

## Cordelia's Salt: Interspatial Reading of Indic Filial-Love Stories

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In 2008 my father, S. Nagarajan (1929-2014), a professor of English, began to consolidate fifteen years of his research toward a new edition of *King Lear*. He had edited *Measure for Measure* for Signet Classics years ago, an edition that remained in print for over forty years, and he had taught Shakespeare for decades. But *King Lear*, for him, remained “Shakespeare’s mightiest play.” The same passion had resulted in his 1961 Harvard Ph.D. dissertation on the heroines of Shakespeare’s problem comedies. As he approached his eightieth year, a former student and colleague urged him to write his autobiography. He had dictated his letter to me and it was one that I had saved. He had responded, “think of the other fate which one risks, of writing an autobiography and remaining a deservedly unknown Indian. No, let the summit of my ambition be to edit *King Lear* for Indian students. One qualification for it I now possess. An old man is always a King Lear, said Goethe.”

And, as things turned out, I became involved in this project because I was in India during the academic year of 2008-09. I was a kind of sounding board for him at first and then gradually became his scribe in addition. We sifted through his notebooks. We spread out multiple editions. We looked at digitized versions on my laptop. We watched stage performances of *King Lear* on DVD. We were unlikely teammates—a distinguished senior Shakespeare scholar and a just-tenured cultural anthropologist (though with a background in literary studies). Yet, not least of what we had in common, were our evolving identifications with the play. For him, that identification was perhaps a resonance of Goethe’s line, and for me, it was the experience of a daughter working with her father on a play such as *King Lear*. His edition was published in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

### Memory and Play: Interspace

This essay attempts an interspatial reading of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and Indic filial-love folktales, as I will refer to them in this essay. My reading is located between my father’s edition of the play and my return to it after his death in early 2014. The idea of interspace forms the basis for my analysis of thematically connected but distinct narratives in this essay. The

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<sup>1</sup>The edition contains six essays on various aspects of the play, including on sources of the play, problems in interpretation, Shakespeare’s use of language, and the play’s dramatization on the Indian stage. All quotations of the play will be from this edition.

political philosopher Hannah Arendt explains that the interspace is the world that exists *between* people and things, conscious of individual distinctions, but simultaneously provides the very foundation for constructive dialogue, relations and purposes. So important is the interspace, Arendt argues, that to lose it, is to lose the world itself (1968:13). And “the world” as she means it, “can form only in the interspaces between men in all their variety” (31). Although Arendt imagines the interspace as a political public realm that engages singularities to generate a pluralistic ethic, I re-tune this notion to serve as an interpretive strategy in comparative reading. By interspace, in this essay, I mean the space of dialogue, visualization, everyday rhythms, and materiality that, while not part of a text’s strict boundaries, nevertheless profoundly affects the field of engagement with the text. In the literary-cultural realm, translation, for instance, is a quintessentially interspatial act that connects the borders and the spaces of at least two distinct things and creates a hybrid experience or insight.

When I returned to re-reading my father’s edition of the play after his death, I read it with the memory of his powerful oral dramatization of the play and our conversations during those early mornings and late afternoons. These recollections helped me find his voice once again within the many voices of the play and its critical commentary. Indeed, what had stayed with me had been the lively orality of my “scribal” experience, an orality that created the interspace for my engagement with the play. As someone who works with oral culture, I had known that the tantalizing persuasion of what we broadly call “oral tradition” is its rambunctious heteroglossia and mediation of sensory experience and variant textuality. However, I now realized that a subjective experience of that phenomenon implied an interlinking of experiences. In my case, these experiences included participatory reading and hearing of a printed text, an embodied performance, and an interiorized remembering.

It is from such an interspace between text and extra-textual memory that I take up in this essay a line of conversation that took place between my father and myself about the oral sources for Shakespeare’s play. Here, I will consider Indic filial-love stories at greater length than he and I did in those conversations.<sup>2</sup> I hope to show that while these stories and *King Lear* share some central predicaments and premises, they propose different reconciliations to an important inquiry on selfhood that begins with a question about filial love. Lear begins by vainly asking his daughters “Which of you shall we say doth love us most?” (1.i.45). Lear’s question is superseded by other questions when a greater search and struggle begin to shake his life. In later Acts, the storm begins to gust and eddy around Lear’s more enduring question, “Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (1.iv.200).<sup>3</sup> Indic filial-love stories, too, begin in a similar vein. Often, however, it is the outcast daughter who moves the story through a different but implicit question, “Who is it

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<sup>2</sup>I am grateful to the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad for inviting me to speak on this subject at the Shakespeare symposium held in April 2014 in the memory of my father, Professor S. Nagarajan, on the occasion of the 450<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Shakespeare. Subsequently, in January 2015, I also presented a revised version of this essay at the English Language Teaching Institute of Symbiosis, Symbiosis International University, Pune, India. I am grateful to these audiences, to the anonymous reviewers of this essay and to my colleagues Kirin Narayan and Ebrahim Moosa for their critical feedback on drafts. My thanks also to graduate students Yael Lazar, Alexander McKinley, and Christopher Luna in the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University for their help during various stages of this essay.

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed and searching analysis of Lear’s questions, see Nowottny (1957).

that *makes* me?" These very different questions undoubtedly reveal significant divergences in worldviews that are shaped by the particular social contexts or the personal locations of narrators in the case Indic filial-love stories.

I propose that an interspatial reading—one that speaks between discrepant texts and through all of them, acknowledging their distances from each other and bridging them—makes it possible to appreciate *both* questions as necessary to the constitution of the human self. The self is configured as always approximate to these questions of “being” and “making.” Larger-than-self forces challenge the autonomy of the process of selfhood showing that the self in an atomistic sense is hardly sovereign. Intertwined in a web of relations and events and, most importantly, accountable to love, the self can at best be symbiotically sovereign. Lear or Cordelia or exiled princesses and princes are distinct protagonists with their own designs and desires. Yet their self-becoming and self-making are only possible when they find commonality between oppositions, suspend borders, and serve others. As I will show in this essay, this symbiotic sovereignty of the self defines the ethics of the interspace.

### Oral and Written: Intertexts

Since this essay identifies various kinds of texts that entail transformations across oral and written media, I offer brief framing remarks. Boundaries between texts of course exist, but interaction between texts generates a new cognition and new intuitions: this activity of the interspace creates a new text, which we may call the intertext. To explain further, the subjectivity and circumstances of each reader make every text possess the potential to be multiple intertexts. For example, as I read *King Lear*, *my* personal memories and literary perceptions predisposed me to identify *King Lear* as a “connected” text that makes sense to me in a way that may be different for another reader.

Literature and art as interspace—the worlded in-between space—would imply that all texts are inevitably intertexts, as Roland Barthes put it (1977), woven across lifestreams and literary memories. According to Jacques Derrida (1979:84):

“Text” is not. . . . a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines).

A staggering range of significances has come to be associated with intertextuality which, nevertheless, in all manner of speaking, refers to disclosed and undisclosed ambient-texts and agents in intersecting relationships that contribute toward “meaning” or a pool of meanings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>For succinct critical reviews of the development of this enormously important concept in Western literary theory and cultural studies that sprung into prominence with Julia Kristeva’s 1966 reappraisal of Bakhtin’s notion of the novel form as polyphonic, see Worton and Still (1990); Allen (2011); and Bauman (2004).

