

Caesurae Special

Translating Orality



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Translating Orality: Empowering the Indigenous Culture and Literary Traditions in India

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Abstract

Orality is one of the most important features of ancient Indian Literature. In oral cultures messages are always transferred in the presence of the speaker. Oral traditions bring people together whereas the written tradition engenders greater individuality as reading is a rather solitary activity; hence, oral transmission does never lose its prominence. Literary writings in India with a multilingual and multicultural history owe a lot to orality, indigeneity, memory, folklore and translation. Folklore and folk poetics is the precursor to written literature and translation attempts to preserve orality/oral-traditions which would otherwise suffer losses and freeze 'knowledge' due to the reduction of its circularity. This paper would focus on how the shift of the 'oral' to the 'written' through translation has reinforced the idea of empowering the oral 'stories' and how this allows for dissemination of the same across languages/cultures to enrich the corpus of literary writing in India. Manifestation of indigenous knowledge through translation of oral heritage is essential to empathise with the indigene struggling with their 'subalternity' to survive 'amnesia' and save their knowledge by participating in the mainstream.

Key words: culture, indigenous, orality, power, translation.

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“Translation is an empowering activity.”

(Marilyn Gaddis Rose)

Every uttered word is a text and it is translatable, and therefore, translation and orality is as old and intimate as language. Translation plays a crucial role in the cultural evolution of the ‘word’ because little of our life and culture is not surrounded and illuminated by translation of oral traditions. Translation and orality have always been associated together in human life across all times and spaces and “every written piece of literature contains numerous layers of orality” (xv), says G.N. Devy in his introduction to *Painted Words*. Today when ‘words are not “fixed” on paper’, translating orality has assumed a wider implication that proceeds from oral to the written to everything that is communicable in oral as well as written form. It incorporates all writing that interfuses the two: what we speak because we remember and that which we write because we may not remember. Literature is a continuation of orality and oral traditions and the symbiotic relationship between the oral and the written text defines the characteristics of literary writings in every respect.

Orality and oral traditions have always been an integral and important part of the lives of Indians for generations that have conveyed the ‘rooted’ and ‘cherished’ societal values and contributed towards the expansion of vital segments of cultural wor(l)ds. The stories, tales, songs and traditional practices heard as children from ancestors are communicative instances of learning and teaching lessons about the ‘past’ and about life in general. The use of oral narratives as sources of wisdom and education has proved as reliable as the written/recorded experiences. In India, the indigenous/native and tribal – though these are not synonyms yet too often indistinctively used as alternatives in the ethnic frame of Indian cultural history – culture and literature has been historically shaped and defined by oral/speech (*vak*) traditions

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and ‘performative improvisations’. The philological and aesthetic practices have depended on the intimate relationship between the oral and written transmissions/translations. A continuous shift from the oral to the written tradition has been observed in the translation/transcreation practices that have reinscribed the Indian oral traditions right from the Vedic texts and scriptures which have been called ‘*sruti*’ for their oral transmission tradition to the epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata*, the Buddhist sermons, *Jataka* tales, fables from *Panchtantra*, Bhakti literature down to the tribal folklore, folk-tales, folk-dances, folk-songs, anecdotes, riddles, legends, ballads, dialects, narrations of genealogies, law, customs, local beliefs, historical narrations, dramas, myths, proverbs, idioms, prayers, rituals, devotional songs, war cries, paintings, art of weaving, etc. and instilled among the readers a sense of collective narrative heritage.

In Indian context ‘*sruti*’ (what is heard) and ‘*smṛti*’ (what is remembered) constitutes the essential means of imparting and receiving knowledge in the ancient *gurukul* system of education. *Vedas* (the Sanskrit word *Veda* i.e. ‘*knowledge*’ or ‘*wisdom*’ is derived from the root *vid-* “*to know*”) are the oldest scriptures/texts that have been considered “*impersonal, authorless*” and have been preserved since ancient times; originally, the transmission of Vedic literature was by oral tradition across generations and possibly written and recorded at a later age by countless writers/authors. The text of *Nāṭyaśāstra* also testifies that the state of transmission of knowledge and information in the theory of aesthetics and drama is fundamentally based on, like the *Vedas*, ‘*pathya*’ i.e. the articulated spoken word and the incanted word. Bharata has employed a familiar mythology and cosmology that “may have been transmitted orally on account of its cryptic aphoristic verses” (Vatsyayan 28).

