



Translation has the Power to Act: Re-Reading of Bhasha Texts Via English

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Literary canons in every language have always been formed by the power/knowledge nexus and have been shaped by various ideological structures. To be specific translation is not a mere academic or scholarly exercise that connects two languages. Rather it is also an exchange between two unequal forces and becomes the reflection of the complexity of the socio-cultural contexts in which they are rooted. Translation clearly has the power to act as a connector between cultures and languages within India and beyond. Translations are mostly into English because that assures the source text a wider readership and increased visibility. Translations are generally thought of as enriching the literature of a language because it widens the horizons by opening up another literature. They have been traditionally thought of as introducing the target language readers to the source culture; in fact, translation theorists believed that a good translation should aim at reproducing the same effect that the text had on the source language readership. Indian Literature may have been divided in many languages, nonetheless, in commonality has described about the problems that are persisting all over India. The text is rooted in the context and in order to decolonize the mind, translation of regional literature becomes mandatory. With English as a filter language, translation has become both a linguistic and cultural activity which is concerned with communication of meaning. For a country like India it is a very delicate and challenging matter to deal with a national identity that derives its strength from its multiple layers of social, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. Translators have always played a pivotal role in social and cultural change in society by expanding knowledge and information. As an identity of literature depends essentially on nationality and not on language, it is said that only regional literatures- called Bhasha literatures are the national literatures of India. In spite of the apparent heterogeneity of the literary scene in India, the multilingual Indian literary scenario is marked by the existence of Indian writing in English and regional language literatures translated in English. India is a cultural memory in which the history of its society is embedded. Society remembers and participates in this history when it is put in a context. Hence, it paves a pivotal role for the translators to recreate this participatory experience of the source language culture by relocating it in the target language so that the reader can participate in an alien cultural experience. Translators have the power to act as connectors between cultures and languages. Since English is the language of interaction and the most natural language for emotional and creative expression, in order to globalize and localize any literary work, it is mandatory to translate it into English. Thus, texts written in Indian languages other than English are bhasha (a word that means language in several Indian tongues) writing. Other terms in use are 'regional language', which could be taken to emphasize a limited, local audience.

The present paper is an attempt to study the praxis of translation with special reference to plays by women in translation. The study analyses the plays of Varsha Adalja *Mandodari*, C.S.Lakshmi 'Ambai''s *Crossing the River* and Vinodini's *Daaham*, plays by women in translation, an attempt to circulate the energy and the richness of the Bhasha texts via English. The volume of Indian literature written in English is smaller than that written in the various regional languages, and spans a smaller range of time, having only commenced with the spread of the English language and education. But in

the last two decades there has been an astonishing flowering of Indian women writing in English, the literature of this period being published both in India and elsewhere. Recent writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The genres emerging in the twenty-first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. They also re-interpret mythology by using new symbols and subverting the canonic versions. The work of Indian women writers is significant in making society aware of women's demands, and in providing a medium for self-expression and, thus, re-writing the History of India.

Theatre in India, as anywhere else, is driven by political, popular, religious, and aesthetic concerns, although many Indian theatre and dance forms such as *kathakali* and *Chhau* dance have continuous histories of training practices and performance repertoires that have evolved over hundreds of years. Many postcolonial Indian theatre artists worked toward a national theatre that reflected the problematic nature of India's newfound unity and sought to combine Western influences with a syncretic blend of indigenous Indian theatre traditions. Others strove to entirely resist the incursion of Western forms and culture so as to heal the wounds of colonialism. Drama and theatre as cultural products hold different places in the history of women's writing and cultural participation. Women playwright in India contributed to the genre during the last phase of 20th century. The lives of Indian women are far more circumscribed, therefore their relationships, their struggles, and their journey towards emancipation constitutes the thematic interest of their plays. Playwright in any culture or society form the backbone, the strength, and the fiber of its theatre movement and without their creation a theater can be neither born nor sustained. Women playwrights in India contributed to the genre from the late nineteenth century. Plays written in English by women can be taken as generally dealing with issues of a certain class comprising of urban/cosmopolitan, socially advantaged, and educated individuals. At the same time the richness of the Indian regional literatures need not be stressed. Literatures of the regions present a more varied gamut. To truly appreciate the experiences that make up a woman's life- her struggles, her sufferings, her failures, her strengths one must draw upon the bhasha texts. Women's relationships, their struggles, their journey towards liberation constitute the thematic interest that these playwrights share. The ideas of women, their role and identity become especially obvious in these plays were they clearly juxtapose the two images of women, namely ideal and the New Woman.

