

A Study of Transcultural Equivalence in the English Translation of *Turmeric* a Poem by Malayalam Poet K. Satchidanandan

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Abstract: Indian writing in English is now recognised as a major contemporary current in English language literature. However, the act of translating a text from this corpus of writing raises several sociolinguistic and methodological issues which require negotiation between text, translator and reader. These include: the role of English as a lingua franca; the position of English in India; the fact that Indian writers in English, whether Indian resident or expatriates, are writing not in their native language but in a second language; and the resultant 'transcultural' character of their text.

This paper will examine how K Sachidanandan has retained the essence of his Malayalam poem "Manjal" while translating it into English as "Turmeric" by himself. K Sachidanandan is one of the most popular and accomplished literary figures in Malayalam. His many works have been translated to English, Chinese, Italian, Arabic, German and Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil, Kannada etc. The poem 'Turmeric' which was originally published in Malayalam with the title 'Manjal' is one of the Sachidanandan's most famous short poems. The poem exploring themes of globalization, Kerala's culture and the deep historical significance of turmeric as a spice, medicine and symbol linking it to everyday life. Since the poem is very culture specific words like Unniyarcha, Nagaraja, amrit, kaavu, velichappettavan will need extensive footnotes and he has tried to maintain the essence without losing any of its socio/cultural implication.

Apart from the cultural change, this poem also talks about the impact of globalization on developing nations like India. There are many international laws are passed by developed countries for their wellbeing in the international market. As a result of laws like Patent Law and International Intellectual Property Right, many third world countries lost their control over many indigenous products. Turmeric is one among them. We use it for many purposes like religious, ritualistic, culinary and medicinal uses for hundreds of years. Now it has converted into market-oriented cosmetic cream by erasing its cultural values connected with it.

Key Words: negotiation, indigenous, expatriates, converted, cosmetic.

Indian writing in English is now recognised as a major contemporary current in English language literature. However, the act of translating a text from this corpus of writing raises several sociolinguistic and methodological issues which require negotiation between text, translator and reader. These include: the role of English as a lingua franca; the position of English in India; the fact that Indian writers in English, whether Indian resident or expatriates, are writing not in their native language but in a second language; and the resultant 'transcultural' character of their text.

This paper will examine how K Sachidanandan has retained the essence of his Malayalam poem "Manjal" while translating it into English as "Turmeric" by himself. K Sachidanandan is one of the most popular and accomplished literary figures in Malayalam. He is a poet, critic, editor and orator. He began his career as a Lecturer in English at Christ College, Irinjalakuda, Kerala. He was the secretary of the Central Sahitya Academy from 1996 to 2006. He is a prolific writer and champion of secularism, environment and human right. He has received many Awards and Honours. His many works have been translated to English, Chinese, Italian, Arabic, German and Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil, Kannada etc. His translated works into English include his own poems, such as While I Write: New and Selected Poems, The Missing Rib, Not Only the Oceans, Misplaced Objects and Other Poems and Letter to the Dead. His translated work to Kannada Nanna Mai Nagara (his own work in

Malayalam Ente Shareeram Oru Nagaram) and Marethitta Vasthugalu (Marunna Vecha Vasthukkal, Misplaced Objects). Sachidanandan has himself translated notable Kannada literature into Malayalam including the Vachanas of 12th century Shaivite poet Basavanna.

The poem 'Turmeric' which was originally published in Malayalam with the title 'Manjal' is one of the Sachidanandan's most famous short poems. The poem exploring themes of globalization, Kerala's culture and the deep historical significance of turmeric as a spice, medicine and symbol linking it to everyday life. Since the poem is very culture specific words like Unniyarcha, Nagaraja, amrit, kaavu, velichappettavan will need extensive footnotes and he has tried to maintain the essence without losing any of its socio/cultural implication.

It is very true to say that it is the imagery and diction of the poem that makes "Turmeric" a serious and worthy cultural text and the thematic importance is heightened by other technical and linguistic aspects. The poem has super fine imagery which is closely related to Kerala's culture. In the first line of the poem, the poet compares "Turmeric" to "Unniyarcha"- Unniyarcha is a courageous and beautiful war heroin of North Kerala's ballads. Here it signifies that Turmeric was most admired and important things to the people who used it. Its cultural and social importance is underscored. Then we have the picture of a pale skinned beauty smuggling gold. It signifies the golden yellow colour of the Turmeric. After that we have the glimpse of Cinderella whose boots are turned gold by the magician. Then the picture of the "Kolam"- "holy design" in the courtyards during festivities and sacred days. We soon see "Serpent kings" - Nagaraja" drinking their nectar. A powerful picture comes with the presentation of the devotees piercing their cheeks with tridents and the "Oracle"- "Velichappettavan" wounding his forehead with sword. We have glimpses of the labour room, the bridal chamber and the rites of a person. Then we have the picture of the once powerful Turmeric trapped in tubes and bottles on the shelves of supermarkets to be sold as cosmetic cream.

