

Deep-Rooted Literary Relations between English and Tamil Novels

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to expose the profound literary relations being deep-rooted between English and Tamil novels. This paper explores the good relationship between English and Tamil literatures by extracting various instances from the works of both the literatures. This paper does explore the relationship between both the literatures. It also presents the artistic renderings made mutually among these literatures. Thus, by going through the ideal works and translator works in these literatures, this paper estimates the bond between English and Tamil literatures.

Keywords: Literary Relations, English and Tamil Novels Translations, culture, autobiographical, society, imitation, epistolary.

The relationship between English and Tamil literatures is more than a century old and the contact between the two literatures has been direct, continuous, complex and all-embracing. English has influenced the entire gamut of Tamil Prose, poetry, short story and novel. This contact inspired the native scholars to take the novel writing. English and European scholars wrote literary works in Tamil. English and European scholars wrote literary works in Tamil. In some respects, it has been a two-way traffic. Distinguished western scholars like Fr. Robert De Nobili (1577-1656), Fr. Beschi (1680-1747), C.T.E. Rhenius (1790-1838) and G.U. Pope (1820-1907) became devoted students of Tamil language and literature. They are said to have done yeoman service to Tamil by writing Prose and poetical works in Tamil. More than this, G.U. Pope translated many Tamil Classics like the *Kural* and *Tiruvassagam* into English. Prof. T.P. Meenakshisundaram calls Fr. Beschi “the father of modern prose and the modern short story” (P 175) in Tamil.

The impact of English on Tamil does manifest itself in form, content and technique. A host of familiar names and titles crowds our mind in this respect. Krishna Pillai’s *Ratchaniya Yathriham* and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Vellakkal Subramanya Mudaliyar’s

Swarka Nikkam and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, P. Sundaram Pillai's *Manonmaniam* and Lytton's *The Secret Way*, Bharati's *Gnanaratham* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its Tamil translation by Pudumaipithan as *Prethamanithan*, R.L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde* and its translation by Chidambara Ragunathan as Naan Iruvar – all these and a lot more stare at us, almost “implore the passing tribute of a sigh”.

The English educational system was at first introduced by Macaulay in 1835 under the British East India Company rule in India. Besides laying the foundation for education, this gave a new turn to Indian literatures and culture. The then Governor General of India, Bentinck made the following declaration:

“The great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India: and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone”.

The results were tremendous and far-reaching. Almost all the early Tamil novelists were the beneficiaries of this English educational system. The Novels of Charles Dickens, Walter Scott, Goldsmith and George Eliot were included in the syllabus for students. These educated Tamils were employed in Government service and had sufficient leisure to enrich their knowledge of English literature. As a result, they wanted their fellow Tamilians to be introduced to this genre which did not exist then in Tamil. Moreover, they were motivated by a zeal for social reform, especially the liberation of women from ignorance through education. Therefore, the early Tamil novels were written for the common man.

In his preface to *Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram* Pillai makes the following observation:

“My object in writing this book of fiction is to supply the want of prose in Tamil, a want which is admitted and lamented by all, and also to give a practical illustration of the maxims of morality contained in my former works, *Niddinool*, *Penmady Malai*, *Samarasa Keerthana*” (P 7).

The author's aim was, therefore, both literary and social. Vedanayagam Pillai (1826-1889) was born in Velan Kulathur near Tiruchy. He had the advantage of English education. He was appointed record keeper in a civil court in Tiruchy. After two years, he got promotion

as translator. Later, Vedanayagam Pillai became District Munsiff. His *Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram*, considered to be the *morningstar* of Tamil novel, is said to have been modeled on a combination of Tom Jones, *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *Don Quixote*, Social evils like child marriage, subjection of women and priestly pretensions are criticized. The influence of English literature is discernible throughout this novel as well as in his second novel *Suguna Sundari*.

In the first novel, there are references to the wives of Socrates and Milton. The author quotes even Bacon. Another reference is also of interest. Ananthayan, a character in the novel, reads antireligious works of Lecky, Stephen, Bain, Darwin, Comte, Mill, Herbert, Spencer, Huxley, Hume, Collins, Tyndall and Voltaire. Hence Ananthayan denies religion and God.

The second Tamil novel *Kamalambal Charitram* by B.R. Rajam Iyer (1872-1898) and *Padmavati Charitram* by A. Madhaviah (1872-1925) were also written in the same mould. Rajam Iyer was a native of Batlagundu in Madurai district. Madhaviah hailed from Perungulam village in Tirunelveli district. Both the novelists raised their voice against social outrages. It is interesting to know that Madhaviah translated Shakespeare's *Othello* and wrote two novels in English. Of the two novels, *Tillai Govindan* is in autobiographical form and *Clarinda* is a historical novel.

