
Redefining the *Karna Parampara Katha* via Intralingual Translation

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Abstract

The karna parampara katha or the orally narrated tale is a semi literary genre, which as a simple anecdotal artifact predates all written literature. Generally classified as part of the Little Canon, there is now a wide spread interest, to preserve it in print, as a vital part of oral literature, both through the mediation of individual and state agencies. The status of oral literature has almost always been lower than that of the genres written in the vernacular style, which again rank below written/print literature although oral arts still continue to form a part of daily life activities in many non-professional ways, through folksongs, work-songs, season-songs, marriage-songs, jokes, riddles, proverbs and sayings, songs for mourning, lullaby and so on, even to this day. Indian oral traditions like the Chinese and African have a long history, and the oral canon forms a vital part of the people's tradition, being handed down orally from generation to generation. The following paper is an attempt to problematise its generic taxonomy in the process of translating it into the print medium and eventually to the electronic mode.

I

The orally narrated tale shows the characteristics of everyday speech as well as the innovative poetic features, to some measure, of the language, in which it is narrated. It is perhaps the only literary genre which practically anyone can be a creator or receiver of. It is enough that one is able to speak and is even a little imaginative, to tell a tale. Literacy is imperative only when the language has to be used in the written mode or when it has to be

used in specific professional situations, though story telling is treated professionally in village communities to narrate myths, religious texts or to convey a socially relevant message. In lay terms, a katha is a fruitful and compulsive area of human interaction, fruitful because it is always contextualized and prompted by the need of the situation, compulsive because most human utterances are compressed anecdotes balancing the said on the unsaid implying metonymic extensions. In critical terms, for a linguist it is an exercise in stylistics and poetics via the linguistic sign; to a narratologist it is a speech utterance coalescing the authorial utterance, the authorial utterance facilitating the character's utterance and besides these two, a third sub-textual utterance that is generally the most vital although often the most silent of all the utterances in the oral text; to a cultural critic the oral tale's third sub-textual utterance which is unsaid but emanating through the text would be the most definite clue to the extra-literary, cultural environment of the text and as such every text would be an ideological form. The tale existing in the absence of a fixed text that could be sought for verification and authentication expresses itself through a fluid and incessantly improvised form. It invokes a diversity of areas and a range of disciplines, overlapping into ethics, philosophy, semiotics, cultural studies, anthropological studies, feminist studies and also political science.

Each of these areas into which it extends problematises its literary taxonomy as it enters into the print mode and finally into the electronic mode. Distinguishing the 'Ear (karma) Tradition (parampara) Story (katha)' from other forms like the folk song and folklore, it can be identified largely as a domestic and social artifact that is more personal and communal, reflecting the aspirations and anxieties of the individual and the community that produces it. Traditionally, tales that are narrated especially for children, converge, across the world on the recurrence of the same key terms that are relevantly individualised through region and culture specific apparatus. Thus when we identify idiosyncracies (such as region and culture specific items) it suggests at once that these function through

idiolects, dialects and a wide heteroglossic range of intra- linguistic variations.

Of these characteristics, the heteroglossia or the variedness of different varieties within a single linguistic code particularly marks the orally narrated tale as a special speech-act and speech-action genre, co-opting the listener(s) into the act of the narration. The phenomenon of narration and that of listening/comprehension is as much of prime focus for the present argument, for the psychosocial environment wherein the orally narrated tale is generated, plays a significant role in deciding the totality of its functions: i.e. its contexts that prompt its emergence, the nature of the tale, the role of the narrator, modes of narration, the psycholinguistic proximity of recognizable language features, the relationship between the narrator and the listener and the nearness of the chief characters in the tale through the channel of the community's cultural traditions. All tales function in the spheres of potential and actualized meanings. So although each tale may be an utterance specific to its moment of production, it is at the same time a receptive point of entry to a chain of stories. Oral tales are also a part of a long evolution of social and domestic ethics. Thus the aesthetic relation the listener has towards the hero is considered as a means of investigating the ethical implications, both individual and social. Such a poetics of the orally narrated tale makes it a region of experience where the inner experience and individual consciousness of the child meet the outside world through the concreteness of all the semiotic signs in the tale, such as words, gestures, the imagined presence of unknown objects and the real presence of known aspects and situations of life. The fact that demands attention therefore is the position of the language of the narrative itself and its use, which makes the narration an act that always comprises at least one more individual apart from the narrator. For example, the *Villupaatu*, literally 'the bow-song' is one such popular genre in oral literature in Tamil. Still in practice during village festivals, the singer(s) uses an upturned

