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Translating and Resisting the (In)visible: Trauma and Silence in Manju Bala's Select Short Stories

Biraj Biswas (SRM University - AP, India),
email: birajbiswas50784@gmail.com
Bidisha Pal (SRM University - AP, India),
email: bidisha.p@srmap.edu.in

Abstract

Postcolonial translation studies have foregrounded questions of power and representation. However, limited attention has been paid to how the translation of Dalit women's writing negotiates caste-specific trauma within global feminist frameworks. Addressing this gap, the study analyses the linguistic and cultural shifts between the Bengali source texts and their English translations. This article examines how translation mediates trauma and silence while enabling resistance in select short stories from *Dalit Kotha: The Subaltern Voice in a Bengali Woman's Narratives* (2022) by Bengali Dalit writer Manju Bala, originally written in Bengali. Through her writings, Bala locates the silence and trauma of the unrecognised voice(s) of Dalit women of Bengal, which has been a less discussed issue in the dominant literary arena of Bengal. Through critical textual analysis, the study demonstrates how translation becomes a form of counter-discursive practice that both exposes and negotiates structures of caste patriarchy.

Keywords: Translation; counter-feminist voice, trauma, silence, Bengali Dalit women, resistance

Introduction

Critics and scholars identify the effects of imbalance within power relations while discussing translation in the postcolonial context.[1] Postcolonialism and translation, in a very intertwined manner, locate the disjuncture and heterogeneity in literary approaches. Translation is the key for communication and disseminating the destabilised narratorial representation through which unrecognised spaces get recognised. In talking about unrecognised spaces, texts that revolve around feminist ideologies nurture a certain understanding. In the translation of postcolonial feminist texts, there is often a tendency to foreground universalist feminist themes while marginalising local feminist struggles that intersect with issues of class, caste,

[1] Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 1999), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203068878; Tejaswini Niranjana, '*Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context,*' (University of California Press, 1992), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520911369; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Routledge, 1994), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315656496.

and colonialism.[2] Within this discourse itself, the specific plight of Dalit women in India has often been relegated to a peripheral *silence* and sometimes discussed under the pretext of universalist feminist discourse. Contemporary research shows that Dalit women constituted about 16.6 per cent of India's female population in 2011. Dalit women's problems encompass not only gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination associated with religion, caste, and untouchability, which in turn results in the denial of their social, economic, cultural, and political rights. They become vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation due to their gender and caste.[3] Varsha Ayyar postulates that narratives articulated by Dalit women authors operate as powerful, unapologetic critiques that 'brought out contradictions of Dalit patriarchy and the wider Dalit movement.'[4] These assertive literary voices arose, in part, as a response to a dual failure of representation: the frequent overlooking of caste-specific oppression within mainstream Indian feminist discourse, which has often failed to 'truly recognise the pain and trauma of the women pertaining to the lower caste background.'[5] Despite the potency and critical importance of these resistive voices, the writings of Dalit women remain disproportionately marginalised. Their works are 'relatively less popular and underexplored in comparison to upper caste Hindu women and male Dalit autobiographies/poems,' an oversight that consigns them to the extreme peripheries of literary canons, leaving them 'epistemically obscured and unclaimed.'[6] While caste essentially forms India's social stratification, sanctioning the marginalisation of those it deems 'untouchable,' it is Dalit women who bear the brunt of its most intimate and brutal manifestations. As scholar Bianca Cherechés affirms, they face 'compounded forms of oppression due to their caste and gender, spanning economic, physical, and mental aspects.'[7] Their bodies and lives become the sites where caste and graded patriarchy—structures that subjugate female agency, enact its most severe oppressions and exclusions.

To essentially grasp the intricacies of this oppression, this article interrogates beyond 'universalist feminist' discourse and focuses on the multilayered, painful granularity of Dalit women's lived experiences. Within this broader context of marginalisation, the landscape of Bengali Dalit literature is no exception. We seek to illuminate this very experiential reality by focusing on Dalit author Manju Bala's poignant short stories, *Dwanda* (Conflict) and *Charai Utrai* (Ups and Downs), both published in 2022. Emerging from the contested terrain of Bengal, Manju Bala has established herself as a pivotal Bengali Dalit feminist writer, whose short stories 'Conflict' and 'Ups and Downs,' translated into English by Saddam Saikh in 2022,

[2] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Duke University Press, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822384649.

[3] Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal and Wandana Sonalkar, 'Dalit Women in India: At the Crossroads of Gender, Class, and Caste,' *Global Justice* 8, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/10.21248/gjn.8.1.54.

[4] Varsha Ayyar, '"Aaydan (Weave of our Lives): Caste, Gender, and Feminism," in Dalit Women's Writings in Western India,' in *Ahead of their Times: Essays on Women Autobiography in India*, ed. K Purushotham (Kalpaz Publications, 2020), 22–23.

[5] Tarik Anowar, 'Manju Bala: A Bengali Dalit Woman Writer,' in *Dalit Kotha: The Subaltern Voice in a Bengali Dalit Woman's Narratives*, ed. and trans. by Tarik Anowar and Saddam Saikh (Authors Press, 2022), 21–22.

[6] Ayyar, 'Aaydan,' 23.

