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## Literary Interface between Telugu and Kannada Through Translation: A Study

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### ABSTRACT

Literature mirrors the social and cultural dynamics of a region. As a multicultural nation with diverse languages, India has rich regional literatures which interact with one another, specifically through translation. While most of these interactions are through English as a link language, direct translations from one regional language to another give way to mutual influences, shaping the literatures involved. Telugu and Kannada belong to the family of Dravidian languages, which are predominantly spoken in South India. Linguistic affinity between these two languages is partly due to sharing a common Brahmic script. Both languages have a rich literary history, and both have made significant contributions to Indian literature at the macro level and influenced each other at the regional level. Analysing these influences from the perspective of translations will contribute to documenting the history of translation and also help in understanding the literary traditions that spawned on either side from these interactions. However, attempts to document the role of literary translation between Telugu Kannada are sparse. The current paper attempts to highlight the importance of translation in cross-cultural literary exchanges between Telugu and Kannada, emphasising how such exchanges can lead to the emergence of new ideas, forms, and narratives on both sides.

**Keywords:** Literary Interface, Translation, Dravidian Languages, Telugu Literature, Kannada Literature.

### Introduction

Literature and society are intricately connected and often reflect the political and cultural circumstances of a region. India, with twenty-two official languages and hundreds of other spoken and written languages, is a ground for not only linguistic influences but also for exchange between regional literatures through translation. Telugu and Kannada, two prominent Dravidian languages, have a long

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history of literary development. This paper aims to describe the mutual influences of Telugu and Kannada literatures, emphasising the role of translation in these cross-cultural interactions.

Telugu literature has a rich heritage with early inscriptions indicating that Telugu language was used as early as the first century CE. Addanki inscription or Pandaranga inscription of the ninth century was written in the *champu* style. Other inscriptions like the Kandukuru inscription and Bezawada inscription are written in poetic form. However, a distinct recognition of Telugu literary texts can be seen around the eleventh century. Nannayya Bhattu's "Andhra Mahabharatam" is a seminal work that laid the foundations for Telugu literature. The *Kavitrayam* – Nannayya, Tikkana, and Yerrapragada transcreated the Indian epic Mahabharata in Telugu, which was completed by Yerrapragada in the fourteenth century. From the neighbouring Kannada-speaking regions, Vaishnava and Veerasaiva movements influenced Telugu literature from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. The *Ashtadiggajas* popularised the *Prabandha* style of writing during the fourteenth century. The Bhakti movement also had a considerable impact on Telugu literature. During this period, there was a rise in devotional literature, with poets like Annamacharya and Bamma Pothana composing poems related to spirituality and God. Annamacharya's *kirtanas* from fifteenth century influenced Carnatic music in a profound way. From the sixteenth century onwards, incidents from Puranas were the basis for the tradition of *kaavya* in Telugu. Mid seventeenth century to mid nineteenth century saw a proliferation of writers in Telugu, however, great works were rare. Chenchiah and Raja say, "[d]uring this period we find versifiers innumerable, but poets few; literary output enormous, but quality very poor" (86). However, some art forms like the Yakshaganam and Harikatha flourished during this period. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Telugu literature was still trying to move away from the *kaavya* influence of the previous centuries. The latter half of the nineteenth century saw new genres like the social novel emerging in Telugu literature. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as other literatures of India have witnessed, Telugu literature was also influenced by the colonial rule. The introduction of print technology made the works of writers accessible to the common man and writers like Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Gurajada Apparao, Tripuraneni Ramaswamy, Rayaprolu Subbarao, Devulapally Krishnasastri, Chaso, Chalam, C. Narayana Reddy, Sri Sri, Boyi Bhimanna, Gurram Jashuva, Kolakaluri Enoch, Kaloji, Abburi Chayadevi, Volga, and others wrote on varied social issues, reflecting the socio-political changes, and thereby influencing the Telugu literary landscape. The twenty-first century is witnessing modern themes in Telugu literature, including new genres and styles.

