r->t IN LATIN AND MALAYALAM: Implications for Historical Linguistics

Introduction

Context dependent inflection of verbs is an almost universal grammatical characteristic in ancient and modern languages. Verbs are modified to derive words of other lexical categories like noun, adverb, adjective etc. In view of the extensive role played by verbs, it will not be surprising to find comparable alterations in verb forms of languages that have been juxtaposed for long; or to put it in another way, presence of similar modifications in verbs of two languages could very well be an evidence of their long-term association.

Malayalam is a classical language of the Indian subcontinent spoken by the people of the state of Kerala lying in the most southwestern part of India. Kerala is bound on the west by the Arabian Sea giving it a coastal line of about 800 km. dotted by numerous ports and on the east by a mountain range of almost equal length; the land in between is crossed by more than forty rivers. The state, noted for its variety of spices, has had intense spice trade which goes back to the 3rd millennium B.C. (Sreedhara Menon, A. 2008). The word dravid, from which Dravidian arises, also means cardamom (Elam), one of the important spices that prompted trade association between Kerala and Europe. The earliest Dravidian word in Greek is quinnamon, Ctesia’s name for cinnamon (a spice), derived from karuva, a Malayalam word (Caldwell, R. 1853). Incidentally, Elam could be related to Elamite which has close association with Dravidian languages (McAlpin, D.W. 1981). Roman coins dating from 117 B.C. to A.D. 123 have been unearthed in Kerala, emphasizing its early relationships with the west (Sreedhara Menon, A. 2007). Kerala has been found mentioned in the Bible and St. Thomas, the Apostle, had reached Kerala in A.D. 52 and established seven churches (Cherian, C.V. 1973). Christians constitute about 20% of the population of Kerala. The land had been referred to or visited by Pliny the Elder, according to whom Muziris (now Crangannore) is the nearest port in India (Pliny’s Natural History, Book 6, Canto 26).

Malayalam, a language belonging to the Dravidian family, is very much influenced by Sanskrit which belongs to the Indo-European family. The Aryans supposedly migrated to Kerala from North India around A.D. 600, hence the Sanskrit influence on Malayalam might have started at least from that period. Malayalam is also influenced by English, a Germanic branch of Indo-European language, which itself has borrowed extensively from Latin. Malayalam has been affected by English grammatically (Girish, P.M. 2005). A notable feature, the usage of English words with addition of Malayalam suffixes, is peculiar to Keralites; e.g. ബോരണം (bōRa for boring person), ബോരത്ത്തിക്കു (bōRaTikkuk.a for getting bored), ബോരത്തിപ്പുക്ക (bōRaTippikkuka for

*The author is not a linguist. Hence, this article need not be viewed only from a linguist’s angle.

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it differs from t. This cannot be labelled as transitivisation (though Caldwell terms it so), since that can be done differently in Malayalam in the case of the same words. Adjectives are routinely formed from either the radical or the modified verb with the addition of the appropriate suffix which is the same for both forms; e.g. \( māriya \) (meaning ‘that which altered’) from the verb \( māruka \), and \( mātiya \) (meaning ‘that which was altered’) from the verb \( māttuka \). In view of the ancient association of Kerala with Europe, the presence of \( r \rightarrow t \) alteration in verbs and the absence of orthographically representable and phonemically similar \( t \) in any other major Indian language, it is possible that it was borrowed from an ancient European language; and this language may have similar verb alterations and influenced Malayalam grammar too.

[To be continued]

V.N. Bhattathiri

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**NATIONAL SEMINAR ON**

**DRAVIDIAN TRIBAL LINGUISTICS: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS**

The Department of Dravidian and Computational Linguistics, Dravidian University is organizing a two-day National Seminar on *Dravidian Tribal Linguistics: Retrospect and Prospects* on 26th and 27th March 2015 at Dravidian University, Kuppam. Those who are interested in participating and presenting papers may please contact the coordinator Prof. G. Balasubramonian (E-mail: gbalu123@gmail.com).

