

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



**Volume 6, Issue 12, December 2018**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

Tresa Peter

Department of English,

St.Teresa's College,

Ernakulam, India.

tresa.febin@gmail.com

Dr. Celine E

Department of English,

St.Teresa's College,

Ernakulam, India.

srvinithaalieas@gmail.com

#### Power relations Vs Personal Relations in the Selected

#### Translations of O.Chandu Menon's Indulekha

The novel has three English translations. The first English version was by John Willoughby Francis Dumergue, a friend of O. Chandu Menon. The latest one was by Dr. Anitha Devassia. The novel had several novelties in terms of theme and technique though Chandu Menon was trying to 'translate' an alien genre to Malayalam literature. Anitha Devasia's translation came more than hundred years after the publication of the original and Dumergue's translation. This paper intends to analyze the two translations to identify the translator more representative of the author using Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as "a general, transposable disposition, which carries out a systematic, universal appreciation – beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt- of the necessity inherent in learning conditions"

Keywords – Power relations, Translation, Post-Colonialism, Nair Matriliny, and History

Power relations Vs Personal Relations in the Translations of O.Chandu Menon's Indulekha

Indulekha written by Oyyarathu Chandu Menon is considered to be the first work in Malayalam which conforms to the conventions of the modern novel. The novel published in 1889 was a huge success. The novel was translated the next year by the then collector of Malabar, W. Dumergue. Chandu Menon was a voracious reader who was well versed in English and Malayalam and Sanskrit. He used to tell the stories of English novels he had read to his wife and friends. He ventured to write a Malayalam work modeled on English novels to satisfy the growing demand from his wife and friends who would not even let him study 'a treatise on law', mistaking it for a novel (Menon 62). He finally decided to translate an English novel into Malayalam. He began translating a novel but felt that a translation thus made would be absolutely without value. I find no great difficulty in communicating to my friends who are ignorant of English, a fairly accurate idea of an English novel by means of an oral rendering, but I think it is wholly impossible to transmit a correct expression of the story through a written translation. The reason for this is that, when a translation is written, a mere string of words is presented to the mind, and this alone is insufficient for the purpose. In translating orally, the true force of English expression is, at times, maintained. If a professedly literal translation were interpolated with such details, explanation and commentary, the details appropriate to each incident as it is related, by supplementing the pronunciation of words and by gesture and expression. If a professedly literal translation were interpolated with such details, explanation, and commentary, then there is no doubt that the work as a translation, would be completely ruined. Moreover, another obstacle is that any attempt to reproduce literally in a written translation into Malayalam, the love passages with which the English novels abound must

necessarily be far from happy. Taking, therefore, all these circumstances into consideration, I determined to write a Malayalam novel more or less after the English fashion. (Menon 62)

Chandu Menon, though not a trained translator, was aware of the challenges posed by a work written in an alien culture. His words quoted above expresses the awe and reverence with which he views the language of the colonizer. He acknowledges his inability in transferring the culture of the colonizer to the colonized. *Indulekha*, in a way, can be considered as a translation as it attempts to reproduce for a target audience the experience of the alien genre. Chandu Menon can, without the constraints of the translator, incorporate the features of the target culture, i.e. the Malayali –Nair- to be more specific- into the alien mould of the novel.

The novel was translated into English within a year by W. Dumergue, who was also his friend. R. Leeladevi's translation came out in 1979. In 2005 the third translation by Anitha Devasia was published. This paper intends to look at the two translators of this novel- W. Dumergue and Anitha Devasia- and explores play of power relations and personal relations in the act of translation using the concepts of cultural capital and habitus propounded by Pierre Bourdieu.

W. Dumergue was the collector of Malabar and translator to the British Government. O. Chandu Menon had sent a copy of the novel to Dumergue who was also his friend. The letter which was sent along with the copy of the work closes with these words, "I beg to remain, Sir, Your most obedient servant, O.Chandu Menon" (Menon, 245). The post-colonial context and Dumergue's rank and status demand these words of servant like humility. The friendship is never that of two equals. Ralph Nelson talks about the translator-author relationship in this poem:

And choose an author as you choose a Friend;

United by this sympathetic Bond

You grow familiar and fond.

