

# Translating Women in Sethu's Malayalam Fiction into English: The Issue of Cultural Gaps

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## Abstract

*As time passes, there is a greater appreciation of the role of Translation Studies in understanding a woman's point of view. How to embody female discourses in translation has become a significant issue in working on a Target Language (TL) text. The present study focus on the translated text titled 'Once Upon a Time' (2014; tr. K.T. Rajagopalan), initially written in Malayalam titled 'Adayalangan' (2005) by Sethu. Through this study, we analyze a translator's literary depiction of central female characters in a woman-oriented Malayalam fiction. There is an evident loss of the essence of Kerala cultural history and its customs on the one hand, and the invisibility of the feminist voice in the text. The study explores the cultural gaps in depicting the central women characters through translation, and also, how the translator depicts women's issues, gender inequalities and handling stereotypes through translation.*

**Keywords:** Translation, Gender, Culture, Inequality, Space, Womanhood.

## Introduction

In this post-globalization world, translation has emerged as an important communication tool. It can initiate conversations between various linguistic communities around the world. It also mediates between the author of the source language and culture and her/his readers from an entirely different culture. This intercultural communication between various cultural spaces, linguistic communities, and interest groups lays the basis of inclusive, intersectional and interrelation interests in feminism and other

perspectives. The transnational experiences became very crucial with the advent of the third wave of feminism which makes the act of translation very important. Questioning each woman's identity in the text and her exploitation and suppression assumes great importance. Whether translations bring out the views and treatment of the source language author become a point of discussion. That is why it is important to recall what Olga Castro (2013) states: "The future of feminism is in the transnational, and transnational links can only be made through translation" (7). This allowed us to evaluate a Malayalam to English translation text from these angles. Our purpose is to discover the cultural gaps that emerge from certain decisions while translating.

Postcolonial studies nowadays prioritise in the representation of the marginal, and therefore it is important to give importance to the works that deals with women's issues from various cultures. When we check the literary and cultural histories, Gender and language have always had a troubled relationship. Castro (2013) refers to language, along with its translation, as "tools for gender oppression and liberation" (7). Language is a good vehicle for communicating culture but a medium for communicating prejudices as well. Given this scenario, feminist writings have always felt the need to 'convert' language, to find ways to overturn the patriarchal bent of the language and re-engage it to topple the existing hierarchies. Flowtow comments in his work titled *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism* (1997) that the feminists of 1970s looked at language "as an instrument of women's oppression and subjugation which needed to be reformed, if not replaced by a new women's language" (14).

## **The Text and the Feminist Perspective**

The present study is about the issue of cultural gaps in portraying women in translation where the examples come from Malayalam to English translation of a well-known prose writer in Kerala – Sethu. In the process, we also discuss the centrality of women characters in the Malayalam novel. Sethu's treatment of his women characters shows that he attempts to delve into their psychological depth. His works are an inspiration for women who are struggling to change

their situation. In several novels, the author tries to motivate readers to understand that women cannot be viewed as subordinates as they were traditionally portrayed. Instead, he focuses on women as leaders who can take centre-stage in today's socio-political and economic matters. He pays special attention to women the patriarchy excluded from participating in important issues of their families and society. In his depiction, the female characters assume equal importance vis-à-vis the men folk for their status and roles. This approach highlights the cultural practices that men generally use to subjugate women. As the victims of gender imbalances, it is up to these women to fight back and deal with stereotyping. In the process, the author sheds light on the psyche of the modern young woman in the Malayalam speech community.

Only a limited number of papers and articles in Malayalam highlight the lack of serious engagement with the theoretical perspectives of cultural gaps in portraying women and translation. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper exploration of the same. This study attempts to analyze culture gaps and involves the multiple interpretations of women through translation by examining how language becomes a tool of gender experiences. This will open up fresh dialogic spaces to engage with interpreting gender from the translation perspective.

Women, and their socio-cultural issues come out clearly in the TL Text if the translators are sensitive to the author's motivation and attitudes. This study will expose how a male translator uses his translation strategies and methods to twist and turn female discourse which should have otherwise revealed the portrayal of women and culture in the background. The study also depicts how the translator did not accept the challenge of depicting the concept of gender and culture to the target text readers, even when the author and the Source Text provided ample opportunities.

The translation is explained as cross-cultural transfer, as Vermeer (1986) explains the theory in detail. Here the suggestion is that cross-cultural transfer implies or infers an ideological transfer as well if the author's ideology is understood in its broad sense, i.e. as the standard set of values, beliefs and ideas that govern a community. Hence a translator must possess in-depth knowledge of

the values, beliefs, and ideas that connect the two languages being mediated through translation.

