CHAPTER III

Problems in translating Culture
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PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING CULTURE

Cultures that are vastly different are not just idiosyncratic. They have a common link; a society and its culture always share some features with others as they are all of human beings who have at least one layer of existence in common, their human-ness, testifying that nothing human is alien. The literatures which reflect different societies stand as a testimony to this common link among cultures, and translations of literatures recognize and establish that link. Logically there should exist a link across diversities and that link has to be cognized by translations.

Culture is the modicum of all valuations of a society and one looks at a society through its culture for the proper perspective; every individual will also be looked at by others through the cultural prism of his society. This applies to all ages and locations. As Maclver and Charles H. Page have put it,

Every people and every age has its characteristic ways of looking at things, its characteristic attitudes, no matter what diversity there may be among them its own thought forms and philosophies.

Anyone interested in bringing out the expression of the culture of an ancient past should strive to live in the past as it were while interpreting the records of its cultural expression and should try to be an exponent by proxy of that bygone age.

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A society and its culture are the environments of a literary system; they partake in its evolution, influence its growth and get registered through the system. Hence when a work is translated from one language into another it gets itself transferred from one culture to the other, from one society to the other. It is left to the translator to decide the new status of the work in the translated form. First it attains, to use Evgeni Sergeyev’s term, an "equicultural" position. It can be equicultural in two different ways. At the first level it can keep the same position as that of the original and can survive in the new environment as an emissary of its own culture in the alien land. It will not acquire, in this case, any of the features of the new environment and its literary system. At another level it can take such a form to become a constituent part of the literary system of the new environment, claiming a place in the new system similar to that of its source at its time. At both levels, the translator faces problems in translating cultural aspects since the existence and the entire meaning of a work lies in its culture carriage, the way in which it reflects the culture of its society.

By "culture" we signify the total social heritage of mankind. While we deal with a particular work of art, a poem, or

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Evgeni Sergeyev, "Translate Yourselves" in Soviet Literature (Translation Forum), 10(427) 1983, 149.
anthology like the Cangkam poems, we refer to "a culture" -- the social behaviour of a particular people who lived in a particular time. We refer thereby to the system of life and living that existed at that time and the people's response to that system. People distanced in time and culture look at them and interpret them in the light of the value of the cultural traits that they exhibit in their own literary system. A translator keeps in mind this approach to the literary system which is fundamental to interpreting it, because the message that the literary system provides becomes clear only when it is seen in the broad frame of its cultural thought and behavioural patterns. Seen otherwise, one is sure to miss the cultural impact of the society in which the literary system had its nucleus. This could be illustrated in the following diagram:

The inner circle represents the Society and the literary system while the inverse triangles represent the cultural thought and the behavioural patterns. The receptor, represented by "R", is sure to
lose his perspective of the entire system when he loses touch with
the cultural thought and the behavioural patterns as the broken
lines illustrate.

And what happens when the source text under translation
is distanced both in time and in culture, like the poems under
present analysis? Arrowsmith speaks of the cultural
incompatibilities while the source and the receptor societies are
separated not only by custom and language but also by time. He lists
the hard facts of culture that "torment" the translator.3 Shattuck
speaks of the handy Venn diagram which is used in formal logic to
represent the state or condition that there is nothing common between
the two systems. Though he does not produce the diagram the
proposition that he suggests by drawing attention to the Venn diagram
is "No feature of Source Language is that of Target Language". The
diagram for this proposition is:-

Here the circles represent, as suggested by Shattuck, the Source
Language and Culture and the Target Language and Culture and his

3 William Arrowsmith, "The lively conventions of
translation" in The Craft and Context of Translation eds. William
Arrowsmith and R. Shattuck (Austin: Humanities Research Centre,
1961), 123.
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And what happens when the source text under translation is distanced both in time and in culture, like the poems under present analysis? Arrowsmith speaks of the cultural incompatibilities while the source and the receptor societies are separated not only by custom and language but also by time. He lists the hard facts of culture that "torment" the translator. Shattuck speaks of the handy Venn diagram which is used in formal logic to represent the state or condition that there is nothing common between the two systems. Though he does not produce the diagram the proposition that he suggests by drawing attention to the Venn diagram is "No feature of Source Language is that of Target Language". The diagram for this proposition is:

![Venn Diagram]

Here the circles represent, as suggested by Shattuck, the Source Language and Culture and the Target Language and Culture and his

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proposition is that they do not share anything in common. But however different they are in time and in space, there will be something common in between any two languages and any two cultures. This can be represented in the following way using Venn diagram for categorical proposition. The propositions are: "Some features of the Source Language and Culture are found in the Target Language and Culture. Some features of the Target Language and Culture are found in the Source Language and Culture." This particular affirmative proposition (I-Proposition) is represented thus:

![Venn Diagram](image)

The two intersecting circles represent again the Source Language and Culture and the Target Language and Culture. We get one more class by the intersecting space where common features shared by these two find a place. They may be the features of "linguistic universals" and "cultural universals" or any one of them. It is this overlapping section between any two languages and culture

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that give the translator a solid base to function as a bridge between the two. But how the bridge, the translation, is created lies in the hands of the translator, shaped by his objectives and abilities for bridging.

It is the purpose of the translator that decides the creation and the function of the translation. If the translator decides to promote the culture of the receptor society by keeping them within the confines of their own culture, the translator may alter the original text. But if he wants to exhibit a particular society and its culture which existed in a remote past on an alien soil, he preserves the original to the maximum degree he can. Eugene A. Nida also endorses these two approaches while commenting on time and culture as two dimensions that are directly relevant in setting up a translation. He says, "the degree to which the foreign cultural setting is preserved in a translation depends in large measure on the extent to which the imperative function of the translation is in focus." The poems and the translations by the four translators under the present investigation belong to the second category stated above.

How far could a translator achieve his aim in translating a work with all its cultural dimensions? Will there be any untranslatability with reference to certain cultural concepts

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which are strongly rooted in the soil of its creation? Certainly there will be some, because "a culture" and its society which is remote in time and space cannot get easily adapted even in its own soil at a later date. As John L. Mish puts it, "The achievement is in the striving, not in the perfect result."^6

With reference to the translations under the present analysis, the translators George L. Hart III, A.K. Ramanujan, M.S. Pillai and David E. Ludden are all bilingual translators equally facile in both the languages. Their social backgrounds testify that they can participate fully in the two linguistic communities and hence they are able to represent and assimilate both cultures. They share at one and the same time the positions of the Receptor in the Source Text and the Source in the Receptor text. This dual function could be depicted through the following diagram.

