



## Modern Indian Literature in Translation

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**Abstract**— *The translation is essential to communicate the meaning of one language into another without disturbing the originally felt emotions. It has been noticed that translation has always been primary to Indian literature, and especially Indian English literature. Encouraging translation talent in India is also a relatively new and interesting space. Since the vernacular writings have been translated into English, it's getting easier for the audiences to understand the point of view of the writers. It is the strength of this vernacular pen that makes writings so dynamic in Indian languages. In the Indian context translation to English is also an act of harmony as it brings voices of protest and those of the subaltern as well, to the advantaged and the powerful challenging them in their space. This research will focus on Marathi subaltern writings translated into English and their impact on the readers, especially the literature created by Dalits (formerly referred to as Untouchables), one of the most exploited and silenced communities in India.*

**Keywords**— *Dalit Literature, Indian English Literature, Marathi subaltern writings, Translation studies, Vernacular writings.*

### INTRODUCTION

Translation studies began to be taken soberly in the late 1970s. Corroboration of interest in translation is everywhere. Many books on translation have appeared continuously throughout the past two decades, and new journals of translation studies have been established. Throughout the 1980s interest in the theory and practice of translation grew steadily. Then, in the 1990s, Translation Studies finally came into their own, for this proved to be the decade of its global expansion. There is a growing body of research that reflects this newer, more complex agenda, for as research in Translation Studies increases and historical data becomes more readily available, so important questions are starting to be asked, about the role of translation in shaping a literary canon

Despite the diversity of methods and approaches, one common feature of much of the research in Translation Studies is an emphasis on cultural aspects of translation, on the contexts within which translation occurs. Once seen as a sub-branch of linguistics, translation today is perceived as an interdisciplinary field of study and the indissoluble

connection between language and way of life has become a focal point of scholarly attention.

Today the movement of peoples around the globe can be seen to mirror the very process of translation itself, for translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another, it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place mediated by the figure of the translator. Significantly, Homi Bhabha uses the term 'translation' not to describe a transaction between texts and languages but in the etymological sense of being carried across from one place to another. He uses translation metaphorically to describe the condition of the contemporary world, a world in which millions migrate and change their location every day. In such a world, translation is fundamental: We should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.

It must be made clear that translation of literary books is not just an exercise carried on at High School and Intermediate levels but a literary and cultural activity affecting the

multilingual culture of a country. A translator these days is regarded as an artist in the same way as an author in any field. A good translation is not a literal one but a rewriting of the original text so as to please its readers. It also applies to the translation of fiction in vernaculars in English which has found a lot of favour as it is an international language and is read almost all over the world. That is why a translator is no more a second-rate inhabitant of the land of literature.

It has been noticed that translation has always been primary to Indian literature, and especially Indian English literature. Encouraging translation talent in India is also a relatively new and interesting space.

The story of Indian literature until the nineteenth century was mostly a story of creative translations, adaptations, retellings, interpretations, epitomes and elaborations of classical texts. These knit together communities, languages, religions and cultures. ... Translation to us is a way of retrieving our people's histories and recording their past and present. (Satchidanandan v-vi)

Translation, we have to admit, is not static; it is also an area of creativity which is claiming and getting more academic and creative importance. The availability of national and international publishers publishing translated books of fiction in English has also increased the volume of books for interested readers. The translators also looked for the convenience of their readers and added a glossary at the end to make the book nearer the original while catering to the taste of readers.

However, we cannot claim that Indian writers translated into English get the same attention as those who write directly in English. Whereas literature written directly gets a place in the University syllabus, it has not been easy for translated literature (the case of books like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gitanjali* and so on is an exception). Moreover, reviews of books translated into English usually appear in the language in which the originals were written; but the translated literature is usually deprived of this privilege. One more factor affecting the importance of translated books is the unavailability of modestly priced editions for students and readers with moderate income.

