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Abstract - Earlier most of the Dalit literature was poetry but fiction is published plenty now. Dalit fiction captures the reader's attention easily more than that of the poetry of Dalits. The beginning of the 20th century saw the arrival of two great reformers Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and M. K. Gandhi, who addressed the issues of untouchability and caste in India. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar believed that only education could bring about a change in the oppressed lives of the Dalits. He has opened many schools and colleges exclusively for Dalits in Maharashtra. Hundreds of Dalits sent their children to study in these Dalit-run institutions. This institution produced the first generation of Dalit literates, who ultimately started their own magazines and printing presses.

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Cultural Translatability and Untranslatablity of the Folk Songs in Bama's Sangati

S.R. Adlin Asha

I. Dalit Literature

Earlier most of the Dalit literature was poetry but fiction is published plenty now. Dalit fiction captures the reader's attention easily more than that of the poetry of Dalits. The beginning of the 20th century saw the arrival of two great reformers Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and M. K. Gandhi, who addressed the issues of untouchability and caste in India. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar believed that only education could bring about a change in the oppressed lives of the Dalits. He has opened many schools and colleges exclusively for Dalits in Maharashtra. Hundreds of Dalits sent their children to study in these Dalit-run institutions. This institution produced the first generation of Dalit literates, who ultimately started their own magazines and printing presses.

"Educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality."-Dr. B. R. Ambedker (Writings and Speeches, Government of Maharashtra, Vol. 5, p. 17 1891-1956).

Dr. Ambedkar also distinguished slavery from untouchability in an intense manner. He remarked, even slaves had the opportunity to become free from slavery and get education, culture and wealth, but the untouchables have no escape from their oppressed state. They fail to get the advantages or opportunities provided for them because of their social disability.

"In slavery there is no room for education, virtue, happiness, culture or wealth. In untouchability there is none. Untouchability has none of the advantages of an unfree social order such as savery. It has all disadvantage of free social order".-Dr. B. R. Ambedker (Writings and Speeches, Government of Maharashtra, Vol. 5, p. 17 1891-1956).

Dalit literature as a genre was established in the 1960s and 1970s. It comprises of both tribal and non-tribal oppressed people's literature. It is a literature of protest, pain and agony. Its beginnings can be traced from the undocumented oral folklore and tales of the past decades. Education gave Dalits a lot of self-confidence and courage to fight against their oppressors. The literary works that brings in light the voices of subalterns are immense. Nearly two decades later, Tamil Dalit writing marked its identity in the literary map of Tamilnadu. Many Dalit writers felt the need to express themselves and to talk about their own experiences. Thus, the portrayal of the life of the Dalit individual reflects the entire community.

It is mostly in the vernacular, though only recently a selected dalit writings of this kind have been translated in to English and other regional languages. In the preface of "Sangati", Raj Gauthaman says,

"Dalit literature describes the world differently from a Dalit perspective. Therefore it should outrage and even repel the guardians of caste and class. It should provoke them into asking if this is indeed literature".

Dalit literature witnessed a rather late start in Tamil as compared to its equivalent in Marathi or Kannada. Due to illiteracy and poverty, the Dalit voice remained silent and Dalit consciousness did not find a positive ground to break free of the Dravidian fold dominated by other castes. During seventies and the eighties the writings were influenced by Marxist ideology and were marked by experimental narrative structure and positing of debates concerning social issues that influenced "Tamil culture." The Dalit identity was subsumed by these writers within a class identity. Bama is one such writer to be noted for her preference to pen on women's plight in domesticity, society, workplaces and so on, although Bama's writings are caste specific and ideological and so unique.

"…Bama's significant contribution is that, through the act of writing, she not only transgresses caste boundaries, she also demolishes the conventional exclusions of language and genre".-The Indian Express (taken from the back side of the cover page of novel "Sangati").

Sangati (1994) is a history of the entire Dalits in her village, Pudupatti. Sangati portrays Dalit women as independent, stubborn and challenging than that of any other upper caste women. It is not like other novels with a definite plot, but it is a collection of incidents told to the narrator in different situations. The characters are either relatives or neighbors to the narrator. The collection of such incidents is aptly titled as Sangati – Events. Bama has brought out many things that happen to Dalit women. Among the often repeated characters of Bama, it is her grandmother who connects the past with the present situation. The novel, thus, well structured and carefully planned to maximize its effects on the readers.