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The translator is the R1 who receives the Source text for translation. Because of his ability to participate fully in both the communities he does the dual role of R1 and S2 thereby taking the responsibility of being the Source in the Target text. The figure of a square with an elongated circle represents the translator who is able to participate in both cultures. The triangle in single line represents the culture of the Source Text and the triangle with the double lines represents the Target text culture. The translator's acquaintance with both the cultures and his dual role as Receptor 1 and Source 2 is represented in the two inverse triangles joined at their base. It is to be noted that with reference to the translations here, the translators have not tried to modify the cultural aspects of the Source text. Hence the M2, the message in the translation and R2, the Receptor of the translation are represented in triangles with different lines representing the fact that the R2 remains in his culture and gets the M2 in its own culture but in the language of the R2.

The culture that gets revealed in the Cangkam classics has no other material to testify to the social behaviour of its society except the poems and the poetic treatise tolkappiyam. Hence to get a clear understanding and awareness of the cultural aspects and the nuances for which the words are employed, one has
to go back repeatedly to the poems alone. This is unavoidable because an insufficient comprehension of the conceptual structures and an inadequate familiarity with the cultural complex responses will cause misunderstanding in another culture. A special feature that a translator has to be aware of is that the Cangkam poems have an independent and unique poetic culture, as discussed in the earlier chapter. With all these constraints within the text the translators have worked out the transmission, testing, to use A.K. Ramanujan's words, "every nut and bolt of the craft" before unfurling the sail of the translation-boat.

Any problem in the translation process is essentially a problem of finding a proper equivalence. The problems regarding various aspects of culture could be studied from different points of view. They could be viewed from the point of view of the cultural concepts that the source text exhibits and those of the society of the receptors. They could also be studied from the point of view of the incompatible nature of the social behaviourist pattern of the two societies or from the contrastive nature of the same. Taking into consideration the physiographic divisions of Nature and its delineation in the source text and the impersonal nature of the characters involved in the poem and the predominance of the part played by Nature this study analyses the different types of

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7 A.K Ramanujan "Translator's Note" Poems of Love and War (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1985) xvi
problems in translating the various aspects of culture under (i) ecology, (ii) material culture, (iii) social culture, and (iv) linguistic culture, following Nida's framework of analysis of such problems. 8

Problems in translating features of Ecology

The Cangkam classical poems exhibit a wide variety of cultural complexes within the broad limits that are set down by the five physiographic divisions. More specifically from the poems one can say that the region specified by the ecological features not only speaks of the life of the people but also provides the backdrop for the central theme of the human drama enacted through the poem. By providing certain specific ecological features, a distinctive social occasion is hinted at while describing a small event in the lovers' way of life. For this reason the problems are analysed by directing attention to the ecological and regional features through which the cultural aspects of their life is portrayed. While discussing the relation of community to locality Maclver and Page also emphasize this point. They say, "The literature of human ecology reveals the accommodative pattern

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of man as he builds a community existence in the different types of environment found."

Variations in ecological features tend to be abundant when the land of the Source text is distanced in space. One may feel that these features are not often anticipated as problematic in a translation process because these minute ecological details may not be of importance in conveying the message of the poem. But in the Cangkam anthology they do play a part, in conveying the meaning, and the message is basically related to the presence of such features. They represent ways in which the poets have expressed themselves. A reference to them brings out the mood of the speaker in the poem.

Various methods are followed in providing equivalences to such details of ecological features. In most of the occurrences they are transliterated and the function of the features is described in general in the preface or in the footnotes. For example let us consider the translation of the following lines:

cengka:R palli tanRuNai payirum
angka:R kaLLiyang ka:TiRand to:re:

K 16. iv-v.

/Our hero must have crossed the barren land full of "kaLLi" plants where the male lizard calls its mate/

Maclver Society, 284.
A reference is made to the plant in a barren land. In the source text it indicates that the theme of the poem is "separation of lovers" and the lines speak of the encouraging statement of the Heroine's friend to the Heroine. Here "kaLLi" the name of the plant in the desert provides the scenic setting with other features of the desert.

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

| Will he not really think of us |
| when he passes the clumps of milk-hedge |
| with their fragrant trunks |

AKR:IL, 26, i-iii.

G.L. Hart translates:

a red-legged lizard calls its mate
in the wilderness
filled with lovely-stemmed kalli
where he has gone

Hart, 51, v-viii.

M.S. Pillai & D.E. Ludden translate:

where the red-legged lizard invites his mate
from the cactus stem

Pillai & Ludden, 417, iii-v

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden give "spurge" as the equivalent name for "kaLLi" in cataloguing the different ecological features and

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10 M. Shanmugam Pillai and David E. Ludden, trans., KuRuntokai (Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1976), 460. henceforth cited as M.S. Pillai KuRuntokai
they use "cactus stem" which is the ecological equivalence carrying the exact meaning. A.K.Ramanujan's "milk-hedge" also stands as an equivalent term and this is also mentioned by Hart in his foot-note along with the translation. These three different expressions with little difference in meaning do not distort the significance.

Though transliteration and foot-notes are useful ways of presenting the features of ecology they may sometimes be replaced with the proper equivalences, if they exist in later versions of the translations. An example of undertaking such a substitution is found in translating poem 66 of KuRundtokai by A.K.Ramanujan. The first translation appears in the The Interior Landscape. A revised version appears in Poems of Love and War. The source text reads as follows:

\[ \text{maTava manRa taTavunilaik konRai} \]
\[ \text{vampa marriyaik ka:irene matitte:} \]

\[ \text{K 66, i,v.} \]

The present rain is an unseasonal one which does not indicate the usual monsoon. Mistaking it for the regular monsoon the "konRai trees" with black trunks have brought out their flowers/

The first translated text of A.K.Ramanujan reads:

These fat konrai trees are gullible

AKR:IL, 44, i.
This is revised as follows later:

These fat cassia trees are gullible

AKR:PLW, 70, i.

The second version uses "cassia" in the place of the transliteration of "konRai" of the first version. This is an example of the translator's awareness of the problems caused by the ecological features and his means of meeting it.

