

SALIENT LINGUISTIC FEATURES IN *CHEMMEEN*, THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF NARAYANA MENON

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Abstract:

Narayana Menon's translation of Chemmeen into English became a best seller at the time of publication. He has ushered in the process of translation with his strategy of providing the foot notes for specific terms. Chemmeen has an academic research potentiality. The linguistic aspects like transliteration, proper English words and phrases and simple ideas in the sentences are analysed in this present study.

Key Words: *Chemmeen, translation, foot notes, transliteration, linguistic analysis.*

Introduction

Chemmeen is a classic novel written by T.S. Pillai in Indian literature. It appeals to the people of Kerala. The translation of *Chemmeen* into English by Narayana Menon is a variation of English literature. It has an appeal to all the readers of English in the world. The linguistic aspects like transliteration, proper English words and phrases and simple ideas in the sentences are analysed.

The Transliterations

Narayana Menon preferred the transliterations to the apt English words. The transliteration helped him to bring out the flavor of the Indian languages like Malayalam. For instance, 'Kochumuthalali' referring to Pareekutti, a young man, who is a trader of fish and the childhood friend of Karuthamma, could have been substituted with 'young owner'. Similarly 'Valia Markathi' also falls into this category. The word 'Valia' means 'Big' and 'Marakathi' means 'a fisher woman' and also a female member of a particular caste namely Marakkan. The intention is to bring out the adulthood of Karuthamma. The word 'anna' denotes a coin which is equal to 1/16 of a rupee. It became out dated with the introduction of new metric system (100 paise is one rupee). The least value of such a coin is mentioned by transliteration. The word 'Allah' used by Pareekutti, refers to God of Islam and is known to everyone. The words 'Chakara' and 'uppa' are characterized with the bold type and the meanings are given in the footnotes for the better understanding of the readers.

The fisher folk were waiting for the good catch in the Chakara season. Before the arrival of fortune the people were starving and had to appease their hungry with 'rice soup'. Normally this compound word brings in an ambiguity. Soup is prepared with the vegetables or any other non-vegetarian stuff. There are few words like 'gruel' and 'porridge'. But they are prepared with oatmeal or any other in water or milk. Narayana Menon wants the readers to speculate the poor condition of living by the fisher folk. A handful of rice or more is boiled with a large amount of water according to the number of the family members. So they get the conjee water.

Narayana Menon is justified in his modest introduction of his title word 'Chemmeen' meaning a variety of fish - the 'shrimp'. Not a mess is added to distract the smooth reading of the readers. The word

'Katalamma' referring to the Goddess of sea is invoked by Chakki, mother of Karuthamma in the right context. 'Tali' is a gold ornament which is designed according to every section in Hindu Religion. Tali is attached with a yellow thread. Tying Tali around the neck of the bride by the groom is considered a compulsory rite. It is a symbol of a married woman. 'Beedi' is a preference of the poor people of India. Working class people have a habit of smoking 'Beedi' to relieve of physical pain or to get an emotional relief. The footnote gives the meaning of 'cheap' i.e., a low costly smoke. 'Ayilam' is one of the twenty-seven stars in Astrology. Celebrating the day in a particular month people visit temple and offer the prayer for the welfare of their family. On that day they put on the new dress or the special dress.

'Arundhati' is the wife of the Sage Vashita, one of the seven sages. She is identified with the morning star. She has been described as 'chaste and revered' and with a character of unblemished, inspiring and worthy of imitation. A ritual in the marriage ceremony is in practice in the Hindu culture.

Choice of English Words and Sentences

The translation of Narayana Menon is faithful to the original work in Malayalam. The language is simple and intelligible. His choice of English words and construction of sentences bring it to the light. The word 'oarsman' is the right word to mention the earlier job of Chembankunju in a boat. Even a synonym; 'rower' will mislead the readers. The reason is that the rowing - boat is different from a fishing boat.

The phrase 'a little kerosene lamp' appears to be an instance of verbosity. The poor people can't afford to buy any vegetable oil. The omission 'kerosene' will raise a doubt about the use of oil in the lamp. An evening environment around Karuthamma's house is narrated by Narayana Menon. It can be called a 'trope' - a literary device. There is a shift from literal meaning of a word or words to a non-literal meaning. "It was a moon lit night. The sea lay bathed in the moon light" (Chem, 14).

