

Rethinking Translation and Publication Politics: Dalit Writings in English Translation as World Literature

VANDANA L.

Power relations between different languages within India and of various Indian languages with English are ridden with inequalities. The process of translating Dalit literature from the vernaculars into English, hence, inevitably traverses these unequal power relations. Moreover, Dalit writings cut across disciplines and are essentially an inter-disciplinary area of research. It is argued that the question of addressivity, that is so crucial to Dalit Studies, is largely being resolved by translation (both within bhashas and from bhashas into English and other international languages). The construction of the literary international or World literature which is primarily through translation – with its assurance of global outreach and international participative reading – appears promising to the Dalit writings in English and English translation because it necessitates a rethinking of Indian history.

Other than the transposition of Source language to Target language and other linguistic technicalities like equivalence, negotiation, appropriation and adaptation, translation needs to be understood as a philosophical, political and cultural category. Andre Lefevere, a noted Translation theorist, significantly proposes three basic distinctions in approaching translation. First is to differentiate between the product (the translated text) and the process (the activity of translation); second is to choose between a descriptive (discursive) versus an evaluative (qualitative) approach; and the third pertains to deciding whether to analyze translations or translate oneself. Taking cue from Lefevere's theorization, this paper takes a discursive approach to translation and discusses English translation of Dalit writings as 'a product' with an interventionist potential.

This paper is divided into four sections, wherein in the first section, an attempt has been made to figure out the position of Dalit writings in English translation in the larger World literature paradigm. The worldwide circulation of Dalit Writings in translation, it is argued, is instrumental in deconstructing 'the idea of India' as a caste-free country. Dalit writings, especially autobiographies, necessitate a rethinking of Indian history. To this end, the first section of this paper engages with the contemporary debates pertaining to Translation Studies and World literature. I have also discussed a few critiques and counter-critiques of World Literature pertaining to canon politics and its Eurocentric approach, especially the importance it ascribes to the English language.

The second section of the paper discusses the Dalit response to English, which is significantly shaped by the politics of standardizing a select few vernacular Indian languages over their dialects, which mostly belong to the Dalits. Here, I discuss the case of a Gujarati Dalit writer, Neerav Patel and his critique of mainstream Gujarati literature, and also I discuss Kancha Ilaiah's views on how caste has its own grammar. The third section of the paper discusses the politics behind publishing—as to what role does publication of certain translations play in the service of certain ideologies, market forces, representational ethics, and questions like which text gets translated into which language and by whom, also which publication house publishes it—with special reference to the ongoing Dalit literary (largely vernacular) movement in India. Here, I also discuss a few cases of anti-caste publication ventures like Navayana and Panthers Paw. The last section of the essay discusses

the question of whether or not the ‘truth value’ of a Dalit text gets affected when it is translated by a non-Dalit/non-Indian translator?

I. Contemporary Approaches to Translation Studies and World Literature

Contemporary approaches to Translation Studies, like the Rewriting approach as proposed by Andre Lefevere and Theo Hermans, the Descriptive approach of Gideon Toury, or the Sociological approach of Pierre Bourdieu, reject the idea that translation is in any way inferior to the original. Translation is now rather seen as a discourse and perceived in its socio-cultural, historical and also national context. It is the recipient culture which is now the primary context of translation. Contemporary Translation Studies and World Literature, in fact, share these protocols.

The Rewriting Approach does not view translation merely as a verbal activity concerning linguistic equivalence, it rather views it in its historical and socio-cultural context. Lefevere understands translation as ‘refraction’, wherein refraction refers to the way a text travels from one language to another. This notion primarily focuses on how a work is adapted in a different language-culture influencing the target audiences, and hence, is significant to our understanding of World Literature. Lefevere’s definition of translation as refraction sounds familiar to what David Damrosch notes about World Literature. Damrosch proposes that World Literature “encompasses all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language ... a work only has an effective life as world literature whenever it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture.” (2013: 199). One can, thus, infer how Translation Studies and World literature as disciplines, facilitate each other.

