

## **Erasure of Gaps in the Terrain of Women Translation: Unveiling of Differences and Ideology in Anjana Sankar’s *To the Work Place***

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### **Abstract**

The scope of translation and interpretation witnessed a tremendous shift in recent times as a form of intellectual investigation or research. The role played by translation in moulding culture accentuated intellectual curiosity among bilingual or multilingual writers, and this pioneered a distinctive field of studies known as Translation Studies. The definition of translation as a process of mediation through ideology and identity is culturally positioned. Involvement and engagement between women writers, women characters, and women readers have paved the way for a new space in the process of translation, which is based on the re-examination of gender issues. The feminist theoretical world has perceived translation as production and not reproduction. The process subjected to refining the notions of invisibility, and equivalence is intended to juxtapose the effects of patriarchal social and cultural domination. The woman translator will be bounded by the power dynamics and such translated works employ gender constructs through the process of subversion. It becomes possible for women translators to create and legitimize a text outside the gender binaries. The act of resistance is perpetuated by translated writings when it comes to articulating the continuing presence of a historical undesirability. The paper explores the history, politics, and identity issues in the translated work, *To the Work Place* (2008) by Anjana Sankar. The study attempts to employ the critical theory ‘The Politics of Translation’ by Gayatri Spivak, who perceives translation as an effective practice that fulfills the feminist goal of achieving women’s solidarity and how language becomes a clue to the working of the gendered agency. The tyrannical dominance of men has veiled the lives of Namboothiri women in Kerala to a greater extent. The hidden turmoils in the lives of such elite women are poignantly encapsulated through the translation. This becomes an act of unveiling the history, memories, and identities to the global readers beyond nation and race. The female collective initiative to overcome the patriarchal norms steered the lives of women who are on the thresholds of progression and deny confinement.

**Keywords:** elite subaltern, gendered construct, ideology and identity, workplace, translation studies.

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## 1. Introduction

All is set for the battle, all is set for the battle  
The preparations are made inside the kitchen  
We are the Sapatnis who are dissatisfied but  
We will not destroy each other.

(Anjana Sankar, *To the Work Place* (1948/2008, p.177))

The literary framework of Postcolonialism and Cultural Studies has critically interpolated with the process of translation which, in turn, paves the way for the concept of 'cultural Translation'. The mapping of postcolonial experience is well portrayed by employing cultural interaction between two cultures. Similarly, the act of translation involves a parallel collaboration between two languages. The amalgamation of textual translation and cultural translation generates a fusion or hybrid culture. Cultural Translation thus becomes an approach for legitimizing literature. Translation theory describes the strategy of 'foreignization', which involves the original reorganization of the receiving language. The translated works thus maintain the ethos of the unique culture even when delineated in a foreign language. The writers who undergo translation are bilingual writers who have creative insight into native and source cultures. Translators transmit tradition, culture, beliefs, and rituals from one linguistic domain to another linguistic realm, and they are endowed with the massive responsibility of preserving and adhering to the underlying convictions without dismantling its totality.

Translation makes it possible for cultural and information transfer between languages. The literary background and the cultural memory of the translators impact both the reading of the source text and their ability to classify and reconstruct the complexity of the content. Steiner (1975) defines "the usual modes of translation as a process by which a message from a source language is transferred to the target language" (p.29). On a linguistic level, translation is the process that identifies the elements of the "pure language" from which all languages originally sprang and to which they all return. On a creative level, translatability validates the universality of classic texts.

The translator's task is to recognize and give way for expressing the affinities with the concerned texts and authors. To Derrida (1985), "Translation is writing...a productive writing called forth by the original text" (p.153). Translators, on a universal basis, recognize the complexities inherent within the semiotics of language and culture as well as the rendering difficulties of signs in the target language. The cultural discrepancies between the host and the target language and the balancing of linguistic and cultural equivalency are serious issues faced by the translator. In Translation Studies, the concept of "remediation" is referred to by Lefevere (2002) as "rewriting" or the interlingual translation of texts. Translation produce works in a new environment for a set of new readers and creates transcultural memory, which implies the shared knowledge of the past encompassing many countries and cultures.

