

Jina Amucha and The Prisons We Broke: A Comparative Study in Translation

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Dalit Literature has significantly expanded the Indian literary tradition. A remarkable addition to Dalit Literature is Baby Kamble's autobiography *Jina Amucha*, which depicts the socio-cultural, economic and political conditions of the Dalit community in Indian society. Over time, translation of literary works from regional Indian languages to English has made the world a global village. The autobiography, *Jina Amucha*, the memoir of Baby Kamble, was translated into English as *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) by Maya Pandit. The paper highlights the importance, challenges and drawbacks of translation, and compares the original Marathi text and the English translated version. It examines the role of a translator through linguistic and socio-cultural aspects to understand the processes that translation adapts in conveying the sensibility of the original Marathi text.

KEYWORDS

Linguistics; Language; Socio-cultural; Translation; Dalit Literature.

Introduction

The present paper explicitly explores the anguish of Dalit author Baby Kamble. Her autobiography reveals several layers of the suffering of Dalit women. The author shares the heartbreaking fact that the oppression that Dalit women face is two layered. Firstly, as a Dalit, she is the 'other' to an entire society in terms of caste; secondly, as a female, she is the gendered other in a male-dominated community. Kamble experienced brutal treatment from society that considered her as a mere sexual object. Her experiences of oppression make Baby Kamble question the existence of God boldly. She questions how a deity can observe the suffering of his child, ultimately asserting that god is nothing more than a black stone. However, Baby Kamble acknowledges Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar as a beacon of hope for the Mahar community as his teachings

illuminated the oppressive nature of the caste system and profoundly changed the lives of Dalits. Baby Kamble's autobiography laid the foundation for the gradual transformation of Indian social consciousness towards caste and gender injustice in India.

While Baby Kamble accurately depicted the difficulties of Dalit women, Maya Pandit brought such tragedies back to a global platform through her English translation of Kamble's work. Language and cultural boundaries can be broken down through translation since they "mediate between languages, civilizations, and literatures" (House J., 2009: 3).

Maya Pandit is a poet, translator, teacher, developer, and activist. She translates plays, autobiographies, and fiction across the two languages and works with Marathi and English. Maya Pandit's translation of Baby Kamble's

autobiography stands out among other literary translations as a significant work. In addition to enhancing learners' linguistic knowledge and proficiency, translation also promotes the growth of their sociocultural awareness, sense of autonomy, and linguistic awareness.

Translation is a process that connects two languages and provides exposure of one culture to another: "Translations mediate between languages, societies, and literatures, and it is through translations that linguistic and cultural barriers may be overcome" (House J., 2009: 3). The text to be translated-original text-is the source text; the equivalent text-substitute one-is the target text; and translation can be considered as both the product and the process. It is a transfer process of messages in one language (source language) to another language (target language) by providing equivalence in terms of meaning and style; and the product ensued as a result of this process (Vardar B., 2002). Structural linguist Roman Jakobson examined the relationship between linguistics and translation. According to Jakobson (1959/2004: 139), a verbal sign can be interpreted in three ways, and; thus, he identified three different types of translations: Intralingual, Interlingual, and Intersemiotic:

1. Intralingual translation: Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs using other signs of the same language.
2. Interlingual translation: Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs employing some other language.
3. Intersemiotic translation: Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs through signs of nonverbal sign systems (cited in Munday, 2009: 5).

The present paper deals with the linguistic aspects of the translation process, especially, the issue of equivalence. It is a complex phenomenon to find equivalence in the process of translation to convey the exact meaning to the readers of a target language having different or sometimes opposite cultural ethos.

According to Eugene Nida, equivalence is of two types first, formal equivalence and second, dynamic equivalence (Nida, 159-164).

In his opinion, formal equivalence focuses on the resemblance of form and content in both source text and target text. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, attempts to impart the message from the source text to the target text naturally. It is obvious that dynamic equivalence is preferred in the translation process. The cultural implications and richness of the source language are unable to translate into the linguistic form and content of the target language. At this juncture, the cultural specific diction is literally untranslatable. The role of a translator is significant in this process. At the outset, she justifies the title of autobiography. Instead of an intralingual translation of the title *Jina Amucha* to "Our Life ", she aptly translates it to *The Prisons We Broke*. The translation viciously depicts the suffering of the oppressed class as a life narrative. Apart from that, she retains the original soul of the autobiography. Nowhere in the target text has the parallelism of Source Text and Target Text been compromised. The purity of expression is maintained throughout the book. Maya Pandit provides the glossary of Marathi words used in the source text and their English meaning for the readers of the English language.