We are familiar with the words, 'dry fish', 'stock fish' and 'cliff fish', but Narayana Menon goes to the extent of invention, that is, 'dried fish' which is entirely a different process of preserving the fish. The phrase 'slapped... on her (Nallapennu's) shoulder' is a choice of rarity by Narayana Menon. 'Slap' is associated with one's face. Further the shoulder is connected with a pat. An alternative of 'slap' is 'smack' but smack can be combined with one's back only. The 'slap' is more aggressive and forcible than 'smack'.

Narayana Menon has preferred the 'Headman' to 'Chief man'. The reason is that the chieftainship in other communities is transferable by election. The headmanship in the fisher community is hereditary and accepted by future generations. Narayana Menon has also maneuvered the technique of Breathalyzer in his verbal narration. Hence, the sentence is:

"...he breathed straight into her nose" (Chem, 26).

The chat between Ramanmuppan and Velayudhan posed a question, 'what will happen if Karuthamma does not get into marriage?'. Velayudhan wants to know the role of the Headman in such a situation. His hidden thought is described in a sentence, "what was at back of mind?" (Chem, 29). Narayana Menon wants to be more scientific than aesthetic. Normally we can't have a distinction between mind and brain. The hidden thoughts always find a place in the back of one's brain.

A man or a woman becomes a celebrity in a particular place. The neighbor of Chakki, Kalikunju, finds fault with the modesty of Chakki and confirms that; 'As is the mother so is her daughter'. In the last generation Chakki was attractive to the fisher folk and the traders. In pursuant to the trend of her mother, Karuthamma allegedly clamors for the attention of fisher folk or the traders. So, the word 'toast' is inserted in the sentence. The fisher community is controlled by taboos and traditions. Fishermen and fisherwomen are trapped in the mythical spell. Outwardly the tradition appears to be protective of the fisher folk. Under such a notion Narayana Menon has used the words, 'hedged in'.

"She stopped almost stunned" (Chem, 43) is constructed to describe the emotional impact of shock from the question of Pareekutti. This sentence is grammatically balanced or not! The verb indicated her cessation of walking. 'Almost' is a word of adverb, giving the meaning 'nearly'. 'Stunned' is to mean 'shocked'. Hence, the above sentence is free from the comments.

The boat starts its onward journey from the shore to the sea and makes a harsh sound. Narayana Menon has chosen this word, 'grated' which further means the slow movement on the sand. On reaching the waves the boat strides up and down on the water. To describe the movement of Chembankunju's boat Narayana Menon has coined a strange word 'canter'. It describes a moderate speed slower than a gallop but faster than a trot of a horse. To narrate the rowing the boat by the oarsmen simultaneously and uniformly Narayana Menon picks up a word from music - Jargon, that is, 'unison'.

After trading the fish with Khadar Chembankunju returned home with a plenty of cash in his hands. Chakki was not happy with Chembankunju's money. "Panchami was sobbing her heart out" (Chem, 55) is the sentence in this context. Chembankunju realized his folly. Despite her bruise and swelling Panchami anticipates an assurance from Chembankunju that a basketful of fish on the next day. One day Chakki buys a nice bedstead. 'Bed stead' is a synonym of bed frame which includes bedpost, bed spring, footboard and head board and excludes the mattress. On the contrary 'cot' is something different from a bed stead. It means a baby bed with high sides. Colloquially we substitute a bedstead with a cot. During the Chakara season Chembankunju gets the Shrimp. Even a tiny place is not left out in his boat. Narayana Menon has constructed the sentence as follows; "Every nook and corner was full of the Shrimp" (Chem, 70). His choice overflows beyond the rim to abundance.

A coin has two sides: obverse and reverse. Likewise the Chakara season has brought the wealth to the fisher folk in its first phase. The second phase is a continuous rain. Narayana Menon has opted for a word 'respite', meaning a short time. 'Break' or 'pause' would imply that time could be longer than Narayana Menon wants. He is very particular of the time: a minute. Hence 'respite' - the exact word for a minute. There is one more chance for Karuthamma to meet Pareekutti in the moon lit night. An owl from a coconut tree and a 'pie dog' are watching them. The word means that the dog is not under the control of any owner. Other words like, 'stray dogs', 'street dogs' and 'village dogs' have owners and are allowed to come and go freely by the owners.

