

**“WHEN CIRCLES ARE MADE SQUARES AND SQUARES MADE
CIRCLES” : TRANSLATING KOSLA AND KAALAM**

Chilkhe Ganesh Nagorao
Research Scholar
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad

Minu Susan Koshy
Research Scholar
The English and Foreign Languages University
Hyderabad

ABSTRACT

Translation is, in a way, transference of creativity in its various forms-linguistic, literary, cultural-from one person to another, from one culture to another and from one discourse to another. Translation of literary texts has long been in vogue, carried out mainly with the aim of acquainting the TL (Target Language) readers with the SL (Source Language) text. In the Indian context, translation of works from regional languages to English has come to be of interest to academicians, taking into consideration the dominance of English in the socio-cultural reality not only of scholars, but also of the educated middle-classes across the country as well as abroad. Marathi and Malayalam literature have contributed greatly to the oeuvre of Indian regional writing. In this paper, we attempt to delve into the translations of two of the best modern novels in these literatures- *Kosla* by Balchandra Nemade and *Kaalam* by MT Vasudevan Nair. *Kosala*, was translated by Sudhakar Marathe as *Cocoon* in 1997. Various methods have been adopted by Marathe in the translation of this piece of modern Marathi literature. Marathe’s translation of *Kosla* embodies various theories of translation. So does *Kaalam* by M.T. The winner of the Sahitya Academy Award, *Kaalam* was translated into English by Gita Krishnankutty, who retained the original title of the work. As mentioned before, this paper intends to explore the nuances of the translations as undertaken by Krishnankutty and Marathe. As with any other translated work, much has been lost in the process of translation. At times, the regional flavor is lost, inaccurate words are used, arbitrary additions and deletions are made. But much has been “gained” as well. And this holds

true especially when it comes to the clarity of ideas and at times the depiction of the emotional state of the characters. The paper thus attempts to locate *Kaalam* and *Cocoon* within the praxis of translation in all its nuances.

“It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language that is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.”

— Walter Benjamin

Translation is, in a way, transference of creativity in its various forms- linguistic, literary, cultural-from one person to another, from one culture to another and from one discourse to another. It is perhaps the most effective way of communicating across cultures. Translation of literary texts has long been in vogue, carried out mainly with the aim of acquainting the TL (Target Language) readers with the SL (Source Language) text. In the Indian context, translation of works from regional languages to English has come to be of interest to academicians, taking into consideration the dominance of English in the socio-cultural reality not only of scholars, but also of the educated middle-classes across the country as well as abroad. Marathi and Malayalam literature have contributed greatly to the oeuvre of Indian regional writing. In this paper, we attempt to delve into the translations of two of the best modern novels in these literatures- *Kosla* by Balchandra Nemade and *Kaalam* by MT Vasudevan Nair.

Kosala, was translated by Sudhakar Marathe as *Cocoon* in 1997. Various methods have been adopted by Marathe in the translation of this piece of modern Marathi literature. Marathe’s translation of *Kosla* embodies various theories of translation. So does *Kaalam* by M.T. The winner of the Sahitya Academy Award, *Kaalam* was translated into English by Gita Krishnankutty, who retained the original title of the work. As mentioned before, this paper intends to explore the nuances of the translations as undertaken by Krishnankutty and Marathe. As with any other translated work, much has been lost in the process of translation. At times, the regional flavor is lost, inaccurate words are used, arbitrary additions and deletions are made. But much has been “gained” as well. And this holds true especially when it comes to the clarity of ideas and at times the depiction of the emotional state of the characters. The paper thus attempts to locate *Kaalam* and *Cocoon* within the praxis of translation in all its nuances.

The translations adhere to the three principles outlined by Alexander Tytler-they give complete transcripts of the idea of the Malayalam or Marathi versions, the style is the same and they have the ease of original works. The translations are both communicative and semantic. In both the texts, while trying to convey to us the exact meaning that the author intends, the translator also attempts to produce the same effect on the readers as the original work had on the source language audience.

