Chapter-VIII

Translation of a Play and a Poem
Chapter-8

8.1 Translation of a Telugu play into English

Gurazada Apparao's 'kanyasulkam' is translated more than once into English with the same title. A few instances from these translations are examined in this chapter.

8.1.1

Introduction to the Telugu play- Kanyasulkam

Kanyasulkam of Gurajada Appa Rao has for long remained not only a play but also the play in modern Telugu. It was the first social play in Telugu and the first to discuss social problems with any degree of seriousness. So perfectly did Gurajada shape it that it remains unsurpassed even today both as a play and a work of art. Many expressions in the play have passed into the daily use of people's speech. It was first staged in Vizianagaram on August, 13, 1892. The first edition was published in 1897 and subsequently revised by the author. It was also made into a film in 1955. It has also been translated into several Indian languages and also into French (1960-61) and Russian (1962). It has been translated three times into English. First by S.N.Jayanthi which was published in 1964. Secondly it was translated, in an abridged form, by S.G.Murthy and K.Ramesh in 1976. C.Vijayasree and T.VijayKumar again translated and published the play in 2002 and they claim that theirs is complete and unabridged.

Predictably, then, the original has acquired a halo that silences even a small shrill voice of critical opposition. To think of translating it is audacity enough; to actually translate it is unpardonable sacrilege---this could well be the attitude of a large
chunk of writers and intellectuals of Andhra, belonging to every shade of opinion, especially of course that breed of hidebound and diehard votaries of orthodoxy.

Not for nothing did Kanyasulkam acquire such impregnable reputation. The play functioned on different facets. It reflected the far-reaching social transformation that was going on at that time led by the famous reformer, Kandukuri Veeresalingam. It also represented the linguistic changes of those times that signalled a confrontation between written and spoken types of Telugu, the Graanthika and Vyavahaarika styles.

Kanyasulkam is hailed as first modern text in Telugu. He states in his preface to the first edition,

'I clothed the play in the spoken dialect, not only that it is better intelligible to the public than the literary dialect, but also from a conviction that it is the proper comic diction for Telugu.' 'When I wrote the play, I had no idea of publication. I wrote it to advance the cause of social reform and to combat a popular prejudice that the Telugu language was unsuited to the stage.'

The two important features of this play are 'Social Reform and Spoken Telugu'. In his preface to the second edition the writer says,

"The Telugu language is also seriously handicapped by the tyranny of authority-of a highly artificial literary dialect, a rigid system alliterative versification, and literary types which have long played out. .. I believe my play is the first ambitious work in the spoken dialect and, certainly, it has not failed, but success or failure of individual authors is no test of the capacity of a language."
The play represented all that was progressive and forward-looking, as it ruthlessly castigated the evil and obscurantist practices of the day. Fortunately, Gurajada was more an artist than a mere social activist. It is for that reason that Kanyasulkam remains relevant and enjoyable long after the problems it discusses are no longer obtainable in society.

8.1.2 Problems in Translating Kanyasulkam

The play has humour, characterization and the construction of an original and complex plot. The title of the SL play itself states that it is ‘KANYASULKAM, A TELUGU COMIC PLAY IN FIVE ACTS’. Kanyasulkam, as the translators note in their foreword, is not an easy text to translate: first, because it has a comedic vein running throughout. Now, comedy appears to be race-specific or language-specific. What is uproariously funny in one language falls flat in another language. The play’s mainstay is comedy and when that is lost, to a large extent the flavour of the play itself suffers.

For our study two translations of the text by Jayanthi and Vijayasree are examined and the problems involved are discussed.

SL – Kanyasulkam by Gurazada Apparao

TL1- Kanyasulkam translated by Jayanthi.S.N

TL2- Kanyasulkam translated by C.Vijayasree & T.Vijay Kumar

The present study of the translation mainly focuses the translation of humour. Further it is to be noted that a play is for performing on the stage. And the efficacy of the translation can only be evaluated when it is performed on the stage. The translations, as they appear, are meant for reading but not for stage performance. The success of the translation can only be gauged when the play is performed on the stage, which seems to
have not been done. Even if it is performed on a stage, whether the audience are Indian or Non-Indian also makes the difference in evaluating the effectiveness of the translation. However it is assumed that these translations are primarily intended for reading and not for performing on the stage.