Indeed, in the Indian context, such intersecting relationships have been stunningly true of the centuries-old South Asian Rāma katha [story of Rama]. As an ever-abundant narrative, the story of Rama continues to produce, inter alia, affiliate and oppositional texts. With this occurring across languages, regions, and media, we have a kaleidoscope of intertexts across oral and written surfaces that are differentiated by their aesthetic and ethical arrangements, and we also have a long history of meta-commentary on this phenomenon of intertexts.<sup>5</sup> Today there is little disagreement that intertextuality is made manifest or experienced just as much by the production of a writer/performer's compositional ingenuity as by the reader/hearer/viewer's associative universe.<sup>6</sup>

The particularity of an intertext is in its self-construction (and its self-consciousness): in other words, in its intermediacy, its intervention, and its interlocution. Let us consider one instance from South India before we look at the intertextuality of the various sources from which I take the filial-love stories in upcoming sections. Narayana Rao and David Shulman describe the accomplishment of Śrīnātha, a brilliant Telugu poet of the fourteenth to fifteenth century, whose work resounds across a 1000-year old Telugu literary tradition. One way to understand this staying-and-roving power of the poet is that his intrepid innovations in sound and sense created intertexts that spoke to the different sensibilities and experiences of his audiences. To illustrate, *Śrīṅāra-naiṣadhamu* is Śrīnātha's Telugu translation of a complex Sanskrit dramatic poem, titled *Naiṣadhīya-carita*, by twelfth-century author Śrīharṣa, who re-created the popular love story of King Nala and Princess Damayanti as recounted in the epic of the Mahabharata. There is a moment in the Sanskrit poem when Damayanti is a shy bride on her first nuptial night with Nala: she feels desire but is tongue-tied and stuck in demureness. In Śrīnātha's Telugu version, Damayanti is utterly conscious of appearing *too* shy, given that she has been previously quite outspoken with Nala; there is no way, she thinks, that she can reconcile her shyness with the boldness she has shown with Nala in the past. Both the Sanskrit and Telugu poems acknowledge the social and literary convention of bridal shyness, but the Telugu poem casts it aside. Thus Śrīnātha's Telugu translation gives us a new Damayanti who insists we refigure the sexual inhibition that characterizes previous Damayantis. "After reading this poem, you can't read the [Sanskrit] Śrīharṣa verse innocently," write Rao and Shulman (2012:72). Indeed, after reading (or hearing) the Sanskrit poem by Śrīharṣa and the Telugu translation by Śrīnātha, the Damayanti of the Mahabharata story is also pluralized. In this way, a translation becomes resonant. Rao and Shulman state (2012:72), "its doubled sonic registers," create "an unprecedented poetic space in the language *into which* one translates. At the same time, it enhances the original by allowing us to see that the translated text preexists in it." Śrīnātha's writing, on the whole, rings of non-literate orality (flowing meter, formulae for referencing other stories, local allusion, for example), but it is so highly-crafted and tightly-packed with "meaning-full" lexemes that the sounds his poetry produces become the very experience of his poetry. The "magically accessible" verses *sound* like a spontaneous Telugu oral epic. In truth what also happens is that they re-energize the Sanskrit one and create a new literary space *between* the Sanskrit and the Telugu

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<sup>5</sup> Richman (1991, 2000, 2008); Ramanujan (1989).

<sup>6</sup> See Rocher (1994) for a discussion of oral and written textuality as mirrored in Sanskrit texts and their contemporary currency.

with a different poetics. One might call this space an interspace—but it remains dormant until a reading that appreciates or visualizes the interaction makes it come alive.

### **Filial-Love Stories: Discrepant Intertexts**

Let us now turn to the oral-written intertextuality of the two principal types of texts in this essay, all of which have their inaugural moment in the test of filial love or gratitude. There is Shakespeare's *King Lear*; Nagarajan's edition of the play is "an eclectic one" that conflates multiple texts of the play (Nagarajan 2012:xi-xiii).<sup>7</sup> There are corresponding Indic stories which have been published either in late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century English-language collections of oral narrative that give us largely disembodied narrations, or in more recent ethnographic work that provides us more full-bodied contexts of narration. These dissimilar texts presuppose orality or performance context in very different ways and raise the question of what kind of interpretive process could be threaded through them. To recall Arendt, I suggest that the recognition of boundaries, limitations, and distinctions is the necessary basis for constructing common ground.

#### *Intertextuality of King Lear*

The intertextuality of *King Lear* is a vast subject in Shakespeare scholarship to which I cannot do justice in this essay.<sup>8</sup> Nagarajan reminds us, agreeing with scholars like Kenneth Muir, that *King Lear* was built from the "most heterogeneous materials, amplifying and complicating his original fable, by using incidents, ideas, phrases and even words from a variety of books" (2012:xvi-xv). The fascinating amalgam of sources that are born out of Shakespeare's reading, hearing and seeing other narrations and plays tells us that *King Lear* itself is a highly accomplished intertext that engaged both an immediate as well as an undateable literary memory.<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare transformed many sources that narrate the story of Lear. His principle source is considered to be an older anonymous play called *True Chronicle History of King Leir*

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<sup>7</sup>That is, Nagarajan's version conflates the Quarto text of the play (1608) with the text in the first Folio (1623), in the tradition of a few other editions of the play, on the grounds that the Quarto and Folio versions are recognizably similar to each other. The debates about the variant texts of the play, their relationship to each other, and how to constitute a critical edition of the play are assessed in detail in Nagarajan (2012).

<sup>8</sup>See Nagarajan (2012:xiv-lxii).

<sup>9</sup>According to Andrew Weiner (1991), the term intertextuality is a late-twentieth-century term that does not accommodate well the "interrelations of Renaissance texts" which are historically better understood through the critical vocabulary of the late sixteenth-century (246-247). To understand how Shakespeare may have responded to Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (the hybrid version of 1593 that was put together by Sidney's sister, the countess of Pembroke) from which he "borrowed" the Gloucester subplot of *King Lear*, Weiner turns to Sidney's *Defense of Poetry* (c. 1580) which proposes, not intertextuality or influence, but "mimesis" to describe the process by which a poet creates poetry. In mimesis, the poet harmonizes various sources to create a "golden" world of art that is distinct from the "brazen" world of nature. From this perspective, I would call the play of *King Lear* a golden amalgam.

and his *Three Daughters; Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* (1605).<sup>10</sup> Shakespeare was intimately familiar with this play, which had been performed twice in 1594 and published in 1605, after which he began to write his own play which was first performed at court on December 26, 1606. Shakespeare also likely knew the story of King Lear as it appeared for the first time in written form in a popular Latin history of British kings called *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1135) by the monk Geoffrey of Monmouth. Shakespeare scholars believe that the Bard found the idea of the love-test and Lear's division of the kingdom on the basis of his daughters' answers in Geoffrey of Monmouth,<sup>11</sup> while Geoffrey's history itself absorbed many oral stories that were in circulation.

Another major source for Shakespeare's *King Lear* was Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, a compendium of English history (second edition, 1587). Holinshed's *Chronicles* recount the basic story of Lear's test to his daughters, his estrangement from them, the loss of his kingdom and its final recovery, and Lear's reunion with Cordelia and the deaths of his daughters. Shakespeare may also have consulted Edmund Spenser's poem *The Faerie Queene* (five books between 1590-1596) which, again, contains the kernel story of Lear's test of love, the disinheritance, ill-treatment of Lear, and so on, until Cordelia's suicide in despair. The theme of despair drives the Lear story in *A Mirror for Magistrates* (editions between 1559-1587), which Shakespeare is also likely to have consulted.