Instances occur where the equivalent ecological features have already gained a symbolic significance in the target audience which is at variance with that of the source culture. Here the translators have to avoid using the equivalent features and to resort to transliteration. One such problem arises in the translation of poem 123 of KuRundtokai. The Source Text reads:

irudiNind tanna vi:rndaN kozhunizhal
ndilavukkuvit tanna veNmaNa loruiciRaik
karungo:t:tu punnaip pumpozhil pulampa
innum vara:r varurum
.... .... .... .... ....

K 123, i-iv.

/.. there lies a stretch of white sand as if the moon light is arranged serially; on its side remains the grove of "punnai" trees which is cool and wet like thick darkness laid and it is left alone with its dark branches./

Hence the "punnai" trees just provide the background and do not
signify anything more. A.K. Ramanujan and M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden provide in their glossaries "laurel" and "mastwood" as equivalents for "punnai" trees. "Laurel" used in the English context will certainly signify some honour wreaths. Hence the translators avoid using "laurel" and use the transliteration of the term "punnai".

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

"... the cool dense shade of a flowering grove of the black punnai"

AKR: IL, 55, iv-v.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

As the flowering grove
of black-stemmed punnai trees

Pillai & Ludden, 72, i-ii.

The selection of the transliterated form is justified because the term does not have any symbolic significance in the source text and the ecological equivalence in the target society will give a meaning other than that which is intended in the source text.

In tackling such problems the translators sometimes simplify the usage by substituting for it a semantic interpretation

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12 M.S. Pillai KuRuntokai, 462.
of the feature. It leads to the loss of certain other dimensions of the entire semantic content, thereby not conveying the exact sense in which it is employed in the source language. One such instance is found in the translation of the poem 220 of KuRundtokai. The source text reads as follows:

pazhamazhaik kalitta putuppuna varakin  
iralai meyndta kuRaittalai pavi  
iruvicce marungiR putta mullaR  
veruku cirittanna pacuviR menpiNik

K 220, i-iv.

"Varaku" [millet] is the foodstuff used by the people living in and around the mountain region. It is part of the ecological culture of the people of a particular region viz. "kuRignci" -- the area comprising a mountain and its surrounds. It is interesting to see how this particular feature has found its equivalence in the translations.

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

The rains, already old,  
have brought new leaf upon the fields.  
The grass spears are trimmed and blunted  
by the deer.

AKR:IL, 67, i-iv.
G.L.Hart translates:

The millet flourishing from an old rain has been harvested.
Only its stems are left, grazed over and chewed to stubble by stags.

Hart, 70, i-iii.

M.S.Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

... ... ... ...
where blossoms of jasmine blooming from tiny, soft, buds like the smile of a wild cat, are near the stubble of millet

... ... ... ...

Pillai & Ludden, 217, vi-ix.

While "millet" is found to be the suitable equivalence for "varaku" by G.L.Hart, M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden, A.K.Ramanujan has replaced it with its meaning component viz. "the new leaf". No doubt this conveys the intended meaning but it fails to contribute to the features of the scenic background conveyed by "millet". Here the translator has a problem with the ecological terminology. While one translator is forced to substitute it with the meaning in which it is employed, the other two translators have found it proper to use the physiographic equivalence of the receptor ecological culture. The method of the first translator results in "simple adaptation" while the method of the other two translators leads to "translation".

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Concepts that are formed purely on an ethnic base may not have their equivalents in other languages with which they do not share any common root. But when such concepts are related to and represented by certain objects of natural vegetation or ecological features the translator's task becomes difficult unless the same feature bears the same symbolic significance in the receptor culture also. Instances often arise where the ecological feature has its counterpart in the receptor soil but without carrying the significance intended by the source text. One such problem is found in the translation of poem 399 of KuRundtokai.

The source text reads:

usuN keNi yuNTuRait tokka
paciyaRRe pacalai kastalar
toTuVuzhit toTuVuzhi ndisngki
viTuVuzhi viTuVuzhip parattalaine:

K 399.

/ (This is a monologue of the heroine to her friend.) My friend, the pallor in me, which leaves me while our man is with me and spreads over me while he leaves me acts like the green algae in our village pond, moving away while the pot is immersed and spreading again when it is taken out./

The word "paci" denotes that greenish plant that spreads over water in ponds and wells. This small love poem centres around this ecological feature for its theme and its existence While
people immerse their pot in the pond the moss over the water gives way and when the pot is taken out they spread again to cover the surface closely. This nature of the moss is compared to the sickly hue of the lady. The sickness that spreads over the body of the lady during the absence of her man gets a way from her when he joins her; it embraces her again when he leaves her. Thus the imagery, the message --- the entire argument of the poem is centered around this ecological feature. Unless it is brought out with a proper equivalence the entire poem will be lost in translation.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

My pallor is like
   green algae growing on the pond
where the village gets its drinking water:
   "  "  "  "  "

Pillai & Ludden, 303, i-iii.

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

Like moss on water
in the town's water tank:
   the body's pallor
clears
   "  "  "  "  "

AKR: PLW, 30. i-iv.

G.L. Hart translates:

Like the scum on the well
from which the townsfolk drink,
my paleness goes away
   "  "  "  "  "

Hart, 88. i-iii.
The equivalence used by M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden viz. "green algae" provides a descriptive phrase. A.K.Ramanujan uses the ecological equivalence "moss". But the equivalence used by Hart can never be an equivalent for "pa:ci". While "scum" denotes something of a waste, "pa:ci" is a life giving source plant and in the poem its floating quality is significantly used. Even if we consider the equivalence suggesting the idea of "impurities" and the fact that they are removed before taking water from a pond, the function of the term in the source text is considerably different. Here the problem exists not because of the non-availability of the equivalent in the target language but because of the poetic significance and the use of the ecological feature as the central image.

An analogous problem exists in the translation of poem 235 of KuRundtokai. The poem is a monologue of the hero. The silent listener is the west wind. The source text reads:

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... ... ...
tunguto:l kaTukkund tuveLLaruvik
calluyar naNNi yatuve: ndelli
... ... ...
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K 235, ii-iii.

/My woman's village is atop the hill
where there runs a waterfall
which looks like the hanging snake's skin/
A.K. Ramanujan translates:

There, among thin silver rills
that look like hanging snake skins,

AKR:IL, 75, iii-iv.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

where a pure-white waterfall
resembles a snakeskin
hanging down.

