

Challenges in Translation: A Study of Select Novels *Parthiban Kanavu* and *Dream of Parthiban*

Aishwaryaa S A^{1*}, Dr. M. John Suganya²

²Department of English

^{1*,2}PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore.

^{1*}aishakshai@gmail.com

²suganyajohn@gmail.com +91 9994924381

Abstract

This article focuses on the challenges and issues involved in translating a regional historical novel into a western language like English which has completely different style, culture, and vocabulary. The chief role of translation is to interlace two or more languages and to unfold the richness of a particular region and its literary manuscripts accessible to the whole world. While in the process of translating, a translator encounters various problems such as finding translational equivalents and cultural terms of the native language. In a multilingual country like India, most people are unobservant of the tradition, History and the anthropology of a lingual group that is distinct from their region. This article analyses the problems of translation of the great Tamil historical novel *Parthiban Kanavu* originally written by Kalki Krishnamurthy, a proficient Tamil historian who blends History and fiction. The translator M S Venkatraman has tried his best in the translated work, *Dream of Parthiban*, to retain the essence of ancient Tamil history and its culture along the parameters of semantics, syntactics and stylistics to make his venture palatable to English readers.

Key words: *culture, history, problems, language, translation, transliteration, equivalence.*

Introduction

Ramaswamy Krishnamurthy, the pioneer of Indian Historical novels is popularly known by his pseudonym, Kalki. This eminent Sahitya Akademi awardee, penned the remarkable classic Tamil fiction, *Parthiban Kanavu* which elucidates the cultural and social aspects of the country. Kalki, a mighty Historian has the power of giving life to his historical gestures and characters. All his works are nationalized and his writings include 120 short stories, 10 novellas, 5 novels and his 3 Historical romances are *Parthiban Kanavu*, *Ponniyin Selvan* and *Sivagamiyin Sabadham*. These three renowned Historical novels of Kalki recapitulate the fact that he is one of the most eminent Historical writers of Tamil Language. He has chiseled these great literary monuments with his inimitable descriptive style.

M. S. Venkataraman, a Professor of Surgery at the Madras Medical College is a prolific writer and he has attempted to make the Historical novel, *Dream of Parthiban*, built around the Tamil culture and heritage accessible to a wider readership. His articles and papers of scientific interest are put together in his book titled *The Gentle Tyrant*.

Parthiban Kanavu, the magnum opus of Kalki's trilogy, exaggerates the richness of Tamilnadu and its people during the reign of Pallava and Chola dynasties. It is set in the seventh century AD, an allegory expressing the intense longing of the author for the liberation of India from foreign rule. Kalki, with his comprehensible and lucid style has interwoven the plot of *Parthiban Kanavu* with everything a reader can dream for: vision, humour, chivalry, mystery, satire, patriotism, love and sacrifice that makes the process of History into a glorious work of art.

Summary of the novel

Parthiban Kanavu gives a glimpse of our Indian history and its glory that takes us through the tussle between four major dynasties that ruled South India. In particular, the rivalry between the Chola King Parthiban to attain independence from the Pallava ruler, Narasimhavarman is been portrayed. Kalki sculpted this literary masterpiece with two distinct themes, the suzerainty of the Pallavas over the Cholas and the fight against the menace of *Kapalika*, *Shaktam*, *Kalamukham* and other similar extremist cults (Venkataraman xvii). Parthiban conveys his dream of regaining the lost glory of Chola Kingdom to his son Vikraman in the art gallery. The narrative moves on with the fascinating love story of Kundavi and Vikraman and the adventurous disguise of Narasimhavarman. The novel ends with Vikraman, fulfilling the dream of Parthiban and it heralds the birth of pasture new, the historical novel in Tamil.

Translation as medium

Translation acts as a bridge between the mother tongue and foreign language for the transference of knowledge, cultural heritage and requisite in efficacious communication among the people worldwide. Translation enriches the language along with literature which performs an effectual role in transferring the aspirations of different people and culture. It is through translation, the translator transfers various forms of art, History, humanity and cultural ethos of a source language into a target language by retaining its true essence to the global audience.

Role of a translator

The foremost significant role of a translator is to be bilingual. In translating a literary text, translator must take up the role of a scholar and a critic. Linguistic competence and cultural inwardness in both source and target language should be possessed by the translator for effective translation. Every translator must play the role of a critic, performer, co creator and comparatist to enrapture readers with the masterpieces of mankind from one language into another.

Evaluation of challenges in translation

Cultural ambiguity

Language is largely culture acquainted and it is one of the major challenges for every translator in the process of translation. They face the problem of translating certain cultural words. The translator must take into account the socio-cultural matrix which plays a vital role in both the source and target language. In *Dream of Parthiban*, cultural words such as *Lord Muruga*, *Lord Krishna*, *Lord Shiva*, *Thirukkural*, *Ayyanar temple*, *Sri Ranganathar temple*, *Aarati*, *Viboothi*, *Rudraksha*, *Shivanadiyar*, *Siruthondar*, *Saptarishi mandalam*, *Bhakti*, *Kamandalam*, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism are transliterated by the translator. These words retain the tradition and culture of Tamil language in the source text. The translator has used transliteration and focuses much on the pronunciation, deliverance of meaning and moving forward the plot. If footnotes or glossary were provided for these transliterated words, divinity and greatness of Tamil language and culture would have been appreciated by the foreign audience and reached great heights.

