

Unearthing the Critical Shores of Sugathakumari's "*Rathrimazha*" (Night Rain)

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Abstract

The art of translation has marked its stamp in captivating the enchanting shores of authentic Indian literature. Malayalam literature has always been exploring innumerable opportunities in the domain of literary genius. Sugathakumari, a renowned poet and activist has opened the windows to untold possibilities in uprising the elements of ecofeminism, pathetic fallacy and anti-ecological consciousness through her poem Rathrimazha. Critically comparing and contrasting the shores of Rathrimazha and its translation Night Rain has extended the prospects of understanding how the anti-ecological consciousness is employed or can be interpreted through the ecofeminist reading of the poem.

Keywords: Translation, Critical Analysis, Ecofeminist Reading, Anti Ecological Consciousness.

1. Introduction:

"Without translation we would be living in provinces bordering on silence" – George Steiner
Translation is an intriguing art of communication that transcends the intractable boundaries of linguistic comprehension sheathed in the stifling nuances of verbal and phonetic discrepancy. The process of translation had always been an enigmatic enterprise as the intervention of cultural disparities spin out a consequential debate in regard of the authenticity of the translation and its fealty to the original. Nevertheless, the art of translation is inevitably creditable, as it plays an invaluable role in quelling the apertures between different natures and cultures and it also helps in bringing a veritable literary harmony amongst the distinguished global heritages. Literary translation is a stultifying act of subjugating and emendating the vocabulary from one language to another. Translated works are often viewed as hybrids as it involves an uprooting of the "source text into another language on the basis of the cultural environment". As Robert M Grant said: "There can never be an absolutely final translation", thus literary translation bears its own

limitations, despite of which they fulfil the purpose of bringing the world together unto the grand hall of literature hoisted by the pillars of creative genius and excellence.

The Indian literary translation is one of the oldest in the world, yet as Salman Rushdie sold "On the map, of world literature, India has been undersized for too long, however the post-colonial and the modern eras came to witness this age of obscurity coming to an end. And it goes unsaid that literary translations had heavily contributed to the globalization of the Indian literature. India has proudly produced some versatile talents who are adept in the art of subjugating linguistic discrepancies such as Susheela Punitha, Terry Pinto, Kushwanth Singh, M A Husaini, Anita Nair, Narayanan Menon, etc. There are also Indian authors who translated their own works, like, O V Vijayan, Kamala Das, Girish Karnad, Arundathi Roy and so and forth.

In this paper, we have comprehensively delineated the conclusive study of a poem by an eminent Indian poet and activist, Sugathakumari. In this study we have critically analysed the poem *Rathrimazha* (Night Rain) and have made a comparison of original poem and the translation and also have presented an Eco feminist reading of the poem. It is also inevitable to mention that the poem has been translated in English by none another than the poet's sister, Hridayakumari. Thus, before moving on to critically appreciating the poem, it is only conveniently adequate to concisely portray a brief caricature of the poet herself.

Sugathakumari was born as the second daughter of the poet Bodeshwaran and V K Karthiyani Amma, a Sanskrit scholar at Aranmula. Her mother was one among the first generation of women in Kerala to attain a master's degree, and also was the Sanskrit lecturer at the acknowledged Women's College in Trivandrum. Sugathakumari was devoted to the act of poetry right from a young age, and her poetry took her the virtues of public life and domain thus molding an irrefutable activist in her. In the late seventies she led a revolutionary, nationwide movement to protect and preserve the Silent Valley in Kerala from the bludgeoning corruption of a hydroelectric project that were to submerge some of the oldest indigenous forests of the country. As a result of this continual exposure to social and environmental issues, her poetic sensibility evolved from the quite lyrical sensibility to a virile, social responsibility that is quite ardently reflected in her poems. And at this point it is only worthwhile to mention that Sugathakumari was the first chairperson of the Kerala Women's Commission, thus incidentally it is only inadvertent that her works reflect a perspicuous feminine sensibility.

