

Colonial Rule in Kerala and the Development of Malayalam Novels: Special Reference to the Early Malayalam Novels

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ABSTRACT

Malayalam literature has a predominant position among other literatures. From the 'Pattu' moments it had undergone so many movements and theories to transform to the present style. The history of Malayalam literature witnessed some important changes and movements in the history. That means from the beginning to the present situation, the literary works and literary movements and its changes helped the development of Malayalam literature. It is difficult to estimate the development periods of Malayalam literature. Because South Indian languages like Tamil, Kannada, etc. gave their own contributions to the development of Malayalam literature. Especially Tamil literature gave more important contributions to the development of Malayalam literature. The English education was another milestone of the development of Malayalam literature. The establishment of printing presses, the education minutes of Lord Macaulay, etc. helped the development process. People with the influence of English language and literature, began to produce a new style of writing in Malayalam literature. New branch of literary works that is novel came into exist. Through my paper, I am focusing on the influence of English language in the development of Malayalam literature.

Keywords: Malayalam literature, 19th century Malayalam novels, Kerala Renaissance, Colonial Rule

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1. Introduction

The origin and development of Malayalam literature cannot be determined within a specific period of time. The root of Malayalam literature is connected with the Tamil language and literature. The ancient period of literary works of Tamil picturized some landscape of Kerala. Works like the *Pathittuppathu* and *Chilappathikaaram* portraits the connection with Kerala and Malayalam literature. The development of "Pattu Prasthanam" was another milestone of the development of Malayalam literature. Ramacharitham by Cheeraman in 1198 was the main work of Pattu Prasthanam. This was followed by Thirunizhal Mala, Niranam Krithikal etc. The main demerits of early Malayalam literature was the domination of Sanskrit language and grammar. Kannasa Ramayanam was another work which portraits some elements of Valmiki Ramayanam. This work influenced Ezhuthachan for the successful completion his Ramyanam. Bharathamala was the work which comes under the category of 'Pattu Prasthanam' which has been published after Kannasa Ramayanam. Bharathamala is the 'Pattu' form of Mahabharatham. Sanskrit language gave its valuable contribution to the development of Malayalam literature. Manipravala Keerthanangal, Bhakthi Prasthanam etc gave some important guidance to the development of Malayalam literature.

The colonial era gave a drastic change to Malayalam literature. This process is widely depicted in the 19th century Malayalam literary studies. The works of Christian Missionaries helped for the development of Malayalam literature. Because they implemented printing presses and translated Bible to Malayalam. In the early time, the Europeans need our people as their employees. For that they began to teach their language in Kerala and that process enriched the cultural and educational values of Kerala. Through this paper I wish to point out the influence of English language in the development of Malayalam literature and also the enrichment of novel in Malayalam literature.

2. The Development of Malayalam Literature

Before mentioning about the English language and literature in Malayalam literature, it is necessary to describe the transformation of Malayalam from Sanskrit language. In the early period, Malayalam literature was under the domination of Sanskrit language. Especially the prose literature of Malayalam came into exist in the 15th and 16th century. The prose of Kerala in the 16th century represents the language known as Manipravalam. This language that is Manipravalam is a combination of Sanskrit and Malayalam language and widely used in verbal as well as written language of that period. The main problem faced by the Malayalam literature was the supremacy of Sanskrit language. It is very difficult for the common people to access the Malayalam language at that time. But in later time, Malayalam literature started its renovation because the domination of Sanskrit language was reduced. So many writers such as Thunchathu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan started their writings. Before the colonial rule Malayalam literature itself started its enrichment. The emergence of new writing style, changes in the narrating technology, etc are the main changes at that period. English education gave more contribution to the development of Malayalam literature. The development started at the time of Portuguese and flourished under British rule. Establishment of printing technologies helped the development of literature, especially prose literature. Missionaries need religious texts for their work, especially religious conversion. The exchange of language and culture in between Kerala and European countries gave another dimension to Malayalam literature. Many Malayalam works were translated to English literature and vice versa. Through this type of exchange the culture and knowledge also be exchanged. New literary theories and new models like novels also came into exist.

This gave way to the emergence of new prose style in Malayalam literature. Lord Macaulay's education act in 1835 was the milestone of the development of Malayalam literature. By the influence of education act English education became a compulsory subject in Kerala. This gave way to the emergence of new English schools and colleges in Kerala. People of Kerala became aware about English language and then they accessed the literary works from outside world. The Travancore kings were more progressive at that time. They started more schools in Kerala. Several grammatical works and the Bible etc were translated to Malayalam and the people had a chance to mingle with that works. Another person who helped the development of Malayalam literature was Herman Gundert. Besides his German hierarchy, he was a scholar in Malayalam language too. So he wrote Malayalam grammar text which was another pillar in the development of Malayalam language and literature.

These processes gave a path to the enrichment of Malayalam literature. The translated works from other countries were a new experience to the people of Kerala. People get a different experience in the structure, narrative style etc of the English novels. It's very helpful that some writers started to write their own works, especially novels. Keralavarma Valiya Koyi Thamburan translated a famous work named 'Akbar'. The novel was a different experience to the common people because it represents the feelings and emotions of the common people. The story, plot and characters of the novel are the symbol of the life of common man. Thus the common people accepted the new trends in Malayalam literature. The scholars in literature and the historians have different versions about the first Malayalam novel. Somebody argued that *Fulmoni Ennum Koruna Ennum Peraaya Randu Sthreekalude Katha* was the first novel in Malayalam literature while others argued that Appu Nedungaadi's *Kunthalatha* was the first novel. But it is widely accepted that O.Chanthumenon's *Indulekha* was the first and finest novel in Malayalam literature. The novels written in Europe as well as England were the pathfinders to the development of Malayalam literature. Novels can be classified into historical, social, political, horror etc.