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With a long history of oral compositions and transmissions literary history in India has witnessed the recording of historical knowledge, information and experience that does an intangible service to mankind thus preserving valuable heritage which would have otherwise suffered decline and disappearance. Learning since ages has been imparted in the traditional ‘*guru-shishya parampara*’ in oral tradition whether it be the knowledge of grammar, dance forms, prayers invoking the blessings of God, architectural heritage, celebrations of festivals, medicinal practices, law, customs, ecology or weaving-art to quote a few examples. Kapila Vatsyayan’s authentication is relevant here:

The composition itself is the word-heard rather than the word-written. The word-heard – articulated, intoned – is perennial and immutable, as in the case of the Vedas (*sruti*); the safeguard of its precise exactitude and purity is a matter of a great and grand system of oral transmission. The Vedic could be preserved for centuries only because of the system of intonation and recitation which broke down the word not only to its syllabic value but more. (29)

The *Bhagvad Geeta* is another apt illustration of transmission/translation from oral to written tradition. The text is set in a narrative framework of dialogue between Pandava prince Arjun and his ‘*charioteer*’ Krishna who delivers ‘wisdom’ through his discourse as he guides and counsels Arjuna to fulfil his duty to uphold ‘*Dharma*’. According to scholars *Gita* is probably the most translated and circulated of the texts in multiple languages, Indian as well as foreign and the essence of the message has earned a growing appreciation and popularity. Bhakti poetry or devotional literature too has its roots in the oral traditions: the Bhakti poets composed ‘*dohas*’ (couplets) or ‘*sakhis*’, epigrammatic and aphoristic verse forms used by them to communicate wisdom that emanates from the common life experiences, with maxims, sayings and proverbs derived from eventful scenes of life and nature, all being originally oral in nature featuring in the micro-histories of the lives and gospels of

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uncountable saints, who were saints first and authors/poets afterwards. They taught lessons of humanity, morality and spirituality claiming historicity through memory with continuous invocation of the past relieved in their ‘democratization’ of multiple cultural voices and linguistic codes attracting people from across the country.

Since 2011 Ganesh Devy, founder of Bhasha Research and Publication Trust, under a project called the People’s Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), has been on a mission to preserve some of India’s traditional, and predominantly, oral heritage by recording the languages spoken by thousands of communities, castes and tribes across the country. Language is the medium by which the sum total of all knowledge — history, culture, traditions, laws, ecology, etc — is passed on from one generation to the next; and with the death of a language, the cultural history and knowledge of a community estimated to have been in existence for years is lost forever. PLSI has provided a solid framework within which to explore and understand the extent of India’s cultural diversity and linguistic heritage across the country to record the existence of minor, rarely heard and endangered languages – that are disappearing at a rapid pace and, with it, a part of our history, knowledge and culture – by capturing data in the form of a set of keywords, folk tales, folk songs and such, along with translations into a more widely spoken Indian languages.

How orally ‘received’ indigeniety transferred to literature does survive through translation in contemporary literary scenario on account of its ‘hegemonic ascendancy’ for its ‘widely shared post-colonial wisdom’ is acknowledged by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi with reference to Mahasweta Devi, who, claims Ganesh Devy, is neither from any tribal language nor herself a tribal but ‘has drawn our attention to the tribals more evocatively’: “Her

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writings on the tribal communities have been the most sympathetic imaginative approximations of the tribal existence” (Devy xvi). Bassnett and Trivedi observe that,

...in inveterately multilingual countries such as India, not only is most literature being written now in the indigenous languages but the majority of translations being done are from one Indian language into the others. In 1996, when Mahasweta Devi, translated, introduced and theorized in English...received India’s highest literary award, the Jnanpeeth (at a ceremony at which special guest was Nelson Mandela) and acknowledged in her acceptance speech the role played by translation in gaining her a wider audience beyond Bengali in which she writes, she mentioned with gratitude the role...of the National Book Trust of India, and earlier a Hindi publisher himself, who had for many years facilitated the translation and dissemination of her works into Hindi and other Indian languages. There are thus two Mahasweta Devis’, the one addressing the political and cultural realities on her native ground in her native language...and the other the author of a few selected short stories which through English translations have been borne across and coopted within the post-colonial agenda set by the Western academy. And there are many Mahasweta Devis’ in each of the Indian languages whose writings engage with a whole range of post-colonial issues but who are yet untranslated into English and therefore unknown to post-colonial discourse. (11)