The SL in this case is not meant for publication alone as the author declares in his preface to the second edition, 'when I wrote the play, I had no idea of publication. I wrote it to advance the cause of social reform and to combat a popular prejudice that the Telugu language was unsuited to the stage.' So a play is basically meant for performance on the stage and the purpose of reading is only secondary. A translation of a play as if it were a written text would allow the readers of SL the luxury of re-reading the dialogues that are not clear and glossary would also facilitate the readers. But if the translation is meant for the performance on the stage the task of the translator becomes greater. All the TLs in the present case seem to be not for stage performing. Hence the TL texts are abundant with notes and glossary, which is inevitable in case of cultural conciliation.

Kanyasulkam deals with the evil practice of bride money, i.e. a custom by which an amount would be paid to the parents of a girl in lieu of marrying her. Incidentally this evil custom is no longer in practice but the reverse of it, Dowry i.e. the custom of paying an amount to the parents of the boy at the time of marriage, is prevalent now a days. Ironically in both the customs the sufferers were women. Further the author also deals with several other social issues such as child marriages, widow marriages and the issue of dancing girls. In this humorous play, the author employs all dramatic and comic
devices - farce, slapstick, burlesque, parody, disguises, mimicry, charade, pun, irony, satire, etc.

In fact translating humour is the most difficult aspect in translating fiction. And the dearth of footnotes further complicates the job of the translator. The translator may have to recreate the effects of the SL and while doing so he/she may deviate from the original to some extant.

8.2.1

Humour is an essential part of everyday communication. It is often rooted in a specific cultural linguistic context. While translating humour, culturally opaque elements and language specific devices are expected to make the translator's job difficult. We can identify three different types of humour in a literary work.

i) Linguistic, where the humour depends on the properties of the language - this would include puns;

ii) Cultural, where the humour depends on the cultural reality lying behind the linguistic construct;

iii) Universal, which depends on neither of the above, and which transfers from one language or culture to another - an example would be the humour perceived when a child imitates an adult.

The play is abundant in all types of humour and the main character Girisham often uses English in his dialogues which it self is the source of humour in SL. But this cannot be recaptured in TL. The TL1 translator tried to sustain it by making those dialogues bold in capitals. The TL2 translators indicated them with in the symbols.
A few examples are examined here to verify the effectiveness of the TLs.

Girisam: ‘...talking to me is in itself an education. I bet your teacher hasn’t got half your command of the language. Didn’t I deliver to you lectures galore on the problem of widow marriage and nautch question? Not one of my students turned out to be a bad penny. When I was in the Deccan College at Puna, the professors were all amazed to hear me lecture for three hours at a stretch on “the eleven Causes for the Degeneration of India”’

(TL1 - 2)

Girisam: ‘...talking to me itself is an education. Come to think of it, does your teacher have the mastery of the language that you have? How many lectures I have given you on the subject of widow marriage, and on the nautchi question! Not one student of mine has turned out worthless! While studying at Poona Deccan College,'
when I gave a three hour, non-stop lecture on 'the Eleven causes for the Degeneration of India' the professors were dumbstruck'.

(TL2-4)

This is pure bragging of Girisam and also his bringing in his lectures as contributing to the mastery of language of his disciple would be seen as irrelevant and therefore funny. But to readers of TL this appears to be pointless verbosity.

venkamma: maa abbaayi nuwwu oka parayam ingliSu maaTlaaDamDi baabu.
giriSham: alaagee namma

My dear venkatesam-

Twinkle! Twinkle! Little star

How I wonder what you are!

venkatesam: There is a white man in the tent.

giriSham:

(SL – 39)

Venkamma: I would very much like to hear you talk in English.

Giri: As you wish, madam.

MY DEAR Venkatesam

TWINKLE TWINKLE; LITTLE STAR

HOW I WONDER WHAT YOU ARE!

