TRANSLATIONS

As an art, translation is as old as original authorship and has a history as honourable and as complex as that of any other branch of literature. It helps to remove the barrier that is placed by a difference in language between the writer and the reader. The advantage of a good translation is that it opens stores of knowledge both ancient and modern, to readers, otherwise invisible to them.

CHAPTER IX

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Divergent views have been expressed about the art of translating poetry. They range from the view that (1) 'Poetry cannot be translated', that 'poetry can be translated only into prose', (2) that all translations is a compromise - the effort to be literal and the effort to be idiomatic, to the approach that (3) 'the life-blood of rhymed translation is this, that a good poem should not be turned into a bad one. The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty'. There may be, successes as well as failures in this art, but the fact is that many have
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Divergent views have been expressed about the art of translating poetry. They range from the view that (1) 'Poetry cannot be translated', that 'poetry can be translated only into prose', (2) that all translations is a compromise — the effort to be liberal and the effort to be idiomatic, to the approach that (3) 'the life-blood of rhymed translation is this, that a good poem should not be turned into a bad one. The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh notion, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty'. There may be, successes as well as failures in this art; but the fact is that many have
run the race and reached the goal. Translation is an ever-
continuing process and its utility is universally felt.
During literary revivals, it has served a major source of
enrichment of literature.

When English education spread throughout Kerala,
English classics of various kinds were introduced in the
school and college curricula. The rise and development of
English learning coincided with translations of prose and
poetical works from that language into Malayalam. These
translations helped to build up the scholarship of Malayalam
writers. A brief survey of the early attempts at translating
English poetry into Malayalam is attempted in this chapter.

Shakespeare is the first English author, who attracted
the attention of Malayalam translators on a large scale. He
is also the most powerful source of English influence on
Malayalam writers. "It was in the year 1856", says
Dr. K.M. George, "that Shakespeare appeared first in Malayalam
literature, when Commen Phipose adapted 'A Comedy of
Errors' under the title Almarattam." This was followed by

1. Dr. K.M. George, Western Influence on Malayalam Language
   Literature, p.148.
Chidambaram Vedhyar's translation of Lamb's version of
As You Like It, in 1882, and the prose renderings of three
scenes from Julius Caesar, Macbeth and Othello. Kandathil
Varghese Mappilai's Kaelhinidamanakam (The Taming of the Shrew),
published in 1893 may be considered the first attempt at
adaptation of a Shakespearean play in total. In his version
of the play, he introduced several changes in the names of
characters and places of action. The maiden attempt to
translate the blank verse in a Shakespearean play was made
by A. Govinda Pillai in 1897 when he published his Lear
Natakam (King Lear). Since then, a number of translations
and adaptations appeared in the language during the first
half of the century; but none of them are faithful versions
of the originals.

The translations of K. Kochunni Menon (Twelfth Night,
Dwedasa Nisa, published in 1954) and K. M. Penicker (King Lear,
Lear Rajalvu, published in 1959) deserve in this context
special mention. The first has prose and verse judiciously
interspersed. While the prose of the original has throughout
been rendered into prose, the verse has been reduced into
verse only at its most poetic levels. The translator has
managed, while sticking to the meaning of the original every
where, to bring out the full spirit of every passage including
the subtle as well as broad aspects of humour. K.M. Panicker's translation is a strictly faithful rendering of both prose and verse with remarkable success. He has shown enviable skill and felicity in a most difficult field and his work is bound to extort the admiration of all discerning readers. Similar praiseworthy efforts have been made by translators like K. Ramakrishna Pillai, P. S. Nair, P.S. Venkiteswaran and a few others.

It is not my purpose to enumerate here all translations from Shakespeare. Suffice to say that many have been stimulated by Shakespearean plays to translate them; and many were benefited by their translations too. Poets like Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Thampuran and Yakkak Vallathol were also drawn to Shakespeare's plays, and inspite of their inadequate knowledge of that foreign language; the first of them translated Hamlet, and second gave a free rendering of The Merchant of Venice. Of course, in their efforts they were helped by friends well-versed in English.

The translators of the language did not leave Shakespearean sonnets untouched. They have rendered many of them into Malayalam. The translations of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are meant mainly for the average - educated person's reading
and not for the capabilities of a highly intellectualised community. However, they have succeeded in stimulating enthusiasm for Shakespeare in the Malayalam reading public; though most of them are mere paraphrases of Shakespeare's texts. Even those which are couched in a pleasant style, have failed to suggest the verbal uniqueness of the original. But then, it must be remembered that Shakespearean plays and sonnets are a law unto themselves, and defy the ordinary principles of poetic translation.