Throughout history Indian societies have heavily banked upon orality to maintain and sustain a record of their cultures and identities. Oral narratives form the foundation by means of which ‘knowledge’ is (re)produced, preserved and transmitted from generation to generation connecting the ‘speaker’ and the ‘listener’ in community experience uniting the past and present in collective memory. Human beings always strive to create conditions in which sustainability and survival of their culture and knowledge can ensure their ‘power’ that inherently permeates in every culture-situation. Migration, displacement and rehabilitation have always been as much the realities of human life as that of language and culture. Oral traditions are liable to wither away on account of different factors: socio-political-economic transitions, cultural shifts, technological innovations, globalization, cosmopolitanism etc.

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Michael Cronin (*Translation and Identity*, 2006) discusses the importance of interaction between the local and the global and interprets language contact zone not as an innocent transaction but a determinant of ‘identity’ which is never bounded by loyalties and commitments but is ‘infinitely malleable human material’. One is constantly sustained by a convergence between local/original histories and their migration towards the mainstream politics. Translation conceives of identity in a more open and flexible fashion in favour of voluntary allegiances and affiliations with the contemporary world in which the indigene are invited to participate and negotiate to enable them to protect, preserve and survive.

Language and culture are the most useful matrices to map the indigene/native/tribal identity and in the absence of transmission, translation, and transference “the literary imaginations of those communities whose speech traditions face the prospect of forced aphasia” (Devy x) will disappear. Translators are, thus, ‘cultural cosmopolitans’ who in travelling from one text to the other, one language to another/many and one culture to multiple cultures, journey from the location, history and memory of one’s birth towards ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ to say in the words of Stuart Hall with a desire to float free from singular location of the text. Local languages or dialects are the mediums to transmit local cultural traditions in general and oral traditions in particular. Translation/transformation of these experiences brings alive the exploration of the oral wor(l)d of these indigenous narratives creating a feeling of relevance, appreciation and a sense of belongingness towards native cultural heritage and that can ‘calibrate’ cultural control and produce desired effects for the sake of social, political or literary commitments, if and when translated and transferred.

Translation is a “dialogue” and “the translator is an all-powerful reader and a free agent as a writer” (5), points out Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi; in their opinion translation is ‘a

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reciprocal process of exchange' between the donor and the recipient cultures; they reject the Euro-centric extremes of restricted interpretation of any text and argue along with Sherry Simon and Homi Bhabha in favour of “a new politics of in-betweenness, for a reassessment of the creative potentialities of liminal space” (Bassnett and Trivedi 5). Every culture speaks through ‘words’ which represent not only sets of values, behavioural patterns and attitudes but at the same time culture is characterised by ‘*between*’ spaces which stand ‘*beyond*’ all boundaries for negotiations and intermediary performances with translation being one of them. Homi Bhabha asserts that,

At the century's edge, we are less exercised by annihilation – the death of the author – or epiphany – the birth of the 'subject'. Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present'... The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. . . . We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion... These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1-2)

In the face of cultural differences and asymmetrical power relations between the marginalized indigene and the ‘mainstream’ Bhabha feels that there is a need to ‘destroy the binary structure of power and identity’ to develop a ‘new’ “structure for the representation of subaltern and post-colonial agency” (237) and hence his question becomes pertinent in relation to the empowerment of the indigene who can “speak of the reality of survival and negotiation” (255) through translation:

How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be

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collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (2)

