



“Translation as the means of Oral Cultural Identity of Meitei’s”

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1.0 Introduction

So far, we know that there is close relationship between language and culture. Bassnett-McGuire (1980,P: 14), indicating the inseparability of language and culture, says:

“No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language. Language, then, is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy”.

On the other hand, Snell-Hornby (1988, P: 39-64) in her book *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*, writes that *the translation process can be envisaged between two cultures involving “cross-cultural transfer” rather than between two languages*. Again Bassnett-McGuire (1980, P: 14), argues that *a text must be translated by considering culture*. House (2002, P: 92-109) emphasizes that *‘meaning’ is really important in translation and translation can be understood within a cultural frame or reference*. All these rationalizations have provided two things: the prominent place of culture in foreign language teaching and language teaching seen as culture teaching. This leads to the incorporation of cultural elements and its materials into the curriculum. In this case, authentic source materials are used for the students to expose them to the ‘real’ languages and help to engage students in authentic cultural experiences (Peterson and Coltrane, 1995). In this paper, I won’t go in detail about the types of authenticity and various source materials. What I intend to mention here is that translating cultural texts not only provides authentic cultural information to the foreign learners but also functions preserving as well as disseminating the cultural identity of the source language. Through translation, the potential knowledge system of the source culture can be transferred to the target culture and the identity of the source culture will be made known to the target culture and so enriching the knowledge system between the two.

Since cultural elements are the backgrounds relevant for adequate communication within a society, cultural embedding will play important role in the translation of cultural texts. Such cultural elements in texts exhibits all the linguistic levels- ranging from specific concepts and word forms, single sentences and text structure to pragmatic context (see Mateusz, 2014). While undertaking any translation activity, there are certain possible procedures for the translation of unmatched elements of cultures. The possible procedures include (Ivir, V. 2003):

- (a) Borrowing (b) Definition and Paraphrase (c) Literal Translation
- (d) Substitution (e) Lexical Creation (f) Addition and (g) Omission

Ivir suggests that

“The translator’s strategy is determined by his understanding of the communicative function of the elements of culture to be translated in that particular context of situation, his interpretation of the position (value) of that element in the source culture and its possible counterpart(s) in the target culture, his knowledge of the contrastive relation between the source and the target language, and his awareness of the translating traditions in the target culture”.

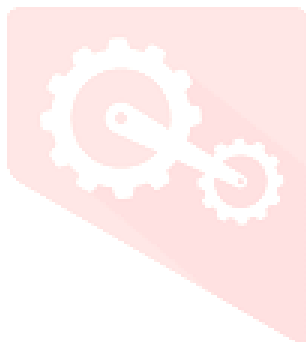
When a translator faces with an element of source culture which lacks a counterpart in the target culture or even a ready-made linguistic expression for such an element in the target language, the translator utilises any one of the procedures listed above. With all these background knowledges, in this paper, I have selected two manuscripts called *KhambaThoibee Sheireng* in section 2 and *Chainarol* in section 3 respectively which have got translated into English. The aim of the paper is just to give the message that translations of old epic and manuscripts have been made available

in this language called Manipuri (Meitei) (locally known as Meiteilon), which really helps maintaining, preserving as well as disseminating the cultural identity of this language. Here, the researcher doesn't focus on the critical analysis of the translated versions.

2. The Epic: *Khamba Thoibi Sheireng*

The folk-epic of *Moirang sayon* (Moirang incarnation) has seven epic cycles that concerns seven incarnations of two lovers Moirang.