Rewriting classics and re-looking at women in the epics have become an important area for feminist study in India. The present paper studies the plays of Varsha Adalja *Mandodari* and C.S.Lakshmi 'Ambai's *Crossing the River* from a feminist standpoint. Women's relationships, their struggles, their journey towards emancipation constitute the thematic interest that both the playwrights share. The ideas of women, their role and identity become especially obvious in these two plays were they clearly juxtapose the two images of women, namely ideal and the New Woman. Both the plays present a symbolic enactment of a woman's song of anguish and suffering and her desire for freedom from oppressive social norms. *Mandodari*, presents a woman's struggle with fate and the hovering clouds of war. The eponymous character from the Ramayana becomes the mouth-piece of all wives and mothers suffering from the battles that men fight to satisfy their greed and their egoistic pursuits of love and lust. In *Crossing the River*, presents Sita's appealing song. Whether she is Sita of Ramayana or Sita from contemporary society, the condition of her subjugation remains unaltered. One of the major themes of both the plays is identity – particularly the identity of women and how men try to take that away. Both, the plays present a dialogic space, public and subversive, for the enactment of the struggle of women against the exploitative nature of human relationships that entangle them. Undoubtedly, both the playwrights offer their audience new modes of perception, new lenses through which to view the past and present, to see that the social order is not 'natural' but constructed in favour of men by men. However, both the plays also set out to celebrate women, to be positive, challenging us with the ideas about the need to change society.

Varsha Mahendra Adalja, born in 1940 in Mumbai, is a prolific Gujarati feminist writer. Adalja writes fiction and essays in Gujarati and Hindi. She is also active as a dramatist, writing for the stage, screenplays, and the radio. She has long been associated with the Gujarati drama group Rangabhumi. She uses her writing to explore women in contemporary middle class Indian society. She has won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1995; Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1976; Gujarati Sahitya Academy Award thrice for 1977, 1979, 1980; and Gujarati Sahitya Parishad Award, 1972 and 1975. The content of the play *Mandodari* is re-working of traditional myths to current social issues. Simone de Beauvoir in the *Second Sex* (1949) rightly says that “few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of women: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse” Beauvoir expresses a commonly held feminist opinion by arguing that mythology validate the subjugation of women in patriarchal culture. Varsha Adalja’s *Mandodari* (awarded the Gujarat Sahitya academy award in 1997) is a dialogue between Sita (Rama’s wife) and Mandodari (Mandodari, the daughter of Maya came to be known as the better half of Ravana (Ravana’s wife). When Sita is held captive by Ravana in *Ashok vatika*, Mandodari goes to visit her requesting her to tell her husband from challenging Ravana as he was a brave ruler and Rama would surely be destroyed. Sita admonishes her by saying how can you support your husband who is on the wrong. Mandodari’s plea was that she was a ‘*pativrata*’ but Sita questions her notion of ‘*pativarta*’ and replies that being a ‘*pativrata*’ means supporting your husband in his good and moral deeds and not being a partner in his evil deeds. The play also contains a long soliloquy of Mandodari where she examines her own fears, nagging doubts, about her husband’s abduction of Sita—what if Ram was defeated in the battle and Sita would be the *patrani*? – What would be her fate? Would she then not be ignored by Ravana. She says, “Lankesh has immense powers and divine weapons. If he wins the war and Rama is killed, then he will marry Seeta. She will become his queen in this palace and I will become her attendant...” (*Staging Resistance*, 112). This play reveals the innermost recesses of Mandodari, her qualms [fears, doubts], her misery.

A play is not like a novel or a poem. This is a truism that needs to be repeated. Because the playwright must put his ideas for his play into so many words on paper, it is all too easy to read them as if they work like those in other books. A composer of music writes a notation for the sounds in his mind, but the fullness of the music is heard only in performance; so, it is with drama. A playwright through the actors can give us only so much at a time; and for the most part h/she must demonstrate it. (DRAMA/PLAYWRIGHT—WORDS—ACTORS—AUDIENCE- WORDS AND VOICES- FEELING AND MEANING

The playwright knows that in the theatre he has our ears and most of his appeal rests upon the feeling he wants us to hear in the voices of his actors, as distinct from the meaning of their words. Reading a play silently encourages us to ignore this and to hear it tonelessly. Visual and aural, mimetic and verbal, all are facets of one art of drama; reading the play, we dare not ignore this fact. This is one that is neither pretending, nor quite being. It is an experience in which part of oneself is surrendered that one may take a new shape born of the active imagination. To quote Sujit Mukherjee, “Reading for translation may be placed at the highest level because not only must the translator interpret the **text** reasonably, he must also restructure his interpretation in another **language** while striving to approximate the original structure. He cannot subtract from the original. And he adds only at great peril” (Mukherjee 1981:139).

