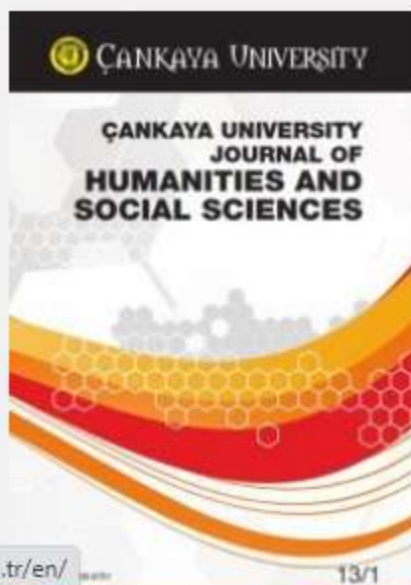




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Translating Orality: Pictorial Narrative Traditions with Reference To *Kaavad* and *Phad*

Sözlü Anlatı Çevirisi: *Kaavad* ve *Phad* Ekseninde Görsel Anlatı

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Abstract

Walter J. Ong's work is crucial for the study of orality, and highlights that a great majority of languages are never written despite the success and power of the written language and that the basic orality of language is stable (Ong 7). When A. K. Ramanujan claims that everybody in India knows *The Mahābhārata* because nobody reads it, he is also emphasizing the power of orality and oral traditions in India (qtd. in Lal). Transmuting oral forms into new mediums and genres is not unknown to Indian narrative traditions. Orality when transmitted or deciphered imbibes a portion of its social/cultural contexts and resembles a nomadic metaphor that finds new meaning with each telling/re-telling/transcreation. My paper deals with the role of translation and its relationship with orality, as embodied in the folk legacy of Rajasthan with reference to the oral traditions of storytelling like *Phad* and *Kaavad*. The paper looks at the intersections between orality and translation, the structures of individual and collective consciousness, convergences and divergences in translating orality.

Keywords: orality, *anuvaad*, *lok*, word, language, re-telling.

ÖZ

Walter J. Ong'un çalışmaları, sözlü anlatı çalışmalarının temelini oluşturur. Bu çalışmalar, yazılı dilin gücüne ve kayda değer başarısına rağmen çoğu dillerin yazıya hiçbir zaman dökülmemiş olduğunu ve sözlü anlatının dilin temelinde kalıcı olduğunu göstermektedir (Ong 7). Ramanujan, *Mahabharata Destanı*'ni hiç okumamış oldukları için Hindistan'daki herkesin bildiğini dile getirir ve böylece Hindistan'daki sözlü ifadenin ve sözlü geleneklerin önemini vurgular. Sözlü geleneğin yeni araç ve türlere dönüştürülmesi, Hint anlatı geleneğinde alışılmadık değildir. Sözlü anlatı aktarıldığında veya deşifre edildiğinde sosyal/kültürel bağlamı özümser ve bu her bir anlatı/yeniden anlatı/kültürel aktarım ve yeniden yaratım süreci ile yeni bir anlam kazanır. Bu makale, *Phad* ve *Kavaad* gibi hikaye anlatımı geleneklerine atıfla Rajasthan'da bilinen halk masalları ekseninde çevirinin rolü ve çevirinin sözlü anlatı ile olan ilişkisini irdeler. Bu makale aynı zamanda, sözlü anlatı ile çevirinin arasındaki kesişimi, kişisel ve kolektif bilinç yapılarını, sözlü anlatı çevirisinde yakınsak ve iraksaklığı inceler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sözlü anlatı, *anuvaad*, *lok*, söz, dil, yeniden anlatı.

