

Transcending Otherness: Exploring Symbolism, Fluid Rejection, and Moral Ambiguity in Anosh Irani's *The Parcel*

Seshaa Senbagam P¹ & Dr. Vijayalakshmi S²

¹Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, India.

²Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, India

Correspondence: Dr. Vijayalakshmi S, Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, India.

Received: May 21, 2024

Accepted: July 31, 2024

Online Published: August 23, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n1p35

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n1p35>

Abstract

The transgender community's historical roots, as affirmed by scholars like Mildred L. Brown and Chloe Ann Rounsley in "True Selves," persist throughout history. Despite global recognition, transgenders face enduring challenges in societal acceptance. Indian hijras, emblematic of this struggle, endure oppressive prejudice, lacking essentials and oppressed by systemic bias. Literary representations of transgender experiences are limited, but works like Anosh Irani's *The Parcel* provide insightful portrayals. The research scrutinizes Irani's work, focusing on its symbolism and the protagonist's turbulent journey amidst rejection, marginalisation and ethical dilemmas. Through Irani's narrative, profound insights emerge into the resilient spirit of transgender individuals confronting societal adversity. Despite strides, true equality remains elusive for the community. This article analyses and summarizes the symbolism in *The Parcel* by analysing static symbols such as characters, objects, occurrences, as well as dynamic symbol such as dialogue, behaviour, and thoughts, in order to further elaborate the role of symbolism in *The Parcel* in promoting the context of the text. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of their struggles, shedding light on the unyielding resilience exhibited by transgender individuals across societal challenges.

Keywords: Transgender, Othering, Symbolism, Marginalisation, Hijras

1. Introduction

The rigid gender binaries that underpin numerous cultures have resulted in the exclusion, oppression, and exploitation of those who don't conform to them. Transgender individuals, being among these exceptions, have endured marginalization, ridicule, violence, and exploitation. These binaries, which shape our familial and social frameworks, fail to create spaces for transgender people to articulate their distinct experiences. (Chanda, 2018). Hijra is the term used to refer to transgenders in many parts of India. Indian eunuchs, also known as Hijras, are a community of people in India who identify as neither male nor female, but rather as a third gender. Hijras have been a part of Indian culture for centuries and have been mentioned in ancient texts, mythology, iconography, and literature. In the text, Cultural Anthropology, Lumen traces the etymology of the word Hijra to the Arabic root, *hjr*. (Kumari, 2020). It means the departure or leaving one's tribe. Hence the idea of transformation is there in the very name. Since hijra is commonly understood to originate from Urdu and gained widespread usage in the subcontinent following the Mughal Empire's establishment in the 16th century, it becomes challenging to establish a direct connection between this term and the expressions found in Sanskrit and Pali manuscripts that denoted "unmales and the third sex" before this era. These earlier designations included *triyaprakrti*, *kliba*, and *napumsaka*. The Transgenders are known by many names such as Hijra, Eunuch, Kinnar, Aravani, Kothi, Shiv Shakti, Jogtas, etc. in India. (Michaelraj, 2015)

"A real hijra is said to be like an ascetic or sannyasi- completely free of sexual desire." (Reddy, 2005) Many hijras choose to undergo a transformative procedure known as the nirvan operation, during which the penis and testes are removed. This nirvan act is believed to grant them the ability to bestow fertility blessings upon newlywed couples. The term "badhai" refers to the compensation they receive for these services. Additionally, a distinct occupational role among certain hijras involves engaging in sex work, earning them the designation of kandra hijras. Traditionally, it was conveyed that prostitution was not a part of hijra customs. When describing badhai hijras, they were described as individuals who earned their livelihood through singing and dancing, primarily supported by their "badhai" income. Whenever a birth occurred within the royal palace, the hijras were summoned without fail. During those moments, all hijras exhibited exceptional skills in singing and dancing, beyond description. Their presence was sought immediately to bestow blessings upon the newborn. This era marked a time of considerable honor for the hijra community. Only through deeper exploration did the topic of sex work emerge, even from the kandra hijras themselves. These two vocational identities appear to be separate and possess distinct levels of social standing. The badhai hijras are perceived as hijras with "izzat" or respect. Conversely, the kandra hijras envision a common path for all hijras, wherein everyone begins as a sex worker, and with changes in their bodies or desires, transitions to the role of ascetic badhai hijras. This trajectory, however, is met with disagreement from the badhai hijras, who consider these two paths to be inherently distinct,

reflecting the contrast between authentic and artificial hijras. (Reddy, 2005)

Hijras express a strong connection to divine entities. When Rama in Ramayana was about to begin his journey to the forest after being exiled from his country for fourteen years, he delivered a speech requesting all the men and women to return to the country. However, some individuals remained motionless and did not move. Rama inquired about them, and they replied by saying that they were neither men nor women. In response, Rama blessed them with the power that whatever they speak would come true. (Sawant, 2024)

One of the hijra characters in the ethnography *With Respect to Sex* said, "We are like Arjuna in his Brhannala incarnation. Some hijras may say, 'not the Brhannala incarnation because that was because of a curse.' But our life is also a curse isn't it?" (Pugh, 1988, Reddy, 2005). As Reddy says, Mahabharata has several references to individuals who may be identified as transgender or gender non-conforming. One of the most notable examples is that of Shikhandi, who was born a woman but later transformed into a man.

