

Existential Writings in Malayalam as a Form of Post-Colonial Mimicry and Hybridity: A Reading of M. Mukundan's Short Stories

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Abstract

Regional Literatures from India have been forms of reflection of the post-colonial fledge. They have influenced the making of the nation, both inside and outside the territorial boundary of India. Along with the Indian Writings in English, translations of regional or *bhasha* literatures have had a huge impact in reflecting the image and nature of the country to the world. Regional literatures also had been the face of de-colonization and regional ethnicity. Short stories and novels by O.V. Vijayan, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and T. Padmanabhan are some such works. But M. Mukundan, on the other hand, pointing his feet on a very Indian and Keralite setting, worked on globally appealing themes. This paper analyzes how M. Mukundan's lenience towards the western and more universal themes like existentialism is an act of mimicry and how his stories produce a hybrid culture out of it, which, in a wider perspective, becomes a post-colonial strategy of resistance just like what Achebe did in the African context. This paper further explores how the translation of his works into many languages helped M. Mukundan to shine brighter among the global readership.

Keywords: regional literatures, Malayalam literature, translation, post-colonial, mimicry, hybridity

Introduction

Indian literature can be seen as a spectrum that contains many regional literatures which include several genres like poetry, novels, short stories, plays, autobiographies, memoirs, travel writings and so on. In his essay "Regional Literature: The saga of the Changing Traditions of India", Tarit Agarwal states that "among many branches of literature,

regional literature is what undoubtedly keeps us bound to our soil, our culture and traditions.”(Agarwal, 1) Regional literature is the branch of literature that retains our connection with our ancestors, with the contemporary world, and with the expectation of making the world a better place by depicting the changing traditions in literature. Agarwal defines regional literature as “a branch of literature which primarily deals with the portrayal of regional life with a language and atmosphere that is completely regional in its true spirit.” Both the words regional and local literature can be the exact description of the manner, standard, dialect, and scenery of a specific topographical area, but "regional" generally indicates a broader intrigue as a regional text is focused on a specific geographical area but also has a broader appeal. Considering the scenario of India, it has been always rich in regional literatures. Indian literature was often recognized by regional literatures. These regional literatures were great attractions as well as source to the Indian English writers. In a multi-lingual country like India, regional literatures have more importance than Indian English literature. The popularity and recognition that the regional literatures have gained after the twentieth century are because of the considerable increase of translation that is happening from Regional and *Bhasha* literatures into English. In that way, the *Bhasha* literatures are being accessible to a wider public, within and outside the nation. The considerable translation of regional literatures in India is a post-colonial phenomenon. Therefore, regional literatures from India have been forms of reflection of post-colonial fledge. They have influenced the formation of the nation both within and outside of India's borders. Translation of regional or *bhasha* literatures has had a huge impact in reflecting the image and nature of the country to the world, in addition to Indian writings in English. Decolonization and regional ethnicity were also reflected through regional literatures.

When the regional literatures of India are analyzed, Malayalam literature possesses a unique position in contributing to the Indian literature. Many considerable authors have given landmarks in Indian literature from Malayalam. Many of their works were also translated into English as well as other Indian and foreign languages. Thakazhi, O.V. Vijayan, Vaikkom Muhammed Basheer, T. Pathmanabhan and M. T. Vasudevan Nair are some of them. Their writings explored the vivid nature and culture of Kerala. These writers exposed modernism to Malayalam literature. But their works elaborated on the very Indian and Keralite themes and subjects to build their plots upon. M. Mukundan, on the other hand, pointing his feet on a very Indian and Keralite setting, worked on globally appealing themes. He built most of his stories on existentialism. His protagonists were those who suffered within the society from existential crisis and alienation. In fact, M. Mukundan's works are known for their way of approaching existentialism in Kerala as well as India.