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II. Translation of Dalit Writing

Language is not only a tool or medium of communication but also an explicit of human -nature, their emotions and feelings. So apart from communication, Dalit people use this kind of language in the form of songs, to escape from their man-made environment or reality i.e, their oppressed state. Abusive terms and bawdy language are used to express anger, irritation, pain and hatred. The use of this kind of language is not a modern phenomenon. From the ancient times it was used in order to display power and command or to express contempt or to mock authority. Thus, the author to a large extent domesticated the language in this novel.

"Some critics cried out that a woman should not have used such coarse words. But I wrote the way people speak. I didn't force a literary language on myself," says Bama.

Translation of Dalit writings helps the reader to look into the sufferings and problems of Dalit people under the clutches of the upper caste people worldwide. As most of the Dalit fiction is written in the regional languages, it is an advantage having translation of Dalit literature to reflect the darker side of a community in a broad way. They opened up so many questions and sensitive issues that had been muted and unheard in the past. While doing translation one should aware some of the factors like the text taken for translation (source text), the reader and the theme of the text in particular. According to the above stated factors, a translation work gets its shape. Translation is a basic process of human mind i.e, interpretation of the text. Translation is not only a progeny of language, but also a blend of culture, a society, a person's point of view and so on.

"No two languages are very sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (Bassnet and Mc. Guire: 21).

When a text is a blend of prose, poetry, idioms, proverbs and slang the translator should translate it with great care. Besides reading for aesthetic pleasure, the readers should also try to follow a methodology because preconceptions about other culture, other nation and even other sub culture bring chaos and it also prevalent in human mind. This paper highlights the culture translatability and untranslatability of the folk songs of Dalit women in the novel Sangati by Bama.

III. Dalit Women- A Life Full of Suffering

We know, in many parts of India, Dalits and women are fighting for their rights. From Independence to present age, untouchables and women face many types of problems created by the dominant people. For example, landless untouchables borrow land from landlords with terms and conditions. The landlords have extra land that they are unable to cultivate. They give that land to Untouchables for cultivation. But after the cultivation they give very meager amount for their hardships. These wealthy people live a prosperous life by the manual labor or toil of the untouchables. They are completely ignored and pushed to the outskirts of the mainstream society. So they are unaware of the schemes that the Government of India has launched to protect these people. Dalits are often unaware of their rights, and even if they know the law, they do not know how to look for help.

In fact, the Dalit people are outcaste by birth. They have no escape from this suppression. They remain outcastes until they die. They are also named as "unclean" or "degraded", because of the environment or location they live.

Literature, basically reflects the society and at times, refracts and reprimands it. Social ecology is an attempt to link human society and natural phenomena.

"Social ecology examines social categories like culture, social structure and economy in their relation to natural categories like soil, water and forest". (Subaltern Studies, Guha 4-7).

In Kappirikalude Nattill, S.K.Pottekkatt pointed out that culture and nature remain two entities by which people are rated in a society. The cultural aspects of the society are required to be implicit in terms of its connection with race, traditions, customs, people and class. Dalits were not given equal rights to live comfortably in their villages. They were marginalized and exploited by relating to their life with the environment. Dalits were considered as most downtrodden people in the Indian society. Their culture is totally different from other community people in the India.

Women in general, basically are considered as the lowest level in the Indian society, in spite of various steps taken for the freedom of women by the government. Women are still exploited or suppressed either by women themselves or by men. The suffering of Dalit women starts from their infancy. They live "hard lives" as Bama recalls. Their suffering starts even when they are babies. The case is different for boys, "if a boy baby cries, he is instantly picked up and given milk. It is not so with the girls." (Sangati, 7) She continues saying that the case does not change even after they have grown old, "boys are given more respect. They would eat as much as they wish and run off to play. As for the girls, they must stay at home and keep on working all the time…" Bama recalls how she ate the "leftover skin" of the mangoes her grandmother brought.

"If she brought anything home when she returned from work, it was always the grandsons she called first. If she brought cucumbers, she scooped out all the seeds with her fingernails, since she had no teeth, and gave them the remaining fruit. If she brought

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mangoes, we only got the skin, the stones and such; she gave the best pieces of fruit to the boys. Because we had no other way out, we picked up and ate the leftover skins". (Sangati, 8).