Culler in *Reading as a Woman: On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1983) suggests that learning to read as a woman may open up new vistas. It may awaken each reader to the meaning of sexual codes buried in the source text, allowing one to identify and correct distortions imposed by a male critical vision. When considering the reading of a translation from a woman's perspective, it's important to recognize those individuals' experiences and interpretations can be shaped by their gender, cultural background, and social context. One could consider a few key points in this respect when discussing reading of translations. The first thing about a woman's perspective would be the emphasis of these texts on 'representation' and 'authenticity' that have been historically underrepresented or misrepresented in literature. When reading a translation, a woman may pay particular attention to how female characters are portrayed, whether their voices are authentically represented, and whether their experiences resonate with their own realities. Therefore, when a woman translates such texts, the emphasis would usually be on gendered choice of language and managing power dynamics. A woman's reading of translation analyzes how gendered language is used, and how cultural norms embedded in the text. The power relationships between male and female characters are highlighted in such portrayals. Translations offer insights into the roles and expectations placed on women in those societies. One could thus see how gender roles and stereotypes are depicted, whether women are portrayed as passive or active agents, and how they navigate societal expectations. In our case, however, it is a woman-centric text, translated by a male translator – and hence many of these perspectives may be missing. In particular, the intersectionality aspects that are reflected social identities and categories, and the empathy and connection with characters would be missing because of a male translator's understanding of gender dynamics.

When a female-centric story is muted through male translation, there is a danger that such translation could become a gross misrepresentation. Naturally, the understanding available to each

target language reader becomes limited in some ways, thus distorting the source texts. Schweickart states in *Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading* (1989) that gender plays a role in our experience an interpretation, especially for a woman reading texts written by men, as well as other women. Today's readers must compensate for how "the experiences and perspectives of women have been systematically and fallaciously assimilated into literature" (24). Judith Fetterley (1978) uses the term "resisting readers". to apply in a new context — for those readers' resistant to subversive meanings and characterizations in texts that may threaten the patriarchy and its view of the world.

Translation in this epoch, which is powerfully influenced by feminist thoughts, can have a drastic effect on literary translation of fictions. A prominent name that comes to mind is that of Judith Butler who is known for her work on gender performativity, especially the ways in which gender is constructed and enacted through language and discourse. Her book '*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*' (1990) has been highly influential in feminist theory and has implications for reading and interpreting literature. Similarly, a prominent feminist theorist, Bell Hooks has written extensively on the intersection of race, gender, and class in her book '*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*' (1984). In her work, she explores the politics of representation and challenges traditional modes of reading and interpretation. The French feminist theoretician, Hélène Cixous focuses on literary theory through her exploration of feminine writing. How the subversion of traditional patriarchal structures can be seen in the fictions, or how the alternative modes of expression can be seen are exemplified in her 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975). Of course, the post-colonial studies scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also examined issues of gender, race, and power within the context of literature and translation – especially in her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).

Due to the experimental nature of the women-oriented stories, each translator has had to deal with enormous translation challenges. Thus, each translator must resort to contemporary women's issues in society to successfully translate a text into their culture. Critic and

translator Marian Ury has noted in her book titled *The Imaginary Kingdom and the Translator's Art: Notes on Re-reading Waley's Genji* (1977) that "A translator is first of all a reader, and every reader ... seeks out in the text those values most congenial to him" (183). In most Indian literary translations, female life and meaning depicted in the source language texts may be inaccessible to male interpretation unless and until men share similar experiences and frames of reference. In the texts under discussion in the Indian context, only filtered account of woman's point of view is presented. The women protagonists are portrayed by misrepresenting their points of view, or their views are commonly dismissed because of a male interpretation. Thus, a perfectly transparent translation becomes difficult as the translators give greater or lesser emphasis, subconsciously or otherwise, to different kinds of values, character traits, and impressions while translating fiction.

The search for identity for each female character was the main focus of the source text in Malayalam, titled *Adayalangal* (2005), translated as *Once Upon a Time* (2014) by K. T. Rajagopalan. The fiction shows the emergence of the female protagonists and their rise – from being victims of the struggle for identity to becoming leaders to create gender awareness and identity formation. Translating such women-oriented source texts to any target language would show a cultural turn. Managing bilingualism in the Target Text will also portray women's quest for identity. The text displays the female spirit of independence expressed through an interesting use of the source language. The challenge is to match that style in a linguistically and culturally language so far removed from Malayalam.

