

Can Translated Works be Original? - A Comparative Study of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Secret Way* and Sundarampillai's *Manonmaniam*

M. Joseph Vinoth

Assistant Professor

Department of English, Sri Krishna Arts and Science College (Autonomous)

Coimbatore

Email: josephvinothlit@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In 1827, Goethe spoke about World literature in his letters to Johann Eckermann, "National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach." (Eckermann qtd. in Damrosch 1); and translation is the main tool which made Goethe's conception possible. Various practices in literature lead to different modes of literary exchange such as adaption, imitation etc. but with established boundaries. Translation or adaption suffers from various factors such as cultural, historical, and linguistic differences. In Comparative literature, it results in various queries; Can a translation be the same as the source or the original text? Can a translator who suffers from creative treason, overcome it? Can a translator succeed in a translative adaption? This paper attempts a comparative study of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Secret Way*, a literary work in the English language and Sundarampillai's *Manonmaniam*, a literary work in the Tamil language trying to find answers to the above questions.

KEYWORDS

Comparative Literature; Variation Theory; Inter-cultural Variation.

In the past century, Comparative literature and related studies focused on the identification of similarities between literary works inspired by the Western schools of comparative literature. Such methodology has become outdated and the necessity of the time is to focus on the differences to draw significance to the comparison of works from different cultures. Old Methods which focused on similarities also limits the comparison of the original and the translated text. In contrast to the study of similarities, variation theory in comparative literature adds significance to the compared texts

through the study of differences. The key concepts of variation theory are variation and heterogeneity. Application of this theory can provide new perspectives on different literary works in comparison. Four types of variation are cross-national variation, intercultural variation, interlingual and cross-civilization (Cao & Shi). This paper studies the intercultural variation between the two works. Intercultural variation deals with cultural filtering which highlights significant cultural norms in each work. Cultural filtering is usually handled by the translator to meet his recipient's cultural

cognition and also primarily to avoid confusion that might arise due to foreign cultural representations. There are four techniques to achieve cultural filtering: social context, linguistic translation, traditional culture, and the recipient's individual acceptance screen.

Sundarampillai's *Manonmaniam*, a Tamil drama is a translation of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Secret Way*. It should be noted that several elements such as similar plot structure and characterization are shared by both works. Yet they vary in many aspects, of which literary form is a primary difference. Lytton's *The Secret Way* is a novel in verse form while *Manonmaniam* is a drama.

Sundarampillai's work is noteworthy for his incorporation of Indian cultural entities into the translated work. Although characters in both works share similar characterisations and traits, Sundarampillai has created characters for his work based on the Indian culture. For instance, Lytton's novel revolves around the characters of Omartes, a Scythian King and his daughter, Princess Argiope. Replacing the characters, Sundarampillai characterized Seevagan, the King of Pandias in place of Omartes; and Princess Manonmani in place of Princess Argiope. Similarly, other characters also undergo culturally adaptive transformation. It should be also noted that Sundarampillai changes the setting from the country of Scyth to the Kingdom of the Pandias. This change is evidenced by the dramatic personae of *Manonmaniam* (Sundarampillai 37).

வாணி: 'தந்தையுங் கொடியன் தாயுங் கொடியள்!

சிந்தியார் சிறிதும்

யான்படும் இடும்பை,

என்னுயிர்க் குயிராம் என்கா

தலர்க்கும்

இன்ன லிழைத்தனர்.

எண்ணிய வெண்ணம்'

(Sundarampillai 52).

(Vaani expresses grieves over her love and life, her lover faces struggles caused by Vaani's family)

Sundarampillai distinguishes his work from Lytton's by introducing a subplot about the love story of Vaani and Nadaraasan. Vaani is the daughter of Sagadan, a minister in the court of King Seevagan. Vaani is also a friend of Princess Manonmaniam. It also extends to focus on their struggles against Sagadan who plans to force Vaani into marriage. This subplot converges with the main plot after the battle between 'The Pandias' and 'The Cheras'. In the case of *The Secret Way*, the work has only one plot.

Forsook the simple ways

And Nomad tents of his
unconquered fathers

And in the fashion of the
neighboring Medes,

Built a great city girt with moat and
wall, (Lytton 15)

கூடல் மாநகர் குடிவிட் டிப்பால்
பீடுயர் நெல்லையில் வந்தபின் பேணி
அமைத்தன னிவ்வரண். இமைப்பறு
தேவருங் (Sundarampillai 44)

(This palace at Nellai was
constructed after the change of
capital from Madurai)

Mentioned earlier are the minute but definite variations in the plot structure, in addition, Sundarampillai confines to Indian cultural lineage rather than imitating the source text. *The Secret Way* begins with Omartes, King of Scythia—a nomadic race who settles by building a palace. He forsakes the simple life lived by his forefathers and lives in luxury. But in *Manonmaniam*, Seevagan, the king of Pandias is unlike Omartes because his kingdom is well established and settled, yet he too builds a new palace after the change of his capital. The difference should be noted between the nomadic nature of the Scyth Country and the

established nature of the ancient kingdom of Pandias.

