



## **Bridging Cultures: A Study of Translation Strategies in Girish Karnad's 'Nagamandala'**

Ms. Rohini Dhondiram Waghmare,  
Head of English Department,  
Bharati Vidyapeeth's  
Dr.Patangrao Kadam Mahavidyalaya, Sangli.

### **Abstract:**

Translation is not merely a linguistic process but a cultural negotiation, especially when it involves works deeply rooted in a specific cultural context. Girish Karnad's play 'Nagamandala' presents a rich tapestry of cultural elements, ranging from folklore and mythology to socio-political issues. This paper examines the translation strategies employed in bringing 'Nagamandala' from its original Kannada to English, with a focus on how these strategies bridge the cultural gap between the source and target languages. Through a comparative analysis, this study highlights the challenges faced by the translator in conveying the nuances of Karnad's play, such as the cultural symbolism of the Naga and the intricacies of rural life in Karnataka. By exploring the choices made by the translator in terms of language, style, and cultural adaptation. This paper aims to shed light on the complexities of translating a culturally rich text like 'Nagamandala' and the ways in which these strategies contribute to the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage through translation.

**Key Words:** Cultural context, Cultural adaptation, Mythology, Socio-political issues, cultural symbolism



## **Introduction:**

Girish Karnad (1938-2019) was a renowned Indian playwright, actor, and filmmaker, known for his contributions to Indian literature and theatre. Born in Matheran, Maharashtra. Karnad studied at the University of Bombay and the University of Oxford. He rose to prominence in the 1960s with plays like '*Yayati*' and '*Tughlaq*,' which blended Indian mythology with contemporary themes. Karnad's works often explored the complexities of human relationships and the socio-political issues of his time. In addition to his plays, Karnad wrote scripts for several acclaimed films and received the 'Padma Bhushan', one of India's highest civilian honors, in 1992. His works often drew inspiration from Indian mythology and history, blending traditional storytelling with contemporary themes.

Girish Karnad's play '*Nagamandala*' presents a vivid portrayal of rural Karnataka, interwoven with themes of love, desire, and superstition. As with any work deeply rooted in a specific cultural context, translating '*Nagamandala*' from its original Kannada to English presents a significant challenge. This paper explores the translation strategies employed in bridging the cultural gap between the source and target languages, focusing on how these strategies preserve the cultural nuances and richness of Karnad's play.

Karnad's works are known for their exploration of Indian mythology, folklore, and socio-political issues. '*Nagamandala*' is no exception, delving into the complexities of human relationships through the story of a woman who is in love with a cobra. The play is not just a narrative but a cultural artifact, reflecting the traditions, beliefs, and customs of rural Karnataka. By analyzing the translated text, this study aims to shed light on the challenges faced by translators in conveying the cultural subtleties of '*Nagamandala*' and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. Through this analysis, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role of translation in preserving and disseminating cultural heritage.

In translating Girish Karnad's '*Nagamandala*' from Kannada to English, translators employ a variety of strategies to ensure that the cultural nuances and richness of the original text are preserved and effectively conveyed to the target audience. The cultural equivalent strategy in



translation involves retaining specific terms, concepts, or cultural elements from the source language (in this case, Kannada) in the target language (English) to maintain the cultural specificity and richness of the original text. This strategy is particularly important when translating works like '*Nagamandala*,' which are deeply rooted in a specific cultural context.

In the context of '*Nagamandala*,' the term "*nagamandala*" itself is a cultural equivalent. It refers to a ritualistic form of worship involving a snake deity, which is a significant part of the cultural and religious practices in rural Karnataka. By retaining this term in the English translation, translators are able to convey not just the literal meaning of the word, but also the cultural and religious significance associated with the ritual. Another example of the cultural equivalent strategy in '*Nagamandala*' is the use of specific names or terms that are culturally significant. For instance, the name "Rani," which means queen in Kannada, is a common name in the region and carries cultural connotations that may not be immediately apparent to non-Kannada speakers. By retaining this name in the English translation, translators are able to preserve the cultural nuances associated with the character.

The cultural equivalent strategy also extends to other aspects of the text, such as traditional customs, folklore, and cultural practices. For example, in '*Nagamandala*,' there are references to traditional beliefs about snakes and their significance in Indian mythology. By retaining these references in the English translation, translators are able to convey the cultural beliefs and practices surrounding snakes in Indian culture. The dramatist has used the cultural equivalent strategy in translation which is essential for preserving the cultural authenticity and richness of the original text that allows the readers to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context in which the work is set.

Cultural adaptation in the translation of "*Nagamandala*" involves modifying specific cultural elements from the original Kannada text to make them more understandable or relatable to English-speaking audiences. Examples of adapted cultural elements could include descriptions of traditional customs or rituals, social norms, cultural symbols, and historical references. The goal of cultural adaptation is to preserve the cultural authenticity and meaning of the original text while making it accessible to a wider audience. Comparing Girish Karnad's original Kannada text

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of "*Nagamandala*" with its English translation can provide insights into the challenges and strategies of translation, particularly in conveying cultural nuances and maintaining the artistic integrity of the work.