The story of Khamba and Thoibi is in the last seventh part of that epic cycle. The stories of Moirang sayon are highly poetical with historical background of each part. It is said that the emergence of manuscripts fragments based on various epic cycles seems to have started from the middle of the 11th century. Khamba and Thoibi, besides regarded as deities, personify an ideal Meitei hero and a woman. Based on the themes and proposition in comparison to other cycles of the Moirang themes, the Khamba-Thoibi episode is said to be the greatest of the Manipuri (Meitei) romances and magnificently considered an epic. Mahakavi Hijam Anganghal, one of the great writers of the middle period of Manipuri (Meitei) literature, has adapted and revived the Khamba-Thoibi episodes in seven volumes. Dr. S.K Chatterjee in his "Languages and literatures of Modern Indian" (April 1963), has described the adaptations of the last Saiyon (incarnation) by Pundit Anganghal as- "a huge poem of 36000 lines in Meitei on a popular theme, old ballads about which in Manipuri (Meitei) are still sung viz., the love of the Khamba and the Princess Thoibi, the 12th Century hero and heroine of the most romantic story of Manipur". Following is the first page of the said epic *Khamba Thoibi Sheireng* by Hijam Anganghal.



(Ahanba Tangkak)

Shan Senba

Kege Moirang Leibakta hanna yengba udraba,
 Magee damak haidana tumit phaobaa paidraba,
 Kege sara oiraba Moirang lamja taraba,
 Khamba-khamnu koubadi machin-moupa anini !
 Wakhre khamba ngasidi machem dugeedamakta |
 Machem khamnu yengduna Khamba mana hayraki-
 "Palem shembi ichem-hal ! Ichem kouraroi, ima!
 Eina meeron khungdringei wabirakle imana!
 Leikai phousu-langbana khubak maron-hurakle |
 Laway phougang pubada laway koyrelparakle!
 Khuman eibu yokpada Ima shakpee ichem-hal |
 Leikai yumthong khudingda korou numit khudingee
 Cheng-ni phou-ni chatpase, tokpirone icham-hal!
 Ei panggan chaoredo ichegee nahut shillage!
 Khuman eihak chatlge Kege inak khunbada
 Shillanglage eihakna ichem amuk yoklage?
 Iche! Kari haybage yabiyuba imana!!"--
 "idu ningthou keidagee Kege Moiraang leipakta
 Konthong ani landriba nongyai nangna karamna,
 Kege leipak asida kaday shillangugani
 Sisu layre matok-o, ichem- panbu-panningde!
 Haydasisu kadayno Khamba nanggee damakni!-
 Karam puthoklasige nangbu Moirang mamangda!
 Chanu ningngol kayani-namannaba lakhani!

-Hijam Anganghal

(Khamba Thoibee Sheireng, 2005:1)

Jodhachandra Sanasam (2019), a renowned translator of Manipuri (Meitei), has rendered translation of the whole epic Khamba Thoibee Sheireng of Hijam Anganghal into English. The above lines are translated into English as follows:

Book 1

Cattle Herding Job

In the land of Kege Moirang, none there to take care for
 Not even a single tiny fungus gnat to fly for,
 Two Kege destitute souls destined as Moirang orphans
 Khamba and Khamnu the brother and sister the two were,
 Deep sadness for her sister Khamnu, Khamba sensed today,
 Gazing at Khamnu his dear sister, Khamba said,
 'Big sister! Mother selfsame! Call you sister I further
 Would not; "Mother" I would rather call you now, Suffered you've
 So very much since those days when human ways I knew not!
 Menial toil, paddy husking you did next-door, everywhere.
 Eroded your palm's skin has; thinned out your head, the top has
 Harvest paddy grain, head-loads you carried much too long now!
 My first-born sister! Mother identical! Stop your chores,
 stop now your entire daily visit in the neighbourhood
 begging door-to-door for rice grains, only to bring me up.
 Strong I have grown up; let me replace you, my sister dear!
 To the Kege riches, I Khuman will go earn wages,
 Look after you sister dear I want to, what do you say?
 O big sister, comply with me please, sister my mother."
 'O my dear younger brother!' Khamnu replied, 'For wages!
 Where would you go? Nongyai, not two gates of Kege Moirang
 You have crossed yet. Why, well, that too hardly matters I'd say;
 Mention I better not, If I don't too, vexed I will stay.
 It's for your sake, dear Khamba. Display you before Moirang
 How can I? Damsels several, there're thousands of your peers!
 Nobody is there for your orphan; you know it Nongyai!
 Your big sister a female of lesser strength, so I am;
 Accompany you in ways your worth I could not do that.