The Descriptive Approach, associated with Gideon Toury, a noted Israeli Translation theorist, refuses to evaluatively judge the quality of the translated text as good or bad rather perceives translation as a discourse. Toury conceptualized two translation strategies namely, source-oriented (one which is governed by the ‘adequacy’ principle) and target-oriented (one which is governed by the ‘acceptability’ principle). A source-oriented translation approach involves a formal approach to reproduce the linguistic structures and forms of source text. Its applicability, however, is difficult as no two languages are the same. Nonetheless, it is considered ‘adequate’, for an adequate translation complies with the source language structures. A translation aspiring absolute ‘adequacy’, for Toury, is ‘unacceptable’. On the other hand, a target-oriented translation approach adapts to the cultural context of the target language. For Toury, this is an ‘acceptable’ translation—one where the requirements of the target reader are taken into consideration and one which enhances readability of the source text, while not strictly adhering to any rules pertaining to structural linguistics. The Descriptive approach, hence, encourages critics and theorists to ‘describe’ the phenomenon of translating and translation. The concept of ‘equivalence’ within Descriptive Translation Studies Approach is not prescriptive and a-historical, but historically situated, descriptive, variable, empirical and functional-relational (Toury 1995: 27). This approach suggests that the purpose of translation and its prospective readers should ideally be the two main considerations while reading or doing translations.

Recent studies in World Literature and Translation Studies have explored the relationship between the two. Both of these fields of study, for instance, have emerged with an idea to enable cross-communication across cultures, languages and time-periods. While David Damrosch, one of the pioneers of World literature, celebrates translation for enabling the concept of World literature, Emily Apter problematizes the equation shared between World literature and Translation Studies. Apter’s complaint with the various models of World literature includes ‘a translatability assumption’. The theory and method in World literature studies, Apter argues, blind-sights the ‘untranslatable’ and the ‘incommensurable’.

Apter also questions the endorsement of the idea of cultural equivalence and substitutability inherent in the idea of World Literature. Apter differs from the belief marketed by the contemporary approaches to World literature that a Samuel Beckett text is equal to a text by Rabindranath Tagore, for instance. She makes a strong case for the ‘creative failure’ of translation and cultural and linguistic untranslatability. In his critique of Damrosch and arguing in line with Apter, Nicholas Harrison also states that all texts are governed by a notional inalterability and integrity that defies translation and/or paraphrasing.

Apter also observes that the project of canonizing World literature primarily through English translation, in an attempt to anthologize and curricularize world literary endeavors and cultural resources, is a Eurocentric and ‘deflationary’ gesture. Even for Aamir Mufti, although World literature is a global multi-lingual public literary sphere which, facilitated by translation, helps determine worldwide publishing practices, academic and ‘elite’ reading habits, one cannot overlook how only the authors promoting Eurocentric worldviews make it to the World Literature canon. Mufti goes on to state that “world literature was from the beginning an eminently orientalist idea.” (36). As a response to this critique of World literature concerning eurocentrism, Damrosch suggests that World literature is always experienced within national contexts. World literature, he argues, only helps further develop national literary traditions.

Taking cue from Lefevre, Damrosch proposes that World literature is an ‘elliptical refraction’ of national literature(s). Contemporary approaches to World literature associated with theorists like David Damrosch and Franco Moretti, instead of seeing World literature as a fixed canon of texts perceive it as a mode of circulation and reading. Nonetheless, the canon of World literature puts English as a given medium of a global literary discourse. In a post-globalized scenario, where the English language and English translations are ascribed such a hegemonic status within the World literature canon, the question that arises here is whether a language like English can also serve counter-hegemonic purposes, as is the case with Dalit Studies, for instance.

II. The English Language and Dalit Empowerment: Understanding Politics of Language Standardisation and Heterogenous Mother Tongue(s) in India

Caste in India is heterogeneous in character and ridden with graded inequality. The location of the Dalit subject even about twenty years into the 21st C, accordingly, traverses from an urban-based educated middle class Dalit to a rural-based scavenger. Hence, to discuss Dalit writings in multilingual India as a homogenous archive is as problematic as homogenizing it in the English language through translation. As Rita Kothari notes that while caste experiences as documented in Dalit writings are trenchantly local in nature with region-specific registers, the English language has ‘no memory of caste’ (61). Kothari further observes that “Indian languages do not constitute for all Indians a proud inheritance, which “globalisation” and similar invasive forces may allegedly besiege. This is essentially an upper-caste view and luxury; those who wish to redefine themselves must do so by abandoning this inheritance and embracing English.” (Kothari 2003, 65)

The Dalit response to English is precisely shaped by this argument. The hegemonic sections in India, like every other aspect, govern what is standard Indian language and what is not. The thus authorized standard language would obviously not reflect the speech/language of the unlettered and disempowered groups. The cultural difference prevalent between English and a non-standardized Dalit dialect in India, Kothari believes, is not more marginalizing than the latter’s equation with an Indian language. Hence, any attempt by the hitherto disempowered to bridge the gap between their local registers and standard regional languages is almost equally challenging for them as espousing the much more promising English.

