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Mahākavi Vallathol: The preserver of art and literature

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The life, literary and cultural activities of Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958) form a distinct chapter in story of the evaluation of literature and culture in Kerala. Vallathol appeared on the literary scene at a time when Modern Malayalam Poetry was in its infancy. Sanskrit norms in literary composition controlled the literary field, and poetry in Malayalam was only a shadow of what poetry in Sanskrit was. Himself nurtured in the Sanskrit tradition which his early compositions in the Sanskrit form. The poet in company with his two illustrious compeers Ullur and Aśan. Soon made Malayalam poetry with his well known lyrical piece in Dravidian metre a thing of the Kerala Soil^[1]. Poetry in Malayalam soon ceased to be a Kerala off shoot of Sanskrit literature and developed with a new secular content and native idiom and form^[2]. Vallathol entered to the world of literature through singing Sanskrit Mukhtakas. He has also written a few works in Sanskrit such as *Matṛviyoga* in 21 verses, *Pārvatīpādādīkeśtava*, *Kṛṣṇastava* and *Tapatisamvaraṇa*. *Triyāma* and *Samlāpapura* written in collaboration with Vellānaśśery Vāsunni Mussat^[3].

Vallathol was a prodigious writer and author of over eighty works of which 'Citrayogam' a mahākāvya, Sahitya Manjari in 10 volumes. Khandakāvya like *Kochusīta*, *Magdalana Mariyam*, *Accanum Makanum*, *Sisyanum Makanum* and *Bandanastanaya Airudhan* are well known in Kerala. The poems of Vallathol breathe the new urge of India. When India were struggling for freedom from bondage with political and social. He accepted Gandhi as his Guru. Gandhiji and his ideas made so profound an impression on Vallathol that he became a missionary by himself. Though the non-corporation and other allied movements slowly spread in Kerala through Congress workers. It was Vallathol that gave fire and spirit to the movement through his poems of enlightenment.

Enrichment of Malayalam literature through Sanskrit Translations was the major contribution undertaken by Mahākavi Vallathol. He did many scholarly translations from Sanskrit. It is perhaps significant that his first and last serious literary undertaking were translations of to of the greatest works in Sanskrit – The 'Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa' done between his 26th and 28th years and the *Rīgveda* between his 75th and 78th years. His other translations comprise purāṇas, they were *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Vāmana* and *Padmapurāṇa* and several works in Āyurveda. Such as *Garbharaśakrama*, *Mātangaleela* etc. Also his translatory works consists of Sanskrit plays such as *Śākunala* of Kālidāsa, plays of Bhāsa (*Svapnavāsavadatta*, *Urubhanga*, *Abhiśekhānātaka*, *Madyamayayoga*, and *Pancaratra*) and Vatsaraja plays (*Hasyacūdāmani*, *Karpuracaritham*, *Rukminīharaṇam* and *Tripuradahanam*) Kshemendran, *Bodhisatvāpadānakalpalaha* describing the Jālakas stories and the romantic kāvya 'Gadhasaptaśati' written in Prakṛt were another tributes to Vallathol's translations works^[4].

Vallathol was not only a great poet, but an artist in every fibre of his being. He is the one man who was responsible for reviving the great classical art Kathakali. Kathakali is indebted to Vallathol for the present rejuvenation and world wide popularity. At heart an educationalist Vallathol was not satisfied with rarely finding new platforms for Kathakali or new patrons for it. He wants to ensure that the tradition did not die out because of the lack of competent artists. The result was the great educational institution 'Keralakalamandalam' at Cheruthuruthi in Trichur district of Kerala in 1930, Vallathol was better known outside Kerala as the chief architect and founder of Keralakalamandalam. The crowning achievement of his life; This magnificent institution like Tagore's Viswabharati^[5].

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At present it is deemed to be University of Art and Culture by the Government of India is a major centre for learning Indian performing arts such as Kathakali, Sanskrit Theatre, K  diyattam, especially those that developed in the Southern states of India, with the special emphasis on Kerala. Kalamandalam is the living standing monument of Vallathol's fame and greatness. Vallathol Narayana Menon the voice of Indian renaissance believed sincerely and completely in the causes for which he lived. That is why the poet has never really died. His immense work for art and literature lives on after him.

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