When asked about the omissions and commissions in his English version, the translator comments (in a personal communication) that he has opted for a free translation rather than retaining the fidelity to the original. The translator being a close acquaintance or friend of the author made the latter agree on the departure from the original text version, and many deletions were mutually agreed upon. The translator acknowledges the lack of knowledge in linguistics which he said could have facilitated the translation process. Such exposures would have helped create the much-needed context to accommodate the given scenarios or cultural practices into the TLT. He thought

that could give translated words bequeathed with meaning and equivalences. He also commented that as he was not formally educated in any Indian languages, it affected the flexibility and choice of equivalences while translating. He further explains that there may often be no equivalents in other languages for words specific to geography, culture, climate, people or practices, as reflected in Malayalam. Likewise, words and phrases relating to faiths, beliefs, religion or rituals are not amenable to translation. If one were to attempt to translate them, not only would one have to belabour the matter, but it would affect the readability too. One could mention here J. Lévy's work that examines the translator's role in making choices from among the various alternatives available during the translation process. For Lévy, translation involves a series of decisions to arrive at the most appropriate option – and this decision can pertain to various linguistic, cultural, stylistic, and communicative aspects of the text. Lévy's perspective emphasizes the active agency of the translator in navigating the complexities of translation. But for the translator here, it is evident from the explanations obtained that the nature of the decision-making process here must have been more subjective, based on his own interpretive choices when making decisions. Although this act of translation could have been creative and dynamic with a systematic pathway to arrive at the chosen expressions, this has not been the case while transferring the source text in the target language.

## **The Translational Problem**

Let us elaborate on the theme of the SLT here. Priyamvada, an HR professional and a single parent, is the novel's central character under discussion - *Once Upon a Time* (2014). She is a powerful woman who can stand independently to solve her problems. She is a courageous mother who protects and looks after her daughter without her husband's or in-laws' support. Priyamvada does not appear as a weak character who must bow down to the pressures of society and meekly carry out the role assigned to her. She is unlike other typical Indian women whom someone else must supervise to carry out their tasks as daughters, sisters and mothers. However, the expected social behaviour of women in Kerala is in contrast as they

have to remain subservient to the head of the family. At the time of the story, the social norm is that women should behave as passive individuals and have only secondary roles in the family's decision-making processes.

For readers of Sethu's original Malayalam novel *Adayalanganal* (2005), Priyamvada's bold nature is a welcome deviation from the 'normal' stereotypical woman in traditional Indian society. Foley (1995) tells us that such stereotypical literary texts often portray a negative picture of female independence. The emotional outburst of these women in their situation could become hysterical. As expected, such reactions do occur in the text when the woman in the lead is under unreasonable patriarchal control. The societal rules affect her mental peace and result in a reaction that could be unpleasant. Priyamvada is driven mad by the unpleasant circumstances of the patriarchal society's forced marriage and the rules of the traditional society. An example from the target text that lost its impact in English could be presented below:

SL: amme mahamaayee! ente strethvam kaathusuukshikaan  
anugrahikeenamee  
Mother/Mahamayya!/my/femininity/preserve/bless  
enikku entethaayoru idam saadhyamaakkenname (247).  
I /have my own/space/ be possible

TL: "All along, she had only one prayer: help me preserve my feminineness. Give me a place of my own" (225).

Here, a more appropriate translational choice for the expression "feminineness" could be "womanhood." "Femininity" always talks about female beauty, and since this word is also closely tied with youth and fertility, whereas "womanhood" ("strethvam" in Malayalam) is the appropriate word which would give the correct contextual meaning. The protagonist wants to preserve her identity and womanhood. She is not a woman who wants to control or invade men's territory. Instead, she wants her own space, identity, freedom and respect from her counterpart and from the society at large. She is quiet throughout the text, but the moment she finds that her identity is threatened, she bursts into anger and expresses disappointment as she tries to overcome her emotions. The translator portrays her arrogant behaviour, which is unavoidable when she loses her cool.



But the aberrant behaviour of the central woman character shows that her environment has had a tremendous influence on loss of temper. The dialogue and the words used by the character portray much of her personality. However, the translator portrays her as an arrogant, selfish and irrational person without going into the psychological trauma of the protagonist.

Consider the following example:

SL: “ningalude aa prakrithamaaya karuthinumunpil  
churundukuudaarundaayirunna aa  
Your/that/pristine/before strength/used to curl up/that/  
pazhaya naattinpurathukaariye maraneekku. ente shariirathe,  
manasine orikkalum  
old/countrywoman/forget/my body/mind/never/  
arinjukondu thodaan ningalkku aayittilla” (247).  
knowingly/touch/for you/has not been possible/

TL: “I am no more the village belle you used to know, the one who used to cower under your brute force. You have never succeeded in touching my body or my mind” (225).

