

French Translations of Thirukkural - A Comparative Study

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Thirukkural, written by Thiruvalluvar, is considered to be a guide to humanity in manifold ways. The aspects and themes of Thirukkural, though written in the classical language Tamil, are relevant to all the people of this world. Thirukkural, considered as a universal book, has been translated into many European and Indian languages. It is to be noted that translation has been a vital tool for the introduction and diffusion of Thirukkural throughout the world.

There are at least 14 French translated versions of Thirukkural as per record. One French version was translated by Mootoomaren Sangeelee in 1988 and another one by Kalaimamani Kalladan in 2015. Mootoomaren Sangeelee had translated all the 1330 couplets of Thirukkural whereas Kalaimamani Kalladan had translated only the part of Arattupal (Virtue).

This paper deals with a brief introduction of the translators, the presentation of their translations, techniques used while translating, the differences and similarities in their translations and how far justice has been done in the translation of Thirukkural. The paper is in descriptive and explanatory modes. This paper also depicts how far the translators have been faithful to the original and how far they have tried to maintain the poetic style of Thirukkural in the translations and what had been the issues in translating the Thirukkural into French. It is to be noted that the lexical items, syntax and cultural elements differ from language to language and how far the translators have been successful in conveying the same emotions and feelings that prevail in the original.

Mootoomaren Sangeelee - An Introduction



Thiru Mootoomaren Sangeelee
Ex-Inspector of Schools, Mauritius

Courtesy: https://himalayanacademy.com/media/books/saivite-hindu-religion-book-two/web/front_matter.html

Mootoocomaren Sangeelee, born on 21st September 1901 in Port Louis, Mauritius, became a teacher at Primary School level. One of his students, Dayendranath Burrenchobay, former director of the Mauritius Examination Syndicate described the latter as “a fastidious, as strict disciplinarian and purist, laid in Standard IV the foundation on which the future finished edifice was to be built. He drilled into us the niceties of grammar, its rules no less than the exceptions thereto, some of which were quite esoteric...” (Pyneesamy Padachy, March 2017). He became Deputy Head Teacher in 1935 and was promoted as Head Teacher after some years of dedicated service to the field of Education. He also acted as Tamil Supervisor and as Tamil Tutor and Indian Culture Tutor at the Teachers’ Training College. In the mid - 1950’s he founded the Bharati Tamil School in the capital city of Port Louis. In the 1960s he contributed to the newspaper, Tamil Voice. In 1980, he became the first editor-in chief of ‘La Lumière’ newspaper which was published by the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation.

He attended the First International Association of Tamil Research Conference held in Malaysia in 1966, at which he gave a vivid picture of the Tamils of Mauritius, outlining their history and struggle for cultural revival (Pyneesamy Padachy, March 2017). He presented a paper in Tamil advocating the reform of the Tamil script so as to accommodate specific letters to denote certain foreign sounds at the Seventh International Conference- Seminar Tamil Studies held in Mauritius in 1989.

Mootoocomaren Sangeelee has been acclaimed for his translations into French of masterpieces including Thirukkural (1974), the ten poems of nithi nul pattu (Ethique de L’Inde du Sud) (1980); selected poems of Subramania Bharati (1982) and Permal Soobrayen (1986); an anthology of selected verses by Thayumanavar, Ramalinga Adigal, Sudhanantha Bharati and other poets (Bouquet de sagesse) (1988); and Vivega Sindamani (1991). He had in heart the propagation and promotion of Tamil language in culture. The ultimate motives in translating the Tamil masterpieces were mainly to bring mutual understanding and the prerequisite for the inter-communal harmony (Pyneesamy Padachy, March 2017). He won the following awards:

- Officer of the Most Distinguished Order of the British Empire for services rendered to Tamil Language;
- The Rajaraja Sozhan prize for French translation of Thirukkural from the Tamil University, Thanjavur;
- The Ulaga Tamizhar Semmal title from the World Federation of Tamils and
- The Medal of Honour from the Government Teachers’ Union.

