

## **Convergence and Divergence in the Tamil Translation of the Play *Fire and the Rain***

**V. Nalini**

**Associate Professor of English  
Sri Meenakshi Govt Arts College (W)  
Madurai  
[nlnimdu@gmail.com](mailto:nlnimdu@gmail.com)**

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Girish Karnad is a modern and multi-faceted writer whose plays have made an indelible mark on the realm of Indian drama for their specific content and form. The subject matter of these plays is given a unique dimension as they are based on myths but they reflect modernity too as they reread the existential questions of life. Most of his plays are written originally in Kannada and are later translated into English by the author and his play *Fire and the Rain* is one among them. Paavannan, a reputed Tamil short-story writer, essayist, and translator has translated the play from Kannada into Tamil with the title *Agniyum, Mazhaiyum*. The translation of these two texts provides ample space for analysis. Therefore the objective of this paper is to examine the ways in which both the texts converge and diverge in translation.

The story of the play is centered on a fire sacrifice performed at the palace to appease Indra, the Lord of Gods to cure the land of a ten years drought. Parvasu, the chief priest has guarded the fire for seven years, sacrificing his marital life and other earthly holds. His brother Arvasu, an innocent but good hearted young man is in love with Nittilai, a tribal girl but fails to convince her elders in marrying her. Yavakiri, their cousin has returned after a ten years period of penance in the forest and possesses universal knowledge. He is angry and jealous that Parvasu has been chosen as the chief priest instead of his father and to revenge it, seduces Vishaka, his former lady love and now the lonely wife of Parvasu. Raibhya, the father of Parvasu, creates a demon to kill him. Induced by the angry Vishaka against his father, Parvasu kills him, thus desecrating his priesthood. But he makes his brother the scapegoat of this murder.

Arvasu is helped by Nittilai who leaves her husband and therefore searched by her relatives. They join a drama troupe and perform the story of how Indra cheated his brother Vishwarupa, murdered him and Vrithra their demon brother, played by Arvasu, tries to avenge Indra in the palace where the sacrifice was held. Arvasu loses his self-control and in the commotion that precedes it, Parvasu kills himself in the fire, Nittilai is murdered by her husband and Arvasu is left deserted in agony. But Indra, the Rain God appears and is willing to

give a boon. Arvasu asks for Nittilai's life but the demon created by Raibhya pleads for its life to him. Arvasu sacrifices his love out of empathy for the demon and his humane act makes Indra at last to grant rain to the country.

The play *Fire and the Rain* is originally written in Kannada in 1989 and translated by Girish Karnad into English in 1994 and published in 1998. Writer Paavannan has translated it into Tamil in the year 2002. The English play has a Preface, List of Characters, Three Acts, an Epilogue and Notes written by Karnad whereas the Tamil text has a Foreword section, Publisher's Notes, a Compilation of various Interviews with Karnad, Translator's Notes, List of Characters and Three acts. This indicates the care taken on the part of the translator to introduce Karnad and his writing to the Tamil reader.

In his notes, Paavannan records how he is inspired by the way in which Karnad transforms myth, dramatizes it and visualizes the light and shades of contemporaneity through his imagery and dialogues. In the Tamil scenario, Therukoothu or street play has made use of myths but that practice stopped with that genre alone and therefore Karnad's works inspired him to translate them into Tamil. Thus the translated text serves not only as a tool to bridge two languages but also as a space to create an awakening to reread myths, develop new texts and reading which would enrich modern art and culture.

Karnad is well aware of the challenges of translation and he writes about the problem of loss in translating the Sanskrit word 'Agni' as 'Fire' in English. He says that the connotations of holiness are lost even while writing in Kannada. "Agni is what burns in sacrificial altars, acts as a witness to weddings and is lit at cremations. It is also the name of the god of fire" (Notes, *The Fire and the Rain*). Interestingly Tamil has got its own space for the use of Sanskrit words and therefore Paavannan has retained the use of the word 'Agni' in his translation. But English is a culturally alien language and therefore the problem of loss occurs in the English translation. As Eugene Nida says: "Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations" (Venuti 126)

In the Prologue of the English text, Karnad gives details of the sacrifice and the priests whereas in the Tamil text, the translator just mentions them and proceeds with the story. The detailing in the original text helps the reader understand the magnificence of the structured Sacrifice and how committed the priests are in that atmosphere. If we ask the question how important is detailing in a work of art the answers are interesting. The creation of reality in a work of art is dependent on the detailing, the visual or auditory or other types of imagery built by the author. It is a technique that makes the readers forget their external reality and be one with

the artistic reality that reverberates inside the text. But such detailing is missing in the Tamil translation.

The language used by the characters is consciously carved by Karnad. For instance, when the priests address the King, they use terms like ‘Your Majesty’ and ‘Please’. The King uses an authoritative voice. This demarcation helps the readers to understand the hierarchy, the way in which it operates and how power and submission have a language of their own. Such a sensitive approach is missing in the Tamil text, as the King and the priests use a colloquial language. In addition to that the priests use a persuasive tone and the king uses a conciliatory tone.

There are certain instances in which the sensitivity to diction is not taken care of in the Tamil text. For example the group of actors is mentioned as ‘Troupe’ in English but translated as ‘Kumbal’ which means an informal crowd in Tamil. Similarly the coinage ‘consummate huntress’ which means a skilled huntress is translated in Tamil as just “vettaikkaari” meaning ‘a huntress’. The term ‘barking deer’ is used in the English text, the equivalent of which is ‘semmaan’ a particular category among the deer. But it is just translated as ‘maan’ meaning a common term for deer in Tamil.

There are differences in the two translations in another way too. There is an addition of meaning in the Tamil text which is missing in the English text. In the English text, Nittilai just observes that the foot prints belong to Vishaka. In the Tamil text, Nittilai observes that they are Vishaka’s footprints and they indicate an absence of confusion or urgency or fear. Likewise when Arvasu narrates how Paravasu disappeared in the Fire, he says that “He went up in flames” (58). In the Tamil text, Arvasu says that Paravasu disappeared like burning camphor. The tamil version uses a visual imagery that is aesthetically appealing than the English translation of the original. Yet fidelity to the original is lost.

Much can be said on the use of proverbs and the issue of untranslatability but the scope of the paper limits itself in pointing out certain instances that differentiate the Tamil translation and the English translation of Girish Karnad’s play *Fire and the Rain*. The gaps and additions are pointed out in the paper to explicate the nuances and problems in translation.

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### Works Cited

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