## **2. Literature Review**

Gayatri Spivak's essay 'Translation as Culture' emphasizes two critical perspectives of translation- the first perspective establishes translation as traditional, comprehending and forming interlinkages with the past; the second perspective reinforces a progressive approach wherein translation is viewed as a process of transcoding. These two perspectives cling on to cultural memory and identity formation. Spivak (2012) identified the distinctive variations between translation and transcoding in cultural translation. Translation as transcoding gives weightage to gain, and adaptability, whereas translation as reparation represents nostalgia and feeling of loss. For Spivak, translation is the fundamental and inevitable aspect of human life; language occasionally transcends rules with the prime objective of shifting between varied perspectives of translation.

The Translation is viewed as an intimate act of reading by Spivak, and she says a translator needs to be a well-versed person of culture and becomes answerable through the process of writing and translating the original work. Through this argument, Spivak posits the postcolonial writers and theorists who dealt with dislocation and discrimination. The employment of the word 'translation' as a metaphor for diasporic backgrounds delimits the act of comprehending cultural and linguistic experiences in the era of globalization according to Spivak (2012). Through 'The Politics of Translation,' Spivak demarcates translation as an act of grasping the other and the self. The translator engages with the text.

The multi-dimensional and universal dynamics of a language are transcended through the process of translation, thus reaching a broader circle of people. Lori Chamberlain admits in *Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation* that the translators, irrespective of gender, are commonly grounded by the same power relations dictated by the conservative society along the lines of gender. She argues for the subversion of ideology to initiate the process of translation with flexibility. When it comes to the portrayal of women across cultures, translation becomes a tool of empowerment. Cixous (1976) has stated:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reverse discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word “silence.” (p. 886)

The paper deals with the possibilities and significance of translated work titled *To the Work Place* by Anjana Shankar. The writer chronicles the lives of women set against the historical framework of early twentieth-century Kerala culture and society. The work addresses the concept of “elite subaltern” inscribed within the logocentric framework of patriarchy. The inferior position of Namboodiri women, represented against the backdrop of social, religious, and cultural history, is brought to visibility by the deed of translation. It is informed by the elderly female members to unmarried girls “there’s no going against your husband’s wishes. Otherwise, you’ll pay a heavy price” (p.170). *To the Work Place* depicts the lives of women surrounded by the strict patriarchal and patrilineal codes, assigning an exclusive space to women within the kitchen during adolescence, depriving formal education, observing ceremonial isolation of widows, and casting out or excluding women from family and community if they decide to argue, challenge or oppose any of the frameworks placed upon them.

The discourse of women’s papers and translation of women’s writing has always incorporated the experiences of oppressed and exploited women. The bilingual portrayal records and concentrates on the women’s need for self- articulation crossing the assigned borders and boundaries. Such representation embodies innovative self-oriented undercurrents of the emancipation of women. Simon’s (1996) *Gender in Translation* posits that women translators experience both familiarity and unfamiliarity in the process of translation, and they owe credit to their contribution to feminist writing upon which they have inextricable bondages. The reports of female authors give way to a preoccupation and fixing of body and mind; looking through the lens of one’s self echoes subjectivity and individuality. The play

cannot be catalogued solely as a linear narrative of women's lives but as replications and reminiscences comprising both cognizant and insentient politics of discourse. It vindicates the notion that the life narratives centering women characters tend to throw light upon the gendered lives and history of women.