Kannada literature similarly has a rich heritage with its roots in the Rashtrakuta rule, with the earliest known work, *Kavirajamarga*, dating to the ninth century. The Rashtrakuta king Nrupatunga Amoghavarsha I is considered the author of this work. At the same time, some historians believe this is a combined work of Nrupatunga Amoghavarsha I and the poet Sri Vijaya (Kamath 90). Poetry flourished in the tenth century period of the *Ratnatrayas* – Pampa, Ponna, and Ranna who are called "the Three Gems" (Sastri 383). Kannada literature between the tenth and twelfth centuries is influenced prominently by Jainism. The Lingayat or the Veerasaiva movement of the twelfth century generated new types of literature, notably the rhythmic *Vachana Sahitya*. Basavanna and Akka Mahadevi, among others, critiqued rituals and rites, pointing out that earthly pleasures are to be left in pursuit of spirituality. This was succeeded by the Vijayanagara period, which is called the golden age of both Telugu and Kannada literatures. During this period, the rulers not only patronised Kannada writers but also Telugu, Sanskrit, and Tamil poets who wrote in Veerasaiva and Vaishnava traditions. The court of the king Krishnadevaraya, who himself was a great writer, had eight poets who were called *Ashtadiggajas*. Both Telugu and Kannada literatures thrived during this period, and the patronage continued in the Mysore and Nayaka kingdoms in the later centuries. The modern period of Kannada literature started in the nineteenth century and, like literature from other parts of the country, was influenced by colonial rule. Writers were still using the archaic literary forms during this period. This practice started to take a turn with the advent of the 'Navodaya' movement in the beginning of the twentieth century under the leadership of B.M Srikantaiah, who called for moving away from the old

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ways and bringing in newer ways of writing. 'Navodaya' phase was followed by the 'Pragatisheela' and 'Navya' movements. The thematic concerns of writings also changed from kings and their kingdoms; and religions to subjects more closer to everyday human life. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries saw the rise of famous writers such as Kuvempu, Shivaram Karanth, D.V. Gundappa, A.N. Krishna, D.R. Bendre, Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, S. L. Bhyrappa, V.K. Gokak, U.R. Ananthamurthy, and later writers like Poornachandra Tejaswi, Chandrasekhara Kambara who wrote on varied themes.

The literary relationship between Telugu and Kannada has been shaped by historical interactions and shared cultural experiences. Translation has a crucial role in this interconnectedness, which is not merely a result of geographical closeness but is also caused by the linguistic and cultural interactions that have developed over centuries. Translation of literary works between these two languages has been a tool for the exchange of literary and cultural aspects, enriching both literary traditions.

### **Review of Literature**

India is a multilingual and multicultural nation with a five-thousand-year-old civilisation, which is a product of an intricate relationship between history, culture, and literature. Indian literature, as Rita Kothari says, is "an archive formed through multiple languages producing a self and society in non-summarisable ways" (60). Translation is an inseparable aspect of the Indian Literature. However, understanding translation as a means of understanding history has not been given the attention it deserves (Burke 3; D'hulst 397). Rationally, studies that attempt to do this demand the historical contextualisation and explanation of translations. History formulates references mainly to historical matters, whereas historiography purveys the discourse of historians (Lambert 4). Devy mentions the historiography of translation from a different perspective in his "Translation and literary history: An Indian view." He opines,

Because most literary traditions originate in translation and gain substance through repeated acts of translation, it would be helpful for a theory of literary history if a supporting theory of literary translation were available. No critic has taken any well-defined position about the exact placement of translations in literary history (183).

There are many complex issues in developing a historiography of translation in India, as there is an inadequate bibliography and incomplete literary historiography of translation in India (Sagar 112). T. Vijay Kumar, in his paper "Translation as Negotiation: The Making of Telugu Language and Literature", analyses the history of translation into Telugu and its role in the making of Telugu language and literature. V. B. Tharakeshwar, in his essay "Translation practices in Pre-colonial India: Interrogating Stereotypes", examines the pre-colonial translation practices in Kannada. He analyses how translation is seen as empowering the regional languages to become literary languages and how Sanskrit texts were made available in regional languages, making them accessible to people who were earlier kept away from these texts. Focusing on how translation shaped Kannada literature, Rao separates translation activities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into macro (colonial administrators translating Indian works into English) and micro level (translating English works into regional Indian languages), and opines that translation had a crucial role to play in shaping the political, social, and literary scene of this period (1). Endotrophic translation enriches the target language literature by bringing in new literary conventions, perspectives, and styles from the source language literature (Rani 332). Though work towards the history of literary translations has been done, there needs to be work on the history of literary translations between Telugu and Kannada, focusing on how translations influenced literature on both sides.

### **Literary Interface between Telugu and Kannada through Translation**

The interaction between Telugu and Kannada literature can be attributed to the linguistic affinity between the two languages and the common past of Telugu and Kannada regions. According to

Narasimhacharya, one of the reasons for this connection may be that the Chalukyas ruled over both Karnataka and Andhra regions and patronised both languages (Ramanujapuram 27). Both languages are connected intricately to such a level that the Telugu poet Srinatha described his Telugu as Kannada (Ramanujapuram 27). This “kinship” of Telugu and Kannada is also visible in the many bi-lingual writers of both regions across centuries, such as Nilakantacharya in the fifteenth century, Mummadi Tamma and Tirumalabhata of the seventeenth century, Hubballi Sangayya and Veeraraja of the eighteenth century, and Venkataramanaiah in the nineteenth century (Ramanujapuram 28). The interconnectedness is also visible during the Bhakti movement, which in Kannada did not come into existence as a result of translations but instead gave rise to translations from Telugu and Kannada into Sanskrit (Tharakeswar 102).

