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# Caste Silencing and the Savarna Gaze: Dalit Muslim Women and the Politics of Translating Sajjad Zaheer's 'Dulari'

*Sudesh Manger (VIT-AP University, Amaravati, India),*
*email: sudesh.manger@vitap.ac.in*
*Deepjoy Katuwal VIT-AP University, Amaravati, India),*
*email: deepjoy.katuwal@vitap.ac.in*

## Abstract

This paper examines how caste silencing operates in literary translation through close lexical and narrative comparison of Sajjad Zaheer's Urdu short story 'Dulari' (1932) and its two translations into English (2014) and Hindi (2022). Centring on a Dalit Muslim domestic worker whose servitude destabilises hierarchies in an Ashraf household, the analysis shows how casteed subjectivity is erased in translation. Drawing on Tejaswini Niranjana's theory of translation and Yogesh Maitreya's critique of Savarna translational practice, the paper conceptualises a 'Savarna translational gaze' that obscures intra-Muslim caste hierarchies. The silencing of caste markers (lauṇḍi, jhootha), shifts in narrative focalisation, and the moralisation of resistance recode structural oppression as generic poverty or personal tragedy. Such silencing reinforces the secular myth of Muslim castelessness and marginalises Pasmanda subjectivities. Therefore, the paper argues for an anti-caste, Pasmanda feminist translation praxis that retains caste markers, embeds contextual notes, and practises translator reflexivity to resist epistemic violence in translation.

## Keywords

Pasmanda feminism, Savarna gaze, caste silencing, translation studies, Dalit Muslim women

## Introduction

The paper examines the politics of caste silencing[1] through a close lexical and narrative comparison of Sajjad Zaheer's Urdu short story 'Dulari' from the anthology *Angare* (1932) and its subsequent translations into Hindi (2011) by Shakeel Siddique and into English (2014) by Vibha S. Chauhan and Khalid Alvi.[2] The story centres on a Dalit Muslim domestic worker whose lifelong servitude and muted resistance subtly destabilise the caste and gender hierarchies within an elite Ashraf Muslim household. The paper explores how caste silencing operates in literary translation and attempts to demonstrate how casteed subjectivity[3]

[1] Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (University of California Press, 1992).

[2] Hereafter, Dulari refers to the character, while 'Dulari' denotes the title of the story, whether in its original or translated form.

[3] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 3. (Casteed is a neologism denoting subjectivity shaped and constrained by caste structures, analogous to 'gendered' or 'racialised').

especially that of a Dalit Muslim woman is systematically silenced and erased in translation. As Anwar Ali claims, the dominant narratives on caste often portray those in a Muslim community as casteless,[4] an ideology reinforced by translation practices that erase such intra-religious hierarchies and construct universalised categories.[5] Sajjad Zaheer's 'Dulari' is set precisely within this caste and class-conscious world, and the paper explores how its translations silence that reality through Savarna translation. The paper defines Savarna translation as the process by which Dalit experiences are mediated through caste-privileged frameworks, often universalising suffering and erasing or silencing specific markers of caste oppression.[6]

The source text written in Urdu is caste-explicit in its depiction of a protagonist Dulari's casteed servitude. It stages caste, gender, religion and domestic labour within an intra-Muslim elite household and the constant use of caste-marked vocabulary and spatialised servitude throughout the story makes this text the appropriate literary source to explore the Savarna translation process adopted by the translator. The protagonist is addressed with caste-inflected terms like londī,[7] a term historically used for female domestic labourers from Arzal communities. Her presence is constantly marked as impure, even as she performs the intimate labour of bathing and feeding children, cleaning bodily waste, and sleeping in the kitchen. These spatial and linguistic cues render caste visible. However, such markers in both the translations are euphemised. Londī is frequently and interchangeably used with another substitute and becomes simply 'naukrānī' (maid) or 'servant,' and the intricate power relations embedded in her subaltern status dissolve into a universal class subjugation while negating caste and gender subalternisation. This act of translational cannot be read as a neutral shift in terminology but the conscious and ideological effort to silence caste, class and gender subalternisation. Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler describe this translation act as 'a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication—and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting.'[8] Such selective rewording is not incidental but ideological.

This ideological dimension of translational silencing is what the paper sets out to examine. Translation in such cases acts as a vehicle of erasure which propagates the secular myth of 'castelessness' and creates the dominant Savarna-Ashraf imaginaries. In the English translation of *'*Dulari*'* the caste-specific markers are constantly translated as generic suffering or universal human tragedy that stems from economic conditions. The consequences of such acts go beyond the text. It shapes academic canons, curricular syllabi, and social imaginaries, and a person's general perspective. When caste is erased from gendered narratives, the result is not only a misreading but a re-inscription of social privileges. Its fluency and readability

[4] Ali Anwar, *Masawat ki Jung* (Struggle for Equality) (Forward Press, 2023, originally published 2005), 73.