In a Hindu creation narrative, as documented by O'Flaherty (1973), Siva, the paramount "creative ascetic," is called upon to shape the world. Accepting the task, he withdraws for a millennium to prepare. During this interval, Vishnu and Brahma, anxious and restless, generate a multitude of deities and other entities while Siva undergoes tapas. Upon Siva's return and readiness to initiate creation, he realizes that the process is already underway. Consequently, he fractures his linga (phallus) and casts it onto the earth. As aptly noted by O'Flaherty, "[The linga] transitions from being an origin of individual fecundity to a source of universal fertility" (1973). In a parallel manner, hijras undergo the nirvan operation and inter their severed organs in the soil. Subsequently, they believe in their capacity to bestow fertility upon others. By relinquishing their personal fecundity, they acquire a universal procreative potency. Such narratives serve as a source of both validation and authority for hijras, who openly draw from these accounts to validate their distinctive position concerning creativity and fertility. (Reddy, 2005)

The identity of hijra evolved during the Delhi Sultanate (1226-1526) and Mughal Empire (1526-1707). During the 17th century, eunuchs gained trust as valued attendants within the Mughal courts. Although now considered derogatory, historical investigations reveal eunuch and hijra were once used interchangeably for India's distinctive gender identities. Capitalizing on their gender uniqueness, eunuchs enjoyed unrestricted movement between the men's and women's domains. They provided protection to harem women and nurtured their children (Jaffrey, 1998). Chronicles recount those eunuchs who held the roles of both intimate companions and cherished confidants to monarchs and princes (Jaffrey 1998). These enslaved eunuch attendants assumed multifarious responsibilities, ranging from administrative duties to advisory roles in royal courts.

Eunuchs enjoyed revered and respectable lives till the advent of the West. Colonizers with the help of the tool named cultural imperialism, enthroned the psyche of Indians and transfigured their views towards the transgender community. Starting in the 1850s, colonial authorities aimed to suppress hijra customs, viewing them as socially indecent and resistant to moral change. Under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, hijras were already criminalized. In 1861, the North-Western Provinces sought a 'special law' targeting hijras. (Christopher, & Karikkat, 2023). By 1870, high-ranking British officials supported this approach, leading to an anti-hijra campaign across the Indian subcontinent. Anti-hijra measures were introduced, including a ban on castration, a rare hijra practice. This law also prohibited initiation through castration, as administrators argued that hijra children couldn't provide informed consent. They were labelled as criminals and different laws were brought against the transgender people during the colonization. (Singh, 2022)

Anosh Irani's novel *The Parcel* looks into the lives of the transgender community, a marginalized group residing at the lower echelons of society. It poignantly highlights the struggles of women coerced into prostitution. Set in Kamathipura, Mumbai's notorious red-light district, the narrative unfolds through a third-person perspective, showcasing the grim realities of existence in the brothel-laden area. The story revolves around Madhu, a forty-year-old transgender individual who has transitioned from a sex worker to a street beggar. Tasked with mentoring Kinjal, a young girl trafficked from Nepal for sex work, Madhu's journey is emblematic of the title *The Parcel*, symbolizing the untouched innocence of young girls sold into this grim life. The novel intricately explores themes of self-realization and the identity crises faced by transgender individuals and female prostitutes alike. (S & Maheshwary, 2023).

2. The Rationale for The Current Study

The rationale behind the selection of the work *The Parcel* by Anosh Irani could be the author's unique perspective and literary style that allows for a meticulous exploration of themes such as identity, marginalization, and otherness. The novel is set in Mumbai's red-light district and follows the life of a transgender sex worker named Madhu who is given the task of grooming a young girl to enter the sex trade. The novel challenges traditional notions of identity and subverts stereotypes through its use of symbolism and moral ambiguity.

The existing literature on Anosh Irani's *The Parcel* has primarily focused on themes of gender, sexuality, and prostitution. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the symbolic elements of the novel and the exploration of fluid rejection and moral ambiguity as means of transcending otherness. This paper aims to address this gap by offering a detailed analysis of the symbolism in the novel and exploring how fluid rejection and moral ambiguity are used to subvert traditional notions of identity and otherness.

3. Research Question

RQ1- How does Anosh Irani use symbolism in *The Parcel* to explore themes of otherness, marginalization, and identity?

