

Constructing Modern World Malayali: English to Malayalam Translations in Periodicals at the Beginning of the 20th Century

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Abstract

It was by the end of 19th century, at the wake of the colonial culture, translation was chosen as the main medium for globalisation for the newly emerging intellectual class. Translated knowledge texts, particularly from English had a key role in constructing the consciousness of a global modernity among Malayalis. This study tries to follow the translations of the knowledge texts published in the early periodicals in Malayalam from 1890s up to 1930. Periodicals like Vidyavinodini, Sarada, Atmaposhini, Mitavaadi and Unninambudiri were selected for the study, because most translations of the knowledge texts appeared during this period. Economics, cosmology and the basic sciences were the main subjects concerned. Translations related to the disciplines of History, archaeology, anthropology and feminist studies also had appeared in these early periodicals. The translations generally tried to articulate the structural concordance of the outer world to prove that the world of the Malayalis was not different from it.

Keywords: Knowledge text translation, English to Malayalam translation, Early Malayalam periodicals, History of translation.

It is often said that the translation work *Paavangal* by Nalapat Narayana Menon set the stage for the golden age of translations into Malayalam. This may be true of literary translations, especially of European fiction. Yet translations of knowledge texts into Malayalam began as early as the 1890s. As early as that, knowledge texts in translation began reaching the Malayali readers through newly founded, progressive magazines that set to shape the new world of the literate Malayali. Even the earliest news paper like *Rajyasamaacharam* included translated works. But it was when

the number of readers with limited education, who refused to adopt English as their language of intellectual quest increased, that translated works become more influential.

The modern Malayali largely wrote in English at the outset. It may be noted that English periodicals began publications not only from the metropolitan centres like Madras, but also from places like Trivandrum and Calicut, such as, *West Coast Spectator*, *Malabar Review* etc. The new translated works appeared in magazines such as *Vidyavinodini* and *Vidyavilasini*, which were targeted at the progressive readers of limited linguistic reach beyond Malayalam.

Vidyavinodini

Vidyavinodini was established by C.P.Achuta Menon. The magazine paid greater attention to and showed special regard for knowledge writing. We can note that it preferred free renderings in Malayalam to word-for-word translations. One of the best and the earliest examples is the article *Panam* (Money). There is no way to ascertain whether it was a free translation or a literal rendering. In this exhaustive article, the description, related to the seven features of money, introduces Malayalam equivalents of some terms in economics. *Sahaja sarata, suvahyata, anaswarata, samanajattheeyata, vibhajyata, sthiramoolyata*, and *sujneyata* are coinages that were not in currency in those days. They might have proved easy to understand, for the Malayalis then, as a working knowledge in Sanskrit was more of a norm then, among readers, than it is now. Finding derivatives from Tamil for European terms had been the practice earlier, as found in the Bible translations. The new tendency of deriving Malayalam equivalents; as above might have been a trend which had been copied from the practice of Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran, who had tried such an example in the school texts, he had devised.

Another article, titled *Dhanavinimayam*, while introducing this basic idea of economics, refers to 'socialism and 'Communism'

(1065 Meenam). These alien terms were translated as Samudaaya swatwa vadam by the way of explanation. Here we find one of the first mentions about socialism and communism in Malayalam. “*Janangalellavarum avaravarepole thanne mattellavareyum vicharikkunnathaya (ennuvachal orikkalum varumennu vicharippan paatillathathaya) kaalathile ithu sadyamaakayullu. Athukonta samudaya swatwa vadam phalikkunnathaayal naattile dhanam kshayikkunnathinna oru margamaanennu spashta manallo. Enkilum ellaa raajyangalilum atidhanikatwatheyum athinirdhanatwatheyum atuttatutta kanumpol samajivikalil snehamulla sajjanamgal samudaya swatwa vaadikalakunnathu kashtamalla*” (p.184) This was mentioned seven years after the demise of Karl Marx and five years before F. Engles died.

