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Translating Dalit Narratives: Taming the Dalit Tongue

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Abstract

This paper critically investigates the "taming" process that occur when Dalit narratives are translated into English, particularly by upper-caste translators. I argue that the relationship between bull tamers and their subjects is reflected in this process. Upper caste translators subdue the raw and defiant voices of Dalit narratives to fit into dominant frameworks. The study also emphasizes how translations by upper castes frequently lessen the original works' radical intensity and cultural uniqueness. These translations invariably soften the political edge and everyday realities of caste oppression while flattening the complex nuances inherent in the original language. This paper raises important issues regarding epistemic violence and politics of representation by emphasizing the power disparity in the translation. It also exposes how Dalit voices are often controlled and domesticated to align with the upper caste sensibilities. The key texts analyzed in this research are Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (*The Outcaste*) and Eknath Awad's *Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav* (*Strike a Blow to Change the World*)

Keywords: Dalit Literature, Caste, Akkarmashi, Untouchables, Translation.

Every Dalit text tells a unique story about Dalit struggles and experiences. The Dalit life within the Balutedari system is examined in Daya Pawar's autobiography *Baluta* (1978) by highlighting poverty, exclusion, and humiliation that Dalits undergo in everyday life. The title symbolizes the bare share Dalits received for their labor in Balutedari system. Laxam Gaikwad's *Uchalya* (1987) is an self-told story which describes the life of a denotified community labeled as petty thieves throughout Maharashtra. The work depicts their constant fight for dignity and existence. Similarly, Eknath Awad's *Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav* (2011) and Namdev Dhasal's *Golpitha* (1973) remain faithful to their titles—Awad's autobiography reflects the wounds of caste oppression while advocating for social change, and Dhasal's *Golpitha* exposes the harsh realities of Mumbai's red-light district. Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (1984) also stays true to its title. Describing his experiences, Limbale writes:

> I have put in words the life I have lived as an untouchable, as a half-caste, and as an impoverished man. There is a Patil in every village who is also a landowner. He invariably has a whore. I have written this so that readers will learn the woes of the son of a whore. High-caste people look upon my community as untouchable, while my own community humiliated me, calling me

> 'akkarmashi.' This humiliation was like being stabbed over and over again. I have always lived with the burden of inferiority. And this book is a tale of this burden. (Limbale, 2004, p. ix).

However, the English title *The Outcaste* does not do justice to the Marathi title *Akkarmashi*. The Marathi title tells a deeper story. It speaks of a poor untouchable who is also a half-caste. It also includes the pain of Dalit women who are sexually and otherwise exploited by upper-caste Patils. Additionally, the Marathi title tell a painful story of 'Akkarmashi' children born out of the exploitative relationships of Dalit women with upper caste men and how these children are marginalized by both upper castes as well as Dalits. However, the title *The Outcaste* only points to untouchability and poverty. It leaves out the struggles of these women and their children. This makes the meaning of the story incomplete. It hides the real pain behind the words. Such a translation causes harm. It takes away the truth of Dalit lives from the original text.

English translations of Dalit literature often change the original meaning. These changes lead to epistemic violence. The rawness, anger and boldness in Dalit narratives are often softened and tamed. Consequently, the radical critique of caste is blunt in the process of translation as it happened with Limbale's narraive. (Limbale, 2004). Shaped by the linguistic and cultural frameworks of upper castes, these translations risk reproducing epistemic injustice by reshaping Dalit voices to fit normative standards of acceptability.

During my second year as an MA student at the University of Hyderabad, I attended a conference organized by the Department of Hindi. Sharankumar Limbale was invited as a key speaker. During a tea break, I asked him, "What do you think about *Akkarmashi* being translated as *Outcaste*? Don't you think it would have been more authentic to retain the original Marathi title?"

Limbale gave a thoughtful reply. He said the English title *The Outcaste* doesn't capture the full meaning of the Marathi word *Akkarmashi*. He admitted the translation isn't very accurate. Moreover, he said the choice was shaped by publishing and marketing needs (Limbale, personal communication, 2014/2015). This reveals how the Dalit literature is often translated to sell better. So marketability is prioritized over the fidelity to the lived experiences of Dalits. In the case of *Akkarmashi*, the English title *Outcaste* dilutes the layered struggles and complex cultural connotations embedded in the original Marathi. Therefore, I argue that the English translations of *Akkarmashi* enacts a subtle form of epistemic violence.