The relationship between Telugu and Kannada literatures began with translations of the Indian epics Mahabharata and Ramayana and also a few significant Jain works. These literary exchanges go back to the medieval period, especially the Hoysala period, with notable figures like Allama Prabhu, a twelfth-century *vachanakara*, influencing the literary traditions of both languages. In addition to being a poet himself, Allama Prabhu was also the protagonist of Chamarasa’s *Prabhulingalile*, which was translated into Telugu by Praudhadevaraya (Datta 617). During this period, translations of devotional texts contributed to the spreading of ideas across linguistic regions and narrative forms. Translation of Telugu texts into Kannada can be traced back to Palakuriki Somanatha’s *Basava Puranamu*, which was written in Telugu in the thirteenth century and was later translated into Kannada by Bheemakavi in the fourteenth century. The readers received the Telugu and Kannada versions of this text differently. While the original “remained at the margins of what is conventionally regarded as “mainstream” Telugu literature, the latter [translation] became a part of a prevalent literary idiom and a foundational text for the Kannada Veerasaivas” (Ben-Herut 133). This difference in reception of the same literary work in different languages indicates that the socio-cultural conditions of the period and the literary traditions influence each other, and translation is a vital tool in these interactions. In the case of *Basava Puranam*, translation gave rise to a socio-religious reform in the Kannada-speaking regions by engaging the readers with broader philosophical questions.

Most of the translation activity between Telugu and Kannada until the nineteenth century dealt with Indian epics, the lives of kings, or religious texts. Lakshmikantham terms the period between 1775-1875 as *ksheena yugam* (period of decline) in Telugu literature when quality of the literary works was waning (10). This might be one of the reasons for a smaller number of translations from Telugu to Kannada during this period. In late nineteenth century, as both the individual literary landscapes were moving away from the influence of the previous centuries, translation between Telugu and Kannada began happening more. Kandukuri Veeresalingam’s novels were translated from Telugu to Kannada - *Satyavathi Charitram* by Ananthanarayana Shastri in 1897, and *Satyaraja Poorvadesa Yaattralu* by Benegal Ramarao in 1899, bringing Veeresalingam’s social reformation ideas to Kannada readers. Gurajada Apparao’s *Kanyasulkam*, written in 1897, calls for social reformation, directly critiquing the social inequalities and customs like bride price. Such works from Telugu have reached Kannada readers through translation and might have also influenced the formation of the Navodaya movement in Kannada in the beginning of the twentieth century. Later social novels in Telugu like Balivada Kantharao’s *Dagapadina Thammudu* (1957) translated into Kannada as *Nadi Kadayitu* (1979) by Upendra, Tripuraneni Gopichand’s *Asamarthuni Jeevayatra* (1947) translated by Sujnana Murthy as *Asamarthana Jeevanayaatre* (2003) influenced not only Telugu writers but also writers of other languages.

Several key literary figures from Telugu literature influenced Kannada writers. Gurajada Apparao’s *Kanyasulkam* not only revolutionised Telugu literature but also influenced Kannada writers such as T. P. Kailasam and Kuvempu. On the other hand, Kuvempu’s emphasis on indigenous culture, spirituality, humanism, and social justice influenced Telugu writers such as Sri Sri and Gurrām Jashuva, who wrote on these themes. In a similar way, the Navya movement pioneered by Kannada writers

emphasised innovation in language and existentialism and this reflected in the works of Telugu poets like Sri Sri and Devulapalli Krishnasastri.

Twentieth century saw a resurgence of Telugu works being translated into Kannada, especially in the latter part of the century. Most of the translations were of poems written by famous Telugu poets such as Sri Sri and C. Narayana Reddy. Parts of Sri Sri's magnum opus *Mahaprasthanam* (1950) was translated into Kannada by H.S. Shivaprakash, Banjagere Jayaprakash, Raghavendra Rao as *Mahaprasthanana - Mathondu Prasthanana* (1991). *Mahaprasthanam* was translated in full in the same year by Markandapuram Sreenivas. C. Narayana Reddy's *Viswambhara* (1980) and *Mantalu Maanavudu* (1970) were translated as *Viswambhara* (1992) and *Jwalegalu Mathu Maanava* (1999) respectively by Markandapuram Sreenivas. N. Gopi's collection of poems *Kaalaanni Nidraponivvanu* (1998) was translated as *Kalavannu Nidrasalu Bideanu* (2011) by Rajeswari Divakarla. Continuing this tradition, there are many poems being translated in the contemporary times between Telugu and Kannada.