In this case, the translator did not do justice by presenting the behavioural complexities of women in the TL text. He presents us with a woman who fights against her cultural set-up. In his rendering, we find her to be a person who displays unreasonable behaviour, as if she is someone who wants to get rid of man's territory. The translator could not assess and assert the power of Sethu's expression in the TL. Sethu's choices act as a tool in establishing the position of women in the traditional hierarchy. For her, the expression “country woman” would have been an appropriate translation for “naattinpurathukaari” in Malayalam instead of the choice of “village belle.” By the word “naattinpurathukaari”, the author pointed towards a woman who lives in or who comes from the countryside and not the town. Also, the author explains her to be a typical Indian woman who comes from a rural background, and who does not have a modern mindset of an urban woman when he explains her past, especially to mark her transition into a complex character with a strident voice.

It is evident that translation is at times challenging, especially because English often seems too prosaic and lacks originality to handle certain passages and sentences about characters' internal conflicts. It was also very difficult to translate certain words and phrases which may appear simple on the surface as they are so culture-specific. Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to communicate the feelings they evoke in Malayalam into English, resulting in cultural gaps.

Gender is always a constructed notion as it is “a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real” (Butler 1990). When the issue of woman is focused here, the author positively projects women-centred issues giving careful thought and treatment. However, the translation of this story does not seem to be impressed by the central concern of feminism in the SLT. To some extent, the rejection of traditional hierarchies, gendered and power-driven roles, questions of faithfulness, and the questioning of universal standards of meaning and values are all missing in his translation. Practically speaking, a translator's ultimate goal would be to convey the true sense of the meaning in the target language. The central act of translation in communicating a text in the target language is to make it understandable for foreign readers. Simon argues in “Gender and Translation” to present the following viewpoints: “My translation practice is a political activity aimed at making language speaks for women. So, my signature on a translation means to use every translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language” (Simon 1996: 15).

In Indian literary history, the postcolonial discourse depicts women occupying an inferior position. The reason is explained by Tavassoli & Mirzapour (2014) who argued that women in the colonized countries suffered from a double colonization: native patriarchies and imperialist ideology. From either angle, they are considered weak and less educated, so they get insufficient opportunities. Ultimately, they understand that they must assume power as an awakening female force. These issues should gain priority in translation and be a reason for the texts to be translated in a certain way. The translator should ideally emphasize the main subject content, including culture-connected words and stress points.

Target text should also capture these qualities through a sincere translation effort and accept a moral responsibility to project them to the target readers. Bassnett-McGuire suggests that “The translator cannot be the author of the source language text, but as the author of the target language text, has a clear moral responsibility to the target language readers” (Bassnett-McGuire 1980: 23). Thus, a gender-sensitive translator must always pay greater attention to the views offered in source language text while translating.

This particular novel was selected for its literary merit for translation and for focusing on gender-specific concerns. The woman and her issues reflected in the novel provide scope for exploring the cultural gaps in translation that it can offer. To do the translation successfully, the translator could use the basic feminist translation strategies here, such as supplementing, footing, prefacing, and hijacking, which are direct interference of translators into the target text (Von Flotow 1991: 74-84).

Priyamvada questions the basic tenets of gender politics, which always makes women victims of its nuances. This is rendered in source text when the central character ends her marriage with her husband, which is the most disgraceful for any Indian family when a woman violates her cultural tradition of arranged marriage by moving away. It is perceived as a sign of violating the values and norms of traditional Indian society. The suffering of such women projected through this translation should create a sense of gendered urgency when there is no note on the background situation— which makes it difficult to understand the actual political situation of that Kerala women face. The readers take time to understand and grasp it through the novel.

## **Instances of Cultural Gaps**

In this section, we will cull out and present examples of cultural gaps and omissions in the translated text under consideration.

Multilingual communities like India add to this complexity in translation because the notion of language and portrayal of gender (especially women) gets interspaced with linguistic hegemonies and politics of linguistic hierarchies. The portrayal of women through translation is cut across by other parameters of identity politics, such

as caste, class, and society, each of which has an impact on the language. The cultural transference of this novel and the situations depicted in it through a few short sections in the story denote the gender and religious issues in traditional Indian society. Patriarchal society, with casteism and strict religious practices, is also practised in Kerala and also in many other states in India. All these are not reflected in the translation to scribe the desired effect. The resultant text is not readable and smooth because there is a discontinuity and omission in translation. An excellent example from the text is information on two college students from different cultural backgrounds and their marriage.

