

Translations and Literary Exchanges between Kerala and Middle-East

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Abstract

Kerala has historically played an important role in the wide network of Indian ocean trade. Recent archaeological excavations brought forth tangible evidence of kerala's trade linkage with gulf region from the first century AD. These journey led to the development of diasporic communities of Arabs in various parts of kerala, especially in Malabar. Ibnu Batuta, a 14th century Arab traveller was the first writer to give detailed description of the settlements of Arab from gulf region in various parts of Kerala. *The keralopatti chronicles* on the history of evolution of kerala narrates a story of two brothers from muscut in Malabar. Cheraman Perumal, the king of kerala, who became first known convert to Islam and he travelled to Mecca and finally settled in Oman. In 1960, gulf states began requiring large-scaled semi skilled and unskilled labour in order to cater their fast growing oil based economies. Which resulted in illegal migrations to gulf region. This first wave migrants had numerous stories about the narrow escapes they experienced during the journey. The reason for migration from kerala were two kind. Some of them migstrated due to socio-economic reason, and others encouraged by personal ambition and aspirations. The continues contact between Kerala and Middle East brought many changes in both languages, culture and Arts. These are very significant in re-conceptualise the history of gulf and Kerala.

Migrant narratives reveal a great deal of emotional conflict that has been associated with departure from Kerala and a sense of alienation in a foreign land. It can be founded on the film and literature. Malayalam film *naadodikaatu* portrays old way of travelling to Gulf, *Pathemaary*, *Arabi kadha*, and *Gaddama* deal with diasporic theme. In literature, *Aadujeevitham* by Benjamin gained a wide readership. His *jasmindays* won JCB prize. *Marubhoomiyude atmakatha* is a travelogue by V Musafar Ahammad won Sahitya Academy Award in 2010. Babu Baradwaj's *pravasiyude kurippukal* translated as *notes of an expat* is the memoir of a man in exile. P Manikandhan's *malayaliyude swanthanweshanangal* was winner of NV Krishna Warriar Award for best critical work. Deepak unnikrishnan's *temporary people* is another important work. Many more works were translated to Arabic such as *Chemeen*, *Shabdikunna Kalappa*, *Oru Sangeerthanam pole*, *Nilavu*, *Kaalam*, *Balyakala sakhi* are among them.

Keywords: History of Middle East settlement in Kerala, Malabar struggle, Arabi Malayalam, Diaspora, Translated Works

History: An overview

“Those who are present here shall take this message to the absentees” - Prophet Muhammad, speech on Farewell Hajj, answering this request the Arabian Muslims reached Kerala to propagate Islam. Recent archaeological studies brought the evidence of Kerala's trade linkage with Gulf region from third century BC. The Arabs exported the pepper from Kerala to Europe. Thus Arabs named Kerala as the land of pepper (*biladul fulful*). It was not available in the world except in Kerala. In the poem of Imrul Khaise, a poet who lived in pre-Islamic period in Arabia described thus “ you can see excreta of deers like the scattered pepper”. The Arabic language had an international status in the field of trade and business. Arabs played an important role of introducing Kerala to the whole world. These journeys lead to the development of diasporic

communities of arabs in various parts of kerala, especially in Malabar. Ibnu Batuta, a 14th century arab traveller was the first writer to give detailed description of the settlement of arabs from gulf region in various parts of kerala. 'The keralopatti chronicles' on the history of evolution of kerala narrate a story of two brothers from Muscut in Malabar

Literary Exchanges between kerala and Middle east

Many settlers from middle east later became influencing figures in freedom fight. Their writings inspired the Malabar struggle. *Saiful Battar*, a book written by Mamburam Saitalavi Tangal, was an invitation to fight against the british rule in harmony with hindus and muslims. *Tanbihul Gafilin* by Sayyid Fazal Pokoya tannal and british prohibited both texts and transported Sayyid Fazal pokoya tannal to Arabia. He later published it from Isthambul. *The Fatwas* of Sayyid Husain Tannal and he was arrested for that. *Song of struggle*(padappattu), *Muhammadul Mueminin* by Aminummantakath Parikutty Musliyar.

