

INTERFACE BETWEEN LANGUAGE, SCRIPT AND RELIGION: A SMALL FLEETING LOOK INTO ARABIMALAYALM OF MALABAR REGION IN KERALA, INDIA

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Although there is a wide-ranging stiff of inquiries into religious languages until recent times, the interface of language, script and religion as subject matters significant to bilingualism or multilingualism has been comparatively little investigated. The translations of holy texts such as Bible, Quran, and Geeta into multiple languages are some of the works came under preview. This paper as a continuum also makes an attempt to make out the linguistic and cultural effects of the spread of Islamic religion, especially with regard to preferences of ritual language and orthographic systems among Mappila Muslims in Malabar. Sawyer (2001b) writes that “Language and religion share a very long and a very close history and it is perhaps surprising that this Concise Encyclopedia of Language and Religion is the first of its kind” in reference to Concise encyclopedia of language and religion edited by himself along with J. M. Y. Simpson in 2001.

Though the religious language itself is a well-studied field (Keane, 1997), the modes that language and religion intermingle to generate language contact is almost unexplored terrain in the domain of language studies or translation studies. This paper is a small effort to show the close bond between varieties of features of Islamic religion especially its diffusion and language contact and associated linguistic engagements in Malabar region. The lack of interest in this type of study for the Indian academia in general and external academia in particular in the past times may be because they were so precipitous in secularism that they didn't want to easily grow to be attentive into the profundity of religious convictions and life.

Linguistic researchers have always focused their attention on the study of various dialects of particular languages within the framework of the discourses relating to their evolution. In that sense, this part aims to draw round the development of Arabimalayalm and the various nuances that played into its development as an independent means of communication. Arabic was used for the religious requisites by Kerala Muslims .But instead of relying upon the existing script which was available; Muslims developed a certain script, a form of mixed Arabic with Malayalam script. The later historians called this Arabimalayalam.

Ferguson's (1982) book is a reliable for the study of interaction between language and religion and it shows the ways how the language spreads through religion. He says “the distribution of major types of writing systems in the world correlates more closely with the distribution of the world's major religions than with genetic or typological classifications of languages” (p. 95). As Christianity initiated a distinguished Latin script to inscribe the

previously unwritten languages where ever it spread, Islam introduced the Arabic script where ever it spread. Ferguson refers to the preservation of the Hebrew alphabets by Jews to inscribe the several other mother tongues they have attained over the centuries and he brings instances of Yiddish, Ladino, varieties of Arabic and Persian and other languages as evidence of the potency of the religiously-derived preliminary teaching of literacy in Hebrew.

Arabi-Malayalam is a peculiar blending of Arabic script and Malayalam language. The varieties of this language can be seen in different parts of the Non-Arab world where Arabs had engagement of trade, propagation and rule. "This is Malayalam vernacular with Arabic script, which is properly modified and innovated with a number of new letters to include all Malayalam sounds. Here could say that a new method had been invented in Kerala to learn this south Indian language, Malayalam through Arabic Script". (Nadvi, 2003). The focus of linguistic researchers is always on the study of different dialects of certain languages within the framework of discourses that are interconnected to their evolution. In a similar way this part of my paper aims to draw around the development of Arabimalayalam and the multiple shades that played into its progress as an independent means of communication.

It goes without saying that this area of study has stirred up widespread interest among linguists and experts to large extent and new outputs have been coming in different disciplinarians. It can be deduced that the foundation for this variety of Malayalam was laid by a trade interaction process during the time when Arabs came in large numbers to Malabar for maritime trade and commerce. This, along with the religious and cultural relations with a section of people inhabiting the region along the South-Western coast of India, led to the development of this form of script. No authoritative source has been found to locate its origin or to outline its age. But one can say that the script's origin was due to the commercial enterprises of Arab merchants with Malabar. Mappila Muslim's contributions and their role in developing this script still need a lot of research and documentation. Nevertheless, the influence of this meticulous script on Muslims in Kerala, particularly those in Malabar, can be mapped out, which is really one of the focal points of this paper. This amazing script is much enough to give the answer for the question how did the Arab mercantile and religious propagators who arrived in Malabar for trade and religious requirements communicate with the local inhabitants.

P.K. Muhammad Kunhi (1993) is of the opinion that the Arabs who came to Malabar for trade often settled down in the region, and married indigenous women. Similarly, the local people in Kerala who had to interact with the Arabs might have gone through many complexities for communicating each other. There might have been efforts which were conscious and unconscious to overcome this complexity. Arabi-Malayalam emerged as a result of the same. This certain script was called Arabimalayalam because it was written with Arabic script and was invented by the Arabs. In the further ages it was the Mappila community who mostly employed this script. Yet all the Muslims in all over Kerala used only this script for their learning of religion till the last decades and even now most of the *madrassas* (primary religious schools) follow the same script to impart the basic knowledge of Islam. It has been observed that till recent time when the tradition of letter writing was widespread among Muslims in Malabar especially to their family members abroad in Middle East countries, the aged people used to make use of this script.