Venkat: THERE IS A WHITE MAN IN THE TENT
Giri: THE BOY STOOD ON THE BURNING DECK WHEN ALL BUT HE HAD FLED.
Venkat: UPON THE SAME BASE AND ON THE SAME SIDE OF IT THE SIDES OF A TRAPEZIUM ARE EQUAL TO ONE ANOTHER.
Giri: OF MAN'S FIRST DISOBEDIENCE AND THE FRUIT OF THAT MANGO TREE, SING, VENKATESAM, MY DEAR GOOD BOY.
Venkat: NOUNS ENDING IN F OR FE CHANGE THEIR F OR FE INTO VES.
(TL1 –20)

Venkamma: Will you please converse once with our boy in English, babu, I wish to listen to that.
Girisam: sure, amma.
My dear Venkatesam-
Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are
VENKATESAM: There is a white man in the tent.
GIRISAM: The boy stood on the burning deck where all but he had fled.
VENKATESAM: Upon the same base and on the same side of it the sides of a trapeium are equal to one another.
GIRISAM: Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that mango tree, sing Venkatesa, my very good boy.
VENKATESAM: Nouns ending in f or fe change their f or fe into ves.
(TL2 –22)
The craze for the English education among the middle class is depicted through Venkamma as she asks Girisham to speak to her son in English. However Girisham who is an impostor recites nursery rhymes and Venkatesam in turn recites a few rules of English grammar. In SL this scene creates humour. The translations may not be all that effective in TLs. Their conversation, which sounds irrelevant, makes them succeed in duping Venkamma who does not know English. This effect is not recreated in TLs as it would be difficult for the readers to imagine that Venkamma does not know English though her dialogues are also in English. Hence the effect is not completely recreated in TLs. Hence the humour that makes use of ignorance of a particular language, here it is the TL, is not captured in TLs.

rama; (jeebuloomci cuTTa tiisi pamTa kona koriki) pilla, aggipulla.

(SL -31)

Ramappa pantulu (Takes a cigar from his pocket, bites off the end) darling matches.

(TL1 -7)

Ramappa pantulu: Takes out a cigar from his pocket, bites its end) Girl! A match stick please!

(TL2 -8)

Here the author uses the two rhyming words pilla (girl) and aggipulla (match stick). The terse expression has humour in its rhythm and the effect is not recreated in TL1 or 2 because the effect is due to the SL's linguistic features.
girisam: Turk! DaamiT, Tel maan.

(SL - 37)

Giri: TURK? DAMN IT, TELL HIM MAN.
Agni: If you think you can call me all sorts of names, take care, I will give you a slap.

(TL1 -16)

Girisham: Turk (To Venkatesam) Damn it, tell man.
Agnihotravadhanulu: Man? You call me names? I will slap you.

(TL2 -18)

Here the author himself uses English in the dialogues of Girisham. Further the other character misunderstands it for a tree as 'man' sounds similar to a word that means a tree in SL, maanu and it also suggests the stoic or unperturbed nature of a person. This is the source of humour in this case. In TL 1 and 2 the translators unable to reconstruct the effect in TL texts use only the expression 'call me names' and this lacks in the force that the SL text has.

It may also puzzle the TL readers because how does the calling Agnihotravadhanulu as 'man' irritate so much. Unless it is known that man sounds as 'manu' (which in SL means a tree). Further it also suggests the inhuman quality of a person in SL. But for TL readers it appears as if he got hurt for no valid reason.
Madhu: why did you hit him, what is this nuisance in my house.

Innkeeper: Then why did he hide himself under the cot?

Madhu: It is none of your business. That is a kind of romance.

Innkeeper: this too is romance, though of a different kind- the broomstick romance.

(ML1 -13)

Madhuravani: why did you beat him? What's this nuisance in my house?

Woman: but why did he crawl under the cot?

Madhuravani: what's that to you? That's a kind of romance!

Woman: then this is broom-ance.

(TL2 -15)

The scene occurs at the house of Madhuravani, the innkeeper or the ‘woman’ as referred in TL2 text comes in search of Girisham but finds Ramappantulu hiding under the cot. She beats him with a broom. The comic effect is created by burlesque scene where in
the girl hides her paramours under the cot while Girisam is chased by an innkeeper for cheating her.