Baby Kambale's *Jina Amucha* highlights the socio-cultural ethos of the Mahar community in Maharashtra. The auto narrative describes the various

rituals, values, and social conventions prevalent in the community. It also highlights the caste hierarchy deeply rooted in the Hindu religious milieu in India. Baby Kamble's narrative is an anthropological journey that depicts the nuances of vivid belief systems, and dichotomies as described in the narrative.

Baby Kamble in the beginning explains the word "Mahar". Here it can be understood that the Constitution of India has given protection to marginal groups to lead a respectable life and protect their honour which is ransacked in the name of their lower caste status. The Atrocity Act protects lower castes from upper caste hegemony. The novelist describes the genealogy of the words Mahar and Maharashtra. She explains that Mahar is the son of the soil in whose name a great state is named as Maharashtra. So being Mahar is not atrocious but a thing of pride, as being aboriginal, being a pure, great race runs in her veins giving a lifetime of inspiration to conquer the darkness of their socially scripted destiny.

Ajay Deshmukh in his book *Ethnic Angst* (2014) analyses the role of language as:

Language is also an ethnic marker. It contributes to the ethno-culture and ethno-religious connotations. Each ethnic group has its own vocabulary regarding the culture and religion as well as dressing and cuisines as a part of ethnic identity. In this way, language signifies the typicality of that particular ethnic group. (245)

He also asserts the exchange of linguistic constructs amongst ethnic groups surrounding or sharing the linguistic geography, "As these ethnic groups coexist with other ethnic groups, the intermingling or exchange of habits, dressing code and cuisines is imperative. So, vocabulary may belong to more than one ethnic group." (Deshmukh, 245)

In his paper "Ethnolinguistic Study of Baby Kamble's Auto-Narrative *Jin Aamuch*" (2020), Deshmukh brings out the relationship between anthropology and linguistics. He traces the various facets of cultural, religious, and social development and the use of language, highlighting ethnolinguistic or anthropological linguistic aspects prevalent in Baby Kamble's *Jin Aamuch*.

The present paper groups the words provided in the vocabulary list in Pandit's translation of *Jina Amucha* into categories like kinship terms, festivals, culinary terms, names of units of currency in contemporary India, terms for household goods or utensils, terms used in nuptial ceremonies, terms used in worship and names of Gods, terms related to customs and beliefs, occupation and caste, instruments, and months in the Marathi Calendar.

A. Terminology used to express relationship:

Translator Maya Pandit retains the kinship terms as is in her translation. The retention maintains originality to express the emotional significance of the terms as relationships in Indian culture. One feature of the use of the kinship terms is to avoid ambiguity and to name every relation individually. This is a way of indicating how every relationship in Indian culture has a unique identity and is accordingly nurtured and preserved. Some examples of this are given below:

1. Aai: Mother
2. Aaja: Grandfather
3. Aaji: Grandmother
4. Akka: Term used to address elder sister
5. Appasaheb: Term of respect used for a brother or man
6. Atya, Atyabai: Paternal aunt; often mother-in-law, because of the custom of marrying the girl to the paternal aunt's son
7. Bhau: Brother

8. Chulat ajja: Granduncle
9. Dir: Brother- in-law
10. Iwan: Kinship term, signifying the relationship between the father of the bride and groom
11. Inibai: Kinship term, signifying the relationship between the mother of the bride and groom
12. Kaka: Paternal uncle; father's brother
13. Kaki: Paternal aunt; also, a respectful way of addressing an elder woman
14. Mama: Maternal uncle
15. Mami: Wife of maternal uncle
16. Sasu: Mother-in-law
17. Sasra: Father-in-law
18. Tatyā: A term of respect used to address a man. Also, a name (171-178)

2. Ambil: Liquid preparation made with *ragi* and buttermilk
3. Ambura: Stale food gone sour
4. Barbat: Cooked meat, meat curry
5. Bhaji: Vegetable
6. Bhakri: Roti made from jowar flour
7. Bombil: Dried bommelow fish
8. Chanya: Pieces of dried meat strings
9. Gulwani: A syrup dish made from jaggery
10. Haladi: Turmeric
11. Jowar: Millet
12. Laki: meat soup
13. Panji: Meat soup
14. Puran Poli: Sweet chapattis stuffed with jaggery and lentils
15. Suti roti: Roti of wheat flour made without oil offered with the cooked liver, heart, and lungs of the sacrificed animals. (171-178)

