

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING DALIT TEXTS INTO ENGLISH: WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO TELUGU NOVEL 'ANTARANIVASANTHAM'

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ABSTRACT

The Dalit literature explains the agony of the Untouchables and how they are socially, economically and politically dominated by upper castes. All the people from schedule castes and tribes are treated as Dalits. Many Dalit Novels and works are translated from regional languages into English in these days. It is found very difficult to translate some words related to Dalit culture into English, as there are no equivalent words in English. This paper attempts to focus on some of the unsolved riddles on the political scenes as the text 'Dalit' in the process of translation, a translator must set up equivalences between a source text and a target language. If we take some words from the novel *Antarani vasantham* like ana, beda, dammidde, jamu kunta, gunta, kaliyuga, kamadenuvu etc. We cannot find exact equivalent English words in translation. In the same way while translating English text into Telugu, translators encounter problem because there is no equivalent words in Dalit culture. Finally, what is implicit through the Kalyana rao's *Antarani Vasantham* (2000) is that finding exact words is very difficult for translator.

**KEY WORDS:** Dalit literature, Untouchables, equivalent words, unsolved riddles.

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The Dalit literature explains the agony of the Untouchables and how they are socially, economically and politically dominated by upper castes. All the people from schedule castes and tribes are treated as Dalits. *Antarani Vasantham* is a Telugu Dalit novel written by Kalyana rao (2000) which is being considered as a popular novel in Dalit literary cultural history. Many Dalit Novels and works are translated from regional languages to English in these days. It is found very difficult to translate some words related to Dalit culture into English, as there are no equivalent words in English.

This paper has made an attempt to study what are the problems faced by the translators while translating the culture-specific words from Telugu to English in the popular novel '*Antarani Vasantham*'. This novel translated into English as "Untouchable spring" By Uma and Shridhar.M(2011). The translator should first try to understand the cultural background of the source text and then try to provide equivalent meaning

in the target language without distorting the meaning of the source text. The study also analyses the problems emerged at cultural level in translation of 'Antarani Vasantham' and tries to provide a possible solution to the research problem.

## 2. Roots of Untouchability: A Mythological Perspective

### a) Purushasuktha of Rig Veda

There are many opinions among the scholars regarding the roots of *Varna Vyavastha* (caste system) and Untouchability, but majority of them trace it back to the Vedas and Puranas, as Thummapudi Bharathi(2008) mentioned in the *History of Telugu Dalit literature*.

*Vedas*, especially *Purushasuktha of Rig Veda*, provides the main source for the traditional theory, it is well known, and much criticized and rejected theory. It appears very unscientific and unnatural to accept *Brahma* to give birth through mouth, shoulders, thighs and feet (Bharathi Thummapudi., 2008:15).

If we examine the above mentioned quotation, we get a clear picture of roots of the caste system, and social injustice in the guise of religion. According to *Purushasuktha* of the *Rigveda*, the *Brahmins* were born from the mouth of *Brahma*, *Kshatriyas* from the shoulders, *Vaishyas* from the thighs and *Shudras* from the feet. Based on this *suktha*, *Brahmins* claimed superiority over the other three *Varnas*. Over a period of time, they monopolized the knowledge which was there in Vedas and declared themselves to be custodians of the Vedas. They were given privilege not only in religious sphere but also in political sphere. They were appointed on the highly respectable post of *Rajguru* (meaning) Teacher of the King. They also acted as the Chief Priests who would coronate the King and conduct great *Yagas* (religious sacrifices) like *Ashvamedha Yajna* and *Rajasuya Yajna*. At the end of such great sacrifices the *Brahmins* were given land, gold, cows etc. as *dana* and *dakshina*. Apart from this, Land grants called *Agraharas* were also given to them. The revenue from these lands was meant not only for the maintenance of Temples and the *Gurukulas* (Educational Institutions) but also for their personal maintenance. Thus the *Brahmins* gradually became the most powerful *Varna* who started dominating and exploiting other *Varnas* especially the *Shudras* and *Antyajas*, who were supposed to serve all the other three *Varnas*, mutely and bear the torture inflicted by the upper castes. Hence the Caste System along with the evil practice of Untouchability and Social Slavery are said to have originated from the *Vedas* but gradually developed by the upper castes for their vested interests.

### b) Ramayana

Even during the time of the *Ramayana*, *Varna System* appears to have existed in the society. According to the Valmiki *Ramayana*, in a particular context Rama while explaining the state-craft to the Bharata at Chitrakoot states that:

"*Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya* live in large numbers in Ayodhya doing their own duties; you do protect such Ayodhya, do you not?" (Ramayana 2.100.42)

Rama does not mention about *Shudras* even in the general categorization of *Varna Vyavastha* (Caste System).

### c) Mahabharata

Injustice appears to have occurred in Mahabharata. In one of the episodes, a tribal prince called *Ekalavya*, is very much interested in learning archery, so his father takes him to *Guru Dronacharya*, considered as the greatest teacher of archery in those times. Dronacharya refuses to train him because he was a tribal and according to *Varna Vyavastha*, it was the prerogative of the *Kshatriyas* i.e. the ruling class.

Later while training the *Kshatriya* princes *Kauravas* and *Pandavas*, he takes them to forest where they are awestruck by the mastery of *Ekalavya*, who silences a barking dog by shooting a series of arrows in its mouth. When the princes report this incident to their *acharya* he is also surprised. He wonders who must have taught him. When *Ekalavya* is asked about his teacher he says that it was Dronacharya himself. Everyone is astonished. Then he explains that he made an idol of Guru Drona, meditated on it and started practicing archery. Hence he considers Guru Drona as his mentor.