[7] Bianca Cherechés, 'Unveiling the oppressed body: Female Dalit Body Politics in India through Baburao Bagul and Yashica Dutt,' *Humanities* 12, no. 4 (2023), 1, https://doi.org/10.3390/h12040063.

meticulously document the brutal realities of caste and gender stratification in Bengal and their repercussions on lower caste Dalit women.[8]

We explore the multidimensional nature of subjugation as experienced by Dalit women in the socio-political and economic context of Bengal. Our analysis will be guided by the critical frameworks of intersectionality, which allow us to see how caste, class, and gender are not separate but mutually reinforcing axes of power which valorise the miseries of the oppressed. In this context graded patriarchy reveals the ideological machinery that perpetuates this oppression on Dalit women. Through these lenses, we analyse how Bala's narratives demonstrate gendered silence and, at the same time, break the pervasive silence, articulating the deep-seated trauma and resilient voices of those who have been systematically rendered invisible through translation.

Recent scholarship shows a growing upsurge of translation of Dalit women's writings that began in the twenty-first century.[9] However, a significant gap persists: the translation of short fiction by Dalit women, especially from the Bengali context, remains severely underexplored. Most translation studies in this domain prioritise the testimonial mode of autobiography, which, while valuable, often carries a universalist appeal that can obscure region-specific, local feminist struggles.[10] Consequently, the nuanced ways in which translated short fiction mediates the specific trauma, silence, and resistance of Bengali Dalit women have yet to be systematically analysed. We address this lacuna by asking: How do Manju Bala's short stories articulate the intersectional trauma and silence of Dalit women within the specific socio-political hierarchy of Bengal? What role does translation play in mediating these narratives for a global audience, and how does it navigate the tension between local specificity and universal intelligibility? In what ways can the translated text function as a site of resistance, reclaiming voice and agency for a community rendered 'epistemically obscured'?

Moreover, the study examines translation as a dual-edged instrument: one that both disseminates and potentially reshapes the resistive voices within Bala's work, making trauma and silence visible in the global literary arena while negotiating the cultural and linguistic pressures such visibility entails. We proceed by first contextualising Bala's narratives within the caste dynamics of Bengal and India, then analysing the textual representation of trauma and silence in the selected stories, and finally, examining how the translated texts navigate these elements to construct a counter-hegemonic feminist voice.

By foregrounding Bengali Dalit short fiction within translation studies, we make three crucial contributions: we expand Dalit feminist scholarship beyond autobiographical narratives to include short fiction; we situate Bengal within debates on caste and translation; and we conceptualise translation as an active site of ideological struggle rather than passive

[8] Manju Bala, 'Conflict,' in *Dalit Kotha: The Subaltern Voice in a Bengali Dalit Woman's Narratives*, ed. and trans. Tarik Anowar and Saddam Saikh (Authors Press, 2022).

[9] Pinaki Mandal, 'Feminist Reimagining in 21st Century Indian English Writing,' *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences* 10, no. 4 (2025), 45, https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.104.8; Judith Misrahi-Barak, K. Satyanarayana, Nicole Thiar, *Dalit Text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-imagined* (Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367149031.

[10] Geetika Rathore, 'Reinterpreting the Canon: Indian Women's Writings in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries,' *Journal of People's History and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2025), 90, https://gsmp.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Complete-Journal-June-2025-98-109.pdf.

transmission. In doing so, the study intervenes in ongoing discussions on trauma, silence, and resistance in postcolonial feminist translation.

Gendered silence: The intersection of caste, class, and gender in Manju Bala's short stories, 'Conflict' and 'Ups and Downs'

Manju Bala's 'Conflict' presents the complexities of an inter-caste romantic union between its protagonists: Banani Mondal, an impoverished Dalit orphan, and Kalyan Kanjilal, an affluent, upper-caste medical practitioner. Bala's narrative technique meticulously traces the chain of events and profound suffering, exposing how the intersecting hierarchies of caste, class, and gender predetermine a tragic trajectory. Despite explicit warnings from her friend Swapna about the perils of an inter-caste marriage, Banani dismisses these concerns, placing her faith in Kalyan's 'modern' education as a shield against 'age-old societal factors.' The *conflict* crystallises following their marriage, as the Kanjilal household becomes a microcosmic site of systemic oppression. Renuka Kanjilal, Banani's mother-in-law, despite being a modern educator, vehemently opposes the marriage. Her subsequent post-marriage abuse targets Banani's passion for singing, culminating in the humiliating reprimand, 'You low caste girl, that there would be no song or music here. It is not customary in the Kanjilal dynasty for the housewives to shout at the top of their voices. You must be courteous here.'[11] This incident is not merely an individual conflict but a political act of silencing, reinforcing a gendered silence upon Banani by denying her access to the cultural domain of music, which is considered an upper caste domain.

