

Sruthi Sasidharan TV

Efl University Hyderabad

Kakkat Keelath House, Bengalam po, Kasargod, Korea

Translating the Subaltern: The Problematic of Englishing Malayalam Dalit and Adivasi Narratives

For centuries the dominant Literature had been the preserve of the elite. The representations of the subaltern and their experiences were either absent or biased. With the emergence of Subaltern Studies, the power relations in the literary products of the 'nation' were re – examined. At the same time the Subaltern Studies Group itself had to face the criticism of being elite in nature. The question of alternative histories that they proposed is widely considered as an important contribution to different marginal sections. As a result, literatures that fiercely challenge the dominant hegemonic systems and structures and projecting a subaltern perspective and aesthetics emerged in India. It includes dalit studies, feminist studies, disability studies, queer studies etc. The hegemonic voices of the 'normal' were challenged by various literary as well as non – literary efforts from different subaltern groups. The so – called 'normal' was called into question and alternative perspectives from the standpoint of marginalized sections emerged. The subaltern literature(s) are often considered as resistance narratives as they project their resistance and identity assertion. Translations of regionally produced subaltern literatures into English and other languages provided a wider audience for them. Despite the international readership attained through Englishing, there exist serious issues of language, culture and politics in Englishing the subaltern texts. As an alien tongue which is geographically and culturally alienated from the context of Indian/ Malayalam subaltern discourses, how English perceives the complex social formations of caste, gender, culture and dialects of local contexts is a new area of interest in research. Furthermore, there exists a politics of market/publication behind the translation of subaltern texts. The agenda behind translating subaltern texts is often the commodification of the subaltern subject, experience and culture, as they are the new interests of literary and academic worlds. Through this paper I intend to focus on the issues and politics involved in the process of translating the subaltern. Since it is difficult to cover all categories of subaltern literatures, the research focuses on dalit and adivasi literary discourses in Malayalam, especially those belonging to the genre of life narratives. Dalit and adivasi life narratives support the agenda of asserting the identity and documenting the protest of the larger dalit movements. The very act of dalit writing can be conceived as translation as it involves the act of translating the culture and literature that are originally based on orality to the written form, which is more or less related to the ma(le)instream and thus an act of mainstreaming the subaltern. Transforming the marginal that rests upon the 'oral' to the mainstream which celebrates the 'written' is a complex process of translation. Hence, every dalit writer is a translator who actively participates in the process of translating his/her community's past/present which includes the culture and language in to the written present. This cultural and linguistic translation becomes complex as they are not simply adopting the mainstream savarna form of written literature. Rather the mainstream written models that fit into the rigid rules of the "literary" are breached with new experiments. Rather than negating the written, the dalit literature quarrels with it, tries to break its standards, brings the cosmology of orality and the carnivalesque into the written. The study of this complex process of dalit translation is also aimed at by this study. It tries to engage with the novel ways in which the dalit writer – translator establishes him/her – self with in the 'written' along with challenging it. In the case of dalit life narratives, things are much more complex. As many of the Keralite dalit life writers are illiterate, often there exist a second person as transcriber, who may or may not belong to the dalit community. This mediation often

creates problems as the life writer gets alienated from his/her life itself and the transcriber becomes the authorial voice and his/her subjectivities (ideology/culture/language/experiences) influence the narrative. Such mediation should be studied in detail to examine the politics of power and language. The projected Kerala mainstream culture that is of course the savarna one and the standard savarna language is entirely different from the dalit culture and dialects. Moreover, they differ among different castes and sub – castes. These facts should be looked at seriously. The different caste – based dialects that the dalit writers celebrate create the problems of untranslatability even into the so called standard one. Modern dalit writings also bear testimony to the transformation of the passive dalit object into an active, resisting subject. Also the Dalit and Adivasi narratives are noted for the alternative ecological understanding and the Eco – protests that they embody. The proposed research also tries to locate the dalit and Adivasi narratives in the larger context of Environmental humanities. How these narratives transgress their local contexts and place themselves in the global environmental concerns? How Englishing these texts aid in such a process? Thus, the research focuses on the multiple translations related to dalit writing like the oral to written, margin to mainstream, passive object to active/resisting subject, local to global etc.