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Language as Archive: Indigenous Lexicons and Cultural Survival in Kalyani Thakur Charal's Works

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Abstract

This paper explores how the writings of Kalyani Thakur Charal, a leading Bengali Dalit woman writer, function as cultural repositories by preserving the distinctive socio-cultural practices of the Dalit communities of Bengal. Through a close reading of her novella *Andhar Bil*, and her autobiographical writings "Why Do I Write Charal" and "My Childhood", the paper foregrounds how language becomes a crucial site of cultural memory and resistance. Though written in Bengali, Charal's narratives embed indigenous expressions, oral idioms, and culturally specific lexicons such as *bil* (wetland), *khurho* (a term of endearment or respect for elders), *gurho* (molasses), and *chingrhebhushi* (a traditional variety of paddy), which resist linguistic erasure and assert an identity rooted in everyday Dalit life and knowledge systems. The paper argues that language in these texts operates beyond its communicative function; it archives collective memories, food habits, rituals, and belief systems otherwise silenced in dominant upper-caste narratives. Even in English translations, the deliberate retention of culturally specific words maintains the texture and rhythm of Dalit life, resisting the flattening effects of standardization. The act of translation here becomes a political and cultural negotiation, ensuring the preservation of indigenous vocabulary and worldview. Engaging with the aesthetics of Dalit literature (Sharankumar Limbale), the caste–food discourse articulated by Ilaiah, and Dalit feminist concerns (Sharmila Rege), the paper situates Charal's linguistic practices within a larger framework of resistance and cultural survival. By analyzing Charal's use of language in the chosen texts, this paper aims to emphasize the diversity within Indian culture and questioning dominant, homogenized narratives surrounding caste, gender, and regional identity. Her writings reclaim marginal voices and celebrate cultural particularity, positioning Dalit women's literature as a critical archive of indigenous survival and assertion. Ultimately, the paper investigates the intersections of language, memory, and identity, showing how language becomes a powerful tool in preserving the intangible heritage of Bengal's Dalit communities.

Keywords: Indigenous language, Cultural preservation, Marginalized voices, Vernacular aesthetics, Translation, Collective memory

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Introduction to Language as archive

While Dalit literature in states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu has long been recognized for its political urgency and literary richness, Bengali Dalit writing has had to struggle against both caste denial and cultural invisibility. In this landscape, Kalyani Thakur Charal emerges as a pioneering figure. As one of the most prominent Dalit women writers in Bengal, she foregrounds the realities of caste-based oppression while simultaneously highlighting the specific experiences and agency of Dalit women, situating her work within the framework of Dalit feminism. Sharmila Rege argues, "In analysing the caste and gender matrix in Indian society, merely pluralising the term patriarchy is not enough. The task is to map the ways in which the category 'women' is being differently reconstituted within regionally diverse patriarchal relations cross-hatched by graded caste inequalities." (qtd. in Rathore and Arya 9) Rege's formulation underscores that any discussion of women in India must attend to the intersections of caste and patriarchy. Charal's writings exemplify this insight: through her use of region-specific vocabulary and oral idioms, she resists upper-caste literary norms while articulating a Dalit feminist aesthetics that confronts both caste oppression and patriarchal control.

Language serves as a living archive of culture, preserving the values, beliefs, and everyday practices of a community across generations. Through local lexicons, idioms, and oral expressions, it safeguards histories often omitted from dominant narratives. In *An Introductory Course to Philosophy of Language* (2016), Ufuk Özen Baykent discusses language from a sociological perspective, "Sociology of language deals with language in terms of sociological matters. The question of what kinds of relationships exist between society and language use or culture and language use and ability is a problem of this field" (Baykent 11). Baykent asserts that wherever human life is present, language inevitably follows, as it represents one of the most defining and unique abilities of human beings. Baykent refers to Plato's idea that language is essential for reflecting on and understanding the nature of existence, the very being we speak of becomes knowable through language.