Kalladan - An Introduction

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Kalladan, known as Janakiraman was born on 30th July 1943 in Pondicherry, India. He is well versed in Tamil, Telugu, English and French. He joined the government service and retired as Deputy Secretary and he rendered service to the government of Pondicherry for nearly forty years. He started his writing career as a short story writer. His great inspiration was his elder brother who had an affinity for poetry. Kavimamani Kalladan was praised for his first poem and this was a catalyst for him to pursue on in this literary field. He has twenty books to his credit out of which five are poetry collections. The poetry collections are as follows: Thein Mozhi (1979), Puratchi Nila (1985), Thai Makal Vandhal (1984), Pesum Vizhikal (1986), Poovai Parittha Pookal (1993), Meidai Kanikal (1998) and Meidai Malarkal (2003). He translated Thirukkural (Aratuppall) into French and the book was published in November 2015. He has got a number of Awards namely Kalaimamani Award (2004), Vallalar Award (2006) and Outstanding Senior Citizen Award for his laudable contribution to the literary world (Dr P. Raja).

Thirukkural Translations in French

It is worth noting that Thirukkural has been translated in nearly 160 languages of the world. There have been fourteen translations of French till date. Find below the year of publications, title of the books the authors' names and the countries to which they belong to:

SN	Year of Publications	Title of the books	Authors' Names	Countries
1.	1767	Traduction manuscript de Thiroukkoural	Unknown	-
2.	1848 & 1852	Koural de Thirouvallouvar	E. Ariel	Paris, France
3.	1854 & 1857	Maxims traduits des Curals de Tiruvalluvar	P.G. de Dumast	Paris, France
4.	1867	Tirukkural in French	M.Lemaraise	Pondicherry, India
5.	1867	Le livre des devoirs de Tiruvalluvar	Louis Jacolliot	Paris, France

6.	1889	Le livre de L'Amour de Tiruvalluvar	G. de Barrigue – de Fontainieu	Paris, France
7.	1893	Traduction des strophes	Julien Vinson	-
8.	1942	Tirouvalluvar Koural	Danielou Alain	Pondicherry, India
9.	1942	Tirouvallouvar Koural	Gnana Diagou	Pondicherry, India
10.	1988	Tirouvallouvar Tiroukkoural	Mootoocomaren Sangeelee	Ile Maurice
11.	1992	Le Livre de L'Amour de Thiruvalluvar	Francois Gros	-
12.	2015	Traduction des strophes	Orse Gobala – Krishnan	Pondicherry, India
13.	2015	Tiroukkoural – Vertu Domestique	Kalladan	Pondicherry, India
14.	2015	Tiroukkoural – Lecture et Reflexion : Vertu	Kalladan	Pondicherry, India

Table : 1 (Kalladan 2015)

The above table depicts that the translation of Thirukkural in French started in the year 1767 and the translated work has been done throughout centuries by eminent persons belonging to both native and diasporic countries; their attempt to bring the French versions of Thirukkural need to be appraised.

Definition of Translation by Dictionary and Scholars

Translation has been defined by many persons based on their knowledge, experiences, skills, styles, techniques, ideology and surroundings. Translation has been defined in dictionaries as follows:

- “Change into another language” (World Book Dictionary - p. 1047)
- “The action or process of turning from one language into another, a version in different language” (Oxford Universal Dictionary - p. 1148)
- “An act or process into another language; that is produced by turning into another language.” (The Lexicon Webster Dictionary Vol 2 - p. 1049)

Some Definitions of Translation

Translation has been defined by scholars like Finlay, Higham, Shipley and Theodore. Some definitions are as follows:

- “Translation is both a craft and an art, that is to say it involves an accurate and controlled manipulation of language, tempered by a degree of freedom. Imagination and creativeness.” - Ian Finlay
- “All translation is a kind of illusion, more or less perfect according to circumstances and varying also with the skill of the translator.” - Higham
- “Every translation is inevitably an adaptation.” - Joseph T. Shipley
- “A good translation is that it should capture the style and atmosphere of the original.” - Ian Finlay
- “A translation should possess the style of the translator.” - Theodore Savory

- “Translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.” - Eugene Nida and Charles Taber
- “Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting a manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and society.” - Basnett and **André Lefevere**

Dryden stated that an ideal aim of a literary translator in the following words:

- “A translator that would write with any force or spirit of the original must never dwell on the words of his author. He ought to possess himself entirely, and perfectly comprehend the genius and sense of his author, the nature of the subject, and the terms of the art or subject treated of; and then express himself as justly, and with as much life, as if he wrote an original; whereas he who copes word for word losses all the spirit in the tedious translation.”