The literal translation of the Marathi term 'Dalit' in English is 'ground down' or 'grounded', which by implication, refers to the oppressed section of the society. The self-ascribed term 'Dalit', however, has ever since its inception meant to over-rule and replace the numerous derogatory terms like the Mahars and Mangs (in Maharashtra), the Parayars and Pallars (in Tamil Nadu), the Malas and Madigas (in Andhra Pradesh), and the Chandals (in West Bengal), designating sub-castes and graded inequality, that have existed in the Indian vernaculars since ages. The lack of a conceptual equivalent of 'dalitness' in non-Indian languages further problematizes the question of cultural untranslatability.

The concept of caste is alien to the English language. Despite the fact that English has remained a language of the privileged ever since its introduction in India, the non-privileged do yearn to learn it. In a study on the English language usage in academic spaces, "English is Here to Stay: A Critical Look at Institutional and Educational Practices in India", Vai Ramanathan observes that cultural and economical factors keep the Dalitbahujan-Adivasi students outside the exclusive, elitist and metropolitan knowledge sharing circles and classroom set-ups. Ramanathan notes that "the dalit and OBC students seem to struggle more than others. These are the students most in need of English yet English seems farthest from them." (228). Hence, if we perceive English as a casteless language and also as a language which is still not within the reach of Dalits, then one may ask how does it suit the Dalit cause? A doubt arises as to whether a language of the oppressors/colonizers, one that exhibits power, can articulate the fragmentation and resilience of the dispossessed? Can Dalit Writings in English translation prove as an illustration of counter-hegemonic and alternative use of the English language?

The English public sphere in India, although gradually increasing, given the vast population of the country is still small. In the absence of any other alternative, English is increasingly emerging, and significantly so, as a pan-India Dalit language connoting solidarity. The English language, Dalit thinkers argue, helps the Dalits do away with the hegemony of standard regional languages. Chanderbhan Prasad's admiration of Macaulay as is evident from his proclamation of Macaulay as the father of Indian modernity and Dalit empowerment, stems from Macaulay's historic 1835 decision to introduce English system of education in India. Prasad believes that Macaulay's insistence on English helped break the sovereignty of dominant classical languages like Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. Renowned for his proclamation of the English language as a Mother Goddess to Dalits and the other marginalized sections, Prasad feels a philosophical and political affinity towards English, which the hegemonic castes in India have always felt towards Sanskrit. In a way, espousal of English is also significantly a refusal to bow down to the Sanskritic traditions and ideologies.

Any study taking into account translation of Dalit writings into English demands an addressal of the following concerns. Firstly, given that language is an identity marker; with differences in diction, vocabulary, syntax and accents, it helps identify a person's caste/class. Hence, the relationship between "standard" registers of regional Indian languages and the "non-standard" vernacular forms of those languages gives rise to linguistic exclusion. Secondly, one may ask whether or not a 'mother tongue' yields the same meaning for everyone. The construction and consolidation of the 'mother tongue', especially in a multilingual country like India, is a political act. For, by and large, it is the privileged few or the upper castes who happen to own the Sanskritized "standard" registers of vernacular Indian languages.

Given that languages are driven by hegemonic forces and desires, language acquisition by children from both the upper caste and DalitBahujan/Adivasi communities is determined by cultural, geographical and educational factors. The language of pastoralists, artisans, dalits and other dispossessed sections, as also noted by Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd in *Why I*

am Not A Hindu?, is inflicted with the materiality of location, occupation, everyday existence, which is mostly oral, production, labor related activities, memory and inheritance. This is how multiple languages exist within the same spectrum as the official/standard language. Ilaiah writes: “Caste language is structured by its own grammar. It is a flexible and alert grammar, designed for production-based communication. Though it has developed without the help of writing, it is no less sophisticated than ‘standard’ brahminical Telugu.” (5-6).