Building on this philosophical and sociological understanding of language as both a human necessity and a means of engaging with existence, this paper turns to the literary practices of Kalyani Thakur Charal. Her works exemplify how language, particularly in its indigenous and localized forms, not only reflects lived realities but also actively preserves and transmits the cultural identity of marginalized communities. By embedding region-specific terms, oral idioms, and everyday Dalit expressions within her narratives, she preserves the collective memory, lived experiences, and knowledge systems of Bengal's marginalized communities. This deliberate linguistic strategy resists cultural erasure, challenges upper-caste literary norms, and asserts a distinct Dalit identity rooted in local traditions and worldviews. Following Limbale's framework, this paper explores how Charal's use of language functions as a cultural archive, transforming everyday Dalit

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experiences into literary expressions that provoke reflection on caste, memory, and identity. Charal's linguistic practices resonate with what Sharankumar Limbale defines as a distinctly Dalit aesthetics, where language and expression themselves become acts of resistance. Sharankumar Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations* (2004) writes, "Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief" (qtd. in Naskar36). Limbale argues that the criterion for evaluating a work of art should extend beyond mere pleasure, as art that evokes social awareness can also possess significant aesthetic value. Following Limbale's framework, this paper explores how Charal's use of language in *Andhar Bil*, "Why Do I Write Charal?", and "My Childhood" functions as a cultural archive, transforming everyday Dalit experiences into literary expressions that provoke reflection on caste, memory, and identity.

Reading *Andhar Bil*: The Wetland as Lexical and Cultural Archive

Kalyani Thakur Charal's novella *Andhar Bil* offers an immersive portrayal of post-Partition rural Bengal, where the intersecting realities of caste, displacement, gender, and survival unfold through a language steeped in memory and resistance. The English translation by Asit Biswas does more than convey narrative content; it carefully attends to the textures of Charal's linguistic world, preserving the meanings along with the emotional and cultural resonance of words embedded in the socio-political fabric of Bengal's Dalit communities. In a literary space long dominated by the polished idioms and aesthetic norms of the *Bhadralok*, Charal's vocabulary emerges as an intervention, reclaiming marginal voices, everyday practices, and folk knowledge that are often excluded from canonical representations. That Biswas retains these linguistic markers in translation underscores a rare editorial sensitivity to subaltern specificity.

The narrative opens with the auditory signature of a steam engine, rendered as *coo jhik jhik*, a familiar sound that situates the story within a distinct aural landscape, evoking mobility, memory, and the rhythms of Partition-era travel. This sound, so rooted in Bengal's collective memory, marks the beginning of a journey that is physical, cultural and emotional. Charal's world is peopled by characters who speak in regional dialects and call each other with kinship terms that resist easy translation: *pisi*, *ma*, *taoi*, *maoi*, *bhagney*, *kurho*, *kulthe*, *kurhi*, *suyorani*, and *duyorani*. These terms are deeply coded social identifiers that reveal the intricate hierarchies, affections, and relational modes within extended Dalit households.

The novella's title itself, *Andhar Bil*, situates the narrative within a physical and symbolic space—the *bil* or wetland—deeply tied to livelihood, loss, and ecological intimacy. This environment unfolds through its own lexicon: a list of fish species such as *nal, shaluk, ghechu, bele, tahi, punti,* and *dorhaban,* which are integral to the local diet while simultaneously signifying ecological knowledge transmitted across generations. The reference to *donga* (a small boat), which Biswas retains

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alongside the English equivalent "boat," illustrates how translation can preserve cultural specificity without resorting to substitution or simplification. Klaus Kaindl observes, "Translators are no longer merely reproducers of a source text in the target language, but active decision-makers who assume responsibility for the functional adequacy of the translation" (Kaindl 6). In his framework, agency operates on two levels: the social function of translation itself, and the translator's capacity to exercise intentional power in shaping meaning. As he further notes, "translators are not neutral mediators, but agents who make conscious decisions in a social and political context" (Kaindl 20). Seen through this lens, Asit Biswas' lexical choice to retain both terms foregrounds his role as an agentive translator who honors the rootedness of the original while offering readers a bilingual register of meaning.

Throughout the novella, Charal uses everyday objects, gestures, and oral expressions that operate as micro-archives of marginal life. Words like *parha* (neighbourhood), *chatam* (boasting, typically by older men), *ghomta* (veil), *gata* (cloth scrap), *dhama* (basket), *durba*, *kool*, *data*, *kajiya*, *bonsai*, *torha*, *haat*, *ghat*, and *kuno* (earthen pot) are scattered across the narrative as semiotic carriers of history and use. Some are left untranslated, others are accompanied by minimal explanation, but none are erased—reflecting how these terms are inseparable from the cultural realities they represent. Aristotle in his "On Interpretations" argues "Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds" (Aristotle 1). Aristotle's concept of language as a mirror of reality finds resonance in *Andhar Bil*, where the structure of language reflects the lived world of Bengal's Dalit communities. The indigenous lexicons used by Charal, names of fish, tools, rituals, and kinship terms emerge from specific mental and cultural experiences rooted in that world. These words act as symbols of shared emotions, memories, and social realities, reinforcing Aristotle's idea that while spoken symbols may vary across languages, the underlying experiences they represent are universal. Through these culturally specific terms, Charal gives shape to the inner life of her community, establishing, as Aristotle suggests, a convention that links words, thought, and the world they describe.