The translation is essential to communicate the meaning of one language into another without disturbing the originally felt emotions. In India, the language needs to be looked into from a caste perspective also as the caste is the 'in thing' in the Indian milieu. The higher the caste the more sophistication and the lower it goes down in the vertical hierarchy, the more the language becomes rugged, colloquial, and sometimes vituperative. With the dawn of Dalit literature the low caste and untouchables who are necessarily working-class people, have woken up and

started writing their experiences stricken with melancholy. The puritans started mocking both the texture and the content. In fact, the world of majority India began to unravel with Dalit (and other backward castes) writing. When a collection of Kannada short stories 'Dyavanuru' which was in the spoken dialect of low caste, was published the upper caste intelligentsia cried for its translation into (formal) Kannada!

Language is always interwoven with native culture. Therefore culture specific jargon which can speak beyond words cannot find substitutes easily in another language. Here comes a challenge for the translator. It may be nearly possible if the translation is to another vernacular of the same cultural background. If it is for a foreign language the difficulty is multiplied. The names like Saraswathi, Hanumantha, and Nagaraja have to be translated as the goddess of learning, monkey god, snake god and so on. These names could be used as they are in regional vernacular. Similarly, there are ritual-specific jargons which have no parallels, in which case an appendix has to be used to explain the details with meanings.

On the whole, it can be said that the text demands the translator to be sincere to the original. And the reader demands more clarity in translation. The translator is obligated to both of them and therefore needs to compromise in between.

A number of translators from the South have made their name in this field. We may mention the names of M. Vijayalakshmi, who has translated Thophil Mohamed Meeran's novel *Chaivu Narkali* (titled *The Reclining Chair*), Padma Ramachandra Sharma who has translated Shivarama Karanth's *Marali Mannige* (titled *Return to Earth*), Smt. Indira Anathkrishnan has translated *Lakshmi* (titled *Ripples in the River*) and C. Radhakrishnan has translated his own novel *Spandamapinikale* (titled *May Be Another Day*). Even more popular as a translator is Lakshmi Holmstrom who has also translated Bama's *Sangati* titled *Events* and *Karukku*.

*Karukku* is an autobiography of the author and has been called an unusual autobiography. It is the story of a personal crisis though it is not in confessional mode as it has left out many personal details of the author's life. Its English translation into English has acquainted readers with non-Tamil literature. In her "Afterword" of the novel, she has pointed out that Mrs Lakshmi Holmstrom has "translated *Karukku* into English without once diminishing its pungency" (106). There can be no better complement to a translator. Bama's picture of the "oppressed, ruled, and still being ruled by patriarchy, government, caste, and religion" ("Preface" vii) has been made available to the readers of English by Mrs Lakshmi Holmstrom :

In *Sangati*, many strong Dalit women who had the courage to break the shackles of authority, to propel themselves upwards, to roar (their defiance) changed their difficult, problem-filled lives and quickly stanch their tears. *Sangati* is a look at a part of the lives of those Dalit women who dared to make fun of the class in power that oppressed them. And through this, they found the courage to revolt.

Here again, Bama says, “My gratitude also to Lakshmi Holmstrom who spent years translating, revising, and redrafting the English version of *Sangati* without disturbing the essence and flow of the original.”

Since the vernacular writings have been translated into English, it's getting easier for the audiences to understand the point of view of the writers. It is the strength of this vernacular pen that makes writings so dynamic in Indian languages. In the Indian context translation to English is also an act of harmony as it brings voices of protest and those of the subaltern as well, to the advantaged and the powerful challenging them in their space. This research will focus on Marathi subaltern writings translated into English and their impact on the readers, especially the literature created by Dalits (formerly referred to as Untouchables), one of the most exploited and silenced communities in India.

The term 'Dalit' (meaning 'broken' or 'crushed' in Marathi) has been chosen by 'Untouchables' themselves as a *nom de guerre*. The history and roots of Dalit literature are still in the process of being written and negotiated. The noteworthy expansion of Dalit literature in its modern form is associated with the demonstrative movement of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra in the 1970s, a movement led by the writer-activists such as Namdeo Dhasal and Arjun Dangle. The Dalit Panthers, and the upcoming hugely affluent group of Dalit literature arising from Maharashtra, were intensely affected by the literary works and life of Dr B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), the most remarkable and admired Dalit leader and muse for many Dalit writers and radicals.

