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Translating Anil Gharai's Bangla Dalit Story "Uttap" into English

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Abstract: Translation is a skilful literary exercise where a translator reproduces both the meaning and style of the Source Text into the Target one remaining as close as possible to the ST. It is the fact that proper equivalents in some cases are not available due to the linguistic limitations and cultural pluralities. The problems of translating a dalit text and a non-dalit one are different. The texts come out from the different cultural backgrounds, and the different linguistic conventions. Translating the voices of the subalterns/dalits, the anger and protests, the humiliations and the exploitations, the ceremonies and the rituals, though challenging and problematic, is really an enriching experience too. This paper shares my own experience as a translator, in translating the Bangla Dalit stories of Anil Gharai with special reference to the story "Uttap".

Key Words: Translation, equivalents, dalit, subaltern.

Eugene Nida from his book *Towards A Science of Translating* (1964) defines translation as "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style" (83). Translation is an act of negotiation between the Source and Target Texts in substituting the linguistic and cultural equivalents. But the linguistic limitations and the cultural pluralities always make the task of the translator really problematic. It becomes more problematic in translating the Dalit Literature because the angers and protests of the dalits out of the life-long exploitations and deprivations are very much rooted in their words. The translation of Dalit Literature into English not only provides a space for the marginalized people in the mainstream society but also acts as a liberating tool for them. In translating a dalit/subaltern text, a translator serves



the role not only of a cultural mediator but also the cultural ambassador of the subaltern/dalit people in rendering the literature about the people who have been so long excluded from the mainstream society even before their birth. The present paper is an attempt to share my own experience as a translator, especially the challenges and the difficulties in translating the Bangla dalit stories of Anil Gharai with special reference to the story “Uttap”.

Anil Gharai (1957-2013) is perhaps the most prolific and versatile Dalit writer of the contemporary Bangla Literature. He was born on November 1, 1957, at Rukminipur, in the district of Purba Medinipur. He has produced many volumes of novels, short stories and poems over the last three decades. ‘Kak’ and ‘Noonbari’ are his first published collection of short story and novel respectively. *Megh Jiboner Trishna* (1996), *Banabashi* (1990), *Mukuler Gondho* (1993), *Boba Juddho* (1993), *Tarango Lata* (1993), *Kanone Kusum Koli* (1993), *Plaban* (1994) are his noteworthy novels. *Garbha Dao* (1993), *Germaner Maa* (1991), *Bharatborsho* (1992) are his notable stories. *Batasher Swarolipi* (2003), *Jaadu Orna* (2004), *Roudro Songshkaar* (2005), *Aaguner Padabali* (2009), *Ghaam Ashru O Aagun* (2009), *Pata Shorir* (2010), *Bhatful Bahtgondho* (2011), *Bonshai Bishaad* (2012) are the poetry collections. His works have been translated into English and a good number of Indian languages. In his literary world, the downtrodden and the caste-ridden people of the Indian society inhabit. His works deal with the hard realities of the marginalized, neglected and caste-ridden people of the Indian society. He graphically portrays the sorrows, sufferings, pains and angers of these neglected and exploited people of the society. Almost all of his characters are from the lower strata of the society. They have become life-like in the hands of Anil Gharai. For his outstanding contribution to literature Anil Gharai has received Bharat Excellency Award, Tarasankar Puraskar, Bankim Puraskar, Michael Madhusudan Award, Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule Sahitya Puraskar, Dalit Sahitya Akademi Puraskar etc. In portraying the sorrows and sufferings of the Dalit people, his writings have become the *Mahabharata* of Bangla Dalit life.