Sugathakumari's involvement with the issues raised by the women movement of the seventies and eighties is evident in some of her recent poetry. "Amma" (Mother), 1989, reiterates the legend of Devaki, the mother of Krishna, with incisive focus on her victimization by her brother Kamsa. *Penkunju Thonnurukalil* (Girl-Child in the Nineties), 1990, is an ironic revelation of the various levels of at which the girl-child is subjugated and exploited. Sugathakumari has to her credit numerous accolades including the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978, for her collection of

poems, *Rathrimazha* (Night Rain), 1977, of which the title poem has been accounted for a study in this paper. For *Ambalamani* (Temple Bell), 1981, she bagged three awards, including the prestigious KumaranAshan Award in 1984. Among other of her better-known collection of poetry are *Pathirapukkal* (Midnight Flowers) 1967, *PavamMaanavahridayam* (Poor Human Heart) 1968, *Pranamam* (Salutation) 1964, a string of seven poems on Mahatma Gandhi, and *IrulChirakukal* (Wings of Darkness), 1969.

2. A Crytical Analysis of *Rathrimazha*

” My friend, I, too, am like you

Like you, rain at night”.

Rathrimazha (Night Rain) is a lyrical parody embodying a heart-felt rendition of a woman’s pain and pallor interwoven with the contagious musings on the paroxysm of a nightly pluvial. The poems present to you a narrator heaving with scalding sickness, writhing pain and plaguing paleness, and the night rain soothingly arrives at her moribund, morbid sick bed, like a priest anointing the sick waiting for the divine revelation. In the poem, the narrator not only addresses the rain as a soothing companion, but also identifies herself with the rain. And this identification is not subtle or obscure but ardently stated in the last stanza of the poem, and through the lines quoted above. Sugathakumari, in one of her interviews, stated the situation that prompted her to pen the poem: – how once she was surprised by the arrival of a sudden downpour whilst she was in her room, reclusively ruminating. However, the poem is not a romantic or dreamy laurel on the mysterious beauty of the night rain. But it is rather a lyrical requiem for the pain and loneliness endured by the narrator that is hovering over her like an ominous nimbus. The tone of the poem is one of desolation and despondency, as the narrator is seen lying in a hospital bed withered and worn out by sickness. In a poem that exceedingly and elaborately caricatures a natural element, the mention of the hospital, and the image of hospital itself is detrimentally ominous. The night rain, here, is portrayed as a faithful companion, a benevolent benefactor, who arrives as a timely aid that rescues you from a despondent depression that belligerently preys on an embattled mind and bereaving conscience.

The poem entails the arrival of the rain, like a “daughter of the pensive darkness”, like an insidious bride of the nightfall, with a flowing veil that encase a lifetime of pensive sorrow and weighed down by a cascade of pendulous ordeals. The penumbras of solitude and melancholy envelopes the lyrical promenade and often promulgates through the emotions encompassed in the poem. The consoling propinquity of the rain propels our narrator to relives the emotions and experiences that once reeled through the screen of her life. The poem captures the element of pathetic fallacy in all its glory, as the narrator here identifies her shifting moods to be at parallel with that of the night rain.

In the first stanza, the poet describes the night rain as a “young madwoman” who is “weeping, laughing, whimpering”, without a cause and without a stop and is “setting huddled up, tossing

