Chapter V

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the various ways of employing the concept of translation while constituting the linear chronological history of Tamil literature and also the covered intentions behind such multiple employment of the term translation. The research however discussed many things regarding the translation and Tamil literary activities in the course explaining the central concern of it. The focal point of the study as discussed previously could be explained as an enquiry on the multiple ways of employing the concept of translation, by doing so, how particular pre-modern religious supremacy had been retained in the modern structure and had also been justified this appropriation as a natural act. Therefore, the study principally centred on the politics of employing the concept of translation and its consequences in the structural part of the history of Tamil literature. However, this research as a part of its argument had extensively discussed the translation practices and the literary activities in Tamil down the ages.

One of the prime discussion of this study would be the very idea of ‘Tamil literature’. This research by quoting many instances argued that the idea of Tamil literature was constituted by the influences of the European translations and their material aspects employed for literary practices. The vast amount of European literature in Tamil starting from the 16th century, although religious in nature, introduced ‘new’ ways and meanings to literary activities in Tamil language. The print became the central mechanism to erase the traditional boundaries that decided the literary activities in Tamil language over the ages. The print and the European mode of presenting the text gradually influenced the literary
activities in Tamil, as a result, the literary activities in Tamil became conscious about the name of the author, date of composition, error free text and above all easy accessibility of texts and their circulation. Nevertheless, the study substantiated its central concern in the following chapter divisions and at last argued that the employment of translation, both as the concrete product and as a conceptual structure, played a subtle role to constitute the present structure of the history of Tamil literature.

In chapter one, I have discussed the scope and the nature of the study. The discussion about the history of Tamil literature invariably took us to the formation of the concepts such as ‘Tamil literature’ and ‘literary history’. Both these concepts were closely related to the modern thoughts. But, many scholarly treatises and the historical writings related to the history of Tamil literature maintained a thick silence when it came to discuss the origin of these terms. I have discussed the various existing literature in detail and explained how they were bypassing the discussion of the origin and the development of the aforesaid modern concept in Tamil. By comparing and contrasting with the existing studies, I have clarified the significance of the study in detail.

The second chapter described the context of the study. It started with two different instances, first belonged to 19th century whereas the next was from the mid-20th century and deducted its argument by emphasising the similarities and dissimilarities between these two by comparing with the larger socio-political changes of Tamil speaking region during the close of the 19th century and the first half of the following century. It sketched the clear dividing line between the traditionally practiced literary activities over the ages and the modern literary understanding that was initiated and developed by the influences of the European literary activities in Tamil. Further, I have explained how these two different
modes of literary activities were practiced alongside over the centuries and the confluences between them gradually started happening only during the 19th century. The traditionally practiced literary activities in Tamil were not also in a ‘unified’ whole, rather they were in diverse modes in terms of religion, region and caste discriminations. The differences in traditionally practiced literary activities were well narrated by U.Ve.Ca’s conversation with C.R.M. Further, this conversation evidently explained the following things: 1) the literary activities in pre-modern times were practiced in diverse ways, mainly the religious world views set the demarcation of literary limits. 2) As the religious substances became the centre of literary practices, the circulation and the reception of literature were also limited. 3) The travel of literature across their religious affiliation were hardly found, the hurdles faced by U.Ve.Ca while publishing Civaka Cintāmaṇi would typically narrate the nature and the practices of literature during that age. However, this chapter explained that how the traditionally practiced literary activities were translated into the modern one. In other words, it narrated how the traditional scholarship was translated to the modern textual practices in Tamil.

In chapter III, I have made an attempt to sketch the diagram of influences that the literary activities in Tamil received from the European textual practices, particularly through translations. I have argued that the early printing history of Tamil literature is nothing but the history of Tamil translation, mainly due to the fact that the early printed books in Tamil were translation, principally the translation of Christian books into Tamil. Further, it had been argued that the translations from the European languages into Tamil introduced ‘prose’ form to Tamil literature and the popularity of prose form is subtly related to the emergence of the marginalised section’s participation in the Tamil literary sphere. Therefore, the central
argument of this chapter emerged out of the triangle relationship among the function of translations, the new arrival of prose style and the introduction of 'letters' to the socially marginalised communities. I have attempted to draw the linear history of the printing activities in Tamil. By analysing some five centuries of printing activities in Tamil, I have categorised the entire act into three folds: the 16th century Roman Catholic initiations, the 18th century Protestant activities and the native's participation in the act starting from the 19th century. The first two faces were directly related to translation activities. I have attempted to discuss these translation and their reception in detail.

