

## **Retrospecting Indigenous Knowledge in the Select Translated Indian Short Stories “Oorkali” by Irathina Karikalan “The Paddy Harvest” by Mogalli Ganesh and “A Childhood Tale” by Urmila Pawar**

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### **Abstract**

Textual representations of indigenous knowledge in contemporary Indian society are brought to light through Translation into English. The three short stories taken up for discussion are “Oorkali” by Irathina Karikalan translated by Hephzibah Israel, “The Paddy Harvest” by Mogalli Ganesh translated by K.Raghavendra Rao and “A Childhood Tale” by Urmila Pawar translated by Jahnvi Phalkey and Keerti Ramachandra. In addition to the nuances of Translation, the selected authors have foregrounded the fading art in the present day scenario, by extending its reach to the readership constituencies outside academia as well. The selected three stories are originally written in Tamil, Kannada and Marathi, depict the traditional activities undertaken and accomplished by the poor in their particular villages respectively. The paper identifies different knowledge prevalent in Indian society which gives a new perspective today. The forgotten history of the past particularly cattle rearing, Paddy harvesting, village school life and also the art of weaving are beautifully narrated by the select authors respectively. Though the above said activities mentioned in the three different stories are from three different places, the reader comes to understand the knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions all over India are the same. The reader finds a singularity and feels wonderstruck among the vast ocean of Indian cultures.

**Key Words:** indigenous, knowledge, Translation, village life

### **Introduction**

Textual representations of indigenous knowledge in contemporary Indian society are brought to light through Translation into English. The three short stories taken up for discussion are “Oorkali” by Irathina Karikalan translated by Hephzibah Israel, “The Paddy Harvest” by Mogalli Ganesh translated by K.Raghavendra Rao and “A Childhood Tale” by Urmila Pawar translated by Jahnvi Phalkey and Keerti Ramachandra. In addition to the nuances of Translation, the selected authors have foregrounded the fading art in the present day scenario, by extending its reach to the readership constituencies outside academia as well. The selected three stories are originally written in Tamil, Kannada and Marathi, depict the traditional activities undertaken and accomplished by the poor in their particular villages respectively. The paper identifies different knowledge prevalent in Indian society which gives a new perspective today. The forgotten history of the past particularly cattle rearing, Paddy harvesting, village school life and also the art of weaving are beautifully narrated by the select authors respectively. Though the above said activities mentioned in the three different stories are from three different places, the reader comes to understand the knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions all over India are the same. The reader finds a singularity and feels wonderstruck among the vast ocean of Indian cultures.

### **Retrospecting indigenous knowledge in the Select Translated Text**

In the story “Oorkali” the author picturises the art of cattle rearing in a village where two sisters Pavunamma and the narrator accompany the father everyday to graze the cattle of the five streets of the Padaiaatchi which belong to the upper caste. Taking the cattle for grazing is “not an easy task” (TC 2). The difficult experiences of the cattle rearers along with their lifestyle, food, and clothing are picturised in a sensible way and that which give an outline to the younger generation. This is explained as, the uncastrated bulls would chase the virgin heifers the moment they caught their smell. The author suggests some mild tips to control the cattle while taking them for grazing: “To control the unruly ones, he would take the rope around their necks and

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tie this to their forelegs, forcing them to limp” (2).

The father used to carrying a stout bamboo stick, about a mozham long, to drive the cattle. While walking through the village streets, he would take his slippers off and hook them to the stick and hold it against his shoulder. By eleven in the morning, the cattle would be taken to the banyan tree for grazing, and from there the animals are taken to the lake to drink water and then to the forest by the big lake. While they graze the cattle, her outcaste friends from the village join together and compete to collect the dung. They pat it into cakes and sell it to buy bangles for Deevali and Pongal, and with the remaining money they buy blouse pieces from the bundle-men. The minute details given by the author help to retrospect the indigenous art of cattle rearing which is explained as “If indigenous knowledge has not been documented and compiled, doing so should be a research priority of the highest order. Indigenous knowledge is being lost at an unprecedented rate, and its preservation, preferably in database form, must take place as quickly as possible” (National Research Council 45).

The paper also highlights the lifestyle and the horrible lives of the outcastes in their native villages. They get up very early in the morning even when the village guard's cock crowed and go to bed late at night. They lead a very simple life, because in return for taking the cattle for grazing, the outcastes would get food, rice, lumpy kevaru kazhi thick kamba koozhu which would fall into the same brass vessel. Unable to bear the pain, sometime they ask themselves “Are our tongues and stomachs only for drinking the watery kevaru koozhu of the masters' houses?” (2-3). Also the narrator does not recall her father ever having worn a shirt.

