Therefore, such lyric poems are said to be transgeneric in nature and can be studied from narrative perspective in the light of the theoretical framework of transgeneric narratology. Generally, narratology as a theory has been ever

thought fruitful for analyzing narrative literary genres including poetry except lyric poems. Lyric poems in particular have been ignored from the narratological perspective on account of their musical nature. However, after Hühn's (2004; 2005) introducing of transgeneric narratology, the postmodern theory, and several story-oriented lyric poems have been explored for narrative aspects in the light of the theoretical model of transgeneric narratology.

Since selected *surs* of *Shah Jo Risalo* have been stated as lyric poems sung in storytelling tradition in which female characters appear as speaking entities (Sorley, 1991; Saleem, 2012; Khoso, 2021), the present study is undertaken to explore narrative aspects in the form of the homodiegetic narrative voice by analysing *Sur Ranho* of *Shah Jo Risalo* in the light of the theoretical framework of the transgeneric narratology. The theoretical framework comprises of the strategy of homodiegetic narrative voice as proposed by Hühn (2004; 2005) and interpreted and explained by Nkamanyang (2008). Since the main objective of this study is to explore the homodiegetic narrative voice employed as a narrative strategy in *Sur Ranho* of *Shah Jo Risalo*, the selected *sur* is textually analysed with interpretive and descriptive methods of analysis with close reading technique.

Literature Review

Narratology is the study of structures of narratives. According to Jahn (2017) and Bal (2009), narratology deals with the form and functioning of narrative. It is mainly related with the study of traits and their modulations in any work of narrative. It does not deal with the history, meaning or esthetic values either of novels or of tales. Categorically, narratology is the structural study of narratives either written or oral. These narratives depend upon stories which contain of series of events. Genette (1980) demonstrates, "narrative refers to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events" (p.25). According to Arege (2012), narratology is concerned with the manner in which stories are told and not the interpretation of stories.

The term narratology itself was coined in late sixties of the twentieth century. Russian formalists were the first who analysed folk stories under the domain of narratology. Since then, the narratology has been granted as a theory and has been applied on all forms of narratives including narrative fiction, novels, short stories and narrative poetry (Fludernik, 2009). From historical point of view, narratology is placed into classical and post-classical domains. Classical narratology as it is concerned more with structure is also known as structural narratology. Under this domain, narratologists deal mainly with textual features of narrative. Post-classical or postmodern modern narratology, on the other hand, deals with interdisciplinary study of narrative. Post-classical narratologists do not deviate from the models of classical narratologists. According to Jahn (2017), they modify and elaborate applications of models of their predecessors. They do not add to the existing models of past narratologists so for the structure is concerned, but introduce innovative approaches in terms of interdisciplinary studies.

Most importantly, in addition to fictional narrative genres such as novels, short stories, etc., poetic story-oriented narrative genres such as epic were examined in the light of the theory of narratology. However, story-oriented lyric poetry was not regarded as narrative genre. Therefore, lyric poems were excluded from the narratological analyses despite their being sung in story telling fames (Nkamanyang, 2008). It is after the introduction of the transgeneric narratology, the story-oriented lyric poems have been analysed narratologically.

The transgeneric narratology is one of the disciplines of post-classical narratology which deals with the analysis of the storytelling lyric poetry which possesses narrative aspects in particular (Plooy, 2010) or the poetry which may have heterogeneous features ranging from the epic, the lyric, the narrative and the prose fiction (Nkamanyang, 2008). Hühn (2004; 2005) is said to have pioneered the theory of transgeneric narratology with specific objective of analyzing story-oriented lyric poems in the light of the theoretical framework. Hühn and Sommer (2012) opine though lyric poetry does not follow the systematic order of telling of events to progress stories the way in genres of the narrative fiction, there are temporal sequences of events in it through what stories progress. Significantly, stories in lyric poems are mediated in the manner of presentation by means of narrative aspects despite their generic limitations. Therefore, lyric poems with storytelling tradition need to be analysed narratologically. For doing systematic narratological analysis of lyric poems there is the need of a theoretical application of narratological categories. The transgeneric narratology offers a systematic application of narratological categories to analyse lyric poems narratologically. Nkamanyang (2008) is another prominent narratologist who has interpreted and explained the applicability of the narrative aspects in the study of lyric poetry in the line of Hühn's model. Hühn's (2005) and Nkamanyang's (2008) interpretation revolves around the narrative voice and focalization categories of narration. However, they emphasize on the narrative voice as the key narrative strategy. They demonstrate that the speaking agent in the story-oriented lyric poem is the narrative voice. He further states that narrative voice is a fundamental cultural construct. The narrating agent tells events with specific narrative aspects which are used as analytical tools of communicative acts by means of story telling frames in fictional literary texts including lyric poetry.

