



Issues in Translating Traditional Indian Kitchen Utensils with Special Reference to Bama's *Sangati*

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Abstract

Traditional kitchen utensils of South India are unique. In those days, people used them to cook food, grind rice, millet and grains, and so on. They lived a healthy life by making food items with these utensils. After the invention of electronic machines, people stopped using these utensils. They thought that modern equipment like grinder, mixie and cooker would save their time and energy. But in recent days, people have begun to realize the benefit of using these utensils. Even the people of other countries are showing interest in using traditional kitchen equipment. So there comes the need for them to know their names. Hence the equivalent words for most Indian utensils are brought into the English language. Lakshmi Holmstrom, a well-known woman translator introduced many Tamil authors to the readers of the English language. Through her translations, many words from the Tamil language have been brought into English. The present paper aims to analyze Lakshmi Holmstrom's translations of such utensils in the novel "Sangathi" by Bama.

Keywords: Translation, Tamil to English, Kitchen Utensils, Bama, *Sangati*.

Introduction

Bama's *Sangati* (சங்கதி), a South Indian novel, centers on the life of the Dalit people. It has been translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom into English as *Sangati: Events*. The characters in the novel are not rich enough to possess modern machines. The kitchen utensils and equipment they use are purely traditional. In the novel, many such utensils and equipment are found. Lakshmi Holmstrom's translations help to make understanding of these items not only to the target readers but also to the Source language readers of the present century, who are not aware of these items. Holmstrom's translations of Kitchen equipment and utensils are analysed under the strategies laid down by Mona Baker. Among her eight strategies such as Translation by a more general word, Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word, Translation by cultural substitution, Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation, Translation by paraphrasing using a related word, Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words, Translation by omission and Translation by illustration, the terms are



analysed under the first five strategies. “Translation is a kind of journey. It is an activity that always involves motion, it is a passage from one language to another, and hence from one culture into another. There is also always a temporal dimension, for what is written in one place, in one time, is then rendered for other readers in another place and another time. Translation theory today is increasingly concerned with translation as movement between different contexts, and increasingly concerned also with the consequent ideological dimension” (Bassnett).

1. Translation by a more general word

This strategy is used when the specific words of the Source language could not be explained through TL terms; the translators sometimes would use generic words. In the novel, when Mariamma and Manikkam are falsely blamed for having sexual affair in the pump set, Manikkam’s father is asked to pay a fine of Rs. 100. He gives Rs.50 and for the rest of the money he gives a குத்துச்சட்டி *Kutthuchatti* as a guarantee. This *Kutthuchatti* is a South Indian piece of equipment. It is also called as குத்து பாளை *Kutthu paanai*. It is mostly used to store water. When compared to the pot, the neck area is a little wider. The middle area of *Kutthuchatti* is round in shape. There may not be a chance for the target readers to know about this utensil. There is also no exact equivalent in the target language for this word. So Holmstrom has translated it using the generic term ‘vessel’ along with the classifiers ‘big brass’. These classifiers have been used to differentiate this utensil from other vessels. Further, the classifier ‘brass’ can be considered a noted one. It implies that these people are not rich enough to have silver vessels. The vessel could not also be made up of plastic or clay as these are very cheap to be mortgaged. So it is a good translation. In translation, the line comes as “Manikkam’s father paid Rs.50 straight away, and brought a big brass vessel as a guarantee for the rest of the money he owed” (26). If the translator had tried to define this *Kutthuchatti*, it may increase the complication of the sentence. As this context is taken, the general term is enough for the target readers to get the idea that it is a vessel that has been mortgaged till he gives money.

Holmstrom has given a generic word for one more term in the translation. In *Sangati*, Bama’s grandmother tells her about the gifts and things she gave to Bama’s mother when she got married. அம்மிக்கல் *Ammikkal* is one among them (86). *Ammikkal* is a traditional Indian piece of equipment. It is made up of black stone. It contains two types of stones, such as a base stone and a rolling stone. The base stone is flat with a slightly curved surface, and the rolling stone is rolled on the base stone to make a paste of maize or other grains. It is also used to grind cooking ingredients to make masalas. Being a traditional machine, it has the capacity of increasing the taste of food. Though the usage of *Ammikkal* has lessened, one could find it almost in every house in South India. In English, the base stone is called ‘Metate’ and the rolling stone is called ‘Mano’. These terms come from the usage of Archeologists from southwest America. A translator’s translation should be in a way that can



be understood even by ordinary people. So Holmstrom has avoided using these terms and has given the simple and generic word ‘Grinding Stone (80). From this word, the readers can understand that it is a type of stone that is used to grind some edible things. The term ‘Grinding stone’ can include any stone that is used to grind masalas such as metate, mortar, pestle or the modern grinder’s mounted stone. Though the exact equivalent is found in TL, Holmstrom’s translation of the word is considered to be a better one.