The enlightenment started in England and other European nations made some impact in Malayalam novels also. Early Malayalam novels depicted the sense of enlightenment. It threw light to the social, economical, political, and cultural environment in Kerala at that time. For example, *Indulekha* points out the importance of education among the Namboothiri women and other social issues faced by the Namboothiri caste. At the same time *Meenakshi*, *Parishkaara Pathi*, *Inthumathisvayamvaram* etc have depicted different issues in Kerala at that time especially the cast system and the sufferings of the lower class people. These writings are the symbol of the social renaissance and enlightenment. The impact of education, especially English education, and the interaction with the English literature gave an eye opening to the writers in Kerala. Besides these the novel gave freedom to the writers to express their own ideas. The totality of the above said process is the development of Malayalam literature and Malayalam novels.

19th century Malayalam novels represented the social milieu of Kerala of that period which was influenced by the colonial rule. Because above all, English language and colonizer's culture are more prominent than native culture. For example, *Indulekha*. In that work the heroin or the central character is a lady whose name is Indulekha. She had an educational qualifications especially English education. The novelist that is O.Chandumenon tried to points out that Inulekha had these much of qualities because of her English education. Similarly the culture, European culture was treated as more important one at that time. This can be seen that some characters in the 19th century novels were imitating the culture of European people. This is also noted that the 19th century Malayalam novels also represented the family system, social circumstances, gender system, political and economical system of Kerala. O.Chandumenon's *Indulekha* made a deep influence in the Malayalam literature, especially novel. O.Chandumenon in his

introduction to *Sarada* pointed out that the benefit of Sanskrit language is the only knowledge about Sringara, Alankara etc and if a person wants to know about the current situation, he/she should have some knowledge about English language¹. These all examples proved that English language and culture is used as a key to modernity. *Indulekha* and its succeeding novels have the influence of modernism. Novels, especially Malayalam novels of 19th century pointed out the influence of caste system also. Namboothiri caste has the prior position and for escaping from the Namboothiri domination, people from backward community selected Christianity as their religion and started to study to study the English language and it helps to increase the social status of lower caste people. So the English education made a drastic change in the social milieu of Kerala at that time. Critics have the opinion that this type of social revolution can be seen in the 19th century novels. *Indulekha* is depicted as a work against the feudal system and domination of Namboothiri caste.

At the same time *Sarada*, another work by Chandumenon, pointed out the incidence related to transaction of land and also activities in the court. Kandasamenon, the central character here is picturized as a person who has some bad qualities and always wants to deal the things through court. Novels in the 19th century had a nature to point out the renaissance movement of Kerala at that time. 19th century witnessed the beginning of a new literary form that is novels by the influence of colonial rule and this movement indicates some elements of renaissance and modernity. Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai points out that O. Chandumenon in his work *Indulekha* tried to picturize the elements of social reformation of India before Gandhian period². For example, the characters of *Indulekha*, mainly the 18th chapter, pointed out some philosophical and progressive discussions on female education, female self existence etc.

Similarly, *Meenakshi*, written by Cheruvanthu Chhithu Nair, depicted the condition of women especially upper caste women in the 19th century. As a central character, Meenakshi stands against the male domination and advocates for female representation. At that time, in Kerala, male domination was the main problem and the central point of a family was the father or uncle and they decided everything in that family. In *Meenakshi* these all things were depicted deeply. But the heroine i.e. Meenakshi always protested the male domination and try to maintain an equality in the society. Other female characters in this work were also advocated for the equal position.

All these novels have some similarities that means all these novels represent some progressiveness and modern ideology which is a by product of English novels. So the colonial rule brought a drastic change in the 19th century Malayalam novels, especially their theme, content, narrative methods, etc. thus the 19th century era was a milestone to the development of Malayalam progressive novels. What is important is that, these novels drawn a clear picture about Kerala's social culture. Some progressive works were introduced and these works depicted the movements against Namboothiri caste and Brahmin supremacy. Besides this, women representation in early Malayalam novels was important. Female characters have an important position in the 19th century novels.

3. Conclusion

The development of Malayalam literature is the social development of Kerala too. It happened through various literary movements and progressive organisations. From the Portuguese and Dutch period to the British period many eminent persons gave their own contributions to the development of Malayalam novels. Our early novels consist of the style of English novels but at the same time the influence of the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata can be seen. For example, the characters in the early novels used several verses from the Puranas and Ithihasas. The cultural impact of early Malayalam novels needs a detailed study because they are the pillars of later Malayalam literature. From the Manipravalam period to the present time the Malayalam literature had undergone various changes. These changes were the indicators of the progress happened in the Malayalam literature too. At that time literatures like Tamil and Kannada produced their own progressive works. But Malayalam literature was under the domination of Sanskrit language. When the colonial rule started, the Malayalam literature had a tremendous change. The changes happened in the structure, narratology and style of the works. The writers of Malayalam began to adopt European style for their works. Thus, new literary forms like novel came into happen. Through my paper, I am trying to focus the early Malayalam literature and the changes of Malayalam literature.

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