Charal also invokes rituals and devotional practices, embedding the text with spiritual rhythms that belong to Bengal's folk traditions. References to *Subhachani Puja*, *Shitala*, *Saraswati* and *Sasthi Puja*, *lathikhela* (stick fighting), *kansi* (ritual utensils), and *Baruni bath* trace a calendar of ritual acts often neglected in sanitized urban narratives. Chants like *hobbol hobbol*, a local variation of *Haribol*, and references to *kirtan*, *surya pranam*, *adhibas*, *mochchhob*, and the *Charhak* festival reflect communal religiosity rooted in oral and physical expression rather than textual authority. Cultural actions like *toloi*, a chaotic celebratory loot during festivals, emerge as distinctly subaltern performative acts that signal collective joy and disruption.

The social realism of the novella is sharpened by Charal's unflinching attention to

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the embodied practices of belief and patriarchy. Remedies like applying tamarind seed paste to wounds or using a *gurudev's* dust as a healing substance are presented without irony, forming a realist register where superstition coexists with survival. The formation of women-led *Matua* groups, and depictions of domestic violence that men justify as 'for peace,' illustrate how gendered violence and spiritual resistance coexist within these communities. Rather than romanticizing rural life, Charal documents it with an ethnographic honesty that insists on preserving even its painful textures. Childhood games—*gollachhoot*, *ekka-dokka*, *kit-kit*—appear as cultural imprints of a shared past, while food vocabulary becomes another site where language preserves identity. Meals made from humble ingredients are lovingly listed: *gurho* (a charred tobacco leaf powder), *ghonto*, *chhechisak*, *kalmisak*, *malanchasak*, *fenabhat*, *patali gur*, *batasa*, *anchar*, *murhi*, and *tana* (a chewy jaggery made from date juice). Even the mention of *chirhey-murhi* with *rosogolla* syrup, or *koroch* (pouch of puffed rice), evokes a sensory archive that is simultaneously culinary and class-specific. These foods do not merely feed bodies—they feed memory, linking the material with the metaphorical. Maurice Halbwachs writes:

> …every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework. Now space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings. It is to space - the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination - that we must turn our attention. Our thought must focus on it if this or that category of remembrances is to reappear. (Halbwachs 6-7)

Halbwachs suggests that collective memory is inseparable from space, as memory is anchored in the physical environments people inhabit and revisit. He emphasizes that space offers a kind of permanence that time cannot, and it is this stability that allows individuals and communities to feel as though they are recovering the past in the present. In *Andhar Bil*, this idea finds powerful resonance. The wetland, or *bil*, functions both as a physical location and as a repository of memory, made enduring through the culturally rooted language Charal uses to describe it. The text draws on place-specific lexicons, names of fish, farming practices, household objects, and rituals, that are deeply tied to the land and to collective experience. Because space retains its structure even as time moves forward, language that encodes that space becomes a vital means of preserving cultural memory. Through her use of indigenous terms, Charal transforms the landscape into a durable archive, and even in translation, this linguistic mapping ensures that the memory tied to space is not lost. Her work, then, shows how language situated in spatial familiarity can resist historical erasure and affirm subaltern presence.

Through this layered linguistic world, *Andhar Bil* refuses to flatten Dalit experience into abstraction. The language itself becomes a method of archiving. Asit Biswas's translation honours this commitment by allowing Charal's lexicon

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to travel without losing its weight. In doing so, the novella claims space in the global literary consciousness, reminding us that translation, when attentive and ethical, can act as a bridge that carries the resonance of the subaltern to a broader world without silencing its roots.