In addition to *Akkarmashi*, this paper examines Eknath Awad's *Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav*, translated by Jerry Pinto as *Strike a Blow to Change the World* (Awad, 2018). Unlike the translation of *Akkarmashi*, Pinto's translation does not appear commercially motivated. However, despite Pinto's linguistic skill, the English version erases certain layers of historical and socio-cultural significance integral to the Marathi text (Awad, 2018). This reduction shows how epistemic violence in translation extends beyond lexical substitution, reshaping the political and emotional dimensions of Dalit narratives to align with the sensibilities of an English-reading public.

What is Akkarmashi?

In the beginning, the term Akkarmashi was used to describe a weight deficit, especially when weighing valuable metals like gold and silver. One tola was equivalent to twelve masa in the old weight system. Akkarmashi was the term used to describe any thing that was considered incomplete or defective, even if it was only one masa short. The term's technical meaning gave way to a social metaphor over time. In caste-conscious societies, it was used to designate those who were deemed "inferior" or "illegitimate." As a result, it became a disparaging phrase for people of "low birth," especially children born outside of marriage or from partnerships that were considered socially unacceptable. In addition to being used to describe people, the term also denoted dishonesty or fraud in more general circumstances, such economic transactions.

As purity, legitimacy and ancestry were deeply valued in traditional Indian society, the term Akkarmashi evolved as a tool to support the caste system and its moral standards. Thus the term conveys a moral assessment of a person's origin and societal status in addition to a connotation of insufficiency. Akkarmashi implies illegitimacy, moral inadequacy, or social worthlessness, and it still remains a powerful insult in modern usage. The stigma attached to being born outside of socially acceptable partnership and ingrained caste prejudices are both reflected in it. The term perpetuates discrimination and social exclusion by attacking a person's moral character as well as their ancestry.

In Akkarmashi, Sharankumar Limbale doesn't just tell his story. He lays bare the wound of being born into a world that never let him forget his place. The word akkarmashi wasn't just a label; it was a sentence. His mother, a Dalit woman, was caught in a system where upper-caste landlords took what they wanted and left women like her to raise children in shame, not love. Limbale and his siblings grew up carrying the weight of this silence, disowned by caste, disowned by legitimacy. His narrative isn't also just personal. It rips through the fabric of caste and patriarchy, showing how Dalit women, already crushed by the brutality of caste, were also punished for their gender. Their children, too, inherited this violence marked from birth, not for what they did, but for what society forced upon their mothers.

The term akkarmashi underscores the brutal violence that Dalit women have long endured. It speaks about the sexual violence Dalit women face at the hands of upper-caste men. For children born out of these exploitative relationships, the world offers little compassion. They are marked twice over—first by caste, then by the so-called "illegitimacy" of their birth. In that sense, akkarmashi becomes more than a label; it turns into a symbol of what it means to live under layered rejection. Limbale doesn't use the term lightly. He uses it to expose the machinery of a society that punishes the vulnerable—women, the poor, the outcast—and calls it tradition. His story isn't just about personal suffering. It's about a system that knows how to wound and still find a way to blame the wounded.

Limbale's *Akkarmashi* and the Problem of Its English Translation

Akarmashi narrates the story of Masamai, an untouchable woman "happily" married to Vithal Kamble, an untouchable laborer who works on a rich Patil's farm. The Patil tricks the couple, and the caste council forces Masamai to divorce her husband. She is forced to leave her suckling baby and four-year-old son behind. While Vithal Kamble remarries, Masamai is compelled to live as the Patil's "whore". When the Hanamant Patil abandons her after she gives birth to his son, Masamai is forced to live with another Patil as his "whore". Thus, *Akkarmashi* represents the stories of thousands of Dalit women as "whores" and their illegitimate, impure, and half-caste children in India's villages who were forced by patriarchal and upper-caste morality to endure exploitation and humiliation.

