

TRANSLATING THE FEMINIST VOICE: CHALLENGES IN RENDERING INDIAN WOMEN'S WRITING INTO ENGLISH

*** Dr. Ashutosh Thakare**

* Associate Professor & PhD Supervisor in English, PDEA's Annasaheb Waghire Arts, Science and Commerce College, Otur, Pune- 412409.

Abstract:

This paper studies the challenges in translating Indian women's writing into English. It focuses on how translation affects voice, gendered experience, and cultural meanings. Translation is not only about language but also about power, culture, and identity. When a feminist text is translated, its emotional tone, idioms, and cultural depth may change. Many times, the translator's choices decide how much of the writer's protest and pain are visible to the reader. Through close reading of selected texts, this paper shows that translation can change tone, erase local idioms, and alter feminist statements. It also studies how translators handle sensitive words and gendered language. The paper argues that translators must try to keep the feminist voice intact and true to the original experience. It ends by suggesting simple and ethical steps for sensitive translation that respects both language and the woman's voice behind the words.

Keywords: Translation; Feminist voice; Indian literature; Cultural loss; Gendered language; Target text; Source text..

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Introduction:

Women writers in India write in many languages; they express their ideas in Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, Urdu, Kannada, Malayalam, and many other languages. Each language carries its own rhythm, emotion, and cultural identity. Through their writing, Indian women share their lived experiences, struggles, joys, and resistance. These writings speak about women's everyday lives, gender roles, and social injustices. They also celebrate strength, sisterhood, and self-discovery.

Many of these works reach wider readers through English translation. English opens doors to national and international audiences. It helps regional voices travel beyond local boundaries. But English also changes things. The moment a text moves from one language to another, something is gained and something is lost. The original voice can weaken. The local colour can fade. Cultural references and idioms may lose their meaning.

Feminist anger or humour may sound softer in translation. The process of translation is not neutral; it involves choice, interpretation, and ideology. Translators act as bridges between cultures, but their decisions shape how the author's voice is heard. In the case of feminist writing, this responsibility becomes even greater. A wrong word or tone can change the message. It can turn resistance into acceptance or make protest sound polite.

This paper asks a simple question: how does translation affect the feminist voice? It tries to understand how women's experiences and emotions travel through translation. It looks at the challenges faced by translators who work with Indian women's writing. It gives examples of how tone, idiom, and cultural meanings change in translation. Finally, it suggests ways to keep the feminist voice alive in English without losing its strength, honesty, and local flavour.

Literature Review:

Translation Studies has grown into a wide and important field. Many scholars have discussed how language, power, and culture are linked through translation. Susan Bassnett, in her book *Translation Studies*, writes about translation as a cultural act. She says that translation is not only about changing words from one language to another. It is also a kind of social activity. It carries meanings, attitudes, and histories from one world to another.

Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translator's Invisibility*, warns that fluent English can sometimes hide the difference of the original text. He argues that English translations often sound too smooth, making the translator invisible. This can erase the foreignness and uniqueness of the source language. Sherry Simon and Luise von Flotow bring gender into this discussion. They study how gender affects translation. They show that translation may carry gender bias because languages are not neutral. The translator's gender and ideology also influence the outcome.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *The Politics of Translation* is very relevant for postcolonial and feminist contexts. She says that when a text by a woman from the Global South is translated into English, the translator must be careful. Spivak asks an important question: who speaks for whom? She reminds us that translation can either give a woman voice or silence her.

André Lefevere and Mona Baker also contribute to this field. They discuss how power, rewriting, and ideology shape translation. Lefevere calls translation a form of "rewriting," where translators and publishers control what readers receive. Baker focuses on ethics and the role of the translator as a mediator of meaning.

In Indian studies, researchers look at how regional voices travel into English. They study Dalit, tribal, and women writers who write in local languages. They note that power always plays a role. Translators often make

choices that suit urban or Western readers. These choices can soften protest or remove local colour. The feminist anger or humour may get lost.

Overall, the literature points to three common issues: the loss of cultural markers, the flattening of tone or voice, and the ethical problems of representation. These ideas form the base for the present study.

Methodology / Approach:

This study uses a simple qualitative method. It focuses on reading, comparing, and interpreting texts closely. The aim is to understand how translation affects the feminist voice in Indian women's writing. The approach is descriptive and analytical. It depends more on observation and reflection than on numbers or statistics.