Jodha Chandra Sanasam (2019:1)

It is a fact that great works of translation involves two things- transforming the text and familiarizing the mind of the reader in the target language. This type of translation is most effective and through this type of translation we can read ourselves of the books of history which took place at certain period. In Sanasam's ways of translation, one can critically observe that there is a process of familiarization from one culture (Manipuri (Meitei)) to another culture (English). Sanasam moves from Manipuri (Meitei) culture to English culture groping for a happy medium guaranteeing his translation to be accepted by the new community of readers:

Chanu ningngol kayani-namannaba lakhani!

Damsels several, there're thousands of your peers!

'A young unmarried woman' is known as a damsel in western society. The Manipuri (Meitei) phrase *Chanu ningngol* can have the appropriate sense from a semantic point of view. Here, the reader of translation coming across *Chanu ningngol* conceptualizes 'the oriental damsel'; so the source culture of Manipuri (Meitei) has been replaced by the target culture of English. Hence it is now in the process of familiarization. The same job works for the word *namannaba* being conceptualized as 'your peers' that can be paraphrased as 'persons who are of equal standing with another in a group'. To concretize the things, this is one of the possible procedures for the translation of unmatched elements of culture: substitution, which is the preservation and faithful rendering of source culture-specific element.

3. The Sacred Ancient Script: Chainarol

One of the sacred puyas (The Holy Book Of Meitei Civilization), i.e., the manuscripts written in ancient Meitei script is *Chainarol*. This manuscript is about an account of Combats where one can witness the inevitable presence of god in the martial arts and the duels (cf.5.1). This is a very important treasure of Manipuri (Meitei) Literature. Even though the book appears to have been composed during the reign of King Mungyamba (1562-1697, it happens to give an account of the tradition of combating from the early period to the 17th Century. One of the interesting ingredients included in the book is that the names of many places in Manipur had been given following the combats. These combats, in some way or another, were always instigated by the gods and they were found frequently interfering in the combats.

The following is the first opening scene of the various combats where the writer renders a usual prayer and expresses his desire to enumerate the fights that took place between those fearless people. There is a transcribed text on Chainarol which has been rendered into modern Manipuri (Meitei) written in Bengali script translated from the earlier old one written in ancient Meitei script and this newly simplified but maintaining the old forms book is translated and composed by one of the eminent local scholars of Meitei puyas (The Holy Book Of Meitei Civilization), Chanam Hemchandra. In this paper, I am not including the modern Manipuri (Meitei) part, the translated version of the old Manipuri (Meitei).

Chaaynarol

Haayaa he leeklaaio □□ Yeepungthou nongthourel pumaapaa □□ laahaal nong haayee chakngaiki □□
naataairem talpaa meekhankhaai □□ athou leechaheppaa □□ thaayaang koltaailonpaa □□ theekkri
lampaaokhol □ hungngaa meekapkhoh yumeet laalchelkhoh □□ kwaaak laal paaokhol cheengnung
yeeraaokhol □ cheengsaang naayaikhoh □□ taamnaa huisonkhohpu naachungtaapaa □ saaipaa palyaithaa
laangkhong yeetaasi □ paanam khomyaa ikhaaipu songkitaapaa maaselpu □□ maarong chung phunaa □□
timel taa chanaapaa maselpu □□ taayam cheenkoi yeewaakmaanaa □ haayaa laaonaa tengtharakke □□

