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Birds In The Bible And Malayali Imagination

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Abstract

The Bible is not a single book. It is a collection of religious texts or scriptures that are held to be sacred mainly in Judaism and Christianity. The word 'Bible' comes from *biblia* in Latin and *biblos* in Greek. The name 'Bible' was adopted by translator and theologian John Wycliffe, and came gradually into use in English and other languages.

According to Wycliffe Global Alliance, the Bible has been translated into 3,589 languages all over the world. A variety of linguistic, philological and ideological approaches to translation has been used in the Bible. The Bible translations are commonly categorized into three. They are: Dynamic equivalence translation, Formal equivalence translation (similar to literal translation) and Idiomatic or Paraphrastic translation. As Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible, like all languages, have some idioms and concepts not easily translated, there is in some cases an ongoing critical tension about whether it is better to give a word for word translation or to give a translation that gives a parallel idiom in the target language. In addition to linguistic concerns, theological issues also drive Bible translations.

The first attempt to translate the Bible into Malayalam was made by Pulikkottil Joseph Ittooppu and Kayamkulam Philippose Ramban, with the support of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan and Colin McCauley. In 1817, the Church Missionary Society of India (CMS) provided Benjamin Bailey to translate the Bible into Malayalam. He completed his translation of the New Testament in 1829 and the Old Testament in 1841. Thus, Malayali became familiar with Bible in their local language.

Introduction

Bible and the Environment

According to the Bible, God has clearly placed humans in a position of responsibility over the creation. Genesis 2:15 says, "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*" Which means, God commissions man to rule over the creation in a way that sustains, protects, and enhances his works so that all creation may fulfil the purposes God intended for it. Anyone can easily cite Genesis chapter 1 when discussing Bible verses about the environment. Yet there are so many other scripture verses that remind that God not only created the Earth, but also calls on mankind to protect it.

The weather, plants, animals and birds are all part of the environment God created on the Earth. The Bible says that they are as much a part of God's creation as mankind itself:

"The wild animals honour me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise." (Isaiah 43:20-21)

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26)

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According to the Bible, the study of Earth and the environment is important. Because, the knowledge of God and his works can be found in understanding plants, animals, birds and all other creatures in the world. This article emphasises the importance of birds and its significant presence in order to portray the rich diversity.

Bible References about Birds

The rich imagery of birds is prevalent throughout the Bible. It significantly portrayed different stages of bird's life. Altogether 27 different species of birds mentioned in the Bible. Bittern, Cormorant, Crane, Cuckoo, Doleful Creatures, Dove, Dukiphath, Eagle, Gier, Eagle, Hawk, Hen, Heron, Hoopoe, Kite, Lapwing, Night-hawk, Ochim, Osprey, Ossifrage, Ostrich, Owl, Partridge, Peacock, Peewit, Pelicans, Pigeon, Quails, Raven, Sparrow, Stork, Swallow, Swan, Turtledove (Turtle Dove) and Vulture are the birds mentioned in the Bible.

When the Bible was translated from English to Malayalam, it is evident that the names of the birds varied. The translators wisely attempted to create more originality by adding local species found in Kerala. Hence, it is interesting to note that most of the birds have been given names understood by the Malayalis instead of the names given in the original. Below are some popular English translations names of birds. Along with this, the birds name is original and translated texts were also compared.

Bittern turned into Hornbill

Bittern is a bird which is mentioned two times in connection with the desolations to come upon Babylon, Idumean, and Nineveh (Isaiah 34:11; Zephaniah 2:14). Bittern belongs to the class of cranes. Its scientific name is *Botaurus Stellaris*. It is a solitary bird, frequenting marshy ground. The Hebrew word *Kippod* thus rendered in the King James Version is rendered 'Porcupine' in the Revised King James Version. But in the passages noted the *Kippod* is associated with birds, with pools of water, and with solitude and desolation. This favours the idea that not the 'Porcupine' but the 'Bittern' is really intended by the word.

King James Bible (Isaiah 34:11)

But the Cormorant and the Bittern shall possess it; the Owl also and the Raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness.

New King James Version (Isaiah 34:11)

But the Pelican and the Porcupine shall possess it, Also the Owl and the Raven shall dwell in it. And He shall stretch out over it The line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.

When it turns into Malayalam translation, Bittern / Pelican, an exotic bird, is becoming a more familiar Hornbill to Malayali.