The present story “*Uttap*”, translated here as “Warmth” is taken from the collection “*Kak O Annyanya Golpa*” (Crow and Other Stories). Though the story is small in length and quite different from the other stories of Anil Gharai in depicting the dalit marginalizations, yet it is no less powerful in highlighting the humiliations and exploitations of the caste-ridden Indian society. The story is about the tragic life-story of a sweeper named Lakhai and his wife Yashoda. Setting against the backdrop of the hardships of Dalit life, the writer has portrayed some of the happiest moments in their lives. Poverty could not restrain their love to each other. Lakhai seems to be a born-sweeper. He has a passion for sweeping. As he was given the opportunity by the people of the market committee to sweep the village market twice a week, he readily accepted. Though he had to clean the filthy and dirty things of the market, yet he felt proud of his profession. He worshipped his sweeping broom as the goddess Lakshmi. He used to say his wife Yashoda, “The crow among the birds, and I among the humans, are the best. Do you know why? Crow cleans the garbage, and I too do the same” (translation mine). He was given potatoes, bringals, radishes, parwals, rices and pulses by the shop-keepers. Yashoda too accompanied him with the wicker basket. They used to gather the garbage and lit fire. The warmth of the fire gave them pleasure in the wintry evening. Thus they used to spend their days happily. But it comes to an end when on a Friday market day Lakhai became seriously ill while sweeping, and died. The whole world crushed on Yashoda. Ramlal, the clever man from the nearby slum, took the opportunity. He came to help her, but his intention was to grasp the duty of sweeping from her. The men from the market, even Yashoda’s own daughter Minu and the son-in-law, advised her to leave sweeping. But she was not willing to leave the broom. So many memories crowd in her mind. In one night, she began to think deeply. She could not decide. She felt helpless. At that moment she felt the need to lit garbage to get warmth. She embraced the broom to her breasts, and felt the warmth of her man Lakhai. Finally, she decided her mind not to sacrifice it to anybody. In the morning, Yashoda came out from the muddy hut with the broom in her hand.



In depicting the dalit sensibilities, Mr. Gharai is really impeccable within his limited canvas here. Translating Anil Gharai's works is always an enriching experience. His stories are written in the typical rustic language spoken by the people of the Dalit society which are really difficult to translate. However, it has made his stories more life-like. The present story is written in simple ordinary lucid Bangla prose. As a translator, my effort was to 'carry over' the sense, rhythm and tone of the Bangla Text into English to the possible extent. The words like '*haat*', '*tola*' '*ghugni muri*', '*dada*', '*boudi*' are retained in the Target Text within italics, and briefly explained in the footnotes. The proper equivalents of the words are not found in the Target Language that can reveal the rustic spirit of the Source Text. However, these footnotes could have been avoided, but somehow to make the readers acquainted with the Source culture these have been retained here. The act may be accused as a strategy of 'foreignization' in the words of Lawrence Venuti, but it would not stand on the way of understanding the Source Text. Finally, the problems of translation are here much less than Anil Gharai's story "*Germaner Ma*" (Anil Gharai: *Shresthya Golpa*) which is one of Gharai's difficult dalit texts to translate into English or any other language because of Gharai's use of dialects. Like sweeping, here Gharai is concerned with the profession of skinning dead animals, and *dhaigiri*, the practice of child-delivery from the womb of the rural women during child-birth. The central character Rambhadhai, the mother of German, is named after her profession. The whole story centres around her life-long sufferings, the humiliations and exploitations by the upper-caste society. The story is mentioned here to highlight the difficulties in translating Anil Gharai's dalit texts.

Translation has a significant role in the multi-lingual and multi-cultural Indian literary scenario. Translating Dalit writings is the most challenging task for a translator. Translating the voices of the dalits or the subalterns from a regional language into English or from English into a regional language demands proper aesthetic treatment in articulating their long suppressed angers and protests. Dalit/subaltern lifestyle, ceremonies, rituals and rites that form the essence of their very existence should be transformed proper into the Target Text.



But sometimes it is found that the voices of the dalit/subaltern remain a 'far cry' in translational practices. The translators manipulate in order to suit the text to their political and ideological purposes. Instead of empowering the dalits or the subalterns through translation, sometimes the translators empower themselves. And here in lies the real 'problem' of translation which should be taken much care in the act of translation.

Warmth

- Anil Gharai

There is no furniture in this muddy hut except the broom of Lakhai. As a sweeper, he was an expert. Observing his well behavior and good nature, the people of the *haat*¹ committee gave him the duty of sweeping the *haat*. The condition was that he had to sweep the whole place twice a week. Those two days were monday and friday.

Sweeping the *haat* was almost a passion to him. Lakhai could feel an excitement to the core of his heart. In pride, he used to say Yashoda, "The crow among the birds, and I among the humans, are the best. Do you know why? Crow cleans the garbage, and I too do the same."

Yashoda could think that there was nothing spurious in the words of her man. The dirty things were enough in the big *haat*. Dust, straws, dried leaves, rejected papers, scales of fishes - everything was there. After sweeping the whole place, Lakahai used to gather those in a place, and then lighted fire. All the dirty things burst into a blaze. And the warmth of the hot waves used to touch Yashoda who remained standing there. During the winter days, Lakhai used to say jokingly, "you take the warmth here, I am leaving. I've to collect *tola*² from the shops."