A translation exists in the canonical, and Brahmanical, traditions variously as means of disseminating “knowledge”, sharing experiences, and forging solidarities in certain cases. In the context of Dalit Literature, the translation of a Dalit text is not simply “re-encod[ing] for a different audience, pan-Indian, non-Dalit or global”. The questions that trouble the translator of a Dalit text is somewhat different. When talking about Dalit literature one is confronted with the whole history of oppression which guide the pen of the Dalit writers like Sharan Kumar Limbale, Omprakash Valmiki, and others. Valmiki, in the introduction to his autobiographical book, *Joothan*, says

that writing the book was a very painful exercise as if he was reliving his arduous past.

Sujit Mukherjee, the pioneer of translation studies in India, has described translation as both a ‘discovery’ and ‘recovery’: the literature in the process of translation gets discovered for people who are unfamiliar with the source language and culture and recovered from the dusty annals of anonymity. Do these and similar ‘theories’ fit into the arena of translating Dalit literature? How do we account for the ‘intention’ (to borrow from Walter Benjamin) of the translator in translating any text?

Dalit literature with its depiction and assertion of subaltern cultures is the most crucial evolution in Indian literature in the last three decades, but this distinctive literary entity has not yet inherited the international acknowledgement it deserves. In spite of the fact that the 1950 constitution of independent India put an end to Untouchability, inequity against people of untouchable caste backgrounds has continued, endorsed by Hinduism. Influenced by the political activism that questioned the discrimination on the grounds of caste in Maharashtra in the 1970s, Dalit writer-activists developed a highly politicised literature in the vernacular language of Marathi. This set the paradigm for the origination of other regional Dalit literature in vernacular Indian languages such as Tamil in Tamil Nadu, Malayalam in Kerala, and Telugu in Andhra Pradesh, Kannada in Karnataka and Hindi. Dalit literature is often highly creative in its form, narrative outlook and use of language but so far only the work of a few Dalit authors has been translated into English and other European languages.

## CONCLUSION

The English language will destroy the regionality of languages and culture. Dr Ambedkar said that, in India, there are two countries. One is touchable India and the other is untouchable India. There is a huge cultural gap. Beyond this gap, it is the translation of Dalit literature that has united Dalits. It has enlightened and encouraged Dalits. It has strengthened the Dalit movement and the language of human rights. The translators of Dalit literature are not always professional translators but they are socially committed. They give back to society with their work of translation.

Dalit literature is the focal point of a continuous struggle against often ruthless and humiliating caste discrimination and maltreatment, and Dalit writers and critics are rightly cautious of having their voices represented, misrepresented, and appropriated by both upper-caste Indian scholarship and Western academia. This paper tried to make a contribution to the transformative value of Dalit literature and how

translation is serving as a tool to make the voices of the Dalits heard by the varied masses.

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- [3] For a discussion of broader definitions of the concept of Dalit literature that include the work of other marginalised Indian communities and an analysis of the notion of Dalit consciousness, see Brueck 9–11 and 61–76. For a postcolonial analysis of caste, see Ganguly.
- [4] For a study of the autobiographical field of Dalit literature in Hindi, see Hunt. 278 Nicole Thiara.
- [5] See also the Dalit Panthers ’Manifesto, reprinted in Satyanarayana and Tharu’s *The Exercise of Freedom*.
- [6] For an introduction to Ambedkar, see Zelliott.
- [7] See Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste*. It should be noted, though, that with the growth of Dalit sub-caste movements that assert the identity of specific castes, which began in the 1990s, “[c]aste annihilation . . . have to be rethought as a project where caste identities may remain as markers of a culture and history, but inequalities and indignities will be eliminated” (Satyanarayana and Tharu, Introduction, *Steel Nibs* 48).
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