

Differences in Literary Narratives Between Translation and Transcreation:

A Scrutiny of Imayam's *She & I* and *En Kathe*

Muthulakshmi S.

Research Scholar (Full Time), Reg. No. 2421117022002,

PG & Research Department of English,

Rani Anna Government College for Women, Tirunelveli.

Dr. T. Mangayarkarasi

Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of English,

Rani Anna Government College for Women, Tirunelveli.

ABSTRACT

Imayam is a prominent contemporary Tamil writer known for his realistic portrayal of rural life, and marginalized communities. *She and I* is the English translation of *En Kathe*. The novel is about Kamla, a widow who moves to a village with her two daughters and meets an unnamed man who is unemployed. He becomes obsessed with her and his one-sided love for her consumes him for a decade. He is the narrator of the novel. Imayam's writings are deeply rooted in Tamil culture with distinct language, caste dynamics and patriarchal reality. This article attempts to examine how translation and transcreation create different kinds of narratives. Translation focuses on equivalence, and accuracy but, transcreation prioritizes

recreating the spirit, emotion, and culture. Through a close analysis of dialogues, cultural references, and the protagonist's inner struggle, this paper examines how translation, and transcreation can bring the essence of Tamil culture and reality to English audience.

Keywords: Cultural equivalence, Adaptation, Cultural transfer, Gender politics.

Imayam is one among the contemporary voices of Tamil literature. His novels have been translated into English and short stories have been translated and published in collections. His writings are deeply rooted in rural lives, and lived experience of ordinary people who face the modern world and its ideology. He often exposes the realities of caste hierarchy, gendered violence and politics. His works particularly depict the social culture, practices, sensitivity, symbolism of rural lives, and marginalised communities. The novel, *She and I* is the English translation of *En Kathe*. It revolves around the life of Kamala, a widow who moves to a village along with her two daughters after the death of her husband. There she encounters an unemployed man who becomes obsessed with her. Though Kamala doesn't reciprocate his feeling, his one-sided feeling gets involved in her life for nearly a decade.

The entire narrative is structured on the man's perspective as he is the narrator. The narrative exposes his inner turmoil, loneliness and, his obsession. It explores the themes of widowhood, gendered expectation, and restriction of the life of women living in the rigid societal norms of rural areas. The cultural significance lies in the portrayal of ordinary life and subtle representation of social realities. The character's dialogues, conversation, and settings are embedded in the Tamil cultural norms and values that govern relationships and behaviour in Tamil society. The translation of such culturally embedded narrative is challenging. The challenges lie in the exact portrayal of expressions, idioms, kinship terms and specific

Tamil references without the loss of meaning in the target language i.e. English. Thus, the translator has employed both the concepts of translation and transcreation. This article examines how both translation and transcreation operates in the narrative *She and I*.

Through the analysis of dialogues, cultural references and inner turmoil, this study examines how translation and transcreation influence the representation of Tamil cultural realities. Translation refers to process of converting source text into target language while ensuring the authentic transfer of meaning, cultural content and nuances. Translation is not just word-to-word substitution. It includes the exact convey of meanings of idioms, and cultural norms. Effective translation requires linguistic knowledge on both the source and target language and cultural sensitivity to convey the original tone, style and meaning of the message. "Translation is a complex process that acts as a bridge between language and culture. Transferring texts expressed in one language to another also involves cultural transmission, In the translation process, cultural differences need to be considered just as much as grammar rules and word choice" (Ozturk).

The aim of the translation is to bring the target audience into the settings of the source text by preserving the foreign elements of the source culture and ensuring that the target audience is engaged. Here the translator is mindful in bringing their perspective and ensuring that the authenticity and integrity of the original voice is maintained. Imayam's strength lies in his raw, unpolished craftsmanship. The translator has used the approach of equivalence theory to ensure accuracy. "Does not the rain which falls in one dry place, eventually stop, clouds blow away, and the rain then falls elsewhere? That was how Kamala arrived in our village- like a shower on arid land" (Imayam 50).

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator introduces the Kamala's arrival. He states that she was meant to be somewhere but dropped there by the intervention of another factor. This description clearly shows the landscape of the village. Instead of stating that Kamala has arrived, the translator has conveyed the poetry that emerges unexpectedly from the narrator. This accuracy of the narrator's voice is essential for the understanding of the character. Shower on arid land refers not only to the physical landscape but also the impact of Kamala's arrival in his life. The arid land signifies the narrator himself and the shower signifies Kamala.

"Can an educated boy roast in this heat! Go home! Even if they did not, my three sisters would send me away saying, Go home, anna!" (7). In this dialogue, the translator had depicted the stark reality of the rural area. In rural areas of Tamil Nadu, the boys had the privilege of education and were meant for doing the elite jobs while the girls were meant for doing agricultural and household work. This conveys that patriarchy is operated not only through male dominance but also through the female compliance and consent. The narrator is the representation of the privilege that has produced nothing, while the woman is the one who sacrificed to create it. The translator has employed the strategy of foreignization: it retains the elements of foreignness of the source text to highlight the cultural and linguistic differences. "Foreignization produces something that cannot be confused with either the source-language text or a text written originally in the target language. Considers foreignizing method to be an ethnodeviant pressure on (target-language culture) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti).