[5] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 2.

[6] For detailed analysis, refer to Yogesh Maitreya, 'Dalit Writers – Savarna Translators,' in *The Untranslated in Translation: A Symposium on the Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Force of Translation,* ed. Rita Kothari (Seminar 726), 36, https://www.academia.edu/44016003/THE_UNTRANSLATED_IN_TRANSLATION_symposium_participants_a_symposium_on_the_linguistic_and_non_linguistic_force_of_translation_10_THE_PROBLEM

[7] Zaheer Sajjad, 'Dulari,' in *Angarey,* by S. Zaheer, A. Ali, R. Jahan, and M. Mahmuduzzafar (Nizami Press, 1932), 132.

[8] Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler, eds. *Translation and Power* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), xxi.

mirror the imagination of upper-caste Brahmins, rendering it acceptable to academic and global audiences while sanitising the caste marker of the author. According to Yogesh Maitreya, these erasures are a sign of the epistemic violence committed by Savarna interpreters.[9] His argument is specifically about Dalit texts in Marathi and Hindi, but the observation resonates powerfully with the case of 'Dulari.' The adoption of Savarna interpretation performed on both translations of the text is a mode of regulating the Dalit Muslim subject as normal human suffering. In the Urdu text, 'Dulari' performs subtle yet defiant acts: 'by running away from the house two times at the end of the story.' These gestures are modes of subaltern expression, acts of embodied resistance against caste and gendered labour regimes. Her silence is a rebellious act, but it is translated into pathos and an act of shame and guilt. This is where Pasmanda feminist critique becomes essential because it argues on reading Muslim women's oppression not just through the lens of patriarchy or poverty but through intra-Muslim caste hierarchies.

The caste rigidity, marked through birth and lineage, underpins Dulari's position in the household. Her servitude is not the result of economic accident; it is the embodiment of intergenerational marginalisation. Yet such casteed truths are rendered illegible in translation. This illegibility is not accidental. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi argue, translation 'does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum ... it is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer ... highly manipulative ... [and] rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality.'[10] The Pasmanda feminist sensibility with its oral registers, bodily knowledge, and structural critique is often overwritten by elite sentimentality and canonical gatekeeping. As Sherry Simon aptly observes, 'each new translation is necessarily a confirmation of, or a confrontation with, a pre-existing version,'[11] underscoring how dominant narratives persist or are challenged through acts of translation. Neither version of 'Dulari' confronts caste-blindness; they confirm and extend it. To resist this complicity, translation must be re-conceived not just as a reproduction but as redress. Luise von Flotow advocates for a feminist translation praxis that includes 'supplementing, prefacing, and footnoting' to preserve a socio-political force of marginalised voices.[12] Therefore, a Pasmanda feminist translational ethics needs to 'supplement, preface, and footnote' the caste explicitly, retaining caste markers such as *londī*, preserving speech patterns, and embedding historical context. It would treat silences not as aesthetic ellipses but as resistant enunciations. Translation, then, is not a bridge between texts but a battleground of meaning, a terrain where the politics of caste, gender, and class are negotiated or erased. In the case of 'Dulari,' it is a site of subaltern disappearance, a vanishing that reveals the deep discomfort with confronting caste within Muslim social life. Her absence from the translated texts, her reduction to a sentimental object of pity mirrors her erasure from the national literary imagination. To reclaim 'Dulari' is to insist on her presence not as a passive sufferer but as a resistant subject. Her gaze, her silence, her labouring body all are the articulation of an epistemology that translation must learn to listen to, not overwrite. Therefore, the paper argues that Hindi and English translations of 'Dulari' enact caste erasure through

[9] Maitreya, 'Dalit Writers,' 36.

[10] Bassnett and Trivedi, 'Postcolonial Translation,' 2.

[11] Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (Routledge, 1996), 106.

[12] Luise von Flotow, 'Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories,' *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction* 4, no. 2 (1991), 74.

euphemisation, re-focalisation, and moralisation, thereby reproducing Savarna-Ashraf hegemony.

