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Anthologies, Translation and Representation: Vernacular Literatures in Metropolitan Languages in a Postcolonial Context

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This paper focuses on the relationship between literary anthologies and the concept of representation in relation to the anthologies of vernacular literatures translated into metropolitan languages. It examines the manner in which translation mediates in the representation of “peripheral” national literatures through anthologies. Translation - that is considered to be the medium of bringing vernacular literature to a metropolitan readership - can sometimes become a tool of maintaining colonial power relations between metropolitan literatures and vernacular literatures instead of challenging them. This argument is demonstrated through seven selected English language anthologies of Sinhala literature which were compiled in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The socio-political formation of the anthologists and translators of these anthologies influences the representation of Sinhala literature into an English audience. For example, the translation and the anthologising of Sinhala literature for an English audience largely remains a privilege of a limited group of people who belong to English educated middle class. In general, this situation is an artifact of colonial and postcolonial politics in Sri Lanka. Because this same group is involved in publishing and translating anthologies of Sinhala literature, the same interests, views, and texts are repeated in different anthologies, leading those texts to be canonised. This paper will also focus on how the introductions provided to anthologies shape the readers’ comprehension of the vernacular literary culture, how the untranslatability becomes a mean of misrepresentation, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion of authors, genres, etc.

Key words: anthology, metropolitan, representation, untranslatability, vernacular