Haorei khaanaapaangpaaram, Laawai Polpeekhok □

Chaaire □ Thaichangpung □□ Huiem Laimataak Khunchaal Tara khang □□ koupaatee kaatounongkinu □ Huiem
chaanuraa aatengpee □□ laichaa yeetaasipeepu □□ maapalnaa kraao numeet 9 ni sunaa □□ thipaapu khangtaaraapaataa
kraao numeet 10 ni suraapaataa □□ khoinou maataa ngaairoinaanaa taaklaaye □ aatoo nong kipu hayrem
laymaataako □□ tounaa kouye □ maamom laaichaa yeetaa sipeeki □□ chaaray mayilphipu haktaa thongtaa □□ koupaa
yen, laaichaa laytaang thaara maakhok loykumnaa □□ nongmalngaamle aatoo nongkipu □□ Laawai Polpee Khok
tholnaaye □□ maapal palthou ningthounaa 10 nitaa khangye □□ haaypakipu lamlel 10 khang tounaa kouye □ Lamlel
Lawaai Polpeekhok □ Chaairel Thaichangpung □ Hairem Laymataak khun 10 khangtaa □ waayraa telpummaanaa
chanaa khongphelnaapaapu leiyee □ laahaal nong Chaairel ningthou Yaaphuraakpaanaa □ lamyaa saanaapaa koirel
lamchaa saataalpaataa □ laapaa khumlpu yaangtaou saaram leepaataa Khelte ningthou Haaotaklaaipaa □ momnoo
taanloi marumpee □ Setao Taongaam Hoihoipee □ 10 lepchaanaa waanglai lepthakanapeeki □ momnoo khootphaang
chaangchao 5 maanaa khoirenyu □ khaaree pheipham hongtaapaa yu maymeetpeetaapaa □□ maaroy haaopaa seksaa yu □
naaltaa tolkon yu khaaroong laimelyoo □□ waanglei aayaakpaa haaotei aathumpaapu □ Chaairel haaokhaamataaree □□
malte laaltaaree Chaairel leenungchang taa □ khaaree khomkaa haalnaa □ waanglai yuraalngaampakitaamakpu □ haayeng
loitaam laanghei kum onlaklaapaataa □□ Khelte ningthou haaotak laaipaa □□ momnu taanloi maaruppee □□ Setou
Toungaam Hoihoipeena □□ momnu yeenphooi maairangshon □□ tillaang haaiseetnaa 2 □□ lemlai ngaachop
thempaataa □□ laahaal momnu yuraal malki □□ Chaairel ningthou Yaayphuraakpaanaa □□ 10 lukmaaillem saarel
phaahaapnaa □□ maaikhangngaampaapu □□ Khelte ningthou Haaotak laaipanaa □□ waataatheekhiye □□ paathou
Chaairel ningthou Yaayphuraakpaao □□ momnu aiki □□ taanloi yeerumpee ashipu □□ nangnaa soikhong taaitheetnaa □□
lamlak loothumnaa □□ thongkhaapaanaa paanaaringaine □□ kaaorel salsaa taaiyam naaisaa □□ yeemlak naaiphake
paanam saltaalke □□ haaynaa waoipaapu □□ Chaairel ningthou Yaayphuraakpaanaa □□ paathou Khelte ningthou
Haaotak Laaipaa □□ aana laahaal nong lamyaa saanaapaa □□ koirel lamchaa saataapaataa □□ momnu taanloi
naarumpee aseena □□ waanglai yuraalmalkipu lasingpeeke □□ haaynaa 10 lukmaaillem saarel phaahaapnaa ani □□
maaikhangpaane □□ aytee soykhong taaitheete □□ lamlak loothumpaapu poomnaa leite □□ haanaa krao nongson
paamaal laysonpuaa □□ Khelte ningthou Haaotak Laaipanaa waachunaate □□ 1 rak Chaairel ningthou
Yaaphulaakpaanaa □□ saaree makhei phang naamung maatol lomnaa wasakpuaa □□ thaachaapeete □□ Irak Chaairel
ningthou Yaaphulaakpaanaa □□ paaomellakle □□ touyee kitee paathou Khelte Haaotak Laaipaa □□ waairaa telpum 1
kaapnaa □□ chaaynaa khongphelnaaraase □□ naapaayeeppaa laanaa chumlaasunu □□ huyel laal seengnakhiye □□ lamlal
Laawai Polpeekhok □□ Chaairel Thaichangpungta □□ waairaa techaaynakhie haaytaapaaraa □□ Khelte ningthou
Haaotak Laaipanaa □□ haalnaa leeree thaamoiting □□ laakaa telmai laaknaa krao nongo yengo □□ maallem laio
khang □□ Hayrem Yeepal lam nang chumo haaynaa □□ waairaa telthaapaapu □□ soirel phoompee toona telpaalye □□
Chaairel ningthou Yaaphuraakpaanaa □□ leeree thaamoiteeng laakaa telmay paaynaa □□ krao nongo yengo □□ maalem
laio khang □□ Hayrem Yeepallam nangsung chumo haaynaa waayraa telthaapaate □□ Khelte ningthou Haaotak
Laaipaa □□ phayraa maatal paangmaa ture □□ selloi maapaataa 2 maatee □□ loynaa aapaampaaneekinaa □□ loorak
kaangtei thitaa □□ khounaao longthong lentaa □□ hakcheng sammaa maallaopitaanaa □□ 2 maa saamu longkolnaanaa
halwaaikhiye □□ Khelte ningthou Haaotak Laaipana □□ paathou yeepeenggaatee □□ seenglel aarempaa leiraang

