

Enriching Cultural Awareness through Translation Studies: A Study of Tribal Culture in Mahasweta Devi's *The Book of the Hunter*

Darshana Tinkhede Pachkawade

Research Scholar, Shri Shivaji Arts and Commerce College, Amaravati
& Assistant Professor, Pillai College of Engineering, New Panvel.

ABSTRACT

Advancements in Digital Technology have provided easy access to literature, worldwide. Literature, emanating from various languages across the world, when translated expose readers to the socio-cultural aspects of other regions - their language, customs, relationships, history etc. Translated works also enrich the target language by introducing new terminology into it. Mahasweta Devi, a renowned Indian writer and social activist has written in Bengali which was later translated into English. The selected work, *The Book of the Hunter* portrays a wide canvas of Indian tribal culture and while translating it, along with the target language, some phrases and concepts from the source language that is Bengali are used. This paper focuses on how linguistic hybridity and code-switching help readers worldwide to get acquainted with various elements of the rich tribal culture of the Shabars, who are occupational hunters and who are known to be living closely to the source culture.

KEYWORDS

Linguistic hybridity; code-switching; socio-cultural aspects; source language; source culture; target language.

Introduction

Today, the whole world has become a global village thanks to the advancements in technology. Geographical distances have ceased to matter, as people are increasingly brought into close contact with each other and are beginning to develop an interest in knowing about the culture and literature of people from different parts of the world. The major obstacle, however, is the unfamiliarity with the languages of the other parts of the world. And, regional literature, without an understanding of the language in which they were written cannot be enjoyed. Here the translator plays an important role. By translating literary

texts written in a regional source language (SL) into the target language (TL), translators make literature from different countries available to a wider audience.

The history of translated literary works can be traced back to the distant past. It is believed that translation started in Mesopotamia and Egypt, with the translation of the first literary text, a poem, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that was originally written in Sumerian and translated into several Asian languages. The translation of the Bible from Hebrew into many other languages worldwide, similarly makes it the most translated book. Other famous translated texts like Aristotle's *Poetics*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*,

and Plato's *Republic* offer great help in the study of literature and criticism.

The translation of varied literary works from different languages offers a great feast to the readers. They are able to enjoy a great variety of classic texts on diverse subjects with scholarly content and benefit from them. These translations make them acquainted with the diverse socio-cultural aspects of other regions like language, customs, culture, social relationships, thought processes, spirituality etc. It provides scope to readers and allows them to compare different cultures and find similarities and differences among them. The global status of the English language enables the translated regional works to reach readers all over the globe, and thereby enjoy wider exposure and appreciation. Translated works can enrich and benefit the language into which they are translated by introducing new terms and ideas from the source language. Well-known examples are the Greek, Latin, French and Dutch words and phrases that have been introduced into the English language through the translation of the Bible; words like 'treasure,' 'mystery,' 'glory,' 'horror,' 'female,' 'sex,' 'fisherman,' 'castaway,' 'beautiful,' 'ungodly' etc. The present study deals with the translated work of Mahasweta Devi, *The Book of the Hunter* and comments on how, through translation, the use of linguistic hybridity, the code-mixing of original Bengali words with standard English words, helps global readers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Indian Tribal culture.

Literature Review

After wide research on translation studies, many scholars and critics proposed their theories and perspectives and tried to focus on the importance of translation. These translation theories are based on diverse elements like stylistics, reader's orientation, linguistic equivalency, word-for-word Vs sense-for-

sense approach, etc. Etienne Dolet, a French Humanist, (1540) proposed five principles for effective translation which say that a translator must understand the proper sense of the original text, he should have perfect knowledge of both Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL), must maintain the dignity of the language, must avoid unusual forms and clumsiness and should not prefer word for word translation. Dolet advocates the reproduction of sense, eschewing the practice of word-for-word translation. Dryden (1680) also supports Dolet when he presents three categories of translation - the first is Metaphrase promoting word-by-word literal translation from the source language, the second is Paraphrase, sense-for-sense translation instead of literal translation and the last is Imitation, a kind of adaptation, forsaking both words and sense if not needed. It is evident that Dryden is more inclined towards sense-for-sense than the literal word-for-word fidelity of the text. The word-for-word translation is even down-casted by Cicero and Horace.