André Lefevere in the *Introduction of Translation/History/Culture* (1982) questions that “who makes the text in one’s own culture “represent” the text in the foreign culture?” or “who translates, why, and with what aim in mind?” and who selects texts to be “represented”? And the answer is to be understood in his assertion that because all languages have not been ‘created equally’ and some are privileged with ‘a more prestigious status than others’, the consciousness behind all translations is to ‘invoke the authority of the text’ and, therefore, ‘translation has to do with authority and legitimacy, and ultimately with power’. The native culture text if translated in another language – and if that language enjoys prestige and prerogative to proliferate ‘significance’ – it can open channels for the indigenous ‘wor(l)d’ to subvert the narrative of ‘knowledge-text’ towards a synthesizing and homogenizing culture-wave. Translated discourses would go far into exercising an influence in the development and dissemination of cultures/knowledges because culture is no longer a monolithic entity but a product emanating from the vagaries and vicissitudes of societal evolution. While translating orality the translator does translate cultures/knowledges making *experiences* accessible to all cultures to enrich our literary writings with all that has been of advantage across time and place through generations. Vinay Dharwadkar in his article “*A.K. Ramanujan’s theory and practice of translation*” asserts that the translator gives the reader a ‘sense’ of the text’s ‘native tradition’ as “the translator, together with his or her reader, enters an immense network of intertextual relations, transactions and confluences spanning both time and space” (Bassnett and Trivedi 122).

Today the ‘word’ *lives* without ‘border’ in a multilingual and multicultural spectrum and people speaking different languages with divergent cultural practices transfer ideas to each

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other and forge a ‘contact zone’ where translator has become, in the opinion of Gayatri Spivak, a ‘culture-broker’ who is a go-between, an intermediary to reduce conflict and produce change embodying partnerships among divergent cultures. Sherry Simon, in the essay “*Translating and interlingual creation in the contact zone*” has proposed that “Translation is not only a process of linguistic exchange; it is *work* which enables a new book to come into being...This life begins with publication, and continues through fortuitous encounters with those who infuse it with meaning.” (Bassnett and Trivedi 66) The shift in the attitudes of the contemporary writers/authors/critics towards the “acknowledgement of the perils of monolingualism and monoculturalism in a globalized world” (Bassnett 145) has increased the focus on the indigenous oral texts and their movement from orality to other forms of linguistic performances including translation from one language to another (mainly English) or many. The revival of interest in the native literary texts and Indian Vernacular Literature has resulted in the creation of ‘new’ texts relocating orality in translation to empower those literary and cultural identities which have been struggling under the duress of survival. Ganesh Devy interprets it as ‘the arrival of a new sensibility in the field of literary creativity’ and asserts that

...the literature of the Adivasis is not a new ‘movement’ or a fresh ‘trend’ in the field of literature; most people have simply been unaware of its existence, and that is not the fault of the tribals themselves. What might be new is the present attempt to see imaginative expression in tribal languages not as ‘folklore’ but as literature, and to hear tribal speech not as a dialect but as a language. (xiv-xv)

Thus, it can be said that translation offers an optimistic view regarding the *emplacement* of the marginalized people of the tribal/indigenous society in the mainstream and has developed a contemporaneous understanding of the cross-cultural communication and the inter-relationship between society, culture and translation. This ‘new’ approach is different from

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the earlier one-sided translation practice in India which was based on the translation and adaptation of classical literature into Indian vernaculars and it establishes a strong link between oral literature, language, and cultural history; it has been forging the aesthetics of ‘revitalization’ of the ignored or suppressed literary traditions spurred by the identity-crisis, ‘fragility’ and vulnerability of indigenous people’s knowledge/culture resources. This new translation ‘sensitivity’ emphasizes on ‘relocating’ the orality of literary traditions, Indian classical literature and folklore into Indian vernaculars, English and other European languages with which came into force reinterpretation/redefinition/representation of knowledge-power-culture relationships ‘to foreground the potentially unfamiliar cultural materials’, to borrow the phrase from Maria Tymoczko. She explicitly states in her essay “*Post-colonial writing and literary translation*” that,

...translation as the activity of *carrying across*...might be imaged as a form...in which vulnerable and holy (historical, mythic and literary) relics are moved from one sanctified spot of worship to another more central and more secure (because more powerful) location, at which the cult is intended to be preserved, to take root and find new life. (Bassnett and Trivedi 20)

The power struggle between the oral and the written is identified as a conflict between the colonized native and the western colonizer with the ‘English’ as a medium of expression. The indigene as the author of the Indian aboriginal/native oral culture is well aware of the power struggles in which his/her writing has been placed and the challenges s/he encounters in writing and publishing through translation to situate him/her in the mainstream. Besides, the experiences of collective knowledge transmitted orally through songs/stories or other performative art has its own challenges when the same is to be adapted in translation on paper and that too in an alien language. In a country like India where multiple languages and art forms are simultaneously in vogue with different communities practicing divergent cultures,

