

Translating Enlightenment: Lakshmi Holmström's Rendering of Buddhist Philosophy and Tamil Cultural Identity in Manimekalai

Dr. M. Hajara^{1*}, Dr. K. Muthumurugan², Dr. R. Saranya³, Dr. B. Muthukarthikeyan⁴, Dr. R. Nithya⁵, Mrs. Priyadharshini M⁶

¹Assistant Professor of English Francis Xavier Engineering College, Tirunelveli- 627003, Tamil Nadu, India.

Email ID:- hajispace93@gmail.com

²EFL Teacher Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Email ID:- muthushadimuthu@gmail.com

³Associate Professor in English Sethu Institute of Technology Kariapatti, Viruthnagar-626115, Tamil Nadu, India.

Email ID:- saranyaarchit@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Professor of English P.S.R Engineering College Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu-624140, India.

Email ID:- Karthiktendlya@gmail.com

⁵Assistant Professor in Tamil Alagappa Institute of Skill Development, Alagappa University, Karaikudi- 630003, Tamil Nadu, India.

Email Id:- nithyaramasamy83@gmail.com

⁶Assistant Professor of English Francis Xavier Engineering College Vannarpettai, Tirunelveli-627003, Tamil Nadu, India,

Email Id:- pdrathna@gmail.com

***Corresponding Author**

Dr. M. Hajara

Assistant Professor of English Francis Xavier Engineering College, Tirunelveli- 627003, Tamil Nadu, India.

Email ID:- hajispace93@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Manimekalai is one of the five great Tamil epics. It occupies a distinctive position in Tamil literary history because it combines poetic imagination with Buddhist philosophy and ethical reflection. Although the epic has attracted attention for its religious and literary significance Holmström's translation is particularly significant because it introduces a classical Tamil Buddhist text to an international readership while attempting to preserve its linguistic, cultural, and philosophical identity. This paper analyses her translation through Lawrence Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization. It pays particular attention to the translation of Buddhist concepts, culturally specific terminology, symbolic imagery, place names and the representation of women. The study argues that Holmström does not privilege one translation strategy over the other. Instead, she negotiates between cultural preservation and linguistic accessibility. While the narrative is rendered in contemporary English, culturally significant expressions, religious vocabulary and indigenous concepts remain largely untranslated. It allows the readers to experience the text within its original cultural framework. The paper further argues that Holmström functions not merely as a translator but as a cultural mediator who enables cross-cultural understanding without erasing the historical and philosophical distinctiveness of the source text.

Keywords: Lakshmi Holmström, Manimekalai, Translation Studies, Domestication, Foreignization, Buddhism, Tamil Epic, Cultural Translation.

INTRODUCTION

Among the classical works of Tamil literature, Manimekalai occupies a unique position because of its close engagement with Buddhist philosophy and its concern for social ethics. It was written by Sīthalai Sāttanār. The epic continues the story of Kovalan and Madhavi after the events narrated in Silappadikaram, but its central concern extends beyond personal tragedy. Instead of celebrating heroism or royal power, Manimekalai places compassion, renunciation, charity and spiritual enlightenment at the centre of its narrative. Buddhist doctrines such as karma, rebirth, dependent origination and nirvana are interwoven with references to Tamil geography, indigenous customs, royal traditions, and local religious practices. So, translating such a work into English requires far more than linguistic competence.

Lakshmi Holmström occupies a significant place among translators of Tamil literature. Her translations consistently demonstrate sensitivity to the cultural identity of the source text while maintaining readability for contemporary readers. In her English translation of Manimekalai, Holmström preserves many culturally

significant expressions, religious concepts and geographical names without replacing them with familiar Western equivalents. At the same time, she adopts clear and fluent English prose that allows readers unfamiliar with Tamil literature to engage with the narrative without unnecessary difficulty. Such translation choices raise important questions regarding the relationship between cultural preservation and accessibility.

Translation theorists have long debated whether a translator should adapt a text to the expectations of the target audience or preserve the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the source language. Lawrence Venuti conceptualises these approaches as domestication and foreignization, arguing that every translation inevitably positions itself somewhere between these two strategies. While domestication privileges fluency and familiarity, foreignization deliberately retains elements of cultural difference, reminding readers that they are encountering a work produced within another linguistic tradition (Venuti 19-20). Holmström's translation provides an excellent opportunity to examine how these apparently opposing strategies operate within the translation of a classical Tamil Buddhist epic.

