



## EXPLORING THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF A TRANSLATOR THROUGH FICTIONAL TEXT

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Like any other profession, translation is a job where many common challenges are faced even by experts. Translators are trained individuals who understand the linguistic nuances required whenever they are doing translation work and know that there is no room for error. Still, each translation job is unique, thus challenges are ever present in the job. The purpose of language is communication. If that fails, language is useless. A good translator should be familiar with the culture, history and beliefs of the people who speak both languages. If the translator is not fluent in both languages, his/her success is threatened. Every language has a unique structure. The structure of language is directly related to the level of accuracy and simplicity of the translation. The simpler the language is, the easier it is to translate that language to another one.

A simple sentence in English has a subject, verb and object in that order, as in "They eat meat." But in other languages, such as Persian, Farsis and even in Indian regional Languages the order is different. In Farsi, a simple sentence is composed of a subject, then an object, and finally, the verb: "*Anha goosht mikhorand.*" In some languages like Arabic, the subject pronoun (they) is part of the verb: "*Yaikooloon allahom.*" There is no independent word "they" in that sentence; the "-oon" at the end of *Yaikooloon* makes it the third person plural masculine pronoun.

This paper tries to explain the major methods widely used in translation and there by explains the issues and challenges faced by the translator from source language to target language. There are eight types of translation apart from MT Translation: Word-to-word Translation, Literal Translation, and Faithful translation, Semantic Translation, Adaptive Translation, Free Translation, Idiomatic Translation and Communicative Translation.

**WORD-TO-WORD TRANSLATION**

The Selected Language word order is preserved and the words translated by their most common meanings. Cultural words are translated literally. The main use of the method is either to understand the mechanics of the source language or to a difficult text as pre-translation process.

PALAKA KUNDA POTHUNNADU-SLATE POT GOING  
(He is going without talking)

PATTIKONDA NAGAPPA PADHI RUPAYALU  
YEGAGOTTADU- COTTON HILL SNAKE FATHER TEN  
RUPEES JUMPED (Pattikonda Nagappa did not give  
ten rupees).

**LITERAL TRANSLATION**

The Selected Language(SL) grammatical construction are converted to their nearest TL equivalents but the lexical items are again translated out of context. As pre-translation process, it indicates problems to be solved.

**FAITHFUL TRANSLATION**

It attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures. It transfers cultural words and preserves the degree of grammatical and lexical deviation from SL norms. It attempts to be completely faithful to the intentions and the text-realisation of the SL writer.

**SEMANTIC TRANSLATION**

It differs from faithful translation only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text, compromising on 7 meaning where appropriates so that no assonance, word play or repetition jars in the finished version. It does not rely on cultural equivalence and makes very small concessions to the readership, while 'faithful' translation is dogmatic, Semantic translation is more flexible.

**ADAPTATION**

This is the freest form of translation mainly used for plays and poetry: themes/ characters/ plots preserved, SL culture converted to TL culture and text is rewritten.

**FREE TRANSLATION**

It reproduces the matter without the manner, or the context without the form of the

original. Usually it is a paraphrase much longer than the original.

**IDIOMATIC TRANSLATION**

It reproduces the message of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms.

**COMMUNICATION TRANSLATION**

It attempts to render the exact contextual meanings of the original in such a way that both language and context are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.

The translation would be nothing but the substitution of words from one language to the other to have the same meaning or equivalent, or more briefly, the replacement of a TLOCS(Source Language Text) for TL(End Text Language) equivalent. However, the problem lies precisely in elucidating the nature of this "Equivalence" that... and not in any way imply a transfer of the TLT TLO word for word nor a mere transfer of meanings. The goal of the translation is not the selection of equivalents that reproduce in the TLT a provision similar to the TCO "situation", taking into account the structure linguistic and cultural context of the TL.

