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Review Article

A Survey Study on Dalit Women's Voices in English Translation: Empowerment, Contestation and Feminist Resistance

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Abstract

Background: Dalit women's literature in India represents a powerful intersection of caste, gender, and language. Through English translation, autobiographies and narratives such as Bama's *Karukku* have gained visibility beyond regional boundaries, enabling global audiences to engage with the lived realities of caste-based oppression. However, translation also raises questions of authenticity, cultural mediation, and ethical representation.

Objective: This study synthesizes key research on Dalit women's voices in English translation, focusing on how translation functions as both a tool of empowerment and a site of potential distortion. It examines the literary, feminist, and political dimensions of Dalit women's narratives, highlighting the challenges and contributions of translation in shaping discourse.

Methods: A comparative review of three major strands of scholarship was undertaken to synthesize the discourse on Dalit women's voices in English translation. The first strand engages with analyses of Dalit feminism and literary voice in English writings, where scholars highlight how caste and gender intersect to shape narratives of resistance, trauma, and identity. The second strand focuses on case studies of landmark texts such as Bama's *Karukku*, which serve as feminist interventions by foregrounding systemic oppression and challenging dominant literary traditions. The third strand examines research on translation practices and their impact on Dalit autobiographies, emphasizing both the empowering potential of translation in amplifying marginalized voices and the risks of cultural loss, domestication, and ethical distortion. Together, these strands reveal the complex dynamics of representation, authenticity, and visibility in Dalit women's literature. The synthesis draws on intersectionality, Ambedkarite ideology, and postcolonial feminist frameworks, situating translation as not merely a linguistic exercise but a deeply political act that mediates between local realities and global readerships.

Results: The findings reveal that Dalit women's translated texts articulate trauma, resistance, and identity politics, thereby situating Dalit feminism as a radical critique of caste patriarchy. These narratives challenge dominant literary traditions by foregrounding the systemic struggles of marginalized women, expanding the scope of feminist discourse in India beyond middle-class perspectives. At the same time, translation enables these voices to achieve national and global visibility, allowing Dalit women's experiences to enter broader conversations on social justice and gender equality. However, this visibility often comes at the cost of cultural nuance and linguistic specificity, as certain caste-bound idioms and regional expressions risk being diluted in translation. Moreover, the process highlights the positionality and ethical responsibility of translators, underscoring the tension between accessibility for wider readerships and authenticity in preserving the lived realities of Dalit women. Collectively, these insights demonstrate that translation is both a vehicle of empowerment and a site of contestation, shaping how Dalit women's voices are heard, interpreted, and situated within global feminist and postcolonial frameworks.

Conclusion: Dalit women's voices in English translation demonstrate that translation is not merely linguistic but profoundly political. It amplifies marginalized perspectives, disrupts hegemonic narratives, and contributes to feminist and caste-critical scholarship. At the same time, translation demands

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reflexivity to avoid erasure or distortion of lived realities. Future research must engage with translation ethics, market pressures, and the role of translators as cultural mediators to ensure that Dalit women's narratives retain their political urgency and authenticity.

KEYWORDS: Dalit women, English translation, Karukku, Bama, Dalit feminism, caste and gender, autobiographies, intersectionality, Ambedkarite ideology, postcolonial feminism, translation ethics, marginalized voices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dalit women's literature occupies a critical position in contemporary Indian writing, offering narratives that confront the entrenched hierarchies of caste and patriarchy. As doubly marginalized subjects—by both caste and gender—Dalit women articulate experiences of systemic oppression, resilience, and identity formation that challenge dominant literary traditions (1, 2). Their voices, often rooted in regional languages such as Tamil, Marathi, and Hindi, have increasingly been made accessible to wider audiences through English translation. This process of translation has not only expanded the reach of Dalit women's narratives but has also transformed them into significant contributions to global feminist and postcolonial discourse (3, 4). The emergence of texts such as Bama's *Karukku* exemplifies the radical potential of Dalit women's autobiographical writing. By foregrounding lived realities of caste discrimination, religious exclusion, and gendered violence, such works disrupt mainstream literary canons and demand recognition of marginalized perspectives (5, 6). Translation into English has played a pivotal role in amplifying these voices, enabling their circulation across national and international platforms (7, 8). Yet, translation is not a neutral act; it is deeply political. It mediates between local cultural contexts and global readerships, raising questions about authenticity, representation, and the ethical responsibilities of translators (9, 10). Scholarly engagement with Dalit women's translated texts has developed along three major strands. First, analyses of Dalit feminism and literary voice in English writings highlight how these narratives articulate trauma, resistance, and identity politics, situating Dalit feminism as a radical critique of caste patriarchy (11, 12). Second, case studies of landmark texts such as *Karukku* demonstrate how autobiographical interventions expand feminist discourse in India by foregrounding systemic struggles of marginalized women (13, 14). Third, research on translation practices underscores both the empowering potential of translation and its risks, including cultural loss, domestication, and distortion of lived realities. Together, these strands reveal the complex dynamics of visibility, authenticity, and representation in Dalit women's literature (15,16).