The present study examines Lakshmi Holmström's translation of *Manimekalai* through the theoretical lens of Venuti's translation strategies. The study argues that Holmström neither domesticates nor foreignizes the text in an absolute sense. Instead, she adopts a flexible and context-sensitive approach in which linguistic fluency coexists with cultural preservation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Manimekalai has attracted scholarly attention from researchers working in the fields of Tamil literature, religion, history and philosophy. Most studies examine the epic as a Buddhist literary text, focusing on its ethical teachings, social vision and historical significance. Researchers have discussed its portrayal of compassion, charity, renunciation and the Buddhist concept of liberation. They often compare it with *Silappadikaram* to highlight the ideological shift from justice and retribution to mercy and spiritual awakening. These studies have established *Manimekalai* as one of the most important literary sources for understanding the influence of Buddhism in ancient Tamil society.

Scholars have also examined the epic from feminist and cultural perspectives. *Manimekalai* has frequently been interpreted as a woman who consciously rejects worldly pleasures and patriarchal expectations in favour of a life dedicated to spiritual service. Unlike many heroines in classical literature whose identities are shaped through marriage or family relationships, *Manimekalai* defines her own purpose through compassion and religious commitment. Studies on gender have therefore recognised the epic as one that offers a distinctive representation of female agency within the framework of Buddhist ethics. At the same time, literary critics have explored the symbolic importance of characters such as Madhavi, Kannagi and Aadhirai demonstrating how women function as moral and spiritual centres within the narrative.

From the perspective of Translation Studies, Lakshmi Holmström has received considerable appreciation for her contribution to the translation of Tamil literature into English. Her translations of modern Tamil fiction, poetry and classical texts have been widely recognised for balancing linguistic clarity with cultural sensitivity. Critics often observe that Holmström avoids excessive domestication and instead allows the cultural distinctiveness of Tamil literature to remain visible in English. Her translations are therefore valued not simply for their readability but also for their commitment to preserving the social, historical, and emotional texture of the original works.

Translation theorists such as Eugene Nida (1964), Susan Bassnett (2014), Peter Newmark (1988), Mona Baker (2018) and Lawrence Venuti (1995; 2008) have emphasised that translation extends beyond linguistic substitution. It involves the negotiation of meaning between cultures, particularly when the source text contains religious concepts, culturally specific expressions and historical references that lack direct equivalents in the target language. Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization has become especially influential in evaluating translations of culturally rich literary works. His theory provides a useful framework for examining how translators preserve or adapt cultural identity while addressing the expectations of target readers.

Although several studies have discussed *Manimekalai* as a literary and philosophical text, comparatively little attention has been paid to Lakshmi Holmström's English translation itself. Existing scholarship largely concentrates on the epic's Buddhist teachings, historical context, or feminist dimensions, while the translator's linguistic and cultural choices remain underexplored. More specifically, there is limited research that systematically investigates how Holmström negotiates between domestication and foreignization in translating Buddhist philosophy, symbolic imagery, Tamil cultural terminology, geographical references, and female characters. The translation is often cited as a source text rather than examined as an independent scholarly achievement deserving critical analysis.

The present study seeks to address this gap by analysing Holmström's translation through the lens of Lawrence Venuti's theory of domestication and foreignization. Drawing examples from the complete English translation, the paper explores how Holmström preserves the philosophical depth and cultural specificity of *Manimekalai* while making the text accessible to an international readership.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Translation is no longer seen simply as transferring words from one language to another. Modern translation scholars explain that translation is also a process of cultural negotiation, where the translator's choices show how they understand both the source and target cultures. Literary translation, in particular, requires an understanding of the historical background, cultural symbols, religious beliefs and social practices found in the original text. *Manimekalai* is a classical Tamil Buddhist epic that contains many philosophical ideas and references to Tamil culture. Therefore, translating it into English requires more than finding equivalent words. The translator also needs to preserve the cultural identity of the original text while making it understandable to readers who may not be familiar with Tamil literary traditions. This study uses the ideas of Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett and Mona Baker to examine Lakshmi Holmström's English translation of *Manimekalai*.

Lawrence Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization provide the main theoretical framework for this study. In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti explains that translation is not a completely neutral process. Translators make choices about how much of the source culture should be retained and how much should be adapted for the target readers (Venuti 19-20). Domestication is a strategy in which the translator makes the source text more familiar to the target readers by using simple and familiar language and expressions. This makes the translation easy to read and can make it appear as if it was originally written in the target language. However, this approach can sometimes reduce or hide the cultural features of the original text.

