

Translation Techniques In The First Arabic Version Of Thirukkural: An Analysis Of Kokan's Methodology

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Abstract

Professor Mohammed Yousuf Kokan's "Al-Abyath Al-Muqaddasa" significantly contributes to the field of translation and intercultural communication through his Arabic translation of the Thirukkural, a classical Tamil text. The main objective of this research article is to analyze Kokan's translation methodology, highlighting how he conveys the philosophical and ethical message of Valluvar while ensuring cultural resonance with the Arabic-speaking audience. The methods used are textual analysis and translation. The results show that the Thirukkural, revered for its universal wisdom, serves as an ideal text for translation, embodying values that transcend cultural boundaries. Kokan's efforts have enriched Arabic literature and fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of Tamil thought in the Arab world. This article provides an in-depth perspective on Kokan's translation approach, which has built a bridge between Tamil and Arabic cultures.

Keywords: Thirukkural; Tamil; Arabic; Translation; Kokan

INTRODUCTION

The Thirukkural has been translated into many world languages, including Arabic, Burmese, Chinese, Dutch, English, German, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Malay, Polish, Russian, Spanish, and Sinhala. It is widely recognized that Valluvar offers a universal perspective. Since the time of Valluvar, the Thirukkural has been extensively studied across various dimensions-texts, explanations, analyses, comparisons, and translations-showing its broad and deep universal viewpoint. Professor Mohammed Yousuf Kokan has translated the Thirukkural into Arabic. By understanding the thoughts and ideas of Valluvar, Kokan has attempted to translate the Thirukkural into Arabic in a suitable way. The purpose of this article is also to document the translation techniques and strategies employed by Professor Kokan in the work "Al-Abyaath Al-Muqaddasa".

Translation is a vital conduit for the dissemination of knowledge, culture, and philosophical ideas across different linguistic and cultural boundaries. It serves not merely as a linguistic transfer but as an act of cultural negotiation, aiming to preserve the essence of the original text while making it accessible to new audiences. In the context of classical literature, translation assumes even greater significance, as it helps sustain the timeless wisdom embedded in ancient texts and introduces them to diverse cultural spheres.

The Thirukkural, composed by the Tamil poet and philosopher Valluvar, is renowned for its universal themes of ethics, morality, and social harmony. Its brevity, depth, and philosophical richness have made it a subject of interest for scholars and readers worldwide. Among the various translations, the Arabic version by Professor

Mohammed Yousuf Kokan stands out as a noteworthy attempt to bridge Tamil and Arab cultures. This translation not only introduces the wisdom of the Thirukkural to the Arab-speaking world but also demonstrates the complexities and nuances involved in translating such a profound work across two distinct linguistic and cultural landscapes.

This study aims to explore the translation techniques employed by Kokan, examining how he navigates linguistic, cultural, and philosophical challenges to faithfully convey the core messages of the original Tamil text. By analyzing his methodology, we can better understand the role of translation in fostering intercultural dialogue and promoting mutual appreciation between Tamil and Arab civilizations.

METHOD

The research employed in this study is qualitative in nature, focusing on textual analysis of Kokan's translation "Al-Abyath Al-Muqaddasa" alongside the original Tamil text of the Thirukkural. Key aspects of the methodology include 1) comparative analysis: Examining the alignment between Kokan's translations and the original Tamil couplets, assessing both linguistic and cultural fidelity. 2) Thematic Exploration: Identifying major themes within the Thirukkural and evaluating how effectively these themes are expressed in Kokan's Arabic translation. 3) Contextual Examination: Investigating Kokan's cultural and academic background to understand his perspective and approach towards translating the Thirukkural. 4) Critical Reflection: Engaging with the translation's reception among Arabic-speaking audiences and its implications for cross-cultural dialogue.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that Professor Kokan's translation successfully captures the essence of Valluvar's teachings while adapting them to be relevant for Arab readers. His translation not only retains the core messages of the original text but also leverages Arabic's rich linguistic heritage to express these ideas vividly.

1. Cultural Nuances: Kokan adeptly navigates cultural differences, illustrating how the universal themes of ethics, morality, and governance resonate with Arabic audiences.
2. Translation Techniques: His use of poetic structure and rhythmic language in Arabic enhances the aesthetic quality of the work, making it accessible and engaging for readers.
3. Impact on Intercultural Understanding: The translation has facilitated cross-cultural dialogue, expanding the reach of Tamil literature in the Arabic-speaking world and promoting a deeper appreciation for its philosophical richness.