Dynamic equivalence method, according to Eugene Nida, is “The quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors”(22). In other words, it attempts to find the closest meaning of the original text. This method is based on the equivalent

effect. Throughout the text, the translator interprets and modifies the colloquial expressions, sentences, phrases and words in the novel to make the foreign reader comfortable with the Marathi socio-cultural scenario. Pandurag Sangvikar says: “*aani me amachya vargatta cheshtecha vishay*”. In the target language, it is translated as ‘And me! My lankiness was a cause of derision for the class. Instead of doing a word-for-word translation, the translator has succeeded in finding the closest meaning of the line. Similarly when the protagonist Pandurang speaks about his dreams and connects them with the phrase “*kinva asahi nahi*”, Sudhakar Marathe gives a different translation of this phrase after each of Pandurang’s dreams. In some places, it is translated as “or may be not like that” and in some places as “or perhaps not even like this” and yet another time as “or not like this either.” So the modification of the same phrase achieves equivalent meaning each time it gets repeated.

Some expressions are very much cultural and language-oriented and the translator achieves the equivalent meaning by paraphrasing the sentence. For example, the Marathi sentence “*Apli jirlyach Ichalkarinjekarakadun aahmla samajl*” is paraphrased as “That tables had been turned thus we learned from ichalkaranjekar himself.” Another good example of paraphrasing is the translation of “*panjoba garajle, navryala aare turre kartes*” as “great grandfather’s voice roared-dare you speak to your own husband with such disrespect.”

Another excellent use of the dynamic method can be stressed in the translation of Sanskrit slokas and some poetic lines. Pandurang describes his friend Giridhar as “*jive parameshwaradhin hoave*” which is translated as “A soul must in Godhead surrender.” The use of word ‘Godhead’ is synonymous with the Christian trinity. This points to the translator’s efforts to make the target reader comfortable by giving an equivalent meaning with which he/she can identify. Similarly the translation of the lyrics of the song “*jalto patang tyacha jyotis dosh ka re*” is worth admiring. It is translated as “The moth claims the flame, why do you then blame the flame?” This line is difficult even for the source language readers to understand. But the translator has modified the structure and the meaning of the line, which makes the reading easier for the target audience. Similarly, the famous line in a Marathi poem “*ek tutari dya maj aanuni*” is translated as “bring me trumpet.” The protagonist and his friends make a parody of this line as “*ek mutari dein aanuni funkshil ji*”, which is translated as “bring me strumpet.” The meaning of the Marathi parody is quite different from the translated one though the translator has succeeded in making the parody using the meaning closest to the original. It’s not necessary to do a word-for-word translation that might not communicate the meaning to the target readers.

In *Kaalam* as well, we see Krishnankutty using the dynamic equivalence method, also called paraphrasing or free translation. We can see her adding or deleting some words or phrases or even sentences to add to the effect of the book or to bring it closer to the socio-cultural reality of the target audience. For example, in the very first page, we see the translator writing “rough country road” (1) for what in Malayalam is called “*naaduvazhi*” (7). While for the SL readers, *naaduvazhi* conveys in itself the roughness of the path, the translator adds the adjective ‘rough’ for the sake of the target audience unacquainted with unpaved paths. Again, while MT uses “*illam*” quite often without specifying the ownership of the *illam*, in the English text, it is always “Unni Namboodiri’s *illam*”. In the case of the former, it is already understood that the dominant Namboodiri family to which Sethu’s family owes allegiance is that particular *illam* close to their house. This particular socio-cultural fact may not be known to the target audience, who may not be, in the first place acquainted with the Namboodiri-Nair co-existence in Kerala. Krishnankutty translates “*Rotary cub angangalude bharyamar shucheekaranavaarathil choolukal*

pidichunilkkunna chithrathil avarayirunnu mumbil” (209) as “...standing with a group of Rotarian wives wielding brooms during the clean-the-city week” (183). The former seems to convey the admiration-cum-contempt of the small-town boy for club-life, while the translation, which may be meant for a club-going elite omits this piece of information. Once again, Rajettan asks Acid Raman what kind of liquor he has: “*Enthadollathu? Therattayo navasaro?*” (206), indicating the strength of the liquor. This is a very colloquial expression, which is omitted in the TL text for the sake of the English audience.