Foreignization, on the other hand, keeps some of the linguistic and cultural features of the source text even if they are unfamiliar to the target readers. Venuti considers this approach important because it allows readers to experience the cultural background of the original text. Instead of removing cultural differences, foreignization encourages readers to understand and appreciate them. In Holmström's translation, the use of terms such as *dharma*, *Amudasurebhi*, *Manipallavam*, *Puhar* and *Aravana Adigal* shows her effort to retain important cultural elements. At the same time, her English narration is fluent and easy to follow. This shows that domestication and foreignization can exist together in the same translation.

Susan Bassnett's view of translation as cultural exchange also supports this study. Bassnett explains that literary translation is not just about replacing words from one language with words from another. It is also about communicating cultural meanings between different societies (Bassnett 21). According to her, language and culture are closely connected, and translators need to understand the cultural values in the source text before translating it. This idea is especially important in *Manimekalai*, where Buddhist philosophy, moral values, social customs, and geographical references are closely connected with the story. Holmström's translation shows this understanding by retaining the cultural atmosphere of the epic instead of replacing it with familiar English cultural expressions.

The study also uses Mona Baker's concept of equivalence, especially at the lexical and textual levels. Baker points out that translators often come across words and expressions that do not have exact equivalents in another language (Baker 17). In such cases, the translator has to choose words or expressions that convey the meaning and importance of the original. This can be seen in Holmström's translation of Buddhist terms. Instead of replacing concepts such as *nirvana*, *karma* and *dharma* with approximate English words, she often keeps the original terms and explains or develops their meanings through the context. This shows that equivalence does not always mean using a direct or literal translation. It can also mean communicating the meaning and purpose of the original text effectively in another language.

The theories of Venuti, Bassnett and Baker together provide a useful framework for studying Holmström's translation. Venuti helps to examine the use of domestication and foreignization, while Bassnett focuses on the role of culture in translation. Baker helps in understanding how culturally specific words and expressions are handled and how meaning is maintained. Together, these theories help the study examine how Holmström balances clear and fluent English with the cultural identity of *Manimekalai*.

The following sections examine selected passages from the translation using these theoretical ideas. The analysis focuses on Buddhist philosophy, Tamil cultural identity, symbolic images, geographical references and the representation of women. Through this analysis, the study aims to show that Holmström's translation is not only a literary translation but also an effort to preserve Tamil culture and create a connection between the source culture and English-speaking readers.

TRANSLATING BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY: PRESERVING THE SPIRITUAL CORE OF MANIMEKALAI

One of the main challenges in translating *Manimekalai* is presenting its Buddhist philosophy without losing its deeper meaning. In many literary works, religion may appear only as a background element. However, in *Manimekalai*, Buddhist ideas are closely connected with the entire story. Concepts such as karma, rebirth, compassion, renunciation, nirvana and dependent origination influence the actions of the characters and the development of the narrative. Lakshmi Holmström handles these ideas carefully. She does not make them too

simple or give lengthy explanations. Instead, she allows the philosophical ideas to develop naturally through the story. In this way, she maintains both their religious meaning and their role in the narrative.

One important feature of Holmström's translation is her decision to retain several Buddhist terms in their original form. Words such as *dharma*, *nirvana*, *karma* and *Sangha* are not translated into English. From Venuti's point of view, this is an example of foreignization because the translator chooses to retain culturally specific terms instead of replacing them with approximate English words. For example, translating *dharma* simply as "religion" or "duty" would limit its meaning and fail to represent its wider philosophical sense. Holmström keeps the original word and allows readers to understand it through its Buddhist context. This helps preserve the cultural identity of the source text while introducing readers to concepts that do not have exact English equivalents.

The idea of karma is important throughout the epic, especially in explaining the suffering of the main characters. Human suffering is not presented as something that happens by chance. Instead, it is often connected with actions performed in previous births. This becomes clear after the death of Prince Udayakumaran. When Manimekalai mourns his death, a divine voice explains that his death is not accidental but is the result of actions from his previous life. Holmström presents this idea in clear English while keeping its Buddhist meaning. She does not give a separate explanation of karma but allows the idea to become clear through the events of the story. As a result, readers can understand karma as a moral principle that influences human life rather than simply as a form of fate.

