



Marwadi
education foundation

ISSN 2454-8537



**DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

**International Journal of
Humanities In Technical Education**
(A Bi-annual Refereed Journal)

Vol: 3 | Issue: 2 | February, 2019

Dalit Empowerment through Translation: A Study of Joseph Macwan's

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The dalit literary works need to be translated in other languages and primarily in the global languages as it helps the dalit community to make their voices reach to the world. On one hand, it is the fact that dalit literature is written in the regional languages for its authenticity. Dalit Literature is written in the regional languages as it authenticates and empowers their identities. It helps them to communicate their way of life, their wretchedness, their culture. The regional languages connect the literatures with its roots/milieu. But at the same time, on the other hand, it is the fact that keeping it limited to the regional languages will never help the literature to serve the very purpose of the its existence. It is known to all that dalit literature is not written primarily for aesthetic pleasure but to raise a voice against the caste based oppression and discrimination. This purpose can be better served only if the voices are heard by others than the community or regional members only. How would the world come to know about the miserable condition of dalits along with their particular way of life unless and until they communicate in the language which the world can understand. Therefore, it is very necessary to translate the dalit literature in other languages to serve its basic purpose of existence. In fact, the dalit literature could not have been part of the social and political equality movement as it is now, had the regional narratives not been translated into other languages. The world knows about the dalits and the dalit literature because firstly it is written and secondly it is translated. According to K. Satchidanandan, 'Dalit literature began to be mainstreamed in India with the appearance of the English translations of Marathi Dalit writing. *An Anthology of Dalit Literature*, edited by Mulk Raj Anand and Eleanor Zelliot, and *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, originally published in three volumes and later collected in a single volume, edited by Arjun Dangle, both published in 1992, were perhaps the first books that popularized the genre throughout India.' (Wikipedia)

Many dalit writers have corroborated that their lives are their literature. This fact of articulating life into literature has given rise to immergence and spread of dalit autobiographies. In that context, translating a dalit text into other languages creates an opportunity for them to speak to the world which otherwise would go unheard. The world could not have come to know about condition of Marathi dalits, had Daya Pawar's autobiography *Baluta* not been translated into several other languages including Gujarati and English. The world would have never come to know about the wretched condition of Chuhara community in Dehradun, had

Omprakash Valmiki's Hindi autobiography *Joothan* not been translated into several languages including English.

The translation of a dalit text not only benefits the dalits and dalit literature but also literature at large. Translating a dalit text is an attempt to enrich and empower target language and literature as well. Translation of the dalit texts adds new themes, new narrative techniques, new point of view, and new characters to mainstream literature. It also helps to bring in new linguistic expressions and usages into the target language as it is evident in the translation of Joseph Macwan's *Angadiyat* into English as *The Stepchild* by Rita Kothari.

Weighing Writing and Translating Dalit Literature:

In the world of intellectuals, writing weighs always heavy than translating. A work has always been upheld high than its translation. But many may not agree with this. As firstly, the process of translating is not less complex than writing and secondly, it is through the translation only that the literary master pieces have reached to the people across the world. And in the same line, I wonder how the world would have ever come to know about the *Blacks* in Africa and America and the *Tribals* and the *Dalits* in India and other countries had their works not been translated. In fact, for dalit literature being translated is as important as being written because many a times, the basic purpose for writing dalit literature is not to please but to draw an attention of the world towards their existence as well as their wretched condition. And as most of the dalit literature is written in regional languages, this goal cannot be achieved only by writing but by translating it into other languages. Today, the world knows about the Gujarati writer Joseph Macwan as well as the dalit community in *Charotar* region of Gujarat because his work *Angadiyat* has been translated into English and several other languages. The world knows the plight of the women in Tamilnadu as Bama's *Sangati* has been enabled to reach to the people by translating it into English and several other languages. But the world hasn't been able to learnt about the discrimination against Satiya, the plight of Lakhmi working day and night in the tobacco barnyards, the motherless burdened childhood of Joseph, the plight of Heta who is raped by the owner of the barnyard and left with no other option but to sink herself in a well, the unchanged miserable condition of the dalits who had converted to the Christianity with the hope to getting dignified life but in vain as the people from the Joseph Macwan's character sketches collection *Vyatha Na Vitak* haven't been empowered to talk to the world. Translating these character sketches will help the characters to be able reach to the world and, in turn, the world to them.

Translation as an empowerment:

Translating dalit literature is an act of empowerment for dalits. Appiah has stated, "A translation aims to produce a new text that matters to one community the way another text matters to another." (FWL: 425).

