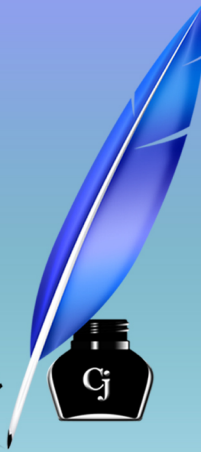


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Translation: An Attempt to Deconstruct Historiography in *The Branded*

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Translation is in par with any creative activity and thus it becomes a primary act. Translation not only becomes the medium of recognition beyond the source language community but also serves as a representation. In “The Branded” by P.A.Kolharkar one could see how translation becomes a representation and also how through translation the act of deconstructing historiography is carried out implicitly. When the subaltern speaks in order to be heard and recognized the medium for expression is denied as the subaltern is confined to the structures of the grand narrative. Translation represents the voice of the voiceless and therefore rewrites history. Though the narrative does not explain the grand narrative construct, as one reads the novel, it becomes evident that the life of Uchalya tribes is defined by the hegemonic power that designs historiography. The act of deconstructing historiography through translation can be traced out through four factors, namely, translation as representation, the need for the translation at the particular time, (in the conception of the translator), the political act of reading, interpreting and critiquing the translation and the issue of representativeness. This paper has taken the translation as a separate entity and through the translator’s note and through the reflections of Lakshman Gaikwad tries to discuss the factors mentioned above.

“The Branded” Uchalya is an autobiographical novel written by Laxman Gaikwad in Marathi and translated into English by P.A.Kolharkar. It was published in the year 1998 by the Sahitya Akademi. The translation has a “Translator’s note” and the “Reflections” of the author which clearly and strongly emphasize the intentions of both the author and the translator. Gaikwad’s “Reflections” has powerfully and elaborately explained the necessity to write the autobiography. It is an attempt to give the subaltern a chance to voice out and it does not stop there for its main aim and focus is what Gayatri Spivak calls deconstructing historiography. As she puts it, “Deconstruction is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced.” The truth produced here is that of branding a community that had no option other than to accept that branding. Gaikwad has made an attempt to erase the established political and social prejudices and preconceptions about his community and urges the leaders of the country to rethink in humanistic terms. He also wants the people of his community who have the benefit of modern education to work for the betterment of their community. “It is with this dual purpose that I undertake to write down the following rankling account of my life” (Gaikwad)

The intention of the author is known to the reader only through the translator who has translated the reflections of the author. This part becomes important because it is straight from the author’s mouth and in a way it gives P.A.Kolharkar a chance to show the readers the necessity of a translation. In the essay “Translation as Disruption: Post-Structuralism and the Post-Colonial Context” Niranjana points out clearly through her discussions how a text is always unstable in the source language and how it demands translation to make it stable, in a way a book does not live when it is written but only in its afterlife. This translation is just not for the sake of

reading an autobiography of a Subaltern but is seen as political move to give voice to the branded people in a language that would reach the people concerned and henceforth justifying Niranjana's statement. Here the people concerned are the politicians who are in the position to redefine the Uchalya community. Both the author and the translator are clear about why they have made this attempt and the main focus of this analysis is to see how far the translator has succeeded in rendering in his translation. This analysis focuses on the preface and the translator's note to understand translation as an act of deconstruction.

From the translator's note one can understand that as textual and secular emissaries of the state power, both historiography and law as Guha in his essay "Chandra's Death" points out, not only structure the past but also translate the other modes into structuring in them. Hegel's influential theory looks at historiography as "History is constructed as a linear movement, through erasure, toward an already predetermined meaning. In order to ensure this coherency of this totality, contradictory moments that do not record the present's coming to Being are erased or expelled from signification" Thus historiography in a broad sense has been without exception, official in character. It has been undertaken for authoritative purposes, for the information of the government, for its use and for its determination of policy. The hegemonic power determines these grand narratives. The British Government had branded the Uchalya tribe as criminals and the reports that were prepared by Kennedy, the Dy I.G.P. Railways and Criminal Investigation Bombay Presidency about the life and the habits of these tribes created an indelible impression that these tribes were criminal in nature and deserved no sympathy. The worst part is that even after a century or more this impression persists and "Gaikwad's book is an eloquent attempt to expose this prejudice and bring people round to the view that the people of these tribes are human beings and are in need of a helping hand from all to bring them into the mainstream of social life." (Kolharkar) The mainstream of social life is patterned by the capitalist bourgeois powers and Gaikwad who is able to see the difference between the life of his tribe and the social life of the mainstream, voices out his determination to get the benefits of the mainstream society to his people. To a man who was able to get an exposure through education and through political influences, a helping hand to enter into the mainstream of social life becomes important and necessary to improvise his society. This is what one can understand through the translator's note and the translated 'Reflections' of the author.