Kalyan's role adds to this circuit of oppression in Banani's post-marriage life. He sheds his liberal façade to actively uphold the traditions of the Kanjilal family, commanding Banani to abandon her education and musical pursuits by saying, 'Banani, you have studied a lot, and now please focus on your family as much as possible; you don't need to work.'[12] This command, articulated as concern, systematically attempts to erase her voice and agency. This dynamic exemplifies what Uma Chakravarti identifies as the core mechanism of graded patriarchy, wherein upper-caste men function as arbiters of tradition, controlling women's bodies and talents to maintain social order.[13] In 'Conflict,' the mechanism of patriarchy controls Banani's bodily autonomy and personal aspirations. As argued by Uma Chakravarti, this structure is not a standalone form of patriarchy but one that is 'structurally integrated into the caste system,' producing 'distinctive cultural codes for upper and lower caste women.'[14] Kalyan's insistence that Banani should abandon her musical practice and higher education, justified by the need to uphold his family's age-old customs, is a direct enactment of the continuity of graded patriarchy and casteist mentality, allowing him to control women's bodies and talents to maintain social order. His assertive actions reveal that his purported modernity was merely a veneer, dissolving when faced with the perceived threat a Dalit wife poses to the family's age-old tradition of being submissive inside the household. Kalyan's enforcement of patriarchal norms is paradoxically endorsed by Renuka Devi, an educated, retired teacher, whose actions demonstrate how patriarchal ideals are upheld by women

[11] Bala, 'Conflict,' 42.

[12] Bala, 'Conflict,' 42.

[13] Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, Revised Edition (Sage, 2018), https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353287818.

[14] Chakravarti, 'Gendering Caste,' 33.

themselves to perpetuate caste hierarchy, often at the expense of their own professed progressive values. The narrative's escalation into physical violence reveals the brutal logic of this system. Banani's body becomes marked with 'countless black spots' which she ironically describes as tokens of 'my husband's and mother-in-law's love for me.'[15] This stark irony functions as testimony to the perversion of familial relationships under caste patriarchy.

Through this narrative turn, Bala demonstrates that exogamous marriage, rather than being a liberatory act, becomes an institution that sanctions extreme violence to enforce caste and gender norms. The physical torture, mental trauma, and utter erosion of Banani's agency are not random acts of cruelty but deliberate mechanisms used to crush her spirit and assimilate her into the silent, subordinate wife demanded by the Kanjilal family's patriarchal caste pride. The bodily violence inflicted upon Banani transcends the depiction of individual suffering; it exemplifies the systemic and gendered peril Dalit women face within inter-caste marriages.

This fictional narrative mirrors a documented social reality. The violence depicted in Bala's fiction reflects a persistent social reality. In December 2025, a 20-year-old pregnant woman belonging from a dominant caste group called Lingayat community was beaten to death by her father and relatives in Karnataka's Dharwad district for marrying a Dalit man, against her family's wishes, despite the couple having sought police protection months earlier. The attack, which also left the woman's mother-in-law and a relative injured, triggered widespread protests by Dalit organisations demanding stronger protection for inter-caste couples and fast-track courts for cases of such atrocities.[16] More recently, in February 2026, a 24-year-old Dalit man died by suicide in Mumbai after sustained harassment by his wife's family over their inter-caste marriage, with activists warning of protests if arrests are not made.[17] National data underscores the systemic nature of such violence. Across India, more than 57,000 crimes against Dalits were registered in 2022—an average of 156 complaints daily—with each representing 'a human being denied dignity, safety and rights.'[18] Dalit women remain 'subject to constant sexual assault by upper caste men,' their bodies becoming sites where caste power is violently asserted.[19] As scholar D. Sujatha affirms, inter-caste marriages are a significant correlative factor for domestic violence against Dalit women, with starkly differentiated repercussions based on gender.[20] Within the framework of graded patriarchy, this factor underscores how women's bodies function as custodians of caste

[15] Bala, 'Conflict,' 43.

[16] Namita Singh, 'Indian state considers new "honour killing" law after brazen murder of young pregnant woman,' *The Independent,* 9 January 2026, https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/india/manya-patil-karnataka-honor-killing-b2897404.html.

[17] Samiullah Khan, 'Malwani man found dead; family alleges harassment after marriage,' in *Mid-Day,* 18 February 2026, https://www.mid-day.com/mumbai/mumbai-crime-news/article/mumbai-malwani-youth-dies-by-suicide-family-alleges-harassment-over-inter-caste-marriage-23617112.

[18] Sher Ali Khalti, 'Politics of hate,' in *The News on Sunday,* 28 September 2025, https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/1346772-politics-of-hate.

[19] CJP Team, 'Everyday Atrocity: Mapping the Normalisation of Violence Against Dalits and Adivasis in 2025,' *CJP,* https://cjp.org.in/everyday-atrocity-mapping-the-normalisation-of-violence-against-dalits-and-adivasis-in-2025/.

[20] Devarapalli Sujatha, 'Redefining Domestic Violence: Experiences of Dalit Women,' *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 47 (2014), 21, https://www.epw.in/journal/2014/47/commentary/redefining-domestic-violence.html.

continuity. Banani's experience in 'Conflict' mirrors this dynamic: her marriage to Kalyan does not dissolve caste hierarchy but intensifies its policing within the domestic sphere. The hostility she encounters, ranging from verbal humiliation to physical violence, can be read not merely as interpersonal cruelty but as an attempt to restore symbolic order disrupted by caste transgression. Sujatha's argument, therefore, provides a sociological backdrop that sharpens Bala's literary representation.[21] The story does not claim statistical universality; rather, it dramatises the structural vulnerability of Dalit women who enter upper-caste households through marriage. By situating Banani's suffering within this gender-differentiated pattern of caste exogamy, Bala exposes how 'modern' inter-caste unions may reproduce, rather than dismantle, entrenched hierarchies.

