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Research Article



The Politics of Representation: Gender, Caste, and Power in Translated Gujarati Novels

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Abstract

Translation has never been devoid of power politics. Those civilizations that were in power made sure that their culture and way of life were proved superior over others. For imposing this power politics over other cultures and civilizations, they used translation to a great extent. Due to this political nature in the selection of the source texts to be translated into target texts, the process of translation has been condemned as 'treachery,' and translators were regarded as 'traitors.' It was also due to this viewpoint that the process of literary translation was considered inferior to that of creative writing. Nevertheless, the use of translation to impose power politics was a recurrent phenomenon throughout the history of colonization. However, the recent trend of literary translation of selected Indian literary works into English sets a narrative of 'showing

Indian culture and way of life in a regressive manner.' The present research paper focuses on the selected Gujarati fictions (novels) in English translation with this set narrative. The selected Gujarati novels into English translation include: Joseph Mecwan's *Angaliyat* translated as *Angaliyat - The Stepchild* by Rita Kothari, Nandshakar Mehta's *Karan Ghelo* translated as *Karan Ghelo - Gujarat's Last Rajput King* by Tulsi Vatsal and Aban Mukherji, and Kundanika Kapadiya's *Sat Pagala Akashma* translated as *Seven Steps in the Sky* by Kunjbala and William Anthony. It is interesting that translators chose such Gujarati novels that show regression, partiality, and mistreatment of female and weaker sections of society. It is also interesting that these translations were sponsored and published by renowned national and international publications.

Keywords: Caste, Gender, Society, Hegemony, Cultural dominance, Translation studies

Introduction:

Translation has historically played a pivotal role in the dissemination and dominance of cultural ideologies. Powerful civilizations have often used translation as a tool to propagate their cultural superiority and maintain their hegemony over subjugated societies. This practice, rooted in the politics of power, has led to the perception of translation as an act of 'treachery' and translators as 'traitors.' The historical context of colonization underscores how translation was instrumental in imposing foreign cultures and diminishing local ones. However, the contemporary landscape of translation, particularly in the context of Indian literature, reveals a shift towards setting specific narratives. This research paper examines the translation of selected Gujarati novels into English, highlighting how these translations reflect and perpetuate regressive views of Indian culture.

Historical Context of Translation and Power Politics:

Translation has long been intertwined with power dynamics, especially evident during the colonial era when the British Empire leveraged translation to assert dominance over its colonies. The act of translating local texts into English allowed colonizers to access and manipulate the cultural and intellectual heritage of the colonized. This manipulation enabled the British to reinterpret these texts in ways that supported their imperialist narratives and objectives (Niranjana, 1992). By doing so, the colonizers established their cultural supremacy, reinforcing their authority and control while simultaneously diminishing the value and integrity of indigenous cultures. The strategic use of translation thus became a tool of cultural imperialism, ensuring that the colonial power not only governed politically and economically but also maintained cultural hegemony. This historical use of translation highlights its role not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a mechanism of ideological control and cultural subjugation, showcasing the profound impact of translation in the broader context of power politics and colonialism.

Literary Translation and Its Perceived Inferiority:

Literary translation has long been perceived as inferior to original creative writing, a view deeply entrenched in historical power dynamics and manipulations. This perception often arises from the questioning of a translation's fidelity to the original text, with translators sometimes condemned as traitors who have betrayed the author's intentions (Venuti, 1995). Political

motivations behind translations further exacerbate this perception, as translations can prioritize ideological alignment over textual fidelity.

In Indian translation studies, this dynamic is evident in the translation of regional literature into English. For instance, the translation of Gujarati novels such as Joseph Macwan's *Angaliyat* and Nandshankar Mehta's *Karan Ghelo* highlights the socio-political nuances of the original texts, sometimes interpreted as aligning with colonial or post-colonial agendas. Rita Kothari's translation of *Angaliyat* as *The Stepchild* brings to light the struggles of marginalized communities, but it has faced criticism for potentially emphasizing themes that align with certain ideological narratives.

Similarly, the translation of Mehta's *Karan Ghelo* into *Karan Ghelo: Gujarat's Last Rajput King* by Tulsi Vatsal and Aban Mukherji involves complexities where historical and cultural nuances must be carefully managed to avoid misrepresentation. These examples underscore how translations can be seen as political acts, where the choice of what to translate and how to present it can reflect broader socio-political contexts and power structures.

Therefore, the perceived inferiority of literary translation is not merely about linguistic fidelity but is intertwined with the political and cultural narratives that translations often embody.

