

Mappila Ramayanam: A Retelling of the Story of Rama and Sita

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Abstract: Ramayana is a “multi voiced entity, that has been retold millions by times, across cultures. This paper focuses on delineating the plurality with which the retellings exist and the need to acknowledge the existence of every Ramayana ever told, contextualizing them in particular time and space. For the purpose, three retellings, specifically, Valmiki Ramayana, Adhyathma Ramayana and Mappila Ramayana have been considered.

Keywords: Ramayana, Valmiki Ramayana, Adhyathma Ramayana, Mappila Ramayana, Paula Richman, Ramanujan, Plurality of Existence.

Ramayana is “a multi voiced entity, encompassing retellings of the Rama story that vary according to historical period, regional literary tradition, religious affiliation, genre and political context.” (Richman, 161)

Paula Richman summarizes the major cause of the diversity in the Ramayana tradition by quoting Romila Thapar's observation as written in ‘The Ramayana Syndrome’ that “Ramayana doesn't belong to any movement in history for it has its own history which lies embedded in the many versions which were woven around the theme at different time and place.” The Ramayana appeals to different people in different myriad ways, depending on the time and place in which they are located. While Rabindranath Tagore glorified the book as an illustration of the poetic truth, Gandhiji considered it to be an ideal rule book to be followed by his countrymen. Whereas for scholars like Romila Thapar and Paula Richman, they considered The Ramayana, not as a mere text but as a tradition that has to be researched with scholarly precision to bring out the diversity with which such diverse tradition emerged. Quoting Romila Thapar's words, “Different versions of Ramayana represent the articulation of different communities and are reflections of alternate perceptions that exist in society.”

It is believed that the story of Ram and Sita that once began as an oral tradition was compiled and retold by the Sage Valmiki in his book *Ramayana*. Written around 5th century BC in Sanskrit, many additions were made to Valmiki's version in a span of 500 years that follows till date. Along with Valmiki's Ramayana, there are hundreds of other tellings of the story of Ram and Sita in different parts of the world. Ranging from Afghanistan in the west to Bali in the east, the story of Ram and Sita had done a wonderful travel accumulating and absorbing diverse cultures and languages. According to Syed A Sayeed, “Different texts as retold by different people provide an infinite variety of narrative possibilities, commensurate with the entire range of possible human experience waiting to be realised.” In terms of its longevity, geographical horizon, use of aesthetics suited to a particular culture, language and literature, religious denominations etc, *The Ramayana* is equal only to Holy Quran and Bible. In the essay titled ‘The Ramayana: Theme and Variation’, Romila Thapar considers the epic to be an expression of a certain historical consciousness, even though the events which it describes may not be historically authenticated. In fact, this point put forward by Thapar reflects the futility in trying to raise communalism in the name of a character that has no sort of affirmative historical information. In her opinion, the epic encapsulates “the universal ethics of battle between good and evil with a large number of subsidiary themes relating to ethical behaviour in a range of human relationships.” Further she adds that the epic functions as a vital source of link between the classical and the local traditions, providing enormous opportunity for the local traditions to leave out their footprints in the classical work. This further helps in inclusion of a broader range of geographical locations in the work. Thapar further highlights the significance of the Ramayana by focusing on the use of text to propagate Vaishnavism.

The story of Ramayana differs with respect to the different forms that it acquires, owing to the differences in linguistic, social and religious dimensions. It would not be wrong to say that different tellings of *Ramayana* takes place in particular contexts, influenced by the regional culture, religious affiliation and linguistic features of the community.

A brief summary of the *Ramayana* story that has been retold millions of times by different people across time and space is as follows:

Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, wins the hand of princess Sita, but was exiled with his brother Lakshmana for fourteen years. Sita is abducted by Ravana from the forest and later follows Rama's efforts to save Sita with the help of an army of monkeys. The allies reach Lanka, kills Ravana and rescue Sita. Sita was then asked by the countrymen to prove her chastity whereby she undergoes the fire ordeal and being vindicated by Gods lives happily with Ram in Ayodhya. Then follows the Ram Rajya.

As detailed by Paula Richman in her work *Many Ramayanas: Diversity of narrative tradition in South India*, *Ramayana* is not a text, but a tradition that is as diverse as humans are: being recited, performed, painted, sculpted and written down through diverse channels of culture. Richman is right when she describes *Valmiki Ramayana* as “the story of Ram with which majority of western *Ramayana* scholars are most familiar.” Further she adds, “Valmiki *Ramayana* is one among the many *Ramayanas*, rooted in a particular social and ideological context.”

Ramanujan urges as to view different tellings neither as totally individual stories nor as divergent from the real version by Valmiki, but as the expression of an extraordinarily rich set of resources existing throughout history, both within India and wherever Indian culture took root. Further Ramanujan adds, “These various texts not only relate to other texts directly, to borrow or refute, but they relate to each other through this common code or common pool. Every author, if one may hazard a metaphor, dips into it and brings out a unique crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a fresh context.” Thus Ramanujan likens the *Ramayana* tradition to a pool of signifiers that includes plot, characters, names, geography, incidents and relations arguing that each *Ramayana* can be seen as crystallization.

