CHAPTER I

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The growth of literature of a country establishes its culture and tradition; its translations as part of its literature establish its groping towards a synthesis and striving towards an identity with the literature of the world. They promote a harmonious understanding between different groups of people who differ in their culture and language but stand homogenous as human beings. As linguists and anthropologists have often remarked it is language that unites mankind as the unique human invention, but languages divide humanity; hence there is, as Nida remarks, "even in cases of very desperate languages and culture [there is a] basis for communication". It is this feature that makes translation an activity worth performing, yielding fruitful results. Through translation communication takes place not only between countries, races and languages but also from a culture of the past to the changed culture of the present. Hence Wilhelm von Humboldt is led to state that translation "introduces those ignorant of foreign languages to forms of art and humanity which otherwise they would never come to know ... and this is an important gain for any nation."\(^2\)

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Translation plays a vital role in the Indian context as the country itself is a confluence of languages and cultures. This has led to a flow of translations between the Indian languages. Equally important has been the fruitful and effective flow of translation with the West, thanks to the rule by the British for more than a hundred years. The Western religious missionaries rendered the Bible into almost all languages of India. A large number of other works, both religious and secular, were also translated into Indian languages. The translation efforts were not a one-way traffic. The English have also translated a number of ancient literary classics of Indian languages, especially Sanskrit and Tamil, into English. Many of these have also been translated into other languages of Europe.

Tamil occupies a unique place in India because of its antiquity and culture. With its 2000 year old classics, it has attracted the attention of linguists and translators. In his study of the Tamil art of translation, V. Sachithanandam classifies the practice of translation in Tamil under four heads:

(i) translations from Tamil into English (and other European languages)

(ii) translations from English (and other European languages) into Tamil

(iii) translations from Tamil into Sanskrit (and other Indian languages and
(iv) translations from Sanskrit (and other Indian languages) into Tamil.

With the help of the excellent bibliography on translation brought out by the International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras, he enumerates the translations from and into Tamil. Translations between English and Tamil top the list with 274 titles of Tamil into English and 1303 titles of English into Tamil.¹

Looking for the translations of Tamil literary classics one can find a number of recent attempts in translating the Cangkam classics. KuRundtokai, the anthology of love poems, has attracted more translators than any of the other anthologies. The translators are — A.K.Ramanujan (1967 & 1985), M.Shanmugam Pillai and David E Ludden (1976) and George L. Hart III (1979). The translation of A.K.Ramanujan published during 1967 was exclusively KuRundtokai but it renders only a selection of poems. His publication of 1985 is a selection from several anthologies including KuRundtokai. Shanmugam Pillai and Ludden have translated the entire KuRundtokai anthology. George L. Hart III has made a translation of selected poems from all anthologies. There is also a translation by A.V. Subramanian under the auspices

of the Tamilnadu Text Book Society, Madras presenting a selection from the anthologies. This was published in 1980. In 1962 J.V.Chelliah’s translation of PattuppaTTu was published. In 1978 N. Ragunathan has brought out a translation of the same text.

The pride of place in translations goes to tirukkuRai, which has been translated into more than 22 languages both in India and abroad. Among them is the noted translation into English conjointly done by G.U.Pope, W.H.Drew and F.W.Ellis who have the Western audience as the target readers of their work. Other translations into English do not seem to have the Western audience as receptors of their work but appear to be good exercises in translation.

Among the other ancient literary classics of Tamil in translation are Cilappatika:ram and MaNime:kai.


Cilappatikaram has been translated into English by three translators viz. V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, Alan Danielou and Ka. Naa. Subramaniam. G.U. Pope's translation of MaNimekalai has not attracted the attention of the reading public as much as his translation of TirukkuRai has done. Among the translations of ancient literary classics mentioned above, the translations of Cilappatikaram are in a combination of prose and poetry.

In the translations of TirukkuRai and MaNimekalai, the predominance of religious and ethical tone outshadows the purely literary and cultural aspects. But while one examines the translations of Kurundtokai, one can see that in their expression of rich and intense human experience in succinct style, in their suggestions of a whole universe of its own through just a few specks and flashes and in their employment of Nature as part of their dramatic personae and the human beings as conforming to the