The significance of these results underscores the importance of translation as a means of cultural exchange. By translating the Thirukkural, Kokan has not only introduced a classic Tamil text to the Arab audience, but he has also created a new space for intercultural dialogue.

Translator: Professor Mohammed Yousuf Kokan

Mohammed Yousuf Kokan was born in 1916 in Meenampoor of Gingee Taluk, Tamil Nadu, India as the son of Ibrahim Kokan. He received his Master's degree in Arabic from the University of Madras in 1948 and a research Master's degree in Arabic (M.Litt) in 1965. He taught Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and Islamic history for three years at the Chennai Government Muhammadan Arts College. On August 5, 1949, he was appointed

as a professor in Arabic, Urdu, and Persian at the University of Madras, from where he retired in 1977.

In 1980, Professor Mohammed Yousuf Kokan published his Arabic translation of the Thirukkural under the title “Al-Abyaath Al-Muqaddasa.” This book was printed by Darul Hafiza, located on Mayilappuran Street in Royappettah, Chennai. As Bharathi said, "Classic texts from other countries must be translated into Tamil," similarly, our literary works should also be translated into world languages, especially classical languages (Zubair, 2014). With great effort, Professor Kokan has translated the Thirukkural into Arabic, which is a Semitic language. In recognition of his contributions to the Arabic language, he was awarded the President’s Award for Arabic Language under the Oriental Languages, becoming the first person from Tamil Nadu to receive this honour.

List of Thirukkural translations available in Arabic (six complete translations and one partial translation) are as follows:

Table 1. List Of Thirukkural Translations Available In Arabic

No	Translator	Year	Name Of The Work
1	Muhammad Yousuf Kokan (India)	1980	Al-Abyaath Al-Muqaddasa (الآبيات المقدسة), India
2	Ammar Hasan (Syria)	2015	Al-Mathnawi Al-Muqaddas, Al Farabi Publications, Beirut, Lebanon
3	Dr. Basheer Ahmed Jamali	2023	Thirukkural (CICT) , India
4	Mahmood Fat-hi Sa’d Khalifa	----	Thirukkural , Published by an Egyptian publisher
5	Dr. K. M. A. Ahamed Zubair	2019	Thirukkural, Noor Publishing Inc., Mauritius. (Partial Translation of 50 Couplets only)
6	Dr. A. Jahir Hussain	2020	Thirukkural (IITS), India
7	Dr. K. M. A. Ahamed Zubair	2024	Al-Abyath Al-Baariza: Thirukkural (الأبيات البارزة) (تيركورل), published by Shams Publishing Inc., London

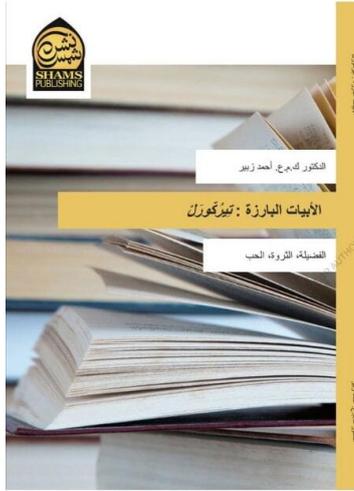
Figure 1. Cover Of Thirukkural Translations