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the trajectories of linguistic signs and their significances adds complexity to this issue because abstraction or uniform standardization of ‘meaning’ would be arbitrary as well as impossible in this respect. Ganesh Devy in his article “*Translation and literary history: An Indian view*” also expresses disapproval of any absolutes and partially agrees with Chomsky’s “concept of semantic universals” and “levels of abstraction” and “monolingual Saussurean linguistic materialism” because in his opinion even “the concept of synonymy in the West has remained inadequate to explain translation activity” (Bassnett and Trivedi 185). In a multilingual and multicultural society like India intertextuality and intersectionality is very natural and translation of orality aims to target the indigenous consciousness for its open-ended potential to share knowledge by sharing ‘significance’ reposing faith in limited ‘semantic equivalence’ through creative translation. K. Satchidanandan proposes that, “India sought through translation a living dialogue between its own cultural past and present as also between its cultures and the cultures of other lands. Translation was looked upon as a revitalisation of the original through the imagination of a writer of another space and time.” (“*Translating India*”, Frontline Magazine, Print edition: November 29, 2013, from the web resource)

The communication patterns of oral text being circular are different from the written process that is linear though, however, the oral tradition always precedes the written creative process of translation. Telling and writing, thus, is a collaborative process resulting in the resolution of the power struggle in favour of the dominant language (i.e. English many of the times) which (re)produces the tribal/native text for the achievement of the marginalized native orality at the expense of alien linguistic code is acceptable. Translation practices ultimately unsettle the linear movement of hierarchies and reinforce discontinuity, multiplicity,

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intervention, (re)interpretation and (re)presentation to empower orality which is circular and functions in friendship with writing/translating on the dynamics of asymmetrical power relations between histories, languages and cultures against totalizing concept of binaries. Dissolution of boundaries and binaries between the indigenous-oral and translation (re)creates the ‘contact zone’ i.e. a ‘new’ literary-space to reconstitute ‘the reality of survival and negotiation’ (Bhabha 255) by retrieving the repressed ‘past’. Here once again Homi Bhabha’s assertions on hybridity ‘Third Space’ to ‘redescribe’ and ‘reinscribe’ cultural-linguistic encounters becomes relevant:

...the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’. And by exploring the Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. (38-39)

Bhabha’s views on ‘hybridized identities’ and ‘cross-cultural initiation’ re-establish translation as the site for ‘cultural production’ and the space where ‘newness’ enters the world’. Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (*Translation and Power, 2002*) have seen translation as a metaphor that serves ‘as a site where discourses meet and compete’; according to them translation ‘negotiates power relations’ and it ‘can be mobilized for counter discourses and subversions’ (Tymoczko and Gentzler xix) to dismantle the Western monolithic assumptions of discourse. They reiterate that,

“Translation is one of the primary literary tools that larger social institutions – educational systems, arts councils, publishing firms, and even governments – had at

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their disposal to “manipulate” a given society in order to “manipulate” the kind of “culture” desired...to create a desired representation. (Tymoczko and Gentzler xiii)

The preservation of indigenous knowledge, rather than to be lost forever, is important because if we lose one of the oral traditions we lose a source of knowledge that is ultimately the source of power and we cannot afford to lose our knowledge forever. Translation redefines the relations between discourse and power preparing ground for cultural/linguistic sharing and preservation of ethnicity. Ethnic-minorities emerge as ‘empowered’ by translation of their oral traditions, thus participating in the (de/re)construction of ‘new’ borders negotiating their representation in the monolithic institutions with their increased power. Translation studies have, thus, addressed the question of emplacement of the indigenous knowledge ‘in polyvalent and multicultural environments’ by way of creation of subverted hierarchies. The text – whether oral or written – is always open to enjoy freedom and mobility; translation in itself is nomadic and itinerant travelling across and beyond boundaries and translator, a migrant who diffuses cultural and linguistic (b)orders to materialize the accessibility of the inaccessible at a greater scale/degree. Therefore, translations of orality/culture-texts – epics, dance forms, folk songs, myths, eulogies, heroic conquests, royal edicts etc. – bridge the ‘distance’ making effective cultural dominance/assertion/resistance of the indigene through the ‘import’ of the ‘other’ to the mainstream by penetrating into their knowledge.

