



# ACHIEVING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRITY THROUGH TRANSLATING LITERARY TEXTS FROM TAMIL TO ENGLISH – A STUDY BASED ON THE SHORT STORY COLLECTION “SUBAVAM”

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## Abstract

This research was undertaken to build social and cultural integrity among people by translating literary texts through the pragmatic method. It also aims to provide suggestions for an effective translation of literary pieces from Tamil to English. As this research employs the empirical method, qualitative methodology is adopted. Under the qualitative methodology, the study is carried out according to two types of methods: comparative and descriptive. The comparative method is applied to compare the perceptive source text, three main short stories from the book “SUBAVAM” with the target text which was translated into English. The descriptive method is applied to carry out the research by describing Jaffna Tamil culture's specific linguistic norms and cultural aspects. Since the sourcebook is written in the Jaffna vernacular, there are numerous dialects, slang, cultural terms, and religious terms. Therefore, the researcher analyzed social, cultural, and religious aspects of literary translation in terms of inducing integrity and harmony by disclosing the target language's real sense, which evokes the readers to feel the originality of the source text. This study also explores some problems identified during the process of literary translation in terms of exposing the originality of the texts. To make literary translation effective, the researcher provides some suggestions and techniques and emphasizes that translators should have high proficiency in both languages as well as both cultures. Through this practice, social and cultural integrity can be attained beyond the language barrier. By undertaking this research in a well-guided method, the researcher has achieved the hypothesis and dispelled the misconception, literary texts are technically untranslatable and through literary translation, it is possible to create integrity and harmony among the multi-ethnic people in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** *challenges and issues, literary translation, social and cultural integrity, techniques, and strategies*

## Introduction

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, the field of translation has emerged as one of the leading fields in the world. As a result of this, there are many subcategories in that field. Among them, literary translation plays a major role as it conveys various cultures worldwide. Culture is the sum total of ideas, customs, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of a particular people or society at a particular period of time. According to the researcher's perspective, translation and culture are intimately connected. Translation means,



translating ideas and messages between languages. Here we can see that translation and languages are interconnected. Each language across the world has its own unique culture. Thus, language and culture are also interconnected. Each language has its own distinctive culture and exposes cultural differences among nations through literature. Thus, translating literary texts offers opportunities to understand different communities' cultural norms, social values, and religious beliefs, which may lead to peace-building within multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious nations like Sri Lanka. As translating literary texts seems to be an effective medium to divulge social harmony, this research focuses on the short story collection “Subavam” originally written in Tamil and translated into English. The aim of this study is to promote social and cultural integrity for harmony and reconciliation nationally and globally.

### **Literature Review**

Chaal (2019) put forward translators should consider the sociolinguistic aspects of language and aspects related to discourse consideration and should be aware of how these concepts are manifested in each culture. Huang (2011) proposed good literary translation must reproduce something of the source text's style; otherwise, the distinguishing literariness in the original will not be conveyed in the target text.

Quach (2019) indicated more than anyone, the author is the one who creates and understands the book the most. So, a discussion with the author is a good reference for your literary translation task. Lahiri (2017) indicated that one problem faced by the prose translator is finding terms in his or her own language that are as faithful as possible to the meaning of certain words in SL.

Haque (2012) put forward prose translation is a literary creativeness where the written word of one language is re-created in another. It is an inherent idea that the translation of poetry is very problematic, yet we have to agree that translators also have to face many difficulties when translating prose. Postan (2020) suggested translating prose seems to be much easier than poetry, but it has its own subtle challenges that make it difficult to perform and maintain. Wright (2016) indicated literary translation remains an inadequately compensated practice and its practitioners almost inevitably rely on additional forms of employment, of which academia remains one, to earn their living.

### **Methodology**

As this research employs the empirical method, qualitative methodology is adopted. Under the qualitative methodology, the study is carried out according to two types of methods: comparative and descriptive. The comparative method is applied to compare the perceptive source text, three main short stories from the book “SUBAVAM” with the target text which was translated into English. The descriptive method is applied to carry out the research by describing the problems of literary translation



and the ways of overcoming those problems by utilizing certain techniques and strategies. The data collected for the study is mainly classified into two main groups: primary data and secondary data.

Primary data consist of the source text, “SUBAVAM”, the translated short stories and the discussion with the source language author regarding the subject matters and the real intention of the author. It also includes some information gathered from literary field experts. Secondary data include the references of books, articles, professional journals, and research related to literary translation on the internet and the short story collections translated by the mentor.

