



# Modern Indian Literature in Translation: Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*

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**Abstract**— *As a discipline, Translation studies is comparatively new and is still in the process of mapping its territory because the mode of transmitting cultural elements through literary translation is a complicated task encompassing a compendium of experiences: including history, social structure, religion, traditional customs and everyday usage. The translation is indispensable to enquire about the tenor of one language into another without doing the central felt sentiments. It has been discerned that translation has ever been elementary to Indian English literature. Manifesting translation sagacity in India is even a relatively new and fascinating respite. Inasmuch the vernacular scrawls have been translated into English, it's getting more facile for the readers to understand the viewpoint of the scribes. It is the strength of this vernacular pen that makes writings so dynamic in Indian languages. In the Indian context translation to English tremendously works also as an accord as it brings the voices of protest and those of the subaltern as well, to the availed and the powerful challenging them in their space. This research will especially focus on Marathi subaltern writings which are translated into English and their influence on the readers, especially the literature created by Dalits, one of the most bleeding and exploited communities in India.*



**Keywords**— *Territory, English studies, literary translation, culture.*

## 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 inclination in this theory and study of translation enlarged resolutely. 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 archive indeed becomes more readily available, so momentous inquisitions are commencing to be exclaimed, about the preamble of translation in creating a literary canon.

Despite the varicosity of the process and approaches, one ordinary peculiarity of much of the research in Translation Studies is an emphasis on cultural outlooks of translation, on the contexts within which translation occurs. Etymologically the word “*Anuvaad*” is accepted as the combination of the root word “*Vaad*” meaning a statement or argument, and the prefix “*Anu*” meaning “*after following*” (Apte, 35). Prior observed as a sub-branch of linguistics, but translation presently is grasped as an interdisciplinary territory of practice and the inseparable cohesion between language and the harbor of life has behooved a umbilical point of scholastic psyche. This day the movement of confluences around the world can be seen to gleam the very action of translation indeed itself, for translation is not only the transfer of texts from one certain language into another, it is now genuinely glanced as a system of interlocution between the manuscripts and

between the cultures, a scheme during which every sorts of treatises befalls interceded by the identity of the translator. Significantly, Homi K. Bhabha sees cultural translation as a discursive strategy. By that I mean a method of diligently negotiating diverse discourses either through literal cultivation and action or the production of literature, culture, media, resolution and knowledge-making. Bhabha treats the term 'translation' not to recount a transaction between manuscripts and languages but in the etymological sentiment of being carried across from one genre to another. He exercises translation metaphorically to describe the proviso of the synchronous globe, a world in which millions migrate and innovate their location every day. In such a world, translation is both inevitable and fundamental: "To that end we should remember that it is the "inter"—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between*, the space of the *entre* that Derrida has opened up in writing itself—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture." (Bhabha, 157)

It must be made manifest that translation of literary books is not only a practice kept up at the Higher Secondary School and Intermediate levels but a literary and cultural acts and deeds invading 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 embeds the translation of the narratives in vernaculars in English which has discovered a lot of indulgence as it is a global language and is studied almost all over the world. That is the sake why a translator is no more a second-rate denizen of the domain of literature.

It has been observed that translation has always been fundamental to Indian literature, and particularly Indian English literature. Encouraging translation genius in India is also a comparatively green and fascinating arena. The saga of Indian literature until the 19th century was mostly a story of creative translations, adaptations, retellings, illustration, compendiums and elaborations of transcendental manuscripts. Translations from Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and modern Indian languages knit together communities, languages, regions 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 confess, is not certain on unchanged; it is also a domain of creativeness which is bidding and getting more scholastic and creative magnitude. 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.

Notwithstanding, we cannot demand that Indian penmen translated into English attain the same animus as those who write instantaneously in English. Since literature composed flat-out gets a territory in the University curriculum, it has not been facile for translated literature in the case of items 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. Again the factor impairing the gravity of translated books is the scarcity and the unavailability of meekly priced editions for scholars and readers with moderate earning.

The translation is indispensable to impart the meaning of one language into another without cluttering the originally groped 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 crack of dawn of Dalit literature the downtrodden lower caste and profanes who are constrainedly working-class people, have woken up and started writing their experiences stricken with melancholy. The puritans started mocking both the texture and the content. As a matter of fact, the globe of majority India initiated to elucidate with Dalit 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 closely feasible if the translation is to other vernacular of the identical 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 endured as they are in endemic 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. Thoroughly, it can be spoken that the text claims the translator to be earnest to the real. And the reader demands more clarity in translation. The translator is obligated to both of them and therefore needs to compromise in between.

