

Locating New Literary Practices in Indian Digital Spaces

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, we locate and explore new literary practices and expressions in Indian digital spaces such as SMS novel and social media narratives: poetry, flash fiction, twitterfiction which are not considered as electronic literature in India. The integration of technology and creativity is not a novel phenomenon in Indian literature where one can find the narrative tradition of ancient Indian literature which includes poetical words, paintings, and music, for instance, Pattachitra, Ragamala paintings and Chitra Kavi. Similarly, new literary practices and expressions in the digital environment include literary artefacts such as interfaces, images, audio and videos. These works serve as a gateway to exciting electronic literature in India.

KEYWORDS

new literary practices; digital environment; India; ancient literary practices.

RESUMO

Neste ensaio, localizamos e exploramos novas práticas e expressões literárias em espaços digitais indianos, tais como romances em SMS e narrativas nos média sociais: poesia, ficção-flash, ficção-twitter que não são considerados literatura eletrônica na Índia. A integração de tecnologia e criatividade não é um fenômeno novo na literatura indiana, onde se pode encontrar uma tradição narrativa da literatura indiana antiga que inclui palavra, pintura e música, por exemplo, Pattachitra, pinturas de Ragamala e Chitra Kavi. Da mesma forma, as novas práticas e expressões literárias no ambiente digital incluem artefactos literários como interfaces, imagens, áudio e vídeo. Estas obras servem como porta de entrada para a literatura eletrônica na Índia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

novas práticas literárias; ambiente digital; Índia; práticas literárias antigas.

The increase in participants from many countries in *Electronic Literature Collection (ELC) Volume 3* demonstrates a certain globalization of digital literary works. The total collection of the third volume includes 114 authors from 26 countries, with many from the United States. There are a few works included from Asian countries such as China, Japan and South Korea.¹ India, however, is still an absence. And yet, people in India employ digital communication technologies every day for textual practices such as update status, text messages, digital photos and videos etc. Such cultural productions originate a new way of practicing literature online through writing a piece of poetry or fiction in brief forms with minimum words. This technological imperative compels vigorous participation in the new literary expressions such as SMS novels and social media network narratives, poetry, flash fiction and twitterfiction etc. Are these cultural practices considered electronic literature? Or do they have any features that could be conceived as electronic literature?

In this paper, we locate and explore these new literary practices/expressions in Indian contemporary digital spaces such as SMS novels and social media network narratives, poetry, flash fiction and twitterfiction which are not identified as electronic literature in India, but find no representation in global anthologies. The creators of these works fuse the digital literary aspects such as interfaces (text, images and videos), static/dynamic elements, collaborative production etc. The digital settings provide the opportunity for the reader to participate in the story and interact with the writer. We argue that these creative works using varied digital technologies which represent contemporary cultural allegiances could be conceived as a promising sign of the existence of the electronic literature in India. Communication technology and Internet in postcolonial India deprovincialize and decentralize the notion of creativity, circulation, reception and publication of creative works.

Souvik Mukherjee in his article on electronic literature in India, “No Country for E-Lit? – India and Electronic Literature” says, “[d]espite the setbacks and the virtual lack of an established form, the potential of electronic literature in India is significant. To communities already used to receiving social messages through oral storytelling, the non-linearity of the electronic story might be a familiar medium” (2017). Mukherjee analyzes the tradition of non-linearity and

¹ Electronic Literature Organization is a non-profit organization founded in 1999 by Scott Rettberg, Robert Coover, and Jeff Ballowe. It has published three anthologies of electronic literary works, respectively in 2006, 2011 and 2016. <https://eliterature.org/elo-history/>

oral storytelling; however, besides the performance of oral storytelling, the narrative tradition of ancient Indian literature includes poetical words, paintings, and music. The interconnection between literature and technology is not a novel phenomenon in India where the earliest artefact of seals that have been found consist of images of symbols used between 3100 and 1900 BCE (Kempton 2012). Karl Kempton says that the roots of visual poetry began from those seals which are assumed to have been worn as amulets and charms (2012). Embedding images and musical modes with text in literature is a continuous practice in the Indian creative space. The following section will briefly explicate this practice in the selected three ancient literary works.