Penguin's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines both the philosophical and aesthetic sides of existentialism. “Philosophically, existentialism applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship, or lack of one, with God.” (259) Kierkegaard is the pioneer of this philosophy. “An important feature of aesthetic existentialism is the argument that existence precedes essence for it is held that man fashions his own existence and only exists by so doing, and in that process, and by the choice of what he does or does not do, gives essence to the existence.” (260)

Nasrullah Mambrol in his article "Existentialist Movement in Literature" points out that numerous pieces of art, films, and literary works have postmodernist and existentialist components since 1940. *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre, which was "steeped in Existential ideas," is viewed as a good way to understand his philosophical position. *No Exit* was an existentialist play by Jean-Paul Sartre, which was first published in French as *Huis Clos* in 1944. The Theatre of the Absurd features existentialist themes and the best example of this is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The play demonstrates a perspective on the experience of man on earth such as the oppression, poignancy, fellowship, corruption, hope, and bewilderment of human experience that can be reconciled only in the absurdist artist's mind and work. The play explores issues like mortality, the purpose of life, and the role of God in human existence. The apparent hopelessness and absurdity that are regarded as the defining characteristics of existentialism permeate Franz Kafka's works. They frequently emphasize themes such as alienation and persecution. The endless and pointless labour of Sisyphus is depicted as a symbol for modern and contemporary lives spent occupied at meaningless jobs in manufacturing industries and offices in Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which presents his concept of the absurd. *Antigone* by Jean Anouilh also makes existentialist-based arguments. Greek mythology and Sophocles' play of the same name from the fifth century BC, served as inspiration for this tragedy. When it comes to short stories, Kafka's *Before the Law*, Edward Bryant's *The Hanged Man*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Wall*, H. P. Lovecraft's *Ex Oblivion*, Samuel Beckett's *Dante and Lobster* and Larry Brown's *Sleep* are the best examples.

In the Indian writings and especially writings from Malayalam, existentialism originates as the component of modernism. Malayalam literature saw the fledge of modernism during the 1960s. K. S. Ravikumar in his text *Kathayum Bhavukathwaparinamavum* mentions that "from the 1950s onwards the aesthetics of Malayalam literature began to change. This change was the Keralite face of modernism, which established a strong presence of its own in the west. At the dawn of the 60s, Malayalam short stories began to conceptualize the aesthetics of modernism." (Ravikumar, 26) This fledge of modernism resulted in every aspect of writing such as themes, plot, and craft. Making existentialism an essential theme was one such change that happened during this period. A group of writers who emerged at this time was branded as existentialist writers in Malayalam. Ravikumar says, "As part of this (modernist) development, a group of short story writers such as Kakkanadan, M. P. Narayanappillai, M. Mukundan, Zachariah, and Sethu emerged. O.V. Vijayan and V. K. N from the previous decade itself produced modernist or existentialist writings and hence, joined this group" (Ravikumar, 97).

His opinion about the emergence of existential writing in Malayalam is significant. "It is a given fact that modernism is a product of urbanization. The emergence of western modernism is a product of the alienation and dehumanization that happened in huge cities in the west. But in contrast, we can find a commonality in the biography of those writers who were part of modernism in Malayalam literature; that is city life. Most of them migrated to other major cities like Delhi for their occupation. The sense of alienation and crisis of identity and existence which arose from the alienation hit them." (Ravikumar, 97)

Among these modernist writers, M. Mukundan is the most known for his writings on existentialism. His short stories explore the questions such as: What is the real nature or identity of a person? What is the meaning of existence? What is the meaning of life? What is the greater purpose of a person in life? What is death? What happens when one dies... etc., these questions are the problems that existentialism deals with. M. Mukundan is deeply inspired by western existentialists like Sartre, Camus, Kafka, and Kierkegaard. Unlike the other modernist writers from Malayalam who have dealt with existentialism, Mukundan's rendering of existentialism has direct lenience towards the west.

Therefore, this paper attempts to analyze how M. Mukundan's lenience towards the western and more universal pattern of existentialism becomes an act of post-colonial mimicry and how his stories produce a hybrid culture out of it, which, in a wider perspective, becomes a post-colonial strategy of resistance. This paper further explores how the translation of his works into many languages helped M. Mukundan to gain more acceptance among the global readership.