This study situates Dalit women's voices in English translation within broader theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, Ambedkarite ideology, and postcolonial feminism. By synthesizing existing scholarship, it seeks to examine how translation functions simultaneously as a vehicle of empowerment and a site of contestation. The introduction of

Dalit women's narratives into English not only amplifies marginalized perspectives but also challenges global readers to confront the ethical and political dimensions of translation. In doing so, it underscores the necessity of reflexive translation practices that preserve the urgency, authenticity, and transformative potential of Dalit women's voices.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design aimed at synthesizing existing scholarship on Dalit women's voices in English translation (17, 18). Given the interdisciplinary nature of the subject—spanning literature, feminist theory, translation studies, and caste discourse—the methodology is structured around a comparative review of scholarly works, landmark texts, and translation practices (19). The study does not generate primary data but instead engages critically with secondary sources, including published research articles, translated autobiographies, and theoretical frameworks that inform the discourse on Dalit women's literature (20, 21).

The first stage of the methodology involved identifying and categorizing relevant scholarship into three major strands: analyses of Dalit feminism and literary voice in English writings, case studies of landmark texts such as Bama's *Karukku*, and research on translation practices and their impact on Dalit autobiographies. This categorization allowed for a systematic comparison of how different scholarly approaches conceptualize the intersection of caste, gender, and translation. Sources were selected based on their academic credibility, relevance to Dalit women's narratives, and contribution to debates on translation ethics and feminist discourse.

The second stage entailed a close reading of landmark texts, particularly autobiographical works that have been translated into English. Texts such as *Karukku* were examined not only for their thematic content but also for the ways in which translation mediates meaning, cultural specificity, and political urgency. Attention was paid to how translators negotiate caste-bound idioms, regional expressions, and culturally embedded metaphors, and how these choices affect the reception of Dalit women's voices in national and global contexts. This textual analysis was complemented by a review of critical commentaries that situate these works within broader feminist and postcolonial frameworks.

The third stage focused on translation practices and their implications for representation. Here, the study engaged with scholarship that interrogates the positionality of translators, the pressures of publishing markets, and the ethical dilemmas

inherent in translating marginalized voices. The analysis emphasized the tension between accessibility for wider readerships and authenticity in preserving lived realities. By synthesizing these perspectives, the study sought to highlight translation as both a vehicle of empowerment and a site of contestation.

Throughout the methodology, theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, Ambedkarite ideology, and postcolonial feminism were employed to guide analysis. Intersectionality provided a lens to understand the compounded marginalization of Dalit women, while Ambedkarite ideology foregrounded the political critique of caste hierarchies. Postcolonial feminism offered a framework to situate Dalit women's narratives within global debates on gender, identity, and resistance. These frameworks ensured that the study remained attentive to both the local specificity of Dalit women's experiences and their broader implications for feminist scholarship.

Finally, the methodology acknowledges its limitations. As a synthesis of secondary sources, the study is constrained by the availability and scope of existing scholarship. It does not claim to represent the entirety of Dalit women's voices but rather seeks to highlight key debates and contributions within the field. The interpretive nature of the analysis also means that findings are shaped by the perspectives of scholars and translators whose works were reviewed. Nevertheless, by systematically engaging with diverse strands of scholarship, landmark texts, and translation practices, the methodology provides a robust foundation for examining the complex dynamics of Dalit women's voices in English translation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Dalit women's voices in English translation occupy a unique position at the intersection of caste, gender, and language. Translated texts such as Bama's *Karukku* articulate trauma, resistance, and identity politics, situating Dalit feminism as a radical critique of caste patriarchy. These narratives challenge dominant literary traditions by

foregrounding systemic struggles of marginalized women, thereby expanding feminist discourse in India beyond middle-class perspectives. The act of translation has enabled Dalit women's autobiographies to achieve national and global visibility, allowing their lived realities to enter broader conversations on social justice, gender equality, and postcolonial identity.

