

Impact of Greek Mythology in Malayalam Literature

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Abstract

The Greek language had been the threshold of the western literature. The world's ever classic epic poems of the Great *Homer, Iliad* and *Odyssey* which extend their traditional existence deep-rooted up to B.C. mark the magnificence of Greek Literature. The well known Greek Mythology which refers to the cultural scenario of the ancient Greece has quite an advent effect in the world literature. It has extensively influenced Malayalam literature as well as the literature worldwide. Malayalam Literature has ever been a wide receptor of the cultural transitions from a number of global languages like English, Persian, Latin, Arabic, Greek, and Portuguese, besides the other Indian languages. The Greek mythology especially could make thorough impact in almost literary works in Malayalam. Many poets and novelists from time to time have quoted the mythical figures, like Achilles, Zeus, Odysuse in their works. The mythology in general affects the cultural transitions of languages. Our epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata beyond doubt could also be transcended by the cultural aspects of the Greek epics.

Keywords- *Cultural transition, Greek Mythology, Vaikunda, Neelavelicham, Bahubali*

Introduction

As of the saying, 'The glory that was Greece',¹ clearly indicates that the Greek influence in literature played a vital role in the development of the literature worldwide, Philosophy Science, Arts, Literature and History. It's a fact that Greek had once been the threshold of the western literature. Greek Mythology has quite a special impact on Malayalam Literature especially in terms of the myths and fables. Malayalam Literature has ever accepted foreign literatures viz., English, Latin, Arabic, Portuguese, and Greek etc. all throughout the stages of its development. On the other hand, such languages have benefitted Malayalam with effective vocabulary and phrases which have been

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inevitable part of it later. In a similar manner, Greek Literature also has played a crucial role in the cultural growth of the language so far.

Greek myth has a varied taste of appreciation. The Greek references in Malayalam literature attract many readers. The feel of originality of the characters as felt, even when they would be mere hallucinations is quite unmatched when compared with any other literature. One cannot help it from believing that they are lively historical idols. The Human-God intimacy or anthropomorphism (humanistic elements bestowed upon God) has come up to the level of more or less equal status, though inclined slightly towards humane version. Most of the Greek Gods and Goddesses seem to have inevitable relationship with the humans, either by kinship or marriage. The God - Humane versions in the Greek stories are sometimes too interspersed in most of the areas to get delineated from each other.

Impact of Greek Stories in Literature in general

Greek stories impart tremendous impact on cultural consciousness of India. The heroic deeds of Hercules, Theseus, and Perseus are more or less similar to that of Bheema, Arjuna in 'Mahabharata' or Lord Krishna. Most of the stories have a close affinity to humanity which breaks the hindrances of caste and creed, language and culture, or any such indifference of human minds. Moreover, the heroes keep a close kinship to the general folk or lead such an ordinary life.

Myths are generally associated with rituals and beliefs where scientific evidence for existence stands irrelevant. The mythical characters thus formed slowly transcended to various art forms, novels and films. It happened in literatures all over India including Malayalam.

The Greek mythical concepts are quite prevalent in Indian Mythology. For instance, the belief that Natural Powers such as rain, lightning, thunder, storm etc are controlled by Gods and Goddesses. Sometimes certain evil spirits are also seen associated with those natural powers. It is followed more or less grave in many novels, dramas and horror films. The literary works, drama and films of the sort evolve the spirit of 'willing suspension of disbelief' in the minds of people.

According to Greek Mythology, it is quite common to have marital relationship between God and man. The same methodology is being practiced in Indian Mythology and is evident in literature widely. For example Hercules is the son of God Zeus and the human lady Alkemy. Similarly *Karna* in 'Mahabharata' is the son of Lord Sun and the human princess, *Kunthi*. Lord Krishna the human incarnation of Lord Maha Vishnu, gets an opportunity to meet Lord Maha Vishnu face to face along with Arjuna at Vaikunda. In fact, Human - God meeting takes place at 'His Place of Residence'. The

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ideology has gradually been transformed into the development of mythical characters in later novels, dramas, stories and films. Even now, heroes and other characters with supernatural powers appear in films.

In Malayalam, Late Vaikam Muhammed Basheer, the renowned novelist depicts in his novel, 'Neelavelicham' (The Blue Light) the love story of a female ghost, who later became tamed by the writer himself. The pretty woman ghost seems to get interested in her own story being written by the writer. The novel 'Neelavelicham' was later produced as a horror film, called 'Bhargaveenilayam.' (The Ghost house). The presence of the ghost in the movie is presented as blue light. In order to make the ghost, a real one, writer keeps a clever distance between them.

According to Greek Mythology man possess supernatural powers if he has some direct or indirect supernatural connections. Hercules, Achilles etc. possess exceptional powers. The same idea had been following in fantasies, many novels and films. In Malayalam movies also, the presence of such characters with supernatural powers and heroes with extraordinary capabilities are quite common. With the help of developing technology it's quite easy to include the supernatural acts of characters in films and even in some dramas. Even well educated viewers are quite happy to accept the godly acts of the heroes as such and worship them next to God!. This can be taken as an impact of the mythology which transcended from Greek to Indian.