bow to the ends of which bells are tied to keep the beat and rhythm. The performance is always threaded on a central tale that is sung mostly, although the performer may speak a few words in between if he aims at teasing a response from the audience. The singer plucks at the string with a small stick and sings legends from the religious epics, often interspersing it with socially relevant messages. The audience participates as a chorus, saying “Yes!Yes!” to rhetorical questions put to them by the lead singer, thereby becoming creators and the singer(s) become listeners when the audience participates through choric responses. Thus there is no formal division between the artist and his audience. These performances use basic texts orally inherited and improvise upon it from time to time depending upon the need of the hour. *Villupaatu* performances are usually held in the evenings and late into the night, appealing to the leisurely mood of the audience during annual festivities, especially in the post harvest season. Such immediate moments of production and exchange determines a style that is very close to the vernacular, everyday mode and the exchange between the singer and the audience very matter of fact and reliant on the use of parataxis as an effective linguistic tool.

Of course, the presence of the oral tale specially constructed for children, when framed into print, becomes the most sensitive index to the changing patterns of domestic structures and communal life. Tales narrated to children reflect domestic hierarchies and extended families. Tales can only be produced in some amount of leisure for it comes alive every time someone narrates it and when someone listens to it. More than any other literary genre it demands an immediate and continuous interaction with both the text and its narrator. So much so, that whether the tale is narrated to the child or whether he or she narrates it, the child becomes at all points of narration, both the author by simultaneous conceptualization and hero by simultaneous enactment of the events of the narrative. Fear, admiration and a host of other emotions permeate the narrative act. Apart from this a tale that is associated with, for example the

grandmother, occupies a special identity in the child's psyche that would probably not be exactly similar to the identity of the tale if it were to be read from a book, although it could impress very deeply upon the young reader's mind. So reorganization of extended and branched families into smaller nuclear ones does bear directly upon the emergence and continuation of this particular literary genre.

Locating the domestic tale in the contemporary literary map, especially in print, ensues the erasure of intra-linguistic richness, at all levels: lexical usages, phonological transitions, freedom in the use of surface grammar rules and more than anything else the open-endedness towards literary rejuvenation and repletion. Telling tales is a natural human act. When a child carries a tale, or imaginatively interprets a situation it is also in fact performing an exercise in the oral tradition of story telling, in spite of the moral censure it evokes. This is because the story-teller almost always wants to tell *something* to the listener. When the teller/narrator narrates a story what he does is far different from the writer of the story who sets out to create a piece of literature. The speech act combining with individual proficiency of 'telling' accesses the twists and turns of everyday speech and the more colloquial and close is the tale to day-to-day reality, the more effective is the presence of the flavor of the spoken language in all its variations. Freed from restraints of societal norms of speech, the teller of the oral tale has the license to create his own grammar for his narration. Combining with extra-lingual skills such as gesture, intonational variations, use of regional registers, idiosyncrasies in pronunciation and the judicious use of humor, the teller of the tale stretches the parameters of his artifact in such a way that finally the right use of a language becomes only one of its uses. Therefore the links and dependencies between the utterance and the language is never a simple one to one relationship. Rather, it becomes complex and dialogic.

An orally narrated tale keeps changing from time to time, absorbing the social ethos and events of the age when it is told with the imaginary and linguistic warp and woof available to the teller.

The changes in the details of the tale may be dictated to, by contextual needs: individual, social and political. Thus by its very nature this kind of a narrative is concentrically intertextual, moving backwards and forwards in its borrowings and yet keeping to itself. This flexibility which constantly opens up new shades of meaning every time it comes into being therefore makes the same story signify new meanings of the older story or even create radically opposite meanings. Therefore the older the story the more complex it's 'history' and the older the culture the more the possibilities of dialogic subversions.