her long hair”. The very first few lines of the poem itself reflects the turbulent petulance that accompanies the pestering sickness that pulverizes not only one’s body but also their psyche, makes it viable for the ascend of a vicarious, vicious madness. In the second stanza; the poet addresses the night rain as the “Pensive daughter of the dusky dark”, thus setting up an insidious tone for the poem. The night rain with her “cold fingers”, “gliding slowly like a long wait”, arrives beside our narrator’s sick bed. And this dark, disconsolate image of the night rain, discreetly discharges an ominous and foreboding picture of death itself. Thus, here, we can say that death, disguised in the inky blackness of the night and the incessant music of the rain, arrives at the poet’s bedside, to console her and free her off her mischance and misery, with a touch of her gold fingers. In the ensuing stanza, the poet assiduously assuages the asperities of a hospital scene by passingly encasing the horrors in the lines mentioning the “groans and shudders and sharp voices” and in “the sudden anguished cry of a mother”. The narrator digresses the terror of these anguished cries and drowns them in the diminuendo of the night rain. Here in this stanza, the rain is personified as “a dear one, coming through the gloom with comforting words”, this tire dilates the excessive dependence the narrator invests in nature in search of solace and sanctity. It is in the benevolent embrace of the nature; our narrator finds the sanctuary and the sanctum that the materialistic world can never provide her with. In this stanza, we come across the lines that embody the vicious, virulent, visage of the truth of the vile subjugation and suffering that the narrator underwent, thus becoming the victim of a villainous, vituperative patriarchal world that ‘denies a woman the freedom for a vociferous volition’.

“Somebody said,

The diseased part can be out and removed

But what can be done with the poor heart

More deeply diseased”

These lines volubly vitalize the feministic perspective of the poem that is dying to be discovered and diligently delineated. Through the next two stanzas, the narrator itches out the eternal companionship that nature provides to the feminine heart, these erudite lines espouses ‘the Wordsworthian theory of the therapeutic and intrinsic value of nature. In these lines, she also characterises life as nothing but an esplanade between the cynical destinations of happiness and misery and companionship and solitude. She says that the night rain was once a “witness to my love”, but is “now witness to my grief, she says the night rain once “lulled me to sleep, on those auspicious nights long ago”, but now the night rain helplessly watches on as she “reel with pain”, “in the sleepless hours of night”. The night rain, “made me thrill with joy and laugh” in a by gone past that is now memorable and meaningful as much as a dream can be. But now the night rain frigidly watches her as she “freeze into stone”, this act of freezing into a stone can be the metaphor for her death itself, thus making the night rain, a bereaved witness of her diminutive demise. The cacophonous cadence of the rain becomes a dirge that discerns and mourns her disconcerting obliteration. The last stanza of the poem is aptly conclusive and conducive of the concomitant concept of identifying herself with nature, as she blatantly phrases it in these lines: -
“My friend, I, too, am like you

Like you, rain at night”

This stanza confers the congenial congruence on the necessity of an eco-feminist reading of the poem, as it entails the aesthetics union of the feminine sensibility with nature. The poet likens the narrator to the sensible night rain, just like Anita Desai likened stoic, barred Kasauli mountains capes to the lonely existence of her protagonist. Nanda Kaul, or as Kamala Das identified herself with the Neermathala tree at her childhood home or as Toru Dutt does with the Casuarina trees as Margaret Atwood, likened her nameless narrator to the slaughtered heron. This stanza witnesses the format and fortifying tolerance and fortitude exceeded both woman and nature. After a night of forlorn and formidable sufferings, the nature and woman with the arrival of the blinding down, they wipe away the bitter tears and “forcing a smile”, they put on an act to conceal the disputes and discord their life has become, Their pity and their “suppress rage” and their sad ,yet kind music tells the story of the protracted, prolonged exploitation and oppression that both nature and women had to receive at the hands of the, subjugation, suppressing and stultifying, despotic autocracy of patriarchy. Thus, the poem, arrows the auxiliary presence of nature in their lives of mankind, how nature avidly reflects and refracts the experiences and emotions of humans, as they go about in a symbiotic and dependent union with nature.

3.Collating The Original And The Translated Version Of The Poem

The poem *Rathrimazha*, was translated from Malayalam to English (‘Night Rain’), by none other than the poet’s own sister- H. Hridayakumari.

Now translations have to its credit, a notorious reputation in regard of the niceties, it possesses in terms of the original work, Voltaire once said.

“It is impossible to translate poetry

Can you translate music”, this blatant statement poses as a looming threatening parenthesis of a question mark at the face of all poetic translation A subtler remark on the nuances of translator aptness was made by Kimon Friar:

“Even the simplest word, can never be rendered with its exact equivalent into another language”.

Now these critical statements on translation incite and invite motley responses and comments.