However, this visibility often comes at the cost of cultural nuance and linguistic specificity. Caste-bound idioms, regional metaphors, and culturally embedded expressions risk dilution when translated into English, raising concerns about authenticity. The positionality of translators becomes crucial in this context, as their choices directly influence how Dalit women's voices are represented and received. Ethical responsibility in translation is therefore central, underscoring the tension between accessibility for wider readerships and fidelity to lived realities.

The discussion highlights that translation is not merely a linguistic exercise but a profoundly political act. It mediates between local contexts and global readerships, amplifying marginalized perspectives while simultaneously exposing them to risks of distortion. The application of intersectionality demonstrates how Dalit women's narratives embody compounded marginalization, while Ambedkarite ideology foregrounds their critique of caste hierarchies. Postcolonial feminism situates these voices within global debates, emphasizing their transformative potential in reshaping feminist scholarship.

Overall, the results suggest that Dalit women's translated texts serve as both empowerment and contestation. They empower by amplifying silenced voices and challenging hegemonic narratives, yet they also contest the ethics of representation, demanding reflexivity from translators and scholars. The discussion concludes that translation must be approached as a political responsibility, ensuring that Dalit women's narratives retain their authenticity, urgency, and radical critique of social hierarchies.

Table 1: Comparative Table for Dalit women's translated texts differ from mainstream feminist writings and how translation mediates their global reception

Theme	Findings	Implications	Challenges
Trauma & Resistance	Dalit women's texts articulate lived experiences of caste and gender oppression.	Situates Dalit feminism as radical critique of patriarchy.	Risk of homogenization across diverse voices.
Literary Intervention	Works like <i>Karukku</i> disrupt mainstream canons.	Expands feminist discourse in India.	Limited representation of broader Dalit women's experiences.
Visibility through Translation	English translation enables national and global circulation.	Amplifies marginalized perspectives in global debates.	Loss of cultural nuance and specificity.
Translator Positionality	Translator choices shape authenticity and reception.	Highlights ethical responsibility in representation.	Tension between accessibility and fidelity.
Theoretical Framing	Intersectionality, Ambedkarite ideology, postcolonial feminism guide analysis.	Ensures balance between local specificity and global relevance.	Requires reflexivity to avoid distortion.

4. CONCLUSION

The study on Dalit women's voices in English translation underscores the profound significance of translation as both a linguistic and political act. Dalit women's autobiographical and literary texts, exemplified by works such as Bama's *Karukku*, articulate trauma, resistance, and identity politics, situating Dalit feminism as a radical critique of caste patriarchy.

Translation into English has enabled these narratives to achieve national and global visibility, thereby expanding feminist discourse and situating Dalit women's experiences within broader postcolonial debates. Yet, this visibility is accompanied by challenges, particularly the risk of cultural dilution, domestication, and distortion of lived realities. The findings highlight that translators occupy a crucial role as cultural

mediators, whose positionality and ethical responsibility directly shape the authenticity and reception of Dalit women's voices. The comparative analysis reveals that while translation empowers marginalized voices by amplifying them across linguistic and cultural boundaries, it also contests the ethics of representation, demanding reflexivity and accountability. Theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, Ambedkarite ideology, and postcolonial feminism provide essential lenses to understand the compounded marginalization of Dalit women and the transformative potential of their narratives. Ultimately, the study concludes that translation must be approached not merely as a technical exercise but as a political responsibility. Scholars, translators, and publishers must recognize the urgency of preserving authenticity while ensuring accessibility. Dalit women's voices in translation are indispensable to both national and global feminist scholarship, offering radical interventions that challenge hegemonic narratives and foreground systemic oppression. Future research should continue to interrogate translation practices, explore diverse Dalit women's texts across regions, and develop ethical frameworks that safeguard the integrity of marginalized voices.

5. Conflict of Interest

None

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