

**SOME INTRICACIES IN TRANSLATION OF DALIT TABOOS**

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**Abstract:**

*The present paper makes one aware about the cultural, linguistic, and social challenges involved in translating Dalit taboos into the target language. 'Dalit taboos' refers to social prohibitions, stigmas, and ritualized or institutionalized caste-based slang applied in literary texts. Translating such taboos is not only a linguistic transfer but a cultural negotiation: translator has to maintain strategies of justifying 'performative' Dalit taboos into the target language in the best possible way. It supports the target language to carry forward very close fervour from source text because the former often lacks equivalent social frameworks. Thus, through conceptual analysis and close textual study of select excerpts from Baburao Bagul's Marathi fiction, this paper argues on intricate exercise of translation.*

**Keywords:** *Dalit, taboo, source and target language, discipline of translation, caste, calque*

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**Introduction:**

Taboos are prohibited everywhere. Can there be any civilization that would permit such an abusive talk even in private? However, in Dalit writings, taboos are institutionalized oblique use of language that affects the receptor mentally as well as physically for sure and shows definite consequences. All the forms of Dalit writings have shown use of such expressions: memoirs, fiction, poetry, theatre and like. Challenge in all respects come in when it is to translate taboos in Dalit writings into target language, for instance - English. Translator finds oneself in turmoil; one can rarely either neutralize or erase them completely from discussion or switch over to parenthetical options like explaining in brackets in the same context followed immediately or paraphrasing in footnotes/ endnotes to 'avoid' risks of taking something 'prohibited' on record on the mainstream platform of so called serious writing. Here, the translator should be well aware that such indispensable 'adjustments' are definitely bound to affect the discipline of translation *per se*. Additional

explanations beside in-text translation are justifiable due to cultural differences. Maintaining this awareness in the back of the scene, the present paper aims at discussing some aspects of intricacies involved in this exercise of translation of Dalit taboos.

**Translation and Marginalized Literatures:**

Postcolonial translation theory talks about the unequal power relations between source and target cultures (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999). Scholarship on translating marginalized literatures, for instance, indigenous, Black, Dalit emphasizes the need to avoid exoticization, in the first place. Works on Dalit literature in translation for instance, scholarship around prominent Dalit memoirs and poetry highlight recurrent problems: euphemism in caste-based violence, loss of speech patterns and mistranslation of honorifics and demeaning epithets. With this awareness in the background, the present paper defines the term 'Dalit taboos' and discusses how some aspects affect canvas of the context of Dalit writings in translation with special focus on Dalit taboos.

**What ‘Dalit taboos’ is:**

Dalit taboos are found in different forms: speech euphemisms, sexual abuse, humiliating names used by upper-caste speakers, caste-referential terms imposed on Dalit, etc. Besides, prohibiting physical contacts considering ‘polluted touch’, restrictions around water sources, not allowing sharing meals and temple entries are other forms of taboos imposed on Dalit. Also place names like *Maharwada* or *Mangwada* being used as abuse, not allowing religious rituals to Dalit and all the other strategies of condescending Dalit in all possible respects include in Dalit taboos.

**How taboos matter while translating into the target language:**

1. Taboos are not lexical items only; rather they shape identities and relations. Translating them with consciousness ‘may’ justify the source text to arise one to provoke, shame, or mobilize towards the subject concentrated. Here, the translator’s intent is supposed to be fulfilled.
2. Taboo terms are mainly culturally bound; caste-specific slurs for instance. The translator has to decide between leaving the term in the source language i. e. calque or to neutralize or substitute with an explanatory note or phrase. The task of translator is important when taboos are expressed via euphemism, ellipsis, or metonymy, so to say. They are to be ‘tranfigured’ into target language with the same fervour. For instance, a narrator may pass the event’s name – intention of making act of sexual violence and gesture at it via slur. Care has to be taken to maintain the same fervour in translation.
3. Taboo passed on to a Dalit often carries ‘performative’ force; translating it into target language with literal reproduction of slur merely may mislead, if the reader is not familiar with the context of the text. Here, standard linguistic

rendering with parenthetical explanation in addition functions as narrow escape, all the same.

4. Code-switching, speech patterns and dialectal features of Dalit taboos index identity and solidarity: translating such a text requires stylistic applications like idiomatic renderings into target language or ‘free’ translation as suitable and correct for target language. It may be elaborated with para-textual explanation, in addition.
5. Discipline of translation demands understanding of taboo nuance. Here, understanding of cultural specifications and social commitments involved therein are required.
6. Translator has to keep some culture-specific items in transliterated form, for instance, *tirth* (teaspoon of ‘pious/ spelled’ water offered to devotee by the priest after prayer or so) or *prasad* (offering teaspoon full share to devotee after prayer or so from specially-offered-to-deity meal at rituals). Such occasions come in when in-text crucial items that cannot be inferred are to be translated. However, such an attempt of transliterated form helps at maintaining context of the situation authentic and preserving cultural flavour as well.
7. A little description in the form of footnotes or endnotes or even a short glossary for caste-related terms, ritual items, and repeated slurs may help readers keep track without interrupting narrative flow.

