

MULTIPLE NARRATIVES IN LANKES'S SHORT STORY: 'THE GARDENER'

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ABSTRACT

P. Lankesh, a well-known Kannada writer, journalist, film director, script writer, translator wrote the short story THE GARDENER (1889) in Kannada. He employed multiple narratives in the story. He employed the narrative technique of frame and embedded story in this narrative. A narrative "at its most fundamental, is an account of events, whether real or fictional." (Wolfreys, Julian: Robbins, Ruth and Womack, Kenneth 193). "A frame narrative is the sum of a linear narrative and a story or series of stories embedded within it. The primary (frame)narrative provides an introduction or justification for the tales it supports; the embedded tales, however, can usually stand on their own, enriched rather than defined by the primary narrative." (Sauer). In this narrative the first-person narrator of the frame/primary story narrates the story of the gardener to the readers and in turn makes the gardener tell the embedded story of the competition and rivalry between Tammanna and Basavaiah and its consequences. The primary or frame narrative, introduces the narrator- the gardener of the embedded story (story within the story) and the occasion for telling the tales. The frame narrative begins and ends the story THE GARDENER. The narrator of the frame story intervenes twice in the main/embedded story. The embedded story can stand alone without the frame story. Ultimately the writer integrates all these stories into a single organic form. In the narrative the writer mingles both fact and fiction. He fictionalizes the fact and makes the fact fiction in the narrative and leaves clues for that. In this article the employment of multiple narratives and fictionalization of fact and vice versa are analysed.

Keywords: frame narrative, embedded narrative, fictionalization, reflective, homodiegetic narrator, unreliable narrator, eponymous character, rivalry, competition, non-entity.

"The Gardener" (1889) is a short story written by P. Lankesh, an Indian writer and journalist who wrote in the Kannada language. The short story 'The Gardener' is the translated English version of 'Thotadavanu'. The story is titled after the gardener, an eponymous character¹. It is translated into English by H.S.Raghavendra Rao. In this short story, the writer employed the multiple narratives. He employed the narrative technique of frame and embedded story in this narrative. A narrative "at its most fundamental, is an account of events, whether

¹ Character after whom the story is named.

real or fictional.” (Wolfreys, Julian: Robbins, Ruth and Womack, Kenneth 70). It is a textual form of the story or events. “A frame narrative which is also called prime narrative is the sum of a linear narrative and a story or series of stories embedded² within it. The primary (frame)narrative provides an introduction or justification for the tales it supports; the embedded tales, however, can usually stand on their own, enriched rather than defined by the primary narrative.” (Sauer 193) Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, perhaps the most famous of all English frame narratives, begins with a prologue which introduces each of a group of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. In this narrative the first person narrator of the frame or primary story narrates the story of the gardener to the readers and in turn makes the gardener tell the embedded story of the competition and rivalry between Tamanna and Basavaiah and its consequences. The embedded story of Tammanna and Basavaiah stands on its own. The primary or frame narrative, introduces the narrator- the gardener of the embedded story (story within the story) and the occasion for telling the tales. The frame narrative begins and ends the story THE GARDENER. The frame story took its shape in the mind of the narrator in a flash. The embedded story took its shape in the mind of its narrator when Russia told America that she was not the enemy of America and would not wage war against it. The embedded story is set in the second half of the twentieth century which is confirmed by the reference of the rivalry between Russia and America. It takes place one evening in the garden at a place called Channarayapatna in Malnad region of Karnataka. The trees, the well and sun setting picture confirm it.

The first person narrator of the frame story says he conceived the frame story in a flash and gives it a dream quality. It has its genesis in his chance encounter with an old man standing near a coconut grove near Channarayapatna, a real town in Malnad region of Karnataka. He gives details of his personality. He introduces the old man through direct description of what he looks like, his attitude, behaviour etc. The old man’s eyes were suffused with strange memories and native intelligence. He a was tall figure with grey hair, a long beak nose and strong muscular arms. In one hand he was holding a spade used to tend coconut trees. He had tucked a newspaper under his another arm. The spade and newspaper indicate that he is both a hard worker and intelligent. He was a labourer, overseer and philosopher, all rolled into one.