The act of deconstructing historiography through translation can be traced out through four factors, namely

- Translation as representation.
- The need for the translation at the particular time. (in the conception of the translator)
- The political act of reading, interpreting and critiquing the translation.
- The issue of representativeness

Translation as Representation:

Kolharkar in his note says that the compelling tone of the work, both militant as well as frank is what promoted him to undertake this translation and the reader has to see if that compelling tone has been reproduced or not. This understanding of the motive will place the novel in the realm of representation. The focus is only on the translation as it is considered as a new product and not

the reflection of the original. Taking few instances from the novel the concept of representation can be analyzed and the translator's note has been used to support this representation. The powerful voice that is heard in the novel is that of Gaikwad's as he is the narrator but at the same time subtly yet emphatically the voice of historiography takes the commanding position. The voice of historiography is the predetermined meaning, the definition of the hegemonic power. The tribal people voice out in the way that the imperial power has defined them. Though years have passed the definition has neither been changed nor altered. Their lives circle around this grand narrative. One should notice that the novel imbibes the grand narrative into it and uses it to voice out its need for redefinition. To a large extent the translation has kept the spirit of representing the voice of historiography subduing or pushing to the margin the voice of the subaltern. When one understands how the hegemonic powers operate through the lives of the subaltern, the voice of the voiceless that is represented throughout the novel is also understood. When it comes to the voices of the voiceless Spivak points out that "They're within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse." This is what one sees in "The Branded" wherein the plight of the tribes is brought between the lines in the way history itself was recorded, narrated, and understood. The Uchalya tribes are forced into a predetermined life right from their birth by the people in power, the politicians, the police and the rich. They need to undergo several hard and cruel training in order to fit themselves into the dictated role. The below example from the text would suffice,

"They are trained to withstand physical beatings and all sorts of torture so that they will not disclose the names of their colleagues when caught and tortured by the police for information. They are trained to be tough and not to crack up when severely tortured." (Page.6 "The Branded")

Their society is so patterned into this concept of acceptance of being branded and as a result, they fail to understand that they ought to come out of this confinement. When Laxman makes an attempt to go to school he is accused by his own community,

"Because you have admitted your son to school, our children are suffering from loose motion and vomiting. Since your bastard of a son has started going to school diseases are visiting us" (Page.16 "The Branded")

Being branded as criminals they are deprived of education, sense of hygiene, a respectful job and a peaceful life.

"I did not take a bath for months. Nobody from the household ever told me to take bath. Washing clothes was not even thought of." (Page.12 "The Branded")

This lack of sense of hygiene is seen in their places of living, the food they eat and in the way they live. Why couldn't they come out of it? It is clearly because there is nobody who wants them to come out of that prescribed narration of the hegemonic powers.

"But so branded and distrusted was our community socially that no one offered work to the people of our tribe." (Page 10, "The Branded")

"Even if a criminal tries to improve himself in all honesty and sincerity he is not allowed to do so by the society in which he lives."(Page 200 "The Branded")

History has molded these people to construct their lives according to the framework dictated by the hegemonic imperials. Attempts to deconstruct this narrative have not been done by any

politician even after independence. The situation is the same even after independence except that the hegemonic powers have changed names. In the beginning it was the British and now it is the democratic Indian government. Apart from the names nothing has been altered, the colonial hegemonic structures are reproduced or replicated in a post-colonial nation. The question to be asked is whether the country has accepted the colonial framework, in other words the colonial construct of the Uchalya tribes or is it just the careless attitude of the politicians who are not in a mood to worry about these tribes. A glance at today's politics would show that the people in power are brilliant to bend these colonial structures according to their necessity. They in the name of image creation do exactly what the colonizers did. To the question of the tribes being branded, they would surely blame the historiography for their failure to rewrite the lives of the Uchalya tribes. If the country's politicians are not willing to revive these tribes from the predetermined meaning then who would? The only one, who could get away from the prescribed notion, is Gaikwad who understood that his community needs a re-definition and therefore fights to achieve that through his novel. "The Branded" in no place fails to represent this ambition of the author but at the same time portrays the power of historiography.

The Need for the Translation at the Particular Time:

Reading the "Reflections" of the author one could see that the translator has not only understood the concept of being branded but also understood the anxiety and anguish of Gaikwad who has emphatically lashed out at the atrocities committed by the people in power and position. Without even going into the text one can understand from the translated preface of the author that he has a dual purpose in writing this autobiography. One has to look into the author's preface too, for it has been translated to serve a purpose. Here it gives the reader an insight into how the translator has taken the effort to carry the intensity of the issue in his translation. It also shows the need for the translation at the particular time. The words of the author would be enough to show that this translation is not only serving the purpose of trying to bring in the tribes into the mainstream but also to reflect the society of the 20th century which has not changed even a bit in the 21st century. In fact it has worsened.