Your thoughts, your Words, your Stiles, and your Souls agree

No longer his interpreter, he He (qtd.in. Song 59)

The absence of this 'sympathetic Bond' becomes evident in Dumergue's translation of Indulekha. In order to develop a 'sympathetic Bond' with the author, the translator must appreciate author's habitus. According to Bourdieu:

The conditions associated with a particular class of existence produces habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (qtd. in Song 59).

Dumergue though a friend to the author cannot really appreciate his habitus because he does not share the author's habitus. A work was written by a member of the colonized society in order to "create a taste among my Malayalee readers, not conversant with English, for that class of literature represented in the English language by novels" (Menon 68) echoes the play of the power relations in colonized society.

Power relations 'reflect the power structures within the wider social context' (Song 59). It converts – in the case of Indulekha- the very act of writing and that of translation to a site of contestation. The author and the translators make certain choices which spring from their habitus. Chandu Menon employs a dramatic mode of narration which is characteristic of Indian literary and artistic forms. Chandu Menon is well-versed in Sanskrit drama, poetry and grammar and the influence is obvious in his use of dramatic mode. This is indicative of the cultural capital- the embodied cultural capital- which he has acquired from childhood onwards. According to Pierre Bourdieu capital can 'expresses itself in three guises'-economic, cultural and social. Cultural capital can exist in three forms:

in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, i.e., in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of theories, problematics etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (17).

Since embodied cultural capital is “a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips a social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts” (qtd.in Song 59), it can significantly affect the way a text is understood, appreciated and translated. Cultural capital in its objectified state can be transmitted by sale (Song 60). Thus it becomes more precious. A literary work and its translated version are thus convertible to economic capital. The capacity to convert an agent’s- in the present case, the author or the translator- embodied and objectified cultural capital into economic capital is closely linked to institutionalized cultural capital. Institutionalized cultural capital encompasses all sorts of certificates, credentials, and titles recognized by society (ibid).

Chandu Menon, as the present researcher has already mentioned, was well versed in Sanskrit and Malayalam literature. He had also received English education. Western education which he received from Thalassery Basel Mission Parsi School equipped him to gain employment in the Government service and brought him close to important officials like William Logan and Dumergue. Chandu Menon could, thus, successfully convert his embodied cultural capital into social and economic capital.

Dumergue’s position as representative of the British Government i.e., the representative of the economically, politically dominant group, places him on a vantage ground in the battle between the colonized – both literally and metaphorically- author and colonial translator.

Dumergue is thus not the friend cum translator but the colonial master who is proud about the success of the civilizing mission his nation has undertaken in the colony. The power relations thus become more important when it comes to translation and is reflected in the choices that Dumergue makes. The choices are made keeping in mind the target audience, the English people. The colonial translator's purpose of translation can play down the motives of the author. I hereby cite some examples from the text to prove my argument.

The main theme of the novel is the love between Indulekha and Madhavan and the hardships that they have to endure before they are happily united. Chandu Menon has successfully incorporated some of the raging issues of the time into the thematic fabric of the novel thus making it historically relevant. The novel can be read as a historical document which discusses education and marriage of Nair women, the significance of the matrilineal system, national movement etc. The one term that is very central to the discussion of the life of the Nair community is Sambandam. The irony is that nowhere in Dumergue's translation the word Sambandam is used. He replaces the word with marriage throughout the text and also in notes that he has given at the end of the novel. Dumergue's incomprehensibility of the concept of Sambandam becomes more clear when he says that "The question, whether the liberty of divorce was not instrumental in destroying polyandry among the Nairs just as it tended to bring about the change from polygamy to monogamy among western nations, is not one which can be discussed here" (Dumergue 4651). Dumergue, true to his habitus and cultural capital, thinks solely as a benevolent reformer.

The debate between Indulekha and Madhavan which occurs in chapter two has the effect of defining the concept of Sambandam to the foreign audience. But he replaces it with marriage. In the notes he attaches to the translation he uses a definition given by Mr. Wigram who defines it as a contract based on mutual consent and dissoluble at will" (ibid). He also ignores that Chandu Menon has the entire Malayali community in mind and writes with pan

Kerala perspective. The debate is about the faithfulness of Malayali women to their husbands. Dumergue replaces the Malayali women with women of Malabar. Sambandam was practiced across the length and breadth of Kerala. Kerala, in the nineteenth century, did not come under a single ruler or a unitary system of governance. The feeling of camaraderie is lost when Malayali women are replaced with women of Malabar. He tries to explain Madhavan's remark by giving his own views to it thus redefining and generalizing it solely as a question of fidelity than of a woman's choice (Menon 743). Dumergue's embodied cultural capital which also derives from his habitus reflects in his antipathy towards many of raging debates that the author foregrounds in the novel.