The mythological past of the humanity explains the present history and the present validates the past: the truth of the great epics, folklore, folktales, folksongs and other oral texts from the pre-history and mythology is documented by literature and translation of the same adds value to the subjective knowledge extracted from orality through its objective presentation. A sense of connectedness is revealed in the transference from oral to the written word

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substantiating the idea that knowledge/creativity is a collective experience resulting from association with human as well as non-human environment. For instance, such connectedness determines the knowledge of the ‘author’ gathered from diverse sources that finds expression in images, symbols, themes and morals expressed in proverbs, idioms, anecdotes, folklore, folktales, folksongs, myths etc. communicated orally for generations by virtue of the imaginative power that “admits fusion between various plains of existence and levels of time in a natural and artless manner” (Devy x). In all these expressions the ‘oral’ signifies the creative process culturally based on a way of thinking that specified the native indigene establishing the identification of the oral with the indigenous knowledge systems. Transmission of knowledge through translation of oral traditions of the indigene bridges the chasm in different tribal cultures and it embodies the principle of kinship where divergent cultures meet in communal harmony with each other.

Without the continual presence of these oral texts the core of the knowledge invested in Indian culture would be gone forever; thus, translation preserves knowledge through the adaptation of traditional texts to contemporary reality associating orality to a state of ‘being’ and ‘communication’ that resists fixity. The possibility to change a being into something else is inherent in all cultures and this transformation enables cultures to survive. For example, a human character can take any shape i.e. of a bird, a stone or a rabbit in a story the symbolic properties of which have the ability to transmit it to other performatory art/text. This transformationality which has been with us for long times, for ages, provides a connection between oral traditions and translated texts. Translation symbolizes ‘rebirth’ because the text has the power to communicate those cultural values which are essentially aboriginal/native/indigenous in nature. In orality, survival consists of an intimate knowledge of one’s surroundings and ‘accepting’ and understanding the mutuality by becoming the

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‘other’. The translated text is the ‘other’ for the original oral indigenous culture: a way of thinking is communicated through the symbolic properties of the text from orality to writing/translation. A translation text is bound by the ‘wor(l)d’ of the oral tradition; it becomes the ‘bird’ or the ‘stone’ or the ‘rabbit’ except a bird or a stone or a rabbit thus taking on the possibilities and limitations of transmission simultaneously. It makes the writer also go through such transformation by him/herself; becoming the translator by believing, feeling and understanding s/he becomes the reader – the subjectivity being transformed into the objectivity – who is an agent of knowledge. The subjectivity of his/her perception is in tune with the concept of knowledge inherent in orality which is permeable across borders. In this way the native denies the truth that there are any absolutes in a multicultural/multilingual world. Hence translation gives credibility to ‘knowledge’ in the same way as oral traditions of the native tribals assuming an authority on equal terms in the cultural politics of power-struggle between the oral and the written literary discourse wherein the native orality is (de)constructed as the ‘other’.

The oral transmission of a text/story/knowledge is a community event because it cannot happen without an audience and the storyteller would relate only a story which is of significance to the cultural history of the society. Edwin Gentzler also proposes that the translator is never ‘neutral’ and translation is not ‘a neutral place’ because ‘it is a site contested by powerful individuals and institutions’. Storytellers/writers pass on cultural history and heritage as a source of truth and knowledge that is intimately connected with struggle for justice and equality to share power in the cultural dynamics as an alternate reality. This emphasis on alternate/other which is also an integral part of the ‘oneness’ is an essential characteristic of indigenous culture/knowledge inherited as an oral form; it blends

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together the collective and the individual memory reflecting a circular rather than a linear concept of articulating knowledge thus rejecting the standardization of authorship.