Noreen writes:-

Lyric and Non-Lyric English poems, since the Elizabethan age, have been for Malayalam translators a fresh pasture-land to graze on. Odes, elegies, sonnets, hymns and narrative and descriptive poems of various kinds from important authors have found their way into Malayalam through their hands. In the meanwhile these foreign poetic forms have also inspired original composition in the language. The important sources of translation to the early writers were F.T. Palgrave's The Golden Treasury, One Thousand and One Gems of English Poetry, edited by Charles MacKay and An Anthology of World Poetry, edited by Mark Van Doren. Most of the translators, whether they were poets in their own rights or not have maintained a remarkably high poetical standard. "The best
translators have been those", says Alexander Fraser, "who
have proved their talents in original poetic composition.
Dryden, Pope, Shelley, Rossetti and Longfellow, rank equally
high in the list of original poets as in that of the
translators of poetry". The worth of this statement with
reference to Malayalam poetry, shall be made by quotation
and comparison.

About those who try to translate lyric poetry, Max
Noradu writes:-

"I have a high opinion of a man who establishes his
ability to translate poetry. He fulfills a mission
which demands character no less than talent. He must
have a supreme mastery of his own language, almost to
a higher degree than an original poet. He must also
be thoroughly familiar with the language from which
he is translating, so that he misses none of its finest
nuances.........Of course, the man to whom transla-
tion is a routine task, encounters no difficulties.
He just proceeds in a mechanical and rule-of-thumb
manner. But the artist realizes that there are crucial
intricacies which are beyond his powers. When he finds
face to face with such an epiphany, he is reduced to
silence and sinks down in veneration. This humble muteness
is the translator's most eloquent tribute to the poet
whose music he has attempted to transcribe for another
instrument of speech"3


4. cf. the Original Text at the end, No.66.
A Govinda Pillai's *Newarathna Malika* (1901) is the first collection of translated poems in the language. It contains at least one example each of the English poetic forms like Ode, elegy, hymn and narrative poem. In the preface the author writes: "There is a trend in English poetry to break away from the conventional poetic technique and follow new methods where sense is given primacy over different sound. In this respect English poems differ from poems in our language. I hope the popularisation of these new methods will enrich our poetry. It is with this goal that I translate here some English poems from the anthology *One Thousand and One Gems of English Poetry*. The nine English poems translated in the book are: (1) *The Ode on Intimations of Immortality* by Wordsworth (Ode) *The Universal Prayer* by Pope, (3) *Eve's Morning Prayer* from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, (4) and *Psalm of Life* by H.W. Longfellow (all hymns); (5) *Elegy written in a Country Church Yard* by Thomas Gray; and (6) a few stanzas from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (Elegy), (7) *The Hermit* by Thomas Parnell, (8) *Edwin and Angelina* by Goldsmith and (9) a few stanzas from *Excursion* by Wordsworth (all narrative poems). Compare the poet's translations, given under Original Text: in the end of this book with the following lines:

4, cf. the Original Text at the end, No. 88.
from Gray's Elegy:

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

and also with the concluding stanza from Edwin and Angelina:

'No, never from this hour to part,
We'll live and love so true;
The sigh that rends thy constant heart
Shall break thy Edwin's too.'

There are two famous portions from Shakespeare translated in this volume. One is Thaophiles and the other is Harune. They show that the translator has entered with exquisite taste into the manner of the originals and has succeeded most happy in his translation of them.

K.C. Kesava Pillai published his anthology Manasaasalam, in 1907. It is mostly a volume of translated poems from English. The Originals are taken from Shakespeare, William Cowper, Charles Mackay, Mrs. Hemans, J.R. Lowell, T. Campbell, Benjamin Franklin and Tennyson. It is wrong to call all poems in the collection mere translations. They are, as the poet truly claims, free

5. cf. Poet's Translation under Original Text at the end, No. 89.
6. cf. poet's Translation under Original Text at the end, No. 90.

7. cf. Poet's translation under Original Text in the end, No. 3.
renderings with suitable modifications to accommodate the changes of place, style and treatment. Besides providing variety for Malayalam poetry the poet also intended to introduce the themes and styles of treatment of English poetry into his own literature. A brief study of some of the translations will show how the poet has sincerely tried to transfuse completely the ideas of the originals.

There are two famous portions from Shakespeare translated in this volume. One is Thathopadesam and the other is Karuna. The first is from Hamlet. The precepts of Polonius to his son Laertes delivered in the formal sententious way attracted the poet. The result was a good piece of translation of this paternal advice. A glance at it and the corresponding Shakespearean lines will be rewarding.

Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy,
For the apparel oft proclaims the man;

The poem 'Gawaran' is a Malayalam rendering of 'Light shining out of darkness'. It is from the 5th volume of William Cowper's poems published by Hayley. MANUSHYA DAURBALEYAM is

7. cf. Poet's translation under Original Text in the end, No. 3.

8.
an adaptation of 'Human Frailty' from the same collections. A third piece Napoleon is a translation of the poem entitled 'Napoleon and the British Sailor', by Thomas Campbell. This appears in the book Pleasure of Hope. The selection groups together Campbell's earliest poems and latest poems - all in the cause of freedom. The poet's passionate devotion to liberty is made conspicuous in these lines.

'Napoleon' in Kesava Pillai's collections called Sahithya Vilasam is a translation of Tennyson's poem 'Home they Brought Her Warrior Dead.' The poet has retained well the spirit of the original in his translation. See how he has done it in the case of the following stanza.

Rose a nurse of ninety years,
Set his child upon her knee -
Like summer tempest came her tears
'Sweet, my child, I love for thee.'

8. 'Olney Hymns' Poems addressed to Delia (Miss Theodora Jane Cowper, poet's first cousin). The Lyrical Ballads and Pleasure of Hope.

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform" - (First line).

9. "Weak and irresolute is man;
The purpose of to-day
Woven with pains into his palm;
To-morrow rends away".  - (Human Frailty) - first stanza.
K.C. Kesava Pillai has also translated Portia's oft-quoted speech on mercy in *The Merchant of Venice*. The way in which he has rendered the lines quoted below will establish the uniform excellence of his translation.

The quality of mercy is not strained
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. 12.

Kumaran Asan's early attempts in the field are a few charming translations of English lyrics, seen in the anthology *Venemala,* published in 1925. But they appeared earlier in some magazines between 1903 and 1917. Some of the translations in the collection are *Cheriysava* (Little Things), *Neythukarude Pattu* (The Weaver's Song) and *Nammude Moodupadham* (Our Mask). The poet of Asia by Edwin Arnold. Arnold was the first English poet who introduced the glory of Buddhism to Western readers.

10. When Burns had been dead two years, and Cooper was dying, two volumes of poetry calmed the attention of British readers. They were *The Lyrical Ballads* and *Pleasure of Hope.*

'...I love contemplating - apart
From all his heretical story' - ('Napoleon and the British sailor' - first line.)

11. cf. Poet's translation under Original Text in the end, No. 4.
12. cf. Poet's translation under Original Text in the end, No. 5.
has admirably preserved in the translations, the tone and spirit of the originals. This can be verified by going through the translation of a passage from E.C. Brewer's *Little things* given in the end. Here is the first stanza of Brewer's poem:

Little drops of water, little grains of sand
Make the mighty ocean, and the pleasant land
Thus the little minutes, tumble though they be,
Make the mighty ages of eternity.

Asan was a faithful disciple of Swami Vivekananda. His philosophy inspired Asan to translate some of his poems written in English. He also translated the favourite hymn of the late King Edward VIII, published in the *Dawn* magazine from Calcutta.

*Sree Buddha Charitham* is a free rendering of *The Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold. Arnold was the first English poet who introduced the glory of Buddhism to Western readers. Arnold's poem shows how he was able to enter into the very innermost sanctuary of Indian spiritual thought and aspiration. Strongly influenced by Buddhist ideals Asan undertook the pleasant task of translating the English man's attempt at climbing the higher domains of Eastern Spirituality.

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Asan's translation of the following lines from The Light of
1
And, subtly revealing the Indian spirit:

Reading of English books had stirred the poet's imagination
in the composition of his famous poems Karuna and Chandala
Bhikshuki. They are based on episodes in the life of Buddha.

In the preface to Karuna, the poet has requested those interested
to read Professor Lashmi Narasu's book The Essence of Buddhism
for the source of the poem. Similarly it is evident that the
poet had read The Gospel of Buddha by the American writer
Dr. Paul Carus before he started composing Karuna.

to explain the Vedic religion to the West. The most important of them is *Rajayogam*. Kumaran Asan has translated this book into Malayalam. The authorities of Sri Rama Krishna Mission wrote back to Asan in reply to his request for permission for translation: "Our President is glad to hear that a very competent man had been good enough to translate the most difficult book of Swamy Vivekananda into Malayalam". Asan's *Maithrayi* is the translation of an English book by a Bengali writer Sita Natha Thatva Bhoosen. The book deals with the religious culture and social behaviour of the Indians of the Vedic times. The ethical treatise *Manasakthi* is yet another prose-translation. The original is *As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen. The poet's last venture in translation was an English novel *Tara* by Col. Meadows Taylor.