What exactly or how Shakespeare drew from which source and in what mode—oral, written, or performed—will remain ultimately imperceptible, perhaps even futile after a point.

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<sup>10</sup> In this older play, Leir says:

Therefore, dear daughters, as ye tender the safety  
Of him that was the cause of your first being,  
Resolve a doubt which much molests my mind,  
Which of you three to me would prove most kind;  
Which loves me most, and which at my request  
Will soonest yield unto their father's hest.

According to Mabillard (2000), "Although *King Leir* retains the ending found in earlier accounts of the story, in which Cordelia lives and Leir is restored to the throne, the anonymous play incorporates vivid new characters (the most crucial being Perillus) and situations which are not found in any of the previous retellings of the tale, thus expanding the sparse legend into an effective, five-act play." Shakespeare transforms Perillus into Kent. <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/kinglear/kingleir.html>.

<sup>11</sup> In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* Leir resolves to divide his kingdom among his daughters after determining who loved him the most. He is flattered by Gonerilla's and Regau's lavish responses but is angered by Cordeilla, who rhetorically says, "Is there any daughter that can love her father more than duty requires?" However, if pressed further, she would have to say, ". . . look how much you have, so much is your value, and so much do I love you" (Geoffrey [1135] 1892:33). Leir disinherits her, marries her to "some foreigner" [the Gaul king, Aganippus], and goes on to rule his half of the kingdom, with the other half being divided between Gonerilla and Regau. Leir's kingdom is overtaken by his conniving sons-in-law, and he becomes gradually beggared by his two older daughters. Aging, he seeks sanctuary with Cordeilla who gives him a home, re-empowering him. Reunited with Cordeilla, and cared for by her and Aganippus, Leir atones, finally understanding Cordeilla's words to him. "How true was your answer, Cordeilla . . ." he says, "While I had any thing to give they valued me, being friends not to me, but to my gifts: they loved me then, but they loved my gifts much more: when my gifts ceased, my friends vanished" (Geoffrey [1135] 1892:36). He regains his lost kingdom with Cordeilla's help and rules till he dies. Geoffrey's account continues after Lear's death—it describes Cordeilla's rulership, the loss of her kingdom to her nephews, and her suicide in prison. Both in Geoffrey and Holinshed, Cordelia points out to Lear the falseness of her sisters' love that is based on the material possessions of her father. While these versions are essentially similar, the endings vary. Holinshed's Cordelia, for example, asks that territories recovered from her cruel sisters must be given to her.

Nagarajan's observation (2012:xix) that Shakespeare "[perceived] the possibilities of his material and [realized] them in his chosen form" connects interestingly to Rao's insights about the fluid textuality of the *Puranas* (ancient Hindu lore about sacred beings, places, and practices) and the adeptness of the *pauranika*, the oral performer. The "recorded" text (in print, palm-leaf) "is often only *part* of the story"; it is the *pauranika* who "imparts fullness to the text in performance" and in this way it is the *pauranika*'s knowledge that shapes the "received text" (that audiences finally engage) (Rao 2004:114). But not only is it the *pauranika*, the performer, or Shakespeare, the dramatist, who brings fullness to the text. We, too, as individual readers, impart to Lear's story the weave and the heave of human relationships that make the story "full."

### *Intertextualities of Indic Filial-Love Stories*

Shakespeare may have availed himself of written versions of filial-love stories that possibly had Chinese origins, dated possibly in the ninth century (Young 1975). However, two "types" of oral tales in particular, ATU 510 A & B and ATU 923, which are prevalent worldwide, bear clear motif-resemblance to the Lear/Leir story.<sup>12</sup> In tale types 510A & B, the "Cinderella" cycle of tales, a daughter flees her father's home because of either incest or banishment, lives a hard life as a maid in a palace where there is a prince, and wins his attention through enchanted means. The prince discovers her true identity and they marry happily.<sup>13</sup> A second tale type, ATU 923, is the "Love Like Salt" story, which opens with an infamous test of love: the youngest daughter displeases her father with her ordinary expression of love, comparing it to salt. She is disinherited and banished. She leads a menial life until a prince courts her and they marry. She regains her status and happiness and is eventually reconciled with her father, who recognizes his error of judgment. Some of these experiences differ in variants in which the outcast protagonist is a boy.<sup>14</sup>

As A. K. Ramanujan observes, the "individual telling of a tale often combines motifs and types that occur independently" (1991:323). A quick summary of premises and situations common to *King Lear* and Indic filial-love stories looks like this:

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<sup>12</sup> These numbers refer to the designation assigned to tales that share motifs in an international classificatory scheme known as tale type index that was proposed first by Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne in 1910, revised by American scholar Stith Thompson in 1928 and 1961, and most recently, quite considerably by Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004—thus the "ATU" designation. Despite its critics, notably the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp, the tale type index provides us with one way to see a global network of a story (partial to the extent that it is recorded and published) and is valuable in providing initial data for comparative analysis.

<sup>13</sup> There is considerable variation in scholarship over the identification of the motifs of Cinderella tales, which some number 510A and others 510B (See Young [1975]; Dundes [1983]; and Jorgensen [2012], for example). Some scholars identify 510B as having the motif of incest which triggers the daughter fleeing home, but even that is questioned because incest is a central motif in other tale types like ATU706 and T411 (Jorgensen 2012). For example, the Tulu story "The Princess Whose Father Wanted to Marry Her" is classified as ATU 706 in Ramanujan (1991:186-9). European examples of 510A "The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and Stars", with correspondences to other stories called "Catskin", and "Cap O' Rushes." For an overview and discussion of Indic variants, see Ramanujan (1991) (Kannada tale "Hanchi") and Blackburn (2001) (several contemporary Tamil variants). Rutz (2013) provides a close discussion of various tale types of Lear analogues.

<sup>14</sup> For a succinct and insightful summation of these analogues and their implications for the treatment of justice, see Young (1975).

- I. A father sets up a test of love for his daughters (or sons), which the youngest fails, in the father's eyes, and is exiled.
- II. The exiled child eventually marries well, but does so either without the parents' blessings and support or s/he must solicit it.
- III. The father repents and asks for forgiveness; his eyes are opened to truth.
- IV. Estrangement ends in understanding and reunion, but whatever storms were weathered are the prices the agents pay for estrangement and reunion.
- V. Gratitude and love are finally understood as eluding measurement.
- VI. Love is seen as the spice of the everyday.
- VII. A greater fate seems to move all local destinies.

In order to establish a kinship between the tellings that resemble each other, let us first consider the differences in the contexts of narrations. Three of the six examples I present in this essay (Shovona Devi, Stokes, and Swynnerton) were published during the late colonial period in India (1880-1915) when it was customary practice in a nascent field of folklore to not unduly worry about tellers' biographies, or emic readings as both were usually seen as unruly. It was routine for collections of folklore to be made under dark hierarchical relations of power between a clear separation of colonizer and colonized.<sup>15</sup> Two examples (Kakar, Narayan, with Sood) come from contemporary contexts that are attuned to narrators as creative, critical, agentive, and embodied individuals. In fact the filial-love stories I extract from these sources are so embedded in the social experiences and repertoires of the tellers that my own analysis of those stories cannot break off "story" from its location in their lives. And one example (Ramanujan), also a contemporary recounting, recognizes narrators and narrative systems as dynamic and culturally situated but emphasizes that we read the tales as primarily aesthetic expressions.