He came to the garden from a far off place, his native, after walking hundreds of miles. His identity and his native are kept in suspense till the end of the embedded story. The owner of the garden/plantation needed a person exactly like him. The owner and the old man had a talk and the man was employed as the gardener. He was really useful to the owner. He was well-versed in agriculture and could understand the problems of the workers also. He put an end to petty thefts in the garden. The plantation which was merely ten acres grew/expanded beyond imagination. The income of the garden improved dramatically under his care. It brought a perceptible change in the life style of the owner. The owner became lethargic and shied away from hard work. His wealth and social prestige rose higher. He acquired a number of friends in his village and many in the next town also. Though he had little to do his life was crowded with colourful events. But he cultivated vices like adultery and many others lately. It worried his wife a lot. She found it strange and hard to decide whether the old man’s arrival was for the better or for the worse because though the family income increased and the size of the farm expanded their life was going out of their hand. She was in a fix. The gardener guessed that her husband's misconduct had given her the worries. Therefore, he decided to narrate his own story and tried to caution her about strange human nature and behaviour. The gardener met her that day evening at the garden and behaved as if he read her mind and knew her plight. He offered her a tender coconut with a smile and sat on the embankment of the well. She sat next to him since she had no alternative other than listening to his explanation and solution to her problem. Then the old man began his narrative, the embedded story.

The frame narrator intervenes twice in the embedded story. 1.“After proceeding this far, the old man started fumbling for words as though he had committed a mistake. She was listening. She felt like going away, saying “All this is none of my concern.” However, unwilling to hurt the old man, she continued to sit quietly. The old man went on. “No, his name was not Sangoji, it was Basavaiah.” He expressed his amazement at how facts take on such varied guises when they are narrated as fiction.” (Committee 61) He makes the reader remember

² An embedded narrative is a story within the story.

that they are listening to embedded story the gardener is telling to the wife of the owner and she is somewhat uncomfortable. Besides, he makes readers believe that the story that he narrates is fact, not fiction.

2. He intervenes when the gardener finishes his story and begins his explanation on the strange human nature. "That's when I realized how strange human nature could be." The old man began his explanation to the owner's wife." (Committee 62)

The frame narrator ends the story THE GARDENER with these words: "Forgive me. Unable to elaborate. I have told you whatever I felt, as it is. I had seen all this in a dream." (Committee 63) He begs pardon of the readers for not being able to elaborate the story further. He had started the story with the words: "Elaboration can only impoverish this account and make it less authentic." (Committee 59). His intention was to keep the story short and open for elaboration by the readers if they wished.

The frame narrative begins and ends the story with two interferences in the middle of the embedded story. In the begging the frame narrator says he conceived the embedded story in a flash. In the end he says he told whatever he felt as it is without modification and he had seen all that (embedded story) in a dream. But at the first interference he says the old man started fumbling for words as though he had committed a mistake. Besides, he says the old man expressed his amazement at how facts take on such varied guises when they are narrated as fiction. It means the story the gardener tells is fact, not fiction. But, he says he conceived it in a flash, and had seen it in dream, meaning it is not fact but fiction. So, he mingles both fact and fiction in the story. Further he says the elaboration impoverishes and makes it less authentic. He leaves space for the imagination of the readers. Commenting on the ending of the story H S Ragavendra Rao says "Such endingsmake it possible for stories to expand in many ways in reader's mind. They are open ended and invite the reader along to do some creative thinking." (Rao 16) The frame story encourages the reader to distinguish the narrator from the author P Lankesh.

The embedded story is narrated to the wife of the owner by the old man turned gardener. It begins as a third person objective narrative but ends with first person subjective narrative. It is the story of healthy competition turned into rivalry between Thamanna and Basavaiah. The rivalry between them keeps moving from the visible domain to the invisible resulting in revenge and loss of relationships.

In a far-off place a man called Thamanna lived happily. He had everything a man needs to lead a comfortable life. He had ten acres of wet land, a comfortable house and servants to do his bidding. But the most important among all his possessions was his rival Sangoji. He felt rivalry offers new possibilities of life for him. It was his strange and unique approach to life. He fumbled for words as if he had committed a mistake while narrating the story. The landlady felt uncomfortable and was unwilling to listen to his story as it was in no way connected to her problem but remained there unwilling to hurt the old man. He corrected himself that Thamanna's rival's name was not Sangoji, but Basavaiah and again said that they should assume his name was Basavaiah. First, he confirms his name as real one and immediately changes it to be a fake name. So, there is a shift from fiction to fact and to fiction again.