In the Kannada version, Karnad's language is likely to be rich in local idioms, dialects, and cultural references specific to Karnataka. These elements are crucial for capturing the essence of rural life, folklore, and mythological beliefs portrayed in the play. The use of these linguistic features adds depth and authenticity to the characters and settings, immersing the reader in the cultural milieu of the narrative. However, when translating such a text into English, the challenge lies in finding equivalent expressions, idioms, and cultural references that resonate with English-speaking audiences while retaining the original meaning and impact of the text. Translators may need to make strategic choices, such as transliterating certain terms, providing explanatory notes, or adapting cultural elements to ensure that the essence of the Kannada text is not lost in translation. For example, the ritualistic worship of the snake deity (*nagamandala*) and its cultural significance may be unfamiliar to non-Indian readers. The translator would need to find ways to explain this concept without losing its symbolic and narrative value in the English version.

The rhythm, cadence, and poetic quality of Karnad's language in Kannada may be challenging to replicate in English. Translators must carefully consider the linguistic nuances and stylistic elements of the original text to maintain its artistic integrity and emotional resonance in the translated version. *Nagamandala*'s Kannada original with its English translation highlights the complexities of cross-cultural translation and the importance of linguistic and cultural sensitivity in conveying the essence of a literary work to a global audience.

Another translation strategy used in translating "*Nagamandala*" is the modification of cultural elements to ensure that the translated text is not only accurate but also culturally relevant and understandable to the target audience. This strategy involves making subtle changes to certain cultural references, expressions, or elements from the source language (Kannada) to make them more familiar or relatable to the target audience in English. For example, in "*Nagamandala*," there are references to traditional beliefs and practices related to snakes and their significance in Indian mythology. These references may be modified in the translation to ensure that they are

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meaningful and relevant to English-speaking audiences who may not be familiar with Indian cultural beliefs. Another example could be the modification of names or terms that are culturally specific to Kannada culture. For instance, the names of characters or places in the original text may be modified in the translation to make them easier to pronounce or remember for English-speaking readers. Additionally, cultural elements that may be considered sensitive or controversial in the target culture may be modified or adapted in the translation to ensure that they are culturally appropriate. This could involve changing certain words or phrases to avoid offending or confusing the target audience. Overall, the modification of cultural elements in the translation of "*Nagamandala*" is a key strategy used to ensure that the translated text is not only accurate but also culturally relevant and accessible to the target audience.

In the translation of "*Nagamandala*," the role of the magical root, known as "ashwattha," is not only pivotal to the plot but also carries significant cultural and symbolic weight. Translating the concept of the magical root requires careful consideration to ensure that its cultural and symbolic meanings are effectively conveyed to the target audience. In the original Kannada text, the magical root is likely to be described in rich and vivid language, drawing on cultural references and mythological beliefs associated with the ashwattha tree. The challenge for translators is to capture the essence of these cultural nuances and convey them in a way that resonates with readers who may not be familiar with Indian mythology or folklore.

In Girish Karnad's "*Nagamandala*," supernatural elements play a significant role, particularly in the transformation of the Naga's, into a human being. These supernatural elements are deeply rooted in Indian mythology and folklore, adding a layer of mysticism and cultural richness to the narrative. When translating the supernatural elements of "*Nagamandala*," the challenge for the translator lies in conveying the sense of wonder, mystery, and cultural significance that these elements hold in the original Kannada text. One approach is to use language that evokes a sense of magic and mysticism, such as using vivid imagery and descriptive language to describe the transformation process.

Additionally, translators may need to provide additional context or explanations to help readers unfamiliar with Indian mythology understand the significance of the supernatural elements. This

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could involve including explanatory notes or descriptions that explain the cultural beliefs and traditions that underpin these elements. For example, when describing Naga's transformation into a human being, the translator may choose to use language that emphasizes the magical and otherworldly nature of the event. Overall, translating the supernatural elements of "*Nagamandala*" requires a delicate balance of preserving the mystical and cultural aspects of the original text while ensuring that these elements are accessible and understandable to readers from different cultural backgrounds.

Girish Karnad's English translations of his plays are considered by many to be far better in terms of literary merit than the Kannada originals. They quite often develop out of a distinct and identifiable English translation of the original. In his preface to his *Nagamandala*, for instance, Karnad argues that the play is based on two oral tales from Karnataka, which he first heard from Professor A.K.Ramanujan.

### **Conclusion:**

Girish Karnad's '*Nagamandala*' explores the intricate process of translating a culturally rich and complex work like "*Nagamandala*" from Kannada to English. Through an analysis of translation strategies such as cultural equivalence, transliteration, adaptation this study sheds light on the challenges faced by translators in conveying the cultural nuances and symbolic meanings of the original text. The paper highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and linguistic expertise in translating works that are deeply rooted in a specific cultural context. By employing these strategies, translators are able to bridge the cultural gap between the source and target languages, allowing readers to experience the richness and depth of the original text in translation.

Thus, this study demonstrates the complexities of translation as a cultural and artistic endeavor, emphasizing the need for translators to navigate between languages and cultures with skill and sensitivity. Through a careful and thoughtful approach to translation, the cultural heritage and artistic legacy of works like "*Nagamandala*" can be preserved and shared with audiences around the world.

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