(1) "The Hireling Husband" is the last story in a collection of twenty-eight stories called *The Orient Pearls* published in 1915 by Shovona Devi. The only context we are given for the collection is what Shovona Devi briefly tells us (1915: Prefatory Note):

The idea of writing these tales occurred to me while reading a volume of short stories by my uncle, Sir Rabindranath Tagore; but as I have none of his inventive genius, I set about collecting folk-tales and putting them into an English garb; and the tales contained in the following pages were told to me by various illiterate village folks, and not a few by a blind man still in my service, with a retentive memory, and a great capacity for telling a story.

The stories are liberally Anglicized in idiom, though their plots and details appear recognizably "Indian," such as the references to Hindu texts, religious and caste communities, and vernacular terms and customs. Even in Shovona Devi's minimalist account, there is a glimmer of the un-mappable process through which "The Hireling Husband," as also her other stories, may have arisen. She would have felt the impact of reading Tagore's Bengali short stories (which he had been prolifically writing by the 1890s) which were deeply embedded in Bengali rural life. She

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<sup>15</sup> See Naithani (2006), Prasad (2003), and Narayan (2002) for close analyses of the paradoxes in relationships between colonial-era collectors and narrators and the circumstances of particular publications.

would probably have felt the tensions of an aspiring writer coping with the aura of influence of a literary giant in family proximity. She makes creative use of the everyday experiences of an upper-class Hindu household in which caretakers in long-term service occupied domestic spaces of varying closeness and distance, spaces that nevertheless would have included storytelling activity. It is very likely that her education and exposure to literary English that would also have given her access to a popular domestic and international publication environment. All of these contribute to the note of commingled reticence and forwardness of Shovona Devi's single prefatory sentence, and we must understand that note as part of the "circumstances" that create the particular intertext that this collection is.

(2) "Adventures of a Disobedient Son," originally recorded by B. T. Patil from a *gondaliga* (Kannada bard) performance in Kittur (North Karnataka), is translated from the Kannada and retold by A. K. Ramanujan in his collection, *Folktales from India* (1991).<sup>16</sup> Without pretending to provide ethnographic contexts, Ramanujan's collection of 110 tales has the intertextuality that one might liken to a vivacious folktale-map of India. The stories in this collection come from twenty-two regions of India, from modern storytellers and from published collections in English and other Indian vernacular languages, from colonial-era sources like the ones cited in this essay, and from Ramanujan's own fieldwork and memory. He writes that he has chosen "only tales from actual tellers, rather than literary texts" (1991:xi). He tells us that the stories are meant to be read for aesthetic pleasure, but they also illustrate conceptual diversity in Indian tales and their place in an international orbit of folktales. Ramanujan says (1991:xi):

A folktale is a poetic text that carries some of its cultural context within it; it is also a traveling metaphor that finds a new meaning with each new telling. I have arranged the tales in cycles as I would arrange a book of poems so that they are in dialogue with each other and together create a world through point and counter point.

(3) A contemporary filial-love story comes to us embedded in a grim autobiographical narrative that psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar tape-recorded in 1989 in a slum neighborhood of Delhi as part of his study of gender relations in North India, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality* (1990). We do not know the ethnographic circumstances under which Kakar conducted his interviews for this study, but he provides a first-person translation from Hindi. At the time of the interview, Janak, the narrator, was a fifty year old woman.

Janak's life story is placed within Kakar's broader understandings of "tale": "What I seek to uncover and emphasize," says Kakar, "is the *oneiros*—the 'dream'—in the Indian tale of *eros* and especially the dreams of the tale's heroines, the women" (1990:1). But for Kakar, narrative is also a means through which Indians construct personhood. He says, "The stories they hear (or see enacted in dramas and depicted in Indian movies) and the stories they tell are worked and reworked into the stories of their own lives. For stretches of time a person may be living on the intersection of several stories, his own as well as those of heroes and gods" (Kakar 1990:2). North Indian modern fiction, folk stories, popular Bollywood film, clinical case studies, Gandhi's autobiographical reflections, and life stories in first-person by two women from Delhi's slums

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<sup>16</sup> A. K. Ramanujan (1991:274-285, 342). Listed as ATU 923, 413, 465A, and 554.

inform and shape Kakar's own telling of an "Indian tale of eros." Writing as a psychoanalyst who "[collaborates] in the creation of the story of an individual life," Kakar's scholarly story finds its form amidst and between all these (Kakar 1990:4). This is its broad intertextuality.

(4) "The King and his Daughters" is part of Charles Swynnerton's 1892 collection, *Indian Nights' Entertainment: Folktales from the Upper Indus*. Swynnerton, a well-known missionary in colonial circles, tells us that he collected the stories over many years from "the mouths of the simple narrators themselves" who were villagers of Ghazi, (present-day Pakistan). He writes, "As translations from the Panjabi of Upper Indus, they are as literal as idiom and freedom of expression would allow" (1892:xi-xvi). Classic pastoralist tropes persist in Swynnerton's "Introduction" and "Index with Notes." While the stories and illustrations (by "purely native draughtsmen" [xi]) evoke in Swynnerton a romantic affection for a vanished purer imagination of a rather Graeco-Roman humankind, the natural landscapes of the Upper Indus and the deeper inlay of the stories remind him of the many glorious but misty pasts of political rulerships of the region. In addition to this interpretive halo around the collection is another important aspect: linguistic authority. Most of the stories were heard in the company of his good friend Thomas Lambert Barlow, Esq., who was "a master of every variety of local dialect of the region" (Swynnerton 1892:xii). They heard these stories (xii):

[W]ithin sight and hearing of every majestic river of history and romance. . . quite close to the ancient ferry over which Alexander the Great threw his bridge of boats, in a district [which has] the fabled mountain of Gandghar. . . in the midst of many a ruined temple and fallen fortress. . . [here they] used to sit late into the night, round the leaping log fire in winter, under the dewless sky in summer, and enjoy hearing, as much as the villagers enjoyed telling, the tales which had charmed their forefathers for scores of generations.

Doubtless, here is a very different kind of intertext from Shovona Devi's. Swynnerton's "The King and his Daughters" belongs to a collection that places heard stories between colonial industry and nostalgia on one side, and an oriental view of Indian history and an oriental anthropology of "the primitive" on the other. Barlow also probably played an important role in shaping the translation and interpretation, and thus, the intertextuality of these stories.