Moreover, Bala's narrative extends its critique of patriarchy beyond the immediate violence suffered by Banani to illuminate the intergenerational consequences of exogamous unions. The plight of Banani's daughter, Tumpa, who is orphaned and rejected by her paternal family, exemplifies how children also suffer under such conditions. Tumpa's struggle to become a medical practitioner without parental support exposes the systemic nature of this exclusion. To fully decode the plight of Banani and Tumpa, a distinct Dalit feminist standpoint is essential. This framework, as Anandita Pan notes, analyses 'the limitations in mainstream Indian feminist and Dalit Politics' representation of Dalit women,' which often subsumes their unique experiences under a generic rubric of caste, thereby neglecting the critical intersection of their gender identity.[22] Bala's work resists such elision, placing the compounded oppression of Dalit women at the very centre of its critique.

While 'Conflict' explores the violence of inter-caste marriage within a domestic sphere, 'Ups and Downs' shifts the focus to the socio-economic dimension of labour, revealing how caste and gender stratifications are codified and perpetuated through the menial work performed by Dalit women. The labour dimension in 'Ups and Downs' finds resonance in contemporary reports. Domestic workers in India—most of whom are Dalit women migrants from socio-economically backward regions—face routine exploitation rooted in 'the ancient institution of caste-slavery' and the 'inherent superiority complex embedded in the mindset of the employer who belongs to the upper crust of society.'[23] In November 2025, a 23-year-old Dalit domestic worker was sexually molested while washing dishes in an upper-caste household; when her husband confronted the accused, he was assaulted and told, 'You belong to a lower caste, go wherever you want; no one can challenge me.'[24] Such incidents confirm that the violence in Bala's narratives is not literary exaggeration but faithful documentation of systemic caste-gender oppression. The description of their daily work in upper-caste households—'They wash dishes, clean the houses and cook at the upper-class households'—is an example of what Gopal Guru terms the 'socially assigned division of

[21] Sujatha, 'Redefining Domestic Violence: Experiences of Dalit Women.'

[22] Anandita Pan, *Mapping Dalit Feminism: Towards an Intersectional Standpoint* (Sage, 2021), 129, https://doi.org/10.4135/9789354792687.n3.

[23] Nausheen Khan, 'Long Work Hours, Less Pay, And No Legal Protection: Female Domestic Workers Most Vulnerable to Abuse,' in *Feminism in India,* 16 September 2025, https://feminisminindia.com/2025/09/16/long-work-hours-less-pay-and-no-legal-protection-female-domestic-workers-most-vulnerable-to-abuse/.

[24] Lokmat Times, 'Woman Molested While Working at Home; Case Filed under Atrocities Act,' in *Lokmat Times,* 30 November 2025, https://www.lokmattimes.com/aurangabad/woman-molested-while-working-at-home-case-filed-under-atrocities-act/.

labour,' where caste dictates one's occupation.[25] This menial labour is presented as an unending cycle, a fate that offers no reprieve to Dalits.

The 'upper-class households' they serve are, in the Bengali context, providing the domestic space where class and caste power converge. In 'Ups and Downs,' the description of the food Bhavani, a domestic helper from a very impoverished lower caste background, takes home—'stale and insipid rice,' 'half-rotten curries,' 'week-old, moldy bread,' and 'arid, fallen grains and crumbs'—is not merely an indicator of poverty but a powerful symbol of her family's social position.[26] The leftovers signify pollution and waste, which are then channelled to the Dalit family, reinforcing a brutal somatic hierarchy where their consumption is framed as an act of scavenging. Bhavani's labour is the linchpin of this oppressive dynamic. Her work as a domestic helper is a direct manifestation of the caste-stratified division of labour, where Dalit women are historically confined to tasks deemed 'polluting,' such as handling waste and cleaning the domestic spaces of the upper castes. Her body becomes the vehicle for transporting not just cleanliness from the upper-caste home, but also its literal refuse back to her own. This creates a vicious cycle where her labour, meant to sustain her family, simultaneously reinforces their subhuman status.

This caste-based labour and inherited suffering extend to Bhavani's daughter, Parul, who is compelled to work as a live-in maid in an upper-class *Bhadralok* household. Her responsibilities in that household include cooking, cleaning rooms and other domestic chores. Her placement in the inner sanctum of a *Bhadralok's* house is loaded with socio-cultural meaning. The *Bhadralok* (an elitist social class) in Bengal, while projecting an image of enlightened modernity, is structurally dependent on the invisible reproductive labour of Dalit bodies to maintain its status. Parul's confinement to their inner sanctum signifies her entrapment within the very system that her education could have allowed her to critique or escape. Her plea to her mother— 'I can't do so much work here. It causes me a great deal of discomfort'—is a critical articulation of embodied trauma.[27] The discomfort is not merely physical fatigue but the psychological anguish of being crushed into a predetermined, subservient role. Parul's mother's response, 'We are born to suffer. Are we born to unwind like the Bhadralok?' is a pivotal moment of ideological interpellation.[28] This is not a lack of love, but a brutal lesson on caste-gender stratification, where the mother socialises her daughter into internalising suffering as her inherent destiny.

The brutal episode of Parul's pregnancy, as a result of the illicit involvement of Proloy, the only son of Amala Devi of the upper-caste household where Parul works as a live-in maid, in 'Ups and Downs' constitutes a visceral exposition of how graded patriarchy operates through the control and exploitation of the Dalit female body. This is not a simple case of (s)exploitation but a systematic assertion of caste power, where Proloy's predatory nature, which impregnates Parul by giving her hope that he will marry her, is enabled by a deeply entrenched ideology that allows upper-caste men to view Dalit women as inherently available. Parul's ensuing silence about her pregnancy is not passive but enforced by a regime of terror and the traumatic realism of her impoverished social position.