Existentialism in Selected Short Stories of M. Mukundan

M. Mukundan started his journey along with the modern experiments in Malayalam literature through his short stories and novels. The modernist phase of Malayalam literature began with the introduction of a number of writers, including M. Mukundan. His works published during the late 60s and 70s gave a novel experience to the readers of Malayalam literature. Those works, which appeared with a strange form and content unlike the previous short stories, made the then readers think very deeply about them. Mukundan's short stories demanded a new sensibility of reading. It changed the old way of approaching literary work, especially short stories. A.M. Unnikrishnan in his text *Mukundante Kala: Asthithvathinte Avasthantharanga* opines that "Compared to all other modernist writers in Malayalam, M. Mukundan was always subjected to controversies. No one else would have faced this much criticism as well. These facts prove the inseparable presence that he has possessed in Malayalam literature." (Unnikrishnan, 9)

The Train That Had Wings is a collection of sixteen short stories written by M. Mukundan in Malayalam. They were translated into English by Donald R. Davis Jr. In the detailed introduction, the translator says that "In Mukundan's short stories, however, cultural heritage and biases are flip-flopped, warped, stretched out like taffy. Mukundan's world is certainly our world, but not exactly. Sometimes it is more intense; sometimes more cruel; always rawer. It is our world without the skin and muscle, but the blood is the same." (Davis, VII)

Mukundan has portrayed the existential crisis and sense of alienation in majority of his short stories. A. M. Unnikrishnan states:

"Mukundan's *NjanAjnan, PrabhathamMuthalPrabhathamVare, Radha,RadhaM athram, VeshyakaleNingalkorambalam, Nithyadaham, OruPaatha, Vaanam, AvarPaadunnu, ChirakukalullaTheevandi, UttaravaadithvathintePrashnam, Munda namCheyyappettaJeevitham, Chennaaya, Nilavilakku, Kayar, JeevikkunnavarMarichavar, NadiyumThoniyum, Anjara VayassullaKutty*; these stories reflect multiple faces of existential crisis." (Unnikrishnan, 61)

This section of the paper analyses the themes of five selected short stories. e., “Radha, Just Radha”, “Parrot”, “Tea”, “Five-and-a-Half-Year-old” and “Tonsured Life” from the translated collection of M. Mukundan’s short stories, *The Train That Had Wings*. Further, it analyzes the question of existentialism that is being raised by Mukundan in each short story. In his introduction, Davis remarks: “Two prominent themes in Mukundan’s short stories elucidate some of the literary devices he uses to allow Malayalam to speak of more than just Kerala and to reach for a way to express this cosmopolitanism. The first theme is anomie, or a person’s sense of lost purpose, identity, or value. In contrast to the chaos of anomie, the second theme focuses on a rigid sense of captivity, or being stuck in burdensome, tedious, or morally bankrupt social roles or situations.” (Davis, 4)

The first short story, “Radha, Just Radha” set a benchmark of existentialist stories in Malayalam during the 1960s. The story begins with a young woman named Radha meeting her boyfriend at a bus stop. But her boyfriend Suresh does not even identify her. The painful encounter between Suresh and Radha turns into a public humiliation as Suresh repeatedly claims that he does not know this lady at all. He finally shouts at Radha and leaves. Radha walks home past Bhaskaran’s tea stall. But neither Bhaskaran nor Kannan Master recognizes her as she passes. At last, Radha reaches home where she thinks she can find solace. But even her father and mother don’t recognize her. At first, they take pity on Radha and then they try to ignore her as though she was insane. Radha constantly declares that she is their daughter, but they reject it. In the end, she is defeated and compelled to leave the place by asking, “Where will I go, Mommy? I have no one except you and Daddy....” (38). Then she leaves the world lost to her as “the birds, the trees, the ocean gusts, the sky, the land- in a single voice, the sang: You are not Radha. We know you not.” This story depicts the dilemma of the protagonist Radha when she realizes that her identity is being questioned even by the dearest people around her. In this story, Radha is being alienated by people such as her lover, parents, and even by the nature.