Though collecting *tola* was a troublesome matter, but this was not a burden for Lakhai. Holding his wicker basket, as soon as he used to come in front of the shops, the shopkeepers gave him potatoes, bringals, radishes, parwals etc. In some cases, he also got rice and pulses too. Whatever he got from a *haat* day, was enough for the whole week. So, there was no such scarcity in the life of Lakhai. He used to say Yashoda in a bragging tone, “Minu’s mother, this broom is the goddess *Laksmi* to me. Even after my death, you would never give this broom to anybody”.

Perhaps these evil words were heard by the *Yamraj*, the King of Death. On the Friday *haat*, when Lakhai was sweeping, he felt dizzy and fell on the ground. The people of the *haat* committee admitted him to the nearby hospital. But only after a single day, Lakhai passed away without saying a word.

After his death, Yashoda saw everything dark in front of her. After hearing the news, the daughter and the son-in-law rushed to her. Ramlal from the nearby slum came to her help from the very beginning. He encouraged her and said, “*Boudi*, it’s true that *dada*³ is no more, but don’t worry. I’m beside you. Whenever you need my help, just call me. In the name of the Alimighty, I promise to stay always beside you”. Yashoda felt that what Ramlal did in her adversity is really unforgettable. Even her own brother would never do this. Her eyes got filled in tears in gratitude. She said to Ramlal, “I will not forget your help throughout my life”.

Ramlal twisted his palms. There was the clear reflection of knavery in his eyes. He said in mild voice, “*Boudi*, if you don’t mind, I’ll say one thing to you. You are a mere woman. You cannot do the duty of sweeping the *haat*. Rather, hand over me the duty. Whatever *tola* I would get, we both will share equally. Like you, I too a poor needy man. I will also be benefitted.”

Yashoda could not reply anything whether yes or no. Minu and the son-in-law said, “Mother, Ramlal uncle is right. You should agree. It would do good to you.” But Yashoda



could not decide. She asked for time to think. The people of the *haat* committee too came to her house. They also gave her the same proposal.

The daughter and the son-in-law had gone almost three days ago. Sitting alone on her muddy hut, Yashoda sobs. Her mind is crowded of Lakhai, and his words. In every *haat* day, she used to go with Lakhai with the big vermilion on her head. Gazing at her face, Lakhai sometimes said “Minu’s mother, today you look like a goddess. You are my deity.”

Sitting together in the tea-shop of the *haat*, they used to eat *ghugni muri*.⁴ Then they went together to collect *tola*. The wicker basket was in Yashoda’s hand. Lakhai sometimes said, “*Babu*, today I’m not alone. We are two! Today you must give *tola* for two persons.”

The shopkeepers used to give them *tola* in utmost generosity. They used to say, we feel jealous in seeing such happy union in both of you. We don’t have such conjugal affection in our own houses too.

So many memories crowd in Yashoda’s mind. There is only one broom of coconut leaves that peeps through the pupils of her eyes. Lakhai used to say, “This broom works so many things. The broom not only cleans, sometimes it works more than a stick in necessary moments. It is more effective in exorcise to make someone free from the evil.” Yashoda used to laugh and almost lie down on Lakhai’s bosom.

Night grows, yet Yashoda can’t sleep. The broom is placed in the corner of the hut. Lakhai used to put it there every day in the same position. In the noon time, he used to repair it in utmost attention. When Yashoda used to call him for meal, he felt sometimes disgusted, and used to say, “Don’t call me to eat while working. First work, and then filling the belly, do you understand!”

Yashoda thought throughout the night, but can’t come to any decision. The wintry air enters into the hut rapidly. She feels herself very desolate and helpless. Now it’s the time to light the garbage for warmth. No life can thrive without warmth. In her hands, Yashoda holds



the broom to her breasts in tight grasp. The warmth of Lakhai's body spreads in her body. She can never hand over this warmth to anybody. Before dawn, Yashoda comes out from the muddy hut with the broom in her hand.

Foot Notes:

1. *Haat* is a village market held twice or thrice on the fixed days of the week in the rural areas.
2. *Tola* is a rate in kind collected from the traders. The market committee or the owner of a market takes it from the traders for using the market.
3. The youngers address the elders as '*dada*', and their wives as '*boudi*'.
4. *Ghugni* is a kind of food prepared with pigeon-peas, potatoes, coconut kernel, spices etc. And *muri* is a kind of dry food made by parching rice on the hot sand.

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