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[25] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 27; Gopal Guru, 'Archaeology of Untouchability,' in *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*, edited by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai (Oxford University Press, 2009), https://www.epw.in/journal/2009/37/special-articles/archaeology-untouchability.html.

[26] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 28.

[27] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 28.

[28] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 28.

Proloy's mother, Amala Devi's reaction to Parul's pregnancy is a textbook performance of this caste-gender stratification. Her immediate response, 'This is why you belong to the lower caste,' projects immorality and shamelessness onto Dalit women to justify their exploitation and to purify upper-caste male transgressions.[29] Her threats and her command to get the baby aborted are acts of casteist domination; an effort to literally erase the biological evidence of this impermissible union and preserve the ritual quality of her family.

Narrating the unspeakable: Manju Bala's literary resistance in 'Conflict' and 'Ups and Downs'

Rather than merely documenting gendered silence, the short story 'Conflict' functions as a deliberate act of narrative resistance. The core of this resistance is Banani's painful yet pivotal moment of realisation that her husband 'Kalyan is no longer the same Kalyan as before. If I hadn't become acquainted with the present Kalyan, I would have been unaware that people could be so cruel,' which marks a critical signpost of oppression.[30] This is not merely a lament but a sharp critique of graded patriarchy masquerading under the guise of modernity. In realising the brutality and deception meted out to her by this entrenched structure of patriarchy, Banani moves from a state of subjugation to one of conscious resistive voices. Her resistance becomes most potent in her decisive, urgent request to her friend Swapna:

> I have a little girl named Tumpa. I desperately want to keep Tumpa with you. You don't have any children. I can't think of anyone else right now except you. I'm scared to death. Day and night appear to me to be a nightmare. Make Tumpa a doctor, but one who is more well-known than her father.[31]

In entrusting her daughter to a chosen female friend rather than to the oppressive paternal family, Banani reclaims her agency as a mother. Furthermore, her specific aspiration for Tumpa to become an even better doctor than her father is a direct challenge to the very hierarchy that caused her tragic demise.

By shifting across time in narratorial strategy and making Tumpa—now a successful doctor—the narrator who discovers her mother's diary, Bala creates a layered narrative of testimony and intergenerational reclamation. Banani's written words, preserved on discarded yellow paper, become a compelling text that bridges the temporal and emotional chasm between mother and daughter. Tumpa's act of reading is an act of witnessing, ensuring that Banani's silenced voice is finally heard. In this regard, Tumpa's inaudible utterance, 'Your desire has been fulfilled, mother, I have become a doctor today,' shows Tumpa's tribute to her deceased mother, Banani, at the same time reclaiming her agency, and dismantling the notion that lower-caste women do not have the brain to become successful professionals.[32] Tumpa's existence as an educated, professional woman is the living fulfilment of her deceased mother Banani's resistant will. Bala thus concludes the narrative not with the tragedy of Banani's death, but with the triumph of her legacy.

[29] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 29.

[30] Bala, 'Conflict,' 43.

[31] Bala, 'Conflict,' 43.

[32] Bala, 'Conflict,' 43.

The narrative structure itself resists a telos of pure victimhood, instead offering a vision of intergenerational defiance and reclamation. Through this dual focus on Banani's vocal despair and Tumpa's reclaimed voice, Bala's narrative resistance ensures that the unspeakable is not only spoken but answered. In the short story 'Ups and Downs,' the central plot—Parul's pregnancy following exploitation meted out to her by the upper-caste Proloy—creates a critical space where resistance emerges within a broader narrative of oppression. Parul's mother, Bhavani's defiant retort—'All the difficulties will be solved if your son simply marries my daughter'—is a seismic challenge to the caste hierarchy.[33] In this moment, Bhavani ceases to be a silent subaltern and directly confronts the upper-caste woman with a demand for justice that would, in fact, dissolve the very social boundaries that Amala Devi, Proloy's mother, seeks to fortify. Amala's stunned reaction and her subsequent outburst—'For a low-caste, you have an excessively large mouth!'—reinforces the thwarting power of Bhavani's speech.[34] The upper-caste household cannot accommodate a Dalit woman who claims the right to demand accountability and integration into mainstream society for her daughter. Bhavani's vehement resistance is multifaceted: she refuses the financial hush money, disobeys the order to abort, and, most importantly, validates her daughter's trauma by not forcing her to do anything against her will. Thus, there is a narrative tension that occurs from the trauma, attempted silence, and the desperate urge to break the silence. Parul's tears for the 'flower bud' in her womb signify a claiming of her bodily autonomy and maternal desire against the dehumanising logic of her oppressors.

Amala Devi's attempts to coerce an abortion, coupled with her vicious victim-blaming, represent the patriarchal imperative to control Dalit reproduction and erase evidence of upper-caste wrongdoings on Dalit women. Against this, Bala posits acts of monumental resistance—the powerful, defiant voice of Bhavani refusing the offered bribe and the command to abort. This is not merely a strategic non-compliance that asserts autonomy in the face of overwhelming power.