The focus of this paper is to show the changes in a retold text using the suitable conceptual tools of

literature and to locate the original and the retold texts in their Structure of Feeling and literary tradition. For my purpose here I focus on the reading of ‘*Mappila Ramayana*’ as a retold version of *Adhyatma Ramayana* with a brief analysis of *Valmiki Ramayana* in the background, through the episode of conversation between Shurpanakha and Rama. I have tried to foreground *Mappila Ramayana* in order to set out the key assumptions informing different tellings of the story. I have also tried to emphasize the diversity and significance of renderings of the *Ramayana* in other genres by taking *Mappila Ramayana* that is being recited in the form of ‘Mappilapattu’ or Mappila Songs.

The three versions of the *Ramayana* story namely, *Valmiki Ramayana*, *Adhyatma Ramayana* and *Mappila Ramayana* will be readlocating them in a particular time and place and thereby detailing the differences that the Shurpanakha episode undergoes with respect to a particular culture and tradition.

The first section of the paper deals with *Valmiki Ramayana* written around 5th century BC in Sanskrit. The work is believed to be written by a sage named Valmiki in 24000 verses and is further divided into seven sections named, Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkinda Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda and Uttara Kanda. Moreover, it is mentioned in Section IV of *Valmiki Ramayana* that “Valmiki composed the entire history of Rama and Sita when Rama had obtained his Kingdom and that he composed it in 24000 slokas and it consist of 500 sections, divided into six Kandas written in a sloka form”, which was divinely suggested by Lord Brahma himself. Here, the poet has used the literary device of self- insertion where the poet himself is a character in his work.

The Shurpanakha episode is detailed in the seventeenth and eighteenth Sarga of Aranya Kanda. Shurpanakha is enamoured with Rama and the description of Rama as seen through Shurpanakha goes thus: “Rama was like a celestial, having a leonine chest, mighty – arms, with expansive eyes resembling Indra”. The chapter further deals with the differences in their appearance: “Rama was graced with a beauteous countenance, that Rakshasas had a hideous face; Rama had slender waist, she had a huge abdomen; he had expansive eyes, she had terrible eyes; he was gifted with an elegant hair, she had coppery

hair; Rama was of a delightful presence, she was of an unsightly presence; Rama had a sonorous voice, she had hideous voice; Rama was youthful, the Rakshasi was an old hag; Rama had mellifluous accents, she had harsh accents; Rama is ever abiding by justice, she was unruly; Rama is handsome, she was ugly.”

What follow is Shurpanakha's advancements towards Rama for convincing him to abandon Sita and marry her and Rama's response to her advancements. The conversation between them is as follows;

Shurpanakha. Wearing matted locks, and equipped with bows and arrows, why hast thou along with thy wife come to this region haunted by Rakshshasas? It behoveth thee to say what the object of thy visit is.

Rama. There was a king named Dasharatha endued with the prowess of a celestial. I am his eldest son known among men by the name of Rama. This is my younger brother Lakshmana, serving me. This is my wife, known by the name of Sita. Commanded by my father and mother, I in obedience to their mandate, desirous of acquiring religious merits, has for the purpose of securing righteousness, come to the forest for dwelling here. I also am anxious to know that whose daughter art thou? And what is thy name and what thy lineage? Possessed of a captivating form, thou appease to me as a Rakshasi. Tell me truly why thou hast come here.

Shurpanakha. Listen, O Rama. I will relate everything truly. I am a Rakshasi, capable of wearing shapes at will. My name is Shurpanakha. Striking terror into the hearts of all, I rule this forest alone. My brother is named Ravana. Thou mayst have heard of him. And he that is given to long sleep – the mighty Kumbhakarna, the righteous Bibhishana, which never serves the Rakshshasas, and the brothers Khara and Dushasana renowned in conflict are also my brothers. Rama, I have surpassed them all in prowess. At first sight of thee, I approach thee, thou best of men, as my husband with love. I am endued with power, and range about at will by virtue of my strength. Become my husband forever and a day. What wilt thou do with Sita? Deformed and unsightly, she is not worthy of thee. I am fit for thee. Do thou look upon me as a wife. This unsightly grim unchaste and human one with lean abdomen will devour up, along with this brother of thine. Then having thy wish, in company with me, thou wilt range the Dandak surveying the various mountain summits and forests.

Rama. Gentle one, I am already wedded; this my

beloved wife. To females like unto thee co-wife-hood is exceedingly miserable. This young brother of mine is good looking and is of an excellent character; he is graceful and is till unwived. He hath not yet tested the pleasures of a wife's company and is desirous of having a spouse. And he is youthful and of an inviting presence. By doing so, thou O supremely beautiful damsel, will not have to fear a co-wife.

After hearing about Lakshmana, Shurpanakha immediately let go of Rama and asks Lakshmana to marry her.