Paraphrasing is used in quite a few instances by Krishnankutty. For example, MT writes : “*Avide kuthazhiyude nerku thalavechu kidannal sukhamanu. Pakshe, venal thudangiyal amma avideyanu kidappu-rathriyum pakalum*” (9). This is translated as “It was pleasant to lie with his head against the railings, where Amma slept during the summer” (3). Such paraphrasing occurs also when the narrator talks about Cheriamma venting her frustration on Padmu, and also while describing the rains in Chapter 1.

Formal translation method, known as “word-for-word” translation, “focuses attention on the message itself in both form and content...which claims to allow the target reader to understand as much of the SL context as possible.” This is seen quite a lot in *Cocoon*, but not much in *Kaalam*. For example, in *Cocoon*, Deshmukh, Pandurang’s friend, says that, “*violin shikun mulina jinku*” which is translated as “I shall learn to play violin and conquer girls.” In this example, the word ‘conquer’ is an example of word-for-word translation. Instead of ‘conquer’, the translator should have used ‘impress’. Another instance of formal translation is when Pandurang’s friend says that “*mala dukh zal aahe*” which is translated as “I have experienced pain.” It should simply have been “I’m sad.” Therefore the word-for word translation does not convey the original meaning of the word or sentence. In the second chapter, we read, “*tu ithe aalyvar tula jevan milt na?*” which is translated as “when you come here, you get your dinner, don’t you?” The word *jevan* can be lunch or dinner. Hence the word ‘dinner’ in the translation may not be suitable. It would have been better had it been ‘meal’ or just ‘food’. Again, “*varma eknadarit bhampak prani. tasntas mulijaval ubha rahun gul kadhat aastana disayach*” is translated as “in short Varma was a goony sort of creature-hour after hour he could be seen hanging about with girls, gassing about-churning jaggery as we might say.” In this line, the phrase “churning jiggery” is translated directly from the Marathi, which leads the sentence to mean that Varma was impressing girls.

The translator is bound to face certain constraints in the translation process. Sudhakar Marathe has done justice in overcoming some cultural constraints. It is difficult to convey the meaning of some culture-specific terms to the target audience. In such cases, the translator has to be very clear in his work. For example we read “*ti aamchyakade balantpanasthi aali, tehva me zalo hoto*”, which is translated as “she came to us, as was the custom, to have her first baby. At that time was already born.” In a word-for-word translation this meaning would not be clear. For such cultural issues, the translator has to paraphrase it in such a way that the foreign reader will be satisfied with its meaning. Such a phenomenon occurs when he talks about his friend Giridhar. There he says “*mag shilinganala nave kore vas sutlele kapde ghalun giridhar swami sabhyapane aamchyasobat sona chorayala*”, which is translated as, “Then on Dessara day, like any respectable person, in his new-smelling clothes, Giridhar would go out with us to steal the ‘gold’ leaves of the Apta tree across the borders of our village, according to our custom, as offering to our elders.” On Dessarah, according to custom people go to get the leaves of a particular tree called the Apta which they give to elders and seek blessings. This cultural aspect

ran under another.” Another example of sounds is noticeable where the protagonist tells about bullfight. He says in Marathi, “*pan dulkyalachya redyala kay vatal, ta tya chhotya redyyach kapal fakt hunun to tabdtob bhirrr magachy bajula palu gela.*” This is translated in English as, “But goodness knows what Dhulkya’s bull felt-for he merely sniffed the little bull’s forehead, turned tail and ran away-b-r-r-r-r-r.” So ‘sarkan’ and ‘bhirrrr’ are translated using the word-for-word translation method.