## Muslim castelessness as a secular myth

Drawing on Tejaswini Niranjana's theory of translation as a colonial and ideological apparatus in *Siting Translation* (1992), this paper interrogates the mechanisms of translational power politics that obscure or displace caste within Indian Muslim narratives. In *Siting Translation,* she argues that 'translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism.'[13] Although Niranjana's analysis interrogates and critiques colonial translations of Indian texts, her insights remain crucial to understanding how translation continues to function as a site of epistemic control in postcolonial South Asia. In the case of 'Dulari,' this asymmetry is replicated in how caste-coded signs in the Urdu original are neutralised or eliminated in translation. Drawing from Niranjana's argument of translation as 'ideological structuration,' this paper examines lexical substitution, narrative re-focalisation, and moral reinterpretation as practice through which caste difference is neutralised. The result is not mere simplification or target culture oriented, but the ideological reproduction of secular-nationalist literary norms that efface Pasmanda feminist subjectivity. Such privileging of secular universalist narratives over caste-coded critique largely sustains the myth of castelessness. The politics of this translational act are especially oppressive when the subject is a Dalit Muslim woman, a figure doubly marginalised within both religious and caste systems. The translation of caste-marked texts has emerged as a critical area of inquiry, particularly through Yogesh Maitreya's work on Savarna translators. Maitreya argues that 'the epistemological positions of Dalit writers and their Savarna translators are not only different, but opposed to each other, given the privilege Savarna translators inherit and the rejection which Dalit writers face in their lives for their outright, explicit narratives against caste(s).'[14] He demonstrates how 'translation in English by their Savarna translators indicates the intention of the Savarna-English literary world in which only certain Dalit narratives are demanded, translated and consumed.'[15] Such translation practices often privilege Savarna translational authority over Dalit voice; where caste markers and resistant voices are selectively silenced in Hindi and English versions.

The scholarship on Muslim caste studies challenges the dominant secular myth of Muslim castelessness. Ali Anwar claims that the Indian Muslim social order is deeply stratified by caste. As he explains, it is a 'triadic structure of Ashraf (noble), Ajlaf (base), and Arzal (degraded). These categories are not only linguistic derivations "based on Arabic roots sharf (shareef, or noble), jalf (neech, base or low), razl (nikrasht, abominable)" but also structural realities that define labor, respectability, and marriageability.'[16] The Pasmanda movement, as Ansari contends, represents 'the return of Muslim caste as the colonial repressed or the "disinvented," under enabling conditions.'[17] The enactment of the 'Pasmanda' identity in 1998 by the All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz, led by Ali Anwar, a journalist-activist,

[13] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 3.

[14] Maitreya, 'Dalit Writers,' 36.

[15] Maitreya, 'Dalit Writers,' 36.

[16] Anwar, 'Masawat ki jung,' 73.

[17] Khalid Anis Ansari, 'Contesting Communalism(s): Preliminary Reflections on Pasmanda Muslim Narratives from North India,' *Prabuddha: Journal of Social Equality* (2018): 1.

inaugurated a new space of counterhegemonic signification vis-à-vis the Muslim-minority discourse. Pasmanda, a Persian word meaning 'those who have been left behind,' refers to Dalit, Backward, and Tribal Muslims, who make up most of the Indian Muslim population.[18]

Ali Anwar powerfully asserts: 'The son of a Jolaha-Dhuniya (weaver-cotton carder) remains a Jolaha-Dhuniya even if he progresses and establishes a cotton factory or a power loom. Similarly, the son of a Syed is called a Syed even if he manufactures and sells shoes.'[19] Such representation of caste fixity makes 'Dulari' and its translation significant in showing how caste markers and Dalit resistance have been neutralised in the translated versions.

## Translation as epistemic violence: Power, and the Savarna gaze

Based on prior discussion of translation as ideological structuration, the paper will explore the idea of the 'Savarna translational gaze' as means of translation practice which privilege the upper-caste ideology of the secular myth of a casteless society by silencing the caste markers and Dalit voice. Far from being a neutral linguistic bridge, 'translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism. What is at stake here is the representation of the colonised, who need to be produced in such a manner as to justify colonial domination.'[20] Literary translation, she writes, is one of several institutional discourses; including theology, historiography, and education that 'inform the hegemonic apparatuses that belong to the ideological structure of colonial rule.'[21] Niranjana's framing highlights how translation is deeply imbricated in the politics of representation, a framework especially useful when interrogating caste and gender erasures in Indian postcolonial literary translation. This violence of representation is further compounded in the case of Dalit Muslim women, whose positionality is doubly repressed by caste and patriarchy, within both Hindu and Muslim spheres. Hence, translation here becomes a site where this double marginalisation is either redacted or softened for dominant readerships. For instance, the English and Hindi translations of Zaheer's 'Dulari' erase casteist slurs, sotto voce curses, and acts of embodied defiance rendering them 'untranslatable' not due to linguistic limits but due to ideological discomfort. Such omissions exemplify how casteism is mediated not merely linguistically but politically, through selective strategies of legibility.

Niranjana highlights the structural imbalance in translational practices; Maitreya further locates this imbalance within caste-specific literary mediation. As established in the previous section, his critique foregrounds the opposed epistemological positions of Dalit writers and their Savarna translators, and the selective demand for only certain kinds of Dalit narratives. These narratives tend to reinforce 'palatable social realism' while excising the uncomfortable textures of caste-based trauma and gendered rage. 'Since translation also works as a filter of meanings and nuances created by the original language, the Savarna

[18] Khalid Anis Ansari, 'Revisiting the Minority Imagination: An Inquiry into the Anticaste Pasmanda-Muslim Discourse in India,' *Critical Philosophy of Race* 11, no. 1 (2023): 124. https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.11.1.0120.