It is in the concluding hospital scene of 'Ups and Downs' that Bala's vision of literary resistance finds its most potent and symbolic expression. The image of Parul, near death after a traumatic childbirth, fumbling around the bed as she regains consciousness, is a powerful metaphor for her relentless will to live and connect. The 'lovely wail of a newborn infant' conceived in violence and born against the explicit orders of the upper caste is the ultimate symbol of defiance.[35] Its cry is the sound of a future that Amala Devi tried and failed to wipe out. The birth of the child points towards the triumphant failure of graded patriarchy to control the reproductive destiny and legacy of a Dalit woman, securing her a perpetual voice to revoke and resist.

In both 'Conflict' and 'Ups and Downs,' Bala ventures into the treacherous terrain of Dalit women's lived experiences, narrating the unspeakable truths of trauma, sexual violence, and systemic dehumanisation that are often forced into silence. Traumatic truth is never only one-fold and physical; rather, it is twofold and involves the psyche.[36] Cathy Caruth talks about the therapeutic effects of languages in literature that help in the therapeutic treatment of

[33] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 29.

[34] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 29.

[35] Bala, 'Ups and Downs,' 31.

[36] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (John Hopkins University Press, 1996), https://doi.org/10.1353/book.20656.

trauma through narrating the experiences that cannot otherwise be heard in reality.[37] Hence, Bala's narrative technique itself constitutes a form of resistance within the story that transforms passivity into an intergenerational resistance, evolving the short story from a mere aesthetic object into a potent vehicle for the testimony of trauma and counter-history. Trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra vouches for the recognition of an objective reconstruction and empathetic engagement of the traumatic past to critically explore the challenges associated with the representation of trauma in narratives.[38] Using testimonies, 'Conflict' and 'Ups and Downs' represent the trauma within the purview of fiction to show Dalit women's plights throughout history. Through the birth of Tumpa, Banani's daughter and Parul's newborn infant, the narrative secures a defiance—defiance against the unrecognition of the women; defiance against silence; defiance against being obliterated by hierarchy. Thus, the story of individual trauma transforms into a lasting counter-narrative against caste-patriarchal domination. Through her unflinching gaze, Bala documents not only the mechanics of oppression but, more importantly, the vehement and multifaceted forms of resistance that emerge from and within the crucible of subjugation.

Cultural and linguistic negotiation: Comparative analysis of select original and translated lines

'Ups and Downs' and 'Conflict' are stories that revolve around women who are the pivotal characters of proverbial womanhood. Translation of such texts is a necessity, and it thwarts the sweeping generalisation of feminist ideologies. The original stories provide the space from which to represent the distinct feminist voice(s) and silence a character regionally. The activity of translation expands the silence to a much broader scope. Tables 1 and 2 provide examples from both the original and translated versions of the stories where the silence has its compelling presence. Moreover, these lines and phrases talk about different expressions of casteist exploitation and torment. The expressions are marked with significant mentions of Bengali terminologies and are an attempt to find befitting equivalents in translation. We provide a close comparative study of the original text and the translated text to which this article refers. This approach provides a detailed and ingrained interpretation of the examples. In this connection, postcolonial translation with an intervention of the feminist angle is necessary to unfurl the instances and the broader contexts that the narratives showcase. The analytical study provides a space to see translation as a discipline where the silenced voices are heard loudly and discussed critically.

[37] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

[38] Dominick LaCapra, '*Writing History, Writing Trauma*' (John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

Table 1. Comparison of select original and translated lines from 'Conflict'

	Original Bengali	**Established translation**
1	বোজা চোখের পাশ বেয়ে জল গড়িয়ে পড়ছিলো নি:শ্বব্দে *Boja chokher pas beye jol goriye porchilo nisshobde* I (p. 65)	'Tears were streaming down the side of the loaded eyes, but no one noticed.' (p. 40)
2	আমি কলোনি এর মেয়ে টুম্পা *Ami colony er meye Tumpa* I (p. 65)	'I am a girl from Colony Para.' (p. 40)
3	কিগো ছোটজাতের মেয়ে এখানে গান বাজনা চলবে না, ঘরের বৌ গলা ছেড়ে চিৎকার করবে এটা কাঞ্জিলাল বংশের রীতি নয় *Kigo chhotojater meye ekhane gan bajna cholbe na, ghorer bou gola chhere chitkar korbe eta Kanjilal bongsher riti noy* I (p. 67)	'Do you understand, you low caste girl, that there would be no song or music here? It is not necessary in the Kanjilal dynasty for the housewives to shout at top of their voice.' (p. 42).
4	আমার ভীত সন্ত্রস্ত মুখ ওকে নির্দয়তার চরমে পৌঁছে দেয় । মানুষ যে এতো নিষ্ঠুর হতে পারে এখনকার কল্যাণ কে না কাছে পেলে আমার অজানাই থেকে যেত *Amar bhito sontrosto mukh oke nirdoyotar chorome pouche day I Manush j eto nishthur hote pare ekhonkar Kalyan ke na kachhe pele amar ajanai theke jeto I* (p. 68)	'He goes to the height of cruelty because of my terrified expression. If I hadn't become acquainted with the present Kalyan, I would have been unaware that people could be so cruel.' (p. 43)
5	মা এর গায়ের রং কুচকুচে কালো । বীভৎস ও মুখের দিকে তাকিয়ে সে কেঁদে ফেলে ।বোধহয় ভয় পেয়েছে সে *Ma er ga er rong kuchkuche kalo I Bibhotso o mukher dike takiye se kende fele I Bodhoy bhoy peyeche se I* (p. 68)	'Mother has a dark ebony complexion. She cries as she stares at the terrible face. Perhaps she is frightened.' (p. 43)