The idea of even a mother tongue in India, hence, can never be homogenous. Caste based discrimination, also owing to the politics of standardization, plays a humongous role in alienating the Dalits from their standardized ‘brahminical’ mother tongues. In his article “Gujarati Maari Matrubhasha, English Maari Foster Mother”, noting how English is a language of human rights and holds the potential of Dalit awakening in India, Neerav Patel, a renowned Gujarati Dalit writer, argues that if standard (sanskritized) Gujarati is as alien and distant to the Dalits as English, it becomes imperative for the Dalits to instead embrace English as a ‘foster-mother’. Patel believes that English not only offers a global reach and a vocabulary of human rights, but with no memory of caste, it does not legitimize and normalize caste.

The Dalit literary movement in Gujarat had continued to be sidelined till the late 1990s by the proprietors of mainstream Gujarati literature. The language politics concerning the use of standard Gujarati and non-standardized Gujarati Dalit dialects led to the dismissal of Dalit literary trends (at regional levels) on linguistic grounds. The use of Gujarati by people from the underprivileged, rural, illiterate sections or the less educated is deemed “inaccurate” compared to standard Gujarati. The thus-rising questions include the ones on power, representation and legitimacy which more often than not are governed by the privileged. How, then, would the lives of the dispossessed be represented and canonized within regional literatures? The politics concerning language standardization, hence, in a way validates the traditional Brahminical politics of inclusion and exclusion.

III. The Publishing Market and Dalit Writings in Translation

Publication, translation and dissemination of a text, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, are governed by three factors, Field, Habitus and Capital. Bourdieu’s sociological theory of translation and interpreting conceptualizes ‘field’ as the social milieu, ‘habitus’ as the dominant ideological worldview, and ‘capital’ as concerning finance, to be the three important factors governing agents of translation, i.e. the translators. Andre Lefevere perceives the ideological component as very crucial. A translator’s own ideological leanings along with the ones imposed on him through patronage govern the activity of translation. Ideological politics and historical moments can affect the process of translation as well as the choice of the source text for translation. Accordingly, any representation of the subaltern is infused with power equations. Its writing in a vernacular and rewriting as translation indisputably reflects a certain ideological parlance. The interplay between power structures and ideological politics invariably influence translators and translations so much so that it may lead to preservation, perpetuation and also misappropriation of socio-cultural hierarchies.

The National Translation Mission launched in 2008 under the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore, for instance, did not have any Dalit text at its onset. With such a huge population and wide ranging publication houses, India is one of the largest publishers in the world. The question to ask here is why/when did publishers in India start publishing Dalit writings in English? To be able to position Dalit writings in English translation on the world literary map and to understand if there has been any publishing pattern, however, it is important to know that the nature of publishing houses range from public to private and even independent.

The fact that higher education departments like Social Studies, English, Anthropology have begun to incorporate Dalit Studies as an emerging field of research has also affected its publication demand in the recent times. The publication industry, like any other industry, works on the demand and supply equilibrium. Even within Dalit Studies, hence, private commercial publication houses have commercial interests. The kind of books selected for publication by publishers like HarperCollins and Penguin, for instance, are largely commercial, academic or of general public interest. For instance, while commercial publishers go directly into the text, others like Sage, Orient Blackswan and Worldview offer detailed critical introductions.

The impact of the market forces along with the author, translator and publishers' efforts decide the reach of a text. The first ever Dalit memoir, Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*, for instance, was published in English by Frederick A. Praeger publishing house in America in 1951. The first ever Dalit anthology to be translated from Marathi into English was edited by Arjun Dangle, an acclaimed Dalit writer and one of the founding members of the Dalit Panthers. Published by Orient Blackswan in 1992, *Poisoned Bread* is a pioneering anthology of Marathi Dalit writings in English translation with a prefatory note by Gail Omvedt, followed by critical essays and speeches on the Dalit discourse.

Orient Blackswan, an Indian publishing company established in 1948, has published G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring*, translated from Telugu by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar in 2010.