[19] Anwar, 'Masawat ki jung,' 31.

[20] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 2.

[21] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 33.

framework of producing Marathi Dalit literature into English has many connotations which do not go hand-in-hand with the philosophy of Dalit literature.'[22]

A Pasmanda feminist approach to translation, then, must begin with the acknowledgment that caste exists within Indian Muslim communities and structures lives especially those of Dalit, backward, and tribal Muslim women. The visibility of Pasmanda identity disrupts the homogenising narrative of Muslim victimhood, bringing caste and gender back into view and challenging both communalist and Savarna secular frameworks. Feminist translation aims to subvert these codes by deploying 'creative strategies' such as supplementing, footnoting, and prefacing, but these strategies must be reworked through a Pasmanda lens. Feminist translation theory critiques patriarchal norms, a Pasmanda feminist approach demands that translators also confront caste by interrogating how 'creative strategies' must extend to preserving caste-marked resistance. Sherry Simon while arguing about feminist translation insists that 'fidelity is to be directed toward neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project—a project in which both writer and translator participate.'[23] In the case of 'Dulari,' an ethical translation would require fidelity to the text's political urgency and cultural embeddedness not its literary polished Savarna version. The Hindi and English translations of 'Dulari' largely confirm the Savarna imaginary of the subaltern woman as an apolitical victim, not a caste-marked agent, while prioritising fidelity towards Savarna-Ashraf imaginary.

## Reading across Urdu, Hindi, and English: A comparative approach

This study employs a comparative textual analysis of 'Dulari' across Urdu (1932), English (2014), and Hindi (2022) versions. The adopted methodology helps us to understand the ways that translation practices mediate, erase, or reframe caste, gender, and class particularly in relation to the representation of Dalit Muslim women. It draws on a post-colonial feminist translation framework to understand how linguistic decisions intersect with structural power relations. The original Urdu text is used as the source of cultural and linguistic embeddedness. Urdu here not only functions as the means of narrative's expressive medium but also encodes religio-socio-cultural nuances, spatial hierarchies within a community, and caste-coded idioms specific to North Indian Muslim lifeworld. The Hindi and English translations were selected for their roles in extending the story's circulation within national (Hindi) and global (English) literary publics. At the same time the availability of both the translations in the contemporary time acts as the representative figure within national and transnational audience. Therefore, it becomes sites from which power and politics shape literary afterlives.

The paper adopts three methods: a) Lexical identification of caste-markers, b) systematic comparison of their rendering in the Hindi and English translations, and c) contextual interpretation. A close lexical and narrative comparison is performed throughout our analysis so that the intentional or accidental omissions that play major roles in erasing caste identifiers, spatial segregation, labour exploitation, or bodily resistance are noted, and the ways in which these erasures can ideologically act as part of Savarna-Ashraf imaginary. The analysis will also track a) caste markers (Lauṇḍī, Pasth, Rutba, Zalīl), b) physical and social space (Her space is thresholdal: she moves between kitchen, courtyard, and corridors, never into zones of dignity), c) labour roles (Chotī begum studies, reads, embroiders; Dulari cleans

[22] Maitreya, 'Dalit Writers,' 38.

[23] Simon, 'Gender in translation,' 2.

and smells), d) bodily agency (Dulari's body is intelligible only as victim, not as resistant subject) and e)acts of naming or anonymity. The constant recurrence of such terms throughout the Urdu version are the key markers of caste encoding and analysing how these markers have been translated will be examined in the paper.

The framework for this analysis is based on the postcolonial translation theory, Pasmanda caste critique, and feminist translation studies. Translation theory, particularly Tejaswini Niranjana's argument that 'translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relation[s] of power that operate under colonialism,'[24] foregrounds how translational practices are never neutral but implicated in ideological projects. The same asymmetrical practice is visible in the translation of 'Dulari' where the character is reduced to mere victim of fate rather than of the caste system. The neutralisation is apparent in both the translations, where caste is not denied outright but purified and made consumable through strategic moderation. Feminist translation studies, drawing on Sherry Simon and Von Flotow, frame translation as a political act where choices of omission, supplementation, or euphemisation can either reproduce Patriarchal-Ashraf dominance or make visible the erased lives of women like Dulari. Hence, it argues for translation not as linguistic transfer but as an epistemic intervention into how caste and gender are represented or erased. By tracing shifts from Sajjad Zaheer's Urdu text to its Hindi and English translations, the analysis demonstrates how Dulari's casteed, gendered subjectivity is recast through Savarna-Ashraf mediations that suppress markers of servitude, spatial marginalisation, and bodily resistance. Therefore, translation becomes a site of epistemic violence that reinforces the secular-nationalist myth of Muslim castelessness. Yet, following Niranjana's call to 'read existing translations against the grain,'[25] these very silences may be mobilised as evidence of structural erasure, opening the possibility of a Pasmanda feminist hermeneutic that resists such flattening.