(5) "The Princess Who Loved Her Father Like Salt" appears in Maive Stokes' *Indian Fairy Tales* (1880). An unusual collection for its time, *Indian Fairy Tales* familiarizes the storytellers to the reader by providing brief biographical sketches and by occasionally including their comments on the tales. Twenty-five of the thirty stories of this collection were narrated in Hindustani to the young teenaged author of the collection by two Hindu *ayahs*, Dunkni and Muniya, and by Karim, a Muslim orderly, who were all in the service of Whitley Stokes, the colonial administrator's family stationed in Calcutta [Kolkata] and Simla [Shimla]. Muniya, we are told, narrated five of the thirty tales to the author's mother, Mary Stokes. A short preface by Maive Stokes quickly sketches the narrators' profiles and the roles played by the different makers of the collection. Dunkni, the younger woman, was born and raised in Calcutta and heard the stories from her husband, Mochi, also Calcutta-born but raised in Banaras. Muniya, a great-grandmother, was born in Patna and raised in Calcutta where she had lived for most of her childhood and adult life. Karim was from Lucknow, and we learn, unlike Dunkni and Muniya,

remained reticent about narrating the stories to the author's mother—it is not hard to imagine that gender, race, and class norms may well have been part of Karim's shyness. This triad provides the creative impetus for, and main content of, the collection; but there are also elaborate notes by Mary Stokes (the author's mother), an Introduction (by anthropologist W. R. S. Ralston), and an Index and native spellings' gloss by Whitley Stokes (the author's father). Mary Stokes' "Notes" provide performative snapshots that, of course, also suggest grids of social hierarchy: Muniya told her stories with the "solemn, authoritative air of a professor. She sits quite *still on the floor*, and uses no gestures" (Stokes 1880:237; italics mine). Dunkni, on the other hand, paced animatedly across the room, enacting parts of the stories. While I analyze elsewhere how the different motley interests of the collection tug it in different directions, it is clear that negotiated narrations and inter-commentary characterize the collection as an intertext (Prasad 2003). For example, Mary Stokes tells us (1880:238):

All these stories were read back in Hindustani by my little girl to the tellers at the time of telling, and nearly all a second time by me this winter before printing. I never saw people more anxious to have their stories retold exactly than are Dunkni and Muniya. Not until each tale was pronounced by them to be *thik* (exact) was it sent to the press.

Ralston provides comparative scaffolding for the stories in his "Introduction." He endorses Mary Stokes' erudition and intelligence, and at the same time he ascribes to the Indian narrators an "incredulous" imagination that puts them behind civilized time. Ironically, the Indian narrators insist that the stories they tell are read as *stories* and not as "real events." In this way the collection shows itself to be a text deeply brokered by many authors separated by unequal literacies, imaginations, and access to media.

(6) Anthropologist Kirin Narayan's *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales* (1997; in collaboration with Urmila Devi Sood) is an ethnographic collection of twenty-one folktales from the Kangra Valley in Himachal Pradesh. It is the fruit of a long-nurtured friendship with local storyteller Urmila Devi Sood. Urmilaji (the suffix *-ji* indicates respect) has a remarkable repertoire of stories she has heard from childhood through various stages of her life. She is not a professional raconteur; the stories emerge both through Narayan's explicit interest in hearing her stories and through natural conversations between them. Insofar as the literary product of a friendship is inevitably intertextual, shaped by intangible exchange—voice meeting voice to paraphrase Narayan—the collection is indeed intertextual, but there is also the critical, dialogic, translational process that makes it so. Intermediacy marks this process, inspired at its root by "affection" (Narayan, with Sood 1997b:221).

Amid the singularities of these discrepant collections is their imperfect kinship. It arises from the demands of an aesthetic that is interpreted differently, but shared, by the collections. This aesthetic, authorial space of each collection contains many presences that become knowable through their negotiations in the text. Translation and textualization engage rhythms of multiple languages and checkered cultural competence. The transformation of oral-aural experience into written text involves recognizing that it is impossible to fully translate a phenomenological experience into words, and therefore the re-narrated text is necessarily improvised. In everyday terms, this paradox is captured by Urmilaji, who tells Narayan, "The only way children of the

future might come to know these stories if someone like you writes them down. Then they'll read them." Upon reflection, she adds, "But there's a big difference between reading something and hearing it told!" (Narayan, with Sood 1997b:221). The imperfect kinship also comes from consanguinity in the thematic explorations on selfhood, which I elaborate below.

### *The Insterspace: Inquiries on Selfhood*

Indic filial-love stories branch into two kinds of explorations after the father's test question to his daughters or sons. One group of stories explores the enigmas of moral agency while the other set unravels the paradox of "true" filial love. The test question ("How much do you love me?" "What are your plans?" "Who feeds you?") knows its answer, of course—as does Lear's question to his daughters—and only seeks from all the children a glowing and univocal affirmation of that answer. The lone untoward answer spirals the "disappointing" daughter or son's life into a swirl of events that eventually conclude happily, and the father's question is amended (triumphantly). Although individual stories tend to emphasize one of the two explorations—the enigma of agency or the paradox of filial love—they all subtext an interplay between individual desire, self-determination, inscrutable networks of moral agents, and reciprocity in human relationships. Collectively, these explorations provide us a complex meditation on self and selfhood: "Who am I?"; "Who are others?"; and "Who makes me?"

### *Enigmas of Moral Agency*

In "The Hireling Husband," from Shovona Devi's 1915 collection of folktales from Bengal, royal power is pitted against the might of fate. A king, who wishes to retire, decides to divide the kingdom between his three sons. He asks each of them: "Who looks after you and feeds you?" (171). The first two sons extravagantly praise the king for his care, but the third declares, "What a queer question to put! Father, who else can feed me but my own good destiny? "What's lotted cannot be blotted" (172). The enraged king banishes his son, saying, "Oh thou ungrateful wretch, if thy good destiny feeds thee, look to it to feed thee in thy exile. Thou art no son of mine" (172). He appoints his other two sons as governors of provinces.<sup>17</sup> The exiled prince wanders into another country where he finds sanctuary in the king's hospitality to him—the text remarks, "Thus did his good destiny befriend him in his darkest hour of trial" (172). The exiled prince becomes a good companion for the king's son who is one-eyed. A neighboring king, meanwhile, has dispatched a matchmaker to find a groom for his daughter; the matchmaker, tired with a luckless search, strikes a bargain with the one-eyed prince's father, who also has had bad luck in getting a bride for his half-blind son. Bribed into silence, the matchmaker returns to his master and hapless princess is promised to the half-blind prince. The king makes the exiled prince stand in as bridegroom for his one-eyed son at the wedding and the "one-eyed prince" is thus married. The trusting princess and the prince—who she believes is the actual son of the king—spend the night "playing" a game of chance. At dawn, the prince inscribes his identity on the hem of her dress and decamps. The one-eyed prince, with his turban

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<sup>17</sup> The division of a kingdom based on a love-test is not a frequent occurrence in Indic filial-love stories.

hiding his blind eye, comes to her pretending to be her husband but he fails both a test of courage and is also clueless about the games they are supposed to have played. The princess discovers the fraud and throws him out. Time passes, and one breezy spring day she discovers the golden scrawl on the hem of her wedding dress. She returns to her country, gathers her father's army, disguises herself as a man, and besieges the kingdom of the exiled prince's old father, demanding his son as hostage (we are left to assume that the exiled prince is found by the king). The king surrenders his son without a battle. Happier reconciliations follow, with the princess throwing off her disguise and the exiled prince emerging to be reunited with his wife. The father realizes that his son had been right about the role of destiny in one's life. He declares, "My dear son, thou did speak the truth. 'What's lotted can't be blotted.' Your bride has won my kingdom for thee, and it no longer mine to give away," (177). The prince and the princess rule the kingdom happily ever after.

The division of a kingdom—not by fair reason but in a fit of temper—a subsequent repudiation (as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's version and Shakespeare's play), and a defeat in war provoke a reflection on the inexorability of fate. Geoffrey's *Leir*, debased by Gonerilla, cries (Geoffrey 1892:35):

"O irreversible of the Fates, that never swerve from your course! Why did you ever advance me to an unstable felicity since the punishment of lost happiness is greater than the sense of present misery... Shall I ever again see the day when I may be able to reward those according to their deserts those who have forsaken me in my distress?"

