TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

The original of the present work, *Malayala Sahitya Charitram*, first published in 1958 and reprinted twice since, carries the story of Malayalam Literature up to the year 1956. Much has happened in the language since then and it may be hoped that in course of time when the contemporary trends have been stabilized, a new edition of the work will cover fresh ground.

A translation of this kind entails certain limitations, and these by and large are typical of translations made from any Indian language into English. There is hardly anything in common between Malayalam and English from a linguistic or literary point of view as there is, say, between Malayalam and Tamil which belong to the same family, and the transference of thought-patterns and imageries from the former into the latter entails considerable stretching and recasting. This is more so in the case of poetry—and the present work contains quite a lot of it. It is inevitable that in this process of transference much of the music, rhythm, nuances and emotive overtones which mean so much in a piece of literature are lost, and the passage as translated may sound flat, if not odd and unpoesic. Indeed the damage is considerable in languages like Malayalam which rely so much on indigenous musical metres for the overall poetic effect. For instance, a *pada* from Kathakali or a boat-song like the *Kuchelavuttam* can hardly preserve its beauty, even its identity, except in its original setting.

We have some well-known instances wherein the translator substitutes a music of his own—and this may be in keeping with the idiom and the diction of English—to make up for the loss sustained by the original. But it seems to the present translator that this approach can hardly convey the feel of the original, especially in a history which involves considerations other than the purely literary. On the other hand, it seems preferable to make the translation as close, and even literal, as possible so that at least the thought-patterns, and possibly even the linguistic features of the original, could be conveyed to the extent possible.

Yet another difficulty is with the plural meanings of expres-
sions which add so much to the charm of the original passages, especially in classical poetry. An instance is given on page 91 but with expressions like *chennayo?* on page 97 there is nothing that the translator could do.

Again, a Malayali knows what a Kathakali or a Tullal is, and the author can proceed on the assumption that he knows its technical and literary associations. But this would not do in a version made for non-Malayalis. The translator has supplemented the original text with a few more details wherever necessary, but even so, for a proper appreciation of such portions the reader may have to stretch his imagination a little.

The question was carefully considered if diacritical marks should be used in the printing of names and titles, but the idea was finally given up as the book is meant primarily for a popular readership. The index is prepared in the usual alphabetical order with the surname or the last part of the name as the basis, but this arrangement is apt to prove occasionally wanting as in names with more than two parts. For instance a name like Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer is given under Iyer, but the part of the name most frequently used in the text is Ullur. This, again, is unavoidable.

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