Pillai & Ludden, 444, vi-ix.

The equivalence provided by A.K. Ramanujan for "tu:veLLaruvi" is "silver rills". It refers to a rivulet or a stream and not a "waterfall" which is specifically mentioned in the source text. The fourth line of his translation also refers to the hanging nature of the snake’s skin comparable to the image of a waterfall and not a rill. The equivalence "waterfall" used by M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden presents exactly the message conveyed in the source text.

Problems involving ecological culture do not affect the conveying of the message unless the ecological features are central to the thematic framework of the poems as discussed in some of the instances above. What happens in such poems is that the ecological feature is given a figurative extension of meaning based on the supplementary components in the primary meaning. Any extension in the language use will certainly be a conventional one and hence will always be specific to the culture involved.
Missing this significance in the source language leads ultimately to missing the central message. Even when similar ecological features are available in the target land, substitution of such features and the material form with its environment alone will not be adequate. The cultural significance is the vital aspect. When no other way is possible, transliteration and footnotes provide the way to meet the problems caused by the use of ecological features possessing cultural significance.

**Problems in translating features of Material Culture:**

By "material culture" we refer to the physical adaptation of human beings to life. The details that mark the complex process of social accommodation by the human beings constitute the material culture. Every group of people creates an environment provided by the ecological features. This forms the material aspect of the life of that particular group and the term "material culture" denotes the way of living of that particular group with the objectives of life devised by them.

Equivalence between features of material culture of two different societies are seldom found when these two groups are separated by time and space. Hence in the process of translation problems involving the features of material culture are invariably

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13 Nida "Linguistics and Ethnology" 194-208
present. These problems are more complex than those that involve ecological features. They are complex because some of the materials in the environment of the people of the source text must have gone completely out of their memory owing to later developments. Some may still remain in both the societies but only as vestiges of antiquity. Some may still be in use in the target society; in that case it becomes the duty of the translator to search for the existence of such materials and use them appropriately in the translations.

While discussing the three components of the creative aspect of language use Fernold F. Katz stresses "appropriateness" as the third component by which he means the suitability or naturalness of the verbalisation of an object. This element of appropriateness is required more for selecting the equivalences for the features of material culture than for other features because it is not just the form of the material but the use of it that matters.

The translations of poem 222 of KuRundtokai bears witness to a problem of this nature. It is a monologue of the hero to himself. While following his lady he observes that she is

always with her friend and tells himself that her friend is the
proper channel for conveying his love to his lady. The poem
expresses how the two are found everywhere together at all times.
The source text reads:

\[
talaippuNaik koLine: talaippuNaikkoLLum
taippuNaikkoLine: kaTaippuNaikkoLLum
puNaikai viTTup punalo: Tozhukin
aNTum varukuvaL po:lu ma:Nda
\]

K 222, i-iv.

//.. the heroine catches hold of the front
portion of the boat if her friend goes that
side; if her friend goes to the rear side
she will also go there .../

The noun "puNai" a small boat made up of wooden reapers,\(^{15}\)
is retained in certain dialects of Tamil native to certain areas
where such boats are in use as a mode of transport. It is
generally used in big ponds where a large quantity of water
accumulates and stagnates. In the source text also it is used in
this sense. Now for a look at the translations:

A.K.Ramanujan translates:

If her girl-friend should take the head of the raft
my girl will also take the head.
If the rear
my girl will take the rear.
\[\ldots \ldots \ldots\]

AKR:II, 69. i-iv.

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\(^{15}\)

Kazhagam Tamil - Tamil Dictionary 2nd ed.
Company, 1969), 634.
M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden translate:

... ... ... ... ...
when her friend grasps hold
of the front of the float,
so does she;
if her friend holds the back,
she does the same;
... ... ... ...

Pillai & Ludden, 55. vii-xi.

For the noun "puNai", A.K.Ramanujan uses "raft" and M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden use "float". In the English context "raft" is used only in moving water, like a river with a heavy current, or the sea. Float is used in the pond and other such places where water remains in great quantity. Hence here "float" is a more natural equivalent for "puNai" than "raft". It is the element of appropriateness that dictates the equivalences here with reference to the use of the particular material feature in the source text. The use of the other word does not miscarry the message but what results is a meaning-based adaptation than an equivalence based translation.

The same type of verse-based adaptation may result if some feature of the material culture is left untranslated. Problems of untranslatability with reference to features of material culture occur because of the non-existence in the target language society of certain features found in the source language
society, or because the social behaviour of the people might have been different with reference to certain features. In such contexts when a translator aims to bring out the cultural message of the source text the translator has to explain such features at least in the footnotes. Translating poem 38 of KυRumtοkai raises a problem of this nature. Throughout the anthology while the eyes of the heroine are described a non-casual compound "uNkaN" is employed suggesting the idea that the eyes have been beautified with black eye-liner. To quote the poem from the source:

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ndanRuman va:zhi to:zhi yuNkaN
nitro Torarngut taNappa
uLla ta:RRai vallu vo:rkke:
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K 38, iv-vi.

/(This is a monologue of the heroine's friend) She says that the separation caused by her man had caused her beautiful eyes to have continuous flow of tears. With this, she insists she should try to tolerate his absence without getting worried since that is a quality of strong persons./

The non-casual phrase "uNkaN" refers to the eyes that are smeared with the "eyeliner". This is one of the material culture features that is quite alien to the target audience, but this alien nature does not imply untranslatability. Nida suggests that "in translating a text which represents an area of cultural specialization in the source language, the translator must frequently construct all sorts of descriptive equivalents so as to
make intelligible something which is quite foreign to the
receptor."\textsuperscript{16} Let us see how this gets translated:

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \\
who will not cry their eyes out
or think anything of it
when he leaves.
\end{center}
\end{quote}

AKR: PLW, 25, x-xii.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \\
when their eyes are eaten away
by endless tears,
when he is gone.
\end{center}
\end{quote}

Pillai & Ludden, 84, x-xii.

In both translations the reference to the eyeliner is missing.

Though this does not hinder the conveying of the message of the poem, an important reference to one of the material-culture
features is lost. This certainly leaves the target audience unaware of a material culture feature. The omission must have occurred because the non-casal phrase has the said meaning implied. This problem could have been solved easily by
substituting it with a descriptive phrase.

