

TIRUKKURAL: DEFICIENCY IN TRANSLATION INTO OTHER LANGUAGES

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Tirukkural is one among the Tamil literary works, translated into a large number of languages. Translation of a book like Tirukkural is not merely translating a book from one language to another, but it is translating a treatise from one culture to another. As technical terms in Science and Technology, there are cultural terms in Social Sciences. Science and Technology are essentially universal and one may find equivalent terms; but culture is not universal. A cultural term in one language may not have an equivalent one in another culture. The word Dharma in Sanskrit is an example. It is not possible to find or coin a single term in English for Dharma; consequently the word Dharma is transliterated and used in English as it is, and its full meaning is given by means of an explanation. The word Dharma, therefore is assimilated into English and finds entry in English dictionaries. The Oxford English Dictionary carries this word and the meaning is given as below:

Dharna:(in Indian Religion) the external law of the cosmos; inherent in the very nature of things (Origin: Sanskrit)

As in Sanskrit, there are in Tamil a number of cultural terms such as Aham, Puram, Aram, Porul etc. that have no direct equivalents Tirukkural consists of three Parts dealing with Aram, Porul and Kamam successively. These three terms have been translated from the days of G.U. Pope and others, almost uniformly, as Virtue, Wealth and Love. They have not even stated that these equivalents are inadequate and do not convey the full meaning. These translations, their long and consistent use notwithstanding, are grossly inadequate and are even misleading. The Tamil Lexicon gives 10 meanings for the word Aram and Part I of Tirukkural under Aram carries 34 chapters covering diverse topics and virtue is not such a comprehensive term as to cover all the subjects dealt with in Part I - Arattuppal. Similarly, the word Porul carries 27 meanings in Tamil Lexicon and part II - Porutpal has 70 chapters, and it deals with all aspects of worldly affairs of which wealth is but one. The author is therefore constrained to say that these three terms namely. Aram, Porul, Kamam have no equivalents in English and therefore must be transliterated as Aram. Porul and Kamam and used. A brief, but appropriate explanation may be given by way of a note to each of these terms. As explained earlier, such practices are common in translating cultural literature.

An attempt is made in this paper to emphasize the need for, paying greater attention to the full significance of certain terms in Tirukkural which almost epitomize important features of Tamil Culture and Civilization. It is suggested that such terms must be transliterated with adequate commentaries to explain the content of each of them.

Among the philosophic and literary works in Tamil, Tirukkural has been translated into a large number of languages. While the exact number of translations is not known, it may exceed 80 - certainly more than any other book in Tamil.

Translation, to be true to the original, is in general a complex and hard task more so when it happens to be translating a work from one culture to another. The name of a tree that is not available in Tamil soil cannot have a Tamil equivalent: it has to be transliterated. Same is the case with all proper nouns.

Certain concepts are unique to a culture. They may not have exact equivalents in the language of another culture. As an example can be cited the word 'Dharma' in Sanskrit. It has, depending on the context, different shades of meaning; even different meanings. A term like charity or justice will never cover the diverse meanings that Dharma carries. Consequently, it is not translated but transliterated and used as Dharma. Taking for instance the Oxford English Dictionary, it carries this word as part of English language and the meaning is given as below.

Dharma :(in Indian Religion) the external law of the cosmos, inherent in the very nature of things (Origin: Sanskrit)

The American College Dictionary gives the following meaning:

Dharma : (in Hinduism and Buddhism) 1. essential quality or character, 2. law especially religious law 3. conformity to law; propriety, 4. virtue, religion (Skt: decree, custom)

Similarly Kautilya's Artha Shastra is not translated as 'Science of Wealth', or 'Science of Economics' but is transliterated and used as 'Artha Shastra' only.

In Tirukkural we come across terms that are unique to Tamil culture and represent the heritage of the Tamils that has come down the ages. Such terms, normally, cannot have equivalents in another culture. There are cultural terms in Tamil which do not have equivalents even in Indian languages though they are part of a common culture. As examples can be stated the words like Aram [Ar̥m]; Puram [Pur̥m]; Porul [Porul]. etc. To understand the full import, each term has to be explained at length since each one epitomizes certain values, traditions and practices in ancient Tamil culture and civilization.