I have selected a few representative texts written by Indian women. These include short stories, novels, and autobiographical writings. Wherever possible, I read both the original and the English translation. Reading both versions helps me to see what changes in tone, emotion, and meaning occur through translation. In some cases, I depend on reliable bilingual editions and translator notes.

I compare specific parts of the text such as idioms, local terms, dialogues, and emotional expressions. I look at how translators handle cultural and gendered elements. For example, I note how kinship terms, proverbs, and local customs are translated. I also pay attention to how female emotions such as anger, pain, and humour are presented in English.

Close reading helps in understanding subtle differences. I observe where the feminist stance is strong and where it becomes weak in translation. I also study the prefaces, footnotes, and translator's introductions. These paratexts often show the translator's intention and strategy. They also help in identifying ethical concerns and cultural attitudes behind the translation.

This study does not cover all Indian women writers. It is a focused study meant to identify patterns and recurring issues. The idea is not to judge translators but to understand their challenges. The method combines literary analysis with feminist reading. It values sensitivity, context, and cultural awareness. The main goal is to show how translation can keep or change the woman's voice in the process of moving from one language to another.

Analysis / Results:

I present three main findings. Each finding relates to a challenge.

A. Loss of cultural specificity

Many women writers use local words and cultural images. These carry meaning. Translators often replace them with general English words. For example, a village ritual may become a “ceremony” in English. The word “ceremony” has weak force. The local name would have been stronger. This weakens the scene. The reader loses a sense of place. The feminist meanings tied to local customs become vague. Translators may fear that local words will confuse readers. So, they opt for familiar words. This choice reduces the text's rootedness.

B. Flattening of voice and tone

Women writers often use a direct and sharp voice. They may use humour, irony or anger. English translations sometimes smooth these tones. The English voice can become neutral. The anger of a woman who speaks against patriarchy may sound polite in translation. This happens when translators aim for “readability”. Readability is useful but it can erase the edge of protest. Some translators add explanations, these notes can distract. They can also shift focus from the woman's experience to the translator's commentary.

C. Gendered language and pronouns

Gender works differently across languages. Some

Indian languages use forms that mark social status. English has fewer markers. Translators must choose how to render respect forms, kinship terms and gendered insults. The choice matters. A respectful form used by a woman may show her social position. If the translator uses a neutral English word, the nuance vanishes. Similarly, some languages allow repetition or short forms that give voice rhythm. English may lose that rhythm. The feminist tone can be affected.

D. Representation and ethical choices

Translators face a moral task. They must decide how much to explain. They choose footnotes, glossaries or leave text as is. Each choice changes how the reader sees the woman writer. Over-explaining can infantilise. Under-explaining can confuse. Translators also decide which texts to translate. This is part of gatekeeping. Often, well-known authors get translated. Marginal voices get less attention. This affects which feminist stories reach global readers.

Discussion:

The findings need careful thought. Translation is necessary, It gives voice and reach but it is also risky. The feminist voice needs careful handling. A faithful translation is not always literal. But fidelity should be to tone and experience. The translator should ask: does this choice keep the woman speaking? Translations should try to retain local words when they carry weight. The translator may use a short glossary. Or they may let the reader feel the foreignness. This helps the reader see difference. It also respects the source culture. Translators should avoid over-smoothing. They should not make sharp lines soft. When dealing with anger or protest, keep the edge. This may make the English text uncomfortable. That is fine. Literature should make readers uncomfortable sometimes. It should show how women resist. Translators must be humble. They

should show their presence as mediators. A translator note can explain choices but it should not dominate the text.

There is also a need for more women translators. Women translators may better sense feminist nuances. They may notice gendered language more quickly and keep women's rhythms. Training in both languages helps. A translator must know social context. They must listen to oral versions too. Many women texts come from oral traditions. The oral voice is different from written voice. Translators should record and respect that oral mode.

Digital tools like machine translation pose another challenge. Machines miss gendered tone. They offer literal renderings. They cannot sense irony. They may strip cultural words. So human mediation is essential. Machines can help with drafts. But human eyes must guide the final text.

Conclusion:

Translation is a bridge which brings Indian women writers to new readers. It can also change meaning. The feminist voice often faces erosion in translation. Main problems are loss of local colour, flattened voice, and ethical choices. Translators must work with care. They should keep local words when needed. They should keep tone and rhythm. They should avoid smoothing anger and write honest translator notes. They should let the woman speak. Publishers also have a role. They must fund translations of marginal voices and support women translators. In this way, translation can become a tool of feminist solidarity. It can spread voices without erasing them.

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