The term Akkarmashi critiques not only the caste system but also the deeply entrenched layers of patriarchy that operate within it. It functions on multiple levels, highlighting both the general caste oppression of Dalits and the patriarchal sexual exploitation of Dalit women by upper-caste men. Akkarmashi emphasizes on the unique suffering of Dalit women like Limbale's mother, and their children, born from their exploitative relationships with upper-caste men. These women are oppressed by both upper-caste people and Dalits, creating an intersectional form of exploitation. And Limbale's Akkarmashi vividly portrays how Dalit women and their children, born out of such relationships, are marginalized. Limbale's narrative also emphasizes the need to understand the multiple layers of marginalization such women and their children face. This multi-layered oppression thrusts them into a state of social liminality, treating them as outcasts among the outcast, creating what may be viewed as a "new caste". This new caste becomes a space devoid of essential social ties, where they are excluded even from the Dalit community. Limbale's narrative illustrates this through his own experiences. He writes about how his family lived in a separate ghetto that he calls a semi-Maharwada:

> "I was born from her (Masamai) affair with Hanmanta Patil. Masamai had Nagubai, Nirmala, Vanmala, Sunanda, Pramila, Shrikant, Indira, and Sidram from Kaka, whose name was

> Yeshwantrao Sidramappa Patil, the head of the village named Hanoor. Because they are registered as Hindu Lingayats in the official records, they are accepted neither by the Mahar community nor by the Lingayat community, so we live in a semi-Maharwada of our own." (Limbale, 2005, p. 38)

Furthermore, Limbale writes that he could not marry a Mahar, as the Mahars had excommunicated his family due to his mother's relationships with upper-caste men. Limbale's love for Shewanta, a girl from untouchable Mahar caste was not accepted. This was because Limbale's father was not a Mahar but a Vani, and his mother was labeled a "whore". This social status made their potential marriage dangerous, even leading to threats of deadly violence. Limbale describes how Santamai, his grandmother, warned him:

> "The Mahars are a very fierce people. They will cut you into pieces, and there will be no one to care for us. Our house has neither a male child nor a female one to continue our lives. They will force us (female member) to sleep with them. You'd better stop your affair with Shewanta." (Limbale, 2003, p. 27)

At its core, *Akkarmashi* exposes the brutal face of the caste system, offering a deeply personal perspective on the exclusion faced by Dalits, especially those born from caste transgressions. As a child born to a Dalit mother and an upper-caste father, Limbale recounts the indelible stigma that tainted his birth. His status as an *akkarmashi*—illegitimate, half-caste, impure, and rejected by caste norms—condemns him to a life marked by relentless marginalization. Limbale poignantly writes:

> "Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the foetus? Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? How many eyes must have humiliated her because they considered her a whore? Did anyone distribute sweets to celebrate my birth? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendant? Whose son am I, really?" (Limbale, 2003, pp. 36-37)

This label of illegitimacy is rooted in the notions of caste purity and it becomes a lifelong mark of shame. This shame renders Limbale and children like him born unworthy of recognition or respect by either his father's upper-caste community or his mother's Dalit world. *Therefore, I argue that Akarmashi* does not merely reflect the oppressive dynamics of caste or patriarchy. The term goes beyond, critiquing the way caste hierarchies intersect with patriarchy. It exposes how Dalit women and their children born from exploitative relationships with upper-caste men are "differently marginalized". The term *Akkarmashi* refers to a person born out of a relationship that violates caste purity, and it highlights the intersectional oppression of caste and gender, and critiques the wider social structures that perpetuate these injustices.

Dalit women, like Limbale's mother, face oppression in multiple ways. Firstly they suffer as Dalits in a rigidly stratified caste society. Secondly, they are marginalized for being women in the patriarchal system. Thirdly, they are stigmatized for mothers of their children born from the exploitative relationships they are forced to have with upper-caste men. Limbale's mother is stigmatized not only for her caste and gender identity but also for her very relationship with upper-caste men and for having children from these men. This makes her more vulnerable to various kinds of exploitation. Her body becomes the site where caste and patriarchy collide, as upper-caste men exert control over Dalit women's sexuality without accountability or consequences.

One particularly shocking example occurs when Limbale's stepfather invites his friend Hanmanta, Sharankumar's biological father, for an evening meal. After dinner, in a grotesque display

of dehumanization, Limbale's stepfather asks Limbale's mother to sleep with her former lover, the very man who fathered Limbale.

