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Mappila Ramayan: A Study in syncretism in Bhakti literature

Mappila Ramayana is a version of the Ramayana narrated by one Hassankutty in the meter and style of a folksong genre known as Mappila Ballad. It is said that 'PiranthanHassankutty,' which literally translates to 'Mad Hassan,' used to go around Malabar singing a ballad, set to the rhythm and tune of the Mappila Pattu, about a prince who went in search of his abducted wife. The significance of this literary piece is its rendition of bhakti where Ram is revered through an interchange of Islamic and Mapilla folk concepts. Rama becomes Lama, Ravana becomes Lavana, Hanuman is rendered Anuman and Surpanakha's friend is even named Fatima! Lama's aunt, Kaikeyi is referred to as 'elemma,' (instead of the Malayalam word, 'ilayamma') reflecting the dialect of the region. This composition was clearly intended as humorous entertainment thereby captivating the attention of the people of the region. Written in the Mappila Malayalam language, which is a Malayalam with Arabic script a version of Malayalam widely used in the Malabar region of Kerala, later became popular in the Vadakara region, now included in the Calicut district of Kerala. This fascinating syncretism in language and ideas imparted Bhakti literature a unique folk flavour that upholds the cultural diversity of a country as vast as India. This study aims to study Mappila Ramayana not just as another of the three hundred known Ramyanas being read all over India and South East Asia but to explore the importance of the Bhakti cult in understanding popular culture of the masses.

Key words: Mappila Ramyana, Bhakti literature, Mappila Malayalam, Folk culture.