"Here on the one hand is a tribe having been denied all lawful living, is forced to resort to thieving and pilfering to satisfy the basic wants—hunger and shelter. There on the other hand are the so called respected and educated people brazenly indulging in looting and amassing crores of rupees. Ironically not those who pile up crores by sheer corruption and nepotism but those who pilfer a paltry sum of ten or fifteen rupees just for their daily bread are branded as thieves and treated with leperous disdain"(Reflections "The Branded")

There are not specific incidents that show explicitly the atrocities of the people in power but the undercurrent of power politics is embedded throughout the matrix of the novel. The incidents that happen in the mill in Latur, the attitude of the police in particular, the case of Jayaba and the best example could be part where Gaikwad a man who stood for principles is forced to bribe officers for the approval of his tender.

"I enquired about the percentage. He told me, "You have to distribute about 30 to 35% among the officers: D.E-10%, G.I.Engineer-10%.....Godown Clerk-2%. I had never before been initiated in this affair of giving bribes. I only knew lodging complaints against bribe taking officers. Now I could be forced to offer bribe money in this business. I had carried out campaigns against injustice and corruption. I had fought against all sorts of injustice. I was deeply hurt I was being forced to succumb to bribe-giving" (Page 220 "The Branded")

The translation thus becomes politically important for it vigorously highlights the current situation where not only the branded but the common people too suffer from the game of power politics. It has fulfilled its aim of hitting at the crux of corruption and of portraying India in its true color of political representation.

The Political Act of Reading, Interpreting and Critiquing the Translation:

From the above analysis, translation can be read as a political act of reading, interpreting and critiquing. One has to in the first place understand how representation is done by the translator. In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak emphasizes the fact that representation is a sort of speech act, with a speaker and a listener. Often, the subaltern makes an attempt at self-representation, perhaps a representation that falls outside the lines laid down by the official institutional structures of representation. Yet, this act of representation is not heard. It is not recognized by the listener, perhaps because it does not fit in with what is expected of the representation. Therefore, representation by subaltern individuals seems nearly impossible. If this is the case then the representation by Gaikwad to deconstruct historiography would not be possible for the focus will be only on the life of the tribal people, their customs and beliefs and their profession. But as one reads and interprets it as a post-colonial writing, the politics of narration is understood. The translation clearly paves way to such an interpretation and evaluation as the voices of the voiceless are in a way pushing the novel into a new paradigm of historiography, away from the grand narrative and towards a model that seeks to include valid and myriad voices.

“If a bird is confined to life in a house by clipping its wings lest it flies away, it is forced to remain in the same house all its life. Even if it wishes to fly, it cannot. Absolutely in the same way once a person these tribes is shoved into jail right at his birth, he gets inextricably bonded to it. Even if anybody tries to retrieve such a person from his prison or the person himself tries to escape from it he cannot come out of the hell. Because his wings are clipped in early childhood. He bears the indelible brand on his forehead for all to see. Even if a criminal tries to improve himself in all honesty and sincerity he is not allowed to do so by the society in which he lives.”(Page 200 “The Branded”)

As the above lines are interpreted and critiqued as a political act, the voice of the representation is clearly read between lines. It is not just the plight of the tribes that but also how they are represented by the grand narrative is understood. That should have been the author's intention and the translation has succeeded in it. Kolharkar has said that he has tried to be as near as possible to the original and transmigration of the spirit of the original is seen in the translation. At the same time while critiquing one does not fail to see the paradox that by translating into English, the position of the subaltern is again defined by the language of the colonials and thus the narration becomes the part of the grand narrative. Here comes the issue of representativeness.

The Issue of Representativeness:

In the essay “The Wandering Indian” Alessandra Consolara addresses this issue. “Given that nowadays we have a ‘global’ language like English, should we conclude that writing in an indigenous language, such as an Indian vernacular, is a symptom of intellectual narrowness, greatly reducing the possibility for a work written in that language to reach a certain degree of quality? Shouldn't the political value of writing in a ‘subaltern’ language be taken into greater

account?" (Consolara) Though the issue of representation could be addressed it cannot be solved because if Indian Literature has the function to represent India as a nation on the world map the question about who represents the nation becomes relevant. The nation with many languages, many religions and different cultures is still holding on to the colonial language to enter into the global market. Today not only Indian writing in English enjoys the limelight but the critical theories of Indian Literature are also in English. "The point is that the international visibility of writers using English is infinitely larger than one of the writers in any other language."(Consolara) Therefore Indian Literature is nowadays often represented almost exclusively by English, the language that has no Indian origin. "Uchalya" is translated into Telugu and Gujarati too but one could see as we operate in an English speaking world that it is "The Branded" that determines its representation.