Appreciating the talent of *Ekalavya* and visualizing its social implications, that a Tribal (a *Shudra*) becoming greater archer than the *Kshatriya* princes would lead to imbalance in the existing social hierarchy, and also to keep his promise of making Arjuna the greatest archer, Dronacharya asked *Ekalavya* to give his thumb as the '*Guru Dakshina*' even though he had not taught him personally. Since *Guru Dakshina* was a sort

of mandatory debt/fees which a disciple owed to his teacher, Ekalavya cut his right thumb and offered it to Dronacharya.

Thus we see that Ekalavya was a victim of upper caste domination. Instead of getting recognition for his talent he was forced to annihilate it so as to maintain the balance of *Chaturvarna Vyavastha* as well as follow the social custom of *Guru Dakshina*.

### 3. Methodology

While translating the source text (Dalit literature) into English, the translator should try to understand the culture of the Dalit community very clearly, and then try to provide equivalent meaning in the target language without distorting the meaning of the source text.

In the process of translation, a translator must set up equivalences between a source text and a target language. This process can be expressed as interpreting the meaning of original text and re-encoding this meaning in the target language.

If we take some words from the novel '*Antarani Vasantham*' like beda, dammidde, jamu kunta, gunta, kaliyuga, kamadenuvu etc, we cannot find exact equivalent English words in translation. It is highly impossible to translate the Dalit culture-specific words which do not have equivalents in English. Here, I would like to look at the problems encountered by a translator. Because of these problems, sometimes, the translator fails to keep up the originality of source text in the process of translation into other language. These problems can be avoided by the following methods.

#### 3.1 Communicative Translation:

Communicative translation is usually adopted for culture specific clichés such as idioms, proverbs, fixed expression, etc. In such cases the translator substitutes SL (Source language) word with an existing concept in target culture. In cultural substitution the propositional meaning is not the same but it has similar impact on target reader. The literal translation here may sound comic. The degree of using this strategy sometimes depends on the license which is given to the translator by commissioners and also the purpose of translation.

#### 3.2 Coining words

Even after using the above method, if equivalent words are not found, then translator may take a step to coin a word in the target language, only if it is essential.

#### 3.3 Tools

The following tools are proposed to be used in this study.

- Texts which are already translated
- Dictionaries [eg: 'Aadunika vyavahara kosham (2000)']
- Internet (Machine translation)

### 4. Scope of the study:

The scope of the study will be limited to '*Antarani Vasantham*' and its translation 'Untouchable Spring' and the available literature on Dalit issues in English articles and books on the process of translation and problems involved in it.

### 5. Translation of Kinship Words

Kinship terminology describes a system of familial relationships. The family is a natural and fundamental unit in society. According to Schapera (1977), there are five principal kinds of kinship terminologies which one could use to describe people with whom one is connected, either by descent from a common ancestor or by marriage. These can be classified, for example, into members of one's family, extra-familial kin (relatives of blood) and one's relative's by marriage. The relationship terms most commonly used are father, mother, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother, grandson, granddaughter, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, brother and sister.

In Telugu language the words like Amma, nanna, thatha, muthatha and mama are examples of kinship words.

The Telugu Dalit novel *Antaranivasantham* has some kinship words for which the translators have not given equivalences even though their equivalence generally available, this is a kind of translation Strategy employed by the translators probably to maintain the flavor of the source text<sup>1</sup>.

The kinship words found in the novel and available equivalents are as follows.

Telugu word	Transliterated into English as	Available Equivalents
తాతా	Thatha	Grand father
అయ్య	Ayya	may be 'father'
అత్త	Attha	Father's sister

#### 6. Translation strategies for Cultural terms

Some cultural words which appear in the source text are not given English equivalents. They are transliterated placed exactly in the English translation of *Antatarani vasantham* that is '*Untouchable Spring*'.

##### a) Mythological words:

Sl.N	Telugu word	Transliterated into English as	Other strateies
1	కామధేను	Kamadhenu	Note given at the end of the novel
2	వేదాలు	Vedas	No explanation is given
3	శాస్త్రాస్	Sastras	No explanation is given
4	ఋషి	Rishi	No explanation is given

##### b) Geographical words (Area related):

Sl. No.	Telugu word	Transliterated into English as	Other strateies
1	ఊరు	ooru	Village. No explanation was given.
2	మాలపల్లి	mala palli	No explanation is given
3	మాదిగపల్లి	madigapalli	No explanation is given
4	హాఫ్ కుంట	half kunta	Note given at the end of the page.
5	అగ్రహారాలు	agraharams	No explanation is given

##### c) Financial words:

Sl. No.	Telugu word	Transliterated into English as	Other strategies
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<sup>1</sup> (Internet source) <http://www.uri.edu/iaics/content/2012v21n1/22MunzhedziJamesMafela.pdf>

1	అణా	ana	Meaning given in the end note (glossary)
2	బేడ	beda	Meaning given in the end note (glossary)
3	దమ్మిడి	dammidi	Meaning given in the end note (glossary)
4	షావుకారు	sahukar	No explanation is given

### CONCLUSION

The study concentrates on socio-cultural gaps in translating Dalit texts into English. Generally Dalit people have their cultural differences. Their use of languages mixed with the words were not totally accepted by the general society, which means socially, culturally, economically developed people will not accept the village Dalit language. Here in the novel *Antaravasantham* there are so many words associated with the Dalit culture and at the same which are related to the mythology. It is impossible to find equivalence for these cultural specific words of Dalits. Therefore translator uses some techniques and strategies to overcome these problems. So I looked at what are the problematic words and how the translator given solutions for those problems by using techniques and I also looked at the translation gaps between the source text and target text.

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