The article, *Vayu* (Air) published in 1891, introduces certain terms different from its present usage (1066 Thulam; 1066 Vrushchikam). In this scientific exposition, *jeevavayu* (oxygen), *yavakshara vayu* (nitrogen), *angarakamlam* (carbon dioxide) are introduced. The article deals mainly with the dangers of air pollution. Another article, the same year, discusses, the possible effects of trade union, translated as *Vyavasaayi Sangham*; stress is given to the differences between *muthalala sangham* and *vyavasaayi sangham* and the advantages of the institution of *vyavasaayi sangham* (1066 Thulam).

It is clear that the articles dealing with the *Bhakshanam* (food) - touching upon food, digestion, cooking, vessels and hygiene, and the following are atleast retold ideas if not word-for-word translations (1066 Karkitakam). Others are on geographical and topographic studies (1067 Thulam). So too, is the article discussing the shape of the Earth with illustrations.

Manushyante pracheena avasthayum naveena avasthayum (The Ancient and Modern Condition of the Human life), which introduced archaeology in detail (1067 Mithunam) and P.Narayana Menon's Japan, a long article dealing with Japan's history and social

conditions (1074 Meenam) are others of the same genre.

Anantakoti brahmaandam, (The Cosmos, 1074 Meenam and Medam), is noteworthy for the close analysis of the topic and its different method of exposition. This article was published in consecutive numbers of the magazine. The name of the translator is not given. In this context, it may be noted that C.P.Achuta Menon had left the editor-ship of *Vidyavinodini* and T.K. Krishna Menon had assumed charge. This article acquaints Malayalis with many basic ideas pertaining to cosmology, perhaps for the first time. *Soorya mandalam* (today, *sourayootham*, solar system) *nakshatra mandalam* (galaxy) *akaasaganga* (The Milky Way), speed of light and light-years are the terms explained, The size of the universe was presented along with comparisons and examples. A detailed discussion ensures for the readers in a easy-to-digest way.

In the annals of the translations of knowledge writing into Malayalam, *Vidyavinodini* one of the earliest literary periodicals, holds a decisive place. It not only constructed popular examples of translations, but also introduced, new and essential branches of science like economics, hygiene and sanitation, topography and cosmology into Malayalam.

Sarada

Sarada was published from Thripunitura from November, 1904 (Vruchikam, 1080). It was a unique and novel feminist monthly. The magazine was published by women and was targeted for women readers. The publishers were T.C.Kalyani Amma, T. Ammukutty Amma and B.Kalyani Amma. Contributors other than the publishers were K. Padmavati Amma, C. Rugmini Amma, I.Devaki Amma, V.Narayani Amma, P.Madhavi Amma, S. Chellamma, Chambathil Chinnammu Mannadiar and many more. When publications was shifted to Trivandrum three years later, K.Ramakrishna Pillai and B.Kalyani Amma assumed the main role. With Ramakshrishna Pillai's banishment from the state of Travancore, in 1910, and with the seizure of the *Swadeshabhimani* press, *Sarada* ceased publishing.

Sarada's role in introducing fresh experiments in translation of knowledge writing from English has not been discussed at all. The most noteworthy contribution by *Sarada* has been a series titled *mahatikal*. It is a collection of the brief life stories of women who overcame their so called gender limitations and sufferings with a strong will and fortitude to work for the sake of social reform. Most of these appear to be abridged translations or free translations. Mentions are often found of the original works. Some sections have been translated directly. Most biographical sketches have been done either by B.Kalyani Amma or T.C. Kalyani Amma. We can assess the role played by these women in the histories of struggle and their resistance in shaping the lives of women like B. Kalyani Amma.

The initial story is that of Ananda Bai Joshi, a young, Brahmin woman of Pune, who went to the United States at the close of the 19th century, to study modern medicine. This story was published in two issues of *Sarada*, (1080 Makaram, 1080 Kumbham). She returned as a qualified practitioner and succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of twenty two. Her emphasis on social service is well documented. Stories of Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Frye are briefly told in the next issues of the magazine (1080 *Metam*, 1080 *Mithunam*, 1081 *Chingam*, 1081 *Kanni*). Florence Nightingale in nursing, especially on the war front and Elizabeth Frye in alleviating the poor lot of women prisoners have both been pioneers in their inestimable service to the society.