RQ2- In what ways does the use of fluid rejection and moral ambiguity in *The Parcel* challenge traditional notions of identity and contribute to the novel's overall themes of transcending otherness?

4. Objectives

To analyze the symbolic elements used in the novel and explore how they contribute to the themes of otherness, marginalization, and identity.

To examine the use of fluid rejection and moral ambiguity in the novel and their impact on the subversion of traditional notions of identity and otherness.

5. Literature Review

The objective of this paper is to dissect the manner in which the novel delves into the themes of otherness, marginalization, and identity by employing symbolism. The literature review pertinent to this subject accentuates the deficiencies and constraints present within the current body of literature. These gaps encompass a scant concentration on the symbolic facets within the novel, as well as a restricted examination of the concepts of fluid rejection and moral ambiguity.

An article by Chaudhary, et.al., (2021) explores the significant shift towards inclusivity and dialogue between marginalized and mainstream genders in Indian literature, exemplified by the "Third Gender Poetry Meet." Focusing on Anosh Irani's novel *The Parcel*, the study delves into the portrayal of trans characters, highlighting the multifaceted struggles of the hijra protagonist in dealing with various forms of rejection.

Maji's article (2023) explores the themes of marginalization and identity formation in the novel. The paper delves into Madhu's poignant evolution, highlighting her struggle to reconcile body and soul while contending with ostracization. In the context of the red-light district's milieu, the study illuminates Madhu's psychological maturation, ultimately underlining the paramount significance of embracing one's authentic self within the queer community, transcending the confines of a patriarchal society.

Jayakanth's article (2022) explores the representation of Eros, as described by Sigmund Freud, in the novel through the voice of a hijra character. The article draws on psychoanalytic theory to analyze the character's experiences of desire and sexuality. The author argues that the novel challenges traditional understandings of gender and sexuality and offers a complex portrayal of the hijra community. The article concludes by highlighting the perseverance of the protagonist to manifest herself as a transgender amidst the disallowance of society.

Aiwale's article (2019) analyzes the emergence of a hidden culture in the novel, which is represented through the lives of the marginalized sex workers. The author draws on postmodernism to examine how the real culture is pulled down in the name of modern technological development. The author also discusses how the current India has been dwelling in the emerging hidden issue such as prostitution and sexual slavery.

Nnodim's chapter (2022) is a part of the book "The Routledge Companion to Literary Urban Studies" which provides an analysis of Anosh Irani's novels set in Bombay, including *The Parcel*. The author draws on urban studies and postcolonial theory to examine how the city is imagined and represented in the novels. The chapter highlights the significance of the novels by decoding the experiences of marginalized communities in urban spaces.

While antecedent works have diligently explored facets spanning gender, sexuality, cultural milieu, discrimination, gender bias, and psychological dimensions, this article assumes a distinct vantage point, meticulously dissecting the novel's strategic utilization of symbolism, fluid rejection, and moral ambiguity.

6. Methodology

The research article employs both descriptive analysis and symbolism as research methods. Descriptive qualitative research methods focus on capturing the essence of data through detailed descriptions and explanations, enabling researchers to deeply explore and interpret the information. By employing qualitative data and descriptive techniques, researchers can uncover patterns, themes, and overtones within the dataset, leading to a rich and comprehensive analysis of the subject under study. The descriptive analysis involves a detailed examination of the text itself, focusing on various literary elements such as language, structure, and themes. This method is used to uncover hidden meanings, symbols, and motifs that contribute to the overall interpretation of the text. Symbolism, on the other hand, is a literary device used by authors to imbue objects, actions, or characters with deeper meaning beyond their literal interpretation. M.H.Abrams remarks, "In the broadest sense a symbol is anything which signifies something In discussing literature, however, the term symbol is only applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event".(Abrams, 1999). In this research paper, the authors analyze the use of symbolism in *The Parcel*, exploring how it contributes to the novel's themes of otherness, marginalization, and identity. Through the analysis of symbols, the article examines how Anosh Irani uses objects, events, and characters in the novel to convey complex ideas related to otherness, identity, and marginalization. "Symbols are used as visible sign to suggest something invisible and are capable of evoking indefinite suggestiveness which becomes a very useful tool for a writer to comprehend and communicate his profound vision of reality." (Sharma, 2014). For instance, the novel's titular "parcel" serves as a potent symbol for the trafficking of women and the commodification of their bodies.

By combining descriptive analysis and symbolism as research methods, the authors provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the novel's meaning and significance. This approach allows for a thorough examination of the text's literary elements and the underlying messages they convey. Hence, the research method provides a valuable contribution to the analysis of literature, particularly in uncovering the deeper meanings and interpretations of a text.