B. Terms to express festivals

India is a multicultural country with its multiplicity in all spheres of human life, geography and history. *The Prisons We Broke* brings in the Maharashtrian context in the backdrop of the Mahar community, in the novel. So too, the festivals celebrated at the local level are retained in the source language as for enhanced authenticity. For example:

1. Nagpanchami: Snake festival
2. Padva: Marathi New Year (171-178)

C. Culinary Terms:

Culinary culture or cuisine culture is the most important aspect of human society. It is deeply rooted in the geographical space that produces natural produce and accommodates everyday lifestyle. The specificity of the terms used in the context of the Mahar community concretise their cultural realities that are preserved by Maya Pandit by using the diction of source language while translating the text to maintain its cultural flavour -

1. Arhar dal: A kind of lentil

D. Names of Currencies:

Currency is a crucial aspect of the economic life of any society. The struggle to earn it becomes the base of life and a source of inspiration. Accumulation of wealth gives status and recognition to the human being in society. *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) is deeply rooted in the Indian caste hierarchy, so the terms used in the narrative highlight the poverty prevalent in the community. Equally poignant is the evocation of a historical context and a bygone era that the use of some of these terms evoke, indicating the long past of the community's oppression. Some of the names of this kind are Anna, Cowry, Ginni, Paisa, Pai, all of which are old measures of money.

Their equivalents would be:

- | | |
|------------|--------------------|
| 1. 6 annas | = 1 rupee |
| 2. Annas | = 1 ginni |
| 3. Gandas | = 1 damdi |
| 4. Cowries | = 1 ganda or pei |
| 5. Damdis | = 1 paisa |
| 6. Paise | = 1 anna (171-178) |

E. Terms for household goods

Words and phrases used to describe food, money, and household goods indicate the Dalit community's abject poverty. Work opportunities were unavailable to them. The words used to describe household objects and the currencies they used become indicators of prevalent socio-economic conditions, signposting the community's affordances and thereby their abject poverty and ostracising.

1. Chulha: Stove
2. Katwat: Wooden plate
3. Keli: Mud pitcher used to store drinking water
4. Kuncha: A small brush used to gather the flour spilled around the grinding stones
5. Parul: Clay pots
7. Tawa: Baking plate made of iron
8. Walni: Here, string for hanging things (171-178)

F. Terms used in the nuptial ceremony:

Equally illustrative are the words used for nuptial rites, tradition and culture. Interestingly, though these ceremonies were followed by the community, irrespective of their poverty. The meticulous usage of the terms Rukhwat, Dakshina, or bohole describes cultural and religious practices of the community.

1. Akshata: Coloured rice grains which are showered on the bridal couple in the marriage ceremony.
2. Bashing: Crown of flower placed on the heads of the bride and bridegroom.
3. Bohole: The platform on which the bride and groom sit during the time of marriage.
4. Dakshina: Money or things offered to the Brahmin priest as a mark of respect.
5. Mundawali: Ceremonial string of flowers worn by the bride and groom on their head.

6. Rukhwat: Ritual gifts to the bride from her maternal house, kept on display for the guests. (171-178)

G. Terms used in worship and names of God:

It has been noted that several of the items of worship were employed when performing religious rituals or calling upon God. Every article used in religious rites and rituals has a distinct purpose and significance. The Mahar community is portrayed as adhering to it with unwavering faith.

