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PERUMAL MURGAN AND AKHILA NAIK: A PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSLATION STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores regional literature and marginal identities. It focuses on the works of Akhila Naik and Perumal Murugan. Both writers are from different linguistic backgrounds - Naik from Odia and Murugan from Tamil. They challenge dominant narratives in their writing. Their works highlight issues of caste, gender, and socio-cultural marginalization. Their fiction reflects the real-life experiences of marginalized communities. They reclaim the stories and voices of these communities. This reclamation is a form of resistance and representation. It gives a platform to those who are often silenced or overlooked.

Keywords: Regional Voices, Identities, Resistance, Socio-Economic, Political And Cultural Status.

1. INTRODUCTION

The word ‘translation’ has been derived from Latin ‘translatio,’ meaning ‘a carrying across’ or ‘a bringing across.’ Translation has grown into a new field, drawing ideas from many areas, including anthropology, philosophy, literature, linguistics, and more. It’s a multidisciplinary field that explores the complexities of language and culture. James S. Holmes coined the term ‘translation studies’. This marked the beginning of the field. The concept of translation is ancient. The Greek term ‘metaphrasis’ means ‘to speak across’. This idea has shaped translation theory. There’s ongoing debate about fidelity and transparency in translation.

2. BACKGROUND OF TRANSLATIONS IN INDIA

Translation in India has a long and diverse past. For thousands of years, it played a crucial role in spreading ideas, culture, and spirituality. Ancient Indian texts like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavad Gita were shared across different parts of the country, crossing language and regional boundaries.

When these texts were translated, they weren’t just translated word-for-word. Instead, they were retold and reinterpreted in creative ways, taking on new forms and meanings in different languages and cultures. This process allowed the original message to blend with local traditions, making it more relatable and accessible to new audiences. As a result, translation in India became an art form that combined interpretation, rewriting, and cultural adaptation. It helped shape the country’s linguistic and cultural diversity, and continues to influence Indian literature, art, and spirituality to this day.

Buddhist and Jain texts were translated from Sanskrit and Pali. This helped spread their ideas beyond classical languages. The goal was to reach non-elite audiences. Regional languages like Tamil and Kannada were used for these translations. The Bhakti Movement took a similar approach. Saints like Kabir, Tukaram, Meera, and Basavanna composed devotional poetry. They used local languages to convey spiritual ideas. This made complex concepts more relatable and accessible. Their poetry bridged the gap between elite and common folk. It inspired people from all walks of life. The Bhakti Movement’s message of devotion and inclusivity continues to influence Indian culture and spirituality. Its impact can still be felt today.

The British arrival in India marked a significant shift in translation’s role. They utilized translation as a means to exert control and governance. The British East India Company translated Indian texts to understand and classify Indian knowledge systems, imposed their own interpretations and dominance, and shaped Indian culture and identity through their colonial lens. This colonial approach to translation had far-reaching consequences, impacting India’s cultural, social, and intellectual landscape in profound ways. It forever changed the dynamics of knowledge, power, and identity in India.

The British used translation to govern India. They founded the Asiatic Society in 1784. They translated Indian texts into English. This helped them understand and control India. Lord Macaulay introduced a new education policy in 1835. He wanted to create a class of Indians who could act as interpreters. English replaced Persian and Sanskrit in education. This changed the way Indians learned and communicated. English became a dominant language. It pushed

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regional languages and literatures to the side. Many Indian voices were suppressed. This legacy still affects India today.

India gained independence in 1947. Translation became important for national integration. The country's diversity was a challenge and a strength. Translation helped foster unity through literary exchange. Sahitya Akademi was founded in 1954. It supported literary exchanges between Indian languages. This helped many Indian writers reach a wider audience. Writers like Premchand, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Ashapurna Devi, and U. R. Ananthamurthy became well-known. Their works were translated into Hindi or English. This made Indian literature more accessible. The goal was to 'Indianize Indian literature'. However, the process had limitations. It often focused on elite or upper-caste voices. Many Dalit, tribal, and minority authors were left out.

Perumal Murugan:

Perumal Murugan is a prominent Tamil writer and scholar. He is a professor of Tamil language at the Government Arts College in Salem Attur and Namakkal. He's a significant voice in contemporary Indian literature. His fiction explores rural Tamil Nadu's complex social landscape, delving into themes like caste, sexuality, and community norms. Works like 'Madhorubhagan', 'Poonachi', and 'Pyre' offer rich insights into social ostracism and more. When translated into English, Murugan's works reach a broader audience. However, translation raises important questions. How do translators balance fidelity to the original text with the need for cultural representation? How do they ensure visibility for marginalized voices? These questions highlight the complexities of translating culturally nuanced works like Murugan's.