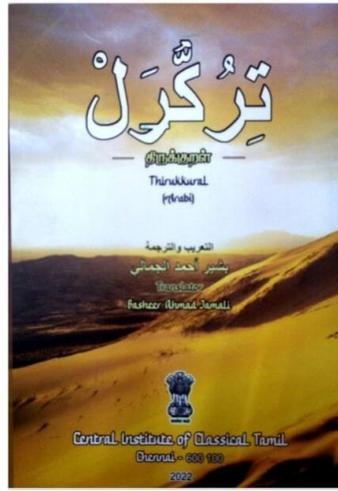
Tr.Mohammed Yousuf Kokan

Tr.Ammar Hasan

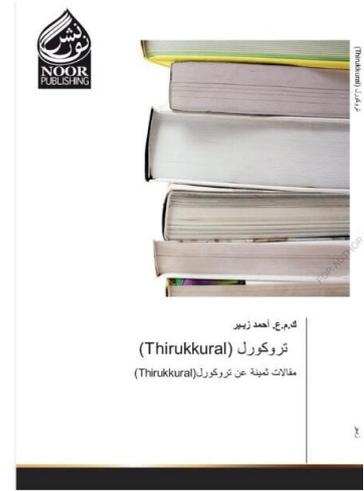
Tr.A Jahir Husain



Tr. K M A Ahamed Zubair



Tr. Basheer Ahmad Jamali



Tr. K M A Ahamed Zubair

Al-Abyaath Al-Muqaddasa: An Analysis

In translation field, the selection of words or phrases that convey the essence of the source language's meaning is termed "equivalent." In the Arabic translation of the "Thirukkural," titled "Al-Abyaath Al-Muqaddasa" we can observe the following equivalents, which serve as either single words or phrases (Zubair, 2014).

1. The term "வான் சிறப்பு" translates to something akin to "the speciality of rain." In Arabic, the word 'வான்' is represented as "سَمَاء" (sama'a), while 'மழை' is translated as "مَطَر" (matar). The translator has chosen to use "مَطَر" for 'rain.'
2. The phrase "இறைநலம்" is translated into Arabic as "التَّحْمِيدُ وَالتَّمَجِيدُ" (al-tahmid wa al-tamjid). The expressions used in this translation are closely associated with Islamic terminology. "التَّحْمِيدُ" means "all praise is due to Allah," and "التَّمَجِيدُ" refers to "glorifying the divine." Thus, several equivalents appear to be highly contextualized.
3. The term "ஆதிபகவன்" is meant to signify "the foremost being" or "the primary essence." Valluvar uses it in a way that suggests its significance for all people. The translator renders "ஆதிபகவன்" as "أَوَّلُ الْكَائِنَات" (awwal al-kainat), meaning "the first of all existence." Here, "العالم" translates to "the universe," thus denoting the essence of "the primary universe or creation."
4. The word "இல்வறவியல்" translates in Arabic as "الأسرة وأعمالها الصالحة" (al-usrah wa amaluha al-salihah), meaning "family and its good deeds." Furthermore, "இல்வாழ்க்கை" is expressed in Arabic as "حياة أسرية" (hayat usriyya) meaning "family life. Thus the translator seems to generalize the concept of family dynamics rather than just marital roles.
5. The phrase "செய்ந்நன்றி அறிதல்" signifies "not forgetting the good done by others." This is translated into Arabic as "إحسان" (ihsan), which encompasses a broad meaning including kindness, beneficence, and good actions. This highlights the depth of the Arabic language in capturing concepts of morality.

6. The expression “நாவினால் சுட்டவடு” is translated as “إِحْتِرَاقٌ بِلِسَانٍ مُرٍّ” (ihtiraq billisan al-murr), meaning “biting remarks made with a bitter tongue.” Here, 'வடு' (wadhu/Scar) does not find a mention in the Arabic translation.
7. The phrase “அறிவுடைமை” is translated into Arabic as “الفهم السليم” (al-fahm al-salim), implying “constructive understanding.” The term for someone knowledgeable is rendered in Arabic as “أصحاب الفهم السليم” (as'hab al-fahm al-salim), meaning “those who possess sound understanding.”
8. The words “தினை/ thinai” and “பனை/ panai” are used to denote the meanings “small particle” and “palm tree” correspondingly translated into Arabic as “darra” for “small particle” and “nakhlah” (date-palm) for “palm tree”. The translator may have chosen these terms while acknowledging that the concept of the palm tree was lesser-known among Arabic speakers.
9. The phrase “பெரியாரைத் துணைகோடல்” implies “being close to the virtuous.” It has been translated as “الصحبة الصالحة” (al-suhbah al-salihah).
10. “கீழ் மக்களோடு பெரியார் சேரா” is expressed in Tamil as not associating with lowly people. The translator uses “الإجتنب عن صحبتهم” (al-ijtinab an suhbatihim) in Arabic, which means “avoiding relationships with the condemned.”
11. The term “கூடா நட்பு” translates to “false friendship,” rendered in Arabic as “الصدقة الكاذبة” (al-sadaqah al-kadhiba).
12. “களவியல்” is conveyed as “الحب والألم” (al-hubb wa al-alam), meaning “love and its pain.”
13. The term “கற்பியல்” is expressed as “قوانين الحب التي ينبغي أن تُفهم” (qawanin al-hubb allati yanbaghi an tufham), translating to “the rules of love that should be understood by all.”
14. The phrase “படர் மெலிந்திரங்கல்” connotes the idea of a young girl lamenting in solitude, translated in Arabic as “آهة المحبوبة المهجورة” (ahatu al-mahbubah al-mahjura), meaning “the lament of the deserted beloved.”
15. “கனவு நிலையுரைத்தல்” is translated as “أحلام الحب” (ahlam al-hubb), meant to suggest “the manifestations of love.”