Authorship gives power to every uttered word and translation is an equally effective a means of assigning authorial power to the ‘knowledge’ inherent in the ‘remembered’ oral traditions that are at the root of indigenous culture and literary traditions in India. Latin American scholar Rosemary Arrojo (*Translation and Power, 2002*) conceptualizes translation in terms of ‘will to power’ and realizes that an author’s will to construct and control meaning is equivalent to a translator’s will to re(construct) someone else’s meaning. A translated text is no longer the *author’s* text is as true as the translator is not the author of the *translated* text. The translator is a listener, a reader and an author of course in the sense that the translation establishes, “a semantic correspondence and stylistic approximation to the source text” (Venuti 5) and it is such correspondence and approximation that reconstitutes a ‘new’ culture of reciprocal movement between orality and literature ‘empowering’ orality to resist and balance isolationist politics and cultural alienation.

The translator cannot be the author of the source language text but as a listener/reader of the source language/culture s/he becomes the author of the target language/receptive culture to negotiate between two or more cultures. Keya Majumdar, in “*Text, subtext and context of Indian Culture*”, addresses the reality that every text is created not for the author’s sake but to address the ‘power of representation’ of the culture embedding in itself the ‘truth’ of ‘sharing’ meaning/knowledge with the world at large: “The text is not merely the book. To read the text merely as a structure of paradigmatic and syntagmatic devices is to divorce the text, which is a cultural act, from the relations of power that produced it.” (*The Language Loss of the Indigenous, web resource*)

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The question whether authorship can exert ‘authority’ through the written word has been a complex one and extensively debated in the Indian as well as Western academia. Here one is reminded of Foucault’s postulations in his essay “*What is an Author?*” about the ‘disappearance – or death – of the author’ and his theorizing on the ‘endless possibility of discourse’, ‘discursive initiation’ and ‘discursivity’ become revelatory as he categorically states that the term ‘author’ cannot be given ‘too narrow a meaning’ because ‘author function’ is very complex and the ‘discursive properties’ of the text ‘exceeds’ the boundaries of his/her own work; there is not one author but many authors of the same text and in the similar vein one author is not necessarily the author of his own text but can produce many texts because he ‘commands’ several ‘possibilities’ for ‘appearance’ in more than one text and communicate multiple layers of ‘meanings’. According to Foucault a text “contains characteristic signs, figures, relationships, and structures that could be reused by others” (217); his question at the end of the essay has kept the debate open: “What difference does it make who is speaking?” (222)

In fact, ascertaining the identity, historicity, dating and exact location of the authors/writers/artists/theoreticians is a perennial problem for researchers but that does not mean that those anonymous texts are without ‘authors’. The importance of Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* in the history of Indian Aesthetics/Poetics is universally accepted though little is known of the identity of the author and the mode of presentation of the text is that of a dialogue between Bharata and other sages. Kapila Vatsyayan considers the question of ‘the identity of Bharata the person, his possible historicity’ and discusses whether the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is a work of a single author or a school of thought or a group of scholars; after the consideration of various positions and counter-positions in relation to the complexities

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regarding the origin and creation of the text it is convincingly clear that “it was the product of a single integrated vision” (Vatsyayan 6). Vatsyayan recounts,

...whether Bharata was a real person or not, the author of the text was unambiguously stating that at each moment and throughout, the actor (extended to artist) who had the power, knowledge and skill of creating another world...reminds his readers that the carriers of his tradition had a responsibility precisely because the art empowered them in an extraordinary fashion.

...Bharata refers to time and again to the power of the creative act to effect and influence and certainly evoke and stimulate reverberations of great intensity and subtlety. (10)

The emergence of the author/translator/artist as an agent of ‘creating a new idiom’ of power through the encounter of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic ‘intelligibilities’ can be well understood in the assertion that the role of the translator is no longer exclusivist but overlaps with that of the writer because there are multiple texts and multiple authors present in a singular act of translation that moves in all times and all places breaking the hierarchy between authors/writers and translators in future. In India, the indigene with their orality have lived as alienated citizens socially as well as culturally yet rich in knowledge that largely remains unacknowledged; the fragile linguistic-cultural base of their sub-text will attain confidence through its encounter with tensions and challenges of situations of unequal cultural aesthetics. The ‘powers of translation’ would help the indigenous culture to address and redress this inequality with subtle replay of *fission and fusion*, which operating in nuclear science produces vast energy through splitting and fusing of atoms, would regenerate, to use Keya Majumdar’s words, the “decentred energies hidden in the form of native culture” (*The Language Loss of the Indigenous, web resource*) by *breaking down and binding together* the borderlands contributing to the renewal of the ‘meaning’ of the ‘text’ and ‘sub-text’ of the marginalized cultures.