When a particular material feature does not have an exact
equivalent in the target language and its society, descriptive
phrases may be employed as substitute equivalences. In poem 221 of
KuRundtokai, we have the following lines:

\cite{Nida1975}
The noun "paRi" stands for a bed-bag cum umbrella made out of palm leaves which the shepherd uses during the rainy season. This feature is alien to the target society and hence the problem of finding an equivalence is met by a descriptive phrase.

A.K.Ramanujan translates:

waiting outside,
palmyra rain-guards in their hands,
herds of young ones in their care:

M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden translate:

a shepherd, with his goats
and his rain-shelter in his hand,
goes away with milk

The equivalences used above viz. "rain-guard" and "rain-shelter" bring out only one aspect of the word "paRi". While A.K.Ramanujan uses the descriptive phrase alone, M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden add a footnote and explain the multifunctional aspect of this material culture feature. This seems to be a better way of tackling such problems. Another similar instance, often found in the songs of mountain region, is worth mentioning.
desire for a meeting or courting, the hero then threatens that he would ride the palm-stem horse. This is a ritual that never takes place throughout the anthology; it is just a threat that he will invite shame on himself and his love affair and that her refusal to meet him will be made known to the world. One such occurrence from the source text is in poem 17.

maTal mu:rpa pu:venak
kuvimuki zherukkang kaNNiyugn custuba

K 17, i-ii.

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

... ... ... ...
men will ride even palmyra stems
like horses; .......

AKR:IL, 27, iii-iv

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

... ... ... ...
When love is over-ripe
men will ride palm-stems
thinking they are horses.

Pillai & Ludden, 121, ii-iii.

In the source text "maTal" which literally means "a broad long leaf" stands for the palmyra-stem. The expression is a synecdoche. Like the non-casal phrase "uNkaN" discussed earlier this phrase is also used in the same way throughout the anthology. The translators have provided the equivalences explicitly and to some extent as an extended phrase. The aspect of love which is revealed in this material culture feature requires to be rendered
with all its semantic overtones, failing which the target audience will not understand its significance. What is vital here is not an equivalent form but the cultural message that is conveyed, and this has not been brought out by the phrase which the translators use. The ritual meaning of the phrase viz. the peculiar form of self-mortification could be brought home to the target language reader through a footnote only.

From the examples discussed above one can notice that similar features of material culture are not easily found in the target society; and even when they are found for a few features the cultural similarity rarely exists. Only a thorough examination of the use of such features in both the environments and the cultural message that they carry with them can help solve the problem for the translator.

**Problems in translating Social Culture:**

Facts and figures regarding social institutions, social attitudes and community organizations present characteristic problems in interpreting the text and finding the appropriate equivalences. The Cangkam classical poems present a spectrum of the rural community setting throughout the anthology. There runs through it a common and vital dependence on the aspects of the seasons among the people. Even the tasks and incidents are
common, shared by all. Such a world, homogenous yet with its multi-dimensional aspects, has to be presented in translation to an audience who face an enormously heterogeneous life with all its varieties.

The features of a social structure are complex and always under the stress of continuous change. Changes take place when human beings react to their environments. Hence concepts and names related to the features of social structure are seldom comparable as between the past and present. When such is the case in the structure of the same society, it is difficult to find equivalent terms to the concepts of social structure in other cultures. But when a translator has set upon himself the task of translating "a culture" he has to relive in that social structure and bring it to life in the other language to the maximum possible level.

Problems of translation posed by the features of social organisation are present in the translation of poem 103 of KuRundtokai. The source text reads as follows:

nilantoTTup puka:ar va:name:Ra:r
vilangiru mundndni:r ka:liR cellar:
nda:TTi nda:TTi nurir nurir:
kuTimuRai kuTimuRai te:riR
keTundaru mularo:ndang karta lore:

K 130.
/(This is a monologue of her friend to the heroine) Our hero cannot dig up and enter the earth; cannot climb up the sky; nor can walk on the water of the crossing seas. If we search through each country, each village and each family circle can he escape our cordon?/

"nda:Tu", "u:r" and "kuTimuRai" --- these are the three concepts of social organizations which give problems in translations.

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

If only one looks for him in land after land from town to town, family by family, our lover cannot slip through the cordon, can he?

AKR: IL, 58, v-viii.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

If we search from land to land, from town to town, and house to house, he cannot escape being found.

Pillai & Ludden, 382, vi-xi.

Hart translates:

If we search every country, every city, every village, can your lover escape us?

Hart, 65, iv-vii.

The three structures of social organization mentioned in the source text viz. "nda:Tu", "u:r" and "kuTi" are descending layers of the society, the first subsuming the second and the second the third. U.V. Saminatha Iyer, the first editor of the entire
KuRundtokai anthology, in his editorial commentary says that "kuTi" means a family and each category comprises the other lower category.\(^\text{17}\) Hence Hart's equivalences viz. "city" and "village" for "u:r" and "kuTimai" are illogical and do not correspond to the respective social organizations referred to in the text. Moreover throughout the anthology the essential difference between a city and a village is never brought out. A village in no sense can equate a family. The equivalences used by A.K. Ramanujan viz. "land", "town" and "family" stand as close equivalents; even the modern dichotomy between a town and a village does not distort the concept in the source text "u:r". In the source text "u:r" is used with an ambivalence suggesting both a town and a village. In the same way among the equivalences used by M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden, "house" cannot serve as an equivalent for "kuTi". It refers to a "family", or, if extended, to the group of families to which the speaker in the poem belongs to. The problem that arises because of these features of social organization could have been easily tackled if the translator had tried to relive in the past with the help of the other poems in the anthology.

Problems of untranslatability arise with certain features of social culture. When some features are quite alien or

absent in the receptor audience neither a descriptive phrase nor any extended meaning is of any use. The only way out is a detailed footnote. But leaving them untranslated will be to miss the presentation of the entire social culture as depicted in the source text. An example of such a problem occurs in the translation of poem 294 of KuRundtokai. It speaks of a particular kind of dance which marks the life stage of the girls who participate in the dance. It is the custom of the girls to take part in that dance when they are maidens. The dance is performed with seven or nine girls. The dance is called "tazhuvaNi" and the source text reads as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kaTaluTa na:Tiyung ka:na lalkiyum} \\
toTalai yayamoTu tazhuvaNi yayarndtum \\
\text{... ... ... ...}
\end{align*}
\]

K 294, i-ii.