King James Bible (Zephaniah 2:14)

And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the Cormorant and the Bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work.

New King James Version (Zephaniah 2:14)

The herds shall lie down in her midst, Every beast of the nation. Both the Pelican and the Bittern Shall lodge on the capitals of her pillars; Their voice shall sing in the windows; Desolation shall be at the threshold; For He will lay bare the cedar work.

When it turns into Malayalam translation, Bittern / Pelican, is again becoming a more familiar Hornbill to Malayali. The bird named Cormorant is not even mentioned in the Malayalam translation. In Isaiah 34:11, Zeph. 2:14 (but in Revised King James Version, 'Pelican') the Hebrew word rendered by this name is *Ka'ath*. It is translated 'Pelican' in Psalm 102:6. The word literally means the 'Vomiter', and the Pelican is so called from its vomiting the shells and other things which it has voraciously swallowed.

Accidental Cranes and Unknown Birds

In Isaiah 38:14 and Jeremiah 8:7 we can see a Crane in the English translation. In both of these passages the King James Version has reversed the Hebrew order of the words. 'Crane or swallow' should be 'swallow or crane,' as in the Revised King James Version.

The Hebrew for Crane is *Agur*, the *Grus cinerea*, a bird well known in Israel. It is migratory, and is distinguished by its loud voice, its cry being hoarse and melancholy. So, as seen in the English translation, the Cranes

appearing in these two verses are not really Cranes. However, the Malayalam translation that followed the English translation retained Crane.

The name of an unclean bird, mentioned only in Leviticus 11:19 and Deuteronomy 14:18 is Dukiphath / Lapwing. The Hebrew name of this bird, Dukiphath, has been generally regarded as denoting the Hoope (Upupa Epops), an onomatopoeic word derived from the cry of the bird, which resembles the word 'hoop;' a bird not uncommon in Israel.

King James Bible (Leviticus 11:19)

And the Stork, the Heron after her kind, and the Lapwing, and the Bat.

New King James Version (Leviticus 11:19)

the Stork, the Heron after its kind, the Hoopoe, and the Bat.

When it turns into Malayalam translation, Dukiphath / Lapwing, is becoming a more familiar Peewit to Malayalis. So as in Leviticus 11:18 Gier Eagle / Carrion Vulture turns into "*Kudummachathan*" in Malayalam.

Ravens turns into Crows

Another important imagination in Malayalam translations is Ravens becoming Crows. There are 8 species of ravens in Israel, and they are everywhere very numerous in that land. When Elijah was concealed by the brook Cherith, God commanded the ravens to bring him "*bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening*" (1 Kings 17:3-6). Raven first mentioned as "sent forth" by Noah from the ark (Genesis 8:7).

King James Bible (1 Kings 17:6)

And the Ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

New King James Version (1 Kings 17:6)

The Ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.

When it turns into Malayalam translation, 'Raven' is becoming a more familiar 'Crow' to Malayali. While Crows and Ravens may look similar and are both highly intelligent birds, they are very different in their behaviour, habitat and even physical characteristics. The main differences between Crows and Ravens are their size and their sounds. Ravens are the larger of the two, with wingspans around 45 inches. Crows have smaller wingspans, with bodies around the size of pigeons. Both can recognize human faces. (Perhaps that is why they recognized Elijah and gave him bread and meat in the morning and evening).

Conclusion

At the end of the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, the author, John, issues a warning upon *man* who adds to or takes away from the book. Specifically, these are the words he wrote: "*And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*" (Rev. 22:18-19). In the Old Testament also are found similar vigorous denunciations and commands that there shall not be taken away or added to the words that were written. The first is found in Deuteronomy, written at the time Moses was exhorting Israel to live the law of the Lord. "*Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.*" (Deut. 4:2). A careful reading of each of these admonitions makes it clear that *man* is not to make changes in the revelations of the Lord: *man* is not to add to or take from the words of God.

A translation cannot be read only as a clear and unidirectional exchange of signs, where one could automatically replace another. The idea of imaginaries allows the critic to shed light on translating choices, on the one hand by studying the representations and preconceptions of the very act of translating a text (the imaginaries of translating), on the other hand by delving into every factor - be it explicit or implicit, personal or collective - that have influenced and shaped any translator's work (the imaginaries of translators). Even if the things are

like that, textual variants include errors, omissions, additions, imaginary changes, and alternate translations are took place in the Bible.

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