More translations of English lyrics in the first quarter of this century came from the pens of C.S. Subramanian Potti, M. Rajaraja Varma, C.P. Parameswaran Pillai, and M.R. Krishna Warier. Potti translated Arnold's *Sonnet* and *Rustum* and Tennyson's *Morte D'Arthur*. M. Rajaraja Varma translated Goldsmith's *The Hermit* and a few of other poems. Michael (Wordsworth), *Dora* and *Knock Arden* (Tennyson) were rendered into Malayalam by C.P. Parameswaran Pillai. M.R. Krishna Warier made the language richer with his adaptation of Thomas
Campbell's Lord Ullin's Daughter.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai: Changampuzha's translations of lyrics cover a wide range of poets. Kollolamala and Manjakkilikal are two collections of translations. The first consists mainly of translations of English poems only. Two poets presented at the beginning of Kollolamala are the Elizabethans, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nash. The poems respectively are The Passionate Shepherd to His Love and Spreading, with their pastoral settings. See how deftly Changampuzha translates the first stanza of Marlowe's poem:

Come and live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and dales, dale and field
And all the craggy mountains yield.

unique as the first attempt that brought together in one volume, The collection also contains translations of Shelley's sonnet on The Grasshopper and Cricket and Byron's The Bride of Abydos (only the lines that describe zuleika). Examine this specimen of beautiful translation of the oft-quoted line

15. cf. poet's translation under Original Text at the end, No.90.
16. cf. poet's translation under Original Text at the end, No.91.
from 2. Never did sun more beautifully steep
shelley's skylark:
pleasure, valley, rock, or hill,
ever see I, never felt, a calm so deep.
the river glides at his own sweet will;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest
thoughts.

Changampuzha has also translated Wordsworth's The Complaint
of a Forsaken Indian Woman, To a Butterfly and The Rainbow.
Browning was the most influential English poet on Changampuzha.
4. And a man's reach should exceed his
imitations
This is evident from his numerous adaptations and translations
of that poet. (For more details see Chapter V, p. 141).
The Anthology of World Poetry edited by Mark Van Doren was the
poet's source for his translations.

P. Sankaran Nambar's Praasathana Thrayam; published in
1942, is a landmark in the history of Malasalan poetry. It is
unique as the first attempt that brought together in one volume,
translations of masterpieces of five eminent English poets.
The poets are Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelley, Browning and
Tennyson and the poems, Ode to Duty, Ode to the West Wind,
the two sonnets, 'Upon Westminster Bridge' and Shakespeare's sonnet no. CXL1, and Andrea del Sarto and
Ulysses. Mark how Nambar translates the following passages.

1. If Winter comes, can spring be far behind

17. cf. Poet's translations under Original Text at the
end, Nos. 92, 93, 94, 95.
2. Never did sun more beautifully steep
   In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill,
   Never saw I, never felt, a calm so deep;
   The river glideth at his own sweet will:
   Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
   And all that mighty heart is lying still.

3. In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes
   For they in thee a thousand errors note,
   But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
   Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.

4. Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
   Or what's a Heaven for.

The translations exhibit the singular union of ease, animation, and harmony of numbers with the strictest fidelity to the originals. These specimens of perfect translations in Prasthana Trasyam emboldened many translators who were shy to enter into this field as they thought only

'Poole rush in where Angels fear to tread'.

Nalappat Narayana Menon, G. Sankara Kurup and Changanapuzha have translated some larger English poems. They are respectively Edwin Arnold's The Light of Asia, (Puraasayya dipam), Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (Vilasa Tahari) and The Song of Songs (Divya Geetham). All the three are significant contributions to the language.

Almost all poets of the New Age came under the influence
of English poets at one or another. Encouraged by the example
set by the pioneers in translation some later poets also sped
their way into this field and breathed a new life into Malayalam
poetry. As a result the literature is today rich with several
examples of their imitations, translations or adaptations of
English poems. Some of the prominent contributors in the mid-
century are Vypoppilil Sreethara Menon, Vennikkulam Gopala
Kurup, M.V. Krishna Wariier and M.P. Appan. It must now be
admitted that there have been, and there are men of genius
among the moderns who have vindicated the dignity of this art,
so ill-appreciated and who have furnished the readers with
excellent translations of English writers of modern and old times.

Malayalam poets have not only completely transfused the
ideas of the originals in their translations, but have imitated
the manner most happily. The uniform elegance in the makes one
think that it is the result of the singular coincidence of the
talents of the translator with those of the original author
that stood them in good stead.

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