The often parodic function of the orally narrated tale breaks down the divide between high and low cultural forms. It maintains a continual and effective critique of those very social aspects and situations to which it is indebted for its emergence. A tale could be, in this parodic sense, kind of a dialogue about the discourses that circulate in one's society. It is a moment of the carnivalesque¹, self-conscious in its narrativization. Its relation to the mass especially distinguishes the orally narrated tale from the printed tale which is more exclusive and dependent on a certain amount of aesthetic formalism. The listener of the orally narrated tale is directly complicit with the ideologies that determine our sense of reality and our self critique of it.

For purposes of illustrating the contention stated above, some examples are taken from the matrix of *karna parampara katha* (which forms the core of oral literature along with the ballads) that circulate in the Tamil language. A remarkable feature of the Indian tradition (I am using words like 'tradition' and 'culture' only functionally and not in any nuanced way) is that no matter how philosophically grand an idea, it has its critique in one form or another. Every system of thought, one could say almost every seminal idea has a counter-system of thought, a counter-concept. The orally narrated tale excels in this function. Whatever the system of thought, or counter-thought, it targets foundational structures. Here are some illustrations.

Perhaps nowhere in the world does the guru or the master occupy so much of the life-space and convictions of a people as he does in this country. Yet his teachings are constantly subverted with a vigor that sometimes outweighs the original force which builds them up. The guru himself as a person becomes the butt of personal jokes and caricaturing. The orally narrated tale has often taken care of this subversive act, provoking the listener/(now) reader to give the matter a second thought, as it were. A popular oral collect in Tamil known as the *Paramartha Guru Kathaigal*² is fully devoted to puncturing the master-figure and the very idea of the teacher-disciple or the 'guru-shishya parampara' concept. These stories are known widely and may be cited sarcastically in every day speech to drive home a point³. A loosely sequential string of stories, this hilarious 'text' has six central characters, the master and his five disciples. The master is known as the Paramartha Guru or One who is the Embodiment of the Supreme Truth (*parama+artha+guru*). As such, the truth that he is a manifestation of, is never understood through the tools of the mind and intelligence, for it is The Truth that must by its own definition, remain ideational with even the idea approximated and hypothetical necessity. This means that the master is infallible in his most supreme wisdom, so much so, that any question of doubt is ruled out altogether. After all, how can one question that which cannot be known? Thus acquitted of his shaming, the master wades through one escapade after another without a stain to his holy name. To begin with what makes the Paramartha Guru a master is that he has a following of five disciples (who are types or flat characters). They are given names such as Moorkhan, Matti, Muttal and so on. They behave as their names suggest because where the fool plays the wise man, the disciples must in reality be fools. Although there are variations of these tales from one version to another, by and large they are similar.

In a well-known episode, the disciples set out to get a horse for their aging master to ride on during his travels. They are conned

by an unlettered peasant who sells them a pumpkin, at a very high price, assuring them that it is a through-bred horse's egg. The disciples carry it slowly and carefully, stopping often in their journey so that the colt inside the egg is not traumatized by the movement. During one such interval, they rest the pumpkin in the thick foliage of a low tree and sit down beneath it. A stiff wind topples the pumpkin into a bush behind where a hiding rabbit takes off in a terrified sprint, followed at once by the disciples who wish to retrieve the escaping colt. But the story does not stop here as a mere parody of foolishness. The disciples return empty-handed to the master and narrate their misadventure. The master is at first disappointed but soon recovers to pronounce philosophically that it was a good thing after all. He argues that if a prematurely born colt is so high-spirited then what would the nature of the adult horse be, not to speak of the plight of the rider upon it? The disciples are consoled when they see the matter in a new light. But the listener/reader is puzzled by the ending of the story. In accepting the ridiculous Pumpkin Horse-egg adventure, the master shares the idiocy of his disciples to the full and thereby becomes the complete subversion of the traditional concept of the master. But in suddenly taking shelter under a fairly sound system of logic, he disturbs the subversion that he represented only a moment ago. So a simple tale that ran counter-wise seems to become complementary. At the same time the extraordinary use to which the system of logic has been teased into is no small matter. The tale can therefore turn back on itself while turning things around thus leaving its meaning indeterminate. The conceptual defiance must come to its logical finish if the tale is to make its point. As it happens in this tale, this collection poses several impossibilities only because our sense of the possible is disturbed. A well injected vein of satire on several cardinal philosophical concepts runs through story after story. This tale laughs at the voluminous exegeses on cosmogenesis. At the same time the language and principles of logic demystify themselves by their employment in incongruous settings.