In the case of English novels, Daniel Defoe used the autobiographical form to give an added effect of actuality to the events described. Richardson adopted the device of telling his novels through letters supposed to be written by the chief characters. Henry Fielding enriched the newly formulated English novel by making it a vehicle for adult comment on human behavior. All these qualities of early English novels were faithfully sometimes even blindly, imitated by these early Tamil novelists. If Fielding calls his novel *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, Vedanayagam Pillai calls his Tamil novel as *Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram*. In imitation of Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, early Tamil novels were loosely constructed, highly episodic and presented as mock biography rather than real fiction. Epistolary form was another common characteristic. Tamil novelists, like their English models, tried to write novels running to many volumes. Fielding's description of his novel as "a comic epic poem in prose" was also responsible for this trend. Characters in early Tamil novels, especially women characters, are anxious to get education which would enable them to enjoy Shakespeare and Tennyson. Besides, this attainment will assure them independence and a place of respectability in the society.

Pandit S.M. Natesa Sastriar (1859-1910) is claimed to have known more than eighteen languages. His novels include *Dinadayalu* (1900), *Dikkatra Iru Kulandaigal* (1902), *Komalam Kumariyanadu* and *Matikatta Manaivi* (1903). *Komalam Kumariyanandu* is based on the story "Dr. Heidegger's *Experiment* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Sastriar's *Tuppariyum Danavan* is a straight-forward imitation of Conan Doyle. The author explains in his preface that he chose the name Danavan in imitation of the name

Dick Danavan, a famous English detective. Another of his novel *Thalaiyanai Metraupathesam* (1901) is an adaptation of Douglas Jerrold's *Mrs.Candles Curtain Lectures*. *Dikkatra Iru Kulandaigal* deserves a closer scrutiny. "K. Kailasapathy draws our attention to the influence of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* on Sastriar's novel" (P 179). The characters in the Tamil novel continue to display shades of the original in *Vanity Fair*. In Sastriar's work, two motherless young girls, Rathai and Alamu, are separated from their father, Pachaiyappa Mudaliar. Their cunning step-mother has been responsible for this. The two girls are helped by a rich lay to join a college at Coimbatore. This college is meant for the children of aristocrats and Zamindars. Balalathai, Mudaliar's daughter by his second wife, also joins the college at this time. Rathai and Balalathai become bosom friends. At the end of the course, the Headmistress secures for Alamu the job of a gorness in Kamatchi Mudaliar's house in Kozhikode. Rathai accompanies Balalathai to Uratchikottai to stay in the latter's house for a short while. We have parallel situations and characters in *Vanity Fair*. One such situation is that while Rathai and Balalathai travel in a car to Uratchikottai in the Tamil version, Rebecca and Amalia go in a coach to Kensington in Thackeray's work. Two novels written by Maraimalai Adigal throw more light on the nature of adaptations and translations of this period. Aarani Kuppusamy Mudaliar, Vaduvor Duraisamy Iyengar, Vai. Mu. Kottainayagi Ammal. J. R. Rengaraju and T.S.D. Samy either wrote adaptations or translated English detective novels. It would be appropriate to quote Prof. T.P. Meenakshisundaram in this context:

"Now begins an era of translation, first Translations from Bengali, later from English, often unfortunately translations of the novels of G.W. Reynolds. Even a great Tamil scholar like Maraimalai Adigal has adapted such a story for his *Kumutavalli* which is full of beautiful realistic descriptions... Attempts are made to write original detective Stories and in this line. *Tupparaiyum Campu* of late Mahatevan, with its abundance of humour, is perhaps the best" (P 181).

Maraimalai Adigal had great admiration for the works of Joseph Addison. He even translated some of Addison's essays. According to Prof. T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram, Maraimalai Adigal adapted the English work *The Soldier's Wife* for his novel *Naganatarasi Kumudavalli*. But Pulavar Arasu avers that Adigal's source was *Laila*. K. Kailasapathy offers an explanation to this dilemma. He suggests that the original could have been *Laila* or *The Soldier's Wife*. This explanation sounds probable because it is based on the then prevailing practice of giving alternate titles to novels. Maraimalai Adigal states in his preface that his *Kumudavalli* is an adaptation of an English novel of great merit. The author of that English novel was George William McCarthy Reynolds (1809-1873), a Contemporary of Charles Dickens (1812-1870). Reynolds appears to be a remarkable personality. He was

closely associated with the chartist movement in England. He started a Magazine “Reynolds News” for the cause of labour movement. K. Kailasapathy says that Reynolds can be even called the emperor of serial stories. As a writer of popular fiction, he had no comparable rival in the 19th century England. In the then popular estimate, he was rated even superior to Charles Dickens.