There are various studies which have been conducted on the story-oriented lyric poems in the light of the theoretical framework of the transgeneric narrative theory. Hühn's (2005) study on John Keats's lyrical poem "Ode to a Nightingale" is one of the illustrative examples of narratological analysis. The author has discussed how the narrative voice is employed in the poem. Hühn's (2005) has also analysed Wordsworth's lyric poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud" from narratological perspective demonstrating narrative voice as a narrative technique in the poem. Hühn proposes that the poet has employed the narrative techniques of homodiegetic narration. Hühn & Schönert's (2005) study of Robert Browning's poem "The Bishop orders his tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" is also made to explore the narrative aspect of narrative voice in the poem. Nkamanyang's (2008) doctoral thesis for exploring the narrative aspects in the selected poems of Byron in the light of the theoretical framework of transgeneric narrative theory is an illustrative example of narratological analysis of the story-oriented lyric poems. Yao's (2011) doctoral study of Keats's lyrical odes from narratological perspective is said to be another worthy mentioning contribution in the area of the transgeneric narrative theory.

As far as Shah Abdul Latif's story-oriented lyric poetry, collected in *Shah Jo Risalo* and divided into different *Surs*, is concerned, no subsequent attention is paid towards the narrative techniques employed in the selected *surs* of *Shah Jo Risalo* despite recognizing that these *surs* are story based tales (Shaikh, 1991; Sorely, 1989; Allana, 1991). However, we cannot ignore study of Khoso, et al. (2021) on *Sur Marui* of *Shah Jo Risalo* from narratological perspective. They have contributed in this area by exploring the focalization narrative strategy in *Sur Marui* of the *Risalo*. However,, the present study departs from their study in two ways. Firstly, this study seeks to explore the homodiegetic narrative voice as a narrative technique employed in the *sur* understudy in the light of the theoretical framework of transgeneric narrative theory. Secondly, this study is made on *Sur Ranho* of *Shah Jo Risalo*. Therefore, this study is a fresh contribution in the existing literature on *Shah Jo Risalo* from narrative perspective. The main purpose of this study is to explore the

employment of the homodiegetic narrative voice as a narrative technique in *Sur Ranho* of *Shah Jo Risalo*. The selected stanzas of the *sur* are textually analysed with close reading technique in the light of the theoretical framework of the transgeneric narrative theory.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the transgeneric narratology comprising of narrative voice as proposed by Hühn (2004; 2005) and interpreted and explained by Nkamanyang (2008) is discussed here in detail. Narrative voice pertains to the agent or person who tells story or events. In narratological convention, narrative voice refers to narrators or narrating agents. Narrators are persons who recount events to other persons or agents known as narratees in the story (Hühn, 2004; 2005; Nkamanyang, 2008). Both narrators and narratees appear in the text as characters or implied authors. An author may allow one of the characters or the narrators or both at the same time to narrate events in the first person or in the third person pronouns (Nkamanyang, 2008). Hühn (2005) following Genette's terminology classifies narrators into homodiegetic narrators and heterodiegetic narrators. Homodiegetic narrators are characters of the story whereas heterodiegetic narrators are not the characters of the story who function as implied authors or third-person narrators (Nkamanyang, 2008). The theoretical framework for the present study is delimited to the homodiegetic narrative voice on account of too much textual data of the selected *sur*.