C S Lakshmi's *Aatraik Kadaththal Crossing the River*, offers a symbolic enactment of a woman’s song of anguish and her desire for freedom from oppressive social norms. The play is about “a Sita and her appealing (tempting) song”. *Crossing the River*, presents Sita’s appealing song. Whether she is Sita of Ramayana or Sita from contemporary society, the condition of her subjugation remains unaltered. Both, the plays present a dialogic space, public and subversive, for the enactment of the struggle of women against the exploitative nature of human relationships that entangle them. Here the “Sita” depicted is a strong woman caught in a predicament. Whether she is Sita of Ramayana or Sita

from contemporary society, the condition of her subjugation remains unaltered. All women are Sita's daughters carrying her agony and deprivation. The play documents the voice of the modern Sitas who say 'no' to the oppression meted out by the tyrannical patriarchal system which considers her as the 'other' and hence unequal. In her reading, Rama's suspicion and seeking of proof of Sita's fidelity becomes a "paradigmatic instance of injustice" meted out to women. This Sita is vocal and has an acute self-awareness and questioning mind. The play begins with a sharp injunction:

"Who was she, who was Sita?"

To be followed by another embargo: "Was she the one burnt by Rama, was she the one rejected by Rama?"

Sita sneers at Rama and indicts him of making a travesty of their love. Banished by Rama this Sita is not the passive one to swallow humiliation lying down as she states,

I am a woman
I am a man
I am an object
I am the thing
Ferreted out by rulers.
They roll me over
Push me aside
Crush me.
I am Ravan
If Rama so wishes;
In Rama's Rajya.....
I am the river
bound by papers of authority.
I am the girl child
that shawllowed poison
.....(*Staging Resistance*, 437).

The text shifts from the epical character to a radical mutation (change) in modern realistic instance. Initially, the tone is of lament. Sita bemoans the universal acceptance of male rules in the game of life and vows to rewrite her own story the next time around. The motif is dual there is "double movement" from past to the present and again swinging back focus not only the seams and contradictions of the history, even those of the modern times. This performance is a one-woman show, where the author herself enacted all the roles.

The third play taken for the study is Daaham – *The Thirst* by Dr. M. M. Vinodini is a Telugu Dalit writer who has written short stories, poems and plays in Telugu. She is well known for her 'Feminist Poetry in Telugu'. Some voices are silent, some others are silenced and some others are heard feebly and rarely. If articulation is empowerment, literature both oral and written, provides a forum for the voices that have been silenced or remained silent for a long time. Among many reasons for not being heard or less heard, language is the most important. When there is a need to voice and convey literature to more number of readers, translation, seems to be one of the worthwhile strategies. The present paper is as well an attempt to circulate the energy and the richness of the Bhasha texts via English; Since Dalit literature is mostly written in regional languages. The term "Dalit", which means people who have been ground down, came into existence as part of this struggle for identity and restitution. The Dalit movement and literature aim to deconstruct the very set notion of society from the viewpoint of the segregated and exploited sections and to reconstruct various aspects of Indian life from a Dalit perspective, from a marginalized people's perspective, raising a voice that has been silenced for ages. Thus, Dalit women face the burden of caste, class, and gender. As a Dalit writer Vinodini makes a humble attempt to point out the core issues of its ideology. Through her Telugu

writings (poems, short stories and play) Vinodini works towards an empowerment based on human possibilities that have been ignored by patriarchy. Gynocritics is, in fact, a term that Elaine Showalter invented. Showalter describes gynocriticism as literary criticism from a gynocentric perspective that is a perspective that consciously places women at the center assuming a female point of view. The perceptions, needs, and desires of women have primacy in this system, where the female view is the reference point or lens through which matters are analyzed. Thus, writings by women in which women are not posited as outsiders, and are instead placed at the center of inquiry from a female perspective this is the perspective from which gynocritics works.

The play *Daaham-Thirst* facilitates re-discovering women's writing from a gynocentric perspective. That it "explains the importance of examining women's experience in its own terms". Gyno criticism seeks to understand what is specific about women's writing not as a by-product of sexism, but as a fundamental, ever-changing reality. The voice of the suffering discriminated and exploited people is, essentially, one and the same all over the world. It is a voice that bursts out from the crushing silence of decades, centuries. It is a voice that heartrendingly expresses the agony and also fiercely and indignantly expresses the protest. Vinodini's play *Daaham* provide a significant context for student and researchers concerning the politics of oppression. Drama of life and the dramatic are matters close to women's hearts. Women's relationships, their struggles, and their journey towards emancipation constitute the thematic interest of modern women playwrights. The format of the play *Daaham* is rather non-linear; present a dialogic space, public and subversive, for the enactment of the struggle of women against the exploitative nature of human relationships that entangle them. Dalits are the original inhabitants of the lands who were pushed by rich landlords of upper castes to the fringes of village settlements. Their touch, even their shadow, it was said, was capable of polluting the water of a well. Therefore, they could not come close to the wells used by upper castes.