Feminist works in Telugu also were translated into Kannada in the second half of the twentieth century. Early feminist works in Telugu had an influence on Kannada writers like Vijaya Dabbe. Gudipati Venkata Chalam's novels *Ameena* (1928) and *Maidanam* (1930) highlighted the plight of women in a pre-independence era. These works were translated into Kannada by Markandapuram Sreenivas in 1983 and Ramesh Aroli in 2018 respectively. Ranganayakamma's *Peka Medalu* (1970) translated by Y.G. Bhimrao as *Bedi Banda Bhagya* (1991); Malathi Chendur's *Ragam Anuragam* (1981) translated as *Raaga Anuraaga* (1991) by Sampath; and Volga's works *Aakasamlo Sagam* (1990) and *Vimukta* (2011) translated by Sampath and Veerabhadragouda as *Ushodaya* (2009) and *Vimukta* (2012) respectively continue to have an impact on later feminist writers in both Telugu and Kannada. Other literary traditions like the Bandaya Sahitya began in Kannada literature in the wake of translations of Viplava Kavitha from Telugu which in turn was influenced by the Digambara Kavitha of 1960s in Telugu (Raju and Kumar 9).

Similarly, many Kannada works reached Telugu readers in the twentieth and twenty first centuries through translation. Many of Girish Karnad's plays were translated from Kannada to Telugu by Bhargavi Rao. Her translation of Karnad's *Taledanda* (Kannada) as *Taladandam* (Telugu) won the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize in 1995. Poornachandra Tejaswi's play *Krishnegowdana Aane*, a story of an elephant and its experiences, was translated into Telugu by Sakamooru Ramgopal as *Krishnareddygaari Enugu*. Kuvempu's collection of poems in Kannada, *Pakshikashi*, was translated into Telugu by Markandapuram Sreenivas in 2011. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar's historical novel *Chikaveera Rajendra* was translated by Ayachitula Hanumachastri into Telugu with the same name in 1973, bringing the story of the last king of Kodagu to Telugu readers. Sarvani's translations from Kannada to Telugu such as Triveni's *Apaswara* (1952) as *Apaswaram* (1976), K. S. Niranjana's *Vimochane* (1953) as *Vimochana* (1985), and Triveni's *Sharapanjara* (1962) as *Sharapanjaram* (1979) made Kannada works with woman as the central character available to Telugu readers. S.L. Bhyrappa's *Parva* (1979) translated by Gangiseti Lakshminarayana with the same name offered a modern interpretation of Mahabharata to Telugu readers. U.R. Ananthamurthy's famous novel *Samskara* (1965) was translated into Telugu by S.L. Sastry. More recent translations from Kannada, like Jagadeeswari's translation of Sudha Murthy's *Dollar Sose* as *Dollar Kodalu*, Ranganatha Ramachandra Rao's translation of Shantinatha Desai's Kannada *Om Namu*, D.V. Gundappa's *Mankuthimmana Kagga* (1943) translated into Telugu by M. R. Chandramouli as *Mankuthimmani Minaku* (2021) continue to introduce Kannada works to Telugu readers.

Translation of oral literature between Telugu and Kannada thrives due to travelling performers, especially in the border areas of the Telugu states and Karnataka. As Bommareddi says, "[w]hile literary traditions in Telugu and Kannada were dominated by 'upper-castes,' oral literature is primarily sung by people of 'lower castes' like māla, mādiga and jangama. Any song or poetry is seen as only a diluted and derivative form of a written text" (233-234). Dissemination of indigenous oral literature

across borders is at a much slower pace than written literature. This is partly due to the inaccessibility of the regional oral literature outside the region, which in turn is because of the lack of documentation and digitisation of such literature. In analysing the bilingual narration (Telugu and Kannada) of the oral art form of *Burrakatha*, Skandgupta and Annem opine, "Bilingual narration of *Burrakatha* can be considered translation in addition to being transcreation" (162). Such a type of translation can introduce new narrative techniques from the literature of one language to the other, thereby creating new literary traditions.

In the current digital age, new technologies facilitate the translation and sharing of literature across linguistic boundaries. This, complemented by various forms of digital media, has opened up new avenues for translation, allowing for faster and seamless exchange of ideas. Another advantage of this development is that the voices of emerging writers come to the forefront in addition to established writers.

### Conclusion

The interconnectedness of Telugu and Kannada literatures is characterised by linguistic affinity, cultural ties, and shared literary themes. Both literary traditions have influenced each other through exchanges of literary works across centuries. Translation has been an interface between the two literatures, shaping them through mutual influence, and continues to play a crucial role in disseminating ideas across linguistic borders. While translation between these languages started with the translation of Indian epics, contemporary translations deal with varied topics related to society and life and continue the mutual influence on literatures of both languages. Translations of lesser-known works in both languages can highlight the voices that are not heard through mainstream translation.

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