CHAPTER 3

THE CONTRIBUTION OF KERALA TO SANSKRIT LITERATURE

- AN EVALUATION
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India is a union of cultural diversity. Sanskrit is one of the major factors that unify the different diversities. Kerala has been a fertile soil for Sanskrit writings. Sanskrit tradition of Kerala is remarkable for its quality as well as quantity. In Kerala unlike many other parts of India, Sanskrit was taught by almost all sections of the people. Malayalam language has been enriched with the adaptation of abundant Sanskrit vocabulary in its ordinary conversations. Actually all systems of knowledge were recorded in Sanskrit in Kerala. This Sanskrit tradition helped the production of a number of literary works belongs to different genres like drama, poetry, etc.

Recording and analyzing the available literary documents in a scientific and methodological manner as a systematic academic discipline is almost done by Raja in his work CKSL. Even though there were some great attempts like the celebrated volumes of KSC by Ullur.S.Parameswara Iyer and KSSC of Vadakkumkoor Rajarajavarma Raja, they were written in Malayalam without sound methodological approaches. The work of Raja depends on them both, but he has evaluated all the topics before accepting and rejecting them with a systematic methodology. Raja reproduces the available material for the
proper understanding of the history of Sanskrit literature in a new perspective. Hence his work was a benchmark which motivated and opened up a number of fresh researches in the field.

The Structure of the Work

*CKSL* comprises of thirteen chapters. The chapter division is done mainly on three methods. One is based on the royal families which patronized Sanskrit literature. The second one is based on major personalities like Melputtur Nārāyanabhaṭṭa, Bilvamaṅgalam Swami and Rāmapāṇivāda. These chapters are also inclusive of references on their contemporaries like Ravi Cākyār. The last device for division of chapters is based on the types of literature like *mahākāvyas*, *kāvyas*, dramas and so on. Up to the last century in Kerala and in almost all other parts of the country, the development of culture and literature was related with the royal families who patronize the cultural activities in general. So as a person belonging to a well-known royal family, Raja accepted the well known method of following the literary contributions of royal families in the creative writings in Sanskrit. Raja might have thought that, it may be more convenient to trace out the history with the cultural background of such royal families. The sense of historicity of Raja enabled and helped him to trace out and place the contributions from Kerala in Sanskrit through Royal families.
The book CKSL is a product of devout research and has been carried out under the guidance of C.Kunhan Raja, the well known Indologist, Professor and Head of the Department of Sanskrit in University of Madras.

The text is divided into thirteen chapters as follows:

The Uniqueness of the Study

The work of Raja is one of the major contributions in the field of Sanskrit ethnical literary history. It helped a lot in Sanskrit research. Not only he exposed the rich tradition of Sanskrit but also adapted a new path of methodological discipline throughout the study.

Raja accepts a new method of categorization. First of all Raja presents royal families of Kerala as seats of literature or centers of learning. The social atmosphere of Kerala has allowed the upper class
communities to study Sanskrit. The social atmosphere of Kerala was very much congenial for the development of Sanskrit literature. Raja examines this in detail, in the introductory pages of the study: ‘The Nambūtiris, though numerically small, were at the top in the spiritual and social hierarchy and were well-versed in the arts of war and peace. Many rulers like the kings of Ampalappuḻa, Iṭappalli and Parūr were themselves Brahmins, and most of the aristocratic Nambūtiris were very big land-owners who could wield great power and influence. Their peculiar system of primo-geniture, confining inheritance to the eldest son of the family who alone could marry in his own caste, and allowing younger brothers to enter into companionship (sambhandha) with the women of matrilinear KṢatriyas, Nairs or Ampalavāsis like Vāriyars and Piśāroṭis, helped not only to preserve the properties of the Nambūtiris intact, but also to create a leisured class of intellectual Brahmins free from the worries of day to day existence, who could devote their entire time to the cultivation of literature and arts. More than that, this system of hypergamy was responsible for the study of Sanskrit to penetrate and permeate into the lower strata of society, even to the Ampalavāsis and Nairs, unlike in other part of India where it was confined to the Brahmins and KṢatriyas.’
Scientific Approach

Another peculiar characteristic of the study is its scientific approach. The *CKSL* has made itself a reliable source book. It keeps maximum accuracy in chronological information. The style of handling controversies is another feature. Rāmapāṇivāda episode is a remarkable example of Raja’s unbiased stand in controversial matters. Some scholars including Ullur.S.Parameswara lyer are of the opinion that Kuñcan Nambiar, one of the great poets of Malayalam and Rāmapāṇivāda a prolific writer in Sanskrit are identical. Ullur, the well known poet and the author of *KSC* was the major advocate of this argument. M.R.Balakrishna warrier, A.N.Upadyaye and L.A.Ravivarma support this view. Scholars like K.Godvarama, Vadakkumkoor Rajarajavarma Raja, the author of, C.Kunhan Raja, P.K.Narayana Pillai were against this view.