Limbale tells this story with brutal honesty. He writes, "Kaka (Limbale's stepfather) was persuading my mother to sleep with Hanmanta" (Limbale, 2003, pp. 60–61). This incident unveils the monstrous entitlement upper-caste men feel toward Dalit women. They reduce Dalit women to mere objects of vulgar gratification. They see Dalit women not as people with blood and flesh, but as objects for their pleasure. This mistreatment towards Dalit women underscores the caste-based misogyny that allows these upper caste men to exploit Dalit women without any remorse.

Limbale's mother's body is treated as a commodity that is stripped of dignity and controled by a system that devalues her not just because she is a Dalit and a woman. But it is also because of her very relationships with upper-caste men and the 'illegitimate' children born from them. Giving birth to 'illegitimate' children in such a deeply caste-bound society pushes her and her children to the absolute margins. Through his mother's story, Limbale lays bare a brutal truth: Dalit women like her face a unique kind of suffering. They are preyed upon by upper-caste men, yet it is they who are blamed, shamed, and cast out—not only by dominant society but also by their own communities, which see them as impure and their children as illegitimate, inferior, and out of place.

The children born from these exploitative relationships are forced into a social limbo who are not fully accepted by either the Dalit or upper-caste communities. They live in a kind of in-between space, a painful liminality that defines every aspect of their lives. This in-betweenness could almost be seen as a "new caste," one shaped not by religious notions of purity, but by the stain of social illegitimacy. In this space, even basic human relationships—marriage, kinship, belonging—are denied to them. They are left without a place, without protection, and without recognition.

When Akkarmashi was translated into English as Outcaste, the soul of the original text was lost. Because the term Akkarmashi in Marathi holds layers of meaning and it speaks not just of caste exclusion, but of the intimate, gendered violence that haunts Limbale's life story. The English title Outcaste narrows this richness to a single axis, that is caste, by muting the suffering of Dalit women like Limbale's mother, whose body bears the brunt of both caste hierarchy and patriarchal domination. The translation of *Akkarmashi* as *Outcaste* misses the intersectional nature of the oppression Limbale seeks to expose.

This is not a matter of semantic. It's a kind of epistemic violence. Translation, when careless, can silence the voices and truths of the oppressed. When *Akkarmashi* is translated as *Outcaste*, much is lost. The painful and layered web of violence Limbale narrates becomes flat. It turns into a simple narrative about caste alone. But his mother's suffering is not just about caste. It's also about gender and beyond. She is hurt not just because of being a Dalit and a woman but also because of giving birth to children with upper caste lovers. The translation of *Akkarmashi* as *The Outcaste* hides this. The nuanced portrayal of a Dalit woman's suffering in the term *Akkarmashi* is diminished in the English translation. The translation blunts the sharp critique of how caste and patriarchy work together to oppress Dalit women.

In the Marathi title, Limbale's mother is not in a peripheral figure. She is at the heart of the story. Her life shows the cruelty Dalit women face every day. She is dehumanized no just by upper caste people, but also by people from her own caste. In English translation, much of this is softened. Her pain becomes smaller, almost unseen and Limbale's life becomes the most dominant. The strong message of how caste and patriarchy work together to dehumanize Dalit women is made weaker. What *Akkarmashi* boldly exposes is made quiet in translation. The sharp tongue of *Akkarmashi* is tamed in *The Outcaste*.

Limbale's Akkarmashi sets out to make visible what is so often silenced—the suffering of Dalit women—by placing his mother at the heart of his story and choosing to name the autobiography after a word that is itself loaded with violence. The choice of the term Akkarmashi by Limbale is deliberate

and radical. It doesn't just name the condition of being "illegitimate" but it also forces the reader to confront the brutal intersection of caste, gender, and social abandonment. Yet when the book is translated into English as Outcaste, much of that complexity disappears. The translation softens the sharp critique focusing on mostly caste exclusion, and by stripping away the gendered dimension that is central to Limbale's critique. In doing so, the translation undercuts the political and emotional force of his work.