Whereas the vernacular scrawls have been translated into English, it's appearing more spontaneous for the readers to fathom the point of view of the scribes. It is the power of

this vernacular pen that creates writings so en train in Indian languages. In the Indian context translation into English is also an act of conformity as it enkindles the voices of agitation and protest and those of the subaltern as well, to the favored and the dynamic challenging them in their arena. 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 Language, 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 two towering figures in Dalit history, Jotirao Phoolley and Dr B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), the most remarkable and admired Dalit leader and muse for many Dalit writers and radicals. Assiduously a huge number of translators from Southern India have artistically made their glorification in this striking arena. We undoubtedly can 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*), and Smt. Indira Ananthkrishnan has translated *Lakshmi* (titled *Ripples in the River*). Nevertheless, the most exoteric as a translator is Lakshmi Holmstrom who has also translated Bama's *Sangati* titled *Events* and *Karukku*.

#### **Translating power, gender and caste of Indian Culture in Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*:**

Bama, the nom de plume of Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, is one of the first Tamil Dalit women writers to be translated. Her first novel *Karukku* (1992) is not only the first autobiographical work of its kind but is written in a dialect that is spoken by the *paraiyas*, a sub-caste within the Dalit community. The testimonio also entangles the Roman Catholic Church in Tamil Nadu as it manifested to the public that the church codified the vantages of upper-caste proselytizers and distinguished against the *paraiya* community that had metamorphosed to Catholicism to escape caste occlusion. (McNamara, 268) Embarking in an ideologic controversy on contextual feminism, Bama plodded from the story of particular struggle in *Karukku* to a flashing revelation of the painful live-spans of Dalit women who faced the triple affliction of persecution by

redouble patriarchies – the 'discreet' patriarchy of their own caste and an 'overlapping' patriarchy of the upper caste – as well as impoverishment in *Sangati*. Through the act of articulation as a Dalit woman writer, Bama not only surpasses caste, creed and gender boundaries but dismantles the traditional redaction of language and genre. In her translations of Bama's *Sangati* and *Karukku*, originally written in Tamizh, i.e. Tamil into English (in 2000 and 2005, respectively), Lakshmi Holmström, a female translator, accomplishes the audacious task of rendering in English the essence and flow of Bama's original prose, the Tamil Dalit dialect. Although language and translation inevitably works as the sensitive tools for gender subjugation or liberation, yet, in today's globalized world it is important 'to ask whether a dialogue between academics working in the field of gender and language and in that of gender and translation has yet taken place; and if so, how fertile these interdisciplinary debates have been'. (Castro, 6) It is the story of a personal exigency though it is not in confessional action as it has left out many individual trifles of the author's life. Its English translation into English has imparted the readers with non-Tamil literature. In her "Afterword" of the novel, she has exhibited that Mrs Lakshmi Holmstrom has "translated *Karukku* into English without once diminishing its pungency." (Bama, 106). There can be no better compliment 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.

The interaction between gender studies and translation studies points to a fascinating arena of discursive conflict in which our intimate desires and identities are established or rejected, renegotiated or censored, sanctioned or tabooed. The notion of discourse has exerted great influence on translation studies. (Venuti, 215–220) It is a potential, linguistic and, above all, semantic position in which social meanings are propagated and challenged. Enduring this in mind, translation is a socio-politically bound culture, hatched by ideologies that buoy, eternize or challenge subsist power relationships present in individual discourses. In other words, the genre of literature is one apposite incoherent site within which Dalit women's voices can be hearkened and cognized by the readers. During the last three decades, Dalit feminism has increasingly posed itself as a differential politics. Dalit praxis needs to ponder through this vacuum, this distinction, to pursue the positioning of the illusions and desires of translating caste, creed and gender. Women translators have added some new dosages to the Dalit feminist discourse remarking to gender as a new axis around which writing relationships are deconstructed. Feminist translation even has explored the combined

potentialities of translation and gender in order to investigate issues of identity that seek to make the feminine subject visible through language. It is a political mobility that targets to contrary women's position of ignominy in discourse and in translation. Susan Bassnett argues for an 'orgasmic' theory of translation, the result of "elements that are fused into a new whole in an encounter that is mutual, pleasurable and respectful" (Bassnett, 72). Feminist translation has explored the collective potentialities of translation and gender in order to supervise loopholes of identity that claim to create the feminine subject perceptible through language. It is a political activity that aims to reverse the cultural inferiority of women's position in discourse and in translation. Susan Bassnett argues for an "orgasmic" theory of translation, the result of "elements that are fused into a new whole in an encounter that is mutual, pleasurable and respectful" (Bassnett, 72)