I. ANCIENT LITERARY PRACTICES

Karl Young says in his work “Notation and the art of reading,” “Poetry is an intensely physical art, one that activates several senses at once” (1984). This is unequivocally applicable to early poetry in India. Before printing culture, the writings mainly occurred through palm leaves and cloth though the quality of the material is very fragile compared to other materials. The meaning of the word *Patta chitra* in the Sanskrit language is “Patta”—Cloth and “Chitra”—picture. The monograph of *patta chitra Gita Govinda*² is written in Sanskrit, and the meaning of the title is ‘Song of Cowherd’ or ‘Krishna in Songs’ carved by Jayadeva, a twelfth-century poet. The poem is embedded with the illustrations of God and Goddess and musical modes. This poem is also an inspiration for Indian classical dance. It is an example of the earliest multiple media antecedents of contemporary electronic poetry which possesses immersive elements such as images, texts, videos and music. Talan Memmot says, “it is essential to understand each digital poetry application as an environment or poetic microculture with its own grammar and customs” (302). Similarly, ancient Indian literary narration has its own “grammar and customs” as the expanded field of writing which includes the text, image and music. The reader has to interact with both text and image in order to understand the significance of the poem. The reader thus cannot evade or isolate the verbal imagery from the pictorial imagery; both are inter-linked through its technical features. These kinds of practices persistently evolve in the Indian literary tradition. “The *Gita Govinda* was also the inspiration for many beautiful miniature paintings of the Rajasthani and Pahari schools in the 17th and 18th centuries” (Britanica 2013). These schools produced miniature paintings which integrate literature and art. *Ragamala paintings* is one of the arts from the school of Rajasthan. It is another example of an art form that juxtaposes art and music for a creative outcome as we elaborate in the following paragraph.

² *Gita Govinda* is a masterpiece in Sanskrit literature. It contains 12 chapters which include 24 songs. It is a love play of god with goddess and their reunion. See Stoler Miller, ed. and trans., *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva’s Gitagovinda* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Ragamala paintings are series of paintings which comprise of classical music, poetry and art. The meaning of the word in the Sanskrit language is “Garland of Ragas” (“raga” means music). This art is well-known in the 17th century in Rajasthan. The music is depicted in the form of pictorial representation. The prominent theme of the art is the relationship between human and divine which is represented through lover and the beloved. The following quote offers comprehensive information about the *Ragamala paintings*:

These paintings served to illustrate a particular form of poetry — a form that aimed less at poetic description than at rendering the mood and sentiment behind the traditional forms of Indian music. Through the verbal imagery of a poem, the musical form was given a more precise expression and the pictures made were attempted to make these poetic interpretations clearer (Condra 2004).

Another renowned ancient literary practice is Chitra Kavi which is famous for its visual semiotic elements of Tamil literature from the land of South India. The precise meaning of the Tamil word *Chitra Kavi* is “picture poetry”. It is a word play with spatial exploration. The structure of the poem is rendered in the form of an image. We couldn’t find many materials on the origin of Chitra Kavi. In one online source on the practice of Chitra Kavi in Tamil language, “Details of Chitra Kavi” written by Surya Narayana Sastriyar (Paruthimal Kalanigar)³ in 1897, the writer explains how to draw the words and images to form poetry and discusses twenty two types of Chitra Kavi. The writer also mentions the fourth century Tamil poet Thirugnana Sambanthar who wrote Chitra Kavi in the poem *Thavaram*, which is one of the earliest literary works in the Tamil language. As Mukherjee says, “[t]he early forms of oral storytelling in India could possibly, therefore, be seen as predecessors of the electronic literature” (2017). Indeed, not only oral storytelling but the use of written and visual forms in these ancient literary arts can be related to the use of multimodality in electronic literature. The images of Gita Govinda, Ragamala Painting and Chitra Kavi are given in Figure 1, 2 and 3.



Figure 1. Gita Govinda. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

³ Other details of the book are unknown. It is uploaded by Gopal Venkatraman in Scribd. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/268383450/details-of-chitra-kavi-in-tamil>.