Contemporary Trends in Translation of Indian Literature with Special Reference to Gujarati Literature in English Translation:

In recent years, the translation of Indian literary works into English has increasingly focused on setting specific narratives that often depict Indian society in a regressive light. This trend is particularly noticeable in the selection of Gujarati novels for translation. Notable examples include Joseph Macwan's *Angaliyat*, Nandshankar Mehta's *Karan Ghelo*, and Kundanika Kapadiya's *Sat Pagala Akashma*, which have been translated into English as *Angaliyat - The Stepchild*, *Karan Ghelo - Gujarat's Last Rajput King*, and *Seven Steps in the Sky*, respectively.

These translations tend to highlight themes of social regression, partiality, and the mistreatment of marginalized groups. For instance, Kundanika Kapadiya's *Seven Steps in the Sky*, translated by Kunjbala and William Anthony, centers on the experiences of women in a patriarchal society. The novel's exploration of gender discrimination and the subjugation of women resonates with contemporary discourses on gender equality and social justice, further emphasizing the regressive aspects of Indian culture as perceived through the lens of gender relations (Kapadiya, 1994).

Likewise, *Angaliyat - The Stepchild* translated by Rita Kothari, portrays the struggles of the Dalit community within a rigid caste system, emphasizing social ostracism and inequality. This perspective aligns with a broader narrative that often seeks to shed light on the darker aspects of Indian society, particularly in terms of caste dynamics and social stratification (Kothari, 2003).

Similarly, *Karan Ghelo - Gujarat's Last Rajput King* by Tulsi Vatsal and Aban Mukherji, delves into the historical decline of the last Rajput king, focusing on themes of leadership failure and moral decay. This translation mirrors a historical narrative that underscores the vulnerabilities and failures of Indian historical figures, contributing to a portrayal of India's past as fraught with challenges and shortcomings (Mehta, 2015).

These examples demonstrate how contemporary translations of Gujarati literature into English are part of a broader trend to depict Indian society's regressive elements, thereby setting

specific narratives that align with particular ideological frameworks. While these translations bring important social issues to the forefront, they also reflect the translators' choices and the socio-political contexts in which they operate, ultimately shaping how Indian literature is perceived globally.

Analysis of Selected Gujarati Novels:

1) *Sat Pagala Akashma* by Kundanika Kapadiya

Starting from the choice of *Sat Pagala Akashma* for translation over many other representative Gujarati novels is a deliberate political choice aimed at setting a specific narrative. *Sat Pagala Akashma*, translated as *Seven Steps in the Sky* by Kunjbala and William Anthony, centers on the experiences of women within the constraints of a patriarchal society. The novel's exploration of gender discrimination and the subjugation of women reflects deep-seated societal issues (Kapadiya, 1994). The translation of this novel reinforces a narrative that underscores the regressive treatment of women in Indian culture.

The selection of specific texts for translation is rarely a neutral act. It involves decisions that are often influenced by socio-political contexts and the translator's or publisher's agenda. By choosing to translate *Sat Pagala Akashma*, a novel that vividly portrays the struggles of women in a patriarchal society, the translators and publishers signal a focus on issues of gender discrimination and societal regression. This choice may reflect a broader intention to highlight these issues on an international stage, thus inviting global scrutiny and potential advocacy for change.

Kundanika Kapadiya's *Sat Pagala Akashma* is a profound exploration of the lives of women who navigate the oppressive structures of a patriarchal society. The novel delves into the systemic injustices faced by women, shedding light on their resilience and resistance. By translating this work, Kunjbala and William Anthony make these narratives accessible to a wider audience, allowing readers to engage with the themes of gender inequality and social justice that are prevalent in many parts of the world.

Translation is not merely a linguistic act but a cultural and political one as well. It involves interpreting and conveying cultural nuances, social contexts, and ideological underpinnings. The translation of *Sat Pagala Akashma* as *Seven Steps in the Sky* serves to highlight and critique the regressive treatment of women in Indian society. This act of translation thus becomes a tool for setting a narrative that aligns with contemporary discourses on gender and social justice.

In translation studies, the choice of works to translate and the manner in which they are translated can have significant implications. For instance, translating a novel like *Sat Pagala Akashma* can be contrasted with the translation of other Gujarati works that might focus on different themes such as economic development, political history, or cultural festivals. The decision to prioritize a narrative centered on gender discrimination reflects an intention to engage with and possibly challenge existing social norms.

