Issues in Translating Mythical references from Tamil into English with special reference to Kalki's சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* (*Sivakami's Vow*)

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Introduction

Translation means transferring the ideas, feelings and messages from the Source language to the Target language. As language and Culture are intertwined, the process of better translation relies on both. A translator's sound knowledge of Source language and culture paves the way for a good translation. In the process of translation, numerous issues arise especially while translating cultural and mythical terms from a Source language text to the Target language text.

Being a part of culture, myths with the help of supernatural beings and events describe the secular and sacred beliefs of people of certain culture. As culture and Myth rely on the natural, social, traditional and religious phenomena of certain people, issues arise while translating culture-centric terms from the original text into the target text.

Here the paper is about such issues that arise while translating mythical references from Tamil into English. Here P.S. Sri's *Sivakami's Vow*, the English translation of the Tamil author Kalki's *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* is considered with special reference for scrutinizing issues. Seven translation strategies of Eirlys E. Davies have been taken as a tool for scrutinizing the translation issues.

Culture and Translation

Indian literature is an amalgam of different traditions, beliefs, languages, ideologies, customs and cultures. Culture plays a vital role in major Indian literature. In case of Tamil literature, as the

culture acts as the backbone of the society, literature and culture are intertwined. Tamil, one of the ancient languages is intertwined with culture and culture occupies the major portion of its literature. While translating a work from Tamil into English, various issues arise. Especially heap of issues arise while translating a culture centric word, because culture-centric words of SL text are more or less familiar with the SL readers whereas those words are purely unfamiliar to the readers in the TL. Hence the translator must be a veteran in the SL as well as in the TL to produce a reasonably good translation. Problems occur while translating cultural words of ambience, settings, materials, food items, tools, measurements, musical instruments, plants, animals, habits , homes, towns ,customs, traditions, beliefs, religious ideologies, mythical references etc. Myths play vital role in exposing the culture of a group. Myths are stories that belong to certain cultural or ethnic group. Sometimes it is linked with spirituality and religion. Myths include the stories of gods, deities, semi gods and supernatural beings. Here myths in Kalki's சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham*, are about the Hindu religion. The native myths, history and legends of a particular ethnic group gradually become a part and partial of their everyday life and occasion. At times they give them a rationale accordingly they come to know that myths, history and legends are the genuine account of their remote past. In this way myths, history and legends are carried forward from generation to generation without any break. Hence myths form the core of a culture sometimes a literature. In translation, rendering myths involve certain problems, as apt equivalent terms to the mythical words in the SL text are scarcely available.

There are various translation strategies as suggested by translation theorists from time to time. Here the seven translation strategies of Eirlys E. Davies are taken for scrutinizing the issues that arise while translating Kalki's சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* into English. Here the English translation of P.S. Sri is considered.

Culture is very important in a society. Though the translator must be keen on providing better translation to the TL readers, it is the duty of the translator to preserve the mythical references as they project the living habit of people of certain society.

Davies considers, "culture as the set of values, attitudes and behaviours shared by a group and passed on by learning" (Davies, 2003, p. 68). She introduces seven strategies of translation. They are, Preservation, Addition, Omission, Globalization, Localization, Transformation and Creation. Here the paper analyses the issues that arise while translating the mythical terms

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referred to in Kalki's சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* into P.S. Sri's *Sivakami'sVow*, especially with Eirlys E. Davies' seven translation strategies.

Preservation

Maintaining the Source term as it is without any additional footnotes in case of lack of equivalent term in the TL culture is preservation strategy.

In the SL text, சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham*, hearing the words of his son Maamallan, King Mahendra praises him by comparing him with the great mythical characters who are very well known for their bravery in the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabaratha.

> அர்ஜுனனும், அபிமன்யுவும், லக்ஷ்மணனும், இந்திரஜித்தும் பேசுவதற்குரிய வீரவார்த்தைகளை இன்று மாமல்லன் பேசினான். (*Sivakamiyin Sabatham,*pp. 607).