Valmiki Ramayana is believed to have been written in the Treta Yuga or the Age of Mankind that witnessed the rise of two avatars of Vishnu, Parashurama and Rama according to legend. Valmiki starts his Ramayana by emphasizing on the qualities of Rama, in the form of a conversation that he has with Narada; Valmiki. Who at present in this world is alike crowned with qualities, and endued with prowess, knowing duty, and grateful, and truthful, and firm in vow – who is qualified by virtue of his character and who is ever studious of the welfare of all creatures? Who is learned, hath studied society, and knoweth the art of pleasing his subjects? And who alone is ever lovely to behold? Who hath subdued his heart, and controlled his anger, is endowed with personal grace, and devoid of malice; and whom enraged in battle, do even the gods, fear? Great is my curiosity to hear of such a person.

Narada. Do thou Listen! Rare as are the qualities mentioned by thee, I will, O Sage, having duly considered, describe unto thee a person endued with them. There is one sprung from the line of Ikshwaku, known by the name of Rama.

Valmiki later emphasizes the fact that Rama is an avatar of Vishnu and it is Vishnu who agreed to take birth as Rama and be the son of Dasharatha. However, he was described as an ideal character that is destined to perform actions that is totally in compliance with rules of the society. *Valmiki Ramayana* depicts Rama as an ideal man who possesses all the positive traits needed for an ideal human being. Rama is described with fine imagery and with utmost precision in details regarding his body and appearance by contrasting it with the Rakshasi Shurpanakha who is described as a character with traits that are not considered positive or superior during the time in which it was written.

Considering the time period in which *Valmiki Ramayana* was written, the society of that time is

believed to have practised the Varna system by which the society was divided into different Varnas. Thus considering the characters in *Valmiki Ramayana*, the reason why Rama was described as an ideal man can be attributed to his place in the social hierarchy where he belonged to the aristocratic clan. Whereas, Shurpanakha is described as a Rakshasi owing to her lower status in the then society.

The second section of the paper deals with the Shurpanakha episode as detailed in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* written by Thunchathu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, a pioneer of the Bhakti tradition, in the early 17th century Kerala. It is a Malayalam retelling of the Sanskrit work *Adhyatma Ramayana* in 'kilipattu' format. 'Kilipattu' or parrot song is a genre of Malayalam poems in which the narrator is a parrot, a bee or a swan. It is believed that Ezhuthachan used the 'Grantha' script, which was widely used to chant hymns in traditional Vedic schools, to write the *Adhyatma Ramayana*.

The episode detailing with the love overtures of Shurpanakha is present in the Aranya kanda section. The story retains the basic pattern as in *Valmiki Ramayana* but is much briefer and has some differences in emphasis. The episode is as follows;

*A Rakshasi, living in Janasthana Who can
take any form she likes Saw the footprints of
a feet
Adorned with Lotuses, flag and a
Vajrayudha,
Goad, Mesmerised by the beauty of the feet,
Entered the hermitage of Rama out of
curiosity.
Seeing Lord Rama who was shining like one
thousand suns
Who belonged to the clan of Sun, who
destroys karma as well as Sin, Who is divine,
valorous man, bewitcher of mind, who is full
of illusion, Who is equal to the moon, who is
Madhava and is the killer of Madhu, Living
happily with Janaki, she was afflicted by the
arrow of God of love, And took the form of a
pretty lady and raining a pretty smile,
Slowly told the consort of Goddess Lakshmi,
“Sir, who are you? Please tell me whose son
are you? What is the reason for you coming
here
With matted locks and dressed in bark? I*

*would tell the truth about me earlier
As you would definitely ask about it later.
I am the sister of the Rakshasa king Ravana.
Shurpanakha, who can assume any form at
will
I am living in Janasthana near my brothers
Khara, Dhushasana and Tsara, Since I am
not able to understand who you are,
Oh, treasures of mercy please tell me all the
truth.*

Then follows the conversation between Rama and Shurpanakha similar to the one in *Valmiki Ramayana*, where the Rakshasi tries to convince Rama to marry her. However, Rama declines the arguments put forward by Shurpanakha saying,

*“She who is Janaki is my wedded wife,
And I should not forsake her for any reason,
The sorrow caused by a co wife is very
troublesome And you would not be able to
bear that pain.
Lakshmana is my brother. He is chivalrous
and young, And you by all means, is
comparable to Goddess Lakshmi, And it is
definite that you both match well,
And so without any delay go and tell him.”*

While Shurpanakha in *Valmiki Ramayana* was described as an ugly demon who is not aware of her ugliness, Shurpanakha in *Adhyatma Ramayana* is merely described as 'the one who is capable of assuming diverse forms at will' and thus using her power approaches Rama as a beautiful lady. Moreover, she falls in love with the footprints of Rama, which bear the divine marks of the lotus, thunderbolt and goad. Moreover, Rama is addressed as "Lord Rama" thereby giving Rama a spiritual divine connotation. Also, he is detailed as a character "who is full of illusion" and is considered "equal to moon" and Sita is addressed as "Goddess Lakshmi" and is not defamed through words by Shurpanakha as seen in the *Valmiki Ramayana*. A complete shift from an ideal man in *Valmiki Ramayana* to an avatar of Lord Vishnu in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* is clearly visible through the choice of words that the poets use.