The idea of rebirth is also closely connected with karma and plays an important role in the lives of several characters. Manimekalai's experience at Manipallavam, where she becomes aware of her previous birth, is an important moment in her spiritual development. This revelation helps her understand her connection with Udayakumaran and strengthens her decision to follow the path of renunciation. Holmström describes this experience in simple language: "In that instant her previous lives were revealed to her" (Holmström 114).

The translator does not add unnecessary details or explanations to this mystical experience. She simply presents it as part of the Buddhist worldview of the epic. This approach allows readers to understand the event within the cultural and religious context of the story. It also supports Bassnett's view that literary translation should preserve the cultural ideas of the original text instead of changing them according to the expectations of the target readers.

Compassion is another important Buddhist idea that Holmström preserves in her translation. Unlike traditional heroic epics, *Manimekalai* does not define greatness through war, physical strength, or political power. Instead, it presents helping others and reducing suffering as important signs of greatness. The magical bowl, Amudasurabhi, represents this idea. Since the bowl never becomes empty, it suggests that compassion and generosity can continue without limit. When Divatilakai explains the power of the bowl to Manimekalai, she says: "Any food that is placed in it... will always pass on into the hands of the needy; it will never be empty" (Holmström 119).

Holmström preserves both the ethical and symbolic meaning of this passage. Amudasurabhi is not simply a magical object in the story. It represents the Buddhist idea that helping others and giving to those in need are important parts of spiritual life. By keeping the original name *Amudasurabhi*, Holmström also preserves its cultural identity and allows its meaning to develop through the story.

The idea of renunciation is also handled carefully throughout the translation. Manimekalai's rejection of Prince Udayakumaran is not simply a personal rejection. It is connected with her desire for spiritual freedom. She repeatedly reminds him that beauty, youth, and worldly pleasures do not last forever. Holmström presents these conversations in simple and direct English, keeping the philosophical ideas at the centre. At the same time, Manimekalai is not shown as a person without emotions. Her concern for Udayakumaran shows that she continues to feel compassion for him. Through this portrayal, the translation shows that Buddhist renunciation is not simply about rejecting human emotions but about overcoming attachment.

The final chapters of the epic also show Holmström's careful treatment of Buddhist philosophy. Ideas such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and Dependent Origination are translated without being made unnecessarily simple or changed into Western philosophical ideas. Holmström keeps the basic structure and meaning of these teachings. Her translation therefore gives English readers an opportunity to understand Buddhist thought while also experiencing the literary nature of the epic.

Overall, Holmström's treatment of Buddhist philosophy shows that a translation can remain readable without losing the meaning of the original. She combines clear English with the retention of important Buddhist and cultural terms. In this way, readers can approach *Manimekalai* as both a literary work and a philosophical text. Her translation therefore creates a balance between accessibility and cultural difference, allowing the spiritual ideas of the epic to remain meaningful in English.

TRANSLATING TAMIL CULTURAL IDENTITY: LAKSHMI HOLMSTRÖM AS A CULTURAL MEDIATOR

One of the important features of Lakshmi Holmström's translation of *Manimekalai* is her effort to preserve the cultural identity of the original text. Classical Tamil literature is closely connected with the religious beliefs, social customs, geographical places and language of ancient Tamilakam. Therefore, translating such a work involves

more than finding equivalent words in English. The translator also has to present the cultural world of the original text to readers who may not know much about Tamil history or Buddhist traditions. Holmström deals with this challenge by combining simple English with the preservation of important cultural elements. Instead of replacing Tamil terms with familiar English expressions, she often keeps the original terms and allows their meanings to become clear through the story. In this way, she works not only as a translator but also as a cultural mediator.

One clear example is her treatment of proper names and culturally important terms. Names such as Puhar, Manipallavam, Chakkaravala Kottam, Ulaga Aravi, Amudasurabhi, Aravana Adigal and Aadhirai are retained in the translation. These names have historical, geographical or religious meanings that could be lost if they were replaced with descriptive English words. Manipallavam, for example, is more than just a sacred island. It is connected with Buddhist memory and Manimekalai's spiritual development. When Manimekalai reaches the island, she remembers her previous birth and begins to understand her religious purpose. By keeping the original name, Holmström preserves the cultural identity of the place and allows readers to experience the setting of the epic more closely.

Holmström's treatment of social customs also shows her awareness of Tamil culture. The courtesan tradition, which is important in the lives of Madhavi and Chitrapathi, is presented without adding modern judgments. Chitrapathi's expectation that Manimekalai should continue the family profession reflects the social conditions of the period. Manimekalai's decision to reject that life becomes an important part of her spiritual transformation. Holmström does not strongly praise or condemn the tradition. Instead, she presents it within the context of the story and allows readers to understand the conflict between social expectations and Manimekalai's spiritual choice.