Accepting that what is decreed cannot be erased, the father of the exiled prince also comes to understand that the kingdom is "no longer [his] to give away." We arrive at an insightful moment that shows the self-absorbed king of the disinheritance scene transformed into a wiser king who has learned to look beyond himself. The King did not give when he had a kingdom and he is unable to give without it, but it is taken from him to be given. A king dispossessed of his kingdom is both pathetic and profound because we view him now, as we see Lear stripped of his kingdom and belongings, become as vulnerable as anybody else to the vagaries of human emotion, error, dependency, and frailty. Most importantly, he learns to acknowledge that his expectation of gratitude from his sons is misplaced in light of the "true" dispenser of goods: destiny. Perhaps the most interesting thread in the story—one that weaves through other tales also in my selection—is the difficulty of characterizing human agency in the imperceptible play of destiny. Thus, the exiled prince is lucky to be offered asylum, and the princess must await a springtime breeze before she can assert herself in battle.

In the "Adventures of a Disobedient Son," a Kannada tale translated in Ramanujan's 1991 collection, the son displeases his father who asks his four sons, starting with the first, "Son, you are my eldest, the future king of the country. What are your plans?" Three of them respond in the manner the king wants to hear. The first son replies, "Father, I'll follow in your illustrious footsteps. I'll try to be a great king like you" (274). The next two declare their "plans" are to support their oldest brother, but the last son says, "Father you are the king of kings. Twenty-four kings pay you tribute. I want to do better than you. I'll conquer kingdoms, marry four celestial wives, and build my own city" (274). He is thrown out into the wild jungles. After a frightening

night hidden in the branches of a tree, he prays at the light of dawn to Shiva and to his family deity to protect him. A fascinating series of adventures ensues in which a reclusive old woman with magical powers aids him. Perhaps more than any other story under consideration in this essay, this one explores the psyche of the prince who *must* seek adventure. He disobeys the old woman who has forbidden him for venturing in a northern direction and ends up being turned to stone. But when she rebukes after rescuing him, he says, “Yes, Granny, you did tell me. But I knew somehow that’s where my life would be fulfilled. So I couldn’t resist it—I went. In fact, I want to go there again” (276). With the old woman’s help he gains a celestial nymph as his wife and then takes up a job with a local king. The king, struck by the beauty of the nymph, wants to steal her from the young man. He sends the young man on the extremely dangerous mission of collecting venom from the most poisonous snake in the world, in the hope that the young man would die. But, aided by his celestial wife, the young man not only accomplishes the task, but also gains another celestial wife. As the king gives him more and more difficult tasks, the young man’s celestial wives help him accomplish the tasks. With each task the young man gains another celestial wife. At the end, the king dies, and the young man has four celestial wives. In a story of ups and downs, the young man meets his parents who are now destitute and brings them to the lavish palace that his wives have magically created for him, but loses all when the wives decamp to their celestial worlds. A second adventure cycle begins in which he solves difficult tasks with the help of various insects and animals that he has helped before, and regains his wives and wealth. Like the heroines in some of our other stories, he is ultimately reunited with his father and asks him, “Father, did I do what I once said I would do?” The father replies, “Yes, my son you did. If one has sons, one should have sons like you” (Ramanujan 1991: 285). Yet, the strain of self-congratulation is undercut by the fact that prince’s self-fulfillment has been possible because he has rendered services, undergone trials, and received immense help from various creatures and indeed from his four celestial wives. Self-fulfillment is clearly not a sovereign accomplishment—as prefigured by his act of prayer on the dawn of his adventures, it relies on forces of luck that cooperate with his self-determination.<sup>18</sup>

Kakar’s study of “intimate relations” in North India reproduces Janak’s autobiographical account which includes a filial-love story that her father had narrated to her in her childhood years. Abbreviated for this essay, Janak’s story begins with her parents relocating to Delhi during the Partition with Janak and her three sisters and two brothers. The family struggles with dire poverty. Janak, the eldest child, having finished high school, takes up the job of a village welfare worker in another town to financially help her unemployed father, but her efforts are constantly challenged by the unwanted sexual attentions of several men. She returns home after falling ill to discover that her siblings have neglected their ailing mother. Janak begins to take care of her mother amidst the complications of Janak’s romance with a distant relative who proposes to her. When Janak is seventeen, she marries this man despite her father’s strong opposition to the marriage. Her father believes that the prospective son-in-law is evil. Janak disagrees with her

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<sup>18</sup> See Blackburn (2001) for a Tamil folktale called “A Clever Daughter” (923B) which Blackburn collected from Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. Relevant to this discussion on fate and agency, the story involves a king who becomes furious with his daughter for her disagreement over his judgment of a case. He throws her out, but she re-makes her life and ends up offering hospitality to her father, now poor, visits her house for alms. After all the self-disclosures, the king-beggar says, “I see it now. I’m suffering because I did wrong and caused you to suffer” (190).

father, hotly arguing, “No, it is in my hands to make him good” (Kakar 1989:70). Janak’s leave-taking after the wedding ceremonies is shadowed by her father’s deliberate absence.<sup>19</sup> She recalls him saying, “she was the one who was my son, but she has now betrayed me” (Kakar 1989:70).

Her father proves to be prescient, as the marriage turns out to be extremely violent. Janak’s first baby, a girl, dies at four months from starvation; a son, born a year later, dies when he is barely two, and the third born much later also dies. Janak goes on to have five daughters. Her husband’s drunkenness and physical abuse escalates each time a daughter is born to them. Yet, nothing persuades Janak to separate from her husband—she feels bound by her love for him but also by a strong sense of *dharma* (righteous duty). As she concludes her self-account, we see an exhausted and bitter Janak. If it were not for having to protect their 14-year-old daughter from her husband’s advances, Janak tells Kakar she would have renounced a householder’s life altogether.

In the midst of this recollection, Janak says to Kakar, “You know, when I was a child my father told me many stories. Two of these stories have stayed in my mind” (72). Both stories center on betrayed love. The story that pertains to filial-love goes thus (Kakar 1989:72-73):

A king asks his five daughters, “Who gives you the food you eat?” Four of them say he does, but the youngest says, “Father, I eat what is given by God, what is given by my *karma*.” The enraged father marries her off to a leper and turns her out of the palace in rags. In Janak’s words, “While leaving the girl said, “O Father! This is the husband of my *karma*—this husband is my god!” The princess begs for food and serves her husband devotedly, believing that such service was divinely decreed. One day a magical bird advises the afflicted husband to bathe in an enchanted pond nearby whose water would cure him of his leprosy. He follows the instructions and is cured; Janak describes, “He came out clean, like a golden king.” When the princess returns, the bird instructs them how to find hidden treasures in the pond and the now-prosperous couple builds a palace and lives in it. In due course, they invite the king for dinner and the princess serves him grandly. When he has finished eating, she re-appears before her father in the rags he had thrown her out in and re-introduces her husband to the king, saying, “These are the clothes you gave me and you have seen the clothes given by my *karma*. You gave me a leper for my husband and this is the man *karma* has given me.”