7. Discussion

7.1 Symbolism & Fluid Rejection in Anosh Irani's Eponymous Novel *The Parcel*

The Parcel by Anosh Irani is about the Transgender sex workers in the so-called Mumbai city's red-light district Kamathipura which is a place of terrible poverty and unspeakable crime. "The world saw the prostitutes standing on display behind huge windows with bars and called these rooms "The Cages," but Madhu knew there was only one cage. It started at Alexandra Cinema and went all the way down to Underwear Tree." (Irani, 2016) The protagonist refers to the kamathipura as the only cage that she knows. The protagonist of this novel Madhu was born as a boy, but transgender by choice. Throughout the novel, Madhu's character undergoes a significant transformation as she navigates her way through the complexities of her life and struggles to find a sense of belonging in a society that has rejected her.

It happened in the year 1984, the year with much significance for Madhu when he was ten. He lived with his parents and younger brother but by that time he started to feel himself as a woman and the people around traced the change in his gestures and attitudes. During this critical stage of development, parents must be supportive, but unfortunately, Madhu's parents failed in this aspect. Madhu's mother always associated their family's pride with Madhu's gender. "You behave like a girl. We may be poor, but as a teacher he commands respect... and you are taking away the one thing that he has. Can you not find it in your heart to listen to him?" (Irani, 2016)

Madhu's encounter with Gurumai who was the head of the hijra clan where Madhu joined was a significant moment for the ten-year-old. Gurumai, the guru of a clan referred to Madhu as "chikini," acknowledging her as a female. This recognition was empowering for Madhu, who had been deprived of acceptance by her parents. Although Madhu's father was disturbed by the scent of the girl that seemed to be trapped inside Madhu, his greatest fear of being talked about by others had already been realized. Madhu's father believed that his child had failed to fulfill his duty as a son, and he was disappointed with Madhu's inability to conform to his expectations. However, in reality, it was the father who had failed in his duty to support his child.

Madhu is a complex character, and her experiences and actions are shaped by her past traumas. As a child, she was abandoned by her parents and left to fend for herself on the streets. She was forced to work as a sex worker to survive, and this has left her with deep emotional scars. Nivedita Menon in *Seeing Like a Feminist* state that "The institution that manages this policing of sexuality is the patriarchal heterosexual family. The family as it exists is the core that sustains the social order." (Menon, 2012). Madhu's past throughout the novel illustrates the trauma that followed the sexual disciplining carried out by his overbearing father and timid mother. "I am indeed a migrant, a wanderer. For almost three decades, I have floated through the city's red-light district like a ghost" (Irani, 2016) says Madhu. Madhu as well as the entire hijra community are being distressed by the exclusion and exile from society.

Irani uses various symbols in the novel to deepen the reader's understanding of these themes. The title of the novel is symbolic. As Baldick says, "a symbol is specifically evocative kind of image; that is, a word or phrase referring to a concrete object, scene, or action which also has some further significance associated with it. . . ." (Baldick, 2005). The novel is named after the practice of selling young girls into prostitution, which is referred to as "The Parcel." *The Parcel* is a symbol of the commodification of women's bodies and the abuse and exploitation of the vulnerable. It is also a metaphor for the trafficking of young girls who are treated as mere objects and are denied agency and autonomy.

The Parcel in the novel is a ten-year-old girl Kinjal from rural Nepal who has been sent to work as a sex worker for a good sum of money by her family members. Madhu has been assigned to train her mentally and physically for sex work. Though Madhu is not ready to do that immoral work, she must do that to recognize herself as one among the hijra clan. "Kinjal was a fine name, but so was Ritu or Lekha or Aarti—a parcel's name had no power, because no matter what, all names added up to one thing: zero" (Irani, 2016). The word Parcel acts as the story-turner of this work which shows the humanity within Madhu who has been a victim of this animalistic world and finally decided to sacrifice her life to save the ten years old girl, she was training for sex work.

The City of Mumbai serves as a symbol of the struggle between tradition and modernity. The city is rapidly developing, but its red-light district remains entrenched in tradition, with women and transgender individuals marginalized and oppressed. The contrast between the old and new parts of the city mirrors the conflict between Madhu's traditional community and her desire to break free from it. Mumbai also represents the possibility of change and redemption. Through Madhu's journey in the novel, we see that change is possible, even in dire circumstances. For Madhu and other transgender individuals, the city is both a place of refuge and a place of danger. "The city never slept—that is what people said time and again. It never slept, thought Madhu, because wounds were wide awake." (Irani, 2016). According to Johann Wolfgang,

Symbolism alters the experience into a notion and a notion into a representative image that contribute to a deeper understanding of a specific idea. Once the idea is voiced through the image, it keeps dynamic and inaccessible. Even though it is articulated in different tongues, it stays deep and indescribable. (Hillis, 2021)

Madhu experienced a deep sense of unease and alienation while in her own home, as she struggled with the dissonance between her assigned gender and her true identity. It was challenging for her to maintain the facade expected of her, and she often feels trapped in a body that didn't align with her innermost feelings and emotions. "The only place you will ever be able to call your home is where we live. It is called Hijra Gulli." (Irani, 2016). When Madhu was abandoned by her whole family, she felt her home in the words of Gurumai. He decided to find his nest in that hijra Gulli. In the novel, hijra gulli serves as a significant symbol that instills a strong sense of community and belonging among the hijras. When finally, he reached that place, everyone invited him cordially. One of the transgenders

in that clan gave him bangles, which made him more loved and empowered than being in his mother's womb for nine months.