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Oral traditions are part of the subtext of Indian literary space and translation can construct “an awareness of their subterranean cultural history” (Majumdar, *The Language Loss*, web resource); their affiliation with Edward Said’s ‘worldliness’ and Venuti’s ‘internationalizing literary relations’ (5) is essential to erase those identity markers which reverse their representation in world literature through marginalization – external as well as internal colonization – and stop the damage done to tribal/indigene/regional ethnicities by (de)politicizing the ‘notion of literary universals’. Revival of orality is possible by replacing reductivist approach with Edward Said’s idea of ‘revelatory power of representation’; creating a ‘confluence culture’ to empower the ‘stories’ of knowledge is essential which would otherwise remain ‘impoverished’ and consequently decrease. Endowing the ‘memory’ with the ‘word’ is to render authority and authenticity to orality, to make it imperishable through formal verbalization i.e. what has been ‘*sruti*’ or ‘*smriti*’ becomes ‘*akshar*’ – giving word to sound heard or remembered – which in Hindi etymology refers to something that never perishes. Authenticity, according to K. Satchidanandan, means ‘an attempt to resituate the original through close imitation’ which translation does accomplish and achieve. The responsibility of the translator is to, to quote Satchidanandan,

...overcome the asymmetrical relations of power that operated in the colonial era, turning translation into a strategy of containment and reinforcement of the hegemonic versions of the colonised as objects without history. Translation to us is a way of retrieving our people’s histories and recording their past and present. (*“Translating India”*, Frontline Magazine, Print edition: November 29, 2013, from the web resource)

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We cannot ignore and escape the silent words of memory because these words growing on layer after layer, year after year construct culture/knowledge documenting the inherent ‘fragmentation’ of the indigene. Writing the memory/orality is a holistic construction of the culture/knowledge; integrating the oral with written through translation means to bring to surface the wisdom of the words spoken by the storytelling grandparents. ‘Listening’ to them is to shift the gaze to the collective voice of the indigene and the decentred energies of their culture/knowledge. Invoking the ‘unheard’, the ‘homeless’ and the ‘nomadic’ from the darkest zones and open the orality to the global audience via translation is the need of the hour. Whether it is *Baul* singing in Bengal, Phad painting and singing, *Kaavad* storytelling in Rajasthan, *Kathputali*-dance-drama, *Nautanki*, *Kissa/Dastangoi* in Urdu or the religious ritual called the ‘*Kamsel*’ performed in Sikkim in the Tibetan dialect and ‘*Tendam*’ in the Bhutia dialect, the customs and cultural festivities of *Khasi* or *Santhal* tribes, or the *Bathukamma* floral festival of Telangana all are the ‘mouthpieces of nativism’ which needs to travel to the mainstream from the periphery. How translation does help to maintain ‘umbilical link’ with these ‘little local’ wor(l)ds and accentuates the ‘situation’ of local ‘*experiences*’ on ‘a common ground, where difference is recognized, not romanticized’, can be understood in Keya Majumdar’s assertions: “It becomes important to situate the indigene and the marginalized that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations and safe in the mythic memory of a unique collective identity in the space of their cultural diversity, which is the articulation process of multiculturalism.” (*The Language Loss of the Indigenous*, 2016, web resource)

To conclude, it can be said that within the fragility of orality lies the inherent strength of the collage of multicultural/multilingual Indian indigene and their regional diversity; orality, with its numerous versions of living and real knowledge-stories with a deep sense of loss and

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deprivation, has travelled for centuries across India and still doing so today. Each of these voices tells the same story differently at different performances, depending on a variety of circumstances making an effort to make readers aware of how much is lost, when an immensely varied oral tradition is reduced to just a few or, even worse, one single textual tradition. Translation as an instrumental power to rediscover, revive and ‘register’ these ‘remote’ voices – ‘stigmatized’ to remain outside the fold of contemporary elite/mainstream literature – can challenge ‘hegemony’ in the post-colonial social spectrum to dissolve borders and create alternative spaces for the survival of orality/oral traditions and secure much wider readership and circulation to find fellowship with the corpus of mainstream world literature and acquire new perspectives as an epitome of ‘memorized’ knowledge.

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