atingngaapu□□ waaoinaaye haaynaa khoorum molmon noknaa□□ 10 khootpoon peemaanaa waanglay cheenkul yongmaanaanaa□□ laangkolnaakhiye haaytaapaaraa□□ lamlel Lawaay Polpee Khoktaa□□ chaaynaa khongphelnaapaa aatoosoong maatomte□□

-Chanam Hemchandra (Chainarol:1-3)

The following is the translated version in English by Irengbam Arun at. Professor Arun and the team have translated the entire book entitling “Ways of the warrior” wherein the cultural ingredients like political landscape, geographical and social setting, historical setting, cultural challenges and regeneration and the basic information about the world of puyas have been well elucidated.

CHAINAROL

(The Way of Warrior)

Haya he he he leeklai o!

Yeepungthou Nongthourel Pumapa O!

O All Pervasive Spirit Primordial,

Thou Lord of all, and Progenitor Sole!

Of times olden when thy noble vassals

Matchless in might and dauntless in battles,

In games of war grim well they were adept

Safe the borders of their homeland they kept.

These men-at-arms were not at all afraid

Of the booming notes of bittern that wade

Over marshes bloody wars portending,

Nor the eerie whine of the waifs wailing,

The ominous croak of the black raven,

The thunder of cascades o’er the mountain,

The chiming note of Tamna so estrange,

Popping by the weir side the headless corpse.

Shields clashed and spears lunged at each other as

In single combats these vassals engage.

And I, the minstrel, submit to recount

Details of these mortal combat’s account.

Chief Yaphurakpa vs Chief Haotak Laiba

A duel was fought in a place known as Lawai Polbikhok Chairel Theichangpung Heirem Leimatak Khulchal Tarakhang.

How did the location derive such a name? A charming young maiden of Heirem Khulchal had disappeared without any trace. Her father searched her in vain for nine days. Close friends of the missing damsel informed the grief-stricken father of her whereabouts on the tenth day. And the site came to be known as Leimatak. The bereaved chief found his ill-fated daughter floating on the water.

There she was, dead, afloat, and stripped of her apparel like the once beautiful waterlily, fading and rotting in the water. The place was named Lawai Polbikhok. She was found on the tenth day. Hence the name Tarakhang. A single combat was fought at the picturesque location of Lawai Polbikhok Chairel Theichangpung Heirem Leimatak Khulchal Tarakhang.

Yaphurakpa, Chief of Chairel, had once gone a hunting and was stalking a wild boar. Leima ShetouToungam Hoi-Hoibi, spouse of Haotak Laiba, Chief of Khende, met him there. And she had served him with food and offered him a rare spirit she had carefully distilled herself with her own hands. She had maintained the fire steady while distilling it. The container was sealed airtight and had stored the drink without ever stirring it. The drink tasted sweet and strong. The same was offered as a goodwill gesture to the chieftain as he was a close family friend.