Eugene Nida (1964) rejects the concept of literal, free and faithful translation and proposes the concept of 'two basic orientations' or 'types of equivalence': formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. For Nida, formal equivalence means focusing attention on the form and content of the message, closely matching the translated message to the structure of the source language whereas in dynamic equivalence the message is modified as per the linguistic needs and cultural expectations of the receptors and it tries to have complete 'naturalness of expression'. German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1977) presents two methods of translation - Transparency or Domestication in which the translator uses familiar concepts from the target language so that the readers can easily relate to it and Fidelity or Foreignization

where he prefers to use concepts from source language unfamiliar to the target audience to expose them to new words and phrases. The Foreignization method of translation encourages the use of linguistic hybridity as the translators prefer to use some words and phrases from the source language rather than giving it a substitute in the target language. All these studies provide various perspectives and methods of translation which ultimately help to display the immense socio-cultural diversity of the regional literature to the world audience. The translators take the aid of varied techniques for translation with the aim of sharing this literary treasure from the source text with their target audience.

Discussion

Translation is not a mechanical process but a creative and complex one as the translators are not merely supposed to provide substitutes for the words as 'word to word translation' but must be able to maintain the real sense and temper of the work as 'sense to sense translation'. They should not only share the story of the original text but should retain the affective dimension as well. The translator must make efforts to get his/her readers accustomed to the real social and cultural elements of the source text. For doing so, sometimes the translator may choose to use linguistic hybridity, i.e., the use of some words from the source language along with the target language. This occasional use of code-switching helps the translator for more effective translation. Besides, the readers also get an opportunity to learn the new cultural and linguistic elements. The constructive use of linguistic hybridity and code-switching is observed in the selected translated work, *The Book of the Hunter* by Mahasweta Devi, translated by Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta which presents a wide panorama of the rich Indian tribal culture.

Mahasweta Devi is not only a towering figure in the field of literature but a fierce social activist also. Both these traits of her personality, her love for writing and her social awareness are perfectly interwoven in her literary creation. Most of her literary works exhibit her great concern for the marginal, deprived and downtrodden sections of the society. She always tries to voice the sufferings of the voiceless. In some of her fictional works, she deals with the tribal people - their culture, the problems they face, the effect of urbanization on them, their oppression by the administration etc. The selected text, *The Book of the Hunter* originally written in Bengali as *Byadhkhanda* by Devi, deals with the story of the tribal community- the Shabars who are the hunters residing in the forest. The novel depicts a detailed picture of their cultural life which is successfully reflected in the translated text by Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta. The translators have deployed all the skills to transfer the real flavour of the original Bengali text into the translated, English version. As an attempt to make the translation more realistic and close to the original text, the translators have made use of linguistic hybridity in which they insert some keywords from the source language that is Bengali into the target language English. This code-switching not only makes the text interesting to read but also offers a very clear picture of the tribal culture to the world's readers and takes them very close to the culture.

Various elements contribute to and shape the culture of any society. These elements range from relationships, customs, traditions, food, social organization of family, caste, social norms, and religious beliefs to political beliefs, economic systems etc. Here, while translating these elements from the original text to describe the tribal culture, quite frequently the translators, Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta make use of the

original words from the source language instead of providing any substitute or synonym to them in the target language. They justify their use of this linguistic hybridity by saying:

Our intention has been to bring Mahasweta's text to the widest possible range of readers around the world, and we saw fit to bring certain Bengali words into play for communicating the flavour as well as the facts. Accordingly, we have tried to retain the original words for forms of address, names of Bengali months, local flora and fauna, weights and measures, caste/professional identities and food items. We did not want to lose the cultural particularity of a tree or medicinal plant or a delicacy in the jungle of generalization! (Translators' note, xiii).