Other popular titles published by them include *Dalit Personal Narratives* by Raj Kumar (first published in 2010) and *Dalit Literature and Criticism* by Raj Kumar (first published in 2019). The Oxford University Press has also lately picked up the fast emerging trend of publishing Dalit writings in translation. *Kusumabale*, a major classic in Kannada literature, originally published in 1988 and translated into English by Susan Daniel, became the first Dalit fiction to be published by the OUP in the year 2015. Thereafter, it has also published anthologies of Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam Dalit literary writings in English translation. Akhil Naik's first Oriya Dalit novel, *Bheda*, translated into English by Raj Kumar is also published by the OUP in 2017. Sheoraj Singh Bechain's autobiography *My Childhood on My Shoulders*, originally published in Hindi in 2009 and translated into English by Tapan Basu and Deeba Zafir was published by the OUP in 2018.

IV. Publishing with a Particular Ideology: Panthers Paw, The Shared Mirror, Navayana, Critical Quest

Yogesh Maitreya, a Dalit publisher and writer, runs a publication house called Panthers Paw Publications. Born in a Buddhist family in Nagpur (a place known for Ambedkar-led mass Dalit conversion to Buddhism in 1954), Maitreya describes his enterprise as not just a business organization but an anti-caste endeavor in publishing, which follows the footsteps of the Dalit Panthers and aims at building upon the still ongoing nation-wide Dalit movement. As a student at TISS, Maitreya realized the importance of strengthening the Dalit movement by creating a platform for publishing and dissemination of Dalit writings. Its first ever publication was J. V. Pawar's *Ambedkarite Movement After Ambedkar*, translated from Marathi by Maitreya himself. Pawar was one of the founding members of the Maharashtra based Dalit Panthers Movement which started in the 1970s. Having named the publication house after this movement reflects the ideology Maitreya is adhering and endeavoring to take forward.

In an article published by the digital media channel Scroll.in, noting his own position as a Dalit publisher, Maitreya notes: "I am a Dalit (not a fact that I wish to emphasise, but I want to make my position clear as a publisher). I am a first generation university-goer in

my family, the first person to get a doctorate. I have been working in English language publishing for four years now and I know what it means to publish stories, especially those which were deliberately erased from public consciousness.” Some other titles published by the Panthers Paw include a collection of short stories *Flowers On the Grave of Caste* by Yogesh Maitreya, *We, the Rejected People of India* by Sunil Abhiman Awachar, translated from Marathi by Yogesh Maitreya, and *Days Will Come Back* by Kamal Dev Pall, translated from Punjabi by Rajinder Azad. *Broken Men: In Search of Homeland* is a collection of poems by Loknath Yashwant, translated by K. Jamamadas and Yogesh Maitreya. The front cover of the book has an intriguing photograph taken by a well-known Dalit photojournalist, Sudharak Olwe, who is the founder of a non-profit organization named Photography Promotion Trust (PPT). According to its website, the organization “uses the skills of photography to create definitive change in the lives of socially marginalized communities and promotes social documentary photography.”

A few other mini publication ventures like Critical Quest (New Delhi), Siddhartha Books (Delhi) and Samyak Prakashan (New Delhi) publish abridged/short works and essays on socially relevant and often anti-caste themes. These short booklets are then sold at rates starting with as low as Rs 25 onwards. The intended reader of these booklets, hence, is certainly not the elite, unlike the case with Navayana is, for instance. Some of such titles published by Critical Quest include *Veda and Varna* by Brian K. Smith, *Speeches at the Round Table Conference* by B. R. Ambedkar, *Ambedkar on Nation and Nationalism* by G. Aloysius, *Slavery* by Jotirao Phule, *Marx on Culture* by Raymond Williams *Resurgent Buddhism* by Braj Ranjan Mani and several others. A section from the back cover of each of its publications by Critical Quest describes its founding principle as an “attempt to retrieve and sustain within current discourses the rational liberative articulation in history and culture. . . . The attempt is not profit oriented and invites co-operation and participation of all committed to socio-political transformation of the Indian societies towards greater social inclusion and more egalitarian social practice.”

The spectrum of Dalit writings published over the last 60 years has followed a visible pattern. What started with the publication of memoirs and autobiographies, gradually shifted to creative, fictional works while presently culminating into critical, theoretical writings. For instance, books like Anand Teltumbde’s *The Republic of Caste, Ambedkar and Other Immortals* by Soumyabrata Choudhury, *The Exercise of Freedom* by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, *Un/Common Cultures* by Kamala Visweswaran, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* by D. N. Jha, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority Through Myths of Identity* by Dorothy M. Figueira published by Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd. These books are undoubtedly taking further a discussion concerning caste and inequality on the level of theory. However, all of these publications are very expensive for the general public.