Language as Cultural Memory in "Why Do I Write Charal"

The translated version of Kalyani Thakur Charal's autobiography "Why Do I Write Charal", rendered into English by Debi Chatterjee, plays a vital role in preserving and transmitting the lived experiences of Dalit women. It is a repository of cultural and gendered realities deeply embedded within marginal communities. The text carries a lexicon of everyday life that encodes a world often excluded from mainstream literary representation. Words like *bel* tree, referring to the hard, woody fruit also known as wood-apple with prized yellow pulp, do not just describe objects; they convey the cultural value and local knowledge associated with food and environment. Similarly, *moshebari*, used to refer to Charal's friend Chhabi, indicates how names and places merge into living memory and personal geography. Through this language, the text documents individual memories and collective experiences. For instance, the label *Keora* is assigned to a woman who is blamed for a man's death out of superstition. This reflects a social tendency to stigmatize women within the margins of belief and patriarchal fear, and its inclusion in the narrative shows how language both exposes and archives these injustices. Everyday economic and material practices are also preserved through terms like *haat*, weekly markets that are central to rural commerce, and *haturey jama*, a type of clothing that is practical, long-lasting, and indicative of rural frugality. These lexicons reflect the social conditions of poverty and resourcefulness, narrating an economy of survival.

What makes this autobiography especially powerful is the presence of Charal's father, a figure who subverts the normative portrayal of Dalit masculinity. In a society where domestic violence was often normalized, Charal remembers how many fathers would beat their wives with sticks typically used to hit cattle. Her own father, however, stood apart. He never raised his hand against his wife. Instead, he stood up against violence—even confronting his own father for assaulting Charal's grandmother. The moral force of this father figure is encapsulated in his words: "Just as we men are, so are the women…Whatever work men do, women will also do" (Chatterjee and Mukherjee 330). His belief in equality is grounded in daily life. He cites the *Harililamrita*, a spiritual text, stating: "A good family person should have knowledge regarding all work" (Chatterjee and Mukherjee 330). His progressive mindset extends to education as well, as he quotes Guruchand Thakur, saying: "Eat or not there is no sorrow. Educate the children that is what I want" (Chatterjee and Mukherjee 331). These statements are powerful for their content and for the context from which they arise. They archive an ethical tradition within Dalit life that challenges the stereotype of backwardness often imposed by dominant narratives.

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The text also documents caste-based discrimination in modern institutional spaces. Charal reflects on the hypocrisy within her workplace, where the daughters of upper-caste men like Chatterjee Babu and Chakravarti marry men from lower castes, both engineers, yet their families remain silent and uncomfortable about these unions. While these women have exercised choice and achieved upward mobility, caste still operates as an unspoken stain. Charal notes with sorrow that despite these inter-caste marriages, the subject remains taboo, never openly discussed in the office. Through this anecdote, she reveals how caste persists quietly, even when social markers such as education or profession appear to transcend it. This is the culture that she is facing, she remarks, pointing to the everyday exclusions that remain invisible to those outside her world.

Wilhelm von Humboldt suggested that linguistic diversity is linked to the expansion of human potential. Humboldt postulates, "language is deeply entangled in the spiritual evolution of mankind, it accompanies the latter at every stage of its local advance or retreat, and the state of culture at any time is also recognizable in it" (quoted in Baykent 66). Humboldt's conception of language as a force intricately tied to the cultural and intellectual development of a people finds powerful expression in Kalyani Thakur Charal's autobiographical text "Why Do I Write Charal?". Humboldt viewed language as inseparable from national and cultural identity, an individual's use of language, he argued, is part of a larger continuum that connects personal expression with the consciousness of a community, a race, and even the human species. Charal's narrative is not merely a personal account; it is a linguistic articulation of collective Dalit memory, struggle, and assertion. Her use of culturally specific terms and idioms rooted in lived Dalit experience reflects Humboldt's idea that language shapes, and is shaped by the imagination of a culture. This reciprocal relationship is clearly evident in how Charal's language both documents and transforms her community's identity. The role of Debi Chatterjee as the translator is equally significant in maintaining this cultural and linguistic integrity. Chatterjee ensures that the translated text does not dilute or erase its rootedness. Instead, her translation allows the autobiographical voice to resonate with the same assertiveness and cultural richness as in the original. In doing so, Chatterjee contributes to the continuity of the linguistic and cultural chain that Humboldt envisioned, where language becomes a means of expression, and a living vessel of cultural memory and transformation.

Ritual Lexicons in "My Childhood": Preserving the Language of Labour and Faith

The English translation of Kalyani Thakur Charal's autobiographical piece "My Childhood", carried out by Suchetana Ghosh Dastidar, opens a window into the cultural and emotional landscape of Dalit life in rural Bengal, where reading becomes an act of learning and one of shared pleasure and pride. Within Charal's household, reading is a cherished ritual. After dinner, it turns into a playful competition—each member vying to be the first to finish a book. This act of

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reading together constructs a domestic environment where intellectual curiosity is nurtured across generations. The range of authors and books mentioned—*David Copperfield*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Rosenberg Letters*, Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Aranyer Dinratri*, along with Bengali literary giants like Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and Swapan Buro (pen name of Akhil Neogi), reflects the literary depth and diversity that defined her family's reading culture. The presence of texts like *Vivekananda's writings* and politically resonant works further suggests that literary engagement within this marginalized space was also a way of entering wider intellectual worlds.