So they believe that to convey the real flavour of the source culture to readers from other cultures, the use of linguistic hybridity proves to be more efficacious.

As the translators stated, the use of linguistic hybridity prominently appears in the description of relationships, food, the concept of God and religion, cultural beliefs, etc. In the depiction of the family relationship, the readers can find many words from the source language which expose the new terminology to them. The word *bou* from Bengali is used for wife along with other words like *Didi*, *Baba*, *Jamai dada*, *Bamun didi*, *Mashi*, *Thakuma* (grandmother), *Jeth* and *Kaka* (uncle) to indicate family relationships. The use of these diverse Bengali words displays how these people have so many relatives in their lives whom they respect a lot. These relationships are of utmost importance for them and they are ready to sacrifice for them. It also indicates the richness of the source language providing words in abundance to mention these relations.

The Shabars depicted in the novel are hunters, the forest dwellers who are

supposed to hunt and support their livelihoods. They are not allowed to settle in the city, or adopt comfortable or luxurious lifestyles but are exhorted to have a decent simple life in the forest. They cannot hoard money and are discouraged from having sumptuous town food instead they are advised to have food which is easily secured from the forest. While describing their food, translators have retained several terms from the source language like *muri* and *gur*, *birikolai* lentils, *amani* (water in which cooked rice is soaked overnight), roasted *bengchishak*, *Shushnishak*, fruits like *rual* fruit, *amla*, *ritha*, *hartuki*, *bridal* and *puishak*. The winter delicacies - *pithy*, *payesh* and *notun-gur*, and the eight kinds of food accompaniments given to pregnant women, *Ashtamrito* all these references make the readers get acquainted with the tribal food culture. The story is set in the sixteenth century and the contemporary units of measurement described in the source text appear unaltered in the translation like: *Katha*, unit of measuring land; *kahans*, unit of measuring gold; *seer* and *maund*, units for measuring grain. Along with it, coins like *dhebua*, and *damri* give a fair idea of the economic system of the source culture to the readers.

Being forest dwellers, the Shabars worship forest gods. In the description of their gods and religious practices, the translators have preferred the use of regional Bengali terms to convey and share the actual sense of their religious beliefs with the readers. The Shabars call themselves the children of goddess *Abhayachandi* and believe that the goddess will give them *abhaya*, protection from all evils. The description of the other gods they worship like *Banachandi* (Forest Goddess), *Dhan Kudra*, *Baghut Thakur* and *Baram Thakurani* (Tribal deities), *Jaguli Manasha* (Snake God), *Airavat* (The King of Elephants, the mount of Indra, the king of Gods), *Kalpeshwar Shiva* and the religious practices they

follow like the Dikbandhan ceremony (to control the winds) show the readers the close connection of Shabars to nature. Their customs and rituals are based on nature, with a few like they marry the sal tree to the mohul tree in the month of phalgun; during the wedding, the girl walks around the mahua tree seven times, during the wedding celebration, they beat the drum, the dhol and madol; they celebrate Ashtami and Bijoyadashami. They harness various plants, weeds and roots available in the forest to make their medicines like bonkenre, bonkapash, chalkutoto, besides the bodopahad vine and the roots of the chhotopahad tree. The earlier head of the community, the old Donko Shabar, is in search of the Amritagandha plant, a plant from their mythology, supposed to regain youth and bring immortality. While describing all these cultural details, the translators use Bengali words instead of offering any synonyms in English to make the global readers accustomed to it.