SL: “aanum pennum cheernulla otthupaarpinnepatti aadyam  
keettathu ii collejil cheerna  
Male/female/with/living together/first/heard/it was/during/  
college/joined time/  
kaalathaayirunnu. Senior classile randu kuttikal orumichu  
veededuthu thaamasam thudangiyathu  
senior/class/two/students/together/took house/lived/started/  
valiya ochapaadundaakki.... oduvil onnum sambhavichilla  
avar avasaana varshakkaar aayirunnu.  
made a big/noise(issue)/finally/nothing/happened/they/last/  
year was/a/  
oru kuusalumillaate padippum kazhinju avaravarude  
vazhikku poyi iyyide randuperudeyum vivaaham  
without coaxing/study/done/they/went their/way/recently/of  
both of them/marriage/  
kazhinjuvennu kettu. haryanakkaaran jat kettiyathu  
haryankkaari jaatine, U.P. kkaari kayestha  
heard that/is over/Haryani/jaat/tied knot/Haryani/jaat/U.P.  
kayestha/  
kettiyatu U.P. kkaaran kayesthane. goothraacharangal  
alpampoolum thettikaate viittukaar thane  
tied knot/U.P.Kayestha/tribal customs/even a little/without  
mistake/the family itself/  
nadathikodutha vivaahangal (83).  
conducted/weddings/

TL: “It was early days in college that she first heard of living in.  
when two seniors from the north rented a house and started  
living together, the campus went agog. Stories about them

were all over the campus, but the pair who walked, heads aloft, facing barbed words and curious looks, had their fans too. But then it all came to nought. After college, they parted ways. Both got married- to those chosen by the respective families. Arranged marriages conducted strictly according to traditional rites” (75).

The translator did not mention the boy and girl's state and culture in this translation. The source text mentions that the girl is from a traditional Uttar Pradesh Kayastha family and the boy belongs to the Haryana's Jat community. The translator omitted the detailed description of these students and how their respective communities were interrupted in their issues. Here these types of dialogues in a text reveal that people are burdened by customs and norms in combination with mistaken and egoistic interpretations of different religions (Schipper in Jones 1987: 46). We believe that it is the responsibility of the translator to carry forward the tone of representation through the right cultural terms and religious descriptions with adequate information, bringing out the meaning in a firm way to present the TLT to the readers. The readers are accessing the text only through English. These readers may have different perceptions of cultural and religious practices in different parts of India as reflected in the Malayalam text.

The novel also dwells on the particular stages of Indian women's marriage lives. The author deals with his source text on what an arranged marriage means for a woman and how their futures fit into their lives, which controls their liberation and not encouraging the equality of sexes. This argument is evident on the selected part of the novel that deals with the central character's protests against the Indian marriage system, but the translator could not render the strict marital practices and its effects on women in Kerala. Consider the following:

SL: “oru typical Indian bandham ennuparanjaal parole kittaatha  
aajivanaantha thadavaanenaanu  
A/typical/to say Indian connection/parole/non-obtainable/life  
imprisonment/  
njaan ithevare dharichirunathu. sangathi ithreyum  
elupamaanennu arinjirunnengil aayakaalathu

I/so far/thought about/thing/if only/I knew/it was/so/easy/at  
that time/  
njan oru naalanjukalyaanangal kazhikumaayirunnu (56).  
I used to/have/four or five/weddings/

TL: “Typical Indian matrimony is like a terrible life term. I was under the impression that there is no provision for parole. If I knew things were easy as this, I would have married a few times in my prime, the professor suppressed a laugh” (50).

The professor here mocks the Indian marriage system, which is terrible without an escape. The original author defies the concept of arranged marriage system, which forces women to marry someone with whom they are not acquainted. Indian society, unlike any other, has proclaimed that women must get married and carry on a family’s legacy because it is all part of their culture and upbringing. Generations of women have followed this same principle of getting married early and living according to society’s norms that offer no place for their preferences. And if any woman dares to disregard these social rules, all look her down, and her confidence is smashed to force her to live with fear. He considers this to be an old-school thought that should be stopped. At the same time, we also find the central character Priyamvada revealing the astrological practices of India. Consider the following:

SL: “uthamathil cherunna jaathakangal anennuparanju  
jyothsyanmaar. pathil ettu porutham,  
In the best/that the horoscopes match/said/astrologers/in  
ten/eight/horoscope match  
pakshe orikkalum othucheranpaadillaathavar aayirunnuvenu  
manassilaakaan njangalkku  
never/to meet/that they were not supposed to be/understand/  
for us/three/days/  
moonaalunaalukalee vendivannullu (57).  
just needed/

TL: “The astrologers had pronounced it a perfect match, but it took us only four days to discover that we were not made for each other.” (50) here, the translator neglected to detail the Indian astrological system, depicting how the calculation of matches was done in astrology (SL: “pathilettuporutham” 57).