Perumal Murugan's novel originally titled, 'Madhorubhagan',which is witten in Tamil language in 2010. It has been translated into English as 'One Part Woman' in 2013 by Aniruddhan Vasudevan. Basically, the novel based on the ancient cultural practice. The novel sparked a national debate on freedom of expression, caste orthodoxy, and literature's role. It tells the story of Kali and Ponna, a childless couple struggling with community expectations around fertility. They live in a society dominated by patriarchy and caste rules. In this society, a woman's value is often measured by her ability to have children. This puts pressure on Kali and Ponna, especially Kali as the woman in the relationship.

'Poonachi' is written by the same author in 2016. It is a powerful allegory, which depicts the psyche of society. It has been translated by N. Kalyan Raman. It tells the story of a black goat. It's about themes of oppression and marginalization. The novel critiques systems of power. It looks at bureaucracy and patriarchal control. The story seems simple, but it's deeply political. It reflects real-world issues. Governance and caste-based domination are key themes. Poonachi is a symbol. She represents the voiceless in society. This includes Dalits, women, and the poor. Their lives are controlled by those in power.

The novel 'Pookkuzhi' originally written at Tamil by Perumal Murugan in 2013. It has been translated into Engish as 'Pyre' by Aniruddhan Vasudevan in 2016. The novel explores themes of caste, love, and violence in rural society. It explores caste violence and the illusion of love. The story follows Saroja and Kumaresan, a couple from different castes. They elope and face brutal reality. The village is conservative and refuses to accept them. The couple faces isolation, humiliation, and danger. The novel builds towards a tragic end. The pyre symbolizes destruction and the violent enforcement of caste order. It's a haunting narrative that highlights the deep-seated caste prejudices in rural society.

The English translation amplified the book's reach, earning global critical acclaim. Interestingly, while the Tamil original faced violent backlash, the translation helped Murugan reemerge in the public sphere. Vasudevan's translation carefully balances cultural context and intimacy, preserving the original's emotional complexity. This approach aligns with translator theorist Gayatri Spivak's argument that ethical translation requires intimate engagement with the text's cultural context, beyond just semantic meaning. Vasudevan's translation choices demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the original text, making 'One Part Woman' a powerful example of effective literary translation.

Perumal Murugan's translated works reveal complexities. Linguistic privilege and cultural gatekeeping are issues. English translations make his voice global, but risk diluting its radical potential. Translation is both empowering and tense. Market politics decide which authors are 'translatable'. Visibility is selective. Translation shapes caste discourse for urban readers. Tejaswini Niranjana says translation reflects colonial residues and cultural hegemony. For Murugan, translation is political. It preserves oppressed voices, critiques caste hypocrisy, and challenges social limits. Translation is a tool for resistance and commentary. Perumal Murugan's works shine a light on rural Dalit-Bahujan life, caste oppression, and gender violence. His stories give voice to marginalized communities. Translation makes his works accessible to a broader audience. It brings visibility to the struggles and suffering of these communities. Through translation, his stories reach beyond Tamil readers, impacting a wider world.

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Akhila Naik:

Akhila Naik is a prominent Dalit voice in Odia literature. He is a poet and teacher of Odia language and literature at Kalahandi autonomous College. His writings highlight brutal realities of caste, patriarchy, and marginalization. His work is crucial for translation studies, particularly in negotiating Dalit subjectivity and regional idioms. Akhila Naik has written the novel Bheda in 2010 in Odia. The novel has been translated by Raj Kumar. The novel 'Bheda' offers a significant case study in translating subaltern narratives from Odia to English. The English translation raises important questions about voice, fidelity, and cultural politics. Akhila Naik's literary voice is marked by bold representation of Dalit life, caste trauma, and feminist assertion, distinguishing him as a leading voice in contemporary Dalit and regional Indian literature. His writing style and narrative techniques offer a powerful critique of caste-based oppression and social injustices.