Difference Between French Translations

Both the translators, Mootoocomaren and Kalladan have done justice to the translation of Thirukkural based on their experiences, circumstances, knowledge and ideals. They have tried their maximum to render the quintessence of Thirukkural to the target audiences which have their own sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspectives.

Structure of the Books

- The table of content with the translations of chapters in both English and Tamil were given; the couplet-wise index was given as appendix.
- A brief note on Thirukkural and its French Translations is given in one book (Kalladan) whereas in the other book (Mootoocomaren), only the table of content was given at the end of the book,
- Arattuppal, Poruttpal and Kaamattuppal were translated in French in one version (Mootoocomaren), whereas in the other version (Kalladan) the first chapter Arattuppal only had been translated;
- The original (Tamil), its commentary, English and French translated versions were given in the translation done by Kalladan , and in the other one Mootppcoomaren only the Tamil and French versions were given.
- The titles of the translated version were as follows: THIRUKKURAL - READINGS AND REFLECTIONS (Kalladan) and the other one (Mootoocomaren) Tirouvallouvar TIROUKKOURAL;
- Some sayings in French related to Thirukkural by eminent personalities had been included.
- Introduction, foreword, felicitations, about the commentator, publisher’s note, acknowledgement and annex have been included thus adding value to the translated version;
- Statue of Thiruvalluvar is the main element of attraction in both versions.

Chapter Translations

There is a difference in the translations of the chapters of Thirukkural by both translators. Problems in terms of lexical items arise while translating titles of chapters. However, there are diverse ways that can be adopted to make the translation possible and to make the same understandable to

the readers. The meaning of the title, the gist of the title, title's transliteration, title's idea, title's direct translation, Tamil nativisation, and poetic style are some of the modes that can be deemed appropriate while translating the titles of chapters. Some examples of the translated versions are as follows:

SN	Original titles	Translated version 1 Kalladan	Translated version 2 Mootocoomaren
1.	அறன் வலியுறுத்தல்	L'accent sur la vertu	LA FORCE DE LA VERTU
2.	இல்வாழ்க்கை	La vie familiale	LA VERTU DOMESTIQUE
3.	வாழ்க்கைத் துணைநலம்	La valeur d'une épouse	LÉPOUSE PARFAITE
4.	இனியவை கூறல்	Les paroles douces	LES BONNES PAROLES
5.	அடக்கமுடைமை	La modestie	LA MAITRISE DE SOI
6.	ஒப்புரவறிதல்	Savoir la nature de ce monde	LA CONSCIENCE DU DEVOIR
7.	அருள் உடைமை	La grâce	LA BIENVEILLANCE
8.	கூடா ஒழுக்கம்	La conduite indésirable	LA CONDUITE TROMPEUSE
9.	வாய்மை	La vérité	DE LA VÉRACITÉ
10.	துறவு	La renunciation	DU RENONCEMENT

Table : 2

In the above table, though the titles convey the nearest meaning, there are differences in the translation of the titles of the chapters of Thirukkural. It is noted that the level of the mastery of the language differ from translator to translator and this is inevitable. There is a manipulation of language with a degree of freedom on the part of the translators.

Style of Translation - Titles

Example 1

வான் சிறப்பு	வான் சிறப்பு
மழையின் சிறப்பு	-
THE GLORY TO RAIN	-
L'éloge de la pluie	ÉLOGES DE LA PLUIE

- One translation is elaborated by giving another Tamil version, an English version and the French version (Kalladan) whereas in the other one (Mootocoomaren) only the French version was given.
- In the first French translation (Kalladan) the word *glory* has is translated in singular form whereas in the second version (Mootocoomaren) the word is translated in the plural form. It seems that the word சிறப்பு is considered as *praise* which might be the reason that plural form is used in the second French version (Mootocoomaren).
- The first French translated version (Kalladan) is in lowercase whereas the other one (Mootocoomaren) is in Uppercase. The same is used to put emphasis on the phrase. It is to be noted that all the chapters in the second translation had been translated using uppercase.