The translation also preserves the religious diversity found in the epic. During her search for truth, Manimekalai meets teachers from different philosophical traditions, including Brahmanical, Jain, Ājīvika, and Buddhist traditions. These different schools of thought are presented as part of the intellectual world of ancient Tamil society. Holmström does not reduce these traditions to familiar Western ideas. Instead, she maintains their individual identities. This allows readers to understand the religious and philosophical diversity of the period. Such an approach is closely related to Bassnett's idea that translation should communicate cultural differences rather than remove them.

Festivals and religious practices are another important part of the cultural setting of *Manimekalai*. The Indra Festival at Puhar, described in the early part of the epic, is presented through descriptions of decorated streets, public celebrations, music and religious activities. Holmström does not provide excessive explanations for these practices. Instead, she allows the cultural atmosphere to develop through the narrative. Buddhist rituals, temple worship, almsgiving and respect for monks are also retained in the translation. She does not replace these practices with similar customs from English-speaking cultures, which helps maintain the distinct cultural background of the epic.

Food also has an important place in *Manimekalai*. Feeding hungry people is not shown simply as an act of kindness. It is connected with Buddhist ethics and Tamil social values. This idea is strongly represented through Amudasurabhi, the inexhaustible bowl received by Manimekalai. The bowl represents the belief that compassion should be expressed through action and that people should not be left hungry. Holmström keeps the original name of the bowl and allows its importance to become clear through the events of the story. Thus, Amudasurabhi becomes a cultural object, a religious symbol and an important part of the narrative.

Place names are another area where Holmström follows a foreignizing approach. Names such as Puhar, Vanji, Kanchi and Manipallavam are retained in the translation. These places are more than simple geographical locations. They are connected with political power, religious change and cultural memory. Kanchi, for example, becomes an important place where Manimekalai helps people during a severe famine. Holmström keeps the original names while providing enough information through the narrative for readers to understand their importance. This supports Venuti's argument that preserving cultural differences can add value to the reading experience.

Holmström also preserves the cultural meaning of important symbolic objects. The Buddha's pedestal, the inexhaustible bowl, sacred shrines and temple spaces are not treated as simple decorative details. They are connected with the religious and philosophical ideas of the story. Their meanings become clear through the experiences of the characters. This approach allows readers to interpret the symbols themselves instead of receiving long explanations from the translator.

The translation also retains many ethical values found in the epic. Hospitality, respect for elders, generosity, respect for teachers and the responsibility of rulers are repeatedly emphasised. Kings are valued not only for their military achievements but also for their ability to protect and care for their people. Women such as Aadhirai and Madhavi are also presented as individuals with integrity, compassion and moral strength. Holmström presents these values without forcing modern interpretations on the text. As a result, the cultural worldview of the epic remains visible in the translation.

From Venuti's perspective, Holmström's translation shows a strong use of foreignization when dealing with cultural elements, while her language is generally simple and accessible. Her English is easy to follow, but the cultural features of the original text are still clearly present. She does not completely remove the unfamiliar aspects of the Tamil world. Instead, she allows readers to enter that unfamiliar world and understand it through the narrative. In this sense, Holmström does more than translate *Manimekalai*, she also helps preserve and communicate an important part of Tamil cultural memory.

Narrative and Stylistic Strategies in Lakshmi Holmström's Translation

Lakshmi Holmström's translation of *Manimekalai* shows that literary translation is not only about transferring the meaning of words from one language to another. Her stylistic choices show an effort to preserve the literary quality of the original while making the story easy for modern English readers to understand. She does not follow a completely literal approach, nor does she freely rewrite the original. Instead, she maintains a balance between clear English and the cultural character of the epic. Her translation is marked by simple language, the preservation of imagery, controlled narration and careful attention to the philosophical tone of the text. These features help carry *Manimekalai* from its original Tamil context into the English-speaking world.

Narrative Simplicity and Readability

One of the most striking features of Holmström's translation is the clarity of her narrative style. Classical Tamil literature frequently employs elaborate poetic constructions, extended descriptions, and culturally dense expressions. Instead of reproducing these structures literally, Holmström reshapes them into fluent English prose while preserving their essential meaning. This stylistic decision enables readers unfamiliar with Tamil literary conventions to engage with the narrative without losing sight of its cultural background.