The novel 'Bheda' by Akhila Naik sheds light on the harsh realities of caste-based violence, discrimination, and alienation in rural Odisha, particularly affecting Dalit communities. Through the protagonist Laltu's journey, the novel highlights the struggles of Dalits in asserting their identity and seeking equality, while also critiquing the oppressive Brahminical dominance. By giving voice to the marginalized, 'Bheda' challenges dominant narratives and offers a powerful commentary on social and economic injustices. The novel tells the story of Makara, a Dalit man in rural Odisha, who struggles for dignity and equality in a society that dehumanizes him. Through his daily encounters, the novel exposes the normalized casteism and brutality faced by Dalits, using unflinching prose to convey the harsh realities of lived experience.

'Bheda' offers a profound exploration of the psychological impact of caste-based trauma on its characters, revealing the deep-seated emotional and mental scars that result from generations of humiliation. The novel portrays the caste system as a mechanism of sustained terror and institutionalized degradation, highlighting the invisible barriers that restrict Dalits' access to education, mobility, and basic respect. The English translation of 'Bheda' is significant. It introduces Odia Dalit narratives to a wider audience. The translator, Raj Kumar, retains Odia cultural references and linguistic elements. This approach preserves the text's cultural distinctiveness. It aligns with Lawrence Venuti's 'foreignization' theory. The translation makes the reader aware of the text's rootedness in Odia culture.

Translating 'Bheda' into English is challenging. The translator must preserve the regional voice. This means keeping the unique cultural and linguistic context of the Odia narrative. It's crucial for the novel's impact and authenticity. The translator's choices affect how the English-speaking audience understands the story. Akhila Naik and Perumal Murugan's works are set in distinct regional worlds. These worlds have unique cultural and linguistic identities. Translating their works into English is a challenge.

The translator must choose between making it easy to read or keeping its cultural uniqueness. This decision affects how the story is represented. Keeping the cultural uniqueness is called foreignization. It helps retain the original work's distinctiveness. The author Venuti Lawrence asserts the concept of 'foreignization' (Venuti 20).Translation involves a crucial choice between foreignization and domestication. Foreignization retains the original text's unique cultural and linguistic features, preserving its distinctiveness. In contrast, domestication adapts the text to fit the target culture's norms, making it more relatable but potentially losing its original flavor. When translating Akhila Naik's work, the translator must decide whether to prioritize readability for a wider audience or preserve the cultural specificity that gives the narrative its power. This decision significantly impacts how the story is received and understood by readers. The author Raj Kumar points out as,

'Language in Dalit literature is not merely a medium; it is a tool of resistance' (Kumar,Raj Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity. 11).

Gayatri Spivak's essay 'The Politics of Translation' is a warning. Translators should be careful with subaltern texts. These texts have embedded politics that must be acknowledged. Translators need to understand the power dynamics and cultural context. They shouldn't just focus on literal meaning. This approach respects the original text's intent and politics. It's about representation and voice. Spivak says that,

'Translation is the most intimate act of reading' and that 'the task of the translator is to surrender to the text' (Spivak 179).

Translating 'Bheda' requires preserving its sharp political edge. Akhila Naik's critique should not be watered down. The specific experiences of caste oppression must be maintained. It shouldn't be reduced to a generic narrative of marginalization. This approach stays true to the author's intent. Akhila Naik's stories are filled with cultural details that are hard to translate directly into English. The translator must find a way to convey these nuances without

disrupting the narrative or making it seem overly exotic. It's a delicate balance between preserving cultural context and maintaining the story's flow.

Translation creates a 'third space' where meanings are negotiated and new identities emerge. This concept, by Homi Bhabha, is especially relevant for texts like 'Bheda' that exist at the intersection of multiple social boundaries, such as gender, caste, class, and region. The English translation of Akhila Naik's work has a significant political impact. It brings his voice to a broader audience, challenging the historical marginalization of Dalit writers in national and international literary spaces. This translation also helps build a larger Dalit literary archive, enabling comparisons and connections b etween Dalit literature from different regions, such as Tamil, Marathi, and Odia. The author Akhila Naik traces on identity as'Our identity is our resistance. We will not stay silent anymore.' (Naik, Bheda, p. 102)

3. CONCLUSION

Perumal Murugan and Akhila Naik's works show the power of regional literature. When translated thoughtfully, it can critique social issues and affirm cultural identities. Translation is more than just converting words. It's an act of resistance. It helps bring marginalized voices to the forefront. These voices are often excluded from mainstream discussions. By translating their works, we can include them in literary and academic conversations. This gives a platform to those who are often silenced. It helps to challenge dominant narratives and promote diversity. Translation Studies is an interdisciplinary field that explores the complex dynamics of knowledge transmission and power relations across cultures and languages, intersecting with literature, linguistics, philosophy, and more

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