Also, in the Marathi text, the translator’s additions have a positive impact on the translation. For example, Pandurang says: “*kahi utsah nahi, kahi hurup nahi.*” It is translated as “not a bit of enthusiasm, no verve, no freshness”. In this sentence, “no freshness” is an addition. Similarly, when the protagonist talks about his dreams, he says, “*pan he ranomal pasrlele he mhje tukde ektr aale pahije*”, which is translated as “But these fragments, scattered all over the countryside, hence got to come together, they MUST.” Here, ‘they MUST’ is an addition. In these two examples, “no freshness” and capital “MUST” indicates the psychological condition of the protagonist. On the other hand, in *Kaalam*, the additions lead to a loss in the essence of the work. For example, when Menon asked Sethu who had come to visit Mrs. Lalitha Srinivasan in the absence of her husband, Sethu replies: “Wilson” (210) in the Malayalam version, while in the translation, it is “Wilson Mudalali!” (183). The sarcasm and resentment in Sethu’s voice is lost with such kind of a hierarchy created by the translation. It is notable here that “Wilson Mudalali” is an Englishman. The translator’s prejudices can be seen clearly here- perhaps the colonial mentality that the colonizer should always be addressed as ‘Sahib’ or ‘Mudalali’- as somebody superior. The translator’s reluctance to use so-called ‘vulgar’ Malayalam is evident when she omits Rajettan’s question as to whether Acid Raman has “theratta or navasaram”! Again, we see Sethu asking Menon if Wilson is a “sahib” (181) in the English version. In Malayalam, foreigners, especially white men, are called ‘sayyip’, a derivation from ‘sahib’. ‘Sahib’ is almost never used in the language. If the translator had not been the holder of a Doctorate in English from one of India’s best universities, she most probably would not have been aware of the etymological roots of ‘sayyip, and hence the word ‘sayyip’ itself would have appeared in the translation as well, thereby conveying the Malayali way of speaking in a better way. Also, a drunk Rajettan calls Sethu a “Veeyekkaran”(180), which is translated as “BA fellow”. Rajettan’s saying “oru veeyekkaran” has a sarcastic tone to it, while in the translation, this element is lost.

Another drawback of the translation is that it fails to convey the Anglicized nature of Mrs. Lalitha Srinivasan and others who belong to the elite class, including Sethu. In the Malayalam work, this is done when the author inserts English phrases and sentences in between. Thus, Mrs. Srinivasan talks in half-Malayalam, half-English, Sethu comes up with random English phrases....In the translation, this is definitely not possible and thus, the representation of the Anglicized elite of postcolonial India suffers.

Both the translators fail in using or juggling with the narrative person and pronouns, unlike the authors. In *Cocoon*, for example, the first word is ‘me’- ie, the accusative case, when in fact, it should have been the nominative ‘I’. The novel is supposed to start with “I, Pandurang Sangvikar. Today, for instance, I am twenty five.” Instead it starts with “‘Me’, Pandurang Sangvikar” . The translator might have wished to give the Marathi flavor at beginning of the novel. In Marathi ‘me’ is nominative case. But in English, it is accusative and hence the translation gives the the target reader a wrong version. Now lets take the case of *Kaalam*. In Part Three , Madhavan is the narrator, and hence, in the Malayalam version, his thought processes are

simply put forth without the use of pronouns, or without specifying him as the subject of sentences. But in the English text, the translator writes: “Madhavan got down from the platform...”, thus subverting the author’s intention of projecting Madhavan as the narrator. Also, the translator uses “He” in the places where she should have used “I”. Sethu says: “Enikku mandahasikkan vayya. Chirikkumbol ente mukham kooduthal vikrithamayitheerunnu”(217). Here the first person narration is used. In the TL text, it is translated as “He felt that he could no longer smile, that *his* face looked more distorted when *he* tried to do so” (189). Again the author’s intention of giving Sethu the vantage point is sabotaged.