## Translating 'Dulari'

### *Lexical euphemisation and the erasure of caste*

In 'Dulari,' caste and gender operate as silenced yet structuring forces that are variously erased, aestheticised, or euphemised across translations. The Urdu original encodes casteed labour and sexual exploitation through spatial markers and sotto voce dialogue, offering a textured portrayal of Dulari's subalternity. The Hindi version flattens these tensions, rendering caste invisible through euphemistic substitution despite being a language which understands caste. The aestheticisation and romanticisation of Dulari's suffering in the English version, which frames her tragedy due to fate, omits caste-based marginality. In Hindi and English translated versions, 'Dulari' functions less as a source language to target language transfer but more as a gradual aestheticising of caste-bound servitude into class-coded domesticity. Hence, her acts of resistance are reframed as moral lapses. Niranjana's argument that 'translation is a political act,' becomes appropriate when the movement from lauṇḍi (bonded servant) in Urdu to naukrani (domestic worker) in Hindi, and finally to 'servant' in English, maps a steady de-politicisation. The lexical substitution of lauṇḍi with 'servant' erases the embedded historical caste bondage, which results in narrative transformation from caste hierarchal servitude into universal domestic labour. Niranjana calls such acts of translation as

[24] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 38.

[25] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 172.

the removal of historical specificity. Within the 'Ashraf–Ajlaf–Arzal stratification,' elite Muslims claim foreign descent and social prestige, while occupationally stigmatised groups are relegated to menial or polluting labour. The term lauṇḍi historically denoted not just a maid, but refers to an unfree female servant from such a background, bound to elite households in conditions resembling hereditary servitude. In Sajjad Zaheer's Urdu text, Dulari's status is framed within this social order: 'Dulari khaas unki lauṇḍi thi … uska rutba ghar ki bibiyon se to kya, naukraniyon se bhi pasth tha … vo paida hi is darje me huyi thi. Ye sab khuda ka kiya dhara hai.'[26] In Hindi this becomes, 'Uska bachpan befikri me guzra, uska ruthba ghar ki beebiyon se tho kya, ghar ke naukraniyoun se neeche tha, voh paida hi is warg me huyi thi. Ye sab tho khuda ka kiya dhara hai'[27] while English renders it as, 'Her childhood had been untroubled and carefree. She was born into a class that was inferior not just to the bibis, the women in the family, but even to the maidservants. This was God's design.'[28] The Urdu term 'lauṇḍi' encodes caste bound servitude with historical stigma. The translated Hindi word 'naukrani' and 'servant,' shifts from caste bound to wage bound employment. Therefore, the lexical substitution alters the ontology of Dulari's condition. Here, the political charge of lauṇḍi—its evocation of caste bondage—is lost as the term slides towards neutral domesticity. This softening is reinforced by the fatalistic line, 'wahi jise chaahtha hai izzath deta hai, jise chaahtha hai zaleel kartha hai. Uska rona kya?'[29] which both Hindi and English reproduce as 'He is the one who determines who should be esteemed and who humiliated. What was the point of grumbling about it all?'[30] Khalid Anis Ansari's notion of 'Ashrafization' is instructive here: structural oppression is reframed as divine will, legitimising hierarchy through theology.

## *Spatial and bodily coding of pollution*

The story portrays Dulari as a caste coded 'londi' which is not just an economic condition, but it is also spatial. The physical and spatial characterisation of Dulari has constantly been compared with the other maids and Choti sahibzaadi. In most cases Dulari is presented as someone beneath everyone's status, in terms of physical cleanliness, her status within the household and among the servants. Dulari's everyday performances involve, 'kamron ki dhool saaf karti, jhoote bartan dhoti.' The word, 'jhoote' has caste connotations, which also mean defiled by the touch of Dalit. However, when this gets translated as 'do the dishes' or 'clean dishes' where jhoote is seen as mere dirt, it erases the coded caste markers of the author. This hierarchical contrast is made explicit in the Urdu text: 'Thoon-thoon dono ke darmiyan faasla zyaada hotha jatha. saahibzaadi kyunki shareef theen, unka waqth padhne-likhne, seene-phiroune me sarf hone laga. Dulari kamroun ki khaak saaf karthi, jhoote barthan dhothi, ghadoun me paani bharthi.'[31] Hindi retains the caste-coded jhoote barthan—utensils defiled by prior touch—as 'tiyon-tiyon dono ke beech faasla zyaada hotha jatha. saahibzaadi

[26] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 132–33.