Introduction

Nobody reads *The Mahābhārata* for the first time in India. [...] When we “grow up” a little, we might read C. Rajagopalachari’s abridged (might I add, sanitized) version. Few of us go on to read the unabridged epic in any language, and even fewer in the original Sanskrit. (Ramanujan 2007, 419)

When Ramanujan claims that everybody in India knows *The Mahābhārata* because nobody reads it, he is in fact emphasizing the power of orality and oral traditions in India. Majority of the Indians are introduced to *The Mahābhārata* or one of its many variants as a bedtime story, followed by oral and visual interpretations. According to Amrith Lal:

The Mahābhārata is traditionally classified as an ancient oral Indian epic that has yielded to the social imaginations and the historical aspirations of artists, storytellers, performers, writers, religious leaders, philosophical commentators, television producers, film makers, and even communities. Countless interpretations, adaptations, and everyday allusions to *The Mahābhārata* make it one of the most important systems of codes. The epic, in the written form, enters the mindscape much later, and most often in the mother tongue, and rarely in Sanskrit. (Lal)

Therefore, the Indians understand this epic as a “tradition” rather than a text. The multiple and varied versions and translations of this epic procreate issues related to tradition (one or many), canon, beliefs and performative functions of narratives. *The Mahābhārata* thus is not only the most striking prototype of reference to writing embedded in oral traditions but is an oral epic in its textual tradition, an epic dictated by Vyasa to Lord Ganesha as it was transcribed in the written form. It is believed that at one point when the stylus broke down, Ganesha pulled out his tusk and continued to write with the broken tusk which in oral traditions is a symbol of “writing” trying to catch the rapidity of the “oral”.¹ Orality and storytelling are the two most dominant features of the Indian narrative culture and tradition and a rich repository for the preservation of ever dynamic collective consciousness. The stories that are told and retold in families, in villages, before or after dinner, and in plays, performed at street corners by people who are not professional artists, cannot just be put under the rubric of “oral tradition”. Moreover, in being so used, the term “oral tradition” itself seems to be restricted in sense and range, because it encompasses much more than narratives or songs or plays; it embraces the whole gamut of the ways of living preserved in and by the “word”. For the sake of convenience, I have divided this paper into two parts, the first explores the concept of orality, the nature of “language” and “speech” and translation (the Indian context) of orality across mediums. The

¹ This was one of the topics of the keynote address of Ganesh Devy titled “Translation Time” which was given at the “International Conference Translation across Borders: Genres and Geographies, Caesurae Collective Society” held on 09-10 October 2018. For information visit: <https://www.caesurae.org/international-conference>

second part takes up two oral/folk traditions of storytelling in Rajasthan, namely *Kavaad* and *Phad* as anecdotal illustrations to discuss the dialogic relationship between translation/*anuvaad* and folk/*lok*.

I

Transmuting oral forms into new mediums is not unknown to the Indian narrative tradition, as many texts, like the Buddhist *Jatakas*, the *Panchatantra* (the fifth century), and the *Kathasaritasagara* (the eleventh century), owe their origin to oral traditions. Indian oral and manuscript traditions demonstrate incredible strength in their transmissions of compositions/texts, as far as protecting the general types of writings through progressive reproductions after some time, yet in addition typically contain trademark varieties that encapsulate their strategy for transmission as in the case of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahābhārata*. The presence of these varieties in how oral and original textual printed conventions transmit their substance raises the likelihood of examining the connection between oral and literary transmission across mediums and genres (Friedlander 187-88). In this paper, when I talk of terms like “orality,” “oral tradition,” “translation” and “folk,” I attempt to focus on the Indian connotations that are quiet distinctive and different from the western notions. All these terms are interrelated at the metaphysical level and share the same structural intrinsic attributes like the existence of a living culture, continuity between the past and the present, variations springing out from the creative impulse of the individual or the group, and above all transmission.

Generally the term “orality” has been used to describe the structures of consciousness found in cultures that do not employ, or employ negligibly, the intricacies of writing. In India, ideas, knowledge, traditions and history have always been communicated and transferred through orality. This is because the emphasis has been on *sruti* (which is heard) and *smriti* (which is remembered) i.e. preferring speech over writing. “The Cambridge World Oral Literature Project” defined oral literature as a broad term that included ritual texts, curative chants, epic poems, folk tales, creation stories, songs, myths, spells, legends, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters, recitations, and historical narratives². In most of the cases, such traditions are not translated when a community shifts to using a language. Before discussing orality and its translation, it is imperative to understand as to what constitutes a “text” in a multilingual country like India and also the nature of language and translation. Talking on the relevance of oral traditions, Ramanujan observed that written and hallowed texts are not the only kinds of texts in a culture like the Indian. Oral traditions of every kind produce