## **Results and Discussions**

Each language across the world has its own unique culture. Thus, language and culture are also interrelated. Each language has its own exclusive culture and cultural differences among the nations as well. In most cases, we find a country having several cultural diversities. e.g.: Sri Lanka, India. Besides, slight dissimilarities can be seen within a single culture. For example, if we consider Tamil culture, there are minute differences between the cultures of Jaffna Tamils and upcountry Tamils. Thus, cultures are rooted in a particular society based on the geographical aspects, climate, landscape, educational and occupational qualification of people, social strata of people, and so forth. Therefore, it is very difficult to relocate them to another language. These differences impede effective translation because of varying conceptions of reality occasioned by languages. In order to transform the written text into understandable, expressive, and unhindered the translator has to solve the cultural problems. A number of details are included under the heading, cultural problems.

### **Social cultural terms**

Sociocultural is a term related to or involving a combination of social and cultural factors, which means common traditions, habits, patterns, and beliefs in a population group. It is also used to describe the differences between groups of people relating to the social class and culture in which they live. Unless otherwise, the translator has a high proficiency in the cultures of the languages he translates, he/she cannot translate the sociocultural terms. As the author of the source text is from Jaffna, the researcher encountered numerous sociocultural terms.

1. Source text: koviyar (கோவியர்;)  
Target text: koviyar (one of the castes found in Jaffna)
2. Source text: Vellalar (வெள்ளாளர்;)  
Target text; Vellalar (one of the high castes found in Jaffna)

Caste system is predominant in Jaffna. Though the researcher has ideas about some castes found in Jaffna, she has doubts in their precedence. Therefore, she knows that these proper



names should be transliterated, but doesn't know how to identify the hierarchy description. Thus, at first the researcher transliterates those names and gives description as one of the castes found in Jaffna. But mentor advised to give description for "Vellalar" (வெள்ளாளர்;) as one of the high castes found in Jaffna. Through this, the readers can see the difference between them. By giving proper descriptive equivalents, the researcher overcomes from this problem.

1. Periya mama (பெரிய மாமா) – periya mama (mother's elder brother or father's elder sister's husband).
2. Sinna mama (சின்ன மாமா)- sinna mama (mother's younger brother or father's younger sister's husband)
3. Periyamma (பெரியம்மா) – periyamma (mother's elder sister or father's elder brother's wife)
4. Thangachi / thangai – (தங்கச்சி / தங்கை) - Thangachi / thangai (younger sister)

These are kinship terms in Tamil. As we already know there is no much kinship terms in English like Tamil. At first the researcher translated "Periya mama" (பெரிய மாமா) as big uncle, "Sinna mama" (சின்ன மாமா) as small uncle "Periyamma" (பெரியம்மா) as aunty and "Thangachi / thangai" (தங்கச்சி / தங்கை) as younger sister. Later when the researcher read some short story translation, in those books those kinship terms are transliterated and the relationships were given in the glossary. And mentor also advised that the main purpose of literary translation is to convey the social system and culture of a particular community or nation to another community or nation. Therefore, it is better to transliterate the words and give description in the glossary. In order to show the kinship terms of Tamil people, the researcher over comes this problem by transliterating the terms and giving descriptive equivalents.

### **Religious terms**

Religion means the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. As the source text is written by the Jaffna author, Hindu religious terms are often appeared in the source text. Let us focus how the researcher changes into English speaking world.

Example – 01

Source text: Patta Vemban than vanthu uthiththirukkiran (பட்டவேம்பான் தான் வந்து உதித்திருக்கிறான்);

Target text: Patta Vemban has been born (one of the tutelary deities in the village)

This is the name of one of the tutelary deities in village. In fact, it was a new word to the researcher as it is a tutelary deity. Tutelary deities differ from village to village. Then the researcher got to know about this from one of her friends. After that the researcher transliterates



the word and gives description as one of the deities in village. But mentor corrected said that “Patta Vemban” (பட்ட வேம்பான்;) is not the usual god we pray. He is a tutelary deity. Therefore, by giving proper description, the researcher overcomes from the problem

### Idioms

An idiom is a phrase or expression that typically presents a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase; but some phrases become figurative idioms while retaining the literal meaning of the phrase. Idioms are peculiar to a people or to a district, community or class. They are also syntactical, grammatical, or structural form peculiar to a language. Idioms are another knotty issue in translation. They are rooted in the cultural or social milieu of the community and it will be very difficult to relocate to a completely different language. In the source text, there are some idioms that are rooted in the Tamil community. Now let's focus on how the researcher transfers to English speaking community.