Limbale's narrative is not merely a personal or social account of caste discrimination—it is a fierce indictment of how patriarchy functions within the caste system, particularly in the lives of Dalit women. His mother's life, marked by abandonment, sexual exploitation, and social ostracism, becomes the site through which he exposes how caste and patriarchy work together to dehumanize. The translation, by focusing only on caste, blunts this critique. It misses the sharp edge of Limbale's condemnation—not just of Brahmanical caste hierarchies, but of the patriarchal logic that allows upper-caste men to commodify Dalit women for pleasure, without consequence or accountability. *Outcaste* fails to capture the full weight of the brutal oppression that Akkarmashi exposes.

Strike a Blow to Change the World:

The second example I want to bring into focus is Eknath Awad's autobiography, *Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav* (2011). It's translated into English by Jerry Pinto as *Strike a Blow to Change the World* (2018). At first glance, the English title seems powerful—defiant, even. However, something essential is lost in the English translation. The original title is not just a phrase or a line from a poem. It is a line from a poem by Anna Bhau Sathe, one of the most important voices in Dalit literature in Maharashtra. Awad's borrowing of the title for his autobiography is much like Chinua Achebe borrowing the title for his novel *Things Fall Apart* from W. B. Yeat's poem "The Second Coming".

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The bolld-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned; (Yeats, (1951), pp. 184-185)

These lines from Yeat's poem give a complex and unsettling meaning. It talks about the collapse of the foundational structure, leading to a chaotic and destructive and loss of culture in new era. Achebe borrowed the title "Things Fall Apart" for his novel from the poem "The Second Coming" because Yeat's apocalyptic vision parallels the disintegration of the Igbo society under colonialism. Achebe uses Yeat's line to frame political, spiritual and cultural disruption in Igbo society. Similarly, I argue that Awad borrowed the title "Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav" for his memoir in Marathi from Anna Bhau Sathe's poem for his larger social and cultural politics. However, Pinto's English translation of Awad's memoir fails to bring the original connotations of the Marathi title.

For those familiar with Sathe's work, that line stirs something deeper. It carries not just poetic force but social and political memory, community pain, and a call to action. When Awad chose the poem's line as the title for his life story, he did not just borrow a line. He was grounded his own journey within a long, collective struggle that Dalits in Maharashtra led against caste. The title speaks to wounds that were never just personal, but always tied to something larger: the fight for dignity, equality, and Ambedkarite justice in Maharashtra.

In English, however, much of this weight falls away. *Strike a Blow to Change the World* is strong, but it doesn't echo the same history. It doesn't carry Sathe's voice or the rhythm of protest that pulses through the original. Without knowing where the line comes from—or what it means to generations of Dalits shaped by Sathe's poetry and Ambedkar's politics—the translated title risks sounding like just another slogan.

To really feel the force of Awad's choice, one needs to understand the world he comes from, and the world Sathe helped shape. Without that, the emotional and political depth of the title—and what it meant for Awad to claim it—is all too easily lost in translation.

Dalits Are Not a Homogeneous Community:

Dalits in Maharashtra have never been a single, unified group, even though untouchability bound them through a shared experience of oppression. Within the larger Dalit identity are distinct castes and each has its own history, culture, and social location. Among the most prominent are the Mahars, Mangs (Matangs), and Chambhars. The Mahars were historically tied to the Maratha armies and later the British colonial military. Therefore, they found earlier access to tools of modernization and social mobility through education, jobs, and military service. It's not a coincidence that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who led the Dalit movement and radically reimagined caste emancipation, also came from this very community. When Ambedkar began his movement in Maharashtra, most of the Mahars were quick to adopt his ideas, and they broke away from their caste-prescribed roles and rural lives.

For the Mang community, the story took a different course. While some were active in the movements of Phule and Ambedkar, many remained trapped in caste-based occupations like rope- and broom-making, skinning dead animals, or performing roles in rituals tied to servitude and superstition—like the Potraj, Devadasi, or Jogini systems. When Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in 1956, large sections of the Mahars followed him. However, most of the Mangs, embedded in their traditional livelihoods and scattered across villages, remained within the Hindu fold. Mangs did not leave behind the old structures of caste.