Like a professional women in the cities, these Dalit women are also doubly burdened with household duties and in fields. They sing songs effectively portrayed their misery and anger, fear and hopes, faiths and beliefs. The Dalit women use fantastic, confessional, Satirical, realistic modes and also employ conversational, colloquial vocabulary in their songs. They used these songs as a weapon to expose the upper caste or dominant people hypocrisy.

In spite of their sufferings and double oppressions, these women celebrate their lives by singing. It is an effective way of expression of their minds. Whether it is a function to celebrate a girl reaching puberty or marriage or death, mocking at upper caste people women takes the central position in singing songs. And through this, they brilliantly execute their revenge or humour or inner minds in a subtle manner. Singing is part of their life. They have songs for every circumstance, from birth to death, while working and it is the women who sing these songs. There are as follows:

- Roraatu (lullaby)
- Oppari (dirge) and
- Songs sung at a girl's coming of age.

These people work in the fields of the upper caste people for their daily bread. They fight amongst themselves over small and petty issues. They are very good at quarrels and fights. In spite of all this, they are always productive, hard working, simple and cheerful in their place.

The translator may find difficulties while translating a cultural- bound text. The culture of the source language text may be entirely different from the target language culture.

"In traditional discussions, the crux of translation, the items which proved particulary intractable in translation, were often described as being "culture-specific"- for example, kurta, dhoti, roti, dharma, karma or maya, all items peculiarly Indian and not really like the western shirt, trousers, bread, relation, deeds both past and present, or illusion. But then the realization grew that not only were such particular items culture- specific but indeed the whole language was specific to the particular culture it belonged to or came from, to some degree or the other" (Bassnett and Lefevere: 65).

The translation of Sangati attempts to surmount cultural untranslatabilty. The translator has opted for replacing with semantics rather than with style. A translator cannot interfere as the poems are loaded with culture- specific meanings. This song is about a man who took a mistress after he got married.

"Eighteen sweet paniyaaram
You handed to her, across the wall,
But whatever you might give away,
You still are my husband" (Sangati, 77)

Here, Paniyaaram is not only a food to show that the man is affectionate to the kept woman but also suggests that though he offer a sweet of rarity of the community 'paniyaaram' to the kept woman, still he is a husband for his wife. Thus it reflects the conditions of the Dalit women. They have to please and live with their husbands even to the extent of accepting the existence of his mistress.

Occasions like coming of age ceremony, marriage and mocking song are often described in this novel. The essence and effect of these songs in the novel is retrieved in the translated text by the author Lakshmi Holm storm. The occasion of a girl coming of age or attaining puberty is a big event. On the day of attaining puberty the girl is given a bath, and then isolated for about a week inside the hut like room in the house. She is prohibited to go out and do any sorts of work in the home and also in the outside places. She is also given rich food and sweets during that period. A grand feast follows and the relatives present gifts to the girl.

Likewise, dalit community people also celebrate the puberty function. Though they are poor or belong to economically weaker sections, they never fail to celebrate these occasions at home. This is the way they inform others that the girl is ready for the marriage.

"In our street, when a young girl came of age, they made a little hut like room inside the house, with Palmyra fronds, and got her to sit there for sixteen days…" (Sangati, 15-17).

One of the culture- specific occasions in the text is a girl becoming 'pushpavathi' (from bud to flower- coming of age). Attaining puberty is like a status or promotion of the girl to get married. The poem goes,

"On Friday morning, at day- break she came of age, the people said her mother was delighted, her father too- ..." (Sangati, 17).

This poem undertones that girl should be married as soon as they come of age and if any girl stays at home for a long time after her puberty, her parents feel themselves unlucky and the girl child, a burden to the family. The word 'pushphavathi' is retained in the translated text. 'kulavai' is one of the cultural items that always accompanies any celebration in villages. This comment upon their living conditions, without any intervention of musical instruments they opt for Kulavai, an instant song. This also shows though they are deprived of education they are creative enough to make the occasion an entertainment one.