Figure 2. Ragamala Painting. Source: "A Female Musician Charms an Antelope," The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

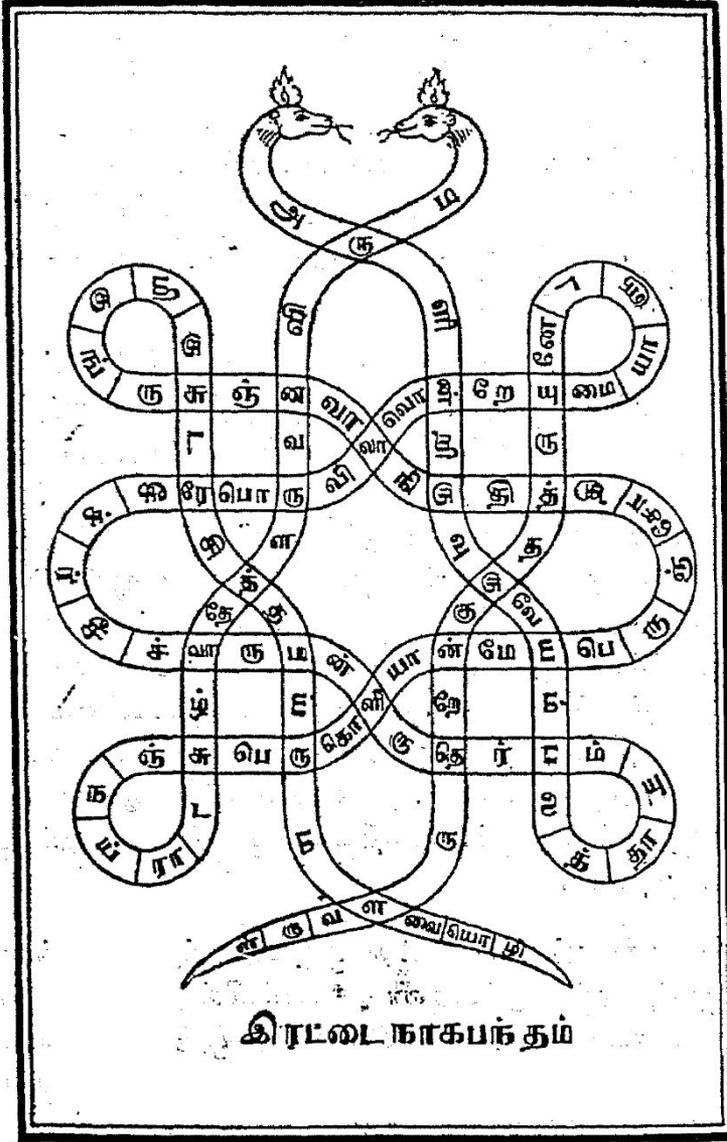


Figure 3. Chitra Kavi. Source: "Details of Chitra Kavi."

Many of these artistic expressions continue to be practiced in different parts of India. There is ongoing research into contemporary art practice in India. For example, Pinaki Gayen is a young research scholar of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur who works on visual art and emotion in the different cultures of contemporary India. One of his essays on art in the daily lives of people – “From Popular Culture to Everyday Aesthetics: the Rickshaw Art of Allahabad” – explores the creativity of rickshaw art. Correspondingly, the new

literary practices/expressions generated in the digital environment are an under explored area in Indian scholarship. In the following section, we explore some of these new forms of creative works in Indian digital space.

II. DIGITAL LITERARY PRACTICES AND EXPRESSIONS

Mukherjee claims that the digital versions of literature such as online journals, blogs and reading groups (for example, *The Little Magazine*, *Muse India*, *Coldnoon: Travel Poetics* etc.) are the expression of the rhizomatic nature of electronic literature in India. He observes, “Electronic literature, as it is understood in Europe and the U.S.A, does not have a presence in Indian literary and cultural traditions yet” (2017). As he says, Indian literary tradition may not have significant electronic literary works which contain heterogeneous digital literary features and require multiple steps to read like some of the works archived in the collections of ELC. However, we are presuming the possibilities of finding forms of fiction or poetry that may be considered as electronic literature which may not be anthologized online. Scott Rettberg, cofounder of the Electronic Literature Organization and co-author of *The Unknown*, contextualizes the condition of contemporary electronic literature in his article “Communitizing Electronic Literature”. He says “most people have no idea that electronic literature exists” (Rettberg 2009) which is analogous to the Indian context where the lack of knowledge might be due to dearth of digital pluralism in India. Despite the apparent lack of this kind of work, electronic literature has already started to emerge through some of the creative works in the digital ecology without any knowledge of Western electronic literature.

