



## **Travails of 1857 : A Post Colonial Interpretation of the Socio-cultural Moorings in a Historical Narrative**

**Alka Nathrekar**

Smt Dankuwar College, Jalna

'It's a sad reality that our children's generation does not know enough Marathi to appreciate an old work of this kind. May be they will want to satisfy their curiosity about it, by reading an English translation of it rather than taking pains to process it on their own in Marathi. A keen awareness of this made me hyper cautions in catching the minute cultural nuances of this work.'(31)

The English Marathi or Marathi to English translation that began during the British rule over India with colonial / evangelist purpose is continued in the present age for academic, research and literary purposes. The global scenario has created a new sensibility in the field of literature. Translation is now thought of from the perspective of knowledge and culture. In the literary field the translation scholars are engaged in trying to cover various genres such as drama, novel, poetry, short-story. It has also touched the sensitive areas such as autobiography. It is sensitive in the sense it requires honesty on the part of the writer to confess while giving details of his own life. The translation of the genre is a challenging activity since it is difficult to retain the felicities and delicate nuances in terms of language and the content as well.

***MajhaPravas*** by VishnubhatjiGodseVarsaikar in Marathi is a unique literary masterpiece of great socio-historic-cultural significance. It is an historic account written by a person who was a direct witness to some of the major events of 1857 uprising/swatantryasamar / riots. Secondly it is the first Marathi language and the only account of the happenings during 1857-1859 from the Indian perspective. It's a travelogue and an autobiography as well. It portrays the eyewitness saga of the trials and tribulations of 1857 from an observant Indian perspective. It is a landmark in



Marathi literature since it accepts the challenges of an autobiography, historical moorings and a social scenario at the same time. Vishnubhatji was neither a writer, nor a man of literature. He was just a poor Brahmin living in Varsai at Kulaba district. Baijabai Shinde at Gwalher was going to perform a sarvatomukh Yojna at Mathura spending Rs 7-8 lacs in those days. With the sole purpose to achieve money Vishnubhatji started for Mathura along with his uncle Rambhat and unfortunately became the victim and the witness of 1857 uprising. Because of tribulations the Yojna was cancelled. However he returned to his place safe though with empty hands. He used to tell the stories of this eyewitness, therefore his friend asked him to write about it. 26 years after the event, Vishnubhatji wrote the story in which Laxmibai, Tatya Tope, Nana Peshve are but human. In his picaresque story he takes us to Zansi, makes us acquainted with the conservative Brahmins, the caste system, the culture of his times. Because of the intense, indelible imprints of the great upheaval during those years of turmoil and unrest the narrative of the travelogue becomes vivid and detailed.

**Travails of 1857** published in October 2012 by Asiatic Library, Mumbai is the translation of **MajhaPravas** done by his direct descendent Sukhamani Roy. More than mere literal translation the book is almost a research project, well-documented, neatly annotated with copious notes to help the readers to understand the landmark. The paper makes an attempt to introduce and assess this historical narrative showing the difficulties the translator might have faced while juxtaposing the past and present in terms of linguistic levels and retaining the socio-cultural texture of the historical narrative on one hand and maintaining the aesthetic literariness of the book on the other. Sukhamani Roy is a Professor of English at Mumbai. Having a rare advantage of access to many details of Godsebhatji's life and times including the family records and the realizations of the enormous significance of **MajhaPravas**, this translation is an honest attempt to retain the original with all its intensity of feeling, the felicities and nuances. Roy seems to be fully aware that the translation of literature is language specific, culture-specific and especially related to the sensibility of the author. Literary



translation is connotative and whether prose or verse , the aesthetic element is dominant. While preserving the greatness and grandeur of this literary landmark, the encyclopaedic knowledge, the mastery of the source and target languages, knowledge of socio-cultural and historical context and the awareness of the generic constraints, retaining the honesty honestly are some of the features of her translation. It's an intimate attempt having no commercial overtones. The quality of translation depends upon how much it is reader oriented. It also depends upon how the translator overcomes the problems. How he is able to retain the semiotics which includes myths, rituals, morals codes, phrases, proverbs and idioms. The quality also depends upon how much the translator is able to understand the writer with all his potentialities. While transferring the intellectual and aesthetic values from one language to the other cultural barriers are bound to be there, losses are inevitable. Roy certainly seems to have reconstructed the whole in such a manner so to avoid the cultural losses.

Godsebhatji's narrative is intervened with the culture of his times. To transfer that richness from Marathi to English not only for non-Indians but also for today's secular Indians was a double challenge.(31)

Roy accepted the challenge and has certainly served the purpose. She studied the complete journey of **MajhaPravas** from Modi to Marathi in the hands of Vaidya, Fatale, Potdar, Joshi, the Hindi translations by AmritlalSagar&MadhukarUpadhaya& the English translation by MrunalPandey. In the introduction she speaks of the difficulties she faced while translating. She has translated many other contemporary works. But the experience of translating **MajhaPravas** was altogether different because this work is a true to life, socio-cultural document of a bygone life-style. Getting into the times of 1857 was a difficult challenge to her. The days of Vishnubhatji were the days before colonization and she was translating in the post-colonial period. The value system, the education system in those days - all these things are almost alien to the children of today's India.



To mention but few of her problems, in terms of lexicology, the words like 'Dakshina' and 'Darshana' are common even now but for the sense and context. Dakshina is far from alms or more than remuneration. Darshana is not a mere visit to the temple. It is a psychological process in which a devout mind becomes conducive to receive a divine exchange between the deity and devotee. Many such words dissatisfied her because of their resistance to translation. The culture-specific words and expressions like Puranpoli, Haldi-kumku, OtiBhara for which she decided to sacrifice stylistic smoothness to the precision of what is conveyed. The concept of Rudra, Pavmana which was a daily practice in most of the Brahmins in Godsebhatji's days, if misinterpreted creates erosion.

I have been a little bit luckier (than the other translators) because I belong to the Shastri lineage of Vishnubhatji and at least as a child I was exposed to the typical Brahmin household.(32)

The rituals like Yajna, Anushthana with different connotations each time cannot be understood without reading the notes that she provided. The use of the word Grashastha that recurs with different meanings, Tee for Teertharoopa, Yajamana these are unwanted and unfamiliar expressions in modern times sounded very strange in English. In terms of syntax Godsebhatji quotes dialogues or direct speeches within the flow of the third person narrative. Roy inserted quotation marks wherever necessary and also breaks the narrative into suitable paragraphs. Overall she says -

I have tried to remain as close to the original as possible and have used almost no gloss, so that my voice should not be superimposed on his.(34)

#### **Works Cited:**

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