The story "Tonsured Life" is one of Mukundan’s strongest accusations of the notion of captivity in the world. The narrator of this story works in an office in Delhi. On a usual day, his receptionist calls to inform him that a holy man named Lakshmanlal Pyari-lal Pandit-Ji is waiting to see him. The narrator wonders what this person could want from him because he has no particular interest in religious matters. But he chooses to visit the pandit. The pandit immediately begins directing the narrator and tells him to go outside. The pandit summons a religiously trained barber to come over and shave the narrator’s head completely off, tonsure not only the head of the narrator but also his heart, soul, and even his life. On the back of an ass, he is carried through the city. The procession eventually stops because the drummers and bell ringers can get tea. Everybody else, excluding the narrator, continues to do this. When the narrator questions the Pandit about why he is receiving this punishment, the Pandit asks if he has ever given a particular man some water. The narrator admits. Pandit-Ji barks at the narrator, "Why did you give this man water? Who are you to give water to the thirsty?" (117) He then spits on the narrator’s face and the narrator is then left lying in the dark, half-dead. We see how institutionalized values drag human beings into pathetic distortion through this story. It also points to the cruel joke of man being betrayed when he follows the values that the world in general advocates to follow. That man is supposed or rather forced to bear a life that is becoming meaningless, and ‘tonsured’ by the others.

In the story “Parrots”, Mukundan presents a wealthy gentleman, who had nothing to do or think about except having food on time and being served by the servants of the house. Meanwhile, he sees his parrot had died, which had often tried to dismantle the cage and jump out. The gentleman comes to know that eventually the parrot stopped trying for that and it even stopped moving. He then goes out and starts to let all the parrots free that he finds caged along his way. The man does not even care about the cost or expense that is being caused to let these parrots free. The image of a caged parrot which is usually used as a metaphor for lack of freedom is used here to represent a wealthy gentleman’s identity crisis. In the end, the man frees a lot of parrots from a place called Chandni Chowk. “Scores of parrots given their freedom flew and played above Chandni Chowk” (32). The man continued his exhausting march in search of parrots while out of breath and with bleeding hands. He locates his car in a shadowy alley and gets in. He heaved slightly and vomited blood. The gentleman fell dead in the car. A person who had left nothing to do in his life seeks his identity and existence by freeing the parrots. Like Sisyphus, he repeats this act without bothering about his state, position, prosperity, or even health. His death can be seen as a symbol of recreating the parrot’s death at the beginning of the story; he dies by vomiting blood, within his cage, i.e., the car. The process of freeing the parrots is an absurd act of the gentle old man to prove his identity to himself.

“Tea” is a short story that starts from a very common incident. The story begins when the mother brings a cup of tea for her husband. Dad is not drinking the tea because there was no sugar in it. Gradually dad began to complain even about very silly things. The dissatisfaction that dad is facing at that age of his life is visible from here itself. What dad is feeling is he is not treated well enough. But when it is seen from the point of view of the family, they treat him very cordially and considerately. When Ravi, his son brings ‘cheroot’ for his father, he refuses to take them by saying it was not his regular brand, where actually it was his regular brand. When Ravi and his mother advise dad not to sit in the rain, he takes it offensively. “I am used to sitting in the rain and hot sun. I won’t get sick. And even if I did, why would that trouble anyone?” Dad asks (52). Finally, as there is no other way Ravi and his mother leave him on the veranda in rain. The story ends when the father stoops over and picks a half-used cheroot and lights it by sitting in the rain. Though his entire family is being considerate towards the dad, he is unable to accept it. He feels that he is an outsider in his own world. Hence, he cannot understand the others, but he thinks that it is them who could not understand him properly. That feeling is what evokes a sense of loneliness and abandonment within him.

Jayan is a five-and-a-half-year-old boy. One usual day, his mother woke him up when it was time to get ready for school. His father thought he woke up late because he slept late after listening to the story of the fox which lost its tail. His father had mentioned cutting his hair when he woke up. Jayan seemed very passive and shallow all day. He ate his breakfast and went to school with Valsala. In the school, he did not answer any of the questions from the teachers as if he was not listening to those questions. His teacher sends Jayan back home along with a peon suspecting that he had a fever. The peon walked him till the middle of the way. After a point, Jayan told the peon that he could go by himself. He leaves from there and sat down on railway track. Tears from his eyes poured down his cheeks. “Spreading out smoke in all directions, shaking the earth, roaring hungrily the train cut across the top of his head.” (59) Mukundan’s characters, which carry the existentialist crisis inside, have this depression that Jayan in “Five-and-

a-half years old” goes through. Jayan’s personality in this story is reluctant to mingle with society from the moment he started to experience the question of existence. He goes through a sense of hollowness. In this story, the hollowness is being transformed into a fondness towards death.

