

Issues in Translating Instruments of War from Tamil into English with Special Reference to Aiyandar's *The Pura-Porul Venba-Malai*

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Abstract

Translation like any other linguistic act is a communicative activity. It not only involves the transfer of meaning from one language into another language, but also involves a whole set of linguistic and cultural criteria. To translate a work is to dignify it. It is amazing that G. U. Pope who was a foreigner to Tamil language and Tamil culture had taken efforts to learn this language and had transformed the treasures of Tamil literature into English. Thus *The Pura-Porul Venba-Malai* had been translated by Pope from Tamil into English. In translating old classics in poetic composition the translator faces certain unique problems while translating the instruments of war from Tamil into English. Thus it is proposed to identify the problems involved, study the principles and procedures adopted, highlight successful and unsuccessful areas in the translator's work and suggest techniques for bettering the quality of translation.

Keywords: Translation, translator, source language, weapon, equivalent

Introduction

Translation is the comprehension of the meaning of a text and the subsequent production of an equivalent text that communicates the same message in another language. The text that is translated is called the source text (ST), and the language that it is translated into is called the target language (TL). As observed by Frenz, translation plays a vital role in opening "new lanes in the literary-world traffic" (103). It enables literary exchanges between countries. A sharing of the literary wealth between countries enables the sharing of literary experiences and emotions. This promotes better human understanding. It is in this light Pushkin defined the translator as "the courier of human spirit" (Kalyani 14). Translating a poem has its unique problems. When translating from one language to another, it is necessary not only to adjust to quite a different system, but also to reckon with the special restrictions which may exist within such a system. With regard to poetry, total fidelity to the original is impossible and the translator can at best try to attain approximation.

The Pura-Porul Venba-Malai

A study has been undertaken in this paper to analyse the issues a translator faces and the strategies he employs while translating the instruments of war in *The Pura-Porul Venba-Malai*. *The Pura-Porul Venba-Malai* is a very ancient work, professing to be founded upon a still older composition called *The Twelve Chapters, pannirupaṭalam* by one of the twelve disciples of Agasthiyar, one of the seven most revered rishis in the Vedic texts. He is one of the Tamil *Siddhars* 'those who have achieved a high degree of physical as well as spiritual perfection' in Shaivism. He invented an early grammar of the Tamil language, *Agattiyam*. His name is Aiyandar and he is said to have been a descendant of the old Chera kings, and the compiler of *Pura-Porul Venba-Malai* which can hardly be less than ten centuries old. *Malai* means 'garland' and *venba* is the name of the metre. It is a derivative work, probably an abridgment of the lost treatise *Pannirupaṭalam, The Book of Twelve Chapters*.

A noticeable development during the early medieval period (circa A.D. 1000-1250) was the writing of specialized and often enlarged books on the subjects treated in the *Tolkappiyam*. The three sections of bardic grammar - namely letters, words, and poetic themes came to be considered under five heads: letters, words, poetic themes, prosody, and rhetoric. The last two were included in the book on

poetic themes in the *Tolkappiyam*. As a result of this trend, separate books were written not only in the earlier sections but also in subsections. *The Pura-Porul Venba-Malai* would seem to fall under this category of later grammar, of which about twenty-five are known from the different commentaries. It seems to have had standing in its own right as a treatise on heroic themes that perhaps belonged to a 'school' different from that of the *Tolkappiyam*. Although it is a treatise dealing with heroic themes, it is also in some respects a literary work. Unlike the *Tolkappiyam*, which merely enunciates the definitions of the poetic situations and themes, *The Pura-Porul Venba- Malai* concurrently provides poems illustrating each theme.

A number of these illustrative verses are quoted by the different commentators on the *Tolkappiyam* either in full or in paraphrasing. Parallelisms in ideas and themes can be seen between these verses and that of the *Purananooru*. Because of this, the treatise has also been called a literary work in *venpa* metre. Its value for the study of heroic poetry is as much grammatical as literary. The author is Aiyanaritanar of the royal family of the Cheras. In its subject matter, the theme of cattle-stealing invites comparison with heroic poems in other languages'. *Porul* is the division of both grammar and treatise in general and it signifies 'substance, reality, and subject'. The *Porul* is divided in the most ancient grammar, the *Tolkappiyam*, into *Agam* and *Puram*. *Agam* treats of love, its various emotions, incidents, and accidents. *Puram* relates to all other things in life in general, especially war and the affairs of kingdoms.

The Pura-Porul Venba- Malai belongs to the division *Puram*. It is divided into twelve chapters or *padalam* containing 360 quatrains. Among them, G. U. Pope has translated fifty-six poems, of which fifty-one are in poetic form and the remaining in prose form. Generally fighting was confined to the respective divisions of the army namely between elephants and elephants, horses and horses and soldiers and soldiers. Hand to hand fight and fights with swords and shields between soldiers seem to have been widely followed (Arooran 70).

Instruments of War

Variation prevailed not only in wearing different flowers and ornaments that characterize different phases of warfare but also in equipping themselves with different weapons. *Pura-porul Venba-Malai* abounds in terms referring to the weapons that characterize the period. In *Pura-porul Venba-Malai*, a cattle lifting is the main subject in all the poems. It is the beginning of warfare: the raid is followed by the rescue, and then by the planned invasion of the enemy's land. This ends up to a systematic defence, and the defenders deck themselves with a different wreath. The siege and protection of forts each require its appropriate garland. The actual war follows, and for that another wreath is carried. . Finally, the victors wear another wreath, as a proud token of their triumph.