This novel also indicates the cultural clash between tradition and modernity in India. It is viewed as a stereotypical case where an educated woman is seen as influenced by the West to a certain extent so that she succeeds in building her career and raises her voice for “freedom” from such practices. A reader unaware of these stereotypes might consider this translation partly discriminatory because it misses many important points about women’s discourses that should have been depicted. However, it is impossible to conclude from here that the translator has deliberately or indirectly neglected the dialogue focusing on stereotyping and viewing female characters as victims resisting the accepted dominant values of their culture. But the net effect of his decisions resulted in not finding a comprehensive “translation” of the novel. The portrayal of woman through translation brings together multiple epistemological concerns, especially about culture and society. It looks at the nature of language and its relationship vis-s-vis not just women but all marginalized communities. It also looks at the possibilities of their empowerment inherent in translation. Good examples of such omitted portions include Priyamvada’s grandmother’s inspirational dialogue on women’s empowerment.

SL: “thalayarthi nadakanna penninte mumpil oranum pathinivarthilla” (119).

Head/raised/walking/of/female/in front of/no one/rears up head/

(Meaning: No one will stand in front (against) of a woman who walks with her head held high.)

Priyamvada is considered a good woman, but she is perceived as giving into the authority and control of her father, as she has been under such male surveillance. When they do something with courage, they are labeled as impudent and a feminist. She lives in a country and in a region where it is a norm that women should show respect towards their husband and father in all family matters. The author portrays this predicament through his female characters. His view is that a balance should be maintained between the social patriarchal control of a man over a woman, incorporating liberal and modern values. He himself is against the old-fashioned idea of forcing his daughter to marry a man whom she does not love. Such

powerful dialogues were omitted by the translator, as in the following:

SL: “achante annathe aa vaachakam marakaanaavunnilla.  
praayamaayakuttiye hostelil kondupooyi  
Father’s/then/that/sentence/can’t forget/old/child/in/hostel  
/take/  
tallaanpaakathinulla gathikedu... taanoru muthirna  
penkuttiyaayi enna thonnal onnukuudi  
dump into/fate/feeling like/a grown-up/girl/thought/again/  
urapikunnathu avidevachayirikaam” (90).  
fixing/will be/from there

(Meaning: The depravity of putting a grown-up girl into a hostel...maybe it is at that time again that I reassert the feeling of being a grown woman again.)

The meanings conveyed through these dialogues are profound, and they relate to Kerala’s political and social situations concerning marriage, education, and freedom of expression as perceived by the author. These social issues are evident when women live in a male-dominated patriarchal society in which women remain unacknowledged. But women are neglected in crucial decision-making situations, because their society demands them to be dependent and passive. Here Priyamvada stresses on her daughter’s freedom:

SL: “innu neethuvinteyokke mukhathu kaanaanaavunna aa  
athmavishvaasathinte  
Today/on Neetu’s/face/can be seen/that/of confidence/  
paatiyengilum undaayirunenkil, purushanepatti yaathonnum  
arinjukuudaathirunna aa  
If only half was there/ nothing about the man/don’t know/at  
that/  
cherupraayathil, thante kalyaanam nadakillaayirunnu” (90).  
young age/my/wedding/would not have taken place/

(Meaning: If I had even half of the confidence that you can see on Neetu’s face today, I wouldn’t have gotten married at such a young age when I didn’t know anything about men.)



Each culture's learning begins within one's family, school, workplace, society, and community. This background is the one that lies within the cultural setting in which an individual grows up and collects his or her life experiences. The culture has an invariable effect on each woman's behaviour, female status, and rightful place in contemporary Indian society. Sethu clearly depicts the psychological effects of females, traditionally linked to traits like emotionality, maturity, and dependence. But it is a pity that some important sentences depicting how it influences each woman were found untranslated in the target text.

