

My tryst with The Cankam literature in translating into English

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(1)Introduction

Translation is an art, as well as a science. It is an art in as much as there is a little bit of originality and beauty in its rendering in a new form. This aspect of creation makes it an art. Art in any form is beautiful and makes an appeal to the senses and evokes an interest for an insight into its soul, which is the source of delight. Credit goes to Eugene Nida and his co-author Taber for developing it as a science.

When translation is attempted adopting definite, and precise norms, it matures in to a scientific endeavour. While translating Tamil Bardic literature we have to exercise extreme caution and care. The exercise has to be diligent, marked with care and alacrity . Even an insignificant error, howsoever small it may be, can mar the whole beauty and the translated product becomes a totally different one differing from the original. Being true to the original is the cardinal principle of translation. The spirit in it should come in the translated body. The T.T should be capable of invoking similar response as in S.T

James S.Holmes, has rightly remarked, “The Name and nature of Translation Studies, is considered to be ‘The Founding statement’ of a new discipline”

(2) The Back Drop

Translation studies are a new academic interest. Research in this field has exploded like **The big bang** creating its own universe with its attendant planets as luminaries.

Jakobson categorises translation in to three. They are

a) Intralingual translation or rewording “an interpretation of verbal signs of the same language

b) Interlingual translation or “translation proper” “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language

c) Inter semiotic translation or transmutation or interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems

We re concerned here with the second type.

God or Nature alone is the original creator. All the other creations are at their best copies only. In a tree all leaves may resemble the same for an on looker. Even a careful study cannot yield him a different picture. He will see the sameness in all leaves. But a botanist analyzing every leaf will find that every one of it differs from every one other .The differences lie in the number of veins or arteries and their molecules. He reveals to us that even every cell making some of the stem or any other organ of the species is different and unique. Thus it dawns to the enquiring mind that God Or Nature alone is capable of creating millions and billions of a single species to be original

At the other end of the scale is scientific attempt to translate a given language piece in to another. The scientific translation may follow certain norms as fixed by the experts in the field. Yet if the translator does not possess a bit of artist in him the translated body becomes what was not intended to be.

Take for an example a lotus flower, even the best scientist team in the world cannot produce another flower looking the very same in all aspects because it is the creation by God Or Nature. God or Nature has infused a little buff of His breath in to it. Scientists can produce a wax model resembling the lotus in all respects yet the smoothness and aroma will be missing. Alas the fragrance too, is not there. “*THERE IS NO LIFE IN IT*”. All Cankam works had been created by poets breathing their life

force in to. The bardic poets never sang for their individual selves. They sang completely devoid of even an iota of ego, they bursted out as and when occasion demanded. On such an occasion they even risked their life to speak out the never dying TRUTH.

Such being the axiom even the best translation is only an imitation. The poets even risked their lives life to bring out the universal truth

(3) Specialty of the body of the bardic corpus and the methodology adopted for the research paper

The bardic literary creations are masterpieces of creation. They have their roots in culture of the soil. Yet their heavenward branches have appeal to the cosmos. Hence the truth lying there in has universal relevance. There fore Inductive logic has been adopted in the research and the deductive technology applied in individual cases to arrive at conclusions thro deductive technology.

(4) The Norms

While attempting to translate the bardic literature the following nuances have to be kept in mind.

- (i) Preliminary
- (ii) Selection of Metrical form for T.L
- iii) A complete and unambiguous understanding of the Akattinai and purattinai, which are absent in English literature.

The translator shall decide upon the format in which it will be best to translate. It depends upon the type of the metrical verse in Tamil

Select the near equal metrical format as regards number of lines. Hatim and Mason elaborated the role of the translator as communicator. They bring to light the two aspects namely, transitivity structure and the ideational function

For Kural venba the translator can select heroic verse. For Venba metre he can select Sitygotyio Japanese metre. For Narratives he can select Free verse but he should try to stick to the conveyance of ideas in each line in S.T to be in line with T.T.

I have adopted free verses while translating **Manimekalai, Culamani and kalitokai and paripatal**

For certain verses in the Kurincikali (translated by me under the title **Love in the wooded hill slope**, I was free to choose many formats suitable to the occasion.

When I was given the pleasant task of translating “Muttollayiram” by the centre for excellence of classical Tamil, I chose, Italian Otava Rima metre as it is amenable for a narrative mode. Yet instead of adopting ten syllables each line, I devised my own to fit the occasion. For Italian Otava rima adopting rhyming pattern “abababcc” will be appropriate. The first six lines will be narrative and the last two summarise the whole.

The great Israeli Scholar Itamar Even-Zohar developed what is known as “Polysystem theory” which deserves our attention at this juncture

Akam has been translated by A.K Ramanuja as “Interior landscape.” Yet it is well known the full import of Akam as depicted by the bardic literature is not covered by the phrase. For the time being we will continue to use that phrase to denote “ what is happening inside the hearts of the characters.” The peculiarity or the uniqueness of Tamil Akapporul is “*nameless*’.

