

**TRANSLATING THE 1960'S TELUGU NOVEL *REPATI VELUGU* INTO ENGLISH  
– A STUDY OF THE PRIMARY CHALLENGES**

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**Abstract:**

This paper introduces Dwivedula Visalakshi, a notable Telugu writer born in 1929, known for capturing complexities of Indian life, particularly women's experiences and lower-middle-class struggles. The translator's experience translating her novel "Repatri Velugu" into English is also discussed, highlighting challenges such as comprehending expressions, identifying contextual significance, and finding suitable translation equivalents. These challenges were classified into Primary (linguistic and culture-specific) and Secondary (finding translation equivalents) challenges. The translator's experience emphasizes the importance of cultural and linguistic understanding in translation, and the crucial role of Prof. Somanchi Krishna Sarma in overcoming primary challenges and successfully translating the novel.

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**Key Words:**

Translation of a Telugu text into English, primary challenges, linguistic and culture-specific challenges

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**Introduction to the Author and her Times:**

Dwivedula Visalakshi was a notable figure in the generation of women writers who emerged during India's intellectual renaissance preceding independence. This era saw women playing multifaceted roles in the freedom struggle, contributing through education, social work, and literary endeavors. Women writers of this period explored a wide range of themes and ideologies, reflecting the changing dynamics of Indian society.

Visalakshi was born in 1929 in Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, and grew up in an upper-middle-class Brahmin family surrounded by a rich literary culture. Encouraged by her enlightened husband, Visalakshi developed her storytelling talent, writing novels and stories that reflected the life and society she was familiar with. Visalakshi's work was characterized by her balanced and realistic portrayal of life and society. She was part of a literary tradition that sought to capture the complexities of Indian life, particularly the experiences of women and the lower middle class. Her writing often explored themes such as economic struggles, family relationships and women's experiences. Visalakshi's works often highlighted the economic challenges faced by the lower middle class, particularly in the context of changing social and economic dynamics. Her writing explored the complexities of family relationships, including the roles and expectations placed on women. Visalakshi's works often focused on the experiences and perspectives of women, shedding light on their struggles and triumphs.

Her works spanned over four decades, exploring themes that are both timeless and relevant to her contemporary audience. Visalakshi wrote 13 novels, 2 collections of short stories, and a travelogue about her visit to Malaysia. Visalakshi's works were known for their realistic depiction of life, without romanticizing or idealizing it. Many of her stories were set in small towns or villages, capturing the nuances of life in these settings.

Visalakshi's contributions to Telugu literature were significant, and her works continued to be celebrated for their insight into the human experience. She passed away in 2014, leaving behind a legacy of literary excellence.

### **Introduction to the Translator and her Challenges:**

The potential translator selected Visalakshi's novel, *Repati Velugu* for her translation project, aiming to examine and analyze the challenges involved in translating a Telugu novel into English.

The translator faced three major challenges in the process of translating the select novel into English. The initial challenge faced by the translator was to comprehend all the expressions from the source text in order to render them properly in translation. There was a set of expressions which were incomprehensible to the translator. A different set of expressions which seemed familiar to the translator, posed a challenge in identifying the underlying contextual

significance. Yet another set of expressions have been identified for which finding suitable translation equivalent posed a problem.

### **Classification of the Challenges:**

The translator has broadly classified these three kinds of challenges into two categories, namely Primary challenges and Secondary challenges. The first set of challenging expressions which were incomprehensible was termed as linguistic challenges. The second set of expressions for which context seemed a problem, even though meanings of individual words of the expressions were familiar, was termed as culture-specific challenges. Both these categories put together form the Primary challenges. Therefore the initial hurdle of being able to completely understand the original work was at stake unless the primary challenges had been overcome.

The final set of expressions for which translation equivalent was hard to find was labeled as secondary challenges. This was the second step to take after overcoming both the primary challenges. The translator then reached the stage where the actual part of translation begun. It was then that the secondary challenges arose. During the process of translation, the translator had to pause at several instances where secondary challenges surfaced. It was the journey of overcoming these secondary challenges that had made the process of translation a success.