**IDIOMS AND EXPRESSIONS**

Idiomatic expressions that explain something by using examples or figures of speech. They are something that Google Translate will never be able to cope with; they still belong exclusively to human communication. In my opinion, idioms are the most difficult thing to translate. Some idioms are misleading, as they may seem transparent because they offer a reasonable literal interpretation and their idiomatic meanings are not necessarily signalled in the surrounding text, e.g., "to take someone for a ride." Familiarity with the culture is very helpful for translating idioms.

**COMPOUND WORDS**

Compound words are made of two or more words, but the overall meaning of the compound word may not reflect the meaning of any of those words. I generally think of compound words as being divided into three groups:

The first group of compound words mean exactly what they say: "afternoon," "anytime," "seashore," "underground" and so on.



The second group of compound words mean half of what they say, at least in a literal sense: “bellboy” involves a boy but not a bell – though perhaps the boy used to materialize when someone rang a bell? Likewise, a “bookworm” is not a worm but a human who likes to read (or burrow into) books.

The third group of compound words have meanings that have nothing to do with the meanings of the individual words involved. For instance, the English “deadline” refers to the final acceptable time to receive or deliver something. It has nothing to do with death or a line. And a “butterfly” is neither a fly nor butter.

### MISSING NAMES

A language may not have a word for a certain action or object that exists in another language. In America, some houses have a “guest room,” which is a room where hosts allow guests to sleep. It is a common room in a house, but Americans don't have a single word for it, so we use its description, “guest room.” Other languages have a very specific name for that room, e.g. *ksnona* (Greek), while some languages may require three words to describe it: *camera per gliospiti* (Italian).

### TWO-WORD VERBS

It refers to a verb and a preposition that have a specific meaning when used together. Two-word verbs are common in informal English: “look up,” “close up,” “fill out,” “shut up,” “bring up,” “break down” and “break in” are some examples. In many cases, it is not appropriate or necessary to translate the preposition separately.

### MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Sometimes words have several meanings depending upon how they are used in a sentence. I think of words with multiple meanings in two ways:

1. Words that sound alike (also known as homographic homophones or homonyms), e.g., “scale” in the following sentence: “Scale the fish completely before weighing it on the scale.”
2. Words that sound different (also known as homographic heterophones or heteronyms), e.g., “windy” in the following sentence: “I drove down the windy road on a windy day.”

### SARCASM

Sarcasm is a sharp, bitter or cutting way of uttering an expression or remark that usually means the opposite of what people say. Sarcasm frequently loses its meaning when translated word-for-word into another language; a literal translation would express the opposite of what the speaker actually intended to say.

My native language, Farsi (Persian), can be quite complicated to translate, as it has two faces: formal and informal. I recently got a translation job that involved translating an app for the World Cup from English to Farsi. This job was challenging because it featured lot of idioms, slang and sarcasm that would not make any sense in Farsi. My solution was to translate the idioms and slang into equivalent Persian slang expressions to make the app as effective as possible.

There is a sea of difference between reading a piece of work in one's mother tongue and in a foreign language. While reading a work in our mother tongue we may slip into the text, get absorbed and become one with its texture. But in a foreign language one becomes sensitive to the nuances of the story. In a way emotions are depersonalized. Marginal writings, especially Dalit writings in the Tamil context, pose such a challenge for the translators. Translation, in this context, becomes a tool of either empowering or abating the text in the target language. A close look at the translation of Bama's (a well-known Tamil Dalit woman writer) *Karukku* (2000) and *Vanmam* (2008) may help us understand this issue pertaining to translation. Bama's *Karukku* – roughly categorized as an autobiographical novel – has become a canonical text in the history of Tamil Dalit writings. It stands as the first of its kind in Tamil especially for its language, its narration of events and for its brilliant use of certain caste codes and signs with an aim to revealing the deep-rooted caste system in Tamil society. Bama has used a local Tamil dialect in her work which is oral in nature. This Tamil, as Lakshmi Holmstrom (translator of *Karukku*) says, is a “Dalit style of language” which aims at subverting the given/built “decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil” which Bama also approves. Since caste has its material and geographical existence in India, especially in Tamil