**Case Study 1: Janaki from Baburao Bagul’s fiction**

**સૂડ (Sood):** Janaki, heroine of Baburao Bagul’s fiction સૂડ (Revenge, 1970) was raped more than once, complete breakdown of family life and ties project her as the worst kind of dehumanization. She is born in this *Murali* family (*Murali* is an anti-social offshoot community. It seems to be forked from untouchables mainly. Superstitious and ignorant nature of society made it born and sustain). The victims are the girls of

this community, so is Janaki's plight in the fiction depicted. The scene where she is raped and disfigured on road by a gang of vagabonds should stand as one of the most explosive scenes in Dalit literature. Taboos applied on her by vagabonds have potency of their own:

‘आज माल लय भारी दिसतोय.’

‘जानके , देतीस?’

‘काय चालतीय . . . आयला मस आवा पयल्या, पण या पोरीवाणी चाल कुठ पयली नही, अन एवढी देखणी बी. वाटत इथंच लोळवावी.’

‘लोळव.’

‘लोक काय म्हणतील?’ ‘ती कुठ कुळशिळाची हाये. मुराळीची पोर. ऐकलं कोण तीच?’ (१८).

(Translation into English:

“Look, how sensuous she is looking today.”

“Janaki, will you cooperate?”

“See her pace . . . I have seen many women, but have not seen

pace like this one and also have not seen attractive woman like

her. I tend to have sexual intercourse here only.”

“Then perform the act.”

“What will public say?”

“She is not from pure clan. She is a Murali's daughter. Who will listen to her?” (18).

(Translation mine.)

The culture-specific euphemistic expressions viz माल, देतीस?, आवा, लोळव and मुराळीची पोर have to be kept in transliterated form. The cultural difference in these euphemistic taboos falls, as it is being seen in the translation above, short when traveling into target language if rendered freely according to the norms of the latter. The footnote/ endnote or additional paraphrasing in parenthesis may function as elaboration for readers to understand context of the situation in source text. Also, a short glossary may work to considerable extent. Thus, such para-textual

exercises function beneficial for readers to understand the content in translation so to say.

**Case Study 2: Patil from Baburao Bagul's fiction अघोरी (Aghori):**

Patil, one of the main characters in Baburao Bagul's fiction अघोरी (Vile, 1983) shows condescending attitude towards lower castes. It is particularly the case when Patil uses abusive expressions for lower caste villagers. Here are a few of Patil's expressions: 1. In chapter IV, Patil asks Thakubai, his spouse whether Rakhama has come and when he gets reply that she has fell ill he says, “तिच्या आयला मी घोडा लावी . . . जवा तवा काय अज्यारी पडतीय डुक्करतोंडी . . .” (9). (Free rendering into English: “What the hell with her . . . she fell ill every now and then” (9), 2. Parvati, his daughter-in-law conveys Patil that her ankle rings are aching her: “तोड्याचा चिमटा बसला.”, “आवाळ व्हत्यात?”, “सोनाराला बोलावून घेतो. भडव्याला चांगला करतो” (10). (Free rendering into English: “Ankle ring ached.” “Is it tightened? I'll call goldsmith and refine him” (10), and 3. It is a typical scene between Patil and Thakubai. She is afraid of Aghoribaba, prays for his favour and cries. Patil abuses her “ए तुझ्या आयला मी घोडा लावी, अशी कुत्रीसारखी का इवाळतीस? गप व्हय नय त कुन्हाडच डोक्यात घालीन . . .” (33). (Free rendering into English: “Hey hell with you, why are you crying like a bitch? Shut up or I'll blow axe in head . . .” (33) (Translations mine.). These utterances represent the floating side of the iceberg of discriminating and dehumanizing treatment given to Dalit in Indian history.

Here in the above quotes, Patil's abusive expressions घोडा लावी, डुक्करतोंडी and भडव्याला are the instances of ellipsis in translation. They need to be appeared in para-textual descriptions, if required to be justified at all. They function as 'performative' role to arise one to provoke, shame, or mobilize towards the subject concentrated. There are, as part of the inbuilt limitations in exercise of translation, possibilities of losing continuous flow in

reading as para-texts are added to the translation and fragment the stream of narration. Also, borrowing too many source-language items may restrict the text inaccessible. Additionally and it is particularly the case with English being foreign language that translator may tend to universalize caste-specific experiences if one does not carefully anchor terms in the proper social context of the welter of castes. Specifically, it is the case in regard of Dalit writings.

#### Conclusion:

Translating Dalit taboos has to be ethically charged, technically demanding task that requires sensitivity to cultural specificity and the politics of representation. Translator should be able to maintain the social significance of taboos, provide minimal but essential contextualization, and foreground the narrator's voice with one's caste-specific ache within. In the last resort,

additional combination of para-text with community specifications should lead translation forward to both educate audiences of the target language and respect the dignity and 'performative' spirit of Dalit authors.

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