

Problems Faced When Tamil Stories Are Translated into English

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Abstract

Translation means the conversion of something from one from medium into another. English language draws a Terminological distinction between Translating and Interpreting. A competent translator is not only bilingual but bicultural. The translator's role in relation to a text has been compared to that of an artist. This paper deals with Bama's Award for Indian language fiction translation, crossword book awards in 2000 which was written by her in 1992 and translated into English as "Karukku" by Lakshmi Holmstrom. Karukku is the autobiographical novel of Bama. This paper focuses on the sufferings of Dalit people in the society. Bama is the narrator and main character of this novel, who is understands that her own experience is part of larger movement among Dalits.

Keywords: Sufferings, Problems, Social equality, bilingual, bicultural

Introduction

Every translation job is very different and hard. Translator faces many problems in Translation.

1. Humour

Humour is not a universal concept. What is funny to people in one culture may leave those from another feeling cold or even offended, which presents a challenge for any translator.

2. Language structure

Language structure is difficult to deal with. When you are moving from one origin language to a vastly different, or even not so different, target language, it can be difficult to not just translate the words.

3. Missing words

This problem relates to the suitability of words being translated. Majority of languages will have words and phrases for most things. But there are always certain words and phrases that are just either totally different or missing entirely from target languages.

4. Multiple meanings

Words in languages may often have a double meaning. For example, in English scales can either mean part of a fish or a kitchen utensil, where in Japan, simply writing the kanji is not enough, because things can be written one way and said differently.

5. Cultures

In some dialects, the written language may not be confusing, but cultural differences may come into the mix to make things just that little bit harder for the translator to deal with.

The Translator

Lakshmi Holmstrom is one of the most successful Indian Translators. She has received the Crossword Award for translation twice (2001-2007) and the loyal award from the Tamil Literary garden, Canada (2008). She is one of the founder trustees of the South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive.

About the Novelist

Bama was born in the mountain range of the western Ghats. She is a Christian and belongs to Paraiyar community. Many people of Paraiyar community worked as bonded labour in the lands owned by members of the dominant non-Dalit community. She suffered humiliation and discrimination along with her people. She belongs to Catholic family. She has published three main works:

1. An Autobiography, Karukku, 1992
2. A Novel, Sangati, 1994
3. Collection of short stories, Kusumbukkaran 1996

Karukku

Karukku means Palmyra leaves with serrated edges on both sides. The leaves are like double-edged swords. By a felicitous pun, the Tamil word karukku, containing the word hare, embryo or seed also means freshness and newness. She has justified the sharpness of the leaves with the sharpness of the sword in the Bible. She connects these terms with sufferings of the people in the novel. Karukku is the first Autobiography of a Dalit woman written in Tamil.

Research Question

1. What is caste? Who are Dalits? Why are they called Dalits?
2. Why Dalit people alone are facing the problems?
3. Why Dalit people are poor?
4. Why upper class people dominated Dalit people?

Discussion

Karukku is not the story of one person. It is the story of a community. In Karukku, Bama focuses on the vulnerable condition of Dalit people and how they are victims of circumstances due to their poor economic background. They remain landless agricultural labourers, who are politically powerless. She focuses on other major problems such as untouchability, discrimination in the new religion Christianity.

