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

Thokchom Premlata Devi
School of Translation Studies Training,
Research Scholar, IGNOU

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
(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 comparion 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 Pundi 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 phaoabaa 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 koyrelderakle!
Khuman eibu yokpada Ima shakpee icheem-hal!
Leikai yumthong khudingda korou numit khudingee Cheng-ni phou-ni chatpase, tokipone icham-hal!
Ei panggan chaoredo echegee nahut shillage!
Khuman eihak chatlge Kege inak hunbada
Shillanglge eihkana icheem amuk yoklage?
Iche! Kari haybage yabiyuba imana!!’’--
“idu ningthou keidadge Kege Moirang leipaaka
Konthong ani landriba nongyai nangna karamna,
Kege leipak asida kaday shillangugani
Sisu layre matok-o, icheem- panbu-panningde!
Haydasisu kadayno Khamba nanggey 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
Khambu 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 selvesame! 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 beforeMoirang
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 famialirization 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 cuture: 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 Civilazation), 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 ingredient s 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.

Chanu ningngol kayani-namannaba lakhani!
Chaaynarol

Haayaa he leeklaio...Yeepungthou nongthourel pumaapaa...laahaal nong haayee chakngaik...ntaataraem talpaa meekhankaai...o athou leechaahheppaa...thaayaang koltaaionpaa...theekki lampaaokol...hungngaa meekkapkol...yumeet laaechelkelkol...kwaakaal laal paokkol cheengnung yeeraaokkol...cheensang saaayaihol kaanaa huoisonkholu naaachungthaapanai...saaiipaa palyaithaa laangkhong yeetaasi...paanam khomyaai ikhaaiupu songkitapaa maaselpu...maarong chung phunaa...timee...taa chanaapaa maselpu...taa tyam cheenki...yeewaakmaanaa...haayaa laaonaann tengthaarakke...
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 leeklai o!  
Yeepunghou Nonghourel 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 ahunting and was stalking a wild boar. Leima Shetou Toungam 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 Shetou Toungam 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 Theichangpung. 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 kharun leimelyui” as the procedure of choice understanding the value of such ite 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to Mr. Amom Nandaraj Meetei, CIIL, Mysore, Karnataka and Mr. Athokpam Jeet Prabhat Meitei, Chairmen-cum-President of International Meitei Organization, Sarvashresth Manipur Corporation, who helped me a lot in developing this paper extending his academic insight. And also grateful to for both moral support and encouragemnt.

References