When Madhuravani says that hiding under the cot is a kind of romance, the woman wittily says that beating him with broom is also a kind of romance. In TL1 and TL2 the translators tried to render the effect. Though the translator coins a word broom-ance in TL2, it does not pose any comprehension problems as the context makes it clear.

agnihoo: idemi TamDooyi prapaṁcamloo wedawalunnarmcuunnaaDu. ingliSu pustkaalalloo ideenaa eemaStii wunnadi?
giriisa: wedwal annadi laaTin maaTamDi- aa maaTakartam kaceerilamDi. kaceerilu emdukunnawi?
(SL –67)

Agni: What does he mean by saying that widows are amongst the most important things in creation! Are these books stuffed with this kind of nonsense?
Giri: No sir, "widow" is a Latin word meaning COURTS. Now, what are courts intended for?
(TL1-63)

Agnihotravadhanlu: what is this? He says the world consists of widows. Is this what the English books say?
Girisham: "Wee-dows" is a Latin word, and it means courts. Why do the courts exist?
(TL2-69)
Here Agnihotravadhanlu’s ignorance of English language is exploited by Girisam and it becomes the source humour. Girisam teaches Venkatesam about the importance of widow remarriages and tries to win the heart of Venkatesam’s sister. Mean while Agnihotravadhanlu enters the scene and enquires about Venkatesam’s study. Girisham tries to protect Venkatesam, who innocently expresses that widows are the most interesting creations of the God, and he defends him by a lie that ‘widow’ means courts in Latin as Agnihotravadhanlu is interested in courts and litigation. The translators in both cases have tried to retain the humour of the original.

raama: kaakitawiteit aggipullatoo faisal! TaaTaakait te neeLLa poyyi kotta jaatakam banaa yinca Dam ayidu nimuShaalu pani. maa siddhaamti maTTuku naalukkaalaalu callagaa umDaali. naa dag gara paata taaTaakulu aleekhaalu aTaka nimDaa wunnaayi. muppai yeLLa naaTi kaakitaalunnaayi. raka rakaala siraalunnayi. oka nurruupaayilu naaku phiiju kimda icci kharchulu peTTukoomDi. grandham naDipistaanu. (SL- 61)

Rama: If that is written on paper, these matches will take care of it, and if it is on a palm leaf, put it in the kitchen fire. Long live our Siddhanti and I shall get a fresh one within ten minutes. I have all necessary materials ready. The attic has a pile of palm leaves, and paper and ink over thirty years old. Give me a hundred rupees for sundry expenses, I will manage the whole show. 

(TL1-54)
In the original the author uses terse expressions. Where as in TL 1 and 2 the translators are forced to explain them and spread them over. Here the writer deftly exposes the way horoscopes are prepared as per the convenience. The TL readers who are not aware of the customs of the SL may find it difficult to follow the text. Among the Brahmin community in India horoscopes play a vital role. They are prepared immediately after the birth taking into consideration the time of birth. They were written on Palmyra leaves in olden days and on paper later. Here the writer ridicules the practice as it was easy to create new bogus ones and the genuine ones can easily be destroyed. The scene also exposes the attitude of upper caste Brahmins who would easily dupe the others by creating fake documents by using different inks as if they were prepared at a different period in the past. Further it is a practice among the many to make fire in a specially constructed stove for making water hot for bathing and all the waste or unimportant documents are burnt in that fire. The writer uses terse expressions to suggest how they can be destroyed. In TL 1 the translator altogether changed and mentioned that it is a kitchen fire. He might have felt that the TL readers are familiar with fire in the kitchen. Anyway it can be treated as a deviation, only made to facilitate the comprehension of the TL readers. In TL2 also an attempt is made to make them sound terse. However the idiomatic expression 'grantahm
‘nadipincu’ has found an equivalent idiomatic expression- ‘manage the show’ in TL-1 and ‘to run the show’ in TL2.

raama: naaku maama gaaritee, neeku baawa gaarelaa geewiTi?


(SL-79)
Rama: When I address him Mama, how can he be a brother-in-law to you.

Madhu: In my caste we treat everyone as a brother-in-law. But how can he be your father-in-law? (Turning to Lubdhavadhanlu) why don’t you please sit down? Evidently my brother looks annoyed and upset. After the wedding I very much wish to see whether you are going to lock yourself behind doors before kissing my sister. In any case, your son-in-law hasn’t got over his youthful antics. You must excuse us.