Graphic narratives like *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability—Incidents in the Life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar* with art by Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam, and story by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand, *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jyotiba Phule’s Fight For Liberty* with story by Srividya Natarajan and art by Aparajita Ninan, and *No Laughing Matter: The Ambedkar Cartoons 1932–1956* are published by the Navayana. Since the graphic mode holds the potential to attract and influence people’s imagination across all age groups, through sequential storytelling format, *Bhimayana* introduces Ambedkar not to the lower castes or the masses but is rather intended for the consumption of the privileged Indian metropolitan English-speaking bourgeoisie and international readers, and this is also reflected in its selling price. Other fictional works include translations like *Unclaimed Terrain* by Ajay Navaria, *Father May be an Elephant but Mother only a Small Basket* by Gogu Shyamala; and poetry collection titled *Give Us This Day A Feast of Flesh* by N. D. Rajkumar has also been published by Navayana.

Navayana publishing house started in 2003 by Ravikumar and S. Anand with an aim to publish works relating to anti-caste literary discourses in English. Initially it was a small enterprise based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, but when afterwards Ravikumar stepped down, it now has its main office in New Delhi with S. Anand as the head. Navayana Pvt. Ltd. now extensively publishes exploring wide ranging fields within Dalit Studies. It is particularly famous for its annotated version of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* with an introduction by an upper-caste writer, Arundhati Roy. The various controversies encircling this text are brought together in the form of a book titled *Hatred in the Belly*, published by The Shared Mirror.

The Shared Mirror Publishing House, another anti-caste publishing enterprise, has published books like *Hatred in the Belly: Politics Behind the Appropriation of Dr. Ambedkar's Writings, In Quest of Equality: Indian Constitution Since Independence, Bhima Koregaon: Our War Cry*. Its website describes itself as the following: "The Shared Mirror Publishing House aims to further the anti-caste discourse and is driven by a sincere desire to radically expand the horizons of Indian writing in English and other languages by providing a platform to a wide range of marginalized voices across the sub-continent."

Hatred in the Belly is an amalgamation of scholarly essays on the Brahminic appropriation of Ambedkar's seminal text, *Annihilation of Caste*. It discusses how Arundhati Roy's introduction of AoC strengthens the traditional notion of savarna intellectual hegemony. This is seen as an attack on Dalit discursive spaces with an attempt to curb and usurp Dalit literary imagination and empiricism.

V. Non/Dalit Translators and Retention of the 'Truth Value'

Linda Alcoff in "The Problem of Speaking for Others" addresses a pertinent question concerning 'who can and who should speak for whom?', one that lies at the heart of identitarian politics of all kinds. She offers an attentive insight into the ethics of representation while describing how 'context' is so important not only in deciphering meaning but also truth—*what is said by whom and how?* For Alcoff: "...truth is defined as an emergent property of converging discursive and non-discursive elements, when there exists a specific form of integration among these elements in a particular event. The speaker's location is one of the elements that converge to produce meaning and thus to determine epistemic validity" (82). In other words, location of the speaker, the context of what is being said where and whether what is being said is true or not determines the 'epistemic validity' of what is said.

It is argued that 'speaking' is not simply a matter of individual choice rather the act of speaking is one that carries with it a sense of responsibility and accountability. It is said that 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere'. To address injustice, Alcoff argues, even if it is about 'speaking for others' and however 'problematic' it be, is an act of responsibility. For the privileged, to 'retreat' from speaking for others only with the desire to rule out criticism, Alcoff reiterates, undercuts the political efficacy of the entire discourse of justice. If the 'others' in question are not in a position to 'speak' for themselves, the impetus to speak becomes even more crucial. Alcoff describes the notion of 'representational crisis' thus: "[In] both the practice of speaking for and the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are, based on my own situated interpretation. ... In speaking for myself, I (momentarily) create myself—just as much as when I speak for others I create them as a public, discursive self, a self that is more unified than any subjective experience can support." (80)