Raja on the other hand deals this matter as the following. First he states his view in crisp and accurate words that ‘both poets belonged to the same house and were almost contemporaries need not necessarily prove that they are identical.’ The logic which substantiates his view is as follows. He presents it point by point by citing necessary references.
At First, Rāmapāṇīvāda refers one Nārāyaṇabhāṭṭa as his teacher, in almost in all his works. Kuñcan Nambiar never mentions Nārāyaṇabhāṭṭa. At the same time Nambiar mentions his two teachers, Dronampiḷḷy Potti and Bālaravi Kurup, who were not referred by Rāmapāṇīvāda.

Raja opines that one researcher should never come into a vague conclusion by depending only on colophons in chronological controversies. To quote ‘The two Malayalam works Śivapurāṇa and Ekādaśī māhātya, generally attributed to Kuñcan Nambiar were written under the patronage of the chieftain Manakkoṭ Accan named Bālarāma; This Manakkoṭ Accan flourished only till 1740 AD when his property was confiscated by the King of Cochin, and presented to Pālli yat Accan. Hence these two works must be assigned to a date earlier than 1740 AD. It is said that some manuscripts of these two works, as well as those of Śrīkṛṣṇacarita and Pañcatantra contain colophons attributing them to Rāmapāṇīvāda. It is doubtful whether we can attribute all these works to one Rama on the basis of some stray colophons.’

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Keralite Identity

Recently research has become more subtle. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies are in prominence. In spite of being broad or descriptive information, a critical analysis of a focused topic is desirable. Thus regional or ethnical approaches in studies are very relevant in the present day context. The documentation of the contribution of a particular region is a first step towards that end.

It is important to note that his research work has been conducted during the period 1943-1946. This period is significant since the preliminary discussions on the formation of Kerala state were in vogue at that time. Raja starts the introduction as ‘Kerala the land of Malayalam speaking people.’ The formation of Kerala union is in the year 1956. One can feel the spirit of the researcher towards his roots in language and culture. Another noticeable thing is that the book CKSL was first published in the year 1958 from Madras University, which happened just after the formation of Kerala state. Raja penned a lot of research articles on Malayalam and Kerala Sanskrit, The article Kerala pronunciation of Sanskrit is a good example for this. Thus the identity of a Keralite is apparent in the various writings of Raja.
Trend Setter

It is a fact that the CKSL motivated or inspired a number of studies to follow the pattern that has been adapted in this study. Many researchers have taken keen interest to survey the depth and vastness of Sanskrit literature of the particular region by the influence of CKSL. Some of the examples were given by Raja himself. To quote Raja, “It was the first book of its kind aiming at a systematic and well documented survey of Sanskrit literature of a particular region in India and was favourably received by scholars and students. Similar attempts at regional surveys of Sanskrit literature were made later. P.Sriramamurthy of Andhra University worked on The Contribution of Andhra to Sanskrit Literature and C.S.Sundaram’s thesis was on the history of Sanskrit literature in Tamilnadu up to the 13th century. Similar surveys of literature of Kashmir, Bengal and Bihar have been made by S.C.Banerji. Other works are being attempted in different parts of India.”

The remarkable thing is that all these studies are done based on the model of the study of Raja.
A list of such attempts is listed below:

3. Contribution of Bikaner in the Development of Sanskrit Literature, by Diwakar Sarma, Rajasthan University, 1968
5. Contribution of Nepal to Sanskrit Literature by Taraprasad Joshi, Bihar University, 1970.
6. Contribution of Mewar to Sanskrit Literature by Chandrasekar Purohit, Udaipur University, 1970.
**CKSL** is an authentic work which is very popular among researchers and the people who pursue the tradition of Keralite Sanskrit tradition of literature. The work comprises of a huge number of Sanskrit writers and different varieties of Sanskrit literary works. This shows that, the deep rooted relation of Sanskrit in Kerala culture. Raja’s efforts are really praiseworthy because the searching of the works, the tracing out of their author’s details, explaining of the work-content and more importantly uniting them in a systematic manner are not at all easy task. Raja was so confident on the merit of this research work. To quote him ‘I have, however, resisted the temptation to make a thorough revision now to bring it up-to-date; partly because I feel that there has not been any basic discoveries to make my work out of date, and partly because much of the later research work in the field is built as superstructure on the foundation given in my book and often refer to the page number in it, especially the bibliographical book on Kerala Sanskrit Literature by Prof.S.Venkitasubramania Iyer.’ Rāmapāṇivāda episode is a fine specimen for Raja’s unbiased view and critical approach.
Notes

4. *ibid.*, Intro. p.XIII.
5. *ibid.*, Intro. p.I.