societies, use of this dialect has become a tool of strengthening the content of Karukku. It also helps the readers to situate the issues in the culture proper and get the region specificity. Inability to capture the dialectical variation may not be as serious an issue compared to the failure to catch such cultural codes, especially in the context of Dalit Literature. One who reads Bama's Karukku in Tamil can obviously feel the rhythm, the orality and the implied caste-cultural markers of the narrative. But by completing the broken sentences of the dialect, wherein lies the orality of the text, Holmstrom seems to have missed something in the English translation. By pointing out the inability of Christianity (which claims to have maintained equality irrespective of class, caste, race etc) to do away with caste, Bama in fact shows the casteised vision of Christianity in Tamil societies. Depressed over the caste discrimination inside the Christian institutions, Bama comes out of the convent. This double-edged critique of Karukku as suggested in the title gives the uniqueness to the text. But the translation seems to have foregrounded only caste in Christianity and silenced the larger level critique of caste in Tamil society represented in the Tamil text. To accomplish this task, caste codes and signs are simplified and blunted in the translation. Karukku in translation though tried its best to capture the locale of the source text, unfortunately fails to capture the rhythm of the narrative and its implications.

This is a problem not simply related to language or dialect but is related to the translator's perception of caste. Before going into the issues relating to the 'Introduction' it would be useful to discuss certain sections from the translated text. Let us first look at the story of 'Bondan-Maama' on page four of the translation. There is a sense of celebration in the Tamil narration which the translation has failed to capture. And in the Tamil original this story is narrated in reported speech. This is typical of Marginal narratives (of numerous cultures) to oppose the traditional way of story telling by not claiming to be authentic. It is apparent if one compares the narrative style of traditional autobiographies with that of the marginal which sprouts from the reminiscence of the persona rather than from recorded 'historical facts'. But the English version of

Bondan-Maama's story is in direct speech which undermines the Tamil narrative and claims authenticity. Thus, the narrative has been inverted here. While explaining the levels of suppressions in convents Bama explains how 'Tamilians' are discriminated and referred to as lower caste in that particular convent by the dominant Telugu people. In this kind of environment her situation becomes worse for she is not just a Tamilian but also belongs to 'Parajathi'. According to Manu Smirti, untouchables (here Parayars) are considered as the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Bama's argument is that being born in the Paraya caste she is already suppressed both in the society and in the convent. And in that particular convent she is suppressed further for being a Tamilian because of their linguistic bias. It is this complexity in the levels of suppression that Bama unveils here. But it has been translated as: It was only after this that I began to understand, little by little, that in that order, Tamil people were looked upon as a lower caste. And then, among Tamils, Parayar were a separate category. (21) This fails to capture the vigour of Bama's narration and the complexity of suppressions that Bama talks about in the text. In addition, certain sentences that are crucial for understanding this complexity are omitted in the translation. On page 33 of the Tamil text, Bama narrates one of the distressed moments of her life. In class a teacher nun says that some convents do not accept 'Harijans' and there is a separate convent for them. Highly conscious of being a Dalit Bama approaches that sister in desperation and asks whether they would accept her in that convent. That sister puts forth a question, has any other convent already invited her. Bama tells her about the invitation of the convent school where she worked earlier. Then the sister says since another convent has also invited her (Bama), it is not a problem for them to keep her in that convent itself. It has been translated as: "Well, they asked you too, did they? Don't worry about it. You may join us." (33) It is not a question of entering/joining the convent that Bama reveals here. She is already in that convent and she was on the verge of completing her training period. Thus, it becomes a question of being, surviving and continuing there. But the translation limits the intensity of Bama's existential question by portraying



it as question of joining. In the next paragraph Bama explains how even convents are not free from caste bias. But Holmstrom has translated it as, "... this convent too was not without its caste divisions." (33) She has literally translated the word "Jathipirivinaï" as "caste divisions" without considering the fact that the word in that context refers to caste discriminations rather than caste divisions. The word 'discrimination' carries with it the caste hierarchy, oppression and bias whereas the word 'division' just means a separate category. A quote from Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches would help sharpen our understanding of this issue.