[27] Sajjad Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Shakeel Siddique, in *Angarey,* by Sajjad Zaheer et al. (Rupa Publications, 2011), 44.

[28] Sajjad Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Vibha S. Chauhan and Khalid Alvi, in *Angarey,* by Sajjad Zaheer et al. (Rupa Publications, 2014), 8.

[29] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 132–33.

[30] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 9.

[31] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' p. 133.

kyunki shareef theen, unka waqth padhne-likhne, seene-phiroune me kharch hone laga. Dulari kamroun ki dhool saaf karthi, jhoote barthan dhothi, ghadoun me paani bharthi.'[32] English renders this as: 'Choti sahibzaadi was from a respectable family; her time was well utilised in reading, writing and stitching. Dulari would dust the rooms, do the dishes, fill up and store water for use.'[33] In both Hindi and Urdu the words 'jhoote barthan' have cultural connotations of being defiled by prior touch indicating caste-coded logic of ritual pollution and untouchability. Whereas the English translation renders this as 'doing the dishes'—neutral household work. The translation removes the 'pollution' semantic embedded in jhootha, and silences the practice of untouchability by replacing it as 'domestic work.'

Maitreya's observation of the caste-oppressed body as both eroticised and degraded resonates when the narrator notes, 'magar aam thaur se uske kapde maile kuchaile hothe aur uske badan se boo aathi.' Hindi repeats this almost exactly, while English offers the flattened 'her clothes were usually filthy and her body smelled bad.' The Urdu and Hindi versions retain the caste-coded phrase 'jhoote barthan,' marking Dulari's labour as untouchable work, whereas English recasts this as ordinary domestic drudgery, erasing the semiotic of pollution altogether. Likewise, Urdu and Hindi describe her body as 'aam thaur se' (as a matter of routine) dirty and smelly, underscoring systemic caste-coded degradation, while English flattens this to personal uncleanliness rather than structural oppression.

Choti saahibzaadi in contrast embodies sharafat (respectability, literacy, purity). She is described as 'Choti sahibzaadi was from a respectable family her time was well utilised in reading, writing and stitching,'[34] in contrast to Dulari who does not have any family background, and her present work involves domestic servitude. This contrast is not just physical but of a hereditary nature and encapsulates the fate of a Dalit. As she does not have any hereditary wealth, there seems to be an ironic condescension. The narrator describes it as 'oonche darje ke log hamesha apne se neeche tabqe vaalon ka khayaal rakhthe hain.'[35] The word 'oonche darje' is high caste/class, but when it gets translated into English as 'after all, the people from the higher classes always take care of the ones from the lower classes!'[36] the caste semiotic gets erased. Hence, the act of condescension becomes the humanitarian gesture of care.

## *Narrative focalisation and the romanticisation of coercion*

The power dynamics embedded in caste and gender violence between Dulari and Kazim when translated become a romantic relation. The act of pursuit becomes an act of wooing when Dulari goes inside the kitchen to bring 'sharbat' after Begum's order. The Urdu narration emphasises 'magar Dulari hukum milte hi andar kī taraf chal dī thī. Kāzim bhī pīchhe pīchhe daude.'[37] The verb 'daude' (ran after) encodes urgency and asymmetry, Dulari moves under compulsion, Kazim chases. It is not a mutual activity but instead is coercive, situating Dulari as pursued, and Kazim as pursuer. The Hindi version romanticises it as 'Kāzim bhī pīchhe

[32] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Siddique, 45.

[33] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 9.

[34] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 9.

[35] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 132.

[36] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 8.

[37] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 133.

pīchhe gayā'[38] (went behind her), dulling the coercive chase. The English transition further neutralises it: 'Kazim followed her.'[39] Maitreya calls such semantic manipulation a 'romanticisation of asymmetry,' in which structural domination is translated as romantic intimacy.

The following act where 'Kazim cut across in front of her, took the bottle from her hand, put it away, and then embraced her,'[40] is portrayed as submissive—'She shut her eyes and handed over her body and her heart to Kazim.'[41] However, it fails to portray the power dynamics that keep him elevated in hierarchy and allow him to follow and touch her without any restriction, as if she is his private property. Her role is that of object, never agent. The Hindi translation softens this dynamic, using euphemism to recast violence as implicit desire, while the English version reframes it as consensual intimacy. Coercion is overwritten by romance. Tejaswini Niranjana's broader insight that translation is never innocent but deeply ideological is crucial here.[42] To render daude as 'followed,' or to recode sexual coercion as mutual love, is not a slip of diction but a political act. It transforms a caste-gendered narrative into a universal, class-inflected story of desire. Kazim ceases to be an Ashraf man coercing an Arzal servant; he becomes a young lover. Khalid Anis Ansari argues that *this* exemplifies the Ashraf dis-invention of caste by substituting systemic domination with individual misfortune.[43]