The film Bahubali depicts a supernatural hero. The actor who enacted as Bahubali raises huge stones, and act extraordinarily, amazes the viewers. This bestowed supernatural power on the actor is totally accepted as such by the viewers and raised the collection of the film to many hundred crores. Hence it is true to accept that even though as a part of entertainment, people from all walks of life always like supernatural characters and many adorn them with fans associations. It is quite clear that most of the actions of the actor in a film is controlled, managed and is with the help of the latest technological advancements. Meanwhile it is known by most of the worshipers. Still they place the actor/actress next to God. There are even temples built on behalf of many of them. For example, the actress Kushbu in Tamil is reported to have a temple in Tamilnadu in which she is worshipped as Goddess. Likewise, late M. G. Ramachandran and Jayalalitha are also placed next to God by the people of Tamilnadu. The mythological impact is the reason for the evolution of mythical characters and all types of worships of the sort and however, the root is with Greek Mythology.

The evolution of mythical figures in novels, stories and films is not a new trend. It has been there long since the formation of ancient literature. The worship towards God has been transcended

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gradually to Godly figures or characters both negative and positive. The belief that supernatural elements can affect the life of human beings was so deep-rooted in the ancient people.

The Aryans and the Greek were of the same Indo-European origin. Those who moved to India were termed Aryans and those who moved towards Greece were termed *Yavanas*.² Both Aryans and the Greek have many cultural similarities which have clearly been transcended to the *Puranas* of India. A typical example for God-human affinity is that of Lord Maha Vishnu and his human incarnation, Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna gets a chance to meet Lord Mahavishnu at *Vaikunda* along with another human being Arjuna. Most of the famous rulers mentioned in Mahabharatha and Ramayana were depicted to have deep inter-relations of either friendship or kinship with Gods and Goddesses. *Dasaratha* and *Rama* in *Ramayana*, origin of Pandavas in *Mahabharatha* etc are some other examples of God – Human relationships.

There are many films in Malayalam produced in such a way that the beautiful female ghost falls in love with the hero. For example, in the film *Vismayathumpath* (at the edge of wonder), the spirit seems to lead the hero to realize and prove certain hidden truths related to, the nearly dead status of her body and later falls in love with him. Gradually, she comes back to life with his help, enlivens it and leads happy life with the hero of the film, characterized by the famous Malayalam actor, Mohanlal. Similarly in the film *Sreekrishna Parunth*, (Sreekrishna Eagle), the hero gets into sexual intercourse with the female ghost. It's based on the old belief that female ghosts if once get involved in sexual intercourse with a man, would never leave him until his death. All these stories originate from the old belief regarding the presence of supernatural powers which can regulate the human life.

Myths being emotional truths are directly related only to world of demeanour and exist as a part of culture. Hence, a movement to illustrate the emotional truths underlying myths with the help of atheism will be generating another myth.³ Anyway, it is evident that the idea of God-Human kinship worldwide has close relation with Greek Mythology. For example, Christian belief takes its root from Greek Culture. As in Puranas, Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammed are also considered to be direct descendants of God as His speakers or representatives.

Lord Indra in Purana has close resemblance with Lord Zeus in Greek Mythology. The sword of Indra *Vajrayudha* 'produces lightning and thunder'. Zeus also has a weapon of lightning. Hercules is equated with Bheema. Goddess Saraswathi is equivalent to Goddess Adheeni and Rati is to Afrodity. Similarly Kamadeva, the God of love with five flowers as arrows has a companion named Eros who has but only two arrows. For the Heavenly architect Mayan, there is blacksmith Hephestus;

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for the Goddess Parvathi, there is Hera and for the God Sun, there is Helius. The similarities in the designations and acts of Gods and Goddesses substantiate the Indo-European-Greek influence.

The Greek mythological figures are commonly used in Malayalam poetry also. The famous Malayalam poet Late P. Bhaskaran has used the name Achilles in one of his poems, '*Vinda Kaladikal*' (The cracked feet). The poem narrates the history of his cracked feet as caused during the war of Independence and reinforces their intimacy to the earth. According to him, if he lost those cracks, he would be so weak like Achilles who lost in touch with the earth. Akin to this, the ever romantic Malayalam poet late Changapuzha Krishnapillai was entitled for his musical poems as, 'The Orpheus of Malayalam'. P. Bhaskaran directed black and white movie of 1960s in Malayalam, 'Venus' is named after the Greek embodiment of beauty, Venus. The Famous revolutionary poet Late Mr. Vayalar Ramavarma has mentioned about Venus, in one of the songs in the film. (the song begins as *Yavana sundari*....Film –Pearl view)

The origin of superhuman characters and heroes in Cartoons, dramas and films are worth to be thought about. The heroes of even the most modern films worldwide act as if with supernatural powers with the help of latest technology in the field. Simultaneously, the viewers worldwide know it very well that the same is mere acting and technology. Still then, why the well educated people of even this most modern world swarm after such films is worth to be analyzed. The innate urge to adorn something supernatural is quite natural for human minds. When impossible acts are to be carried out as in their minds, just like finishing off the entire corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, the help of some supernatural power is needed. Though they know very well that the act is mere fancy, they applause that heroic deed in films. The producers knowing this psychology of common man produce such films bestowing much importance and extra-ordinary or supernatural power to heroes. Actually all of them get these ideas from the mythical characters from Indian mythology or from the aligned Greek mythology.

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