Drawbacks abound in both the translations. In the first chapter of *Cocoon*, we come across the sentence where he talks about his reading of the Gita. He says: “*tya veli me avantar vachan thodac kel.*” This is translated in English as “during that time I did very required reading.” In this line, the word ‘*avantar*’ means ‘extra’ or ‘additional’ but the translator has used ‘required’, which changes the meaning of the sentence completely. Again, we see Pandurang’s discussion with his friend. The protagonist says: “*AAai bap naste tar aapnhi nasto*”, which is translated as “no father, no mother-ergo NO ME!” This clause can be translated as “If parents do not exist, neither would we”. Similar syntactic problems can be seen in some other sentences too. For example, when he talks about his opinion about rats, he says in Marathi, “*undarabbadal maz mat pidhyan pidhya changl nahi.*” It is translated as, “About rats my opinion has not been good for-oh-generations-?” In this sentence the hyphen and exclamation mark are not needed. The Marathi sentence carries neither pause nor question. The same problematization of syntax is observed when he speaks about the friend of the person who went with him to Puna. In Marathi it is, “*aani kay, tyach kay chalay? Mhanun nighun jaych.*” This sentence is translated as, “and saying to me, how’s ‘HE’ doing, go away.” This sentence does not sound good and fails to convey the original meaning. To add to this, the translator makes some sentences a little complicated. For example, Pandurang’s uncle says in Marathi: “*Pan F.Y. lach drop gheu nko mhnaje zal-as mhanale*”. This is translated as, “But don’t take drop like Tilak from the examination in your very first year, see-he said.” The sentence has no connection to Tilak’s photo which has been mentioned before. The sentence would have been better as “but don’t drop your studies in first year only-he said”. Another example of poor translation can be seen in the English rendering of a Marathi poem. It goes in Marathi as “*gagani phire ghar tila devacha shejar.*” This is translated as, “the kite hovers in the sky, in God’s neighborhood.” In this sentence, ‘ghar’ means ‘eagle’, but the translator has used ‘kite’ which is not an accurate rendering. To add to this, some unnecessary omissions are observed in the translation. In the Marathi version, words like ‘*udarnarth*’, which means ‘for instance’ or ‘for example’, and ‘*vagaire*’, which means ‘etc’, so on and so forth, are used in every other sentence. In some contexts, these words have been omitted. For example, Pandurang says that, “*ai ghabarli, pan vadil khush zale.*” This is translated as ‘mother got quite scared hearing this.’ The translation should have been as, “mother got quite scared, but father became happy.”

This is a major drawback of Krishnankutty’s translation as well. In fact, in almost every page, the translator misses out on some or the other piece of information. It is mostly the minor details that are omitted. For example, in the translation of the part where the author projects Padmu as playing with a coconut shell, there is no mention of a coconut shell. The translator just says “Padmu was playing on the verandah” (10). It is to be noticed that by missing out on this detail, the translator is doing a gross injustice, considering the fact that coconut is not only deeply tied to the geographical reality of Kerala, but also to the social reality in that coconut

groves were owned mainly by the upper castes. The translator also misses out on the details of the author's descriptions of nature. An interesting element in the TL text is that she avoids the repetition of phrases and words, which is seen in the SL text. Thus, where in the Malayalam text, "Who was/is Premakumar?" is repeated, the question occurs only once in the English text. Again, in the Malayalam version, Kunhathol asks Madhavan what the matter is twice when he tries to tell her about Unni Namboodiri's *Veli*, while in the TL version, it occurs just once. When Sethu thinks about Thangamani, he chants in his mind: "I love you! I love you! I love you!" (97). But in the English version, this phrase is written just once. The pathos and the intense emotions involved are lost in translation. Sometimes, as when describing Unni Namboodiri's wife or writing about Cheriamma's *vishari*, ie, a hand-fan, the translator gives inadequate renderings, which fail to capture the depth of the emotions or the culture-specificity of the words. Krishnankutty does not follow the paragraph division of the SL text. We see her dividing sentences into paragraphs almost arbitrarily; yet without losing the essence of the original text. Sometimes, the sentences are also split and converted into multiple sentences, in order to retain the syntactic structure of the TL.