Sandy Baldwin, Reham Hosny and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang argue that N. Katherine Hayles’s *Electronic Literature* suggests that the American hypertext works, for example, Michael Joyce’s *Afternoon* is a “classic” or “first generation” work which surmises a logic of “canonicity (“classics”) and organic geneticism (“first generation”)” that proposes “other works, from other languages and regions are non-classical and outside of the family” (2017). Of course, Indian literary productions does not contain hypertext electronic literature except for a few video games which narrate the story through the hypertext link such as “a point-and-click mechanism” (Mukherjee 2017), for example, Studio Oleominus’s postcolonial game *Somewhere* engages hypertext storytelling. The existing electronic literature from India have their own singularity of generic and stylistic forms of digital literary aesthetics which may not emulate the interactive or non-interactive electronic literature of the West. Also, the pursuit of the tradition of embedding heterogeneous elements and technology is a cultural practice as explained in the earlier literary practices of Ragamala paintings, Chitra Kavi and Gita Govinda in which the symbolic also stimulates the senses.

If we closely observe the ELO's definition of Electronic Literature, "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer" (ELO n.d), we can see that this includes: hypertext fiction and poetry, kinetic poetry presented in Flash and using other platforms, computer art installations which ask viewers to read them or otherwise have literary aspects, conversational characters, interactive fiction, literary apps, novels that take the form of emails, SMS messages, or blogs, poems and stories that are generated by computers, etc. However, the inclusion of platforms of mobile, social media network, gif files etc. in the *Electronic Literature Collection volume three* unfolds the expanded field of creativity through digital communication technologies and other new technologies (Pawlicka 2016). For instance, Ottar Ormstad's *When*, Abraham Avnisan's *Collocations*, Ana Maria Uribe's *Tipoemas y Anipoemas* and Katharine Norman's *Window* exemplify these technologies as new platforms to create electronic literary works. Then, what does constitute electronic literature in India and how does digital culture influence Indian literary practices? We argue that indeed the literary aspects of creative digital works in India also take advantage of the capabilities, facets and virtual spaces provided by computers and other digital communication technologies.

III.SMS NOVELS IN INDIA

Locating these digital literary works is a challenging task since the creator may not describe or consider their works as electronic literature as Alan Bigelow says in one of his interviews: "...one writer outside of the known elit community who is writing elit but may not call it by that name" (Wiese and Giampa 2015). People write creative works in their own language or in English through digital media such as works simply created in a Word document or Photoshop or mobile or any other relatively simple technology. They insert a few images and designs for their own gratification without realizing they are creating a work of electronic literature. They import their works into the digital environment which can be read and discussed and debated through comments. The recent born digital communication technology and Internet in India decentralized the notion of creativity and opened up new horizons in the landscape of literature. Collaborative writing, embodiment of languages, various use of space in terms of linear and non-linear, static and dynamic, and diverse critical analyses etc. are an inextricable formation as codifying features of the work. Before the introduction of the Android phone, the role of the ordinary mobile phone was simply as a significant tool for communication. SMS (Short Message Service) is a feature used for text message, and this cultural transformation in the communication largely affected the literary formations. Scott Rettberg explains this shift in the following quote:

In the inclusion in the list of “novels that take the form of e-mails, SMS messages, or blogs” (see EMAIL NOVEL) is an indication of the directions we might expect electronic to take in the future... The essential idea here is that our communication technologies effect changes in the form, style, and content of writing, and that just as literary forms have been modified, and literary genres have emerged, from every previous historical shift in textual communication technologies, we might expect that novels will be written in the networked platforms that have been widely adopted as part of the practice of everyday life. Who will write the Great American Facebook novel, or best encapsulate a moment of epiphany in a work of cathartic Twitterature? And will we even, at that point, recognize the relationship between those and the forms that preceded them? (Rettberg 2014, 8, 9)

Following Rettberg, we suggest that a paradigm shift occurs in the literary composition, representation and dissemination after the advent of mobile phone in India. The recent literary practice has been called as cell phone novel, mobile phone novel, text messaging novel, m-novel, m-lit, cell literature, phone novel, and SMS novel (Roy 2012, 81). The first SMS novel is Ro Gue’s *Cloak Room* published by 3825media and supported by SMS Junction. The total micro chapters *Cloak Room* are 16 and every day two micro chapters were sent through SMS. This process stopped in 2005 and the chapters are archived online. The author mentioned on his blog: “Until Chapter 16 will be called Round I of the game. “CloakRoom-II” will begin in the early part of 2006, if not sooner. I’m hoping that a book deal or some other thing will help me resume this baby” (Gue 2005). However, the *Cloak Room-II* is not yet published. An excerpt from the novel is given below.