B.Kalyani Amma narrates the story of Lady Russell who was the spouse of Earl Russell who was beheaded in the 18th century on charges of treason. Lady Russell's firm will and ardent love have been well portrayed by the writer (1081 Makaram).

Lady Jane Gray occupied the British throne reluctantly for ten days and was later accused of treason falling a prey to the prevalent struggle between the British Catholics and Protestants. She was executed too. This woman's life is sketched touchingly by B.Kalyani Amma (1081 Mithunam).

British prisons were hellish places even in the early 19th century. The stories of two women, Sara Martin and Dorothy Pattison, who tried to improve the minds of the prisoners by educating them and providing spiritual teaching are narrated in the series *mahathikal* (1082 Chingam; 1082 Thulam).

Indian women symbolising courage of excellence such as Chand Beebi were also given a place in the series (1082Kanni). She was born at Ahmed Nagar. She was the spouse of Adil Shah, sultan of Vijayapur. She waged battle after battle and enthroned herself as the sovereign of most parts of south India. Her kingdom was ruined by battles and internal strife. Her love, generosity and fortitude sustained the land from total ruin. Her end was caused by her own commander's deceit. She posthumously declared the heroine of her land.

Another appealing and engaging story is that of Lady Grizel Bailey who supported the leaders of Scottish popular resistance movement in the seventeenth century. This story (1909 May) is one of woman's fortitude under duress: the Lady was born as the daughter of the Scottish leader Sir Patrick Hume. She became the spouse of another Scottish resistance leader, Robert Bailey. Lady Grizel took care of her father while he was in hiding and, also, when he was in flight to Holland. There was a change of reign in England and the families of Hume and Bailey were freed of charges. Consequently she returned to Scotland, with all the due titles restored. Her worth was recognised and she was idolised only later, in early 18th century.

Apart from the series, *Mahathikal*, women got a mention in *Sarada*, through the studies of women belonging to various nationalities. S.Chellamma wrote about American women, P.Madhavi Amma's article is on Parsi women. They both are, a combination of translation and free rendering of ideas in Malayalam. The former piece introduces the subject in the form of certain comments by the gentleman posted in the U.S. capital as a representative of the Chinese emperor (1081 Vrishchika). The sense of freedom and self reliance

of the American women are highlighted. Such an approach might have been adapted under the impression that it might encourage the development of modern women in Kerala. Otherwise, one is at a loss to see the logic of presenting a Chinese gentleman's view which holds no relevance to the Indian context.

Another article contributed by C.Andi Pillai (1909 May), is a lengthy study of the social conditions of Japanese women, as compared to those women of India, and also of Europe. The focus is on the rising social status of the Japanese women. There is an analysis of the prevalent conditions of the Japanese women of the past and of the modern days. There is ample evidence that the Indian women who were undergoing a lot of suffering and humiliation in contemporary society would learn from the models of the higher social involvement by the Japanese women.

Parsi women identify themselves with the western women in freedom of choices and their self assertiveness. It is this aspect which is focussed in the article on Parsi women. They are free to select their spouses. Yet, they give importance to family matters and show great modesty. These qualities are highly valued in the article.

The article *Streejanatthinte oupathika swabhaavam* (The Nature of Women, 1909 Jan.) makes a strong feminist reading of the human history. The article's argument is that women have contributed greatly to human society's cultural advancement and civilization which was later on distorted by the male hegemony.

Purushan ee ghattattilum poornamaya samudaya avasthayil vannu ennu parayan pattilla. Avan striyotum kuttikalotum anuyojichu varthichu. Ennal avan asthiran aayirunnu. Avan vettayatukayum yudhdam cheyyukayum cheytu. Ennal avan grihattil sariyayi paarttilla. Manushya samoohattinte kendram streeyum kunhugalum ayirunnu. Purushan thante alanju natappinnu sesham avitekku thirichu vannu (p.13).

The translation resisted the malecentric views which were newly formed in Kerala, which had its roots in the western milieu. Here C.S.Potti, the writer transposes the ideas of the original works in English, which is directed towards the European male centred social context of the 19th century. The language employed was strong, too.