² <http://www.oralliterature.org/about/oralliterature.html>

texts (Ramanujan 1990, 4). This notion of “text” has further been substantiated by Singer in the following words:

“Cultural performances” of every sort, whether they are written or oral acts of composition, whether they are plays or weddings, rituals or games, contain texts. Every cultural performance not only creates and carries texts, it is a text. Texts then are also contexts and pretexts for other texts. (47)

Orality and oral literature thus serve as a spontaneous alternative discourse to the idealized canonical literature/text. One way of defining orality and folklore for India is to say that it is the writing of the vernaculars, those first languages of the towns, roads, kitchens, tribal homes, cottages, and wayside coffeehouses. This is the wide base of the Indian pyramid on which all other Indian regional literature rests. According to Ramanujan, “Past and present, what’s ‘pan-Indian’ and what’s local, what’s shared and what’s unique in regions, communities, and individuals, the written and the oral—all are engaged in a dialogic reworking and redefining of relevant others” (1990, 15). Although there are many ways in which orality and textuality interrelate in the Indian context, still most discussions on orality in India owe their origin to the transmission of the *Vedas* (Rocher). *The Vedas* are also called *Srutis* because they are recited and heard, not written and read. *Shruti* or *Shruthi* in Sanskrit means “that which is heard” and *Smṛti* means “that which is remembered” (“*Sruti*”). The word *Shruti*, also means the rhythm and the musicality of the infinite as it is heard by the soul. *The Vedas* have been transmitted from generation to generation through the oral tradition. This implies that Indian speculations on language began with *The Vedas*; and the school of Grammar and *Mimamsa* seem to be an outcome of the expanded recommendations found in *The Vedas*. According to Sreekumar, the four auxiliary disciplines of *The Vedas*, namely *Shiksha* (phonetics, phonology, pronunciation), *Chandas* (prosody), *Vyakarana* (grammar and linguistics), *Nirukta* (etymology), have been the foundation of language philosophy. The divine nature of speech, the creative and illuminative power of the word and the different levels of speech, are the main doctrines, which formed the philosophy of language in the Indian context (Sreekumar 51). Language has always been at the centre in India, and all schools of language philosophy had given attention to the ultimate question of the relation between the “word” and “reality”. Talking about language philosophy and language function, Krishnaswamy and Mishra writes:

In India, from the beginning, language philosophy took into consideration both performative and contemplative functions of language; the performative function included ritualistic as well as communicative or transactional functions of language in the outside world; the contemplative function considered the use of language for inward or private functions, like meditation and introspection in the inner world. (2)

Language thus had both phenomenal and metaphysical dimensions in the Indian language philosophy and was examined in relation to consciousness and cognizance. Grammarians like Panini and Patanjali were worried about human discourse in the ordinary exact world, and yet they have additionally given equivalent significance to the powerful aspects of language. Similarly, Bhartrhari begins his *Vakyapadiya* with an account of its metaphysical nature, but then he goes on to explore the technical and grammatical points involved in the everyday use of language. According to *Vakyapadiya*, language is conceived as “being” (*Brahman*) and its divinity expresses itself in the plurality of phenomena that is creation.³ The acknowledgment of supreme information and the profound freedom which results is unmistakably an ontological reflection on language. The knowledge of the “absolute” followed by spiritual liberation is only possible by comprehending the relationship between “word” and “reality”. The grammatical tradition of Bhartrhari identifies the *Brahman* as *shabda* (word) and the *shabda* as *sphota* (utterance). The inward nature of the *Brahman* (Lord of Speech), and the creator of the four *Vedas*, is thus hidden in consciousness, but it has the power to express itself as communication. This capacity of self-expression and communication gives it the character of “word”. Language then constitutes the ultimate principle of reality (*śabdabrahman*). Meaning (*artha*) stands for the object or content of a verbal cognition of a word (*śābda-jñāna*) which results from hearing a word (*śābda-bodha-viśaya*) and on the basis of an awareness of the signification function pertaining to that word (*pada-niṣṭha-vṛtti-jñāna*). The meaning further depends upon the kind of signification function (*vṛtti*) involved in the emergence of the verbal cognition. Therefore, the role of cognition as a process of acquiring knowledge and comprehending it through thought, experience, and the senses becomes very significant in derivation of meaning.

