

# Looking for a worldwide impact

**The translation project of Malayalam University is hoping for more financial support from the state government. The aim is to spread Malayalam literature all over the globe**

● **Shevlin Sebastian**

In October, 2016, K Jayakumar was at the Malayalam University stall at the Frankfurt Book Fair. An American publisher walked in.

Immediately Jayakumar opened a map of India and pointed at Kerala and said, "The language of this state is called Malayalam. And we have a rich literature." Then he showed a catalogue which consisted of 100 authors.

The American listened patiently. Later, Jayakumar said, "The Americans have no idea about Malayalam. They might know Kerala as a tourist destination but not as a destination with a rich literature." But Jayakumar has not lost hope. "Thanks to globalisation, there is an interest in lesser-known literature across the world," he says. "So the plan is to promote Malayalam literature through English translations."

With this end in mind, in late 2014, Jayakumar, as the then Chancellor of the Malayalam University set up a translation project, with himself as Chairman. And an advisory council was also selected. The members included K. Sachidanathan, Dr E V Ramakrishnan, Dr Jancy James, Dr J. Devika, Dr PP Raveendran, Dr M M Basheer, Dr T M Yesudas, Dr KM Sherif and Mini Krishnan. It is a mix of noted writers, academicians and in Mini, an experienced publisher of translations. However, when they approached English language publishers most were hesitant since they were not certain of assured sales. So an understanding was reached. The publisher would bring out the book, according to its norms, but the university would buy 300 copies of the first edition. "That would be enough to meet the cost of the printing," says Jayakumar. "But we can only use the books for promotional purposes."

In the end, six leading publishers accepted the proposal. They included Oxford University Press, Orient Blackswan, Navayana, Juggernaut, Women Unlimited and Yoda Press. "In 2018, Niyogi Books and Aleph Book Company have agreed to participate," says Mini.

Thus far, six books have been published. The authors are: 'Swarga' by Ambikasuthan Mangad; 'On the Far Side of Memory' - short stories of Lalithambika Antharjanam (both translated by J. Devika); 'A Path and Many Shadows & Twelve Short Stories' by Rajalekshmy (translated by RK Jayasree); 'He, My Beloved CJ' by Rosy Thomas (translated by G. Arunima); 'Barsa' by Khadija Mumtaz (translated by KM Sherif) and a book of stories by Dali writers called 'Don't want caste' (translated by Abhirami Girija Sriram and Ravi Shankar).

As to how the choice of authors was done, Jayakumar says, "We looked for authors who have contemporary relevance. Both Lalithambika and Khadija have dwelt on woman's emancipation. As for Rajalekshmy, none of her books has been published in English. We are the first. And we felt very happy when the first edition sold out and the publisher has gone in for a reprint. We have also selected based on the thought whether a foreigner can relate to the subject matter. I am sure our list cannot be beyond criticism. Selection of an author means rejection of another." At this moment, the committee has short-listed about 20

authors. "Mini is trying to harmonise the interest of the publisher as well as the university," says Jayakumar.

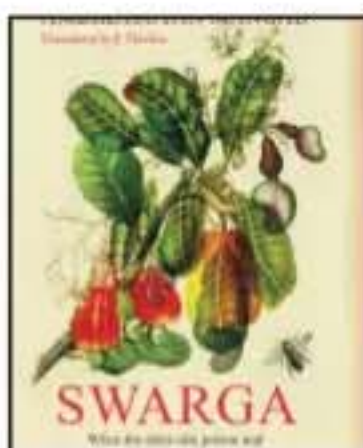
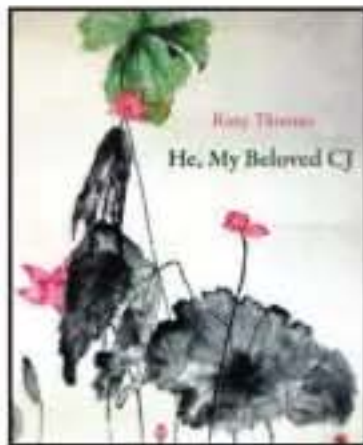
As for the target audience, both in India and abroad, Jayakumar says, "We are looking for academic-oriented and serious readers. And there is also the vast Indian diaspora. Maybe, the second-generation Indian could be encouraged to read these books so that they can get an idea of their rich cultural heritage. This is an area that needs to be explored."

But increasingly, the committee feels that they need more financial resources and support from the state government. And Jayakumar gave an example of government support. "Many Turkish authors are published in India," he says. "And the reason is that the Turkish government is under writing the cost of publication. So we will be approaching the state government for an increased financial commitment so that we can get more authors, more translators, more publishers and, eventually, more readers."



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— K Jayakumar, chancellor, Malayalam University, 2014



Khadija Mumtaz

Lalithambika Antharjanam

Rajalekshmy

Rosy Thomas

Ambikasuthan Mangad