Mukundan’s short stories are being survived through projecting the various faces of existentialism. The construction of modern aesthetics is derived from distortions rather than compilations. P.S. Radhakrishnan declares that Mukundan’s narrations are always of lonesome grief, nausea, and dementia. His stories carried lonesome people who were mentally fragmented and deeply drown in existential crisis. (Radhakrishnan, 38)

In “Tea” and “Five-and-a-half-years-old” the protagonists themselves are alienated from the rest of the world. In “Tea” we see the mother and son constantly trying to make Daddy comfortable and do everything he asks for. But it is daddy who finds problems in everything and thinks that the family is trying to question his existence. He wants nothing but an alienation from all of them. He finds that only he can understand his feelings and he prefers to be alone. Similarly, Jayan in “Five-and-a-half-years-old”, after listening to the tale of the fox who lost his tail, finds himself as the fox, who lacks something of his own, which none of the people around him could rejuvenate. His parents want to cut his hair and make Jayan a boy who is presentable and altered for them. Maybe that is where Jayan realizes that he is not fit into the present world. He questions his own existence in that world which he found different from his own and decides to stay away from there forever. The reader feels absurd and disturbed when a five-and-a-half-year-old boy decides to be alienated from the rest of the world and commits suicide due to a deep existential crisis. Both Jayan and daddy identify themselves as persons not fit into the world around them. On the other hand, in “Radha, Just Radha” and “Tonsured Life” it is the world that alienates the protagonists from their space of existence. Radha and the narrator of “Tonsured Life” are trying to establish and ascertain their identity to the rest of the world through their activities. Radha tells Suresh about a magazine in which Samuel Becket’s poem is published. It reveals that Radha is an intellectual. Nobody including her parents and boyfriend accepts this Radha who finds her own identity through reading. They say that they do not know this particular Radha. Likewise, the protagonist of “Tonsured Life” is also a man who had established his personality and identity by his kind and empathizing nature. The entire city is inhumanly treating him just because he gave some water to a poor man and treated him respectfully. For their eyes, the narrator is nobody to take care of others, he is not a god, he is not a holy man. Hence, they harass him and tonsure his entire life itself. So, here their identity and existence are questioned by the rest of the world and thinks that these protagonists are not appropriate into the world which they live in. “Parrots” is configuring the absurd seeking of the old man for his own identity. The old man finds his freedom as the freedom that he buys for the parrots.

K. P. Appan, who has written Introduction to the compilation of Mukundan’s works, states: “The basic alienation of human beings is one of the key themes that Mukundan has always handled. Hence, the destructive anger of those people who hated the established values of life and were alienated from them became the soul of his art. Sterilization happened to emotions, human relationships, morality in modern life and the degradation of values of language, and the contradiction between mind and language, all these have influenced the writings of Mukundan. It is the way of portraying the secrets of

human existence through very clear imageries that made his works beautifully traumatizing ones.” (Appan, 99)

It is evident that M. Mukundan’s stories are the strongest narrations of human beings’ dilemma of existence and its numerous faces or levels. His protagonists are the victims of existential agony and forlornness. Therefore, M. Mukundan stays as the prominent one among modern short story writer’s.

Writing as Post-colonial Hybridity

Existentialism and existentialist writing are ideally western concepts. It was established in Germany right after the outbreak of the First World War. From there existentialist philosophy reached various countries of Europe like France and Italy and thereafter, spread to the other parts of the world. After the Second World War, this philosophy turned out to be present everywhere, even in the coffee houses of Europe where writers and intellectuals used to gather and parallel publications as well. It gained tremendous impact as a philosophical concept during that period. (Unnikrishnan, 56) It is around this time that this philosophy gained importance in Indian Literature. An important development in post-independence fiction can be seen by taking a quick look at Existentialist novels. It reveals a shift of emphasis in perspective from the external to the internal conflicts. Works of numerous novelists and short story writers exhibited a strong existentialist undercurrent. This trend can be seen in the regional literatures of that era as well.