Nevertheless, all these censures proactively take a backseat when faced with the noble drudgery, translation undertakes so as to conjoin and conflate the literary discrepancies into a confluence at the global level. However, a conscientious comparison between the original, and translated words conjure up consequential distinctions. And we shall expose such distinction by undertaking a collation of both the versions of the poem, Considering the structure, there are verily considerable contrarities: - the rhythm and music excluded on narrating the poems differ due to the variance in intonation and cadence owing to the linguistic disparity in form and vocabulary. In the Malayalam version, the lines flow with a convergent ease and the lines follow an equable sequence and is elliptic in form and appearance. Whereas in the translated version, even though the lines ramble on with an ease, more words were required to capture the underlying essence of the poem. But the elaborate pursuance of the line indicates the punctilious

attitude of the translator, who aptly fits the description of the “Translator” according to John Connigton who stated that: - “A translator ought to endeavor not only to say what his author has said, but to say it as he said it”. Thus, the translator has evidently endeavored to convey the poem with the exactitude of artistic geniuses, which in itself is a laborious task.

Another point of dissimilitude arises in the addressing of the ‘Night Rain’ in the poem, therefore in the original version, it appears that the narrator is evoking the ‘Night Rain’, as if it were muse and then consequent lines assume the tone of a panegyric. Whereas, in the translated version, we feel as if the narrator is directly addressing or as if she is calling out to the “Pensive Daughter of darkness”. The language of the original version is strikingly salient and suggestive and bears an air of savage flamboyance with the touch of rustic realism. Whereas, the language of the translated version is subtly sophisticated and possess the chain of receptive refinement. The language of “*Rathrimazha*” retains a subliminal power as it suavely conjures up distinctive images in the mind of the reader, thus it subdues the language of the translated version, which flaunts not an impulsive but a methodical charm of meticulousness. Another feature of incongruity can be measured on the basis of the efficacy of the poem in eliciting an effusive response in the minds on hearts of the readers therefore how it makes the readers feel, and here too language becomes the conclusive yardstick. For Instance, the description of the insidious voices of the hospital room in the original version is so powerful and prolific, that is excites and enthralls the reader in an ominous way as it entices on exclamation in the readers mind and this effect is lacking in the translated version, the mystifying surreptitiousness gets lost in the translation.

A case of minor erratum appears in the translated version in the line: - “But what can be done with the poor heart, more deeply diseased”; in the original diseased heart, but the diseased mind. Thus, in conclusion, the translation has done a convincing job of doing viable justice to the original version.

4.An Ecofeminist Reading of *The Night Rain*

Ecofeminism is a socio-political movement which signifies the concurrence of considerable affinity between environmentalism and feminism. It emerged in the 1970s and 80s as multifarious strain of feminist, environmental conjectures and activism converging each other. The term ‘Ecofeminism’ was introduced by Francois D’ Eubonne in the book *La Feminiscimaou la Morte* (Feminism or Death?) (1974). some critics view ecofeminism as “the third wave of feminism “, while other critics place it in “the general category of deep ecology linking deep ecology and feminism “. But the fact is, Ecofeminism, “act as both and neither of these movements”, but it concomitantly suffices as “an environmental critique of feminism and feminist critique of environmentalism”. The erudite essence of Ecofeminism is that it calls forth the feminist and environment school of thoughts to take up a mutual and contributing stance so as to achieve solutions for the issues related to both the schools. According to the principles of

ecofeminism, there exists an equivalence betwixt the persecution of women and the exploitation of nature, and this shared suffering arises from the unjust tyranny exercised by the ruthless patriarchal domain. All branches of ecofeminism share the basic understanding it is “women and natures shared oppression within male dominated western culture rather than biology or essential identity that culture rather than biology or essential bid entity that constructs a special closeness between them”. The essentiality of an ecofeminist reading of a literary text most unusually arises out of the women-nature identifications on the text, where there is the presence of a prevalent feminine conceptualisation of nature”, And the work that is the recipient of critical attention in this study, is a lyrical record of the women – nature equation. If there is a literary theory apt enough to pragmatize through this poem, ecofeminism undoubtedly deserves the honour. The fundamental basis that forms the foundation of the woman- nature analogy is the divine concept of conception and creation. The male dominant world had for year’s underscored the feminine, naturalistic faculty of creation as one of the dutiful eventualities that characterises the subjugated existence of women. This very concept of precreation, overlooked by the patriarchy is what, led to the symbiotic conjecture of nature and the feminine essence.