## *Moralisation of resistance*

The moralisation of Dulari's transgression becomes even clearer in her disappearance into 'gareeb randiyon ka mohalle.' Urdu narrates her act of revolt: 'gareeb randiyon ka mohalle me dekha. budha bechara bachpan se Dulari ko jaanta tha. Vah uske paas gaya aur ghanton thak Dulari ko samjhanya ke vaapas chalo. Vo raazi hogayi. Budha samajta tha ke use inaam milega aur yeh ladki museebath se bachegi.'[44] The tone is descriptive, embedding Dulari's plight within a structural economy of poverty, gender, and caste. Hindi's version is almost identical, yet it introduces a new line: 'Bewakoof, ab aisi harkath math karna,'[45] echoed in Urdu as 'Bewakoof, ab aisi harkath na karna,'[46] and softened in English to: 'Stupid girl! Never do something so foolish again!'[47] The rebellion reframes her act not as a critique of servitude but as irresponsible foolishness. Flotow argues that translators often 'correct' women in translation: what is resistance in the source becomes error in the target. Here, Dulari's rebellion is disciplined, rather than giving her the agency of challenging systemic caste exploitation, it becomes proof of her own foolish judgement. Pasmanda feminists critique

[38] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Siddique, 44.

[39] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 10.

[40] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 10.

[41] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 10.

[42] Niranjana, 'Siting Translation,' 23.

[43] Ansari, 'Revisiting the Minority Imagination,' 124.

[44] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 134.

[45] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Siddique, 46.

[46] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 134.

[47] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 11.

such erasure because it exemplifies how translation collaborates with dominant Savarna–Ashraf imaginaries to depoliticise Dalit Muslim women's defiance. It transforms acts of resistance into moral lapses, not allowing the reader to reflect on the possibility of their action as a challenge to caste and gender hierarchies.

## *Public humiliation and private sentimentalisation*

The Ashraf women's pity substitutes for solidarity in the household. The Urdu translation makes this explicit: 'shareef, paak baaz, ba ismath, haseena begum ko us gareeb bechari par bahuth taras aa raha tha. Magar unki samajh na aata tha ke koyi ladki kaise aise gharka sahara chod kar jahan uski saari zindagi basar huyi huyi, baahar qadam tak rakh sakthi hai.'[48] The high caste language of shareef and paak baaz (respectable, pure) is not just moral but it encodes caste, marking the symbolic purity of Ashraf womanhood against the polluted Dalit womenhood. English translation turns this into 'the modest, chaste and unpolluted Haseenabegum pitied the poor girl… but could not comprehend how any girl could abandon … the home where she had spent her whole life.'[49] By domesticating sharafat into 'modesty' and 'chastity,' the translation erases intra-Muslim caste stratification, re-framing the contrast as a generic anxiety about women leaving home. Niranjana's warning that translation 'stabilises unequal relations by naturalising them' comes alive here: what was a commentary on caste-inflected sharafat becomes a universalised morality tale about domesticity.

The narrator's explicit judgment underscores this: 'aur phir nateeja kya huwa? Ismath paroshi, gurbath, zillath. Yeh sach hai ke o lauṇḍi thi, magar bhaagne se uski haalath behthar kaise huwi?'[50] The English translation here substitutes moral construct 'she sold her body, faced poverty and humiliation, but running away… did not improve her lot.'[51] It erases the word 'lauṇḍi', and universalises her oppression into fate, poverty minus caste. Ansari's claims that Ashraf narratives frequently displace caste into registers of respectability or misfortune, a gesture that English doubles for a global liberal readership.

The final rebellious act of Dulari is portrayed as betrayal which forms this translational politics. In Urdu: 'Yakayak bagal ke kamre se Kāzim apnī khoobsūrat dulhan ke sāth nikle… Unhone Dulari par nazar nahīn daalī!'[52] The humiliation is public; Kazim's refusal to look at Dulari marks her complete social erasure. Hindi echoes this but quickly shifts inward: 'Ladkī is āwāz ke sunne kī tāb na la sakī, uskī ānkhon ke sāmne voh sārā manzar ghoom gayā jab vah aur Kāzim rātoṅ kī tanhāī meṅ yakjā hote the!'[53] English version translates as, 'The girl didn't possess the strength she needed… Her memory recreated those nights when she and Kazim would meet secretly.'[54] This change in narrative focalisation is decisive because in Urdu it holds Dulari within the gaze of caste society, where humiliation is collective and structural. The translations, however, sentimentalise her memory, recasting structural violence as private heartbreak. Hence, translation shifts the oppression from the social hierarchy to

[48] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 134.

[49] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 11.

[50] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 137.