In another tale which is well known all over India, the Paramartha Guru and his five disciples cross a river in spate. On reaching the other bank the master counts the others leaving himself out. The others do the same. Always failing to count up to six the whole group collapses on the river bank weeping for the comrade lost in the waters. A passing fisherman enquires and sizes up the situation. He then lines up the six fools and instructs them to shout their serial number as he gives them a hard knock on the head, thus reuniting the band once again. A grateful master pays the fisherman a large amount of money. Actually, apart from its subversive effect, this story has been used in many folk tales to highlight human being's failure to see and note the obvious. Generally used to illustrate the inability of the individual to know his self, in its metaphysical sense, in this story, the fisherman uses the same kernel of the story to help the master to recover the lost student not through any elaborate metaphysical teaching but by a quicker and more direct method. This is what makes for the use of the tale in one context and another. Much of the satire lies not only in the method of retrieval but also on what is retrieved. In the former it is the wisdom of the self and in the latter, it is the foolish disciple. Moreover, as it happens in the case of the Pumpkin Horse-egg story, here also, the outsider figure who arrives into the context is the total opposite of the master-disciple group. If they represent wisdom he is either a simple villager or an illiterate. Yet it is he who finally gets the better of them. One could give a number of examples where the narrative imagination affects this kind of a defamiliarization.

The carnivalesque success of the tale and its enjoyment lies in the shared knowledge both the narrator and the listener have of the traditional semantic field of meaning of the words, as well as its subversive and creative possibilities. However the multiple meanings can never be seen as separate entities, because for each to function effectively the other must act as a foil. Therefore the orally narrated tale exploits the inherently dialogic nature of words, here

for instance ‘master’, specifically appealing to the regional renderings of words at the semantic and more importantly the phonetic levels. Dialogic readings of the word impressing upon lived experience make the tale possible, providing, that the cultural context allows this alliance. So using the same set of words to decode known systems of thought, new discourses come into being, always questioning the neutrality of words. Vinay and Darbelnet encourage the translator (here the intralinguistic translator) to think of meaning as a cultural construction and to see the close connection between the linguistic signs and processes and the metalinguistic information that are outside the text⁴.

One can think of a number of collections of the orally narrated tale constructed like the *Paramartha Guru Kathaigal* using binary divisions, like the Akbar-Birbal tales or the Tenali Ramakrishna–Krishnadevaraya tales. While history texts accord Akbar a high rank among the Moghuls, substituting the claim with reference to the efflorescence in art and learning, it is always Birbal who gets the better of the two, offering commonsensical solutions to tricky situations. Similarly in the Tenali Ramakrishna–Krishnadevaraya tales, the court jester outwits not only his patron but all the scholars of the court. He has the special gift of fathoming a riddle or revealing what is hidden from sight and understanding. Some of the finest specimens of temple art and architecture in south India were the product of Krishnadevaraya’s zeal and he was himself a poet of repute. But in every encounter with Tenali Ramakrishna, he eats the bitter fruit. In such tales it is not the king who is the hero but the *vikata kavi* or the *vidushaka*⁵ whose special talent is his use of language in newer and unprecedented ways. The king’s existence is reduced to textual remains along side the official versions, always in opposition with the former. While the official canons of history define exhaustively the life and achievements of legendary heroes and kings, the orally narrated tale upsets conventional hierarchies, reads history cynically and redefines categories. Thus a historic figure like Krishnadevaraya exists only as a residue in the stories and

legends about him in the genre where he is more human and closer to life when compared to his presence in the impersonal official version.