The detailed description regarding the nature and reception of the early translation in print, published during the 16th century initiated a debate regarding the practices of translation in Tamil over the ages. By substantiating various instances from Tamil literary texts, I have argued that the translation in terms of proper 'source' and 'target' in Tamil were started only with the arrival of the Portuguese prayer books in print. By arguing so, I have emphasized the fact that the traditional translation activities in Tamil could be discussed as more 'assimilation' in nature than that of 'translations' as we presently understand. Following this, a detailed study on the Protestant activities was made. The Protestant printing activities were invariably related to the Holy Bible translation activities and these activities were subtly connected to prose form and the formal schoolings. The attempts for translating the Bible into Tamil created lots of controversies, mainly because of its diction. The first attempt of translating Bible into Tamil, initiated by Ziegenbalg adopted the common people's Tamil. And interestingly, how can the Holy text printed in common people's language which was kept away from literary activities over the ages would not create the controversy? Above all, the translated Tamil Bible posed a potential threat to the traditional literary activities in
two senses: at first it selected the commoner’s diction mainly due to the fact that the commoners were mostly converted into Christianity during that age. The second threatening aspect was related to prose style of the Bible. Both, the diction and prose style adopted for translating the Bible into Tamil evidently interrogated the traditional believed and practiced assumptions that the literature had separate set of exclusive dictions and elegant styles. Further, the entire corpus of Tamil literature until the European encounter were composed in the ‘high’ dialect of Tamil which had a strong religious as well as Sanskrit domination. This Sanskrit-religious monopoly kept the common mass away from the textual activities. In this context, the selection of the commoner’s language for translating the Holy Bible erased the traditional hegemony of the poetic and elegant language.

The Protestant religious propagation was largely associated to the formal education for both men and women. The importance of missionaries educational practices could only be understood when it had been compared to the prevailing educational condition of that age. In this chapter I have discussed by quoting the letters of Ziegenbalg that the intimate connection between the formal education and the role of translation in it.

The fourth chapter exclusively discussed the role of translation in constituting a linear chronology of Tamil literature. By discussing various attempts for structuring the history of Tamil literature, I have argued that the concept of translation had been employed in the following ways and by doing so the traditional supremacy of the Vaithika religion had retained in the modern structure.
A) Translation as a tool to ‘constitute’ the others.

Non-Vaithika religious texts were labelled as translations, by doing so the Vaithika religious texts became the Tamil’s own. Therefore, Tamil scholars are at the forefront in finding the source texts to the non-Vaithika literature, whereas even the Vaithika texts evidently belonged to translation category, the scholars attempted to argue that the Vaithika texts were some way or other part of Tamil’s own. The Vaithika religious supremacy sidelined the texts affiliated to the Jains and the Buddhist, and treated them as translations mainly because of the Vaitika-Tamil association. In using this strategy, the Vaitika sects’ dominance has been intact in the literary history of Tamil as it was in the pre-modern times. This part discusses how the Jains and the Buddhist texts were treated and marginalised using the act of Translation as a tool.

Not only labelling the non-Vaithika religious texts as translations, but also by emphasising and reiterating the Vaithika religious myths, the supremacy of Vaithika religion retained into the modern structure.

Many myths regarding Tamil’s past and its origin were related only with the Vaitika supremacy. The nature of the myths was also sharing a considerable space with the notion of translation in its functional aspects.

B) Myths regarding the origin of Tamil

These varieties of myths not only focus the beginnings of Tamil but also explain its nature and relation to Sanskrit. The inner structure of these groups of myths that talks about the origin of Tamil is the debate between the supremacy of Tamil and Sanskrit. Some myths explain Sanskrit as the mother to Tamil whereas many others depict Tamil had a separate
origin which is parallel to Sanskrit. But interesting aspects in these myths are its Vaitika orientations. However the base argument of these myths is the debate between Sanskrit and Tamil in terms of ‘Source’ and ‘Target’.