Translation helps to bridge the gap between the dalits and the rest of the India or the world. It also helps in creating awareness about the thrice oppressed worst condition of dalit women. The women have been denied equality with the men in the rigid patriarchal society and the dalits have been placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Wherein, to be born as woman in the dalit community is to be at the lowest level of the society being thrice down than an upper caste man in India. Their voices have never been noted in the thousands of years of history. But, translation is such a platform that enables them to speak with the world, to draw an attention of the world towards their thrice oppressed traditionally worst condition as Teeho, Valji and Methi have been given tongue to speak to the world by translating *Angadiyat* into English.

Explaining the benefits of translation of dalit literature to dalits, Vijata Guttal says, “Translations act as powerful agents in the task of deconstructing the predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience enabling the marginalized voices to find utterance. [...] By taking these texts to a wider public, the translators not only underline the articulation of the implicit resistance but become participants in the creation of meaning.” (Vijaya Guttal: 13) Writing and Translating help the dalits to break the hegemonic structures of inequality between man and man and man and woman. Vijata Gullat says, “The narrative leads towards a reinterpretation of the religious codes which the patriarchal hegemony has used against women for its own convenience.” (Vijaya Guttal: 10) And the same remains true for dalits as well. Translating a dalit text helps to bring social awareness and change.

S. Armstrong in his paper ponders over the benefits of translating dalit literature, “The translation of Dalit literatures in India into English and other foreign languages like French and Spanish is a leapfrogging transformation for providing a space for sharing the Indian dalit's age-old stigma of untouchability with foreign readers. The Indian Dalit literatures not only discuss social discriminations now, they also assert their identities and prove their creative potentialities.”(Armstrong: 263)

“The empowerment of dalit literature is already attained when the dalit characters articulate their experiences and feelings which come from deep sense of pain and shame. Hence, translation is only extending the established empowerment into the target language and target literature.”(FWL:246)

On translating Dalit literary texts:

The process of translating a dalit text needs to be seen separately from other literary translations. The dalit literature differs fundamentally from the mainstream literature as Raj Gauthaman's idea quoted in the introduction to *Sangati*, “Dalit Literature is essentially subversive in character, bringing both content and forms which challenge received literary norms. In terms of content, it should set out to outrage, by choosing as subject matter, the lifestyles of Dalits, who by definition, stand outside caste-proprieties. 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.”(Sangati: xii) “One of the important objectives of the dalit literature is “to disrupt received modern (upper caste) language proprieties and to expose and discredit the existing language, its grammar, its refinements and its falsifying order as symbols of dominance”. (Sangati xiii)

This characteristics and objectives prove that dalit literature is fundamentally different from the mainstream literature; therefore it demands different methodology to deal with its translation. It should be ensured that the translated dalit literary text retain its uniqueness of being a dalit literary text. A translated dalit text should serve the purpose the exposing and discrediting the upper caste language and its falsifying symbols of dominance. The translated text should be able to communicate the unique use of language of the original works which is ‘marginalized as a vulgar and obscene language, the language of slums’ according to the parameters of the upper caste language. The translation of a dalit text requires addressing the colloquial approach of the dalit language. “Dalit literature brings into literature the subject matter hitherto considered inappropriate, it uses a language hitherto considered unprintable.”(Snagati xiii) It is the role of the translator to retain and reflect the so called unprintable language as the characteristics of the dalit literary texts.

A translator of a dalit text can not afford to take off the agenda set out by Gunasekaran. He bid to “reclaim and to develop the dalit art forms, retaining sharply and without compromising to mainstream tastes, particularly dalit features of spectacle, mask, gesture, and language”.

Translating a dalit text is the process of reconstructing the dalit culture or identity. “For translating a dalit text it is very important that it communicates the espoused voice of the original, otherwise the entire purpose of translating a dalit text remains unfulfilled. Thus translating a dalit text [like *Vyathana Vithak*] would entail the need for not only [Gujaratising] it but also Dalitising it so as to represent the linguistic ethnicity of the source text by avoiding the pitfall of Anglicisation, Hinduisation, and Neutralization of the dalit expression.”(FWL: 247)

Sharankumar Limbale feels, “The view of life conveyed in Dalit literature is different from the world of experience expressed hitherto...The reality of dalit literature is distinct and so is the language of this reality. It is the uncouth impolite language of the Dalits. It is the spoken language of Dalits. This language does not recognize cultivated gestures and grammar.” (Limbale 33)

Translation of a dalit literary text is difficult in the sense that the target language may not have the cultural connotation of the source language. While the dalit literature is written in the language of their own which may be capable of carrying their experiences, the target language may not be such which can help them to

communicate their experiences. As in India, the main stream languages are being dominated by the Savarnas – the upper castes. When a dalit text is translated from regional languages or dialects into other languages, it may not have the equivalents which can communicate the experiences and images of the dalit texts particularly when it comes to English language. English is believed to be sophisticated and political language hence translation of a text from regional language or dialect becomes almost impossible or with lose of dalit authenticity. It is difficult to translate the flavor or specificities of local customs, culture in the language which is alien to this culture.