A.K.Ramanujan translates:

If when you play water games or stay in seaside groves or dance in flowers those linked dances with your girl-friends

\[\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots\]

AKR:IL, 89, i-v.

M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden translate:

\[\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots\]
as we played in the ocean or danced, holding hands, in the grove, with our girl-friends,

\[\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots\]

Pillai & Ludden, 290, ii-iv.
Both translated versions provide descriptive phrases in the place of "tazhuvaNi". "Linked dances with your girl-friends" and "danced .... with our girlfriends" just mention the dance and the social significance that the word in the source text carries is not conveyed. Of course in the absence of such a custom in the target society it is difficult to provide an appropriate equivalence. But the significance could have been explained in the footnotes.

Superstitions form one of the basic layers of social culture from which we can learn the history of the culture of the society. In translating such aspects, the cultural significance along with the behavioural patterns of the people is of much importance. Superstitious beliefs common to two societies which are distanced in time and space are very rare. Sometimes the environments and the objects referred to in such beliefs may have corresponding equivalents, but their significance may differ entirely. In such cases it will be better to offer a translation, using a number of descriptive phrases that convey the entire superstition. Let us analyse the translations of poem 210 of KuRundtokai which deals with a superstition. When the crows caw it is considered to be a good omen, for telling the arrival of guests to a household. In the song, the heroine’s friend tells her lover on his return that she has pacified the heroine with news of his impending visit by pointing to the crow that cawed.
This is a superstition which is still preserved in the source culture. The source text reads as follows:

perundto: Nekizhtta cellaRku
virundtuvarak karaindta kâkkaiyatu paliye:.

K 210, v-vi.

/ The shoulders of the heroine have become thin because of her longing for the return of her man. But in order to pacify her, the crow was drawn to foretell some good omen, by giving some food. /

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

.. .. .. .. .. ..
.. offer it all to that crow
   that cawed those good omens
   bringing guests
   and an end to the grief
   that has been wasting my girl's arms.

AKR: PLW, 83, x-xiv.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

... ... ... ... ...
the omen that foretold
of your coming for the feast,
which ended the grief
that emaciated the wide shoulders
of my friend.

Pillai & Ludden, 239, viii-xiii.

This version is added with a footnote which runs as follows:

If a crow cries while sitting on a house top, it is said to be an omen foretelling the arrival of guests for the day.

Pillai & Ludden, 239 n.
While A.K. Ramanujan brings out both the belief and the message in
the translation itself, the other translation adds a footnote to
convey this feature of social culture. When problems are
encountered owing to such features, instead of finding out
corresponding features in the target society, both these methods
solve the problem equally well.

Next to superstitions, the social customs that figure
in the source text give problems in locating appropriate
equivalences. Generally social customs have significance only to
that particular society and its culture. Unless a similar custom
exists in the target society, the presentation of the full
cultural significance of that custom becomes a problem. A social
custom has to be kept alive in a translation because it is one
mode of conduct of the entire society and its culture. It is part
of a complex of behaviours that is fundamental to and sustained by
the society. Any custom is a practice that is always practised
collectively in a society. Hence if a translation aims at
bringing a culture of the source text to life the problem arising
out of it has to be confronted in every possible way.

When a social custom is related to, nay, forms the
vital basis of a poetic theme, the problem of translating it
becomes two dimensional. The social custom has to be brought out
in full in the translation and its significance to the poetic
theme has to be conveyed with an effective equivalence.
Poem 223 of KuRundtokai poses this problem and the two translations are at two extremes in interpreting the custom. Through the poems we learn that when a maiden grows up, it is customary that the mother gives her a slingshot and rattle and sends her to the fields in order to scare away the parrots and birds that come there to eat the corn. A maiden is also given a dress made up of leaves in order to camouflage her presence while moving in the fields. In the source language the dress of leaves, the slingshot and the rattle are referred to as "tazhai", "taTTai" and "muRi". The source text reads as follows:

perurr konTa varrkali vizhaviR
celva:gn celvai menRi yanRivaN
ndaillor ndalla palava:R Rilla
tazhalund taTTaiyu muRiyund tандtивai
ottana ndinаккенap пoyttana kurRi
annai ompiya vayndalam
ennai konTa:nya minnama: liниye:

K 223.

/(a monologue of the heroine to her friend)
Once you wanted us to go to a festival organised in a big city with so much of din and noise. While we started on that day we saw omens that were considered good by elders. But the virtue and innocence nurtured in me by my mother who used to give me "tazhai", "taTTai" and "muRi" with the false comment that they suited me well, were taken away by my man who waylaid me. And now I remain, robbed of my virtue./
A.K. Ramanujan translates:

Once you said
let's go, let's go
to the day carnival in the big city;

that day
the good elders spoke of many good omens
for our going.

But he waylaid me,
gave me a slingshot and rattles
for scaring parrots,
and skirt of young leaves
which he said looked good
on me,

and with his lies,
he took the rare innocence
that mother had saved for me.

And now I am like this.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

Mother gave me
the tazal, tattai, and muri
for chasing away birds,
and said it was best if I went
to the fields.
She sought to protect my virtue.
But she was too late:
you had already said, "Let's go,
let's go to the loud and joyous
festival in the big town!"
that day the words of the elders here
bode well; and that day
my lover took for himself
the virtue my mother guarded so.
Now I am like this.

In Ramanujan's version, it is the hero who gave the "tazhal",

M.S. Pillai & Ludden, 144.
"taTTai" and "muRi" and robbed her of her innocence and virtue by telling her lies. In the other translation it is the mother who had given her the instruments and the dress for scaring the birds and had informed her that it would be good if she could go to the fields. The heroine laments to her friend that her mother had tried to guard her innocence in that way but the hero had robbed her of her innocence and virtue. In this version no equivalence is found for the phrase "poyttana ku:ri" (by telling lies). Though the structure of the poem provides for ambiguously interpreting the person who had spoken lies to the heroine as the mother or the hero, the social custom demands, as one understands from the corpus of poems, that it must be the mother who had brought up the daughter by giving her "tazhai" "taTTai" and "muRi" in order to send her to the fields to chase away the birds. This can be substantiated by quoting other poems. For instance let us see poem 217 of KuRundtokai.

```
tinaikiLi kaTikeniR pakalu mollum
iravundit varutali nuRu mangcuval
... ... ... ... ....
```

K 217, i-ii.

