
**MORAL AESTHETICS: AN ICONIC TEXT IN THE ERA OF POST-TRUTH - A
CRITIQUE**

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Abstract

The book *Moral Aesthetics* is an iconic text in the era of Post-truth. The statement of this research paper emphasizes the uniqueness of the book in the era of Post-truthian world. The term 'Post-truth' was coined in 2016 to refer to the age of uncertainty of truth in politics. Later, the term is used to refer as the result of 'Late Capitalism'* in which the colonization of consumers is predominant by the 'Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'*. In the capitalist post-truthian era 'some fake news lasts forever', '[O]nce a lie, always the truth and people are 'getting out of the brainwashing machine'*. The translator's task is a difficult one in Walter Benjamin's way of defining it by referring to Freud. The translator has double tasks, the 'work of remembering' and the 'work of mourning'. Here the mourning comes for the loss of essence in Target Language and the translator has to be ready to accept this loss. On the whole, the linguistic ability of the translator is shown in the translation. The book serves as a bridge between the readers and the Tamil culture. The transportation of the culture and civilization of Tamil people is beautifully summed up in the book. The preface of the book *Moral Aesthetics* is written by Mrs. K. Jayalakshmi, formerly a professor at Thiagarajar College. The preface is also a comprehensive report on Avvaiyar and her literariness.

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"Indeed, in one sense, translation tends to betray the originality of the language when it is translated into a target language. One cultural motif is betrayed into another cultural motif, one traditional value is betrayed into another traditional value, one group of linguistic signs is betrayed into another group of linguistic

signs. But translating betrayals are necessary to sustain the sustainability of life.
Life translated is life enhanced.

One signifier is translated into another signifier, but the signified always remains
unchanged in translations. The signified is Truth.”

- Prof. Dr. M. Elangovan

The book *Moral Aesthetics* is an iconic text in the era of Post-truth. The statement of this research paper emphasizes the uniqueness of the book in the era of Post-truthian world. The term 'Post-truth' was coined in 2016 to refer to the age of uncertainty of truth in politics. Later, the term is used to refer as the result of 'Late Capitalism'* in which the colonization of consumers is predominant by the 'Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'*. In the capitalist post-truthian era 'some fake news lasts forever', '[O]nce a lie, always the truth and people are 'getting out of the brainwashing machine'*. In such kind of situation, one cannot have moral values and dignity. All these characteristics are also reflected in Literature.

The book *Moral Aesthetics* is a collection of four translated poems of Avvaiyar, an aged-spinster of Tamil Literature, such as *Aathichoodi*, *KondraiVendhan*, and *Nalvazhi*. It serves an important purpose. The iconic leftist and theoretician Dr. M. Elangovan, who has meticulously planned and worked out the translation of Avvaiyaar, is working as an Assistant Professor of English at Thiagarajar College, Madurai. He is known for his Neo-Marxist ideologies and perfection in recent Literary, Critical and Cultural Theories. The itinerary of the translator in the book *Moral Aesthetics* lies in his exportation of the earliest ancient Tamil cultural ideologies into the Western culture. His aim is to export the Regional Literatures to the Western elites.

Tamil Literature is the ancient and the oldest body of discipline in India. It indicates the literature produced in the Tamil language. It has its 'Great Tradition' and uniqueness. Tamil Literature spans two thousand years ago. The rich values in 'Bhakti' and Moral Literatures in Tamil make its constant place in the world of literature. One can divide Tamil Literary tradition into various segments, such as Sangam Age, Post-Sangam period, Medieval Literature, Vinayagar and Nayak period and Modern era. The notable Tamil classical works are *Tolkāppiyam*, *Purananooru*, *Agananooru*, *Tirukkural*, and five great epics such as *Cilappatikāram*, *Manimekalai*, *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi*, *Valayapathi*, and *Kuṇṭalākēci*.

Of the above stated period, both Post-Sangam and Medieval period have Didactic literature. The aged spinster Avvaiyar belongs to the Medieval literature, which is also referred to as Chola literature. The dominance of poets in the Medieval literature had given a small place for a poetess Avvaiyar, whose prominence and happiness rested on writing the didactic literature

for children. Her important collections of didactic books are *Aathichoodi*, *KondraiVendhan*, and *Nalvazhi*. The basic moral principles are expressed in these four books. The essence of these books should be known to the world. Prof. Dr. M. Elangovan, in spite of an English professor, has brought the hidden treasures of the Tamil didactic characteristics to the world.