Apart from the cultural change, this poem also talks about the impact of globalization on developing nations like India. There are many international laws are passed by developed countries for their wellbeing in the international market. As a result of laws like Patent Law and International Intellectual Property Right, many third world countries lost their control over many indigenous products. Turmeric is one among them. We use it for many purposes like religious, ritualistic, culinary and medicinal uses for hundreds of years. Now it has converted into market-oriented cosmetic cream by erasing its cultural values connected with it. It shows how a simple product like Turmeric is changed into a market oriented cosmopolitan cosmetic. The change is achieved by subtle erasure, nullification and redefinition. The poem shows how aggressively advocates of globalization market their product. For us Turmeric has many uses. But the west has reduced it into simply cosmetic cream. The poem has very short lines, but they speak volumes. Almost the entire poem describes the qualities of turmeric. But the last couplet shows how it has cultural and political implications.

The contrast between the last couplet and the rest of the poem is shocking indeed. It shows the great fall of turmeric from her imperial throne to the shelf of the supermarket to be bought by any Tom Dick and Harry who has a few bucks in his pocket. This same Turmeric was Unniyarcha, the courageous and beautiful war heroin of North Kerala ballads. She was a pale skinned beauty carrying gold. She is seen in the Kolams in the courtyards during festivities and sacred days. We soon see serpent kings drinking it for their immortality. Then we see her soothing and healing the devotees piercing their cheeks with tridents and the oracles wounding their foreheads with swords to prevent the wounded spot from getting septic. The poet calls turmeric the yellow shore of venom because is used an antidote for poison. The poet uses the phrase the cool moon of moist faces because when turmeric applied to the faces it does two things. It gives a fine colour to the face, and it also gives coolness to the face. Moonlight is bright but without heat. So is Turmeric. We see her in labour room on babies, in the chamber on the brides and in the last rites. But then in the last couplet we have an anticlimax. Suddenly we see this all-powerful Turmeric trapped in tubes and bottles on the shelves of supermarket to be sold as cosmetic cream. Anybody can pick her and take her home!

The western do this in a subtle manner by acculturation. All other cultures except the western culture are supposed to be inferior. The westerners laugh at the customs, traditions and the beliefs of the Third World Countries. The western ideology is materialistic. They measure the happiness by the criteria of owning things. It does not give any importance to spirituality and the concept of fellow beings. Sympathy and Empathy are not something they are worried about. In the name of science and technology, development and progress, they ridicule the Third World Countries and try to bring them under their dominance by propagating their ideas, philosophies, dress, food and even language.

Another important aspect of this poem is its untranslatability. On being asked to translate the poem, Sachidanandan said, I was rereading the poem and find it near-impossible to translate it into any other language since it is very culture-specific. Words like Unniyarcha, kavu. Kolam, Sougandhigam, Nagaraja and Vel would need extensive footnotes and then the charm is lost. I am just trying a literal version here. But the translation has retained its socio-cultural implications.

When he translated the poem, he consciously avoided taking extra freedom or excessive liberties just because he is the creator, striving to respect the integrity of the work as a distinct literary object. He views translation as a game of words and meanings that involves navigating cultural contexts. For him, the excitement lies in replacing images or expressions from Malayalam with those in English that may belong to completely different linguistic family.

Domestication and Foreignization are the strategies in translation, regarding the degree to which translators make a text conform to the target culture. Domestication is the strategy of making text closely conform to the culture of language being translated to, which may involve the loss of information from the source text. Foreignization is the strategy of retaining information from the source text and involves deliberately breaking the conventions of the target language to preserve its meaning. These strategies have been debated for hundreds of years, but the first person to formulate them in their modern sense was Lawrence Venuti, who introduced them to the field of translation studies in 1995 with his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*.

The translation of a poem like Manjal often requires a mix of both strategies – using Domestication for ease of understanding and Foreignization to maintain the poem's authentic cultural, emotional and sensory experience.

Domestication in Manjal: This strategy is used to make the Malayalam imagery easily understood by non – Malayalam, often English reader. It involves replacing localized terms with broader, more common equivalents that evoke similar emotions, images, often making the text feel as if it were originally written in the target language. Examples: sacred groves holy design—kolam, serpent kings – nagaraja, trident – shoolam, dancing oracle –velichappettavan etc.

Foreignization in Manjal: The poem famously refers to turmeric as the “Unniyarcha of the subsoil”. By retaining the name of “Unniyarcha” (a legendary warrior from Kerala's Vadakkan Pattukal/ ballads), the translator forces the reader to acknowledge a specific cultural hero rather than substituting her with a generic Western equivalent like Joan of Arc.

Thus, Sachidanandan certainly establishes the integrity of our cultural products through the icon of Turmeric. Turmeric is important to us economically, culturally, sociologically and ritually. The poet is telling how even our culturally important things are degraded and used for profit by the multinationals through their unjust IPR and Patent Laws.

In conclusion K Sachidanandan has made tremendous effort while translating his own Malayalam poem Manjal into English language as Turmeric. But the translation has successfully retained its socio-cultural implication.

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