Example - 01

Source text: Saathippermai kottuthal (சாதிப்பெருமை கொட்டுதல்; )

Target text: beating caste trumpet

As idioms are rooted in a particular language and society, finding equivalents in another language is very difficult. When the researcher searched for the equivalent, there was no proper equivalent. But researcher already knows that there is an idiom “Saathippermai kottuthal” (சாதிப்பெருமை கொட்டுதல்;) and the equivalent for the idiom in English is beating one's own trumpet. “Saathippermai kottuthal” (சாதிப்பெருமை கொட்டுதல்) is also little related to “sonthapparayai adiththal” (சொந்தப்பறையை அடித்தல்;). Therefore she added a word caste in the idiom beating own trumpet and coined a new idiom as beating caste trumpet.

Example - 02

Source text – Aaniyadichcha mathiri (ஆணியடிச்ச மாதிரி)

Target text - without moving

Example - 03

Source text: Eeralaip pizhilntheduththal (ஈரலைப் பிழிந்தெடுத்தல்);

Target text: too much of emotional hurt

Example – 04

Source text: Pattum padatha pokku (பட்டும் படாத போக்கு)

Target text: non-committal tendency

Example - 05

Source text: Kattupettiththanam (கட்டுப்பெட்டித்தனம்;)

Target text: grip



Example - 06

Source text: Vallisaik kathaththal (வள்ளிசாய்க் கதைத்தல்;)

Target text: glib talk

### Proverbs

Proverbs are simple and insightful, traditional saying that express a perceived truth based on common senses or experiences. Almost every culture has its own unique proverbs. Some proverbs exist in more than one language because people borrow them from languages and cultures they are in contact with. Like idioms, proverbs too are rooted in a particular culture and it is very challenging to transfer them into a new culture. To properly translate a proverb requires several steps, and it often requires a translator to delve deeper into the culture of the source and target languages. Now let's focus how the researcher transfers the Tamil proverbs into English.

Example - 01

Source text: Kaalam kaniya kovam thaniyum (காலம் கனிய கோவம் தணியும்;)

Target text: time will soothe anger.

As there is no equivalent proverb for this proverb, the researcher translates the proverb with descriptive equivalent.

### Dialect

Dialect is a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group. A dialect includes not just pronunciations, but also one's general vocabulary and grammar. Each language has many different dialects. For example, if we take Tamil language, there are many Tamil dialects in Sri Lanka such as Jaffna Tamil, upcountry Tamil, Batticaloa Tamil, Colombo Tamil and Puttalam Tamil. As the source text is written in Jaffna vernacular the researcher faced some difficulties while translating Jaffna dialects into English.

- I. Sadangu seithirukkinai (சடங்கு செய்திருக்கினை) – they are married  
In tamil “sadangu” (சடங்கு) actually means, puberty ceremony.
- II. Nalla vallisaik kathaikkira (நல்ல வள்ளிசாய்க் கதைக்குற) - you and your glib talk
- III. Angu aal silamanillai (அங்கு ஆள் சிலமனில்லை) – there was no sign of anyone.

As these are dialects, the researcher translates them with written English. So that any type of target reader can read and enjoy the taste of short stories.

### Slang

Slang is a type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people. Slang is an informal nonstandard variety of speech which consists of newly coined and rapidly changing



words and phrases. The main difference between dialect and slang is that slang is distinguished by its vocabulary whereas dialect indicates differences in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. As the source text is a short story collection written in Jaffna vernacular, there are slangs that are specific to social groups of Jaffna. Let's focus how researcher brings those slangs in English.

- I. Naakku valaichchal (நாக்கு வளைச்சல்;) - insulting
- II. Aarathu? (ஆரது?) – who is that?
- III. Pisaththal (பிசத்தல்) - babble
- IV. Mandu (மண்டு) - gulp
- V. Sadangu seithal (சடங்கு செய்தல்;) - marrying
- VI. Peeththal vangeesa magimai (பீத்தல் வங்கீச மகிமை) – bragging about ancestral greatness
- VII. Vadugan (வடுகன்;)– an outcast
- VIII. Ayarthu pothal (அயர்ந்து போதல்;)– drifting into a doze
- IX. Savangaaviyal (சவங்காவிடல்;) – people who carry dead bodies

These are used in the Jaffna community. So, if the translates translate literally, they will not bring out the actual meaning. Therefore, the translator translates sense-for-sense with descriptive equivalents.