Despite the fact that Arabs carried their language along with them as they spread from one country to another for different purpose whether it is for religious propagation or trade, it was only with the help of natives that they could extend these processes encompassing formation of new script, elementary teachings and all other social transactions. Arabic having possessed an

incomparable prominence among Muslims that goes beyond being just another form of human speech made these endeavors much easier. For them it was the means of expression through which God had chose to deliver his final revelation to mankind.

As mentioned before, Where ever the Arabs reached, they used to introduce certain script a mixed form of Arabic script with the language of the concerned region and they tried best to intermingle with the language and culture of those regions. The Arabs who entered Persia used Arabic script to write the Persian language and in due course Persian script became Arabic for centuries. Muslims from Arabia stepped into the Indian sub-continent in the commencement of H.E. first century. Crossing the threshold of Sindh under the headship of Muhammad bin Quasim, they spread Arabi-Sindhi language in that province. Due to their movement towards Punjab the emergence of Arabic-Panjabi language was occurring. Once they reached into Tamil Nadu, there emerged Arabi-Tamil and Arabi-Kannada when they reached into Karnataka.

The presence of scripts such as Arabi-Punjabi, Arabi-Sinhalese etc in line with Arabi-Malayalam can be seen even in places where political power was not exerted. It was the Arabs who created the script for the Turkish language which used to be only a spoken language. Malaysian language and some languages of the Middle-East region are written using Arabic script. Although these languages did not accept the influence of Arabic Grammar, or syntax, many common words of daily use are of Arabic origin. The Arabic script was also adopted for Gujarati by the Gujarati speaking Ismaili community of Gujarat even if it was mainly restricted to Ismaili literature in Gujarati. Gujarati in the Arabic script is still written and used as a means of communication by some members the Bohrah community of Mumbai and Gujarat. (Ahamed ,1976 pp.45-46).

It was the Arabic script that laid the base for the Arabi-Malayalam characters. The necessary changes were made on the twenty eight letters of the Arabic language by using lines, symbols and dots so as to denote the Malayalam sounds. Arabimalayalam thus got a unique alphabetical order. The reformation of the script was implemented from time to time and that led to the increase of letters in the alphabet for Arabimalayalm from 35 in the beginning to 50 at present. Today with advance and progression of present Malayalam Arabimalayalm script also has been modified almost like the alphabets in Malayalam. (Ahmed Kutty,1989)

Any attempt to identify this process of transliteration in among Muslims in Malabar shouldn't fail to realize their socio-cultural and sociopolitical dilemma. Keeping a distinguished identity in terms of script as they had already their own identity in terms of dress code, style and worship etc the ethnic particularism of Muslims didn't pose any menace to the smooth endeavor of state/nation for a united script pervades the entire Kerala. Consequently many religious terms and phrases were borrowed from Arabic and freely used in their missionary activities and many works were produced in abundance over the centuries. This literature though laid without much attention after the dominance of Malayalam and Malayalam script endorsed by print modernity still posits great historical and religious value for the community.

We can find two motives of vital importance behind the emergence of Arabimalayalam. First, Muslims have showed disinclination towards translating words, phrases etc which entail a kind of religious importance for they were afraid of their meaning being deformed. The script of Arabic facilitated Muslims to write in their mother tongue and impart religious tutoring without having to translate religious idioms or deforming their intonation by having to write them in a script that is completely different from Arabic. Second, Since more than a few Muslims became skilled at reading the Quran in Arabic resulting numerous Muslims being capable of reading and often writing Arabic while being incapable of reading the scripts usually used for their mother-

tongue i.e. Malayalam script . For them it was easier to write their mother- tongue in Arabic than learning another script. This relentless thirsty to learn Arabic and religious texts prompted literacy among Muslims especially women.

The survey of literary inter-connections of Arabimalayalm is possible only by a thorough investigation of its multiple genres and adaptations. Many interfaces between Arabimalayalm with Literatures from Malayalam, Tamil, Arabic and Persian can be found by a systematic scrutiny of the plethora of texts written in Arabimalayalm. *Muhyadheen Mala* (1607), the first text written in the genre of *Malappattu* is built upon the tradition of *bhakti* poetry which was prevalent in Arabitamil and is greatly influenced by the bhakti movements in Tamil and later in Malayalam.