King Mahendra praises Maamallan's valor and his great speech by comparing him with the mythical characters in the Hindu epics ராமாயணம் *Ramayana* and மகாபாரதம் *Mahabaratha*. The king praises that, as if Arjuna, Abhimanyu, Lakshmana and Indrajit, Maamalla spoke courageous words. The mythical references in this line are the names of four mythical characters அர்ஜுனன் *Arjuna*, அபிமன்யு *Abhimanyu*, லக்ஷ்மணன் *Lakshmana* **and** இந்திரஜித் *Indrajit*.

Arjuna and Abhimanyu are the mythical characters in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Arjuna is more courageous and good at archery, with his enormous archery skill he saved Pandavas (in favour of justice) in the Baratha battle. Abhimanyu is the son of Arjuna, a man of bravery and skillful in breaking Padma Vyugam , a challenging battle trick or pattern. Lakshmana and Indrajit are the mythical characters in Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Lakshmana is the brother of God Rama, very courageous, fought against the Demon King Ravana. Indrajit is the son of Demon King Ravana with tremendous strength.

In the TL text, the above Tamil sentence has been translated as, **"Whatever brave words an Arjuna or an Abhimanyu, a Lashmana or an Indrajit might have used, those were spoken by Maamallan today".** (*Sivakami's Vow*, pp. 466)

In the TL text, the translator has preserved the SL term அர்ஜுனன், அபிமன்யு, லக்ஷ்மணன் and இந்திரஜித் without any footnotes or additional details. These mythical characters hides bravery, native culture and myth behind them but in the TL text they lack their originality and stand as just words to the TL readers when they are vaguely preserved. As the SL readers are more familiar with these mythical characters they understand the utmost essence of the line and account for the bravery at the characters and figure out prince Mamallan as a brave personality when the author compares him with the concerned characters whereas the TL readers being unaware of the mythically significant words lack in getting the true essence which are implicitly expressed in the Target text.

Addition

Keeping the SL term as it is and adding further explanation to it is defined as Addition strategy. Recognizing the importance of the mythical term, the translator gives the TL term as it is in the SL text and adds further supplement details in order to make it clear and expose its cultural importance to the TL readers. Here the translator gives the additional information related to a particular mythical term in the form of footnotes, glossaries or descriptive phrases.

The SL word பகீரத பிரயத்தனம் *Bageeratha Prayathanam* has been translated in the TL text as it is with the foot notes that gives adequate information about it. In the TL text *Sivakami's Vow* the translator P.S. Sri has given the footnotes as:

Pronounced 'Ba-gee-ra-tha Pra-yath-an-am --- 'Ba-gee-ra-tha's effort'. The legend of Bageeratha is narrated in the epic *Ramayana*. An ancestor of Rama, Bageeratha made incredible efforts to bring the Ganges down from heaven to earth, so that he could perform the funeral rites of his ancestors. (649)

Addition works better than other strategies hence it provides some required information about the mythical term and throws light on the concern myth in the supplement details. Whereas, proper addition is a must. Addition acting just as vague explanation never brings any fruitful result. It must provide enough information to the TL readers regarding the SL mythical reference.

Omission

A Translator's act of erasing culture-centric terms as there is no equivalent term in the TL culture and as well as he finds it very difficult to give its original meaning to the TL readers by all means is named as Omission strategy.

In the SL Text, சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham,* Kalki praises the King Mahendrar with various Hindu gods and Mythical characters.

எத்தகைய சாமான்யக் குறுநிலமன்னர்களையும் கூட அந்தந்த இராஜாங்கக்கவிகள் புத்தியிலே **பிருகஸ்பதி** என்றும், வித்தையிலே **சரஸ்வதி** என்றும், அழகிலே **மன்மதன்** என்றும் வீரத்திலே **அர்ஜுனன்** என்றும், கொடையிலே **கர்ணன்** என்றும் வர்ணிப்பதுண்டு. இந்த வர்ணனையெல்லாம் மகேந்திர சக்கரவர்த்தியின் விஷயத்தில் உண்மையிலேயே பொருந்துவதாயிருந்தது. (109)

The Mythical terms in the above extract are **பிருகஸ்பதி** *Birugaspathy*, **மன்மதன்** *Manmathan*, **அர்ஜுனன்** *Arjunan* **and** **கர்ணன்** *Karnan.* All these characters are well known for their special characteristic features to the Source language audience.