A question also rises for the translator. It is believed that a text can be better deciphered only by common experiences between an author and a reader. If that is so then a question arises is whether a dalit text is to be translated by a dalit translator only. The answer to this quested yet to be found but one can say that many at times a translator's different background may affect the intensity in interpreting and feeling the text. Notwithstanding the fact, it is to be noted that there are fewest self translations by dalit writers and hardly any dalit translators.

So far translation of Gujarati Dalit Literature into English:

Even though Gujarati dalit literature is proliferating since last two decades, there are hardly few translations of dalit literary texts. The groundbreaking translation was Joseph Macwan's *Angadiyat* translated as *The Stepchild* by Rita Kothari in the year of 2004.

As quoted about the condition of translation in Gujarat, Rita Kothari says, “. . . approximately 1000 works from Indian and some European languages exist in Gujarati translations. In contrast, very little Gujarati literature has made inroads into other languages, particularly English.” (Kothari: 09)

Though the graph is increasing, very few Gujarati works have been translated into English, and the fewest from Gujarati dalit literature. Some of the Gujarati dalit works translated into English are: translation of a collection of poems into English as *The Silver Lining* (2010), translation of a collection of short stories into English as *Tongues of Fire* (2010) translated by Darshana Trivedi and Rupalee Burke. Collection of selected dalit Gujarati poems into English translated by various hands appeared in a special issue of *Skylark*. Recently translated is Daxa Damodar's novel *Shos*. *An Anthology of Gujarati Dalit Literature* is a collection of all the genres of Gujarati dalit literature edited by D S Mishra in 2011. The Gujarati dalit writer and scholar Harish Managlam and M. B. Gaijan edited *Pristine Land* which is collection of the all genres of literature including critical essays translated by many hands and minds and published in 2009. Apart from that, some of the works have been published in the reputed journals also.

On translating *Vyathana Vithak*:

Gujarat Sahitya Academy awarded *Vyathana Vithak* is Joseph Macwan's renowned first character sketch collection consisting of nineteen character sketches appeared in 1985. Macwan is known for his real-life live-character sketches. He has given total eight collections of character sketches in Gujarati. The character sketches in *Vayathana Vithak* have given new style and form to character sketches in Gujarati literature. All the character sketches are autobiographical form. The characters have been part of Macwan's life and therefore Macwan is present there with all the characters. The characters here are not portrayed with the colors of imagination but with the strokes of reality. Each word articulates the pain and sufferings of the dalits, oppressed, and marginalized. Macwan has presented the ordinary masses into individual artistic form. The writer has poured the characters with the painful situations of accidents, deaths, struggle, anger and agony he had lived through. Pathetic rasa is flowing through each word.

The text is full of the shadows of death. The writer's mother passes away at his very young age, his mother like Ladubhabhai, his close friend Magan, the young son of Bhavan Bhagat, Jivikachis's son Gordhan, Ukkamal, Bhavan Bhagat all go away leaving him alone. In this text, almost all the characters are heard of their shrieks of pain and suffering.

The mainstream Gujarati literature had stretched itself to the rural characters earlier but the dalit community had remained untouchable to them. The ice breaking was done by Macwan. The dalit community comes alive in all these characters with the economic, social, spiritual, and cultural aspects. He has also highlighted their self-consciousness, social customs, lifestyles, behaviors, beliefs and occupations. Focusing the problems of the community, the writer has narrated the economic dependency of the community people on the upper caste people, the illiteracy and orthodoxy, their ignorance towards government policies, the hierarchical caste system within the community, the problem of untouchability between the dalits and savarnas as well as within dalit community, and unimproved condition of the converted Christian dalits.

While translating *Vyahthana Vithak*, it is felt that translating dalit texts may help to empower the community but at sometimes it is not true for the texts. That is because 'the caste and the context of a person can easily be identified in the original text. But it is difficult to translate it in the same way. While attempting the translation of these variants of languages, the loss is assured'.

I have faced serious scarcity of equivalence while translating the text. There are many words which are very culture specific and archaic even in Gujarati. These words like 'vaheru', 'fukanu davakhanu', 'akhapatar ganatu khetat', 'khuno palavo', 'rog-nivarak', 'pindheriya' etc. The language of Macwan in *Vyathana Vithak* is faithful to the ethnography of the community. The language is the beautiful combination of the *charotari*

dialect and its further offspring which is being spoken by the dalits of that region. The beauty of language is reflected in the atmosphere or setting of the characters, narration, dialogues etc. The language is many a times expletive and invective to express the anger and helplessness of the characters.