Institutions are also pulled down at times. Recall for instance, tales celebrating the wisdom of Mariyadai Raman. A runaway peasant boy, Raman emerges as the finest judge of the Chola kingdom. He assesses every case with exceptional insight and objectivity which is why he is known as Mariyadai Raman. Since law and justice are generally incompatible, Raman posits an alternative figure to the judge in his society. In these tales the corrupt judges of the court stand in opposition to Raman who does not have scholarship but has a deep sense of righteousness. The oral tale becomes an alter world where things are set right in a language that is known to the common man.

In all the three collections mentioned so far, humor laces every episode pungently and while serious reversals are effected, no ill will is meant. The orally narrated tale is irrepressible and nothing contains it. The teller of the tale stands outside the language he uses and manipulates the speech of the characters to project his own subversive intentions in a refracted way. The comic, ironic utterances of parody create the ‘double-voiced discourse’ which serves at the same time two speakers, expressing the direct intention of the character within the fictional context and the refracted intention of the story-teller. In carnivalised literature such as the orally narrated tale, nothing is a high or true utterance, neither is that low and false. Signifiers such as ‘master’, ‘king’ and ‘philosopher’, to refer to the examples given above, are released from official contextualization and regenerated by the author through the characters so that, what results is “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices”(Emerson’s trans. of Bakhtin 1984 :6).

Whether these kinds of tales were started off and set in circulation as a satire of formalized thinking or simply for the sheer

fun of it – like school boys nick-naming the headmaster because they cannot defy him openly-is left for us to guess at. Whatever the motive, it is clear that the ‘author’ must be learned in life. The point of contention however is that reading a tale is at all times restricted to a specific group, whereas listening to/creating simultaneously to a tale coalesces a larger group. The former act is elitist and in entering the portals of print loses its open-ended vigor in the closure of print. Bound by the logic of syntax, it must necessarily order itself in a linear fashion. The informing structure that makes its discursive substance secondary is its grammar and syntax that operate through a priori rules, so that what is printed and read makes sense to the reader. Moreover the act of reading being an intensely personal exercise, poised in a moment of time, circumscribes the periphery of the story’s function, excluding for the writer, at the same time, alternate and multiple modes of narration through instantaneous editing and improvisation. The oral narration of a story to/with a group of involved people could radically refashion an already established story in unexpected ways. It would not be farfetched to say that the orally narrated tale as a communal semiotic establishes the social stability of human groups and enshrines the ways and means which every society views life and tackles life.

II

Shifting from the preceding argument of how print affects oral narratives in their production and reception/participation, I now look at some difficulties of generic classification that arise when the spoken language is inscribed in the narrative, with specific literary references to validate my hypothesis. With the increasing withdrawal of domestic tales narrated verbally - person to person - comes in the growing predominance of oralistic traditions in written fiction. While most of the examples highlighted in the first section centered on adult reception of adult tales, there is also a vast fund of oral narratives for children about children. If tales about children were meant for children and meant therefore to build up their ethical,

psychic and emotional stamina necessary for life, then the contemporary tale about children have also to be seen lying juxtaposed alongside the traditional tales. Traditional tales were of course carefully pieced together keeping the listener in mind and story telling was a responsible act.

Usually tales narrated to children feature through the mother tongue, although with growing and irreversible facets of urbanization and consequently education, the mother tongue is constantly replaced by, for us in India, English from early childhood, for language usage is today affected both by the politics and economics of globalization. This, besides the hierarchization of languages as related to upward social mobility and social identity, tends to invariably place the mother tongue, more so the region based variation lower, or lowest, perhaps in the ladder, although in the individual sphere it may occupy a higher place. However such a reduction does not hold as a commonly applicable truth in a state of affairs where access to the basics of education even in one's mother tongue is difficult and impossible for many. Yet the filtering impact of urbanization into villages and the necessity of the fragmentation of the community and domestic groups towards the urban areas in search of economic sustenance take its palpable toll on the intralinguistic aspects of day to day language which is truly the language of the oral narrative. To explicate in terms of a simple but valid citation, take a brief comparative look between the domestic language in any regional language heard thirty or forty years ago and compare it to the one heard now. Many lexical items have gone out of use because the items that they signify have gone out of use. Similarly the persistent linguistic interference of another language into and at times in lieu of the mother tongue affects the speech utterances which enable narration, that are once more culturally located.

