
B. Venkatacharya's Novels in the Kannada Literary Polysystem and the Founding of the Novel in Kannada

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Abstract

This paper looks at the dynamics of the appropriation and establishment of the novel as an independent genre in Kannada literature through translations during the last decades of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th Century. With Itamar Even-Zohar's concept of 'literary system as a polysystem', as the theoretical anchor, the corpus of translated novels of B. Venkatacharya is looked at as a unified genre. Through this perspective, the role played by B. Venkatacharya's Kannada translations of Bengali novels in establishing the novel in Kannada literature is examined.

Background

Kannada literary historiography considers the history of the Kannada novel as nothing more than the history of the realist novel. According to Kannada literary histories¹, the realist novel marks the beginning of the novel as a form in Kannada, and some of the greatest achievements in novel writing have taken place under the realist paradigm. The question to ask is: what preceded the realist novel? Little importance has been given to, or critical attention focussed on, describing and analysing the precursors of the realist novel. In documenting the development of the Kannada novel, Kannada literary histories completely ignore the content, the form and status of the early novels, the sheer numbers of such works, and negate the existence of the innumerable translated novels during that time. Effectively then, the history of the Kannada novel in these literary histories, begins only in 1899 when the first 'independent'² or 'autonomous' realist novel – Translation Today Vol. 4 No. 1 & 2 2007 © CIIL 2007