Birugaspathy-Head of gods in heaven, also intellectual and veteran in four Vedas and Sixty Four skills have been listed in the Hindu myths. Manmathan - God of Romance with enthralling resplendence. Arjunan and Karnan are the mythical characters in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Arjunan is more courageous and good at archery, with his enormous archery skill he saves Pandavas in favour of justice in the Baratha battle. Karnan is praised and known for his generosity and friendship.

In TL text *Sivakami's Vow*, the SL mythical terms பிருகஸ்பதி, மன்மதன், அர்ஜுனன் and கர்ணன் have been omitted and instead of this, the translator has vaguely presented the following words:

Even very ordinary local chiefs and rulers are praised upto the skies bu their court poets and hailed as gods with penetrating intelligence, deep learning, enthralling beauty, invincible courage and boundless compassion. Such inflated descriptions were truly befitting the personality and accomplishments of Mahendra Chakravarthi. (87)

In the TL text, the translator has omitted all the mythical characters and vaguely replaced them with usual adverbs. Whereas, the SL mythical words are more than adverbs and special as

they compare the great king Mahendra with Supernatural mythical characters and Gods. Through the SL words, the readers figure out the majestic and magnificent King but in the TL text, the vague descriptions allow the TL readers to consider the great king without much importance. Hence this sort of omission hides the original meaning of the SL text and lessens its flavor among the TL readers. This omission paves the way to the projection of a king among the TL readers but not the great king with appreciating and admiring characters.

Localization

Using the TL audience's familiar words in place of the SL cultural terms, the translator seeks to "make sure that their translated texts sound as if they originated in the culture of the Target language". (Davies, 2003,p.84). Localization projects the equivalent effect of SL text in the TL text as the TL readers are familiar with the translated cultural terms.

The mythical term கற்பகவிருட்சம், *Karpaga Virutcham* (*Sivakamiyin Sabatham* **110**) is used in the SL Text while praising the generosity of the King Mahendrar. In the TL text it is translated as "endlessly bountiful patron" (*Sivakami's Vow*, pp. 87).

As per Hindu Mythology, people believe that the Karpaga Virutcham tree is a living being and it fulfills their wishes. It is believed that the tree is divinely and it is in Heaven. In the TL text, the translator using the localization strategy, has localized the SL term கற்பகவிருட்சம் into "endlessly bountiful patron". The localized words provide the required meaning to the TL audience but swipe away the cultural and mythical importance.

Globalization

Replacing the culture centric SL term into a more neutral or general reference is Globalization strategy.

The mythical term கிங்கரர்கள் *Kingarargal* (p 800) in the SL Text சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* is translated into the TL as, "**tormentors**" (*Sivakami's Vow* 514). In Hindu mythology, Kingarargal are giants or demons who serve Yama, the god of death. They grab the life of a human being and torture humans in hell. Instead of using the mythical word

'Kingarargal' the translator has localized the cultural term as "Tormentors" that brings the relevant meaning torturing.

In the same manner, the mythical term ஜீவஹத்தி *Jeevahatthi* (24) in the SL text சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* has been translated into the TL text *Sivakami's Vow* as "**kill**" (20). As per Hindu Mythology the word *Jeevahatthi* is known as the act of killing a living being, in case of spirituality it is a great sin that prevents the human soul in reaching heaven after death. Especially the priests, Brahmins, Bhuddhist and Jain monks who indulge in ritual as well as religious practices must avoid Jeevahathhi. As the term is simply translated into the TL text as "kill", the meaning is globalized but culture lacks its importance. Thus globalization vanishes the cultural effect of the SL text and provides a familiar word in the TL text which decreases the spirit or real meaning of the Source text.