There were many other works that needs mention as translations of science literature. C.Ramunni Menon's articles on health sciences finds Malayalam terminology for many scientific terms. Ingaalum (Carbon), bhaavaham (phosphorus), Ganthakam (sulphur), vindu (cell), Chuvanna naadi (artery), neela naadi (vein), raktasira (artriole), rasanaadi, jnaana vahini Vathanadi (nerves?), aamajalam (bile?) raktaasayam (heart), ingalamlam (carbon dioxide) Amlajanaka, (acidic ?) – are some such terms which are the author's own coinages. Many scientific terms are translated differently into today's Malayalam (1080 Makaram, pp.3-6).

The magazine itself gives comparisons of the original English terms and their equivalent Malayalam coinages. The magazine, *Sarada* had published Mrs. Isabel Brander's 'Talks on Health' as translated version obviously with her permission. It was titled *Arogya sastram* in Malayalam (1908 March). Original English terms for all Malayalam coinages of scientific terms were appended as foot notes.

Original (English)	Malayalam equivalent
Ligaments	<i>granthikal</i>
Joints	<i>sandhikal</i>
Muscles	<i>snayukkal</i>
Sinews	<i>snasakal</i>
Skin	<i>twak</i>
Mucous membrane	<i>sleshmaavaraniika</i>

Cartilage	<i>bandhini, asthigranthi</i>
Upper arm	<i>melkayyu, urdhwa bhujam</i>
Lower arm	<i>munkayyu, prakoshtam</i>
Elbow joint	<i>kaimuttu, kurppara sandhi</i>
Shoulder joint	<i>thol poott, amsasandhi</i>
Saliva	<i>uminir, lala</i>
Sweat	<i>viyarppu, swedam</i>
Skin oil	<i>twak tailam</i>

It may be noted that many terms were given Malayalam equivalents with Sanskrit derivations. A century ago, Malayalam clearly saw two clear possibilities for translation: local terms in Malayalam or equivalent Sanskrit terms with or without Malayalam suffixes. Today, Sanskrit coinages have gained greater preferred status.

This was at the level of words. A rare experiment adopted by Sarada is the practice of printing English originals along with their Malayalam translations, side by side, enabling comparison of structures of the sentences and larger discourses. The joint publishers were Swadeshbhimani Ramakrishna Pillai and B.Kalyani Amma. Whether they introduced this to assist the evaluation of the translation process or to help the readers who were adept in English terminology, can not be determined at this time.

Thunnal pani (Needle work, 1908 Sept.), *Sadharana thaiyal* (Plain sewing, 1908 Sept.), two technical articles and a brief biographical sketch of Miss.S.B.Williams (1909 March), are the bilingual works published. Miss Williams was an able educator who

functioned as the principal of Maharaja's Girls School, Trivandrum, and later, Government Women's College, for fourteen years. *Thunnal Paniyute Arambham*, the Malayalam translation, along with its original in English:

“The art of the needle is one of the most ancient and the earliest developed. It has been constantly referred to through out historic ages and is believed to have existed far beyond them; and it is an art that has at all times been especially associated with woman.” is translated as,

“Kalaavidyakalil ettavum puratanamayatil onnanu thunnal pani. Ee vidyayaanu mattu kalaavidyakalekkaal aadyamayi abhivrudhi ppedutha ppettittulathu. Charithra kaalangalil ee kalayepatti palappozhum parannjittundu. Ennal athinnu enthrayo mumpu thanne ee vidya natappil vannittullathayi janangal viswasichu varunnathanu. Ee vela mukhyamaayi streekale sambadhicha oru vidyayanu thanum” (1908 July, p.125).

The reader today can find that long English sentences with multiple clauses were divided into small sentences. So also, the necessary structural freedom was taken for granted in the above sample, for facilitating free translation.

Aatmaposhini

Aatmaposhini was published from Kunnankulam, a town of trade in Central Kerala. It was noteworthy for its variety of topics. The Malayalam poet laureate, Vallathol was the editor of *Aatmaposhini* for quite a few years. This magazine, which started publication in 1910, gave pride of place to science writing, including translations.

