

Is Translation a form of Cannibalism?- A study of Kamala Das' *My Story* and *Ente Kadha*

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Abstract

Translation is defined as the “replacement of the textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language).” This definition by Catford is acceptable to all of us since it conveys the rough idea of this centuries-old notion. From times immemorial, translation plays a significant role in satisfying our intellectual, cultural and spiritual needs wherever there is a demand for sharing and exchanging of ideas and information. The purpose of this paper is to establish the argument that Kamala Das' act of translation of her work *My Story* into *Ente Kadha* is a form of cannibalism. Borrowing the idea from Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi whose essay titled “Of Colonies, cannibals and vernaculars” an introductory piece to their work "Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice." what is attempted to affirm in the paper is that translation is a form of cannibalism.

Key Words-Translation, Feminism, Cannibalism.

Introduction

The term 'cannibal' originally refers to a group of Caribs in the Antilles, and it entered the English vocabulary in the OED of 1796 as it now indicates both the name of a tribe and the name given to savage people who eat human flesh. In the sixteenth century Brazil, father Sardinha, a Catholic priest was eaten by a tribe called Tupinamba as an act of homage. This act has certainly created the ambience of horror and uncertainty in Portugal and Spain, considering as it did the ultimate taboo for a European christian. Later in 1920s, a group of Latin American writers attempted to rethink that story in terms of the relationship they'd with Europe. Europe was endorsed as the great Original, the source and the colonies were the 'translations' of the Original, which they were supposed to copy. This devaluation of the 'copies' in fact establishes the myth of translation as something that diminished the greater original. Bassnett and Trivedi add that the students of the translation hardly recognize the fact that there might also be a process of gain along with the loss in the translation. And thus, this cannibalistic metaphor has come to be used to teach the function of the translators.

Translation as a form of Cannibalism

The element of cannibalism in the translation of *My Story* can be witnessed from the very examination of its composition itself. For instance, a mere glance at the chapter headings will prove this point. None of the original titles find place in the Malayalam version which has assumed chaste headers. Thus here we have a writer/translator exhausted by different levels of cultural intervention while writing/translating in two different languages. Even the year and place of publication receive significant dimensions.

The further act of cannibalisation can be evidently visible in the structure, length and content of the sentences and paragraphs of the translated version. Even though there is a great confusion regarding the fidelity of the Original, a concept propagated by the Romantics and is still prevalent amongst many translation circles even today, it can be realized that the Indianization of English, which is probably the celebrated idea of some Postcolonial translators, is something that she attempted in *My Story*. Since translation is not an innocent, transparent and isolated activity, it rarely involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems. This could be one reason why the readers can find a lot of discrepancies between the Original version and the translation. While transcreating *My Story* into Kamala Das' mother tongue, she carefully misplaced certain events and details and in fact, omitted even a few chapters like 'A Brush With Love,' 'Mahabharata,' 'my Great-Grandmother' etc. Indeed, there are more instances of cannibalism of Kamala Das' text that resulting in interesting personifications, metaphors, similes and mixed metaphors. In *Ente Kadha*, she compares her works to an embryo in the chapter 'Kandethikkazhinjittillatha Bhookandam.' Later in the same chapter, her emotions are related to the worms commonly seen in cow-dung.

The potency of cultural mythology is immense. It is remarkable to note that in order to make the narrative running and interesting, Kamala Das combines myths from the Hindu religious texts with her personal memories. She cites the tales from the Mahabharata and when the chapter ends, she uncovers her overwhelming desire to become a Draupati 'who had commanded her adoring mate to brave the demons to get flowers for her wavy tresses. 'The writer also quotes another story, the story of Kunthi, the mother of Pandavas who is well-known for her method of getting good sons.

Culture plays a significant part in cannibalising the original. The cultural frame work set by the original need not to be comprehended in its entirety when it is recreated in the Target Language. Since Malayalam provides a cultural frame of reference within which the story is situated, *Ente Kadha* suffers by comparison with *My Story*. *Ente Kadha* displays more difficulties of narrating the self because the writer is a Kolkata-based Malayali woman who like to dream in English. But at the same time, the English language in *My Story* removes the frame of reference spatially and culturally, and simplifies the methodology of remembering and narrating the past. As language changes, the ideological context also changes. Therefore, *Ente Kadha* reveals the ideological problem of narrating a woman's story where the act of remembering and reiterating has emotional overtones.

In a multi-cultural, pluralist society that we inhabit today, translation provides access to cultures different from one's own and aids us to overcome our prejudices regarding race, religion, language and culture of others. When a work of fiction in an Indian language is translated into English, a great deal of cultural and linguistic problems comes to the foreground. A plethora of culture-specific terminology, situations and life events escape the comprehension of the target language reader. Any number of foot notes and explanation hardly satisfy him. Likewise, it is not easy to find a word-to-word correspondence with the target language. Untranslatable words, phrases, or terminology, or dialectical variants would again leave gaps in the Target Language text.

Despite the popular belief that *Ente Kadha* was a story written by a sick woman on the death bed, the textual evidence suggests that Kamala Das had started writing her story much before she was hospitalized and entered into a contract with the editor of Malayalanadu to serialize *Ente Kadha*. So it Indeed, there are more instances of cannibalism of Kamala Das' text that result in interesting personifications, metaphors, similes and mixed metaphors. A further act of cannibalisation can be witnessed in the translation of selfhood in *Ente Kadha*. The translation of the story of her self reveals the plight of a writer who is compelled to reshape herself and her story in two contradictory sets of cultural and linguistic norms of which the former is rooted in the language of patriarchy and orthodoxy whereas the latter is moulded in free thinking and equality. Translation perhaps is the best possible solution to reveal her identity which gets divided between the other tongue of English and the mother tongue of Malayalam. But it is pathetic to note, yet at the same time one can trace cannibalism in the way she apologizes or justifies herself throughout the Malayalam version. But these justifications, apologies and attempts to chastise the body are not to be seen in *My Story* for they are 'the unconscious fears of social ostracization' associated with the female body. It poses the question, 'Which is the Original Text?' and also problematises Pound's notion of 'Fidelity to the Original.'

Conclusion

To sum up, what I mean is that translation is in a way, a 'patricide' which deliberately refuses to repeat that which has been presented as the Original and ensures that the content and form (the meat and bones from the Source Text) will somehow constitute a new text that is developing in the hands of the translator but at the same time the Target Language or this process of conversion does not culminate in the formation of a 'clone' or photocopy of the original. What cannibalism presents ultimately is a newborn infant with its own distinct features and an absolute varied form and appearance.

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