CloakRoom: Chptr16

Chptr16:NoAnswerGoes2VoiceMail“NowWe’reGoing2PlayAGame.

ThePassNeeded2PlayIzAlreadyInYourPossession.

ILoveYou,Baby.AndI’mWidYou.PlayWell.” (Clik2SendSMS)

ScoreUpdate: WeHaveARoundWinBySouthPawPisces OneRoundWinE-qualsTenBlowkiss. DisHappensWhenSomeonePredictsMyNextMoov.

News: DaGameIzGoing2GetBigger&Better,SoStaySharp&PlayWell. — RoGue (novel) (Gue 2005).

Hayles calls electronic literature a “hopeful monster” and “hybrid by nature” (4) as it is also informed by contemporary powerhouses such as computer games, digital art, films, etc. *Cloak Room* is also “hybrid in nature” as it evinces the “hybrid language” of the contemporary text message as mentioned above in the examples. Dhananjay Roy in his “Cell Phone Novel: A New Genre of Literature” studies the basic characteristics of SMS novels. He discusses how the inherent features of mobile phone brings the hybridity in the creative works. For instance, the emoticons such as :- (smiling or agreeing), :-D (laughing), :-((sad or unhappy), :-@ (screaming), :-& (tonguetied), :* (kisses) etc. become literary artefacts of creative works produced by mobile technology (Roy 2012, 87).

The language which is generally used in the cell phone novels is very simple and often having the “repetitive vocabulary”¹² – a language that is frequently used by common people, especially by youngsters in their day to day lives. Sentences are very short (essential because a mobile phone screen can hold maximum 100 to 200 characters in a single text)... (Roy 2012, 86).

As Roy says, the novel *Cloak Room* is narrated through SMS language as text shorthand, with no spaces between the texts. This kind of writing in the communication technologies has emerged as a cultural practice that is replicated in creative works. The text solely engages with material form of what Hayles calls as “technotext” (25, 26) and the readers thus cannot evade the integration of ‘text and technology’. This feature of the text itself becomes the semiotic element of this digital communication work which “requires its readers to read and think comparatively” (Pressman 2014). Jessica Pressman in her article “Electronic Literature as Comparative Literature” construes the intersection between text and media as inextricable. She says,

Digital literature operates in medial contexts and networked configurations that expose the inextricability of the technological from the linguistic and cultural (as well as political, protological, and historical dimensions). As a result, electronic literature exposes that there is never text without media and mediation (2014).

It is a collaborative writing as the author writes the story and readers predict and control it through their comment. “It is written by RoGue, but controlled by you. The author keeps landing her in trouble and only you can save her. After each chapter, predict what RoGue’s going to do next and upset his plans. Suggest an alternate course for the story, via comments, and fight the author” (Gue 2005). This feature is unique to the literary practice and reimagines the narrative production beyond the book model in India where mainstream literature is fully directed by the author. John David Bolter (1991) in his book *The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* writes, “(a)n electronic text permits the reader to share in the dynamic process of writing” (5, 6). Digital communication allows the reader to take part in shaping the story and as Bolter says, “the price of this new freedom for the writer is that the writer must allow the reader to intervene in the writing space” (146). The author of *Cloak Room* has applied some rules as, “*RULES* 1. You get points for helping Rita (BlowKizz), and negative score for landing her in trouble or making an illogical move which is not consistent with the past chapters (ButtKixx). For brilliant moves you get a RoundWin. 2. The rules will evolve as the game grows bigger. 3. Currently, the comment threshold for new chapters is 7 comments” (Gue, 2005).