### **Analyzing the contextual problems**

As language is a way to see and understand the world, translation is the vehicle of our ideas, thoughts, and perspectives of our world all around the world. Many people believe that translation is an easy process; all you have to do is change words from the source text into the equivalent words of a target text. However, this is not true since some phrases if translated literally without considering its context. Translation is a very complicated process which demands much preparedness. When it comes to translation, context is really important. By context what is meant is the entire environment in which the word or sentence is expressed or stated. The context influences the meaning of a phrase or sentence. It is linked to the environment in which the communication takes place. For a perfect translation, it is important to let the translators know the context of the text, which have provided. Understanding the exact context is the key to an efficient translation. Therefore, if the translator fails to understand the context, he / she will face contextual problems.

### **Finding correct equivalents**

In the translation process, choosing the correct equivalents according to the context is the major problem for the translator. In fact, the context is the amalgamation of idea, society and culture. Especially in literary translation, as the authors of source texts are from a different community and a different ethnic group, it is very difficult to understand every word that has been used. And it is also very difficult to find out the equivalents for most of the word as they carry specific meaning according to the context. Therefore, it is the translator's duty to understand the context thoroughly and then translate.

Example – 01



Source text: Vasu paavam (வசு பாவம்;)

Target text: poor Vasu.

While translating the above phrase, if the translator translates the word “paavam” (பாவம்) as sin, it will ruin the translation. Here the translator has to choose the word “poor” according to the context. Likewise, if she translates as “Vasu is poor”, it will be meant as Vasu is financially inadequate. Therefore, the translator completes the sentence as “poor Vasu” in order raise the same expression.

Example – 02

Source text: Ithu paavam sariyilla (இது பாவம் சரியில்ல)

Target text: “This is sin, not good”

While translating the above phrase, if the translator translates the word “paavam” (பாவம்) as poor, it will ruin the translation. Here the translator has to choose the word sin according to the context.

### **Overcoming the cultural level problems**

Under the cultural level problem, the researcher faces problems in translating sociocultural terms, religious terms, idioms, dialects, and slang from Tamil to English. These items are rooted in a particular language and culture. Therefore, relocating them to a totally different language and culture is very difficult. Very few of them have equivalents in English. In order to transform the written text into understandable, expressive, and unhindered the translator has to solve the cultural problems. In order to solve the cultural problems; the translator utilizes some techniques and strategies. In most cases, the researcher transliterates the word in Tamil into English and gives descriptive equivalents in the glossary. Besides, by adding something, omitting something, coining new terms and phrases, transferring the terms with the synonyms of the equivalents, and modulating she could overcome the cultural problems.

### **Overcoming the contextual problems**

Under the contextual problem, the researcher could not find appropriate equivalents. Further, most of the terms are written in Jaffna vernacular, the researcher could not relate the meaning of the word with the context. After clearing the doubts from the supervisor and Jaffna people, by utilizing some techniques and strategies such as adding and transferring the terms with the synonyms of the equivalents she could overcome the contextual problems. Although the researcher encounters challenges in translating the source text, “SUBAVAM” from Tamil to English, the researcher overcame those challenges by utilizing appropriate techniques and strategies. Techniques are common to all translators all around the world whereas strategies differ from translator to translator. In accordance with that, according to translation scholar Newmark’s theory, the researcher uses borrowings, literal translation, transposition, dynamic equivalence, and modulation as techniques and addition, omission, and coining new terms as strategies.





## Conclusion and Contributions

As this study aims to build social and cultural integrity among the multi-cultural community through literary translation, this study also addresses some problems and challenges encountered in translating literary text from Tamil to English. By undertaking this research in a well-guided method, the researcher has achieved the aim and dispelled the misconception, literary texts are technically untranslatable. Researches on the problems in translating literary text from Tamil to English are comparatively limited. The findings of the research will not only help to build integrity among people and also help the students of Translation Studies and future researchers to study the problems in literary translation and techniques and strategies, utilized to overcome the problems and to motivate them to do literary translation from Tamil to English in future

To provide appropriate literary and other types of translation without any misinterpretation, the researcher would like to share that every translator should follow. They are:

Before undertaking any kind of translation, the translator should have a high proficiency in both languages he / she translates. Because, translation does not only mean the conversion of words but also many other factors such as semantics, syntax, and culture.

Having high proficiency in two languages is not enough for better translation. The translator should also be aware of the cultures he is dealing with. He should study the tradition, customs, beliefs, behaviors and attitudes of the people in the particular cultures.

There are several dialects and slang in a language. Dialects and slang are used by a single community in a language. They are given priority in literary texts. Therefore, if a translator is going to do a literary translation, he/she should be able to understand and transfer it into the target language.

Stylistic devices play a major role in translation, especially in literary translation. Without them, a literary text is not beautiful. As they are also connected to cultures, they differ from language to language. Therefore, the translator should have a deep understanding of the usage of stylistic devices and should know how to transfer them in the target language related to the target culture.

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