Chairman: The inclusion in the Constitution of declaration of fundamental rights safeguarding the cultural and religious life of the various communities and securing to every individual without distinction of race and so on.

Dr. Ambedkar: After the word "rights" at the end of the paragraph I should like the words "without discrimination" added.

Chairman: It says already "without distinction of race, caste and sex" Dr. Ambedkar: I should like the word "untouchability" be included there. Chairman: "Untouchability"! You already have race, caste.

Dr. Ambedkar: I think we ought to make a distinction between caste and untouchability. Many people who have caste do not suffer from the difficulties of untouchability. (Vol. 2: 535-36)

Similarly, certain sections of Lakshmi Holmstrom's Introduction to Bama's Karukku also reflect her limited understanding of caste in Tamil societies. The introduction eschews certain deeper facts to convince the readers, especially the foreign readers. According to Holmstrom, Bama "discovers... that the perspectives of the convent and the Church are different from hers. The story of that conflict and

its resolution forms the core of Karukku" (viii). Seen from the history of caste atrocities, can Bama's Karukku be limited just as a conflict between her perspective and that of the Church's? Does Bama represent only 'this conflict' in Karukku? 5 Here, it is inevitable to look into the cause of Bama's departure from the church as represented in the story. Bama comes out of the convent identifying the hypocritical nature of the church, convent, Christian institutions and its members. She is shocked to notice a contradiction between what is preached and practised there. They live a life of sophistication and strive to maintain it by serving the rich and the upper castes rather than the poor and lower caste people who really need their service. In short, Bama notices the 'same' hierarchal caste distinctions and discriminations in those institutions. It is this 'same' that the translation eschews. This 'same' is adopted by Christianity from the Hindu Brahminical casteist society. Thus, one can say life inside those Christian institutions is no better than the life in the Hindu Varna society. One's understanding becomes shallow if he/she attacks only Christianity for these issues because Christianity in Tamil societies is not similar to Christianity elsewhere. In Tamil societies, one can say, Christianity is itself brahminicised because of the strong influence of the casteist Hindu society. It is this that Bama points out in her recent interview, Especially after I became a nun, it [the vigour] was completely lost. I was merely spending my time in teaching, and that too, teaching students from wealthy backgrounds. In other words I was serving those who oppress our community.... I realized this. So I left the convent in 1992. (144) She adds that, In reality, there is no difference between Hindus and Christians in the way they treat Dalits. The only difference between the two is that while Hinduism is basically hierarchical, Christianity claims to be caste-free, but in practice it preserves the caste hierarchy. (146) Thus, simplifying Bama's conflict as just a conflict between Church's perspective and her perspective limits the depth of the issue, by exclusively blaming Christianity. Holmstrom says, "Karukku is concerned with the single issue of caste oppression within the Catholic church and its institutions" (ix). According to Holmstrom Karukku attacks only Christianity and portrays the conflict