Another difficulty is with the names of the characters. In the Gujarati, the names of the characters change as per the context. The names are modified, specifically suffix, based on who is addressing whom as in the fifth character sketch, the protagonist Satis becomes Satiya, Satiyo and Chandu become Chandiyao and Chandudiyao. These changes themselves communicate particular context and meaning, but because English language does not have such flexibility, the translator has to keep the names as it is in its standard form and has to communicate the context and meaning with other techniques.

While translating the character sketches, one also faces difficulty in rendering specific usages, phrases or idioms as, '*Poonjo phati padyo*' (Poonjo died), '*kholiye kenchyo a hancho*' (This dharma is for this life).

The translator also faced problem in communicating the meaning and context of the words related to alchemy. Many of the necromancy practices and superstitions are deeply rooted in the social life and the equivalence does not exist in English language it fails to communicate the beliefs and superstitions of the people. As in the character sketch of Hezal Padamani, many words related to the specific practices, or beliefs about necromancy, alchemy could not be carried across exactly.

Sometimes, even if one finds the right words in the target language - English, it becomes difficulty to communicate the context or atmosphere which is deeply rooted in the traditions and social practices like the social practice of *aanu*, the practice of untouchability between castes and within the same community, the role of *panch*, the nature of relationship of daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and father-in-law as well as other and socially specified roles of some of the castes like *Bhavaiya*, *Turi*, *Dhayajo*.

The translator has faced difficulty in encompassing the totality of human life by recording those moments of happiness which do form an inextricable part of dalit life through jokes and repartees as well as the oral flavor of the text i.e. the riddles, linguistic peculiarities and the various linguistic registers. One also finds it difficult to render the hymns and poems which have been put in the mouths of the characters here and there.

Lot of words have root in the social context. Many words have been invented in the source language to define and communicate the social and cultural value and customs. Therefore, exact words in the source language which can be replaced with the words in the target language do not exist or lose its essence while translating. Therefore, at points, the words carrying cultural value and social customs are retained as they are and explained in end notes.

Many times it has happened that the words of source language have been used with vernacular/dialectical pronunciation. Like the word ઁય (xay) is pronounced in one way in standard Gujarati language but pronounced as ુય (khay) in the regional dialectical language. While translating such words into the target language, though the words matching with the exact meaning of the source language are available but the tone and rural/dialectical pronunciation was very difficult to communicate. In such situations, efforts have been made to retain the rural touch of the source language and therefore more informal or dialectical target language is preferred while translating. While translating, care has been taken to retain 'an atmosphere of Indian domesticity and at the same time, maintain the individuality of the text by preserving the flavor of the specificities of local customs, culture and language.

The women characters in *Vyathana Vithak* bring forth the dalit culture. It shows the double oppression of women in the patriarchal and caste based society. The women don't have anything to own even though they work day and night. The women have to do all the household works, to bring up children and also go on wage work. In the work place the women have to toil but are paid less. They also become victim of sexual harassment and are abused by the men as well as upper caste people. They cannot spend their earned money on their own. "Within the community, the power rests with men: caste-courts and churches are male-led and rules for sexual behavior are very different for men and women. Hard labor and economic precariousness leads to a culture of violence..." (Sangati xvii) Exploration of these themes by Macwan helps in learning the problem of women within dalit community. One can learn the socio-political power play within a community. In this way, it also helps to cure the problems. The characters sketches bring awareness among the feminist across the world and within the dalit community. In this way, it is helping to empower them to resist against it.

The text is about everyday happenings. It narrates the activities from dawn to dusk, their way of life, their societal norms, the *panch*, the central well to draw water, the games and schools of the children, the inter caste untouchability and hierarchy within dalit community. *Vyathana Vithak* is beautiful combination of the writer's personal experience and artistic expression.

Conclusion:

Vyathana Vithak reveals the socio-cultural life of dalits in Gujarat. Translation of the text strengthens the dalit literary transition as well as culture. English translation of the dalit texts brings them power to communicate to the world. It helps further to achieve the objectives of the dalit literature as it is counted by Raj Gauthaman, "dalit literature has enabled non-dalits to deconstruct a traditional mindset which made them perceive dalits as lower than themselves; and instead to see dalits as equals rather pitiful victims; 'to awaken the dalit who lies

asleep within the conscience of all people of all castes'. Second, he says, it has put forward a subversive ethic which not only awakens the conscience of non-dalits, but also fills dalits themselves with confidence and pride.”(Sangati: xiii)

‘Translating dalit texts dismantles the upper caste male discourse by supplementing the language difference through culture-specific terms. The narrative leads towards a reinterpretation of the religious-social-cultural codes which the upper caste patriarchal hegemony has used against oppressed for its own convenience.’

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