(TL1-80)
Ramappantulu: He is uncle to me, how does he become brother-in-law to you?

Madhuravani: In our caste, everyman is a brother-in-law. How is he an uncle to you, anyway? (To Lubdhavadhanlu) Why don’t you sit down? What ever may be the reason, brother-in-law appears to be angry. Let me see if after marriage, you will bolt the door before kissing your wife. Your nephew, of course, has not grown up.

(TL2 –89)
Here the culture specific concept may pose a problem to the TL readers.

Madhuravani belongs to a community of dancing girls. It is a custom for them to call their paramour as ‘bawa’, brother-in-law. Unless the cultural concept is familiar, ‘brother-in-law’ may be taken as a mere relationship term thus lacking in the humour of the original.

madhu: yawareemi ceesitiroo, naaku teliyadu gaani, mii iddari koosam heD kaniSTibu gaalistunnaaDu. dorakagaanee maTa praweeSam ceystaaDaTa. yii maaTa maTTuku naaku ruuDigaa telusu.

(SL-146)

Madhu: I don’t know all that. But one thing is certain; the HEAD CONSTABLE has been searching for you all thro’ the town and is sure to put you behind the bars the moment he gets you.

(TL1 -108)

Madhuravani: I don’t know who is responsible. Head Conishteebu is looking for both of you. the moment he finds you, he’ll put you behind bars. That I am quite certain of.

(TL2 -205)

The author himself uses loan words such as ‘constable’ but with a corrupt form as it was pronounced by the uneducated. The TL1 translator uses capitals to signify the use of English words in the original itself. The TL2 translator has gone a step further and uses the
corrupt form of pronunciation of constable as ‘conishteebu’, perhaps to add regional flavour to the translation. But it may also create a problem of comprehension to the TL readers. Further the expression ‘matapravesham’, literally means only a religious hermitage but it euphemistically and mockingly refers to the prison. This euphemism is not found in the TL1 and 2 as it is translated at the pragmatic level as ‘put you behind the bars’.

naayuDu: ingliSuu wakiilu saradaa tiirimdaa? foorjarii ki tamakkuduDa maTapraweeSam awutumdi.
agni: ayyo nii imTa kooDi kaalca.
naayuDu: rooju kaalustuuneed emTaaru.
(SL-161)

Naidu: Now I suppose you have had enough of the English lawyers! I am afraid you too will soon be on your way to the jail for this forgery.
Agni: damn you. (curtain)
(TL1 –185)

Naidu: Has your fascination for an English vakil waned? You’ll also be behind bars for “forgery”
Agnihotravathanlu: Ayyo, May a chicken be roasted in your house!
Naidu: We do that everyday! (Exit)
(TL2 – 228)
Agnihotravadhanlu curses Naidu that a death may occur in his family. To which Naidu, a non-vegetarian replies wittily that they do it everyday suggesting that they eat it everyday. In TL1 the reference is absent, perhaps the translator might have felt it cumbersome to translate it and so he leaves it with an expression, 'damn it'. The TL2 translator has glossed it that it was customary among the Sudras to hold a non-vegetarian feast after cremating a family member. This makes the TL-2 text comprehensible to the readers.

8.2 Translating Poetry

Translating poetry is another major area of translation which has been found complex. Poetry has so many elements that do not readily yield to translation and so it is difficult to bring about at least a modicum of meaning of the SL text. The translation of poetry presents many intriguing problems to the translator. It is possible for a translator to be close to the text while translating prose, but the matter stands on a different footing in case of poetry. One of the reasons is that the lyricism, the cadences and the musical sound effects, the rhythm and rhyme—— devices, which the writer uses in a very subtle manner to bring out or enhance the meaning of what he wants to say—— defy translation. It is pointed out that successful translations of poetry have always been rather free, instead of sticking to the text proper. A celebrated example is that of Edward Fitzgerald’s Omar Khayyam. The music, the rhythm, and rhyme that give the poem its life in the SL are difficult to translate.
“Poetry represents the writing in its most compact, condensed and heightened form, in which the language is predominantly connotational rather than denotational and in which content and form are inseparably linked. Poetry is informed by a ‘musical mode’...” (Newmark-More Paragraphs 158)

One possible reason might be that the meaning of a poem is not one or uniform. Interpretations of poems do change their meaning. Hence, it is not mere hunting for equivalences and substituting them at the proper places that the translator has to do. Since the poem is amenable for different interpretations, the translator finds it difficult to decide whether he should translate the denotation of the poem or its connotation. Since the connotation depends on the interpretation given to the poem, the translation also tends to be a kind of interpretation--- the translator’s interpretation. But whether this interpretation is valid is a question that has to be decided by the reader as well as the scholar. It is of course true that if the translator interpolates his own ideas or expressions, he is definitely harming the original text.