The fact that nine bangles on his wrist can evoke feelings of love and comfort in him suggests that he may not have experienced these emotions before since he found out that he belongs to a different gender. The comparison to nine months in their mother's womb further emphasizes the depth of the emotional impact that the bangles have had on Madhu. As Langer says, "symbol is a term that can make readers, viewers, etc., think that a word has a function that includes more than just language. Symbols allow a person to describe what is conveyed; symbols do not stand only as a substitute for an object." (Langer, 1953). The womb is a symbol of safety, security, and unconditional love, and the fact that the bangles have surpassed this experience in terms of making Madhu feel loved is a testament to their importance. It highlights the power of material possessions in providing comfort and emotional support to individuals who may have experienced neglect or trauma in their lives.

7.2 Faunal Symbolism and the Enigmatic Presence of Madhu

"A sari that made her resemble a parrot, a gaudy creature that sat croaking on one's windowsill. She had a beak for a nose, and she had often thought of herself as a crow—her dark skin made her feel so—but today the green sari gave her a parrot's sheen, made her two birds at once. If only she could fly." (Irani, 2016)

Madhu, who is wearing a green sari that makes her look like a parrot and the word gaudy reflects the unpleasant feel of Madhu about herself in the eyes of the outer world. The statement "resemble a parrot, a gaudy creature that sat croaking on one's windowsill" can be seen as a derogatory comparison. It implies that the person being referred to is like a parrot, which is commonly perceived as a noisy and showy bird that repeats what it hears without any real understanding of the words or concepts being communicated. Additionally, the use of the word "gaudy" further reinforces the negative connotations associated with the comparison to a parrot, implying that the person being referred to is loud and ostentatious.

Madhu, who has dark skin, has often felt like a crow. The phrase "made her two birds at once" suggests that Madhu is embodying both the qualities of a crow and a parrot simultaneously. This may reflect her complex identity and the different aspects of her personality that she is navigating. The phrase "If only she could fly" implies that Madhu feels trapped or limited in some way. It may reflect her desire for freedom or a need to escape from her current situation.

The author employs animal imagery to depict Madhu's isolated and bitter existence, highlighting their desire for human connection. The author uses the phrase "there was nobody, only a stray dog would show up" which highlights Madhu's lack of human connections and the desperation of her situation. The author compares Madhu's future to that of a dog's pungent urine smell. The phrase "to whose pungent urine the taste of his later life" is a metaphorical expression that suggests the character's bitter and disillusioned state. The use of the word "pungent" implies a strong and unpleasant smell, which can be associated with decay and decay of hope. The phrase "the taste of his later life" suggests that Madhu's life has become bitter and unpleasant, perhaps due to the decision he is proceeding. (Irani, 2016). The metaphorical language used in the sentence adds a layer of emotional depth, conveying Madhu's inner turmoil and bitterness as well as their search for any form of companionship, but she got it only from stray dogs.

To illustrate the struggles of being a transgender individual, Madhu often resorted to comparing herself to animals and birds. She would frequently describe how she felt like a shooed-away crow, constantly facing rejection and discrimination. Crows are often considered pests and are shooed away by people. They are seen as dirty and unwanted, and their presence is often viewed as a nuisance. By comparing herself to a crow, Madhu is expressing her feelings of being unwanted and unwelcome in her surroundings. Like crows, she is seen as an outcast and a nuisance by many people, and her presence is not accepted or appreciated. Symbolism avoids excessive exaggeration and overly bright elements. It strikes a balance between clarity and obscurity, creating a sense of mystery that is both partially illuminated and shadowed. This approach imbues the work with a deep sense of reality and profound meaning. (Liu, 2023).

