

A homage to ONV, not lost in translation

● Roshne Balasubramanian

Jnanpith award winning writer ONV Kurup has a towering presence in Kerala's literary world. His book of selected poems, translated by bilingual poet and lyricist K Jayakumar, recently won the AV Abdulla Remembrance Award. The translator, who was in the city for the award ceremony, has published 30 books, translated Rabindranath Tagore, Kahlil Gibran and Rumi into Malayalam and Jayadev's *Geet Govind* into English.

"For over six decades ONV has been one of Kerala's best poets and I had been following his career graph, even as a young boy. I used to wonder how he wrote such exquisite lyrics. That's when I began learning his poetry," shares Jayakumar who has served as chief secretary at Government of Kerala.

Later, when Jayakumar began establishing himself in the literary field, he met ONV and became his avid follower. "Many times I have tried to resist his influence in my writing. ONV is so influential that one has to try hard to find one's own language," he says.

When ONV passed away in 2016 at the age of 84, Jayakumar was serving as the founding vice-chancellor of the Malayalam University, Kerala. "We were working on a project to propagate Malayalam by way of translation in English and other foreign languages. In 2017, I realised that I should take initiatives to make ONV Kurup a national figure in literature. So, I started translating his work," he says.

In four months, Jayakumar translated a set of 70 poems by ONV Kurup to English. "I worked every night from 6 pm to 1 am, for



K Jayakumar (third from right) translated a set of 70 poems by ONV Kurup to English ● Martin Louis

four months. It turned out well and publishing house Orient BlackSwan decided to publish it," he says. Calling this just the beginning Jayakumar says, "He would have written more than 1,000 poems. This is just a drop in the ocean, to inspire other translators to translate take other poems by ONV."

Jayakumar has been rather selective in the poems he has chosen for translation. "Every language poet has his own pet style, rooted in nativity. Only that language can convey the nuances. So, I have avoided those with heavy amount of nativity and selected poems with an eclectic sensibility. At the same time, I have tried to maintain ONV's graph from 1950s to 2016," he says.

ONV's entire circle has been represented

through his poems and when someone goes through the translation, there's an understanding of his evolution, his significance and how he has responded to historical and social situations from time to time. "That's the purpose of a translator and a translation. You don't have to read Kerala's history... when you read these poems, you'll understand the growth rings of the society. This is my humble homage to the poet," he shares.

Harping on the importance of translation, he adds, "It is an important cultural task at the time of globalisation also known as homogenisation. When people get tired of homogenisation that's when native/language literature finds its place. This will trigger the importance of more such translations."



I used to work every night from 6 pm to 1 am, for four months. Finally, the publishing house, Orient BlackSwan decided to publish my work. —Jayakumar, Author/Translator