[51] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' Chauhan and Alvi, translation, 11.

[52] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' 137.

[53] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Siddique, 48.

[54] Zaheer, 'Dulari,' trans. Chauhan and Alvi, 12.

emotional sphere, in Spivak's term it is epistemic violence, a replacement of systemic knowledge with affective individualisation.

## *Epistemic violence and the marketability of translation*

The shift in translation clearly indicates that translation here is not a neutral process but Ashraf-Savarna act. The lexical encoding of caste violence in Urdu is somehow maintained in Hindi, but when it comes to English version, it shifts focus on global readership which erases caste altogether, domesticating her suffering into liberal-humanist frames of poverty, fate, and broken love. So, the result of the Ashraf-Savarna translation method results in what Spivak and Niranjana term 'epistemic violence': the erasure of Dalit Muslim women's narrative history and recoding of systemic oppression into forms legible to dominant sensibilities. Ansari calls such acts as 'depoliticise caste realities, reproducing Savarna-Muslim erasures under the guise of empathy'. Therefore, it is not only the erasure of Dulari's story but an entire register of caste-conscious Urdu realism from the pre-independence period and its social memory overwritten by the benign sorrow of liberal translation. The caste silencing traced in the translations of 'Dulari' is not an isolated literary occurrence but a significant instance of a larger pattern of erasure produced through the Savarna gaze.

It would be a mistake, however, to locate the Savarna translational gaze solely within the ideological dispositions of individual translators. The publishing industry, including a network of translators, editors, and publishing houses that are mostly Savarna-led. They mostly function as a powerful sanitiser, determining which narratives reach national and global audiences, and in what ideological form. The silence on caste in the translation notes for *New Urdu Writings* (2013) is characteristic of a translation practice where the Savarna perspective is the default, unstated norm. Market demands for 'palatable social realism' exert immense pressure on translators and editors to produce texts that are fluent, accessible, and universal. For a liberal Anglophone readership, a story of class disparity or universal female suffering is more readily marketable than that of a female character with semiotics of pollution and caste bondage. This commercial imperative creates a structural complicity. Translators may find themselves compelled to smooth over caste-specific details might not be out of overt ideology, but as a perceived professional necessity to render a text viable for publication. The erasure of caste is therefore not merely an ideological choice but a market-driven one, where the Savarna gaze aligns perfectly with the economic logic of a global literary marketplace that rewards universality and penalises radical, untranslatable difference.

## *Toward a Pasmanda feminist translation praxis*

The analysis undertaken in the preceding sections highlights that in the translation of 'Dulari' the translators not only fail to translate caste, they actively untranslate it. The story of Dulari is not a narrative of female servitude, shame, and sorrow and humiliation. It is a narrative of structural violence portrayed through the bodily degradation and the subsequent silences of a subaltern woman. Caste, gender, and Arzal marginality is inscribed in every domestic gesture, every euphemised slur, and every untranslated silence. Yet, in both Hindi and English translations, though to a lesser extent in Hindi, this political charge is erased. The euphemisation, universalisation, and moralising of key terms and circumstances reframe Dulari as a miserable symbol of suffering rather than a victim of a caste system. Thereby, the truths, sexual violence, caste humiliation, and social rejection, are flattened and made palatable for dominant Savarna, Ashraf, and liberal-humanist audiences.

A Pasmanda feminist translation praxis treats translation not as neutral mediation but as a site of political struggle. It insists caste be rendered visible alongside gender, and that the Arzal be recognised together with the feminine. Translation can no longer be content to transform marginalised women from invisibility into objects of pity; it must instead reproduce ruptures, epistemic defiance, radical citation, and narrative reclamation to the target audience. As Tejaswini Niranjana reminds us, translation is 'not an innocent act of exchange, but a constitutive gesture of colonial and ideological power'. To intervene in this gesture requires anti-caste translation ethics that involves practices such as accountability to source communities, preservation of socio-religious idioms, and refusal of moral flattening of texts. Retaining caste markers and idioms such as londī, Ashraf, and Arzal, rather than replacing them with abstractions like 'maid' or 'servant,'. It is precisely this substitution that detaches Dulari's condition from its historical and structural specificity. Honouring oral and embodied cultural specificities, including dialects, ritual references, and casteed speech forms, is equally necessary: the jhootha is not a descriptor for dirty utensils but an encoding of ritual pollution and untouchability that 'do the dishes' simply cannot carry. By refusing to aestheticise sexual violence or reduce caste oppression to individual tragedy it follows that to render daude as 'followed' and coercion as intimacy is not a translator's licence but a political act that dissolves the structural into the sentimental. And following von Flotow's feminist translation theory, ensuring the translator's visibility through footnotes, prefaces, and self-reflexive interventions would make the political stakes of every lexical choice transparent, refusing the fiction of the neutral, invisible translator.

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