Despite their shared experiences of untouchability, relations between the Mahar and Mang communities have not been harmonious. The tensions between these communities are often reflected even in Dalit narratives. Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi offers such examples.* In one passage, Limbale recounts how his friend playmate Arjya from Mang caste was denied water by his grandmother due to caste hierarchies:

> Once, in summer, as usual I was playing with Arjya, a Mang. Thirsty, we entered my house and I drank water first before giving the cup to Arjya. Sanatami shouted, 'Why do you play with that boy? Is there no one else in the village to play with? Don't give him water in that vessel. If he touches it, he will defile it. Go away.' (Limbale, 2003, pp. 19-20)

In *Strike a Blow to Change the World*, Awad similarly recounts instances of deep-rooted caste rivalries within Dalit communities. Awad's narrative includes an episode where a Chambhar, an untouchable caste boy called Waghmare discriminates against other untouchable boys. Upper caste boys treat Waghmare as they treat other untouchables. But Waghmare refuses to eat with Mang and Mahar boys because of the fear of getting polluted by Mang and Mahar boys. (Awad, 2018, p. 27) Such fractures within Dalit society underscore the persistent divisions that have often undermined Dalit solidarity. Dr. Ambedkar himself, recognized the divisive potential of these rivalries amongst Dalits and he appealed for unity in his 1937 speech at Karkam. He urged the Mangs and Mahars to set aside their differences and unite against caste oppression. (Jamanadas, Web)

In last three decades, the demand for sub-categorization within Scheduled Caste reservations has also created divisions, particularly between the Buddhists (formerly Mahars) and the Mangs. To advocate for sub-categorization, the Mangs formed independent organizations. They voiced their grievances that often went unaddressed by the broader Dalit intellectual leadership. This lack of recognition forced the Mangs to pursue their demands in isolation. Supporters of sub-classification argue that it ensures equitable representation and addresses long-standing inequalities within the Dalit community. However, critics contend that it fragments Dalit unity by weakening the collective struggle for social justice.

Who is Anna Bhau Sathe?

Anna Bhau Sathe, a towering figure in Maharashtra's Dalit public sphere, made an indelible mark on Marathi literature despite his lack of formal education. With 35 novels, 15 collections of short stories, and numerous plays and ballads, Sathe became a literary giant and a cultural icon, especially in Dalit politics. His influence transcends literature—his statues can be found in both urban and rural Maharashtra, and he is celebrated alongside figures like Phule, Shahu, and Ambedkar.

Initially a communist, Sathe's political journey later aligned with Ambedkarite thought, making him a symbol of Dalit resistance. His literature, particularly his ballads, played a crucial role in mobilizing the Mang community. In one of his famous poems, Sathe invokes Ambedkar's teachings to call for resistance against caste oppression:

> Strike the blows to change the world,
> That is what Bhimrao (Ambedkar) taught me.
> Why are you, the mighty elephant,
> Stuck in the mud of caste slavery? (Sathe, 1998, p. 75)

This poem has become a rallying cry in efforts to unite the Dalit castes, particularly Mangs and Mahars, under the banner of Ambedkarite politics. It is no coincidence, then, that Eknath Awad chose a line from Sathe's poem as the title of his autobiography. The title symbolizes not just a call to action, but a deeper political and social meaning—reflecting Awad's work to mobilize the Mang community and integrate them into the larger Ambedkarite movement.

To translate *Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav*, one must understand the cultural, social, and political weight weight it carries. However, Pinto failed to do so. The English title, *Strike a Blow to Change the World*, keeps the force of the original title but it loses the depth. It cannot carry all the layers hidden in the Marathi title that was borrowed from Annabhau Sathe's poem. For Marathi readers, the title brings many things to mind. It reminds them of the long history between the Mang and Mahar communities. It brings back the legacy of Sathe and Ambedkar and it shows their efforts to unite people across caste lines. But in English translation, much of this is lost. The reader who reads the English title cannot connect it with Sathe's poem. Hence, the reader cannot understand the social, cultural and political weight the original text had. The English title becomes simpler. The deep meanings, the history, and the emotions tied to the original title don't fully come through in translation.