between Bama's Christian-self and the Dalit-self. At last the Dalitself wins – Bama comes out of the convent. This, again, implies that the text in its translation is an attack only on Christianity and not on Hinduism and the Varna system. Here, it raises the question why the caste oppression seen in the translation is cut off from its umbilical cord – the Varna system of Hinduism/Brahminism – and connected only to the Catholic Church. Holmstrom chooses to represent the “way in which the Church has ordered and influenced the lives of the Dalit Catholics” (viii) and refrains herself from criticising the Hindu Brahminical influence on Christianity. It is crucial to analyse why the root of the caste system was spared and the branches had been criticized. In another context Lakshmi Holmstrom says, “She [Bama] refers neither to Ambedkar nor to Periyar, who not only attacked the Caste system, but whose remarkable speeches and writings against the oppression of women were published in 1942 under the title *Pen Yenn Adimaiyaanal?* [Why women were enslaved?]” (ix). This sentence is again obscure and comes to justify her position. She places Ambedkar and Periyar together in the first part of the sentence and in the second part she speaks only about the contribution of Periyar. This could delude the global readers to think that Periyar and Ambedkar worked together for the above mentioned issues and their speeches and writings were collectively published as *Pen Yenn Adimaiyaanal?* This creates a danger of placing Ambedkar and Periyar on a same scale, ignoring their differences in operation. Lakshmi Holmstrom identifies the “parallel double perspective” of Bama – (1) “the nurturing of her [Bama's] belief as a Catholic” and (2) the “socio-political self-education” through which Bama “understands what untouchability means” (viii). When she [Holmstrom] could identify both, why does she develop only the perspective connected to Catholic Christianity and avoids Bama's “socio-political self-education” in the Introduction? When she could elaborately discuss the influence of Christianity on the life of Dalits, why hasn't she placed it within the context of the Brahminicised nature of Tamil Societies? Her comment that, “Not indeed does Bama – again like Vidivelli – make a connection between caste and gender oppression.

Not in Karukku at any rate” (ix). This, again proves to be a limited argument for one could notice certain sections in which Bama speaks about the inequality in the wages of Dalit men and women, difference between young Dalit girls' recreation and that of young Dalit boys' and the reason for which Dalit women in her place are restricted from going to cinema theatres. Though she instigates she does not develop them. Bama might have done it deliberately to show the crude nature of Caste system and its discriminations without going deep into gender issues. But the statement “gender issues are raised not in Karukku at any rate” makes the readers suspect whether this leads to the development of the strategy which uses Dalit Feminism to unvoice Dalitism and encourages the forthcoming Dalit women literature to operate in that sphere. Issues mentioned above show that this translation of Karukku and the Introduction tend to make things more obscure instead of making them clear to the readers. But the translation of Vanmam, the third novel by Bama, by Malini Seshadri stands different. Vanmam, through its focus on contextualized animosity between the Pallars and Parayars, refrained from its critique on caste and endorses the Brahminical casteised vision of social hierarchy (privileging Parayars over Pallars). The language (as Bama claims the Dalit style of writing), which proved to be a tool of empowerment in Karukku, has become formulaic and weakens Vanmam. The language of Karukku in Tamil attains a flow and orality. But the so called Dalit language of Vanmam seems to be forcibly inserted into the text. Reading Vanmam in Tamil informs us that the author was very conscious of and keen on inserting the language which weakens the plot. This is obvious in her use of written form in artificial oral expressions. Words like “poruma ezhandhupona” (29), “Eruchala” (29), “veroru” (30), “urchaga vellam karaperandu” (30), “thoyandhu oru naalanju” (32), “vimarsanam senjaan” (32) and “aaththurama” (34) are few examples. After the popularity of Karukku ‘naturally’ there was a demand and expectation in the publication market for ‘Dalit style of writings in Dalit's language’ and Bama's Vanmam in Tamil is an offspring of this marketing demand. But the English translation of Vanmam shows that translation – as a