But the translation goes back to the encounters between two or many Western Cultures. Richard Kearney says "Translation has been a central feature" in the present society (Pg. vii, Introduction to Paul Ricoeur's *On Translation*). According to Paul Ricoeur, there are two types of translation, first, the 'linguistic paradigm' and the second, 'ontological paradigm'. The former refers to "how the words relate to meanings within a language or between languages" (xii), whereas, the latter concentrates on "how translation occurs between one human self and another."(xii)

The translator's task is a difficult one in Walter Benjamin's way of defining it by referring to Freud. The translator has double tasks, the 'work of remembering' and the 'work of mourning'. Here the mourning comes for the loss of essence in Target Language and the translator has to be ready to accept this loss. But Ricoeur says "in reality, two partners are connected through the act of translating, the foreign – a term that covers the work, the author, his language – and the reader, a recipient of the translated work." (4) The position of the translator is to "go from one idiom to another" which is an uncomfortable position of mediator. (4) In this Post-truthian era, people do not have the cultural ideologies. The culture of the ancient Tamilnadu has its own rich values. The richness of Tamil culture teaches Moral values. Tamil writings have an aesthetic sense, through which morality has been expressed aesthetically. So the necessity of translating these values in the language of the western elites arises.

While translating the aged spinster's didactic poetry, the translator Prof. Elangovan has undergone a drastic metamorphosis. He was torn between The SL and TL. Roman Jakobson in his article 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' says that there are three types of translations:

1. Intralingual translation
2. Interlingual translation
3. Inter semiotic translation.

In these, the interlingual translation is termed as 'translation proper'. (Translation Studies, 23)

The process of translation inherits five different criteria as pointed out by Eugene Nida. The process starts from the text of SL, analysis of the translator, transfer of the contents, restructuring of the same and then the translation begins. Certain central issues are found in translation. The translator does encounter some of the problems while translating a text, such as a

language and culture, problems of equivalence, some loss and gain and certain untranslatability. So one should accept Susan Bassnett's idea that the "Exact translation is impossible." (29)

The problem arises when the selection of equivalent phrases, cultural terms, and idioms are not found in the Target Language. So the job of the translator is critical in nature. He becomes second God when he indulges in the act of translation.

Susan Bassett has rightly says that more time has been spent to investigate the problems occur in "translating poetry than any other literary mode." (86) In poetry, the translator has to come across the phonemic translation, metrical translation, rhymed translation, blank verse translation, and interpretation. These are some of the problematic areas to be coming up with. No two languages have the same phonemic mode. The language is constituted according to the culture of the group.

Professor Dr. M. Elangovan has struck by the phonetic translation. The poet is a translator. Similarly, the translator can be a poet. Prof. Dr. M. Elangovan does the same. While translating Avvaiyar's poetry he does not only translates but also interprets the source text into the target text. Professor has employed the free verse. He attempts to show the individual space, time and values in the post-truth era.

The author himself in his note at the beginning of the book *Moral Aesthetics* has quoted a maxim that "All translations are betrayals." Professor's acceptance of this famous maxim in the world of translation has led him to come up with a new definition of translation. The translation is rendered through simple language. The exploitation of the simple similes and metaphors of professors have made the book easy access to the readers.

Avvaiyar's literary strength lies in her simple ways of conveying meaningful values of moral life through her poetry. This 'self-centered' nature of Avvaiyar, as said by Dr. M. Elangovan in his author's note, inspires the professor to translate her didactic poetry. The translator has taken the readers to a moral journey towards wisdom. The wisdom of didactic values is illuminated in the translation. In spite of encountering the multifaceted problems while rendering the SL text into the TL text, the translator has not renounced the spirit of translation. At the same time, he has maintained the originality in his translation. The problems for the translator occur at four different levels, such as Graphic level, syntactic (structural) level, semantic level, and cultural level.