The novel begins with Bama's village. Bama mentions her people are labourers. If they could not find work, the beautiful woods on the mountains would beckon them to gather firewood (1). This is not the fate of upper castes. When it rains, her village gets more beautiful and the fish is plentiful. In her street they bought and cooked the "cheapest we could get", while the upper castes ate all sorts of fish (2). While she continues to describe the natural beauty of her village. She sketches a life of superstition, belief on spirits and of almost unquestioning acceptance of the oppressive caste system. The landless labourers knew every field in their village and would unfailingly turn up for work at the right field at the right time. Bama mentions untouchability. In her usual fashion, she describes her walks back from school. She recalls that both grandmothers worked as servants for Naicker families and recount their routine humiliations. They worked hard for the Naicker, from dawn till dusk, with almost no reward. Even the food that they got was leftover food from the Naicker home, food was given almost a favour. Bama has one elder brother, who was already studying at the university. Bama shows how prejudices and caste practices are so much a part of the system that lower caste children are discriminated against almost naturally even in institutions like the schools and the church. The school and the church sided with the upper castes in their very physical locations in the Nadar Street. The lower caste children were discriminated against and humiliated in very many ways. There was conflict between Parayars and Chaaliyars over the cemetery that Parayars had traditionally used in Bama's village. This cemetery was next to a Chaaliyar community school. The upper caste Christian had a different cemetery. The Chaaliyars wanted the cemetery so that it could become a playground for their school. Hence there were frequent conflicts between the two communities. Bama's father was in the army and this ensured that, at least when he came home, the family had plenty to eat. Bama describes her daily diet and how poor she felt when she went to the hostel to study in high school and how supportive her parents were. She had enough money after finishing her B.Ed. and joining a school as a teacher. She says that even the church and the school have let the Dalits down. When she left her village and joined the boarding school in her IX class that her devotion underwent a change. The nuns ran a boarding school, which was nominally for the sake of destitute children. Bama feels that the nuns should have taught the Dalit children more than what the curriculum called for, made them aware about their situation in the world. Bama's three years of training were not bad. Then she joined a school which had been founded by a woman who had loved the poor and the lowly and had educated the children of the poor and helped them in their lives. The whole story deals with, Bama's life, and the Dalit people's sufferings. Through this story Bama conveys, their dalit people sufferings.

In the novel *Karukku*, Bama focuses many problems the Dalit people have to face in the caste-ridden society. Most Dalit victims of abuse are landless agricultural labourers. Lack of access to land makes Dalit economically vulnerable. Their dependence is exploited by the upper caste landlords. The impoverished condition of rural Dalits made struggle for survival a condition of life. They are the sons of the soil, yet in the so called democratic system they have no hope of owning their share of that soil. They are condemned day after day, to grief and despair and poverty are immutable aspects of their life. There is a frightful piece of statistics that Mari Marcel Thekaekara provides to suggest the magnitude of oppression: "In India Dalits faced constant discrimination. Every hour two are assaulted, everyday three Dalit women are raped and two Dalits are murdered- simply because they come from a caste considered 'Untouchable'; the bottom of the heap."

A Caste is a social group that includes people of the same economic status, occupation or rank. Caste is a word derived from Portuguese, meaning "Lineage". The closest Indian terms are Varna, meaning "color" or "class" and jati, meaning "birth". The former is the term generally used for the caste system. The latter term describes any group that has characteristics in common, but also used to describe the Hindu castes. Dalit meaning "Broken/scattered" in Sanskrit and Hindi, is a term mostly used for the *ethnic groups in India* but have been kept depressed by subjecting them to *untouchability*. The term *Dalits* was in use as a translation for the British Raj census classification of Depressed Classes prior to 1935. It was popularised by the economist and reformer B.R. Ambedkar. Originally "untouchables" were termed as Harijan and Dalits. India is the only country in the world where such a system came into being and still exists. The varna and caste system was sanctified by Hindu religion and by Vedic scriptures. This was the main reason for its consolidation. Dalit people suffered from many economic problems. They had to face many economic hardships, and they were not given proper reward for their services. Dalits were historically oppressed. They were basic human rights. They were given representation through reservation when India got freedom. While Dalit women share common problems of gender discrimination with their high caste counterparts, they also suffer from problems specific to them. Dalit women are the worst affected and they suffer three forms oppression - caste, class, and gender.

Millions of Dalits, Tribals and others still face discrimination, especially the women and girls. In too many communities, religious minorities also suffer.

Summation

Ambedkar had suggested some methods to eradicate the caste system in India. He basically made three recommendations to eliminate the caste system:

1. Brahmins must denounce the shastras.
2. Inter dining between castes

3. Inter-caste marriage

The eradication of caste system in India is not easy as it sounds. The caste system has become an inherent part of the lives and mentalities of many Indians. Education seems to be the most ideal solution to the problem of casteism. People should be well aware about the dangerous effects of casteism. The young generations, now a days, should give least importance to caste. Encouragement to inter-caste marriages should develop within the young mass, and it will help them to come closer and to develop healthy relations among them. If the differences will be removed and all castes are placed in the same socio-cultural footing, then nobody will think well of his own caste. Very wide economic gap is found between the upper caste and lower caste people. It widens the social distance and contributes to the development of casteism. Hence all castes should be given equal economic opportunities to attain economic prosperity. It is very much needed that the idea of caste discrimination should be removed from the minds of the future generation. Co-education will encourage inter-caste marriage, it is necessary to make effort in every direction for improvement of this horizon.

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