

REGIONAL PRISMS AND GLOBAL VISIONS: AN APPROACH TO GITA KRISHNANKUTTY'S TRANSLATION OF NAALUKETTU

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Abstract

It is a widely accepted fact that translation is not a mere mechanical activity of carrying across the message of the Source Language text to the Target Language Text. In today's multinational world, perseverance of national identities is of pivotal importance and translations of texts across cultures act as a linguistic bridge for global interaction. In the context of global interaction, cultural assimilation, search for roots and ethnicity, Naalukettu, the much acclaimed Malayalam novel by M.T.Vasudevan Nair abounds in its richness of cultural and social values. The plot and characters are intricately interrelated with the rich cultural inheritance of Kerala. Gita Krishnankutty in her translation of Naalukettu, has rendered poise, elegance and balance in transcreating the socio-cultural ambience of the original text. Her choice of this novel gives her scope to build a bridge across cultures, time, history, language and geography. Her success lies in her ability to create the 'equivalent effect' – the ability to create the same or similar effect on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original. This paper aims to show how the creativity and imagination of a translator enables him/her to make available to his/her readers the nuances of an alien culture.

The cultural turn taken by translation studies is related to the increasing internationalization of our world and the consequent need for better translation of key cultural texts. In today's multinational world perseverance of national identities is of pivotal importance and translations of texts across cultures act as a linguistic bridge for global interaction. According to Lawrence Venuti, "every translator should look at the translation process through the prism of culture which refracts the source language cultural norms and it is the translator's task to convey them preserving their meaning and connotations to the target language text"(Venuti,56). It is a widely accepted fact that translation is not a mere mechanical activity of carrying across the message of the Source Language text to the Target Language as the etymology suggests – *Trans*(across) and *latus*(carry). The translator as an individual has his/her own affinity, choice, creative genius, linguistic proficiency and

scholarship in the socio-cultural, historic, political and other required details of the regions of both the source language and the target language. “No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language”(Mc Gurie,14).

Culture is the “ integrated pattern of human knowledge, beliefs and behavior that is both a result of, and integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Culture thus consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies, symbols”(Mark,430).Translation helps in cultural promotion beyond being an art, craft and science. In the context of global interaction, cultural assimilation, search for roots and ethnicity, *Naalukettu*, the much acclaimed Malayalam novel by M.T.Vasudevan Nair abounds in its richness of cultural and social values. The plot and characters are intricately interrelated with the rich cultural inheritance of Kerala. It mirrors the geographical features of a small village named Kudallur, plumbs the psychological depths of the characters caught in the traumas of the gradual disintegration of the feudal structures, and describes the customs, conventions, rituals, ceremonies, festivals, dress, food, social and family structures as practiced at a certain period. The translator is a messenger who make unremitting efforts to search for equivalence in information, concepts and aesthetics. This paper aims to show how the creativity and imagination of a translator enables him/her to make available to his/her readers the nuances of an alien culture.

Gita Krishnankutty in her translation of *Naalukettu*, has rendered poise, elegance and balance in transcreating the socio-cultural ambience of the original text. Her choice of this novel gives her scope to build a bridge across cultures, time, history, language and geography. After constant consultation with the author himself, and through inquisitive queries she has tried to recreate the essence of the novel in the target language. Her success lies in her ability to create the ‘equivalent effect’ – the ability to create the same or similar effect on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original.

Translation is an interaction between cultures, a transcultural activity that which bridges the gap between cultures. “In effect one does not translate languages, one translate cultures”(Cassagrande,338). The need to communicate with the nations of the world has become indispensable for the well being and progress of mankind. Hence translation is bound to play a crucial role in bringing far-flung cultures together in the years to come. The translator’s scope of representing the cultural values of the source language depend on the type of work selected by him/her. In *Naalukettu* the story itself is reflective of the strong cultural values, family bonds and social and geographic patterns. The indigenous plants, the river, the rituals, festivals , architecture, food, dress, language, forms of greetings, kinship terms, the literary and cultural inheritance in the form of dance, literature, folk songs, references to the most popular stories and characters from the Indian classical epics are translated without any substitution of the original with the target language. For example, Ammaman, Opol, Edathi (kinship terms), Onam, Vishu, Thiruvathira (festivals), Kanji, Kannikkorka(food) Mapillas, Cherumi(caste and community), Kathakali, Kaikottikali, Thullal(dance and rituals) and also words like Bharathapuzha, Naazhi, Cheriambra, Mundu,

Pathiri, Pappadam, Muthacchi, Bhuvaneswari Pooja, Kalam Pattu, Ottam Thullal, Soorya Pooja, Pagida game, Naalukettu, Marumakkathayam, Machu, Thekkini, Uri, Patthayappura, Chellapetti, Kuruthiparampu are such terms which include layers of multiple meanings apart from their literal meaning. Semantically they are loaded with connotative values and so are capable of evoking emotional response from native readers.