### **The Primary Challenging Expressions:**

The translator had identified a total of fifty-four linguistic and culture-specific challenging expressions, the journey of which has been discussed in detail as follows:

1. ***Kaalu jhaadinchi***: The translator felt that this was something to do with beating with the leg or that it could be easing out a leg cramp. But it was only later that the actual contextual meaning ‘to go for a walk’ was understood.
2. ***Vedi neellu posina ralla sunnam***: The translator was aware of all the words in this expression. But when it came to summing it up contextually, the challenge arose. It was said to be idiomatic expression which meant ‘a person’s anger is very high and was hissing like lime stone would, when hot water was sprinkled on it’.
3. ***Adaatu***: The translator knew that *daatu* meant ‘to cross’. But this particular expression *Adaatu* differed slightly and created a challenge in comprehension. It was only later that the translator knew the expression meant ‘suddenly’.

4. **Ramdolla motha:** ‘The roll of drums’ is the contextual meaning of the expression *Ramdolla motha*. Whereas this was another expression where the translator felt that contextual meaning was required even after knowing the meanings of the individual expressions like *Ramu*, *dolu* and *motha*.
5. **Palakapulla:** The translator didn’t know the meaning of this expression too, which was later revealed as ‘slate pencil’.
6. **Kaakataleeyam:** This expression seemed close to the Kakateeya dynasty to the translator, but in actuality it meant ‘coincidence’.
7. **Aakali mestunna:** *Aakali vestunna* was the colloquial expression of the contemporary times of the translator. So the minute difference in the expression made it a challenge. The meaning of the expression was ‘starving’.
8. **Muppithamaina:** This particular expression which meant ‘to be well-behaved’ was completely unfamiliar to the translator. She had no clue about what it could be before her interaction for clarification seeking.
9. **Jnathulu:** *Jnathulu* was yet another expression which was totally incomprehensible to the translator. The meaning of the expression was ‘kith and kin’ according to the context, apart from its other meanings, like wise men and knowledgeable.
10. **Dulipi dullagottu:** The translator was familiar with the first word from the expression. *Dulipi* meant ‘to dust’. But she was unfamiliar with the expression, which actually meant ‘slamming a person with counter argument’.
11. **Nishkarshagaa:** This was again an expression that the translator felt incomprehensible. It meant ‘strictly’.
12. **Addakarra:** The translator knew the expressions *Addam* and *Karra*. But the expression in its context was challenging. It actually meant ‘cross bar’ (of the door). In the olden days, the security of the door was ensured by tightening the cross bar, which was fixed horizontally after the doors have been shut.
13. **Kisukkuna:** This happened to be an onomatopoeic expression that imitated the sound behind it. This variety was one of the major primary challenges faced by the translator.

The meaning of the expression, *Kisukkuna*, was ‘a sudden burst of laughing after trying in vain to withhold it’.

14. ***Eederina***: This is yet another unintelligible expression to the translator. It meant ‘to come of age or to attain puberty’.
15. ***Kaaryam kathaa***: The translator was familiar with both the words from the expression, but couldn’t get the contextual significance of the expression. *Kaaryam kathaa* meant ‘celebrations and commemorations’.
16. ***Udukumothu - ulli gadda; kantlo padithe - kallu manta***: This was another idiomatic expression that the translator was unfamiliar with, even though all the individual words from the expression were familiar to her. The idiom actually meant if a person is envious to the core, he might hurt the other person just as an onion slice would, when it touches the eye (its spray). It has been translated as, ‘the envious one – like an onion slice; it would hurt – if it touches the eyes’ following the same pattern from the original novel.
17. ***Nelagantu***: This was another instance of a strange expression to the translator. *Nelagantu* actually meant ‘new moon’, which came as a shock to the translator as her thoughts were nowhere close to the actual meaning.
18. ***Vontiki aava gundu rasukunnatlu***: This happened to be another instance of an expression where meanings of individual words was known, whereas the translator failed to grasp the meaning contextually. *Vontiki aava gundu rasukunnatlu* meant ‘rubbing mustard powder all over the body’ in jealousy.
19. ***Boduru kappalla***: The expression *Boduru kappalla* was used to refer to ‘people who keep shouting or singing in cacophonous voices like big mouthed toads’. The translator didn’t know the meaning of this expression, even though she knew that *kappalu* were frogs.
20. ***Bilabilamantu***: *Bilabilamantu* was an onomatopoeic expression. It was used to refer to a ‘rush or sudden swarming of people’. The translator felt this expression strange and challenging.
21. ***Thataaluna***: This was yet another challenging expression for the translator which meant ‘suddenly or out of the blue’.