SL: "Alice angane rasamaayittu paranjupokum irunirathil nalla pokkathil kuuttupurikavum  
Alice/so/amused/will say/wheatish completion/tall/with eyebrows/  
kattimiishayum okke aayi ethandorutharam urupadi. nettiyillo kavilatho matto vettinte  
with a thick mustache/almost an iron figure/forehead/or cheek or otherwise/of a cut/  
adayaalam kuudiyundengil jooraayi. angane engane nokiiyaalum oru shariyaaya aantuna.  
mark/excellent/So/however it will be/a/right male/  
enikkayaalude kaikalilkidannu valaranam. ayalude chuuodil viriyanam. ayalude thanalil  
I want to lie/grow/in/his/arms/and hatch/in his/warmth/In his/shade/  
ayaal tarunna aa valiya urapil enikoru kudumbam undaakanam. Oru randaam kettaanengilum  
he/gives/that big/assurance/I should have a/family/even if a/second marriage/  
kuzhappamilla. vereyuru pennintekuude poruthathinte experience kaanuullo (20).  
It's okay/another/experience/girl/with/experience/of living with another/

TL: "Alice would go on, 'Tall and dark...with thick eyebrows ... and heavy moustache, the works. I will grow in the macho's hands, hatch in his warmth. I will rear a family in the shade and the security he provides.' I know it's fashionable to be feminist. Brand me conservative, but I prefer man's

masculinity to woman's femininity. Call me prude if you will, but believe that the lord had its purpose when he made man stronger. The woman has to grow in his shade and security..." (17)

Since it is a patriarchal community where the order of doing things has become too rigid for a woman and all the power is vested in one sector (male) of the society, the translator here omitted an important half of the dialogue.

(SL: "oru randamkettaayaalum kuzhappamilla. veereyoru pennintekuude poruthathinte experience kanoolo" (20).

(It's okay/another/experience/girl/with/experience/of living with another/)

Alice here says that she is even ready to marry a guy who is strong and already married. Explaining that he will already have experience in married life, which a conservative and narrow-minded woman like Alice finds good for married life in India.

Having a voice for a woman is a symbol of homogenisation and empowerment. Freedom of expression for females is expressed in the source text, and the author indirectly encourages females to emancipate from such traditional situations. The author depicts the difficulties of moving from the traditional Kerala culture to the new modern way of life for a woman, but the translator fails to impart this effect upon readers. The translator omitted this dialogue, which is an important confirmation of a woman who is not given the freedom to decide her life. The dialogue by Alice in the novel (given below) depicts how women are entangled in traditional society. Alice's dialogue is perceived as a response to the unreasonable adherence to traditional perceptions found in Kerala society and Indian culture.

SL: "nammudeyokke jeevitham enthu jeevithado, Neetu appanapanmaaru aadum pashum onnum  
Our/life/what/life/Neetu/our forefathers/Goat/cow/  
kadikaaathe veeliketti valarathi oduvil thalemmalem oru  
saisaavumbo aavunnathre ponnum panoom  
do not bite/Fenced/reared/finally/head/body/when becomes a  
size/plenty/gold/money

koduthu, vela paranjurappichu evideyokedakkana oru  
marangodantembileekku ittukodukkum.  
was given/alice/prize bargained/lying somewhere/a/worthless  
guy/infront of/will put in  
Alicinu enthokke venam, enthokke paadillaennokke Alice  
parayumbozhanu kudumbathillu fight  
what alice need/what not/when/alice/saya/in the family/fight/  
varunathu. athum nalla muttan fight” (15).  
comes/that too/horrible/fight/

(Meaning: No matter what kind of life we have, Neetu, our parents raised us by fencing without any goat or cow biting us, and finally, when we were big enough, they paid as much gold and money as they could, fixed the price, and left us to a worthless guy living somewhere. A fight in the family occurs when Alice tells what she wants and what she doesn't want. It will be also a horrible fight.)

## Further Discussions

Thus, the omitted passages from the source text show discrepancies in the target text translation. The most evident discrepancy is in the mitigation of women's issues. The reconstruction of the source text translation through this textual omission and the reception of its English-translated version led to a cultural clash between translations. The English translation of this text presents an impression as if it is an abridged version with various characters and their details omitted. The translator's omitting certain important text sections has significantly reduced the overall narration in the target text. Also, the text's pace is much faster than the source text. In the translated version, the roles of minor characters are considerably reduced. A good example is the omitted section that deals with Priyamvadava's father and her cousin, Uniyettan. These sections describe Priyamvada's education, teenage life, and upbringing in a male-dominated culture. The omitted text will provide relevant background knowledge on women's issues in Kerala society. These omissions deprive the English readers of the opportunity to appreciate the in-depth reflections on women in Kerala culture depicted in the source text. Even though a substantial amount of the text was omitted, the story was viewed as complete

and concise to a foreign reader without deepening the cultural backdrop of Kerala.

The scope of translation of these and other sensitive stories centering on women and their issues is expected to bring out their issues to a wider audience. The transfer of meaning should be carefully carried out by the translator. However, a translator could certainly take liberties in selecting and deciding how a woman's character in the text is translated and focused upon. He has put effort into making it a careful and conscious selection to project the ideas that are addressed to women with immediacy. But the actual translation gives rise to articulation problems, and how the ideas are transferred from the source text language to the target language lacks the vigour of femininity that the writer articulates through his source text. The translation of this literary text to some extent changed the mindset of a reader as it should bring to the fore the relation of a literary text to the patriarchy role of women, but the translator at times neglected such favourite sentences of the author.