Why does the story stay in Janak’s mind? There is little doubt that it is tightly interwoven with her lifeworld, yet in significant ways, it engages the general problem of agency, the role of

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<sup>19</sup> Readers familiar with Indian narrative and cultural worlds will probably recall other poignant contexts in which a daughter leaves her natal home for her husband’s house. For instance, when Śakuntalā of Kālidāsa’s play (~fifth century CE) leaves her father’s home in the forest, her departure is felt by her friends, the woods, the animals, and even the creepers. Depriving a daughter of a ritual farewell at her wedding casts a tragic shadow on a critical rite of passage. For women’s songs that delineate a wide range of emotional stances and moral perspectives in kin relations in South India, see Prasad (2006); for North Indian contexts, see I. Srivastava (1991); Raheja and Gold (1994); and Narayan (1997a). Describing a 1989 Indian staging of *King Lear* directed by Amal Allana in New Delhi, Balwant Gargi, highlights the dramatic awe of the scene when an anguished and spent Lear appears, carrying dead Cordelia in his arms. Gargi writes, “. . . when the daughter leaves the courtyard of her father’s house, the parting scene is like the tearing of one’s flesh. Women sing in a chorus commenting on the separation and those in the courtyard break into sobs. . . . When Goneril and Regan turn the old father out of their palace and he wanders under a turbulent sky, it breaks the heart of the Indian audience” (1991:96).

karmic fate in one's life and filial—and familial—relations. And because the story is set in Janak's *particular* life, it ironically illuminates that golden ponds and palaces are paradoxical illusions and dreams.

As in "The Hireling Husband," the banished princess of Janak's tale and Janak herself are subjects who create their experiences through conscious choice or effort and simultaneously the objects of a force that determines their experiences. This agency also applies to the highest temporal power, the king in the story: How much power does a king really wield? By telling her father "I eat what is given by God," the princess re-routes the power to give to divine authority, effectively questioning her father's autonomy within an ethical scheme where the king *cannot* be sovereign; he can only be instrumental. However, there is a transformative potential within karmic operation. Ragged clothes, her husband's affliction, and homelessness are the inheritance she receives from her father. She attributes this suffering to the inheritance. But the restored state of flourishing is because of her past karma, her devotion to her leper-husband, and most certainly the magical bird's compassionate grace.

Janak's observation at the end of the princess story—"Look, no one can erase even one line of what *karma* has written down in your book" (73)—bestows agency on the princess; but applied to her own life, the comment reflects a fatalism that dogs her life.<sup>20</sup> As we follow the events in Janak's life, we see that her path diverges from the path of the princess in her story. Two powerful persuasions prevail on Janak who is unable to leave her hopeless husband. The first is her conviction, instilled by her own father, that fidelity to her husband is dharmically prescribed. This dharmic injunction (Janak likens her plight to that of Sita) is part of a powerful web of relationships that is woven around duty and love—a theme that makes a checkered appearance in all Indic filial-love stories. The second persuasion is spun around hope, but it is weaker than the dharmic conviction. While hope for a similarly restorative pond and magical bird may have kept Janak going despite the violence, the possibility of an enchanted transformation gradually fades away: "My love for him is slowly dying from inside," she bitterly concludes, "It would have better if I had married a blind man. At least I could have served him, been rewarded for performing good deeds" (Kakar 1989:77).

### *The Paradox of Filial Love*

Janak's remark in the preceding section takes us to a paradox of affect through which *King Lear* and Indic filial-love stories feel their way. They evolve from a test of love but unravel the ultimate immeasurability of love. Yet, love commands the final accountability in relations. Blindness, or an incapacity to see love, throws characters into a jungle of contrarian emotions through which they come to a clearing of lucid insight about the nature of love. This understanding matures through the momentum of a tragic mode in *King Lear*—Lear must

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<sup>20</sup> The literature on interpretations of *karma* is vast: see Doniger (1980) for its elucidation in Buddhist and Hindu philosophical texts and medical treatises; within comparative frameworks of rebirth, Obeyesekere (2002); and for *karma* and similar notions in everyday contexts, see Keyes and Daniel (1983). For how *karma* and destiny are explored in oral narrative and performance, see Wadley (2007). Janak's lifestory has the haunting aura of a story titled "Twelve Years of Affliction" in Narayan, with Sood (1997b) where affliction is dogged and inexplicable.

gradually overcome his ego through estrangements, physical hardship and poverty—while the understanding comes in a flash in the “comic” mode of the folktales.

In “The Princess Who Loved Her Father Like Salt” from Maive Stokes’ *Indian Fairy Tales* (1880), Muniya tells the story of a king who banishes the youngest of his seven daughters for her simple “love-you-as-much-as-salt” answer. He has her transported in a palanquin and abandoned in the wild jungle. The terrified princess cries herself to sleep and wakes up to find a plate with food and water beside her. “God must have sent me this food and water,” she surmises. In the morning, she leaves the palanquin and wanders into an isolated beautiful palace. Here she discovers a dead prince with countless needles stuck in his body. She painstakingly removes needle after needle for a week (“without eating, or drinking, or sleeping”). A man visits the palace and sells her a servant-girl in exchange for her gold bangles. Glad to have a companion at last, the princess continues to pull out the needles while the servant girl does the housekeeping. In the third week, only the needles in the eyes are left but just before she removes the last needles, she decides to bathe, anticipating the prince’s eyes falling on her as he opens them. She asks the servant girl to watch over him while she freshens up. The maid, however, removes the needles from the prince’s eyes while the princess is bathing. The prince wakes up and sees the servant girl. He asks, “Who has made me well and pulled all the needles out of my body?” The servant girl answers that she has, and the prince thus marries her. The princess is made a servant. When the prince sets out on some travels, he asks both women what they would like for a gift from his travels. The servant girl asks for clothes and jewelry, while the princess asks for a mysterious sun-jewel box. The prince tirelessly serves a fakir who, pleased, fetches the sun-jewel box from a fairy. The fairy instructs, “No one but she who wants this box must open it. . . .She must open it when she is quite alone and at night” (Stokes:168). At night, the princess plays the little flute in the box, and seven fairies appear from the box who set up a tent and chairs and carpets and attend upon the much-neglected princess: “They bathed her, combed and rolled up her hair, put on her grand clothes and lovely slippers” (Stokes:169). She weeps bitterly and narrates her misfortunes to them. They assure her that all will turn out well. On the second night of this ritual, a passing woodcutter secretly sees this occur and brings the prince to witness the scene for himself. The astonished prince discovers her true identity and asks her hand in marriage. Roles reverse: the servant girl who had lied to the prince becomes a servant again, but is treated very well by the princess.

The story then returns to the salt-frame. The princess invites her parents and sisters to her wedding. For a week she feeds them food cooked only in sugar. When they can no longer tolerate it, she gives them a dinner spiced with salt. The king, her father, declares, “I know how much she loved me when she said she loved me like salt (Stokes 1880:171).

The princess’ suffering as a consequence of being deprived of a receptive and sympathetic audience is something that is familiar to Cordelia.<sup>21</sup> Initially neither the father nor the prince perceives the princess’ “truth.” Indeed the magic of the sun-jewel box is precisely in the transformation it effects by manifesting sympathetic audiences for the princess in the fairies

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<sup>21</sup> This theme is very reminiscent of the Telugu folktale “A Story in Search of an Audience” (M 311) in Ramanujan (1991:26-29). As in the tradition of a ritual tale (*vrata katha*), closure of, and satisfaction in, the ritual event come only when the story has been narrated by the performer of the ritual and heard by members of the family.

who come out of it, the passerby-woodcutter, the prince, and finally even the king. Although the prince's eyes literally open with the removal of the needles, they symbolically open only when he *witnesses* the princess' story and believes her. Engaged listening comes, this would argue, only when one is *present* as a person. The lack of an audience stifles personhood. Therefore the care that the fairies bestow on the princess not only enables her cathartic self-expression but also recognizes her humanity and her identity and thus *restores* her.