Ezhuthachan was a pioneer of the Bhakti movement in Malayalam literature. The poet wrote the epic '*Ramayana*' in order to influence the common people to follow a path of spirituality. His efforts of

rendering Ramayanam into a local language, brought a sense of uprightness in a community that would have otherwise been trapped into cultural mess at the cost of semantic religion's influence. His work showed that language could set a strong base for socio-cultural re-evaluation and spiritualism that is popular among natives.

He wrote it in the form of 'kilipattu' and made it suitable to cater to the spiritual needs of the common man. The retelling of the story of Rama and Sita into the local language made the common folks familiar with the epic, which was once considered the private property of elite class.

The poet writes the introduction to his work where he says "Dear bird that came chanting Sree Rama's name! / Narrate me the tale of Rama without hesitation." Further he adds, "I am not a Brahmin but despite that I will pray to God / to provide me with captivating words to tell the story of Ramayana".

In *Adhyatma Ramayana*, each chapter starts with the calling of parrot and asking it to recite the song of Rama. The story is presented as told by Lord Shiva to Goddess Parvati about the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Rama upon the request of Brahma to end the troubles caused by Ravana, the demon king.

Ezhuthachan helped to set a firm base for the local language to flourish. He had a deep insight into the spiritual force of Sanskrit sounds, which had the power to induce nature in all its glory. He gave predominant importance to the use of sounds in his 'kilipattu' form that could help in setting the spiritual tone that was much needed in his time period. He used the technique of 'seed of resonance' of using 'ra' 'ma' 'ya' 'na' in all the couplets in the

Adhyatma Ramayana, thereby fetching a power of chanting mantras. Episodes in the story of Rama and Sita were linked with divine spirit and was elucidated to make it a holy text that could be read by common men of his age. Thus, unlike the *Valmiki Ramayana* that details the story of Rama and Sita as human beings with ideal qualities, *Adhyatma Ramayana* gives the story a spiritual divine connotation, elevating Rama to the pedestal of Gods.

The third section of the paper deals with a retold version of the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Mappila Ramayanam*. 16th century witnessed a significant change in the socio-political environment in India, particularly Delhi. Emperor Akbar who admired

Hindu Literature decided that his nobles who needed to understand their Hindu subjects, better set up a translation bureau to render *Valmiki Ramayana* into Persian. He hired scholar Abdul-Qadir Badauni who began, most reluctantly and fearful of loyal displeasure, to complete what was a 'haram' project for him. Akbar also issued gold coins depicting Rama and Sita in the Dandak forest. Meanwhile, the tellings of the *Ramayana* were undergoing continuous changes in the southern part of the subcontinent. Innumerable number of retellings of the story of Rama and Sita flourished in the Indian soil owing to the diversity of people and their cultures. *Ramayana* was retold and recited into a large number of local languages by different class of people. One such variant that emerged in Malabar, a part of Kerala in the southern tip of the subcontinent was the *Mappila Ramayana*.

The long standing Arab, Greek, Persian and later Portuguese contact with the coastal areas of India left its permanent mark in the form of several communities. Malabar and Kochi were two important princely states on the Western coast of India where the Arabs and Persians found fertile soil for their trade. The Mappila community of Kerala came into existence through the immigration of Arab traders to these regions.

Mappila, also known as Muslim Mappila or Jonaka Mapila, is a member of the largest Muslim group in the Indian state of Kerala. The community arose primarily as a result of the pre and post Islamic Arab contacts. Mappilas chiefly reside in the Malabar region. They share the common language of Malayalam with other inhabitants of Kerala. In addition to Malayalam, as a result of the migration, they came into contact with a number of other languages as well and this vibrant conglomeration of languages is visible in their form of literature called, Mappila Literature which is usually written in Arabi-Malayalam.

'Mappilapattu' or Mappila song is a major category in Mappila literature. It is a folklore Muslim devotional song genre rendered to lyrics in Arabic laced Malayalam. Mappila songs have a distinct cultural identity, as they sound a mix of the ethos and culture of Kerala as well as West Asia. They usually deal with themes such as religion, love, satire and heroism. Most of the 'Mappilapattu' is a mix of Malayalam, Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Tamil etc. And it follows many 'Ishals' (tunes), 'Praasams' (rhymes scheme) and other

rules. The themes are mostly related to Muslim culture in the Malabar region and no stories about the other groups or communities could be seen in such songs.

Mappila Ramayana deals with the story of Rama and Sita. Like most other oral traditions, the actual story of the creation of *Mappila Ramayana* is lost. It is believed that, it began with a labourer who wandered around doing odd jobs in Kerala's Malabar region over 100 years ago. Nicknamed crazy Hassan, Hassankutty recited the story of *Ramayana* in the form and metre of the 'Mappilapattu' or Mappila songs which was widely popular then.