Another example from Indian translation studies is the translation of Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf (The Quilt)*. Like *Sat Pagala Akashma*, *Lihaaf* addresses issues of gender and sexuality. Its translation has sparked discussions on the intersection of gender, sexuality, and social norms in India. Similarly, the translation of Perumal Murugan's *Madhorubhagan (One Part Woman)* into English brought international attention to the societal pressures and the concept of marital fidelity in rural India.

Thus, the translation of *Sat Pagala Akashma* is a strategic choice that serves to highlight the issues of gender discrimination and the patriarchal structures within Indian society. This political act of translation not only makes these critical narratives accessible to a broader audience but also sets a specific narrative that aligns with global discourses on social justice. By understanding the implications of such choices in translation studies, we can better appreciate the role of translators and publishers in shaping cultural and social narratives.

This approach is not unique to Gujarati literature. Translation studies have shown that the selection of texts for translation often reflects broader socio-political agendas. For instance, the translation of Latin American literature during the Cold War was influenced by the desire to promote certain political ideologies. Similarly, the translation of African literature in the post-colonial era has often focused on themes of resistance and liberation, reflecting global interest in these narratives (Berman, 2004; Venuti, 1995).

2) *Angaliyat* by Joseph Mecwan

Choosing to translate Joseph Macwan's *Angaliyat* over many other representative Gujarati novels is a political decision that sets a specific narrative. The translation of *Angaliyat* as *Angaliyat - The Stepchild* by Rita Kothari delves into themes of social ostracism and the plight of marginalized communities. This novel's depiction of the Dalit community's struggles within a rigid caste system illuminates the regressive social structures persisting in Indian society (Kothari, 2003). The choice to translate this particular novel emphasizes a narrative of social regression and inequality, reflecting broader socio-political agendas.

The act of translating *Angaliyat* is not merely a linguistic exercise but a socio-political statement. During the colonial and post-colonial periods, translations often served to either highlight or undermine cultural narratives. Choosing *Angaliyat* highlights the continued relevance of caste issues in modern India, thereby drawing international attention to the plight of marginalized communities. Such choices in translation can influence how Indian society is perceived globally, often emphasizing narratives that align with specific political or social agendas.

Angaliyat explores deep-rooted issues of caste-based discrimination and the resulting social ostracism. The protagonist's experiences as a Dalit reflect a broader commentary on the systemic inequalities ingrained in Indian society. By translating this novel, Kothari brings to the fore these regressive social structures, presenting a stark picture of inequality and social injustice. This translation serves as a critique of the caste system, resonating with global movements for social justice and equality.

Other Gujarati novels that could have been translated might focus on different aspects of Indian society, such as cultural richness, economic development, or historical achievements. For instance, translating a novel like *Saraswatichandra* by Govardhanram Tripathi would present a vastly different image of Gujarati culture, focusing on the complexities of love, duty, and the socio-political issues of the 19th century. By contrast, choosing *Angaliyat* underscores the ongoing struggles against social injustices, framing India within a narrative of ongoing socio-political challenges.

The choice of *Angaliyat* for translation has significant implications for how Gujarati literature, and by extension, Indian literature, is perceived internationally. It shapes the narrative around Indian society, emphasizing ongoing struggles rather than historical achievements or

cultural richness. This can affect the literary canon and influence the themes that are associated with Indian literature globally.

The translation of *Angaliyat* is a strategic choice that underscores a narrative of social regression and inequality in Indian society. By focusing on the plight of the Dalit community, this translation draws attention to the persistent issues of caste-based discrimination, aligning with global discourses on social justice. This decision reflects the broader socio-political contexts within which literary translations are made, highlighting the powerful role that translation plays in shaping cultural narratives and international perceptions.

3) *Karan Ghelo* by Nandshakar Mehta

Choosing to translate *Karan Ghelo* over many other historical Gujarati novels is not just a literary decision but a political one, aimed at setting a particular narrative. The novel, originally written by Nandshankar Mehta and translated as *Karan Ghelo – Gujarat's Last Rajput King* by Tulsi Vatsal and Aban Mukherji, delves into the historical decline of the last Rajput king of Gujarat, *Karan Ghelo*. This period of socio-political turmoil is marked by the failure of leadership and moral decay (Mehta, 2015), which the translation brings to a broader audience, highlighting specific aspects of Indian history that may align with certain contemporary ideological narratives.

Translating *Karan Ghelo* serves to underscore the vulnerabilities and failures of historical Indian figures, thereby resonating with post-colonial themes of critique and introspection. This choice aligns with a broader narrative that emphasizes the flaws and eventual downfall of Indian leadership in historical contexts, possibly reflecting a post-colonial lens that scrutinizes indigenous rule and its limitations. By focusing on *Karan Ghelo's* weaknesses and the consequent societal repercussions, the translation can be seen as part of a larger discourse that questions traditional heroism and the glorification of historical figures.