Mukundan himself has stated in an interview given to *The Times of India*: “The writer in me is a product of sixties and seventies. I was influenced by the dominant philosophical waves of those days, existentialism for instance. Simply writing a novel is not enough, I told myself. My writings should have a metaphysical base. So, I was naturally drawn to existentialism.” (Mukundan, 21, November 2021) In the 1950s and 1960s, Mukundan read and was inspired by South American and European revolutionary literature, ranging from Che Guevara’s militant Marxist essays and speeches of Jean-Paul Sartre’s high literature and philosophy, like many other Malayalis. Thus, despite being set in India, the main themes of Mukundan’s stories centre on people, things, and places that western readers will be able to relate to. (Davis, 2)

Even though Mukundan’s stories were set either on the soil of Kerala or in some cities of India and his characters belonged to those cultures, their emotions, thoughts, actions, and sub-consciousness were not from the realities of the then India. The post-independent India was the reminiscence of the colonial rule of more than two hundred years. The country that colonialism had left over was the country where resources were robbed and the evils of society that already was there became severe. The victory of the Indian Independence movement and the gain of independence gave umpteen number of expectations to the younger generation of that time that these issues would be addressed effectively. But the expectation that the people of post-independent India had, had been diminishing from the middle of the 60s. The late sixties and seventies were the period of realization that the impact of colonial rule is still a block to achieving the dream of a post-independent India. The desperation and futility of this were there inside the young generation of that era, especially writers and artists. The expression of this sense of futility came out in different ways in different streams of society such as Naxalite Movements, and angry young men heroism in movies and literature. Similarly, some

writers used existentialism as the mode of expression. What they actually did was that they tried to express their desperation over the western colonial rule and its impact on the country by using the very western philosophy of existentialism.

Analyzing this by using Homie K. Bhabha's theory in a post-colonial scenario, this method of taking things from the western colonial master falls under the concept of mimicry. Most frequently, colonized persons mimic the language, attire, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonizers in colonial and postcolonial literature. According to *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Homie Bhabha defines mimicry as "how the colonizer encourages the colonized to copy, internalize or 'mimic' aspects of the colonizing culture, its behavior, manner, and values. (437) Bhabha writes, 'mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.' (437) But not every writer who had written on existentialism become the actor of mimicry. Because most of their writings transcended the level of mimicking something from the colonial masters but rather, they turned out to be the adaptation of existentialism into the Indian context. When it comes to Mukundan, he tried to recapture the same western philosophical thought in a very western way itself. Only the setting of the stories did change into India and particularly to Kerala. In the introduction of *The Train That Had Wings*, Donald Davis says that "the singular contribution of Mukundan to Malayalam literature was to pull Malayalam out of its link with Kerala and its associated images, themes, history, people, and lifestyles." (3) By doing this, Mukundan is not only pulling Malayalam Literature out of Kerala, but also is pushing it towards the west through theme, thought, and plot. "Mukundan interprets modernity in terms of a cosmopolitan existentialism, a recurrent assertion that humans everywhere share emotional and psychological pressures that transcend cultural boundaries." (Davis, 4) With this argument Donald R. Davis justifies Mukundan's western lenience in his writings.

As mentioned earlier, writers like Anand, and O. V. Vijayan featured the characteristics of existentialism according to Indian context and philosophy. "One could consider O. V. Vijayan's stylistically path-breaking *The Legends of Khasak* or the alienation and political rhetoric of Anand's *The Refugees* or Kakkanadan's *World of the Dogs*. Their contributions, on the other hand, speak to other dilemmas and negotiations of modernity, such as technology, loss of tradition, and political power." (Davis, 2)

Rajendran. N. P describes *The Legends of Khasak* in his article "O. V. Vijayan's *The Infinity of Grace: A Study in the Philosophy of Literature*": "This novel, while portraying the existential sorrow of the sin-smitten hero, contains vibrant seeds of spiritual redemption. We are not thrown into an intellectual vacuum typical of many western existentialist novels, but, here, we have the subliminal message that Ravi, the hero has already set on his trans-mundane quest for his spiritual destination unknown even to himself." Similarly, K.S. Ravikumar sets the writings of Kakkanadan on the parallel ground. He says that Kakkanadan created his own way of writing by using Indian mythology and Hindu philosophy as tools to conceptualize the ideal dimensions of modernity and its view of life. (Ravikumar, 100) From these examples, it is evident how it was different when existentialism was Indianized. Also, it segregates the approach of Mukundan from his other contemporaries. Hence, his direct embracement of non-Indian existential realities proves his fondness to mimic the west.