According to M. N. Karassery, a scholar in Malayalam literature, Hassankutty might simply be a character used in the version as a narrator or that he might have been a wandering bard. It was during his research on Mappila songs that he came to know about *Mappila Ramayana* from another scholar named K. K. Karunakaran, which he had heard being recited by T. H. Kunjiraman Nambiar, a scholar of 'Vadakkanpattu' or Vadakkan songs. It was in 1976, he finally met Nambiar and recorded the lines that he had memorised realising the importance of the composition, which was indicative of the harmony between different religious communities in Kerala. Later it was published by many authors including Karassery's 'Kurimanam'.

The *Mappila Ramayana* is divided into five sections namely 'Shurpanakhayude Chamanjorungal' (Adornment of Shurpanakha), 'Hanumante Poonkavanapravesham' (The entry of Hanuman into the garden), Ravanande Pranayabhyardhana' (Love proposal of Ravana), 'Shurpanakhayude Pranayabhyardhana' (Lover overtures of Shurpanakha) and 'Hanumante Poonkavananasikaranam' (Destruction of garden by Hanuman). Many other songs are lost. In fact, these titles are mere indication of the themes of the songs. The *Mappila Ramayana* has an introductory song which gives a brief idea about the story of *Ramayana*. It begins with the following lines;

*This the song the old bearded saint sang A
long time ago
The song that we saw as depicting the
Ramayana story
We wait to hear the song every (monsoon
Season) of Karkatakam.*

The tone of *Mappila Ramayana* is comic; with the language being used is a conjuncture that some of the Malabar Muslims migrated from the Tamil Coromandel areas, especially the Marakkars used. Humour and wit are abundant in this story. The social context of the Mappilas informs this particular account. 'The song that the bearded saint sang long ago' has the Arabic "aulia" in the original, the word for a holy man derived from the Arabic, which in fact points to Valmiki who composed the epic. And the line 'we wait to hear the song every Karkatakam' further points to the tradition of reciting *Ramayana* in the monsoon season in Kerala.

The Shurpanakha episode undergoes an interesting change in *Mappila Ramayana* in terms of language and theme. The episode 'Shurpanakha's Overtures of Love' is the first major song in *Mappila Ramayana*. The episode is as follows;

*Lama clad in leaves, flowers and bark
Mesmerised the beauty queen Surpanakha.
Enamoured by Lama
Darling Surpanakha told Lama
"Who are you and what is your name? Who
is the lady with you, is it your wife?
Don't you have children? Didn't your wife
give birth to children?" "I am Laman. My
wife hasn't delivered children.
Along with me is my brother Lasmanan
Went into exile into this forest
As part of obeying Kosala King Dasarath.
Lady, May I know who you are?"
"I am Surpanakha
Sweet sister of the demon king of Lanka,
Lavanan! My darling sweet bird Lama,
Come with me to Lanka – brother in law is
Lanka's King! For a man, one woman, for
A woman, one man that is the law of
Shariyat"
"It is dangerous to sip milk from
More than one woman's breast and it is not
Right to just change the oil if it doesn't suit
You, go get lost you Lankan lioness."
"A man can keep four or five wives, but a
woman cannot keep more than One man
according to Shariyat.
Honey my Love my Life!
My kingdom is rich with wealth and army
And our wedding will be done with great*

splendour.” “Why should I marry again!? I am already married. My beloved brother is in need of a wife.

O Beauty! Who can ignore the beauty Of your limbs and thigh!?”

Lama Lama Lama Lama

Lama Lama Lama Lama

Lama Lama Lama Lama

Lama Lama Lama Lama . . .

The song is flavoured by the Muslim milieu of its origin – the words used in this poem are predominantly associated with the culture of Malabar Muslims. Starting with the presence of droll pronunciation where the consonant ‘l’ is used instead of ‘r’ while pronouncing ‘Rama’ and ‘Ravana’ to the inclusion of terms like ‘nikkah’ instead of ‘marriage’ and the presence of ‘Shariyat’ in the poem can be understood only by locating the poem in a specific context and time. The social context of the Mappilas informs the use of various words in the poem.

In the above poem, ‘Surpanakha’ being enamoured by ‘Lama’ is proposing her love to him. After being mesmerised by Lama’s beauty, ‘Surpanakha’ visits him after long hours of embellishments. A tremendously satirical portion describes ‘Surpanakha’ getting ready to approach Lama with the help of her friend Fatima. She is in fact referred to as “the jewelled darling of the Sultan of great, golden Paatalam.” The description of ‘Surpanakha’ embellishing herself is as follows;

*Her age since birth came to fifty-six
But with effort she could seem less than
forty. On each white hair of her greying
head*

*She put charcoal and honey, to blacken
them. Then summoning Fatima from the
house nearby*

*She settled on a fee and got her hair
braided. She plucked out the long hair
growing*