The use of Bengali words for describing the professions of the people like Akhetiyas - hunters, mahout (a person who trains or looks after the elephant), parthi - a midwife (Paritran means to deliver, so the one who helps in the delivery of a baby is parthi) helps the readers to get acquainted with the tribal social system. The names of the flowers - Gandhraj, Kundo, and the name of the months- Aashadh, Ashwin, Bhadra, Aghran, Baisakh, and Jaistha appear as it is in the translation. Various other things which are an integral part of the Shabar's forest life like malsha (a clay bowl), machan (platform made up of bamboo), gamachha, kanr (arrow) and baans (bow) remain the same in translation. In the original text, different characters belonging to different social classes speak uniquely as the language of a Brahmin husband and wife differs from the language of the tribal couple Phulli and Kalya; the way the King speaks differs

from the way the servants speak. The translators honestly admit that they had limitations while translating these linguistic mannerisms into English (Translators' note, xiii) and so they prefer to continue it in the source language, i.e., Bengali and try to make a distinction between the town and forest language. For example, in Bengali culture, it is customary not to utter the husband's name but to address him with great respect as 'tumi' or 'apni', the address used for elderly respectful persons. But Phuli calls her husband 'tui', an address for younger or same-age people, instead of 'tumi'. So Mukunda strongly objects to it and criticizes her as shameless. But in Shabar's tribal culture, they do not bother about this kind of respectful address to the husband as both the partners - husband and wife have equal status in their culture.

Conclusion

Translation tries to develop and establish an equivalent relationship between the source text and the target text by communicating the original message without any distortion. But many a time, the diverse linguistic and cultural elements make it difficult for the translators to maintain the equivalence. However, the word-for-word translation cannot produce the desired effect. The translators of the selected text, Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta believe that merely substituting the Bengali word with English would have made a parody of the original text (Translators' note, xiii). To overcome this limitation, they opted to use those peculiar words from the original Source Language in the translation. This use of linguistic hybridity opens a way for new terminology to be introduced to worldwide readers to get a better understanding of the Tribal culture. It acquaints the readers with the history, philosophy, religious beliefs and practices of the tribal culture. Their social

relationship, economic setting, food habits, religious beliefs and rituals, flora and fauna, etc. all these cultural elements depicted in the source language help them to gain a clear picture of the life and culture of the tribal community. In writing *Byadhakhanda*, the Bengali work of fiction, Mahasweta Devi had a clear agenda of reconstructing the Shabar tribal history as

well as identity and making it known to the mainstream Indian society (Translators' note, xii). In rendering the English translation of this text, the translators are guided by the same purpose, of introducing the rich Shabar culture at length to global readers. The adoption of linguistic hybridity helps them in achieving their goal.

WORKS CITED

- Al-Ali, Kadhim. "An Analytical Study of Schleiermacher's Essay 'On the Different Methods of Translating'". 2018:1-35.
- Cooper, L. "English Translations of Greek and Latin Classics." *The Classical Weekly*, 11(7), 1917, 49-52. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4387545>
- Cruz, Ellaine. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation by Roman Jakobson". 2018. 13140/RG.2.2.29411.78888
- Devi, M. *The Book of the Hunter*. Trans. Mandira Sengupta and Sagaree Sengupta. Seagull. 2002.
- Dolet, E. *La maniere de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre*, Paris: J. De Marnef. Translated by D.G. Ross as 'How to Translate Well from One Language to Another' in D. Robinson (ed.) 1997:17-31. Print.
- Dryden, John, "From the Preface to Ovid's Epistles," *The Translation Studies Reader*, Routledge, 2021. eBook ISBN9780429280641
- Nida, Eugene A., and Charles R. Taber. *The Theory and Practice of Translation, With Special Reference to Bible Translating*, Leiden: Brill,1969, 200.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. 'On the Different Methods of Translating'. Trans. André Lefevere. In *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig*, ed. André Lefevere. Assen & Amsterdam: van Gorcum. 1977, 67-82

Darshana Tinkhede Pachkawade is a research scholar from Shri Shivaji Arts and Commerce College, Amaravati, Maharashtra. After completing her graduation and post-graduation in English literature, she is now pursuing her Ph. D in Comparative Literature. She is working as an Assistant Professor at Pillai College of Engineering, New Panvel, Navi Mumbai. In her 19 years of teaching experience, she has dealt with various subjects like Professional Communication and Ethics, Communication Skills, Human Values and Social Ethics, Functional English, etc. Her areas of interest are Comparative Literature, Translation Studies, American Literature, and Indian English literature.