The first and foremost in instructional writing that appeared in the periodical were the contributions by K.Ramakrishna Pillai. A detailed elucidation, titled *Socialism athava samashtivadam* was published serially in several issues (1088 *Etavam*, 1088 *Mithunam*).

This adopts a fresh approach. *Mooladhanathinte udbhavam*, (The origin of Capital) *Paranthrees Raajya Parivartanam*, (French Revolution), *Samashti vaadodayam* (Origin of Socialism), are chapters that excel all thereto published works in explaining the topics they address. The first ever explanations of socialism and communism as we saw in C.P.Achuta Menon's *Vidyavinodini* do not detail the topics with as much clarity or precision. Ambady Narayana Menon's *Bandhanastha aayirunna Russia* (Imprisoned Russia), an article that appeared in *Mithunam* and *Karkitakam*, 1092 (July – Aug. 1917) examines the causes of the Soviet Revolution even when the historical events were unfolding. Events discussed are the happenings such as the abdication of the Russian emperor, the succession of the publicly elected representative parliament, the Duma. They span from March to July, 1917. This work shows that decisive political changes reached the reading public of Kerala more or less concurrently, through the then Malayalam media.

Aatmaposhini gave equal importance to humanities such as history and social science as well as sciences such as natural history and physical science. Sheikh Ramzani's *Tripoli vazhakku* (1087 Metam) discusses the history and contemporary political situations in Tripoli in a non-western view point. Another important translation is a letter from Napoleon translated by Attukaal A.S.Padmanabha Pillai. This is a letter from Napoleon in exile to his son analysing the French polity and politics. It was his last letter (1088 Kanni-Thulam).

Aatmaposhini gave special importance to translations of science writing and biographical sketches of scientists. Some works of novelty in reading experience were *Praanibhukkukalaaya Chetikal* (Carnivores plants) by Edamarathu V. Sebastian (1087 Edavam), *Thel* (Scorpion) by C. Jacob Job (1088 Dhanu), Attukal A.S.Padmanabha Pillai's *Janthukkalute Saisavakaalam* (The Infancy of animals, 1088 Dhanu), *Vandukal* (Beetles) by N.Sankara Pillai (1088 Kumbham), all articles on Natural history, and V.Kunhikkannan's biography of the famous naturalist Sir Oliver Lodge (1099 Dhanu).

They are not mentioned specifically as translations. Yet, the technical terms in Malayalam are followed by the original English terms, making the readers aware of the fact that they were the free renderings of English works in Malayalam, if not exact translations. Some examples are words and phrases like *vidhi* (Destiny), *manushyante bhaagadheyam* (Human destiny), *charvaakanmar* (Materialists), *goodangalaayi* (occult), *British science samajam* (British Science Association), *Ottakappullimaan* (Giraffe), *iyyal* (May flies), *pollal vandukal* (Blister beetles) etc. These articles on science, in general are comparable to similar articles today in the high quality maintained. Probably the subject matters were derived from some English source such as encyclopaedia or similar works.

There are other translated contributions such as *Chandra mandalathile Aagneya girikal* (Volcanos in the Moon) by M.Subramania Iyer (1094 Meenam), a lengthy essay, and Puthezhatu Rama Menon's *Jeevarakshakku Velichattinte Aavasyam* (The necessity of light for survival - 1088 Makaram).

Swadeshaabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, who was exiled from Travancore, had been given a medal (Travancore Patriot Medal) by the organisation of Malayalis in Malayasia in 1912. A report of the event appeared in *Aatmaposhini* (1088 Kanni, Thulam). The report presents an interesting sample of translation of English into Malayalam and also the strong stand taken by Malayalis of Malaysia on political events in Travancore. The Diwan of Travancore had deported Ramakrishna Pillai on charges of treason. As a defence, from Malaysia, he was awarded *Thiruvithamkoor Swadeshaabhimani Biruda Mudra* by the Malayalis there. On their behalf, a barrister at the British Malaysia supreme court, Mr. P.K. Nambiar had put his signature on the award certificate.