As said before, Sugathakumari’s poems charismatically embody this eco feminine perspective in all its glory and grade. Be it in *MarubhoomiyudeVasantham* (The Spring of the Desert) or in *IrupathionnamNootandinodu*(To The Twenty First Century) or in *Pazhmaram* (The Futile Tree) or in *EthuPoovinManamanithu* (Which Flower’s Fragrance is This?), the poet envisages nature as a maternal figures, a mother anxious of her progeny’s welfare, a mother who laments over the uncertain, unpredictable future that entails the life of her daughter , a mother who vehemently protects her children. “The Mother Figure” that is metaphorical of nature in her poems “is omnipotent with the power to protect and rear or to torture and destroy. The portrayal of women and nature as the epitome if munificent tolerance is evidently conspicuous in her poems and the poem ‘Night Rain’ blatantly embraces this concept. The poem also encompasses how nature and women assume the role of a benefactor who excludes clemency, consolation, comport and companionship and ill showcases how nature and women functions in a symbiotic and reliable relationship. Another point that exalts this symbiotic equation on the poem is in the poignant similarity that nature and women share in the name of unjust suffering, but it is not characterised as a featured of shared vulnerability and the poems also gives due recognition to sacrificial attitude excided by both nature and women.

The Covert concept of Anti-ecological consciousness in the poem: - The women – nature identification in the poem give rises to the prominence of ecocriticism in the poem, thus it leads to equating the narrator with nature therefore the narrator in the poem becomes the persona of nature itself. Thus, on an ecological perspective, the poet is presenting to us nature herself lying on the moribund sickbed, overwrought with illness during to stultifying existence that is a suggestive of the vicious exploitation meted out to her by mankind. And the night rain becomes the soothing solve that offers a reviving salvation by drizzling down upon the scalding, scary,

scorched surface of the earth. It is the last stanza of the poem that entails the crucial chronicles of tolerance and patience that nature excides in the face if patriarchal oppression and objectification. Thus, it is about to say that patriarchy vehemently exercises and anti-ecological consciousness in their treatment of both women and nature, As to delineate, patriarchy fails to understand the intrinsic value and goodness that nature and women innately possesses, but his values are shamelessly taken for granted in terms of subjectivity and the utilitarianism practiced by them. In accordance with a staunch, misogynistic, exhaustively masculine, patriarchal attitude; conquering and subduing nature and woman is viewed as a glorious heroic act that confers an almost sadistic satiation to the man's psyche. This is the name of fallacious misnomer of heroism, the patriarchal society remorselessly continues to exploit and enslave nature in the aim of surfeiting their salacious ego.

5.Conclusion

In conclusion the poem, *Rathrimazha* (Night Rain) is a lyrical chrysalis, which on perusal excites the emergence of a lyrical excellence that enthralls and enraptures the aesthetic sensibility of the reader. The woman – nature nexus, evoked recurrently in the poem had conductively paved for an ecofeminist reading of the poem that aided in a better comprehension of the subtle feminine sensibility enclosed in the poem. The ultimate personification of nature expressed in the last stanza vindicated the poet's overpowering love for nature and her congruence with nature. In this critical study of poem, we have elaborately sketched out an expository analysis and appreciation of the poem thus delineating the delicate intricacies that confer the mystifying concise and through eco-feminist reading of the poem that palpably etches out the underlying ecological and anti-ecological consciousness that is subtly suggestive in the poem. Thus, in closing, it is only fair to state that this critical study has done ample justice to a poem of lyrical excellence, as *Rathrimazha* (Night Rain).

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