The Translators of Tirukkural from the very beginning, have missed rather badly to bring out the broad cultural significance of such terms as Aram, Porul and Kamam, which constitute the titles of the three Parts of Tirukkural. Aram has been translated as virtue; Porul as wealth and Kamam as love. It is an extremely simplistic and inadequate translation, misleading and even doing injustice to Tiruvalluvar.

The Part-I of Tirukkural on Aram deals not only with Virtue, but also with a number of other topics, 34 in total. As per the Tamil Lexicon the meaning of Aram is as follows:

1. Moral or religious duty, virtue, performance of good works according to the Sastras, duties to be practised by each caste; j Ukk; (gpq;)
2. Merit; Gz z pak; mwkght nk;d;D kUq;fap;whw; fl b
3. That which is fitting, excellent; j Fj pahdJ. (, i w. 29> gf; 136)
4. Religious faith; rkak; (rPt f. 544)
5. Wisdom; Qhdk; mwj j pd t;UgGr; rpwgngL Eej (Qhdh. gha;5)
6. Feeding house; mwrrhi y. mwj j f;Fg; Gwj j d; (T.A.S. I,9)
7. Fasting; NehdG. (rPt f.386)
8. Letters or words in a verse which cause harm; j gga Dz ; hf;FQnrhy; - mwk;t;ogghbdhd;
9. Goddess of virtue; j UKNj ti u. (Fws>77.)
10. Yama; akd; mwj j pd; i kej Df;F (ghuj . Thuz h. 112)
11. The Lexicon gives 27 meanings for Porul. The Part II on Porul deals not only with wealth, but many aspects of life. There are 70 chapters covering different

aspects of worldly affairs, each as important as wealth. According to the Lexicon the meaning of Porul is as follows:

1. Thing, matter, entity; t] J> t̄wqf̄p̄a nghUS;fl ki kg; nghati f̄ āp̄d̄w̄j̄; Nj wy; (r̄p̄t̄ f. 1436)
2. Meaning, as of a word; sense, signification; nrhwnghUS; (#l h)
3. Subject; subject-matter; t̄p̄c̄ ak; vgnghUS; ahahh; tha;f; Nfl gpDk; (Fws>423.)
4. Essence, as of a treatise; true object or significance; c z i k fUj J. Ntj q;fz z̄ p̄a nghUNs;yhk; (fkguh> , uz p̄a. 1.)
5. Object, affair; fh̄p̄ak; xU nghUS; nrhy;YtJi l Nad; (fyj̄; 8)
6. Essential principle; j j J tk; ei taW ednghUS i u k̄p̄Ndh (kz p̄ Gj p̄87)
7. Immutability, reality, verity; nkak; k. nghUSNr̄h; Gfo; Gh̄p̄ej h̄H (Fws>5).
8. That which is important ; ed;Fkj p̄f;fggLtJ. nghUNs kdw nghUNs (FWe; 174).
9. Learning; fy;t̄p̄
10. Knowledge; mw̄p̄T. (c h̄p̄ep)
11. Doctrine, belief; n̄f̄hs; i f. ngha;A nga;Akh nk̄d;Dk; nghUZ Nkwnf̄hs;S k; Gi u newp̄ahH (ngh̄p̄aG. Ek̄p̄ej; 10.)
12. Virtue; mw̄k; Jwj j y; nkaggngghUS; fhz g j w̄p̄T (Fws>423)
13. Fruit, result; gad; ngagngghUS; fhz g j w̄p̄T (Fws>423)
14. Final bliss Nkhl r̄k> GfY)h; Gfog; nghUshFNk (Nj th. 640>8.)
15. God; fl Ts; nghUS khdkhTq; fh̄l b̄ (Fku. Ḡp̄u. fej h;fȳp̄27)
16. Property, wealth, riches, treasure; j̄p̄t̄p̄ak; ngUkngghUS; i t̄j̄j̄ h̄; toq;Fk̄p̄d; (ehyb> 6).
17. Stores, provisions, utensils; gygz l̄k; (#l h.)
18. Gold; nghd; (#l h.)
19. Son Gj j̄p̄ud; (gp̄q;) j̄ hufi dg; nghUJ nghd;W t̄j̄j̄ nghUSp̄i d̄ Kd; gi l̄j̄ J̄fej Gd̄j̄ d; (Nj th. 622>9)
20. Stratagem, device; j̄ej̄ p̄uk; Ḡh̄p̄f;f̄K̄ay;t̄h̄H Gz h̄ej̄ nghUshk̄p̄ (fkguh> r̄l̄ h̄A.155)
21. Beauty-spot, as on woman's breasts; Rz q;F. NghfKk; nghUS k̄d̄w Gz h̄k̄ī yj̄; j̄ l̄ q;f̄s; (r̄p̄t̄ f. 460)
22. The thing compared in a simile; c t̄Nk̄ak; nghUNs AtkQ; nraj dh; nk̄h̄ōp̄p̄Dk; (nj hy; Ngh. 284)
23. Objectives of human existence. See c Wj̄ p̄ 4. mw̄k; nghUSp̄dgk; t̄h̄l̄ d;Dk eh̄d;F̄ nghUSp̄Dk; (j̄ p̄J̄f̄N̄f̄h. 1> c i u).
- 24.(Log.) Deduction or conclusion from premises given, inference from circumstances; mUej̄ hgj̄ j̄ p̄ mḡht̄k; nghUNshgG (r̄p̄r̄p̄ m̄si t̄> 1> ki wQh).
25. Affairs of life, as topics of poetry, in two classes, viz., akam, puram; mfok; GwK kh̄f̄p̄a j̄ p̄i z̄ gngghUS;
26. Science of political economy; mh̄j̄ j̄ rh] j̄ p̄uk; Qhyj̄ j̄ wk; nghUS; fz̄ l̄ h̄H fz̄ p̄y; (Fws> 141)
27. Headship, leadership; j̄ ī ȳī k. (aho; mf)