Kohilambal Kadithangal was set in the form of a series of letters written by Kohilambal to her lover. The author has adopted the epistolary form in imitation of Richardson’s *Pamela* or *Virtue Rewarded*. But the Tamil work is a poor imitation of the English novel. In the case of Arani Kuppusamy Mudaliar (1867-1925), a similar attempt led to artistically successful results. Mudaliar became very famous as the adapter of G.W.M. Reynolds and Conan Doyle. Kuppusamy Mudaliar was a prolific writer who wrote nearly seventy five novels, some of which were translations, many adapted and a few original. His *Ratnapuri Rahasivam* was an adaptation of the Mysteries of the Court of London by Reynolds. A development of this period that merits our attention is that literary scholars in Tamil applied their mind to problems of adaptations and translations. In his preface to V.D. Mahadevan’s translation of William Le Queux’s *Whose Findeth a Wife* Selvakesavaraya Mudaliyar says that many Tamil adaptations of English novels are as indecent as English Salvation Army men in Hindu dress. He feels that a faithful translation of the English originals will offer an opportunity to the native Tamils without a knowledge of English to know at least some aspects of the European way of life. In the introduction to the same translation, K.R. Kovindaraja Mudaliar endorses the above view. This stand, by implication, supports the view, “A badly written book is only a blunder. A bad translation of a good book is a crime” (Horst 108).

In Comparative Literature, it is stated that a variety of factors determine the choice of a writer or translator. First of all, the translator may be attracted by the thoughts and ideas of a work. Secondly, he might think that his translation will satisfy the needs of his people. Therefore, the translator will be guided by the language demands and literary traditions of his country at that particular point of time. Perhaps Maraimalai Adigal performed Reynolds because novel readers of his time demanded only such stuff. French novelist Maurice Le Blanc’s famous dacoit-hero Arsent Lupin is presented to the Tamil readers as Veerakesari by S.S. Arunagirinathar, a Tamil Professor. Equally interesting is the fact that K.S. Venkataramani wrote novels in English, *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan The Patriot* (1932). Krishnakumari translated *Murugan the Tiller* into Tamil in 1928. Venkataramani also wrote a Tamil novel Desabhaktan in 1930. We have a host of other Tamil novelists whose works could be found to bear some kind of link or resemblance with some English novels. Already some work is done in areas like Scott and Kalki, Maugham and Mu.Va., Kafka and Mauni, Coleridge’s *Kublakhan* and Bharathi’s *Kani Nilam Vendum* etc., No doubt, the literary relation between English and Tamil has been a continuous one. The Tamil novel has developed a dynamic of its own. What began as trickle a century ago has now assumed the astounding proportions of a deluge. The one event which stirred both the

masses and the intellectual was the freedom movement. This subject has been treated in a number of novels. Kalki's *Alai Osai* (1950), Narana Durai Kannan's *Seeman Suyanalam* (1961), M.S. Kalyana Sundaram's *Twenty Years* (1965), Vallikkannan's *Veedum Veliyum* (1966), N. Chidambara Subramanian's *Mannil Theiryuthu Vanum* (1969), Naa. Parthasarathy's *Aathmavin Ragangal* (1969) and Ra. Su. Nallaperumal's *Kallukkul Eerum* (1969), belong to this category.

Many others have written novels analyzing the conditions of citizens in free India. Modern English novelists experimented with the stream of consciousness technique. It is claimed that individualism achieved its sublimation in the stream of consciousness technique. Despite the absence of such a situation here, Tamil novelists have been tempted to use this technique too. Puthumaipithan is believed to be the first Tamil writer who tried interior monologue in his short stories. Shades of this technique have been scattered in many such novels as *Orunal* by K.S. Subramanian, *Bhudra* by La. Sa. Ramamirtham, *Panchum Pasium* by Ragunathan, *Kettavaram* by Anuthma and *Pallikondapuram* by Neela Padmanabhan.

To conclude, out of profound literary relations between English and Tamil novels, it can be understood that these novels are indeed an artistic rendering of the society in which the novelists themselves move about in real life.

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