Anitha Devasia translated the novel more than a century after the publication of the original. The translation was published by the Oxford University Press in 2005. The translation was part of her Ph.D. research which she undertook under the guidance of Dr. Susie J.Tharu and Dr. Venkat Rao in EFLU Hyderabad (then CIEFL) in 1999. Her introduction to the translation shows her regard for three major functions of the translator, which came up in the 1989 workshop held by Sahitya Akademi :

1. Respect for the communicative intent of the original author;
2. preservation of the basic design of the original text; and
3. Rendering in a language and style communicable to identified readers. (Paniker 25)

Devasia's embodied cultural capital which also includes her education - especially her access to post-colonial literary theory, debates in the field of translation- and her habitus as a Malayali woman enables her to understand and appreciate the concerns of Chandu Menon. Devasia, as a woman writing from post-independence sociocultural and political background, is empowered to take on the audience alien to Chandu Menon's milieu without fear and apprehension- a privilege denied to Chandu Menon while he tried to translate Henrietta Temple. Her status as a research scholar gives her the freedom to respect the specificity of the

source culture. She does not replace the dramatic form of the source text. She does not try to robe Indulekha in the western attire either physically or metaphorically.

In her introduction to the thesis, Devasia says that, in Indulekha, “discussions about the reform of Nair marriage and inheritance practices and about the advantages of learning English and Western education are placed alongside proposals for the consolidation of Nair identity within an all India frame” (Devasia, “A Translation” xiv). This authorial intent is kept alive in the translation written more than a century after the publication of the source text. She retains the word *Sambandam*. She preserves the aesthetic value of source culture. She does not describe Indulekha’s teeth as “pearly” like Dumergue – which is typically western- but as ruby red, as Chandu Menon has depicted it. Ruby red teeth, as Indulekha chewed beetle leaves, was considered to be ideal among Nair women (lxxvii).

Devasia, thanks to her habitus, bravely translates the contrast between the Western and Indian concept of beauty. The colonial master’s racial superiority does not allow Dumergue to include Chandu Menon’s remark on the Malayali view of English women’s eyes. Dumergue omits this. Devasia’s translation is given below:

“ Yet while describing the quality of beauty in a woman, English poets generally speak of golden hair and light blue eyes-precisely what we in raw Malayalam speech derisively term ‘cat-eyed’.(Devasia 5)

The post structural scholarship has had the effect of liberating contemporary translators. This difference is evident in the translations of the same text by two translators who belong to two different centuries. The changed socio-political and cultural condition gives the translator more freedom to ‘importing extra linguistic codes and cultural markers from the source culture’ (qtd in song 61).

The conflict between power relations and personal relations is evident from the choices that Dumergue makes while translating the novel. Devasia, though born in a different era but

unified by the same mother tongue as that of author's and unaffected by the power relations, successfully transports the target reader to the source culture. She thus becomes more of a friend to Chandu Menon than Dumergue.

## Works Cited

- Bourdieu, P. "The Forms of Capital". The Handbook of Theory and Practice of Sociology of Education, edited by Richardson. Greenwood, 1986, pp.241-58
- Devasia, Anitha. Translator. Indulekha. By O. Chandu Menon, Oxford UP, 2005.
- . A Translation of O Chandumenons Indulekha 1889 with a critical Introduction.1999  
EFLU. PhD Dissertation. Shodhganga.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/150186>
- Dumergue, W. translator. Indulekha. By O. Chandu Menon, Tarjuma, Kindle Ebooks, 2007.
- Menon, O. Chandu. Preface.Indulekha, translated by W.Dumergue, Tarjuma, Kindle Ebooks, 2007.
- . Letter to Dumergue. Indulekha, translated by W.Dumergue, Tarjuma, Kindle Ebooks, 2007.
- Paniker, K. Ayyappa. Ed. Making of Indian Literatures. Sahitya Akademi. 1991.
- Song, Zhongwei. "The Art of War in retranslating Sun Tzu." The sociological turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies, edited by Claudia V. Angelelli. John Benjamins PC, 2014, pp57-72.