

12. Another Note on Literary Translation - IV Poignantly Penned Femininity

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Women's Movements are myriad and the more recent Feminist Movement is an offshoot of Women's Liberation fighting for liberation and equality. These movements not always go to the root of the problems of women-kind at the basic living of women as fair sex with pain and problems starting with the biological aspects.

Telugu women have come out with a bang hitting the nail on the head in the following seven poems. They laid bare the horrors of the condition of women dealing with the fair but painfully seething weaker fair sex. The solutions are simple and what is imaginatively demanded is a little kindness and humane understanding. The poems below are not part of a strong movement for fair sex rights. It is a plangent threnody pleading for sympathetic, hearty empathy. The translations of all the seven poems were published first in my book *Voices on the Wing* in 2000. Later they were included in my book in Telugu, *Anuvada Darshini* (published in 2005), which came to be used as an aid for teachers teaching literary translation in the graduate courses in Andhra Pradesh. The voices of the seven poets are not the same. The vehemence and the voice level vary. The heights of the expressive feeling are different and the practising translator needs to get into the hearts and souls of the speakers of these poems.

These seven poems by women are not expressive of any belligerence or ideas of rebellion or revolution. The speakers express their ire, and vent their mental and physical suffering, both unnecessary and thoughtless.

Translating these poems is not easy. The psyche of womenfolk and the limitations of the body with its delicacies are dealt with sensitivity and scathing truthfulness by the speakers of the poems. Mandarapu Hymavathi talks about the act of the male who is some times utterly insensitive to the fine qualities of the woman whom he wedded. Loveless act is pain. Coition needs to be soft, sweet and satisfying but in the poem it is not so for the woman since the act of the man is loveless and self-serving. For the practising translator it is highly challenging if he does not have any understanding or appreciation for the feelings of the woman.

SUFFERING AND HELPLESS

EMBRACE SERPENTINE: MANDARAPU HYMAVATI

Everything would be fine

Till that moment

Through love exceeding

Or, through lust

The bodies two become one

The condition of oneness attained

The world forgotten

In those moments immortal

From out of the inexhaustible quiver

You aim an arrow of a question

“When do they disburse salaries?”

Even a prostitute at that juncture

Wouldn't bring up such subject

A beast wouldn't behave like that –

Just at once

Like a thousand lizards

Crawling on me

At that moment when *manas* has taken flight

From my life

Far, far away I'd like to fling you away.

But being a *Bharat Nari*,

Wriggling, struggling, breathless

In the living grave of custom

Into the quick sands of wedlock

I'm drawn.

Not from life, but

Even a whit from the body

It's not in my hands to be away.

Every moment, making compromises like this

Till death, the very end,

I'd go on living away

In your embrace serpentine.

Another poem by Vimala is about the hard, uneasy and enervating responsibility thrust on the wife with ruthlessness. The speaker is sore with the system and she vehemently argues that it should be chastised equally ruthlessly. It is painful that the name on pots and pans being the man's. This is the last straw and the line is the most powerful barb. The agony of the faithful and slogging housewife reaches its crescendo in the last lines.

KITCHEN: VIMALA

This kitchen: how wonderful, wafting aromas

How it makes mouths water,

Like an open shop of sweets

It breathes spices, incense from the *pooja* room

Wakes in the morning to the churning of butter,

Or vessels being scrubbed.

The earthen oven gets a fresh mud-wash
Decks herself for the burning.
From the small change in the box of spices and seasonings
We bought ourselves sweets,
Played house, played at being cooks,
With jaggery and lentils: it was a magic world
The kitchen ensnared my childhood
Remained a spell, a passion.
Wisps of childhood shadows lifted,
It's no longer a playground.
I was taught 'kitchenness' here;
My shaping started here.
Mother, grandmother, all the mothers in the house
They say learned womanhood here.
Our kitchen now is a graveyard with corpses of all kinds,
Tins, dishes, sacks.
It hangs there in the smoke, clouds from damp firewood.
Fears, despair, silence lurking there
Mother floats like a spirit.
She herself looks like the morning kitchen
Her eyes ran out of tears long ago
Her hands are worn out with endless scrubbing.
Look, she doesn't have hands anymore.
She looks like a ladle, a pan, a bowl:

A piece of kitchen bric-a-brac.
Sometimes she looks like a flaming oven,
Sometimes a tigress trapped.
Restless, she paces the kitchen floor, bangs pots and pans.
How easily they say, with the flick of a ladle
Her cooking gets done!
None comes this way, except to eat:
My mother is empress of kitchen,
But the name on pots and pans is my dad's.
Fortunately, they said, I fell into a good kitchen:
Gas, grinder, sink, tiles and all.
I make cakes and puddings
Not old-fashioned things my mother does.
Even now the name on all utensils is my husband's.
My kitchen wakes to the whirr and hiss
Of the grinder and cooker.
I move like a modern kitchen, a wound up toy.
My kitchen is like a workshop:
It's like a butcher's shop with its babble.
Washing endlessly what has already been washed.
Cooking and serving, cooking and serving,
There's kitchen even my dreams:
The smell of spices even in jasmines.
Damn this kitchen.

Inhuman, it sucks our blood, robs us of hopes and dreams

A demon, a vulture, eating into us bit by bit all our lives.

Kitchen culture, kitchen talk, we're reduced to cooks and maids..

Let's smash these kitchens for making ladle-wielding our duty

No more names on kitchenware

Let's uproot these separate stoves.

Our children are about to enter these lonely kitchens:

Come, for their sake,

Let's demolish these kitchens now.

Volga, a renowned and enthusiastic front liner in the movement for women's liberation, expresses a woman's passion for freedom. Advaita is philosophy of oneness denying duality. The way the speaker of the poem enjoys getting into the world of oneness is the thirst for real and lasting ecstasy.

