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## ***Sava Sher Gheun*: Representation of Social Evils and Problems in Translation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Premchand's *Sava Sher Gheun* is an interesting short story which shares the plight of farmer in Indian Society. It deals with the problem of bonded labour. The story also throws light on the social evils like caste exploitation and problematic money lending system. The paper aims to explore the problem of Translation as well. The translation of text leads to removal of so many things. The paper attempts to examine the issues related to translation and farmer in Indian Society.

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### **Introduction:**

Translation makes an immense contribution to the growth, blossoming, and fruition of cross-cultural creativity. A Good translation makes the work of original literature sparkle in new literary surroundings, bringing the original and the receiving culture close to each other. It takes a text to a distinct and wider reading audience. According to Raghunathan Rao, translation means "expressing the sense of passage or extract in another language". It is an act by which the ideas of the author are transferred from one language into another, to affect the mind of the reader in the way in which the original effects itself. It means translating ideas not merely words.

Translation is not a new art as it has been in this world for quite a long time. The Greeks are seen as the first translators of work. The first traces of translation date from 3000 BC and the most famous translation from the ancient world is that of the Rosetta stone which dates back to the 2nd century BC.



Roman also started translating Greek text into Latin. People such as Quintilian, Cicero, Horace, and Catullus gave serious study to the problem of translation.

Translation should be able to retain the flavour of the original text culture and taste. It allows text to expand and gather multiple views from a pluralistic world. Translation introduces the reader to alien culture, society, manners and style of living. It brings recognition to a text at the world level. Translation in India says Sujit Mukherjee is very difficult because of cultural, social, and religious diversity. Good translation has sometimes been defined in terms of their 'Faithfulness' or 'equivalence' to their source language texts (Lewis, P-16). For Spivak, translations of 'third world' literature not only have to fully master the source and target languages, they must also be familiar enough with literary production in the source language to be able to look at it critically, have a thorough sense of the specific terrain of the original (Spivak 1993: 405).

Like many other great works and short stories of Munshi Premchand, which have been translated into English and various other languages. 'Sava Sher Gheun' is a short story translated into English by Purnima Mazumdar. The story portrays the plight of a poor peasant who becomes a bonded labourer from a happy and independent peasant. It also throws light on the social evils of Indian society like the caste system, illiteracy, rural indebtedness etc. The translation is not always able to convey the exact meaning of the original text. Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Task of Translator' argues that translation is just a passing of information as it fails to convey the 'essential substance' of the original work. It is unable to create the same socio-cultural context and unable to develop the same flavour as of original text. In translation the essence of the original gets lost says Benjamin. He believes that two languages cannot have the same socio-cultural and historical context so in translation the emotions and cultural affiliations attached to certain words get lost.

There has been a significant loss in the translation of this short story. The translation is unable to transfer the social-cultural milieu. It fails to transfer the same emotional and psychological effect on the mind of the reader. In the source language, the first sentence of the text reveals the name of the protagonist, his caste and his profession. While the translated text fails to translate it properly, it fails to mention the caste of the protagonist, which is an essential marker of identity in India. So, the translation loses its significance in the very first sentence as fails to translate the caste of the protagonist. In India people live and die by caste; it's caste which defines a person's socio-cultural and economic status in society. The original text presents Shankar, the protagonist in a social-cultural context, he is presented as a kurmi (a



particular peasant caste, which comes under Shudras), while the translated version fails to explain and place the protagonist in an Indian context. In its first paragraph, Premchand introduced the local words, phrases and sentences and it became very tough and in fact impossible to translate. The translator also fails to create a similar portrait of the protagonist as created in the original language.

In the translated text, the translator is unable to convey the meaning and its socially rich context. The translator has used three different words for Vipr Mahajan, who is one of the characters in story. Initially, he (translator) called him pundit, then brahmin and after that Pandey. This kind of variation creates confusion in the minds of foreign readers. The translator has skipped a few significant sentences from the original text. This depicts the inability of the translator and also the inability of translated languages. As in many languages, one cannot find a suitable word to express the same emotions and feelings. The sentence which has been skipped I believe can be easily translated and would enhance the emotional side of the protagonist.