Seen from this angle, I now argue for the presence of the orally narrated tale authored by adults about children within the contours of contemporary fiction that stem from oral traditions.

Some of the finest practitioners of oral tradition within the fictional mode are writers of identities with the third world in general, from where they imbibe their stylistic devices. Bringing oral narrative modes into print fiction creates a field of literature where the oral mode itself functions as part of the thematic and discourse that underlies the text. Here the orally narrated tale becomes a stylistic tool which is however not value free. This mode of narration also is meant to destabilize the formalized print form and practice, being in its use of orature, a continuity and a difference at the same time. When one hears a regional dialect in real life situations, it may pass off as nothing uncommon, but the same when it appears in print within a fiction, becomes purposeful and is no longer just a language variation. It is an ironic stance upon the representation of language as spoken in daily life. This justifies the genre crossing i.e. from the domestic oral tale to oral structures of narration in contemporary fiction by marginalized writers in the continuation of my argument.

A tale narrated can never be considered as an autonomous linguistic construct, abstracted away from the dynamics of social context. How the child is presented in the story is also a comment on how the child ought not to be in reality. Ideations in traditional tales are taken *prima facie* and generally no tale is told that elaborates the class and gender based exploitation of the child, as being located in an unalterable reality controlled by real forces outside the textual space. If it is the story of a suffering child, the story is finally resolved at a point where virtue triumphs, reward is at hand and the harsh realities are easily surmounted and altered to lead to an optimistic closure, because at the heart of the story-telling act is the philosophic aspiration to create not only the ideal individual, but also an ideal social and historic world. Therefore the child and his or her experiences within the story and the closure and nature of the closure of the story are predetermined by these compulsions. In other words, characters are archetypal, located within Manichean binaries⁶ of eternal good and evil and values are fixed.

When writers use the oral mode in contemporary fiction, what they do is to use the lucid narrative forms so as to question the

synchronic approach that underlies traditional narratives, disturbing at the same time our understanding of what we consider stable. From the visionary epic foundation that aims at an ideal world the move is towards a novelistic mode that is resistive and often oxymoronic in content. They record the fluctuations of tone, semantic ambiguity and unconventional grammatical constructions as they occur in day to day language, interspersing the narration with other genres like songs, letters and self-addressed comments. Humanistic legends and aspirations are defeated by them by allowing the onslaught of a contemporary world that is far from conducive to the engineered construction of an ideal child and an ideal community. Their narratives mirror the linguistic impoverishment, lack of leisure, the alienation of the child, the collapse of domestic comfort and the inescapable future where the good child is not the best or the most successful child. So old epistemes and paradigms are questioned when we look at not the tale told for the child per se, in itself, but alongside the child in other narratives as well in the actual world as a seamless semiotic paradigm. The theoretical complexity involved in this complex manouvre is often overlooked leaving one set of texts as an aspiration that fails to address the ways in which values and beliefs are often conflictual, and other sets of texts fully implicated within the society in which it is produced defying the former in precise detail. Institutional matrices such as the syllabi or the canon once again resolve the issue by emphasising on specialization, but even here the resolution is indebted to linguistic analysis which differentiates literature for children, from that by children or about children the last of which not always recording the expansive and negative meanings of the term as well it does the positive. The orally narrated tale is not a distinctive genre but a problematic that can be described as a site of a combination of all the problems inherent in synchronic classifications, stretching its contours to the totality of the study of all texts. This may veer the emphasis from the inspirational and aesthetic (I do not equate the two as synonyms) to the ideological. This, however, by no means excludes the aesthetic although it links the total construct of the aesthetic of literature with

its reliance on inspirational value of the spoken language and the spontaneously, often metonymically constructed oral tale.