The non- native speakers are intrigued by the phonemic translation of these terms and are compelled to consult the glossary, the descriptive introduction or the list of kinship terms used by the translator. The Introduction gives an elaborate explanation of the socio-cultural terms which are specific of region and language. The socio-cultural history which is inalienably blended with the story is further strengthened by the translator's Introduction as well as by the Author's note. "The reader has to constantly make an effort to respond sensitively to the details in the translated stories, which express nuances of everyday life in a particular part of India"(Holmstrom,XVIII).

The creative genius of the translator acts as an invisible mediator effecting the transmigration of the soul (essence) of *Naalukettu* to take place from the source language to the target language in a spontaneous and natural way. The introduction about the author, the society, the conventions and practices make the reader fully prepared with the equipment necessary for the final plunging into the alien ocean of an unknown cultural tradition. Most of the cultural codes are explained in the process of the delineation. The protagonist Appunni is a small boy whose inquisitive questions invite descriptive answers: *Where did you go this time, Muthaachi?* "Nowhere, child. I landed up at Vadakkepat. They had a Bhuvaneswari pooja there the day before yesterday. And yesterday, they conducted a Kalam pattu ritual at the Vazhavil temple." (Naalukettu P.20). *What all do they have for the Bhuvaneswari pooja, Muthaachi?* "Muthaachi intoned as if it were a song: Beaten rice, puffed rice, jiggery, coconuts, sweet karolappams and tanneeramritus.." Appunni's mouth began to water" (P.21) Muthaachi also gives the description of the *Naalukettu*'s architectural details. "Yes, a *naalukettu*, four wings built around a central four-pillared quadrangle" (P.21)

The Sarpam Thullal ritual is also elaborately described as witnessed by Appunni. Still the translator anticipates the difficulty of a non-native reader in having a complete emotional rapport with the events described there. As a facilitator she describes every difficult concept and term with its socio-cultural emotional value. Without imposing one's scholarship on the readers, the translator intermingles the descriptive features with the introduction to the author, region, language and culture.

Gita Krishnan Kutty informs the readers about the architecture as "*the Kerala Naalukettu(nnalukettu: four; Kettu: building or structure)*". She tells about the economic status as "*ordinarily, there are four pillars in a naalukettu. However, larger, wealthier residences have courtyard flanked by eight pillars (ettukettu:ettu meaning eight) or sometimes sixteen pillars (Pathinaru kettu:pathinaru meaning sixteen)*". Next the social status of the term is explained- "*Prosperous Nair families generally lived in Naalukettus*". The religious significance is explained further—"*The household deity resides in this room and a lamp is lit there at dusk.*"(Naalukettu,XXII).

The translator's work is to prepare the ground for the actual interaction between the alien cultures. Yet at times the social history will remain incomplete without the relevant political history and the acts of the government. While describing Nair marriages known as Sambandams, Gita Krishnankutty provides us with the details of Nair Acts right from 1912 to 1933 so that the slow changes in the socio-political history can be understood by the reader. Serpent worship is a religious practice and this novel includes a few aspects of the worship like how the colourful kalam is prepared and how the virgins are dressed. Chapter 2 of the novel describes the actual scene of action. Yet the translator still has some more relevant details which she gives in the Introduction. In this way the author and the translator become complementary to each other.

Malayalam months, festivals, food, rituals, dances, kinship terms, games, exclamations are given in phonemic translation and this helps non-native readers not only to understand the culture but also to learn some important terms in the source language. The description of the cultural and social traditions are rendered with historical background, religious importance, minute details of ritual performances and the emotional bond that these words create in native speakers.

While the author has the responsibility of constructing a plot, developing the characters, expressing the theme, controlling the diction and style, the translator is free from controlling the plot, theme, character, and thought. The aesthetic selection of diction, syntax and style is still in the translator's domain though with some compelling confinements regarding register, dialect and a limited methodical processes of translation. Within this predetermined boundary, the translator recreates the original work. Here in Gita Krishnankutty's translation, any non-native reader gets fully acquainted with the traditions followed in Kerala by the Nair community. Through this work of translation, the spice and flavor of Kudallur assertively breaks the confining linguistic, spacial and temporal barriers to reach a vast number of non-native readers.

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