We can see the diverse critical analysis of the story when we read the comments. Collaborative production is a part of strategies in the narrative works of electronic literature. We can identify similar kinds of collaborative works in the publications of *ELC*, for instance, Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph’s *Flight Path* is

an example of collaborative writing which is archived in *ELC volume 2*. The authors solicit for audience contribution through text comment, email, Facebook, Flickr groups and other communication technologies. We found two more SMS novels, *Death Heaven*, written by National Award winning writer Pinki Virani. It is published as audio mobile book. Another one is *The Revenge*, an SMS story created by AVS Sreenivas. However, we couldn't find the archives of these novels online. There are few SMS novels created in Indian languages such as *Neelakkannukal* written in Malayalam by P. R. Harikumar. He made it available for free download in <https://sites.google.com/site/prharikumar/download>.

Together with this, we located many literary expressions across social media networks which are marginalized in mainstream literature. The application of internet and smartphone technologies are moderately augmented after they were introduced a few decades ago. The internet was launched in India on August 1995; however, it became widely available in all major cities after 2005 due to the Special Economic Zone Act in 2005 (Rajaraman 2012, 49, 55, 77). Similarly, the usage of smartphone has considerably increased every year after it was introduced in 2009 (Radhakrishnan, 2009).⁴ The article "Only 20 per cent Indians have access to Internet: Study" discloses the usage of the Internet around the world. The survey was conducted by The Pew Research Center. It states about the application of Internet in India, "The study by The Pew Research Center also found that 65 per cent of Internet users in India said they use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter while 55 per cent have used the Internet to look for or apply for a job" (*Indian Express* 2015). These kinds of forums harness socialization among individuals and create wider social awareness. However, the technoculture in India is entertained not only in socialization, social awareness and experimental music, but also in many creative works produced through digital communication technologies. Mukherjee observes the creative works of social media sites such as "'Kolaveri di' (sung in Tenglish, a mix of Tamil and English) and 'Hok Kolorob'" saying that they "became overnight hits on Youtube and other social media sites" (2017). These are film songs and experimental music, which are already familiar in the social networks; however, apart from these experimental works, we can find many artistic works of "twitterliterature" (Rettberg 2014) and Facebook literature such as flash fiction, poetry, and twitfiction.

David M. Meurer, in his article "Towards Network Narrative: Electronic Literature, Communication Technologies, and Cultural Productions", analyses whether the practices of communication technologies are compatible with prose narrative fiction and whether they are capable of forming the basis for network narratives now and in the future. He argues,

⁴ The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) reports that mobile and internet users increase rapidly every year and it says that "India will have 478 Mn internet users by June 2018" (2017 Mobile Internet Report, 2).

[E]stablishing a place for born-networked narrative within contemporary culture requires substantive shifts in production practices in order to better accommodate additive participation. Creators of prose narrative fiction *can* cast the conventions of the novel aside and instead let works emerge out of the affordances of digital communication technologies and practices... (Meurer 2012, 3, 4).

The shift in the production of creative works is already on the uptake in India through flash fiction, poetry and twitterfiction. The creators employ the affordable features of new media technologies for “series of short narrative units” of what media theorists call micronarrative (Jenkins 2004). Narrating a story through a constrained number of characters is a new feature of a literary form in the 21st century. Dene Grigar, in her paper “Narration in Social Media” discusses the notion that narration plays through social media networks such as Twitter, names the 140 character limitation of story as the “21st century micro-fiction” (Grigar 2011). The brevity is one of the imperative practices in social media narrative. Leonardo Flores proposed that these kinds of literary forms, which are built in Social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) and mobile and apps platforms (iOS, Android, etc.) etc., are third generation of electronic literature (2017)⁵. The authors take advantage of the services and interfaces established for “the platforms such as the haptic vocabulary of the touch screens and the tools for interaction offered by the Apps and social media – to guide the interactions of their readers. These familiar interfaces will be key to the mass adoption of electronic literature” (Flores 2017).

IV. FACEBOOK AND TWITTER LITERATURE IN INDIA

Some Facebook groups are dedicated to the creation of literary works such as *Terribly tiny tale (ttt)*, *English Poetry in India* and *Paperless postcards (PP)*. *ttt* is a genre of flash fiction, contributed to every day by a dedicated group of digital writers. It is a platform that “brings together a diverse pool of fantastic writers to create one tweet-sized story every day” (“About” 2013). Recently, they also initiated new creative writings as a small animated video of flash fiction which imitates the chat application Whatsapp, a relatively new digital communication platform. Additionally, they upload collaborative audio clips of flash fiction in which two voices read the plot. Recently they announced on their website that selected short story contributions are to be published in a curated collection as a physical book. Ritika Singh analyses the brevity of *ttt* in terms of the space between words, colours and enjambments. She says,

⁵ The first generation electronic literature is associated to print model and the second generation arises after the advent of World Wide Web. The former embraces hypertext, video poetry, generative work etc. created and circulated in paper, disk, CD-ROM etc. The latter includes both interactive and non-interactive with image, audio and video mainly published in online forums (Hayles 2004, Funkhouser 2007, and Flores 2017).