When writers tell a story about a child they have a point to make and they are talking about and for real children who cannot speak for themselves. This then raises a fundamental question. What kind of a tale is a tale for the child? Are those tales privileged or are they? Can the child's world whether narrated through the vision of an adult or whether self-narrated through authorial help in the pages of a novel ever exist independently without adult intervention? Since it cannot, one is then led to conclude that tales of heroism and vision meant and narrated to children are most necessary not so much for the children themselves as it happens in the oral/domestic form, as they are for the adult who shapes the child's future world. Otherwise children's literature will lie museumised on the one side and contemporary literature will continue to be read and critiqued on the other side without being seen side as two sides of the same coin.

Stepping further towards the responsibility that makes literary art meaningfully empowered to shape and reshape life, literary genres cannot be compartmentalized synchronically. Rather their diachronic and simultaneous identities or taxonomies should be accommodated. It is on the strength of the above argument that I underscore the difficulties that arise in the classification of the orally narrated tale when it enters the print media. The only way to preserve oral literature outside human memory is to convert it into written texts. However, this process of writing/printing the oral body of literature is necessarily determined by various socio-political factors through history, apart from language usages of a society at a given period of time, thus influencing both its content in form and content, when it enters print. Like language itself, oral traditions grow and change into new forms, die out or persist in unexpected new varieties. The language of the tale is closely related to the spoken dialects of the local areas. Textualizing puts an end to the continuous imaginative renderings through reformulation of already known legends and tales and robs the tale of its strongest

characteristic. Media critics⁷ lead us on to acknowledge the inevitability of the digitalized form replacing printed versions of oratures, giving place to a technological orality as it were, although in India oral literature is statistically more than print literature.

This takes us to a final question: who really is the author of the tale, which depends on the narrator and the listener for its survival. Every time a narrator appropriates a tale to suit his need and imagination he creates it and every time the listener hears it and appropriates it into his individual or social context, he creates it too. Knowledge of the listener's social and personal identity, gives the teller of the tale an edge over the writer. Constantly provided with a feed-back from the audience even as he narrates the tale, he can rapidly modify items of information, shift the focus of the tale to suit the audience's mood or even provoke the listener to enter into the tale by making the references recognizably personal. Thus he receives, creatively, certain benefits which the writer of the story does not. This is why the oral tale has an existence that challenges time. As the social situations, listeners, and language change the tale keeps changing too, to come into being relevantly. The oral tale because of its flexible nature renders the same story differently in every instance of repeated performance, depending upon the need of the hour. The written story on the other hand, frames oral stories into singular versions. The form is tight and allows no room for improvisation or human presence via mediation. It is always defined by the translator of this exercise or the editor or the publisher, rather than by the narrator/performer. Oral tales disappear the moment after it has been narrated, so memory, repetition and reformulation keep them in existence though they may continuously change in detail.

Thus instead of classification being a disciplinary measure, with the pun deliberately intended, it becomes an inquisitive and responsible activity that questions the problems contained within disciplinary studies itself. Tale tellers or tale fabricators have skirted scrupulously all immediate determination of truth by rhetorical

strategies that are resistant to what is increasingly the normative practice around us, in the negative sense of the word. If a contrary stand is taken, then the exercise of contextualizing literary studies views the genre not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what it does to related texts. So the difficulty arises in the containment of one set of definitions and one focal point in the genre of children's literature rather than as something that is composed, and constructed of multiple truths. This means the necessary erasure of our understanding of the differences between the two set of texts referred to earlier that makes them easily manageable without one disturbing the other. Such disagreements about cataloguing would therefore also inflect the availability of meanings in the text, making it, to borrow a currently recognizable term, heavily encrypted. Sympathetically positioning the argument which starts from an initial bafflement at the totalizing and generalizing of generic taxonomies. If we step further towards the responsibility that makes literary art meaningfully empowered to shape and reshape life, literary genres cannot be compartmentalized synchronically. Rather their diachronic and simultaneous identities or taxonomies should be accommodated. It is on the strength of the above argument that I underscore the linguistic, cultural and ideological difficulties that arise with the entry of the orally narrated tale or the *karna parampara katha* into print.