**Important Dates**

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**“MANY RAMAYANAMS” – SAYS THUNCHAT SHRI RAMANUJAN EZHUTHACCHAN? – A RESPONSE**

Prof. T. Madhava Menon wrote in the January 2015 issue of *DLA News*, asking for a clarification about the verse in the Ayodhya Kanda, wherein Sita contends with Rama that “I have heard many Ramayana-s recounted by many gifted poets, but in none of them did Râghava (rama) go to the forest leaving Sita behind.”. He quoted the relevant section from the *Adhyatma Râmâyâna* of Ezhuttacchan and notes that a corresponding text is found in the *Adhyatma Râmâyânam Kîlipâṭṭu* as well.

This episode is noted by A.K. Ramanujan in his essay *Three Hundred Ramayanas* (Dharwadker 1999, pp. 143) as well. He traces it to the Sanskrit *Adhyatma Ramayana*, but does not furnish an explanation. My current note is in response to the selfsame point. There are two distinct Sanskrit sources that record this peculiar statement and there is a satisfactory explanation provided within the mythopoetic universe of the *iithâsa-purâṇâ*-s.

1. The *Adhyatma Râmâyâna* in Sanskrit – very popular in the North, particularly with the sect of Kabir and his guru Ramananda (who is sometimes said to be the author of the text). It can be assigned to 15-16th century, since the Marathi poet Eknath (died 1608) calls it a modern text (vide Bhandarkar Vaishnavism etc., pp. 48).

Here is the Sanskrit verse relevant to the discussion:

\[
\text{rāmāyaṇāni bahuṣaḥ śṛutaṁ bahubhir dvijaḥ} |
\text{sītām vinā vanam rāmo gataḥ kim ktracid vada} | \text{II 77} |
\text{atastvāyā gamiṣyāmi... etc., II 78} \]

\text{Ayodhya Kāṇḍa, Canto 3.77-78}

2. The *Ānanda Rāmâyâna* (Sanskrit)

Popular tradition ascribes the text to Vālmiki but the internal evidence points otherwise. This text has elaborate descriptions of many *tīrtha*s and pilgrimage spots of South India, like Gokarna and Rāmeśwaram. While searching for a bride for Lava, even the Southern kingdoms of Kānci and Vijayanagara are visited. The language is rather modern and the title *Chatrapati* is used, as a consequence of which Prof. V. Raghavan assigns it to early 18th century, suggesting that it was produced in the Tanjore Maratha courtly milieu. This text is popular amongst the Tamils, since Mahākavi Subrahmanya Bharati has translated it into the Tamil language.

Ayodhya Kanda, canto 6.11 of the Ananda Rāmāyaṇa has a verse with Sita insisting that she will accompany Rama to the forest, giving the same explanation as seen in the Adhyatma Rāmāyaṇa above.

The Solution – Kalpabheda or Kalpāntara

In the circumstance of discussing the Ahalyā śāpā episode, Prof. V. Raghavan discusses the concept of kalpa-bhedā, or kalpāntara, which is crucial for a coherent exegesis of purāṇic mythopoesis. It entails the use of the cyclic nature of the various temporal units in a nested loop to explain variants or repetitions of a certain adventure, act or curse in each age (kalpa).

Hence, there are countless kalpa-s, each with a quartette of yuga-s [Kṛta, Treta, Dwāpara and Kali], and each kalpa has a repetition of the events of the previous yuga, with minor or major variations. Every kalpa will have the lives of the same characters re-enacted, and the multiple variants on the themes of stories of well-known characters will be reconciled by saying that both versions of the tale occurred albeit in different kalpa-s.

The Poet as a Narratologist

The Ananda Rāmāyaṇa has frequent, deliberate and self-conscious use of the device of Kalpabheda and seems to have been written with a view to document alternative accounts of many episodes in the Rāma story. Further, within the story, he uses a metadiscursive strategy to introduce Kalpabheda, wherein a character Viṣṇudāsa questions a certain Rāmadrāsa about these deviations in the Rāma story, and the latter explains it using the trope of Kalpabheda; saying that while Rāma incarnated in each kalpa, he played his role differently, accounting for the multiple narratives, all of which are equally valid.

As evidenced by many variant episodes in the Ananda Rāmāyaṇa, and this oft-used device of kalpabheda, the poet establishes himself as a student of the Rāma tale and its variants. He is in this aspect, an intellectual predecessor of A.K. Ramanujan, in being a narratologist of the Rāma epos.

References


Naresh Keerthi