

Voice of the Voiceless: A Discussion on Narration and Representation in Social Media with Special Reference to 'Facebook'

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Abstract

The first decade of 21st C has witnessed for the emergence and flourishing of social media as popular means of information and communication. They opened up vast arena for self-narration and creation of one's identity. Unlike the past centuries the age of social media gives opportunities for all to introduce themselves and their interests to the world. Earlier this has been the privilege of literate and educated strata of the society. When the platform of narration shifted from page to screen its nature and scope have undergone for radical changes. Irrespective of one's education, social class, color, race, gender, belief and age social media provides to human beings space to interact in public and establish their selfhood. Individuality and personal distinctions so long stuck in narrow corridors of life have found new expressions. It brightened and illuminated dark caves of negligence and brought out pearls into the public sphere. Thus social media became instrumental for the voice of many voiceless and unfortunate lives buried for long period under the pressure of 'standard', 'skilled', 'privileged' and 'educated'. This paper examines the nature and scope of narration in social media with special reference to Facebook as a popular culture in terms of providing to the mass public opportunity to narrate their self, share their indigenous knowledge and to establish their individuality and selfhood without any conventional barriers of narration on print.

Keywords: Virtual space, Voiceless, Narration, Representation, Contention, Correction, Substantiation.

Each day of every person passes with at least a single glance to any of the social media. As they wake up look for updates of stories. Scroll down screens of gadgets and begin a day. At some instances social media trap the users for hours and disorder routines. Unlike other creatures human beings grow and develop their thoughts and knowledge through stories. Their world of reality blooms in the stories narrated to them by their grandparents. This practice of listening to the stories of grandparents while one is a child is in the process of transformation in this age of mechanical outburst. Social media is slowly emerging to the position of a story teller to infants and replaces grandparents. This state of affair is not strange to any grown up and they experience this directly at their home or at somewhere else. Listening to stories is a matter of pleasure at any level of age but telling becomes more significant as a person grows up and his experiences spread beyond dependence of childhood. Narration is an expression of one's thoughts that are modified by knowledge and

experience in an adequate language. The reliability of a narrative depends upon the relation of knowledge and experience with reality and sanity of the narrator. The mere existence of human history lies in narration which had begun from the time immemorial. It has been the means of representation of persons or society throughout the history and will persist with the responsibility until men can breathe. The advent of virtual platforms due to the scientific and mechanical development has altered the notion of narration and representation in the contemporary period. The questions such as who is a narrator, what is a narrative, and what should be the method and language of narration have radically changed. Access to the internet and distribution of open platforms for all became instrumental in reformulating the answers to the above questions. Social media, specifically Facebook, has revolutionized the idea of a typical narrator and established new space for everyone to represent himself. Stories of those who have been in utter negligence or the stories of those who have been pushed to the quiet oblivion were found space in Facebook either by their own narration or by others narration about them.

Narration in Facebook is one of the most recent text types. It serves two important purposes. Firstly narration solidifies one's position and secondly it justifies change. Narrative psychology considers three interesting emotional perspectives on a person's narration in Facebook. Recollection, being the first among them is an emotional reclamation of past events or an updating of present status in which the narrator finds pleasure in sharing. The narrator, as has been indicated earlier, is everyone. While narrating his recollections of current or past life incidents he solidifies his position and justifies it. Observer is the second realm of the perspective. It refers to others responses to the emotion of the narrator. The observer is free to understand, interpret and to cooperate with or to question the narrator's emotional circumstance. Additional Self-Talk is the third emotional perspective that the narrator adds new positive or negative reinforcing emotions to support his/her position based on the observer's feedback and his/her own impression. This is an elementary nature of a narrative in facebook where conventional text narratives for instance novels and epics differ in their nature and interference in communication with the receiving end. Reliability of the narrator is not an assumption or uncertainty in facebook instead it can be proved by the observer and additional self talk of the narrator. Traditional narratives had put on an aura and the narrators of which were considered as unchallenged and unquestioned magnificent creators of incidents. Virtual platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn, WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr, MySpace, and Foursquare have made such conventions obsolete and brought the narrator to the space of an ordinary space. This state has been well observed by the German Frankfurt Marxist scholar Walter Benjamin in his acclaimed essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936). He says: "To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction." (Benjamin 1171) Though Benjamin has made his remark on mechanical reproduction of art the observation invites us to have a "sense of the universal equality of things"

which the virtual space of facebook contributed to the negation of ‘aura’ in connection with the narrator and narrative.

Language of narratives in facebook is a combination of photos, images, audios, videos and verbal texts. This contributes to a variety of experiences to both the narrator and observer. The verbal narration assumes the qualities of what has been propagated by William Wordsworth, the renowned poet of the romantic era in English literature –in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballad* Wordsworth observes the poetic diction as “...in a selection of language really used by men ;”.(Wordsworth 650) – and Mikhail M. Bakhtin, as proclaimed by Tzvetan Todorov as perhaps the greatest twentieth-century theorist of literature. Bakhtin in his essay “From Discourse in the Novel” says that;

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorecie*) can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized).