Daaham, scripted as a street play in 2002 and enacted by Dalits, depicts the unfair domination and exploitation of the dalit people, women in particular. The play opens in (A thatched hut in a Dalit village) Dasu is eating his meal and starts getting hiccups. When Dasu looks for some water, his Tata (Dasu's grandfather) brings the tumbler, Dasu with relief states "Ammo... I felt as if I was dying". In the meanline Souramma, (Dasu mother) enters and tells her account, how people pulled her down from the well and beat her up. Dasu reacts in utter rage and wants to fight back. Tata scolds him "Stop it... as if you are a valiant male! What will you do, going there alone? What will you do, tell me? Who will you beat and who will you attack? What do you think of them? Listen, they are Reddys.... Reddys! Understand? How many years have we borne their cruelties? How many times where we beaten up by them... we know... And that's why we hesitate...."

Next day, Pedda Mala, an elderly man of the Dalit community, accuses Souramma for bring a disaster to the village. Souramma argues her case and questions "What have I done? I waited by the well all morning, when nobody gave me water, I put the rope. Is that such a big mistake". Enters Narsaiah, Dasu's father and insults his wife before everyone. Pedda Mala declares the penalty for taking water from the well to Souramma is "to pay a hundred hundred as fine. If they fail to pay- near the same well (Souramma) will be unclothed, her head will be shaved, and she will be paraded naked around the village".

As soon as Dasu comes to know about this he revolts and tell all the senior men present "You have lived like blind and mute people all these days. You've tolerated their atrocities and lived on their charity. ..What my mother has done is a good thing... Come what may, whoever comes in the way, we shall put on our own pulley and draw water. Let's see who can stop us." In the last scene the Village assembly takes place under a tree in the centre of the village. The Pedda Reddy the head of the family who well Souramma touch states "We started the custom because when the untouchables go to the well and put the rope, the wells go dry and Mother Gangamma disappears". To this Dasu

replies “If it dries up at our touch, not just the well but the whole village should go dry and become a cemetery”.

In the midst of these hot arguments somebody shouts Gangi... Gangi, Gangi, Yasodamma wants you to come immediately...He is crying non-stop and is not drinking milk from anybody. Now, this becomes the high point of the play. Ganga is Souramma's daughter in law who feeding the grandson of Pedda Reddy. Souramma in a roar says “Where will she go? And why? Unless this assembly is resolved, none of us will move from here”. Pedda Reddy (Comes close to Pedda Mala and pleads) Tell Ganga to save the child. Ask her to give him a drop of milk. Take, Ganga, take the child. To this Ganga says “(Slowly) what are you saying? Don't you understand why we have come to the assembly? We haven't come only for the pulley. Whether you give it or not, we will put the pulley and draw the water anyway. That's not why we came to the assembly today. We want that for beating my mother-in-law, for breaking her pitcher, for abusing our whole caste as pigs...you admit your mistake. If you admit your mistake, I will feed the child”. At the end Pedda Reddy's sister –in-law (Takes the child in her arms and quickly carries him to Ganga.) See, Gangamma, it was our mistake to beat and abuse Souramma. Take the child, please (Turns to Souramma and slaps herself.) Please tell Ganga to give him a little milk and save the child.... (Ganga sits down with the child in her lap.) CURTAIN. The ending of the play rationalizes those women together can break the caste system in order to nurture a child. Since ‘life matters. However, what becomes manifest is the way the play controlling gender shapes its meanings and the way cultural changes affecting the society as a whole affect the portrayal of gender. The powerful message that the play conveys is that the unfair domination and exploitation of the Dalit people, both men and women must end and the dignity of life and their share of land resources be returned to them.

All the three plays present a symbolic enactment of a woman's song of anguish and suffering and her desire for freedom from oppressive social norms. There is an urgent need, therefore, for methods of representation to be recovered and modified to cater to the needs of women's drama through the study of Bhasha texts. In other words, women must be the subject of their own drama and be understood as signs of change. Women playwrights of India are trying to reformulate dramaturgy by assuming multiple points of view, new languages, and new forms to articulate their experiences. They have brought in transformational drama that derives from the sharing of experiences, to be able to strengthen. Transform, and create new horizons of expectations. Critical engagement with women's work would encourage more women to write plays and perform woman-oriented theatre that would, in turn, help break the stereotypes of attitude and behavior. There is an urgent need, therefore, for methods of representation to be recuperate (better) and modified to cater to the needs of women's drama.

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