Charal's mother, too, is portrayed as an avid reader, using moments between sewing a *kantha*, the traditional quilt of Bengal, to immerse herself in books. This image of a woman negotiating domestic labor while finding time to read is a powerful reminder that literacy and creativity can thrive even within constrained spaces. Dastidar's translation effectively communicates the intimacy and emotional vibrancy of this reading culture, preserving the nuances that make it specific to the Bengali Dalit experience. The autobiography also contains valuable references to broader historical and political contexts, most notably the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The mention of *Razakars*, collaborators who supported the Pakistani army and were perceived as traitors, grounds the text in a politically volatile period. Charal draws upon collective memory to recount how these violent events intersected with local narratives. Folklore too finds a voice here, as she recalls characters like Basho Kumar and Nader Chand, passed down through storytelling traditions. An elderly woman named *Aaji* becomes a vital oral historian, recounting tales of *Shubho Chandi Pujo* and *Huloi songs*. The former is performed for blessings before significant events such as marriages or childbirth, particularly for a male child, while the latter refers to seasonal folk music sessions held during winter, culminating in communal feasts. These rituals and songs are encoded with the rhythms of rural time and belief, and their inclusion in the text preserves their role as performative cultural memory.

Charal's account is also full of references to material culture, ecological practices, and everyday objects that are deeply rooted in regional experience. The base of sugarcane stalks, known as *nara*, and *goja*, are used as fuel. A drink called *taari*, a locally brewed fermented sap, is mentioned in a domestic scene where Charal's cousin Damu becomes verbally abusive toward his mother after consuming it. Such moments, while personal, speak volumes about the intersections of poverty, patriarchy, and alcohol use in rural communities. The mention of *apa*, meaning a small pond, anchors the setting further in agrarian life. Fishing tools such as *ocha*, a cane-made conical trap for catching fish, and *kuno*, a clay or brass vessel for storing the catch, are also documented. These terms are not translated away or minimized; instead, they form part of a living lexicon that ties land, livelihood, and language together.

Seasonal rituals such as *kulonamano* are also captured in rich detail. Practiced

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during the summer month of *Jaistha*, *kulonamano* is a traditional rain-invoking ritual that involves the use of *kulo*, a winnowing fan made of cane, used in agricultural practices to separate chaff from grain. Another seasonal observance is *del namano*, which extends through the month of *Chaitra* and ends with *vaastupujo*, a ritual meant to invoke stability. This observance resembles the more widely known *gaajon* but is free from Brahminical associations. One symbolic object in this ritual is the *chhiremama*, a large wooden block carried on the shoulder, smeared with oil and *sindoor*, and worshipped as a deity. Participants often carry a smaller version, called *chhota*, made from cane, and dance to the rhythm of the *dhak* drum. Such practices, rich with community participation, spiritual symbolism, and embodied performance, are central to the cultural archive that this narrative builds. The story also preserves the memory of local performance traditions, such as the *Ashtak* group of musicians who perform during *del* festivals. As the translator notes, the word *ashtak* traces back to the mythical *Ashta Sakhis*, the eight companions of Radha in Vaishnav lore, and its adaptation into folk contexts speaks to how spiritual themes are reinterpreted and reappropriated by Dalit communities. The music is not ornamental; it functions as both spiritual expression and social glue. Even animals occupy a significant emotional and symbolic role in the narrative. Charal recounts how cows in her family were as livestock, and as cherished companions—each with names like *Lakkhi*, *Shyamali*, *Sonali*, and *Rupali*. The grief experienced after the death of one of these cows was so profound that her mother was unable to cook. These recollections do more than evoke sentiment; they reveal a form of kinship that includes the nonhuman world as part of everyday emotional life, challenging hierarchies of value. Claire Kramsch in his book *Language and Culture* (1988) asserts:

> Language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture. Thus, we can say that language symbolizes cultural reality (Kramsch 3).