The political implications of translation choices are not limited to *Karan Ghelo*. The translation of Joseph Macwan's *Angaliyat* as *The Stepchild* by Rita Kothari also reflects socio-political considerations. *Angaliyat* highlights the struggles of marginalized communities, particularly the Dalits, within the rigid caste system of Gujarat. By translating this novel, Kothari brings attention to issues of social justice and caste-based discrimination, aligning the narrative with contemporary discourses on equality and human rights. This translation choice highlights the lived experiences of marginalized groups, offering a critique of social hierarchies that persist in modern India.

Similarly, the translation of U. R. Ananthamurthy's Kannada novel *Samskara* into English by A.K. Ramanujan is another example of how translation choices reflect socio-political narratives. *Samskara* deals with the rigidities and hypocrisies of the caste system in Karnataka. The English translation opened up the novel to a global audience, bringing critical issues of caste and social reform to the forefront. The translation choice here underscores a narrative that challenges orthodoxies and advocates for social change.

Moreover, the political dimensions of literary translation can also be observed in the translation of Bhisham Sahni's Hindi novel *Tamas* into English. *Tamas*, which means 'darkness,' portrays the horrors of communal violence during the partition of India in 1947. The translation of this novel into English brings international attention to the traumatic events of partition, highlighting the deep-seated communal tensions and the human cost of political decisions. The

translation serves not only as a historical account but also as a reminder of the dangers of divisive politics.

These examples illustrate that translation is never a neutral act; it is imbued with political significance and potential for shaping narratives. By choosing specific works for translation, translators and publishers contribute to the construction of particular historical and cultural discourses. The translation of Karan Ghelo, for instance, is part of a broader effort to re-examine and critique historical narratives, questioning the glorification of past leadership and highlighting the complexities of socio-political dynamics in historical contexts.

Sponsorship and Publication in Translation Studies:

The sponsorship and publication of literary translations by renowned national and international publishers often raise critical questions about the motivations behind promoting particular narratives. The backing of these prestigious institutions suggests an endorsement of the perspectives offered by the translations, which can significantly shape global perceptions of the source culture.

For instance, the translation of regional Indian literature into English often receives support from notable publishing houses. This was seen with the translation of Bama's *Karukku* and Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*. Bama's *Karukku*, translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom and published by Oxford University Press, presents the life and struggles of Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu. The choice to translate and publish this work under a prestigious banner not only validates its narrative but also aligns with a global agenda of highlighting marginalized voices.

Similarly, Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*, translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan and published by Penguin India, delves into the socio-cultural challenges faced by a couple in rural Tamil Nadu. The international attention this translation garnered highlights how publishers can influence the reception of regional narratives on a global stage.

These examples underline the need for critical examination of the interests and agendas of sponsors and publishers. The selective nature of these translations can often reflect and reinforce specific socio-political ideologies, shaping how global audiences perceive Indian culture. Thus, the role of sponsorship and publication is not merely about bringing literature to wider audiences but also about navigating the complex interplay of cultural representation and power dynamics.

Conclusion:

The translation of Indian literature into English, particularly Gujarati works, underscores the intricate interplay of power dynamics and cultural representation. Historical instances, such as the British colonial use of translation for cultural dominance, reflect how translations have long been tools of ideological control (Niranjana, 1992). In contemporary contexts, translations like *Angaliyat* and *Karan Ghelo* highlight societal issues but also reveal the translators' and sponsors' underlying agendas. The sponsorship by prestigious national and international publishers often raises critical questions about their motivations, suggesting an endorsement of certain perspectives and shaping global perceptions of Indian culture. For instance, Rita Kothari's translation of *Angaliyat* and Tulsi Vatsal's translation of *Karan Ghelo* are not just literary acts but political ones, aiming to bring attention to specific social issues within Indian society, such as caste discrimination and historical vulnerabilities (Kothari, 2003; Mehta, 2015). Furthermore, translations like Bama's *Karukku* and Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* highlight the struggles of marginalized communities, reflecting a global agenda of promoting marginalized

voices (Holmstrom, 2014; Vasudevan, 2014). Thus, the act of translation, influenced by socio-political contexts and supported by influential sponsors, becomes a powerful tool in shaping cultural narratives and international perceptions. This critical examination of translation practices reveals the profound impact of literary translation beyond mere linguistic conversion, emphasizing its role in cultural and ideological representation.

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