

## The Engraving of Civilization in Malayalam Literature

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**Abstract:** *The engraving of civilisation in Malayalam literature. How the evolution of Malayalam language and literature bears strong imprints of our culture. The diverging of ancient malayalam poetry. The impact of arrival of Europeans and popularity of English in Malayalam Literature. Also the impact that modernist movements like evolution theory, feminism, and dalith theory.*

**Key Words:** *Malayalam literature, engraving, feminism, kadhakali, dalith theory.*

The term civilization denotes the way of life of mankind in general. It includes areas like human relationship, manners, language, geography, farming, architecture, commercial relations, media, art, weather, migration and the like. Civilization is the sum total of life. As literature is the representation of life, literary works of a particular age will bear out the cultural imprints of the age. Literary works take root in the soil of civilization. If literature is the sum total of human life, it can not but be related to civilization.

The evolution of Malayalam language and literature bears strong imprints of our culture. A work of art very well reflects the characteristics of the age in which it is written. Malayalam evolved as a result of the contacts and conflicts at the national and culture levels. There are three different lines of argument with regard to the origin of Malayalam language. One view is that it originated from Sanskrit. The arrival of the Aryans and the kind of popularity Sanskrit gained during these days seem to substantiate the argument. Even though this argument is unacceptable the theory of the Sanskrit origin of Malayalam demonstrates the cultural amalgamation that occurred in the land. Another line of argument is that Malayalam originated from Tamil. Caldwell who put toward this theory analysed the difference in meanings of the words ‘*kizhakku*’ and ‘*mekku*’ in Malayalam and the so called parent language Tamil. The word ‘*kizhakku*’ means keezhdikku (low or bottom direction) and *mekku* means meldikku (high or top direction). But we have in the east the Sahya mountain ranges in the east (*kizhakku*) and the Arabian Sea in the ‘*mekku*’.

Caldwell found that these interpretations are acceptable for the Tamil speaking people. For them the Bay of Bengal lies in the east and the Sahya mountain ranges lies in the ‘*mekku*.’ When the Tamil speaking people migrated to this place, they used the words as such and hence the contradictions. The pure Tamil spoken in the five lands included in the Kerala Province evolved into Malayalam. A R Rajarajavarma attributes it to the characteristics of the Malayalam speaking people and the predominance of the Brahmin community. All these are cultural issues. The argument that Malayalam evolved from Draveedean language also highlights the same fact.

The works of art that emerged during the Sangha regime testify that before Malayalam came into existence Tamil was a popular and predominant vernacular here. Renowned historians recorded the history of civilization of those days only after a careful perusal of these works. Sangha literature very well reflects the art and civilizations of the age. They remain as testimonials of the life and custom of these days. The economic status, statesmanship, military strategy, sales and marketing, war and religiosity become subject matter for the poems. “*Puranaoro*” which is believed to be the oldest among the literary works of the Sangham Age is an ancient representation of Kerala culture. ‘*Pathittuppatti*’ remains a true representation of the rulers of that age and their rulings. Even though these works contain a lot of exaggeration, they reflect the culture of the age in which they were composed. The study of legends in the Sangha period is based on the civilization of the age.

The Sanskrit work ‘*Mahodayapuracharitham*’ composed by Tholan who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century based on Kulasekharaperumal, the one who honoured him, describes the good old days of Mahodayapuram. The Sanskrit work by Tholan entitled *Mooshakavamsam* is a prologue to the history of the Mooshaka dynasty. Scholars infer that the ancient folksongs in Malayalam literature were composed so that they might be used for worship which is the starting point of social life. Farming, love and death became the subject matter for these works. The folksongs reflect the ancientness and uniqueness of our civilization.

Ancient Malayalam poetry diverged into two streams: songs and “*manipravalam*.” Some scholars believe that the ‘perumals’ (rulers) who ruled our land from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> AD belonged to Tamil Nadu and their reign caused the spread

of Tamil literature and culture in this land and as a consequence folk song literature emerged. Folksong literature must be viewed as the continuation and dissemination of culture. ‘Manipravala’ literature is closely related to the ‘devadasi’ system that prevailed in our state. Most of the manipravala poems have a ‘*devadasi*’ as its heroine. The most ancient manipravala poem “Vaisikathanthram” belongs to the branch of literature called ‘ganika sahitryam’. This branch of literature is the fruit of the devadasee system. As Brahmins gained prominence, local rulers and devadasees enjoyed many benefits.

Early works like ‘Vaisikathanthram’ ‘Unniachi’ ‘Unniyadi’ and ‘Unnichiruthevi’ demonstrate the licentious life of the aristocrats of the age. The unbridled sexual instinct of the upper class is reflected in these works. The poems exhibit the rotten state of civilization in which sex plays the predominant role. “Unnineeli Sandesam”, a product of the ‘manipravala’ stage, is also a record of the socio cultural state of Kerala. Geography and history are woven into the poem. Country lanes, places, palaces, houses of worship, market places, harlot homes, ways of life, customs and association with other languages appear in this poem. ‘Unneneeli sandesam’ is an outstanding mirror of the civilization of the age. In ‘Chandrolsavam’, which is unique in ‘manipravala’ literature, we see the worst stage of the deterioration of civilization. The work brings to light the predominance of the Brahmin community, and how they were fascinated by the beauty of devadasees and the kind of immoral life they led.