Almost all the Indian literary theories that deal with the meaning of literary discourse like *Rasa* theory of Bharata, *Alamkara* theory of Bhamaha and Dandin, *Vakroktijivita* of Kuntaka and *Kavyamimamsa* of Rajasekhara also emphasize the notion of consciousness and experience. In the Indian context, the reader is never a passive receiver of a text in which its truth is enshrined. The theories of *rasa* and *dhvani* suggest that a text is re-coded by the individual consciousness of its receiver so that he/she may have multiple aesthetic experiences and thus a text is not perceived as an object that should produce a single invariant reading. Orality helps us understand these structures of consciousness. According to Bhartrhari, consciousness is essentially the nature of the “word”. When he says that the essence of language has no beginning and no end, and it is imperishable ultimate consciousness, he in fact emphasizes the presence of language as priori similar to

³ *anadinidhanam brahma sabdatattvarh yadaksaram, vivartate 'rthabhavena prakriyd jagato yatah* (1.1). (The *Brahman* is without beginning and end, whose essence is the Word, who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world proceeds.)

the “arche-writing” of Derrida. For Derrida, the consciousness is the trace of writing and for Bhartrhari it is *sabda-tattva*. This *sabda-tattva* is Absolute, a distinguishing factor of human consciousness, and by saying this, Bhartrhari lends a spiritual character to speech (qtd. in Coward 132).

In the Indian language philosophy, there is a simultaneous co-existence of plurality as well as oneness, similar to Derridean “textualities”. This differential plurality (in the post-structuralist sense) lies hidden in the text of the source language as well as the translated text. Therefore, the translations/retellings of the same text give different versions. It is a widely acknowledged assumption that translation is a form of transmitting culture across languages, and therefore, it is not only about transmitting meaning but also interpreting cultural contexts and practices. This is an issue which, in concurrence with later etymological speculations, removes the idea of significance from a limited semantic elucidation and reframes it to join cognizance. This differential plurality is also the inherent core of what constitutes folk (*lok*) in India. In India, folk (*lok*) is not just limited to human beings, it is rather a broad word, encompassing all life and denoting “all people”. In the Indian culture, it is believed that whatever is perceivable outside in the universe has a simultaneous existence inside and vice versa; therefore, it is essential to establish a relationship between folk (*lok*) and knowledge (*jyana*). The word *lok* is hard to translate as it covers different ranges of meanings and interconnected sub-concepts such as the world of appearance, the mundane world, the perishable phenomena, the cosmic divisions of space, any realm, mundane or transcendental, and the common people and their behavior. The Indian word *lok* is a pervasive term embracing cosmic notions of space on one hand and the world of direct perception, the world of sense objects, on the other; it is both space and what fills space; it is both the people and their behavior; it is both the object of perception and the process of perception. It is through *lok* that mystic experience is actualized as a commonly shared ordinary experience and vice versa. It is more a process term than a static concept. It is generally defined as, “*lokyate iti lokah*” meaning that which is perceived is the “world”. Kalātattvakośa refers to a comprehensive philosophical conception of what constitutes *lok*:

Lok is a generalized concept of space filled up primarily with activity of various kinds now and here, but secondarily of possible transformations at a higher or lower level. It can neither be equated with the world or with common people, or with the sphere of direct perceptions or the manifest, nor the folk or rustic as against the elite; or the oral unformed tradition as against the codified written tradition nor the real as against the ideal. And yet it covers all these ranges of meaning interrelated to each other. (155)