Vel (Nty;)

In verse number 80 of *Kanji Padalam*, there is a reference to a weapon called *vel* 'spear'. In Hindu mythology, every god has a weapon or an item with excellent symbolic and metaphorical references. The *vel* is the weapon used by the South Indian war God, Murugan ,who is the second son of Lord Shiva and Goddess *Parvati*. He has been venerated by names with the affixing of Vel, his prime weapon, as in Vetrivel (ntw;wpNty;), Pazhanivel (godpNty;), Muthuvel (Kj;JNty;), Shakthivel (rf;jpNty;), Senthilvel (nre;jpy;Nty;), Thangavel (jq;fNty;), Rajavel (uh[Nty;), Velmurugan (Nty;KUfd;), Kathirvel (fjph;Nty;), Kanthavel (fe;jNty;), Velavan (Ntytd;), Gnanavel (QhdNty;), Velayya (Ntya;ah), Vairavel (ituNty;) and Tamilvel (jkpo;Nty;). The *vel* was a gift given to Lord Murugan by his mother Goddess Parvathi to equip himself against his powerful demon foe Soorapadman. It is made up of five metals such as silver, gold, lead, copper and iron. The Tamil army was organized in the traditional manner with the four divisions – the chariots, the elephants, the cavalry and the infantry. The infantry or foot soldiers formed the largest division in the army organisation. Soldiers were armed mainly with bows and arrows, swords and spears. Historically, the *Vel* has been the weapon used by the Tamils during warfare. While praising the heroes who ascend to the paradise of the valiant, it is said:

Nghh;f;Fg; Gizkd; GiuNahh;f;Fj; jhDkd;
Cu;f;Fk; cyfpw;Fk; xUapu;kd; - ahu;f;Fk;
mwe;jpwe;j thapy; mil;j;jhy; mz;zy;

epwe;jpwe;j ePspiy Nty;. (PPVM. 80)

He was the raft on which his people sailed over the sea of battle !

He was a pillar amongst the mighty!

He was the life of his town, and of the world!

The door of the charitable deeds has been closed by the spear that tore open our leader's breast! (PPVM. 80)

In the above verse, the translator has rightly rendered the term *vel* as spear. The same instrument has been rendered as 'dart' in other verses (verse 21 in *Vetchi*, verse 24 and 34 in *Karanthai*, verse 37 in *Vanji* and verse 120 in *Ulinai*).

vāl (ths;)

ths; *vāl* 'sword' is another weapon used by the warriors in *Pura- porul Venba- Malai*. The rulers and soldiers in ancient India used this double- edged sword. It has a long blade that is attached to a hilt and is longer than a knife or dagger. The successful soldiers who came with their glittering swords are given the raided herds of cattle. This has been mentioned as: "xs;ths; kiye;jhu;f;Fk; xw;wha;e;J ciuj;jhu;f;Fk;"(PPVM.14) which is translated into English as "to those who overcame with their glittering swords"(PPVM. 14). Here the term *vāl* is rightly rendered as 'sword' by the translator.

vīl (tpy;)

A bow is a long and flexible staff with a shorter string attached to its two ends, causing it to bend. An arrow is a shaft with feather-type vanes near one end, which is notched, and a pointed head on the other end. The notched end of the arrow is mounted against the bowstring, with the pointed head extending just beyond the bow. With one hand braced against the bow and the other gripping the string, an archer pulls back on the string, storing potential energy in the bow. When the archer releases the string, that potential energy is converted to kinetic energy, which is imparted to the arrow, propelling it forward suddenly and swiftly. Bows are used primarily for hunting and for target shooting. The bow was an important weapon for both hunting and warfare from prehistoric times.

A bow is a long, flexible staff that bends because of a shorter string fastened to each of its two ends. An arrow is a shaft with a pointed head on the other end and feather-like vanes towards one end that are notched. The pointed head of the arrow extends just past the bow, with the notched end fixed against the bowstring. An archer pulls back on the string while holding the string in one hand and the bow in the other, accumulating potential energy in the bow. The potential energy is transformed into kinetic energy when the archer lets go transformed into kinetic energy when the archer lets go of the string, which is then transferred to the arrow and causes it to fly forward rapidly and quickly. Hunting and target shooting are the main uses of bows.

In the fifth verse of the *Vetchi padalam*, the poet states that the raiders have been armed with bows. It is given as "\$w;wpdj; jd;dhh; nfhLtpy; ,lNde;jp" (PPVM. 5) "Like death's satellites, bearing the curved bow in their left hands" (PPVM. 5). Here the name of the weapon *vīl* is rendered as bow. Synonym for *vīl* in Tamil is *silai* which is given in the 16th verse of the *vetchi padalam*. It is said that the king gives the rewards to those who has bent their bows in the warfare.

mq;fl;fpizad; Jbad; tpwypghz;

ntq;fl;F tPRk; tpiyahFk; - nrq;fl;

nrUr;rpriyah kd;dh; nrUKidapw; rPwp

thpr;rpriyahy; je;j tsk;. (PPVM. 16)

The wealth brought back from the battlefield by the warriors

That flinched not in the strife, but bent their bows,

Has become the price paid for the fiery drink

By musicians, drummers, singers and singing women (PPVM. 16)

In the above verse the term *cilai* (rpiy) means 'bow'. This term is rendered as 'bow' by the translator. The above study makes it clear that the translator has taken great efforts to render the SL instruments of war from Tamil into English without causing much trouble to the TL readers in comprehending the meaning. As a result, translation is a very complex process, and a translated text must be evaluated according to its acceptability and appropriateness within the target culture.

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