Visually and structurally, the brevity of these stories allows words to become visual signifiers of the message or the theme of the story. The planned placement of words and spaces, with the often breaking of the regular syntactic structure of a sentence, facilitates guided perception of the viewer/reader where words become images and images become words (Singh, 2016).

Hence, the primary digital literary motifs such as black background with white font, the brevity, and a small animated fiction of chat conversations are inextricable formulations of *ttt* creative work.

Similarly, the milieu of the PP is postcard design which brings the nostalgia of physical, letter-based communication to its readers. Other groups such as *English Poetry in India* fuse photos and images with their texts. This ecosystem fuses together to produce an effective poetic expression. Importantly, the animated video of flash fiction from *Terrible Tiny Tales*, the postcard designs from PP and photos from *English Poetry in India*, show clearly that the creators enhance their literary pieces with interfaces which reiterate earlier media of communication through imitation. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin delineate this practice as “remediation” and say, “[w]hat is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media ...” (15). Of course, these creative works born through social media networks remediate the print and encompass features of the old (postcard design) and new medium (Whatsapp) as literary artefacts which underpin the new literary expression. These novel components are the devices of digital literature.

Also, this “remediation” persistently evolves in adopting literary works from print to the “banal” (Kushner 2015) information found in social media networks. Kushner says, “If the way we read now is more screen than page, more tweet than blank verse, then let’s deploy the power of literary studies to understand how those textual forms work, how they communicate meaning...” (2015). It is germane to the electronic literary work of Twitter where everyday people flood the digital spectrum with their tweets. Ultimately, this network also becomes an abode for literature. Narrating a story through 140 characters is a genre in Twitter, called ‘twitterfiction’. The author builds stories for his or her followers in a particular format. This kind of short-narratives may be traced back to its origins such as Japanese *keitai shosetsu* (cell-phone fiction) or forms of fanfiction; users are restricted to write a story in not more than 140 characters (Bronwen 2014, 95). Thomas Bronwen analyses two distinct forms of twitterfiction; “shorty” or “Twister” is a tweet which is “self-contained narrative”, another one is “serialized form as its focus, where the narrative unfolds across tweets” (95). Chindu Sreedharan’s *Epic retold: #Mahabharata #twitterFiction #Bhima #140 characters* is a serialized form of twitterfiction. It is retelling the story of Indian Epic Mahabharata through the voice of Bhima who is one of the most important characters in the work. The author began his tweets on July 19, 2009. He continued to tweet the story for 1605 days. It has digital literary devices such as readers’ comments or feedbacks to change the narration of the story as the epic is

well-known in the Indian subcontinent. Finally, HarperCollins India published a traditional book version of his story.

These three categories of digital literary works together offer a glimpse of new literary practices/expressions that can be found in Indian digital spaces. These practices demonstrate the transformation of circulation, reception and publication of new literary productions. The literary works of SMS, Facebook and Twitter execute the strategies of circulation and production of affordances of digital communication technologies. The twitterfiction *Epic Retold* gained considerable attention through its choice of social media dissemination, building a huge fan following — which ultimately, and perhaps ironically, allows it to find final publication in book form.

What we have tried to demonstrate in this paper are two imperative aspects 1) to relate current multimedia electronic forms to the long-running tradition of combining textual, visual, music and oral modalities in certain literary practices in India, and 2) to look at contemporary literature which has disparate forms of fiction, novel and poetry in digital spaces — of which we are unaware — that could be described as ‘electronic literature’. Hence, the recent born creative works of the contemporary power houses are the combination of both natural languages and technologies that are distributed in the digital spectrum. The narratives of these works also affect the several senses of the reader through interfaces, images, audio and video. These new literary expressions are reimagining electronic literature in a more pluralistic way in India. It may serve as a gateway to exciting Indian electronic literature in the future.

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