From her chin,

*And for her disorderly teeth, she Hammered
her gums.*

The above poem clearly explains the comic tone of the poem and definitely never fails to amuse the reader. Thus, after the above procedures, she manages to meet ‘Lama’ and tells him to marry her. In the original work,

marriage is depicted using the word ‘nikkah’ which is a term used by Muslim communities to depict marriages just like the term ‘sultan’ being used by Muslim communities instead of ‘king’. Also, the use of ‘beedaru’ instead of the term ‘wife’ in the original work further points to the context in which this work was written. Other such choice of words includes ‘bappa’ (father), ‘umma’ (mother), ‘monju’ (beauty), etc. Similarly, it is worth mentioning the presence of the character ‘Fatima’ as the friend of ‘Surpanakha’, which is a new addition to the story of Ram and Sita. Moreover, the episode in which ‘Surpanakha’ propose ‘Lama’ has undergone a rapid shift in terms of theme and language. Other than the presence of the three characters Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, the poem in *Mappila Ramayana* has retold the basic storyline in terms of their culture and language. One such instance is when ‘Lama’ and ‘Surpanakha’ talks about ‘Shariyat’.

While ‘Lama’ tries to convince ‘Surpanakha’ that he is already married and that according to ‘Shariyat’ (if used according in terms of its meaning ‘law’ with respect to Hindu tradition), a man can have only one woman and a woman can have only one man in order to justify his action of ignoring her wish to marry her, ‘Surpanakha’ uses the same ‘Shariyat’ (with respect to Muslim ‘Shariyat’) to justify her argument saying that, according to ‘Shariyat’, a woman can have only a man, whereas a man can have more than one wife up to three. Thus, she tries to say that it is not wrong for ‘Lama’ to accept ‘Surpanakha’ as his wife. The above mention of ‘Shariyat’ in the poem can be understood in terms of the cultural context of the Mappilas. They are Muslims and thus they follow the Quran verses to live their life. According to the Quranic verse (04:03), “And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice then only that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that he will not do injustice.”

Moreover, the character ‘Lama’ is being described not as a super human as in *Valmiki Ramayana* nor as a God in *Adhyatma Ramayana*, but as a normal human being who talks in plain language and responds the way in which a normal man would. He addresses ‘Surpanakha’ as a “Lankan lioness” and asks her to “get lost.” Also, the ‘Surpanakha’ episode in *Mappila Ramayana* is replete with sugar coated words

(common in the local language) used by 'Surpanakha' to address 'Lama', unlike the more refined language used in *Adhyatma Ramayana* and *Valmiki Ramayana*. Besides the reference to 'Shariyat', a lot of words and sounds that is in close connection with the Muslim milieu of the Malabar region of Kerala can be seen. Some of them include the use of 'Sultan' for describing the position of Ravana and Rama, presence of 'Fatima' (a common name in Muslim communities), reference to Kaikeyi, Rama's aunt as 'Elemma' (ilayamma being the term used to describe kinship in Malayalam). And as detailed earlier, the use of 'l' in place of 'r' also points to the use of the local variant of language.

Regarding the use of 'l' instead of 'r', it is difficult pin down the exact reason for its use. 'r' is present in both Arabic based Beary and Mappila dialects as a syllable. So as a logical conclusion, it does appear that this came back from the Malaya or Indonesian regions through traders. Another fact is, the Japanese cannot pronounce 'l' because the sound doesn't exist in their language. Forming the 'r' sound is the next closest mouth movement to the 'l' sound, which is why 'r' replaces 'l'. Chinese people, however, have problems pronouncing 'r', so they do the opposite and 'r' with 'l'. This is prevalent in South Asia where there is a large Chinese influence. According to M. N. Karassery, the peculiar aspect related to 'r' and 'l' is something that even Sanskrit permits.

Talking a bit on Arabi-Malayalam, learning Arabic was a religious necessity for Malabar Muslims as the Holy Quran was written in Arabic. However, to voice their creativity they had to use Malayalam as well. In Arabic there are 28 alphabets and 13 of these do not have phonetic equivalents in Malayalam. Similarly, 53 letters of the Malayalam language cannot be represented by the limited number of Arabic alphabets. Thus, they came up with the idea of Arabi-Malayalam. It is Malayalam written in a modified Arabic script that can account for all Malayalam sounds and still present Arabic words in the original script in order to preserve correct pronunciation.

The emergence of Arabi-Malayalam justifies Khubchandni's comment in his essay 'India as a Sociolinguistic Area', that "Everyday life speech activity is a bunch of organisms related in communication and institutional networks spread across the vast Indian region." According to Haugen, "the concept of language as a rigid, monolithic

structure is false." The statement proves to be true considering the emergence of Arabi-Malayalam that emerged out of a unique blend of two languages belonging to two different language families. "Natural language is structured both temporally and spatially. Both temporal and spatial structures of speech have their social dimensions depending on the time and place in which it is spoken". "Emeneaus' study of India as a 'language area' is quite revealing. It characterises the pressure of space in tracing the history of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages co-existing in the same region".

