

## **Exploring and Interpreting the Uninterpreted Vastness of Translation in Literature: English Translation of 'Tiruvassagam' Tamil Hymns by Dr. G.U. Pope**

**C. Geetha Priya**

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The paper aims to bring out the aspects and issues of translation of Tamil poetry by discussing the translation of Tiruvassagam by G. U. Pope.

The 'Tiruvassagam' (Sacred Utterance) is a Poem in Tamil language, composed and sung towards Lord Shiva (Aavudaiyar) in Tiruperunthurai Temple, by one *Shaive Bhakti* Poet Manikkavasagar, born in Thiruvadhavur near Madurai in Ninth Century A.D. It is eighth *Tirumurai*, (the Sacred Anthology) in *Saiva Siddhantha*, comprising 649 Quintets (i.e, five-line stanza) in 51 Hymns.

Dr. George Uglow Pope (called as G.U. Pope) was born in Canada and belonged to Anglican Christian Missionary group. He came from England to South India (Sawyerpuram near Tuticorin of Tamilnadu State) in the year 1839 for the propagation of the Gospel. He learned Tamil, Sanskrit & Telugu languages well, became a Tamil scholar, studied many Tamil literature books like Tiruvassagam, Tirukovaiyar and Tirukkural, etc, enjoyed the beauty of Tamil language, tasted the content of Tamil literatures and translated the same in English language to help people in the world know about the uniqueness of Tamil Literature. Tiruvassagam was translated in English by him in the year 1900 and it is considered to be a significant contribution to Tamil literature in translation.

While exploring the Translation of Tiruvassagam by G.U. Pope, we find many Tamil words were used as they are, and a few words were translated as mere literal translation of Tamil words. Hence, foreigners who read the translation of Tiruvassagam may not get the original meaning of the original Tiruvassagam written by Manikkavasagar and thus may not experience its depth of meaning.

G. U. Pope well recognized the difficulty in translating verses from one language into another language. For example, he mentions:

“And in places G.U.Pope mentions the difficulty about translating these Tamil poems to the proper meaning in English. He states, "Lines 66-95 are well-nigh untranslatable, for they contain a subtle and intricate allegory, by means of which the grace of the manifested Shivan, who is praised under the title of the 'Cloud' is set forth. The idea is that the Infinite sea of rapturous supreme felicity is Civan, but - as the Cloud in the monsoon season sucks up water from the sea, and rises in black masses that cover the sky, while all the phenomena of the wonderful outburst of the beneficent, but also fearful, monsoon are exhibited - so does the Supreme manifest Himself as the Guru, the Object of Love, and Give of grace to His worshippers..."<sup>[19]</sup>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiruvagasam>

We discuss below some of the issues found in the translation of Tiruvagasam by G. U. Pope.

Line: 1-5: The translator (G U Pope) translated ‘நமசிவாய வாழ்க’ (*Na Ma Chi Vaa Ya’ Vaazhga*) as “Hail, the five letters”, in which, the word ‘Hail’ has so many meanings, very few only can mean of ‘Vaazhga’, where the word ‘Live (Long Live)’ will mostly be right in its place and similarly very few can only understand ‘the Five letters’ are as ‘Na Ma Chi Vaa Ya’. Then, he translated the word ‘இமைப்பொழுதும்’ (*Imai pozhdhum*) as ‘Not for an instant’ and it might be translated as ‘(even) for a time of winking’. He used the word ‘கோகழி’ (*Kokazhi*) as it was; it might be interpreted as ‘Avudaiyar temple at Tiruperunthurai’ and similarly he merely translated the word ‘குருமணி’ (*Guru mani*) as ‘Guru-Pearl’ & it might be interpreted as ‘the great Teacher’ (i.e, *Parama Guru*).

He translated the word ‘ஆகமம்’ (*Aagamam*) as it is, which might be interpreted as ‘a Script of Knowledge/Wisdom to attain the God’. He translated the word ‘அநேகன்’ (*Anegan*) as ‘the Not-One’ & it might be as ‘the Many’ and also translated the word ‘இறைவன்’ as ‘King’ & it might be as ‘Lord/God’. In general, the sentence ‘ஏகன் அநேகன் இறைவன் அடி வாழ்க’ (*Yegan Anegan Iraivan Adi Vaazhga*) might be interpreted as ‘Live (Long Live) to the feet of God who is as, the One & the Many’, instead of the translation is ‘Hail, foot of Him, the One, the Not-One and the King!’.

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Line: 6-10: He translated the word ‘பிஞ்ஞுகன்’ (*Pinnagan*) translated as it was, instead of ‘one who has hair crest in his head’ and also translated the word ‘பெய்கழல்கள்’ (*Peykazhalgal*) as ‘the jewelled foot’ and it might be translated as ‘clink sounding feet’ (i.e, Anklet jewel sounded feet) and likewise translated the word ‘கோன்கழல்கள்’ (*Konkazhlgal*) as ‘Anklet of the King’ and it might be translated as ‘feet of the King’.