In *She and I*, the translator has borrowed words that are culturally significant to the English text, rather than finding culturally equivalent terms for the Tamil cultural terms. This act is not just a linguistic decision but also a deeply ideological one. He refuses to reduce the complexities of Tamil cultural terms to

bring an easy reading for the English audience. But it depicts the translator's commitment to bring out the authenticity of Tamil culture. In Tamil culture kinship terms carry different meaning and weight. It depicts the responsibility, social standing and behaviour. "Go home, anna!" (Imayam 7). The translator has used 'Anna' and 'Thambi' instead of elder brother and younger brother. The term Anna refers not only the age but also the respect and responsibility. He must take care and guide his younger siblings. "Did you see what happened, thambi?" (Imayam 100). The term 'thambi' is a term of endearment and affection. It reflects dependency.

To represent the spaces and its cultures, the translator has borrowed terms such as 'thinnai' and 'madapalli.' The term thinnai refers to the traditional raised platform, situated in the entrance of the traditional Tamil homes. It is the area of interaction with the neighbours, strangers and the place with strong social behaviour for conversation and relaxation. It is where the gossips were shared. "Pavadai became mendicant who keep waiting for Pongal from the madapalli" (Imayam 25). The term madapalli refers to the kitchen of the temple. In most areas women were not allowed to enter or work. Because the society believed that the presence of woman inside the madapalli would make the food impure or contaminated. The translator projects the patriarchal systems through this representation.

"If a woman wailed and bemoaned like me, she would be praised as the chaste one, Kannagi, uthami, pathini" (Imayam 73). The terms kannagi, uthami, pathini reflects the social standing and societal expectations of women. Kannagi is the embodiment of virtuous women in Tamil Literature and culture. She is the protagonist of the Tamil epic, *Silapathikaram*. The mention of 'Kannagi' is not only a literary reference, but it is a moral judgement. Other terms 'uthami' and 'pathini' refers to women with chastity, virtue, and complete devotion to the family and husband. It depicts patriarchal ideology that construct the behaviour of women. By borrowing these words, the translator has retained the cultural significance, in

which a women's worth is tied to purity and wifely behaviour. "The land where I planted it is also that chandali!" (Imayam 87). The word chandali is one of the most derogatory words used to address woman of lower caste. It combines the caste contempt and the gendered violence. Retention of this word portrays the viciousness of the caste prejudice and the power of the dominant caste to dehumanize others.

The translator showcases the reality to the English audience with its raw brutality. With foreignization, the translator has achieved the authenticity in the portrayal. Each borrowed word provides the English audience with the original cultural significance, values, hierarchies and prejudices. This ensures that the narrative is deeply rooted in the culture form which it emerges from. Transcreation refers to the process of conveying meaning from source text to target language through adaptation with the intention to maintain the same tone, style and emotion. "Transcreation is the form of intercultural communication, and transcreating a text is both an act of translating as well as copywriting in that both are carried out as and, in the form, and process if rewriting an activity that contributes to constructing the image of a writer and/ or work of literature" (Katan et al.).

In the narrative, the translator has employed transcreation to ensure the better understanding and authenticity of the source text. Instead of word-to-word translation, the narrative adapts dialogues, proverbs and cultural concepts where literal translation fails to deliver intensity and significance. "From the next day, I began waiting for her like a dog waiting at the doorstep of a house where dried fish, kuzhambu was being prepared" (Imayam 8). The narrator instead of simplifying, highlights his longing and desperation through dialogues. The comparison of dog is essential to convey the feeling of the narrator towards kamala. It represents hunger, desperation and degradation. Thus, this dialogue conveys his animalistic obsession and awareness of his own degradation.

“For instance if she gave me neem seeds to eat, they tasted sweet; if she gave me hot water to drink, it was cold, This was because she was the mirror that reflected me. She was the form, I was her shadow” (Imayam 23). This dialogue expresses the psychological complexity of the narrator. Neem seed is extremely bitter which tastes sweet, and the transformation of hot to cold, depicts that the narrator is living in delusion. Kamala’s existence erases reality. The mirror in the dialogue demonstrates that the narrator’s identity is entirely dependent on Kamala’s appreciation. Without her, he stops to exist. The shadow represents his dependency on her. Through the metaphor of mirror and shadow, the translator illustrates the truth: his love or obsession results in self-annihilation. He forgets his own existence and reality and lives and experience the world only through her. Thus, the translator has employed transcreation to give deep insight into the narrator’s character and psychological turmoil that he goes through after the arrival of Kamala in his life.

Though translation and transcreation are different key approaches, they work together in balance to ensure the authentic cultural transfer. With foreignisation, the translator has made the English audience to engage with the source culture’s otherness. In retention of kinship terms, spaces, and patriarchal concepts, the narrative ensures the authentic cultural transfer of the significance of Tamil culture. On the other hand, transcreation gives the psychological depth of the narrator using comparison and metaphors. It exposes the emotional truth which literal translation may fail to do. Together, these two strategies bring out the originality of not only Imayam but also cultural specificity. Thus, the narrative states the reality of the rural Tamil and the universality of human obsession without compromising the cultural authenticity.

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