Excellent translations can also be seen in certain parts. "A night that has stayed undimmed in my memory all these years, as vivid as the sight and smell of fresh blood" (2) is an example. Although it departs a little from the SL text, the result is exemplary in that the poetic element is retained. In some parts, the translation is even better in terms of clarity than the original text. For example, when Sethu gets his brother's letter, he thinks to himself: "A week later, there was a letter from Parameswara Ettan. In an envelope.. Parameswara Ettan seldom wrote letters. Had Amma written to him and...?"(35). This is clearer than in the Malayalam text in that the latter leaves us with doubts as to whether the last part is a question or a statement. Such instances abound in *Kaalam*. In *Cocoon* as well, the translator has made some excellent renderings of the Marathi original. In certain contexts, he manipulates the syntax and words to give the right meaning of the sentence. For example, "*zop dalat basan he aaplya nashibich*" is translated as, "it's part of my fate that I must wear this milestone of sleeplessness." Another example of good translation is when he talks to his uncle. In Marathi it is, "*aasha zopichya prasangich kunitari aaplyala uucha vichar sangto.*" This sentence is translated as, "It's exactly when you are so sleepy that someone waxes eloquent on philosophical thoughts." To add to this, the translator, Usdhakar Marathe, makes use of italics and glossary to achieve the original socio-cultural flavor. The same is the case with *Kaalam*. One of the best aspects of the translation is the fact that Krishnankutty has used the kinship terms as they are used in Malayalam. Many of the Malayalam words like '*koothambalam*', '*nalukettu*', '*pathayam*' etc are also used in the translation. For the benefit of the target audience, a glossary has been added at the end and also explanations of kinship terms given. Thus, the translator manages, to a certain extent, in catering to the needs of the target audience without impairing the local flavor of MT's masterpiece.

Now, to come to the titles of the translations, it is interesting to note that while Marathe gives a literal translation of the word 'Kosla' –i.e, Cocoon (which symbolically stands for human life and death wherein, unlike the caterpillar, human beings deteriorate and die in the cocoons they construct for themselves), Krishnankutty has retained the original Malayalam title '*Kaalam*' for her translation. She says: "The real protagonist of the novel is kaalam itself, the ceaseless flow of time that shapes Sethu's life, alienating him from everyone and everything he loves and carrying him from one mistake to the next. The word "kaalam" holds within it a deep consciousness of the present, the past, and the future and an implicit awareness of the unrelenting

passage of time. The title of the novel has been left untranslated because “time”, the nearest English equivalent of “kaalam”, suggests neither its complex connotations nor its infinite span” (Translator’s Preface).

On the whole, Gita Krishnankutty and Sudhakar Marathe have done good translations of the works. They have contributed to the oeuvre of English literature, excellent renderings of the magnum opuses of two of the best novelists ever. They can be considered ideal translators, going by the principles laid down by Etienne Dolet. They keep a fine balance between maintaining fidelity to the original and freedom from it. The works are direct proof that “les belle infidels” (a 17th century French critic said this to suggest that translations, like women, could be either beautiful or faithful, but not both at the same time) is a misconception. The works exhibit fluency and fidelity. Although there are problems (which are natural while translating a work), Krishnankutty and Marathe have succeeded in “conveying the fine distinction of meaning, feeling, tone, sound, style and diction of the original” (New Standard Encyclopedia).

Translation is a field of study gaining prominence now. It not only makes works created in one language accessible to people reading in other languages, but also helps acquaint people with cultures all over the world. In this age, when the world is becoming a global village, the relevance of translation cannot be ignored.

Works Cited

- Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. *Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.
- Belloc Hillaire. *On Translation*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1931. Print.
- Catford, J.C. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1974. Print.
- Das, Bijay Kumar. *The Horizon of Translation Studies*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 1998. Print.
- Engle, Paul and H.N. Engle. *Writing from the World II*. Iowa: Iowa University Press, 1985. Print.
- Gentzler, Edward. *Contemporary Translation Theories*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Nair, M.T. Vasudevan. *Kaalam*. Trans. Gita Krishnankutty. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Pvt Ltd, 1997. Print.
- Kaalam*. Thrissur: Disha Books, 1970. Print.
- Nemade, Bhalchandra. *Cocoon*. Trans. Sudhakar Marathe. Chennai: Macmillan Publishers India, 1997. Print.
- Kosala*. Mumbai: Popular Publications, 1963. Print.
- Nida, Eugene. *Towards a Science of Translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964. Print.