When the whole hijra clan has been watching rape news, the lawyer asked the judge to punish the criminals with castration. But another man asked to let the animals live along with the other animals. Another man said that castration is not enough, make them hijras and humiliate them. On hearing this statement everyone in the clan raged in anger and disappointment. Madhu keeps on thinking about that news and the punishments. Castration is the punishment for those criminals but in the life of hijras, it is a pathway to higher life. Even society labelled transgender life as all about humiliation. She interrogated God about their creation. If it is a cruel humiliation why should God create hijras? Their creation has been rewarded as the cruelest form of punishment for the rapist. She cannot tolerate those acts. She feels so pathetic about the state of hijras in this world. Society is not ready to accept them as mere human beings. As one of the hijras in Reddy's ethnography states, "Hijras are just hijras, and women are just women. If there's a woman, she'll at least have a little sarm. But hijras are just hijras. They have no sarm" (Reddy, 2005)

Madhu raised an important question about why the news of rape garners so much attention from the public, while issues related to sex workers and transgender individuals often go unnoticed. It seems that the government and society do not show any concern or respect towards eunuchs living in marginalized communities. When news involves individuals from higher social classes, people tend to pay more attention to the matter, however, those living in ghettos, such as eunuchs, often go unheard and their struggles are not acknowledged.

7.3 Lifeless Representation and Madhu

Irani employs the symbolism of the mirror in several incidents throughout the story. As a hijra, Madhu is in a constant state of identity

crisis and is often forced to confront her physical and emotional self. This internal struggle is mirrored in the symbol of the mirror, as Madhu frequently looks into mirrors to see herself, both physically and emotionally. "Madhu had stared at the mirror every single day and tried to beautify herself, and in doing so had masked the person she had turned into." (Irani, 2016).

The mirror symbolizes the idea of self-reflection and introspection. "She knew what the man saw when he looked at her. She didn't need a mirror. She saw herself every single day in the eyes of others, and this man told her nothing new." (Irani, 2016). Madhu's self-worth is tied to how others perceive her, and she is acutely aware of how society views her as an outcast. The statement highlights Madhu's sense of powerlessness, as she feels that she cannot control how others see her. It also shows how Madhu has internalized society's rejection of her and how she perceives herself through the eyes of others. The statement reflects Madhu's desire to be seen as a person and not just as a eunuch or a prostitute. However, the man's gaze reinforces the idea that Madhu is only seen as a sexual object and not as a person with hopes and dreams

It is disheartening to note that many hijras have been coerced into accepting prostitution as their profession, with even new hijras being brainwashed into accepting sex work as their only means of survival. Madhu wisely advised that sex workers should not place too much importance on their physical body, but rather focus on embracing their inner self and soul. By doing so, they can avoid blaming themselves for their circumstances. "As long as her soul was intact, her body could be massacred ten times over." (Irani, 2016). Developing inner selves is crucial for overall development and attaining mental maturity. Madhu used to say that hijras and sex workers should prioritize their inner well-being to achieve a greater sense of self-worth and fulfillment.

During the mid-age of Madhu, she took up the job of a badhai hijra, a traditional dancer and singer who performs at weddings. On one such occasion, while dancing, Madhu inadvertently glanced at the bride's face. The bride's mother immediately called her over and warned her that staring at her daughter's face would render her sterile. Madhu was infuriated by the superstitious belief and admonished the lady for allowing such outdated and baseless beliefs to persist. In a fit of anger, Madhu even shouted that she cannot have a baby because she lacks the necessary anatomy meanwhile, she lifted her sari to show why she doesn't have a child. "Hijras' lifting of their saris is embarrassing and even shameful not only because many people find exposing oneself distasteful, but because it is especially so when "there is nothing there"—a fact, however, that makes the act potentially empowering for hijras." (Reddy, 2005) The fact that she is unable to bear a child due to her lack of female anatomy challenges the traditional notion of motherhood and female identity. As one of the hijras in Reddy's ethnography says, "If people give us respect, then we are also respectful. But if they do not show us respect, then we also abuse them verbally and lift our saris. Then they bow their heads in shame and give us respect. It is like that." (Reddy, 2005).

The name of Kamathipura, a street infamous for prostitution, has been changed to Nimkar Marg in an attempt to remove the negative connotations associated with the area. While the move was intended to bring some respect to the locality, it was viewed as a mere cosmetic change by many, including Madhu, a member of the transgender community. Despite the celebratory atmosphere on the day of the name change, with colorful lights adorning the street, Madhu couldn't help but scoff at the hypocrisy of society. She lamented the fact that although society doesn't accept them as human beings, they are still exploited for prostitution. Merely changing the name won't bring about any real change in the attitudes towards the transgender community. Madhu also pointed out that despite the name change, the sounds of prostitution still ring out in the streets.

"The girl had been bought for a price and was no longer human. She was being converted into Cheez- a thing to be consumed." (Irani, 2016). The phrase "had been bought for a price" highlights the commodification of human beings, reducing them to mere objects for sale. The use of the word "no longer" suggests that the girl's identity as a human being has been stripped away, and she is now seen as something less than human. The phrase "being converted into Cheez" is particularly striking as it compares the girl's transformation to a food item, emphasizing her objectification and dehumanization. The word "thing" further reinforces this idea, as it removes any sense of individuality or humanity from the girl's existence. Overall, these lines speak to the theme of exploitation and the brutal reality faced by many young girls and women who are trafficked into the sex trade industry.