//-- a monologue of her friend to the heroine -- If my mother had asked me to go to the fields for chasing the birds you could have met me/

A translator is sure to face problems of this nature when there is a possibility for more than one interpretation in the structure of the source text. But any interpretation should be within the
social context set up by the text as a whole and should not be at variance with an established feature of social culture as in the translation by A.K.Ramanujan.

Yet another type of problem arises when certain features of social culture are implicit in the source text and are used as an organic part of the poem in conveying a message. In the source text it is implicit because the receptor of the source text is expected to be aware of specific features of that particular social custom. But when it is translated these features have to be conveyed explicitly because the purpose of translating such a work is to carry the cultural heritage of the source society to the target audience. To make explicit these implied features a method of translation has to be devised. Nida analyses such problems in general and advocates "lengthening of the text ... [and] supplementation of the text by certain marginal helps which will provide the necessary background information indispensable to a proper understanding of the text".18 This has to be practised because the receptors of the translations are not equipped with the same experience as those of

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the source text, especially when the context is particularly one of cultural significance. Nida's diagram below (with labels changed for the present context) explains the problem and the solution he offers.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics{diagram.png}
\caption{SOURCE LANGUAGE}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics{diagram.png}
\caption{TARGET LANGUAGE}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics{diagram.png}
\caption{TEXT IN TARGET LANGUAGE}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{19} Eugene A Nida, 25.
Figure 1 shows that the channel capacity of the receptor to the source text is wider with reference to the cultural message conveyed in the source text and hence communication takes place even if the text employs an implicit way of communicating the message. Figure 2 shows the incompatibility of the channel capacity of the receptor to the target text and the depth of the cultural message is to be built up with redundant details or with descriptive phrases. A problem of this kind is confronted by the translators in poem 7 of KuRundtokai. It is a monologue of one of the passers-by while he notices the hero and the heroine before marriage on their way as an eloping couple. The source text reads:

\[\text{villom ka\lana kazhale: toTiyorl} \\
\text{melladi me:lavugn cilampe: nallo:r} \\
\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \]

K 7, i-ii.

// this hero with the bow wears a warrior's bangle on the anklet; the girl with the band around her arm wears the anklet up above her tender feet. //

A.K.Ramanujan translates:

This bowman has a warrior's band on his ankle; the girl with the bracelet on her arm has a virgin's anklets on her tender feet

\[\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \]

AKR:IL, 21, i-v.
M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

He wears armor on his ankles
and carries bow.
She wears an arm-band
and anklets above her tender feet.

Pillai & Ludden, 372, i-iv.

G.L. Hart translates:

The bowman has battle rings on his legs
and the bangled girl wears anklets on her soft feet

Hart, 50, i-ii.

The feature of the social culture involved here is the anklet that
the girl wears. This anklet is one that was put up by the parents
of the girl and this will be removed in a ceremony just before the
marriage. The anklet here is an indication that the girl is a
virgin, yet to be married, now going away with her lover without
the knowledge of her parents. In the source text a reference to
the anklet worn by the girl is enough to indicate that she is a
virgin and the anklet is a virgin's anklet. In terms of Michael
Riffaterre's semiotics, the word "cilampu" (anklet) takes part in a
hypogram as a nuclear word of the matrix. "The readers' natural
experience of a literary text, namely, his greater awareness of
the way things are said than of exactly what is meant"²⁰
is the key to the passage that communicates the cultural message.

²⁰ Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*
It is this hypogram and the source text readers' experience that poses the problem of translation. In A.K. Ramanujan's translation, - "the girl with the bracelet on her arm / has a virgin's anklet" - the cultural feature and the message involved is made explicit by adding the possessive pronoun virgin's thereby conveying that she remains a virgin while she runs away with her man. While A.K. Ramanujan has incorporated this message in the text itself, M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden add a footnote:

For the woman, anklets and arm-bands are symbols of unmarried status.

Pillai & Ludden 372 n.

This footnote is the "marginal help" that Nida suggests in solving this kind of problem in translation. But Hart's translation though it has a footnote does not mention this feature or social culture at all. This leaves the translation imperfect and the message incomplete.

From the foregoing discussion on the problems of translation one can notice that with reference to social culture the translator is confronted with problems not only in finding the closest possible equivalent but in interpreting the source language text also. This demands that the translator keep himself aware of the entire cultural heritage and also show an understanding of the message of the text in its own period.
Problems in translating Linguistic Culture:

The term "culture" in the technical vocabulary of anthropology, means the entire way of life of a society, nurtured and controlled by its members. In such a conception of culture, as Robins states, "language becomes one of the most important parts uniquely related to the whole by its symbolic status." This symbolic status of language in a community creates the problem of translation in consonance with semantic analysis and contextual theory of meaning. Problems arising out of the use of linguistic features in poetic structure, those related to the contextual theory of meaning and problems related to the architectonics of the genre concerned will be dealt with in the following chapters, while problems that arise out of the conventions in the language use, which we call linguistic culture, are discussed here.

A language, by usage, creates certain conventional ways of expression which are always kept alive by the members of the society. They figure in the poetic diction and hence a translator faces problems in finding equivalences for such conventional uses since they are different from the surface level usage. Every conventional use requires a different approach from

the translator because he has to trace the origin of such use. An appropriate equivalence could be found only after comprehending the features of that conventional use.