On the other side, the translator has kept some words from the source language and provided meanings within brackets. There are two reasons behind this one there would be no exact translation of these words available in the translated language; the second would be that the translator wants the reader of the translated language to enjoy some words from the source language. The translator has retained words like *Panseri*, *Chhatank*, *Mirzai*. He has kept the original proverb '*lekha jon jon ,baksi son son*'. It allows the foreign reader to know different cultures and words. In one place the translator mentions the Indian word *Bighas* but fails to provide its translated meaning. It creates a problem in the mind of an alien reader.

In the translated text there are many words which do not convey the exact emotions and feelings. For a word like '*jeth ki dhup*', the translated word 'scorching heat' seems inappropriate and fails to convey the month in which the author is talking. The translator uses 'Hubble and bubble' for *Chilim and Hukkah* and for *Khalhiyani*, the word alms is used. The translated words fail to convey the meaning and cultural context. The translated words seem completely inappropriate and useless. At the end of the story, the original work mentioned that Shankar worked at a Brahmin place for twenty years and this fact is not at all mentioned in the translated work. This shows that translation loses lots of important words and sentences, which are important parts of the original work.

The translator has failed to translate some crucial sentences which reveal some significant traits of Brahmin's character. As a researcher, I believe that a translator should not leave such significant sentences. The original sentence '*weh chatur shikari ki bhatein achuk nishana lagana chaate tha. Phele*



*se chaukana unke niti ke virudh tha'*. The above sentence reveals the sly and cunning nature of Brahmin and he plans things for the future. He is a great planner, who knows how and when to use and say things. Another sentence which again reveals the sly nature of Brahmin remains non-translated '*pundit ji ne us garib ko ishwar ke darbar mein kasht dena uchit na samjha, itne an-nayaye, itne nirdayye na the'*'. This line too reveals that Brahmin is not bothered about Shankar after his death. He has now caught hold of Shankar's son.

The title of the story is deeply rooted in Indian society and reflects and represents 'socio-economic and cultural conditions. It demonstrates that people of Indian society are aware and using the Indian weighing system and this system was more prevalent than the European one. In the title '*Sher*' stands for a kilogram and '*Sava*' stands for a quarter. The last word '*Gheun*' describes the staple diet of north Indian society which is symbol of prosperity and happiness. In the story '*gheun*' is a symbol of prosperity as it is enjoyed by people from certain classes and castes. Shankar has millet (*Joo*) at his home but the saint cannot be served millet for his dinner as it will be disgraceful to serve him. '*Gheun*' is seen as a diet enjoyed by high caste people not by ordinary and lower caste. Shankar does not find *gheun* at anyone's place except Brahmin's, which depicts that wheat is enjoyed only by upper-caste people in their daily diet. Wheat becomes a symbol of prosperity, happiness and economic stability.

When the title gets translated into English it loses its cultural and social importance, it is translated as 'One and quarter kilo of wheat'. The translated title does not connect with the socio-cultural and economic situation of Indian society. The translated title fails to describe the society, people, culture economic strata of people and many more things. It also fails to depict the indigenous weighing system.

The short story introduces its reader Indian weighing system which was prevalent during the time this story was written. The title itself reveals some measures of the Indian weighing system. It introduces the reader that *Sher* is equivalent to one kilogram and *Sava* is equivalent to a quarter. There are other measures which are used in the short story like *Panseri*(five kilograms); *Mann*(forty kilograms); *Chhatank*(1/16th of a kilogram). In the present time, the indigenous weighing system is used very rarely but translation is an effective way to introduce the contemporary reader to the indigenous measuring system. We can write Indigenous measures in the original language in Italics and within bracket, the equivalent Western measure can be mentioned to assist the reader in understanding it. Not only Indian readers of contemporary India but also Western readers can know about the Indian measuring system by this method.