Rita Kothari notes that the writers of Dalit autobiographies shoulder the burden of not just self-representation, but arguably act as translators of their communities. (Kothari 2003: 62). If a 'cultural other' (be it a non-Dalit or non-Indian) attempts to 'parachute'

into the lived reality of such a writer either through translation or a commentary, Guru and Sarukkai claim, it will never be 'authentic'. The idea of representation, hence, traverses multiple possibilities. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics of Politics of Ethnography*, Clifford and Marcus argue how even ethnographies are social constructions and lack any fixed truth value. The book discusses ethnographies as research involving 'inventions of cultures'. It argues how ethnic communities are not fixed in space and time. Since ethnography involves qualitative research based on reliable participant observation and/or experience, it is not an unambiguous representation of 'truth'. Clifford and Marcus develop on the insider/outsider dilemma of ethnography and discuss how challenging it can get for an insider to objectively approach a language, culture, ritual or a tradition. An insider ethnographer, as against an outsider, struggles with the idea of self-effacement to reconcile between the objective and subjective accounts.

However, language is a site of meaning construction and so is translation. Given the significance of English in the Dalit discourse, English translation inevitably holds the potential for enhanced visibility and dissemination. Spivak discusses translation as a possible site of constructing and articulating 'otherness'—oriental, sexual, subaltern. In "The Politics of Translation", she observes: "[i]n the act of wholesale translation into English, there can be the betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it 'translatese', so that literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. The rhetoricity of Chinese and Arabic! The cultural politics of high-growth, capitalist Asia-Pacific, and devastated West Asia! Gender difference inscribed and inscribed these differences." (qtd. in Venuti, 2000: 400). Here, Spivak raises concerns pertaining to the distortions English translations of Third World literature entails.

In another essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak problematizes the postcolonial discourse arguing how Post-colonial Studies adhere to re-inscription and cooptation of neo-colonial (institutionalized, male-privileged, first-world) ideological apparatuses of cultural erasure, economic exploitation and political domination. At a point, discussing the case of double marginalization, she notes: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (Spivak, 1988:287). Spivak, here, points out how the subject position of a subaltern as a caste-oppressed Dalit/Dalitbahujan/tribal/woman is even more vulnerable to foreshadowing and silencing. Any translation of such a subaltern writing becomes problematic with myriad possibilities of cultural appropriations and political manipulations. The act of translation, hence, emerges as a site of power politics between the centre and the margin. It ceases to merely be linguistic, aesthetic and neutral, rather becomes cultural and political.

Discussing the case of a Dalit autobiography in translation, Christi Merrill also raises the question of 'double (in)fidelity' concerning firstly the generic category of *atmakatha*/autobiography (translating one's lived experiences into a language) and, secondly the activity of translation (translating from one language to another). Merrill problematizes the assumption that "'insiders" are trustworthy translators of their own authentic experiences, and thus are verifiable sources of information about their lives." (131). Discussing the case of Om Prakash Valmiki's autobiography, *Jhoothan's* English translation(s), she rather suggests that "this "insider's" experience is in part constructed by a series of outsider languages—not only the caste-based Hindi linguistic culture, but also Indian and American English – that posits an autobiographer in both the singular and the plural, an insider who can describe his life from the outside." (131).

Merrill, here, warns us against essentializing a community experience – both at the linguistic and ethnographic level. Even while discussing an autobiography, for instance,

references to the ‘Dalits’ in the plural are non-negotiable. The early usage of the term ‘Dalit’ in the newly independent yet caste-bound India to denote a pan-India solidarity across regions, cultures and languages was clearly not meant for a homogenous group and certainly not singular. Also, Merrill questions, if the nature of the ‘truth’ in question is one with a heterogenous history, then which fixed ‘truth’ value do we expect the auto-biographers and translators to adhere to?

The insider/outsider or the dalit/non-dalit debate concerning Dalit writings in India is already much discussed upon. While non-Dalits, owing to their privilege, are present within all prime locations in and outside academia, Dalit translators are even today not readily available. Given the descriptive contemporary approach to Translation Studies along with due adherence to translation ethics, translations of Dalit writings by ‘cultural others’ need not be abhorred rather should be welcomed. Even if there are mis-translations and mis-appropriations, it will still create a discursive space and offer a ‘corrective’ to the idea of India in the West.

Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi

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