Example 2

மக்கட் பேறு	மக்கட் பேறு
பிள்ளைச் செல்வம்	-
CHILDREN, OUR TREASURE	-
Les enfants, c'est notre trésor	AVOIR DES ENFANTS

- The interpretation of மக்கட் பேறு is taken into consideration for the first French translated version (Kalladan) whereas in the second version (Mootocoomaren) the idea of having children is the translation.
- Thiruvalluvar considers the birth of a child as a boon to the parents; he mentions upon ways of rearing a child; a child is a fortune to the parents; the joy that parents experience while bringing up a child; education and knowledge are the main aspects that are to be considered while bringing up a child; gratitude of a child towards his parents, etc. So, it may be deduced that the gist of the chapter on மக்கட் பேறு is the focal point in the first French version (Kalladan). The second version (Mootocoomaren) gives primarily a general idea of having a child.

Example 3

ஒழுக்கமுடைமை	ஒழுக்கமுடைமை
நல்லொழுக்கம் கொண்டிருத்தல்	-
POSSESSING GOOD CONDUCT	-
Avoir une bonne conduite	LA MORALITÉ

- Morality is given the following definition: system of values and principles of conduct as well as the extent to which an action is right or wrong (Kalladan). In the second translated version (Mootocoomaren), the good moral conduct is considered while translating whereas in the first translation (Kalladan) the generalised idea of ஒழுக்கமுடைமை is given as translation.
- Conduct is defined as the manner in which a person behaves, especially in a particular place and situation. Thirukkural talks about good and bad conduct too, so this aspect is taken into consideration for the first translation.
- The translated version of உடைமை is possession, so the literal translation of the source language considered in the first translation (Kalladan).

Style of Translation - Couplets

Example 1

மனத்துக்கண் மாகுஇலன் ஆதல் அனைத்துஅறன்

ஆகுல நீர பிற (குறள் 34)

Avoir un esprit sans tache, c'est là tout l'effet de la vertu ; le reste n'est que fastueux. (Kalladan)

Un cœur pur résume toutes les vertus ; le reste n'est que pompe. (Mootocoomaren)

The first translated version (Kalladan) shows that flawless mind is all virtue and all else is showy whereas the second version (Mootocoomaren) depicts that virtue is purity in mind and all else is pompous show.

Example 2

வையத்துள் வாழ்வாங்கு வாழ்பவன் வாழ்உறையும்

தெய்வத்துள் வைக்கப் படும் (குறள் 50)

Celui qui mène une vie dans le monde, comme il doit, sera placé au milieu des Dieux qui habitent le paradis. (Kalladan)

Celui qui, en ce monde, observe les lois de la vie domestique, sera considéré à l'égal des dieux qui sont dans le ciel. (Mootocoomaren)

The first translation (Kalladan) means that one who lives as one should be on this earth, shall be placed among the Gods who dwell in the abode of Heaven; the second one (Mootocoomaren) shows that one who in this world observes all the laws of a domestic life, will be considered as equal to Gods who reside in Heaven.

Three main things have been observed in both translations:

1. In the first translation (Kalladan) domestic life has not been mentioned.
2. In the second translated version (Mootocoomaren), it is claimed one who leads a domestic life following all the norms is considered equal to Gods, instead of being among Gods.
3. In one translated version (Kalladan), the word *paradise* is used and in the other version (Mootocoomaren), the word *sky* is used having a belief that Gods reside in there.

Example 3

இருந்தோம்பி இல்வாழ்வ தெல்லாம் விருந்தோம்பி

வேளாண்மை செய்தற் பொருட்டு (குறள் 81)

On fonde un foyer, on gagne et on préserve la richesse simplement pour Recevoir les hôtes et leur être utile. (Kalladan)

Le motif pour lequel il faut conserver ses biens et vivre La vie domestique est d'exercer l'hospitalité et d'aider les autres. (Mootocoomaren)

“All traces of the original text should, as it were, disappear and a new original appear in its place, without there being any sign of intermediate process of transition” (Ian Finlay).

The idea that was translated in the first translation (Kalladan) is as follows: Man sets up a home, earns and preserves wealth, only to receive guests and please them. The idea of the second translation (Mootocoomaren) is as follows: The motive for safeguarding one's wealth and to lead a domestic life is to extend hospitality to guests and help others. ‘*To please them and to help them*’ are the ideas that differ from these two translated versions.