On hearing a scandalous charge against Karuthamma Chakki becomes unconscious and falls down. Some women consider that all these things augur ill. Narayana Menon fixes a word 'augur'. The verbs like 'predict' and 'foretell' have been avoided. So also the noun 'omen' is not helpful. Presently all the developments of conflicts between Palani's party and villagers of Nirkunnam establish something bad in reserve.

Karuthamma's marital life starts in Trikunnappuzha. Palani goes out to sea. Karuthamma makes the preparation for cooking the meals. Narayana Menon makes a list of utensils in the house of Palani. The poor people of Indian villages have the earthenware pots and a wooden spoon. Mere mention of 'pots' will leave the readers at a mess. So, the raw material of pottery is added before the pots. Similarly, 'wooden' is added before the spoon by Narayana Menon.

Karuthamma prepares the South Indian meals; 'rice' and 'curry'. The curry is made with onions. The content words: 'rice' and 'curry' may be consulted for the meanings by the people of other food habits. When Palani brings the fine clothes instead of pots and pans for the domestic need, she can avoid talking with Palani on his returning home. Narayana Menon plays with the words of same rhyming to narrate this situation. "Karuthamma wondered whether she should sulk and refuse to talk" (Chem, 125). Palani brings a parcel to Karuthamma. She finds a lovely piece of cloth with gold borders. The phrase 'with gold borders' refers to the borders of a saree with the work of golden threads. The men and woman have such bordered dhotis or sarees on the days of festivals or special occasions.

Pareekutti visits Chakki to enquire about her health. Chakki makes an earnest request to Pareekutti to be her son. Whole-heartedly he cannot make a reply to the dying wish of Chakki. Chakki wants Pareekutti to inform Karuthamma the change of his relationship; a brother to her. She is not satisfied with the manner of expressing his consent. Narayana Menon aptly assesses a phrase, 'word of honour' instead of a 'promise'. Chakki asks for his word of honour from Pareekutti.

Kunjan Valakkaran, the owner of Palani's boat, is afraid that the boat in which Palani works is under danger. His boat may be broken into pieces. Narayana Menon chooses a right phrase, 'be smashed into smithereens'.

Pappikunju plans to separate Panchami from Nallapennu. She instigated Chembankunju by telling that the neighbors teach Panchami to be disrespectful to herself. She even calls Panchami a 'rascal'. This particular word is associated with a man or mischievous boy. The second marriage between Chembankunju and Pappikunju without the Headman's approval is a serious matter in the fisher community. But Chembankunju refutes the marriage with Pappikunju and adds that he has brought Pappikunju for housekeeping. The Headman is asking for the reason for the expulsion of Pappikunju. Chembankunju reaffirms that she stole his money. In this context Narayana Menon uses a word of legal term, 'legalistic'. The term implies that Chembankunju's answers adhere to law or moral code.

Chembankunju understands that he owes some money to Pareekutti. He has 595 rupees, his last and least asset. He stuffs the money in the hands of Pareekutti who never worries about the return from Chembankunju. Chembankunju walks along the seashore. His boat is stationed before many days. It is brought from Pallikunnath Kandankoran. It beckons Chembankunju as if it is yearning for a travel on the waves. It likes to say farewell to Chembankunju. A terrible laughter of death visits Chembankunju. Narayana Menon assigns a word 'emanated' meaning 'flew out'. The next day Palani walks to the beach. Karuthamma follows him with her baby in one arm and his food in another. The baby raises her hands and waves 'goodbye'. To describe an evening sky Narayana Menon brings in a word, 'girdle'. The blue sea ends with a black line at the horizon. The western horizon appears to be a semi-circle cover in red color over the waterline.

Narayana Menon has exercised his intellectual ability in narrating the last sea venture of Palani. His drive towards the horizon, appearance of sea monsters, moon light and blue sea, whirlpool, encounter with a shark, rise of waves, storm and thunder, engulfing of Palani and his boat by the huge waves and so on are earnestly portrayed. The last ten pages are captivating the anxiety of the readers till the end. In such descriptions, whether Narayana Menon has borrowed the ideas of T. S. Pillai or not, the translation into English demands a high command over the English Language. The accomplishment of Narayana Menon is a feast for the English minds.

Conclusion

Narayana Menon's translation of *Chemmeen* from Malayalam into English displays his mastery of the English language. He has coined the standard terms and has constructed the sentences with simple ideas. His writing style is strategically distinctive in presentation.

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