(Bakhtin 1193)

Bakhtin’s proposal of heteroglossia as one of the principle natures of novel can also be attributed as a nature of narratives in facebook. Comprehension of heteroglossia in facebook narratives has to be done in a different way that the observer of a narrative responds positively or negatively by providing an opportunity to the narrator for additional self talk and the process of debate between the narrator and observer form a heteroglotic nature. Thus narratives in facebook simultaneously accept and reject the elements of conventional narrative modes in their use of language.

These rapidly spreading narratives help the immediate creation of a person’s identity. Language, images, photos, and other audio visual materials embedded with a narrative add to the total absorption of a narrators’ or the person about whom or what the narrator speaks. Bruner, a 20th C. psychologist observes it as “Our lives are constituted by the narratives we create or to which we subscribe, so that through our stories we construct not just our reality, but who we are.” (Davies et al. 397) He continues “We seem to have no other way of describing “lived time” save in the form of narrative.” (398)In their general nature narratives expose the self and identity of a narrator and are very crucial when published in facebook for their expedited outreach to the mass society. Observers of narratives are relentlessly informed about the narrator’s turns and stances and thereby they modify their construction of the narrator’s being. Than exhibiting oneself through attire or postures in the public the identity is reflected in narratives. This has been well explained as;

A person’s identity is not to be found in behavior, nor-important though this is –in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual’s biography, if he/she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day to day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self. (400)

Irrespective of a person's familial, racial, national and gender overtones this virtual space (facebook) bestows ample opportunity to narrate the self and individual. Narratives on pages require certain knowledge of forms, language, process of printing and publishing where narratives on the virtual space require none. Full many a bunch of people had stayed back in this enterprise of narrating themselves or their experiences on page because they could not, for many reasons, stretch their hands to the requirements. Else there must have been a handful of skilled narrators from the rustic villages as has been lamented by the 18th C. English poet Thomas Gray in his well known poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" as he says; "Full many a gem of purest ray serene,/ The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:/ Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen, /and waste its sweetness on the desert air." (Lines 52-56) Hence telling about the self not only provides to the observers some information but also it answers certain questions like who am I? To whom do I belong? What is my role and purpose here? Why are things the way they are and why do I do what I do? How do I decide what is right and what is important?

Narratives in facebook have the beauty of everyday ordinariness. It treats both elite and rustic alike. It has no "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r," (Gray line 33) so much so that it stands for providing equality of opportunity even for the most oppressed stratum of the society. Everyone is free and independent to narrate his thoughts and experiences with least faculty and resources. It's 'culture is ordinary' as remarked by Raymond Williams about culture in his *Culture is Ordinary* (1958). People lives in a remote country village and the voices obscured in the bustle of modernity find a place in this platform. Facebook has been decisive power in bringing forth the culture and identity of so long sidelined lives. It has become a modern pioneer in promoting subaltern narratives and to bring them into the limelight. Narratives of marginalized in facebook embellished with adequate photos, images, and videos awake a sense of inclusiveness in the mind of elite observers. Voices suppressed for decades burst out to claim the existence of downtrodden through facebook. Stories of untouchables while posted in facebook assume a new perspective in the mind of observers. Their responses to what has been narrated sets grounds for the alienated to dissent the contentions remarked wrongly against them. The voiceless signs him/her with counter arguments and stands erect in the multitude. Elite narratives on the 'other' as uncultured and uncivilized have been left unquestioned on pages for many years. This tradition of letting narratives go on the 'haves' track confronts an end with the 'tit for tat' facility of virtual page in facebook. Space provided for comments equips the observer for suggesting essential anomalies in the story of a narrator. Narrator can either correct himself with additional self-talk or correct the observer and defend himself with what he is a master in. Instant contention and correction being the soul of developing self image of a person in facebook narratives it is reckoned as space where every narrator is satisfied with.

Fame and reputation had been a forbidden fruit to conventionally neglected people. Advent of this virtual space helped, at a limit, reducing the distance between the oppressed and their desire to appear on limelight. Here everyone becomes a poet, a novelist, a dramatist, a biographer, an autobiographer, a historian

and above all a story teller who persistently tells his own or others' stories of survival. Here everyone listens to everyone without the barriers of social stratification and division. None is treated in this space as 'the other'. Everyone is an individual of distinct life story and experience that he wants to tell the world. This is a room the mere thought of the infinite possibility of which flood us from everywhere. Voice emerges by every swipe of forefingers, images breathe by every click and we celebrate the universality in individuality as has been remarked by the great Nigerian novelist and critic Chinua Achebe in his critical essay "Colonialist Criticism". He says: "...Let every people bring their gifts to the great festival of the world's cultural harvest and mankind will be all the richer for the variety and distinctiveness of the offerings." (Achebe) Thus facebook with all its brothers and sisters teach us to celebrate every voice and to stand with genuine

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