

Issues in Translating 'Sexuality' into Sinhala: Inadequacy of the Terms Used in the Sinhala Translation of Lady Chatterley's Lover By D.H. Lawrence

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The depiction of sexual and gender matters has been a controversial subject in Sinhala literature as in many other South Asian literatures. Classical Sinhalese literature consists of translations of Buddhist texts from Pali. The writers being mainly monks who emphasized the ideology of celibacy spurned sex and married life and described pleasures of life as low, rude, worldly, ignoble and leading to ruination. This attitude that was primarily intended for the monastic community gained ground among the laity. On the other hand, the impact of Hindu and Sanskrit tradition that had *kāma* (love) as one of the four ideals of life was elevated to a divine form as erotic sentiment, far above worldly, natural sex. Though some Sinhala writers tried to emulate the Sanskrit models, the general attitude was discouragement of sex or love as a literary experience. However, since the 19th century secular literature became established, apparently under the influence of western literature, fiction being a newly introduced genre.

Except for a few early poetical works with descriptions of erotic scenes, and some erotic poetical works of the 17th & 18th centuries A.D., we can not find many fictional works of recent times that treat erotic themes.

Sex is without a doubt, one of the most intimate indicators of identity as it conjures up images of sexual activity, eroticism, pleasure, taboo, fantasies and desires. Language is considered to be the most intimate medium of expressing sentiments of sex. It is apparent that the Sinhala language does not have sufficient vocabulary on sexuality and gender. However, there is a hidden or vague vocabulary among Sinhala speakers for referring to sexual organs and related physical acts. Especially as a language with *diaglossia*, Sinhala has a standard pattern in writing. Although many taboo words are used in colloquial Sinhala such words are not used in the standard written language.

Lady Chatterley's Lover by D. H. Lawrence is one of the most famous erotic novels written in

English and further, it is believed to be a philosophic exploration of sex and sexuality. It also offers provocative perspectives: female fantasy about male sexuality for the so-called predominantly male audience. The citation below shows the philosophical background of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

"I always labor at the same thing, to make the sex relation valid and precious, instead of shameful. And this novel is the furthest I've gone. To me it is beautiful and tender and frail as the naked self is, and I shrink very much even from having it typed. Probably the typist would want to interfere."¹

"The mind has to catch up, in sex. . . . Balance up the consciousness of the act, and the act itself. Get the two in harmony. It means having a proper reverence for sex, and a proper awe of the body's strange experience. It means being able to use the so-called obscene words, because these are a natural part of the mind's consciousness of the body."²

Although the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* became very popular around the 1950s in Sri Lanka, due to the issues of gender and sexual matters that the novel covers and its alleged pornographic nature, no attempt was made to translate it into Sinhala until 1985. On the other hand, contemporary attitudes of expressing sex matters in literature was very controversial in the 1960s and 1970s; that is, "*Sabhyā-asabhyā vādāyā*" (the argument of courteousness and discourteousness) was one of the main arguments raised regarding this matter. However, the first translation (Wijesekara, M.)

¹ Letters, ed. Harry T. Moore (London, 1962), p. 972. The first typist did interfere; Nelly Morrison refused to go on after five chapters, and Lawrence had to farm it out to his friends.

² "Edmund Wilson, "Signs of Life: *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" [1929], in *Shores of Light* (New York, 1961), p. 407

was based on conventional translational practices and the language used is close to classical norms. The other translation that appeared in 1995 (Wikramasinghe, W.) was by a translator with postmodernist persuasions.

The Sinhala translators of Lady Chatterley's Lover in rendering words on sex, in general, have used clinical terms and Sanskrit words such as: *yōniyā śiṣṇāyā, garbhāṣayā, pratikūṭaprāptiyā, mlēccaprātikāntiyā, amurāgī tīkṣṇā atyānandāyā, śuklāmōcānāyā sansargakṣayā, sansarga sankatāvā, garbhā kukṣiyā, utkrūṣṭvā tivrāvīmā, payōdhara cucukā cumbānāyā*. Sometimes they use loan words or derived forms, slang words, eg. *Tattam kuttamā, piriṃ aṅgā, aṇimā*, Sinhalaisation of English terms, literally translated words: thing-*ekā*" male thing-*piriṃ aṅgā*, endearments and euphemism, and paraphrasing: eg; *rati krīdāvā nimāvē uccatamā avastāvā*. They adopted this method, as they could not find appropriate words in Sinhala to convey the exact meaning of the original. It is noteworthy that the translators have second thoughts in using the prevailing language, which is generalized, and the norms related to translation have also affected their work. Some of these operational norms were considered as barriers subsequently by critics. Here are some of the conventional norms approved by a committee³ at a time that the issues regarding translational norms were highly discussed in Sri Lanka.

"parivartanāyā sūdāhā tōrā ganu labanā pot ēvā parivartanāyā vānā bhāṣāvā bhāvitā kārānā jānātāvāge samskrutikā ratāvā nodedārāvānā ēvā viyā yutuyā"⁴

"vidēśiyā sāhityā krutiyak sinhālētā parivartānāyā kārānā parivartākāyā.....mulkrutiyen prākāśitā jīvitā darśānāyā hō ein pilibimbu vānā sanskrutiyā hō meratātā nogcēlāpē nam emā potā parivratānāyā kirīmēdīdā privartākāyā vimāsilimat viyā yutuyā. Mehidī ohutā kālā hākkē meratātā nogcēlāpenā krutīn cētōt ēvā parivartānāyā nokotā atharinu vinā samājāyē hēngimvālētā anukūlā vānā sē mul krutiyā sakas kirīmā novē."⁵

3 Sinhala translator's conference 1965

4 Guruge, Ananda, 1965, *Sinhala Pariwartana Sahitya*, Department of Cultural Affairs, 58p

5 *Ibid*, 10p

In conclusion, these multiple perspectives place a great deal of importance on translation, as the translation of sex has become at present a socio-cultural and political act with serious theoretical and ideological implications. Sinhala is a norm governed prurient language, which does not allow its users to openly discuss the sexual matters. In order to overcome these difficulties, the Sinhala translators have utilized various devices in translating sexual matters in to Sinhala. In this study I focus on different devices used by translators and critically examine their weaknesses and adequacy while giving possible solutions.