Translation of poetry therefore is a difficult and a rather delicate exercise. The translator should be able to strike an acceptable balance between the original and the translation. Some of the translators of Homer have said that they have followed the path that wherever it was possible to be close to the text, they kept close, but where it was not possible, they took some freedom to operate within the limits imposed by the original. But one may be sure that it is not transcreation they are speaking of.

In Telugu, for example, it was a kind of transcreation all the way that was successful. Starting with the Mahabharata, everything down to the Prabandhas was the
translator's own creation. The text only supplied the content to the translator to work upon.

"The politics of medieval Indian translations could perhaps be understood and interpreted in terms of the visible absence of the anxiety of authenticity on the part of these "translators". If the local / regional versions of Ramayana and Mahabharata became the classics of the regional literatures, the reason is not far to seek. " (Ayyappa Paniker. *Indian Literature* vol.162, 104)

There are, in Telugu, rare instances of where the translator was entirely true to the original, but somehow they lacked the verve of the original and were therefore held in contempt by the scholars. Rarer still are the translations that closely followed the original and were successful as translations.

These instances are mentioned only to show that different methods of translation followed by different translators yield different and perhaps unpredictable results. From the above, it may be clear that the success of translation of a poem is a question of balance and fine judgment. Since the translation is not merely substituting one word for its equivalent---the options should be weighed carefully so that the result would not only read freely, but should also contain all the ideas or feelings embedded in the original and also recreate the effect of the SL. In no circumstances should it contain ideas external to the poem. Relocating the lines in a translation cannot in any case be considered as being unfaithful to the original. Such relocation may sometimes be necessary in order to transmit the same emotion as the original poem seeks to.
8.2.1

The translation of a short Telugu poem is examined here:

**paaTa**

*selayeeraa, selayeeraa*

*gala gala manToo nityam*

*elaa paDutunTaawu?*

**cooDu**

*naa bratuku nimDaa raLLu*

*paaDakumTee elaa?*

(Ismail – *ismail kavitalu*)

**Song**

How can you sing,

O stream,

that interminable murmuring song?

Look, I can’t help singing:

my life is full of stones. (Kesava Rao’s *unpublished translation*)

The ‘ś’ and ‘ś’ sounds in the original are not found in the translation. However, like the first stanza of the SL, the TL first stanza too has a flow that suggests the flow of the stream. Whether or not on the whole the translation is successful, unless the last
two lines are relocated, it would not bring about the 'punch' that is in the original poem. Moreover, the question in Telugu is changed into a statement in translation because a question in English would make the meaning turbid, e.g. 'how can I help singing?' would only make the meaning difficult to understand. Further repetition such as 'selayeera selayeera', while addressing, is common in SL which has to be avoided in TL.

There is also a linguistic problem to contend with. Telugu is a soft, melodic language, while English is comparatively hard and lacks the rhythmical element that is natural to Telugu, as it seems to us.

The more important the words and their order in the original, the more closely the original should be translated. Since the genre where words and their order are most important is poetry, you would expect the translation of poetry to be the closest form of translation. Far from it, this is not possible since the language of poetry includes so many additional important factors— the kind of poem, poetic form, metre, connotations, rhythm, sound, including rhyme, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, word play—which are missing or not so important in other types of writing. Never the less, poetry translation is always worth attempting, and I think the best poetry translations are miracles of closeness.

(越来越 More Paragraphs on Translation 126)

As a poem is a complex verbal construction, a translator is assigned the great task of reconstructing it in an alien language, a mission which is rarely accomplished. For this reason it is said, "Only in one area (perhaps)-poetry-is a translator born not made." (Newmark About Translation 49).