The theme of the text is borrowed from the pan Islamic history, the hagiography of Sufi Saint Muiyadheen of Bagdad, Iraq. *Muhyadheen Mala* in other way can be said as parallel of *pillai* poetry of conventional Tamil language. It is how we can see many works were translated/ adapted/ transcreated to Arabimalayalam from different languages like Tamil, Sanksrit, Arabic and Persian. Translation as a site of interface caters to the trans-nationality of Malabar Musilms. The Persian novel *Qissae- Char Darvesh* was translated into Arabimalayalam in 1883. This was six years before O. Chandhu Menon wrote *Indulekha* (Rahman, “Mappilamarude” 34).The inexorable endeavors by Moyinkutty Vaidyar , the famous poet of Mappila literature made voyages into different parts of India even he spent around six years in Tamilnadu in search of inputs to write in Arabimalayalam. His work *Badrul Muneer Husnul Jamal* is a long narrative poem that talks about romanticism in a very interesting and fascinating way which made it alive for readers till today. This poem was based on the accounts provided to him of the reign of the Persian king Moinuddin Shah that he presents the story it in Indian background. The storyline revolves on the love between the monarch's daughter Husnul Jamal and the minister's son Badrul Muneer, and how the lovers are faced with stiff opposition. Though Vaidyar was an Ayurvedic physician by profession his passion towards writing songs and singing was remarkable and it is reported that he used to write medical prescription in verses.

A lot of works from Sanskrit have been translated into Arabimalayalam that consist of, *Panchatantra*, *Astangahridaya*, *Amarakosha* and accounts of tales about *Amarakosha*. Abdur Rahiman Musliyar of Puthiyakath near Ponnani was one of the translators of that time and he translated many medical texts from Sanskrit into Arabimalayalam. Some of these works are *Yogarambha*, *Mahasara* and *Upakarasara*. Bible was also translated into Arabimalayalam. Moin Kutty Vaidyar Memorial Centre for Research located in Kondotty, Malappuram district, Kerala and Grace Educational Society and C.H chair in Calicut University are some of the rare organizations engaged with finding out and preserving this old and dilapidated Arabimalayalam texts written decades or centuries ago.

The verses in Arabimalayalam have been adapted to many art forms both in Mappila and non-Mappila traditions. The performing art culture of Mappiala Muslims such as *Daffimuttu*, *Oppana*, *Kolkkali* are seen as the adaptations of poems written in Arabimalayalam. The songs of these artistic performances were initially composed in Arabimalayalm and later in Malayalam language. *Mappila Ramayana*¹ an oral narrative is even told to be written in Arabimalayalam. It was passed on through different generations and compiled in 1976. More or less alike is the adaptation of *Pakshippattu*. ‘*yakshaghana*’ a performance tradition that can be seen in the

northern parts of Malabar is the adaptation of *Pakshippattu*. A thorough reading of both of these will be enough to put in the picture of translational interfaces that happened from and to Arabi Malayalam irrespective of religious diversity/disparities.

The intensity of expression, which reflects overriding in Mappila Literature, provides Arabimalayalam poetry a high aesthetic position. The implications of the socio-political and cultural backdrop in which it had prospered as a “counter poetic theology” and as an “alternative literary mission” commands serious academic consideration to Arabimalayalam Literature (Rahman, “*Muhyiddeen Mala: Oru*” 33). The linguistic interfaces of many languages and the inter-literary relationship between Tamil, Malayalam, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit demand the attention from the scholars of translation studies in particular and as well as literature in general.

The immigration of people from Malabar to different parts of middle east countries especially the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain from 1970 onwards on a large scale added swiftness for this process of preservation of Arabic bonds in multiple ways. The direct familiarity of Arabic words attained from experience of job place helped the people to keep their attachment to Arabic, the language they believe to be the language of Heaven, the language of Islam, the language of prophet Muhammed (pbuh). Similarly, as Ferguson said “all religious belief systems includes some beliefs about language” (1982, p. 103).

In this way to sum up, Linguistic bond added with transformation is a general effect of religious conversion. Making an attempt to elucidate the course of conversion to Islam in Makassar in Indonesia, Cummings (2001) takes an inventive view. Instead of just presuming that religious conversion is an issue of substituting old convictions with new, he puts forward that, what was central was the introduced language and its texts. The Makassarese, he argues, perceived Islam as it was embodied in Arabic language manuscripts, and their conversion resulted from the high status and special powers they attributed to written texts. Almost similar or the same can be seen in the case of Malabar and the Muslim community there especially this will be very evident when we try to analyze the things keeping the problems between landlords and tenets as backdrop that was fuelled with the support of the colonizers particularly the British.

Needless to say, now this area of study has evoked considerable interest among linguists and experts on culture to the extent that some of the new researchers especially from this region of Malabar have started to embark on working on the issues related to culture and language in different ways. The questions of identity, religion, culture and language that are abounding in the contemporary literary field have been creeping to the hearts of the newly emerging scholars. I hope this paper will be a torch light in the long process of taking Malabar and the Script of Arabimalayalm and discourse around them to the forefront of academic domain. This Paper doesn't aim at bringing the entire edifice of Arabimalayalm, instead some of the nuances that interface between the language, culture, script and translations.

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