The relationship between *lok* as in folk/people and the sense of the world takes the concept and nature of orality beyond homogeneity. The Hindi term “*lok*” for western “folk” is plural in denotation, and therefore, it carries a sense of

belongingness and inclusivity. Since the term is located in the plural and in community, there is a greater and wider scope for free play or recreation. Orality too travels across times without any string of authorship attached to it. In oral tradition, the words “author” and “original” have either no meaning at all or a meaning quite different from the one usually assigned to them. “The performance is unique: it is creation, not a reproduction, and it can only have one author,” says Albert Lord (101-102). Ben-Ami foregrounds the same idea when he claims,

the anonymity of folk narratives, rhymes, and riddles hardly solved the enigma of origin. The responsibility for authorship had to be assigned to some creator, be He divine or human. So in the absence of any individual who could justifiably and willingly claim paternity of myths and legends, the entire community was held accountable for them. (11-17)

In the context of orality and folk, this notion of collective consciousness and plurality become primary. In oral traditions and folk, narrators, singers and performers accredit their tales and songs to the collective tradition of the community. This dynamism and collective consciousness is the most distinctive feature of oral cultures. Translation of orality is not merely intended as the act of transferring material from one language into another, but also includes the intra-lingual passage from oral to a different form; translations of oral material lend space to the collective voice rather than an individual. The concept of source beyond a textual context is thus extended in translations of oral traditions. “Source” here does not refer to a text, but rather to those who produce orality, in other words narrators, storytellers, performers, in fact, all oral sources. Therefore, the true calling of translation of orality is not just to reproduce but also to recreate the world of orality which inevitably involves creation; it also invites us to dispense with the polarized view of folklore and short story, oral and written, retold and authored, and so on. Each new rendition of oral tradition is open to reworking of content and theme, giving rise to variants ensuring relevance even in a novel spatial-temporal context. This conceptualization leads us to the theory and reception of translation in India. The Hindi word for translation with its Sanskrit provenance is *anuvāad*, which means retelling, interpretation, transcreation. According to Krishnaswamy and Mishra:

The Sanskrit word *anuvāad* has a temporal connotation which means the “discourse that comes later” or “what comes later,” whereas the word translation has a spatial connotation which means “transfer” or to carry across. (160)

This temporal connotation has also been elaborated by Christi Ann Merrill when she questions the definition of author with reference to folk. While the “logocentricity,” she says, encourages us to believe that the power of the story can be reduced to specific words in a fixed text, “lok-ocentricity” forces us to embrace the ambiguity and temporality inherent in plural play where all performers of oral traditions are translators that recreate the *lok* (Merrill 69-70). Thus, in *anuvāad*

the whole tradition is kept alive and is recreated through an endless line of performances. *Anuvaad* is a creative activity and so is performance. The inherent multiplicity of narratives in oral traditions is dynamic and distinctive, thereby allowing convergences and divergences. Some of the Indian words for translation like *Anuvaad* (speak after), *bhashantar* (linguistic transference), *tarzuma* (reproduction), or *roopantar* (change of form) do not imply the concept of carrying across of meaning from one language to the other. On the other hand, all of them point to the possibility of transcreation as opposed to mild transference of significance from one phonetic framework to the next. This infers that our fundamental idea of translation has always been different.

The Indian consciousness, which, according to Devy, is a “translating consciousness,” believes that language is operative only at the level of mind, thought and intellect, and he further argues that “the multilingual, eclectic Hindu spirit, ensconced in the belief in the soul’s perpetual transition from form to form, may find it difficult to subscribe to the Western metaphysics of translation” (135). According to Aurobindo, translation is also a cognitive process that operates at three levels—*nama* (name), *rupa* (form of meaning), and *swarupa* (essential figure of truth), corresponding to reading, analyzing, and interpreting respectively (Gopinathan 10). These three levels are cognate to the three levels of language mentioned by Bhartrhari in his *vakyapadiyam* viz *vaikhari* (spoken level of language), *madhyama* (intermediate level between articulation and conception) and *pasyanti* (the highest level where a thought is at its nebulous stage). Gopinathan says that the text has to be grasped intuitively at the highest level of *swarupa* before it can be translated at the other two levels of *nama* and *rupa*, or the level of text and meaning. Therefore, in translation, “the process of text analysis, comprehension of the literal as well as the suggested meaning, and the process of decision making will also have three levels” (Gopinathan 9). During the process of cognition and translation there is a constant shifting of these levels. This is what distinguishes the Indian context with the Western.