Her translation avoids unnecessarily complex sentence structures and archaic English vocabulary. Dialogues between Manimekalai, Aravana Adigal, Aadhirai and other characters flow naturally, creating an impression of immediacy without sacrificing the solemnity of the original text. This linguistic fluency reflects what Venuti identifies as a domesticating strategy at the level of language. However, Holmström's readability never results in cultural simplification. Instead, language becomes a bridge through which readers enter an unfamiliar cultural world.

This balance is particularly evident in the conversations between Manimekalai and Prince Udayakumaran. The heroine's rejection of worldly love is expressed in direct, uncomplicated English, yet the philosophical weight of her words remains intact. The simplicity of expression allows Buddhist ideas of impermanence and detachment to emerge naturally from the dialogue rather than appearing as abstract doctrinal statements.

Translation of Symbolic Imagery

Symbolism forms one of the defining characteristics of *Manimekalai* and Holmström preserves these symbolic structures with considerable sensitivity. Rather than explaining every symbol through translator intervention, she allows images to retain their suggestive power, trusting readers to discover their significance through the narrative. The sacred island of Manipallavam functions as more than a geographical location; it symbolises spiritual awakening. It is here that Manimekalai gains knowledge of her previous birth and recognises her religious calling. Holmström translates this moment with quiet elegance: "The tears streamed from her eyes as she walked three times round the shrine from left to right... In that instant her previous lives were revealed to her" (Holmström 114). The translator refrains from interpreting the experience, allowing the symbolism of the sacred space to remain intact.

Similarly, the Amudasurabhi, the inexhaustible alms bowl, represents unlimited compassion. Although it appears as a miraculous object within the narrative, its symbolic meaning extends far beyond supernatural intervention. It embodies the Buddhist conviction that charity increases through giving rather than through possession. When Divatilakai explains the bowl's power, she observes: "Any food that is placed in it... will always pass on into the hands of the needy; it will never be empty" (Holmström 119).

Holmström retains the Tamil name of the bowl while allowing its symbolic significance to unfold through repeated acts of feeding the hungry. The translator thus preserves both the cultural identity and philosophical depth of the image.

The symbolism of hunger is equally significant. Kayachandikai's insatiable hunger is not presented merely as a physical curse but as an allegory for human desire and attachment. Its eventual removal through compassion reflects the Buddhist belief that suffering can be overcome not by material abundance but by moral transformation. Holmström preserves this symbolic layer without reducing it to a simple moral lesson.

Translation of Place Names

Holmström consistently retains the original Tamil place names throughout the translation, reflecting a clear preference for cultural preservation. Locations such as Puhar, Manipallavam, Vanji, Kanchi, Ulaga Aravi and Chakkaravala Kottam remain untranslated. These names function not merely as geographical references but as carriers of historical memory, religious significance and cultural identity.

For example, Manipallavam represents the spiritual centre of the epic rather than merely an island. Likewise, Kanchi becomes the setting where Manimekalai's mission of compassion reaches its fullest expression during the devastating famine. By preserving these names, Holmström enables readers to experience the geographical landscape of ancient Tamilakam without cultural substitution.

Venuti argues that foreignization preserves the visibility of the source culture within the translated text. Holmström's treatment of place names exemplifies this principle. Instead of replacing culturally unfamiliar names with descriptive English expressions, she invites readers to engage with the original geographical imagination of the epic.

Representation of Women

One of the important features of Holmström's translation is her portrayal of women as morally and spiritually strong characters. The women in *Manimekalai* are not limited to traditional domestic roles. They also act as moral guides and their decisions influence the philosophical development of the story.

Manimekalai is presented as a woman who makes her own moral choices. Her rejection of Prince Udayakumaran is not based on hatred or anger. Instead, it comes from her decision to follow a spiritual path. Holmström presents her character in a simple and controlled way. She does not add unnecessary emotional expressions, but clearly shows Manimekalai's determination and commitment.

Aadhirai represents generosity, patience, and moral strength. Her first offering to the miraculous bowl shows that true charity does not depend only on material wealth but also on a person's inner goodness. Kayachandikai, through her suffering, shows the possibility of change and redemption through compassion. Madhavi also undergoes an important transformation. She moves from being a well-known courtesan to becoming a caring mother who supports her daughter's spiritual journey.

The female divine figures, such as Manimekalai Devi, Chinta Devi, and the Pattini Goddess, are also important in the epic. They are not shown simply as supernatural figures. They guide the characters and provide wisdom and moral direction. Holmström preserves these representations without adding modern interpretations to them. Instead, she allows their importance to emerge from the moral and spiritual values of the original text.