In the conversations of the heroine and the confidante the proper names never appear. What is mentioned is heart to heart talk between the duo- purely impersonal like but universal in its application. In English literature we know the hero, the heroine and the confidante by proper names. Such is seemingly opposite cultural milieu there.

It calls for extreme care and diligence in grafting the new product from the original sapling. The new plant shall survive in the new soil and yet shall contain the original germ of the species transplanted.

Like a good horticulturist the ‘Mother soil’ has to stick to the roots of the graft.

In addition the soil type - one among the five fold classifications- has to be simulated in the targeted clime and time. Then only the new product though a hybrid one will thrive as a native species with standing the rigours of drought.

5) *The relation of Genre and register to language*

This is elaborated in Hallidayan model as :-

Socio cultural environment → Genre → register (field, tenor, mode) →
→ Discourse semantics (ideational, interpersonal, textual) →
→ Lexico grammar (transitivity, modality, theme-rheme/cohesion)

6) *To be well versed in the History and geography of Tamilnadu*

The history of Tamil Nadu, especially the cultural history should be the translator's prime attention before attending to his job.

At the University of Texas Andri Lefevere in the comparative literature Department highlights the play of the cultures in the S.L

In the cultural history *Aram* occupies a pre-eminent place. The aram has been translated as "virtue" by many Linguists. We know that virtue is one of the ingredients of Aram but not the only one. Aram is such a beautiful concept which is native to the Tamils. Such an out look is rarely seen in any other culture.

On the political side Monarchy differs vastly from that of the west. Monarchs are the very life source of the people. This shall be borne in mind while dealing with texts about kings

7) *Understanding the structure and architectonics of the literary edifices*

Several readings of the text will reveal the beauty of the structure of the verses. It will come to light how every word has been chosen and how it is impregnated with susceptibilities to several interpretations. Every poem is like the proverbial "Mono Lisa." you cannot alter even one limb". Chomsky brings out the structural patterns in S.L for a successful translation in TL

When K.Muthukumarasamy the managing director of Kazhagam asked me whether, I could take up the translation of Manimekalai. I came the reply from me "I shall do it with pleasure". Why did I so accept? What temerity I had in accepting the challenge/ I ruminated

My earlier success in translating Kalitokai (Kuricikali under the title LOVE IN THE WOODED HILL SLOPE well received by the learned

public and well reviewed by leading journals and magazines including The Hindu, My translation of Paripaatal, valayapati and kuntalakeci, gave me additional courage.

I completed the translation in a month but alas only up to canto 26th. Beyond that I could not move an inch. The reason is the last three cantos are steeped in theology, and treatises of various religions especially Buddhism.

I abruptly closed the work on hand. I requested Muthukumarasamy to provide with all good books on Indian logic and Theology especially Buddhism which he gladly did. I took nearly six months to master Indian logic. (Fortunately Logic was my optional in my college) and theology I did under the feet of my spiritual mentor

In poetry like Paripatal, we realize that the poems have been poured out of the hearts of the singers. They were god intoxicant men. Only such zealous souls alone can attempt to translate it.

Dr G.U Pope and Yogi Suddanantha Bharathi used couplets as equivalents to Kural Venba. Of course there is no equivalent metrical verse in English literature. We can suitably adapt the Japanese Sityogoti verse form with seven syllables long in the first half followed by five syllable short in the second half making one line. I have tried it in some of my translations. For translating three line innisai venba the Japanese metre Haiku has been successfully used to the best advantage.

8) Understanding the peculiarity of the narrative mode.

As in the case of Cilappatikaram and Manimekalai, narratives shall be broken piece-meal without the appearance of clipping but fused and reassembled as one whole to look like the S.T.

9) Being Faithful to the original

When conveying in the T.L it should be faithful to the S.L with its aroma of the local custom and practices, yet keeping intact their universal appeal.

10) The intensity of the emotions

The emotions expressed in the original shall be incorporated in exact equivalent measure in the translated text. This is a Herculean task indeed. And therein lies the genius of the translator.

11) The suggestive hints

The hints in S.T running through out the bardic texts shall be brought out in an unabridged and full format in the T.T.

12) Use of Glossary

An exhaustive glossary explaining the technical words, customs and practices peculiar to the Tamil genius shall accompany all translations.

13) Use of Artistic Flavour

The product in the T.L and T.T are both an art and science, yet hybrid products with artistic flavour with a scientifically built body with the necessary contours so that an impartial reader of the T.T should feel that he is reading the S.T.

14) Use of Colophons

Colophons are to be given wherever necessary explaining the unit of time and space and ***Tinai*** and its mode Translation shall confine and conform to the original Genre and its variance. Some times it is likely the translator forages in to the neighbouring field unwittingly.

15) The scheme of transliteration

The transliteration table universally accepted as found in the Lexicon published by The Madras University, alone shall be adopted.

There is a case for revision for the scheme. For example the authors of the Lexicon have completely abandoned the letter “D” while it can perform pronunciation function of the fifth consonant. The case of D deserves merit for induction

in to the transliteration scheme and to relieve the over burden of “T” to an unwieldy extent.

List of abbreviations used:

S.L - Source language, S.T- Source Text, T.L- Target Language, T.T - Target Text

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