Mitavaadi

Mitavaadi did not give any special importance to works of translation. Still there appeared two notable works of translation in

the years 1915 and 1916. One was a translation of article by A.V. Sharma on white Jews of Kochi - *Kochiyile Vella Yoodar* (1916 Feb.). This sheds light on the not so well-known history of the white Jews of Kochi. Another one is *Jyothi Saastram* (1916 Jan.). This article describes the solar system and provides a comparison of the planets. There is a mention about a planet called Vulcan situated in between the sun and Venus. This work is not a piece of direct translation. It could be a free rendering in Malayalam.

Unninambudiri

We find the translation and free renderings in *Unninambudiri* to be a continuum of the tradition evolving from those found in *Vidyavinodini*, in the 1920s. The Initial articles were related to history and geography. Thereafter there appeared biographical sketches and articles pertaining to physical sciences and life sciences. One such notable is *Misrah Raajaakkan maarute Shavakkallara* (1098 Metam). It deals with the funeral rites of one of the Egyptian dynasties. This article by M.R.K.C is interestingly written. “*Ithaanu Misrah desathu undaayirunna sooryavamsa raajaakkanmaarute savasamskaara charithram. Ee vaka karmangalum naam anushticchu varunna karmangalum thammil thaarathamyappeduthi nokki lokathinte saamanya charithram vallathum grahippaan tharamaayaal valare nannaayi*” (p.400). Writers of the period believed that there was a common thread running through the entire human history. This idea is delineated well in the concluding line cited above.

Darwinum parinaama vaadavum, an article by way of direct translation from English, presents Darwin’s life and his thoughts in Malayalam (1101 Chingam). This must be the only one of its kind in Malayalam. Evolutionary theory, for Darwin, was one of the physical world. This translation by G.Sridharan Potti carries touches of cultural hegemony, today known as Social Darwinism. As in: “*Parirnaama vadam thanne punarjanmatthe atisthaanamaakki ullathaannallo. Innu manushyaraanennu karuthipporunna palarkkum vasthavatthil manushyayai theerunnathilekku iniyum ethrayo parinaama*

vaadattinu atisthaanam aayulla punarjanmangal kazhiyendathayi irikkunnu” (p.680).

Kampiyillaa kampi athava vydyuta telephony deals with the wireless broadcasts widely in use in the United States by then (1098 Vrishchika). *Vydyuti charithram* describes the potential of electricity (1098 Dhanu). *Anjooru varsham kazhinjittu* covers the predictions by H.G.Wells on the distant future of the world and its occupants.

The most notable among direct translations from English is a life sketch titled *Meerabai*. Cherukkunnathu Narayanan Nambudiri translated this lengthy sketch(1102 Vrichukam, 1102 Dhanu). A.V.Vasu Nambisan contributed in 1929, *Ente Kutta sammathangal*, (My confessions) an auto biographical sketch of Tolstoy which runs into three consecutive issues of the magazine.

Inferences

An overview of translations of knowledge literature that appeared in a representative selection of early Malayalam periodicals of the period from 1890 to 1930, a span of forty years, has been given here.

Some observations are recorded here for further research.

Today in Malayalam, many terms are taken directly from English as transliteration. But in these early works, the same terms were used as Malayalam translations. *Ingaalam, angaalam* (carbon), *bhavaha* (Phosphorus), *Ottakappulliman* (Giraffe), *nakshatra mandalam* (galaxy), *Jeeva vaayu* (oxygen), *Yavakshara vayu* (nitrogen), *angaarakamlam* (carbon dioxide), *samudaaya swatwa vaadam* (Socialism, 1890), *samashtivaadam* (Socialism, 1913) etc. are examples.

The translators are found to be following contemporary western theories in the branches of knowledge like economics

and cosmology. They are also interested in history, archaeology, anthropology and the feminist studies.

Women readers must have been motivated highly by the sense of independence palpable in the western writing and the prevailing familial and social system there.

The philosophy behind the translations is that the world has a structural concordance and that the world of Malayalis is not disparate from that.

Translation was chosen as the main medium for globalisation for the newly emerging intellectual class, at the wake of the colonial third culture. Translated knowledge texts, particularly from English, had a key role in constructing the consciousness of a global modernity among Malayalis.

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