Stylistic Restraint and Emotional Balance

Another important feature of Holmström's translation is her controlled use of emotion. Even in scenes of great sadness, such as Udayakumaran's death and the grief experienced by Madhavi and Queen Scerthi, the narration does not become overly emotional. The feelings of the characters are expressed through simple and measured language. This allows readers to understand their emotions without making the scenes overly dramatic.

This style also suits the philosophical nature of the epic. In *Manimekalai*, suffering is often understood through Buddhist ideas such as impermanence and karma. Holmström's restrained style therefore encourages readers to think about the meaning of suffering rather than simply respond to it emotionally. The events of the story are connected with wider ethical and spiritual questions.

Overall, Holmström's narrative and stylistic choices show her careful attention to both literary quality and cultural authenticity. Her clear English makes *Manimekalai* accessible to modern readers, while her preservation of symbols, place names, religious terms and philosophical ideas keeps the cultural identity of the original text. Her translation shows that literary translation is not about replacing one culture with another. Instead, it can create a meaningful connection between different cultures and literary traditions.

7. DISCUSSION

The analysis of Lakshmi Holmström's translation of *Manimekalai* shows that her work cannot be placed completely under either domestication or foreignization. Instead, she uses a combination of both approaches. She changes her strategies according to the needs of the text. Important philosophical ideas, cultural terms, and symbols are retained, while the English narration remains clear and easy to understand. This shows that literary translation cannot always be explained through fixed categories. Translators have to make careful decisions based on the nature of the text and the needs of the readers.

One of the main findings of this study is Holmström's effort to preserve the Buddhist foundation of the epic. Ideas such as *karma*, *dharma*, *nirvana*, rebirth, compassion and renunciation remain connected with their Buddhist meanings. Instead of replacing them with similar Western philosophical or religious terms, Holmström presents them within the Buddhist context of the story. This reflects Venuti's idea of foreignization, in which the translator tries to preserve the distinct cultural features of the source text (Venuti 19-20). At the same time, Holmström uses

simple English, which makes these ideas easier for English readers to follow. Thus, cultural preservation and readability are not treated as opposite goals.

The study also shows that Holmström considers culture to be an important part of meaning. Tamil place names, customs, rituals, social practices, and religious festivals are retained in the translation. Terms such as *Manipallavam*, *Puhar*, *Amudasurabhi* and *Aravana Adigal* are not replaced with English descriptions because their meanings are closely connected with Tamil culture. These choices support Bassnett's argument that language and culture cannot be separated and that translation involves the communication of cultural experience, not simply the transfer of words (Bassnett 21). Through Holmström's translation, English readers are able to experience aspects of ancient Tamil society while retaining its cultural identity.

Another important finding is the way Holmström handles symbolism. Important objects, places and events continue to have their symbolic meanings in the English version. The inexhaustible bowl represents unlimited compassion, while Manipallavam is connected with spiritual awakening. The cremation ground represents the idea of impermanence, and the repeated references to hunger suggest both physical suffering and spiritual longing. Holmström generally avoids interrupting the story with long explanations. Instead, she allows readers to understand these symbols through the events and experiences of the characters. This helps preserve the literary quality and philosophical depth of the original work.

The representation of women is another area that shows Holmström's careful approach. Characters such as Manimekalai, Madhavi, Aadhirai, Kayachandikai and the goddesses are presented as morally strong and spiritually important figures. Their characters are shaped by compassion, wisdom, sacrifice and ethical decisions rather than by simple gender roles. Holmström does not force modern interpretations onto them. Instead, she presents them within the social, cultural and religious setting of the epic. This allows modern readers to recognise the importance of female characters in classical Tamil literature without changing their historical context.

The study also shows that Holmström acts as more than a translator. She also works as a cultural mediator. Her task involves not only transferring words but also preserving and explaining a cultural tradition through translation. She constantly balances the expectations of English readers with the cultural identity of the Tamil text. Mona Baker's idea of equivalence is useful in understanding this approach. Holmström often communicates the meaning of an expression without removing its cultural identity (Baker 17). Instead of searching for a direct English equivalent for every word, she chooses expressions and strategies that maintain the meaning and function of the original.