The paper tells of the village scenic beauty, its organic food varieties, indigenous games played by children, and also the indigenous medicine used by the author in a touching way. The scenic beauty of the village is depicted by the author as, on sunny days, paddy, black gram and coriander seeds of various households are spread out on the streets to dry. When the cattle come on the way, the householders would stand by their grains to guard them. If the cattle eat the grain or so, they curse the masters immediately. Also the small recreations of the characters are also highlighted by the author. The two sisters, the narrator and her younger sister Pavunamma who is otherwise lovingly called “Thangatchi” is like “the lotus that bloomed in the lake” (4), go to the pond and do petty doings to enjoy themselves. The narrator used to dig the roots of water lily out of the lake for her younger sister and digs up clay on the bank of the lake and pat out radio sets and trucks for her. Natural food used by village children is also portrayed, as the younger sister likes millet she slips the sight of the watchman in the forest to pluck millet cobs and would roast it for her.

The paper tells of the staunch superstitious beliefs of the villagers, the treatment given to the sick animals as well as to human beings, illegal child abortion, and sexual harassment of the illiterate villagers especially the affiliated miserable condition of the villagers. Sometimes a pregnant cow's water sac would burst in the forest. The narrator's father would carefully pull the calf out by its head, and pinch out the tender parts of its hooves. Then he would heat water with karuva leaves in a pot, on a stove built of loose stones. He would rub the cow down with hot water and hay to soothe it and clean the blood splattered on the ground. Also when the animals refuse food, the narrator's father sucks out the thorns from their tongues with his own mouth. When they are sick, he pounds the medicinal peranda and feeds them.

The horrible moment emanates when Thangatchi is conceived from a boy belonging to the upper caste. It is finally decided by the father to abort the child. The vannathi (Dhobi) who is otherwise the midwife gives liquor to the young girl before the process starts. She ties a thin cotton cloth around a coconut reed, and dipped it in the poisonous milk of the yerrakkam plant which is kept in a coconut shell. Holding her legs apart, the vannathi pushes the wetted stick deep enough to touch the walls of her uterus. Then she draws the stick out, giving the girl some green leaves to chew. Later that night, her body begins to heave and convulse. Her skirt is covered with clots of blood and she is screaming which sounded beyond the streets of the outcastes and dies a tortured death in front of her loved ones. Here the author gives a kind of awareness regarding the wrong treatment given to a person in need.

The paper clearly picturises that indigenous knowledge, good as well as the bad, refers to understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. In the second story “The Paddy Harvest” by Mogalli Ganesh the author beautifully depicts the nuances, before and after paddy harvest in addition to the lives of the harvesters. This knowledge is fading gradually and in some places it had already faded due to the intervention of modern technology. This

knowledge is integral to the culture of the society that also encompasses language, systems of classification, resources, practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality. These unique ways of knowing are the important facets of world's cultural diversity, and provide a foundation for locally appropriate sustainable development.

Past culture seems to be incongruous, but it is part of the cultural legacy. It is fading in the present scenario as one seeks for a compromise to go into modernization. Here the paper pinpoints the activities the harvesters undergo before harvesting paddy. They are very eager to receive their long expected fruits. Small children too try hard to drive away their sleepiness in order to take part in the elders' activities to collect the paddy. Women's prior role is to take out all the unused and used vessels and keep them ready to collect the paddy safe. Many of them had forgotten to eat the last night's leftovers, and are content with the jiggery sweetened tea from the shop. They sharpen the scythes to a fine point and the whole scene is picturised by the author as "an incredible sense of life in the night black colony." Their very presence in the place shows "as if they are waiting eternally for some joyous event" (12). Also the pond area is bustling with activity and noise as if a fair or festival is on. The author reminisces that earlier the ancestors in the village used to steal cattle, slaughter them and eat them, not leaving a trace behind. To escape detection by the cattle owners, they filled the storing vessels with the remaining bones and bury them. Hence they prone to lose many useful vessels and at this juncture they are compelled to think of them.