Sherry Simon and Paul St-Pierre in the introduction to their book *Changing the Terms* made a distinction between the Western tradition of translation and the Indian tradition. They maintain that the Indian tradition is “essentially oral, involves a much looser notion of the text, interacts intensely with local forms of narrative and is a reinvigorating and positive global influence” (10). Not only the interaction between regional and national narratives, but also the whole history and pervasiveness of languages in India has impacted the way translation has existed and has been accepted. As per the 1971 census, there are more than 3000 mother tongues referred to as speech varieties in India. These vernaculars are divided into 105 dialects. Out of these 105 dialects, 90 are spoken by under 5 percent of the whole populace; 65 have a place with little clans. 15 of the dialects

are written, spoken and read by around 95 percent of the general population, including Sanskrit. That is why Ananthmurthy remarks that

we live everywhere in India in an ambience of languages. [...] The word “mother-tongue” doesn’t mean what it means in Europe. Most of the writers, poets speak two or more than two languages and therefore in the context of India this free play beyond the hegemonic nature of language allows for mixtures and shifts. First it was the language of the Gods making way for the languages of common people, now it is the official domain of English making way, however reluctantly, to the vernaculars in the process of empowerment of the people. Because of vernaculars India has been able to bear and digest not only cultural inclusion but also the languages of power that has dominated over the centuries. These vernaculars have a front yard of self-aware literary tradition as well as a backyard of unselfconscious oral folk traditions. (277-78)

The impact and the presence of vernaculars lend a significant and unique Indian ethos and phenomenon to the texts. The unselfconscious oral folk tradition fills in the sense of continuity and makes the literary traditions alive. In the *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, this is reinforced as the return to orality in language use, as well as the look to visuality and sound as discourse methods in sign systems. This return to orality is the postmodern turn in linguistic analysis that takes exception to older notions of stable, fixed and ordered movement in language (Victor 224). This notion also subverts the earlier idea about language progressing in linear and temporal orders, and accepts simultaneity through unlimited expansion across time and space. Thus, translating orality is an attempt to reunite language with discourse, words with ideas, *sphota* with context and form with function.

II

Talking about the impact and influence of storytelling and the nature of translation in India, Amitav Ghosh remarks:

It has been said, with good reason, that nothing that India has given the world outside is more important than its stories. Indeed, so pervasive is the influence of Indian story that one particular collection, the *Panchtantra* is reckoned by some to be second only to the Bible in the extent of its global diffusion. Compiled early in the first millennium, the *Panchtantra* passed into Arabic through a sixth century Persian translation, engendering some of the best known of Middle Eastern fables, including parts of *The Thousand and One Nights*. The stories were handed on to the Slavic languages through Greek, from Hebrew to Latin, and thence to German and Italian. From the Italian version came the famous Elizabethan rendition of Sir Henry North; *The Morall Philosophy of Doni* (1570). These stories left their mark on collection as different as those of La Fontaine and the brothers Grimm, and today they are inseparably part of a global heritage of folklore. (35)

This sort of exceptional Indian style of cultural dissemination is fundamentally oral and it includes a much looser idea of the content and definition of a “text”. *Anuvaad* (interpretation), or transmission of this sort is a constant nurturing and innovative process that creates itself with each re-telling. Storytelling, as we know, is the most powerful medium that reflects and assimilates the relationship between individual and community, between micro and macro, between the living and the dead, and so on and so forth. Storytelling and listening to stories is a natural impulse in humans. The earliest form of storytelling was oral in nature. The myriad storytelling traditions popular in India are told in numerous ways. The uses of voice and gestures are the commonest modes. Other modes include using painted scrolls and boxes, texts, dance, music, performance or a combination of all these. Indian tradition of narrating, through painted boards or parchments, can be followed back to the second century BC and are known to have existed everywhere throughout the subcontinent. Buddhist, Brahmanical, and Jaina writings contain plentiful references to the craft of painted parchments (*pata chitras*) which were shown in antiquated occasions to instruct and engage the general population. The established Sanskrit writing has a few references to *yama patas*, scrolls narrating the punishments in Hell and journey to Heaven. Narrative scroll paintings are still popular art forms in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bengal, Bihar, and South India. As an anecdotal illustration for this paper, I refer to two pictorial narratives, *Kaavad* and *Phad* from Rajasthan to explore the intimate and intricate relationship between orality and its transmission. The form and function of these narratives undergo variations with each retelling.