Dalit women's writing and its translation in the context of the need for a poetics of identity meet in their common desire to foreground female subjectivity in the production of meaning. *Sangati* constructs both textual and extra-textual strategies that contribute to the feasible feminization of the text and context and to the assignation of both author and translator. Though in Bama's stories one does not encounter the terms feminism, casteism or patriarchy, she mentions the words caste and patriarchy only in the 'Acknowledgements'. However, it demands to be unfolded that there are distinctions to be boggled between authentic words pronounced or inscribed and the act and context of discourse itself. It is in the 'action' of predication and the context within which oration takes place that, according to Foucault, enunciation is convinced. Foregrounding Foucault's framing of enunciation and speaking of the production of what he calls 'routines of normalization', it could be argued that in the novel Bama describes the forms through which Dalit women are quenched and 'made' voiceless. This shrewdness of enunciation is grounded in cross-examining the dis/conjunction and cracks between 'truth,' 'to speak,' wisdom and strength. creating her motive very translucent in the 'Acknowledgements' in *Sangati*, Bama says: "My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious culture; their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide; about the self-confidence and self-respect that enables them to leap over their adversities by laughing at and ridiculing them; about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment; about their hard labor. I wanted to shout out these stories." ('Preface', *Sangati* ix) One of the skills most successfully utilized by women scribes and translators is adjuvant, which is compatible with the theorizations of feminist

translators. As Agorni states, "... collaboration effectively explodes the notion of translation as a unitary activity, breaking it down into a set of parallel practices and corresponding roles – those of translating, editing, promoting, but also mentoring, supporting the translator, and so on. Not only does this perspective emphasize the notion of negotiability of meaning and interpretation, as Massardier-Kenney (1997) has argued, but it also demonstrates that the roles and activities involved in translation are also essentially negotiable, in a very creative way." (Agorni, 827–828)

The influence of gender-specific translation of *Sangati* is most apparent in the metatext (preface) that accompanies the English translation by Lakshmi Holmström. Elaborating on the close collaboration between the translator (Lakshmi Holmström), editor and publisher (Mini Krishnan) and herself, Bama says, "Today, information about Dalit women is being widely discussed in many places by many people. Mini Krishnan who edited and published the translation of *Karukku* into English (1999) approached me in 2001 for the English translation of *Sangati* through Oxford University Press. It was she who introduced my work to French publishers. It was through her that L'Aube translated *Sangati* into French (2002) and it was well received in France. Without Mini's interest, backing and hard work it can be said that *Sangati*'s present form would not have been possible. I am delighted to render my affectionate thanks to her. My gratitude also to Lakshmi Holmström who spent years translating, revising, and redrafting the English version of *Sangati* without disturbing the essence and flow of the original." ('Preface', *Sangati* viii)

Nevertheless, 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 are somewhat different. When talking about Dalit literature one is confronted with the whole histories 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. According to Arun Prabha Mukherjee, "On one level this is an autobiographical account of Valmiki's journey from his birth and upbringing as an untouchable in the newly independent India of the 1950s to today and his pride in being a Dalit. On another level *Joothan* is also a report card on the condition of people who are now routinely called

“erstwhile untouchables” or “ex untouchables.” Even Sujit Mukherjee, the ambassador of translation studies in India, has delineated translation as both a ‘discovery’ and ‘recovery’: the literature in the mode of translation grows discovered for populace who are rummy with the embryo language and culture and recovered from the vicious sagas of anonymity. It speaks that 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 writers activists developed a highly politicized 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.

## I. CONCLUSION

As a medium, translation has played a key role in understanding, analyzing and dissecting the socio-political aspects of Indian literature. It has helped to knit India together as a nation throughout her history linking lands and communities together. Ideas and concepts like ‘Indian literature’, ‘Indian culture’, ‘Indian philosophy’ and ‘Indian knowledge systems’ are the outcomes of translation. Undoubtedly translation has been a mirror and has led to the promotion and enrichment of indigenous literary culture by translating masterpieces of great masters of world literature as Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, Kalidasa and Bhasa or more contemporary writers like Dostoevsky, Kafka, Beckett to Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Octavia Paz and others. These exchanges also have created new movements and trends. Likewise, translation has enabled the weaker sections of the society to be heard. Thus translation contributes to the empowerment of the marginalized sections like the poor women dalits, tribals, minorities disabled and others. As Dr Ambedkar said that the translation to English language will destroy the regionality of languages and culture in India as 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. So, Translation is not merely an imitation of a text in another linguistic system but communication of a message to his prospective target readers whose culture and language differ from the culture as used in the original message and so hinders direct communication of message between the received message and its recipient. Thus, translation involves translation of a culture, as J.B. Casagranade has put it: “In effect, one does not translate Languages, one translates Culture (...) That it is possible to translate one language into another at all attests to the universalities in culture, to common vicissitudes of human life, and to the life capabilities of men throughout the earth as well as to the inherent nature of language and the character of the communication process itself and a cynic might add, to the arrogance of the translation.” Translation, thus, becomes a cross-cultural event and the translator has to formulate his translation strategies to translate source culture into target culture and is serving as a tool to make the voices of the Dalits heard by the varied masses.

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