Most of the words are in the style of Malayalam dialect and possess the folk beauty due to the oral transmission of the cultural production. Except the theme of the song, all other elements are connected with that of the Mappila songs of North Malabar. Quoting T. K. Hamsa, author of 'Mappilapattinde Madhuryam' (Sweetness of Mappila songs), "Mappilapattu and Kilipattu belong to a similar style in time and context. This poetry genre touches on every aspect of life, and the songs formed the basis of different communities. It captures the joys and sorrows, hopes and despairs of diverse cultures."

Regarding the poetic form of *Mappila Ramayanam*, it follows certain rules of 'Mappilapattu'. 'Mappilapattu' as mentioned before, is written following 'Ishals' (tunes) and 'Praasams' (rhyme schemes). Rhyme schemes are of three kinds in Mappila songs. They are 'Kambi' (when the first letter of each sentence rhymes), 'Kazhuthu' (when the second letter rhymes in each stanza) and 'Valinmel Kambi' (when the last letter rhymes). In *Mappila Ramayana*, it follows 'Kazhuthu' and 'Valinmel Kambi' rules, thus giving it a particular rhythm while reciting.

The linguistic and thematic conventions available across time in the language helps in building a literary tradition in that language and thereby a literary tradition is peculiar to the language in which it is written. However, a tradition of literary convention and themes may also be shared by languages (which are inseparable from its culture) that have come into contact with one another as seen in the case of exchanges between Malayalam and Arabic that led to Arabi-Malayalam and in fact helped in the development of Mappila Literature.

In the case of *Adhyatma Ramayana* and *Mappila Ramayana*, what happens is a generic transformation

of the epic – *Ramayana* by Valmiki. While Ezhuthachan transformed the epic into a 'Kilipattu' or Parrot Song elevating it into a holy book that can be read by the common man, *Mappila Ramayanam* by Hassankutty has turned the epic into a 'Mappilapattu' or Mappila Song. In *Adhyatma Ramayana*, Bhakti is the dominant emotion and the centre of the narrative structure is the importance of a particular God. Whereas in *Mappila Ramayana*, the tone is comic and wit and humour are abundant in it.

According to Syed A. Sayeed, "the reteller doesn't function at the level of language at all. His function is at the level of narrative. To retell a story is to construct a counter text; to create a possible world in which in some sense the same events could have occurred in a different sequence, or could have been interwoven with other events and so on. To retell a story is to recognise the possible character of fiction and to extend it in the direction of its logical conclusion. In this sense, we can say that when the retelling happens in mother language, the elements of translation are altogether secondary. The interest lies in the way in which an alien story has to become our story."

Here, the retellers have created an atmosphere where, while the essential nature of the events is retained, their manifestation fits the audience's sense of the possible. Each poet composed their works based on the structure of feeling of their time which is influenced by the residual, emergent and dominant elements. "Structure of Feeling refers to a formally structured hypothesis of the social, but it is more adequate to the actual range of cultural evidence". (Williams, 133)

Ezhuthachan lived in a time period that was struggling under the anarchy of semantic religions that came from abroad. He translated the Sanskrit epic that was considered a private property by the high caste people into a local language, thereby enabling the common men to get access to the classical epic. Moreover, he composed the epic keeping in mind the need to develop devotion and spirituality in common folk. Thus, he created a God like hero in his retelling of the story of *Ramayana*, thereby providing the common men to follow the God like hero Rama. Whereas in *Mappila Ramayana* that is believed to have been inspired by *Adhyatma Ramayana*, was written in the Muslim milieu, using words and cultural terms related to the Muslim Mappilas of the Malabar region in Kerala. The poet retold the story of Rama and Sita in the form of a Mappila song that was widely popular

and familiar with the people of his society. Thus it is worth mentioning that both the writers have retold the work in terms of its theme and the form in which it was written. However, the basic story of Rama and Sita remains the same. Here, the basic story and thereby the thematic elements acts as the residual element that "has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element in the present" and the new form in which it was written represents the emergent element. The dominant element in Ezhuthachan's time period would be the anarchy of the semantic religions and the social order that kept the epics confined to higher castes of the society. In Hassankutty's time period, dominant element would be the epic story of Rama and Sita confined to the tradition of Hindu Literature. Here, it is clear that "the dominant culture can do nothing about the emergent and the residual, whether or not it approves of these practices". Moreover, the philosophical discourse of the epic was edited by the retellers as a way of putting the epic in a different perspective, pushing it towards different religious and ethical conclusions.