Rajasthan, a state in the northwest side of India, was known as Rajputana during the British rule. The state had 19 princely states ruled by local princes and hence never fell directly under central rule, be it Muslim or British. The state comprises of a vast stretch of arid desert terrain known as The Thar. The geography of Rajasthan has a deep influence on the life and culture of its people. Although the political and geographical factors alienated the region from rest of India, yet it helped in preserving the liveliness and nativity of its culture. Rajasthan is one of the most dissociated regions in terms of the impact of literate culture because of the limited exposure and the lower literacy rate. The tribes who constitute around 12.13% of the total population according to the 1971 census have a major contribution to the oral culture, yet their relationship with mainstream Indian culture is somewhat marginal. In its journey from oral art form to written word, and then from the written to the audio-visual representation, the rich and varied Rajasthani oral culture has met the demands of a world progressively mediated by technology, despite showing immense divergences.

Kaavad is one such living oral tradition of storytelling in Rajasthan, where stories from the epics *The Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are told along with stories from the *Puranas*. Its origin is believed to be located in mythology or attributed to a

mysterious power. Sometimes there are other stories of local saints or heroes too. The structure and the concept of *Kaavad* are almost like a moving temple. In Mewar, the home of *Kavad*, it is primarily used to tell family stories including genealogies. The dictionary defines *Kaavad* as “*Kavaat*,” “*Kapaat*” or “*Kivaad*,” meaning half a door or panel of a door, and also as “*Shruti*,” which is audition, hearing or relating to the ear. The *Kaavadiya Bhats* (priests) relate the form to its concept and for them the word *Kaavad* stands for “that which is carried on the shoulder;” the origin of the tradition is therefore attributed to Shraavan Kumar from the *Ramayana* (Apte 21). It is a portable wooden temple/shrine and the visual narratives, on its numerous boards or panels that are pivoted together, lend it a performative character. These panels open and close like doors simulating the several thresholds of a temple. The visuals are those of Gods, goddesses, saints, local heroes and the patrons. An audiovisual experience is imparted through the manner of telling. Against the backdrop of storytelling, it invokes the idea of a consecrated space and provides an identity to all concerned with its making, telling and listening. There are three main communities involved in the *Kavaad* tradition: the first one is the *Suthar* community that makes colorful wooden boxes or *Kavaads*; the second is the *Kavadiya Bhat* who uses these boxes to tell stories; the third is the *Jajman*, or patrons, who commission as well as consume these stories. The patrons of the storytellers are spread far and wide in Rajasthan and belong to 36 *jatis* (castes). Each storyteller has 30 to 50 patrons whom he visits once a year. The storyteller goes to the house of his patron, or *jajman*, and narrates the stories that relate to the patron saint of his community. For both the *kaavadiyas* (storytellers) and the *jajmans* (patrons), the *Kaavad* is like a pilgrimage where the shrine-like *Kaavad* comes to their homes and sanctifies their space. The performative and participatory function of this oral storytelling tradition delivers an indigenous understanding of the mysteries of human existence.