More broadly, Holmström's translation challenges the idea that a translator must choose between fluency and cultural preservation. *Manimekalai* shows that both can be achieved in the same translation. Clear English makes the work accessible, while the retention of cultural terms and ideas allows readers to experience its foreignness. The success of the translation lies in this balance. Readers can enter an unfamiliar literary and cultural tradition without finding the language difficult to follow.

The present study therefore shows that Lakshmi Holmström's translation is an important contribution to the study and understanding of Tamil literature in English. Her translation demonstrates how a classical text can be made accessible to modern readers without losing its philosophical ideas, cultural identity or historical background. By carefully combining domestication and foreignization, Holmström presents *Manimekalai* as a literary work, a philosophical text, and an important representation of Tamil cultural memory.

CONCLUSION

Lakshmi Holmström's English translation of *Manimekalai* makes it clear that translating a classical literary work is not simply a matter of transferring words from Tamil into English. The epic is closely associated with the religious beliefs, moral ideas, social practices and cultural traditions of ancient Tamil society. For this reason, translating it for readers who may not be familiar with its historical and cultural background is a challenging task. Holmström addresses this difficulty by maintaining a balance between readability and cultural faithfulness. She does not attempt to make the text completely familiar to English readers, nor does she retain so many unfamiliar elements that the meaning becomes difficult to follow. Instead, she creates a space where English readers can approach the Tamil text while its cultural identity remains intact.

One of the important findings of the study is the way Holmström handles the Buddhist ideas that are central to *Manimekalai*. Concepts such as *karma*, rebirth, compassion, renunciation, *nirvana* and dependent origination are retained without being reduced to ideas that belong to a Western religious or philosophical framework. Rather than replacing them with supposedly familiar equivalents, Holmström allows these concepts to remain within the Buddhist context of the epic. As a result, readers are given an opportunity to understand Buddhist thought as it functions within *Manimekalai* itself. This approach is particularly significant because the religious ideas in the epic are closely connected with its characters, events and moral concerns.

The preservation of Tamil cultural identity is another significant feature of Holmström's translation. Tamil place names, religious practices, social customs, symbolic objects and culturally specific terms continue to appear in the translated text. Names such as Puhar, Manipallavam, Amudasurabhi and Aravana Adigal are retained rather

than being replaced by English descriptions. Such choices allow the geographical, historical and spiritual atmosphere of the original epic to remain visible to the reader. In this respect, Holmström functions not merely as a translator of language but also as a mediator between two cultural contexts. She introduces the Tamil literary tradition to English readers without removing the elements that make the work culturally distinctive.

The representation of women in the translation is also noteworthy. Characters such as Manimekalai, Madhavi, Aadhirai and Kayachandikai, along with the female divine figures, occupy important moral and spiritual positions in the narrative. Their significance is expressed through qualities such as compassion, wisdom, moral strength and spiritual awareness. Holmström does not appear to reshape these characters according to present-day ideas of womanhood. Instead, she presents them within the social and religious world of the epic. Her treatment of important symbols, including the inexhaustible bowl, Manipallavam, hunger and compassion, further contributes to the preservation of the meanings associated with the original text.

The findings can also be understood through the translation theories of Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett and Mona Baker. Holmström's translation suggests that domestication and foreignization need not always function as completely separate or opposing strategies. The translator may move between the two according to the requirements of a particular passage or concept. The use of accessible English helps readers follow the narrative, while the retention of Tamil cultural terms, Buddhist concepts and significant names prevents the source culture from disappearing in translation. Thus, the translation achieves a certain balance between accessibility and cultural preservation. Even when read in English, *Manimekalai* continues to retain its distinct Tamil character.

The present study has been limited to Lakshmi Holmström's English translation of *Manimekalai* and examines it primarily from the perspective of Translation Studies. It does not undertake a comparison between Holmström's version and other English translations, nor does it examine translations of the epic into other languages. Such comparative research may offer further insights into the different ways translators approach Buddhist philosophy, cultural symbols, gender representation and Tamil terminology. It may also reveal how different translation strategies influence the way *Manimekalai* is received by readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

To conclude, Lakshmi Holmström's translation makes an important contribution to the study of both Tamil literature and translation. Her work makes *Manimekalai* accessible to English readers without losing the philosophical ideas, cultural practices and literary qualities that are central to the original epic. The translation demonstrates that the role of a translator extends beyond linguistic transfer. A translator also negotiates between cultures, histories and systems of thought. Through Holmström's translation, readers outside the Tamil-speaking world are able to engage with *Manimekalai* while encountering the cultural and philosophical features that give the epic its distinctive identity...

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