Days rolled into months. Leima ShetouToungam Hoi-Hoibi was plying on her fishing net the following year when Yaphurakpa treated her to a sumptuous meal heaped with choice meat in gratitude of her civility the previous year.

Chief of Khende, Haotak Laiba, took offence. He said, “O Pathou, Chief Yaphurakpa of Chairel, perhaps you are having an illicit affair with my spouse and fooling around abroad. This stupidity behoves only slaves and cattle. And I mean to hunt down the dumb brutes and catch the slaves in the act.”

'Pathou, Chief Hoatak Laiba of Khende,' replied the Chief of Chairel, "I had once gone a hunting and was tracking a game when your lady had offered me a drink of fine home-distilled spirit. Afterwards, I had served her a lunch heaped with choice meat as a mark of gratitude. I swear in the name of heavens that no foul play was involved." And he swore by the Sky above and the Earth below. The Chief of Khende won't be convinced. Again, Chief Yaphurakapa swore by all that was divine and declared his innocence.

But Haotak Laiba won't be moved. The Chief of Chairel consequently challenged him to fight a personal combat. "Let us then decide it by shooting an arrow at each other," he said. "The guardian deities of your ancestors and my forefathers shall dispense justice."

It was stated that the duel was fought at Lawai Polbikhok Chairel Theichangung.

Chief Haotak Laiba fitted an arrow to his bow-string, drew it full. "Look down, Oh lofty Sky! Mark it well, Oh Mother Earth! Heirem, my fatherland, you mete out justice," he invoked and let the arrow fly. The arrow but hit the pile of weeds on the weir.

Chief of Chairel, Yaphurakpa, in his turn, picked an arrow, fitted it to his bow and besought, "O you Sky above and Earth below and Heirem, my fatherland! Do mete out justice." And he shot the arrow.

The arrow hit one of the things of the Chief of Khende. Chief Yaphurakpa could have claimed the head of Haotak Laiba by the code of personal combat, but he did not.

Bosom friends, that they were, the victor did not claim his booty, the head of the vanquished. Instead, he took the Chief of Khende in his arms, who said, "Both of us had gone this far over a trivial matter." They shared their lunch-packs and home-distilled spirit and departed arm-in-arm with broad smiles. And there are yet other instances.

-Irengbam Arun (Chainarol:23-25).

As suggested by Ivir (2003), the translators' choice/strategy is determined by his understanding of the communicative function of an element of source culture incorporated in the original message and so in the above translation, the phrase "*Chairel Ningthou Yaphurakpa*" has been translated as "Yaphurakpa, Chief of Chairel" not as "Yaphurakpa, the King of Chairel". This alludes to the picturesque scene of a pluralistic society where there prevailed semi-autonomous chiefdoms in the land of Kangleipak presently known as Manipur while acknowledging the supremacy of the Meitei king. In this perspective, the translator felt duty bound to convey the semantic content of the phrase to the receivers and the translator does so by means of providing necessary informations in terms mapping from a source language to the target language. Another interesting thing is the translators' technique of using the paraphrase 'A drink of fine home-distilled spirit' for the corresponding Manipuri (Meitei) phrase "*Yu kharung leimelyu*" as the procedure of choice understanding the value of such item in the source Mankipuri culture and its possible transfer to the target English culture instead of using literal translation. This shows that the translators tactfully decide to establish the communication more effectively while following the originality of the source culture.

5.3 Conclusion

This paper vividly shows that translation is no longer considered to be only cross-linguistic activity but it significantly is cross-cultural transfer. It has been shown that translating cultural texts not only provides authentic cultural information to the foreign learners but also functions preserving as well as disseminating the cultural identity of the source language. By highlighting the possible procedures of translation, I have also provided two translations of two ancient Manipuri (Meitei) manuscripts in a logical explanation.

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