C) Myth of Akattiyar

Many stories regarding Akattiyar in Tamil are in circulation. The gist of the myth is that he is a progenitor of Tamil. He started the tradition of Tamil literature. He composed the grammatical treatise Akattiyam for three fold Tamil (prose, music and performance) which set the base for all the Tamil texts produced later. Akattiyam is said to be composed by Akattiyar. Not only Tolkkâppiyam, but also all the texts in Tamil originate from ‘the master source’ Akattiyam. Various versions of this myth and their content reflect the conflict between Tamil vs Sanskrit debates and the enquiry of ‘the source’ between these two languages is the soul of the myth.

D) The ‘glorious past’ and catastrophic histories

The concept of three Cañkam, God as a member of the first Cañkam, the names of the texts that were practiced in those Cañkams and the stories related with Cañkam’s and their destruction are creating fabulous narration about the great, glorious past of Tamil literature. The entire narratives are carefully tied up which assert the dominance of the Vaitika religion.103

103 (see, Sumathi Ramaswamy 2004)
E) Muttamil (the three fold Tamil):

When the categorisation of Tamil into three fold came into existence is a vital enquiry and important to probe further. Except the text Akattiyam that believed to be 'lost', none of the texts in Tamil directly dealt all the three together. Moreover, the rise of Bhakthi movement is associated with the 'musical' elements. How the relation between Akattiyam, the Bhakthi literature and the music constituted the concept of three fold Tamil, which become the basic 'structure' of Tamil.

Various kinds of myths and old legends, as discussed, provided considerable amount of materials to constitute the structure of Tamil literary history. However, by relying these materials, the traditional Vaithika religious supremacy is subtly translated into the modern structure and adopting the same logic the entire act was also justified. Thus, the employment of translation had a politics and intention and that had been materialised logically by retaining the Vaithika-Tamil bond into the history of Tamil literature.

Limitation of the study:

The study is a modest attempt to understand the role of translation in the act of imagining and thus constructing a single linear chronological history of Tamil literature. To substantiate the central idea, this study discusses the translation activities in Tamil over the ages. Further, the study is not exclusively discussing the nature and the reception of translated texts. Many of the translated text's name and their details are not found in the history of Tamil literature. As the study described, the history of Tamil literature is not the complete account of the texts in Tamil; rather it had been constituted by foregrounding many pre-conceived intentions.
This study is not only taking into account of the translated texts and their nature to explain the meaning of translation, but also considered any attempt to exclude the text as 'other' as the conceptual construction of translation. Therefore, the study underlines that the notion of translation is not only as products, but also as processes even in conceptual level. Moreover, this study is not completely a full-fledged one in the sense that it could be further elaborated in detail if one can access the detailed list and the texts of translations in Tamil down the ages. However, the study and its arguments are constituted and substantiated by using a limited available source and also the secondary information found in the existing literature so far produced in this line of thoughts.

Scope for Future Research:

This study has explained the intimate connection between the concept of translation and the act of literary historiography in Tamil. Further this study is has also exposed the nature of the history of Tamil literature. It explained at least two points from where further development of this line of thoughts could be advanced:

1) The study exposed that the present history of Tamil literature is not a complete account of the texts composed and translated into Tamil. An enquiry into the translated texts from and into Tamil language would restructure the present order of Tamil literary history. However, this attempt becomes the history of translation in Tamil, and at the same time, becomes the study of translations and their influences on Tamil literary activities.

2) The European textual activities in Tamil languages could not simply be limited to the translations from the European languages into Tamil. They have translated many
texts into European languages. As far as the existing knowledge and the bibliographies on the translated texts into the European languages from Tamil are concerned, the texts entered to the European languages are very selective in nature and they constituted the 'moral' value to Tamil literary activities. For instance, the translation of Thirukural into the European languages created an impression to Tamil literary world as 'the world of high morals' and so on. The detailed study on the texts and their translations into European languages becomes one of the important works in understanding the influences of translation activities. And this kind of studies would strip off the covered intentions and the politics behind the act of writing the history of Tamil literature.