The act of mimicry in Mukundan's case has not been mere copying. The setting of his stories is regional, but his themes were somewhat western. He must have taken this

approach to the notion that human emotions and experiences are always similar. According to Davis, the writings of Mukundan present a cosmopolitan vision of modernity as a shared but tragically compromised humanity. By arguing that personal loss, awkward social situations, institutional oppression, and libidinous evil are all shared human experiences, Mukundan offers us a cosmopolitanism of suffering and emotional alienation. (Davis, 2)

The setting and themes in Mukundan's writing never go unsynchronised. Somewhere Mukundan was able to knit them together very closely, close enough to both the domestic and western readers could relate. He places his characters in two spaces. One is in a cosmopolitan ambiance of Indian cities and the second is in Indian or rather Keralite villages where the inner conflicts of the characters resemble the city-based and cosmopolitan anguish. This cosmopolitanism is not only restricted to Indian cities, but it applies to any city space in the world. Thus, it is relatable to domestic, western, or people from anywhere. Davis agrees with this argument by stating: "Mukundan's genius is to write stories about Kerala and about India that feel like stories about almost anywhere. What is most interesting for a Western reader, however, is the manner in which Mukundan's cosmopolitan and modernist commitments express a different perspective on contemporary life, especially its darker side, than is typically available in European and American works from the same period." (3)

This universality of Mukundan's works transcends his writing as an act of mimicry into post-colonial hybridity. Hybridity, a term again comes from Homie K. Bhabha, is most frequently used in colonial and postcolonial literature to describe colonial subjects from Asia or Africa who have managed to strike a balance between eastern and western cultural traits. Therefore, by connecting western concepts in Indian contexts and making them understandable to the other parts of the world, Mukundan's works stand for the hybrid texts from post-colonial India.

Translation and its Role

Several texts from Malayalam have been translated into English as well as many other languages. Most of those texts could not communicate with the readers from the other parts of the world, especially the west. T.P. Rajeevan, a famous Malayalam writer in his text *Purappettu Pokunna Vaakku* says that the writings from Malayalam are mostly created to communicate within the physical and cultural territory of Kerala. Those texts are unable to break the barriers of regionalism. (130) Even though they are translated, the intricacies of culture, ethnicity, and regionalism are still there which a non-Malayali reader may not be able to comprehend. It is because of this reason that the works of celebrated authors in Malayalam failed to communicate with foreign readers. Works of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, O. V. Vijayan, and M. T. Vasudevan Nair are translated; but they failed to impress the foreign readers.

On the other hand, Mukundan's works were comparatively readable and comprehensible for foreign readers. Rajeevan talks about his experience of introducing Malayalam writers and their works to Peter Nazareth, a Ugandan-born literary critic, who works at Iowa University. Nazareth did not like the works of Basheer and Vijayan. But he enjoyed reading M. Mukundan and he was interested to read more books written by him. (129) Mukundan's use of cosmopolitan modernity and the universality of themes, plot, images, and symbols by sustaining the local flavour, make his works understandable to people

from anywhere. As discussed earlier, this mixture of local flavour and universality in Mukundan's writings possesses the features of hybridity. Through this presence of hybridity in Mukundan's writing, he could overcome the limitation of cultural barriers and regionalism.