2. Translation by a more neutral/ less expressive word

The translator would sometimes use less expressive terms in TL when the SL terms cannot be given one-to-one equivalents and generic terms in the target language. Here the TL equivalent would not be perfect but tries to convey some idea regarding the SL term.

Bama’s grandmother tells about a few vessels that were given to her daughter as wedding gifts. It includes the utensil கலாட்டா *Lota* (Sangati 86). In most of the houses of South India, one could find the utensil *Lota*. It is a container for drinking water. There is less chance for English readers to know the term. *Lota* is round in shape with its mouth open. It is a little bigger than a tumbler. Now the term has been adapted into English and is still not familiar to English readers, as those people do not have the habit of using it. So, Holmstrom has avoided using transliteration and given the term ‘brass tumblers’ as its counterpart (80). Though the use of the tumbler is the same as that of a *lota*, it is somewhat different from it because of its shape. Unlike the *lota*, tumblers’ sides are straight. Apart from this, in the Source text, it is not given that the *lota* is of metal or brass. But in translation, it is given as brass tumblers. *Lota* can be of any metal like brass, copper, silver or plastic. The translator might have given the term ‘tumbler’ as the counterpart of ‘lota’, by considering the similar usage of both items. Both are used for drinking water. It cannot be considered a perfect equivalent word but a less expressive one. As the word has already been borrowed into English, the transliteration maybe with an explanation like a round-shaped tumbler would have been better equivalent.

3. Translation by Cultural Substitution

This strategy involves replacing the SL cultural terms with the TL cultural terms. Though the words do not have similar meanings, they would have similar impacts on the target readers. Bama says that in her community, before a wedding ceremony, the parents of the groom would give தாம்பாளத் தட்டு *Thamabala Thattu* with gifts keeping in it, to the bride’s parents to confirm the marriage (Sangati 88). Once Bama attends such a ceremony in which she sees, the groom’s father giving *Thaambala that* with gifts like a betrothal sari, material for a blouse, a bundle of betel leaves, some betel nuts, a bunch of bananas, coconut and money for a hundred and one rupees to bride’s father. *Thaambala thattu* is a large shaped plate and is used on auspicious occasions, especially during the wedding ceremony. South Indians believe that keeping betel leaves and betel nuts in *Thaambala thattu* is mandatory while giving it to others. According to them, the betel leaf is a symbol of promise. Once it is given, the marriage between the boy and the girl is fixed and should not be broken. If the



marriage is cancelled after exchanging *Thaambala thattu*, it is considered a sin. So the *Thaambala thattu* places a vital role in South Indian tradition. But there is no such belief in the target language. Trying to bring the word to the target readers by borrowing it with cultural background or details would never make any impact on them. So, Holmstrom translated it using TL culture's item 'presentation tray' (83). In TL culture, a presentation tray can be given for any function or occasion. There is no belief or rule that something like betel leaf or betel nut should be kept on it. They keep anything they like in the tray. Unlike South India's traditional *Thaambala thattu* which is usually made of brass or silver, the target readers' tray can be made of anything. As the belief of giving *Thaambala thattu* is not present in the target culture the translator has given the cultural substitute word. The term 'presentation tray' does not convey the importance of 'Thambala thattu'. Yet it is acceptable due to the similarity of the items.

Apart from this, Holmstrom has used another cultural equivalent term for the word கும்பா *Kumba*. In SL Context, when Bama's grandmother comes to inform them about Manacchi who has been possessed by a ghost, Bama is drinking gruel in கும்பா *Kumba* (51). *Kumba* is a type of urn-shaped vessel with a footed pedestal. It is made of either silver or brass. South Indians use this for eating rice, drinking water or for keeping sandal paste in it. It is a traditional one. As this type of vessel is absent in the target language, Holmstrom has given the cultural substitute word, 'Bowl' (45). Bowl is a round-shaped dish. It comes either with or without a footed pedestal. It is used for serving or eating food. It looks more or less the same as that of *Kumba*. But still, no other word would provide a better equivalent for 'Kumba' than the word 'bowl'. So it is enough for the target readers to understand the term.

4. Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation

This strategy is sometimes used when cultural-specific terms are found. Here the translator would loan the words by transliterating them. Sometimes, the translator would add explanations with the loaned words which help the TL readers to understand the term. In TL text, this strategy is found in one of the places where Holmstrom loaned words with an explanation.

In SL context, *Sangati*, Bama says that in her community, if any girl comes of age, her maternal uncle would buy her gifts like saree and kitchen vessels like அண்டா *Anda* and குண்டா *Kunda* (25). *Anda* and *Kunda* are cooking vessels that are big in size with the broad mouth. They are mostly used for boiling water over an open flame or while cooking for many people, usually during special occasions. People of South India consider it pride in giving these vessels to their daughters when they are married off. The target readers might not know about *Anda* and *Kunda* and their importance. So Holmstrom, considering the importance of these vessels, has not translated those terms into English. She has loaned the words into English with an explanation. The equivalents for the words *Anda* and *Kunda* come in English translation as 'big cooking vessels andas and kundas' (16). Though this translation is enough



for the target readers to understand, there is also an equivalent word available in TL with the same meaning. The word ‘Cauldrons’ can be given as a substitute for Anda and Kunda. It is also a large vessel, used for boiling water over an open fire. But Holmstrom’s preservation of the terms, rather than using the equivalent English word, has kept the essence of Indian culture in a foreign language.

5. Translation by paraphrasing using a related word

This strategy is found in the places where the translator uses paraphrase when the correct equivalents are not found in the target language. Here the meaning of the word is preserved but in a different form.

In *Sangati*, சருவப்பாளை *Saruvapaanai* is one of the gifts given by Bama’s grandmother to Bama’s mother when she got married (86). *Saruvapaanai* is one of the types of pot, used by Indians. The upper side of this pot is wide whereas the bottom is slid and narrow. There are many types of பாளை *Paanai* available in Indian side, such as உரிப்பாளை *Uripaanai*, அடிசிர் பாளை *Adisir paanai*, கஞ்சி பாளை *Kanji Paanai*, தவளை பாளை *Thavalai paanai* and so on. These different types of Paanai differ from one another in shapes. So if the translation for *Saruvapaanai* comes as just ‘vessel’ or ‘pot’, it might be misunderstood by target readers as any other kind of vessel or pot. Here wisely Holmstrom has paraphrased it using the related words as per the understanding of the target readers. The translation for the term comes as ‘a wide-mouthed vessel’ (80). It is a suitable translation as it provides a clear explanation of the term to the target readers.

This strategy is found in another place the context. In SL context, a woman named Virayi is possessed by the goddess Esakki. Esakki claims for a cradle and சொளகு *Solagu* in return for her exit from Virayi’s body (54). *Solas* is kitchen equipment which places a vital role in Indian tradition. In those days, it was used to remove small stones, husks and chaff from cereals or grains. It is also called முறம் *Muram* in Tamil. This traditional Solagu is made of split bamboo. One could find reference to this Solagu in some of the famous Tamil poems of ancient literature such as கலித்தொகை *Kalithogai*, புறநானூறு *Purananooru* and கலிங்கத்துப்பரணி *Kalingatthuparani*. Such noted equipment has now lost its importance. Nowadays people have stopped using this and started using modern machines to clean the cereals and grains. As the target readers’ food habits vary from Indians, they do not use this Solagu. To make the term understandable to the target readers, Holmstrom has brought it to them using paraphrase. In the TL context, *Solagu* has been translated as ‘Winnowing tray’ (49). It means the tray which is used to separate the chaff from the grain. It can be considered an apt translation as it provides not only a suitable name but also explains the usage of the item.



The traditional kitchen utensils that have been used in the novel may not be familiar not only to the foreign people but also to the modern generation of native people. Holmstrom's efforts of translating those terms help people to know or get little idea about them. In recent days, the contribution of women writers is growing efficiently. Lakshmi Holmstrom, as a literary translator on her part, has contributed much to the development of Tamil literature across foreign countries. Her translation helps to lessen the cultural gap between the source and target countries. Further, it helps English readers to know about Indian culture.

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