The ululation song tells us about their beliefs. Friday is the most auspicious day in Tamil Nadu. So the "pushpavathi's" parents were happy for their daughter come of age on Friday. Like an upper caste people, they are not rich enough or afford to get a silk, gold and other items mentioned in the poem but they use these things

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in their songs to make the girl and her family happy. This shows their real condition in the Indian society. The only privilege the Dalit woman gets is that she will be given good food when she attains pushpavathi or in full- term pregnant. Thus they use imaginary things to reflect their cheerfulness in their songs.

Their songs are spontaneous and they find themselves comfortable in singing. Even for routine chores they have rhythmic poems to sing. It gives a peace of mind at least for a short span of time, though they have the scar called 'Dalits' and chain of 'oppression' in the society. Apart from communication these people use language in the form of songs to escape from their man-made environment or reality i.e., their suppressed state. They used to express their pain, sufferings, irritation and hatred through songs. They have no taboos and euphemism. This reflects their cultural overtones and undertones. It shows their position in this free India.

Some of the natural flow of language is erased while translating the songs. It is unavoidable because the translation undergoes anointer- lingual translation here. When the two different extremes confront, there will be a gap in perception. Sometimes the norms and customs of one society may be underestimated and the standard of living of the people may be looked down upon by the reader of the translation. Another noteworthy picture that the culture elucidates is the frequency of poems that shows the spontaneity, creativity, wit and sense of humour. Not only for rare occasions like puberty ceremony, has marriage functioned and so on, but also for routine activities like the quarrel between husband and wife. In the betrothal ceremony of Gnanappu's daughter, the women tease her dark complexioned spouse and his schooling with eighth class as,

"Handsome man, dark as a crow
More Handsome than a blackened pot
I have given you my promise
You who can read Ingilissu" (Sangati, 77)

In another instance, where the husband who walks off in anger for a trivial things, is teased through a sudden teasing song by his wife. In translation, the poem is constructed as follows,

"As we cleaned our teeth
In the spring by the river
Is it because i spluttered over you
You haven't talked to me for eight days" (Sangati, 77)

Another thing that adds to the culture is the food habits of the people. Unlike the upper caste people, the readily available food for the Dalit people is ragi- Kuuzh. Even in our Indian context, ragi kuuzh indicates the food for the poor and oppressed. According to the patriarchal pre defined norms, women should eat only after serving their husbands. A poem from the text represents how a woman is beaten up for eating before her husband's arrival. Thereby, it reflects the double oppression of a Dalit Woman for being a 'Dalit' and also as a 'woman' in the community. It says,

"I waited and waited for him to come home
And began to eat as he came through the door
He came to hit me, the hungry brute
He pounced at me to kill me
He struck me, he struck my child
He almost crushed the baby in my womb
He beat me until my legs buckled
He thrashed me until my bangles smashed" (Sangati, 35)

Though Sangati is primarily about a community identity, it moves around woman who could not fight back. The expression of their bawdy and abusive words with a tinge of slang show their depression and inferior state. Their original ways of expression are rendered abundantly in the translated text. These songs act as an outlet of their minds.

The translation of culture is one of the aspects of the art of translation. In Sangati, a text scented abundantly with cultural items, the translator has many challenges to face. However as a social document it succeeds because it opens vital questions that are relevant. Lakshmi Holmstorm deserves appreciation for producing an unbiased work of translating Sangati. The usage of glossary, retrieval of cultural items and some slang words as they are show her unbiased translation, doing justice to the both the author as well as to the readers. Words like pushpavathi, kummi, ragi kuuzh and so on shows the attention of a good translator to transform a particular culture, by the art of borrowing words and blending it with English. As Schleiermacher aptly points out that,

"Genuine translator, is a writer who wants to bring those two completely separate persons, his author and his reader, truly together, and who would like to bring the latter to an understanding and enjoyment of the former as correct and complete as possible without inviting him to leave the sphere of her mother tongue" (Lefevere, 44).

Thus, Sangati translated by Lakshmi Holmstorm tries to fulfil the act of globalising the culture of a deprived community in the Indian society to light. The source text (tamil) Sangati is a light from a chimney that illuminates the confined group of the people who knows Tamil. By translating this text in to English Language it has brought into glare of publicity worldwide about the society which is under repressions. These are some of the regional/colloquial terms retained in this novel, which reflects the particular environment of the character. Through this the authors make the characters to speak the language of common men and women. These terms also mirror the environment in which the people live in. Thus, the author and the translator make the characters to speak the language of common people.

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