Notice that even the title "*Once Upon a Time*" is not the literal translation of the original name, and has no clear connection with the story. The Malayalam title "*Adayalanga!*" is more appropriate if we translate it to "Signs" or "Indications". because the author is trying to explain it through the last chapter with the symbol of a penguin that all the joys and sorrows of birth, the black and white markings on the body of the penguin, represent their status as widows in previous births. It reveals here that the story of Priyamvada and her daughter Neetu, born into their clan, is condemned to penance in the lonely glaciers; thus, in selecting equivalent words and expressions, one should be very conscious and appropriate. Only then it would help in depicting the space needed by these women to focus on their problems, highlighting gender bias and cultural and religious issues through translation.

As all readers will notice, it is a dynamic text and in line with changing times. But the translator does not offer much explanation regarding the status of the characters or the changing scenario of women's roles in Indian culture. As the women in this text want to do away with patriarchal control, they yearn for freedom of speech. This puts them at loggerheads with men who maintain their old

tradition of dominance. The characters at the end find that there is no possibility of a compromise with their counterparts. The translator focused on the changing status of the individual position of the women through dialogue but did not focus so much on the effect of their psychological development and craving for freedom at the same time. Since status and roles are two paramount aspects of interpersonal relations and culture, any translator must focus on the emphatic emotional and psychological waving and the dilemma of the female character in their changing situations as background in the old tradition.

The fact that a woman is depicted protesting for equality through writing is due to the pressures of time during the male-dominated political discourse, which leaves very little space for her to voice her protest. This fact of the novel makes it interesting to be translated to affirm the gendered position of translation. When such stories are translated, they must retain the terseness of the original and through it; the bitterness of the times of one's culture has to come out. However, translation is not an innocent activity, and this gender and culture-specific approach is what a translator should focus on while translating this novel. Douglas Robinson (2003) states "There should be "an increasing emphasis on the collective control or shaping of cultural knowledge: the role played by ideology or what Antonio Gramsci (1971) called "hegemony" in constructing and maintaining cultural knowledge and policing transfers across cultural barriers." The intercultural awareness and competence in translation arises out of experiences of culture is a complex phenomenon. Thus both the translator and translation will be better when the translator is more aware of these complexities like power differentials between cultures and gender.

## **Conclusion**

The gender-sensitive translation issues in translated texts are noticed when there is an issue with the bilingual capabilities of a translator and when their sensitivity to reform the language is absent. This is especially true in those fictional texts where the centre space is occupied by a woman protagonist. The lack of awareness of feminist theories, or gay and lesbian identity formation, shows the

possible differences between the writer and his translator. In several cases, the intricate knowledge of the linguistic structure of source and target languages could become an issue, as in the present case. The women portrayed in the source text have linguistically and socio-politically created their own culture. Their development parallels the plot, with external forces influencing each woman from society. Here the translator's role is to depict gender issues and show sensitivity to cultural and religious issues through translation. Thus, a translator can highlight the gender politics and culture as seen in the SLT while carrying forward the original author's ideas.

Sometimes the languages are so far apart that translators create a distorted work entirely. This is because expressing an idea to potential readers in their own language can be hard enough. It becomes more difficult to carry forward the connotations in another language, unless the translator is familiar with the target language. Therefore, trying to liaison between a writer and a reader who come from two entirely different cultures and speak two different languages requires a lot of creativity and skill from a translator.

Here we may recall that Flowtow (1997) described the role of the translator in translating feminist texts as "working for the cause of the woman in this work, she regularly oversteps the bounds of invisibility that traditionally define her role" (20-21). Here, Flowtow brings in the role of the translator as an activist to portray the original text without leaving any cultural gaps. Therefore, we see two important factors in translation to avoid cultural gaps, i.e. accuracy and expressivity. A good translator's role is to achieve the goal of translation to convey the meaning and style of the source text language. Thus, it is evident that a translator should be skilled in the idioms and vocabulary of both languages and have a concrete plan to translate both emotive aspects and cultural thought processes. Michela Baldo (2021) comments that "when viewed at the cultural level, diverse spoken or written texts are understood to represent distinctive worldviews that it is the task of translators and interpreters to register, reproduce, reconfigure, and contest." It is a translator's role to work to critique heteronormative views on genders and sexualities, using translation as a tool of resistance against sexism and patriarchy.

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