As in the previous story "Oorkali," where the cattle rearers beg for food from the rich for their day's work, in "The Paddy Harvest" too the villagers though they work very hard in the fields, they do not get rice often. They recollect their past experiences in eating rice. One harvester tells that the last time they ate rice was during the last harvest. Another is remembered of the sumptuous meal she had during the death anniversary of the headman's wife. The other one reminds of the feast she had in the house of Dase Gowda. The glory of the meal is narrated by the Kannada author as "There was rice palav. . . served on plantain leaves. . . and what a beautiful smell. . . The lovely aroma of spiced rice filled the room, so that the entire house seemed to be something made out of sandalwood" (13). Also the previous night of the harvest, they begin to calculate their debts that are to be cleared the next day by means of paddy. They dream of how to make a different living of their own by selling paddy the next day. But still their life is filled with threats and fears and sufferings. Many a time their dreams are in vain and they lead a discontented life.

The paper also highlights the scenic beauty of the surrounding enjoyed by the harvesters as in "Oorkali." They feel the cool breeze from the plain, "a breeze that travelled across the wide fields and wafted in with the aroma of paddy" (14). On the harvesting day, the beauty of the colony is elaborated as that the morning light wraps itself round the colony like a warm cloth and they spring to action. The author tells "the stars in the sky's garden looked like paddy grain, hung for drying or scattered for sowing" (13). Seeing the vast expanse of the fields and the glistening gold of the paddy crop, they stood dumbstruck for a moment. Young boys touch the hanging paddy stalks gently, like birds, with unconcealed joy. Lamola puts across "Small-scale, resource-poor farmers in developing countries breed local crop varieties for improved production using informal innovation systems based on indigenous knowledge" (3).

Harvesting is a marvelous teamwork carried out with exemplary speed and skill. Their oneness and the togetherness are to be highly appreciated. While indulging themselves in their work, they divided the work spontaneously on the spot. When the harvesters begin to cut the crop, they cut at an incredible speed: "Their scythes waving and swishing, their bangles jangling, wielding their tools with dexterity" (16). Some collected the cut paddy and heaped it, while others poured the paddy into bags, for beating and winnowing. The beaten and winnowed paddy is packed into bags and placed in neat rows. Yet others heaped the stalks in one place.

By the time they complete the work, their bodies are exhausted and their clothes are crumpled. They look totally different but they are confident that they have done something worth and that made them flee from hunger. Next the paddy is cooked before turning into rice and that will send out a pleasant mouth-watering aroma reaching the noses of everyone around. Oldfield and Alcorn are of the view "Much of the world's biological diversity is in the custody of farmers who follow age-old farming and land use practices. These ecologically complex agricultural systems associated with centres of crop genetic diversity include not only the traditional cultivars . . . , but also wild plant and animal species that serve humanity as biological resources" (37).

Past oriented societies are concerned with traditional values and ways of doing things. Those that are past oriented, tend to be conservative in management and slow to change those things that are tied to the past. The beautiful narration of the lost art is worth reading as the younger generation is not aware of this and this will definitely help them by giving a little awareness in the lost art. Stanley comments “Modern culture tends to take over traditional culture because modern culture is powerful: it is mechanized, it moves mountains, it digs canals and drains swamps, it overwhelms, and it is seductive—it glitters, it tastes sweet, it goes fast” ([www.huffingtonpost.com/St Stanley-knick/traditional-culture-andm\\_b\\_655992.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/St Stanley-knick/traditional-culture-andm_b_655992.html)).

The final story taken up for discussion “A Childhood Tale” by Urmila Pawar, is an autobiographical narrative. The author goes back to her past of what had happened before thirty five years to tell of her tale. She had four major enemies: her father, mother, brother and her teacher Herlekar guruji, the last one, often waits to pounce on her. At present she comes to a realisation that these four enemies had laid the foundation in her life and only because of them she is what she is today. To her surprise her father died early and she feels that she is relieved from “one of the fearsome foursome” (44). Even at his deathbed he requests his wife to educate their children. Her father, a schoolteacher, is a very brisk person, constantly running around here and there. His attire is of a white dhoti, white khamis, a black coat, and a Gandhi topi on his head. He carries a black umbrella always. He often beats the children with the umbrella.

As an educated person in the backward community, though he has passed only seventh standard, people would respect and honour the narrator's father. He gives awareness to his people about education, as if he is advising a treatment for arthritis. In the midst of his school work and acting as a priest of their community, he cares his children. Every evening when he comes home, he would make the children sit with their books in front of the lantern till they felt their necks would get twisted or else he would thrash them. Every now and then he unwraps small chinapud packets and mixes them with jiggery and rolls into berry sized balls. If one swallows those balls after dinner and drinks castor oil in the morning, all the worms inside the body will die. Her second enemy the mother too, washes her hair with washing soda and boiling water, by scrubbing the scalp and also the ears. When the hair is dry, she applies oil and runs a fine toothed comb hard through it so it picks out lice and nits.