22. ***Pai vaadu***: The translator felt that this expression meant God, which was her contemporary knowledge of the same expression. But contextually the expression *Pai vaadu* meant ‘a stranger/ an outsider’.
23. ***Vaakita undi***: The translator faced cultural challenge yet again for this expression. It could easily mean to be at the porch/ entrance of the house. But in fact, *Vaakita undi* was a euphemistic expression. In olden days, women were made to stay away from the household in a separate designated room during their periods. Hence, when ‘one has their periods’, it was referred to as *Vaakita undi*, literally translated as near the door, meaning that the person cannot enter the house unless she completes her menstrual cycle.
24. ***Sanduga pette***: This was another strange challenging expression for the translator. The meaning of the expression *Sanduga pette* was a ‘storage box’.
25. ***Kadigi muggu veyani gummam***: The culturally significant expression *Kadigi muggu veyani gummam* caused cultural challenge to the translator. It meant ‘the bereft entrance without rangoli’ which was an indication of a recent death.
26. ***Mudukulu***: *Mudukulu* were ‘Knees’. This expression had lost its original meaning and the expression *Mokaallu* now replaced it. In fact, the translator felt that *Mudukulu* was a variety of contemporary savoury.
27. ***Vaithalikulu***: The expression *Vaithalikulu* meant ‘torch bearers’ which posed a linguistic challenge to the translator.
28. ***Jada padardham***: The expression *Jada padardham* posed yet another cultural challenge to the translator. She knew what both the words in the expression meant individually, but given to the cultural context, the connotation remained challenging. The expression actually meant ‘a lifeless object’.
29. ***Bekkuthoo***: The translator faced linguistic challenge to understand this particular onomatopoeic expression. *Bekkuthoo* meant ‘convulsive, spasmodic or jerky; the bouts and breaks in speech or wailing caused due to extreme emotional outburst or lack of proficiency over the vocabulary to speak in a language’.
30. ***Bodemmalu***: This symbolic expression *Bodemmalu* meant widows. The translator was obscure to this term of the yesteryear. ‘During the olden days, widows were made to

shave their heads which was one of the many customs they had to follow. Due to the tonsured heads, the name was prevalent, where *bodi* meant devoid of hair’.

31. ***Aarunnka raagam***: The translator was aware of the meanings of the individual expressions: *aaru* meant six, *okka* meant one and *ragam* meant tune. But when the three words were put together to form a rich expression, she faced cultural challenge. *Aarunnka raagam* meant ‘continuous and non-stop wailing for petty reasons’.
32. ***Sainu panche***: Although the translator was aware of the clothing *panche*, she didn’t know the meaning of this culturally loaded expression. The actual meaning of the term *panche* in the given context also differed tremendously from what the translator was aware of. She knew that *panche* was ‘the long rectangular piece of clothing wound around the waist covering the lower part of the body by men’. Contrary to her assumption, the given expression *Sainu panche* meant widow's weed (in an Indian context). This was the attire a widow was supposed to maintain during the olden days. After tonsuring their heads, widows were expected to cover the shaven head with the loose end of their white saree, which is the *Sainu panche*.
33. ***Voiles***: The translator was unaware of the expression *Voiles*. They were ‘printed cotton sarees’. These were supposed to be the fancy or the polished type of outfit worn by college going girls during olden days, apart from nylon and silk. There was another variant, the handloom cotton sarees. Those were thick and plain, unlike the machine made and printed *Voiles*. These were worn by older women.
34. ***Javaatu***: *Javaatu* was synonymous to *Javaabu*. Both the expressions meant ‘answer’. But the former expression became so outdated that the translator was unfamiliar with it.
35. ***Kallothukonu***: This had been another cultural challenge for the translator. Even though the translator knew what *kallu* and *othu* meant, she could not put the two together and understand the contextual meaning. *Kallothukonu* merely meant ‘wiping tears’. Instead of *tuduchukonu* (which also meant wiping tears) which is of contemporary use, *othukonu* had been used in the novel.