As a result of the contact between Middle east and kerala, a new language was formed, known as Arabi Malayalam. It was the language of literacy in Malabar till the last century .There are many books on various subject in Arabic and Arabi Malayalam language. It is guessed that about 3000 to 5000 words in Malayalam had their origin from Arabic to Malayalam such as haajir,jilla,kathth,vakeel,taluketc.

Most of the mappila songs were written for the first time, in arabi Malayalam script.many works written in Arabi Malayalam still have not been transliterated to Malayalam script. First ArabiMalayalam scripted novel *Chahar Dervesh*, Malayalam translation of Persian work before six years of the composition of *Indulekha*. *Alavudhin*, *Qamar Zaman*, *Shamsu Zaman*, *Amir Hamza*, *Gulsanobar*, *Zubaida*, and *Zinaba* etc are the famous novels in ArabiMalayalam

translated from Persian. Many Sanskrit texts were translated in ArabiMalayalam such as *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Amara Kosa*, *Pancha Tantra* and even legends about *Vikramaditya* and Sanskrit medical texts such as *Upakarasara*, *Yogarambha*, and *Mahasara*. Various manuscripts in Arabi Malayalam concerned with the topic like *Balacikitsa*, *Tatkalikacikitsa*(first aid medicine), *Natappudinacikitsa*(common diseases), and Unani treatment. Religious, medicinal, agricultural texts, biography, history, commentaries of Quran and hadith etc are written in ArabiMalayalam language such as *Tuhfathul Mujahidin*, *FatahulMuin*, *Fatahul Mubin* etc. An anonymous author compiled text of Mappila Ramayanam.

Diaspora in the works of Gulf Malayalees

During 1960s, Gulf states began requiring large-scaled semi skilled and unskilled labour in order to cater their fast growing oil based economies. Which resulted in large illegal migrations to gulf region. The first wave migrants had numerous stories about narrow escape they experienced during the journey. The continues contact between kerala and middle east brought many changes in both language, culture, and literature. These narratives are very significant in reinventing the history. A great deal of migrant narratives reveal a great deal of emotional conflict that has been associated with the departure from kerala and a sense of alienation in foreign land. It can be found in films and literature. *Khaddama*, *Pathemari*, *Arabikadha* are examples for films that deals with theme of diaspora. *Khaddama* (2011) a film by Kamal, about ashwathi, a lower middleclass malayaliwoman, comes to SaudiArabia as a migrant worker. Unable to deal with torture at the workplace, she attempts to flee the country. *Pathemari*(2015) directed by Salim Ahamed about Narayanan, a young man migrated to Dubai during 60s. The film portrays life, lonliness, and sacrifice of kerala migrants. *Arabikadha*(2007) by Lal jose recalled a hardcore communist in Dubai abused and alienated. *Nadodikattu* a movie

reminds us of histories of people smuggling in the early days. *Diamond necklace* is a film about hypocrisy of gulf malayalees. *Take off* is another well-known film about an Indian nurse working in Iraq.

In recent time a number of novels and travelogues published in the Malayalam ingeniously encapsulate the ordeals of the migrant community. Benjamin's novel *Aadujeevitham* 2008, won Kerala Sahitya Akadamy Award, gained a wide readership and was translated as *Goat days* by Joseph Koyipally. The story revolves around Najeeb's journey of survival in a desert. It translated in to Arabic as *Ayyamal maayiz* by Suhail Abdul Hakeem Wafy. Benjamin's *mullappoo niramulla pakalukkal* won JCB price, tells about a Pakistani woman who work as a radio jockey in middle eastern country, which translated in to English as *Jasmin days* by Shahnaz Habib. *Maruboomiyude Atmakatha* 2008 a travelogue by V musafer Ahammad that won Sahitya Akadami Award in 2010. It is a slave narrative against celebrated narratives of the Gulf dream. It was translated by P J Mathew as *Camels in the sky*, Travels in Arabia. Babu Baharadwaj's *Pravasiyude Kurippukal* directly translated to *notes of an expat* is a memoir of life and thought of a man in exile. P Manikandhan's *Malayalyude Swanthanweshanangal*, Malayali's search for themselves was the winner of NV Krishna Warrier Award for best critical work by Kerala Basha literature. Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary people* is a set of interrelated stories of Indian labourers in the middle east. Shihabuddin Poythumkadav, a literary journalist has a essay collection titled *Marujeevitham* that based on middle east diaspora in 2014. Several Malayali authors have launched their work at 32nd edition of Sharjah International Book Festival, Among them KM Abbas launched his *Shaamal* (storm) a collection of 12 short stories about life of an expatriate in gulf. Sadiq Kavil launched *Jeevithathinte Nalloru Bhagam* (Major Chunk of Your Life) deals expatriate life.