Madhu was crossing the road with a parcel in her hands when she noticed a police van that was painted with the words "Crimes against Women, Children, and Senior Citizens - Call 103". She read the words again and again, finding a strange sense of amusement in them. However, the same road was where she had been forced to deliver the parcel in front of the police before. Madhu felt saddened by the harsh reality that even with the presence of law enforcement, no one seemed to care enough to save and change the lives of those in Kamathipura. As Revathi says none of the law is going to keep transgender people, in Truth about me, a Hijra life story, Sex work was considered a crime, which is why if a rowdy grabbed one of us in the streets, or bundled us into an auto, there was no one to take our side. In fact, from our perspective, there was no difference between police and rowdy. They both behaved similarly. (Revathi, 2010)

Madhu's search for love is as important as her quest for identity, if not more. This is because she was abandoned by her family, which left her with a deep yearning for affection and connection. If her family had accepted her for who she was, Madhu may have pursued a different career and led a different lifestyle. However, their failure to support her during a critical period of her life led her down a path of sex work and begging. As Vidya asserts her demand for inclusion on humanitarian grounds in, I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey., she says: "We need to belong, just as the rest of humanity need to belong. What can we do when we do not have a wall to lean on when we can't find a place to stay?" (Vidya, 2007). Likewise, Madhu wanted to belong in society as a mere human being.

8. Conclusion

Even though society is not giving enough acceptance to the hijra community, World law has recognized transgender as the third gender.

Hijras secured voting rights in 1936, followed by eligibility for local political office in 1977. Their most recent achievement came in 1994 when they earned the significant privilege of participating in national elections as women. As Vivek Shraya says in, *I am Afraid of Men*, “How cruel it is to have endured two decades of being punished for being too girly only to be told that I am now not girly enough.” (Shraya, 2018). Through the character of Madhu, a transgender sex worker, Irani offers a glimpse into the daily struggles of those who are often invisible in society. The novel highlights the complexity of human relationships and the potential for change and redemption. The relationship between Madhu and the young girl in the name of Parcel, whom she is entrusted to care for, is a testament to the transformative power of compassion and empathy.

The Parcel by Anosh Irani is written in a lyrical and gritty style, using vivid descriptions to portray the gritty realities of life in Mumbai's red-light district. The author's voice against the miserable condition of transgenders is very obvious in his language. The author uses a third-person limited point of view to focus primarily on the experiences and perspectives of the main character, Madhu, a transgender sex worker. The narrative technique of the novel involves a non-linear structure, with flashbacks and shifts in time and perspective that provide insight into Madhu's past and present experiences.

The impact of this research is multifaceted. Firstly, the research offers a new perspective on the novel by highlighting the symbolic elements of the text and exploring how these symbols contribute to the novel's themes of otherness, marginalization, and identity. Secondly, the research expands the existing discourse on the representation of marginalized communities in literature by emphasizing the novel's use of fluid rejection and moral ambiguity to subvert traditional notions of identity and otherness. Thirdly, the research opens up new avenues for further exploration of the novel by identifying previously overlooked aspects of the text. This can inspire future research and analysis of the novel and contribute to a better understanding of its themes and significance. The impact of this research is to enrich the existing body of literature on Anosh Irani's *The Parcel* and to offer new insights and perspectives on the novel's themes and symbolism.

In conclusion, Anosh Irani makes great use of the of symbolism in his novel *The Parcel* which serves to add depth and complexity to the narrative, while also providing insight into the themes and characters of the story. Through the process of reading, the reader construct meaning according to its cultural context. According to reader response theory, symbolism acquire meanings that matches the reader's experiences. Through the use of symbols such as the parcel, the mirror, the city the bird, and the Hijra Gulli, Irani explores issues related to gender, sexuality, identity, and power in contemporary Mumbai. The Parcel, for instance, represents both the burden of history and the possibility of redemption, by weaving these and other symbols throughout the novel, Irani creates a richly textured and evocative work of fiction that invites readers to engage with its themes on multiple levels.

The Parcel serves as a potent symbol of how patriarchal systems of power and oppression can manifest in everyday life. By exploring the experiences of the parcel's various characters, Irani sheds light on the often hidden and overlooked realities of life for marginalized individuals in Indian society. *The Parcel* is a hard-hitting and thought-provoking novel that demonstrates the transformative potential of literature and the importance of using symbols to explore complex social issues.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Seshadhri for His abundant grace and blessings. I extend my sincere thanks to my research guide, Dr. S. Vijayalakshmi, Associate Professor at SSL, VIT University, Chennai, for her invaluable guidance and support.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to Seshadhri for His abundant grace and blessings. I extend my sincere thanks to my research guide, Dr. S. Vijayalakshmi, Associate Professor at SSL, VIT University, Chennai, for her invaluable guidance and support.