We have previously observed how words and phrases have been rendered as equivalents. Let us now explore how certain couplets (Kurals) have been translated without losing their essence and how they convey deeper meanings.

Table 3. Phrases Translation

1	Thirukkural: "ஒழுக்கத்து நீத்தார் பெருமை விழுப்பத்து வேண்டும் பணுவல் துணிவு"	Translation: The greatness of one who adheres to good conduct, forsaking bad, is the highest of all virtues
جميع الصحائف تؤكد بشئ وحيد عظيم وهو زهد رجل يسير دائما في سبيل الحق والصدق		
The translator interprets this to mean that all records affirm one great truth: the asceticism of a man who always walks the path of righteousness and honesty		

2	Thirukkural: "தந்தை மகற்காற்றும் நன்றி அவையத்து முந்தி யிருப்பச் செயல்"	Translation: The support of a father for his son makes him a leader in the gathering of great men
	من حسن حظ الأب ان يرى ولده شاعلا للمنصب الرفيع بين الناس	
	The translator interprets this to mean that it is a great privilege for a father to witness his son attaining a prestigious position among people	
3	Thirukkural: "அன்பிலா ரெல்லாந் தமக்குரியர் அன்புடையார் என்பு முரியர் பிறர்க்கு"	Translation: The one devoid of love will claim everything for himself, while a loving person shares his body and belongings with others
	الرجل الذي يخلو من المحبة يموت لنفسه فقط والذي قلبه مملوء بالمحبة يموت لغيره من الناس	
	The translator expresses this as: The man who lacks love dies only for himself, while the one whose heart is filled with love dies for others	
4	Thirukkural: "எப்பொருள் யார்யார்வாய்க் கேட்பினு மப்பொருள் மெய்ப்பொருள் காண்ப தறிவு"	Translation: To discern the true nature of something is wisdom, regardless of who speaks about it
	الفهم السليم هو الذي يميز بين الحق والباطل من الكلمات التي يتفوه بها احد	
	The translator states that the sound understanding is what distinguishes truth from falsehood in the words spoken by someone. It implies that the true wisdom lies in discerning between truth and falsehood in a person's words. Some translations of certain couplets are expressed in a better way that convey deeper meanings compared to the original text. Let's examine one such example (Zubair, 2021)	
5	Thirukkural: "காலத்தி னாற்செய்த நன்றி சிறிதெனினும் ஞாலத்தின் மாணப் பெரிது"	Translation: An act of kindness done in the right time, even if small, has benefits greater than anything in the world
	الإحسان في وقته مهما كان صغيرا يفوق كل شيء في العالم	

In Arabic the translator articulates this as: Kindness at the right time, no matter how small, surpasses everything in the world. It implies that the timely act of kindness, no matter how small, holds greater value than anything in the world.

This demonstrates the depth and flexibility of translation, highlighting how the subtleties of meaning can be preserved, and even enhanced, in another language. In this translation, it can be said that the translator has closely engaged with the original text and its cultural context. Kokan has employed effective translation strategies to resonate with the readers. The Arabic translation titled "Al-Abyaath Al-Muqaddasa" has successfully illuminated the essence of the Thirukkural in the Arabic-speaking world. Therefore, Kokan's efforts signify the important status that the Thirukkural has achieved in the Arabic realm. This work serves as a new bridge between language and culture and signifies an attempt to create a global perspective of Tamil.

CONCLUSION

Kokan's "Al-Abyath Al-Muqaddasa" exemplifies the significant role of translation in bridging cultural divides. His meticulous approach to preserving both the linguistic and thematic integrity of the Thirukkural serves as a model for future translation endeavors. This work not only enriches Arabic literature but also fosters a greater understanding of Tamil cultural heritage within the Arab world. The success of Kokan's

translation emphasizes the transformative power of literature in fostering intercultural dialogue and appreciation.

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