Sl. No.	Original	Translation
1	<i>Gnanapaal</i>	Milk of wisdom
2	<i>Amudhu ozhugum</i>	Divine language
3	<i>Parkadal</i>	Ocean of milk
4	<i>Theevarthanai</i>	Flame torches

Imitation of sounds

Onomatopoeia words is a linguistic tool in literature. Translating these words of an artistic language is a laborious task for a translator and it is completely inevitable. Sound is the most significant component of onomatopoeia words and it is difficult to translate these sounds from a source language text to target

language text. The translator emphasizes on semantic equivalence rather concentrating the phonological equivalence in the target language. This acts as a major obstacle in translating a text.

Sl. No.	Original	Translation
1	<i>Taktak taktak</i>	Heard the sound of the horse trot
2	<i>Idi idi</i>	Sarcastic laugh
3	<i>Thaarai thaarai</i>	His eyes were moist
4	<i>Kala kala</i>	The sounds of the birds
5	<i>Kulu kuluu</i>	Murmuring gently through the channels
6	<i>Pada pada</i>	Rush of amazement and delight
7	<i>Thappu thappu</i>	What do you hope to achieve by repeating that you have erred?

Retention of idiomatic expression

Culture, ethical values and social background of a particular region is expressed through the sayings and proverbs which acts as a reflection of culture. In the process of translation, the translator must avoid making use of the lexical equivalent of words and he/she must consider the adaptation of culture, associated with the proverbs and idiomatic expressions. In translating a proverb or idiom from source language to target language, there may be misrepresentation of message and it may also be derogative to other cultures.

Sl. No.	Original	Translation
1	<i>El pottal el vilum satham</i>	Pin drop silence
2	<i>Yaanaiku munnal kosu</i>	It would be easier for a mosquito to defeat an elephant
3	<i>Ellum kollum vandadhu</i>	She was all fury
4	<i>Vayitiril paalai varthen</i>	Your words have poured milk in my burning stomach

Untranslatable emotions

In word-for-word translation, connotative meaning of sarcasm and humor is lost. For instance, In *Dream of Parthiban*, *Aamaam Nee vaaivettu dhan vettuvaai!* is translated into ‘oh, a big joke!’ The intended tone of humor is lost in this process of translation. Identically, Valli taunts Ponnans’ disgrace and she utters a sarcastic dialogue, *ketta kaetuku pattu kunjamdhan* which is left untranslated by the translator. Valli is one of the female protagonists of Kalki’s *Parthiban Kanavu* and she is characterized as *Vambukkara Valli* for her mischievous behaviour. The translator has modified her trait as ‘Gossiping Valli’ and this varied denotation of Vallis’ characterization brings out confusion among the target audience.

Tamil is a Dravidian language with multiple and unique kinship terminologies. Comparably, English, the Lingua Franca has common names to address the relationships. So, it is very hard for translators to translate the familial relationship labels of the source language text to target language. In *Dream of Parthiban*, the translator is inconsistent in using the word *Thatha* throughout the novel. He has encompassed different labels such as *Grandfather*, *Grandpa*, *Paatan*, and *Kilavan*. This inconsistency of relationship labels is burdensome for the foreign readers to grasp and understand relationships in the cultural source language.

Thirukkural is known for its universality, secularism, moral values and ethics. It is one of the most revered ancient works in Tamil literature. In the source text, Kalki Krishnamurthy has comprised a couplet that praises the beauty and divineness of this universal book. The Translator has left this moral couplet untranslated and he has also failed to provide proper footnotes. Through this context we infer that cultural ingenuity of Tamil Language has faded away among the foreign audience and it is ineffective.

Conclusion

Translation has the power to transfer the richness and cultural heritage of one language into another. Adequate problems occur in the process of translation, but it is evident that only these challenges make the art of translation fascinating. M.S. Venkataraman an ardent lover of Tamil literature, has exhibited his liking for the language by translating a great Tamil Historical novel, *Parthiban Kanavu*. A work of translation on no account can do absolute justice to the original writing. But the translator has remained genuine to the original text by keeping himself off from word for word translation. In commencing *Dream of Parthiban*, the translator has equipped with a pronunciation guide for clearer understanding and to transfer true essence of the most alluring Tamil language to global audience. M.S. Venkatramans’ immense

efforts has made this great masterpiece accessible to the whole world. The cultural history and glory of Tamil literature has surpassed the boundaries of Tamil Nadu only through the art of translation. Tamil and English are two different languages known for their eminence and uniqueness. Juxtaposing the Historical novels of these two languages is always subjective. Translators are mostly criticized for the mistakes occurring in the process of translation and seldom acknowledged for the successful completion of the translated work. The scope of translation studies must be essentially developed as it transfers the cultural heritage of diverse languages worldwide.

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