Basavaiah was Thamanna's rival in all respects. If Thamanna bought a piece of land adjacent to his land Basavaiah followed suit. If Thamanna had ten friends Basavaiah acquired fifteen admirers. All this healthy competition gradually rose to such a pitch that there was no land left in the village for them to buy. All land of the village belonged to either Thamanna or Basavaiah. Thamanna had thousand acres of land whereas Basavaiah had only eight hundred acres. Basavaiah could not tolerate it, so he sent word to Thamanna asking him to sell two hundred acres of land to him which Thamanna refused. Instead, Thamanna was prepared to buy all the land belonging to Basavaiah. It made Basavaiah go mad with rage and with the help of his supporters he forcefully acquired two hundred acres of land of Thamanna and fenced it. Thamanna could not tolerate it. The fight between two had sucked in all their supporters. The individual fight turned a fight between two groups.

Thamanna's supporters advised him three means to get his acquired land back: to go to the court of law, take help of police or attack Basavaiah. Such a war had become virtually inevitable but Thamanna, who was strange and unique in his approach, was in search of a method that could annihilate Basavaiah completely. So,

he decided to annihilate him in such a way that he could never counteract. He conceived that method. First he started composing all his experiences in the form of ballads and singing them. Basavaiah had no answer to that. He also tried to sing but could not. He performed his farming more diligently but it was not an answer to Thamanna. Thamanna got name and fame all around. His songs started making a mention of Basavaiah's cruelty and meanness gradually. Scholars of folklore, and critics started admiring, analyzing and translating his songs and even they earned their share of fame. Basavaiah became helpless and was enraged further. He encroached more and more land of Thamanna but he took no note of it. He lived for art and was felicitated as the best poet of his time. So the rivalry between the two moved away from things that were visible towards an invisible, abstract domain.

Basavaiah shrunk in humiliation. He tried to excel in his life with all kinds of material wealth. He got a palatial building, appointed many to admire him, bedecked himself with gold, diamonds and precious stones. But his house looked dull and empty without the books of Thamanna as visitors told him. Hence he started inviting scholars, musicians and poets to his home to invest it with meaning but could not.

The desperate Basavaiah learnt that Thamanna was ill. He felt happy that he excelled Thamanna in health as health was his wealth. Thamanna's disease was Basavaiah's health and wealth. Finally, he consoled himself that he had at least surpassed Thamanna in having good health.

By then, Thamanna had thought of yet another method of punishing Basavaiah. That was death. At physical or body level Basavaiah would give him tough competition. So Thamanna decided to renounce his body, separate his body from his songs to annihilate Basavaiah completely. Thamanna started explaining the landlady how strange human nature could be to do so.

The story teller- gardener turned an interpreter of the nature of such human beings. First he talks about the human nature in general, next about his own nature, the nature of the nations and at last the nature of the landlord. He says: "Man needs wealth, education, art and many more things. And yet he lives for some kind of unbearable vengefulness. Without it, there would be no reason for his existence". (Committee 63). He says the story he told was not the real story but the one he heard elsewhere. Even he might have read it in the newspaper as he subscribed to a daily. Further he says he conceived the story all of a sudden when Russia told America: "I am not your enemy. I shall not wage a war against you." (Committee 63). He is not very much sure about the source of the story. It seems to be a fact once and fiction at the other. He interprets the enmity between Russia and America. America, the sworn enemy of Russia, is there only to fight with and annihilate Russia. It/she felt boredom and agony when Russia all of a sudden withdrew from the fight and declared that she was no more the enemy of America. There was no point for America for being as a nation. Russia is her very important possession and America's prestige or identity remains just because of its hatred for Russia. If not, it loses it. He further says a nation can withstand such strains but a man can't live without a rival. He means hatred of man is much greater than that of a nation.

Then, Thamanna talks about himself and his identity. He is just an old man, gardener and the servant of the landlady. He is also a person who reads a newspaper daily and looks after the garden properly. But after a particular age, he or any man for that matter, loses his name. In course of time, his age becomes important and his name vanishes into thin air. He further says he suffered the similar fate of America. He says: "I thought my death alone could destroy Basavaiah. I gave up everything and started off. A few days after I left, Basavaiah passed away. He had no more reason to live." (Committee 63). The gardener thought that his death was the only way to avenge and destroy Basavaiah. For that reason, he gave up his land, name and fame and even his village. He came to a distant land, reduced himself to a gardener losing his identity of a rich man and popular singer. He made Basavaiah believe that Thamanna was no more. He killed himself metaphorically and deceived Basavaiah. A few days after his departure from his village Basavaiah passed away having no reason to live. Even Basavaiah had lived for some revenge. The gardener gave his true identity as Thamanna which he had concealed so far. The third person narrator turned the first person narrator narrating his own tale. Thamanna found no use of his ballads and songs and forgot all of them after the death of Basavaiah, because he had composed and sang them as a device to annihilate his enemy Basavaiah. That purpose was served and so he gave them up. Thamanna,

who was very popular, reduced himself to a non-entity in order to annihilate and avenge his enemy. He avenged at the cost of his own fame. Thamanna was terribly disturbed because he did not know what to do, as the very purpose of his life had been defeated. So, he felt that in the process of taking revenge against his rival, he has avenged himself. He reasons that man who aspires for wealth, education, art, fame and many other things at his prime days also lives for some kind of unbearable vengefulness at the cost of his own wealth, name and fame he achieved. That made him realise that human nature was very strange.