Example 4

கெடுவாக வையாது உலகம் நடுவாக
நன்றிக்கண் தங்கியான் தாழ்வு (குறள் 117)

Le monde ne considère pas comme mal la pauvreté d'une personne qui vit justement. (Kalladan)

Aux yeux du monde, la pauvreté de l'homme juste et vertueux n'est pas pauvreté. (Mootoocomaren)

The world does not consider badly the poverty of a person who lives an impartial life. (Kalladan)

The world does not despise the poverty of a person who is impartial and virtuous. (Mootoocomaren)

Both translations convey the same meaning, but in the second one impartial is an adjective which had been used to put emphasis on the virtuousness of the person. Both translations are in one sentence each. They are short, brief, but impregnated with the meaning of the original.

Example 5

அழுக்காறு எனஒரு பாவி திருச்செற்றுத்
தீயுழி உய்த்து விடும் (குறள் 168)

Le vice, autrement dit l'envie, ruine la fortune de celui qui est envieux et le traîne dans la mauvaise voie. (Kalladan)

L'envie est un monstre qui ruine votre fortune et vous pousse dans le feu de l'enfer. (Mootoocomaren)

“A translation should have all the ease of original composition” (Woodhouselee). The first translated version gives the exact literal meaning of the original. The vice known as envy will ruin the wealth of the person who is envious and will lug him into the evil path.

The second version gives the following meaning: envy is a monstrous force which ruins your fortune and leads you into the fire of hell. Though both translations reflect the meaning of the original, the nearest equivalence has been used by the translators based on their experiences in the field of translation.

Style of Translation – Over-translation

“Translating into a foreign language can be and is an excellent exercise for testing one's understanding of the structure of that foreign language” (Ian Finlay). Both the translators' jobs can be considered relevant and reflect the saying of Ian Finlay. Both translators have used over-translation to bring the nearest meaning of the original. The over-translation can be in terms of giving more explicit explanation on a particular word or idea so that the target audience understands the original with precision. Some examples are as follows:

- The glorious feet: the word *glorious* has been explained as those who are detached from the worldly matters and lead a spiritual life. (Kural 3, Mootoocomaren)
- Indira (the Celestial King) (Kural 25, Kalladan). The same Indra is related to legends of Ramayana and Mahabharata in the version of Mootoocomaren.

- Ceux qu'on appellent "anthanars" (Kural 30, Mootoocomaren). The transliteration of the Tamil word அந்தணர் was given in this translation. Furthermore, sages or hermits were given as explanation to this Tamil word.
- Le bien qu'un fils procure à son père, c'est de faire en sorte que le monde puisse dire "Quel bien ce père a-t-il fait ? (pour avoir un tel fils)" (Kural 70, Mootoocomaren). The gratitude bestowed by a son towards his father is the praise of others who would wonder what penance his father pursued/offered to beget such a son. In this version, to beget such son was included in brackets so that it is more visible to the reader.
- Par cette hospitalité (Kural 83, Kalladan) *by this hospitality* is included in brackets so as to assure the reader that the idea is none other than *by this hospitality*.

Similarities in Both Translations

There are many similarities that have been noted in both translations. These similarities show the competencies of the translators and their faithful commitment to the original. The similarities are as follows:

- Use of elaboration
- Transmit the nearest equivalence
- Communicate additional information in terms of footnote to the readers
- Share elaborated ideas within brackets
- Use of punctuation notes to put emphasis on certain phrases or words
- Give transliterations of cultural words like Lakshmi, Aniccham
- Translate in both verse form and prose form
- Transmit the original ideas in simple language thus targeting a wide range of audience
- Convey the emotions found in the original
- Relate some important ideas of the original to philosophical thoughts

Conclusion

On a concluding note, it can be deduced that both translators had been faithful to the original. They have used minimal but appropriate equivalence so as to render justice to the original. The language used was simple but impregnated with meaning thus transmitting the message and ideology of the original. The literal meaning as well as the hidden meaning of the couplets have been translated with much care and without any distortion in meaning or ideas. Both translators have made an immense contribution to the French translated versions thus giving an elevation to the world of francophone. Their laudable initiatives to the diasporic world need to be appraised as with appropriate use of translation techniques, elaboration of ideas, over-translation of ideas, and difference in style. All these have culminated in versions which propagate some moral values which are of significance to the world of today where there are lots of confusion and chaos.

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