36. **Muddaraalu:** The translator felt that this expression meant food to fall from somewhere. She had thought it was a negative expression. But the expression *Muddaraalu* meant ‘naïve or the innocent one’.
37. **Acchivaakula:** The expression *Acchivaakula* was a totally strange one. The translator didn’t know the expression, although the *aakula* in it sounded like leaves to her. The expression actually meant ‘dumb and foolish’.
38. **Aardhram:** The translator couldn’t comprehend this expression. *Aardhram* meant ‘tenderness’. This expression was mostly used in the context where the tone of the voice was being discussed. Tenderness associated with grief or sorrow in the voice was being referred to here.
39. **Paallu sarigga padda chichu buddi laa:** This culture-specific expression *Paallu sarigga padda chichu buddi laa* unknown to the translator, literally meant ‘a tightly packed Diwali sparkler’. This expression was an equivalent in meaning to the English idiomatic expression ‘adding fuel to the fire’.
40. **Chebosthoo:** The expression *Chebosthoo* means ‘panting or exertion’ after a run.
41. **Jambukaana:** This was an onomatopoeic expression was unfamiliar to the translator. The expression *Jambukaana* meant ‘mat’. It was a large carpet spread on the floor for people to sit or sleep during occasions like marriage or other gatherings where large number of people needed to be accommodated.
42. **Bholluna:** The challenging expression *Bholluna* was yet another onomatopoeic expression meaning ‘emesis’. A sudden urge or force with which a vomit occurs is expressed with this term.
43. **Nikshiptamai:** The unfamiliar expression *Nikshiptamai* meant ‘hidden’.
44. **Vanta pooti:** *Vanta pooti* was the expression which means the ‘Cook’. The translator knew only the term *vanta* which meant cooking, but the second word *pooti* from the expression was challenging to the translator.
45. **Gotu:** The challenging expression *Gotu* meant to ‘show airs of superiority’.

46. ***Aata Kalipeyadam***: The expression *Aata Kalipeyadam* was to ‘mix up the game in the middle’. This was yet another culture-specific challenge to the translator where she knew the individual meanings of both the words from the expression, but couldn’t understand the meaning of the expression in its entirety.
47. ***Pakkalu vecchagaa***: The expression *Pakkalu vecchagaa* meant ‘to have a slight fever’. The translator knew both the words from the expression. *Pakka* was bed and *veccha* was warmth. The cultural challenge surfaced yet again with this expression.
48. ***Kaddu***: *Kaddu* meant ‘Seldom’. It was a totally unknown expression to the translator.
49. ***Tairu kottu***: The expression *Tairu kottu* meant to ‘flatter’. The translator knew only the second part of the expression – *kottu* – which meant to beat, but she didn’t know the cultural meaning of the total expression.
50. ***Deva Pitru karyaalu***: The translator knew the meaning of all the individual words from this complex culturally significant expression. But she didn't know the meaning in total. In fact, the expression *Deva Pitru karyaalu* meant ‘the ritual obligations for Gods and the deceased’. According to Hindu traditions, after a family member departs, a series of customary prayers and commemorations are organized at certain set intervals of time. There are also several religious prayers to Gods marking festivals and other special dates. Both these can only be performed by married men, only with the accompaniment of the wife.
51. ***Chitaginjalaata***: The translator knew that *chitaginjalu* were tamarind seeds and *aata* was a game. But she didn’t know what this particular game was, its rules were and how it could be played. Hence this expression was labelled as a culture-specific challenge.
52. ***Kacch dalu, gurralu, enugulu***: The translator only knew *gurralu* were horses and *enugulu* were elephants. But unless one was familiar with the mentioned game, one would not know what the connotations of the words horses or elephants meant in that context. For example, a person familiar with the game of chess would be able to explain or understand what camels, horses and elephants in the game meant and also how they were used. Similarly in the tamarind seed game discussed in *Repati Velugu*, camels, horses, elephants existed.

53. *Tiru veedhulu tiragadam*: The translator is aware of the words *veedhulu* and *tiragadam*. The former meant streets and the latter meant roaming. Hence, the initial assumption of the translator was to roam on the streets. But in reality, the expression meant ‘to frequent a particular place’ due to its popularity or due to a necessity linked to the place.

54. *Chavaka maccha netha cheera rangu*: This was the last culture-specific challenge faced by the translator. Even though she knew what each individual word from the expression meant, she couldn’t grasp the hidden meaning behind it. The actual meaning of the expression was ‘grey colour’ associated with early dawn.

### **Conclusion:**

The translator, born in 1990, was far from grasping the profound cultural and linguistic subtleties expressed in the 1960s. At this moment, it was pertinent to recall that the translator could surmount the initial difficulties solely through the assistance of Prof. Somanchi Krishna Sarma, who was born in 1934 and existed during the period in question. He was an avid reader, a poet, an essayist, a novelist, a critic, and also a translator. It was because of his thorough introduction to that era and his patient explanations of all the questions posed by the translator, who was not even alive during that time, that she was able to view the novel clearly and surmount the primary challenges in her translation.

### **References:**

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