The Brahmin women of Kerala have undergone scornful status inscribed by the codes of a hegemonic patriarchal society, which stands in dark opposition to the privileged position of their male community. Narratives from Kerala focussed on the lives of these Brahmin women popularly referred to as Antharjanams. The term "Antharjanam" is a Namboodiri caste name, which means "one who lives in the interiors." The work that shed light on the lives of these women astutely brought out the plight and poignancy of the Namboodiri women. The marginalized status imposed on these women is articulated as a historical undesirability based on gender differences and the narratives obliterate the chronological boundaries restricted by the past order. The notable female writer from the Namboodiri community, and the pioneer literary figure who shaped Kerala's Feminist writing, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Devaki Nilayamgode have admitted that their society looks down upon the birth of a female child. Thus, the cultural disrespect of women begins from their labor, and the part played by translation in reconstructing the gender specificities in the framework of provincial history is highlighted.

### **3. Analysis**

The play centers around three girls – Devasena, the orphan girl to be sold off in marriage but saved by two activists of Antharjanasamajam- Parvathy and Devaki. The latter was modern with an educated outlook, emphasized the need for liberating their community, and voiced against the practice of treating girls like cows or vessels, and men marrying women to fulfill the role of a domestic maid in the family. Parvathy's husband treats her as an object of male pleasure and serves the duties assigned in the kitchen. She interrogates, "wasn't it insolence to marry such a young girl to the old and ailing patteri. Wasn't the wedding a mere pretext to get someone to manage the kitchen/ Such men should suffer a worse fate than that! In these modern times, girls cannot be married off without their consent" (p.171). Devaki breaks the sacred thread and throws it on the husband's face, leaves out the house. This is a moment of self-realization that women collectively feel "We shall not live in sloth anymore and destroy ourselves. Shouldn't we live like women? Shouldn't we? (p. 170).

The work was penned when gender discrimination was at its extreme. Staged in 1948, the play raised our concern about the issues like women's education, dress reform, monogamy, widow marriage, inter-caste marriage, etc. The play echoes the need to end women's slavery and advocates the rights of women and their privilege to live in a society like males. The women revolted against caging themselves in the name of aristocracy, "Going off somewhere when you please and as you please, without telling me anything...that won't do" (p.184). The Antharjanams are determined to work towards equality and empowerment. Devaki says, "I am not prepared to live as his slave. I'll leave him and his family and walk away, proclaiming my freedom" (p. 184). Devaki's husband desisted her from attending the workplace, but she is firm in proclaiming, "freedom is the monopoly of man and slavery that of women...we are husband and wife – not master and slave" (p. 186). Highlighting the defense of women to face patriarchal regulations and control, the work erases the borders of Kerala and it universalizes the experiences of such women struggling hard to assert their identities amidst obstacles and hardships. The translator unravels the identities of women from the male-dominated canonical literary history of Kerala. The text that sheds light on the account of a region will indeed hold the attention of national and international audiences in the annals of Feminism.

The translated work outlines the physical and psychological development of a woman being encircled and engulfed within a heap of rigid conventions such as marriage before puberty, denial of education, marriage with older men, and prohibition of widow remarriage, among many issues. Namboodiri girls were prohibited from moving beyond their houses or occupying the verandah. The Brahmin women hold superior status compared to other women, but they were not emancipated from social taboos. The patriarchal dominance and assertion are implemented through oppressive customs like Ghosha or veil system, illiteracy, dowry, child marriage, and polygamy to degrade the women. Womanhood itself is looked down and discriminatory practices are imposed upon the female child. Negligence of education allowed women to remain subservient to men. The role played by women in transforming society has inspired social reformers to pay attention to the upliftment of Namboodiri women. The women activists in Yogakshema Sabha actively participated in the movements, Antharjana Samajam and Yachana Yatra, organized to establish "Thozhil Kendram" or work place. These women erased the caste hierarchies and began to work collectively for the peasants and workers. This allows them the opportunity to challenge caste hierarchy and women's subservient position in marriage and family. The character Savithri comments, "If Gods don't

practice untouchability, why should we? Are we above Gods? (p.172) and “Aren't they human beings” (p. 173) is the answer of Devaki when her husband raises the question- “If we mingle with low-class people, we will be in trouble” (p. 173).