ADVAITA - NOT BEING TWO: VOLGA

About joy I cannot write

But when it is joyful or not I can.

Body becoming moonlight and a ball of butter

Pollen and finally a rainbow

Like a pigeon's wing

Lightly, freely flying

Leaving impressions

With movements continuous

Breaking all dams

Unleashing floods inner and outer

Masked joy breaks into a dance.

Around my body there is no world
With my body I go penetrating the world
Wonderful is this sensation
It's like falling in love again and again:
Like delivering a baby for the first time.

Silalolita's poem is a powerful call to the women to assert independence coming out of the shackles they are bound in. The nail marks of the beastlike man are edicts on the rock. They cannot be deliberately obliterated. So, there is the need for rewriting history all over once again.

LET'S REWRITE HISTORY: SILALOLITA

In the drawer of eye-lid chests
Drops of water frozen
Huddled in throat's way
Tribulations lurking noisily
Around life solidified
Experiences that fence like barbed wires
On the foreheads
Marks of masculine scrawls
Rock edicts of generations
By any eraser not to be obliterated
Except by you
None can erase
Again, let us ourselves
Rewrite history.

JAYA'S POEM RIDICULES THE PROMISE AND THE JUDGMENT THAT WOMAN IS HALF OF MAN AND SHE IS HALF WORLD. FINE WORDS BUTTER NO PARSNIPS IS THE OLD SAYING THAT IS ALWAYS TRUE. THE ACTUALITY IS DIFFERENT AND HENCE THE FIERCE ANGER AND FRUSTRATION WITH UTTER, INFLECTED HELPLESSNESS. ONLY WOMEN COULD HAVE WRITTEN THESE POEMS.

HALF WORLD: S. JAYA

Arthanareeswara – half woman, half Eswar

You say, or, half of the sky

Both sound the same.

Cleaving the globe vertically into two

Half light and half darkness

Darkness is only the shadow of light

That's the lesson taught at school in childhood.

Three rooms in our home:

Drawing room, bedroom, and kitchen

One half is mine

For my hubby the drawing room

For me the kitchen

For us both, the bed

Responsibilities we share half-and-half

Bearing the baby mine,

Giving the family name, his.

When dusk falls

Shivers in the spine

Wailing hearts
On being raped

As though rising from graves

Before lamps run out of oil

Spent matchsticks

If these snigger and tease

If wan and feeling wretched

The differences aeon-long

Are those of light and dark.

Groping in the dark

Claiming half world as mine

How long can I feign Urmila*'s sleep?

Not in the answer sheets in the exams alone

For life too should a margin be given.

Life should be securely held and protected:

Even from the one to whom the heart is given.

(*Lakshmana's wife in the Ramayana. She spends all her life in sleep during his exile.)

Rajani's poem is the most powerful and with that she has carved a niche for herself in the temple of poetry. For the woman the birth of a baby is rebirth whether it is a boy or girl. Killing the girl child heartlessly makes the mother seethe with anger doubled by her helplessness. The speaker goes into the heart-rending actualities of the operation theatre, the bed and the bucket underneath.

ABORTION STATEMENT: PATIBANDLA RAJANI

Naughty, violating the limit, ridiculing the safety period

On this side or that of the fourteenth day
While thinking 'no' and when carelessly I let in contrary cells
Why did you become the other half to merge, the little one!
Isn't it since there isn't enough blood to share with you
Since no leisure to bring you up
Since your elder sister to crawl is still unlearnt
That I thought that I wouldn't have you!
For your crime of getting
Being without my consent
When my job and health are shaky
I confirmed the sentence.
Anguished and faltering between right and wrong
Getting up the table becoming a head-chopper
Covering your face with mask of rubber gloves
Wailing like the Pandavas
After consigning Abhimanyu to enemy arrows'
Losing you in Pethidine sedation,
Wan and wafting like fibre
Burying the mom in me, becoming pale bagasse
Finding you like a lump of plaster of Paris
Swallowed by the plastic bucket, Kamsa's sword
Yearning to take you into my lap and hug
Sculpting you as lips wetting in search of mother
To join the broken fragments again into a statue whole

Wishing to spit the amniotic fluid
At those who found a way so easy to kill
Belly ripped, the sensibility wound lacerated

It's grief, my dear, a pot of tears.

Alas!

As there are tablets to drive the milk run dry

If there were to be drugs,

The sensibility to parch

How nice it'd have been!

There is Geeta's poem on menstrual pain which no man could have written. And then, unless one has experienced it at least by entering the original writer's mind, even a woman could not have written this. Translation of all these seven poems needs getting into the hearts of those poets. For a rendering of each of these poems, the practitioner should get into the body of the original speaker, which means he should go into another body for seven times to bring out the power of the feeling in another language.

THE TIME I'M MY PERIOD: K. GEETA

When the whole body is frozen into an abscess

When a private mount explodes silently

I make efforts vain to catch the pain in my grip

All of a sudden it gives a jolt

I in myself, solid becoming liquid

Then become a solid again

And then shattered to pieces.

Every month, having no other go

I transform myself into pain

Dead

Unable to plaster the wound that would'nt surface

Unable to grind the ribs into powder
Even unable to draw myself into a bundle of cosy sleep
Embracing the thirty-six hours of turbulence
Unable to remain a forced untouchable
Walking forward a few paces in civilisation
Becoming gasping leaps and sprints
Desiring to flatten the spine on the anvil
Toying with the idea
To bundle this bother with chains of iron
Again and again, once in every thirty days
Taking rebirths one after another
The period when crushed in gut-twisting agony
This period ...

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