Authors' contributions

Ms. P. Seshaa Senbagam collected the data and drafted the article. Dr. Vijayalakshmi (corresponding author) assisted with editing, refining ideas, and proofreading the paper. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Not Applicable

Competing interests

The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

- Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Singapore: Thomson and Heine, 1999.
- Aiwale, H. D. (2019). The Emerging Hidden Culture in the Light of Anosh Irani's The Parcel. *Cultural Perspectives in Modern Literature*, 157.
- Baldick, C. (2005). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*. London: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Brown, M. L., & Rounsley, C. A. (1996). *True selves: Understanding transsexualism--for families, friends, coworkers, and helping professionals*. Jossey-Bass.
- Chanda, K. (2018). Indeterminate Bodies: The Politics of Exclusion in Anosh Irani's The Parcel. *SSM JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE*, 7(1), 142-148. Retrieved from <https://ssmahavidyalaya.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/MIDDLE-FLIGHT 2018.pdf#page=157>
- Chaudhary, P., & Agrawal, S. (2021). Anosh Irani's The Parcel: A Study of Ostracization, Exile and Marginalized Sex. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(6).
- Christopher, A. M., & Karikkat, U. K. (2023). From colonial violence to decriminalisation and recognition: An interdisciplinary appraisal of perspectives on Indian LGBTQ+ community's encounter with law. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 27(1), 105-119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2023.2194552>
- Dharma, K. (2020). *Mahabharata: The greatest spiritual epic of all time*. Mandala Publishing.
- Hillis, R. R. (2021). Symbolism in Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist (1837-9): A critical study. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(13).
- Irani, A. (2016). *The parcel*. Knopf Canada.
- Jaffrey, Z. (1998). *The invisibles: A tale of the eunuchs of India*. Vintage.
- Jayakanth, R. (2022). Freud's Eros through the Voice of a Hijra in The Parcel by Anosh Irani. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3).
- Kumari, K. (2020). The Exiled Sex: Centering the Marginalized in Anosh Irani's The Parcel. *Journal of Commerce, Management & Humanities. MANTHAN-SBU*, 1, 40-45.
- Langer, S. K. (1953). *Feeling and form* (Vol. 3). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Learning, L. (2020). *Cultural Anthropology| Simple Book Production*. Lumen Learning. Retrieved from <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/culturalanthropology>
- Liu, X. (2023). A study of symbolism in invisible man. *Lecture Notes on Language and Literature*, 6(13), 78-81. <https://doi.org/10.23977/langl.2023.061312>
- Maji, B. (2023). Coming out of the Closet: A Study of Marginalization and Identity Formation of a Marginalized Sex in Anosh Irani's The Parcel. *Journal of Women Empowerment and Studies (JWES)*, 3(3), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jwes.33.1.7>
- Mal, S. (2018). The hijras of India: A marginal community with paradox sexual identity. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 34(1), 79. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijsp.ijsp_21_17
- Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Penguin UK.
- Michelraj, M. (2015). Historical evolution of transgender community in India. *Asian Review of Social Sciences*, 4(1), 17-19. <https://doi.org/10.51983/arss-2015.4.1.1304>
- Nnodim, R. (2022). City Imaginaries from the margins. *The Routledge Companion to Literary Urban Studies*, 360-372.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003124931-28>

- Pugh, J. (1988). Divination and Ideology in the Benares Hindu Community. *Shariat and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*, 289.
- Reddy, G. (2010). *With respect to sex: Negotiating hijra identity in South India*. University of Chicago Press.
- Revathi, A. (2010). *The truth about me: A hijra life story*. Penguin UK.
- S, S., & Maheshwary, U. (2023). Transcending violence, embracing identity: Navigating the transgender experience in Anosh Irani's the parcel. *Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature*, 6(8), 227-234. <https://doi.org/10.51879/pijssl/060825>.
- Sawant, M. R. (2024). TRANSGENDERS: REFLECTIONS IN INDIAN HISTORY. *A GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES*, 7(2), 52-56. Retrieved from <https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/>
- Sharma, R. (2014). A Mythic and Symbolic Study of Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope. *The Criterion An International Journal in English*, 5(3), 215-220. Retrieved from <https://www.the-criterion.com/V5/n3/Rajani.pdf>
- Shraya, V. (2018). *I'm afraid of men*. Penguin.
- Singh, A. K. (2022). From colonial castaways to current Tribulation: Tragedy of Indian hijra. *Unisia*, 40(2), 297-314. <https://doi.org/10.20885/unisia.vol40.iss2.art3>
- Subramaniam, K. (2021). *We are not the others: Reflections of a transgender Activist*. Notion Press.
- Vidya, L. S. (2014). *I am Vidya: A transgender's journey*. Rupa Publications India.