Anjana Shankar's work chronicles Brahmin households as a hidden domestic realm that obstructs and hampers female subjectivity. The practice of “sambandham” allows only the elder male Brahmin to marry from his community resulting in polygamy. The resulting emotional pain and anguish undergone by widowed Namboothiri women are also represented with poignancy. The progressive measures adopted by Yogakshema Sabha to uplift Namboodiri women become a crucial indicator in the feminist empowerment upsurge. The domestic space defines, redefines, and regulates the delineations of women within the borders of the female realm. Devaki's husband comes up with the argument, “How can women discard their husbands, forget their duty of child rearing and go away? How will this world function? ...It wasn't for nothing that our ancients devised the concept of division of labor!” (p.179). Devaki retorts to her husband's question, “what's wrong with Kitchen work? “you mean that I should give up all else and become the kitchen woman, isn't it? (p. 179). The gap between gender equations within the community aggravates the subaltern status of women. Breaking the binaries and focusing on women's selves through translation paves the way for an emancipatory experience. The cloistered lives of elite Namboodiri women within the domestic realm facilitate a revolt through literary translation.

The play *Thozhilkendrathileku* (1948) has imprinted a literary landmark in the history of Malayalam literature as the first women's collective theatre experiment. The assigned roles for men were performed by females themselves, and they received support from a group of Namboodiri youth. The work was translated as *To the Work Place* after six decades, that is in 2008 when the status of women in Kerala society underwent a drastic progression. Antharjanams were forced to cover themselves with a cloak, and a large umbrella if they need to move out of the house. They were raised with an overwhelming sense of inferiority right from their childhood. Young girls experienced widowhood, and remarriage was prohibited. Women did not exercise ownership over land and the dowry system thrived.

Nationalism and radical leftist thinking had a remarkable influence on Malayali Brahmin reformism. Influenced by the revolutionary ideas, the reformation of women's lives became the need of the hour, and Antharjanams gradually decided to break the conventions. They began to look for ways to promote financial independence. Antharjanams emphasized

the importance of work for women and thereby asserted their independence. When men discarded the concept of work place, women accepted it as an attempt to find solace from the everyday kitchen work. Their collective efforts, initiatives, and measures adversely bothered the rigid foundations of the Namboodiri community by demolishing all the age-old evil practices such as exchanging young orphaned girls for money. Treated as a familial burden, the girls were married off to aged grooms under the pretext of charity marriage; Parvathy reacted, “selling girls for money under the guise of marriage...Don’t you feel ashamed to act so brutally, without any human feelings?” (p.188). The real-time experience of a thirteen-year-old orphan girl named, Kavungara Bhargavi, forms the crux of the plot. Raised by her uncle, who has decided to marry her off to a senior and immoral Namboodiri groom, in return for money, she has attracted the concern of the Antharjanasamajam. Considering her plight and protesting the practice, the commune freed her from the shackles of captivity. Antharjanam’s initiative of establishing a workplace, where lessons were imparted in spinning, weaving, stitching, and the Hindi language, became a solace for all the Namboodiri women to escape from patriarchal interventions.



#### **4. Conclusion**

Marginalized women from Namboodiri community emerge as protesting warriors and self-asserting individuals, whose voices become audible beyond the borders of Kerala to depict the concealed uproar and protest in the lives of Indian women. The insensitive humiliations agonized by the Namboodiri women and the resulting gendered exploitation of women have been restricted with compassion. The turmoils of women in the Namboodiri community are dependent upon their status in India, but this role has witnessed significant changes in the decades. The women who were once restricted within the domestic realms of household and outdated customs are now liberated. Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy, the governing dictates of social order, lead to the objectification of Namboodiri women. A translation says Huetius (1683), “a text written in a well-known language which refers to and represents a text in a language which is not as well known” (p. 103).

#### **About the Author**

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