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Line: 11-15: He translated the word ‘ஈசன்’ (*Eesan*) as it was which might be as ‘One who is Head of all’ and translated the word ‘தேசன்’ (*Thesan*) as ‘Teacher’ which might be interpreted as ‘One who is as light’. He translated the word ‘நம்தேவன்’ (*Nam Thevan*) just as ‘God’ instead ‘Our Lord.’

Line: 21-25: He translated the first line ‘கண்ணுதலான் தன்கருணைக் கண்காட்ட வந்தெய்தி’ (*Kannudhalaan Thankarunaik Kankaata Vantheidhi*) as ‘I came, attained the grace the ‘Brow eyed’ showed’, in which the word ‘கண்ணுதலான்’ (*Kannudhalaan*) may be interpreted as ‘One who has an eye in forehead, denoting wisdom’ instead ‘Brow eyed’. Then, he translated the word ‘இறைஞ்சி’ (*Erainchi*) as ‘Adored’ instead of the correct word ‘Plead’.

He translated the line ‘விண்ணிறைந்து மண்ணிறைந்து மிக்காய் விளங்கொளியாய்’ (*Vinnirainthu Mannirainthu Mikkaai Vilankoliyai*) as ‘O Thou, Who fill’st the heaven, Who fill’st the earth, art manifested light’, in which ‘விண்ணிறைந்து’ (*Vinnirainthu*) translated as ‘fill’st heaven’ and it might be as ‘fill’st space/sky’ and the word ‘மிக்காய்’ (*Mikkaai*) translated as ‘O Thou’ which might be as ‘O the greatest of all’.

Line 26-30: He translated the word ‘அசுரராகி’ (*Asuraraahi*) translated as it was, but it might have been as ‘Monster’.

Line 31-35: He translated the word ‘வேதங்கள், ஐயா என ஒங்கி ஆழ்ந்து அகன்ற நுண்ணியனே’ (*Vedhangal Ayya Yena Oongi Aazhndhu Agandra Nunniane*) as ‘Lord of the Vedas! Rising Sinking, Spreading Subtle one’ it might be as ‘Vedas call one as The Honourable by rising, sinking, spreading and is subtle one.

Line 40-45: He translated the word ‘ஆக்கம் அளவு இறுதி இல்லாய்’ (*Aakkam Alavu iruthi illaai*) as ‘Thou know’st no increase, measure, end!’ it might be as, ‘You/Thou are the creation / creativity, has no measure, end’.

Line 45-50: He translated the word ‘கன்னல்’ (*Kannal*) as ‘Sweet juice of cane’, it might be as ‘(juice of) sugarcane’, the word ‘நெய்’ (*Nei*) translated as ‘Butter’, it might be as ‘Ghee’ and translated the next sentence ‘சிறந்தடியார் சிந்தனையுள் தேனுறி நின்று’ (*Siranthadiyar sinthanaiyul Thenoori nindru*) as ‘Thou dost distil, like honey, in the

thought of glorious devotees’, it might be as ‘stood as (a feeling like as) honey soaked, in the thought of glorious devotees’

Line: 55-60: He translated the word ‘நீள்கழல்கள்’ (*Neelkazhalgal*) as ‘Mighty feet’; it might be as ‘lengthy feet’.

Line 61-65: He translated the sentence ‘தாயிற் சிறந்த தயாவான தத்துவனே’ (*Thaayir sirandha dhayaavaana thathuvane*) as ‘Essential grace more precious than a mother’s love’, it might be as, ‘(You are) the Generous Philosopher more precious than a Mother’ and translated the word ‘மலர்ந்த மலர்ச்சுடரே’ (*Malarntha malarchudare*) as ‘Brightness of full-blown flower’, it might be as ‘Flame / light like abloom flower’. Again, He translated the above said word ‘தேசனே’ (*Thesane*) as ‘O Teacher’ which might be interpreted as ‘O, One who is as light’. He translated the sentence ‘பாசமாம் பற்றறுத்து பாரிக்கும் ஆரியனே’ (*Paasamaam Patraruthu Parikkum Aariyane*) as ‘O venerated One, Guardian, Looser of Pacam’s tie’, it might be as, ‘O, the One who has great wisdom, protects/safeguards by cutting of bond of affection’.

Line 66-70: He translated the sentence ‘பேராது நின்ற பெருங்கருணை பேராறே’ (*Peraadhu nindra Perunkarunai Peyraarey*) as ‘Great river of exceeding tenderness, with ceaseless flow’, it might be as, ‘great river of vast kindness, stood without leaving my mind’.

Thus, some of the few words found in the translation of ‘*Tiruvagam*’ by Dr. G U Pope are mere literal meanings, sometimes the same Tamil words are used and some of the English words used are Old English Poetic words. The use of the above may not help one who is new to Tamil culture / Literature to fully understand ‘*Tiruvagam*’ and they will feel it very hard to understand the actual meaning meant by the Poet. At the same time we also need to understand that cross-cultural translation always carries with it the issues identified in this paper.

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C. Geetha Priya

II B.A. (English Literature)

Bishop Heber College, Vayalur Rd., Puthur, Tirchirappalli-17

[geethapriya138@gmail.com](mailto:geethapriya138@gmail.com)