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cycles of Nature, the poems of KuRundtokai stand as masterly examples among ancient Tamil literary classics available in translation. Hence, for the present study of the problems in translation, the translations of KuRundtokai alone are taken up. Limitations of space and time demand that critical attention is focussed on a restricted field for detailed discussion -- a sample analysis of which may yield insights, extendable, mutatis mutandis, to other works of a similar nature. Moreover only this anthology has been tried out by more than two translators, of whom one has done the entire anthology. Besides, it is of interest to note that every translation of KuRundtokai has as the translator or co-translator someone who is native to an English-speaking country or has chosen to live and work in an English-speaking country. This factor may be expected to contribute to a certain linguistic authenticity in the end-product of the translation process. While there are occasional translations of a few poems of KuRundtokai in histories of Tamil Literature in English, only the following translations are taken up as the corpus of the present study:


The present study aims at investigating the problems in translating the Cangkam love poems, choosing as representative samples the translations of the KuRundtokai anthologies mentioned above. Besides identifying and classifying the problems of translation it aims at formulating the basics of a translation theory with regard to the texts of the type under study. The study does not aim to provide set solutions for the problems discussed but rather indicates the principles and strategies that could be adopted in approaching such problems.

Studies on the art of translation in Tamil seem to have started even as early as the period of tolka:ppiyam, the first grammatical treatise in Tamil. Though actual samples of translations made at the time of tolka:ppiyam are not available to us, from the verses on the subject of translation in tolka:ppiyam one can infer that translations were attempted and that there was a considerable amount of study on the art of translation. While discussing the art of translation and the source text tolka:ppiyar states the following:

\[
\text{tokuttal, virittal, tokaiviri, mozhi peyarttu atarppaTa yarittalol Tu anaimara pinave;}\]

tol., 1597.

This codifies the art of rendering a book at different levels, compilation, elaboration, condensation and translation. Elaborate comments have been offered by the editors at later stages.
Shanmugavelayutham in his book traces the translations subsequent to the tolkaappiyyam codification and finds that adaptations were done mostly on religious literature. Only during the nineteenth century formal translations of literature appear to have been undertaken with a few of Shakespeare’s plays and some dramas from North Indian languages rendered into Tamil and published. During the twentieth century the Sakitya Akademi, instituted by the Government of India, has taken up the work of translating literature from one Indian language to others and also from Indian languages into English. Most of the Indian universities have also instituted departments of translation for inter-language cultural flow. Noted for this task in the field of translation between Tamil and other languages is the International Institute of Tamil Studies at Madras which has not only brought out several translations but has also undertaken many projects on translation studies.

In regard to modern studies on translation in Tamil one can cite Kandaswami Pillai’s observations under "mozhipeyarppu" in his translation of Grey’s Elegy and Maharajan’s essays

10 S. Shanmugavelayutham, mozhipeyarpptiyal (Madras: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 1983) p. 93.

on translation in Ezhutuvatu eppaTi?.\(^\text{12}\) It is really unfortunate that no one has attempted to formulate comprehensively the general principles of translation between Tamil and other languages. But there have been a few critical surveys of translations from and into Tamil. V. Ramasamy has done a doctoral dissertation on the translations of tirukkuRal.\(^\text{13}\)

Modern theorists on translation, viewing the process as art and science, have relied upon various fields of linguistics, especially structural linguistics. Beginning with the linguistic circle of Prague which has applied the theories of linguistics to the translation theory, the attempt has been carried on by Sapir, Whorf, Vogel, Martin Joos, Joseph H. Greenberg and Uriel Weinreich. As Nida points out they have liberated the translators "from the philological presuppositions of the preceding generation."\(^\text{14}\)

There have been formulators of many theories based on the translations of Bible into languages all over the world, of which Eugene A. Nida is pre-eminent. Next to him in importance is Peter Newmark whose major contribution to translation theory lies in the detailed treatment of semantic and communicative aspects of the art of


\(^{13}\) V. Ramasamy, The problems in the Art of Translation with special reference to English versions of Tirukkural, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Madras: University of Madras, 1988)

\(^{14}\) Nida, Science of Translating 21.
translating. These theories provide solutions to problems in translation in general and none of them have any special application to problems of translation of literary works.

Recent studies by Robert de Beaugrande, Andre Lefevere and Theo Hermans treat translation criticism with special application to literature and poetry in particular. Theo Hermans and the group of critics whose essays are presented in The Manipulation of Literature edited by Hermans insist on a "frame of reference" for a critical appraisal of the literary translations, based on the source and target texts under study.15

The present study in its approach combines and, where necessary, diverges from these theories because the problems faced in this context are different in nature, resulting in three broad classifications. Since the text concerned is an ancient literary classic, especially one particular text and not all the works of an entire period, a philological approach is followed with reference to the use of language. Since the corpus of study has three target texts against one source text, a study of correspondence forms the basis of study, adopting a linguistic approach. The study also has a sociological dimension as it investigates problems relating to actual communication of the source culture's values and traditions.

by the target texts. These approaches are not used in isolation with reference to any particular type of problem but enunciated throughout the discussion of the various problems that arise out of the comparison of the correspondences of the target texts with the source text.