Homodiegetic narrative voice

Homodiegetic narrative voice refers to the voice of characters of the story who tell their personal issues or experiences to their fellow characters commonly known as narratees (Hühn, 2005). Characters tell events they experience themselves. They are located on the level of action known as intradiegetic level. Since they tell about themselves, they are also named as autodiegetic narrators. Mainly, they appear as the protagonists or heroes and remain dominate throughout the story. They do not hold omniscient and omnipresent privileges rather they remain restricted only to their present. They tell only what they see, do or experience themselves or told by someone else. They mention the source of information for telling about something or someone on the story level. In other words, they can quote words or sayings of other characters after hearing them being present on the scene, i.e. they tell what they experience personally (Nkamanyang, 2008).

They interact with other story internal characters who function as their silent narratees. They try to motivate their narratees to believe in their telling about themselves. They appear as appealing characters and want their narratees to sympathize with them by hearing their issues. There can be one or several narratees in the same text. Sometimes narrators address to their narratees in the second person and sometimes with their names. Narratees can be physically present or imagined, or even can be apostrophized. Homodiegetic narrators for telling their issues or experiences employ certain narrative tools. Simultaneous narration and monologues are identified as certain narrative tools that the homodiegetic narrators employ for sharing their personal experiences (Nkamanyang, 2008).

Simultaneous mode of narration allows homodiegetic narrators to report events at the time of their happenings in present tense. This, often, occurs when homodiegetic narrators are in face-to-face interaction with their narratees on the action level (Hühn, 2005). They speak in story's plan action sentences, gestures and movements of body. Rhetorical questions, use of interjections and apostrophe clues are useful tools for projecting simultaneous mode of narration in the poetic text (Nkamanyang, 2008).

Homodiegetic narrators also tell their personal experiences through the technique of monologues. When they are alone, they express their feelings, desires, wishes, expectations and emotions. They describe their inner feelings in solitude or loneliness giving clues that they are in mental tortures or pains. They mainly contemplate and introspect by musing over their past and present painful or joyous moments of lives. They do not aim at addressing any other character of the story rather they recede into reflections. Sometimes, through their narration in monologues it appears if they are in a state of trauma and hallucination. Sometimes, homodiegetic narrators also tell their experiences by recollecting or recalling their memories of past. When they recall or recollect their past experiences, they become experiencing self and when they tell their past experiences in the present moment they become narrating self. They recall their memories in order to describe their present situation by comparing it with their past that might be happy or unhappy (Nkamanyang, 2008).

Material and Methods

Hühn (2005), Nkamanyang (2008) and Plooy (2010) state that the usefulness of the transgeneric narrative theory as a theoretical framework is that it itself provides the suitable methodology for narratological analysis of the story-oriented lyric poems. Nkamanyang (2008) demonstrates that the narrative aspects subsumed under the core narrative category are used as analytical tools. With interpretive and descriptive methods of analysis, the selected stanzas of the poems can be textually analysed with close reading technique. Therefore, simultaneous narration and monologues subsumed under the core category of homodiegetic narrative voice are employed as analytical tools for analyzing *Sur Ranho* of *Shah Jo Risalo*. Thus, the relevant selected stanzas of *Sur Ranho* are analysed with close technique reading in the following section.

Results and Discussion

The analysis is made to identify, interpret and describe how the homodiegetic narrative voice in the *sur* appears by employing various narrative tools of simultaneous narration and monologues.

Homodiegetic narrative voice in *Sur Ranho* of *Shah Jo Risalo*

Once there had been a beautiful lady named as Moomal who had got constructed a deceptive palace at the bank of the river named as *Kaak*. She used to say that if any would enter the palace by solving her riddle of deception, she would marry to him. Many people failed and lost their wealth. However, a Raja named as Ranho after reaching at *Kaak* wins the game by solving Moomal's riddles and marries her. Few days after his marriage, *Ranho* went out of the palace for several days. Moomal, on the absence of her husband, made her sister Soomal to join her bed wearing Ranho's clothes. One night Ranho arrives in the palace and gets surprised seeing Moomal sleeping with someone else (It was her sister Soomal in disguise wearing Ranho's clothes). He gets angry at her and decides to leave her alone in the palace by going away. However, it was unbearable for Moomal to be separated from him being his dearest wife, she pleads before him not to leave her. Moomal enters the poetic text as a character-narrator. She addresses to her husband Ranho in simultaneous mode of narration:

*Your torment oh Sodha! burns blaze in my being,
Nostalgia of natter oh Ranho! simply devastating,
Compeers mock me; come back, let us reconcile (Shah, 2014, p. 349).*

*Don't go to Dhatt darling! making Kaak vulnerable,
Have already been bonded to your commitment,
Heart is horrified oh sweetheart reminiscing you,
Abodes and dollies believe me! have become bitter (Shah, 2014, p. 357).*

Through the above narration, Moomal addresses to Ranho as if he is physically present before her and is making to go away from her. She seems imploring before her husband by making him believe that without him her life is very painful. What we see in the above stanzas is speech made by the character in the form of direct addresses in simultaneous mode of narration. The experiencing of events and their telling go concurrently. Moreover, the narration is made in the present tense in the rhetorical style. Furthermore, the speaking agent is only Moomal not Ranho. Ranho merely functions as a silent narratee to Moomal. To be more specific, Moomal functions as an addresser and *Ranho* as an addressee demonstrating that there is a narrator-narratee contact. This contact is constructed on the story level where both Moomal and Ranho are characters of the story. The phrases such as 'oh *Sodha!*', 'oh *Ranho!*', '*Dhatt* darling', etc. clearly imply the rhetorical strategy with what Moomal has addressed to her narratee. Undoubtedly, Moomal's telling projects her personal experiences, perceptions, feelings, thoughts and emotions as a result of her deplorable situation. Lines such as: 'Your torment oh *Sodha!* burns blaze in my being, / Nostalgia of natter oh *Ranho!* simply devastating, / Heart is horrified oh sweetheart reminiscing you' and 'Abodes and dollies believe me! have become bitter', demonstrate Moomal's painful experiences at the present moment. Another clue to justify the claim that the above stanzas are recounted homodiegetically can be the Moomal's narration in action-oriented lines in the second person narrative mode. The lines in the above stanzas such as: 'Compeers mock me; come back, let us reconcile', 'Sulk nor be cross oh *Ranho!* stay away no instant', 'Don't go to *Dhatt* darling! making *Kaak* vulnerable', and 'Abodes and dollies believe me! have become bitter' are lucidly action-oriented uttered in the second person grammatical references. However, *Ranho* does not listen to her pleas and goes away leaving her alone in the palace. Moomal then expresses her painful feelings of separation sometimes by addressing directly to some other characters of the story such as her peers to tell:

*What Sodho has done, oh peers! to my being,
Kaak turned obnoxious; I loathe all the chores,
Eyes do not reckon; anyone in his absence (Shah, 2014, p. 350).*

*Kaak is torched, trees parched, this palace is ablaze,
Forsaken by Sodho oh playmates! I am hysterical,
Consumed in grief oh sweetheart! come back quick' (Shah, 2014, p. 350).*

Through the above direct addresses made in simultaneous narration to her playmates who function as her silent narratees, Moomal is attempting to reveal her inner life. The significance of the above narration is that it is uttered in direct address clues in which narratees are engaged in active participation to hear narrator's self-telling of bitter feelings and emotions caused due to unjustified separation of *Ranho*. Thus, the experiencing of emotions and their telling in the rhetorical style has taken place simultaneously.

The claim that Moomal is a homodiegetic narrator further can be justified through the presence of elements such as physical and cognitive restrictions imposed on the character-narrator. The fact that Moomal is physically and cognitively limited to her present can be evidenced through some stanzas in the *sur* uttered in simultaneous mode of narration:

*Kaak is torched, trees parched, my corps scalded,
Am in utter disbelief; why he left dropping cane?
Keeping still alive oh sweetheart! come back quick (Shah, 2014, p. 350).*

*Someone tell Sodho, please! been away for too long,
Hope my Ranho has mercy not to be away too long,
Shall send a delegation to Mendhro with all humility,
Bring camel back to Kaak oh Sodho! share my pain (Shah, 2014, p. 353).*

*Convey salutations oh courier! to sweetheart,
Petals also faded yesterday; on bridal bed,
Keep shedding tears; fervently missing you,
Would hear me dead; if you failed to visit (Shah, 2014, pp. 359-360).*