Table 1 is a clarification of the dominated silence and life of Tumpa, a girl from the colony who belongs to the lower caste. Translated words are provoking here, as they provide resistance that addresses a broader space and periphery. In the first example, the word '*nisshobde*,' which literally means silently, has not been translated and given a proper equivalent. Instead, the phrase 'no one noticed' is used. The translated words do not carry the meaning of the original; however, the sense has been aptly transferred in a subtle manner, where the translators try to disseminate the sense of the silence of the protagonist, Banani. Here, the translator is taking a liberty in choosing a particular befitting expressive phrase for substituting the original sense that has been carried through. This can be viewed

as the 'translator's visibility'—a term coined by Larisa Cercel and Alice Leal, which is an extended and a more reciprocative response to Lawrence Venuti's 'translator's invisibility.'[39]

In the second example, the phrase 'Colony para' in the translated version produces the environment of a colony. The retaining of the word *para* (locality) in the translated text is also a part of the translator's own sense of choice. This is a reciprocation to the 'foreignization' concept of translation that was proposed by Lawrence Venuti in 2017, where foreignisation means a target text is produced which deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original.[40] The word *para* is a Bengali word which means locality, but the word has been used deliberately by the translators to identify the specified stipulated space where the Dalit people belong and the space from which the hierarchy emerges.

In the third example, the word '*choto jaat*' has been translated as 'lower caste' in the translated text to denote the abominable condition to which the Dalit women belong. There is a semantic shift that occurs here and transfers the sense in a suitable way. In another example of semantic shift, the word 'dynasty' has been used as a substitute for the word '*bongsho*,' which is not an apt equivalent. The word dynasty connotes a reference to kings and emperors. Hence, the translation does not carry the literal sense properly. However, when hierarchy prevails, upper-caste people often believe themselves to be rulers of society, and they dominate people who belong to lower strata. Hence, in translation there is a subtle reflection of that mentality. The last two examples in Table 1 (4 and 5) befittingly show the battered and tragic aftermath of Banani that has been reflected in the translated terms. Although the term 'terrified expression' does not really connote the idea of '*bhito sontrosto mukh*,' the way it has been represented manages to strike a balance between the original and translated senses while providing a sense of curiosity for the reader. It is part of an ideological intervention, and the translators manage to feature a sense of the cruelty and gruesomeness of the situation of the protagonist. The expression 'she stares at the terrible face' has been placed against the original '*bibhotso o mukher dike takiye se kede fele*' as the translated phrase neutralises the extensive emotion with which the reader has written about the writhing pain of Tumpa. The way the little girl cries at her mother's dead body is a mark of reaction against the *silence* that has accumulated so far. The phrase 'dark complexion' explains the fact that even after death, Banani cannot get rid of her battered condition of being a lower-caste Black girl. To Banani, again, silence is a coexisting companion that remains with her from the first and provides her with the desired freedom—death. In this way, she makes her silence more provoking than her words. This is where again the ideological intervention of the translator seems to occur as the loud and expressive wailing of Tumpa denotes and exacerbates the deafening silence of Banani.

[39] Larisa Cercel and Alice Leal, '*The Translator's Visibility: New Debates and Epistemologies'* (Routledge, 2025), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032675008; Lawrence Venuti, '*The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation'* (Routledge, 2017), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315098746.

[40] Venuti, 'The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation.'

Table 2. Comparison of select original and translated lines from 'Ups and Downs'

	Original Bengali	**Established Translation**
1	আমাদের জন্মই তো কষ্ট করার জন্য। আমরা কি ভদ্রলোকের মতো আরাম করতে জন্মেছি? *Amader jonmoi to kosto korar jonno I Amra ki bhodroloker moto aram korte jonmechi?* (p. 57)	'We are born to suffer. Are we born to unwind like the *Bhadrolok*?' (p. 28)
2	তোমার মেয়েকে নিয়ে যাও ভবানী । আরে এতো অসভ্য মেয়ে আমি দেখিনি। এই জন্যই বলে ছোট জাত । তোমাদের কোনো ম্যান সন্মান এর বালাই নেই, নেই কোনো ইজ্জত এর বালাই *Tomar meyeke niye jao Bhabani I Are eto osobhyo meye ami dekhini I Ei jonnoi bole chhoto jaat I Tomader kono mam sonman er balai nei, nei kono ijjat er balai I* (p. 58)	'Bhavani, take your daughter away. I've never seen such a brazen young lady. This is why you belong to the lower caste. You have no respect and no honour.' (p. 29)
3	কি বললে ? তোমার মেয়ের সাথে আমার ছেলের বিয়ে ? যতবড় মুখ নয় ততোবড়ো কথা ? তোমার সাহস তো কম নয় ? ছোট জাত কি আর সাধে বলে? *Ki bolle? Tomar meyer sathe amar cheler biye? Jotoboro mukh noy totoboro kotha? Tomar sahos to kom noy? Chhoto jaat ki aar sadhe bole?* (p. 58)	'What exactly did you say? My son's wedding with your daughter? For a low-caste, you have an excessively large mouth!' (p. 29)
4	প্রলয়ের মা তাকে শাসিয়ে বলে, প্রলয়ের নাম উচ্চারণ করবি না। যদি কখনো শুনতে পাই ফল ভালো হবে না *Proloyer ma taake sashie bole, Proloyer nam uccharon korbi na I Jodi kokhno sunte pai fol bhalo hobe na I* (p. 59)	'Proloy's mother warns her not to mention Proloy's name to anyone else.' (p. 30)
5	বাইরে অপেক্ষা করছে ভবানী। ওর মুখে ভয় এর ছাপ স্পষ্ট *Baire opekkha korche Bhabani I Or mukhe bhoy er chhap sposto I* (p. 59)	'Bhavani is waiting outside. The expression on her face conveys a sense of apprehension.' (p. 30)