It is generally agreed that "meaning" is the vital aspect in any translation process and all definitions of the translation process must have this aspect as the primary concern. Hence basic to any discussion of principles or problems in the translation process is the transfer of semantic components from the source text into the target text. To assess this feature the present study follows Nida's dictum of equivalence:

Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style...

Keeping this as the basic requirement the study examines the target texts along with the source text. A problem is located whenever there arises an untranslatability of the message in the source text. Often different but nearly synonymous equivalents for the same concepts are employed resulting in differences not in meaning but in style, and sometimes entirely different equivalents are chosen by the translators resulting in variations both in

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meaning and style. While examining these, the translational methods adopted by the translators with reference to their target audience and the methodology of translation adopted by each of them are taken into consideration.

Once the problem is located, its nature and the cause for the miscarriage of the message are discussed. If a proper equivalence is found in the other target text a comparison is made between the equivalences of different texts and a discussion on how far each equivalence justifies its use in the particular text is provided. The aim is not to point out whether a translation is adequate or correct; instead the why and the how of the particular expression is analysed. Based on the nature of the problems they are discussed in different chapters in the following order.

In chapter II the meaning and milieu of Cangkam poetry in general and the Cangkam love poems in particular are discussed. The text or even a word or phrase in it should be considered only in its context. As Nida has pointed out the "tendency to think of the meaning of the word as apart from an actual communication event is fundamentally a mistake, for once we have isolated a word from its living context we no longer possess the insight necessary to appreciate fully its real function."17 Since poetic works are unthinkable outside the rules of their language and their specific

17 Nida, Science of Translating, 40.
tradition and conventions, a discussion of the various resources that the Cangkam poetic conventions use are provided. It presents the diverse features and situations in which the poems are built up. It also discusses the poetic tradition and conventions codified in tolkaappiyam, the treatise of Tamil grammar and poetics, without which any discussion of Cangkam literature will be incomplete.

Once the semantic components are treated as the vital aspect of translation, this study proceeds to demonstrate that meanings are relative to the speakers and their environments. Since a semantic account and analysis of a language should also have an ethnological base for its full realization, the study sets out hypotheses on considering the various cultural aspects of the Cangkam society. Under ecology the study sets out to analyse whether the features of ecological culture are transferred without detriment to its semantic components. These features, if translated without their corresponding categories, may at times lead to a skewing of the semantic components. This analysis studies these features on this hypothesis and makes a comparative analysis of what the translations have done. Based on the same hypothesis the study analyses the features of material culture as well. Since the social aspects decide the functions of linguistic components in a language and literary system the analysis under
social and linguistic culture sets out to examine the relevant features of social culture that influence the function of the language features and how successfully they are translated in the target texts.

Chapter III discusses the problems in translating the cultural concepts of a particular society since a society and its culture are the environments of a literary system. The discussion is based on the criterion that in the translation of literature, the culture of the people, their social behaviour, should be given priority over other features. Following Nida's framework of analysis of such problems the discussion is arranged under four broad divisions viz. ecology, material culture, social culture and linguistic culture.18

Chapter IV takes up the problems faced in translating literary devices. The discussion of the poems is based on the poetics of the ancient Tamil literary classics as enumerated in tolkāppiyam. Its main thrust is to point out the unique nature of literary devices in the love poems of Cangkam literature and how in communicating these the translators face problems relating to the source and target languages.

Chapter V discusses the problems in translating certain stylistic devices. Following the dicta of tolkaappiyam on certain broad classification of the stylistic features of Cangkam love poems, the discussion is presented under (i) lexical, (ii) morphological and (iii) syntactical categories. The study is mainly focussed on the style of the source text and how it has been transferred in the target texts with appropriate devices. The analysis sets out the hypothesis that the style of the source poems, in an ancient text, since archaic, will contain several features that need elucidation for clarity in the target literature. A comparative study is made analysing the equivalent devices adopted by the translators. On occasions where all available versions appear to be untenable an attempt is also made to show how the problem could be solved.

The last chapter in addition to enumerating and summing up the problems discussed in the foregoing chapters attempts a generalisation of how and why these problems arise in translating ancient Tamil literary classics into English. It also indicates how far the application of the theories of Nida and others may help solve these problems. It suggests a few steps that need to be taken to facilitate the attempts of a translator tackling these literary classics. It also suggests possibilities for further studies of problems in the translation of Cangkam love lyrics.