1. Abir: A fragrant powder made from various ingredients like sandalwood
2. Angara: Holy ash
3. Bhandara: Holy turmeric
4. Bukka: Black powder used for worship
5. Devhara: Platforms on which idols of gods are kept
6. Dhoop stick: Incense stick
7. Dhoop arti: Ritual worship
8. Gomutra: Cow's urine, considered to be holy by upper caste Hindus
9. Gulal: Coloured powder
10. Janeu: The sacred thread worn by Brahmins as a mark of the status of their high caste
11. Khanderaya: God Khandoba of Jejuri
12. Ithuba: A dialectical variation of 'Vithoba'
13. Kumkum: Red powder used to make a mark on the forehead
14. Nag Khandoba: Mud snakes which are worshipped on the Nag Panchami day
15. Nivad: Sacrificial food offered to God
16. Padri: Christian priest
17. Kanher: A wild bush with white-pink flowers which are used for worship (171-178)

H. Terms related to customs and beliefs:

The hidden aspect of life is revealed by words describing rituals and beliefs that show propensities towards superstition. The terms reflect the inhuman treatments meted out to them, and their lack of access to basic needs for survival. Jogtin, Vaghya, or Potraja are cruel, inhumane concepts that reflect metaphorically the rejection of their human status, indicating social inequality.

1. Jogtin: A girl offered to goddess Bhawani/ Ambabai as her ritual worshipper
2. Kalawatin: A dancing woman from the Kolhati caste; also means woman artist.

The word is also used as a term of insult, signifying a woman with loose morals.

3. Murali: A girl offered to God Khandoba in marriage
4. Nachya: Male dancer who dressed as a female in the Tamasha theatre.
5. Pativrata: A woman who upholds her husband as God and serves him faithfully
6. Potraja: Ritual worshipper of God Khandoba; who played drums
7. Sat Asra: Seven spirits that are supposed to dwell in the rivers and wells, and are worshipped as deities.
8. Satwai and Barma: A pair of deities who are believed to write the future of a child on its forehead on the fifth day after the child's birth.
9. Suwasini: A married woman whose husband is alive
10. Vaghya: Ritual worshipper of God Khandoba, offered to the god as a child
11. Vajra: The deadly weapon of the god Vishnu which is invincible (171-178)

I. Terminologies of occupation and caste:

The use of occupational and caste-related terms reveals the details of the

social system. The caste system, which is deeply rooted in Indian culture and society, confines one's body, mind, and soul to discriminatory practices by organising space. People were also denied education and employment as a result of this.

1. Balutedars: The twelve major Shudra and Atishudra Dalit castes were responsible for village work and were entitled to some economic returns
2. Bhagat: A non-brahmin priest; medicine-man; godman
3. Dhangar: Shepherd
4. Kolhati: A nomadic caste lower in the caste hierarchy
5. Mali: Gardener
6. Mamledar: The government official responsible for the administration of the district and the collection of the revenue
7. Maratha: A Kshatriya caste
8. Panch: Committee composed of the elder men of the community which dispensed justice
9. Patil: The administrative officer of the village
10. Shimpi: Tailors
11. Vinkar: Weaver
12. Yeskar: The Mahar whose duty was to work for the village (171-178)

J. Names of musical instruments:

Music comprises part of cultural heritage, with artistes revered in society for playing instruments skillfully. However, the artists from the lower castes were only permitted to play occasionally and without proper respect and honorarium. The words used for musical instruments are retained because they are irreplaceable as innate aspects of cultural identity that have no western equivalence in customs, manner of making and contexts of use.

1. Shenai: A musical instrument
2. Mridung: A kind of a drum (171-178)

K. Name of months in Marathi:

Like the names of musical instruments, the calendar months in India are distinct. The Indian calendar system is based on the solar cycle that keeps pace with the natural cycle in the tropical regions of the globe. So, the names of the months used in the novel are used in the source language. It showcases the respect of the tradition and culture of the society by translator Maya Pandit, while reinforcing the intricate relationship between language and life as well as its socio-cultural dimensions in marking time.

1. Ashwin: Name of the seventh month in the Marathi calendar
2. Chaitra: First month in the Marathi calendar
3. Kartik: Eighth month
4. Shraavan: Fifth month (171-178)

Thus, the translations of one text into a different language becomes a complex process when the source language

is rich in diction, having a unique variety of words for things, objects, emotions, etc, and doesn't share linguistic roots with the target language of translation. Retaining the source of diction for the key terms of cultural and spatial relevance enables dialogue between the two languages to capture the experiences with greater authenticity.

The target text uses the same terms to reveal the Mahar community's socio-economic and cultural status. The language used to refer to money reveals the community's poverty. The description of food, festivities, and household items discloses the lack of abundance of the Dalit families. Maya Pandit maintains authenticity, and consequently, the distinctive flavour of the original Marathi text by using dialects. In the process, the translation represents a subaltern worldview through empathetic sensibility and sincerity as present in the source text.

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