Another powerful storytelling tradition is *Phad*. It is a style of scroll painting traditionally done on a long piece of cloth or canvas, known as *phad*. The life stories/narratives of the folk deities *Pabuji* (a local hero) and *Devnarayanji* (a reincarnation of Vishnu) are depicted on the *phads*. Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, epic poems and panegyric couplets like *Pabuji ra duha*, *Pabuji rau chand*, and *Pabuji ko yash varnan* were written in *Dingal* (ancient Indian language written in Nagri) by *Charan* (caste) bards to celebrate Pabuji’s self-sacrifice on the battlefield. The *phads* of *Pabuji* are regularly around 15 feet long, while the *phads* of *Devnarayanji* are ordinarily around 30 feet long. Customarily the *phads* are painted with vegetable hues. The *bhopas* commission these extravagantly painted boards, sanctify them on their obtaining, treat them as living holy places, and hold exhibitions before groups of onlookers, in which a piece of the legend of these divinities is connected in writing and is aided with melodic instruments and choreographic developments. The *Bhopas*, the priest-

singers traditionally carry the painted *phads* along with them and use these as the mobile temples of the folk deities. While the male priest (*Bhopa*) would sing and portray the story delineated in the *Phad* painting, his better half (*Bhopi*) would go with through song and dance, while likewise putting a focus on the relating segment in the canvas, using a lamp. A two-string instrument called the “*ravanhatta*” is also used in the performance. The performance lasts into the night and the *Phad* painting is unrolled (*phad* in local dialect means “fold”) or unfurled after dusk. Joshi tribe living in Shahpura, Bhilwara, Chittorgarh, and Udaipur paint these *phads* for their *bhopa* customers who are priests-cum-storytellers artists/performers of these divinities. When such a scroll has outlived its life or has proved to be inauspicious, the *bhopa* and the painter take it to the Pushkar Lake in Ajmer on an auspicious day. They invoke the main deity by ritual offerings combined with recitation of sacred stanzas and request him to leave the scroll-shrine.

Nowadays, painters have also started depicting other characters besides *Devnarayanji* and *Pabuji*. Since the very core of *Phad* paintings is storytelling, stories and characters from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Hanuman Chalisa* and even *the Panchatantra*, have been introduced lately by the narrators/performers, thereby making the paintings more interesting and familiar to a larger audience. The narrator/performer follows the general storyline and strings the panels, one after the other, in the running thread of the narrative. Yet, even if one or two pictures are missing, the narrator verbally pursues the story line, and continues the performance. The narrator also sometimes reuses the same picture in another context if the narrative so required—a possibility not available to the narrator of running scrolls. The episodes of a story are organized in chronological order, one closely following the other. What is unique and interesting about the *phad* performances of *Pabuji* and *Devnarayanji* is that the painter neither follows the chronological sequencing in the process of painting nor in the placement of episodes. Single or a few episodes are scattered all over the panel, but as the *bhopa* and the *bhopi* narrate the story, they turn to chronological sequencing and while doing so point at the relevant painted episode at the definite moment whenever and wherever a reference to it becomes imminent in the oral narrative. Sometimes two sequentially episodes are painted at quite a distance from one another which are interconnected by the narrator/performer during his narration. The scattered illustrations are woven into a single narrative by the performer, as they make their way dancing from one point to another and in that duration also get an opportunity to improvise the song and music. In other words, the pictorial schema of these panels is so designed that it allows scope for a composite performance of oral narration in prose and verse as well as dance and music. While painting, the painter usually paints from left to right in rhythmic progression. This schema and the spatial context is known to the *bhopa* and so it becomes convenient for him to arrange and sequence the episodes, in terms of

both oral and pictorial narrative. A rough sketch with earmarked spaces is the highlight of *phad* painting because it allows the performer to accommodate each definite character and the details of each episode. This freedom and individual contribution of all those who are involved in this storytelling is a peculiar feature of cultural translation in the context of Indian oral traditions.

These two powerful storytelling traditions of Rajasthan bear testimony to the timelessness of oral culture. In this act of performing/narrating through paintings, the viewers are not passive; their participation completes the narrative, making it lively and significant. The individual consciousness of the “source” refers to all those who create and produce the text, i.e. narrators, storytellers and performers. The “target” achieved through the collective efforts reveal the intricate structures of collective consciousness and multiple aesthetic experiences. The transmission and retelling of each form and structure is like a dialogue between the “word” and world(s) creating a new text. This means that “orality,” when transmitted or deciphered, imbibes a portion of its social/cultural contexts and resembles a nomadic metaphor that finds new meaning with each telling and retelling. During this journey one’s being is integrated with a wider field of “Being”.

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