One can never understand Indian society without understanding the rigid and unjust caste system, which has been continuing in India for last five thousand years. Earlier Indian society was divided according to the Varna system, caste came to existence very late. According to the Varna system, Indian society was divided into four broader categories according to their work, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudras. Manu Smriti says on Varna vyavastha "Now, for the sake of preserving all his creation, the most glorious ordained separate duties for those who sprang from (His) mouth, arms thigh (and) Feet (Manu 187). The holy book Gita says "The four varna were created by Me according to the division of guna and labour (Gita 4.13)"

Caste in India is deeply entrenched in people's psyche. It is a marker of one's identity and social status. It is not a sudden artificial creation but an organism which evolved gradually through a multiplicity of factors. M.N. Srinivas says that the notion of 'karma' which teaches a Hindu that he is born in a particular sub-caste because he deserved to be born there and dharma, the code of duties (or rule of caste) has contributed greatly to the strengthening of ideas of hierarchy which is inherent in the caste system'. The Shudras have no space and agency to rebel and retaliate. According to Celestine Bougle, the real groups were jatis or caste which, in his view, formed part of a system based on three fundamental principles: one hereditary specialization; second hierarchy and repulsion; third isolation of one group from another.

As a social realist, Premchand handles many components of the Indian social system of the time. The Story reveals the rigid and ubiquitous caste system and also describes the problem of illiteracy, poverty and rural indebtedness in India. Illiteracy is one of the significant reasons why Shankar becomes a bonded labourer in the story. He says in the story that 'had he been educated, he would have said –alright, I will pay you in God's house only... (P-102)'. His submission before the Brahmin is because of two reasons one is illiteracy and another fear of 'God'. The sly Brahmin created the fear of God and Karma which forced simple Shankar to accept his words. Education would have assisted him to rebel and retaliate against the orders of Brahmin. This happens in Premchand's magnum opus Godan, in which Gobar returns from the city and tells the moneylender that the total debt on his father is Rs 80. not Rs.180. His education and stay in the city assisted him to know and learn accounts. But his father (Hori) refuses to believe Gobar and accepts the debt developed by the Brahmin. It shows that caste and religion overpower reason and how illiteracy refuses to accept reason and logic. Shankar like Gobar's father has no option but to accept Brahmin orders.



The sly Brahmin creates a fear of God which becomes obvious from these lines. "I will go straight to hell. He was horrified by the thought only. He said, 'Sir I shall pay you whatever I owe to you, here only. Why in God's house". The above lines expose the constant fear of God in Shankar's mind. He is afraid of God and Brahmin is using religion as a tool to extract money out of him and he has no option but to accept it.

Bonded labour says Davin Finn is a long-term relationship between employer and employee, is usually solidified through a loan, and is embedded intricately in India's socio-economic culture—a culture that is a product of class relations, a colonial history, and persistent poverty among many citizens. Also known as debt bondage, bonded labour is a specific form of forced labour in which compulsion into servitude is derived from debt. It evolves from a variety of reasons like an ingrained legacy of caste-based discrimination, vast poverty and inequality, an inadequate education system, unjust social relations and illiteracy. Under the constitution of India bonded labour has been abolished and banned, Article 23 of the 1949 Constitution of India outlaws both the trafficking of human beings and forced labour, but the legislation defining and banning bonded labour was only approved by Parliament in 1976. The unwillingness of the government and weak enforcement of the law allows this system to flourish in contemporary society.

In the story 'Sava Sher Gheun', Premchand describes how a sly Brahmin with his clever nature creates a fear of God to force Shankar to work under him as a bonded labourer. The whole act of not reminding Shankar for seven years about the meagre '*sava sher gheun*' reveals that he is waiting for the right moment to catch his hunt. Once you become a bonded labourer, then no one can bring you out of this vicious circle. It becomes a hereditary or generational work. It happens in the case of Shankar, he dies after working for twenty years as a bonder labourer but is unable to return the debt of *Sava Sher Gheun*. After his death, the sly Brahmin catches his son to work as a bonded labourer to pay the debt of his father. Bonded labour also becomes a hereditary phenomenon and passes from one generation to another like the caste system.

The translation of *Sava Sher Gheun* cannot be seen as a very 'faithful' and comprehensible one as it fails to convey meanings; fails to translate some important sentences; fails to translate the social-cultural set-up and local flavour but it does a wonderful job by introducing Indian weighing system to Indian and western reader. We are becoming more accustomed to the Western weighing system. This short story introduces the indigenous weighing system which is used now only in rural parts of North India while



urban cities are completely devoid of it. Also, it throws light on the social evils of Indian society, especially on bonded labour, caste system, illiteracy and poverty. These social evils are still prevalent in contemporary society in one way or another.

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