To sum up the orally narrated tale that is known as the *karna parampara katha* or to translate literally, the ear-tradition tale, cannot have an author in the sense of a text being written by the author. Compilations and editions in print make these tales available to many, but we find quite often - see the reference list to my paper - that editors print their own name under the head of author. Leaving aside the question of publication ethics, a more serious point is to be considered. The very forte of an oral tale lies in its anonymity, its defiance to closure, its availability to all people at all times and its endlessly self-generating power. Being antique, no authentic claim can be made to its authorship. The absence of a manuscript does not facilitate verification. Many versions of the same tale as well as the

simultaneous existence of the same tale in several traditions only complicate the matter. So the privilege of the authorship of the orally narrated tale lies with all people of all times, owing itself to a shared matrix of the knowledge of life as well as the incurable human impulse to pull things apart and upside down to know it better. Its essential location in life keeps it elusive and not fully captured by any method to frame it in time and space through the written/printed/digitalized word. The orally narrated tale is thus a spacious literary genre which enables epistemological and semantic conversions, both delighting and instructing at the same time and defiant of classification. While scholars and philosophers present counter-systems of thought in elaborate theses, the orally narrated tale prefers the fisherman's straightforward tactics - of a hard blow - not caring even for the written word.

NOTES

1. Carnival is associated with the revelry, the subversion of authority and hierarchies. In literature carnivalisation mobilizes one form of literature, an informal or popular genre against the more elitist forms. As a literary usage the carnivalesque is transhistorical and is not located in the Renaissance model of the carnival as seen in Rabelais by Bakhtin, who extends it to the ancient Menippean satire as well as to the subversive style of Dostoevsky. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (1965; Trans. Helene Iswolsky [Indiana Univ.Press, 1984).
2. Constanzo Beschi, a missionary better known as Veeramamunivar who lived in Tamil Nadu in the early eighteenth century is credited with first putting the Paramartha Guru's story collection in written form from the oral tradition.
3. Print editions, referred below, have also been taken into consideration along with the oral versions for discussion in this paper.

4. Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, "A Methodology for Translation" translated by Juan C. Sager and M.-J.Hamel in the *Translation Studies Reader*, Ed. Lawrence Venuti (rpt. New York: Routledge 2002), pp128 -137.
5. The *vikata kavi* is a palindrome (literally 'back direction'), a poet and polyglot who has such command over the languages he uses, that he can create meanings forwards and backwards simultaneously and alike using the same set of syllables, words or at times alphabets. Kings considered it prestigious to have a *vikatakavi* in court. A *vidushaka* is a secondary character in Sanskrit drama, like the court jester of the European tradition. However he is not a fool but often the wisest in the text, both jesting and commenting on the action. Witty but sarcastic and frivolous, he takes extraordinary liberties in speech.
6. Manichaeism is a dualistic religious system of Manes, from first century A.D. Persia and refers to a combination of Gnostic Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and various other elements, with a basic doctrine of a conflict between light and dark dualistic philosophy dividing the world between good and evil principles or regarding matter as intrinsically evil and mind as intrinsically good. The term is used here only descriptively and not theologically.

Web source:

<http://www.reference.com/search?q=manichean>

7. Walter J. Ong in his *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. *New Accents* (Ed. Terence Hawkes, New York: Methuen, 1988) talks about the emergence of a second orality dominated by electronic modes of communication and incorporating elements from both the chirographic mode and the orality mode. This in turn creates a secondary community, a virtual community.

Marshall McLuhan, in his *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (University of Toronto Press, 1962), studies the emergence of what he labels as the ‘Gutenberg Man’, the subject/reader who is a product of the printed book and whose consciousness is shaped by the medium of knowledge, whether individual or collective.

Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Penguin USA, 1985 holds the view that the boom in technological media like the television trivialises all human concerns. All three media critics illustrate the western model.

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