Kramsch argues that language is the primary tool through which we engage in social interaction. When used in communication, it becomes deeply intertwined with culture in various ways. At a basic level, the words we use refer to shared experiences, they convey facts, ideas, and events that are intelligible because they draw upon a collective body of knowledge familiar to others. Language also carries the speaker's personal beliefs, attitudes, and worldview, thereby reflecting the cultural reality of the speaker. However, beyond reflecting reality, language also plays a creative role in shaping it. This is evident in Charal's autobiographical narrative "My Childhood," where language becomes a means of constructing and conveying lived experience. The modes through which individuals use speech, writing, or visual communication generate meanings that resonate within their specific cultural group. These meanings are shaped by words, by tone, accent,

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gesture, and style, or elements that together embody cultural meaning. In this context, Suchetana Ghosh Dastidar's English translation of "My Childhood" effectively preserves the distinctive voice and cultural nuance of Charal's original narrative. Her translation ensures that the intimate realities of Charal's life and her community transcend linguistic boundaries. Rather than diluting the specificity of marginal experience, the translation extends it into new discursive spaces, enabling wider audiences to engage with the cultural and emotional texture of Dalit life.

Translation as a Site of Cultural Preservation

If language acts as a map of reality and a means of expressing cultural identity, then translation becomes the bridge that carries this identity across linguistic borders. In the context of Kalyani Thakur Charal's works, the act of translation does not merely transmit meaning—it participates in the preservation and circulation of subaltern memory. It is within this transitional act that language's archival function expands, allowing culturally rooted expressions to travel beyond their source while resisting erasure. This is where the insights of translation theorists like Michaela Wolf become vital. Michaela Wolf opines, "translational activity as an interactive process, a meeting place where conflicts are acted out and the margins of collaborations explored" (Wolf 13). Wolf, drawing on Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, suggests that this space can be understood as a shared zone of interaction among the various agents engaged in the translation process. It functions as a transitional area where tensions and cultural conflicts are not erased but negotiated and transformed into constructive, generative elements. Translators like Asit Biswas, Smita Basu, Debi Chatterjee, and Suchetana Ghosh Dastidar resist the flattening effects of standardized English by preserving essential terms such as *bil*, *kurho*, *pantabhat*, *del namano*, *kulo*, and *taari*. These untranslated or minimally explained words do more than decorate the text; they invite the reader into an immersive cultural world that speaks in its own cadence, thereby unsettling dominant linguistic norms. As Michaela Wolf, referencing Homi Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, suggests, translation can create a shared zone of negotiation, an in-between space where cultural tensions and asymmetries are not erased but transformed into productive encounters. In this light, the translation of Charal's works can be seen as operating within such a Third Space: a transitional zone where the voices of the marginalized engage with global readerships, not through assimilation, but through assertion and cultural specificity. This practice affirms the political and archival power of Dalit women's writing and underscores the importance of linguistic diversity within Indian literature. It also signals a broader shift in translation studies and caste discourse, one that recognizes the value of preserving subaltern vocabularies as acts of resistance, memory, and cultural survival.

While the positionality of a translator can often influence how subaltern texts are mediated—Dalit translators may foreground culturally specific lexicons and narrative rhythms, whereas non-Dalit translators may risk domestication—in the

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case of Charal's works, the non-Dalit translators examined here (Asit Biswas, Smita Basu, Debi Chatterjee, and Suchetana Ghosh Dastidar) approach the texts with notable sensitivity. Their translations preserve key cultural terms such as *bil*, *kurho*, *pantabhat*, *del namano*, *kulo*, and *taari*, ensuring that the archival and political dimensions of the original works remain intact. This suggests that while translator identity remains an important factor in the politics of translation, attentive engagement with the source culture can mitigate the risks of erasure or flattening, allowing the texts to assert Dalit memory and identity across linguistic boundaries.

Conclusion: Retention of Lexicon in English

A language, any language, serves as a map or blueprint of reality, offering a framework through which the world is represented. It also functions as an evolving tool that enables the shaping of cultural identity, allowing communities to express themselves both artistically and socially. The selected works of Kalyani Thakur Charal—*Andhar Bil*, "Why Do I Write Charal?", and "My Childhood"—demonstrate how language functions as a tool for communication and as a vessel of collective memory, cultural identity, and subaltern resistance. Through her intentional use of indigenous vocabulary, regional idioms, and culturally grounded references, Charal constructs a living archive that encapsulates the rhythms, rituals, foodways, and belief systems of Dalit life in Bengal. The translation of these texts into English, when carried out with fidelity to their cultural and lexical particularities, becomes an extension of that archival project. In this sense, Charal's linguistic strategies foreground the role of indigenous lexicons in resisting erasure, amd in ensuring cultural survival across generations, making language itself an archive of lived experience.

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