The translator has mentioned that the original book suffers from obscure composition and that he has tried to make it intelligible only after consulting the writer and after having the meanings clear to him. This shows that translation is not merely translating something but utmost it is an understanding of a work to the core and producing it as a representation and not a mere translation. At the same time it also shows that the original product is put to interrogation by the canons of the target language. By pointing out the obscurity Kolharkar not only shows the inadequacy of understanding that is seen in Gaikwad's narration but also his authority in deciding the mode of representation. "Sir Lakshman Gaikwad has not had much formal education. He has not the polish and advantages of a man of letters. The book suffers from many shortcomings which would be regarded as unpardonable in a well-educated writer" (Kolhakar) Niranjana in her book "Siting Translation" succinctly points out, "That the agenda of the post colonial translator to produce a coherent text in translation which is also congruent with an acceptable representation may often mean blurring the complexities, paradoxes, inconsistencies in the source text and which are a part of our history". She also cites that this asymmetry between the two languages is more vividly seen in Dalit works. In "Branded" the swear words used at many places do not carry the intensity or project the nature of the tribes. It seems to be more polished and less effective. The notion of civilizing the barbarians, the hybridization that the colonial powers imposed on the colonized is seen in this act of polishing swear words. It shows that how our minds have imbibed the colonial mental pattern of understanding life based on binaries, primitive and civilized, rational and irrational, underdeveloped and developed etc which are connected to a hierarchy of supremacy and inferiority. This also adheres to Trevelyan's point as noted by Niranjana in her essay that the heterogeneity of Indian literature and culture is barbaric and English had to come in order to construct the history to make it homogeneous and civilized. As history is constructed, the construction is hidden and only the history is represented as reality. The theory behind the hidden construction is that the inferior culture and civilization has to be inscribed superior through English. Translation thus becomes the interpretation of the translator. Kolharkar makes a genuine statement that he had tried to make it intelligible only after consulting the writer and after having the meaning made clear to himself and hence here this civilized construction is not explicit as one can see the intensity and the effect being retained because the translator has made a clear point about the idea behind the translation in his note. Moreover it is a first person narrative and the facts and the narration in the translation adhere to the theme of the novel.

Another interesting issue of representativeness seen in *The Branded* is the role of the Sahitya Academy. P.A.Kolharkar did not have the difficulties that Gaikwad had in printing and publishing his book as it is a part of the Sahitya Akademi project which translates all the Sahitya

Akademi award winning novels. The Akademi should be thanked for translating this politically controversial novel. The Marathi novel would have reached only the people who knew that language. The translation would now reach all the parts of the country and the intention of the writer to get a helping hand to enter the mainstream would reach the ears of those who are concerned. The role of the Akademi should also be taken into consideration while critiquing the novel. The Akademi acknowledges about twenty four Indian languages and after scrutinizing and critiquing from all perspectives the works are chosen for the award. The politics concerning this translation can be seen in two ways. Foremost, if Gaikwad had written in his tribal language what would have happened? The work which for the first time gave a literary voice to a dalit community traditionally considered a criminal community would have become voiceless and subdued. Secondly, only if a work is chosen by the Akademi it gets translated and if it is not been chosen what will be the answer to the question of representation. The irony is that again a mainstream institution which recognizes the languages and decides the awardees is needed for representation. The replication of the oppressed and the oppressor continues in all walks of representation.

We live in a world which is coming closer through globalization and the global language, whether one accepts it or not is English. Today to voice out, one ultimately, in a direct way or through translation needs this global language. Kolharkar's "The Branded" speaks for the tribes in the language that has a voice today. His translation has given voice to a community which has "never been touched by politics, education, religion and economics of the main stream society and which has been living in its own world of superstition of primitive norms of justice and of ignorance." (Translator's note) The one line he says about his experience shows that there was a genuine urge in him to speak for the deprived community and thus this translation could be taken as representation.

"All this is graphically delineated in this book which I found to be very touching experience. I have tried to stick to the way of narration adopted by Laxman Gaikwad so that the reader of this translation may savor the same experience which I, as a reader of the original savored."

It is only through translation the voice of a subaltern gains power. "Subaltern," Spivak insists, is not "just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie." She points out that in Gramsci's original covert usage, it signified "proletarian," whose voice could not be heard, being structurally written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative. There is an attempt made to deconstruct this capitalist bourgeois narrative and "The Branded" though in the language of the imperialist, has succeeded to a greater extent in the attempt to deconstruct historiography. After reading the novel one finds that the intention of both the author and the translator to represent the voice of the voiceless which is submerged in the grand narrative has been successfully accomplished.

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