This characteristic of Mukundan's works helps the translator in his task of translation also. Mukundan's language is very simple and direct. As Mukundan's short stories have visible lenience towards the west in themes, his works usually lack images and words which are untranslatable. This can be proved by observing the images used by him in the previously discussed short stories. The image of caged birds in "Parrots", rain as the symbol or representation of an old man's loneliness in "Tea", the act of tonsuring the head as making one's life totally barren in "Tonsured life" etc. are significant in any part of the world. Hence, it's easier to translate these images since it is present in almost every culture. Also, the use of myths, folklores, and backstories which are communicable only to Malayalis are very less in his works. We find no such mythical or folk stories in any of these five short stories. In *Mayyazhi Puzhayude Theerangalil*, one of Mukundan's seminal novels he talks about "Velliyankallilethumbikal", which means the dragonflies in a particular rock bed in the sea called "Velliyankallu". There is a myth that these dragonflies are the spirit of dead people. But this myth is very simple which anybody from any part of the world can understand. Similarly, such culturally rooted usages, idioms, and phrases are less in his works. Mukundan's way of narration accelerated the ease of translation.

Translation is a process that helps to reallocate cultural boundaries. It questions the existing hegemonic orders by working as an agent of communication between two cultures. In a post-colonial world order, translation possesses a very crucial role as a political activity. It often transforms into a strategic act of democracy, diplomacy, protest, resistance, revolt, and liberation. In *Translation and Understanding*, Sukanta Chaudhuri pronounces that "a crucial dimension of the colonial encounter through translation lies not in the direct commerce between colonizers and colonized, but its reflection in intra-communal disparities in the colonized or post-colonial society." (Chaudhuri, 21) This means, in this context, the political and cultural intricacies that the regional literature brings out to the world via translation become the reflection of the colonial encounter between the colonizers and the colonized. In that way, "translations are presented as attempts to break the cultural hierarchy; they serve collaterally if not primarily to perpetuate it." (Chaudhuri, 22)

M. Mukundan's works have created a hybrid literary culture by placing the western philosophy of existentialism in an Indian setting and connecting it to a universal experience of human feelings. Being written in a regional language as Malayalam, his writings have no opportunity to act as a hybrid text which challenges the existing hegemony of the European countries. Through translation, his texts reached the other parts of the world. His hybrid texts reached the colonizers such as Britain, America, and France. It got a wider readership over there. Thus, when a text from a regional language is being read in a European situation, the hegemony of readership is being changed up and down. This is possible only through the process of translation.

Conclusion

Mukundan is a writer who has expanded the horizon of Malayalam literature. His generation introduced a new dimension of philosophy into Malayalam literature. M. Mukundan, along with some writers wrote on the individuals and their sense and crisis of existence. In Malayalam, Existentialism had two different paths to travel on. One is the Indianized use of existentialism, which O.V. Vijayan, Kakkanadan, Anand, and Zachariah used to write. The other one was existentialism in its western philosophical manner which was followed mainly by M. Mukundan. This wave of existentialism happened as the extension of modernism in Malayalam fiction. The primary existentialist philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus, have vehemently influenced Mukundan in formulating his vision. This influence is the major reason for why he used the western nature of existential philosophy as it is.

Since Mukundan is from post-independent India, his writings represent the post-colonial writings from regional literatures. The generation of Mukundan finds existential writing as a tool to express their anguish and frustration on the then India. In Mukundan's case, by borrowing the western concepts of existentialism and planting them in the soil of India, his act of writing becomes an act of post-colonial mimicry. But because of the universality of Mukundan's existential themes such as anomie, captivity, identity crisis, etc., his texts turn out to be hybrid. They show an entirely new and universal nature.

Translation helped Mukundan to transcend the boundaries of regionalism and represent Indian literature in various parts of the world. Through translation, his texts began to reach the other parts of the world, especially the west. By mimicking western philosophy and creating hybrid texts through that process, Mukundan actually challenges the hierarchy of the western, colonizing countries and their literature. His texts due to their hybrid nature got wide acceptance in those countries as well. This reallocated the existing hierarchy of readership in the post-colonial west. In other words, by using their philosophy, Mukundan creates a hybrid culture in literature as well as in its readership. This change in readership is the result of a conscious or unconscious sense of resistance that each third world and the post-colonial subject has had within them. Mukundan, being a writer, through his peculiarities of writing could expose this resistance through his works. Hence, M. Mukundan's method of writing, through translation has become an act of post-colonial resistance. This is how the process of translation becomes an instrument for resistance.

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