This marriage with the Mede

...
Sow in men's minds vague fears of foreign rule, (Lytton 27).

... யாடவர்த் தேடி மன்றல்
சாற்றுதல் தகாதெனப் போற்றுமிவ்
வுலகம் (Sundarampillai 88).

(It is not right for the girl's father to go after a man and propose the marriage of his daughter)

Sundarampillai intrinsically adapts his work to cultural nuances. In *The Secret Way*, the Scythian Convoy meets King Zariades and asks him to marry their princess and make her the queen. It is so because King Omartes is convinced by Seuthes that Scythians would fear foreign rule unless Argiope becomes the median queen. When a similar situation arises in *Manonmaniam*, regarding the marriage proposal of Manonmani, Seevagan, the King of Pandias is convinced by the Tamil cultural ritual that the girl's father won't usually go asking a man for marriage. Kings in both the works use a political matter as a vehicle for the marriage proposal nevertheless the event in *Manonmaniam* is supported by a cultural exercise differing from the exercise of power in *The Secret Way*

As the dream fled, broke war upon the land

The Scythian hosts had crossed the Tanais.

...
Who first in fault, the Scythian or the Mede,
Who first broke compact, or transgressed a bound. (Lytton 45).

புரு: ...இ அஞ்சா தெமது
நன்செய்நா டதனை நாவு கூசாமற்
பாண்டியற் களிக்க என்றுரை
பகர்ந்ததும்,
...

ஒருவா ரத்திற் குள்ளாய் அவன்முடி

...
அரிக்கு நேரென்னநீ யறைந்த
அரசனும்
இருப்பரேல் காண்குவம் அவர்வலி
யினையும் (Sundarampillai 116).

(Purudothaman challenges to defeat and show his power to King Seevagan who claimed the *Nansei* Land unwisely)

Manonmaniam has yet another plot variation in cultural context. In *The Secret Way*, a battle starts between the Scyths and Medes due to the conflict over a river between their countries' border and in *Manonmaniam*, the battle starts between the Pandias and the Cheras due to Baladevan, a messenger who speaks low of Purudothaman, the king of Cheras over the marriage proposal of Manonmani. Purudothaman's act is a Tamil cultural and ethical act of winning over the enemies who disprove or ill-treat them, their people or their country.

But I will place no traitor on a throne.

Yet, since thy treason saves me many lives,

I for their sake spare thine: (Lytton 68).

புரு: (குடினைச் சுட்டி)
பூட்டுமின்! நன்றாய்! (Sundarampillai 266).

புரு:
மூடுநின் பாழ்வாய்
சேரன் விஜயமுந் திருடான்!
அறிகுதி (Sundarampillai 267)

(Purudothaman orders to arrest Kudilan for treason and proclaims that Cheras will not win by deceitful acts)

It seems that Sundarampillai is careful enough to handle his work at every level based on culture and history, it is proved when he portrays the ethics of Tamil culture through Purudothaman, the

King of Cheras who arrests Kudilan for treason against Seevagan, the King of Pandias. It should be noted that Purodothaman is arresting Kudilan who can help him win the war but still arrests Kudilan for treason against his enemy. He also says he won't win by cheating. Purudothaman exhibits his high ethics through this act although the treason of Kudilan would bring him victory. Whereas in *The Secret Way*, Zariades doesn't arrest Seuthes who treasons against King Omartes, at the same time he doesn't

relent to the demands of Seuthes, instead ethically he spares Seuthes' life for helping to avoid a great deluge of lives.

Thus Sundarampillai adopting various recipient cultural representations in a translation succeeds in creating his work both as a translator and as a writer worthy enough to be credited as an original work. Pillai seems to have overcome the creative treason by adapting his work to meet the recipients' cultural knowledge while at the same time maintaining the spirit of the original text.

WORKS CITED

- Cao, Shunqing and Song Shi. "The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature and the Cross-Civilization Studies", *Comparative Literature: East & West*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 5-26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2011.12015564>
- Eckermann. *Conversations with Goethe*. 1835; quoted in David Damrosch. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Lytton, Edward. *The Secret Way*. Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1889.
- Sundarampillai. *Manonmaniam*. Vasantha Publications, 2006.