The book *Moral Aesthetics* was published by Emerald Publishers in 2018. It can be distinguished into two parts. The first part consists of moral stories based on Avvaiyar's didactic poetry. The second part of the book consists of the translation of 'Aathichoodi', Kondrai

Vendhan', Madurai and Nalvazhi. The translator's intention is, at first, to translate these four eternal works of art. Since the publisher asked to render the moral stories for the translation, he has, unwillingly, come up with twelve stories.

One can understand Prof. Dr. M. Elangovan's leftist ideologies and his linguistic capabilities through moral stories. Each story has a protagonist. All the protagonists of the moral stories have rewarded at the end of each story, according to their moral quality. For instance, in one of the moral stories the protagonist, Johnson Stephen has been rewarded with his wish for his modesty. The story has been written according to the sixteenth verse of 'Madurai'. The following verse is used to narrate the story of Johnson Stephen.

SL Text: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
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TL Text: Do not undervalue modest people as if
 they were fools, they are like the cranes on
 the riverbank patiently waiting for the big fish
 and allowing the small ones to escape.

The second part of the book contains the hidden treasury of the moral values in Tamil literature. 109 sayings of Avvaiyar in her *Aathichoodi* have been translated. In all these sayings, the translator has found out more or less the equivalent semantics in English. The first twelve sayings start with the first twelve Tamil alphabets.

- SL Text:
1. அறம்செயவிரும்பு
 2. ஆறுவதுசினம்
 3. இயல்வதுகரவேல்
 4. ஈவதுவிலக்கேல்
 5. உடையதுவிளம்பேல்
 6. ஊக்கமதுகைவிடேல்
 7. எண்ணமுத்துஇகழேல்
 8. ஏற்பதுஇகழ்ச்சி
 9. ஐயமிட்டுஉண்
 10. ஒப்புரவுவொழுகு

11. ஒதுவதுஒழியேல்

12. ஒளவியம்பேசேல்

TL Text:

1. Love to do righteous acts.
2. Appease your anger.
3. Perform capable good things.
4. Do not stop charity.
5. Do not reveal your weakness and strength.
6. Do not give up your strong mindedness.
7. Do not ignore words and numbers.
8. It is a shame to beg.
9. Eat after sharing.
10. Adjust with the world.
11. Do not stop learning.
12. Do not become jealous.

But in the English translation, it is missed on the graphics level. Here lies the richness of Tamil Literature. Here the translator was unable to find out the equivalent alphabet whereas he renders all the sayings which are in poetic in nature into prose. The alliteration is not followed by the translator. For the sake of meter and rhyme, one cannot change the original text. If it happens, the whole text is marred. Hence, the translator does not want to betray the originality of the SL text. He has strictly followed the ethics of translation.

Another important difficulty occurs in the 'graphic level' at the fifteenth saying in 'Aathichoodi'.

SL Text: '□'□□□□□□□□□□

TL Text: Be flexible like the Tamil Alphabet '□'.

Since the English language does not have the same graphic symbol, the translator has utilized the Tamil alphabet '□' as it is given in the Tamil language.

In syntactic level also the translator encounters certain difficulties. He was unable to maintain the same structure of the SL text in the TL text. For instance, in the following saying, he does not maintain the structure of the SL text, at the same time he has not betrayed the originality and has maintained the essence.

SL: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

TL: Love to do righteous acts.

Here the translator becomes the interpreter and translated the line without losing the essence of the original line. The material composition has not been followed.

As far as the semantic level is concerned the translator has struggled to translate the line '□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□'. Here the word '□□□□□' has two different meanings, first are female and second is the job. But in the English language, the author does not find this kind of expression. So he renders the above saying as "Do not listen to the words of women". These are the few instances that can be shown in this article.

On the whole, the linguistic ability of the translator is shown in the translation. The book serves as a bridge between the readers and the Tamil culture. The transportation of the culture and civilization of Tamil people is beautifully summed up in the book. The preface of the book *Moral Aesthetics* is written by Mrs. K. Jayalakshmi, formerly a professor at Thiagarajar College. The preface is also a comprehensive report on Avvaiyar and her literariness. The researcher has spent a lot of times with the translator Prof. Dr. M. Elangovan. If the present article fetches laurels let all of them go to the crown of Dr. M. Elangovan, but if it receives the pungent criticism let all of them come to the writer of the article.

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*Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism*

*The term is borrowed from a book by Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

*Yuval Noah Harris in his *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*.