An example of such a conventional use and the problem caused by it in the process of translation is present in the translation of poem 325 of KuRundtokai. This is a monologue of the heroine to her friend. She laments that she had told her man to leave her, thinking that he would not really leave. But now he has gone away from her. She asks her friend, "Where am I to find him?" The source text reads:

```
mannik kazhi ken Re:ne: yanno:
a:ca kendtai ya:NTulan kollo:
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K 325, iii-iv.

A.K.Ramanujan translates:

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Where is he now,
protective as a father,
O where?
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AKR:PLW, 49, viii-ix.

M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden translate

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But Oh! Now where is
my love? Who is support
for me?
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Pillai & Ludden, 341, vii-ix.
The noun phrase "endtai" in its literal sense means "my father". But in the poem it is used to denote "my man" with reference to the supreme status that his lady accords him. This is a conventional use and hence to be treated as such providing appropriate equivalence. But A.K. Ramanujan taking the phrase literally has given the equivalence "as a father". The equivalence provided in the other translation carries the conventional use and hence finds itself as a close possible equivalent. Here again the ambivalence between the literal sense and the conventional use has caused the problem.

A very similar problem is found in the translation of poem 157 of KuRundtokai. To quote the source text:

kukku: venRatu ko:zhi yatanetir
tutken RanRen Ruya ndegncam
... ... ...

K 157. i-ii.

The phrase that causes the problem in the process of translation is "tusyanegncam". This literally means "heart that is pure"; but in the anthology it is used conventionally to denote "a heart that is pure"; but in the anthology it is used conventionally to denote a heart with unqualified longing for the hero.

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

Co Coo
crowed the cock
and my poor heart missed a beat
... ... ... ...

AKR:IL, 65, i-iii.
M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

The rooster cries, "kuckoo":
right away my purest heart
is full of fear.

Pillai & Ludden, 250, i-iii.

While commenting on the phrase in the "editorial commentary", P.V. Somasundaranar writes that the heart is pure because it is filled with the patronage and affectionate love of the hero.22 Her heart is filled with nothing but her longing for the hero. Hence it is pure. But the equivalences provided in the translations viz. "poor heart" and "purest heart" do not convey the meaning of the phrase in its conventional use. Nida's comments while discussing a problem of the same nature in a different context highlight the problem and suggests a possible solution.

In order to translate correctly into another language one must study the actual usage. The etymology may be of interest, but the descriptive linguist (and every translator should be such) must study each word on the basis of how native speakers use it, and not on the basis of what the investigator thinks it should mean or how he thinks it should be used.23

Words indicating stages in the growth of man and woman may appear to have equivalences in other languages since they appear to be universal. But if the poetic diction by its

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23 Nida, "Linguistics and Ethnology". 207.
conventional use standardises them, corresponding equivalences in other languages may be either negative or non-existent. Hence untranslatability may occur and the translator who is to carry the literary and the cultural features across has to substitute them with descriptive phrases or footnotes. Leaving them untranslated will lead the receptor of the target text unaware of the meaning of the distinctive words that denote such stages.

In Tamil poetic diction womanhood is described in seven stages viz. "petai", "petumpai", "mangkai", "maTandtai", "arivai", "terivai" and "perrilampeN". Each stage of growth is denoted by a specific name and a mention of this name suggests that stage of womanhood and all its related qualities. Poem 292 of KuRundtokai uses one such term. The poem is a monologue of the friend of the heroine and she refers to yet another context in which a woman was mercilessly killed. That woman is mentioned thus in the source poem.

maNNiya cenRa voNNuta larivai

K 292, i.

A.K. Ramanujan translates:

When a lovely girl bathing in a river

AKR:IL, 87, i.

M.S. Pillai and D.E. Ludden translate:

of the girl with the bright forehead

Pillai & Ludden, 98, xiii.
In both translations "arivai" is substituted with the equivalences "lovely girl" and "girl" and no footnote is added to the translation regarding the connoted meaning of the word.

When such words and terms of poetic diction stand for basic concepts which are absent in the target culture, the intensity of the translator's problem becomes greater. As discussed in the previous chapter, "kaLavu" — clandestine love before marriage — is a basic concept which is thematic in most of the poems of the Cangkam classics. The term means in the literal sense "an act of stealing". But here it refers to the stealthy courting of the lovers before marriage, desired by both the hero and heroine. An exact equivalent for this term is absent in the target language. Hence the translators use descriptive phrases as equivalences.

A translation problem involving this concept arises in translating poem 47 of KuRundtokai. It is a monologue of the friend of the heroine and the silent listener is the hero. The monologue is an apostrophe to moon. The source text reads:

```
karungkai veingkai vi:yuku tuRukal
irumpulik kurulaiyiR RomRungka:TTiTai
elli varundar kaLaviRku
nallai yallai neTuveNNilave:
```

K 47.
You, the long moon; your light makes
the flowers of the black neem tree
appear as a big tiger; hence you do not
help and are of no use to my man when
he comes to court me during night./

The problem arises in translating the phrase "elli varunar
kaLaviRku". A.K.Ramanujan translates:

O long white moonlight,
you do him no good at all
as he comes stealing
through the night in the forest
.. ... ...

AKR:IL, 41, i-iv.

M.S.Pillai and D.E.Ludden translate:

O long white moonlight:
you are no help
for the romance of this man,
who must come through the forest
in the dark of night,
.. ... ...

Pillai & Ludden, 70, i-v.

Hart translates:

Flowers have fallen from black-stalked
venkai trees,
on to round stones
so they seem tiger cubs in the forest
where he comes at night
to do what he should not.
.. ... ...

Hart, 58, i-v.

A.K.Ramanujan's equivalence viz. "as he comes stealing / through
the night in the forest" for "kaLavu" describes the hero's
surreptitious approach and this suggests the surreptitious
purpose for which he has come. M.S.Pillai's translation provides
"for the romance of the man" as the equivalence for "kaLavu" which
does not convey the clandestine nature of the concept at all. It just denotes the meeting of the lovers and nothing more. Hart's equivalence for "kaLavu" as "to do what he should not" distorts the sense of the text, making it immoral, while it is a perfectly accepted, even expected stage of courting in Cangkam literature. Both the heroine and her friend like the hero courting the heroine whenever he likes, but are scared of the dangers that the hero may encounter if he comes during night. There is no word in the source text to indicate that the act of the hero is objected to by either the heroine or the friend. Thus while there exists a void in locating an exact equivalence for "kaLavu" because the term by its conventional use in the language has attained a cultural value for which an exact equivalence does not exist in the target language, Ramanujan's version employs a close approximation.

Problems that arise out of the various features of culture remain challenging to all translators and a translator needs to be constantly aware of the entire range of cultures of the societies of the source and target languages. While a language and its literature reflect the culture of a society, they themselves form a part of the culture of that society. One who interprets it needs to know this complementary synecdochical function of the two and one who translates it needs to know how the two systems keep this complementary function based on the distinct features of the societies.