Table 2 represents the suppressed voices of Bhabani and Parul. The act of translation resists silence and offers explanatory comments with fitting words. In the first example, 'We are born to suffer. Are we born to unwind like the *Bhadrolok*?' the term *bhadrolok* has been deliberately retained in the translated piece to show the dichotomy between the upper class

as well as caste and the lower class as well as caste. Bhabani repents of not being a part of the *bhadrolok* category, and for this, she has to nurture silence. The preservation of the term *bhadrolok* or the act of non-translation specifies some distinct appearance here. This is the translator's choice and a reciprocity with the 'foreignization' concept where the deliberate retaining of the Bengali word *bhadrolok* denotes a sense of foreignness in the translated text. However, there is a sense of untranslatability as well where the translators lack a literal equivalent for that term for a broader audience.

In the second example of Table 2 the furious Amala Debi reminds Bhabani that they belong to the *choto jaat* or 'lower caste' people. The translated term 'lower caste' is not suitable again, as it fails to explain the hierarchical disjuncture within society. In the third example, '*chhoto jaat ki r sadhe bole!*' the term *choto jaat* or 'lower caste' again denotes the destabilising space to which the Dalit people belong. Amala Debi's scorn in using the term exacerbates the negative attitude towards Dalit women who love to dream and aspire to shedding the limitations of caste discrimination. This is where an ideological intervention on the part of the translators occurs when they try to carry the sense of this specific Bengali term to target readers who might be unfamiliar with the word or concept. In the fourth example, the original speech has been translated into a reported narration of Amala Devi, being representative of the upper caste populace. The character becomes prevalent in showcasing her reactions towards Parul and Bhabani. Here, translation provides a particular and individual expression. This is a classic example of translator's visibility where the translators do not rigidly maintain the literal meaning. Instead, translation features its own sense of understanding and translatability and establishes an independent ideology of the original expression to the target readers. The last example is again where the silence of Bhabani becomes very prominent, and the translated term carries the silence of apprehension in Bhabani's face. The translator makes the readers visualise the apprehensive look and perspective of Bhabani.

The examples in Tables 1 and 2 show some particularities of interpretation and comparison of the original texts and the translated texts. Each representative example denotes an individual's interpretative angle with its individual approach to the core theme of 'silence' caused in Dalit women due to domination by graded patriarchy. These particularities of translation also characterise the cultural intervention or 'cultural turn' associated with postcolonial translation and the need to acknowledge the cultural and linguistic specificities of the marginalised Dalit communities of India.[41] For Dalit women's texts and their languages, particularly, feminist translation theories in the late-twentieth century, especially that of Luise von Flotow, have important implications here because they contain an intersectional *l'écriture* that talks about the shared experience of all women, including Dalit women.[42]

Conclusion

Translation scholar Maya Pandit argues that in a country divided by caste, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity, translation operates within regimes of power, privilege and legitimation of the dominant sect—Hindu upper-caste patriarchal male writers—at the expense of women, Dalits, tribals, and minority communities. Translation of the writings of

[41] Bassnett and Trivedi, eds, *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*; Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context*; Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?'

[42] Louis Von Flotow, 'Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories,' TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction 4, no. 2 (1991), https://doi.org/10.7202/037094ar.

Dalit women in Bengal has not been foregrounded, even though these authors have been writing for a considerable period. Perhaps the primary reason for this lacuna is the tendency of Dalit women writers to use the vernacular and regional languages, which make reaching a wider audience difficult. Indeed, these writings have a *silence* of their own.

Although autobiographies and a few short stories, as well as poems, have been translated for some of the authors, the number is minor and has tended to focus on Dalit male writers. In this article, with its careful analyses and detailed explanations, we bring out the nuances of Manju Bala's short stories and the underlying silence within the stories. When the original Bengali stories were translated, they disseminated the essence of the silence that is steeped within each Dalit woman, either in narrative or reality. These are stories woven for all women, and translation reclaims the silence to lend a voice to previously silenced women in the global arena.

Our contribution in this paper is important as it relies on translation theory and feminist theory from the positions of intersectionality and postcoloniality. Since Bengali Dalit women's texts have not been routinely translated, there is ample possibility for future researchers to focus on this area and address the issue in a scholarly and compelling manner. As more translations become available, scholars will find new ways to study the works of Dalit women. This will help shape comparative studies of regional Dalit texts and their translations. It will also give greater visibility to translators working on Dalit and Black literatures, while bringing attention to their positionality. Dalit women remain doubly marginalised, and their stories need to be heard and recognised. Their narratives encourage critical scholarship that challenges hegemonic hierarchies of caste, class, gender, and patriarchy.

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