discipline – has travelled a long way and has consequently improved a lot to accommodate the nuances and intricacies of the regional and cultural differences and significances of a language and culture. It also promises that it will have a considerable impact on the studies on Bama in particular, and Dalit Studies in general. Certain expressions, descriptions of people and places and the narrative have been well-captured in the translation which positions this translated text as a significant contribution to Translation Studies as well as Dalit Studies. Localized expressions like “coming home” (2), “school holidays” (3), “beginning of the street” (5), “common meeting place” (5), “middle of the night” (9), “involve me also” (10), the use of “now” in many places, “play without arguing and fighting” (17), “super joke” (20), “you son of a waster” (24), “too busy” (35), “copied our fellows” (52) and some such 8 expressions and syntactic deviations capture not simply the local colour but also the tonal variations suggested in the Tamil original. The descriptions of people and places strike a balance between the oral nature of the source text and the communicability to the non-native readers. Even in narration, a conscious effort has been made to ‘tell’ the story without falling into the impulse to ‘narrate’ the story. This again manages to capture the orality of the source. Bama’s writings (can be read as all Dalit writings too) are set in a particular context and region. Thus they put forth a great challenge on the translator to capture its complete essence. In such cases, it becomes the responsibility of the paratext (Introduction, translator’s note, author’s note etc) to provide proper guidelines on the situatedness of the text and the context of Tamil Dalit writings to make the readers understand the significance of the text, overcoming the hierarchal representation of conflict within Dalit communities. The translation of Vanmam goes past the original not only because it has effectively captured the nuances of language but also in its way of representing the issues. It sets a perspective together with the paratext – the Introduction, interview and photos – helping readers to see the complexities of the caste dynamics. This perspective is contrary to the perspective of the Tamil text. As Gerard Genette in his essay “Introduction to the Paratext” argues,

paratext acts as a “threshold...which offers to anyone and everyone the possibility either of entering or of turning back” from the text. In the case of the translation of Vanmam, it applies not just to the text but also to the issues that the text deals with, for it is the paratext that gives a perspective to the text. As Genette rightly points out “An element of paratext...necessarily has a positioning” (263). It is here that the significance of editing is revealed for it is this that determines the positioning in the text. This change in the position of the narrator in the original and in the translation is a change from a Gandhian to an Ambedkarian perspective. The subjective account of the author’s note receives importance vis-à-vis the Introduction, interview, the photos and the translator’s note that reveals the complexities in translating an issue-based work like Vanmam. Bama’s interview exposes the author’s conception and understanding of caste and facilitates an understanding of the issues and their representation in the text. The Introduction points out that: 9 The focus on the animosity between the two Dalit communities need not be seen as merely commenting on their internal differences, but also as highlighting how caste remains sacrosanct and inviolable, and the dangerous consequences of what Ambedkar would call, the ‘caste-mindedness’. (XV) In this way, one can say that the paratext sets the perspective of the translation and the issues represented in the text. The photos that accompany the interview give a local flavor to the text and help the readers to situate the plot in the region represented. If one compares the glossary of Vanmam with that of Karukku one can see the development and the elasticity of Translation Studies in incorporating the cultural variations and expressions of a language (here a particular dialect) and efforts taken in the translation and editing of Vanmam to decode them in the target language. Thus, the translation along with the paratext creates an awareness which helps the readers overcome the caste assumptions suggested in the source text. In this sense, this text is a significant contribution to Dalit Studies as well as Translation Studies. This would also help us to re-read many of our assumptions regarding certain intricate issues of our culture. But this development within Translation



Studies poses a great challenge on the critics and reviewers who are caught in a web of issues relating to the source text and the translated text. While Lakshmi Holmstrom is an academician exposed to the issues of representation and identity politics (discussed in Post-colonial studies, Dalit Studies and Feminist discourses), Malini is a freelancer. Ironically, Lakshmi's translation foregrounds only caste in Christianity but avoids a critique of caste in Tamil society. But Malini's translation manages to focus on the implied issues in the Tamil text and allows the possibility of seeing a general critique of caste in Tamil society. Thus the critics and reviewers of today have a difficulty in fixing their focal point – the content and context of the source text, the translator, translated text or the act of translation. To those who do not have access to a source text and have difficulties in understanding the issues involved in a Dalit text, this complexity is mounted further. It is here that we get an opportunity to discuss the role and function of an editor of a translated text which is quite often ignored within translation studies.

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