Transformation

Instead of globalizing or localizing, the translator replaces the SL cultural term with a word which lacks in compensating the original meaning of the SL term. Hence the translation comes out as an alteration or distortion of the original words without proper SL equivalent.

Alteration

In SL Text சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham*, there is a word ஆகாசகங்கை *Akasa Gangai* (850). This term is translated into "**Ganga**" (*Sivakami's Vow* 650) in the TL text. The SL term ஆகாசகங்கை *Akasa Gangai* is a marvelous mythical reference in the Hindu mythology which depicts the life of river Ganges, specifically the word 'akasa' meaning sky, has much importance. According to Hindu mythology the river Ganges once flowed in heaven and came down to earth as per the order of God Brahmmaa in order to sanctify human souls after death. Hence *Akasa ganga* is a divinely mythical word. But in the TL text the translator has translated the word as "Ganga" (*Sivakami's Vow* 649) which alters the meaning of the SL term and lacks in displaying the divinely river and its mythical vitality among the TL readers.

Distortion

In some places instead of translating the mythical terms from the SL Text, the translator deviates. This sort of action creates a mess in between the SL and TL texts. Sometimes distortion paints false colours to genuine culture and project a different ideology among the TL readers. In the SL text while depicting the various dance postures of God Nataraja, the God of Dance, the SL text mentions different mythical references namely,

நாதாந்த நடனம் *Nathantha Nadanam*, தாண்டவ நடனம் *Thaandava Nadanam*, குஞ்சித நடனம் *Kunjitha Nadanam* and ஊர்த்தவ நடனம் *Oorthuva Nadanam*. (*Sivakamiyin Sabatham* 79) All of the SL terms, நாதாந்த நடனம், தாண்டவ நடனம், குஞ்சித நடனம், ஊர்த்தவ நடனம் refer to a kind of famous dance posture of, the Dancing God Nataraja. As per the Hindu Mythology it is believed that Lord Nataraja, the King of Dance, dances different thandavams (Bharatha Natyam dance) in different situations revealing various gestures and postures. Each thandavam reveals different moods of the God. Nathantha Thandavam means a dance of bliss danced by Lord Shiva. In the TL text *Sivakami's Vow*, the translator has translated all these dance terms as "**various dance postures**" (64). The SL mythical terms bring the dance postures of Lord Nataraja in front of the SL readers' eyes but the vague TL term leads to distortion amidst the TL readers as they are unaware of the SL culture and myth. Thus the Thaandava Nadanam by the dance god Nataraja which has 108 dance postures and divinely initiation of Bharatha Shastram (rules of Bharatha Natyam dance) is viewed by the TL readers as just dance postures without any cultural importance.

Creation

Inserting or creating a culture-centric term in the TL text which is not there in the SL text is named as creation strategy.

The word "**Tapas**" in the TL text is a better example for creation strategy. The SL text *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* consists of the word தவம் *Thavam* (p. 851) is a ritual practice made in order to get the blessings and boons from god directly. In the TL text instead of preserving the original or adding description or finding another equivalent term, the translator has inserted the Sanskrit word "Tapas" (*Sivakami's Vow* 650*)* which seems to be out of context to both the readers in SL and TL. In most cases, Creation becomes an error or it creates a defect.

Conclusion

Various problems arise in translating mythical terms from Kalki's Historical Tamil novel சிவகாமியின் சபதம் *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* into English by the author P.S. Sri. Due to these problems such as lack of original meaning, deviation from SL text meaning, alteration of SL text, creating new meaning apart from SL text meaning, myth that forms the backbone of culture in the SL text lose its originality amidst of the TL readers. In order to get rid of these problems the translator could use the Addition strategy in an effective way as Addition gives adequate information about the SL text terms to the TL readers and prevent from misunderstanding. Especially in the case of portraying the mythical terms, the strategy of Addition provides the rich cultural heritage of the SL text to the TL readers.

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