Conclusion: Taming the Dalit Tongue:

In 1936, Ambedkar was invited by Jat-Pat Todak Mandal in Lahore to deliver the presidential address of their annual conference. After reading the draft of Ambedkar's speech, the Mandal found that the speech could offend the Hindus. When the Manda's secretary requested for modifications, Ambedkar refused to alter even a comma and declined to deliver the speech. He later self-published the speech under the title *Annihilation of Caste* (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 34). Ambedkar didn't compromise with anything. His refusal to not even alter coma of his speech highlights his opposition to epistemic violence or the suppression of marginalized voices by dominant caste knowledge systems. His rejecting to any form of modification to his speech was a challenge to the Brahminical control over knowledge production. It was also an assertion for the intellectual autonomy of Dalit perspectives. Ambedkar recognized that even minor alterations would dilute the authenticity of Dalit experiences and weaken his radically path-breaking critique of caste. Through self-publication, he bypassed casteist gatekeeping and created an alternative knowledge system centered on Dalit resistance (Ambedkar, 1936).

However, the act of publishing Dalit work often involves a taming of the Dalit tongue. Dalit voices are not published in their raw, original form as Ambedkar did in case of *Annihilation of Caste* but are softened to meet the demands of an upper-caste-controlled publishing industry. Even in the vernacular languages, the publishing industry prioritizes profit and marketing over authenticity and

mold and soften Dalit narratives to fit normative frameworks of the upper caste imagination. Furthermore, in translation, this taming process continues as upper-caste translators and English-language publishers further mold Dalit texts to align with commercially viable standards and to fit the upper caste elites English readers. So, I argue that every Dalit narrative goes through the taming process. When the tamed narrative is translated, it goes through one more layer of taming. This double taming—subduing the Dalit voice both in the original and in translation—erases its unfiltered critiques of caste, patriarchy, and other exploitative institutions.

For example, consider the case of Sharankumar Limbale's Akkarmashi originally written and published in Marathi. It is unlikely that Limbale's first ever draft was published without alteration. It is also possible that Limbale himself, both consciously and unconsciously, may have thought about the Marathi readers and shaped his first draft to fit into the social and cultural standards of Maharashtra. Marathi publishers, no doubt, bound by commercial interests and cultural biases, must have persuaded Limbale to modify the manuscript, that he had first submitted, to align with upper-caste expectations. Thus, the Marathi version of Akkarmashi was already tamed, with some of its 'wildness' removed. When Akkarmashi was translated into English as *The Outcaste*, the text went through one more layer of taming, further diluting its critique of caste and gender. The Marathi term *Akkarmashi* carries deep social and historical significance, reflecting the dual oppression of Dalit life through caste and gender. However, the translation as *The Outcaste* reduces this complexity, stripping away the sharp critique embedded in the original text.

A similar process occurs with Eknath Awad's *Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav*, translated by Jerry Pinto as *Strike a Blow to Change the World* (Awad, 2018). While Pinto's translation is linguistically skillful, it erases crucial layers of historical and socio-political significance. The original Marathi title reflects a broader Dalit movement and the inclusion of marginalized communities into the Ambedkarite fold. The English translation, however, fails to reproduce the same meaning and disconnects it from its historical and cultural context, enacting a subtler form of epistemic violence.

Therefore, I argue that this taming of the Dalit tongue parallels bull-taming practices in Indian villages. Bull taming also occurs in two phases. In the first phase, the bull undergoes castration and loses its wildness. In the second, the bull is taken to an uneven farm to be trained into obedience. Likewise, Dalit texts first undergo taming in their original language where publishers sanitize their radical critiques. In the second phase, English translations further domesticate these narratives, erasing the rawness and sharpness of Dalit resistance. Both *Akkarmashi* and *Jag Badal Ghaluni Ghav* were subjected to this double taming, resulting in the dilution of their powerful critiques of caste and gender.

At an international conference held on August 28, 2024, at Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, Professor Panchanan Mohanty, a linguist and translator, questioned the qualifications of translators. He remarked that university administrators who hire carpenters to fix furniture ensure the carpenter has formal training (Mohanty, 2024). Building on this, I ask: What qualifications do upper-caste translators possess to interpret and convey Dalit narratives? Without deep engagement with Dalit lived experiences and socio-political realities, these translators risk reproducing epistemic violence by diluting and reshaping the radical content of Dalit texts to align with upper-caste sensibilities. The taming of the Dalit tongue, therefore, is not just a matter of translation but a broader structural problem reflecting the persistent caste-based control over knowledge production.

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