It is believed that the middle age Champoos of the manipravala stage were made for the sake of temple arts like ‘Koothu’ and ‘padakam’. Teaching moral values was the primary aim of these art forms. Attempts were made to reproduce the legendary stories with a view to inculcating cultural values in the minds of the common man. These art forms were able to arouse people from cultural stagnation and inspire them through advice. Koodiyattam is the Kerala version of Sanskrit dramatization. Many things that are characteristic of Kerala culture were included in it.

The role of teaching moral values was primarily played by the clown. A sort of cultural union has taken place in Koodiyattom. We must not fail to notice that the origin and development of the art form ‘kadhakali’ is related to the king and the palace. A close examination of the legend brings to light the fact that the origin of ‘attakkadha’ is related to strife. It was a time when there was strife among the provinces in the state. It should be noticed that most of the Aattakkadhas end in murder. They were composed at a time when there existed strong protest against western forces. Whether the social background of the age made ‘kadhakali’ a representation of strife and murder is debatable.

It was the society and culture of the age that made Ezhuthachan the poet. Ezhuthachan had the fundamental aim of liberating the people of the cultural deterioration of the age. This was the reason why Ezhuthachan, leaving behind *The Ramanaya*, translated *The Adhyatma Ramayana*. Ezhuthachan knew well that his age demanded *The Ramayana* which portrays Rama as God, and not the one in which Rama is portrayed a man. Ezhthachan followed a way of translation which would instil devotion into the reader. His poetry was a sort of remedial medicine for the cultural deterioration that the age faced. The reason why Poonthanam composed the devotional *njanappana* was to instil devotion in the mind of the reader.

The best example for poetry becoming the mirror of culture is Kunchan Nampiar’s ‘Thullal krithikal’. Though he chose legends as subject matter his poetry was replete with contemporary society. Ezhuthachan and Nampiar had the same goal. Sarcasm or mockery was the means that Nampiar adopted. While living as a dependent of the king everything connected with the palace became a laughing stock for him. Nampiar attacked the social evils of the day through humour and sarcasm. No other Malayalam poet has ever used so sharp and powerful words to criticize the cultural retardation of those days. Hence in the search for civilization or culture the poems of Nampiar are very relevant. In his poems Nampiar portrays the social evils of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with microscopic accuracy. The poems of Nampiar incorporate multiple areas like social, cultural, economic, military and religious aspects of life.

The arrival of the Europeans and the popularity that English gained paved the way for the birth and development of new branches of literature like novel and short story. Novels and short stories are literary forms that are closely related to life and civilization. Novel paved the way for presenting life in a wider canvas while short stories needed only a shorter canvas to present life. The ups and downs of these literary forms became the indicators of social evolution. The first Malayalam novel “Indulekha” contains all the throbbing of the civilization of the age.

The genius of CV Raman Pillai recreated the bygone dynasties and their renewed forms in his novels. The burning issues of the downtrodden section of Kerala society became the subject matter for the reformation novelists. Marxist theory had its impact on these writers. This is an age in which the world of the fisherman as well as the world of the beggar is subject matter for the novel. Most of them became true representations of some incidents drawn from life. The spring season of the novel literature came into existence when the novelists began to look into the various aspects of life.

Branches of philosophy like the existential philosophy imported from the western world had their impact on the art and literature of Kerala in the 1960s. The novelist believed that existence is more important than the supreme soul and as human life is filled with fear and anxiety human existence is in torment. People began to think that life is quite insignificant. Such lines of thought had their impact on literature. The root cause of such lines of thought was cultural issues. When writers began to write about solitary men, they chose a different style of writing with which the reader was not able to compromise and a crisis arose. Modern criticism arose as a solution to the crisis.

The impact that modernist movements like evolution theory, feminism, and dalit theory has had on literature is worth good research. These movements have had great influence in the field of poetry and fiction. The wounds of man caused by wounded Nature has become subject matter for poetry and fiction. Feminist ideas like equality of man and woman and the injustice in assigning wageless but painful jobs to them had tremendous impact on literature. The torments undergone by the dalit community for generations and the consequent resentment appeared in the literature of the age. Even the flood and the pandemic of recent years have turned out to be good raw material for good literature.

It is undeniable that the culture and civilization of the age has always influenced and guided Malayalam literature. Non Keralite and non Indian streams of culture may have intruded into our culture occasionally. But there is a fundamental Kerala culture which is always subject to changes. Geniuses through ages have made good works of art based on this culture. Whatever you come across in literature may not be visible in life and culture. But the guiding force of literature is life and culture. Like life, literature is subject to changes. This evolution leads literature to new pastures. We can not even imagine the existence of a world of literature which is devoid of the cultural domain. Blockage of culture is blockage of literature as well.

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