

Translation Prospects in Malayalam and Tamil

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Abstract

Translation is a method of literature attempting to reflect and illuminate a culture from outside. Many translated works from world literature has attracted wide publicity in Malayalam due to their translation clarity and language. Tamil and Malayalam are the two prominent languages among the Dravidian Language family, which are engaged in close and intense cultural and literal interactions. Since both of them belong to the same language family, they are closely connected in cultural and lingual aspects. “Tamil and Malayalam became two distinct languages around 10th century AD and are closely connected in the Dravidian Language family. There are several similarities between these two languages. People who speak these languages also have many similarities” (Nachimuthu, 2005:97). Such similarities are also visible in works translated from Tamil to Malayalam and vise-versa.

Among the authors translated from Malayalam to Tamil, prominent ones are Thakazhi Sivasankarappillai, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, Karur neelakandappillai, M. Govindan, O.V. Vijayan, Attoor Ravivarma, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, Zakariya, Balachandran Chullickadu, and K. Sachidanandan. Novel translations were mostly based on realistic nature. Its magnitude has been transformed in later translation works. The aim of this paper is to examine which types of works are widely accepted in contemporary Malayalam and Tamil literatures.

Key words: creativity, modernism, feminism, magical realism

Translation throughout History and in Malayalam

The history of translation, which begun in BC 2nd century by the *Rosetta Stone*, grown and spread into different categories like Literal translation, Word to word translation, Faithful translation, Free translation, Adaptation etc. Initially, as other Indian languages were not so

developed, translations from other foreign languages were mostly made into the dominant cultural language ‘Sanskrit’. Translation of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavatha, Puranas. etc. became motivational not only for Malayalam but for other Indian languages also. Translated versions of all these – which include complete translation, free translation, partial translation, brief translation etc. – were widely available in many languages. Those languages – which had an orderly growth – usually undergoes four different phases of translation, says Dr. N.E. Vishwanatha Iyer. “During the first phase, Sanskrit works were translated, and during the second phase, books from foreign languages such as Persian, Arabic, etc. In the third phase, English and other foreign language books were translated. The fourth phase of translation was from other Indian languages” (2012:153). Thus, it is observable that during these four phases of development of translations, books from almost all the languages were translated. Not only that, the fourth phase of translation in Malayalam took place during the time of national renaissance. It has persuaded writers across the country to identify themselves as brethren’s. As a result, several works were translated among various languages in India.

Translation Trends in Indian Languages

Earlier, the trend in translation in Indian languages, especially in Malayalam language, was focusing on works which have gained more attention in other countries specifically western countries. Works of authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez (One Hundred Years of Solitude), Mario Vargas Llosa (In Praise of the Stepmother), Paulo Coelho (The Alchemist, The Zahir), Yasunari Kawabata (The House of the Sleeping Beauties), Leo Tolstoy (War and Peace), and William Shakespeare (all works) etc. were translated into Malayalam. This trend goes on even today. The gist of such widely received foreign works probably has a realistic or ideological or modern or social base. But while being translated, translators, instead of giving prioritized consideration to that element, focus more on the global publicity of such works. Because of this, many translated works fail to carry their genuine ideas from its source language to the target language.

However, the structure of translations taking place among the Indian languages is quite different. Here creative aspects of the works are given more priority, especially works from languages like Hindi, Bengali etc. Most of the new age writers belong to this category.

The leading authors, whose works were recently translated from Malayalam to Tamil, include T.D. Ramakrishnan, Benyamin, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, K.R. Meera, R. Unni., Veerankutty, S. Joseph, Thomas Joseph, Jose Vazhookkaran, Sheeba E.K., P.P. Ramachandran, etc.

Once, most of the books translated from Malayalam to Tamil were of realistic nature. Books with realistic nature, authored by writers Thakazhi, Bahseer, Karoor, M.T., were widely received by the Tamil people. Later, books written by Zakkaria, O.V. Vijayan, R. Unni, etc. were also translated. However, as the time passed, they have shown more interest in works of modernist nature.

Now-a-days, mostly selective works, which are unique and creative in nature, are being translated from Malayalam to Tamil. ‘Aarachar (The Hangman), Francis Ittikora, Dunia, Neelalohitham, Uppante Kooval Varakkunnu, Eerppam etc. are few examples to cite. Besides, themes basing on realism (Arivaal Jeevitham – Jose Vazhookkaran), (Dunia – Sheeba E.K.), feminism (Neelalohitham – Sheeba.E.K.), modernism ((Dunia), magical realism (Paralokavasasthalangal – Thomas Joseph) etc. are also being welcomed by the Tamil community.

Another fact to be considered here is that, the renowned novel ‘Khasaakkinte Ithihasam’ (The Legend of Khasak) by O.V. Vijayan, has been translated to Tamil very recently only. Reason behind this undue delay is the doubt that whether the ‘feel’ of this novel could be properly carried over into Tamil. Yuma Vasuki, the translator says about this “I have translated about 100 works from Malayalam. But I never experienced such a stress that I felt while translating ‘Khasaakkinte Ithihasam’. It is a great work combining modernity, dialect, local language, Sanskrit, and Arabic. It took one year for me to translate that. The reason is to bring quality of Malayalam into Tamil is very difficult”.

The innovativeness present in these works is the major reason for Tamil readers heartily welcoming such books. They consider people in Kerala are educationally and culturally higher than themselves. Well-known Tamil writers like Jayamohan, Jayakanthan, and Charuniveditha openly agrees with this. Established publishers like ‘Kalachuvadu’, ‘New Century’ etc. also support this view.

Insight from Tamil Works into Malayalam

Let us examine what insight is being provided by Tamil translations to Malayalis who strive to include new writings and trends in their works. Except a few works like Thirukkural, Sangam Literature, Grammar's like Tholkkaappiam, Nannool, Attoor's Puthunaanoor (400 poems of 100 poets), translation from Tamil was very limited earlier. Few authors like Jayamohan, Jayakanthan, Charuniveditha, Pama, Salma, Leena Manimeghalai, Meena Kanthaswami etc. only were translated from Tamil. Among them, most authors are either feminist or Dalit in nature. Amidst the new age writers, Jayamohan, Raja Narayan, S. Kanthaswami, Bala Kumar, Kutti Revathi, Leena, Malathi Maithri, and Manushya Putran have more readers in Malayalam.

Similarly, in Tamil, poets like Muthukumar, Abhilash, Pon. Vasudevan, Konanki, Prem Ramesh, Raman, Azhakiya Periyavan etc, who combines modernism and post-modernism in their works are the leading authors. But, none of them are translated into Malayalam, which indicates how men-oriented works are being viewed by Malayali readers. One thing is evident: As in Kerala, Dalit and feminist movements are quite active in Tamil Nadu also. It may be because of this, works of authors like Leena, Kutti Revathi, Meena, Pama, Salma etc., - who have an 'activist' label –receive wide publicity in Malayalam.

Overall Conclusions

1. Interactions with foreign languages not only enriched literary works but also the translation.
2. Compare to earlier days, more 'selective' works are being translated from Tamil to Malayalam and vice-versa. More 'creative' works gain wide publicity among them.
3. It is indication of cultural similarity that Tamil Dalit-feminist works earn wide publicity in Malayalam.

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