Content of a work cannot be separated from its form. That informs the situation in these works too. The spirituality of *Adhyatma Ramayanam* and the comic tone of *Mappila Ramayanam* is inseparable from the form in which it was written, i.e.; 'Kilipattu' and 'Mappilapattu' respectively. That informs the situation in these works too. The spirituality of *Adhyatma Ramayana* and the comic tone of *Mappila Ramayana* is inseparable from the form in which it is written i.e. 'Kilipattu' and 'Mappilapattu' respectively. Readers located in a specific time and place and thereby in a specific culture approach a text with some expectations that they already gained by means of convention and experience of reading literature, which is what we call as Horizon of Expectation. The Horizon of Expectation of a work determines its artistic character by the kind and degree of its influence on the presupposed audience. In case of *Mappila Ramayana*, it was written in 'Mappilapattu' form because it was the most popular and familiar form of literature during the time period in which it was written. Similarly, in *Adhyatma Ramayana* 'Kilipattu' was used to recite the epic story keeping in mind the social scenario where the Sanskrit epic was considered the sole property of the high caste society.

Here, Ezhuthachan expanded the Horizon of Expectation by using a different form of writing in local language thereby enabling the common men to read the epic story of *Ramayana*. Thus, it can be said that the reconstruction of the Horizon of Expectation enables one to pose questions that the text will be able to answer. Here, why 'Kilipattu' and 'Mappilappattu' and why not something else. Also, it helps to discover how the contemporary reader views and understand the work.

Quoting Satchidanandan, "it is about the imagination of the people, allowing them the freedom to imagine the nation in their own way and to relate to it in their own way and allowing them to relate also to literature, to epics, to tradition in their own different ways. If that is the case, definitely the recognition of the diversity of the *Ramayana* tradition becomes extremely important and only by recognising them and bringing even the buried *Ramayan*s up and by doing more research on forgotten *Ramayan*s or *Ramayan*s which have been completely marginalised because they exist in some language which only a few people speak, only by doing that can we really enrich this *Ramayana* tradition and also that way battle the kind of hegemonic version of *Ramayana* which is being imposed upon us."

Mappila *Ramayana* is one such version of *Ramayana* that has been buried deep because it was limited to the Malabar region in Kerala. Only after 1976 that the tradition gained popularity through the works of scholars like M. N. Karassery and Kunjanandan Nambiar. Also, a lot of criticism had emerged depicting the portrayal of *Ramayana* in a humorous tone and also against the inclusion of terms and words related to the Muslim community into an epic that is considered a Hindu Literature by some sections of society. According to Karassery, "*Mappila Ramayana* is not a work of devotion and despite its humorous tone; it is not meant to offend anyone. It is meant only for enjoyment."

According to Davidson, "Metaphors mean what the words in their most literal sense mean and nothing more." A metaphor doesn't say anything beyond its literal meaning. However, by using words as metaphor, certain words take an extended meaning based on the context. In addition to that, extra conceptuality forms the basic principle of a literary work. It is the system by which a word can get multiple interpretations, in contrast to the concept of

conceptuality, whereby a specific word is attributed to an abstract concept by means of shared convention. The essence of literature lies in the relation between the text and an active reader who is located in a time and space. Literature is to be read keeping in mind that it is not meant to give us knowledge or to establish a truth or put forward a fact or reality. Literature provides us with the "delight of experiencing the freshness of new understanding."

Aristotle in *Poetics* detailed in length about the distinction between History and Fiction. "It is not the function of the Poet to relate what has happened but what may happen – what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The Poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." The occurrence of history and fiction is in the realm of possibility. If that distinction is made, then it is simply not whether it may or may not occur but that it has not yet occurred, without foreclosing the possibility that it will never occur. There is no obligation in literary works to consider it as a fiction or as a fact.

Ramayana, the story of the Prince of Ayodhya and his consort Sita, is a piece of literature truly expressed by its authors in the languages through which they communicate. The writers choose words for their work, thus determining the form, depending on the content which they would like to express. The content and form of the work depends upon the Structure of Feeling of the time and the Horizon of Expectation of the readers of the time in which the writer is located. *Ramayana*, being widely recited and written by a large number of people has travelled across time and space and has absorbed and assimilated both cultural and linguistic elements thus resulting in a wide range of retold versions of the same story but in different form, content and language. Thus, *Ramayana* being a literary work doesn't claim the characters in it to be real or imagined. Rather, it is to be read for the purpose of enjoying the literature that is produced as a result of different cultural encounters.

Religious fanaticism is on the rise and writers are being "squeezed" as "olives" in the present scenario.

They are being curbed of their rights to express through language. In terms of such trauma and hardships, it becomes imperative to dig out and find the downtrodden voices and works of different sections of society and it becomes a need of the hour to make sure that not one community is being deprived of their right to expression. In recent times with the rise of Hindutva ideology, certain sections of the society are trying to hold the epic of *Ramayana* as a text solely belonging to Hindu literature. However, the truth is that the *Ramayana* is a tradition that is not just limited to India but to the whole South East region of the world. Thus, it becomes a part of every culture that it has encountered with, absorbing and assimilating the cultural, linguistic aspects of that culture located in specific space and time. Every literary work is unique and has an individual existence on its own. The best way to mark its existence is “to acknowledge the other and to enjoy the nature of being in difference with the other”.

Ramanujan asks, “How many Ramayanas? Three Hundred? Three Thousand?” The answer would be - infinite.

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