It may appear to be a sweeping criticism, if one says that generations of translators over two centuries including so venerated a scholar as G.U. Pope have not done justice to Tiruvalluvar in so far as their translation of the titles of the three parts are concerned. Among those who translated and commented, Rajaji has

deviated from the rest and has attempted to find more acceptable equivalents to the terms Aram and Porul. He has translated Aram as Dharma. It is infinitely better than Virtue, but still inadequate. Kalanithi Pandithamani K. Ganapathi Pillai, the great Tamil scholar from Jaffna says that 'Aram contains Dharma, but Dharma does not cover Aram'. Rajaji has translated Porul as 'Worldly Affairs' which is certainly a vast improvement over wealth; however, it is too general and even vague. This problem has a simple and straight forward solution on well established lines. The terms such as Aram, Porul, Kamam, Aham, and Puram must be written in transliterated form and the meaning that each term carries must be briefly explained in a footnote. There is a list of terms in Tamil tradition that must be identified after due analysis and selection. These must be transliterated whenever any translation of Tamil literary works is undertaken. This is important in the context of the notification of the Government of India, including Tamil in the list of classical languages, thus registering Government's recognition of the contribution of Tamil to the cultural heritage of India and South East Asia. It may be expected that the importance of Tamil in indological studies will receive better and more adequate attention and archeological and history departments will show greater interest in ancient Tamil literatures. For the benefit of Non-Tamils, especially foreign scholars, it is necessary that the significance of cultural terms as containers of certain characteristics of an ancient culture is fully brought out. This requirement can be met satisfactorily only if one transliterates the cultural terms and provides adequate, explanation against each of them.

By way of summing up, it may be stated that

1. The terms referring to the titles of the three Parts in Kural dealing with Aram, Porul and Kamam do not have direct equivalents in English and hence cannot be translated using a single expression for each of them.
2. The practice established and continued for centuries wherein Aram is translated as virtue, Porul as wealth and Kamam as love is not doing justice to the content of these terms and is grossly inadequate and even misleading.
3. The only proper course is to transliterate these words and use them as they are in Tamil and add an appropriate note explaining the cultural significance of these terms.
4. This approach is to be adopted in general in translating ancient Tamil literary works.
5. The procedure suggested is nothing new and has long been followed for such terms as Dharma in Sanskrit.