The above stanzas clearly reveal that the character-narrator is addressing in simultaneous mode of narration to some other story internal characters at the action level. Her addressing to her husband, 'oh sweetheart! come back quick', to someone, 'Someone tell Sodho, please! been away for too long', and to a courier, 'Convey salutations oh courier! to sweetheart', is made in the rhetorical style in the present tense form implying that she has constructed 'I' and 'you' narrative situation. She has addressed to her silent narratees in the second person linguistic references suggesting that she has constructed narrator-narratee contact. Moreover, through the narration of the above stanzas, the character-narrator seems to have engaged with her silent narratees in face-to-face interaction for expressing her personal issues and feelings. She has attempted to motivate her narratees for normalizing her relationship with her angry husband. Most importantly, she is confined into a particular place and does not jump from one place to another place to transfer her messages. She sends her messages to her husband through messengers (the human source) suggesting that she is a character inside the story and is bound to human restrictions to time, place and cognition.

Moomal also recounts her personal experiences, in terms of feelings and emotions, by means of monologues. She tells about her different activities that she experiences at the palace of *Kaak* in solitude. Moomal tells her own emotional experiences through monologues by individualizing herself in the first-person references without addressing to any particular narratee. In this connection, she complains of pain caused by *Ranho's* separation staying in solitude:

*Heart aches for Ranho; and pines for his prattle,
Bring Mendhro, oh Allah! Back in courtyard (Shah, 2014, p. 358).*

She expresses her feelings and introspections in such a manner that one assumes that it is her mind which is at work. Some more stanzas from the *sur* can be cited as an evidence of monologues attempted by character-narrator meditating in loneliness:

*Do not find today; with whom I spent in yard,
Looking for them now; on the banks of Kaak (Shah, 2014, p. 356).*

*No chatter today; that buzzed the dwelling,
Beset by some qualm; they deserted the yard (Shah, 2014, p. 356).*

*Parched in fervency; eyes shed no tears,
Musing abstractly missing babble of Ranho,
Sent death by Sodho; distressed cannot frolic (Shah, 2014, p.358).*

Sometimes, through monologues Moomal recalls the past moments that she passed with her husband. This helps in evoking the past in the present where the past of Moomal was the happiest for that she was very close to her beloved husband. She comes to realize that life is no longer as joyous and satisfying as it used to be in the company of Ranho:

*See hawsers of Ranho; anchored in my soul,
Sodho hooked my breath; like boat to the pier,
Calm became unbearable; I shed profuse (Shah, 2014, p. 363).*

The above telling projects Moomal's self-conscious moves to retrieve from memory. She now is telling painful moments of her present, living a life of loneliness and mental torture. In addition, Moomal compares her past with present moments telling:

*All my prattles with Ranho; are the only solace of my soul,
Having lost quietude; I keep querying couriers (Shah, 2014, p. 359).*

The above stanza describes that the past life of the experiencing self of Moomal was the happiest which is contrasted with the present moment in which narrator's life has become painful as implied in the line 'Having lost quietude; I keep querying couriers'.

Conclusion

By analyzing *Sur Ranho* of *Shah Jo Risalo* in the light of the model of transgeneric narrative theory one may assert that the *sur* understudy is transgeneric in nature due to the blending of narrative aspects. The rhetorical narrative style, narratee signals, first person and second person linguistic references, action-oriented poetic lines, memory clues, etc. observed through the narratological analysis of the *sur* understudy suggest that the poem deviates from the conventional generic definition of the pure lyric poem. The study reveals that Moomal, the story internal character is a homodiegetic narrator who tells her personal issues to other story internal characters by means of narrative tools of simultaneous narration and monologues. Ranho, Moomal's peers, playmates, and messengers serve as her narratees who remain silent throughout the poem. Thus, the events of the story of *Sur Ranho* are recounted through homodiegetic narrative voice. The study also suggests that the transgeneric narratology is very useful theoretically as well as methodologically for that it offers theoretical framework and methods of analysis simultaneously which can be used for analyzing any story-oriented lyric poem. This study also recommends that not only some other story-oriented *surs* of *Shah Jo Risalo* can be analysed narratological in the light of the theoretical framework of transgenic narratology but also various other story-oriented lyric poems of various other poets across the world can be analysed narratologically.

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