Other Malayalam works translated to Arabic

Chemmeen, a prominent work in Malayalam written by Takazhi sivasankaran pillai was translated to Arabic as *Shemmeen* by MohiaddinAlwaye. *Shabdikunna Kalappa*, a short storie by Ponkunnam varki was translated by Khaleel Jarseees as *Al Mihrasul Nathib*. Perumbadavam Sreeddharan was a well known novelist, and his *Oru sankeerthanam pole* published in 1993. It deals with the life of the Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky. It was translated by an Egyptian poet Mohammed eid Ibrahim. BM Suhara's *Nilavu* which revolves around life of naseema translated by Lamar al shishkali under the title *Lavul Qamar*. *Kaalam* a novel by MT Vasudhevan nair has been translated by Sahar Tawfeeq in 2011. Most significant poem *Veena poovu* by N Kumaranashan translated by Aboobakkar nenmanda as *Asharath Saakthwa*. Kamala Surayya, one of the major Indian English writer, *Ya Allah* translated by Moythu moulavi and UAE poet Shihab Ganim under same title. Sree Narayana Guru's *dhaiva dasaka* also translated by Shihab Ganim. He translated a collection of poems of various writers such as vailopilli, sachidanandan, Balendra chullikad, and kadamanitta under the title *Mathwal lail gasaaid mina shalkvilgalb*. He translated poems by sachidhanandan under the title *kaifa ilthahara mayakovsky va hamsoona kadeesa ukra*. Some notable stories were translated by VA Kabeer. Among them NP Muhammad's *Vellam* as *Vajafathil Abaan* , kamala das' *Unni* in to *saairulaheera* and PK Parakkadav's work published as *faathura*. Vaikam Muhammed Basheer's *nooru roopa note* translated as *varkathu miathu rupiya* and his *balyakala sakhi* also translated by suhailwafy.

Translations from Arabic to Malayalam

Morethan fifty works were translated fro Arabic to Malayalam. Holy Quran translated to Malayalam and kerala much influenced by its Islamic philosophy. *Alif layla va layla* was most celebrated work in Arabic. Many works of Galeel jibran translated to Malayalam. Poems of

Mahmood Darveesh also influenced much in the hearts of kerala. Recently, Translated works are *Awlad Haratin* by Najib Mahfouz (Egypt) as *Theruvinte Makkal* , Which deal wuth History semitic Religions. *Zanqa Bin Baraka* by Mahmood saeed (Iraq) translated as *Bin Baraka Theruvu* about Iraq and morocco conflict and Migrants . The work deals with poverty, individual freedom, democracy. His *Fuha Fi Al Fada* (A Portal in space) translated as *Soonyathayilekru pedakam*. It highlight the horror of war. Habib selmi (Tunisia) , His *Nisa al Basatin* (The woman of al Basatin) translated as *Tunisiayile pennungal* , about Tunisia , former French colony which resembles Europe in its Geopolitics. *Al – Mawt Amal shaqq* (Death is Hardwork) by khaled khalifa (Syria) translated as *Maranam Dushkaram*. It is about a journey of brothers with the corpse of their father, ordeal and cruelty they faced in that journey. *Wahdaha shajara al rumman* (the pomegranate tree alone) by Sinan Antoon(Iraq) translated under the title *Vella puthappikunnavar*, about the life of javad kasim and horror of war. Jamal Naji(Jordan), his *Indama tashikh al diab* (when the wolves grow old) translated as *chennaykkalkk vayasaakumbol*. A project report by N Shamnad The Palesine issue: an historical analysis translated to Arabic.

Conclusion

There was a great deal of literary exchanges occurred between middle east and kerala. Many works were translated to both languages. Translations from Malayalam to Arabic are less than that of Arabic to Malayalam. These are very important in terms of reconceptualising the history of middle east and kerala. Many people in kerala depend the employment opportunities offered by Middle East. Eventhough these people feel alienated, they remain thankful to this foreign land as it provides comfortable life to their family.

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