He turned to the issue of his landlord with all these evidences and said that he was flourishing as a rich man then and not amenable to any advice. He is also a human being, like Thamanna and Basavaiah, who lives for name and fame and other things. He concludes his explanation that "Man is so complicated that till the day of his death, he goes on living for some revenge or the other, confronting one challenge or the other." (Committee 63). But at the end everybody turns into a non-entity. He almost begged the pardon of the landlady for not being able to give solution to her problem. He just asked her to assume that he did not talk to her at all or think all that happened in her dream. Thamanna, a great manipulator turned reflective at the later part of the story. He forgot all his songs and ballads. He becomes non-entity. He says that after a particular age, man loses his name because his age becomes important and his name vanishes into thin air. He says that man is so complicated that till the day of his death, he goes on living for some revenge or the other, confronting one challenge or the other. He gave up his role of story teller, interpreter and philosopher of life and turned into the gardener. He was as the frame narrator had described him. He paid his attention to the labourers who started going home. He also went to pay a visit to the young child of Lokya who paints well and is bedridden with fever. He is a dedicated worker who cares for the plight of workers, women and children though he knows that human nature is very strange and unpredictable and unamenable. He left the land lady in confusion that whether she really listened or not to the gardener or was it a dream. He left her in a dilemma that her husband might meet the similar fate as Basavaiah or Thamanna did. He foreshadows the fate of the landlord. Thamanna is a homodiegetic narrator, "a narrator who has participated (more or less centrally) in the circumstances and events about which he tells a story." (Herman 187). Thamanna, who is a character-narrator, "narrates the events entirely through his perspective, and the narration is therefore subjective". (Nayar 74). His narration is full of his passions of revenge and dislikes for Basavaiah. His narration cannot be taken reliable as it compels the readers to read between the lines. Once he says the name of the enemy was Sangoji and then corrects it as Basavaiah. Again he says let us assume his name was Basavaiah. He narrates the embedded story as a third person narrator concealing his identity in the begging but at the end identifies himself as Thamanna. He begins his story as if he knows the solution for the problem of the landlady but ends it without a solution. His prediction of the landlord's future is also unreliable. Once he says the genesis of his story is the newspaper he reads regularly, again he says he conceived it when Russia declared that it was no longer the enemy of America, and yet again he says he saw it in a dream. So, his narration is full of inconsistencies. He is an unreliable narrator. It seems the author deliberately made it so to make the story seem both fact and fiction.

At first the narrator of the frame story meets an old man and narrates about the old man turned the gardener. When the owner's wife becomes apprehensive the gardener later turned Tamanna narrates a story about himself and Basavaiah bringing to light many facets of human personality. He goes on unveiling the mystery of human relationships like taking vengeance, manipulation, living with supporters, grabbing forcibly, imitating without any gain, undergoing humiliation etc. So multiple issues are narrated. Towards the end, Tamanna becomes reflective and tells the end of enmity or rivalry between himself and Basavaiah.

Conclusion

The frame story is shorter and the embedded story is longer than it. The main character of the frame story, the old man, later turned out to be Thamanna, is the narrator of the embedded story and a part of it. He begins his narration as an outsider but towards the end identifies himself with the main character of the embedded story. He links both the stories being a part of both. Even the narrator of the frame story intervenes twice in the embedded story's narration and makes comments. The embedded story is a part of the frame story the frame narrator conceived in a flash. The frame story begins and ends the story *The Gardener*. The frame story is narrated to the readers whereas the embedded to the landlady. Both the stories were conceived by the

narrators. Both the narrators beg pardon of the listeners for not being able to elaborate or give solutions. Both the stories have parallel narrations. The real events are fictionalized and fictional events are presented as facts. So the events in the story are neither completely fact nor fiction. By doing so the writer deliberately keeps the story in between fact and fiction, and the reader uncertain about factual and fictional nature of the events. Without elaborating the stories, he leaves space for the readers to give different shapes and conclusions to the stories. The author unites both the stories into an organic whole and make them look like one story.

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