The author who hates to go to school would think up all sorts of different excuses to avoid going. Instead of going to school, she would sit in the temple. Mother puts a lump of jiggery on her palm and sweetly says “Go, go to school. . . When you come back I will give you money to buy chana” (50). Once in order to bunk school, she hides her only nice frock in the corner behind the grinding stone among some rags and affirms that her frock is missing. As it is time for school, the mother and her brother the third enemy begin to search for the frock in all the corners of the house and finally it is pulled out as if it were a bag full of gems from Alibaba's cave. They throw angry glances at her and give hard slaps on her. Even if he is late to school, nobody scolds him as he is in High School. He takes his sister to school, though it is late for both of them, by dragging her through the ditches on the road, the gutters, thorny bushes, and whatever else on the way. He makes her to sit in the class and that is highly appreciated by the teacher.

On that day, the teacher punishes her for being late by saying, “Hold your ears and stand!,” “Bend forward!,” “Get up, go collect the cow dung from the verandah and throw it away” (53), as it is from her cow Kapila. She disobeys her teacher who gets angry and slaps her hard across her face, leaving a mark of five fingers and sends her out of the classroom. As she goes home crying, the mother gets provoked and wants to go for a fight with the teacher. In the evening on his way home, she meets the teacher and asks the reason for his beating. She warns the teacher and from that day onwards things become easier for her. No more dung collecting and no more beatings. Her behavior towards school and studies also has changed and gives a new turn in her life.

Village school life is clearly depicted in the story “A Childhood Tale.” Modern teachers are not supposed to beat the children at School. Government takes strict action against teachers at present. Through the story the author cautions that punishment to students or children will not empower them or mould their character and definitely it will not lead them to acquire leadership qualities in their lives. The author compares her father to her teacher Herlekar guruji by saying that her father would beat her if she did not study but Herlekar guruji would punish her even if she did. He would ask her to do menial jobs in the classroom like cleaning the blackboard,

throwing out the garbage, collecting the cow dung from the verandah. He always makes her sit in the last row. Also it is her mother had issued a proclamation to the teachers in the school to beat her child hoping that it will help her to gain knowledge. These ideologies are completely removed from the society and hence a teacher or a parent is advised to treat the children as his friend or a companion if he expects a new turn in their lives.

Finally the lost art of weaving is brought to light. Weaving basket is one of the most ancient of all decorative crafts. Weaving of baskets in India is an art as ancient as the making of pottery. Baskets are made out of twigs, bamboo, cane and the wild monsoon grass, and are covered with golden grass or the golden outer skin of the rice plant. Bamboo proliferates in hundreds of varieties throughout India. Even the nomadic food gathering cultures wove reeds together to prepare baskets. Later, different materials and cultures developed a variety of basketry for domestic use, as well as for ritual purposes. They developed special patterns based on local traditions and techniques. The hard working mother is always seen in the courtyard weaving baskets of different shapes—big, small, wide and shallow. She weaves winnowing fan, sieve, etc. and is seen from the daybreak until one goes to sleep at night. Her hands always move and the other time she would meddle around near the kitchen fire. Her neighbours as well as the children while crossing her house watch her weave. She dedicates her life to weaving for the welfare and education of her children.

### **Conclusion**

The three stories are originally written in Tamil, Kannada and Marathi, depict the traditional activities undertaken by the poor in their particular villages respectively. The paper identifies the different past activities prevalent in Indian society which give a new perspective in the mindset of the present-day generation. The forgotten history of the lost arts particularly cattle rearing, Paddy harvesting, village school life and also the art of weaving are beautifully narrated by the select authors respectively. Though the above said activities mentioned in the three different stories are from three different places, the reader comes to understand the knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions all over India are the same. The reader finds a singularity and feels wonderstruck among the vast ocean of Indian cultures.

In addition to the three indigenous activities, the paper highlights other indigenous knowledge prevalent among the villagers such as the village scenic beauty, its organic food varieties, indigenous games played by children, the indigenous medicines given to the young and the old and also to the sick animals as well as to human beings. It also shows the negative impact of following some foolish inconsistencies that should be abolished such as the staunch superstitious beliefs of the villagers, illegal child abortion, and sexual harassment among the illiterate villagers which often lead to death. These are beautifully taken into account, in a way of giving awareness the readers.

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