Salt is another key transformative agent. As an analogue of love, it is paradoxical: salt is earthly, but essential, and suffusing.<sup>22</sup> Love too, from the princess' example, is not extravagant in statement but extravagant in service (the princess suspends her everyday needs to remove the needles). In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, immediately after the love-test scene, the banished courtier, Kent, says (1.i.186-189; Nagarajan 2012:21):

[To Cordelia] The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid

That justly think'st, and hast most rightly said.

[To Regan and Goneril] And your large speeches may your deeds approve,

That good effects may spring from words of love.

Just as excess salt makes food unpalatable, excess love makes relationships repelling—a point to which I will return shortly. In right measure, love lasts and sustains, as the story “The King and his Daughters” from Swynnerton's 1892 collection of folktales from the Punjab region demonstrates.

In this story, a king asks his oldest daughter, “How do you love me?” and she answers, “I love you as sugar.” The second daughter says, “I love you as honey” and the third proclaims “I love you as sherbet.” The youngest however says, “I love you as salt.” She insists on not modifying her answer, much to the fury of her father who exiles her to the forest. The forlorn princess upon hearing a horse hides in the hollow of a tree. Her fluttering dress gives her away and the prince who discovers her falls in love and marries her. After a few years, the king (her father), who has no idea of these events, pays the prince a visit. The daughter, disguised, treats him to royal hospitality but dish after dish she serves him is sweet until the king, still hungry and longing for “proper” food, is unable to eat. Finally the princess serves him a dish of farmer's spinach seasoned with salt and the king is finally satisfied and happy. The princess removes her veil and says, “O my father, I love you as salt. My love may be homely, but it is true, genuine and lasting, and I entreat your forgiveness” (79). The king realizes his “great mistake”, repents, and they are reconciled.

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<sup>22</sup> Among the cluster of meanings associated with salt in Indian folklore, the most widely circulating are loyalty and gratitude. *Uppu tinda manege droha bageyabedi* (Don't betray the home in which you have eaten salt) is the Kannada proverb; *namak harām* (violator of salt) in Hindi means a betrayer. Janak says, referring to her husband: “I had eaten his salt and was true to him” (Kakar 1989:76). In the political imaginary of India, salt will of course recall Gandhi's famous Salt Satyagraha, the Dandi March, of 1930. In the philosophical tradition, there is the famous story in the *Chandogya Upanishad* in which the teacher Uddalaka Aruni uses salt to teach his son, Svetaketu, how the universal self pervades everything like salt in water but is invisible. (6.13, *Chandogya Upanishad*, in Olivelle 1996:154-155).

A test ends with a test. The outcast heroines of the filial-love stories, after re-making themselves, are in a position to demonstrate once again the strength of their original commitment by setting up a test of endurance for their fathers (and families) which finally leads to the acknowledgment of the heroine's love for her father. It is only in Swynnerton's variant that the princess asks for forgiveness for this test. After the intense trials she has had to endure, it seems ironic—but to have deliberately kept her father hungry goes against *her* conception of salt-worthy love. In Shakespeare, a moment of pure filial love is signaled when Lear, before their deaths, says to Cordelia (V.iii.10-11; Nagarajan 2012:262):

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down  
And ask of thee forgiveness.

But the salt-answer invites some censure in Narayan's collection of folktales from the Kangra Valley. Here, the Love Like Salt story is narrated by Urmilaji who has heard it as a child from another woman who lived near the valley's tea gardens where Urmilaji's father worked. The story, which Narayan tells us echoes the material aspirations and values of Kangra social life, is as follows (Narayan, with Sood 1997b:189-90):

The king asks the proverbial question. The first daughter says, "Lots of love, just as crystallized sugar is sweet, very sweet, that's how much I love you." The second daughter says "like refined sugar stirred into milk" and the last one says, "Just as vegetables need salt, that's how much I love you." She is married off to a very poor woodcutter while the other two daughters are married to powerful kings. The princess makes money by embroidering beautiful wall-hangings which she sells, and the price for wood keeps increasing. They soon open a shop, then a factory, and become millionaires with a grand house. The queen feels guilty about their long neglect of their daughter and the king dispatches a servant who brings back news of the daughter's success. The queen is "really moved." The king and the queen visit their daughter who feeds them unsalted and sweet food, even vegetables, until the father, cloyed by the sweetness is unable to eat. It dawns on him how much his daughter loved him.

Returning to the story a year later, Narayan learns something more. Urmilaji elaborates that people [in the story] had remarked on the "arrogance" of the princess in telling the King she loved him like common salt and therefore she deserved to be married poorly. They are not alone in this view. Lear fumes to Kent while disowning Cordelia: "Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her" (1.i.27). He warns her, "How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little, Lest you may mar your fortunes" (1.i.89-90). Depending on whose perspective we see, salt could index love and (or) coldness—both qualities have been attributed to Cordelia by scholars of *King Lear*.

Interestingly, in Urmilaji's telling, filial love is unusually underscored by the silhouette of a figure who is absent entirely in *King Lear* and substantively in most variants of filial-love stories—the Queen, the banished princess' mother. Her yearning for news about their daughter and being moved that she had made it on her own, reflects, as Urmilaji says "a mother's heart after all" (191). The Queen becomes an agent for the reconciliation in the final scene of the Kangra variant. In the jointly constructed interpretation of this story, Narayan and Urmilaji tell us

that salt has remained a constantly available commodity in the Kangra economy while sugar, far more expensive, has become available only recently. Nutritionally speaking, too, Urmilaji places a higher value on salt than on sugar.

Yet, in the stapleness of salt is a resonance of the “bond” that Cordelia alludes to in *King Lear*. After her sisters have flamboyantly described their love for him, Lear invites Cordelia to her turn (I.i.80-81; Nagarajan 2012:11):

...what can you say to draw  
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak .

And Cordelia simply says, “Nothing.” She does not wish to compete with flattery and has “nothing” to contribute to it. She eventually explains (I.i.86-88; Nagarajan 2012:12 and I.i.92-100; Nagarajan 2012:13):

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave  
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty  
According to my bond; nor more nor less. .

You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I  
Return those duties back as are right fit,  
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.  
Why have my sisters’ husbands, if they say  
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,  
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry  
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.  
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,  
[To love my father all]

The bond that Cordelia refers to is an ancient and essential one. In Nagarajan’s words, “It refers to the mutual duty and love which binds parents and children and upholds the larger world, the macrocosm” (2012:12). Just as food has to be salted “just right” in order for it to be palatable, this bond also asks that Cordelia perform her duty to love Lear in a manner that is the “right fit.” It would be an untruth—an excessively sweet untruth—for her to say she would stop performing her duty of loving the man she marries.

Lear, after disinheriting and disowning Cordelia, is tossed into a journey of turbulent self-transformation. For all his initial egotism, he must undergo humiliation, weather a storm in a hovel, and lose all his possessions—including his mind.<sup>23</sup> By the time Lear and Cordelia are reunited, the question of how much Cordelia loves him become irrelevant. It has long been answered. He tells Cordelia (V.iii.9-20; Nagarajan 2012:261-2):

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<sup>23</sup> The king in the folktales that I have summarized in this paper, by contrast, remains a wealthy and powerful king.



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